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The Power of Biases: Anti-Chinese Attitudes in California's Gold Mines

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A study conducted in 2015 found that 49 percent of Americans believe immigrants take jobs away from "true Americans," and that 61 percent believe that immigrants take social services away.[1] These beliefs in the negative effects of immigrants, which inform immigration policy today, have deep roots. Anti-immigrant sentiments began in the United States during the first waves of immigration from Europe in the late 18th century. Various immigrant groups faced severe discrimination throughout the 19th century, but one group was the subject of the first prominent and targeted law restricting immigration to the United States in 1882: the Chinese. The anti-Chinese movement, like all anti-immigrant movements, was the result of a variety of factors. The motives that shape attitudes towards immigrants are often grounded in economic, racial, and cultural phenomena. In examining the interactions between these factors with regards to the Chinese in the gold mines of California in the 1850s, where the anti-Chinese movement first took hold, much may be learned about the American psychology regarding the treatment of immigrants.

A multitude of historians have discussed attitudes towards the Chinese in various contexts: in voluminous histories on California, in works on the Gold Rush, and in books and articles specifically on the Chinese and their treatment in California. Throughout time, the historiography has evolved with regards to both the explanations for animosity and in the portrayal of the Chinese. With regards to the latter, it is necessary to note that as time progressed, historians generally gave more attention to the Chinese as active participants of history in their own right rather than as the passive subjects of history. In this way, the historiography reflects the prevailing attitudes towards the Chinese in the United States, which have become significantly more accepting in recent decades, with the late 1960s and early 1970s as a

[1] Cliff Young, "Trump's 'America First' in Global Context: Global Resonance of Anti-Immigrant Rhetoric," *Ipsos Public Affairs* (March 2016).

general turning point. For the present study, however, the focus of the historiography is on the explanations for the anti-Chinese sentiments during the Gold Rush.

The literature began with the first historians of California: Theodore Hittell, Hubert Howe Bancroft, Josiah Royce, and Charles Howard Shinn, who published their works in the late 19th century.[2] To explain the causes of problems during the Gold Rush, one of which was Chinese discrimination, these historians blamed immorality. The blame was placed, according to Leonard Pitt, on both "immoral foreigners" and on "otherwise moral Americans obsessed with the pursuit of wealth."[3] Moral explanations for discord were confined to these early historians, however, with the focus shifting as time progressed from the theme of morality to one of economics.

The economic frustrations and threats felt by white miners exist as perhaps the most prominent lines of explanation for animosity towards the Chinese. One of the first historians to explicitly state this was Mary Roberts Coolidge in 1909. According to Coolidge, the first initial anti-Chinese sentiments came from white miners competing with the Chinese for good placers and wage jobs. She described the initial reaction to the Chinese in California as positive, which started a tradition among many historians to portray a warm welcome for the Chinese. Coolidge acknowledged that animosity as a result of racial biases existed upon the arrival of the first Chinese workers, but argued that these were outweighed by the economic benefits of a small Chinese presence. When, however, the belief that the Chinese were detracting from the economic prosperity of whites became more widespread, sentiments changed.[4] According to Sucheng Chan, the emphasis on economic reasons for negative sentiments towards the Chinese continued to manifest in the early 20th century with historians such as John

[2] Theodore Henry Hittell, *History of California* (San Francisco, CA: Pacific Press, 1885); Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of California* (New York: Bancroft Co, 1890); Josiah Royce, *California: From the Conquest in 1846 to the Second Vigilance Committee in San Francisco: A Study of American Character*; Charles Howard Shinn, *Mining Camps: A Study in American Frontier Government*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons; New York: A. A. Knopf, 1948).
[3] Leonard Pitt, "The Beginnings of Nativism in California," *Pacific Historical Review* 30, no.1 (February 1961): 23.
[4] Mary Roberts Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 21–29.

