

Anti-Chinese Sentiment in the American West (1885-1892)

NCSS Thematic Strand: Time, Continuity, and Change

Grade Level: 8-12

Class Periods Required: 2 class periods, one whole period plus 35 minutes

Purpose, Background, and Context

Between 1852 and 1882, 300,000 Chinese came to America's western shores seeking work in gold mines, on railroads, as fishermen, or farmers. The Chinese were pushed to the American West due to overpopulation and economic woes in China and were pulled by the 1848 discovery of gold in California. They worked overwhelmingly in mining and building the Central Pacific Railroad, where they accounted for 90 percent of the work force. Although the 1790 Nationality Act denied American citizenship to these sojourners based on their race, groups of Chinese laborers formed more-or-less self-governing communities that came to be known as Chinatowns.

Despite their contributions to the development of the American West, Chinese laborers faced bitter racial discrimination. By examining boycott posters distributed in Butte, Montana and an account of the massacre in a Rock Springs, Wyoming Chinatown, students will examine the roots of these racial attitudes. They will learn that much of the conflict between white and Chinese laborers centered on attempts at unionization, often erupted in violent episodes, and had harsh consequences for Chinese immigrants.

Objectives & Student Outcomes:

Students will:

- ❖ Use posters to reconstruct life for citizens of Butte, Montana in August of 1898.
- ❖ Wear the "hat" of historian by hypothesizing about the roots of the conflict between White Americans and Asian Americans in the mid-nineteenth century American West.
- ❖ Analyze the conflict using documentary accounts by Chinese Miners of the massacre at Rock Springs, Wyoming in 1885

- ❖ Understand the concepts of conflict, historical method, primary sources, and multiple perspectives (NCSS Standards, p. 31)

Materials:

Three large images of boycott posters from Butte, MN to be displayed during the gallery walk, found at:

<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/chinese-boycott/>

Handouts for the account of Chinese Miners of the massacre at Rock Springs, found at:

http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/asian_voices/voices_display.cfm?id=27

Procedures:

Day 1

Procedure 1: Gallery Walk

Have students do a “gallery walk” viewing three Chinese posters from Butte, MN that urge boycotting of Chinese Americans labor. Tell the students they have about 3 minutes to view each poster during the gallery that they will do so without talking. While the students are viewing the posters, write on the whiteboard, “*What is happening in Butte, Montana?*”

Procedure 2: Gathering Evidence & Making Hypotheses

After students are seated, display one poster at a time and invite them to answer the question using evidence from the poster. Record student responses on the Smartboard (split the screen with the poster image on one half) asking for evidence as answers are given. If students begin to speculate about why the posters say what they say, write those under a different heading labeled “*Hypotheses.*”

Explain to students that historians use primary sources to gather evidence about the past, use that evidence to try to explain the past (making hypotheses), and seek more evidence from additional primary sources to support or refute their explanations. Using the list of evidence gathered from the posters invite students to make hypotheses about the evidence that they’ve gathered. Encourage students to use historical knowledge while hypothesizing (for instance, they may know that citizenship was denied for nonwhites at this time or that the Chinese Exclusion Act passed in 1882).

Procedure 3: Read a Second Source

Tell students that we will now test our hypotheses by looking at another primary source. Distribute the Chinese account of the massacre at Rock Springs, Wyoming in 1885. Have student volunteers read the document aloud while others follow along and underline passages that help answer the question: “What is the cause of the conflict?”

Day 2

Procedure 4: Gathering More Evidence

Recall for students their student hypotheses saved and now projected from Smart notebook file. Ask students to get out their underlined copies of the account of the massacre at Rock Springs. Ask students to share with the class which passages they underlined that point to the cause of conflict between laborers in the American West.

