Interpreting US Attitudes Toward China and People of Chinese Descent: A Visual History Gallery Walk

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ABOUT THIS LESSON

In this lesson, students will explore the history of US-China Relations through the lens of the US treatment of Chinese and Chinese American citizens over time. Using a clip from the PBS documentary *The Chinese Exclusion Act* and a series of visual primary sources, the students will trace the path of US attitudes over time. The source analysis and questions will culminate in a discussion tying the history of US attitudes toward Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans to the most recent events involving US attitudes toward China during the Covid-19 pandemic.

GRADE LEVEL

9-12

CLASSROOM TIME

75-90 minutes plus evaluation

RESOURCES

The Chinese Exclusion Act Documentary by Ric Burns and Li-Shin Yu PBS/American Experience DVD (or find the needed clips on YouTube at the links provided in the lesson explanation)

Source Chart with Questions for Analysis (copies for each student)

Sources for Gallery Walk (Print to display around the room, or print multiple sets of copies and place in folders to be shared in groups)

“Rep. Chu Speaks in Support of Resolution of Regret for Chinese Exclusion Act” YouTube. 2012. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cVEKx9um_jY

Final Images to Display for Analysis and Discussion: Political Cartoon depicting Chinese origin of Covid-19 and photograph of Anti-Asian graffiti

BACKGROUND

Despite having actively recruited Chinese citizens to come to the US to work on building the transcontinental railroad, American attitudes toward the Chinese were often discriminatory in nature. Before the US government passed the federal Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, many local and state regulations were already in place, restricting the lives of Chinese immigrants.

While the Chinese were instrumental in the completion of the transcontinental railroad, they were visually erased from American understanding of the project, by not being present at the celebration or in any of the photographs memorializing the joining of the two sides of the railroad.

Exclusion did not begin or stabilize with the 1882 law, which was revised, extended, and finally made permanent. The repealing of the law occurred because the US needed China's support and cooperation during WWII. The damage of the law and the exclusion and poor treatment of Chinese immigrants and Chinese American citizens created a legacy that did not end in the 1940s.

The Cold War and the rise of China as an economic power in the recent past, caused attitudes toward the Chinese to often remain negative, discriminatory, and dangerous. The most recent evidence of this can be seen in the view of China and those of Chinese descent during the Covid-19 pandemic.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Analyze political cartoons and other primary sources to gain an understanding of American feelings toward the Chinese.
- Interpret sources for continuity and/or change over time.
- Apply the historic US attitudes toward China and the Chinese (including Americans of Chinese descent) to the recent events involving backlash as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

STANDARDS

Wisconsin Model Academic Standards for Social Studies (Grade 12 benchmarks):

SS.Inq3.a.h Develop a defensible claim to provide focus for an inquiry that is based upon the analysis of sources.

SS.Inq3.b.h Support a claim with evidence using sources from multiple perspectives and media (electronic, digital, print, and other mass media).

SS.Hist2.a.h Evaluate a variety of primary and secondary sources to apply knowledge of major eras, enduring themes, turning points, and historical influences to analyze the patterns of continuity in the community, the state, the United States, and the world.

SS.Hist2.b.h Evaluate a variety of primary and secondary sources to apply knowledge of major eras, enduring themes, turning points, and historical influences to analyze the patterns of change in the community, the state, the United States and the world.

SS.Hist3.a.h Analyze significant historical periods and their relationship to present issues and events.

LESSON

1. Opening Activity

Show clip of the PBS documentary *The Chinese Exclusion Act*. The clip used can be found on YouTube using this URL: https://youtu.be/FbBatK7JWYc. If desired, a longer clip from the full DVD could be used, if the DVD is available.

Briefly discuss the content of the video and the impacts of the law over time. Ask the students the following question: Did the Chinese Exclusion Act start the exclusion and discrimination of the Chinese, or did this start before the law was passed? Take some student responses, then let the class know that they will be completing an activity today that will help to answer the question by examining US attitudes toward the Chinese immigrants, Chinese Americans, and China in general over time.

