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Women in the anti-Japanese movement in California, 1900-1924

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**Women in the Anti-Japanese Movement in
California, 1900-1924**

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO:

the Faculty of the Department of History

San José State University

IN CANDIDACY OF THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts

BY

Randa-Noël Johnson

May 2000

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Women in the Anti-Japanese Movement in California, 1900-1924

by Randa Johnson

Abstract

This study explores the participation of California women and women's organizations in the anti-Japanese movement between 1900 and 1924. It begins with a brief overview of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century anti-Japanese movement in California; then it examines the participation of individual women and women's organizations. Then follows a discussion of the involvement of such clubwomen and labor activists as Katherine Philips Edson, Maud Younger, and Louise La Rue. The positions of the Women's Trade Union League, and the Women's Equal Suffrage League as well as that of prominent suffragists such as Carrie Chapman Catt, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony are examined. The interactions of gender, race, and class in the anti-Japanese movement as they relate to individuals, organizations, and the wider movement are explored. The use of images of women in anti-Japanese rhetoric in the media and popular culture is investigated. The paper concludes with a brief examination of the continuing resonance of anti-immigrant and racial themes in California politics today.

DEDICATION

To my mother, Margaret Sue Wrathall Johnson

;

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INTRODUCTION

Extensive research has been done on the anti-Japanese movement in California and the West Coast. I am particularly indebted to Floyd Matson for his thesis on anti-Japanese activism in the labor movement, and to Akira Saito for his excellent overview of the anti-Japanese movement. John Modell's The Economics and Politics of Racial Accommodation: the Japanese of Los Angeles, 1900-1942 is a good source of information about Japanese stereotypes in the media, as well as extensive documentation of their presence and the response it evoked in the Los Angeles area. He interprets the history of the Japanese in America in terms of a "middleman minority" model, comparing them with the Jews of medieval Europe, and the Chinese in Southeast Asia in modern times.

Gwendolyn Mink covers the subject of nativism in the labor movement in her dissertation "The Alien Nation of American Labor," offering detailed information on different factions of the labor movement, along with some interesting insights into the consequences of the adoption of a nativist stance for working-class unity. Ken Wall's thesis, "A Theoretical View of Race, Class, and the Rise of Anti-

Japanese Agitation in California: 1900-1924," offers a look at the anti-Japanese movement from a sociological perspective.

The participation of women in the anti-Japanese movement, however, is barely mentioned in the literature. While newspaper and magazine articles of the time quote women in the movement, and women authored books on both sides of the controversy, there is little written about their involvement, or the ways in which their experience paralleled or diverged from that of their male counterparts.

The evidence I found deals primarily with middle- and upper-class white women and the organizations to which they belonged. Very little written information is available on the participation of women of color, or working-class women of all races. The letters found in the Hiram Johnson collection may reflect a broader class and race base, but it was not possible to do more than speculate on that information unless the writer supplied it herself in the course of her letters.

CHAPTER 1: A BRIEF SKETCH OF THE ANTI-JAPANESE MOVEMENT,

1880-1924

The involvement of women and women's organizations in the anti-Japanese movement in California must be seen in the broader context of the tradition of American racism and nativist movements. The involvement of individual women, the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL), and the California Federation of Women's Clubs in anti-Japanese activity is illuminated by a look at the history of agitation by established East Coast labor against the Irish, the Italians, and Eastern Europeans; the history of Anglo and Spanish relations with the Native American population in California; and the virulent anti-Asian platforms of politicians, political parties and grassroots movements on the West Coast. The purpose of this paper is to explore the participation of women in the anti-Japanese movement, as individuals, and in expressly women's organizations.

All over the United States, nativist sentiment sprang up periodically in response to hard times or a new wave of immigration: the Irish, the Italians, the Eastern and Southern Europeans.¹ Labor was a leading force in these

¹

John Higham, Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981),

nativist movements. Fear of competition, ethnic prejudice, high unemployment, and lowered wages fueled anti-immigrant feeling throughout the country in the 1830s and 1840s, the 1880s, and again in the 1900s through the 1920s.

American nativism became increasingly racial in character at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth.² The majority of early immigrants to the United States were Protestants from Northern and Western Europe.³ Between the 1820s and the 1880s, a wave of heavily Catholic Irish and German immigrants arrived, provoking an often hostile response from

3-11.

²

Gwendolyn Mink, Old Labor and New Immigrants in American Political Development: Union, Party, and State, 1875-1929 (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1986), 51-53.

³

Ibid., 29, 51; Oscar Handlin, Immigration as a Factor in American History, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1959) 10-13.

earlier settlers.⁴ Anti-Catholic nativism played a significant role in pre-Civil War politics.⁵

Between 1880 and 1920, 23.5 million immigrants entered the United States, of which 63% were from countries outside of Northern and Western Europe. The main focus of nativist activity shifted from religious differences to supposed "racial" differences between old stock immigrants and the new arrivals.⁶ While in the earlier period it had its basis in vague notions of Anglo-Saxon cultural superiority, later nativists turned more and more to theories of racial inferiority to support their position.

Anti-Asian or anti-Japanese movements were predominantly a West Coast phenomenon. The vast majority of both the Chinese and later the Japanese coming to the mainland United States landed on the West Coast, settling

⁴

Sucheng Chan, "European and Asian Immigration into the United States in Comparative Perspective," In Immigration Reconsidered: History, Sociology, and Politics, ed. Virginia Yans-McLaughlin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) 59.

⁵

Ibid., 52.

⁶

Mink, 53.

primarily in California.⁷ The number of Japanese in other parts of the country was minimal, and therefore did not provoke the depth of response seen in California.

The Japanese in California inherited much of the tradition of anti-Chinese prejudice from the 1850s to the 1890s. The Chinese and the Japanese who settled in California were accused of similar vices: immorality, laziness, spreading disease, and a willingness to work for wages on which no white man could live. This is understandable, for in addition to their shared Asian origin, the Japanese essentially took over the economic niche previously filled by the Chinese in California.⁸ The Japanese, like the Chinese before them, worked mainly in agriculture, in laundries, on railroad jobs, in fishing, and in industry.⁹ The overwhelming majority of the Chinese who

7

Roger Daniels, The Politics of Prejudice: The Anti-Japanese Movement in California and the Struggle for Japanese Exclusion (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 33-34.

8

Ira Cross, A History of the Labor Movement in California (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1935), 73.

9

H.A. Millis, The Japanese Problem in the United States, an Investigation for the Commission on Relations with Japan, Appointed by the Federal Council of the Churches in Christ in America (New York: Arno Press, 1915), 29.

came to the United States in the 1800s were male, so their numbers declined steadily after the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Further legislation was enacted in 1917 which prevented all Asians, except Japanese and Filipinos, from immigrating to the United States.¹⁰ As the number of Chinese people dwindled, the Japanese moved into many of the jobs formerly done by the Chinese.

In 1900 there were fewer than 25,000 Japanese in the United States. Despite their small numbers, white Americans were already concerned about the new "Oriental menace." Individuals of Japanese descent may have been mistakenly targeted as Chinese during the anti-Chinese riots of the 1870s and 1880s.¹¹ Some of the same people who had organized against the Chinese then turned their focus onto the Japanese. An article in the San Francisco Examiner chronicled long-time anti-Chinese organizer Denis Kearney's return to anti-Asian agitation:

¹⁰

Roger Daniels, Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), 278.

¹¹

Raymond Leslie Buell, "The Development of the Anti-Japanese Agitation in the United States," Political Science Quarterly 37 (December 1922): 608.

Denis Kearney sounded his old-time slogan "must go" at the corner of Montgomery Street and Broadway last night to a crowd of about 300 people. He is now urging a crusade against the Japanese. His argument was precisely that which he used some years ago when talking about the Chinese. He professed to have found that the Japanese were inassimilable, and could at no time become part of the nation.¹²

The intensity of anti-Japanese prejudice increased rapidly after 1900. Legislation to prevent the Japanese from buying or owning land was first introduced in California in 1906.¹³

The pace of Japanese immigration increased as the Chinese population dwindled. By 1910, the Japanese population in California had grown to 41,356; by 1920 it was up to 71,952.¹⁴ Even more worrisome to exclusionists, the percentage of Japanese women in that population rose sharply as married Japanese men sent for their wives, and single men sent for "picture brides." Women comprised four percent of the Japanese population in 1900, thirteen percent in 1910,

¹²

San Francisco Examiner, June 17, 1892.

¹³

Floyd William Matson, The Anti-Japanese Movement in California: 1890-1942 (M.A. Thesis, Berkeley: University of California, 1950), 23.

¹⁴

Thomas Ken Walls, A Theoretical View of Race, Class and The Rise of Anti-Japanese Agitation in California: 1900-1924 (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1989), 232.

and thirty-five percent in 1920.¹⁵ Anti-Japanese agitators equated the growing number of births among Japanese immigrants with the annihilation of the white population. In the words of James Phelan, a prominent California politician who served three terms as mayor of San Francisco, and later as a United States Senator:

Wherever I went in the beautiful and productive regions about Los Angeles, I could not but feel a shudder at witnessing the disappearance of the white man's family.... I am sure that rural Los Angeles county, where for every three births one is a Japanese, will realize before it is too late that there is a duty just before us which we will have to perform. We must stop this yellow tide and regain the soil for our own people.^{16 17}

Wildly exaggerated estimates of Japanese population growth were used again and again to inflame racist sentiment against them.

Perhaps California's white citizens were simply worried that another race might follow their example. As John Modell so succinctly states: "California had already passed

¹⁵

Ibid., 86.

¹⁶

Los Angeles Examiner, October 17, 1920.

¹⁷

Both Phelan, and Samuel Shortridge, his opponent in the 1920 senatorial race, were founders of the Japanese Exclusion League. Timothy O'Keefe, and James P. Walsh, Legacy of a Native Son: James Duval Phelan and Villa Montalvo, (Los Gatos, CA: Forbes Mill Press, 1993), 190.

twice from the hands of one race into another: from the Indians to the Spanish, and from the Mexicans to the Americans. Such a prize might well be coveted by yet another race."¹⁸

This analysis is borne out by the words of Jeb Stuart, an "Eastern admirer" of California Governor Hiram Johnson's Johnson's stance on the Alien Land laws: "You are on the firing line. Stand firm. Remember the fate of the American Indian. Their first mistake was giving title to land."¹⁹

Anti-Asian prejudice had many facets. Anglo-Saxon nativists invoked the specter of contamination of "pure" white, Northern European blood with other races. During a California legislative discussion over the 1913 Alien Land Bill, a politician from Elk Grove effectively silenced dissent on the bill with these words:

My neighbor is a Jap. He has an eighty-acre place next to mine and he is a smart fellow. He has a white woman living in his house and upon that white woman's knee is a baby....Now what is that baby? It isn't white. It

¹⁸

John Modell, The Economics and Politics of Racial Accommodation: The Japanese of Los Angeles, 1900-1942 (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 29.

¹⁹

Jeb Stuart to Governor Hiram Johnson, April 28, 1913, Hiram Johnson Papers, box thirty-nine, folder S, miscellaneous, Special Collections, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

isn't Japanese. I'll tell you what it is, it is the beginning of a problem...the biggest race problem the world has ever known.²⁰

Considerations of race overrode considerations of justice or of the practicality of the bill.

