

Voice 1: The Chinatown International District (also known as the CID) is located east of King Street Station, south of Pioneer Square, and west of the Central District. It's a vibrant,

Voice 2: delicious,

Voice 1: and culturally diverse neighborhood.

Voice 2: Seattle's Chinese American community is perhaps one of the most storied in America, from the first settlers arriving from Guangdong in the 1860s to the current diverse and thriving diaspora. This history of resilience has been in the face of oppression and exclusion.

[theme music plays]

Voice A: Seattle is...

Voice B: Well, we don't use umbrellas.

Voice C: Coffee.

Voice A: Computers?

Voice C: It's a city with a needle.

Voice B: Home to sasquatch.

Voice D: Home to the Museum of History and Industry.

Voice B: Innovation.

Voice C: Rain.

Voice A: A story.

Voice D: A history.

[music plays out underneath]

Voice 2: I'm Atul.

Voice 1: And I'm India. We're youth advisors at the Museum of History and Industry in Seattle.

ATUL: And this is *Rainy Day History*, a podcast by the MOHAI Youth Advisors that explores inclusion, exclusion, objects, people, and how the Seattle we know now...

INDIA: the questions we grapple with now about what it means to be a Seattleite...

ATUL: are all part of a bigger story.

INDIA: This season, we're taking a closer look at the physical and intangible marks that aspirations of growth have left on the city and ways periods of growth have impacted Seattle communities differently.

ATUL: This season was also recorded from our homes via the wonderful internet during the coronavirus pandemic.

INDIA: So stay safe, stay healthy, stay at home, and enjoy the show, whether it's raining outside or not.

[Rain sounds fade in and out]

INDIA: The Chinese American business community in early Seattle is far too complicated as a whole to detail in this podcast. Instead, we will focus on one particular business, the Wa Chong Company, founded by Chun Ching Hock, who is widely considered by historians to be the first Chinese immigrant to Seattle.



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He was born in a village in Toisan, Guangdong Province, where much of Seattle's present Chinese community has roots. He came to Seattle by way of San Francisco, and arrived in 1860 at 16 years old.

ATUL: Like many early Chinese immigrants, Chun came over to America with very little. He had, however, prepared enough capital to start a small general store in what was then the outer reaches of Seattle. He opened the Wa Chong Company in December of 1868.

INDIA: As it turns out, the early white settlers of Seattle had quite a penchant for Chinese goods, especially silk and tea. Chun's little general store quickly grew into a commercial empire.

ATUL: It was a full-blown megacorporation, once known as the largest employer in the entirety of Washington!

INDIA: The city had to buy so many products from Wa Chong that it ended up owing them over sixty thousand dollars. Today, that's almost two million dollars adjusted for inflation! The city ended up paying Wa Chong back by just giving them real estate, so the company once owned a sizable portion of Seattle.

ATUL: Wow!

INDIA: Chun was indeed a wealthy man, and returned to China in the early 1900s, coming back to Seattle occasionally to look over his finances. His final visit to Seattle was from 1924 to February 1927. Upon his return to China, Chun, now eighty-two years old, partied for five days straight for the Lunar New Year, and died of the flu not long after the festivities.

ATUL: Of course, Seattle quickly grew past its initial settler population around the 1870s and 80s. Chinese workers were in high demand for the city's booming lumber mills, canneries, and burgeoning railroads.

INDIA: Yes, a fact that is commonly glossed over is that Chinese laborers were responsible for the construction of the western portion of the Transcontinental Railroad. In the 1870s construction on the Northern Pacific and Seattle & Walla Walla lines opened up train access to the Pacific Northwest. Chinese workers again provided much of the labor force.

ATUL: Wealthy Chinese business people with a variety of backgrounds were a great support to the development of the Chinese community in Seattle, as some were already rich in China. They contracted laborers for railroads, lumber mills, & fishing, built boarding houses for Chinese workers, and opened shops. By the mid-1870s the Chinese community in Seattle was a bustling hub of more than five hundred people, located in a small area south of Pioneer Square, near the tide flats.

This fledgling community, however, faced that most pernicious of threats: xenophobia and hatred.

INDIA: The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 is often understood to be a monolithic event, that the passage of this legislation inspired the severe anti-Chinese sentiment and violence that ensued. It was much the opposite.

