

Name _____



Chinese Immigrants and the California Gold Rush

By Cindy Grigg

On January 24, 1848, gold was discovered in California at Sutter's Mill. By 1849, people were coming to California from all over the world to look for gold. The California gold rush caused a huge increase in California's population. That year about 80,000 gold-seekers came to California, hoping to strike it rich. These migrants were known as "forty-niners." Nearly eighty percent of these were Americans from the east. The others came from all over the world. Many of them came from countries that had had few people move to the United States in the past.



At that time, war, famine, and a poor economy in southeastern China caused many Chinese men to come to America. Most of them hoped to find great wealth and return to China. Between 1849 and 1853, about 24,000 young Chinese men immigrated to California.

Chinese immigrants soon found that many Americans did not welcome them. In 1852, California placed a high monthly tax on all foreign miners. Chinese miners had no choice but to pay this tax if they wanted to mine for gold in California. Chinese workers were also the targets of violent attacks in the mining camps. The legal system offered little protection. It often favored Americans over Chinese and other immigrants.

Many Chinese immigrants continued working in the gold mines despite such treatment. Some looked for different jobs, and many opened their own businesses. Many Chinese opened their own restaurants and laundries. The largest and oldest Chinese community in the United States is the Chinatown area of San Francisco.

San Francisco, California, grew more rapidly than any other city in the world at the time. Its population jumped from about 800 in March 1848 to more than 25,000 by 1850. In a very short time, business growth, gold mining, and trade changed California's economy. As the gold rush faded, frontier society became more stable. Great wealth became more difficult to achieve, but with luck and hard work, immigrants could build good lives for themselves in the West. After the gold rush ended, many Chinese immigrants worked as farm laborers, in low-paying industrial jobs, and on railroad construction.

As more Americans moved west, the need to send goods and information between the East and West increased. The federal government passed the Pacific Railway Acts of 1862 and 1864. These acts gave railroad companies loans and land grants. The railroads hired many immigrants, many of them Chinese. Chinese workers were paid less than white laborers. They were also given the most dangerous jobs and longer working hours. However, Chinese workers could earn much more money working for the railroads than in China.

Chinese immigrants continued to come to America between the years of 1849 and 1882. In that year, the U.S. government passed a law stopping their immigration. The Chinese Exclusion Act stopped almost all Chinese immigration for nearly a century. This was the first immigration law passed in the United States that was against a specific national or ethnic group. This act was the first of many discriminatory laws against other racial or ethnic groups.

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Questions

1. What event sent people from all over the world to California in 1848-1849?

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- _____ 2. People who came to California after this event were called:
- A. illegal aliens
 - B. forty-niners
 - C. gold rushers
- _____ 3. Most of these people who came to California came from:
- A. Canada
 - B. China
 - C. the eastern United States
- _____ 4. What was happening in China that caused many people to emigrate from there?
- A. war
 - B. famine
 - C. poor economy
 - D. all of the above
- _____ 5. What did California do to discourage foreigners from mining for gold?
- A. wouldn't give them jobs
 - B. wouldn't give them a place to live
 - C. taxed them
- _____ 6. What kind of businesses did many Chinese men open for themselves?
- A. restaurants and laundries
 - B. hotels and grocery stores
 - C. factories and railroads
- _____ 7. Where is the oldest and largest Chinese community in the United States?
- A. Chinatown in San Francisco
 - B. Chinatown in New York City
 - C. Chinatown in Los Angeles

- _____ 8. After the gold rush ended, what type of jobs did many Chinese immigrants hold?
- A. farm laborers
 - B. low-paying industrial jobs
 - C. railroad construction
 - D. all of the above
9. Why did the Chinese stay in America even though conditions were not the best?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____ 10. What happened in 1882 that stopped almost all Chinese immigrants from coming to America?
- A. The railroads stopped hiring them.
 - B. There was a war in the United States.
 - C. A federal law was passed excluding them.

Did the railroads treat Chinese workers fairly? Why or why not?

[illegible]