

Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans Study Guide

Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans by Ronald Takaki

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Plot Summary

Strangers From a Different Shore, by Ronald Takaki, is a study of Asian Americans. The book concentrates on Chinese, Filipino, Japanese and Indian immigrants, although other Asian immigrants are also discussed. Most came to America and Hawaii with hopes and dreams of a better life. Many did not find it.

Asian immigration began because of the need for labor. In Hawaii there was an need for plantation workers, and the growers began to import Chinese workers. Many of the Chinese signed labor contracts in China that provided for passage and the terms of their employment. They left their families behind and worked long and hard hours in the fields. They lived in crowded conditions.

Eventually, workers were recruited from other occupations and this led to conflict between the groups. The planters intentionally played one group against the other so they couldn't unite and act as one labor group in their demands for higher wages and better conditions.

Asians immigration to the mainland began in response to labor demands due to industrialization and the building of railroads. Eventually many Asians came to America looking for jobs. The only jobs they found were low paying jobs that other workers didn't want. Most could not bring their families and could not marry white women. This led to the development of a picture bride business.

Asian immigrants faced a great deal of discrimination. Only low wage jobs were available. They were denied service in most white establishments. Some were able to open their own small business, which allowed them to eke out a living.

The Asians were discriminated against by the immigration laws. Many were not allowed to bring their families with them. At one point in history, Chinese immigration was prohibited entirely by the Chinese exclusion act.

World War II resulted in changes in the attitude and treatment of Asian Americans. A nation that opposed the racial practices of the Nazis could not allow or promote racial discrimination at home, and various legislation was enacted. After the Vietnam War, there was a massive influx of Asian refugees from various Asian countries. Takaki points out that Asians feel like strangers in America because they are not accepted as equals.

Takaki writes an interesting book that the readers will find interesting and informative.



Chapter 1, pgs. 3-20

Chapter 1, pgs. 3-20 Summary and Analysis

The author grew up in Palolo Valley in Oahu, Hawaii, a community consisting of Japanese, Chinese and Hawaiian families. At a Midwestern college, he was treated as a foreign student, even though his family had been in America for more than three generations.

Asian Americans have roots reaching to a variety of Asian countries. Many of them live in Chinatowns and in other districts, where they have spread into other ethnic communities. They are one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in America. Their growth rate surpassed those of Hispanics in the 1970-1980 time period since the Immigration Act of 1965 eased entry requirements. During this period, Asians represented half of all immigrants to America.

The author makes the point that many people equate America as being white, or European. They overlook Asians. This is an attitude that author Takaki feels needs to be changed.

There were two waves of Asian immigration: the first ended with the Immigration Act of 1924 and the second began with the Immigration Act of 1965. Asian immigrants were often paid lower wages than their white counterparts. This eventually led to the exclusion of Asian immigrants. Many Asian immigrants opened their own businesses because of their exclusion from the labor market. Immigration law also applied differently to Asians whose wives were not treated the same as other immigrants. They were not given non-quota status.

Other examples of discrimination against Asians occurred during World War II when Japanese Americans were held in internment camps.

Chapter 2, pg. 21-53

Chapter 2, pg. 21-53 Summary and Analysis

Hawaiian sugar mill owner, William Hoper, opened his sugar business in 1835. At first he only employed Hawaiians, but found them to be inefficient workers. Then he began to employ Chinese immigrants and found them to be better workers. In 1848, when developing the plans for a transcontinental railroad in America, policymaker Aaron H. Palmer called for the use of Chinese laborers. Many companies of the time had supply requisitions which included Asian workers.

When the Hawaiian planters realized they had become too dependent on Chinese workers, they began requisition workers of other nationalities. This was done to suppress wages and to keep unions out. The national diversity of the workers kept any one block from becoming powerful. When Hawaii was annexed to the United States, they could no longer import Chinese workers, so they had to find other nationalities, mainly Koreans. This lasted until 1905, when the Korean government prohibited their people from going to Hawaii, so the planters began to recruit Filipinos.

In the 1860s, when America was industrializing, there were labor shortages. Asian workers were brought in to meet the demands for labor. The cheaper Chinese labor was used to offset the wage demands of American workers. The result was a divided labor class. The diversity of the labor class gave the employer more control. Takaki refers to the Asian labor forces as the industrial reserve army, which is a Marxist term.

