



## *California Clash*

Irish and Chinese Labor in San Francisco, 1850–1870

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**G**old brought them all: Americans, Mexicans, Chileans, Native Americans, French, German, British, New Zealanders, Scandinavians—young men, adventurers from every corner of the globe—swarming into San Francisco on their way to certain, instant wealth in the Sierra foothills. Tens of thousands in those early years shuffled down gangplanks to the boisterous, muddy streets of this Pacific boomtown. Pitching tents or shanties on the nearest unclaimed patch of land, they immediately set out in search of news and provisions. A week was usually enough time to lay in supplies, glean a tip or two from the swirl of inflated rumors, and witness enough gold dust being squandered to ignite the “fever” in all of them. Posting a last letter home, they shouldered gear and resolutely struck out for the high country to claim their share of its incalculable riches. Within days, their places would be taken by another shipload of adventurers freshly landed at the bay.

The two immigrant groups who felt the Gold Rush pull most strongly were the Irish and Chinese.<sup>1</sup> Great waves of these peoples crossed the oceans and continents to reach the mining fields of California. Enduring blistering sun, bone-chilling cold, disease, deprivation, swindlers, and violence, they shoveled tons of gravel and washed untold pans of muddy water for the flecks of gold that would take them home wealthy men. Some did make it back after striking it rich, their tales of adventure inspiring the next surge of fortune seekers. The majority, however, were less fortunate. Hard-earned gold dust, which steadily trickled away in the inflation-racked mining camps, flowed during the slack season in the gambling, drinking, and prostitution houses of the cities. As legions of prospectors played out the most lucrative surface deposits, dreams of an early, affluent retirement in Canton or Dublin gradually faded into more moderate aspirations of steady work, good wages, and gradual savings.

Fortunately for disappointed miners, wealth could be achieved more readily in the gold-induced boom economy of San Francisco than in any other city in the United States. Within a few years of the first gold discovery, this swampy backwater on the bay developed into a thriving commercial depot. Instant urbanization created countless opportunities for unskilled labor to level hills, fill tide flats, grade

roadways, lay water and sewer lines, construct buildings, transfer cargo, haul goods, and perform a thousand other jobs requiring only muscle and mettle. Rapid commercial and industrial growth, coupled with frequent labor desertions for new silver or gold strikes, depleted the number of available workers and inflated wages. San Francisco itself became a secondary “gold field” where frustrated prospectors could judiciously mine labor opportunities, abandoning less rewarding jobs for others promising higher wages, better housing allowances, or more suitable work. With a bit of frugality and restraint, urban workers discovered they could still amass an enviable savings and return home, or, as occurred more and more frequently, capitalize a small business and settle down in the city.

Most of the laboring Irish and Chinese who met in the streets of San Francisco had almost nothing in common except their limited skills and a desire to make money. These Irish workers were hard-drinking, politically savvy, primarily East Coast Catholics, seeking escape from the dismal factory life of the north Atlantic seaboard.<sup>2</sup> The Chinese were generally reticent, hard-working farmers and laborers mainly from southeastern China, seeking relief from famine and social upheaval.<sup>3</sup> The two groups were divided by race, language, religion, politics, social customs, and personal habits. They lived in separate areas of the city and associated with different immigrant organizations. However, they found common ground—and a good measure of contention—in the city’s labor market. In times of prosperity, the two immigrant groups coexisted if not on cordial, then at least tolerable terms. However, during periods of economic constriction or depression, competition for work often precipitated hostility and violence. In these more rancorous times, when even the pinched California dream of steady, well-paying work was threatened, each group clung tenaciously to its piece of San Francisco’s prosperity.

This essay will trace the interaction of the San Francisco Irish and Chinese during the mid-nineteenth century and examine how these immigrant groups protected their own interests within an environment of changing social, political, and economic conditions. These conditions are defined in terms of an evolving ethic which gradually shifts from general tolerance for various immigrant groups in mining regions and cities, to a selective exclusion of non-white laborers—particularly the Chinese—from the California workforce. This essay, however, will not directly address the issue of the prohibition of Chinese immigration, which has been thoroughly investigated elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> Rather, it will focus on Irish and Chinese responses to intensifying labor competition and the measures taken by each group to maintain the livelihoods of their workers, prosperity of their businesses, survival of their communities, and future employment opportunities for their countrymen.