The Japanese, like the Chinese, African-Americans, and Native Americans, were often accused of immorality. In the words of a California Congressman:

[T]he vast majority of the Japanese people do not understand the meaning of the word "morality", but are given up to the practice of licentiousness more generally than in any nation in the world justly making any pretenses to civilization. I am told by those who have lived in Japan and understand its language that there is no word in Japanese corresponding to "sin" because there is in the ordinary Japanese mind no conception of its meaning.²¹

In addition to the charge of licentiousness, the Japanese were considered to be dishonest, cunning, and sneaky.

Pamphlets and newspaper headlines accused the Japanese of all manner of criminal and immoral acts. Ordinary citizens made similar charges. Mrs. T. McKeon, in a letter to Governor Hiram Johnson, described the Japanese as "a lying,

²⁰

Harper's Weekly, June 7, 1913.

²¹

Thomas A. Bailey, Theodore Roosevelt and the Japanese-American Crisis (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1934), 36, quoted in Matson, 81.

scheming, selfish people" who "should never be allowed to gain a foothold in our nation."²²

Valentine McClatchy, editor of the Sacramento Bee, frequently sounded the theme of irreconcilable differences in Japanese character, which would prove a weakening force in the American republic if barriers were not erected in time to prevent the influx of divisive elements:

The experience of the past four years has convinced most Americans that our immigration and naturalization laws are entirely too liberal and that if we are to preserve the high standards of American citizenship we must be more careful in the selection of material from which that citizenship is molded.²³

In a similar vein:

Shall we hereafter conduct this nation so as to best preserve its institutions and insure its perpetuity? Or shall we, as in the past, open our doors on request or demand, to the elements that will make for disunion in a national crisis, and invite a yellow flood that will eventually dispossess the white race?²⁴

²²

Mrs. T. McKeon to Governor Hiram Johnson, May 3, 1913, Hiram Johnson Papers, box thirty-eight, folder M, miscellaneous, Special Collections, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

²³

Valentine McClatchy, Sacramento Bee, undated clipping, Katherine Philips Edson Papers, Special Collections, box five, folder seven, University of California, Los Angeles.

²⁴

Virgil Taylor to Governor Hiram Johnson, May 15, 1913, Hiram Johnson Papers, Special Collections, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Some bluntly stated that the United States already faced serious race problems without the addition of new groups to the mix. "We don't need the Japs or the Chinese-[the] Negro question is enough to battle with."²⁵

Some anti-Japanese rhetoric took the form of an appeal to save the "endangered" Anglo-Saxon race from being forced out by Japanese competition. White Americans could not hope to compete against the Japanese, whose standard of living was lower, and whose ability to survive harsh working conditions allegedly surpassed that of the Anglo-Saxon:

Nearly half the population of Hawaii and more than half the annual births are Japanese and that territory will be governed, in a few years, under present conditions, as a Japanese province though under an American flag. What has happened there is an indication of what has already commenced in California. It has been conclusively proved that the two civilizations will not exist together; that under economic competition and because of a difference in standards of living and in racial characteristics the Anglo Saxon is displaced by the Japanese.²⁶

California Assemblyman W.C. Wall went so far as to propose that Japanese people were inherently better suited to working certain crops than were whites.

²⁵

Sacramento Bee, June 17, 1919.

²⁶

Valentine McClatchy, Sacramento Bee, June 17, 1919.

[T]he Caucasian under existing conditions cannot kneel and stoop in doing the labor necessary in the asparagus, potato and onion fields of the Delta....The white man cannot and will not work in the Delta, and they are compelled to use Japanese labor for the reason that in the growing of asparagus and potatoes, the Asiatic is just better to do the work at present....[T]he constant stooping and moving along on their knees, the white man will not submit to it and cannot. Now, whether it is owing to the malarial conditions that exist there or whether it be the insecure quarters... I know not.²⁷

The Assemblyman implied that Japanese workers might be somehow better physically suited to the backbreaking labor, and to the unsanitary conditions. At the same time he insinuated that these hardy workers were craven, willing to submit to labor and conditions that a white worker would not tolerate.

Some portrayals of the Japanese focused on aspects in which they were believed to be equal or even superior. This sort of picture can be seen as prefiguring the "model minority" image. The Japanese may have been brave, clean, polite and hard working, but they were still foreigners of a different, competing race, whose intentions could not be trusted:

The Japanese would Mongolize America if they were given the chance. We should not forget our civilization and

²⁷

Text of Speech, Assemblyman W.C. Wall, Hiram Johnson Papers, box thirty-nine W, miscellaneous, Special Collections, Bancroft Library, University Of California, Berkeley.

throw discretion to the winds out of recognition of the valor of the Jap in the present war [with Russia]. They will become a scourge to the country. In time of war, pest or famine, they die like flies, but in prosperous times they will multiply at a rate that would astound one. Don't be deceived, Japanese progress and energy are deceptive.²⁸

It was a no-win situation for the Japanese; no matter what they did, nativists would see it as a threat and a reason for exclusion.

One major difference between the experience of the Japanese and the Chinese in the U. S. was the ability and willingness of the Japanese government to defend the rights of its citizens in America on a diplomatic level, and potentially on a military level. Japan's decisive victory in the 1905 war with Russia inflamed American fears of an Asian imperial power. The term "yellow peril," used earlier to refer to the Chinese, was applied to the Japanese in a more frightening context. The supposed danger posed by the Chinese related to the large Chinese population:

The great danger of the "yellow peril" is its enormous size. With less than two million white men in California, and more than four hundred million Chinese in China, just across the way, the very smallest

²⁸

San Francisco Call, May 8, 1905.

overflow from that limitless reservoir would swamp our Pacific Coast.²⁹

The imagined Japanese "threat" had more military overtones. Japan, unlike China, had a strong government, an effective military, and a willingness to stand up publicly for the rights of its citizens. First the German Kaiser, and then the Russian Czar encouraged and exploited fear of the "yellow peril," envisioned as an armed Japanese invasion.³⁰ To a certain extent, this theme was picked up in the United States:

Drunk with victory and fired by uncontrollable ambitions, these one million Japanese Napoleons [the discharged soldiers] will turn their eyes around for new territory to conquer. The United States, and California in particular, is an inviting field, and if they capture it without powder or shell so much the better.³¹

Japanese immigrants, along with other Asian groups were targeted by press, politicians, and labor as warranting particular concern, above and beyond that accorded to the masses of immigrants coming to the United States from other parts of the world. Asian immigration constituted a small

²⁹

Chester Rowell, "Chinese and Japanese Immigrants -- A Comparison," Annals 34 (September 1909): 9, quoted in Matson, 84.

³⁰

Ibid.

³¹

San Francisco Chronicle, February 23, 1905.

fraction of immigration to the United States. Approximately three quarters of the immigrants coming in between 1880 and 1914 came from Southern and Eastern European countries.³² Southern and Eastern European immigrants also provoked nativist responses ranging from harassment to outright violence.³³ However, perhaps because of their common European background, they were not the focus of specific exclusionary and discriminatory legislation.

In California, organized labor focused clearly and successfully on Asian immigration: in particular the Chinese and Japanese. Labor organizations first became concerned with the Japanese in 1888, a few years after the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act. The Coast Seamen's Journal, the paper for the International Seamen's Union of the Pacific, printed an article decrying a move by the San Francisco Shipowners' Association to hire Japanese seamen to crew several of its vessels.³⁴ The San Francisco Council of Federated Trades pressured merchants to boycott coal shipped

³²

Ewa Morawska, *The Sociology and Historiography of Immigration*, in Immigration Reconsidered, ed. Virginia Yans-McLaughlin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) 188.

³³

Higham, 48, 65.

³⁴

Matson, 2.

in on "coolie labor" vessels and, along with the Coast Seamen's Journal, hotly protested an employer's proposal to import five thousand Japanese laborers from Hawaii:

Through all the major protests against the Japanese, 1890 to 1920, the voice of labor was clearly audible. Thus, for over a generation Orientals were banned from membership in west coast unions; union members discovered dealing with the Japanese were frequently fined or otherwise censured, and boycotts of Japanese concerns became a standard practice.³⁵

Hostility to Japanese workers could be seen at all levels of labor organization, from local trade councils to nationwide unions. The American Federation of Labor, one of the most powerful and influential labor organizations, showed little interest in organizing unskilled workers, or immigrants per se. Constituent members focused on skilled workers in craft unions and had a long history of anti-Asian prejudice. Samuel Gompers, long-time president of the AFL, wrote and published a pamphlet entitled "Meat Versus Rice, American Manhood Against Asiatic Coolieism, Which Shall Survive?"³⁶ West Coast delegates of the AFL put forth resolutions to

³⁵

Ibid., 2-3.

³⁶

Robert M. Jiobu, Ethnicity and Assimilation: Blacks, Chinese, Filipinos, Japanese, Koreans, Mexicans, Vietnamese, and Whites (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988), 45.

classify "cheap Japanese laborers" in the same category as the Chinese in order to preclude further immigration.³⁷ The AFL first endorsed this position at its annual convention in 1892, and passed similar resolutions almost every year for the next thirty years.³⁸

In 1904 the AFL adopted a San Francisco Labor Council Resolution "to permanently exclude...all classes of Japanese and Koreans." It warned that:

The menace of Chinese labor...has been succeeded by an evil similar in general character, but much more threatening in its possibilities, to wit, immigration ...of large and increasing numbers of Japanese and Korean laborers. [Their] wage and living standards [are] dangerous to and destructive of American standards [and] present a problem of race preservation.³⁹

The supposed threat from Chinese immigrant labor having been contained, the AFL sought to apply the exclusion remedy to other Asian immigrants.

The California Federation of Labor was another vocal and active participant in the anti-Japanese movement.

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American Federation of Labor, Reports 1892, 39, in Matson, 6.

³⁸

Matson, 7.

³⁹

Ibid.

Federation members emphasized economic issues. In a letter from the Executive Council the Federation stated:

Our objection to the Japanese in California is not, as you so well know based on trivial or sentimental reasons. We object to them for economic reasons. We know Californians cannot compete with them and maintain an American standard of living.⁴⁰

Over and over, labor organizations returned to this notion of unfair competition to justify their animosity to Japanese workers.

Asian exclusion proved to be a popular and politically useful theme in California. In the first few years of the twentieth century, anti-Japanese groups formed with amazing swiftness. For example, the Japanese and Korean Exclusion League came into being on May 7, 1905 at a mass meeting.⁴¹ By the end of 1906, the League had a membership of 78,500, concentrated mainly in San Francisco.⁴² Olaf Tveitmoe, the editor of Organized Labor, conducted a two-month recruitment

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Paul Scharrenberg, American Japanese Relations: The Necessity for a Clearer Understanding Between the Workers of the Two Countries (San Francisco: James H. Barry Co., 1921), 8.

⁴¹

Akira Saito, "California Press and Anti-Japanese Movement, 1905-1924," (M.A. thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1968) 17.

⁴²

Ibid.

drive to encourage the formation of anti-Japanese clubs.⁴³

"Let every city in the state and every other state organize anti-Japanese Leagues."⁴⁴ These efforts to organize labor groups were very successful; of the 232 groups affiliated with the Asiatic Exclusion League in May of 1908, 196 were labor organizations.⁴⁵

The Socialist Party also had strong nativist elements. While Eugene Debs and Bill Haywood opposed nativism, other leaders within the party were strong supporters.⁴⁶ Morris Hillquit stated:

[T]he majority of American Socialists side with the trade unions in their demand for the exclusion of workingmen of such races and nations as have not yet been drawn into the sphere of modern production and who are incapable of assimilation with the workingmen of the country of their adoption and of joining the organization and struggles of their class.⁴⁷

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Matson, 9.