Procedure 5: Revise Hypotheses/Draw Conclusions

Explain to students that we will now use the evidence from the reading to revise our hypotheses, as a historian might. Ask students to write the following question on a piece of paper: *“Based upon the evidence that we’ve gathered from the massacre at Rock Springs and the posters of Butte, MN, what conclusions can you draw about relations between white and Asian laborers in the American West during the late nineteenth century?”*

Go through the existing list of hypotheses and revise them, based on student suggestions. Add new explanations or delete some, if necessary. Students should record the explanations in their notes for future discussion or exams. Collect students’ underlined copies of the Rock Springs handout.

Assessment of Outcomes

Assessment of student understanding will be informal for this lesson. Participation in class discussion and the collection of the Rock Springs handout with underlined passages will serve as measures of student understanding. The collection of the underlined handout will assess individual understanding, while whole class understanding is determined by the quality of the discussion, as well as teacher monitoring of student participation. Be sure to call on shyer students!

Students will:

- ❖ Successfully draw evidence from the posters to answer the question, “*What is happening in Butte, MN?*”
- ❖ Identify passages in the Rock Springs document that point to the causes of the labor conflict from the point of view of the Chinese.
- ❖ Offer explanations about the root of the conflict and revise those explanations in light of new evidence.

Extensions and Adaptations

Students can draw a political cartoon depicting the conflict between Chinese and white laborers based on their examination of the primary documents.

Students can create anti-discrimination posters in response to the boycott posters of Butte, MN.

Have students write a letter from a Chinese laborer in America to his/her family members in China describing their working, social, and economic lives.

Have students imagine themselves as a mine operator or local sheriff and craft a statement regarding the ongoing conflict between racial groups under their jurisdiction.

Resources

Flyers distributed by Silver Bow Trades and Labor Assembly and Butte Miners’ Union in support of Chinese and Japanese boycott., ca. 08/1898 [Electronic Record]; found in *Teaching with Documents online lesson plan, Affidavit and Flyers from the Chinese Boycott Case*. Retrieved Feb, 1 2012 from <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/chinese-boycott/>.

National Council for the Social Studies. (2010). *National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: A framework for teaching, learning, and assessment*. Silver Springs, MD: NCSS.

Mintz, S. (2007). Chinese Miners Describe the Rock Springs Massacre. *Digital History*. Retrieved Feb 1, 2012 from http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/asian_voices/voices_display.cfm?id=27.

J Exhibit J. Conf

BOYCOTT

A General Boycott has been declared upon all CHINESE and JAPANESE Restaurants, Tailor Shops and Wash Houses. Also all persons employing them in any capacity.

All Friends and Sympathizers of Organized Labor will assist us in this fight against the lowering Asiatic standards of living and of morals.

AMERICA vs. ASIA

Progress vs. Retrogression

Are the considerations involved.

BY ORDER OF



*Silver Bow Trades and Labor Assembly
and Butte Miners' Union*

Exhibit A

A

BOYCOTT

MEMBERS AND FRIENDS

—OF—
ORGANIZED LABOR

Notice is hereby given that
MRS. GEO. ALTHOFF, pro-
prietress of the WILL
HOUSE at corner of Arizona
and E. Broadway defies
organized labor, and says
she will continue to patro-
nize Chinese.

GUIDE YOURSELVES ACCORDINGLY

BY ORDER OF



Silver Bow Trades and Labor Assembly

Exhibit K K K K

BOYCOTT!

TO ALL FRIENDS OF ORGANIZED LABOR THE BUTTE TAILORS UNION

Has placed a Boycott on all Agents taking orders for Eastern "Scab" and Unfair Houses.

