

Chinese American Citizens Alliance

The Chinese American Citizens Alliance is an organization that was created by Chinese American citizens with a goal for fighting the discrimination that Chinese faced in America politically, economically, and socially. The CACA's purpose was also to aid and educate their own to be more politically active and to integrate into American society. Over the past century, the CACA have worked hard to accomplish their goal of integration, facing discrimination, and fighting laws that took away their rights as American citizens.

In 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed, banning Chinese entry into the U.S., preventing the Chinese from job opportunities and employment. In 1892, the Geary Act was passed, extending the Chinese Exclusion Act for another ten years and added the requirement of certificates of residence for the Chinese already living in the United States. Facing harsh discrimination on top of this, some Chinese Americans in New York formed the Chinese Civil Rights League in 1892, and took the Geary Act to court. They gained a lot of support even among the whites. In the Supreme Court case *Fong Yue Ting v. United States*, this organization challenged the constitutionality of the Geary Act. However, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Geary Act saying that as a sovereign nation, the U.S. had the power to exclude any person or race it wished and therefore can deport any person it wished. It was a bitter defeat for the Chinese living in the U.S. but this and the many harsh treatments imposed on the Chinese people in America are what prompted the formation of the Chinese American Citizens Alliance.

May 4th, 1895 a small group of Chinese American youths met in San Francisco's Chinatown with the single mindset of forming an organization to improve Chinese Americans' standing in society and to fight for their rights as American citizens. Now, Chinese that were born in America were looked down upon by both sides of the community they lived in. They were discriminated by the host society working for less pay and could not testify in court, just like all the Chinese in America during this time period. However, American-born Chinese youth were also looked down upon disapprovingly by their China-born Chinese peers. They were often berated for not knowing their Chinese ancestry. They were often called "brainless" and "*tusheng*" which meant "home grown" with a sense of spite towards them. Another more modern term was "ABC", or "American-Born Chinese". The youths that met on May 4th wanted

to change all of that. Their goal in mind was to elevate their position in society so that their China-born counterparts would respect them instead of look down upon them, and they wanted to integrate themselves into American society so that they would not be looked upon in a discriminatory manner.

This group started solely by American-born naming it after the Native Sons of the Golden West that was formed 20 years ago. Only Chinese youths formed an organization and named it the Native Sons of the Golden State in 1895 later in 1915 would the Native Sons of the Golden State change their organization's name to the Chinese American Citizens Alliance. In the following decades after the NSGS was formed, progress was slow and this group did not gain much popularity with their community. Most of the group was looked down upon due to the reasons mentioned above. However the NSGS still held many educational seminars in English and in Chinese and members encouraged each other to be more politically active and to actively help them protect their right to vote. They believed that by retaining their rights as American citizens and showing they could move up in the world through that respective channel, they could push assimilation into the American society and gain the respect of their elders.

Around the turn of the century, the organization began getting more members and was gaining momentum. One of the reasons for the NSGS/CACA for gaining more and more members over the years was the influx of native-born Chinese in America increasing drastically over foreign-born Chinese. According to the U.S. censuses, in 1900, these American-born Chinese only accounted for 10% of all Chinese in America. In 1910, this number increased to 21% and in 1920, increased to 30%. By 1940, the percentage had risen to 52% of the whole Chinese population (Tsai 97). Members of the Native Sons of the Golden State began spreading out, as more like-minded people were committed to their cause. Local lodges were established by the NSGS in San Francisco and Los Angeles Chinatown 1912. More lodges were constructed in Fresno, Oakland, and by 1914, they had a lodge down in San Diego. Construction of a permanent headquarters in San Francisco known as The Grand Lodge was started in 1914 and completed by 1921.

In 1911, California State Senator Anthony Caminetti put forward a proposal that would disenfranchise American citizens of Chinese ancestry and prevent them the right to vote. By 1913, the NSGS's efforts in writings and petitions to the government successfully blocked

Caminetti's proposal. This political win for them, earned the NSGS fame and more members flocked to support and be a part of the NSGS.