McGroarty, Henry Norton, Zoeth Eldredge, and Gertrude Atherton.[5] Another prominent historian who approached the issue from an economic angle is Leonard Pitt, who argued in 1961 that the beginning of nativism in California was in late 1849 and early 1850 when most white miners wandered from camp to camp, fostering an "economic jealousy" of foreign miners and mining companies who took what they believed was their rightful gold as Americans. Along these lines, Pitt emphasized that the free labor preferences of whites contributed to anti-Chinese sentiments, the importance of which is echoed by Tricia Knoll.[6] Throughout the historiography, economic threats and fears continued to manifest as primary explanations for animosity.[7]

It is an inaccurate representation of the historiography, however, to isolate economic explanations for animosity from other factors. Historians have also acknowledged the role that race played in the anti-Chinese movement, even if to a lesser degree. As race became more central to historiography in the United States, which was largely the result of the reinterpretation of the Civil War as dominantly about the issue of slavery, racial explanations were portrayed as more important in shaping the treatment of the Chinese. Still, economic fears and frustrations continued to play a major role. In 1974, William Tung argued that Sinophobia was initially the result of economic competition, but was exacerbated by "American deep-rooted antipathy to color."[8] Alexander Saxton, in *The Indispensable Enemy*, acknowledged the role that labor competition and the

[5] Sucheng Chan, "A People of Exceptional Character: Ethnic Diversity, Nativism, and Racism in the California Gold Rush," *California History* 70, no. 2 (July 2000): 45.
[6] Pitt, "The Beginnings of Nativism in California," 23–38; Leonard Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios: A Social History of the Spanish-Speaking Californians, 1846-1890* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 53–59; Tricia Knoll, *Becoming Americans: Asian Sojourners, Immigrants, and Refugees in the Western United States* (Portland, OR: Coast to Coast Books, 1982), 24.
[7] Rodman W. Paul, "The Origin of the Chinese Issue in California," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 25, no. 2 (September 1938): 182; David V. DuFault, "The Chinese in the Mining Camps of California: 1848-1870," *The Historical Society of Southern California Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (June 1959): 155–62; Randall E. Rohe, "After the Gold Rush: Chinese Mining in the Far West, 1850-1890," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 32, no. 4 (1982): 7–18.
[8] William L. Tung, *The Chinese in America, 1820-1973: A Chronology & Fact Book* (Dobbs Ferry, N.Y: Oceana Publications, 1974), 2.

1873 recession played in the expansion of the anti-Chinese sentiment. He also stressed, however, the importance of the "ideological and organizational patterns" that shaped the treatment of the Chinese in California because the Chinese were placed into a certain "mental compartment, which in the East had been reserved for Blacks."[9] Daniel Cornford, in his contribution to the discussion, emphasized the independent pursuit of wealth, in addition to the centrality of the ideal of Manifest Destiny and the racist ideology, which he argued was integral to the "white working-class consciousness."[10] Rudi Batzell continued the discourse on Chinese discrimination by arguing that racism must be continually exacerbated by economics and power dynamics in order to have the prominence it did with regards to the Chinese in the West.[11]

Related to race, the comparison of Chinese mining practices to slavery has also been integrated into economic explanations for animosity. This is demonstrated by Roman Hoyos, who argued that a major force behind the anti-Chinese sentiment was the threat white workers felt due to the supposed resemblance of Chinese labor conditions to slavery.[12] Another major book on the history of the Chinese in California is Gunther Barth's *Bitter Strength*, which approached the topic from an economic angle. Central to Barth's narrative was how white miners saw a resemblance between Chinese workers in the mines and slaves, which endangered the "health and virtue" of California as a growing state.[13] These complaints against slavery must be taken in the context of the workingman's problem with slavery, which is that it is impossible to earn fair wages when competing with slave labor.

Cultural differences between white and Chinese miners, in the context of assimilation, have also been acknowledged throughout the historiography.

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[9] Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 259–61.
[10] Daniel Cornford, "'We All Live More Like Brutes Than Humans': Labor and Capital in the Gold Rush," *California History* 77, no. 4 (December 1998): 84–94.
[11] Rudi Batzell, "Free Labour, Capitalism and the Anti-Slavery Origins of Chinese Exclusion in California in the 1870s," *Past & Present* 225, no. 1 (November 2014): 149, 186.
[12] Roman J. Hoyos, "Building the New Supremacy: California's 'Chinese Question' and the Fate of Reconstruction," *California Legal History* 8 (January 2013): 322.
[13] Gunther Paul Barth, *Bitter Strength: A History of the Chinese in the United States, 1850-1870* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 7, 129, 131, 155.

