

# Discrimination Against Gold Rush Immigrants

**Cross-Curricular Focus: History/Social Sciences**



Immigrants came to California in the late 1840s and early 1850s for the Gold Rush. Many of them faced awful discrimination. They were not treated fairly by those around them.

Two of the largest immigrant groups were the Chinese and the Irish. Almost 50,000 Chinese came, attracted by the gold. In Ireland, the Potato Famine had killed thousands of Irish people between 1845 and 1849. There was not enough food for the people who lived there to eat. Those who were lucky were sponsored by wealthy patrons. The patrons paid travel expenses for them to start a new life in America.

The United States government gave in to the pressure of citizens and passed some unfair laws during this time. In 1850, immigrant miners were forced to pay a Foreign Miners Tax of \$20 per month. That gave the immigrant only the right to look for gold alongside the other miners. Many had to give up their dreams of gold. They were not able to pay the tax.

By the 1870s, the Irish and Chinese populations in California were very large. Many citizens grew worried. They thought the immigrants were trying to take their jobs. They thought they were using resources that belonged to them.

Chinese and Irish immigrants were sometimes forced off their land. Some were told they must live in certain cities or areas. The land where they had lived was taken over by **squatters**. Squatters are people who settle on land they do not own in the hopes of claiming it after a period of time. The immigrants struggled to find jobs or had to take hard jobs for very little pay. Occasionally, immigrants went on **strike** to try to improve their working conditions and pay. The strikes were not usually successful.

The Chinese **Exclusion** Act of 1882 prevented any more Chinese immigrants from coming to the United States. The law was not changed until 1943.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer the following questions based on the reading passage. Don't forget to go back to the passage whenever necessary to find or confirm your answers.

1) What is a squatter?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2) You read that the Chinese and Irish were made to live in certain areas. Do you think this was fair? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3) Who were the two immigrant groups that suffered discrimination? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4) What did the Foreign Miners Tax of 1850 make immigrants do?

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\_\_\_\_\_

5) If you had been an immigrant who went to the Gold Rush, would you have stayed even though there was discrimination? Why or why not?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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**Actual wording of answers may vary.**

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don't own in hopes of owning it

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3) Who were the two immigrant groups that suffered discrimination?

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4) What did the Foreign Miners Tax of 1850 make immigrants do?

pay \$20 a month to look for gold

5) If you had been an immigrant who went to the Gold Rush, would you have stayed even though there was discrimination? Why or why not?

student's choice