### *Defining the Gold Rush Ethic*

It may be said that nearly all came to the city only as devout worshippers of mammon; scarcely one, to find a home, which might unjustly have been denied him elsewhere. In order to accumulate the greatest heap of gold in the shortest possible time, schemes and actions had often to be resorted to, which nice honor could not justify nor strict honesty adopt.<sup>5</sup>

Every new immigrant to San Francisco arrived with one objective—to become rich, either by digging gold or by acquiring the gold from those who dug it. Whether in the mining regions or cities, the work was grueling and risky, but extremely rewarding for those who persevered. For miners in the gold fields, every minute counted, and they cursed the weather, accidents, sickness, necessary chores, even sleep; for the time lost from the pan or sluice forfeited a few flecks of gold to some more diligent miner downstream. Many succumbed to the hardships, left unburied and unmourned by the living who were too intent on working their claims to linger long over the dead.<sup>6</sup> Others survived but were so “broken in constitution and wearied in spirit” that they returned home, “living spectres of their former selves.”<sup>7</sup>

For still other miners, however, the gold fields were abundantly rewarding. In 1849, an average day’s work yielded about ten to fifteen dollars in gold dust. In some areas, prospectors might abandon sites yielding forty dollars a day to look for yet richer, more promising digs. Documented accounts of claims producing one to two hundred, even seven to eight hundred dollars a day were reported.<sup>8</sup> Two lucky Chinese miners struck it rich in one stroke, when they discovered an enormous 240-pound nugget worth over \$30,000.<sup>9</sup> To recent immigrants accustomed to factory labor at a dollar per day at best, California riverbeds were fountains of potential wealth.<sup>10</sup> Not surprisingly, miners were willing to work through pain and weariness to accumulate as much of these riches for themselves as possible. In August 1848, the *Daily Alta California* accurately captured the optimism of the mining camps and the implied promise of the Gold Rush: “If the means be perseveringly used and discretion be observed, there are very handsome prizes for all, and some very large ones for a few.”<sup>11</sup>

The rapid accumulation of such unimaginable wealth, however, coupled with the peril, deprivation, and isolation of the camps, seriously affected the ethical standards of immigrants living in the newly established mining communities. A new moral code, shaped by the competitive, materialistic, and transient environment of the camps, emerged and spread throughout the region. This new “Gold Rush ethic” was predatory in nature, reflecting the intent of miners to acquire as much gold as possible, in the shortest amount of time, by whatever means necessary before the inevitable end of the windfall. Under the influence of this ethic, traditional mores, honed in the old world or the new, were displaced by principles nearly free of social constraints. The pursuit of gold suspended old standards—trust in family, faith, and frugality—while the acquisition of gold generated new ones—an embrace of self-reliance, avarice, and indulgence.

Far removed from the “restraints of family and neighborhood custom,” prospectors and adventurers espoused the Gold Rush ethic.<sup>12</sup> Miners jealously guarded claims, mistrusted strangers, hoarded gold dust, ignored friends, forgot loved ones, and neglected religious observances. Sober New England farmers, who had scrimped to buy seed the previous year, now casually waged a month’s salary on the turn of a card at the local saloon.<sup>13</sup> A veteran street preacher tirelessly chastised men “frequenting . . . haunts of infamy, who have confiding wives and interesting children at home.”<sup>14</sup> Even grievous misconduct was viewed as legally, if not morally, relative. When asked about the fate of a Chinese ar-

rested for murder “up country,” a fellow countryman responded: “He get free; he no hang. He just same as one Melican (American) man. *He got money.*”<sup>15</sup> Reality, as these recent immigrants had known it, was displaced—at least temporarily—as the Gold Rush ethic pervaded and dictated life in the mines.

Those who survived the mining season packed their gear and gold dust to “winter-over” in the relative comfort of the cities—Sacramento, Stockton, Marysville, and especially San Francisco. Here they discovered that despite the comfortable rooms and diverse entertainment offered in the cities, the atmosphere was not far removed from that of the mining regions. San Francisco was a young, bawdy, unruly, and frenzied city obsessed with money, and as in the camps, dominated by the Gold Rush ethic. The *Era* dubbed it a “fast town” where everyone was “determin[ed] to enjoy life while it last[ed].”<sup>16</sup> Like prospectors toiling at distant claims, entrepreneurs in the city labored to acquire as much money as possible before the gold disappeared and the boom ended. They exploited miners and each other, colluding and conniving to divert the greatest portion of the flowing gold dust into their own pockets. Every businessman faithfully observed the adage hung in the main hall of a San Francisco casino, “My son, make money, *honestly* if you can, *but make money.*”<sup>17</sup> Engaging in any profitable enterprise, no matter how immoral it might be considered “back home,” salesmen offered intemperate, gold-laden sourdoughs every form of diversion imaginable—from sleazy banjo saloons, to gaudy casino brothels, to sultry opium dens. Caught up in the roaring, mercenary economy of San Francisco, “Nobody had leisure to think even for a moment of his occupation, and how it was viewed in Christian lands . . . while a bit of coin or dust was left” for the taking.<sup>18</sup>

