Japanese came to the United States from Southern Japan in 1880-1920 before laws curtailed their numbers. Due to economic depression and political instability, Japanese sought work opportunities abroad. In Japan, men heard stories of wealth and comfort in America, however, most were exaggerated. Japanese immigrants encountered tremendous hardships in the U.S. They found employment in farming, railways, plantations, factories, canneries, plant nurseries, and fisheries, industries that needed cheap labor when the Chinese labor was excluded.

The early anti-Japanese movement led to the Gentlemen’s Agreement in 1907-1908, which restricted Japanese laborers from entering America, but allowing non-laborers, and wives and children of Japanese already in the U.S. to enter the country. Anti-Asian sentiments flared again in the 1920s leading the U.S. to pass the Immigration Act of 1924. This act prohibited entry of all “aliens ineligible for citizenship,” effectively halting all Asian immigration. The Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 abolished these restrictive quotas based on race and nationality.

Activity

Hisayo Makimoto’s granddaughter taped her grandmother’s story for a college assignment. Identify a person that you would like to know more about. Conduct an oral history by interviewing them about their life.

Look through the newspaper to find a story about government policies. How do they affect the people in your community?

Teachers: Order no-cost newspapers for your class, call (415) 777-6797 or visit www.sfchron.com/nie.
For Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation info visit www.aiisf.org. Photos: California State Parks, Janice Muto Design: Stephen Lowe