The Chinese workers came voluntarily. They could borrow the money for their passage, known as a credit ticket, or they would sign a labor contract and receive free passage. They were not coolies or slaves. Most left their wives and children behind if they went to California. In Hawaii, the women would work on the plantations under their own labor contracts. Hawaii encouraged the immigration of women. The United States government allowed the immigration of Japanese women. In Hawaii, there were higher monthly wages for workers whose wives were also contract workers.



Chapter 2, pgs. 53-78

Chapter 2, pgs. 53-78 Summary and Analysis

Between 1903 and 1920, more than eight thousand Koreans came to the United States. Many were trying to escape the harsh rule of the Japanese. Some left because there was no work or way for them to survive. Stories of Hawaii made it seem like a paradise to them. The men who were unmarried used agents to select wives from the picture brides. Hawaii represented a better life to them also. The Japanese began to limit Korean immigration so they couldn't compete with Japanese workers.

Most Filipinos came to Hawaii to escape the poverty and hardships of life at home. They would sign labor contracts that included transportation. Indians began arriving in 1907, and they were mostly men who left their families in India. Many were small farmers trying to escape the harsh rules of British colonialism.

The Asians came to America with dreams. Most planned on returning to their villages and many had never been out of their villages.

Many of the picture brides were disappointed. Most found their husbands did not look like the pictures and were much older. Many Japanese brides found their husbands forcing them into Western style clothing as soon as they arrived.

They were all racial minorities and subject to discrimination in their new country.



Chapter 3, pg. 79-112

Chapter 3, pg. 79-112 Summary and Analysis

Many Chinese immigrants settled in California. They engaged in a variety of occupations. Many came for the Gold Mountain or the gold mining. Eventually, their different customs, language and educations were considered a threat to mining districts. A foreign miners' license tax was imposed in May 1852. It applied to Chinese who did not plan on becoming citizens. Other taxes were imposed and the purpose of these taxes was exclusion of the Chinese, not revenue.

Many Chinese independent prospectors joined grounds and formed their own companies. As the Chinese left the mining industry, many worked in the industrial sectors of cities. Fifty Chinese were hired to work on the railroad in February 1865. Two years later, there were twelve thousand Chinese workers at the Central Pacific Railroad. They eventually staged a strike for higher wages. They returned to work when the company threatened to bring in blacks.

The Chinese who worked in industry were also paid less than their white counterparts. They also worked in the agricultural fields and they were paid less than other workers. There were strikes due to the dual wage system. Chinese laundries were opened since the capital outlay was low.

Chinese workers were brought to New England shoe factories to replace striking workers. As Chinese immigration increased, a movement began to stem the tide. The issue was addressed by Henry George in his book. Eventually the Chinese immigration was prohibited.



Chapter 3, pgs. 112-131

Chapter 3, pgs. 112-131 Summary and Analysis

The Chinese immigrants were subject to prejudice and immigration. They were represented by an association known as the Chinese Six Companies, who protested the treatment of Chinese, claiming they made a valuable contribution to America. There were protests and lawsuits regarding the prohibitions of citizenship for Chinese and the imposition of special taxes on them.

Even though federal law and treaties guaranteed equal rights and equal protection, the Chinese remained victimized. They claimed that they were preferred as workers because they were good workers, not because they worked for low wages. Many Chinese found themselves victimized by violence and discrimination, and while working for low wages, they accumulated debt. The Chinese Six Companies points out that very few Chinese could afford to return to China.

The Chinese built Chinatown in San Francisco, where they lived according to their culture and customs. Chinatowns were also built in other California cities. Tongs were also formed. These were basically secret societies that offered protection to the members. They became active in the opium trade, gambling and prostitution. There were also fongs, which were associations of families or villagers. These were also associations based on Chinese provinces. The Chinese slowly established their own community.

Many Chinese women became prostitutes, which was basically a life of slavery with a high rate of suicide. Others worked as housekeepers. The store was the center of Chinese society because it served as a meeting place. The back rooms were places where people could meet, talking and play games.

Even though they could not become citizens, they could look at what they had accomplished.

Chapter 4, pgs. 132-178

Chapter 4, pgs. 132-178 Summary and Analysis

More than three hundred thousand Asians came to the Hawaiian islands between 1850 and 1920. The workers were needed to staff the sugar plantations. The planters treated the workers well because it was good business. A worker weak with hunger was not productive. The occupational structure was based on race, with Asians at the lowest rung of the occupational ladder.

Workers were issued coupons that entitled them to dollars. Many learned to counterfeit these coupons. There was always resistance from the workers, and sometimes there was violence. Discipline was always a problem, and some workers fled without completing these contracts.

