

Northwest History Consortium

Gaffe or Compliment?

An Ambassador's State Dinner Toast Creates Uproar

Char Seawell
6th Grade

National Standard

Era 4: Expansion and Reform (1801-1861) / Standard 2

Standard 2: How the industrial revolution, increasing immigration, the rapid expansion of slavery, and the westward movement changed the lives of Americans and led toward regional tensions.

Washington State Standards EALRs

EALR (History) 4.1.2: Understands how the following themes and developments help to define eras in US history from 1776 to 1900

- *Development and struggles in the West, industrialization, immigration, and urbanization.*

EALR (History) 4.2.2: Understands and analyzes how cultures and cultural groups have contributed to U.S. history (1776 - 1900)

EALR (History) 4.3: Understands that there are multiple perspectives and interpretations of historical events.

BACKGROUND

Chinese Immigrants and the Building of the Transcontinental Railroad

“In 1862, in the midst of the Civil War, Congress authorized the most ambitious project that the country had ever contemplated: construction of a transcontinental railroad. The price tag was immense: \$136 million, more than twice the federal budget in 1861. The challenge was enormous; 1,800 miles across arid plains and desert and the rugged granite walls of the Sierra Nevada and Rocky Mountains.

Two companies undertook the actual construction in return for land grants and financial subsidies worth from \$16,000 to \$48,000 a mile. The Union Pacific began laying track westward from Omaha, Nebraska. The Central Pacific lay track eastward from Sacramento, California. Which ever company laid the most track would receive the largest federal subsidy.

The Union Pacific's task was easier; two-thirds of its track was laid across plains. The Central Pacific, in contrast, had to carve out a rail bed across the Sierra Nevadas. The first year, it lay 31 miles of track; after two years, it had only put down 50 miles.

The Central Pacific also faced an acute labor shortage. In the winter of 1864, the company had only 600 laborers at work, a small fraction of the 5,000 for which it had advertised. And these workers were unreliable: 'Some would stay until pay day, get a little money, get drunk and clear out,' a superintendent said.

In February, 1865, the Central Pacific decided to try a new labor pool. Charles Crocker, chief of construction persuaded his company to employ Chinese immigrants, arguing that the people who built the Great Wall of China and invented gunpowder could certainly build a railroad.”

"Chinese Immigrants and the Building of the Transcontinental Railroad." 2 Dec. 2010. [Digital History \(University of Houston\)](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/historyonline/china1.cfm). ©2006 - 2010. Houston, TX. 2 Dec. 2010 <<http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/historyonline/china1.cfm>>. Reprinted with permission.

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SCENARIO

At a recent state dinner in Beijing, the American ambassador to China in his opening comments thanked the Chinese people for their hard work in helping build the Transcontinental Railroad. He praised their work ethic and credited them for their partnership in expanding trade and industry on the American continent. The next day, Chinese officials were quoted in local media as being horrified at the tasteless and insensitive remarks and have demanded an immediate apology. They have cited horrible labor abuses of the Chinese during this time period and the prejudices shown by immigration laws instituted after their work was complete. The ambassador has suggested the officials and leaders were being overly sensitive. He was also quoted as saying that the Chinese people should be proud of how they helped the United States become the nation it was today. When made aware of the uproar, the ambassador referred critics to an article that he had read to prepare him for the remarks. This article (statement by Leland Stanford, President of the Central Pacific Railroad Company) can be found at the following link:

<http://cpr.org/Museum/Chinese.html>

Central Pacific Railroad Statement Made to the President of the United States, and Secretary of the Interior, on the Progress of the Work. October 10th, 1865. H.S. Crocker & Co., Printers, 92 J Street, Sacramento, CA.

TASK

You are members of the US President's Advisory Committee on Foreign Relations. The president has asked you to research Chinese participation in the building of the Transcontinental Railroad. You will then meet with the ambassador to present your findings and help the ambassador process whether or not this was a simple mistake in etiquette or a cultural gaffe worthy of a formal apology.

The president has asked for a summary of the proposed action that will be taken as agreed upon by your committee and the ambassador, as well as a summary of the evidence that supports your action.

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RESOURCES

Internet

"Archives of the West from 1877 - 1887." PBS.Org (WETA). ©2001 - 2010. Arlington, VA. 2 Dec. 2010 <<http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/resources/archives/seven/chinxact.htm>>.

"Chinese Exclusion Act." . Digital History (University of Houston). ©2006 - 2010. Houston, TX. 2 Dec. 2010 <http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/database/article_display.cfm?HHID=419>.