The Gold Rush ethic of San Francisco was as irrepressible as it was pervasive. The city’s flimsy wooden structures, muddied and potholed streets, and inadequate sewer and water systems exemplified the rapacious nature of its inhabitants.<sup>19</sup> Ignoring building and fire codes, speculators hastily erected boarding houses, gambling dens, saloons, restaurants, brothels, stores, and liveries to capitalize on the city’s booming commerce and high rents. Shoddy workmanship and general disregard for safety resulted in frequent fires which often decimated entire districts.<sup>20</sup> Before the ashes had even cooled, however, gamblers would already be back plying their trade, “spread[ing] their table in the open street . . . as if nothing had happened.”<sup>21</sup> Undaunted investors reconstructed saloons and brothels within days, and the business of fleecing the miners resumed unabated. Legitimate and shady businessmen, land and loan sharks, professional gamblers, and swindlers of every kind relentlessly “mined” the city’s hapless population. Mirroring the moral decline in surrounding mountain camps, the Gold Rush ethic in San Francisco also suspended traditional mores and values. “In the scramble for wealth,” reported one witness to the city’s degradation, “few had consciences much purer than their neighbors; few hands were much cleaner.”<sup>22</sup>

However, as long as there was sufficient gold for every miner, businessman, or crook to get his “fair share,” the dogged pursuit of prosperity produced only limited antagonism toward others intent on the same goal. Behind the sense of urgency and greed that permeated the mines and cities,

the strong, steady flow of gold soothed ethnic, racial, and class tensions. The abundance of easily mined surface gold acted as a counterbalance to the cold hedonism of the Gold Rush ethic and promoted a guarded acceptance or wary tolerance of diversity.<sup>23</sup> Irish laborers, Chinese peddlers, German farmers, Scandinavian fishermen, British merchants, and Spanish sailors worked—in the relative forbearance of plenitude—the same riverbeds, gulches, wharfs, and warehouses. “The country and city were wide enough to hold them all,” reported one observer, “and rich enough to give them all a moderate independence in the course of a few years.”<sup>24</sup> East Coast and Old World prejudices still generated antagonism; racism still provoked dissension and segregation; fear of competition still evoked conflicts; and tempers still flared over disputed claims, honesty, or honor. But a provisional sense of tolerance suffused this heterogeneous Pacific community. The commentary that “uniform peace and good will go hand in hand with prosperity” applied equally well at this time to the labor markets in San Francisco as to “the mining region o’ Northern California.”<sup>25</sup> That was true, of course, only as long as prosperity and the flow of gold continued. Relative peace, good will, and tolerance, however, would quickly dissipate under changing economic conditions.

### *Chinese and the Gold Rush Ethic*

Quite a large number of Celestials have arrived among us of late . . . [and] scarcely a ship arrives that does not bring an increase to this worthy integer of our population. The China boys will yet vote at the same polls, study at the same schools and bow at the same altar as our own countrymen.<sup>26</sup>

This sentiment of welcome and optimism, expressed in May 1852, greeted the first major wave of Chinese immigrants to the United States. In that year alone, over twenty thousand Chinese passed through the customs house at San Francisco—almost all from the same region near Canton in southern China.<sup>27</sup> Some were merchants, businessmen, and craftsmen pursuing profitable opportunities in California’s expanding market for services and trade. Most, however, were laborers, peddlers, and farmers, seeking relief from oppressive economic and political conditions. They were spurred to emigrate by rumors, letters from relatives and friends, and labor circulars distributed in Canton claiming that Americans “want the Chinaman to come and make him very welcome [and] . . . Money is in great plenty and to spare.”<sup>28</sup> Nearly all Chinese emigrants were young adventurers who shared the same ambition of everyone who came to California: strike it rich and return home to a life of ease.<sup>29</sup> As a whole, they worked with exceptional diligence, industry, and enterprise and led a quiet existence in the mining camps and cities. Among a frontier population notorious for coarse and immoderate living, these more temperate qualities set the Chinese apart as much as their unique dress, language, and diet. At least initially, these positive characteristics helped deter racist opposition to early Chinese immigration and facilitated a degree of tolerance among the curious residents of California’s mining regions and cities.