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Organized Labor, March 11, 1905, in Matson, 9.

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Walls, 184.

⁴⁶

Gwendolyn Mink, "The Alien Nation of American Labor: Immigration, Nativism and the Logic of Labor Politics in the United States, 1870-1925," (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1982), 317.

⁴⁷

Morris Hillquit, "Immigration in the United States," International Socialist Review 8 (August 1907), 75, quoted in Mink, Alien Nation, 317.

Victor Berger, a leader in the party, warned that unless immigration was restricted, "this country is absolutely sure to become a black-and-yellow country within five generations."⁴⁸ In 1908, the socialist constituency was overwhelmingly native born (71 percent) at a time when the majority of the industrial work force consisted of new immigrants.⁴⁹

In 1908, the party established a standing committee on immigration at its national convention. According to Mink, "disagreement within the committee with respect to the propriety of public racial protectionism prevented it from reporting a comprehensive immigration resolution to the 1910 convention."⁵⁰ However, the committee members felt comfortable expressing anti-Asian sentiments, calling Asian immigration "A menace to the progress of the most aggressive, militant, and intelligent elements of our

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Ira Kipnis, The American Socialist Movement, 1897-1916 (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1952), 62.

⁴⁹

Mink, Alien Nation, 315-16.

⁵⁰

Ibid., 321.

working-class population."⁵¹ In the next few years the party swung to a stronger anti-immigrant stance. By 1913 most of the "internationalist defenders" had left the party.⁵²

Anti-Japanese ideology was an integral part of California politics in the early twentieth century. Elements as diverse as the American Socialist Party, the Anti-Jap Laundry League, the American Federation of Labor and the Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West participated in campaigns designed to curtail Japanese immigration and economic activity in the state.

In 1907 the number and severity of anti-Japanese incidents increased. In the first six months of 1907, there were over fifty-seven assaults on Japanese individuals or groups.⁵³ Press coverage continued to be overwhelmingly negative, portraying the Japanese in an extremely derogatory manner, and going so far as to blame them for mob violence directed against them. For example, the San Francisco Call published this account of an attack by fifty San Franciscans

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Proceedings (1910) 76, as cited in Mink, Alien Nation, 321.

⁵²

Mink, Alien Nation, 324.

⁵³

Saito, 28.

on a Japanese restaurant, in which the customers were driven away and the restaurant was severely damaged:

· To be sure, a fist fight between Americans, followed by some injury to Japanese property, is not a very substantial pretext, but apparently it is made to serve for want of better....The moral of all this is that the Japanese are a highly undesirable people as neighbors....For our own peace we must exclude the Japanese.⁵⁴

In March of 1908 disgruntled white workers in the laundry business founded the Anti-Jap Laundry League to prevent Japanese persons from acquiring licenses or equipment, and to reduce their clientele.⁵⁵ The League was one of the more extreme anti-Asian groups. The League's campaign to boycott Japanese businesses erupted into violence. In 1906, a number of Japanese businesses were vandalized, and several restaurant owners were beaten.⁵⁶ The Associated Anti-Japanese Leagues, formed to coordinate the proliferating number of Anti-Japanese groups, was established in the early 1910s.⁵⁷

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San Francisco Call, June 7, 1907.

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Saito, 34.

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Daniels, Politics of Prejudice, 33-34.

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Matson, 10.

In hindsight, the extent of anti-Japanese sentiment in California in the early 1900s seems grossly out of proportion, given the small numbers of Japanese living in the state. In 1910, with a population of 41,000, the Japanese constituted a mere 1.7 percent of the population of California.⁵⁸ In 1919, approximately one percent of California agricultural land was owned by the Japanese. If the Japanese were driving out the white farmers, they were doing a pretty poor job.⁵⁹

Why was there such a fuss over a few Japanese farmers? One reason is that Japanese immigrants to the United States and California had "high social visibility" due to their tendency to concentrate in a few geographical areas and occupations. The majority went to Hawaii, California and Washington. In California, until 1907, most Japanese lived in the San Francisco area, the San Joaquin Valley, and the Sacramento area. Later immigrants tended to end up around Los Angeles.⁶⁰ The vast majority of the Japanese went into

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Jiobu, 41.

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Roger Daniels, Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States since 1850 (Seattle: University of Washington), 144.

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Daniels, Politics of Prejudice, 12-13.

agriculture, first as laborers, and later as farmers. Others went into fishing, or service occupations such as laundry or restaurant work.

The concentration of Japanese in strawberry farming, fishing, or the laundry business made them an obvious target for disgruntled white workers concerned about their position in a tight economy. Japanese farmers did predominate in a few small rural areas, and in a few specialized crops. Land farmed by the Japanese generally made a better profit than land farmed by traditional American practices due to the labor-intensive farming methods the Japanese used.⁶¹

One of the more interesting examples of the exaggerated importance of the "Japanese question" was the controversy surrounding the San Francisco school board's decision to exclude Japanese students in 1906. The incident had national and international repercussions, despite the fact that it involved only ninety-three students.⁶² Of these

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Daniels, Asian America, 144.

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David Brudnoy, "Race and the San Francisco School Board Incident: Contemporary Evaluations," in Neither Separate Nor Equal: Race and Racism in California, ed. Roger Olmsted and Charles Wollenberg (San Francisco: California Historical Society, 1971), 83.

students, only four were over eighteen years old. There is some question as to whether any of the white parents ever made any specific complaint of "immoral or disorderly conduct" against any Japanese student.⁶³

The Union Labor Party, the Asiatic Exclusion League, and a host of local politicians had long pushed for the expulsion of Japanese students from the "white" public schools. President Theodore Roosevelt and the rest of the country had trouble understanding the vehemence of West Coast anti-Japanese feeling at the time. In 1907, bowing to pressure from West Coast exclusionists, President Roosevelt negotiated the Gentlemen's Agreement with Japan, providing that no more passports were to be issued to Japanese laborers wishing to emigrate to the United States. Initially heralded as a great victory for the forces of exclusion, in practice the agreement did not slow Japanese immigration to the United States. Japanese men in other occupational groups were still allowed entry to the United States, as were Japanese women.⁶⁴ The practice of sending back to Japan for

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Oakland Tribune, January 20, 1907.

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Daniels, Politics of Prejudice, 44. The fact that significant numbers of Japanese women immigrated to the United States allowed the Japanese in America to establish

a "picture bride" became common in this period.⁶⁵ The marriage would be arranged by the two families in Japan, subject to the approval of the man and woman involved.

This migration of women fanned white fears of a Japanese takeover through population growth, rather than military force. Newspapers and politicians criticized the Japanese for their alleged unwillingness, or inability, to assimilate into American society. In direct contradiction to these accusations, many of the same sources incited outrage at Japanese who married whites. Pseudo-scientific theories, which exaggerated the differences between races, propounded the dangers of intermarriage.

A principle enunciated by biologists is to the effect that intermarriage between races widely different in characteristics does not perpetuate the good qualities of either race. The differences between Japanese and American whites are claimed to be so radical as to bring them within this category.⁶⁶

permanent communities, unlike the early Chinese immigrants. The early Chinese settlements in California died out gradually after the institution of the 1882 Exclusion Act. The settlements were almost exclusively male due to restrictions on the immigration of Chinese women.

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Ibid.

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Valentine McClatchy, Preliminary Skeleton Brief, Prepared for the Department of State at Washington, D. C., on behalf of the Japanese Exclusion, (Sacramento, CA: Sacramento News Printing and Publishing Co., 1921), 17.

Fear of miscegenation and of a high Japanese birth rate competed for public attention. Much of the anti-Japanese propaganda for the San Francisco school campaign had centered on the specter of Japanese boys and men corrupting the morals of pure white girlhood.

In 1913, the combined forces of the Union Labor Party, and opportunistic politicians passed the Webb-Heney Bill.⁶⁷ This law, also known as the California Alien Land Law of 1913, prohibited aliens ineligible for citizenship from buying or owning land. The law was carefully worded so as not to name any particular ethnic group specifically, but it was obvious that the law targeted Asians, in particular the Japanese.⁶⁸ Persons of European or African descent were eligible for citizenship, while Asians were not.

The bill prohibited aliens ineligible for citizenship from holding real property for more than one year, and provided that the district attorneys of individual counties should institute proceedings against the owners of property held contrary to the provisions of the Act. The Act did not

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Matson, 13.

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Kiyoshi Karl Kawakami, The Real Japanese Question (New York: MacMillan Company, 1921), 316-19.

affect property already owned by aliens, so long as they or their wives or children continued to hold it. Additionally, the bill mandated that no lease of land should be made to an alien for more than five years. Finally, corporations in which the majority of capital was held by aliens ineligible for citizenship were considered aliens within the meaning of the act and prohibited from owning land in the state.⁶⁹

The Asiatic Exclusion League challenged the bill on the grounds that it was not strict enough, even before Governor Johnson signed it into law.⁷⁰ The 1913 law left several loopholes which allowed Japanese residents to continue buying land. In 1919, U. S. Senator James Phelan pushed for the passage of a new, stricter law. The 1920 amendment closed off the loopholes in the earlier law, making it extremely difficult for Japanese immigrants even to lease land.⁷¹

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Larry A. Nepomoceno, "Japanese Restriction in California, 1900-1913," (Ph.D. Diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1938), 62.

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Eldon Penrose, California Nativism: Organized Opposition to the Japanese: 1900-1913, (San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, 1973), 48.

⁷¹

Matson, 25.

James Phelan used a characterization of race loyalty in his 1920 senatorial campaign tours. He spoke of the need to turn back the "yellow tide" and maintain American soil for whites, believing that "the westward transit of white civilization was in danger of being reversed in California."⁷²

Labor organizations like the Union Labor Party in San Francisco began lobbying on anti-Japanese issues in 1905 and lobbied continuously on such measures as the alien land laws for the next twenty years. Rather than directly challenge the large growers that paid low wages, or the land speculators making huge profits off of land sales, labor focused on the issue of the Japanese. The Japanese, like the Chinese before them and the Mexicans after them, were a convenient scapegoat for a myriad of troubles:

Again, as in the case of the Chinese, the opposition of the west coast labor leaders- in the form of mass meetings and public resolutions, boycotts and physical assaults- was instituted for the express purpose of discouraging Japanese immigration, whether by federal exclusion, discriminatory state laws, international agreements, or simply the reluctance of the Japanese to enter a land possessed by prejudice and pervaded by restrictive covenants.⁷³

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Modell, Economics and Politics, 46.

⁷³

Matson, 1.

Most labor organizations wasted no time in getting to the issue.

Labor's decision to focus on immigration as the root of its ills carried a heavy price. Having worked so long to exclude parts of the laboring population, it was not possible simply to set those prejudices aside in favor of the class unity necessary to make substantial changes in the economic and political system. Divisions among the working-class had been exacerbated by the immigration issue, pitting newer, less skilled immigrants against older, more established groups:

The "immigration problem" could no longer provide a cover for the obsolescence of the craft structure. What's more, the ethnic and racial prejudice that sustained the restriction struggle was not so easily erased by dint of closing the gates-so that organized skilled workers (most of whom were also old-stock) were not inclined to forge unity by instantly embracing new immigrant workers as one with themselves.⁷⁴

Mink argues that nativist politics had encouraged anti-immigrant labor groups to become involved and to a degree absorbed by middle-class political interests. "The quest for a policy that would satisfy nativist claims commanded nativist labor to engage in pressure politics with the

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Mink, Alien Nation, 345.

ruling middle-class parties. Nativists absorbed middle-class tactics and values." The intersection of middle- and working-class nativism (both were directed against the new immigration) further facilitated the absorption of nativist labor into middle-class politics."⁷⁵

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Ibid., 346.