When President Roosevelt signed a law prohibiting Japanese from migrating from Hawaii to the mainland, the Japanese had to make a better life for themselves in Hawaii.

In 1900, the plantations were plagued by strikes and there was even more conflict after this time. Workers formed blood unions based on national origin. They protested the higher wages paid to European workers. In April of 1920, the different blood unions united as the Hawaii Laborers Association.

Workers were housed in different camps based on nationality. This was a way of dividing and controlling the workers.

There were schools for the children of the workers, but the planters saw no reason for them to be educated beyond eighth grade. They felt the emphasis should be on vocational training.



Chapter 5, pgs. 179-229

Chapter 5, pgs. 179-229 Summary and Analysis

The Japanese established their own ethnic community in which they had shared cultural values. The Japanese were considered strangers in the white society. They were subject to prejudice and racial discrimination just as the Chinese were. In spite of this, they established their own community with their own businesses in various occupations and industries. Many went into agriculture as fruit and vegetable farmers.

Many Japanese women worked both in and out of the home, and half of all Japanese were involved in agriculture. Most were small farmers. Many had arrived with the intention of earning some money and returning to Japan.

Abiko Kyutaro felt that the Japanese should have a goal of being settlers. He returned to Japan to find a bride and then returned to America where he established a Japanese farming community called the American Land and Produce Company. It was known as the Yamato Colony.

Japanese on the mainland were also subject to discrimination. The California legislature enacted legislation in 1913 forbidding Japanese from owning land. Many farmers found ways around the law.

Discrimination was so prevalent that even with a college degree, a Japanese could not find a good job.



Chapter 6, pgs. 230-269

Chapter 6, pgs. 230-269 Summary and Analysis

The Chinese in America were basically males. Takaki tells the story of Lung On and Ing Hay. They came to America in the 1880s. They eventually opened their own business and became successful. Both received letters from their families after seventeen years in America, demanding they return home.

The only Chinese who could bring their wives to the United States were merchants. After the big earthquake in 1906, more Chinese women were allowed into the country, but the flow was stopped. Since all official documents were destroyed in the fire, many Chinese forged documents claiming they were citizens so they could bring their families to America. The purchase of counterfeit birth certificates was a big business. The people using them were called paper sons and they would come to America claiming to have been born there. Many would face weeks of interrogation at the Angel Island Immigration Station.

In 1940, fifty-seven percent of Chinese lived in the West Coast states and twenty-one percent resided in the Middle Atlantic states. As they were squeezed out of the labor market, they opened their own businesses. Many opened laundries because of the low capital requirements. They eventually formed a trade association called the Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance.

Many Chinese children attended American schools during the day and then Chinese schools afterward. In addition to the Chinese language, they learned about history, literature and philosophy. The second generation Chinese did not want to be cooks or work in laundering as their parents did. But even if they were educated, they couldn't find jobs because of discrimination.

Chapter 7, pgs. 270-293

Chapter 7, pgs. 270-293 Summary and Analysis

After the earthquake of 1906, many Koreans migrated to America. Most settled in California, but some settled in other areas. They were too few in number to establish their own communities. They were forced to live in black towns or Mexican towns. The Koreans faced the same discrimination as other Asians did and had to compete with other Asians for jobs.

Many Koreans worked in agricultural fields, and most Koreans were more accepted by white society than their Asian counterparts. The Koreans were deeply tied to the movement for Korean independence. They were opposed to Japanese colonialism in Korea. As a result, there were frequent clashes with the Japanese in America.

Second generation Koreans did not share in the Korean nationalism of their parents. They did not share in the enthusiasm for the Korean culture. The second generation Koreans were more Americanized. They saw their future as being in America.



Chapter 8, pg. 294-314

Chapter 8, pg. 294-314 Summary and Analysis

In 1865, Hawaiian planters began to recruit Asian Indian workers. Within twenty years, they were working in the lumber town of Washington and the agricultural fields of California. They were generally referred to as Hindus in America, even though some of them were Muslims or Sikhs.

In America, the men continued to wear turbans, their traditional headdress. Because they looked and dressed differently, they were subject to racial slurs. They were continually blamed for causing labor problems. There was constant conflict between them and white workers.

In 1910, the US courts ruled that Asian Indians were classified as whites and could be allowed citizenship under the 1790 law. In 1923, the Supreme Court ruled against Indian eligibility for citizenship on the basis that they weren't white.

