

The Unwanted Immigrants: The Chinese (1878)

(1)

*Many Chinese immigrants went to California during the Gold Rush and then built the western railroads, making millionaires of railroad barons. Many of these immigrants were willing to work long hours for little pay and became known as “coolies.” When the railroad industry declined, they became manual laborers. White workers began to resent these immigrants due to their hard work ethic, different customs, and lifestyles. This situation is but one example of why Mark Twain referred to the time period as “**gilded**.”*

The document below is an extract from the California legislature report on the perceived “evils” of the Chinese and the racism toward them. Four years later, in 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which suspended Chinese immigration for 10 years.

(2)

The Chinese have now lived among us, in considerable numbers, for a quarter of a century, and yet they remain separate, distinct from, and antagonistic to our people in thinking, mode of life, in tastes and principles, and are as far from assimilation as when they first arrived. They fail to comprehend our system of government; they perform no duties of citizenship; they are not available as jurymen; cannot be called upon as *posse comitatus* (sheriff’s deputies) to preserve order, nor be relied upon as soldiers. They do not comprehend or appreciate our social ideas, and they contribute but little to support of any of our institutions, public or private.

What’s going on?

(3)

They bring no children with them, and there is, therefore, no possibility of influencing them through our ordinary educational appliances. There is, indeed, no point of contact between the Chinese and our people through which we can Americanize them. The rigidity, which characterizes these people, forbids the hope of essential change in their relations to our people or our government.

(4)

We respectfully submit the admitted proposition that no nation, much less a republic, can safely permit the presence of a large and increasing element among its people which cannot be as-

simulated or made to comprehend the responsibilities of citizenship. They do not recognize the sanctity of an oath, and utterly fail to comprehend the crime of perjury. Bribery, intimidation, and other methods of baffling judicial action are considered by them as perfectly legitimate. It is an established fact that the administration of justice among the Chinese is almost impossible ...

What's going on?

How does this relate to what you have read already?

(5)

We now come to an aspect of the question more revolting still. We would shrink from the disgusting details did not a sense of duty demand that they be presented. Their lewd women induce, by the cheapness of their offers, thousands of boys and young men to enter their dens, very many of whom are inoculated with venereal diseases of the worst type. Boys of eight and ten years of age have been found with this disease, and some of our physicians treat a half dozen cases daily. The fact that these diseases have their origin chiefly among the Chinese is well established ...

(6)

The Chinese herd together in one spot, whether in city or village, until they transform the vicinage (area) into a perfect hive—there they live packed together, a hundred living in a space that would be insufficient for an average American family. Their place of domicile is filthy in the extreme, and to a degree that cleansing is impossible except for the absolute destruction of the dwellings they occupy. In almost every house is found a room devoted to opium smoking, and these places are visited by white boys and women, so that the deadly opium habit is being introduced among our people ...

(7)

Our laborers require meat and bread, which have been considered by us as necessary to mental and bodily strength. The Chinese require only rice, dried fish, tea, and a few simple vegetables. The cost of sustenance to the whites is four-fold greater than that of the Chinese and the wages

of the whites must of necessity be greater than the wages required by the Chinese. The Chinese are, therefore, able to underbid the whites in every kind of labor. They can be hired in masses; they can be managed and controlled like unthinking slaves.

Adapted from California Senate. (1878). *An address to the American people of the United States upon the evils of Chinese immigration*. Excerpted from Hyser, R. M., & Arndt, J. C. (2008). *Voices of the American past: Documents of U.S. history* (Vol. 2, 4th ed.). Boston, MA: Thomson Learning.

What's going on?

How does this relate to what you have read already?

What is the overall message of the passage?

What questions do you have?

A Mother Protests Against the Denial of Equal Education for Her Daughter

(1)

In 1884, the 8-year-old daughter of immigrants Joseph and Mary Tape was denied admission to the Spring Valley Primary School in San Francisco because of her Chinese ancestry. Her parents sued the school board and won the case. As a result, the San Francisco School Board lobbied for a segregated school system for Chinese children. In 1885, a law was passed giving the board the authority to establish separate schools and stating that “when such separate schools are established Chinese children must not be admitted into any other schools.”

In the following excerpt, Mary Tape protests the refusal of San Francisco to admit her daughter Mamie to a school nearer her home.

What’s going on?

(2)

To the Board of Education—

Dear Sirs: I see that you are going to make all sorts of excuses to keep my child out off the Public schools. Dear sirs, Will you please to tell me! Is it a disgrace to be Born a Chinese? Didn't God make us all!!! What right have you to bar my children out of the schools because she is a Chinese Descend ... Do you call that a Christian act to compel my little children to go so far to a school that is made in purpose for them. My children don't dress like the other Chinese ... Her playmates is all Caucasians ever since she could toddle around. If she is good enough to play with them! Then is she not good enough to be in the same room and study with them? ... It seems no matter how a Chinese may live and dress so long as you know they Chinese. Then they are hated as one. There is not any right or justice for them.

Alta, April 16, 1885

What’s going on?

How does this relate to what you have read already?

What is the overall message of the passage?

What questions do you have?