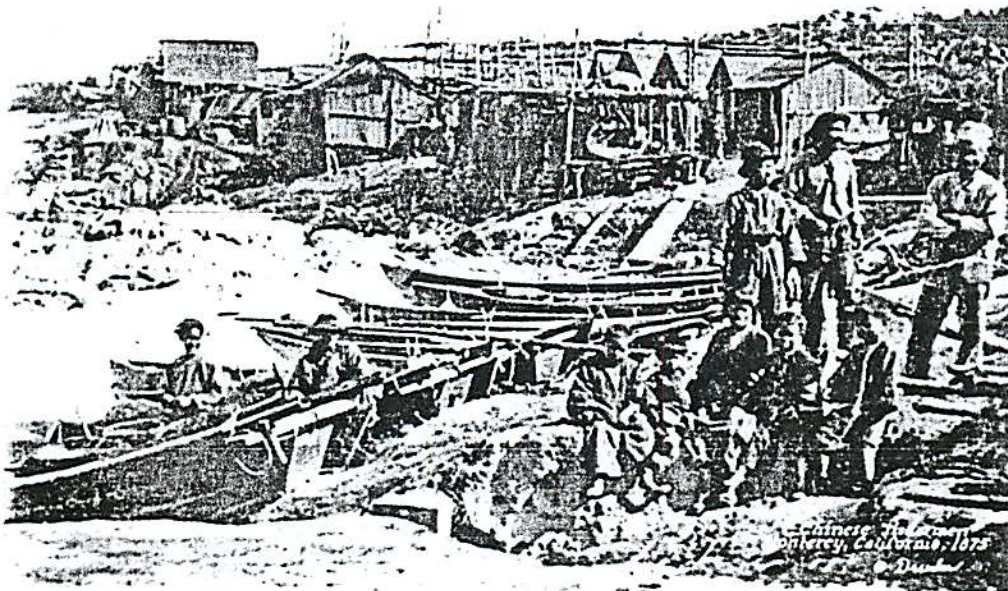


Handout #1

Chinese Immigration

China was a nation in chaos in the first half of the 19th century. Between the 1850s and 1864, civil war killed millions, and millions more were forced from their homes. When news of the discovery of gold in California reached the embattled country, many Chinese made the long journey east to try their luck in the place they called Gum Saan, Cantonese for Gold Mountain. Like many foreign miners before them, the Chinese faced hostility and discrimination when they arrived.

While some Chinese miners were successful, easy to access gold was nearly gone by the 1850s. Many Chinese workers became part of an immigrant labor force that signed on to the dangerous work of building the first transcontinental railroad. By 1861, two-thirds of all Chinese living outside of China lived in California.



Albert Dressler, Chinese Fishermen in Monterey, California, ca. 1875; courtesy the California Historical Society

Discrimination in the Goldfields

In 1852 California passed a Foreign Miner's Tax. The new tax required all foreign miners who did not want to become citizens to pay a hefty monthly fee to state officials. Even if they had

wanted to, Chinese laborers were not allowed to become U.S. citizens. The Naturalization Act of 1790 limited citizenship to "free white persons," preventing Asians from becoming citizens. Although the Foreign Miner's Tax affected other foreign miners such as French and Mexicans, it was applied most forcefully to Chinese miners, who faced extreme racial hatred. This hatred and discrimination was fed by rumors of Chinese success in the goldfields. Easily accessible gold was running out, and groups and individuals battled one another for what remained.

Building the Great Railways

The hostility directed toward the Chinese, as well as the rapid disappearance of available gold, left many Chinese miners hungry and homeless. They were denied work in the more skilled professions, and it was difficult for them to find jobs of any kind.