CHAPTER 2: LAYERS OF DISCRIMINATION: GENDER, RACE, CLASS AND
THE ANTI-JAPANESE MOVEMENT

The involvement of women's clubs and women's organizations in the anti-Japanese movement presents a complicated and problematic picture. Many women's groups opposed Japanese immigration and presence in the United States, and lobbied fiercely for exclusionary legislation. Other groups with similar membership staunchly defended the rights of the Japanese to live, work, and own property in the United States. More puzzling, groups which opposed Japanese immigration sometimes were active in struggles for the rights of other groups such as Native Americans, Mexicans, and Eastern Europeans.

Women's clubs sprang up in great numbers in the late nineteenth century. Some focused on service work and civic projects, others on educational issues, and still others primarily on social activities.¹ Many women's clubs prided themselves on their work to prepare immigrants for political participation. Some women's clubs were active in anti-

¹

Anne Firor Scott, Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 38, 43, 142-174.

Japanese activity, others supported the right of the Japanese to live and work in the United States

Clubwomen became involved in anti-immigrant activism through a variety of avenues. Middle-class, native-born women worked through a variety of channels to convert immigrants to an imagined standard of "American" behavior and values. In the years immediately following California's enfranchisement of women in 1911, reform-minded women looked for ways to translate their newfound citizenship into greater political power. California women "wanted to go beyond enfranchisement and acquire more political power, thereby enhancing both their membership and their position in the American polity."²

In the years preceding America's entrance into World War I, the desire to secure the rapid loyalty and assimilation of recent immigrants was at the forefront of white middle-class consciousness.

...[I]n 1915 California women enthusiastically entered a different effort to redefine the meaning of United States citizenship, the Americanization movement, an aggressive attempt by businessmen, patriotic groups,

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Gayle Gullett, "Women Progressives and the Politics of Americanization in California, 1915-1920," Pacific Historical Review 64 (February, 1995): 71.

settlement workers, and educators to acculturate immigrants.³

The California Federation of Women's Clubs expanded its efforts to provide classes in English, as well as events and activities designed to promote rapid assimilation of immigrants into American culture. The Federation's annual report for 1916-1917 shows women's clubs across the state sponsoring classes for adult immigrants. Mrs. Palmer⁴ of the San Francisco District encouraged women to go a step further and "Teach one Alien the English Language."⁵ In February of 1920, the Executive Committee of the California Federation of Women's Clubs adopted a resolution favorable to the Japanese.⁶

While efforts to ease the transition into American society and citizenship were laudable, those impulses could also spring from a distrust or contempt for the cultures the immigrants came from. Efforts to promote civic pride and

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Ibid., 71.

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First names given when available.

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California Federation of Women's Clubs Annual Report, 1916-1917 (Los Angeles: California Federation of Women's Clubs, 1917), 69.

⁶

Ibid.

patriotism sometimes translated into xenophobia. The women of the California Club of San Francisco, for example, invited speaker John McNab to address them as part of a series on American citizenship. He emphasized the need for restrictive immigration policy to protect American institutions:

If our form of government is to endure, if the institutions upon which this nation was founded are to be preserved, aliens must be permitted to enter this country only upon a selective system that will weed out those undesirables who are not by education or natural qualities adapted to accept our form of government or be assimilated by our native stock.⁷

Immigrants who, like the Japanese, not only brought their own language and customs, but were also clearly physically distinct from the dominant white population, were easily singled out as inassimilable. Immigrants of non-European origin, and sometimes even immigrants of eastern and southern European descent, were generally considered to be undesirable.⁸

Katherine Philips Edson, a prominent Los Angeles clubwoman, labor activist, and Progressive, was for many years a driving force of the anti-Japanese movement in

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San Francisco Chronicle, February 3, 1924.

⁸

Daniels, Politics of Prejudice, 24.

California. Edson's career is notable for the extent and duration of her involvement in women's and labor organizations, and her enduring commitment to the Progressive Party. For many years, she was involved with the Los Angeles Friday Morning Club, a prestigious women's club. Between 1908 and 1915 she served in a variety of capacities, first as the club's secretary, then as vice president, and later as chair of the Committee on Public Health, and of the Committee on Industrial and Social Conditions.⁹ Through her suffrage and club work, Edson became deeply involved in electoral politics, campaigning for Progressive candidates such as Hiram Johnson across California and throughout the country. Johnson appointed Edson to serve on the five-member Industrial Welfare Commission (IWC), which was created in 1913 to set and enforce wages, hours, and working conditions for women and children.¹⁰ She was with the IWC for many years, fighting for the rights of working women. In 1921, Edson served was

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Jacqueline R. Braitman, "A California Stateswoman: The Public Career of Katherine Philips Edson," California History 65 (March 1986): 84.

¹⁰

Ibid., 87.

a United States delegate to the Council on the Limitation of Armaments, and in the late 1920s was involved in several Pan-Pacific Women's Conferences.¹¹

Throughout the 1910s Edson staunchly opposed Japanese immigration. Her anti-Asian stance may have been affected by her experiences managing an almond ranch in southern California with a Chinese labor force.¹² She was deeply influenced in her views on the Japanese by her acquaintance with Valentine Stuart McClatchy, the editor of the Sacramento Bee. Author of many of the most vehement and inflammatory anti-Japanese articles, he used his position as editor of the Sacramento Bee to advance his political beliefs.

Edson's papers contain many of his writings, as well as correspondence between the two. In 1920, McClatchy sent Edson drafts of several proposed planks for the Republican National Platform, including one which advocated a policy of outright exclusion of undesirable races. "So far as concerns the treatment of inassimilable races, whose

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Valentine McClatchy to Katherine Philips Edson, Katherine Philips Edson Papers, Special Collections, box eleven, folder two, University of California, Los Angeles.

¹²

Braitman, 85.

standards of living are so low as to make them dangerous competitors to American citizens, exclusion is the only logical remedy."¹³ He argued for exclusion on the grounds that these "inassimilable peoples" were "dangerous to American labor" because they were able to survive on less, and furthermore were "a menace to American institutions."¹⁴

Edson's longtime friendship with Hiram Johnson also may have influenced her position. Johnson was not among the loudest or most strident of the anti-Japanese forces, but he held strong views on the subject, and was instrumental in the passage of the 1913 Alien Land Acts. He allowed the California legislature to pass the Alien Land Acts without intervening despite strong presidential pressure to veto or otherwise halt passage of the Act. His father, Grove Johnson, was a member of the California legislature, and had been a leader in the early phases of the anti-Japanese movement.¹⁵

¹³

Ibid.

¹⁴

Ibid., Valentine McClatchy to Katherine Phillips Edson, May 21, 1920, box five, folder seven.

¹⁵

Herbert P. Le Pore, "Prelude to Prejudice: Hiram Johnson, Woodrow Wilson and the California Alien Land Law Controversy of 1913," Southern California Quarterly 61 (Spring 1979):

Edson's work on the Industrial Welfare Commission also contributed to her position on the Japanese. One of the ever-present issues the commission dealt with was the problem of unemployment. To this day, the specter of unemployment never fails to bring racism out into the open, whether it be the Mexicans, the Irish, or the Japanese who are targeted as scapegoats. In the period following the First World War, progressives and labor leaders became deeply concerned about the possibility of widespread unemployment. Groups that had been welcomed, or at least tolerated, were now denounced for stealing jobs from hardworking Americans.

Edson wrote two articles about "California's Japanese Problem" for The Woman Citizen, a magazine put out by the newly formed League of Women Voters. In the first article she owns up frankly to the charge of racism. "Prejudice against the Japanese is strong in California--race prejudice, if you please."¹⁶ In it she accuses Japan of maintaining "an elaborate propaganda organization in the United States," paid for in part by government-subsidized

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¹⁶

Katherine Philips Edson, The Woman Citizen, November 5, 1921, 9.

steamship lines.¹⁷ She castigates the Japanese for failure to integrate into American society:

These [pro-Japanese] propagandists admit that there is no intermarriage of Japanese and whites and there will be none, and that without intermarriage and social intercourse the Japanese must live in separate colonies apart from whites; yet they contend that "assimilation" is possible, though they can make no showing of real assimilation to date.¹⁸

It is interesting to speculate what her opinion would have been had there been significant intermarriage between Japanese and whites in California.

Edson tacitly supported the violence of the anti-Chinese movement, feeling that without it the state would have been overrun by the Chinese:

We do not condone that violence, but we do know that except for the determined resistance of California the entire Pacific Coast would be Chinese today. We resent it that our people of that earlier time had to go to lawless lengths before the nation would see the danger and come to their assistance.¹⁹

In a draft of the second article, Edson made the accusation that a special propaganda effort against the Alien Land Law of 1920 was targeted at women. "A most elaborate effort was

¹⁷

Ibid.

¹⁸

Ibid.

¹⁹

Ibid., 16.

made to convince the women of the state especially that passage of the bill would cause such an outburst of indignation in Japan that war would follow at once."²⁰

Edson's strong anti-Japanese position was in many ways at odds with her principles and actions. Despite her strong anti-Japanese prejudices, Edson cannot be dismissed as merely a small-minded bigot. Her views on race were complex, defying easy explanation.

Edson was fairly supportive of Mexican immigration. The fact that Edson maintained a positive view of Mexican immigrants, and on occasion advocated for them, is ironic in light of today's political situation, but it caused little comment at the time. Letters and articles in her papers contained positive references to Mexican immigrants to California, extolling their hard work and honesty. Edson worked with other clubwomen to provide social services to Mexican American women in Los Angeles.²¹

Edson worked with people from a variety of ethnic groups. She was involved with John Collier's efforts on

²⁰

Katherine Philips Edson, Draft of article for The Woman Citizen, Katherine Philips Edson Papers, University of California, Los Angeles, 5.

²¹

Katherine Philips Edson Papers, box three, folder two.

behalf of Pueblo Indian religious rights. During her tenure on the Council for the Limitation of Armaments, she spoke in front of "the largest Jewish synagogue in San Francisco" promoting the proposed ban on chemical weapons.²² In many ways Edson could be considered reasonably progressive in her views on race given her social position and time.

Edson seems to have muted her views on the Japanese in the mid-1920s. In the heat of the exclusion frenzy, she produced no more anti-Japanese articles; her correspondence makes no further mention of the controversy. She even attended several Pan Pacific Women's Conferences in Hawaii in the late twenties.

²²

Katherine Philips Edson to Maud Miles, January 24, 1922, box one, folder eleven.

CHAPTER 3: ISSUES OF CLASS AND RACE IN THE WOMEN'S TRADE

UNION LEAGUE

The presence of women such as Katherine Philips Edson and Maud Younger in the movement for Japanese exclusion reveals contradictory strains of thought within the labor movement and the middle-class club women's movement.¹ The Women's Trade Union League (WTUL), of which Edson was an active and prominent member, professed to welcome women of all races and religions within its ranks. Individual chapters of the WTUL admitted a few black women at a time when most unions categorically excluded non-whites.² In 1917, the national organization supported efforts to organize black women in the South. At the 1917 National Women's Trade Union League Conference in Kansas City the Committee on Organizing stated:

The American Labor Movement knows no color, race or creed, and in order to live up to these ideals, and in view of the influx of colored girls into industry, we

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Maud Younger was a well known journalist and labor activist.