Now that the organization was statewide and becoming well known, many Chinese Americans outside of California wanted to join this organization but they could not be "Sons of the Golden State" because they were not Californians. So at the 3rd annual convention of the NSGS, held in Los Angeles 1915, the organization adopted their current name, the Chinese American Citizens Alliance. Another reason that this happened was because the Native Sons of the Golden West, whom the former was named after, did not recognize NSGS because the Chinese Americans were not being acknowledge at the time. And so, this organization did not want their name affiliated with the NSGW anymore either.

Now, more local lodges for the CACA were formed in Chicago, Detroit, Boston, Pittsburg, and Portland. By 1921, the CACA was known nationwide. Around this time was also the beginning of a decrease in discrimination against the Chinese. Chinese artifacts, designs, and even games like *mah-jong* started to become popular in the 1920's. The CACA started a life-insurance fund for its members and in 1924, the CACA also began publishing their own newspaper, *The Chinese Times*. The paper was circulated throughout the U.S. and by 1929 was the most widely circulated Chinese newspaper from San Francisco with its aim of being "dedicated to the service and betterment of the Chinese community" and "arousing its readers of their civic duty".

However, there were still many challenges to overcome. Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1924 also known as the National Origins Act that limited immigration to a certain quota in the U.S. The CACA fought against this act, especially against Sections 4 and 13 that would not allow alien wives of American citizens to be permitted into this country. This is something the Chinese strongly fought for because of the skewed sex ratio the Chinese society in America faced. The ratio of male to female Chinese persons was 93.5% male to 6.5% female in 1910. In 1920, the ratio was 87.4% to 12.6% and in 1930 the ratio was 79.8% to 20.2%. Chinese men were having a hard time finding wives in the U.S. of their own race (although some did intermarry with other races, though this was looked down upon and sometimes prohibited in certain areas). Chinese men would usually go over to China to find a wife and return to the U.S. But because of the National Origins Act, those wives were not permitted in, and so families would be separated. The CACA successfully fought against the National Origins Act with many

petitions and letters to Congress, their representatives appearing before several courts numerous times. Those sections were successfully amended in 1930 and in 1946, Chinese wives of American citizens would no longer count towards the quota limit. An upset that happened in 1949 was the Judd Bill that wanted to eliminate the non-quota status the Chinese wives possessed. The CACA petitioned the Senate and the bill was dismissed.

In light of these triumphs, and because they were now a nationwide organization, members felt that the old articles of incorporation and its constitution were too old and vague. So in 1928, a special meeting was held in San Francisco where the CACA gained a new and improved constitution and articles of incorporation. The purpose of the CACA was stated in the articles of incorporation and their message was more sophisticated, specific, and much clearer. In short, the CACA's stated goal is to unite Chinese American citizens and raise their moral standing, educating them and making them capable of doing their duties as American citizens. They also promised to protect the legal rights for Chinese Americans and give them equal economic and political opportunities.

After the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on December 17, 1943, the barriers of discrimination were finally broken down. The CACA participated greatly in the hearings for the revision of the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952. This act granted the right of naturalization and property ownership for Asians who were permanent residents. The CACA fulfilled its goal and purpose of legitimately fighting for the rights of their fellow Chinese Americans. They showed that they could be active with their American citizenship and make positive contributions to the country.

Post World War II, U.S. and China relations were strengthened and the Chinese living in America were smoothly being accepted by American society. The integration and assimilation the CACA fought for was now becoming a reality. CACA's membership began to decline post World War II and after the McCarran Walter Act. Because there were not many immigration problems anymore and the CACA became a more conservative organization. Many of the newer generations no longer had to rely on a predominantly Chinese American environment to protect them. In 1935, Los Angeles's total CACA membership was 826, and in 1963 the membership had dropped to 233. However, the CACA's contributions to American society have left a huge impact that have paved the way for Chinese Americans to embrace their equality and citizenship,

raise their political awareness, and ultimately allow Chinese Americans to smoothly transition to be a part of America's society.