

The Unwanted Immigrants: The Chinese (1878)

Many Chinese immigrants came to California during the Gold Rush and then built the western railroads. They were always 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 them due to their hard work ethic, different customs and lifestyles. The document below is an extract from the California legislature report on the "evils" of the Chinese and the racism towards them. Four years later, in 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which suspended Chinese immigration for ten years.

The Chinese have now lived among us, in considerable numbers, for a quarter of a century, and yet they remain in 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 a *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.

They bring no children with them, and there is, therefore, no possibility of influencing them but 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.

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 assimilated 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....

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....

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....

Our laborers require meat and bread, which have been considered by us as necessary to that mental and bodily strength....while 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.

An address to the American People of the United States upon the Evils of Chinese Immigration. (1878)
extracted from *Voices of the American Past* 340-343.