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Philip Sheldon Foner, Women and the American Labor Movement From Colonial Times to the Eve of World War I (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 340.

recommend that special efforts be made to organize these workers.³

Although the WTUL was certainly not free from the racial and ethnic prejudice characteristic of "white" unions at the time, WTUL unions had organized among black and white workers in the South, and had a small number of black members in predominately white locals.⁴ On a theoretical level, and to some degree a practical one, the WTUL was committed to working for the rights of workers of all races.

Early efforts to introduce anti-Asian resolutions met with a cold reception. In 1909, when Louise La Rue of San Francisco introduced a resolution to support the extension of the Exclusion laws to all Asian peoples,⁵ a majority of

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National Women's Trade Union League, "Proceedings of the National Women's Trade Union League Sixth Biennial Convention, June 4-9, 1917, in "Papers of the National Women's Trade Union League and its Principal Leaders" (Woodridge, CT: Research Publications, 1979, Text-fiche), 46.

4

Foner, 313, 341.

5

The resolution came from the Laundry Workers. Mrs. La Rue had been instructed to bring the resolution to the convention by the Labor Council. National Women's Trade Union League, "Proceedings of the National Women's Trade Union League Second Biennial Convention," September 25-October 1, 1909, in "Papers of the National Women's Trade Union League and its Principal Leaders" (Woodridge, CT: Research Publications, 1979, Text-fiche), 49.

the women on the committee spoke against the measure. Mrs. La Rue and Miss Willard, another West Coast delegate, were the only women to speak in favor of the bill. Rose Schneiderman, a leader from the New York WTUL, brought out the commonalities between the position of Japanese immigrants and other recently immigrated groups:

[T]he National Conventions of the League, if they illustrate anything illustrate that the movement we stand for is the brotherhood of man, and we are not going to exclude certain people out of that brotherhood on account of color, degree, or caste. I believe, personally, that it is an economic question with the Japanese as well as with the Italians in New York. The Italians work for four dollars a week, and they live so that the little children work, and the mothers work, and everybody works; and as soon as they get together enough money on four dollars a week, they go back to Italy. But we would no more think of asking for the exclusion of the Italians than we would think of asking for the exclusion of the Irish.⁶

This statement reveals an awareness that the reason the Japanese were singled out for exclusion was racial. Not economic. Immigrants of European background were criticized, but not targeted for the same type of discriminatory laws. Unwanted and despised new immigrants of European background, if considered "white", soon settled into an established sector of the workforce and labor movement. The Irish, who had been the despised newcomers in

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Ibid., 50.

the 1840s, were now an integral part of the labor scene.⁷ Southern and Eastern Europeans, more recent arrivals, would in their turn be accepted as part of the "white" majority.

Mrs. Post spoke eloquently against the resolution. Like Schneiderman, she appealed to a broad vision of the unity of working peoples everywhere:

We are brothers and sisters all the world over, and we are fighting the fight of the Chinese, the Japanese and of every human being around this great world; we are going to give a place to every one where he may plant his foot on the soil and labor for what he owns in the freedom of the wage which every human being, no matter of what race, needs as much as we. So, although I do not want to criticize, I hope the Women's Trade Union league will not go on record as having put one little line between the brotherhood and sisterhood of this world that we shall ever in the great economic future look back to and regret.⁸

She appealed to universal values, to the common bonds of laboring women and men the world over. This spirit of tolerance would not survive the heat of anti-Japanese organizing on the West Coast and the loss of optimism about organizing women of different cultures and values.

7

The Irish were not automatically included in the white "race". In the early 1800s, Irish people were often referred to as "niggers turned inside out," and African-American people were sometimes called "smoked Irish." Noel Ignatiev, How the Irish Became White, (New York: Routledge, 1995) 41, 59

8

Ibid.

Internal disputes about the value and utility of multi-cultural organizing arising within the ranks of the National WTUL affected the group's response to the rabid anti-Asian sentiment of the West Coast members. A turning point came in 1914 with the New York WTUL's presidential election. Rose Schneiderman, a Russian-Jewish immigrant and a socialist, ran against Melinda Scott, a native born American. Votes were divided along class lines. Scott, who had little interest in organizing Jewish, Italian, or other "ethnic" women, was elected by a narrow margin.⁹ Her pessimistic attitude towards organizing efforts aimed at immigrant women, and her focus on native-born workers, may have produced an atmosphere more conducive to the virulent anti-Japanese attacks of the West Coast delegates. It is also possible that the escalation of World War I in Europe increased the level of xenophobia and anxiety in America.

By 1917 WTUL members had no qualms about passing blatantly racist resolutions. Resolution 40, introduced by Joanna Hilts of Seattle, was adopted with little discussion.

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Nancy Schrom Dye, "Creating a Feminist Alliance: Sisterhood and Class Conflict in the New York Women's Trade Union League, 1903-1914," in Class, Sex, and the Woman Worker, ed., Milton Cantor and Bruce Laurie (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 24.

Owing to the lamentable condition now existing on the Pacific Coast as a result of the influx of Asiatics in the past, and owing to their gradually assuming the reins of industry, thus in many cases completely crowding out the white workers through their ability to live and work on less than one-third what is absolutely essential to the life and health of a white laborer, we the Trade Union Women of the Pacific Coast most urgently ask the National Women's Trade Union League of America, in convention assembled in Kansas City, Missouri, to adopt the following resolution:

WHEREAS, the question of coolie labor is fast becoming a momentous one, and

WHEREAS, The importation of coolie laborers to fill the vacancies created in the world of industry by the American government's call to arms will force the wives, mothers, sisters and daughters of these men, who will give their lives to the cause of democracy, to compete with the Japanese and Chinese in the field of labor in their struggle to provide the bare necessities of life for the little children, the aged and the infirm left dependent upon them, and therefore be it

RESOLVED, First, That no changes whatsoever in the existing immigration laws which in any way affect the importation of Asiatics be made.

Second, That vacancies made by this call to the Colors shall not be filled by Japanese or Chinese workers until the trade unions have declared their inability to fill the vacancies and in all such positions filled the same wages shall prevail.¹⁰

The first part of this statement was blatantly untrue; the Japanese were a modest presence in industry as workers, and could by no stretch of the imagination be seen as having

¹⁰

National Women's Trade Union League, "Proceedings of the Sixth Biennial Convention, June 4-9, 1917," in "Papers of the Women's Trade Union League and its Principal Leaders" (Woodridge, CT: Research Publications, 1979), Text-fiche, 67.

taken control of it. Even in agriculture, where the Japanese had a greater presence, they owned a very small percentage of farms. At the height of anti-Japanese hysteria, the Japanese owned only 0.7 percent of the total land in California, and cultivated 1.64 percent of the land devoted to farming.¹¹ The percentage of property owned by the Japanese was not even proportionate to their presence in the total population.

¹¹

The second figure includes land leased or rented by Japanese people, as well as Japanese-owned land. Kawakami, 266.

CHAPTER 4: RACISM, WOMAN SUFFRAGE, AND THE ANTI-JAPANESE
MOVEMENT

Organized labor was only one of many groups to find race a useful organizing tool, and a handy way to avoid larger questions of class. As large numbers of primarily white middle- and upper-class women became involved in politics through the efforts of the Progressive movement, the Temperance movement, Settlement Houses, the women's club movement, and the cause of woman suffrage, they found race could be used to explain a variety of social ills. They followed a tradition established in this country by prominent women such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Carrie Chapman Catt.¹

The movement to gain woman suffrage in America began with the 1848 Seneca Falls Conference and continued until the passage of the nineteenth amendment in 1920.² California's first woman suffrage meeting was held in May of

¹
Aileen Kraditor, The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920 (New York: Doubleday, 1971) 53, 125-26.

²
Howard Zinn, A People's History of the United States (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1980), 375.

1869 in San Francisco.³ By 1913, women all over the country were fighting for woman suffrage. Women already had the vote in Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, and Idaho before the turn of the century. The passage of a woman suffrage amendment in 1910 in the state of Washington galvanized the movement, and soon California, Oregon, Arizona, Kansas, Montana, Nevada, and Illinois followed suit.⁴

The first proposition to grant women suffrage in California was defeated in 1896. A resolution to amend the California constitution by removing the word "male" from the suffrage clause was proposed in 1895. It passed both houses of the California legislature and was signed by Governor James H. Budd. However, the Legislature then submitted the amendment to the voters, and it was defeated at the polls in 1896.⁵ Suffragists blamed their unexpected defeat at the polls on several factors, including the difficulty they encountered at launching an unanticipated grassroots

³
Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and Matilda Joslyn Gage, editors, History Of Woman Suffrage, (Indianapolis, IN: The Hollenbeck Press, 1902), 478.

⁴
Carol Hymowitz and Michaela Weissman, A History of Women in America (New York: Bantam Books, 1978), 277.

⁵
Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, 486.

suffrage campaign, an alliance of anti-suffrage Democrats and Populists put together in response to the presidential campaign that year, lobbying by the Liquor Dealers' Association, and strong opposition among all classes in San Francisco and the surrounding area.⁶ At the last minute the liquor industry put up an expensive and successful campaign against women's suffrage.⁷

Suffrage activity in the state virtually stopped for several years after this decisive defeat.⁸ In 1901, following a visit by Carrie Chapman Catt, president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), California suffragists began to regroup. Much of the leadership came from the women's club movement.⁹ In 1907, an increasing number of union women joined with the middle- and upper-class clubwomen who had previously dominated

⁶
Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, 486-500.

⁷
Doris Weatherford, A History of the American Suffragist Movement, (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1998) 169-70.

⁸
Susan Englander, Class Coalition and Class Conflict in the California Woman Suffrage Movement, 1907-1912: The San Francisco Wage Earner's Suffrage League (San Francisco: Mellem Research University Press, 1992), 73.

⁹
Ibid., 76-77.

suffrage organizations in California.¹⁰ The 1911 campaign for woman suffrage printed four million pieces of literature in several languages. Advertising played a prominent role in the campaign.¹¹ In 1911, Measure 8, the woman's suffrage amendment to the state's constitution, passed.

Segments of the women's suffrage movement had long used racist rhetoric to advance the suffrage cause. Pro-suffrage abolitionist women felt betrayed by their colleagues, female and male, who turned away from the cause of votes for women in the name of assuring suffrage for black men.

After the Civil War, white abolitionists such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony viciously denounced the proposed fifteenth amendment to the Constitution because it gave black men the vote before white women. For a brief period, Stanton and Anthony campaigned along with George Train, a politician known both for his notorious bigotry and his support of woman suffrage.¹² Stanton lamented that "ignorant" men of inferior races would

¹⁰

Ibid., 78.

¹⁰

Weatherford, 185.

¹²

Hymowitz and Weissman, 160-61.

have the vote while educated white women remained unenfranchised. "[T]wo million ignorant men are being ushered into the legislative halls....What can we hope for at the hands of the Chinese, Indians and Africans?"¹³ Anna Howard Shaw, successor to Anthony as NAWSA president expressed similar concerns:

No other country has subjected its women to the humiliating position to which the women of this nation have been subjected by men...American women are governed by every kind of a man under the light of the sun. There is no race, there is no color, there is no nationality of men who are not the sovereign rulers of American women.¹⁴

Clearly the women Shaw is referring to are white, and her audience is meant to understand the degradation of a white woman subject to the rule of inferior, primarily non-white men. Stanton and other prominent NAWSA members supported literacy requirements, which in practice denied the vote to black men, and many immigrant white men. In addition, NAWSA admitted black women as members, but refused to allow black women to attend conventions and conferences.¹⁵

¹³

The Revolution, vol. III, February 11, 1869.