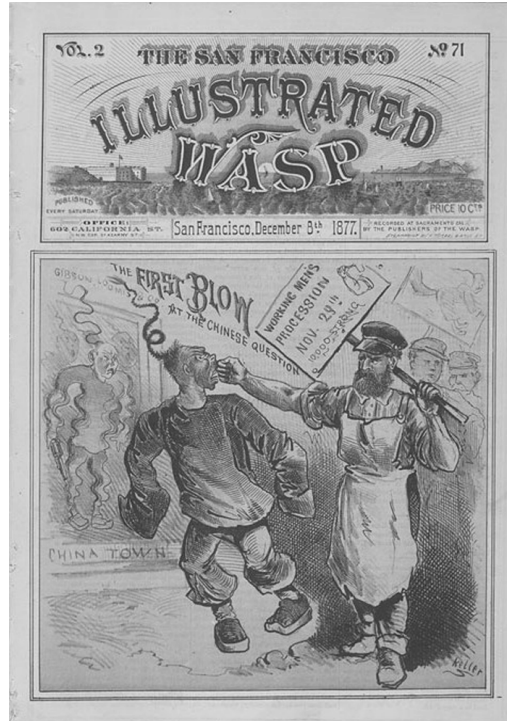
Indeed, Chinese immigrants were perceived by some as worthy additions to American society. In 1850, San Francisco Mayor John W. Geary presided over a public ceremony to present the city’s “China

boys” with a collection of Chinese language books and papers. For the occasion, the leading members of the Chinese community dressed in their finest attire and marched into Portsmouth Square, making “a fine and pleasing appearance.”<sup>30</sup> Following speeches and the presentation of gifts, Mayor Geary extended a formal invitation to participate in the funeral ceremonies to be held for President Zachary Taylor—an honor the Chinese readily accepted. The following day, they joined other representatives of various immigrant groups in commemorating the President’s death in a solemn, stately procession through the streets of San Francisco. Shortly thereafter, the Chinese presented Mayor Geary with a certificate of gratitude, stating, “The China Boys feel proud of the distinction you have shown them; and will always endeavor to merit your good opinion and the good opinion of the citizens of their adopted country.” Moreover, they thanked the mayor for the warm reception and hospitality extended to them: “Strangers as they [the Chinese] are among you, they kindly appreciate the many kindnesses received at your hands.”<sup>31</sup> Judging by these early cultural exchanges, pioneer Chinese sincerely appreciated the opportunity to actively participate in community affairs, and San Francisco’s civic authorities genuinely welcomed them as desirable members of that community.

Mayor Geary’s magnanimous inclusion of these leaders of the Chinese community in San Francisco’s civic affairs was surely influenced by the city’s critical labor shortage. During this period of booming economic growth, the lure of instant wealth—literally for the taking in the Sierra foothills—drained cities of nearly every able-bodied man. Sailors deserted ships at port; goods, if somehow transported to shore, languished on wharves for lack of dockhands and draymen. Demand for labor in San Francisco soared, as did wages. A common worker in the city “who had formerly been content with his dollar a day, now proudly refused ten.”<sup>32</sup> Hundreds of ships idled at anchor in the harbor when offers of even one hundred dollars per month could not entice sailors from the mines. Why toil for wages when one good day on a rich strike could buy a plot of farmland or pay for an entire winter of ease? As captivated and convinced by this reasoning as any other immigrant group, the majority of Chinese arriving at San Francisco left almost immediately for the mining regions. However, a number of Chinese remained in San Francisco to take advantage of the inflated wages, earning the acceptance and gratitude of local businessmen and officials. Mayor Geary’s gracious gesture and the *Daily Alta*’s respectful response are examples of the Gold Rush ethic’s racial tolerance at a time when gold was plentiful, labor scarce, and dependable Chinese workers a godsend.

This tolerant attitude, however, would last only as long as gold flowed freely in the mines and cities, and equal opportunity existed for all to gain wealth—a situation which existed only during the first year or two of the Gold Rush. Between 1848 and 1850, the state’s total population was still less than seventy-eight thousand, and fewer than eight hundred immigrants had arrived from China.<sup>33</sup> Following the trail of earlier prospectors, most Chinese set off directly up the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers, where they sought promising sites among other immigrants working the placers. White miners viewed with idle curiosity these strange newcomers, uniformly outfitted in blue pants and jackets, wide

FIGURE 2-1 “The First Blow at the Chinese Question.” The Chinese as targets of working-class protests in the San Francisco Bay Area. Photo credit: Cover illustration from *The San Francisco Illustrated Wasp*, vol. 2.71 (8 December, 1877).



