

The Remedial Herstory Project

INQUIRY-BASED LESSON PLAN

STAGING THE INQUIRY

For this inquiry, teachers should consider opening with an intriguing and open ended question, then provide some background on this topic generally in the form of a video, brief lecture, or presentation. Close the introduction by asking students what questions they have, guide them in discussion to the question for the inquiry, highlighted at the top of the next page.

ACTIVITY TASKS

- Pose a broad open ended question. Provide background information.
- Students respond to questions in this packet independently or with a partner.
- Consider doing one of the following to extend the exercise:
 - Facilitate student discussion of the compelling question.
 - Facilitate a 4-corner debate.
 - Facilitate a structured academic controversy.
 - Students assume the characters involved and discuss the compelling question in character.
- Students craft an argument.

C3 FRAMEWORK

D1.1.9-12. Explain how a question reflects an enduring issue in the field.

D1.2.9-12. Explain points of agreement and disagreement experts have about interpretations and applications of disciplinary concepts and ideas associated with a compelling question.

D2.His.4.9-12. Analyze complex and interacting factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras.

D2.His.5.9-12. Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people's perspectives.

D2.His.10.9-12. Detect possible limitations in various kinds of historical evidence and differing secondary interpretations.

D2.His.11.9-12. Critique

the usefulness of historical sources for a specific historical inquiry based on their maker, date, place of origin, intended audience, and purpose.

D2.His.12.9-12. Use questions generated about multiple historical sources to pursue further inquiry and investigate additional sources.

D2.His.14.9-12. Analyze multiple and complex causes and effects of events in the past.

D2.His.16.9-12. Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past.

Inquiry Activity: Why did the US exclude Chinese women?

In this inquiry students will examine contrasting primary source accounts and form their own conclusions about the Page Act of 1875, which preceded the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

Document A: Page Act

FORTY-THIRD CONGRESS. SESS. II. CH. 141. 1875. CHAP. 141.-

An act supplementary to the acts in relation to immigration.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That in determining whether the immigration of any subject of China, Japan, or any Oriental country, to the United States, is free and voluntary . . . it shall be the duty of the consul-general. . . to ascertain whether such immigrant has entered into a contract or agreement for a term of service within the United States, for lewd and immoral purposes; and if there be such contract or agreement, the said consul-general or consul shall not deliver the required permit or certificate...

*Immigration History Editors. "Page Act." Immigration History. Last modified N.D.
<https://immigrationhistory.org/item/page-act/>.*

According to this document, why were women from Asia given greater scrutiny when immigrating to the United States?

Document B: Picture Brides

**Picture Brides Landed
On a Fire Trap Island**
**Congressmen Find Deplorable
Conditions at Pacific Immig-
ration Station**
Special Dispatch to The Tribune
SAN FRANCISCO, July 17.—Angel
Island, where the immigrants arriving
by way of the Pacific are housed in
large numbers, to-day was declared a
fire trap and health menace by mem-
bers of the Congressional Committee
on Immigration who made a tour of
inspection.
"It is a rotten, dirty hole, the worst
I have ever seen," said Representative
Isaac Siegel, who has been a member
of the committee three years and has
visited all the receiving stations main-
tained by the Immigration Department.
"A fire trap" was the comment of
Representative John C. Kleczka.
The Congressmen visited the island
primarily to inspect the forty-two Ja-
panese "picture brides" who arrived on
the Shinyo Maru yesterday.
The buildings in which the immigrants
are housed are of wooden construction.
Two men remain on guard at night. In
case of fire scores of lives would be in
danger, members of the committee said.
The only water on the island, the in-
vestigators found had to be brought on
barges. The sanitary conditions were
characterized as "deplorable."
Before proceeding to Alcatraz Island,
where military prisoners are kept, the
committee witnessed the picturesque
meeting of the "picture brides" with the
husbands they had never seen before. At
Alcatraz the committee inspected the
dungeons and gave attention to condi-
tions surrounding conscientious ob-

Picture Brides Landed On a Fire Trap Island: Congressmen Find Deplorable Conditions at Pacific Immigration Station; 7/18/1910; Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Record Group 85. Retrieved from <https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/picture-brides-landed-on-a-fire-trap-island-congressmen-find-deplorable-conditions-at-pacific-immigration-station>.