Some of the Indian immigrants worked on the railroads and in lumber camps. When they were squeezed out of these jobs, they migrated south and found work in the agricultural fields. There were many jobs because of the prohibition of Chinese immigrants. Many Asian Indians became active in partnership farming, where they would pool their money to buy a farm. Many of their farms were in the Sacramento and Imperial valleys.

In 1920, the Alien Land Law was passed, and in 1923 there was a third decision. As a result of this, they were prohibited from owning land. Some Indians put their land in the name of their American born children. Others became laborers.

Like other Asian Americans, second generation Asian Indians were more Americanized than their parents. But they didn't feel truly either American or Indian.



Chapter 9, pgs. 315-356

Chapter 9, pgs. 315-356 Summary and Analysis

The Filipinos came from an American territory and were considered American nationals even though they did not qualify for citizenship. Their migration began after 1910 and they settled in all parts of the country. Unlike their counterparts in Hawaii, they faced racial discrimination. Many tried to be as American as they could but found they were still not accepted and were treated as strangers.

Most Filipinos arrived in San Francisco and went to Stockton to find jobs. Many eventually found work in service jobs, like bellboys or busboys. These were the only jobs open to them. Some went to Alaska to work in the fishing industry. Others found jobs as agricultural workers. It was hard work for low wages and they lived in very poor conditions.

The planters found the Filipinos difficult to work with. There were frequent strikes. When they found an interethnic labor union, it was broken up by the growers. Whenever there was a strike, the growers would hire other workers.

Anti-Filipino sentiment grew that eventually led to violence. Problems arose from their socializing with white women. Eventually there was movement to exclude Filipino immigration and to expel the immigrants. The Filipinos did not feel any strong nationalistic feeling. They were looking for equality in America.



Chapter 9, pgs. 315-356

Chapter 9, pgs. 315-356 Summary and Analysis

World War II changed America's view of itself and the way it treated immigrants. When the Japanese invaded the Philippines, many Filipinos in the United States tried to enlist in the armed forces but were rejected because they weren't American citizens. The law was changed in February, 1942 so they could serve in the first and Second Filipino Infantry Regiment.

Many Filipinos viewed enlistment as a form of entry into American society. They felt they would be viewed differently by white Americans. Things did not change. They still experienced discrimination, such as being refused service in restaurants. This eventually changed and they could now become citizens. They could also own land. Laws were passed prohibiting discrimination, but Filipinos still were not accepted.

The war years were also confusing for Koreans. The Korean immigrants were first classified as enemy subjects. Many were familiar with the Japanese language and provided valuable services to the US government. They found the Tiger Brigade to defend California if necessary.

At the time of World War II, Asian Indians were also struggling for equality and the right to become citizens. Indian immigration policies were broadened and Indian men began immigrating with their families. They also gained the right to become citizens.

The Chinese also supported the war effort and raised a lot of money for the war cause. They also felt that wearing an American military uniform would bring them acceptance. The Chinese exclusion laws were repealed, but the new quotas were one hundred five per year; however, the Chinese could now be nationalized.

The Japanese did not fare so well during the World War II years. They were placed in internment camps. Some Japanese in Hawaii were also interned. They received more liberal treatment in Japan since their labor was needed for the economy's survival.

In 1943, their Japanese were allowed to serve in the armed forces. Many provided valuable service due to their knowledge of Japanese.



Chapter 11, pgs. 406-432

Chapter 11, pgs. 406-432 Summary and Analysis

World War II resulted in more diversity in American society and a lessening in the attitude of white superiority. After the war, more Japanese registered to vote and they became the largest ethnic voting block in Hawaii. Workers gained the right to collective bargaining.

On the mainland, discriminating laws were struck. In 1952, the McCarran-Watter Act was passed. This did away with the racial restrictions of the 1790 law and made the Japanese equal to all other immigrants.

The Chinese communists took control of mainland China in 1949 and the Kuomintang of Chiang Kai-shek fled to Taiwan. This caused a splintering of the Chinese in the United States. The Chinese Six Companies supported the Kuomintang. There were confrontations between the two groups. Thousands of Chinese were investigated for subversive activities.

The 1948 Displaced Persons Act and the 1953 Refugee Relief Act allowed for greater immigration. Many Chinese soldiers brought their Chinese brides to the United States. Even though the immigration laws were liberalized, they still allowed for few Asians until 1965. This marked the second wave of Asian immigration. Although there were not many Japanese immigrants, there were other Asian immigrants.

Mexicans, Filipinos and Chinese constituted the three largest groups of immigrants. The Chinese settled mainly in California and New York. Many came to attend graduate school. They then changed their immigration status and remained in the United States and brought their families to the United States. More than half of the immigrants were female and many were professional.

