



The Chinese Exclusion Act: What It Can Teach Us about America

Benjamin Railton

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This provocative study uses the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act to explore two critical strands in American Studies: policy conversations on legal and illegal immigration, which too often include no engagement with the actual histories of these categories, and social and educational conversations on diversity and multiculturalism, which tend to misconstrue multi-national diversity as a late 20th and early 21st century phenomenon. As author Benjamin Railton shows, a fresh look at the CEA overturns much of the received wisdom on immigration and American identity. At the same time, it highlights stories - such as that of Yung Wing, the first documented Chinese American immigrant, and the 120 students at his Chinese Educational Mission - that give a hopeful and instructive perspective on the challenges of today.

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