ATUL: Yup, the movement for Chinese exclusion had a long gestation period before it burst out in the 1880s.

INDIA: First arriving on the U.S. mainland in significant numbers in 1848, Chinese immigrants were drawn by the California gold rush and soon expanded out to other Western cities. Many of the Chinese were in the US to make money and planned to return to the families they had left in China. In Washington State, mining, salmon canning, and agriculture attracted Chinese workers.



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In the mid-1870s and early 80s the national economy took a downturn, increasingly leading to white workers to view the Chinese as threats to the few available jobs. They were usually offered and accepted lower wages than their white counterparts. As early as 1870, anti-Chinese race riots were breaking out in Los Angeles and throughout California.

ATUL: Even before the 1873 Depression, politicians were already taking advantage of the Chinese as a scapegoat to launch their political careers. Public figures rallied behind the cry of "The Chinese Must Go" and passed measures such as voting restrictions, taxes, and land ownership restrictions targeted at Chinese people.

INDIA: Eventually, the anti-Chinese fervor reached Congress. The Chinese Exclusion Act, passed in 1882, was a federal law that prohibited the immigration of Chinese laborers for 10 years. Prior to the 1882 act, US immigration in the 19th century was basically an open-door policy. The act was the first major restrictive immigration law, and the first federal race-based immigration law.

In addition to restricting entry, Chinese immigrants could no longer become US citizens. The law was extended by the Geary Act of 1892, which added new restrictions as well, including requiring Chinese residents to procure Certificates of Residency. In 1902, the law was extended again. It was finally repealed by the Magnuson Act of 1943, which replaced the all-out ban with a quota system. The original quota was 105 new entry visas per year based on some questionable math in accordance with the 1924 Immigration Act.

ATUL: As a result of the initial law and following restrictions, almost no Chinese people were allowed to enter the United States. Needless to say, this was disastrous for Seattle's Chinese community.

[slow piano and flute music plays underneath]

INDIA: In November of 1885, a mob forcibly expelled the Chinese residents of Tacoma. Taking such violence and the passage of the Exclusion Act as a tacit endorsement of the expulsion of the Chinese from their own city, the Seattle chapter of the Knights of Labor led a crowd to riot in February of 1886 against the Chinese presence.

ATUL: The mob nearly succeeded in their goal of forcing their Chinese detainees onto the Queen of the Pacific, a steamboat headed for San Francisco, before its captain was promptly served with a writ of habeas corpus.

The Chinese were escorted under arms to the courthouse the next day, and were given a choice whether to remain or to leave. After having been rounded up and imprisoned on a boat for a few hours by their fellow citizens, however, most of the Chinese were feeling rather lukewarm about the idea of staying in the city.

INDIA: A hundred or so inhabitants, however, did choose to return to their burned-out residences. A group of soldiers escorted the Chinese as they returned to their homes, many to await another steamboat that was due to arrive a few days later. They did not make it far, however, before a mob of 2,000 intercepted them.

ATUL: When the escorts tried to clear their way by arresting members of the mob, the mob attacked them. The ensuing violence would rage on for three days,

INDIA: At this point, the Governor imposed a curfew on the city, and President Cleveland called in federal troops. Said troops would remain in town until summer, finally quelling the riots.

ATUL: The Chinese community would not return to 1886 population levels for another two decades.



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[music finishes]

INDIA: Both Chun Ching Hock and Chin Gee Hee, partners at the Wa Chong Co, survived the riots and remained in Seattle. Chin Gee Hee was captured by the mob, but due to his role in the community he was released by the militia. He insisted he would not leave Seattle until he was paid money owed to him, and during the period of martial law, sought help from the Chinese consul-general in San Francisco. He also kept a record of damage done to Chinese businesses during the rioting and later was able to collect compensation through a ruling by Judge Burke.

ATUL: The Chinese community was able to slowly re-establish itself in the city with a variety of creative approaches to skirt the Chinese Exclusion Act. As the law was targeted explicitly at working-class Chinese, many hopeful migrants were able to claim merchant status and thus be exempt from the requirement. When the exemption was eliminated by subsequent legislation, many began offering money or utilizing family connections to have Chinese already in the United States claim prospective immigrants as their sons or daughters. False identification required forged documents to back it up, so people who used them became known as paper sons (or, less commonly, paper daughters).