In 1959, Robert Seager attributed the different customs, habits, and language of the Chinese, in addition to the low wages they worked for, as factors contributing to animosity.[14] S.W. Kung brought together various explanations for a more holistic examination, including economic competition, foreign customs, and the notion of America as a "White Man's Country."[15] In 1939, Elmer Clarence Sandmeyer proposed that the Chinese were seen as slaves, uncivilized, unassimilable, unchanging, and alien. He also argued that the Chinese were thought to conflict with white labor and degrade the work they performed.[16] Joshua Paddison, in *American Heathens*, focused on a gap in the historiography by making a case for the centrality of religion, arguing that because the Chinese were not Christian, they could not be identified as American.[17]

As the historiography on this subject shows, a multitude of factors have been identified as contributing to the anti-Chinese sentiment in Gold Rush era California. The driving motives of animosity, however, have disproportionately been related to economic competition, which resulted in a number of frustrations and fears. Existing racial prejudices and cultural differences are identified in nearly all works on the subject, but have been examined as the primary causal factors of the anti-Chinese movement by few. While economic fears and frustrations are undoubtedly of importance, using only an economic frame risks ignoring powerful and lasting forces in the American psychology. By examining the interactions between economic complaints against the Chinese and racial and cultural biases in a new way, the power of preexisting prejudices is illuminated. In California, cultural and racial biases influenced and shaped white perceptions and judgments of the Chinese and served as a frame in which the perceived economic injustices that strengthened the anti-Chinese movement were understood. This is most

[14] Robert Seager, "Some Denominational Reactions to Chinese Immigration to California, 1856-1892," *Pacific Historical Review* 28, no. 1 (February 1959): 49–52.
[15] S. W. Kung, *Chinese in American Life; Some Aspects of Their History, Status, Problems, and Contributions* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973), 64–69.
[16] Elmer Clarence Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1939), 11, 25, 80.
[17] Joshua Paddison, *American Heathens: Religion, Race, and Reconstruction In California* (Berkeley, CA: Published for the Huntington-USC Institute on California and the West by University of California Press, 2012), 3–4, 37–44.

clearly demonstrated by examining several of the most powerful and widespread economic complaints against the Chinese in the gold mines. Before beginning, however, it is vital to understand the mindset of the miners who voiced complaints against the Chinese and called for their removal.

An influential and widespread sentiment among white Americans was that the Chinese were incapable of assimilating because of their cultural and racial inferiority. Multiple cultural factors contributed to this opinion. One was a perceived lack of morals, which was articulated by Creed Haymond, a California State senator, who said, "They have no morals that I could ever discover."[18] Their perceived lack of morality was intrinsically related to the fact that the Chinese were not Christian. The Chinese were described as, "wedded to the traditions of the past, looking backwards and never forwards."[19] In addition to being designated as immoral heathens, the Chinese were also characterized as, "dirty in their habits" and "filthy around their camps."[20] This demonstrates how the basic quality of life of the Chinese was deemed incompatible with the desired future for California. Additionally, the language of the Chinese was described as a "horrid jargon" and their clothes were deemed inferior.[21] When considering the diversity of cultural critiques, it becomes evident that whites believed that the Chinese culture was unclean in both a physical and abstract sense. From their morality to their dress, the Chinese were thought to have a certain aura that was deemed both foreign and inferior, and which would ruin the white American vision for California.