2. Primary Source Gallery Walk OR Group Table Activity

Explain to the students that they will be examining 12 exhibits, describing the contents and analyzing whether what is present demonstrates a positive or negative attitude toward China and people of Chinese descent.

Point out the exhibits displayed around the room and distribute and walk the students through the chart they will be completing. Students may work individually or with a partner, but this activity will work most effectively if there is a limit set for the number of students that can be at a single exhibit at the same time. As students work, they may need or want to use an electronic device to look up contextual information about the events depicted in the exhibits (depending upon the class's background knowledge of US History.

Note: Though this was originally planned as a gallery walk, it would also work to have students sit in groups and make enough copies of the exhibit set for each group to have their own set. It is best to have these in folders, so it is easier to distribute the resources and have the students begin working in a more efficient manner. If this is the method you choose to utilize, you could also place the chart handouts in the folders and distribute everything at once.

The bulk of the class period will be spent in having the students complete the exhibit sources and recording the information in their charts. As the groups finish their charts, they should discuss and answer the questions on the last page of the chart handout.

3. Class Discussion of Exhibit Findings

Ask the class to share their findings from the chart. You could have the discussion by starting at the first exhibit and working through all of them, having students share their thoughts, if time allows.

You may wish to have students share their findings through the lens of the questions which ask the students to discuss how the exhibits demonstrate continuity and change over time. Have students use evidence from the different exhibits to support their responses.

Show the video of Rep. Chu reviewing the impacts of the Chinese Exclusion Act and the importance of Congress acknowledging that the law was wrong and very harmful. The video can be found at this URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cVEKx9um_jY. Ask the students if impacts of Chinese Exclusion can still be felt today.

4. Attitudes Toward China and Those of Chinese Descent Today

Display the final discussion images one at a time, using a projector so students can all see them. Have students discuss how the images related to China and the Covid-19 pandemic demonstrates a continuation of the continuity and/or change in US attitudes that have been demonstrated for more than 150 years.

This final activity could be assigned as a summative assessment, asking students to write a paragraph which applies the information learned in class today to the recent events involving Covid-19.

POST LESSON ACTIVITIES

Optional post-lesson activities to extend student engagement in this topic could include having students find additional information and/or sources which demonstrate further evidence to support the class findings or the class could look at other immigrant groups that have faced similar targeting over time. It is important, though, to stress that, though other groups have been targeted, no other group has had federal legislation passed in the same way the Chinese were targeted by the Chinese Exclusion Act.

ASSESSMENT OPTIONS

Essay

Students could use the final activity (4) as a summative essay assessment. Students will write an essay, applying the impacts of the Chinese Exclusion Act to the US response to Covid-19 and the increase in Anti-Chinese/Anti-Asian violence. The students could use the sources provided as the basis of their evidence. The could also be required to find additional sources to use as support for their essays.

News Report (Video or Podcast)

Students work in groups to create a news report on the Chinese Exclusion Act and its impact that is still relevant today. They could choose to create a video or record a podcast. Requirements could vary depending on the time you wish to allow them to use in the creation of the news report.

Exhibit Sources Chart and Questions for Analysis

Name: _____ Date: _____ Period: _____

Number & Title of Exhibit	Description of Exhibit Images	US Attitudes Positive/Negative	Evidence for Choice of Attitudes
1 Rock Springs Massacre			
2 Transcontinental Railroad			
3 Pacific Chivalry			
4 Throwing Down the Ladder			

5 Posters of Policies			
6 Chinese Exclusion Act			
7 Australian Cartoon			
8 Magic Washer Ad			
9 China Relief Posters			

10 US-China Cold War Relations			
11 Nixon-China Relations			
12 History of US-China Relations			

Answer each of the following questions using evidence gathered from the gallery walk sources from your chart above. Each question should be answered completely, using complete sentences.

1. Using specific examples to support your argument, explain to what extent the sources demonstrate continuity of US attitudes toward China, Chinese immigrants, and Chinese Americans over time.

2. Using specific examples to support your argument, explain to what extent the sources demonstrate change of US attitudes toward China, Chinese immigrants, and Chinese Americans over time.

3. To what extent did the Chinese Exclusion Act contribute to the continuity and change in attitudes toward China, Chinese immigrants, and Chinese Americans?