By the 1860s, when construction of the first transcontinental railroad got under way, the railroads needed laborers to perform the very dangerous work of blasting tunnels and laying ties over the treacherous terrain of the High Sierra. Generally free to choose their own jobs, the majority of white men in California avoided this hazardous work. Railway managers pointed to China's Great Wall as proof that the Chinese were capable of the labor required. Railroad executives determined that Chinese workers were cheap and easy to manage. They received around \$26 a month for a workweek of six 12-hour days, and they had to provide their own food and tents. White workers, however, earned \$35 a month or more and were furnished with food and shelter. Thanks in large part to Chinese laborers, the railway was completed in 1869.

After their great contribution to the transcontinental railroad, the Chinese faced further discrimination when the U.S. passed the Naturalization Act of 1870, which allowed African Americans to become citizens while continuing to exclude Asians.

Many former railroad workers turned to farming to make ends meet. By 1880, Chinese workers comprised one-third of the agricultural labor force in California. Others moved to cities such as San Francisco and worked in the few industries permitted to them, such as laundries.

Racist Discrimination and the Chinese Exclusion Act

By limiting immigration for 10 years, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 sought to contain the threat of competition that Chinese immigrants posed to white laborers. The act introduced a list of race-based restrictions aimed exclusively at Chinese communities. For instance, it banned all Chinese immigrants other than students, teachers, and merchants from entering the U.S.. In addition, the law prevented those already living in the United States from becoming naturalized U.S. citizens, regardless of how long they had lived and worked in the country. Based on false beliefs of racial and moral inferiority, such legal restrictions on Chinese immigration were extended until 1902. Chinese exclusion was not fully ended in the United States until 1943.

Handout #2

The Biography of a Chinaman: Lee Chew Independent, LV (Feb. 19, 1903). 417-423.

The village where I was born is situated in the province of Canton, on one of the banks of the Si Kiang River. It is called a village, although it is really as big as a city, for there are about 5,000 men in it over eighteen years of age women and children and even youths are not counted in our villages.

When I was ten years of age I worked on my father's farm, digging, hoeing, manuring, gathering and carrying the crop. We had no horses, as nobody under the rank of an official is allowed to have a horse in China....

I worked on my father's farm till I was about sixteen years of age, when a man of our tribe came back from America and took ground as large as four city blocks and made a paradise of it. He put a large stone wall around and led some streams through and built a palace and summer house and about twenty other structures, with beautiful bridges over the streams and walks and roads. Trees and flowers, singing birds, water fowl and curious animals were within the walls.

The man had gone away from our village a poor boy. Now he returned with unlimited wealth, which he had obtained in the country of the American wizards. After many amazing adventures he had become a merchant in a city called Mott Street, so it was said.

The wealth of this man filled my mind with the idea that I, too, would like to go to the country of the wizards and gain some of their wealth, and after a long time my father consented....

My father gave me \$100, and I went to Hong Kong with five other boys from our place and we got steerage passage on a steamer, paying \$50 each. Everything was new to me...The food was different from that which I had been used to, and I did not like it at all. I was afraid of the stews, for the thought of what they might be made of by the wicked wizards of the ship made me ill... When I got to San Francisco, which was before the passage of the Exclusion act, I was half starved, because I was afraid to eat the provisions of the barbarians, but a few days' living in the Chinese quarter made me happy again. A man got me work as a house servant in an American family, and my start was the same as that of almost all the Chinese in this country....

When I went to work for that American family, I could not speak a word of English, and I did not know anything about housework. The family consisted of husband, wife and two children. They were very good to me and paid me \$3.50 a week, of which I could save \$3.

I did not know how to do anything, and I did not understand what the lady said to me, but she showed me how to cook, wash, iron, sweep, dust, make beds, wash dishes, clean windows,

paint and brass, polish the knives and forks, etc., by doing the things herself and then overseeing my efforts to imitate her. She would take my hands and show them how to do things. She and her husband and children laughed at me a great deal, but it was all good natured. I was not confined to the house in the way servants are confined here, but when my work was done in the morning I was allowed to go out till lunch time. People in California are more generous than they are here.