To enforce the restrictions and catch paper sons and daughters, Hundreds of thousands of Chinese people would be detained at ports of entry, contrary to their fundamental human rights, in dozens of detention centers up and down the Pacific and Atlantic Coasts. They were often separated from family members, physically examined, and intensely interrogated, sometimes in these centers for days, weeks, and even months.

INDIA: The Angel Island detention center off the coast of San Francisco was particularly infamous, into whose walls were painstakingly carved the following poem in Chinese:

"America has power, but not justice.
In prison, we were victimized as if we were guilty.
Given no opportunity to explain, it was brutal beyond measure.
I bow my head in reflection, but there is nothing I can do."

ATUL: The INS building, for the new Immigration and Naturalization Service, was built in 1932, and served this purpose until 2004. It was the entry and exit point for immigrants arriving in Seattle, hundreds of whom were detained there for months.

INDIA: Not too long after the 1886 riots, Seattle's Chinatown faced another disaster. During the Great Seattle Fire of 1889, Chinatown—much of it built on stilts over tidal flats—burned down.

ATUL: After the fire, Chin Gee Hee commissioned the Canton Building, a brick building at 208 South Washington Street. This helped stimulate development in the area as other Chinese businessmen began to lease buildings nearby, developing a second Chinatown.

INDIA: And again, in the 1900s, Seattle began a major city regrading project. For three years, construction workers raised, lowered, and reshaped more than one hundred blocks in downtown Seattle. As the Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park tells it, quote "The Jackson Regrade uprooted the Chinese community, and Chinese immigrants moved to nearby King Street. Chinese entrepreneurs and investors flocked to this area to open businesses, which fueled the community's relocation to this third Chinatown." (end quote)

ATUL: Which is where it's located now! By the beginning of the twentieth century, it was already growing into the International District we know today, with different Asian micro-communities living and working side by side.



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INDIA: And what about the Wa Chong Company from the beginning of the episode?

ATUL: Well, in 1910, approximately 170 recent Asian-American immigrants pooled their resources to erect a community center and apartments for themselves in the East Kong Yick Building at 719 South King Street. The Wa Chong Co, the Quong Tuck Co. (founded by Chin Gee Hee), and other businesses moved in. The building served as an anchor in the community for decades.

INDIA: And still does! Only now, it houses the Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience.

ATUL: Here to tell us more about the museum and the stories within its walls is Doan Nguyen, Senior Tour Manager for the Wing Luke Museum.

[INTERVIEW] - slow piano comes in and plays out underneath

Hi I am Doan, Nguyen. I am the senior tour manager over at the Wing Luke Museum. A little bit about myself: I have been working with the museum for probably almost 10 years now, and I identify as second generation Vietnamese American. So, my parents came over to the United States as refugees during the Vietnam War, and they settled here and this is where we made our homes, so this is where I've always been.

My work consists of being part of the education department, so uh, helping to manage tours, outreach to different groups, running the tours myself, and working with my team to help educate folks on history of the neighborhood but then also like, where our stories are interconnected to all of that as well.

So, the Wing Luke Museum is over 50 years old, started in 1967, and it is actually the only museum across the whole nation that focuses on the Asian Pacific American experience. So, like, when I say that, well our mission, I can tell you that, (laughs) I have it written down right here. "We connect everyone to the dynamic history, cultures, and arts of Asian Pacific Americans through vivid storytelling and inspiring experiences to advance racial and social equity."

So, you know like, besides looking at objects, you know, we're looking at the reasons why folks come to the United States, whether it is by their choice or not, whether they are documented or not documented, you know, whatever that story is, all of those things – the way we see it is that it folds into American history, right? So, each and every one of those stories is very important and powerful to share. You know, the kind of history you might be reading in textbooks in schools might not capture every aspect of it. So, and our kind of storytelling, it comes from the people, the community. And that is what our programming at the museum is really well-known for. Being a community-based place provides a different kind of storytelling to happen, where you have that platform but you're giving it to others to share their own stories on their own accords and their means. So that way there's not just that one story that speaks to everybody's experience.

