

Asian Immigration to the US, 1790-2026

June, 2026

Jack Chin

University of California, Davis
School of Law

Second Library

NO JAPS IN OUR SCHOOLS

CITIZENS'

MASS MEETING

Will be held in

DREAMLAND PAVILION

POST AND STEINER STREETS

Monday Eve., Dec. 10, 1906

AT 8 O'CLOCK

Under the Auspices of the

Japanese & Korean Exclusion League

O. A. TVEITMOE, Presiding Officer

The Meeting will be Addressed by

MAYOR EUGENE E. SCHMITZ

HON. FRANK MCGOWAN,
Attorney.
WALTER MACARTHUR,
Editor Coast Seamen's Journal.

W. R. HAGGERTY,
President San Francisco Labor Council.
F. H. MCCARTHY,
Pres. State & Local Bldg. Trades Councils.

AND OTHER PROMINENT CITIZENS

Two Points:

- ▶ Exclusion of Asian immigrants from the United States was one of the most prolonged and effective public policy initiatives in history.
 - ▶ Although the U.S. is a “nation of immigrants, and Asians are half the world population, Asian Americans were about ½ of one percent of the U.S. population as late as 1960.
- ▶ Congress Intentionally reversed the policy as part of the civil rights movement in the Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments of 1965, which was one of the most effective reforms ever enacted.
 - ▶ Before 1965, about 80% of U.S. immigration was from Europe; since then, without racial or national preferences, about 80% has been from the third world. About 7% of Americans are of Asian ancestry.

Columbian Centinel (now Boston Herald)

June 30, 1790, Page 2: Naturalization Act of 1790

That any alien, being a **free white person**, who shall have resided within the limits and under the jurisdiction of the United States for the terms of two years, may be admitted to become a citizen thereof.

* * *

FREDERICK AUGUSTUS MUHLENBERG,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

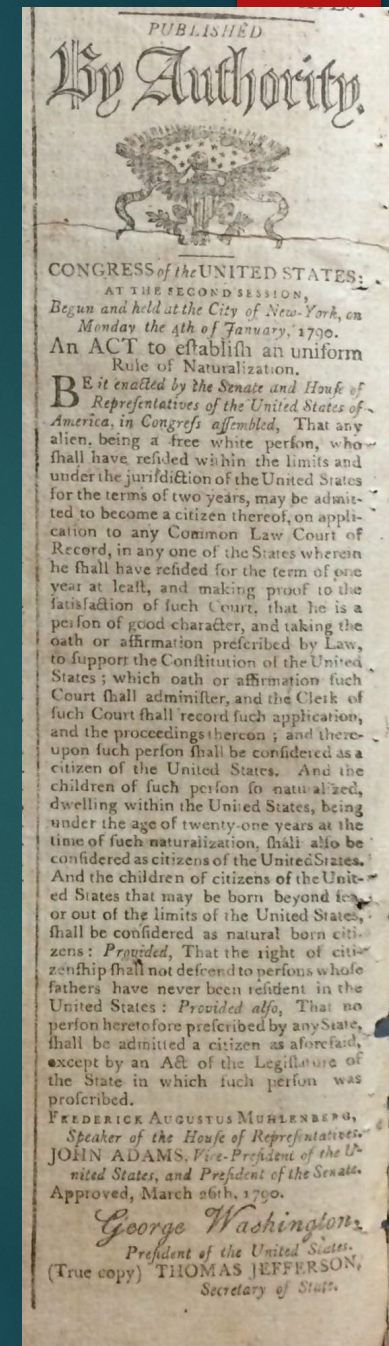
JOHN ADAMS, Vice-President of the United States,
and President of the Senate.

Approved, March 26, 1790.

George Washington,

President of the United States.

(True Copy) THOMAS JEFFERSON,
Secretary of State.