¹⁴

Kraditor, 126.

¹⁵

Suzanne M. Marilley, Woman Suffrage and the Origins of

Carrie Chapman Catt went further with her nativist arguments, claiming that the unworthy and uneducated votes of slumdweller and immigrants posed a "great danger" to the government. "That danger lies in the votes possessed by the males in the slums of the cities, and the ignorant foreign vote which was sought to be brought up by each party, to make political success."¹⁶

M. Carey Thomas, president of Bryn Mawr College and a prominent suffragist, recounted the incident which converted her mother to the suffrage cause, after many months of unsuccessful lobbying on behalf of women prisoners in Baltimore:

One day, when she was being driven fruitlessly about from one politician to another, she had to stop at a polling booth to let her ignorant negro coachman, who could neither read nor write, vote for those very men she had implored in vain. She often told me that from that moment of bitter humiliation, in which she, a woman who could not vote, held reins for the ignorant man who

Liberal Feminism in the United States, 1820-1920 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 14.

¹⁶

Woman's Journal, December 15, 1894, in Kraditor, 125. As head of the New York state branch of NAWSA, Catt would later change this opinion, and work actively and successfully to recruit immigrant support of suffrage. Tax, Meredith, The Rising of the Women (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1980), 170.

could, she never again doubted that women must vote to protect the interests of other women.¹⁷

¹⁷

M. Carey Thomas "Woman's Ballot," in Woman Suffrage: Arguments and Results (New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1971), not paginated.

Anecdotes such as this were intended to illustrate the unjust restrictions which prevented white middle-class women from doing their feminine duty to help the less fortunate.¹⁸

While other well-known white suffragists such as Jane Addams, Florence Kelley, and Lucy Stone opposed the use of racist arguments to gain suffrage for women, the advocacy of Stanton, Shaw, Anthony, Catt and others left a clear precedent. Prominent white suffragists who propagated racist and anti-immigrant ideology to advance their cause, while not specifically targeting the Japanese, had laid a path that others would follow.

The California suffrage campaign used anti-Japanese and anti-immigrant arguments to further the suffrage cause. In Woman Suffrage and Politics, Catt and coauthor Nettie Shuler argued that the failure of the 1896 suffrage amendment was due to 5,000 Chinese voters "in 'pigtailed' and sandals" being roused out by anti-suffrage forces to cast their

¹⁸

Suzanne Marilley illustrates how such stories as the story of Li Po Ton, narrated by Carrie Chapman Catt, give the reader the message that "female social workers lacked the standing they needed to intervene successfully in cases of sexual slavery that included child abuse." Woman Suffrage, 184.

votes against it.¹⁹ According to Catt and Shuler, the narrow margin of victory in the 1911 suffrage campaign was due in part to "all voting Chinese being again rounded up against it."²⁰

Maud Younger was a journalist and society woman who began a long involvement with labor issues after a stint as a waitress while in San Francisco working on a newspaper feature. Appalled by the working conditions she encountered, she helped organize the Waitresses Union before going back to her life as a journalist and prominent member of New York society.

Like many earlier suffragists, Younger used anti-Asian rhetoric as an argument for white women's suffrage.

In different parts of the country the vote has been given to negroes, Indians, hindoos and other Asiatics. Have they greater interests to protect than have the American women? Are they more capable of citizenship?²¹

¹⁹

Carrie Chapman Catt, and Nettie Rogers Shuler, . Woman Suffrage and Politics: The Inner Story of the Suffrage Movement (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1969), 123.

²⁰

Ibid., 176.

²¹

Maud Younger, "Why Wage Earning Women Should Vote," (San Francisco: California Equal Suffrage Association, undated), 2, in Frances Noel Collection, box one, folder seven,

In keeping with her interest in (white) labor struggles, she asserted that white women needed the vote to protect their interests and ability to earn a living:

The women of California are in daily competition with the Asiatics. They have a constant struggle to maintain wages and conditions under which white women can live. Yet the native born Chinese have a weapon far more powerful than any she has. They can vote for the lawmakers who govern her, and she cannot.²²

She also pointed out the company in which women were kept as citizens not allowed to vote. "In California every adult may vote excepting only Mongolians, Indians, idiots, insane, criminals, and women."²³ Her argument is similar those of Stanton and Chapman Catt, that white women were inherently more deserving of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship than "inferior" men of color. Younger appealed to white women and men to support suffrage on the grounds of racial solidarity and preservation.

Class was a problematic issue for the well-bred reformer intent on doing her part to ease the hardships of working

Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles.

²²

Ibid., 1.

²³

Ibid., 2.

women. Race was a convenient scapegoat on which to blame all the hardships suffered by working-class women, allowing middle- and upper-class white women the luxury of railing against the conditions of their white working-class sisters without examining the connections between the power and privileges of the white upper-class, and the misery of the many who labored to support it.

Middle- and upper-class women were not the only ones to fix upon racial issues as a convenient scapegoat. White women workers in the anti-Japanese movement seized on Japanese immigration as the cause of their economic woes. They followed a well developed tradition in American labor politics of blaming the most recent arrivals for lowering wages and deteriorating working conditions.

Buffeted by continuous waves of cheap, unskilled immigrant labor, American workers, unlike their European counterparts, turned to nativism rather than class solidarity for solutions. More established workers focused on the latest or most culturally dissimilar group of immigrants, rather than the underlying industrial system which supplanted skilled labor for less skilled workers:

At a time when the industrial organization of production was coming to disrupt the logic of craft organization in unions and when mechanization was beginning to undercut

the value of craft skills, immigration shifted its source, accelerated its pace and swelled in volume. Because this new wave of immigration came from different sources and because it was comprised overwhelmingly of semi- and unskilled workers and peasants, the cause of economic dislocation became confused with the symptom.²⁴

The anti-Japanese movement cut across class lines, uniting working, middle, and upper-class white women and men against Japanese people of all classes.

Race issues also divided working-class women and sometimes created solidarity across class lines at the expense of working-class unity. Race, ethnicity, and color often took precedence over issues of class, focusing resentment for poor wages and working conditions on the most racially different, or the most recently emigrated, rather than on the institutions which caused those conditions. This framing of issues around race or ethnicity, and blaming newly arrived immigrants for the actions of corporations, can be seen in a resolution on exclusion brought to the 1909 national WTUL convention by Louise La Rue of San Francisco:

Whereas, The unlimited immigration to the mainland of the United States of alien races, particularly Japanese, Koreans, Hindoos and other Asiatics, is constantly increasing and already has effected the displacement of hundreds of thousands of white men and women in numerous industries and occupations, thus proving conclusively

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Mink, Alien Nation, 26.

the invincibility from a material standpoint of the cheaper and lower Asiatic standard when permitted freely to compete with our American standard of life; and Whereas, The sole danger of such free competition of alien races lies in our present industrial and economic conditions which enable the employer to draw from this reservoir of cheaper labor...

Resolved, By the National Women's Trade Union League in convention assembled, that we earnestly support the strenuous efforts of the people of the West to obtain exclusion laws against all Asiatics, similar to those now in force against the Chinese.²⁵

"The employer" is left as a faceless and blameless entity for his part in setting wages and working conditions, and hiring cheaper labor.

In her book Class Coalition and Class Conflict in the California Woman Suffrage Movement 1907-1912, Susan Englander briefly explores the influence of race on white working women in the woman suffrage movement. She looks at the effect of race on the San Francisco Wage Earner's Suffrage League:

The WESL drew its leadership from San Francisco's largely Irish female work force. These independent white women...tended to invest in their identity as wage earners....They unionized at a higher rate than did women nationally due to a more receptive labor community, the presence of a unifying anti-Asian movement, the opportunity to form separate women's

²⁵

National Women's Trade Union League, "Proceedings, 1909," 49.

unions, and their ability to generate a contingent of capable union leaders....²⁶

Louise LaRue, long-time trade unionist, suffragist and anti-Japanese activist, represented Local 48 of the Waitresses Union at the 1909 NWTUL Convention, presenting some of the strongest arguments for Japanese exclusion. She also represented the local before the California Federation of Labor and the San Francisco Labor Council.

Some WESL leaders, such as LaRue, specifically targeted the Japanese and other Asians as a menace. Others focused on the supposed necessity of protecting the white race from all other races.

It is also clear that the WESL and its successor, the HLL, were self consciously white. While women like Louise LaRue campaigned to exclude Asians and other racial minorities from the union, and, indeed, the nation, spokeswomen Noel and Younger appealed for support for female enfranchisement as a "protection of the race," and the white women who had born and raised children, "mothers of the race." These suggestions of racial endangerment and assumptions of white solidarity punctuated calls for woman suffrage and for the necessity of white female political participation.²⁷

The literature of Wage Earners' Suffrage League often linked women's suffrage with racial improvement. In a

²⁶

Englander, 168-67.

²⁷

Ibid.

statement addressed to the union men of California, the league proclaimed: "Woman's vote will come; Woman's Vote must come; The Progress of the Race Calls for Women's Vote."²⁸

²⁸

Frances Noel Papers, box one, folder seven, Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles.

CHAPTER 5: IN THEIR OWN VOICES: WOMEN EXPRESS THEIR OPINIONS
ON THE 1913 ALIEN LAND ACTS

The campaign to pass the Anti-Alien Land Acts of 1913 stirred up controversy across the country. Coming as it did, when California women first gained the vote, women both from California and across the nation held a particular interest in the outcome of the campaign. The Hiram Johnson Papers proved an invaluable source of information about the ideologies and motivations of women concerning the Anti-Japanese movement. The Hiram Johnson Papers collection contains hundreds of letters from voters to Governor Johnson during the campaign to pass the 1913 Alien Land Acts. While the majority of letters came from men, the newly enfranchised women of California sent in dozens of letters expressing their position. In addition to the letters from California residents came a surprising amount of correspondence from across the country. The letters represent a broad spectrum of literacy and class. Women's reasons for supporting the Alien Land Acts varied. Very few women defended the Japanese.

The major themes in the letters include the alleged threat posed by the Japanese people in the United States to the white race and to white standards of living, the menace

to democratic ideals and American institutions, and an occasional reference to the debauched morals of the Japanese.

Many letters sounded the theme of an "invasion" by an aggressive and inassimilable Japanese populace. Mrs. Jewel Kerney, a native Californian living in Washington D.C., invoked the image of an assault on the state to describe Japanese immigration. "We women of California know the awful peril hovering over the beloved state by the constant and insistant [sic] invasion of the yellow race."¹ In a similar vein Mary Pearson emphasized California's geographic vulnerability:

California by reason of its unprotected hundreds of miles of coast, open to the attacks and invasion of a threatening alien race, should receive great consideration and protection from the national government....No state in the East or other part of our Country has ever been threatened or put in peril by any nation as we in California are threatened and plased [sic] in peril by this Asiatic race.²

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¹

Mrs. Jewel Kerney to Governor Hiram Johnson, May 22, 1913, Hiram Johnson Papers, box thirty-eight, folder K, miscellaneous, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

²

Mary Pearson to Governor Hiram Johnson, undated, Johnson Papers, box thirty-eight, folder P, miscellaneous.

Miss J. Augustin Basset of Chicago referred to Japan's military successes in China and Russia as reason for what she saw as a cocky and aggressive Japanese mentality.

