



# Immigration at the Golden Gate: Passenger Ships, Exclusion, and Angel Island

*Robert Eric Barde*

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Perhaps 200,000 immigrants passed through the Angel Island Immigration Station during its lifetime, a tiny number compared to the 17 million who entered through New York's Ellis Island. Nonetheless, Angel Island's place in the consciousness of Americans on the West Coast is large, out of all proportion to the numerical record. This place is not conceded fondly or with gratitude. Angel Island's Immigration Station was not, as some have called it, the Ellis Island of the West, built to facilitate the processing and entry of those welcomed as new Americans. Its role was less benign: to facilitate the exclusion of Asians—first the Chinese, then Japanese, Koreans, Indians, and all other Asians.

This was the era when a rampant public hostility to newcomers posed grave threats to the liberties of all immigrants, especially those from Asia. The phrase Angel Island connotes more than a rocky outpost rearing up inside the mouth of San Francisco Bay, more, even, than shorthand for the various government outposts—military, health, and immigration—that guarded the Western Gate. Angel Island reminds us of an important chapter in the history of immigration to the United States, one that was truly a multicultural enterprise long before that expression was even imagined. With the restoration of the Immigration Station and the creation of a suitable museum/learning center, Angel Island may well become as much part of the American collective imagination as Ellis Island—but with its own, quite different, twist. This book shows how natives and newcomers experienced the immigration process on the west coast. Although Angel Island's role in American immigration was greatest at the dawn of the previous century, the process of immigration continues. The voices of a century ago—of exclusion, of bureaucratic and judicial nightmares, of the interwoven interests of migrants and business people of the fear of foreigners and their diseases, of moral ambiguity and uncertainty—all echo to the present day.

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