[On The Evils of Chinese Immigration](http://farley-woodapush.wikispaces.com/On%2BThe%2BEvils%2Bof%2BChinese%2BImmigration)

**On the “Evils” of Chinese Immigration (1878)**
Speaking of America by Laura Belmonte.
***During the Gold Rush, about 24,000 Chinese Immigrants came to California. Racial discrimination forced most to leave the gold fields. Some became launderers, cooks, gardeners, farmers, and domestic servants. Others gravitated to dangerous jobs in railroad construction and mining. Although the Chinese immigrants proved tireless workers, many white laborers resented their willingness to work for low wages and refusal to abandon their language or cultural traditions. When an economic depression hit in the 1870s, white displays of nativism escalated. In 1877, a labor rally in San Francisco degenerated into an anti-Chinese riot. In the wake of the violence, a committee of California legislators examined the impact of Chinese immigration. Their report is excerpted here:***

Reading Questions:

1. How do the legislators believe that the Chinese are affecting the culture and economy of California? How might a Chinese immigrant have responded to these characterizations?
2. Why do the legislators believe that the Chinese cannot be Americanized? Was this a fair generalization? Explain your answer.

The Chinese have now lived among us, in considerable numbers, **[in 1878, the Chinese comprised 1 percent of the California population, and a miniscule 0.0002 percent of the nation’s population.]** for a quarter of a century, and yet they remain separate, distinct form, and antagonistic to our people in thinking, mode of life, in tastes and principles, and are as far from assimilation as when they first arrived.

They fail to comprehend our system of government; they perform no duties of citizenship; they are not available as jurymen; cannot be called upon as a *posse comitatus* to preserve order, nor be relied upon as soldiers.

They do not comprehend or appreciate our social ideas, and they contribute but little to the support of any of our institutions, public or private.

They bring no children with them, and there is, therefore, no possibility of influencing them by our ordinary educational appliances.

There is, indeed, no point of contact between the Chinese and our people through which we can Americanize them. The rigidity which characterizes these people forbids the hope of any essential change in their relations to our own people or our government.

We respectfully submit admitted proposition that no nation, much less a republic, can safely permit the presence of a large and increasing element among its people which cannot be assimilated or made to comprehend the responsibilities of citizenship.

The great mass of the Chinese residents of California are not amendable to our laws. It is almost impossible to procure the conviction of Chinese criminals, and we are never sure that a conviction, even when obtained, is in accordance with justice.

This difficulty arises out of our ignorance of the Chinese language and the fact that their moral ideas are wholly distinct from our own. They do not recognize the sanctity of an oath, and utterly fail to comprehend the crime of perjury. Bribery, intimidation, and other methods of baffling judicial action, are considered by them as perfectly legitimate. It is an established fact that the administration of justice among the Chinese is almost impossible, and we are, therefore, unable to protect offenses against our own people. This anomalous condition, in which the authority of law is go generally vacated, imperils the existence of our republican institutions to a degree hitherto unknown among us…

We now come to an aspect of the question more revolting still. We would shrink from the disgusting details did not a sense of duty demand that they be presented. Their lewd women induce, by the cheapness of their offers, thousands of boys and young men to enter their dens, very many of whom are inoculated with venereal disease, and some of our physicians treat a half dozen cases daily. The fact that these diseases have their origin chiefly among the Chinese is well established…

But we desire to call your attention to the sanitary aspect of the subject. The Chinese herd together in one spot; whether in a city or village, until they transform the vicinage into a perfect hive, there they live packed together, a hundred living in a space that would be insufficient for an average American family.

Their place of domicile is filthy in the extreme, and to a degree that cleansing is impossible except by absolute destruction of the dwellings they occupy. But for the healthfulness of our climate, our city populations would have long since been decimated by pestilence from their causes. And we do not know how long this natural protection will suffice us.

In almost every house is found a room devoted to opium smoking, and these places are visited by white boys and women, so that the deadly opium habit is introduced among our people…

We now call attention to an aspect of the subject of such huge proportions, and such practical and pressing importance that we almost dread to enter upon its consideration, namely, the effect of Chinese labor upon our industrial classes. We admit that the Chinese were, in the earlier history of the State, when the white labor was not attainable, very useful in the development of our peculiar industries; that they were of great service in railroad building, in mining, gardening, general agriculture, and as domestic servants.

We admit that the Chinese are exceedingly expert in all kinds of labor and manufacturing; that they are easily and inexpensively handled in large numbers.

We recognize the right of all men to better their condition when they can, and deeply sympathize the overcrowded population of China.

Our laborers cannot be induced to live like vermin, as the Chinese and these habits of individual and family life have ever been encouraged by our statesmen as essential to good morals.

Our laborers require meat and bread, which have been considered by us as necessary to that mental and bodily strength which is thought to be important to the citizens of a Republic which depends upon the strength of its people, while the Chinese require only rice, dried fish, tea, and a few simple vegetables. The cost of sustenance to the whites is four-fold greater than that of the Chinese, and the wages of the whites must of necessity be greater than the wages required by the Chinese. The Chinese are, therefore, able to underbid the whites in every kind of labor. They can be hired in masses; they can be managed and controlled like unthinking slaves. But our laborer has an individual life, cannot be controlled as a slave by brutal masters, and this individuality has been required of him by the genius of our institutions, and upon these elements of character the State depends for defense and growth…

As a natural consequence the white laborer is out of employment, and misery and want are fast taking the places of comfort and plenty.

Now, to consider and weigh the benefits returned to us by the Chinese for these privileges and for these wrongs to our laboring class. They buy little or nothing from our own people, but import both their food and clothing from China; they send their wages home; they have not introduced a single industry peculiar to their own country; they contribute nothing to the support of our institutions; can never be relied upon as defenders of the State, they have no intention of becoming citizens, they acquire no homes, and are a constant tax upon the public treasury….