In six months I had learned how to do the work of our house quite well, and I was getting \$5 a week and board, and putting away about \$4.25 a week. I had also learned some English, and by going to a Sunday school I learned more English and something about Jesus, who was a great Sage, and whose precepts are like those of Kong foo-tsze.

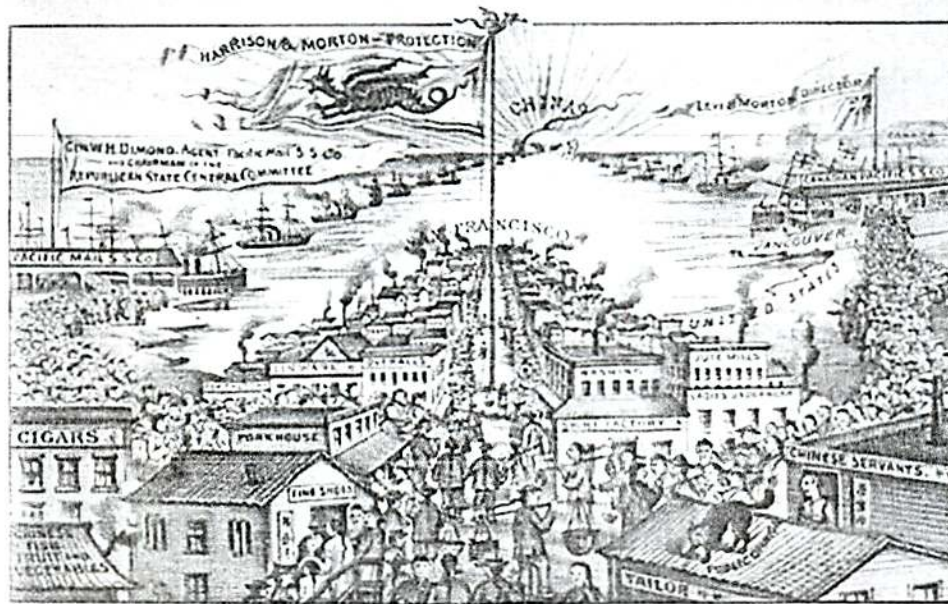
It was twenty years ago when I came to this country, and I worked for two years as a servant, getting at the last \$35 a month. I sent money home to comfort my parents, but though I dressed well and lived well,...I saved...\$410 at the end of two years, and I was now ready to start in business.

When I first opened a laundry it was in company with a partner, who had been in the business for some years. We went to a town about 500 miles inland, where a railroad was building. We got a board shanty and worked for the men employed by the railroads. Our rent cost us \$10 a month and food nearly \$5 a week each, for all food was dear and we wanted the best of everything -we lived principally on rice, chickens, ducks and pork, and did our own cooking...We had to put up with many insults and some frauds, as men would come in and claim parcels that did not belong to them, saying they had lost their tickets, and would fight if they did not get what they asked for. Sometimes we were taken before Magistrates and fined for losing shirts that we had never seen. On the other hand, we were making money, and even after sending home \$3 a week I was able to save about \$15. When the railroad construction gang moved on we went with them. The men were rough and prejudiced against us, but not more so than in the big Eastern cities...

Edited from Digital History-http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/social_history/16chinaman.cfm

Growth of Chinatowns

Limited to specific residential areas and jobs, many Chinese were forced to form their own ethnic communities and neighborhoods. Referred to as Chinatowns, these neighborhoods were described by white politicians and newspaper editors as “unsanitary,” “unhealthy,” and somehow “dangerous” to the values of white Americans. Bigotry and negative press resulted in the further separation of Chinese immigrants from mainstream life in California. It was difficult for the children of immigrants to find decent education and good jobs. However, Chinatowns became safe and familiar havens for Chinese families.



Fanciful view of San Francisco's Chinatown, ca. 1800s; courtesy the Bancroft Library, U.C. Berkeley

<http://weareca.org/index.php/en/era/1850s-WWI/chinese.html>