"Japan's late prowess has made her vain and she feels she can now dictate to the world. Subdue the Oriental or be subdued by him."³

Many women expressed fears that white Americans would be unable to compete successfully with Japanese immigrants and their children. One correspondent contrasted the situation of the predominantly single Japanese worker with that of white men with wives and children to support. "The white man with family cannot live in competition with the cheap living single Asiatics."⁴ Others were more concerned with the increasing number of Japanese families residing in the United States and the competition that native-born Japanese Americans would afford to white settlers:

Of course in 25 years there will be plenty of native son Japs, and Evolution has started it, but it is dreadful

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Miss J. Augustin Basset to Governor Hiram Johnson, May 19, 1913, Johnson Papers, box thirty-seven, folder B, miscellaneous.

4

Letter to Governor Hiram Johnson, undated, signature illegible, Johnson Papers, box thirty-seven, folder C, miscellaneous.

to have it overwhelm us like a broken dam and flood out the standard of living that pioneers have built up.... We cannot go back to their standard. We would die in their environment.⁵

This statement and others like it implied that the Japanese should be prevented from competing freely with whites because they were tougher, more able to stand bad conditions and long work hours. As Joanna Hilts, representative of the Seattle WTUL, put it: the Japanese were "in many cases completely crowding out the white workers through their ability to live and work on less than one-third what is absolutely essential to the life and health of a white laborer."⁶

Mrs. John Schmidt, a farmer's wife in Sonoma wrote:
"[W]e do not want the Japanese for neighbors and we cannot compete with them in the first place. We would sell our little ranch at a sacrifice before we would live alongside a

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Mary Allabough to Governor Hiram Johnson, June 7, 1913, Johnson Papers, box thirty-seven, folder A, miscellaneous.

⁶

National Women's Trade Union League, "Proceedings: Sixth Biennial Convention," 67.

Jap family."⁷ For Mrs. Schmidt and others like her, economic well-being took a back seat to racial concerns.

Preserving California for white settlers was of prime concern to many women in and out of the state of California.

You and the Legislature did right I think about passing the Anti Alien Land Bill. Why our unborn generations of the Anglo Saxon race will rise up and thank you and the Legislature for being true to the welfare of your state.⁸

In the same vein, Mrs. J. M. Howard of Seattle, Washington wrote:

[T]he decession [sic] you have giving [sic] in the Japanese bill its [sic] one of the greatest things that ever was done for us Amaricans [sic]. Dear Sir giving us Amaricans [sic] the honor and land that belongs to us and to those that will become Amaricans [sic].⁹

These correspondents missed the irony of identifying the welfare of California and the United States solely with the descendants of the relatively recently immigrated Europeans.

Mrs. Richard Halsey, a former missionary to Japan, clearly articulated the viewpoint of those who opposed

7

Mrs. John Schmidt to Governor Hiram Johnson, April 12, 1913, Johnson Papers, box thirty-nine, folder S, miscellaneous.

8

Mrs. J. M. Howard to Governor Hiram Johnson, undated, Johnson Papers, box thirty-eight, folder H miscellaneous.

9

Ibid.

Japanese immigration on the grounds of their "moral turpitude."

I went to Japan as a missionary, and the good of the people is still my earnest desire, but it is true of heathen nations everywhere, and the Japanese are no exception, that they are moral lepers. Keep them out of America for the same reason you would keep a known criminal from associating with your loved ones....[W]e have found them everywhere the same, on the surface polished and delightful in manners, but at heart intensely conceited, selfish, deceitful, lying immoral, treacherous.¹⁰

According to her, the Japanese placed a high value on treachery and deceit. "Their national heroes have, almost without exception, made their way to fame and power through treachery, usually the assassination of their patrons...."¹¹ She referred to the experience of the Hawaiian islands in some detail to further her argument about the moral degeneracy of the Japanese. Halsey voiced the common accusation that Japanese men were predators on girls and women. According to her, Japanese women who have "taken advantage of our laws" regarding divorce were often murdered by their partners. Additionally, she claimed that

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Mrs. Richard Halsey to Governor Hiram Johnson, April 24, 1913, Johnson Papers, box thirty-eight, folder H, miscellaneous.

¹¹

Ibid.

"Robberies, murders, thefts, and particularly crimes against women and little girls are fearfully on the increase," due in large part to the Japanese. Mrs. Halsey exhorted the governor to protect the state from all non-European immigration, not just Japanese immigrants: "My intense interest in the anti-alien land bill impels me to write begging you to close California to any immigrants or aliens not of our race and civilization."¹²

The charge of miscegenation was frequently made with great venom. Mrs. A. Anderson, "voter, mother and homekeeper" of Long Beach wrote Governor Johnson on the subject:

I seen a Jap in one of the large stores with a white girl as his wife- I was quite shocked I said to myself- goodness me- In a few years we will be so mixed up and so full of half-breeds- we will be like Mexico and go to killing one another- You know the bible always speaks of mixed races as being cursed.¹³

She appealed to the governor to uphold the purity of the white race: "Shall we be a clean race and a white race or shall we be a race of many collars [sic]." Two weeks later

¹²

Ibid.

¹³

Mrs. A. Anderson to Governor Hiram Johnson, May 1, 1913, Johnson Papers, box thirty-seven, Anderson folder.

she wrote another letter on the dangers of mixing the races, stating that if Japanese and whites intermarried, white men would scorn manual labor, and that the "Asiatics might conclude to be the master."¹⁴ Mrs. Cushing from New York also warned the Governor of the dangers of miscegenation:

Mixing of the races can only cause problems later on. I am sending you a clipping from the New York District about the Japanese. Surely they are laying the foundation of plenty of trouble for those who come after us, witness the intermarriage of the Negro in Brazil.¹⁵

Mrs. J. M. Bohus of Red Bluff, California, wrote to Governor Johnson complaining; "Two white women in Red Bluff are living in shame with two Japanese and tho [sic] the law requires all bad women to leave town these two remain."¹⁶

One of the few letters to Governor Johnson criticizing the Alien Land Act provides an interesting view into the (white) mindset of the time. Alice McBrown, a longtime native of Florin, California, a center of nativist activism, clearly articulated a viewpoint both racist and pro-

¹⁴

Ibid.

¹⁵

Mrs Cushing to Governor Hiram Johnson, July 9, 1913, Johnson Papers, box thirty-seven, folder C, miscellaneous.

¹⁶

Mrs. J.M. Bohus to Governor Hiram Johnson, May 21, 1913, Johnson Papers, box thirty-seven, folder B, miscellaneous.

Japanese. While vehemently opposed to the bill, and believing the Japanese to be excellent neighbors and potential citizens, she pointed out that she would not socialize with her Japanese neighbors.

Many of her arguments echoed the racism and Anglo-Saxon ethnocentrism of the Land Law's staunch supporters. Her views on miscegenation are a case in point: "If, in the rarest incidences, there is intermarriage of the white and brown races, let us place the error where it belongs, to the degeneracy of the white person, and not the whole Japanese race."¹⁷ She later tempered her stance by saying that such prejudices might spring from "our narrowness, our conservatism," and that perhaps it was better that a white woman marry "an industrious alien" rather than a "shiftless intemperate white man." Still the overall tone of her letter suggested that it was the excesses of the anti-Japanese faction rather than their core beliefs which troubled her. Even the more liberal Caucasians, then, as is often true now, held similar, if less exaggerated views of their darker neighbors.

¹⁷

Mrs. Alice Brown to Governor Hiram Johnson, May 13, 1913,

She concluded her letter using first an economic and then a political argument: that "whites cannot do this work," and that "[t]he Japanese alone are fitted for the ceaseless labor of raising strawberries."¹⁸ This statement was a variation on the argument that the Japanese must not be allowed to compete with white American labor because Japanese willingness to suffer under abysmal conditions undercut "superior" white laborers' wages and living conditions.

Mrs. Wisdome of Chicago was the one correspondent to take what could be construed as a Socialist, or at least anti-capitalist stance. She put forth the radical proposition that someone other than the Japanese might be benefitting from cheap labor that undercut the prevailing wage, namely the businesses that employed cheap immigrant labor.

It is more than time our country ought to consider the Americans' welfare instead of the immigrants. The American capitalists import foreign help by the millions, who by their willingness to work for low wages cut the working American man's wages, elbow him out of his place, his job and reduce him to starvation. Not only are the American man [sic] elbowed out but also the American girls are obliged to make place for the foreign girls in the factories and family service. One has only

¹⁸

Johnson Papers, box thirty-seven, Brown folder.

to follow the advertisements in our papers to see the truth of it. German, Swedish, Bohemian, Hungarian preferred. The tenure of the "ads" now if the orientals are permitted to own our land soon the United States would be another Russia by its anarchy.... Let America be for the Americans. You did a noble thing there.¹⁹

¹⁹

Mrs. Wisdome to Governor Hiram Johnson, May 15, 1913, Johnson Papers, box thirty-nine, folder W, miscellaneous.

CHAPTER 6: VIRGINS AND INNOCENTS; WOMEN IN ANTI-JAPANESE
RHETORIC

Women were involved as participants in the anti-Japanese movement, but they were perhaps even more frequently invoked as icons in the propaganda of the wider movement. White girls were portrayed as virginal innocents, helpless before the advances of lascivious Japanese men. The October 11, 1906, decision of the San Francisco School Board to require Japanese children to attend a separate school built for the Chinese was in large part precipitated by racist outcry over Japanese boys purportedly lusting after their Anglo-American female schoolmates. Sacramento Assemblyman Grove Johnson, father of Hiram Johnson, decried the danger posed to American girls by Japanese boys with "evil oriental thoughts".¹ A cartoon in the Sacramento Bee depicted lecherous Japanese young men seated side by side with helpless young white girls.² In the Grizzly Bear, a notoriously anti-Japanese paper put out by the Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West, a Native Daughter wrote:

¹
Walton Bean and James J. Rawls, California: an Interpretive History (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1983), 278.

²
Hiram Johnson Papers, box thirty-seven, undated clipping.

"it is not unusual these days to find, especially the 'better class' of Japanese, casting furtive glances at our young women. They would like to marry them."³ Mrs. Alice Howard referred to the schools controversy in a letter to Governor Johnson in 1913, encouraging him to stand firm in support of the Alien Land Laws which were coming under fire from Washington.

I am suggesting...that some one have pictures taken of classes in San Francisco of burly Japs and baby boys and girls. That should satisfy your friend Roosevelt tho [sic] his little folks have grown up. A wide distribution of such classroom pictures should satisfy even President Wilson who has raised three daughters.⁴

The Governor received letters of support from as far away as Virginia. Mrs. E.R. Horsley from Nelson County, Virginia wrote: "[Y]ou did the right and just thing for the benefit of the white children."⁵

3

Grizzly Bear, July 1923, 27.

4

Mrs. Alice Howard to Governor Hiram Johnson, May 13, 1913, Hiram Johnson Papers, box thirty-eight, folder H miscellaneous.

5

Mrs. E.R. Horseley to Governor Hiram Johnson, May 2, 1913, Hiram Johnson Papers, box thirty-eight, folder H miscellaneous.

This sort of characterization followed a longtime American tradition of portraying men of color as depraved beasts, slaving after the prize of white womanhood. In movies such as Birth of a Nation, in popular novels and plays, black, brown and red men were frequently depicted threatening white women. In the film, Shadows of the West, evil Japanese men exploited terrified white women. The Los Angeles Examiner noted that "the scene at the docks when the terrified girls are packed off by an uncouth crowd [of Japanese] and speedily put to exhausting work made a deep impression on the audience."⁶ Attempts were made to appeal to racial loyalty against outsiders, and to contrast the enlightened treatment of women in American society to the subjugation of women in Japanese culture. In another review:

[T]he hardships of Washington and His Continentals, the struggle of Lincoln for unity and freedom...contrasted with the Asiatic's enslavement of women....Constitutional law is placed beside emperor worship: feudal Asiatic tenets, engrained [sic] in the Oriental mind for generations, are proved to be non-assimilable with a government founded upon the Christian doctrine and dedicated to liberty and freedom.⁷

6

Los Angeles Examiner, October 5, 1920.

