

San Francisco's Chinatown: Immigrants Build Community in "City by the Bay"

By History.com, adapted by Newsela staff on 06.07.17

Word Count **457**

Level **540L**



A photo of Chinatown in San Francisco, California, around 1900. This was before the San Francisco earthquake ruined many of the buildings. Photo from the Library of Congress

Almost every big city in the world has a "Chinatown." It is a Chinese neighborhood with Chinese homes, stores and restaurants. Chinese began coming to the United States in the middle of the 1800s. They first settled in San Francisco, California, the "City by the Bay." It was the first Chinese community in North America. Life wasn't easy for the new immigrants, though.

Chinese moved to the U.S. for better lives. In the 1850s, about 25,000 Chinese arrived.

Worked in gold mines, building railroads

They came during the California Gold Rush. Gold was found in California. People rushed to California hoping they would get rich. Many Chinese worked in the gold mines.

Others took jobs on farms or making clothes. Many others worked building the railroads.

Like most immigrants, life was hard for Chinese in America.

Most Chinese were desperate to work. They needed to make money to pay for food and shelter. They also wanted to send money to their families back home.

Many took jobs that paid badly. They worked long hours with few days off.

Limiting immigration

Other groups were angry at the Chinese. They thought the Chinese were taking their jobs.

At first, California tried to stop the Chinese from coming. The state made them get special licenses to run a business. The national government canceled many of these unfair laws.



Many people were against the immigrants. In 1882, lawmakers passed a law called the Chinese Exclusion Act. The law said that Chinese workers could not come for 10 years. It also took away some of the rights of Chinese already in the U.S.

White miners attack Chinese

In 1885, a terrible event happened in Wyoming. A group of white miners thought Chinese were taking their jobs. They attacked the Chinese workers. The miners killed and hurt many of them. It is now called the Rock Springs massacre.

For the rest of the 1800s, Western states kept Chinese out. Eastern states felt differently. Many Chinese came to the U.S. through New York.

They started Chinatowns in many new cities. These Chinese-American communities are doing great today.

Rebuilding after San Francisco earthquake



In 1906, there was a terrible earthquake in San Francisco. It destroyed thousands of homes and businesses in Chinatown. It also killed many Chinese-Americans. Chinatown had to be rebuilt.

San Francisco's Chinatown now covers about 30 city blocks. It is packed with Chinese restaurants and stores. Tourists to San Francisco love going to Chinatown. It is one of the most popular places in the city.