

A LETTER WRITING CAMPAIGN TO DISCOURAGE IMMIGRATION (1876)

The Chinese Six Companies is asking our fellow clansmen not to make the long sea voyage to the United States so as to avoid bringing trouble on the community. The reason we have been subjected to all kinds of harassment by the white people is that many of our Chinese newcomers are taking jobs away from them. And yet, if we take a look at the wages of the Chinese workers in the various trades, we can see that they are shrinking day by day. This is also due to the large number of our fellow clansmen coming here. If up to 10,000 people come here, even if they do not take away 10,000 white men's jobs, they will still drive down the wages of 10,000 workers in various trades. It's inevitable. If this trend is not stopped, not only will the white men's harassment continue, causing a great deal of trouble for our community, but even skilled Chinese workers will have difficulty finding jobs and will lose their livelihood. If it is hard for the Chinese who are already here, imagine how much worse it will be for the newcomers.

Therefore, in an effort to prevent disaster before it strikes, the members of the Six Companies believe that the best course of action is to have each person in California write a letter home exhorting his clansmen not to come to America. And who would doubt such advice when it originates from a kinsman? This is much better than our posting thousands and thousands of notices. If the trend should cease and fewer clansmen come here, first, further trouble from the white people would be avoided; second, wages will stop shrinking; third, there will be no worry about newcomers being detained. Everyone will benefit. Just a single word from you will do a world of good. For this reason we are urging every one to write home.

The Chinese Six Companies

15th day of the 3rd month, Guangxu⁴ 2nd year [April 9, 1876]

SOURCE: Reverend Otis Gibson Papers, Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley. Translator: Ellen Yeung.

3. The year 1868 is a leap year in the Chinese calendar and there were two fourth months. Tongzhi is the reigning title of the eighth emperor of the Qing dynasty.

4. Reigning title of the ninth emperor of the Qing dynasty who ruled from 1875 to 1908.

A Chinese View of the Statue of Liberty (1885)

Saam Song Bo

The following letter by a Chinese immigrant in response to the building of the Statue of Liberty pedestal in 1885 was first published in the New York Sun newspaper and later reprinted in the monthly periodical American Missionary. Just three years before, Congress had passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, barring further immigration of Chinese laborers to this country and denying Chinese immigrants the right to become naturalized U.S. citizens. Excluded from political participation and denied civil rights as symbolized by the Statue of Liberty, Chinese immigrants such as Saam Song Bo considered it an insult that they were being asked to contribute funds toward the building of the statue. To add salt to the wound, the statue was a gift from France, which that same year had defeated Chinese troops in Indochina and begun to colonize the area that is now Vietnam.

Sir:

A paper was presented to me yesterday for inspection, and I found it to be specially drawn up for subscription among my countrymen toward the Pedestal Fund of the Bartholdi Statue of Liberty.¹ Seeing that the heading is an appeal to American citizens, to their love of country and liberty, I feel that my countrymen and myself are honored in being thus appealed to as citizens in the cause of liberty. But the word liberty makes me think of the fact that this country is the land of liberty for men of all nations except the Chinese. I consider it as an insult to us Chinese to call on us to contribute toward building in this land a pedestal for a statue of Liberty. That statue represents Liberty holding a torch which lights the passage of those of all

1. The Statue of Liberty was designed by Augustus Bartholdi and given to the United States by the French in memory of the two countries' alliance during the American Revolution. An additional \$270,000 had to be raised among the American people to build the statue's pedestal.

nations who come into this country. But are the Chinese allowed to come? As for the Chinese who are here, are they allowed to enjoy liberty as men of all other nationalities enjoy it? Are they allowed to go about everywhere free from the insults, abuse, assaults, wrongs and injuries from which men of other nationalities are free?

If there be a Chinaman who came to this country when a lad, who has passed through an American institution of learning of the highest grade, who has so fallen in love with American manners and ideas that he desires to make his home in this land, and who, seeing that his countrymen demand one of their own number to be their legal adviser, representative, advocate and protector, desires to study law, can he be a lawyer? By the law of this nation, he, being a Chinaman, cannot become a citizen, and consequently cannot be a lawyer.

And this statue of Liberty is a gift to a people from another people who do not love or value liberty for the Chinese. Are not the Annamese and Tonquinese [Tonkinese] Chinese, to whom liberty is as dear as to the French? What right have the French to deprive them of their liberty?

Whether this statute against the Chinese or the statue to Liberty will be the more lasting monument to tell future ages of the liberty and greatness of this country, will be known only to future generations.

Liberty, we Chinese do love and adore thee; but let not those who deny thee to us, make of thee a graven image and invite us to bow down to it.

SOURCE: *American Missionary*, October 1885, p. 290.

OTHER REFERENCES

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