


Module 6: A Nation Grows - 1877 to the 1900s

Topic 2 Content: Acts Regarding Immigration and Eugenics Notes

Introduction

Acts Regarding Immigration and Eugenics

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Many immigrants resisted assimilation because they did not want to give up their cultural heritage. In turn, Americans began to resent immigrants. In fact, anti-immigrant feelings grew so strong that Chinese immigrants became the target of mob attacks. As a result of resentment and fear, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. In 1921, Congress acted again. This time, it passed the Immigration Restriction Act, which limited European immigration. In this interactivity, click each of the panels to learn about the two Congressional Acts that controlled immigration and one Virginia Act that controlled eugenics.

Image: Anti-Chinese Riot, 1880

- Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882
- Immigration Restriction Act of 1921
- Virginia Sterilization Act of 1924

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Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882

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The Chinese Exclusion Act was the first United States federal law to prevent a specific ethnic group from immigrating to the United States. Specifically, it banned all Chinese laborers. While the Chinese Exclusion Act was written to extend for ten years, it became permanent in 1902. On December 17th, 1943 the law was repealed.

Image: Cartoon showing Uncle Sam, with proclamation and can of Magic Washer, kicking Chinese out of the United States.



Immigration Restriction Act of 1921

Virginia Sterilization Act of 1924

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Immigration Restriction Act of 1921

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The Immigration Act of 1921, also known as the Emergency Quota Act, added to the current immigration laws in the United States. The Immigration Act of 1921 limited the number of immigrants admitted from any European country. Specifically, 3% of the number of residents from the same country living in the United States could immigrate annually. The population of residents was determined by the United States Census of 1910.

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Sterilization Act of 1924


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Eugenics is the science of controlling the genetic composition of the human race. Many states enacted eugenic sterilization laws, including Virginia in 1924. The Sterilization Act of 1924 was Virginia's attempt to prevent the birth of genetically inferior children through sexual sterilization. This act allowed for sterilization of inmates in state institutions that housed people considered insane, criminal, feeble-minded, or epileptic.

The first person sterilized under the Sterilization Act of 1924 was Carrie Buck, a seventeen-year-old girl from Charlottesville, Virginia.

Eugenics is the science of controlling the genetic composition of the human race. It is based on an idea that the quality of the human population can be improved by discouraging reproduction in individuals who are presumed to have “undesirable” traits, and encouraging reproduction by those who have desired inheritable traits. The problem with this argument is determining what is considered desirable or undesirable, as those terms can be very subjective.

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The first person sterilized under the Sterilization Act of 1924 was Carrie Buck, a seventeen-year-old girl from Charlottesville, Virginia who, along with her mother, had been institutionalized for feeble-mindedness. Buck challenged the doctor at the institution, John H. Bell, claiming that she was not feeble-minded. The Supreme Court tried the case, and ruled in favor of Bell. Buck was sterilized in 1927. After Buck, more than 8,000 Virginians were sterilized before the Act was repealed in 1974. This Supreme Court case also allowed for an estimated 65,000 Americans to be sterilized without their consent or the consent of a family.

Image: Virginia State Colony for Epileptics and Feeble-minded, 1910