

ASIAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S JOURNEY

Resilience and Power Through Challenges

Throughout these years, Asian women weren't just migrants—they were **gatekeepers of community, symbols of respectability, and targets of exclusion.**

They stood at the intersection of **race, gender, empire, and belonging**—often unwelcome, but never passive.

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ASIAN AMERICAN WOMEN

Who Gets to Belong?

1875 Page Act – The U.S. drew its first immigration line—against Chinese women. It painted them as sex workers and banned most from entering. Behind the law was a deeper fear: **Asian women** meant Asian families, and that meant permanence. A woman's ability to migrate depended not on her own identity, but on who she married.



Who Gets to Belong?



Who gets to build a future in America—and who doesn't?

1898 Colonization in the Philippines – As the U.S. colonized the Philippines, Filipino men were allowed into the U.S.—but not out of welcome. US empire made an exception to exclusion, but **Filipina women** remained largely invisible in this narrative of labor and mobility.

1907 Gentlemen's Agreement—in contrast to Chinese exclusion laws, this let Japanese and its colonized Korean **“picture brides”** join their husbands in the U.S., creating paths for family migration and settlement. Despite anti-immigrant laws, U.S.-born children could legally hold property.

Who Gets to Belong?



1907 Expatriation Act

American women lost their U.S. citizenship if they married foreign men. Marriage, not birthright, defined their national identity.

1922 Cable Act – Women now only lost citizenship if they married men who were legally "ineligible to citizenship"—namely, Asian men. Because of anti-miscegenation laws, this law mainly affected Asian American women.

Even as citizens, Asian women's rights were conditional.

ASIAN WOMEN THROUGH

War and Imperialism

1934 – Filipino Repatriation Act

Framed as a step toward Filipino independence, it was really a tool to push Filipinos out of the U.S.

Filipina women—already marginal in labor migration—were caught in this political sleight of hand.





War and Imperialism

1945 – War Brides Act

Women who married U.S. servicemen during WWII could migrate outside of strict quotas.

But at first, racial barriers stayed—Asian wives were excluded until later amendments.



1948 – Exchange Visitor Program

Quietly, this paved the way for Filipina nurses to come to the U.S. — Skilled women who would later become anchors for their families.

HART-CELLER ACT

pathways for family reunification

After a series of rollbacks to Asian exclusion laws, this law put an **end to national origin quotas**. In its place, it created a priority system which favored skilled **technical laborers and family reunification**.

Under this law, it was largely **women who created pathways** for family reunification. Women who had arrived in previous “waves” of migration as wives, war brides, or nurses became the first link in the chain migration that followed.



HART-CELLER ACT



pathways for family reunification

This law also **reshaped the demographics** of Asian America not just in terms of ethnicity, but also class and gender. The comparatively high level of education new immigrants arrived with played a large role in perpetuating the “**Model Minority Myth**” in the decades to follow.

Although this law abolished the national origins quotas, it **introduced regional quotas**, placing limits on migration from North and South America for the first time in U.S. history.