7

Grizzly Bear, October, 1920, 7.

Wallace Irwin, author of many books about Japanese immigrants, portrayed Japanese men tyrannizing Japanese women in the farm town of Bly. "At the sight of a man the women bend their bodies stiffly from the waist up, accompanying the gesture with folding of the hands and a lowering of the eyes. In Bly, California, the male is lord."⁸ Although women in America were considered far from equal to men, the inequalities between the sexes in Japanese culture were held up to public scorn.

Kosti L. Aryan of Fort Worden, Washington sent a letter to Governor Hiram Johnson advocating a firm defense of the Alien Land Laws using a metaphorical tale of a beautiful princess and her daughters.

Many are the suitors who court them. Some of alien blood got so impertinent that the girls complained to their mother and got encouraged to use their rights and throw the impudent fellows out. But they are tough, worse than pigs. They went to complain too. And "Father" is going to decide. Does he love his girls or will he try to "marry them by paternal authority" to the unwelcome stranger? "Father" seems to get scared, where the girls are not afraid to protect their own virginhood [*sic*], because they know and love "their feller."⁹

8

Irwin Wallace, Seed of the Sun (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1921), 56.

9

Kosti L. Aryan to Governor Hiram Johnson, May 1913, Hiram

Aryan described the United States as the virginal and virtuous daughters, and recent immigrants, Japanese and otherwise, as the "impudent fellows."

Newspaper accounts mentioning Japanese women were often sensational, focusing on prostitution and vice. The San Francisco Call, the Sacramento Bee, and the San Francisco Examiner were among the papers to take a particularly negative view of the Japanese.

Four Japanese girls, named Mio, Tiko, Taki and Tanaki Yoni, arrived from Japan in this port on May 7, 1891, with eleven other Japanese women. Mio and her three companions were brought here for immoral purposes and were refused admittance to the United States on the ground that they were likely to become a public charge.¹⁰

The women here are of the lowest class, and, like the Chinese women, are imported only to leave a life of shame....[T]hey are held in bondage and are obliged to turn over their wages of sin to their masters and importers....[T]he Japanese have not until lately taken any care of the chastity of certain castes, and the women have learned to look upon their awful business as a matter of course.¹¹

Cora Woodbridge, a Native Daughter of the Golden West pointed out the lack of feminine delicacy in Japanese

Johnson Papers, box thirty-seven, folder A, miscellaneous.

¹⁰

San Francisco Call, May 4, 1892.

¹¹

Ibid.

immigrant women: the Issei mother "is a beast of burden up to the time of the birth of her child and, within a day or two at most, resumes her task, and continues it from twelve to sixteen hours a day."¹²

Anti-Japanese agitators frequently evoked the specter of white women thrown out of work because of the Japanese. According to popular mythology, hardworking and virtuous white women were driven from gainful employment into poverty, degradation, and even prostitution by competition with Japanese workers. This image was repeatedly raised as a sure consequence of Japanese immigration:

[T]he blabbering, pretentious, half-civilized Japanese were fast supplanting white workmanship both in field and factory, while driving American girls into the stifling beer joints and the gloomy streets; into the bawdy houses and slums of the tenderloin district and the Barbary Coast.¹³

Women were at a disadvantage in comparison to men due to protective legislation limiting their working hours to eight in a day.

Another instance appears in the action of the Placer Packing Association, of Auburn, Placer County, June 28th, in dismissing a number of white girls for the

¹²

Grizzly Bear, October, 1920.

¹³

Organized Labor, March 1900, in Matson, 5.

reason, assigned by the management, that the white girls, under the State law, could work only eight hours a day, while the Japanese could work fifteen hours, and the fruit had to be moved, and the accommodations in the plant did not permit the use of a large force.¹⁴

Interestingly, McClatchy did not question the laws which caused men and women to compete on such uneven footing in this case.

Anyone looking closely at the situation at the time would have been hard pressed to find evidence that Asians controlled the industry, or in many cases that white women or men were willing to do the jobs dominated by Asians. The Japanese were reviled for their very success. Precisely because they worked hard, saved, and when possible became home and business owners, they were seen a greater threat to white interests:

The general system of peaceful penetration followed by the Japanese is to first supplant labor by working for less money or longer hours than would the whites: then, having driven out white competitors, to raise the rate of wage until it is as high or higher than that asked for by white labor; then to refuse to work for the whites under wage, and to work only for Japanese, or by leasing land from whites, and finally where possible to secure ownership of the land and allied business.¹⁵

¹⁴

McClatchy, Preliminary Skeleton Brief, 18-19.

¹⁵

Ibid., 17.

In contrast to the virtuous white woman lay the tremendously fecund Japanese woman. Anti-Japanese propaganda made frequent reference to the high fertility rate of Japanese women. Even the State Board of Health joined in:

[T]here is no race within our borders that can compare with the Japanese in rate of reproduction and vitality. In 1920 alone the Japanese increased their population 5.4 percent by reproduction, while the white race increase 0.5 percent, one-tenth as fast.¹⁶

Often these references were highly sexualized. "Japan's Peaceful Penetration," was an article dealing with the fertility rate of the Japanese. The article referred to the vigor of Japanese men in the prime years between fourteen and forty-four.¹⁷ V.S. McClatchy, editor of the Sacramento Bee, frequently sounded this theme. According to McClatchy, the Japanese government put out propaganda exhorting its citizens and nationals abroad to produce large families and buy land:

All the utterances in speech or press of the Japanese, intended for consumption among their own people, show conclusively that there is neither the intention nor the desire to merge their identity in that of assimilated

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State Board of Health Bulletin, October 1921.

¹⁷

Ibid., June 7, 1919.

American citizens, but--as they, themselves, express it--to secure for the Yamamoto race a permanent place on this continent. For this purpose, their people are constantly urged to beget children, and secure land, as the most effective means of establishing their race here.¹⁸

Newspapers accounts starting in the 1890s accused the Japanese of all manner of sexual vices. An article in the San Francisco Call in 1899 reads:

Today the Japanese procurer, slave owner, and divekeeper from whose filthy brothel in Brooklyn alley officers for the Society for the Suppression of Vice rescued 17-year-old Nia Koku Chiyo was arrested... on two charges "procuring minor girls for purposes of prostitution" and "keeping a minor in a house of ill-fame."¹⁹

Another account accused Japanese prostitutes of perverting young boys:

To show how depraved these women are even with their reputation for quietness and honesty, it may be stated that less than two months ago two of them were arrested for enticing boys of thirteen and fourteen years of age into their dens. When arrested they felt very much aggrieved, saying they had done nothing more than a number of other fallen women of their race were doing.²⁰

Newspaper accounts as far away as Washington state mentioned Japanese slave rings. The Japanese resident minister Tateno

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McClatchy, Preliminary Skeleton Brief, 20.

¹⁹

San Francisco Call, February 16, 1899.

²⁰

Ibid., May 4, 1892.

Goza found an interview in the Washington Evening Star in which traveler Henry Slocum described a public sale of Japanese women in San Francisco. "[T]wenty Japanese girls who were overcome with shame at being viewed clad in such a paucity of clothing" were sold off "like hotcakes on a cold morning and at prices ranging from forty to five hundred dollars each."²¹

The Seattle Post Intelligencer had several reports on Japanese involvement in prostitution. "Not a gambler was arrested Saturday afternoon, although the women continued to pour in all day, and were of various nationalities-- American, French, colored and Japanese. Nearly all were of the latter nationality."²² Another article reported: "It is estimated that at least 300 disreputable women were in White Chapel, the greater number of whom are Japanese."²³

²¹

Evening Star, in Donald Teruo Hata, "Undesirables": Early Immigrants and the Anti-Japanese Movement in San Francisco, 1892-1893, Prelude to Exclusion, (New York: Arno Press, 1970), 82-83.

²²

Enclosure to Official Dispatch No. 27, Sugimura to Okabe, 2/16/1891, UTGA/JARP MSS, quoted in Hata, 70.

²³

Seattle Post Intelligencer, May 1, 1891.

Anti-Japanese agitators such as McClatchy used incredibly exaggerated reports of the growth of the Japanese population. "The total Japanese population of the United States will be, at the end of 1923 - 318,600; and the end of 1933 - 542,000; at the end of 1940 - 875,000."²⁴ McClatchy used the example of Hawaii to point to the horrors ahead if Japanese immigration was not stopped. He painted Hawaii as the foot in the door of an Asian invasion on two fronts: immigration from Japan and a torrent of Japanese births from those already in this country:

Nearly half the population of Hawaii and more than half the annual births are Japanese and that territory will be governed in a few years, under present conditions, as a Japanese province under the American flag. What has happened there is an indication of what has already commenced in California.²⁵

²⁴

Sacramento Bee, June 7, 1919.

²⁵

Ibid.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS

White women in California and the West Coast participated in the anti-Japanese movement on many levels. Women of all classes participated in the anti-Japanese movement. Further study is needed to determine the extent to which women of other ethnic groups participated in anti-Japanese activism. While women in California, Washington, and to a certain extent Oregon made up the bulk of the active participants in anti-Japanese activity, women from all over the United States held strong feelings on the subject.

Women were involved in labor efforts to exclude the Japanese, both through single-issue organizations such as the Anti-Jap Laundry League, and through more traditional labor organizations. Labor organizations such as the Women's Trade Union League, and the California Federation of Labor resented the Japanese for their willingness to work for low wages, and their success at moving up the economic ladder to lease and buy land or start small businesses. The willingness of white laborers to put questions of race and ethnicity over questions of class hampered their efforts to make lasting changes in the economic order. Anti-Japanese and anti-Chinese rhetoric was used by some suffragists to

further their cause, inflaming fears that a tide of uneducated, immoral foreigners would swamp the polls. Some women's clubs saw Japanese immigration as a threat to American standards, while others worked with immigrants of all races to smooth their transition into American society. The image of the pure white woman threatened by the immoral Japanese man was widely used in political circles. A frequent image in popular accounts was the white worker, female or male, cruelly displaced by Japanese men willing to work for starvation wages. Sensational images of the alleged immorality, cunning, and cruelty of the Japanese flooded newspapers, movies and popular literature.

Anti-Japanese and anti-immigrant legislation such as the Anti-Alien Land Laws and the various exclusionary measures brought before the state and national legislatures, clearly struck a chord with a large section of the population of California. While the strength of anti-Japanese fervor may be difficult for today's Californian to understand, some of the same arguments have been revived in a new context. The pervasive anti-Mexican prejudice so evident in California's recent ballot initiatives is clear evidence that racial scapegoating is far from extinct. Where nativists once

decried the numbers of Chinese, or Japanese immigrants, now they target Mexican and Latin Americans.

Once again, white residents of many Western states cite unfair competition, willingness to work for low wages, lack of English, and "un-American" values as the reasons for their opposition to newcomers. California again has the unfortunate reputation of being a national leader in anti-immigrant politics. The popular support for anti-Mexican and anti-immigrant ballot measures such as Proposition 187, aimed at excluding children in the country illegally from attending school or receiving state funded health care, and Proposition 227, to abolish bilingual education, shows the continuing strength and resonance of racial and anti-immigrant politics in California.

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