Perhaps the first
case involving
Asians (a Pilipino)

*United States
v. Dow*, 25 F.
Cas. 901
(C.C. D. Md.
1840) (Taney,
Chief Justice)

**The only nations of the
world which were then
regarded, or perhaps
entitled to be regarded, as
civilized, were the white
Christian nations of Europe;
and certainly emigrants
were not expected or
desired from any other
quarter.**

California Constitution of 1879, Art. I, Sec. 17

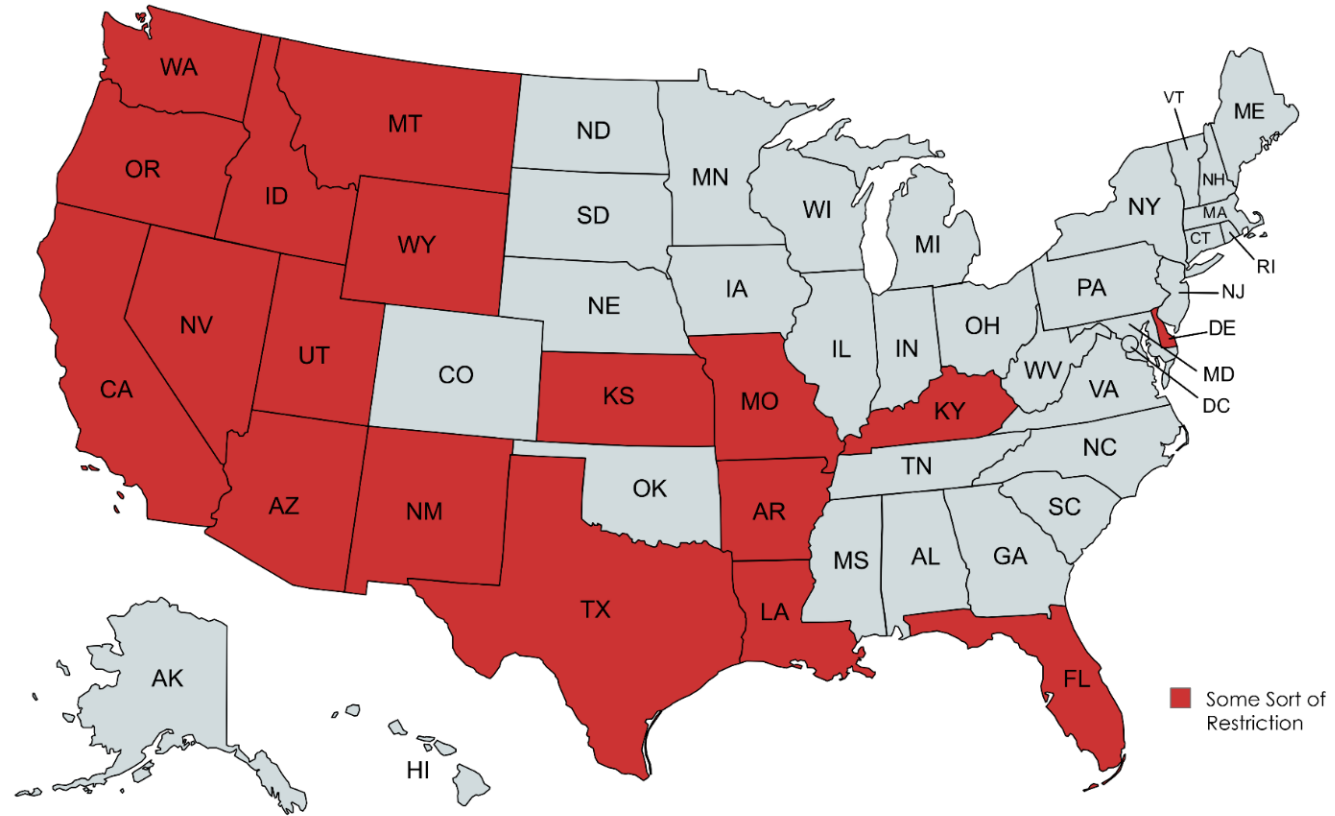
Foreigners of the white race or of African descent, eligible to become citizens of the United States under the naturalization laws thereof, while bona fide residents of this state, shall have the same rights in respect to the acquisition, possession, enjoyment, transmission, and inheritance of property as native-born Citizens.



In re Yano's
Estate, 188
Cal. 645,
658, 206 P.
995, 1001
(1922)

The object sought to be attained by these statutory provisions, that is, to **discourage the coming of Japanese into this state**, may be a proper one, and may be even desirable for the promotion of the welfare and progress of the state.