brimmed straw hats, and oversized American-made boots.<sup>34</sup> The Chinese worked diligently in small groups, kept to themselves, caused little trouble, and were easily driven off rich claims by intimidating white miners. They were more a novelty than a cause for serious consideration or concern.<sup>35</sup> By 1851, however, their numbers had more than quintupled, and curiosity in the mines began to turn to irritation and suspicion.<sup>36</sup> Rich surface deposits were already growing scarce, and the placers

required more work to produce a satisfying return. As early as August 1849, the *Daily Alta* was pessimistically reporting that some of the most promising sites had already been “raked over” and that new miners were “only gathering the leavings of our predecessors.” Nativist and racist grumbling arose in the camps against foreigners, who had “overrun the country, rifling it of its riches, and abstracting forever” its treasures to the detriment of American citizens and the state.<sup>37</sup> As the number of Chinese increased, fingers began pointing at this most physically distinct, most “alien” of the immigrant groups in the mining regions as the root of white miners’ problems.

Already alarmed by steadily rising Chinese immigration figures, white miners were thoroughly shocked by the number of Chinese immigrants entering California in 1852. Nearly twenty thousand Chinese immigrants came ashore in San Francisco over the course of this year, and approximately twelve thousand streamed into the Sierra riverbeds to prospect. Arriving as they did when the mining regions were already overcrowded and tensions increasing, these new Chinese immigrants provoked a rapid change in white attitudes—elevating suspicion to resentment, and resentment to hostility.<sup>38</sup> The early conditional tolerance of Chinese prospectors evaporated as miners in Marysville selectively banned Chinese from filing mining claims in the district. Mining communities in other regions followed suit and lobbied the legislature to increase efforts to curtail Chinese immigration or access to the mines. The California legislature acceded to miner demands, passing or amending several discriminatory laws imposing selective fines or licensing fees on Chinese immigrants.<sup>39</sup> These camp ordinances and legislative statutes proved effective in confining Chinese prospectors to less profitable claims already worked over by white miners.<sup>40</sup> By using their political influence to circumscribe Chi-

nese rights, whites not only successfully reduced competition by limiting Chinese opportunities in the mining regions, but also initiated the process of legal separation and segregation based on race. Thus, under mounting pressures from declining returns and increasing competition, racial tolerance under the Gold Rush ethic had quickly devolved into hostility, discrimination, and exclusion.

The diligence and frugality that enabled Chinese to survive and prosper in the mines proved equally successful in the labor markets of California's cities. The same year that white prospectors were restricting Chinese access to the mines, Governor John McDougal was praising California's Oriental population as "one of the most worthy of our newly adopted citizens."<sup>41</sup> The following year, Henry H. Haight, future governor of the state, warmly welcomed the citizens of "one of the most ancient, intelligent and populous of these nations." Couching his acceptance of Chinese in terms of assuming the "white man's burden," Haight declared, "We regard with pleasure the presence of great numbers of these people among us as affording the best opportunity of doing them good."<sup>42</sup> These speeches by influential leaders of the state indicate that in 1853 tolerance of Chinese still prevailed in labor-starved San Francisco. However, as had already occurred in the mining regions, discrimination and intolerance were not far beneath the surface, and they could quickly emerge if sufficient numbers of white immigrants began settling in the city and competing with Chinese for steady work.

### *Irish and the Gold Rush Ethic*

Irishmen have made themselves a position here fully equal to any other nationality in our cosmopolitan population, and newcomers of the same race will find no prejudice to bar their advancement, unless what any fault of their own may raise against individuals. Catholicity, too, has stuck as firm a root in California as in any part of the U.S. . . . and as probably over a third if not a full half of the population of our state belongs to her fold.<sup>43</sup>

In the mid-eighteenth century, conquistadors and missionaries brought Spanish rule and Roman Catholicism to California. In 1776, a small group of Spanish soldiers, their families, and Franciscan missionaries arrived at San Francisco to construct the area's first mission, San Francisco de Asís—or as it was more commonly known, the Mission Dolores—which became the social and commercial focal point of the small community on San Francisco Bay. The mission provided religious services and education for local Spaniards and Indian converts, who studied Spanish, western customs, trades, and the Catholic religion with the Franciscan padres.<sup>44</sup> Though the missions were dissolved under the Mexican Secularization Act, the baptized Indians and original Spanish settlers formed a core Catholic community in California, which facilitated the settlement of later Catholic immigrants—particularly those of Irish descent.<sup>45</sup>

