

# Chinese Immigration and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882: Why Do Many Large American Cities Have a Chinatown?

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## **Abstract:**

This unit is set up as a [Document Based Question](#), with a final writing prompt assigned to address the question:

### **How did Chinatown come to be a part of so many American cities?**

Students will examine primary source documents from the late 1800s to get an idea of the racism against Chinese-Americans at the time and what kind of procedures were in place for Chinese immigrants who came to the U.S.

## **Essential Questions:**

- ◆ How did others perceive Chinese immigrants in the 1870's?
- ◆ What were the specific provisions of Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882?
- ◆ How did the Chinese Exclusion Act affect Chinese-Americans in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century?

## **Background:**

After the discovery of gold in 1849, thousands of fortune hunters from all over the world descended on California with the dream of finding easy wealth and returning to their homelands to live a life of ease. The allure of "Gold Mountain" beckoned Chinese adventurers as well, but their fate differed from many of their fellow immigrants to California. Their cultural and physical differences doomed them to becoming the first victims of a racist United States policy barring foreigners from immigrating to this country, to pursue a better life.

## **Setting the Purpose:**

Given that students have already studied the California Gold Rush in some detail, understanding how and why such a large influx of people invaded the San Francisco area in the early 1850's, this unit should commence with a brainstorming session, or ideally, an Internet search of the word, "Chinatown." Many large American cities, including San Francisco, Los Angeles, Seattle, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston and New York, each have a neighborhood called Chinatown. These neighborhoods are as architecturally distinct from the rest of the city as they are ethnically and culturally distinct.

## **Lesson Plan:**

1. After divining some the characteristics of each these Chinatowns, students should ponder the following question:

### **How did Chinatown come to be a part of so many American cities?**

This question will set up the previously stated essential questions of this unit. A concluding essay answering this fundamental question will serve as the final assessment for this unit.

2. The first document for students to explore is a [Champaign County Herald newspaper correspondent's report from California](#), published December 3, 1879. Here, correspondent

James Faulkner unabashedly derides the Chinese presence in California, warning the nation of the dangers that Chinese immigrants will incur. Students need to read this article carefully, teasing out fact from opinion and listing statements and ideas displaying racial prejudice. Faulkner often argues that the Chinese are inferior using neutral observations or no evidence at all. We can learn a lot about Chinese culture and Western prejudice in this piece. As students dissect it, they should keep the following question in mind:

**How did Anglo-Americans perceive Chinese immigrants in the 1870's?**

3. Within three years after James Faulkner wrote call for white supremacy, Congress wrote the [Chinese Exclusion Act](#). Students should break into small groups and translate each of the 15 sections into their own words, rendering this 19<sup>th</sup> century xenophobic legislation into modern English. Much of the act deals with the problem of documenting who can legally stay in the United States and what should be done to those of Chinese ancestry who fail to possess proper papers. It would be appropriate for students to examine modern parallels associated with undocumented immigrants and how this problem should be handled. As students work cooperatively, they should keep the following question in mind:

**What was the purpose of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882?**

4. The following primary document is from a collection of artifacts from the Great Lakes Regional Archives, **Record Group 85, Chinese Exclusion for Hong Sling and Family**. These documents are United States Department of Commerce and Labor Immigration Service forms for the entire [Hong Sling family](#) of Chicago. Students should discuss the following questions regarding this document:

What is this form's purpose; what is used for?

What strikes you as unusual about this form?

Why are merchants, teachers and students listed on the top of the form?

What do applicants swear to not having performed manual labor "except such as was necessary"?

These questions are all designed to lead to the following overarching question:

**How is the Chinese Exclusion Act being enforced 31 years after its inception?**

5. The following primary documents are from a collection of artifacts from the Great Lakes Regional Archives, **Record Group 85, Chinese Exclusion for Hong Sling and Family**. These comprise a transcript of [Hong Sling's interrogation](#) by the Inspector in Charge of the Chicago Office of the Department of Labor's Bureau of Immigration. This is a dialogue between Inspector Howard D. Ebey and Hong Sling, so two students at a time could read this as though it were a script while the rest of the class listens on.

The [photographs of the Hong Sling family](#) should be made available for examination as students go through the transcript. Students should consider the following questions as they read or listen to this transcript:

What does the inspector wish to learn about Hong Sling?

What does the inspector learn about Hong Sling?

Why is Hong Sling being interrogated?

What are some strange or disturbing questions the inspector asks Hong Sling?

How would you feel in Hong Sling's position?

These questions are all designed to lead to the following overarching question:

**How is the Chinese Exclusion Act being enforced 31 years after its inception?**

6. The following primary documents are from a collection of artifacts from the Great Lakes Regional Archives, **Record Group 85, Chinese Exclusion for Hong Sling and Family**. The first is a [transcript](#) of Hong Sling's eldest son Harry's interrogation and the next is a [transcript](#) of Hong Sling's wife Toy Shee's interrogation by the Inspector in Charge of the Chicago Office of the Department of Labor's Bureau of Immigration. These are dialogues between Inspector Howard D. Ebey and Hong Sling's family members, so two students at a time could read each of these as though they were a script while the rest of the class listens on. Students should consider the following questions as they read or listen to this transcript:

What does the inspector wish to learn about Harry and Toy Shee Hong Sling?

What does the inspector learn about each family member??

What are some strange or disturbing questions the inspector asks?

How would you feel in each of the family member's position?

These questions are all designed to lead to the following overarching question:

**How is the Chinese Exclusion Act being enforced 31 years after its inception?**

7. The following primary document is from a collection of artifacts from the Great Lakes Regional Archives, **Record Group 85, Chinese Exclusion for Hong Sling and Family**. The final set of documents provide the [answers to the Hong Sling](#) family as they apply for permission from the US government to visit China and return to their life in Chicago. Inspector Ebey submits his recommendation that each member of the Hong Sling family is who they say they are and should be allowed to travel abroad for a period of time. As students examine this letter, they should once again return to the main question:

**How is the Chinese Exclusion Act being enforced 31 years after its inception?**

### **Conclusion:**

Now, students should return to the opening question regarding the existence of Chinatowns across the American landscape. Given their study of the prevailing racism of the late 1800's/early 1900's, their examination of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, and the real-life tribulations of one Chinese-American family trying to travel to China and back, they should be able to craft a well-informed answer to the initial question:

**How did Chinatown come to be a part of so many American cities?**