U.S. Alien Land Laws 2.0, 1913- 1952



Asian Immigration Policy: From Internal Exclusion to External Exclusion

1862-Coolie Act

Invention of the Visa. Chinese people in ships headed for U.S. need clearance.

1875-Page Act-Asian Women Presumptively Prostitutes.

“China, Japan, or any Oriental country”

1882-Chinese Exclusion Act

1907-08-Gentlemen’s Agreement, Restricting Immigration with Japan

1917-Asiatic Barred Zone (Restricting Asian Indians)

1924-“Aliens Ineligible to Citizenship” Excluded (All Asians)

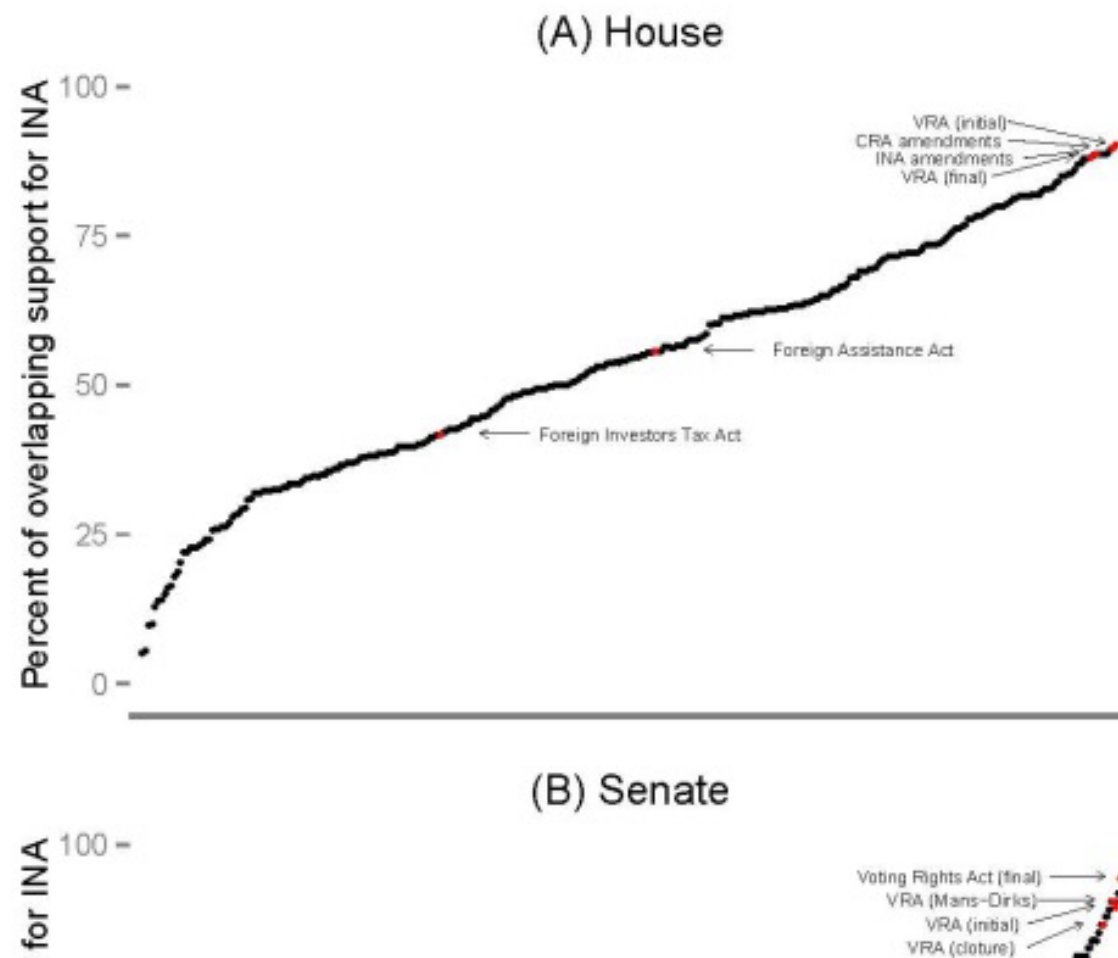
1960 Census: about ½ of 1% of US population is Asian