The Chinese were thought to be incapable of assimilating not only because of their culture, but also because of their race. Racial biases were

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[18] *Chinese Immigration: The Social, Moral, and Political Effect of Chinese Immigration. Testimony taken before a Committee of the Senate of the State of California, Appointed April 3, 1876*, California Legislature, Haymond, Creed (Sacramento: State Printing Office, 1876), 155.
[19] Albert S. Evans, *À la California: Sketch of Life in the Golden State* (San Francisco: A.L.
Bancroft & Company, 1873).
[20] *Chinese Immigration*, 155.
[21] John David Borthwick, *Three Years in California: 1851-54* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1857), 51.

widely expressed, as demonstrated by an 1860 article in a San Francisco newspaper, which says of the Chinese, “They are an inferior race, and cannot assimilate with us.”[22] Because of supposed racial inferiority, the Chinese were thought to have several possibilities. Hinton Helper, the author of an account of life during the Gold Rush, explains in 1855, “They have neither the strength of body nor the power of mind to cope with us in the common affairs of life; and as it seems to be a universal law that the stronger shall rule the weaker, it will be required of them, ere long, to do one of two things, namely—either to succumb, to serve us, or to quit the country.”[23] Given the widespread belief of white racial superiority, very few believed assimilation to be a viable course for the Chinese. Removal of the inferior race, however, was widely considered. This reflects the broader hardening of racial lines that was taking place throughout the United States. The superiority of whites in comparison to other races is articulated by Helper:

No inferior race of men can exist in these United States without becoming subordinate to the will of the Anglo-Americans. They must either be our equals or our dependents. It is so with the negroes in the South; it is so with the Irish in the North; it was so with the Indians in New England; and it will be so with the Chinese in California.[24]

The parallels between attitudes toward the Chinese in the West and blacks in the South are significant. In the South, it was a common belief that whites and blacks could not live as legal equals. Many thought that the solution to race troubles was “the removal of one of the races from the Southern States.”[25] Starting before the Civil War, and continuing after it, this was demonstrated by support for the Colonization movement that advocated for the return of free blacks to Africa. After the Civil War, towards the end

[22] "The Plan to Legislate the Chinese Out of the Mines," *Daily Evening Bulletin*, 24 Feb. 1860.
[23] Hinton Rowan Helper, *The Land of Gold. Reality versus Fiction* (Baltimore: H. Taylor, 1855), 95.
[24] Helper, *The Land of Gold*, 96.
[25] C.A. Gardiner, *Papers of The Social Economy Department* (New York, Boston: American Periodicals Series III, 1884).

of the 19th century, these sentiments were supported by the increasing prominence of scientific racism, which justified white supremacy and claimed proof for the limited "mental powers" of blacks.[26] In this way, the belief that the Chinese could not assimilate was rooted in a long and entrenched history of racism throughout the country that was evolving and strengthening around the time of the anti-Chinese movement. With this context in mind, the most prominent economic complaints against the Chinese will be examined.

One widespread economic frustration was expressed as the belief that when the Chinese extracted gold it was the equivalent of thievery against hard working Americans. Historically, however, Chinese miners often purchased claims for land that had already been mined and generally stayed out of the way of white miners. While racial and cultural prejudices can account for the frustration white miners felt working in the same profession as the "degrading" Chinese, economically the Chinese did not seem to have a directly negative effect on white miners. A former miner expressed the grounds for this complaint in a testimony, saying, "the Chinese made more money than the whites. This money (so far as my opportunities enabled me to judge, and my opportunities were of the best) nearly all left the mines in possession or ownership of Chinamen."[27] At the surface level, this seems rather straightforward; had the Chinese not been present in the mines, the reasoning goes, white miners would have extracted more gold. However, this does not accurately resemble the situation in many of the mines. An account of life in California published in 1857 says, "the Chinese are the easiest satisfied, with regard to paying ground, they were always the best customers for these indifferent claims, and by these means rose vastly in public estimation."[28] The Chinese, in paying for the worked out claims of white miners, were tolerated for a time. However, as immigration continued and the Chinese became more numerous in the mines, sentiments changed.

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[26] Samuel George Morton, *Crania Americana* (Philadelphia: J. Dobson, 1839), 88.
[27] *Chinese Immigration*, 156.
[28] Pringle Shaw, *Ramblings in California; Containing a Description of the Country, Life at the Mines, State of Society, & Interspersed with Characteristic Anecdotes, and Sketches from Life, Being the Five Years' Experience of a Gold Digger* (Toronto: J. Bain, 1857), 227.