The new Chinese immigrants established a suburban Chinatown in Monterey Park, California. It was known as Little Taipei and the Chinese built their own society there. Most of the residents are wealthy professionals. At the same time, most of the residents of urban Chinatowns are low wage earners. Many of the women in New York work in the garment industry while the men work in the restaurant industry. They are subject to a dual form of oppression since they are forced to work in the Chinese ethnic economy. The constant influx of new immigrants keeps wages low.



Chapter 11, pgs. 423-471

Chapter 11, pgs. 423-471 Summary and Analysis

Filipinos are the largest group of Asian immigrants. They did not concentrate in any one area. Most of the second wave came from urban areas and many were women and professional or technical workers. Many immigrated because of the corruption and repression of the Marcos regime. In spite of their professional status or education, they worked for low wages. Many did not practice their professions because of licensing requirements. There was a great deal of underemployment, and many became self-employed because of this and discrimination.

Many Koreans immigrated to the United States after 1965. Most settled in big cities and established Koreatown and many operated their own small business. Approximately seventy percent have college degrees when they immigrate and they bring their families with them.

Even though Korea had experienced rapid industrialization, many people immigrated for better job opportunities. Many professionals faced the problem of licensing requirements just as the Filipinos did, and as a result, underemployed Koreans who arrived with money opened their own businesses.

There was also an influx of Asian Indians after 1965. Many Pakistanis also immigrated and they were highly educated. There were many professionals in both groups. Most sought and found better educational opportunities.

There was an influx of other Asian immigrants after 1975. Thousands of Vietnamese immigrated after the collapse of South Viet Nam. Many had worked in their government or military and had no chance but to flee. There was no packing or planning since most fled on a few hours notice. Many arrived in the United States and were sheltered at military camps before settling throughout the country. There is a large Vietnamese community in California and much underemployment in Vietnamese communities. They also face racial discrimination.

Refugees from Laos also immigrated to the United States. They fled from the civil strife in their country. Many of them work at low paying jobs or are on welfare. Like other Asian immigrants, they feel like outsiders. They were the Hmong and Mien and many of the Hmong went into farming. Many of them helped the Americans during the war and are now barely surviving in America.



Chapter 12, pgs. 472-492

Chapter 12, pgs. 472-492 Summary and Analysis

The Asians who immigrated to America came for various reasons. Wherever they came from, they were treated as outsiders. Most hoped to build a better life. They are concentrated in California, Hawaii and New York. The other forty-one percent are located in other areas. Most have below average incomes. Even when they are highly educated, they do not hold positions consistent with their education. They are separated from the top management positions by a glass ceiling - they can see the top but can't reach it.

Asians still face discrimination. People complain that there are too many Asians in universities and that there are too many Asian immigrants. There have been many movies portraying the Vietnam era with their portrayal of the cruelty of the Viet Cong. In addition to discrimination, there have been many acts of violence against Asians, including murder.

Takaki explains how he came to write the books he has written about discrimination. While lecturing in Hawaii, he learns he has living relatives there.

The history of America has been the history of immigrants. Asians immigrants have contributed to this history.



Characters

Ronald Takaki

Ronald Takaki is the author of the book. He grew up in Palolo Valley in Oahu, Hawaii in an area populated by Hawaiians, Japanese, Chinese and other nationalities. There were people of many different ethnic cultures speaking many different languages. Most spoke pidgin English. As a child, he did not understand the ethnic diversity of his community and his schooling did not explain it. He attended college at the College of Wooster in Ohio and received a Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley. Even though he was a third generation American, he was still treated as a foreign student in college. He feels that this is true of all Asian Americans because they are not white. In his look at Asian Americans in America, he takes somewhat of a Marxist approach, using terms like "class conflict" and "industrial reserve army." In *Strangers From a Different Shore*, Takaki looks at how Asian immigration to Hawaii and the United States began. Asians provided a cheap and reliable labor source during the period of industrialization and labor shortages. His own grandparents had been immigrant plantation workers from Japan and he looks at the terms under which immigration took place. Takaki is a professor at Berkeley and has written several books and received numerous awards.