The Irish were not long in coming. During the early to mid-nineteenth century, political and economic crisis in Ireland spurred waves of emigration to countries around the world, including nearly one million to the United States by 1850.<sup>46</sup> Irish immigrants in Atlantic ports found, however, not



the promised land of opportunity, but rather, increasingly saturated labor markets, prohibitive farmland prices, and debilitating prejudice. Many soon became disillusioned with urban ghetto conditions and set out for more promising inland cities and rural areas.<sup>47</sup> A few adventurous Irishmen drifted as far as California, where they settled and prospered amid the Spanish prior to the Gold Rush.<sup>48</sup> With the discovery of gold in the Sierra Nevada, the trickle west turned into a torrent. Both residents and newly arrived Irish in the East, set out by wagon, sea, or even on foot for the West Coast, eager to claim their share of California's riches. Similarly, the news of sensational gold deposits drew Irish settlers from England, Scotland, Mexico, Australia, New Zealand, and other countries, swelling the Celtic population of the state. By 1852, thousands of Irish prospectors were working the mining fields, and over 4,200 first-generation Irish were living in San Francisco.<sup>49</sup>

Some of these Irish newcomers were educated professionals, skilled tradesmen, and successful businessmen, seeking adventure and prosperity in the booming cities of California. They left behind established firms, positions, and careers to seek their fortune servicing the needs of a soaring urban and mining population. The majority, however, were young, unskilled or semi-skilled, farmers and laborers, drawn from Australia and the East Coast.<sup>50</sup> Mustering the capital for their traveling expenses, these young ambitious immigrants abandoned the drudgery of wage labor and set out for California, where they believed every man was his own boss and untold wealth was nearly guaranteed. They were confident that "with the pick and shovel they were a match for any workers under the sun, and their luck was on the average as fortunate as that of others."<sup>51</sup>

Their luck was indeed fortunate, at least for some. In 1844, an Irish rancher and army lieutenant from Missouri, John Murphy, arrived in California with the first wagon-crossing of the Sierra Nevada. Among the first to enter the pristine mining fields in 1848, Murphy moved freely from site to site along Weber Creek and the Stanislaus and Tuolumne Rivers, staking claims at promising digs while continually searching out richer deposits. In his wake, he left a string of work parties composed of native Indians, numbering as many as 150 at one time, to sluice the streams. Within a year, Murphy had amassed staggering profits and tallied his daily take of gold dust not by the ounce, as other miners, but by the pound.<sup>52</sup> "It was said," wrote the noted California historian H. H. Bancroft, that Murphy "had at one time more gold dust than any man in California. On one occasion he brought into San Jose from Calaveras a mule loaded with three hundred and fifty pounds of dust."<sup>53</sup> At fourteen to sixteen dollars an ounce for gold, it did not take Murphy long to quarry his first million dollars worth from the eastern foothills of the Sierra Nevada.

Though perhaps not as spectacular as Murphy's, there were hundreds of other such success stories which spurred the tremendous forty-niner stampede to California.<sup>54</sup> Among those rushing to the West Coast were thousands of Murphy's countrymen who, like the majority of newcomers, hoped to quickly make their "pile" and return home "to the wives and families or the friends that they had left in the Atlantic States or Europe."<sup>55</sup> Although many Irish were successful in the mines, few re-

turned home rich. Gold dust flowed like water through Irish fingers in the excessive, reckless environment of the mining camps and cities. Drinking, gambling, and inflated prices drained miners of their earnings nearly as quickly as they could pan it. Picks and shovels sold for from five to fifteen dollars, common wooden or tin bowls for three to seven dollars, eggs for a dollar (and up) each, poor quality sugar, tea, and coffee for four dollars a pound, and whisky from ten to forty dollars a quart.<sup>56</sup> Equally exorbitant prices for firewood, cleaning, and cooking sapped more dust, and the remainder of a day's pay could easily be squandered on a game of cards or a roll of dice. Consequently, prospectors found it difficult to put aside savings even when working relatively prosperous digs. As weeks stretched into months, seasons, and years, forty-niner dreams of instant fortune gave way to a more tempered hope for slower—but assured—accumulation.