1965-Asian Exclusion Ends

Three Great Civil Rights Measures of Congress

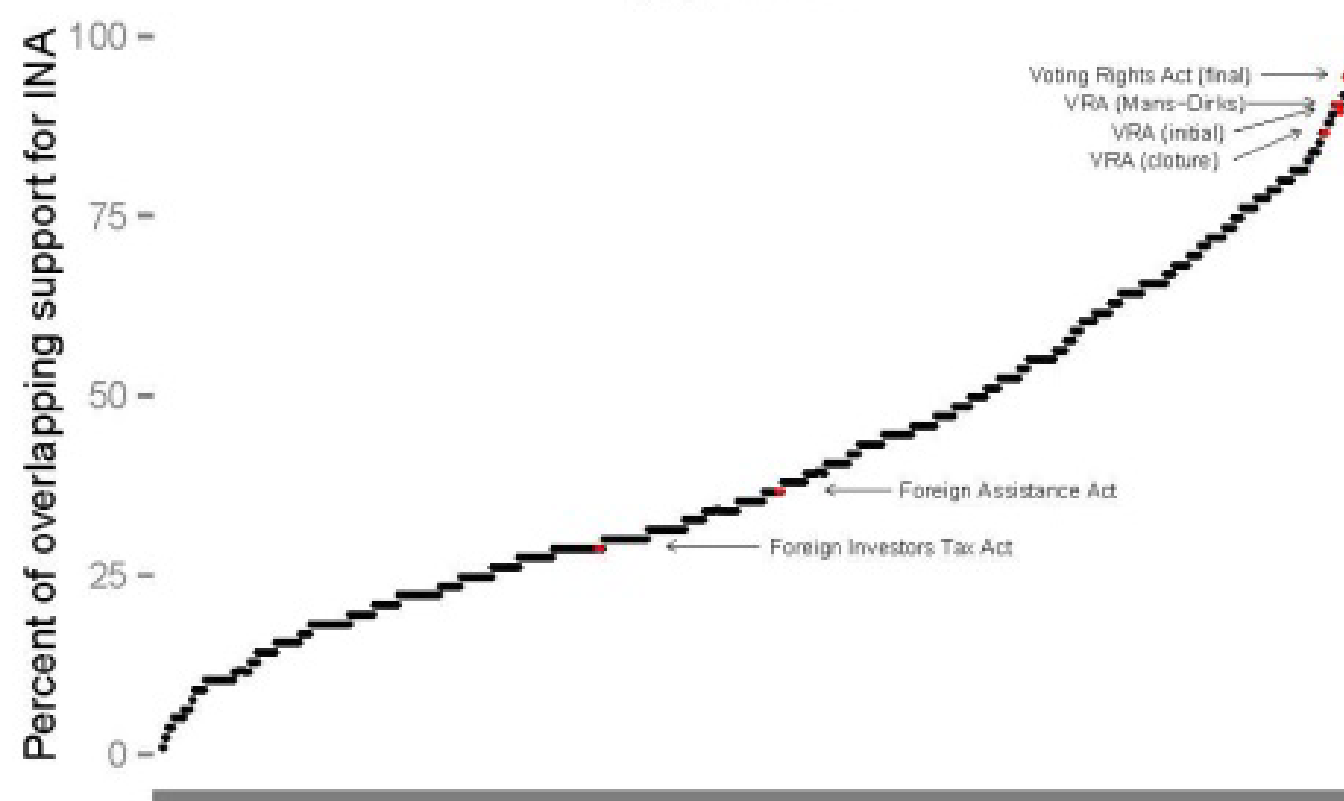
- ▶ Civil Rights Act of 1964 (employment, public accommodations)
- ▶ Voting Rights Act of 1965
- ▶ Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments of 1965—Finally, immigration is on a race-neutral basis.

FIGURE 1. ROLL CALL VOTES IN THE 89TH CONGRESS, RANKED BY PERCENT OF OVERLAPPING SUPPORT FOR THE IMMIGRATION AND NATIONALITY ACT





(B) Senate



Contrast this relationship with the VRA to the lack of overlapping support for the two foreign policy bills. Support for the Foreign Assistance Act was less similar to support for the INA than nearly half of