4. To what extent did the US government's need for support (economic, political, and/or military) from China impact the demonstrated positive or negative attitudes toward China?

Gallery Exhibit 1: Rock Springs Massacre



Chinese miners attacked, leaving 28 dead

Gallery Exhibit 2: Chinese and the Building of the Transcontinental Railroad



Chinese Railroad Workers



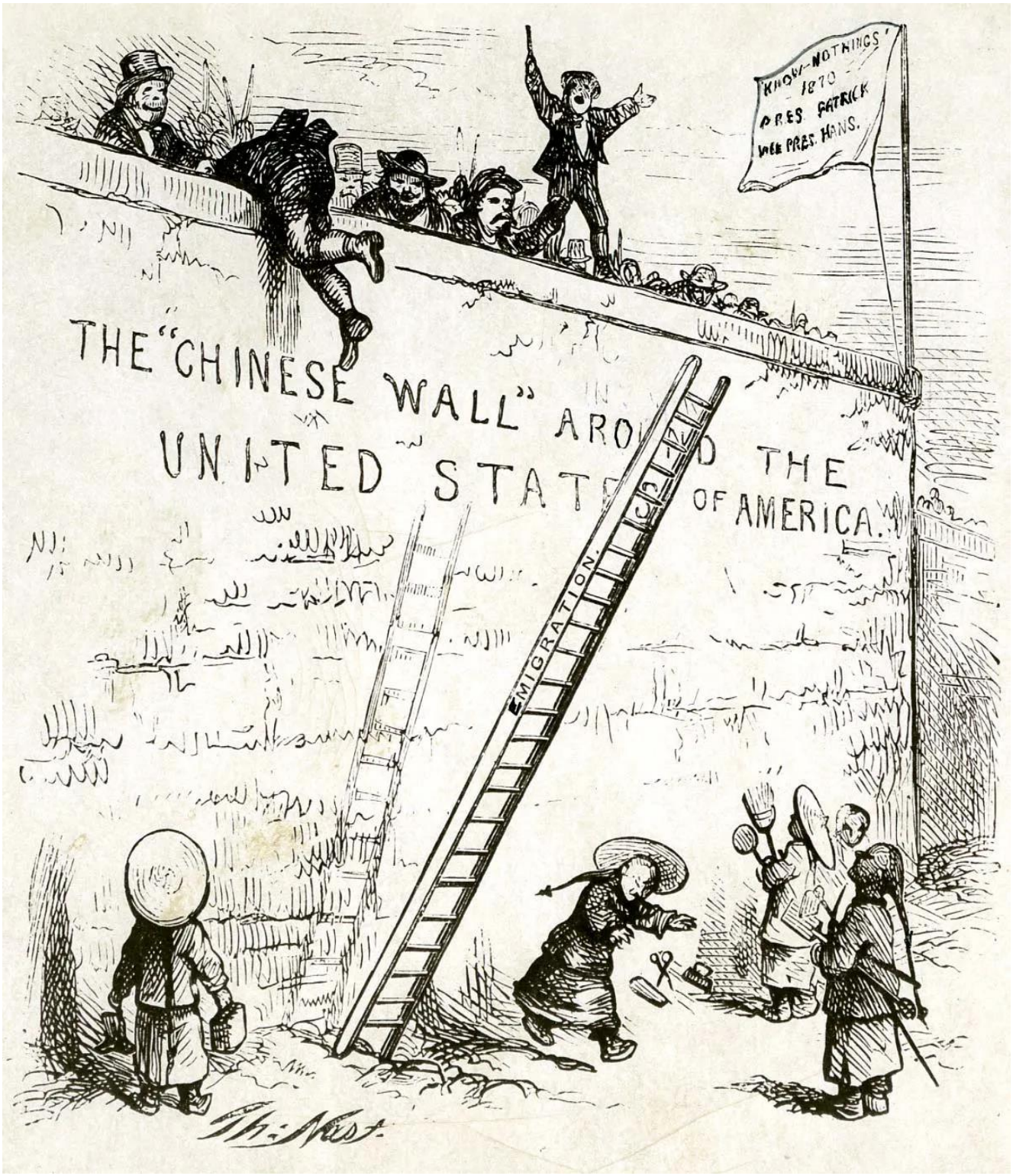
Completion of the Railroad Celebration - Who is not present?

