

## Timeline of Chinese Immigration and Exclusion

- 1848** Gold discovered at Sutter's Mill, California; many Chinese arrive to mine for gold.
- 1850** Foreign Miners' tax mainly targets Chinese and Mexican miners.
- 1852** Approximately 25,000 Chinese in America.
- 1854** Court rules that Chinese cannot give testimony in court.
- 1862** Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association forms.
- 1865** Central Pacific Railroad recruits Chinese workers; ultimately employs about 15,000 Chinese workers.
- 1869** First transcontinental railroad completed.
- 1870** California passes a law against the importation of Chinese and Japanese women for prostitution.
- 1871** Los Angeles: anti-Chinese violence; 18 Chinese killed.
- 1873** Panic of 1873; start of major economic downturn that last through the decade; blamed on corrupt RR companies.
- 1877** Chico, CA: anti-Chinese violence.
- 1878** Court rules Chinese ineligible for naturalized citizenship.
- 1880** Approximately 106,000 Chinese in America; California passes anti-miscegenation law (no interracial marriage).
- 1882** Chinese Exclusion Act: prohibits Chinese immigration (in one year, Chinese immigration drops from 40,000 to 23).
- 1885** Rock Springs Wyoming Anti-Chinese Violence.
- 1892** Geary Act—extends Chinese Exclusion Act.

## Document A: Anti-Chinese Play, 1879

If this document were your ONLY piece of evidence, how would you answer the question: 'Why did Americans pass the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act?'

### "THE CHINESE MUST GO."

#### ACT I.

SCENE—A Kitchen; Sam Gin washing dishes; Ah Coy smoking his opium pipe.

Ah Coy. I telly you, white man big fools; eaty too muchee, drinky too muchee, and talkee too muchee.

Sam Gin. White man catchee plenty money; Chinaman catchee little money.

Ah Coy. By and by white man catchee no money; Chinaman catchee heap money; Chinaman workee cheap, plenty work; white man workee dear, no work—sabee?

Sam Gin. Me heap sabee.

Ah Coy. Chinaman plenty work, plenty money, plenty to eat. White man no work, no money, die—sabee?

Sam Gin. Me heap sabee.

Ah Coy. White man damn fools; keep wifes and children—cost plenty money; Chinaman no wife, no children, save plenty money. By and by, no more white workingman in California; all Chinaman—sabee?

(Enter Frank Blaine.)

Frank B. Damn such luck; can't borrow a cent to save my life. Money is getting as scarce as flies about Christmas. I must have some. Losing three games of billiards, one after the other, with this flat-footed Jack Flint is a shame. (To Ah Coy.) Why don't you work?

Ah Coy. Your mother no payee me last month; no payee, no workee—sabee?

Frank B. How much does she owe you?

Ah Coy. Six dollars.

Frank B. All right, John; I get it for you. (Aside.) If I squeeze the six dollars out of the old man that Chinaman has to pay me commission, that's business (pulling Sam Gin by the queue). Exit.

Sam Gin. Damn hoodlum. What for you foolee me all the time?

Source: The page above comes from a play called "The Chinese Must Go:" A Farce in Four Acts by Henry Grimm, published in San Francisco, 1879. In just the first page, you will be able to see many of the common stereotypes of Chinese immigrants in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## Document B: Political Cartoon, 1871

If this document were your ONLY piece of evidence, how would you answer the question: 'Why did Americans pass the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act?'

FRIDAY 18, 1871.]

HARPER'S WEEKLY.

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THE CHINESE QUESTION.—(See page 142.)  
The cartoon is a political cartoon by Thomas Nast, published in Harper's Weekly on Friday, 18th July 1871. It depicts Columbia, the personification of the United States, standing in a protective stance over a Chinese man. She is surrounded by a large, arched structure filled with anti-Chinese propaganda. To the right, a group of Irish and German thugs, some holding clubs and knives, are threatening the Chinese man. The scene is set in a dark, industrial environment with a factory in the background. The cartoon is signed 'Nast' in the bottom right corner.

HARPER'S WEEKLY

Source: The cartoon was drawn by Thomas Nast for Harper's Weekly, a Northern magazine. In this cartoon, we see Columbia, the feminine symbol of the United States, protecting a Chinese man against a gang of Irish and German thugs. At the bottom it says "Hands off-Gentlemen! America means fair play for all men."

### Document C: Workingmen of San Francisco (Modified)

If this document were your ONLY piece of evidence, how would you answer the question: 'Why did Americans pass the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act?'

