



## Angel Island

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The immigration station on Angel Island in San Francisco Bay, in use from 1910 to 1940, has often been called the Ellis Island of the West. But to what extent is the Pacific gateway a junior version of the storied immigration station that sits next to the Statue of Liberty in New York's harbor?

If Ellis Island remains the iconic symbol of American immigration, Angel Island represents a more complete history of America's diverse origins and the government's diverse policies that welcomed some and excluded others.

That fascinating history is the subject of "Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America," by historians Erika Lee and Judy Yung, both descendants of Angel Island immigrants, and published on the occasion of the station's 100th anniversary. Lee and Yung offer a kaleidoscope of immigrant portraits that bring history alive, and, in the process, demolish many myths and stereotypes about Angel Island and American immigration in general.

Readers who already know that Angel Island differed from Ellis Island because the former was built to process Chinese immigrants and the latter for Europeans will be surprised to learn that non-Asians comprised fully one-third of those seeking entry through Angel Island before the 1920s.

According to the authors' research, about 1 million people passed through the Angel Island station: foreigners and citizens, arrivals and departures, immigrants and deportees. "Angel Island" tells the stories of Chinese, Japanese, Koreans and South Asians, as well as Mexicans, Russians, European Jews and Filipinos who were processed through the station. Their stories testify to the great diversity of American immigration.

Indeed, a map shows ship-passenger routes to San Francisco from Hong Kong and Yokohama, as well as Sydney, Havana, Mazatlan and Lima. Those arriving hailed from 80 nations, from Afghanistan to Ghana to New Zealand to Yugoslavia. San Francisco is thus revealed as a node in the networks of migration that spanned the globe in the early 20th century.

Arriving at Angel Island, all immigrants faced a few common procedures but an immigrant's experience on the island was mostly determined by his or her national origin, race, gender and class status. By exploring who was likely to be detained and for how long, and ultimately who was admitted and who was not, "Angel Island" reveals a diversity of official policies that were both welcoming and restrictive.

The authors make sense of these as products of domestic and international politics: race relations, gender roles, foreign affairs, colonialism, wartime policies. In this way, Angel Island offers a window to America's view of itself and its place in the world in the first half of the 20th century.

The Chinese and other Asian exclusion laws (1882-1952) defined Angel Island's original purpose, to exclude Chinese from entering. The island station was built in 1910 in response to years of complaints over conditions at the detention shed at the end of Pier 40, where arriving Chinese passengers were held in crowded and filthy conditions.

The station on Angel Island aimed to improve the conditions of detention during the process of examination, which determined the eligibility of the Chinese to enter. It was built to be spacious and sanitary, as well as isolated, the better to keep away kinfolk and friends who might coach the would-be immigrants to help them through their lengthy interrogations.

The station, designed by Oakland architect Walter J. Matthews, was similar to the one on Ellis Island and exemplified the ethos of government rationality of the Progressive Era - separate buildings for administration, detention and medical services. Despite boosters' claims that it was like a "summer resort," it remained a jail for Chinese and other Asians, who were detained for weeks, months, in some cases as long as a year.

One might assume that Europeans were treated better than Asians and Mexicans, and, in general, that was the case. But it was not a simple matter of white versus nonwhite. Women, regardless of nationality or race, were suspected of being prostitutes unless they were

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married and accompanied by their husbands.

Nor were all whites treated the same. Those from Australia and New Zealand could bypass the quota laws, but Assyrians and Russians could not. War refugees and asylum seekers also faced differential treatment, depending on the war and America's relation to it. Angel Island welcomed Russian and Jewish refugees during World War I, but excluded Koreans persecuted under Japanese colonial rule and Mexicans fleeing the turmoil of the Mexican revolution. And class mattered. The mighty "likely to become a public charge" rule excluded many would-be immigrants.

"Angel Island" is also a book about activism. It recounts the mobilization of ethnic communities to defend their immigrants, from Chinese family associations to Jewish relief networks. Some, like the Japanese, could count on a strong home government to counter American discrimination; others, who were colonized - Koreans, South Asians and Filipinos - had no such recourse.

The book ends by recounting the activism of community groups and Angel Island descendants since the 1970s who rescued and restored the station, which closed after a fire in 1940. They recovered the station's history and preserved the site, winning it designation as a National Historic Landmark. "Angel Island" is a fitting offering on the station's 100th birthday.

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