So, our building, the East Kong Yick building, was built in 1910... being one of the first few buildings to really come up in the early 1900s of the 3rd version of Chinatown, is a pretty big deal. The fact that it's still here today is a pretty big signifier of its resiliency and you know, determination to not go away.

But our building, created 1910 with its sister building right next door, when you, when you're just hanging around in the Chinatown International District, you'll see lots of buildings, they all have a very similar kind of format – stores and restaurants on the bottom floors of the spaces, and lots of those windows on the top floors, those are all hotels for a lot of the immigrant pioneers who were helping to start up the neighborhood. And uh, something that's really cool about that history of the building too is that that it revolves around that whole community-based aspect that I was talking a little bit about.



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So, you know, when Chinese immigrants were coming into the United States, um something that was already set up against them was the fact that they were not allowed to become US citizens. So, for those immigrants then who are coming on over, not being able to become naturalized citizens and own land and property meant that having a space for themselves would be a challenge, right? Lots of difficulty. So, it was actually 170 different Chinese immigrant men who pooled their resources together to build the East Kong Yick building, and this is an example of kind of like today how we have like, you know, "go fund me's to help collect money and do community work together in support of a cause kind of thing. So it's cool how that was how our building was coming on up and for the museum to be connected to the building too we had to work with those, not 170 different men, but those 170 families that came our of those immigrant men who started it all in that space.

A lot of the history of what happened in our building reflects the way the other buildings in our neighborhood was also used. So, when you're walking in the neighborhood there's a lot of old hotels just all around you that have all been renovated and fixed up and being used for different kinds of things but they were...homes.

Lots of things (chuckle) were going on in our building. If you're familiar with Chin Chun Hock, he was someone who started up the Wa Chong company. He's seen as the first Chinese immigrant pioneer to like, come to Seattle and make a lot of really big things happen. So it's interesting when it comes to talking about history and pioneers, you know, we know a lot about the people that Seattle streets are named after like Henry Yesler and stuff like that. But, we don't really talk about Chin Chun Hock and the kind of stuff that he was doing.

But besides the businesses you know you have Wa Chong, and in the museum today we also have the Yick Fung Company, which was a Chinese import and export shop. That was run by James Malcom Mar, or Uncle Jimmy as a lot of folks knew him by. His store was kind of memorialized in our museum space – and that's where folks can do a *virtual* tour now since we're, you know, not open to the public and Covid-19 stuff. But it's cool – having that storefront there to kind of evoke some of that memory – it's cool in that it's a space that you can walk into and see you know, these huge pickle jars, of like dried candies, and different kinds of things, medicinal goods, canned and preserved items of all sorts of things... but not only can people get a kind of, like, sensory experience with it, it also brings back like, memories for folks too. Even though they might not have visited Uncle Jimmy's store or the Wa Chong Company, you know just stepping into that space it... clicks. It's *cool* how we're able to do that.

But so you had the businesses, you had restaurants, and then like on the top floors where all of those windows that you see but on the very very top (chuckles) you had what they called family associations. So, if you can imagine being in the shoes of this young immigrant, maybe as young as 14 years old, you're being pulled to the United States (I'm talking in the context of Chinese immigration again) um but what folks were doing were creating their own networks and organizations to help support and assist with that kind of transition. So, family associations are like these old organizations and clubs where if your last name was the same as theirs you could join that association and that's how you would get like, support in finding a job, finding a place to stay and you know, connecting with the community. So our building, we had the Gee How Oak Tin and if your last name was Wu, Chin, Yuan, you could join, and that was kind of like, your connection to the local community and how you kind of like, get started.

One of the families that we had living in the apartment over on 8th avenue, apartment 507... there was a woman named Au Shee. And Au Shee, she was married to one of the merchants who was one of the folks in the neighborhood too. Because Ark was a merchant she was able to come through. But if you look at the context of life in the 1920s, a young woman in her 20s, travelling by herself overseas to come to the United States... during this time too, Chinese women are being stereotyped as prostitutes. Before you even have the Chinese Exclusion Act you have the 1875 Page Act. That one was very interesting in that it was specifically keeping out anyone from Asia who had like, a criminal background, anyone who is not sound of mind, anyone who is considered a prostitute.