We have met here in San Francisco tonight to raise our voice to you in warning of a great danger that seems to us imminent, and threatens our almost utter destruction as a prosperous community.

The danger is, that while we have been sleeping in fancied security, believing that the tide of Chinese immigration to our State had been checked and was in a fair way to be entirely stopped, our opponents, the pro-China wealthy men of the land, have been wide-awake and have succeeded in reviving the importation of this Chinese slave-labor. So that now, hundreds and thousands of Chinese are every week flocking into our State.

Today, every avenue to labor, of every sort, is crowded with Chinese slave labor worse than it was eight years ago. The boot, shoe and cigar industries are almost entirely in their hands. In the manufacture of men's overalls and women's and children's underwear they run over three thousand sewing machines night and day. They monopolize nearly all the farming done to supply the market with all sorts of vegetables. This state of things brings about a terrible competition between our own people, who must live as civilized Americans, and the Chinese, who live like degraded slaves. We should all understand that this state of things cannot be much longer endured.

#### Vocabulary

Imminent: about to happen

*Source: The document above is a speech to the workingmen of San Francisco on August 16, 1888.*

## Document D: Autobiography of a Chinese Immigrant (Modified)

If this document were your ONLY piece of evidence, how would you answer the question: 'Why did Americans pass the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act?'

The treatment of the Chinese in this country is all wrong and mean. . .

There is no reason for the prejudice against the Chinese. The cheap labor cry was always a falsehood. Their labor was never cheap, and is not cheap now. It has always commanded the highest market price. But the trouble is that the Chinese are such excellent and faithful workers that bosses will have no others when they can get them. If you look at men working on the street you will find a supervisor for every four or five of them. That watching is not necessary for Chinese. They work as well when left to themselves as they do when some one is looking at them.

It was the jealousy of laboring men of other nationalities — especially the Irish—that raised the outcry against the Chinese. No one would hire an Irishman, German, Englishman or Italian when he could get a Chinese, because our countrymen are so much more honest, industrious, steady, sober and painstaking. Chinese were persecuted, not for their vices [sins], but for their virtues [good qualities].

There are few Chinamen in jails and none in the poor houses. There are no Chinese tramps or drunkards. Many Chinese here have become sincere Christians, in spite of the persecution which they have to endure from their heathen countrymen. More than half the Chinese in this country would become citizens if allowed to do so, and would be patriotic Americans. But how can they make this country their home as matters now are! They are not allowed to bring wives here from China, and if they marry American women there is a great outcry.

Under the circumstances, how can I call this my home, and how can any one blame me if I take my money and go back to my village in China?

*Source: The passage above is from Lee Chew, "The Biography of a Chinaman," Independent, 15 (19 February 1903), 417–423.*

### An Immigrant's Phrase Book

From the 1850s to 1882, approximately 300,000 Chinese immigrated to the United States. Most came as "sojourners"—that is, migrants who expected to return to their homelands after making money in the United States, and thus had little incentive to learn English, shed their native garb, or learn American ways. Mostly male, they left wives and children behind, traveling thousands of miles to California, which they called "Gold Mountain," and other West Coast destinations, where they worked as miners and on the railroad. When the mining boom and railroad construction ended by the 1870s, many migrated to cities, such as San Francisco, to work as tailors, cigar makers, and domestic servants. Some operated laundries and restaurants. After the Civil War, some planters in Louisiana and Mississippi even recruited Chinese workers to replace blacks who once labored in their cotton fields. In 1875, Wong Sam and Associates in San Francisco published *An English-Chinese Phrase Book* for Chinese immigrants. These examples provide insight into their harsh new world and ways that they tried to fight against discrimination.

The men are striking for wages.  
 He assaulted me without provocation.  
 He claimed my mine.  
 I will expel him if he don't leave the place.  
 He tries to extort money from me.  
 He falsely accused me of stealing his watch.  
 You have violated the Constitution of this State.  
 He was choked to death with a lasso, by a robber.  
 Can I sleep here tonight?  
 Have you any food for me?  
 Have you any grass for my horse?  
 The passage money is \$50 from Hong Kong to California.  
 The United States have many immigrants.  
 The immigration will soon stop.

## Racism

Although small in number and once highly prized as workers, the Chinese, more than any other immigrant group in the Gilded Age, became a target of discrimination, bigotry, and violence. Different racially than European immigrants and Euro-Americans, the Chinese were viewed by some native-born Americans as subhuman, as people so inferior that they were simply incapable of ever becoming Americans or good citizens. Many "old stock" Americans placed the Chinese in the same "racially inferior" category as blacks and Indians. Moreover, their dress, hairstyles, and physical appearance made them easily distinguishable. They suffered numerous violent attacks, and anti-Chinese riots erupted periodically throughout the Gilded Age.