Henry George

Henry George was a nineteenth century political economist who became interested in the "Chinese question." He was interested in analyzing American capitalism. He grew up in California during the period of the influx of Chinese immigration. Many came to work in the gold fields. George felt that there was a contradiction in the United States system of capitalism and that he could better understand it by analyzing the situation of the Chinese. He studied the building of railroads and what it would do for America. The West would become more populated, leading to a wealthy capitalist land owning class while the workers would compete for low wages. It was the Chinese that were crowding the labor market at the time and forcing wages downward. They were preferred as laborers because they would work longer hours for lower wages. Because of this, George considered them a threat. He felt that they could not be assimilated into the American way of life because many planned on returning to China. He authored a book called *Progress and Poverty An Inquiry into the Cause of Industrial Depressions and of Increased of Want with Increase of Wealth: The Remedy*, which was published in 1879. The book took ten years to write and was cited in the debate for Chinese exclusion. He called for a single tax on land.



Jade Snow

Jade Snow was born in America and the daughter of a garment factory owner in San Francisco's Chinatown. She was enrolled in Chinese evening school at the age of eight. When her younger brother was born, she watched him treated differently, receiving privileges she didn't receive. Sons were more important than daughters. Her father told her to obtain an American education. She attended San Francisco Junior College and then Mills College. As long as she was at home, she had to abide by the rules of her parents. Told that she could not compete in a man's world, she became a writer and opened her own ceramics shop.

Jean Park

Jean Park is a second generation Korean who grew up in San Joaquin Valley. Her father was fired from the Standard Oil Company for being Oriental. Her mother was a supporter of the Korean independence movement. They opened a chicken farm and saw it vandalized. She was baptized a Christian and her family frequently moved, looking for better economic opportunities. Her father eventually committed suicide. As a child, Jean made friends with children of different ethnic groups.

Abiko Kyutaro

Abiko Kyutaro was an immigrant who had been born in Japan. He ran away from home at the age of fourteen and went to Tokyo. He arrived in San Francisco in 1885. Kyutaro eventually attended the University of California. By the 1890s, he had several businesses and was a founder of the Japanese American Industrial Corporation.

Frank Emi

Frank Emi was a Japanese American with a wife and two children. The twenty-seven year old was placed in the Heart Mountain internment camp in World War II. When officials tried to recruit him for military service, he refused and formed the Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee. He was arrested for conspiracy to violate the Selective Service Act and served four years at Leavenworth.

Carlos Bulosan

Carlos Bulosan immigrated from the Philippines in 1930 when he was seventeen years of age. He became an author and never returned to the Philippines or became an American citizen. He worked in the Alaskan fishing industry when he first arrived and then drifted around the country working at various jobs.

Vincent Chin

Vincent Chin was a third generation Chinese American living in Detroit. He went to a bar with a friend and two white men accused him of being Japanese and the reason for their unemployment. They beat him to death with a baseball bat. They were fined and sentenced to probation.

Ron Wakabayahi

Ron Wakabayahi is a third generation Japanese American who is the National Director of the Japanese American Citizens League. He complains about the discrimination against Asians.

Manuel Buaken

Manuel Buaken immigrated from the Philippines. He arrived in Stockton to look for a job and found the city flooded with Filipinos. He found a job as a dishwasher.



Objects/Places

Palolo Valley

Palolo Valley is on the island of Oahu in Hawaii, where the author grew up.

Hawaii

Hawaii is the site of many plantations which imported Asian workers to meet their labor demands.

Chinatown

Chinatown in San Francisco was built in the 1850s and was a place where the Chinese lived according to their customs and culture.

Stockton, California

Stockton is a California City east of San Francisco where most Filipinos gathered after arriving in California.

Angel Island

Angel Island is an immigration station located in San Francisco Bay.

Heart Mountain

Heart Mountain was an internment camp for Japanese in World War II.

Monterey Park

Monterey Park, California, is the first suburban Chinatown to be established in the United States.

New York City

New York, New York is the most populous city in the United States and is home to many Asian immigrants.



San Francisco

San Francisco, California was the point of entry for many Asian Americans.

Los Angeles, California

Los Angeles is a California city where many Asians settled.



Themes

Want of a Better Life

Many immigrants came to Hawaii and the United States in search of a better life. Some came to escape harsh political regimes, such as the reason for the Japanese colonialism in Hawaii. Most came on labor contracts that paid their passage and specified the terms of their employment. They left their families behind thinking they would work for several years, save money and then return to their home country where they would lead a good life. They had dreams when they came to America, most of which were shattered by the situation they found. The jobs were not what they were promised and they found themselves with low wage jobs that others did not want. They lived in poor conditions and were able to save little money. Most of them could not afford to save money to send for their families or return to their country. Many never saw their families again and many did not find the better life they came for. Other Asians came as refugees. People from Vietnam and Cambodia basically fled to save their lives. Even professionals and educated people faced labor market discrimination and licensing requirements which kept them from jobs consistent with their education and training. Even though life was hard, it was still better than returning to their country of origin for most of them.