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So, Au Shee, when she arrived in the United States... if you're familiar with the INScape Arts building that's one block south of Uwajimaya today on Seattle Boulevard... so she came through and had to get processed through that space, and she um, was detained for like a month before they even interviewed her or anything like that. And so just imagining that process of coming to this country where folks are like, "yeah land of the free, come here to do what you can do and make money" but when you come you're just met with a lot of hostility, people treating you as though you're a criminal, you're being detained, waiting to be interviewed, and...

She had to go through a process of two interviews all together and it was a really long process too that took months and months and the questions they asked her, it was like... really goofy (laughs) my opinion! Because you know, they're just really trying to set it up to make it sound like she *was* a prostitute. So, if she said the wrong thing that was an easy way to pin it and say look, this is why you can't come into the United States kind of thing, right? But she was able to come through and, in that apartment, 507 in the East Kong Yick building, she had... she gave birth 15 times but 9 of her children survived. And there's just a whole big story of this one family that was able to you know, make what they wanted happen and it's just so powerful thinking about what other stories are out there too that haven't been told or haven't been shared. But like, if she wasn't able to come in then that family history wouldn't have existed and you know, the community that we see it as today might not even exist or look like that either. Families wouldn't have been able to form and then you wouldn't have the community in that um, in that way.

I really hope that folks can find stories that they resonate with but also resonate with, maybe appreciate – it's okay if you don't, I get it – but also I hope it sparks something in anyone that goes through to like, maybe think a little bit about their own personal history too and see where their history plays out. How it is, you know, how does it fit along the timeline of the history that you learn in our building, kind of thing.

[piano and flute music fades in underneath, finishes after paragraph ends]

When we keep on learning about history, because there's always so much more to find out, it's really interesting how what we think we know can always be re-envisioned, relearned, and like, we can expand from it from there. So it's not like, this monolithic thing that just stays concrete, right? I think thinking about fluidity and how things can change can be pretty powerful. So... yeah.

[music ends - pause]

JULIA: Hey this is Julia, one of the producers for this episode. To close out, I have a few questions for our hosts about what their thoughts are on what we've learned. So to start off, what was the most interesting thing you learned in your research or while you were interviewing, or while you were just learning about this episode?

ATUL: Well to me probably the most surprising thing that I learned, really throughout the entire process of this episode, was kind of the story about the Wa Chong Company. Well, I knew that it existed but I didn't know that it was so large that it was the largest employer in Washington state and I definitely didn't know that it owned a portion of Seattle at one point. Just like, understanding that, maybe thinking about how Asian American immigrants have played such a large role in the history of Seattle... it kind of just put it into context, it just contextualized it all for me to think about how the Wa Chong Company was one of the largest companies.

INDIA: One thing that I thought interesting when I was researching about the 1886 riot was that this mob like, rounded up all of the Chinese people and like, took them down to the docks and were like, 300 plus of them, and they were like we're gonna put you on this boat only... they only bought like, 97 tickets, that was all they could afford. So, it kind of just goes to show you that racism just *destroys* your common sense!



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And another thing that I thought was really interesting when I was learning about the Magnuson Act - I mentioned the 105 new entry visas...The Immigration Act of 1924, set the quotas, were meant to be 2% of the number of people of that nationality already living in the US during the 1890 census, but 105 is disproportionately low. It should have been 2,150 visas, based on 2% of the Chinese population which was 107,488.

JULIA: So, why was this a topic that you wanted to explore, specifically in the context of season two when we're talking about the growth of Seattle and the growth of communities within Seattle.

INDIA: I wanted to explore it because I spend a lot of time in Chinatown and it's definitely...you can tell that there's been a lot of change in that neighborhood like, from the very beginning. So it's cool to sort of understand why and how. And then there's also a personal component because my great grandpa immigrated to Seattle while the Chinese Exclusion Act was still in effect. And he was detained not at the INS building, but I believe in Port Townsend. That was a thing I remembered.

JULIA: So, India – do you want to talk about researching your family in NARA?

INDIA: Sure!

JULIA: Is that how do you say it?

