

# Chinese Immigration in America 1850-1910

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US History II

# Early History

- 1849—gold discovered at Sutter's Mill in California
- 1850—450 Chinese lured to US
- 1851—about 2,700 entered the US
- 1852—about 20,000 arrived
- 1860—by this year there were 34,900 Chinese in the US
- 63,100 Chinese in US by 1870 (an 81% increase from 1860)

# “Pushing Factors”

- Population Pressures in China
  - Population in China ↑
  - Land per family ↓
  - Unequal wealth distribution
  - Poor peasants driven to revolt or to leave
- Forced Open Door Policy
  - China forced to open foreign trade as result of Opium War (1839-1842) with England, Chinese citizens allowed to leave the country

- Taiping Rebellion (1851-1864)
  - Weakened the Chinese Empire, anti-imperialist societies led insurrections
- The Development of the Passage System
  - First Type
    - Organized by Chinese middlemen—a form of indentured servitude
  - Second Type
    - Handled at the ports, emigrants usually tricked into forced labor—slave like conditions
    - Some of the earliest Chinese arrived under this latter system, but laws were changed

# “Pulling Factors”

- The Gold Rush
  - 1850—only 400 of the 58k miners/Chinese
  - By 1870, Chinese laborers accounted for more than 27% of all US miners
- Building the Transcontinental R.R.
  - Mining declined, Chinese went to work for RR
  - Const. of the Central Pacific RR utilized between 12-14k Chinese workers

- Chinese used in the const. of the S. Pacific and N. Pacific RR's
- Estimated that 1,200 died from avalanches and accidental explosions
- Chinese quickly acquired important skills
  - “extraordinary ability to carve ledges from cliffs while hanging in baskets”
- Upon completion of the Trans. Cont. RR
  - Some Chinese migrated to the East coast
  - 75 Chinese went to work in North Adams, MA at a shoe and boot factory

- Crucial to the Development of the West
  - Burlingame Treaty (1868) ensured emigration from Far East would continue through 1870's
  - Immigration avg 12k Chinese per year
  - Chinese very important to the devel. of Calif.
  - Using their knowledge of farming—
    - Worked in planting, cultivating and harvesting
    - Known for horticulture skills—Bing Cherry named for Ah Bing, Chinese immigrant who created it

## – San Francisco

- By 1870 composed 70-80% of factory workers in woolen mills—90% of cigar makers in city
- Majority of shoemakers, garment and undergarment makers, brooms, slippers, and cigar boxes
- Never more than 1/10<sup>th</sup> of California's population
- Formed 25% of Calif. labor force because they were almost all working age men

# Attitude Toward Chinese

- Early on OK
- As their numbers ↑ employers began to hire them in place of Caucasian workers
- Hired as “strike-breakers”
  - North Adams, MA (1870)
  - Belleville, NJ (1870)
  - Beaver Falls, PA (1872)

- Anti-Chinese organizations began to form
  - Anti-Coolie Association and Supreme Order of the Caucasians, launched boycotts against Chinese laborers
  - Bloody riots occurred in China Towns from Denver to Los Angeles
  - Workingman’s Party organized and distributed pamphlets stating,
    - “The White freeman with his wife and children cannot live in the same atmosphere as the coolie slave. One or the other must leave State, and it must be the Chinaman.”

# Court/Legislative Discrimination

- 1859—Calif. Legislature declared that “Negroes, Mongolians (Chinese), and Indians, shall not be admitted into public schools.”
- 1870—San Francisco passed law that use of sidewalks was prohibited to anyone carrying a load on a pole
- 1879—New Calif. Constitution adopted with anti-Chinese provisions
- 1880—President Hayes renegotiated Burlingame Treaty—limited immigration

- Chinese Exclusion Act (1882)
  - Pres. Chester Arthur signed this Act
    - Temporarily suspending immigration of skilled and unskilled Chinese laborers for 10 years
    - Act stated that no citizenship would be given to any Chinese immigrant: past, current, or future
- The Scott Act (1888)
  - Barred Chinese from reentering the country unless they had family or property in the US
- The Geary Act (1892)
  - Extended Exclusion Act for 10 more years and required laborers already in country to apply for permits and certificates of residence

- In 1906, Calif., Oregon, and Washington passed alien land acts.
  - Forbidding ineligible citizens from owning land
- Impact of the Exclusion Act of 1882
  - The 1890 census reported 107,488 Chinese in the US
  - 1900 census—89,863 Chinese in the US
  - 1910 census—71,531 Chinese remaining