The diary of a miner named Chauncey Canfield demonstrates this: “Six months ago it was seldom one was seen, but lately gangs of them have been coming in...We called a miner's meeting and adopted a miner's law that they should not be allowed to take up or hold ground for themselves.”[29] Canfield’s account seems to indicate that the Chinese did not pose a significant threat until their numbers threatened white miners. Numbers alone, however, do not suffice to explain the widespread movement against the Chinese because other ethnic groups of miners, such as Latin Americans, exceeded the Chinese in numbers but were not feared in the same way.[30] Something more must have caused people, such as the author of an 1853 article in *Alta California*, to say, “Admitting this class of degraded foreigners is but another name for robbery of our own people.”[31] It is at this point that the prevailing beliefs regarding assimilation, shaped by racial and cultural biases, are exceptionally informative. Upon the arrival of the Chinese, many thought, “If Chinamen came here under circumstances that made it probable that they would become identified with our country, our habits and language,” assimilation would be possible.[32] However, because the Chinese were not believed to come under these circumstances, assimilation was never perceived as possible and the prevailing beliefs indicated that miners were “justly dissatisfied to see their substance torn from them.”[33] This demonstrates that it was not the act of the Chinese extracting gold that spurred the anti-Chinese movement, but the assumption of white Californians that they did so with no intention of staying and assimilating.

In order to fully understand these sentiments, one must examine the related complaint that the Chinese did not sufficiently give back to the American economy by buying goods. While voiced as an economic frustration, this complaint is informed by the frame of mind that the Chinese were incapable of assimilating. The perceived injustice is clearly expressed

[29] Chauncey L. Canfield, *The Diary of a Forty-Niner* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920), 222.
[30] "The Chinese in California," *Daily National Intelligencer*, 16 June 1852.
[31] Peregrim Pilgrim, "The Chinese in California," *Alta California*, 1 Aug. 1853.
[32] "The Cooleys," *Sacramento Union*, 1 May 1852.
[33] Ibid.

in an issue of the *Sacramento Union* in 1852: "They literally spend nothing in comparison with the enormous amounts of treasure which they carry out of the country."[34] The seemingly closed nature of Chinese culture, in which economic interactions with Americans were limited, was an indicator of the inability of the Chinese to assimilate. Prevailing sentiments were that, "the Chinese are more objectionable than other foreigners because they refuse to have dealing or intercourse with us."[35] Given the context, the lack of economic dealings are what whites found objectionable. This is confirmed by the testimony of a former miner in the California State Senate, who said, "Nearly all their ware is evidently Chinese manufacture and they have their own merchants in the mining camps."[36] One must consider, however, whether the loss of business that store owners in mining areas faced explains the widespread nature of this complaint against the Chinese. Again, to understand more fully the animosity towards the Chinese, racial and cultural biases must be considered. Helper, in 1855, asks, "Will they discard their clannish prepossessions, assimilate with us, buy of us, and respect us? Are they not so full of duplicity, prevarication and pagan prejudices, and so enervated and lazy, that it is impossible for them to make true or estimable citizens?"[37] Economic transactions are included in Helper's list of complaints against the Chinese, but only presented as part of the larger objection to the way the Chinese lived and acted in California. In this way, the complaint that the Chinese did not contribute to the Californian economy was more than an economic frustration; it was an expression of the unassimilable nature of the Chinese that spurred from cultural and racial prejudices as well as from fears for what effects a lasting Chinese presence might have.

Another prevalent economic complaint denounced the "slave" labor of the Chinese miners that undermined whites. The complaint was framed economically: "we object to the Chinese capitalist buying and bringing here,

[34] "Review of Passing Events," *Sacramento Union,* 1 May 1852.
[35] Helper, *The Land of Gold*, 92.
[36] *Chinese Immigration*, 155.
[37] Helper, *The Land of Gold*, 92.