Gallery Exhibit 3: Pacific Chivalry



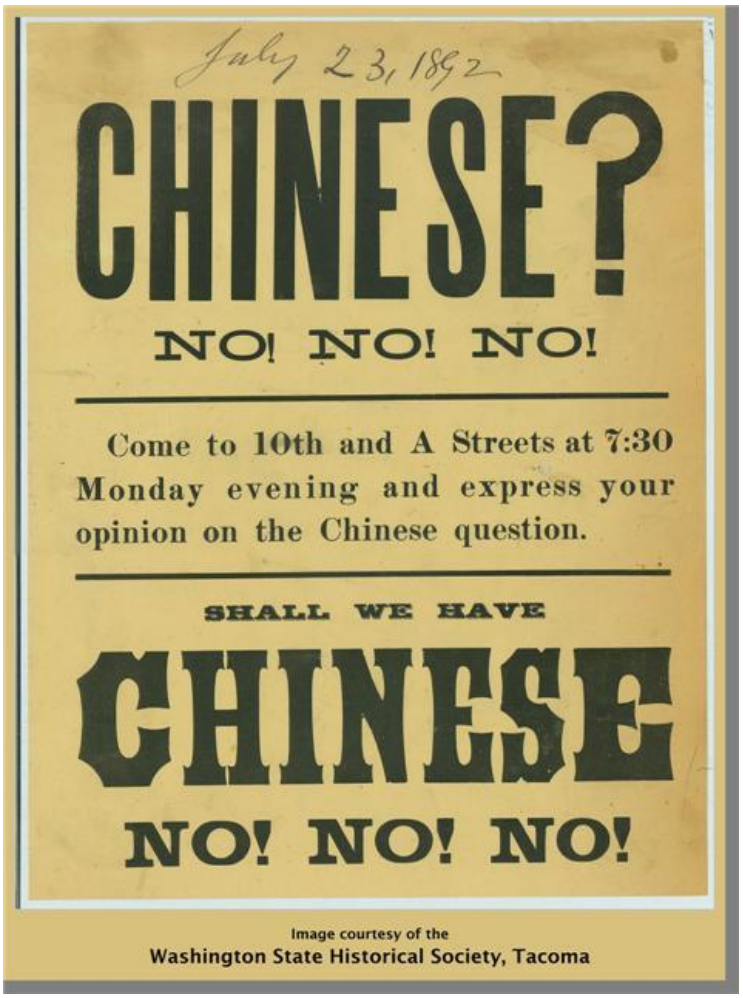
Thomas Nast, 1869

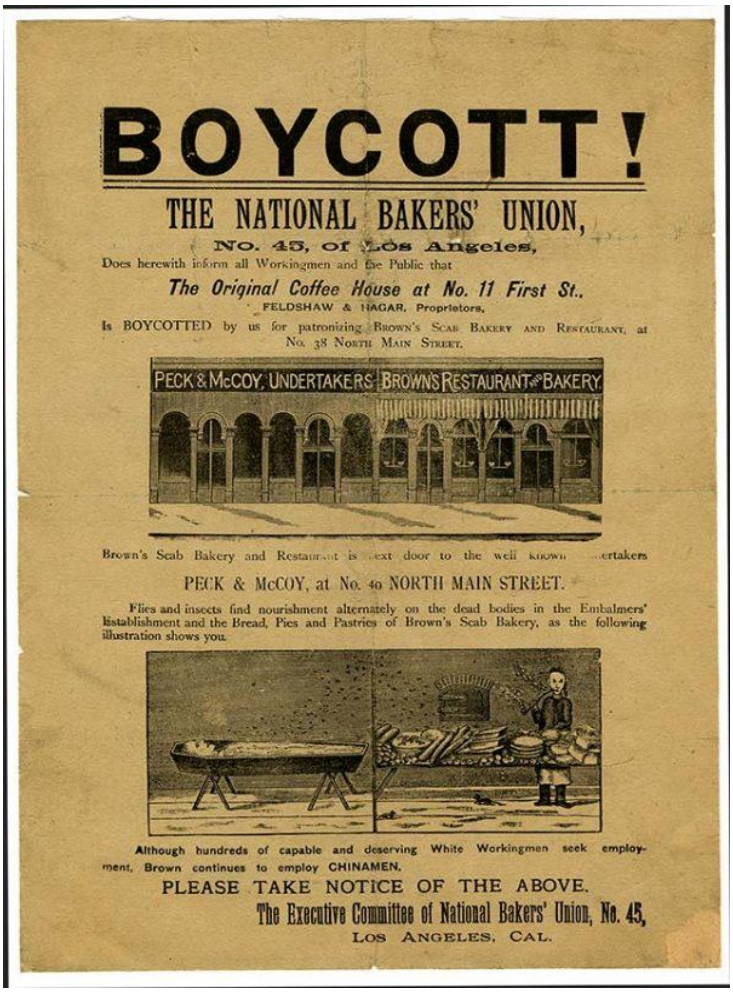
Gallery Exhibit 4: Throwing Down the Ladder