Also All "Scab" and Unfair Houses as Follows:

- | | |
|--|--|
| George Palmer , 50 East Broadway,
Employs scab labor. | McConville , Agent for Eastern scab made garments. |
| James W. Bell , 48 East Broadway,
Represents Eastern ready-made garments for custom tailors' make. | P. J. Maloney ,
Lou Wise and Agents for Eastern Scab and Unfair houses. |
| Goldman and Rheinbeck , 60 East Broadway, agents for Kase Bros., a Chicago scab firm. | Wm. Fitzgerald ,
Abraham , Cor. Wyoming and Broadway,
Lichtenstein , 256 East Park. |
| A. J. Beckman , 4 South Wyoming, agent for Eastern scab and unfair houses. | and Dolling , East Park, agents and introducers of the sweatshop system. |
| Lease Bros. , 8 E. Broadway, scab tailors. | <i>And Last But Not Least</i> |
| Aiken , 119 N. Main, same as Beckman. | All Chinese Tailor Shops. |

WE BELIEVE THAT

The Public Will Take an Interest

In this Boycott and help us to enforce it, as it is to their interest as well as ours that they should not be deceived into buying a ready-made garment for a custom tailor's make.

See That This  Label is Attached

and you may rest assured that your clothing has been made under fair sanitary conditions, that you have the genuine article and at the same time patronize home industry. This is the only Label used by Custom Tailors in America.

BY ORDER OF BUTTE TAILORS' UNION

Endorsed by **Silver Bow Trades & Labor Assembly**

THE SUNDAY  OYSTANDER

Chinese Miners Describe the Rock Springs Massacre

In a memorial presented to the Chinese Consul in New York, the Chinese miners in Rock Springs, Wyoming, describe the massacre.

1885

We, the undersigned, have been in Rock Springs, Wyoming Territory, for periods ranging from one to fifteen years, for the purpose of working on the railroads and in the coal mines.

Up to the time of the recent troubles we had worked along with the white men, and had not had the least ill feeling against them. The officers of the companies employing us treated us and the white man kindly, placing both races on the same footing and paying the same wages.

Several times we had been approached by the white men and requested to join them in asking the companies for an increase in the wages of all, both Chinese and white men. We inquired of them what we should do if the companies refused to grant an increase. They answered that if the companies would not increase our wages we should all strike, then the companies would be obliged to increase our wages. To this we dissented, wherefore we excited their animosity against us.

During the past two years there has been in existence in "Whitemen's Town," Rock Springs, an organization composed of white miners, whose object was to bring about the expulsion of all Chinese from the Territory. To them or to their object we have paid no attention. About the month of August of this year notices were posted up, all the way from Evanston to Rock Springs, demanding the expulsion of the Chinese, & c. On the evening of September 1, 1885, the bell of the building in which said organization meets rang for a meeting. It was rumored on that night that threats had been made against the Chinese.

On the morning of September 2, a little past seven o'clock, more than ten white men, some in ordinary dress and others in mining suits, ran into Coal Pit No. 6, loudly declaring that the Chinese should not be permitted to work there. The Chinese present reasoned with them in a few words, but were attacked with murderous weapons, and three of their number wounded. The white foreman of the coal pit, hearing of the disturbance, ordered all to stop work for the time being.

After the work had stopped, all the white men in and near Coal Pit No. 6 began to assemble by the dozen. They carried firearms, and marched to Rock Springs by way of the railroad from Coal Pit No. 6, and crossing the railroad bridge, went directly to "Whitemen's Town." All this took place before 10:00 A.M. We now heard the bell ringing for a meeting at the white men's organization building. Not long after, all the white men came out of that building, most of them assembling in the barrooms, the crowds meanwhile growing larger and larger.

About two o'clock in the afternoon a mob, divided into two gangs, came toward "Chinatown," one gang coming by way of the plank bridge, and the other by way of the railroad bridge. The gang coming by way of the railroad bridge was the larger, and was subdivided into many squads, some of which did not cross the bridge, but remained standing on the side opposite to "Chinatown"; others that had already crossed the bridge stood on the right and left at the end of it. Several squads marched up the hill behind Coal Pit No. 3.

One squad remained at Coal Shed No. 3 and another at the pump house. The squad that remained at the pump house fired the first shot, and the squad that stood at Coal Shed No. 3 immediately followed their example and fired. The Chinese by name of Lor Sun Kit was the first person shot, and fell to the ground. At that time the Chinese began to realize that the mob were bent on killing. The Chinese, though greatly alarmed, did not yet begin to flee.

