

# Transcribed Excerpts from U.S. Rep. John Kasson (R-IA) Speech on Chinese Immigration, March 22, 1882 (Pgs. 5-6, 10-11)

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**Mr. Kasson:** Now Mr. Speaker, the subsequent amendments proposed are chiefly confined to harmonizing the existing provisions with that change in respect to rules and regulations, my object being to make it the duty of the executive department of the United States to carry out under our laws and in unison with them the provisions of the treaty, which provides that in case of difficulty adjustments may be made by the exchange between the two governments of complaint and answer and good reasons.

I do not intend now, sir, to go into detail touching these other amendments. I have only to say there are still some clauses of the bill which tax very heavily the conscience and judgement of many of us who remember the events of the decade from 1850 to 1860. I doubt very much whether the conscience of this country will allow you to find any citizen of the United States who, from charity or from necessity, may have taken across the Canadian or other frontier into the United States some poor young Chinaman to relieve his wife from household work in his home. I doubt whether “aiding” or “abetting” a single Chinese laborer to come into New York, New England, or Louisiana, is not disproportionately and excessively punished by the enactments of this bill. It reminds many of us born in the northern part of the country of the time when penalties and imprisonment were imposed upon the man who took care of a poor fugitive slave from the South on his way to a free country, or harbored him for the night or gave him bread by day.

I do not like (and I say it frankly) these features of the bill. I want, if possible, to accomplish the result aimed at without them. I wish it were in the hands of the committee who could so trim the bill as to accomplish what the treaty calls for and what the rest of us desire to be accomplished, the prevention of masses of these men coming in such numbers as to overthrow our systems of labor or endanger the peace of communities. At the same time I should be glad if this poor miserable pursuit of one Chinaman crossing the frontier or stepping off a ship in order to see a town, might be stopped; that he might not be pursued by the police, hazed into prison and robbed of \$100. My soul revolts at that sort of individual persecution of an ignorant foreigner coming to this country, unable to speak our language, and not knowing our institutions and laws. This is one of the most vulgar forms of barbarism.

**Mr. Hammond, of Georgia:** Will the gentleman permit me to ask him a question?

**Mr. Kasson:** Certainly

**Mr. Hammond, of Georgia:** Is it not true that in many Northern States, notably Indiana, up to the passage of the fourteenth amendment, it was a crime for any free negro to go into those States?

**Mr. Kasson:** Yes sir, and I do not want to go back to that infamous system of legislation. [Applause on the Republican side.] Does the gentleman?

**Ms. Hammond, of Georgia:** No I do not wish to go back to it, but I wanted to point out the hypocrisy of your party. [Applause on the Democratic side.]

**Mr. Kasson:** Call it what you please, it was as mean as you can make it to refuse to feed or take care of these poor people, whether North or South. I admit its meanness, and you can have no issue with me on that subject ...

No sir; it is not a debased empire [China]. Its higher authorities are the peers of European and American statesmen. When you speak of it as a government, it is not a governments acting upon low or barbaric principles unworthy of our commendation or respect. There was a famous house of American merchants in Canton at the time of the famous opium war. Ah, do you remember, my colleagues on this floor, when you speak of the comparative "Christianity" of nations, that while China stood with all her worthless armament of battler, but with all her moral power behind it to keep her people from becoming debased and falling into the wretched opium drunkenness which now characterizes the shops of San Francisco, Canton, and other cities; when she sought to prohibit the importation of opium, as temperance men in this country were seeking to prohibit drunkenness from liquors? ...

There is your paganism; there is your idolatry; there is your debased country, which has been defamed on this floor! Sir, I appeal to gentlemen here to make the discriminations due from fair-minded men, discriminations not founded on costumes, not founded on the way of wearing the hair, not founded, on ignorance of our language, but discriminations based upon better and higher principles and facts than these paltry distinctions.

We have here representatives of that people who are orderly, who are seeking education, who are in responsible places, and who are entitled to respect. On the other hand, you have bad classes who are not entitled to respect. On the other hand, you have bad classes who are not entitled to respect, and against whom it is legitimate to legislate. Let use frame our bill in this spirit of accomplishing purposes admitted to be just. Let us be careful that we do not forfeit the friendship of a great empire, to be still greater in the future, when she shall have accepted more and more of the principles of progress that animate us. Let us take care that we do not forfeit that friendship, that we keep within the treaty, and assure that great government of the honesty and good faith of this Government and of the people of the United States. [Applause.]