The Chinese had already suffered economic and legal discrimination for years, when a severe economic depression in the 1870s kindled a blaze of anti-Chinese sentiment. Many white workingmen blamed the Chinese for their joblessness and for driving down the wages of native-born workers. Shouting the slogan "The Chinese Must Go," California's Workingman's Party demanded an end to Chinese immigration. By 1882 anti-Chinese sentiment had grown so great that Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act. The first exclusion act based on race or ethnicity in American history, the Chinese Exclusion Act was in effect until 1943. In 1876, in the midst of the economic depression, as anti-Chinese sentiment was deepening on the West Coast, Thomas Vivien wrote an article published in *Scribner's* magazine entitled "John Chinaman in San Francisco." Vivien wished to "enlighten" the rest of the nation about the Chinese "threat" to the United States. The following excerpt sums up the stereotypes and bigotry that the Chinese faced and suggests how these attitudes led to their exclusion.

Individually, John Chinaman is a clean human; collectively he is a beast. Ah Stue, the cook, keeps his coppers and pans clean and bright, washes his hands in going from dish to dish, is orderly, fresh in appearance, and ever arrayed in spotless white and blue. Follow him home, and you will find this cleanly unit become one of a herd of animals living in a state of squalor and filth, at which even a Digger Indian would shudder. Fifteen Chinamen will live, sleep, and cook, in a hovel or cellar twelve feet square, having

only a door as admitting light and air. Clouds of rancid smoke issue continually from the common chimney, window, and door, through which John and his fellows may dimly be seen crawling, cooking, smoking, and sleeping. . . .

John, as a domestic, is invaluable and a nuisance, a perfect treasure and a horror. . . . He is either passably honest, or steals everything he can lay hands on, according to his disposition. In fine, he would resemble Bridget or Pete [Irish maid and black male servant stereotypes] in many ways, were it not for that strange, impenetrable reserve, inherent with the Oriental, which is as distinctive as his expression is immobile, and which will keep John Chinaman forever an alien.

As has already been hinted, the Chinaman is not a model (American) law-abiding citizen. He gambles incessantly, smokes opium continuously, keeps his women in a state of sinful and abject bondage, and generally brings his quarrels to a conclusion by chopping his antagonist's head open. His favorite weapons of assault and battery are iron bars, butcher-knives, and cleavers ground sharp as razors. . . . To hack, to hew, to chop, and to cleave are his greatest delights when on the war-path. . . .

While immigration is the life-blood of young nations, there is such a thing as blood-poisoning, and this is frequently occasioned by the presence of some particular foreign substance. John is that substance, and is, moreover, utterly devoid of any quality of assimilation. He is a heterogeneous element, and will always remain so. Unlike the Japanese, he does not follow or care to follow our customs or our costumes; in fact he regards all western rules of life with supreme contempt. . . .

In short, the Chinese have here a power with which white labor can by no means cope, for a white man would starve on what John thrives on. Few capitalists pay their employees more than is necessary for their support, consequently, the workman who lives more cheaply is the workman who is paid more cheaply, and here it is that the Chinaman has greatly the advantage. Only by degrading white labor to a bestial scale can the two compete on equal grounds; that being impossible, the outlook for the poor white man and woman in San Francisco turns but one way. . . . one of these results will certainly follow: Either California will be bereft of white labor, or such an exhibition of latent hostility will occur as will somewhat startle those who pooh-pooh the possibility of collision between races arising from a struggle for employment. Either way lies a calamity. And this is no croaking, but the strong uncolored logic of observation and facts.



*Chinese workers played a crucial role in the successful completion of the transcontinental railroad. Making up 90 percent of the entire workforce of the Central Pacific Railroad, the Chinese worked for \$31 a month (wages significantly lower than those paid to white workers) and labored in extremely perilous conditions as they built the road from Sacramento east, crossing rugged and hazardous mountains. Avalanches killed countless workers. One railroad official wrote that "many of them we did not find until the next season when the snow melted."*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_

Chinese Immigration and Exclusion: Graphic Organizer

Research Question: Why was the Chinese Exclusion Act passed in 1882?

Step 1: Read the timeline. Write your hypothesis (educated guess) in response to the research question:

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Step 2: Read documents A-F. For each, write any evidence that helps you understand why the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed.

Document	Evidence



In the space below, answer the following question: *Why did Americans pass the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882?*

Use evidence from the documents and the timeline.