But soon, even that more modest hope for eventual wealth began to slip away. Production dipped precipitously after 1852, when a record eighty-one million dollars worth of gold was extracted from California mines. Despite a steady increase in the mining population, the gold yield in 1855 fell below \$55.5 million.<sup>57</sup> Irish and other white miners felt the pinch of competition and turned accusingly toward the great influx of “foreign” prospectors as the cause of declining placer returns. Although comprising one of the largest foreign populations in the camps, Irish immigrants were successful in overcoming anti-Irish prejudice among American and European miners and deflecting nativist hostility onto the Chinese.<sup>58</sup> The tremendous influx of Chinese immigrants at this time (and the potential for millions more to come), combined with their decidedly “foreign” dress, language, religion, and customs, made possible the racial alliance of Irish and other white miners against this common, non-white “menace.”<sup>59</sup> In comparison to poor laboring Chinese immigrants, poor laboring Irish immigrants proved more “American”—despite stereotypes in the United States of their papal allegiance, destitute circumstances, limited skills and education, and dubious morality.<sup>60</sup> As one observer noted, “The English, Scotch and Irish immigrants were also numerous, but their characteristics, although something different, were less distinguishable from those of native Americans [whites] than were the manners and customs of other foreigners.”<sup>61</sup> Consequently, white miners accepted the Irish as allies in the deepening struggle to protect their common “nativist” interests in the mining regions—that is, their rights under the Gold Rush ethic to acquire as much gold as possible for themselves.<sup>62</sup> In this time of escalating competition for an increasingly scarce commodity, racial tolerance within the Gold Rush ethic was an inevitable casualty. Tolerance amid plenty gave way to discrimination over shortages, manifested in acts of violence and exclusion against the most visible and least resistant population in the mining camps—the Chinese.<sup>63</sup>

As placer returns declined, many Irish miners left the uncertainty of the foothills for the more steady work available in San Francisco. Here they joined their countrymen who had chosen to seek work or practice their trades in the city rather than face the hardships of the mines. In the booming environment of the Gold Rush era, San Francisco offered both skilled and unskilled immigrants nearly limit-

less opportunities for exceptional gains—opportunities of which the Irish, in particular, quickly took advantage. Among the pool of skilled Irish workers in San Francisco, the success of three brothers, Peter, James, and Michael Donahue, exemplifies the city’s potential for “rags to riches” prosperity. Arriving in 1848 from New Jersey, where the three were trained in foundry, boiler making, and molding, they scrounged cast-off materials to set up a blacksmith shop under a tent on Montgomery Street. This makeshift business grew rapidly from a simple iron-working enterprise into the city’s first iron foundry. Parlaying this initial success into related fields, the brothers constructed “the first printing press, the first steam engine, the first mining machinery and the first quartz mill in California, and the first city gas works and the first street railway system in San Francisco.”<sup>64</sup>

A native Irishman, John Sullivan, who accompanied the Murphys to California in 1844, was another early immigrant who recognized the business potential in provisioning miners. Taking advantage of inflated prices for scarce goods, he established a retail outlet on Sullivan’s Creek in Tuolumne County. With prices for staples in the mining regions exceeding ten times the already exorbitant city prices, Sullivan’s business reaped huge profits, which he judiciously invested in San Francisco real estate.<sup>65</sup> The city’s rapid growth sent property values soaring, and in the process, made Sullivan one of California’s earliest commercial millionaires.<sup>66</sup> In 1849, another Irish entrepreneur, James Phelan, opened a liquor store in San Francisco. Since nearly every sailor, soldier, prospector, gambler, businessman, and laborer in the city imbibed, Phelan’s business proved exceptionally lucrative. Like Sullivan, he reinvested profits in other enterprises and eventually founded the first National Gold Bank of San Francisco.<sup>67</sup>

Phelan, Sullivan, and the Donahues were not exceptions to the rule. Other skilled and professional Irishmen, such as John Conness, Martin Murphy, David Broderick, John Downey, Frank McCoppin, Eugene Casserly, and Michael Cahalan, also prospered during this Gold Rush period and left their marks on California history.<sup>68</sup> Unparalleled opportunity made their success possible. The influx of gold and the crush of immigrants transformed San Francisco within a few years from a sleepy mission town into a major commercial entrepôt. This transformation required the importation or production of all goods, services, and structures necessary for the support of a burgeoning population in a thriving city. Consequently, the door of opportunity was opened wide for anyone with the skills, initiative, or capital to take advantage of the city’s prospects for advancement and prosperity.<sup>69</sup> “The ordinary rates of profit in all kinds of business were very great,” observed one city resident, “and unless the recipients squandered their gains in gambling, debauchery, and extravagance, they were certain in a very short time to grow rich.”<sup>70</sup>