for a term of years, slaves to be put in competition to our own labor."[38] The factual extent of this competition, however, has already been questioned. Some Chinese did work as wage laborers for American mining companies, but most worked for Chinese cooperatives and companies.[39] These companies and cooperatives did not directly compete with white miners and the existence of bonded Chinese miners would not have necessarily brought white wages down. In an account of life in California from 1851 to 1854, John David Borthwick aptly describes the prevailing perceptions, saying, "it is well known that whole shiploads of Chinamen came to the country under a species of bondage to some of their wealthy countrymen in San Francisco, who, immediately on their arrival, shipped them off to the mines under charge of an agent, keeping them completely under control by some mysterious celestial influence, quite independent of the laws of the country."[40] This is most accurately understood as a fear of losing individualism. Around the time the Chinese arrived en masse to the mines, white miners were increasingly working for companies. They understood that the trend in mining practices was towards a loss of freedom, and reacted by reinforcing the ideal of individualism, meanwhile blaming the Chinese for the changes that were occurring. The Chinese, because of the way they worked in groups with little autonomy under a mysterious overlord and lived in frugal conditions, were denounced because their conditions were deemed unsuitable for white Americans. Furthermore, the Chinese mining practices served as a warning of where America could be headed, should Chinese presence go unchecked. Peter Burnett, the first American Governor of California, explains, "Were Chinamen permitted to settle in our country at their pleasure, and were they granted all the rights and privileges of the whites... in one century the Chinese would own all the property on this coast."[41] White Californians feared that they would soon be forced to live

[38] Cosmos, "A Miner's Views on the Chinese Question," *Daily Evening Bulletin,* 24 Feb. 1860.
[39] Mae M. Ngai, "Chinese Gold Miners and the 'Chinese Question' in Nineteenth-Century California and Victoria," *Journal of American History* 101, no. 4 (March 2015): 1092–95.
[40] Borthwick, *Three Years in California: 1851-54,* 263.
[41] Peter H. Burnett, *Recollections and Opinions of an Old Pioneer* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1880), 267.

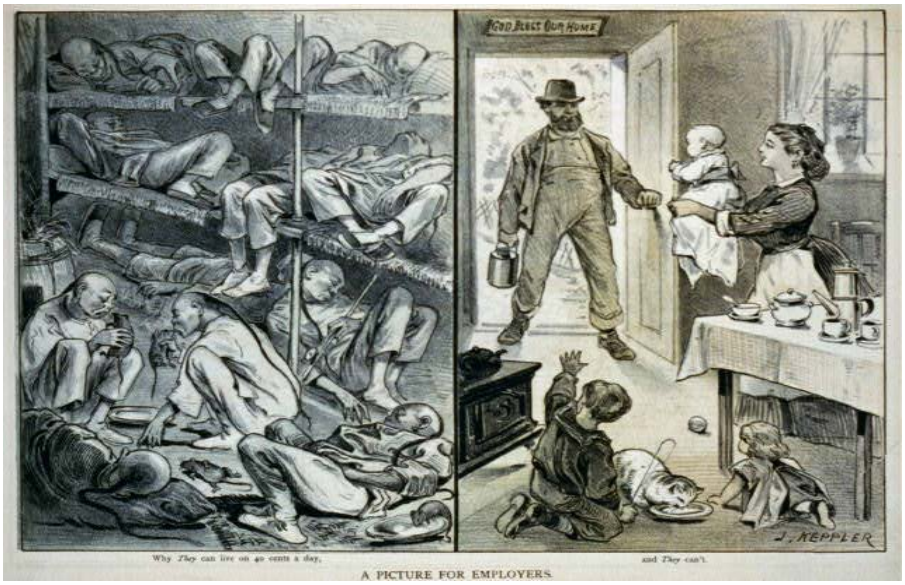
and work without the individualism that they were already losing. Further frustrating was the sentiment that "though most of (the Chinese) are held as mere slaves by their wealthier countrymen, it goes desperately against the grain with them to take the situation of servants among white people, as they are constitutionally haughty and conceited, and believe themselves to be superior to us in all respects."[42] This is a manifestation of the belief that the Chinese did not want to assimilate because they thought Western culture was inferior. Helper voices the offense he takes at this questioning of American exceptionalism, saying, "They look upon us and all other white-skinned nations as 'outside barbarians,' and think we are unduly presumptuous if we do not pay them homage!"[43] Men such as Helper feared that if the Chinese gained enough influence, which was tied to economic power, the superior culture of white Americans would be subordinated to the "degrading" and communal ways of the Chinese. In this way, the negative reaction towards perceived slave labor was the result of cultural biases that caused fears for the future of Californian culture, rather than simply the effect of economic threats.