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Document C: Wedding Photo

Annotation from DocsTeach National Archives: Chinese women immigrants faced not only racial prejudice but also false assumptions about their gender roles. The first anti-Chinese legislation enacted into American law – the 1875 Page Act – aimed not only to prevent Chinese contract workers but also Chinese prostitutes from entering the United States. The law reflected a popular prejudice, lasting well into the 20th century, that most Chinese women were brought to America for prostitution. When 27-year-old Wong Lan Fong and her new husband, Yee Shew Ning, traveled to the United States, they were aware of such prejudices and took measures to emphasize their respectability and economic status. They delayed their departure for the United States until they had enough money to travel in first class. They also submitted a letter from the clergyman who performed their wedding ceremony, attesting to their good character. Immigration officials seized further evidence when they confiscated the couple's wedding photograph as proof of their marriage. The couple's strategy worked. They were detained on Angel Island only one day before being allowed to land. Some 70 years later, their granddaughter, American historian Erika Lee, was conducting research for her book on Chinese immigration at the National Archives in San Bruno, California, when she discovered her grandparents' wedding photograph in her grandmother's immigration file.



Wedding Photograph of Wong Lan Fong and Yee Shew Ning; 1/27/1927; Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Record Group 85. Retrieved from <https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/wedding-photograph-of-wong-lan-fong-and-yee-shew-ning>.

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Document D: Historian

Chinese women were perceived as a particular type of threat: A sexual one. “They were stereotyped as promiscuous, as prostitutes,” says Borja. While there were Chinese women working in the sex industry in the mid-19th century, they were singled out from their white peers: “Chinese women were specifically accused of spreading sexually transmitted diseases. They were scapegoated. That sexualized stereotype stuck,” says Dr. Kevin Nadal, professor at the City University of New York and vice president of the Filipino American National Historical Society.



Did you know? The earliest known Chinese woman to immigrate to America, Afong Moy, arrived in New York from Guangzhou in 1834. She had bound feet and was exhibited as a curiosity across the United States, first by traders Nathaniel and Frederick Carne and later by American promoter and circus founder P. T. Barnum.

The Page Act of 1875

Enacted seven years before the better-known Chinese Exclusion Act, the 1875 Page Act was one of the earliest pieces of federal legislation to restrict immigration to the United States in the 19th century. “It was designed to prohibit immigrants deemed ‘undesirable’ – defined as Chinese “coolie” laborers and prostitutes – from entering the U.S.,” says K. Ian Shin, Ph.D., assistant professor of History & American Culture at the University of Michigan.

On paper, the Page Act of 1875 prohibited the recruitment of laborers from “China, Japan or any Oriental country” who were not brought to the United States of their own will or who were brought for “lewd and immoral purposes.” It explicitly forbid “the importation of women for the purposes of prostitution.”

In practice, it was used as a way to prevent Chinese women from migrating to the United States. It left the decision as to whether or not to permit an individual’s entry to the United States up to the consul-general or consul at port cities.

Under the Page Act, Chinese women attempting to enter the country at Angel Island Immigration Station outside San Francisco were subjected to invasive and humiliating interrogations by U.S. immigration officials.

“Poems scratched on the wall at Angel Island identified the medical exams they were forced to undergo as barbarous, humiliating, and discriminatory,” says Borja.

“One of the reasons why the number of Chinese women immigrating to the U.S. declined after the 1870s is precisely because these women opted not to subject themselves to these kinds of interrogations,” Shin says.

Impact of the Page Act

The Calvin T. Sampson's shoe factory in North Adams, Massachusetts showing Chinese immigrants fastening soles onto shoes, first published in Harper's Weekly for an article relating to worker strikes and Chinese laborers, c. 1870.

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The impact of the Page Act skewed gender ratios in the Chinese American community to heavily male. "In the early 1870s, there were roughly 78 Chinese women per 1,000 Chinese men in the U.S.," Shin says. "After the law's passage, that number dropped to 48 women per 1,000 men."

Preventing women from immigrating alongside their partners meant male laborers were unable to create families and set down roots in America. Instead, many sought to earn money and then return to China to rejoin their families. Bachelorhood among Chinese male laborers, in turn, enhanced U.S. suspicions. "They were portrayed as driftless," says Borja. "It enhanced the view that they shouldn't be full Americans. Barriers justified other barriers."

Most west coast states had laws preventing people from marrying outside their race by the mid-1800s. So by effectively barring Chinese women from entering the country through the Page Act, the U.S. government limited the growth of Asian American families. Nadal points out that there were no laws targeting immigrant women from European countries.

In setting a precedent for discriminating against a specific group of immigrants, the Page Act and the Chinese Exclusion Act paved the way for other discriminatory immigration policies that placed quotas on certain ethnic groups and prohibited the entry of individuals with mental disorders, physical disabilities, and members of the LGBTQ community.

Rotondi, Jessica Pearce. "Before the Chinese Exclusion Act, This Anti-Immigrant Law Targeted Asian Women: The 1875 Page Act was one of the earliest pieces of federal legislation to restrict immigration to the United States." History.com. Last modified March 19, 2021. <https://www.history.com/news/chinese-immigration-page-act-women>.

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