Discrimination

Discrimination and prejudice are a major theme of the book, with examples in every chapter. The Asians were not accepted as Americans even if they were native born Americans. They were considered to be strangers. This was an experience that the author, Ronald Takaki, himself had. He was born and raised in Hawaii in a community comprised of people from different ethnic backgrounds. He was a third generation American, yet where he attended a Midwestern college, he was considered a foreign student. Many Asians had the experience of being refused service in white restaurants. They were forced to sit in a corner of the theater instead of being allowed to select their own seats. They could not own land or become citizens because they were not considered to be white. In the labor market, they were forced into low paying jobs that others didn't want. Many were forced to work within their ethnic economy even if they were educated. They did not have the same employment opportunities. Takaki talks of the glass ceiling and how workers could see the top management but could not reach any of the positions. The discrimination reached all aspects of their lives.

Hardships

Another theme of the book is the life of hardship and the struggle for survival. Many immigrants left their home country for a better life. They thought they would find good jobs and make a lot of money so they could either send for their families or return home



with money. With the situation they found, most could do neither. They worked long and hard hours for low wages that barely allowed them to survive economically. They did not have their choice of jobs but could only take jobs that other workers did not want. There was ethnic conflict between the different Asian groups which the employers fostered so they could not unite and form a strong labor alliance against them in their demands for higher wages or better working conditions. A divided labor force kept the employers strong and in control of the workers. Those who could raise or borrow a small amount of capital would open their own business to eke out a living. Most were stuck in their own ethnic economy even if they were educated and had professional qualifications. Many were victimized by the labor contracts they signed to gain passage to America. Conditions for Asian immigrants did not begin to improve until World War II, during which time the Japanese were held in internment camps. After the war, they gained the right to be citizens and discrimination legislation was enacted.



Style

Perspective

The book is written in the third person point of view with the narrator being the author, Ronald Takaki. This approach allows Takaki to provide the background information that the reader needs to understand the points that Takaki is making. This allows the author to impart more information to the reader. This is the best approach for this kind of book because it allows the author to tell the stories of various immigrants and their experiences. It also allows the author to provide historical details that explain the situation that the immigrants faced, both in their home country and in their adopted country. This helps the reader to have a more complete picture of the situation.

At the beginning and the end of the book, Takaki discusses his own situation as a descendant of Japanese immigrants. In those places he uses the first person point of view since he is discussing his own background and experiences. He explains the kinds of discrimination that he faced and how he, a third generation American, was considered a foreign student when he arrived at a Midwestern college. His reasons for writing the book are to reveal this discrimination and to explain the situation that most Asian immigrants find themselves in. He feels that they always feel like strangers in America.

The book can appeal to a wide audience since it would be of interest to many people. It is interesting reading that will cause many readers to look at the situation regarding Asian and other immigrants.

Tone

Strangers From a Different Shore is written in a more or less objective manner. The book is written in an academic style with documentation of supportive research, since it is written by an academic. Takaki's reason for writing the book is to show the plight of the Asian immigrant and the problems they faced in America. Because they looked and dressed differently, they weren't accepted as other immigrants were. Because they weren't classified as white, they weren't allowed to own land or become citizens. Many white establishments, like restaurants, refused to serve them and they faced discrimination in almost everything they did. The only jobs available to them were low paying menial jobs that white workers didn't want. They had to struggle to survive. Some could save or borrow enough to open their own small business.

Even though the book is written in an objective fashion, Takaki's purpose was to reveal the discrimination the Asians experienced. This was the same experience that Takaki experienced and the book is full of examples of discrimination and violence against Asians. Each chapter discusses this issue until it becomes redundant. Takaki makes his point.

Structure

The book is well structured. There are twelve chapters and four parts. Each of the four parts deals with a different aspects of immigration. Extravagance, Strangers, Necessity and Diversity are the four parts and each section has a page with a poem or passage that is related to the subject of that section. Within this framework the chapters are more or less chronological, telling the history of Asian immigration beginning with the first Chinese workers to Hawaii and following the saga through the nineteen eighties. There are also passages or poems throughout the various chapters.