The frame of cultural and racial biases informing an economic complaint is informative again when examining the similar frustration that white men could not compete with Chinese labor. While seemingly economic, this complaint is not against the working practices of the Chinese but against their culture, which, in the eyes of white Americans, did not appear to value individualism or family. While competition between Chinese and whites likely first appeared in the mines, where white and Chinese miners increasingly worked for companies by the early to mid 1850s, it expanded to other lines of work, especially after the Gold Rush winded down and the Union-Pacific Railroad was completed. As noted earlier, most Chinese worked for Chinese companies and cooperatives, but American companies did employ others. The complaint was expressed by Peter Burnett, saying, "The white man can do as much work, and as skillfully, as the Chinaman; but he can not live so cheaply."[44] Without considering the

[42] Helper, *The Land of Gold*, 90.
[43] Ibid., 91.
[44] Burnett, *Recollections and Opinions of an Old Pioneer*, 267.

implications of this complaint, the centrality of economic competition seems obvious. However, the ability of the Chinese to work for less than white workers is the key factor that created this conflict. The low wages of Chinese workers went hand in hand with a frugal way of living, which was deemed inferior by whites. Burnett continues: "It would require many centuries of inexorable training to bring the white man down to the low level of the Chinese mode of living."[45] This statement demonstrates the prejudices white people in California had against the Chinese culture. It is important to note that they were decidedly limited in their exposure to Chinese culture. However, Chinese culture, as whites in California understood it, was not only inferior to white culture, but also a threat to the white way of living. This threat is demonstrated by an illustration titled "A Picture For Employers," which is presented as Image 1. It contrasts a white man returning home to his wife and children with a room overflowing with Chinese men who are engaging in stereotypical activities such as smoking opium and eating rats. The caption of the picture reads, "Why they can live on 40 cents a day, and they can't." The frugal living of Chinese men in California, which is caricatured in the illustration, demonstrates the fear that the culture of California was being degraded because white men were unable to support families while competing with Chinese labor. In this way, Chinese culture was believed to threaten the nuclear family, which has consistently been one of the most highly valued aspects of American culture. It was this belief that resulted in arguments against the Chinese relating to

[45] Ibid., 267.



economic competition, which demonstrates how cultural prejudices inform economic complaints.

Image 1. J. Keppler, "A Picture for Employers" Puck, 21 August 1878

Although the complaints that formed the basis of the anti-Chinese movement in the gold mines, and later throughout the West, were expressed economically, they were understood and framed in the context of the cultural and racial inferiority of the Chinese. In this way, economic complaints against the Chinese were expressions of the greater threat that the Chinese were believed to pose to the future of Californian society. The biases manifested largely in discussions about assimilation to American culture, which values ideals such as individualism and family. It is acknowledged that this study is of a relatively narrow frame, and focuses on prejudices that may be regarded by some as living only in the past. Persecution of immigrants in the United States, however, is lasting. Although the immigrant groups that face the most severe discrimination differ, it is important to be aware of the prejudices that are held in the American ideology. The current President, Donald Trump, said in a campaign speech, "Not everyone who seeks to join our country will be able to successfully assimilate. It is our right as a sovereign nation to choose immigrants that we think are the

likeliest to thrive and flourish here."[46] As the 2016 Presidential election demonstrated, the belief that immigrants must change their ways to conform to "American culture" is more widespread than one might like to accept. The demand of assimilation demonstrates the belief in American superiority that has persisted for centuries. Although economic justifications for the harsh treatment of immigrants are frequently cited and are undoubtedly important, it is necessary to search deeper. Underneath economic complaints, as well as underneath calls for assimilation, are cultural and racial biases that the population of the United States must understand in order to improve the treatment of immigrants.

[46] Donald Trump, "Immigration Policy" (speech, Phoenix, AZ, 31 August 2016), *The New York Times.*