

LESSON: CHINESE IMMIGRATION & EXCLUSIONARY POLICIES

Central Historical or Essential Question:

➤ *Why did political officials restrict Chinese immigration in 1882?*

Purpose of the Lesson

In this lesson, students practice sourcing to better understand the treatment of Chinese immigrants in the American West and resulting exclusionary policies

Brief Overview of the Lesson

By the 1860s, Chinese and Mexican immigrants made up one-fifth of the mining population in California. Across the West, whites were often landowners and managers, while Chinese worked the mines, railroads, and assorted jobs.

In this lesson, students will look at various primary sources to better understand racial hostility toward Chinese immigrants, their struggles to obtain American citizenship, accusations of their supposed “immoral” practices (drugs, prostitution), and even the challenges faced by Chinese children in schools. Students will then delve deeper into the 1875 anti-Chinese crusade in California and the eventual Chinese Exclusion Act—the first legislation placing restrictions on the basis of race.

Targeted Audience

This lesson is for students in a 9-12 American History classroom (or, if offered, an Asian-American Studies course). Scaffolds and modifications will be provided for English-Language Learners (ELLs). Students should possess broad prior knowledge about Manifest Destiny, railroads, and immigrant groups to the U.S.

Digital and Global Literacy

Students will use image annotations tools like ThingLink, Google Photo Albums, Instagram, and/or Pinterest to provide their own sourcing notes.

This lesson weaves the experience of Chinese and Chinese-Americans into the larger story of nineteenth-century U.S. History via topics like Manifest Destiny, railroad transportation, immigration, labor, and racial politics. It also situates (albeit briefly) this story into the larger Chinese diaspora of the last few centuries.

Relevance Beyond the Classroom

This lesson offers students an opportunity to analyze the degree to which immigrants are welcomed and shunned by other Americans. By understanding the hostilities that Chinese

and Chinese-Americans faced, students will be able to draw connections to the experiences of other immigrant groups across U.S. History and to the present day, and hopefully become more understanding of the struggles immigrants continue to face — especially those deemed as “illegal,” such as Chinese immigrants beginning in the 1880s.

Research & Sources

Secondary sources include general US History surveys, as well as those specific to Chinese- and Asian-American history. [List 1-2 main books] Methodological resources focus on the use of images as primary source analysis, and reviews of image-annotation tools on websites like Teachinghistory.org. Databases include: DPLA, American Yawp, Library of Congress, National Archives, and Stanford History Education Group lesson plan and materials for the Chinese Exclusion Act.

Primary sources include political cartoons, a labor union flyer, newspaper article, congressional testimony, and a Chinese American merchant's letter.

[For a detailed list of sources, see the attached lesson plan](#)