INDIA: (chuckles) yeah! It's the National Archives and Records Administration – it's like NASA but for paper (laughs). Yeah so my mom's grandpa, my grandpa Jack is the name that he went by, yeah so my mom always kind of wanted to know more about him. So she had done some research quite a few years ago and then more recently she and I went to the archives building at Sand Point and worked with some of the volunteers there.

And we found, what did we find? We found ship manifests. We found out how tall he was (he's not very tall), and we found out that he was employed as a cook on the Blackball ferry line and I think did like, laundry also? And then we also contacted another archive system and they were able to do a massive search and sent us a whole bunch of documents. We saw pictures of him that we had never seen before of him as like a 19 year old or 20 I think, as well as the family that he was a paper son for.

They sent us a transcript of his interrogation, which was really interesting, just to like... they just ask the most bonkers questions! It's like, what – who was in the picture above your fireplace in your house in China? Just to like, do as much as they could to vet any paper children. Yeah, I think that's about it.

JULIA: So, what do you think this history helps us understand and perhaps more specifically, what does learning about the Chinese Exclusion Act help us understand about our current immigration system?

ATUL: well if you look at the border problem down in the southern United States, there's a whole bunch of different humanitarian issues and a whole bunch of, realistically, issues going on down there. And the Chinese Exclusion Act is really, is a lot more relevant than it seems. People are obviously trying to immigrate to the US to find, to have a better life than they did in whatever country that they're leaving, same thing happened in the Chinese Exclusion Act. And they're getting detained unfairly, they're getting separated from their families, much like the Chinese were also separated from their families as well.

INDIA: Yeah, in addition to like, detention centers at the southern border there's also the Muslim Ban that was passed pretty early in the Trump administration that definitely echoes a lot of the same sentiment and intentions as the Chinese Exclusion Act despite happening what, 130 years later?

JULIA: What does resilience mean to you?



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ATUL: so I guess to me resilience means...resilience is the form of perseverance in a community that... it's a quality that allows people to not lose sight of why they're doing what they're doing just because somebody else doesn't like... doesn't like it.

INDIA: Yeah, I think resilience is just...survival in the face of adversity even when everything's against you, being able to just stay standing and not let it just...completely crush your spirit.

[sweeping outro music plays]

INDIA: Thanks for listening to this episode of Rainy Day History. We hope you enjoyed what you learned.

ATUL: To learn more, check out the show notes for research highlights and images of some of the things we mentioned in the episode. You can also visit the MOHAI website at mohai.org, that's m-o-h-a-i-dot-org.

INDIA: You can also follow us on Instagram @mohaiteens and follow the museum @mohaiseattle.

ATUL: When we can safely re-open, come visit the museum in sunny South Lake Union Seattle!

[jaunty piano music comes in and plays out underneath]

TK: Hello, this is TK, and I'm here with the credits! Stay tuned through the end for a sneak peek trivia question from India!

Many thanks to Doan Nguyen for sharing with us stories of the history of the Wing Luke Museum.

The script was researched by India and Jason, written by Jason, and edited by TK & India. This episode was produced by Annabelle & Julia and edited by Vance and Sue. Show notes and transcripts were built by Julia, Ziah, India, & Ethan. Marketing help came from TK.

This season was imagined by the 2020 MOHAI Youth Advisors. The podcast was developed by the 2019 MYA. Grace designed the logo, and Finch wrote the theme music and performed it along with Tyler and friend of the pod Sylvie Wang.

Thank you to all of our MOHAI staff cheerleaders, and special thanks for this season goes to Chris, Leonard, Sondra, Tori, and of course Emily T.

[8-bit elevator music starts playing and plays softly underneath]

INDIA: Hey! It's your trivia master, India. Last time we asked: Which Seattle park is named for the person who repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943? And the answer was B: Magnuson Park. Warren G Magnuson was a US Representative and later Senator from Washington who introduced legislation to repeal the Chinese Exclusion Act. The Magnuson Act replaced it with a quota system for entry visas.

Here's a bit of a preview of what's coming up in the next episode: The Drumheller Fountain on the UW campus is a hold-over from the AYP. How often is it drained for cleaning?

- a. Every year
- b. Every other year
- c. Twice a year
- d. Every four months

Find out the answer on the next episode of Rainy Day History!

[music fades out]