

Cosponsors: the [Center for Law and Work](#), and [Berkeley Interdisciplinary Migration Initiative](#)

Monday, October 17, 2022

HIDETAKA HIROTA

Associate Professor of History, UC Berkeley

“The Influence of the Alien Contract Labor Law on the Development of U.S. Immigration Policy”

This presentation examines the influence of concerns about imported foreign labor on the development of U.S. immigration policy in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era between the 1880s and the 1920s. In 1885, Congress passed the Foran Act in response to pressure from organized labor, which viewed immigrant workers imported by American employers as unfree, servile people equivalent to slaves and as threats to Americans’ employment. Known as the alien contract labor law, the Foran Act prohibited individuals and corporations from importing foreign workers under contract and became part of the U.S. general immigration law in 1891. Most other provisions of U.S. immigration law primarily focused on the exclusion and deportation of undesirable foreigners, but the alien contract labor law also had the goal of tracking down and prosecuting those who unlawfully imported contract workers, often in interior parts of the country. Historians of U.S. immigration often focus on immigration law enforcement at points of entry, making the impression that immigration control was a regional affair in seaboard and border states. This presentation, by contrast, investigates the implementation of the alien contract labor law in the interior regions of the United States. It demonstrates how the law made immigration control a national issue pursued across the United States by integrating the interior into the national immigration regime by the 1920s. The presentation also illuminates another way the alien contract labor law affected U.S. immigration policy by revealing how the immigration bureau’s repeated failures to convict alleged importers of foreign workers ended up expanding immigration officials’ authority over the admission and exclusion of foreigners.

PLACE Philip Selznick Seminar Room, 2240 Piedmont Avenue
TIME 12:45 – 2:00pm.
INFO <https://www.cslls.berkeley.edu>