Soon after, the mob on the hill behind Coal Pit No. 3 came down from the hill, and joining the different squads of the mob, fired their weapons and pressed on to Chinatown.

The gang that were at the plank bridge also divided into several squads, pressing near and surrounding "Chinatown." One squad of them guarded the plank bridge in order to cut off the retreat of the Chinese.

Not long after, it was everywhere reported that a Chinese named Leo Dye Bah, who lived in the western part of "Chinatown," was killed by a bullet, and that another named Yip Ah Marn, resident in the eastern end of the town, was likewise killed. The Chinese now, to save their lives, fled in confusion in every direction, some going up the hill behind Coal Pit No. 3, others along the foot of the hill where Coal Pit No. 4 is; some

from the eastern end of the town fled across Bitter Creek to the opposite hill, and others from the western end by the foot of the hill on the right of Coal Pit No. 5. The mob were now coming in the three directions, namely, the east and west sides of the town and from the wagon road.

Whenever the mob met a Chinese they stopped him and, pointing a weapon at him, asked him if he had any revolver, and then approaching him they searched his person, robbing him of his watch or any gold or silver that he might have about him, before letting him go. Some of the rioters would let a Chinese go after depriving him of all his gold and silver, while another Chinese would be beaten with the butt ends of the weapons before being let go. Some of the rioters, when they could not stop a Chinese, would shoot him dead on the spot, and then search and rob him. Some would overtake a Chinese, throw him down and search and rob him before they would let him go. Some of the rioters would not fire their weapons, but would only use the butt ends to beat the Chinese with. Some would not beat a Chinese, but rob him of whatever he had and let him go, yelling to him to go quickly. Some, who took no part either in beating or robbing the Chinese, stood by, shouting loudly and laughing and clapping their hands.

There was a gang of women that stood at the "Chinatown" end of the plank bridge and cheered; among the women, two of them each fired successive shots at the Chinese. This was done about a little past 3:00 P.M.

Most of the Chinese fled toward the eastern part of "Chinatown." Some of them ran across Bitter Creek, went up directly to the opposite hill, crossing the grassy plain. Some of them went along the foot of the hill where Coal Pit No. 4 stood, to cross the creek, and by a devious route reached the opposite hill. Some of them ran up to the hill of Coal Pit No. 3, and thence winding around the hills went to the opposite hill. A few of them fled to the foot of the hill where Coal Pit No. 5 stood, and ran across the creek, and thence by a winding course to the western end of the "Whitemen's Town." But very few did this.

The Chinese who were the first to flee mostly dispersed themselves at the back hills, on the opposite bank of the creek, and among the opposite hills. They were scattered far and near, high and low, in about one hundred places. Some were standing, or sitting, or lying hid on the grass, or stooping down on the low grounds.

Every one of them was praying to Heaven or groaning with pain. They had been eyewitnesses to the shooting in "Chinatown," and had seen the whites, male and female, old and young, searching houses for money, household effects, or gold, which were carried across to "Whitemen's Town."

Some of the rioters went off toward the railroad of Coal Pit No. 6, others set fire to the Chinese houses. Between 4:00 P.M. and a little past 9:00 P.M. all the camp houses belonging to the coal company and the Chinese huts had been burned down completely, only one of the company's camp houses remaining. Several of the camp houses near Coal pit No. 6 were also burned, and the three Chinese huts there were also burned. All the Chinese houses burned numbered seventy-nine.

Some of the Chinese were killed at the bank of Bitter Creek, some near the railroad bridge, and some in "Chinatown." After having been killed, the dead bodies of some were carried to the burning buildings and thrown into the flames. Some of the Chinese who had hid themselves in the houses were killed and their bodies burned; some, who on account of sickness could not run, were burned alive in the houses. One Chinese was killed in "Whitemen's Town" in a laundry house, and his house demolished. The whole number of Chinese killed was twenty-eight and those wounded fifteen.