"City Intelligence" 1 May 1865 from *Sacramento Daily Union*. Sacramento, CA. Central Pacific Railroad Museum. ©1998 - 2010. [location unknown]. 2 Dec. 2010 <<http://www.cpr.org/Museum/Newspapers/index.html>>.

"Eye on the East: Labor Calls for Ban on Chinese Immigration" from American Federation of Labor, *Some Reasons for Chinese Exclusion. Meat vs. Rice. American Manhood against Asiatic Coolieism. Which Shall Survive?* Senate Doc. No. 137, 57th Congress, 1st Session (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1902). History Matters (George Mason University). ©1999 - 2010. Fairfax, VA. 2 Dec. 2010 <<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5035>>.

Kearney, Dennis and Knight, H. L. "'Our Misery and Despair': Kearney Blasts Chinese Immigration" from "Appeal from California. The Chinese Invasion. Workingmen's Address," *Indianapolis Times*, 28 February 1878. History Matters (George Mason University). ©1999 - 2010. Fairfax, VA. 3 Dec. 2010 <<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5046>>.

Little, Daniel. "Labor Abuses in China." 7 Jan. 2010. Understanding Society (Blogspot). 2007 - 2010. Dearborn, MI;. 3 Dec. 2010 <<http://understandingsociety.blogspot.com/2010/01/labor-abuses-in-china.html>>.

"Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration." 27 Feb. 1877. Central Pacific Railroad Museum. ©1998 - 2010. [location unknown]. 3 Dec. 2010 <http://www.cpr.org/Museum/Chinese_Immigration.html>.

"'Rock Springs is Killed': White Reaction to the Rock Springs Riot" from *Rock Springs Independent* (Rock Springs, WY) 3 September 1885. History Matters (George Mason University). ©1999 - 2010. Fairfax, VA. 2 Dec. 2010 <<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5042>>.

Stanford, Leland. "Chinese Labor." 10 Oct. 1865. Central Pacific Railroad Museum. ©1998 - 2010. [location unknown]. 2 Dec. 2010 <<http://cpr.org/Museum/Chinese.html>>.

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Strobridge, Edson T. (Review). *The Chinese in America: Chapter 5 - Building the Transcontinental Railroad* by Iris Chang. New York, NY: Viking Press, 2003. Central Pacific Railroad Museum. ©1998 - 2010. [location unknown]. 2 Dec. 2010 <http://www.cpr.org/Museum/Chinese_In_America_Chang.html#book>.

"'To This We Dissented': The Rock Springs Riot" from *Memorial of Chinese Laborers*, Resident at Rock Springs, Wyoming to the Chinese Consul at New York (1885). History Matters (George Mason University). ©1999 - 2010. Fairfax, VA. 2 Dec. 2010 <<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5043>>.

Or you can use other sources as you discover.

ASSESSMENT

1. Informal assessment using Metacognition strategies intermittently throughout process.
2. KWL Chart
3. Group assessment of each other's recommendations using "Yes Test" and self-reflection.

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Group Assessment "Yes Test" and Self-Reflection

Recommendation to the President: China State Dinner Controversy	Yes	No
1. The group's proposal contains a recommendation to resolve the controversy.		
2. The group's proposal contains a summary of the evidence to support the recommendation.		
3. The evidence summarized is from multiple perspectives.		
Does your team think that the recommendation will resolve the controversy? Why or why not?		
What do you believe is the strongest evidence to support the recommendation? Why?		
What do you think is the weakest argument for the recommendation? Why?		

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REFERENCES/CITATIONS

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- "History Standards for Grades 5-12 United States." UCLA National Center for History in The Schools. 2009. University of California, Los Angeles, CA: 3 December 2010 <<http://nchs.ucla.edu/standards/era1-5-12.html>>.
- OSPI. "Washington State Social Studies EALRs, Grade 7." OSPI (Office of Superintendent of Instruction). 2010. Olympia, WA. 3 December 2010 <<http://standards.ospi.k12.wa.us/ComponentListByGrade.aspx?subject=6,GLE&gl=7>>.
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- Seawell, Char. "Group Assessment "Yes Test" and Self-Reflection." NWESD Organization. 2010. Anacortes, WA. 3 Dec. 2010 <http://www.nwesd.org/1510101216191755740/lib/1510101216191755740/4.2_Chinese.Railroad.Seawell.6.pdf>.