There is a well structured and developed Table of Contents that not only provides the chapter title but also details the contents of each chapter. This is followed by a map showing the countries the immigrants came from. There is a well structured Index that is useful for looking up information. There is also a copious Notes section documenting the research the author has done. This allows the reader to look for information he/she is interested in and wants more details about. There is also a section with pictures that add a little more realism to the book. The book is well structured and well balanced and is very informative for the reader.



Quotes

"As I grew up, I did not know why families representing such an array of nationalities from different shores were living together and sharing their cultures and a common language. My teachers and textbooks did not explain the diversity of our community or the sources of our unity." Chap. 1, p. 3

"Similarly manager George F. Renton advised his fellow planters to employ as many different nationalities as possible on each plantation in order to 'offset' the power of any one nationality of workers." Chap. 2, p. 26

"And so they entered a new and alien world where they would become a racial minority, seen as different and inferior, and where they would become 'strangers'." Chap. 2, p. 75

"As the first Asian group to enter America, the Chinese merit our close attention. What happened to them in the nineteenth century represented the beginning of a pattern for the ways Asians would be viewed and treated here - their transformation into Georg Simmel's 'stranger.' But their identity as outsiders was determined not only by their entry but also by a complex combination of economic, ideological, and political developments in American society. New 'necessities' drove the Chinese after they arrived in Gold Mountains." Chap. 3, p. 80

"To the Chinese, white prejudice and discrimination were both uninformed and insulting." Chap. 3, p. 112

"To strengthen their authority over their ethnically diverse work force, planters developed an occupational structure stratifying employment according to race." Chap. 4, p. 140

"Japanese ethnic solidarity - a shared identity as countrymen and common cultural values - contributed to the establishment of the Issei ethnic economy, which in turn provided an economic basis for ethnic cohesiveness. But both their ethnicity and their economy developed within an American contexts of what Edna Bonachich terms 'ethnic antagonism'." Chap. 5, p. 180

"During the early decades of the twentieth century, the Chinese became increasingly urban and employed in restaurants, laundries, and garment factories. Isolated from American society, their communities in the cities became places of curiosity for white tourists, and a new industry began to develop in Chinatowns. Tourism became a new 'necessity,' reinforcing both the image and condition of the Chinese as 'strangers' in America." Chap. 6, pp. 230-231

"They were too few in number to have developed their own colony - their own Koreatown with its own stores, wholesales, restaurants, services, churches, schools, and commercial networks. But the Koreans felt a strong sense of ethnicity, even more



intensely than the Japanese and the Chinese. Though they lacked an economic basis for ethnic solidarity, they had another source for community: powered by a unique 'necessity,' Koreans in America had to struggle against colonialism in Korea." Chap. 7, p. 270

"Wearing their traditional headdress, the newcomers from India were described as 'the tide of turbans.' 'Always the turban remains,' a witness wrote, 'the badge and symbol of their native land, their native customs and religion'." Chap. 8, p. 295

"They had come here, thinking they were Americans, pushed from the Philippines by poverty and pulled to America by 'extravagance.' They found the land encircled by sharp blades of white hostility and their lives by a new 'necessity'." Chap. 9, p. 316

"As the United States confronted the threat of Fascism in Asia and Europe, the nation would be asked to extend its democratic ideals to immigrants of color and acknowledge its diversity. The task would prove to be difficult, for it would require a critical scrutiny of American society and would expose the contradictions within." Chap. 10, p. 358

"While the winds of World War II destroyed Japanese-American communities on the West Coast, they also blew a fresh breath of democracy through America and opened the way toward greater 'diversity.' The war against Nazism generated a greater awareness of racism at home, and notions of white superiority became less popular and less plausible." Chap. 11, p. 406

"One of the factors driving this middle-class exodus was the repressive regime of President Ferdinand Marcos. Professionals in the Philippines became increasingly critical of Marcos's corruption and alarmed by his political repression and violations of human rights." Chap. 11, p. 432

"Their dreams and hopes unfurled here before the wind, all of them - from the first Chinese miners sailing through the Golden Gate to the last Vietnamese boat people flying into Los Angeles International Airport - have been making history in America. And they have been telling us about it all along." Chap. 12, p. 491

Topics for Discussion

Why did America and Hawaii want Asian workers in the latter part of the nineteenth century? What were the policies regarding wives and children?

What was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882? What was the purpose of this law?

What kinds of employment did the Chinese seek? What kind of communities did they establish?

What kinds of communities did the Japanese establish?

How did World War II affect Asian immigrants? What was the effect on Asians living in America?

How did the Vietnam War affect the pattern of Asian immigration?

What is the general status of the different Asian groups in America in comparison to the norm?