"Throwing Down the Ladder by Which They Rose," cartoon by Thomas Nast, *Harper's Weekly*, July 23, 1870.

Gallery Exhibit 5: Posters Promoting Policies Regarding the Chinese





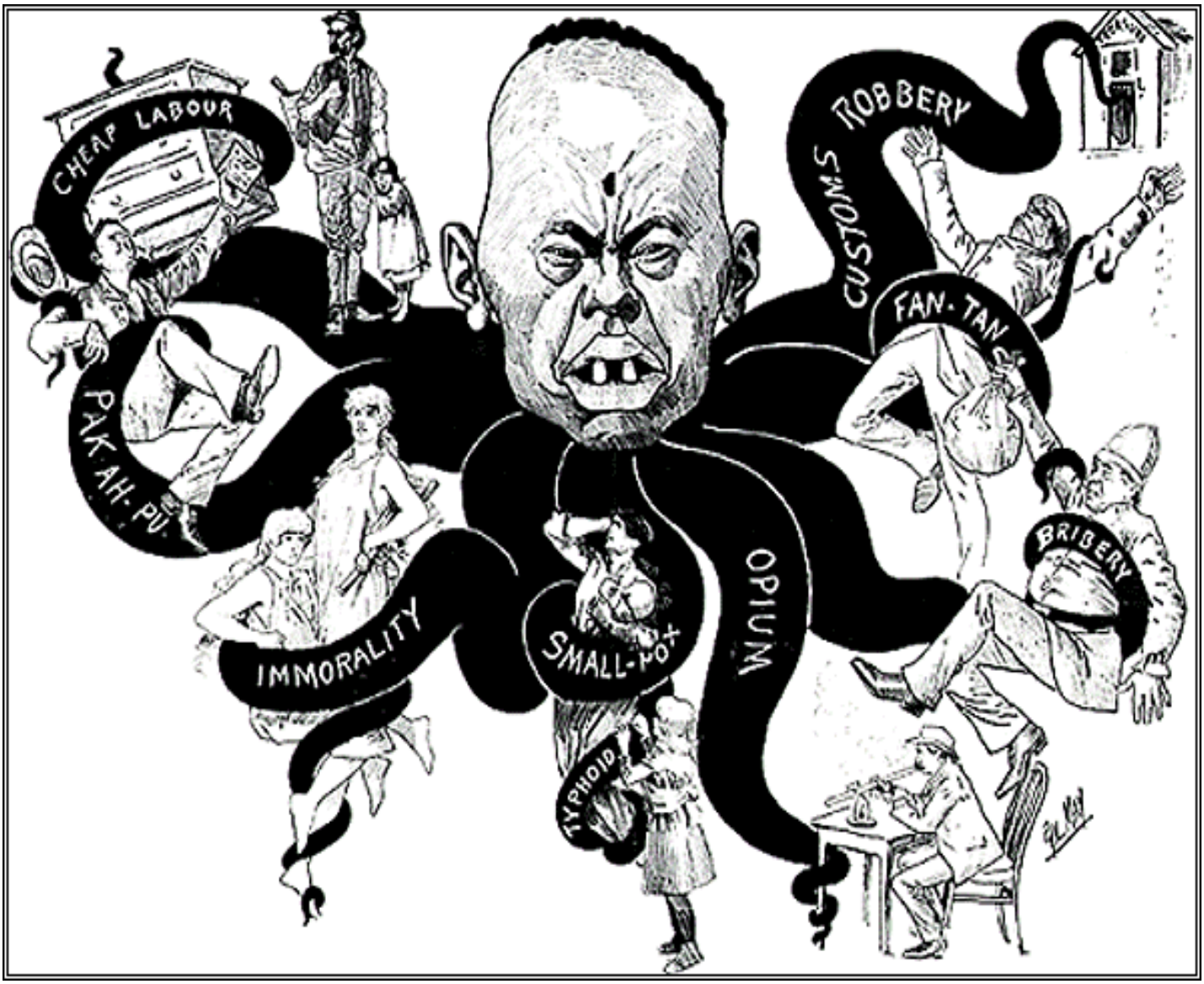
California Historical Society

Gallery Exhibit 6: Chinese Exclusion Act

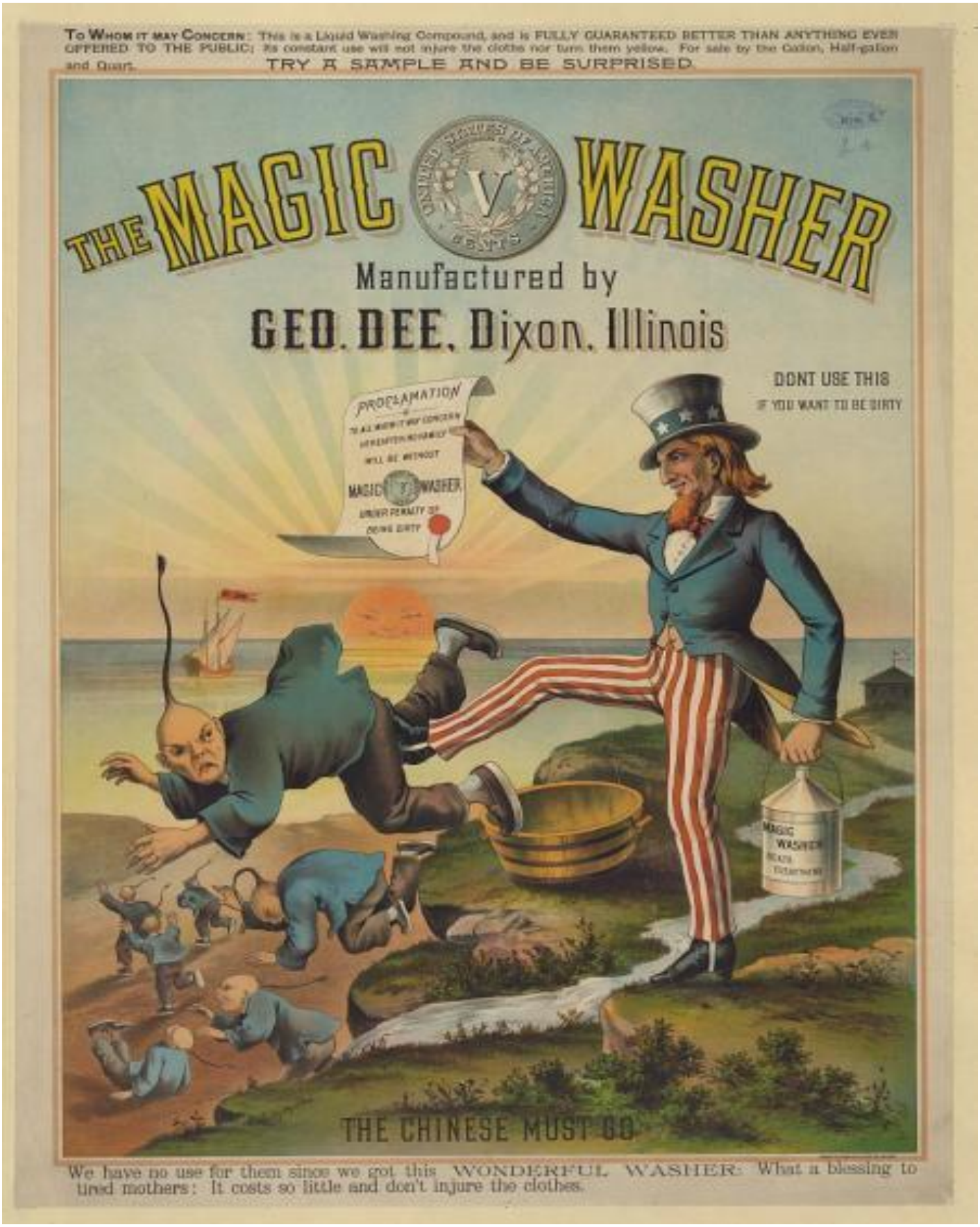


This image depicts a chaotic anti-Chinese riot in Denver, Colorado, on October 31, 1880, that resulted in the death of a Chinese man and the destruction of Denver's Chinatown.

Gallery Exhibit 7: Australian Cartoon Popular in the United States



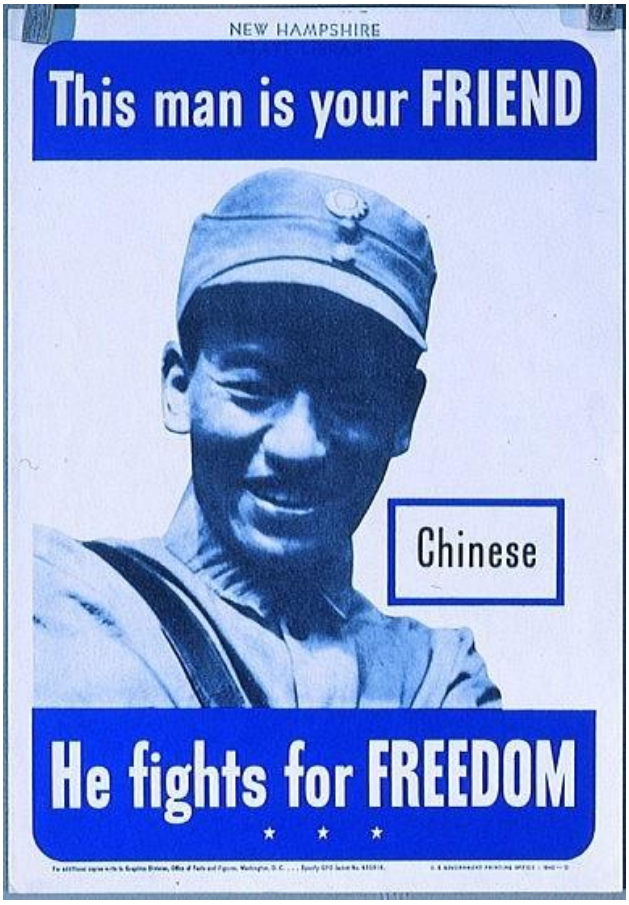
Gallery Exhibit 8: Magic Washer Ad



Laundry detergent advertisement from late 19th Century

Gallery Exhibit 9: United China Relief Fund Posters





US ends Exclusion Act in WWII (1943)

Gallery Exhibit 10: US-China Cold War Relations



Edmund Valtman: By Government Decree Every Member of the Commune Is Entitled to a Private Lot, 1961
Published in The Hartford Times, March 9, 1961

Gallery Exhibit 11: Nixon and China



US President Nixon and Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai Share a toast, 1972

Gallery Exhibit 12: History of US-China Relations

KAL
THE ECONOMIST
London
ENGLAND



Final Images to Display for Class Analysis and Closing Discussion



Mike Ramirez, 2020



LARISSA LAM / JOSH FLEAGANE

A poster for the Disney film Mulan was vandalised. BBC. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52714804