This promise of prosperity held equally true for thousands of unskilled Irish workers in the city. As San Francisco rapidly evolved into a metropolitan commercial center, the demand for manual labor in construction, shipping, warehousing, grading, planking, and hundreds of other skilled and unskilled positions continually exceeded supply. Chronic labor shortages, magnified with each rich strike in the mines, guaranteed high wages for anyone willing to accept work with private companies

or on public projects. Common laborers in San Francisco commanded a dollar an hour in 1849, and skilled workers twice that amount and up.<sup>71</sup> A drayman's daily wage of fifteen to twenty dollars even tempted professional men such as John McCracken, a city lawyer, to take advantage of "downward mobility" to advance his lot.<sup>72</sup> A church musician found it nearly impossible to refuse the offer of thirty dollars per night to entertain customers at a bawdy gambling house.<sup>73</sup> Such phenomenal wages not only provided substantial incomes for city residents, but also acted as a safety net for immigrants, ensuring that disappointed prospectors would not starve or lack the means to earn the return fare home. "If all things fail," an Irish carpenter, Thomas Kerr, noted in his diary, "[I would] take apick [*sic*] in my hand and earn 5 or 6 dollars a day working at the road making."<sup>74</sup>

Employment opportunities remained strong as long as the placers drew the steady stream of immigrants landing at San Francisco into the mountains. As surface deposits played out, however, independent prospectors joined the workforce of hydraulic and quartz mining companies, or increasingly, left the hills for the good steady wages of the cities. After 1852, the continuing rush of new immigrants and the growing numbers of dejected miners swelled San Francisco's population.<sup>75</sup> From a sleepy settlement of about one thousand inhabitants in 1848, San Francisco's population burgeoned to nearly thirty-five thousand in 1850, and approximately fifty thousand in 1853.<sup>76</sup> Despite thousands of successful or disappointed sojourners annually returning home, population figures continued to climb—particularly among the Chinese.<sup>77</sup> Although 5,700 Chinese left California for home between 1854 and 1856, more than 18,000 new Chinese immigrants entered the state during this same period.<sup>78</sup> Most set off for the mining regions, but an estimated five thousand laborers remained in San Francisco to seek work. Similarly, Irish immigrants continued to settle in the city, and by 1870, the number of Irish residents exceeded twenty-five thousand.<sup>79</sup>

As the numbers of skilled and unskilled workers increased in the cities, so also did competition for better or higher paying jobs. The urban employment situation was further complicated by the decline in independent prospecting and a generally slumping economy. Commodities speculation, undercapitalized investments, over-extended credit, and other manifestations of the Gold Rush ethic that had dominated the early growth of the city now threatened its commercial prosperity. As increased agricultural and industrial production began to ease chronic shortages and reduce inflated prices, risky ventures collapsed, dragging down with them many otherwise stable firms.<sup>80</sup> During the Panic of 1855, 197 businesses filed for bankruptcy in San Francisco, resulting in a commercial loss of over \$8 million in unpaid debt.<sup>81</sup> Wages declined under this deflationary cloud, and the specter of unemployment—unthinkable since 1848—descended upon the city. During the fall of 1856, an estimated three thousand jobless were looking for work in the city.<sup>82</sup> Thomas Kerr, the resolute Irish immigrant carpenter in San Francisco, wrote that a dejected acquaintance had given "Calafornia [*sic*] up as a bad job," and complained of his own situation that "[a companion] & I nearly walked the shoes off our feet looking for something to do, but in vain, there are too many here see[k]ing employment."<sup>83</sup>

As labor surpluses mounted, wages continued to fall. In 1854, skilled workers could demand only five to six dollars a day, while common laborers earned just three dollars.<sup>84</sup> Disgruntled workingmen, particularly the Irish, pointed toward Chinatown as the source of San Francisco's labor glut and declining wages. As in the mines, Irish immigrants allied themselves with other white laborers against what they perceived to be the unfair and seemingly unlimited "coolie" labor flooding San Francisco.<sup>85</sup> The Irish-white cause was bolstered in 1854 by Chief Justice Hugh C. Murray's Supreme Court decision which legally classified Chinese as "black," that is, as "contradistinguished from white."<sup>86</sup> Once thus categorized, Chinese were legally denied the right of naturalization granted to all "free white citizens," including the Irish, under the Constitution.

By legally drawing the racial line between Irish and Chinese immigrants, the state Supreme Court officially established the two opposing camps of the emerging labor issue. Despite nativist prejudice, Irish were still regarded as white and assimilable, and therefore included within, if not designated the leaders of, the white workingmen's camp.<sup>87</sup> Regarded as colored and unassimilable, Chinese were derided and abused despite their generally exemplary behavior and work ethic. Following this landmark decision, each immigrant group embarked on a different developmental path determined by the freedoms granted or limitations imposed by the white majority. The Chinese continued to pursue whatever means of success were possible under the Gold Rush ethic in the mines and cities. The Irish, however, adopted a new set of developmental criteria—the San Francisco ethic—the tenets of which directly contradicted those of the Gold Rush ethic. A clash between old and new, Irish and the Chinese, was inevitable.

### *Irish and Chinese Under the San Francisco Ethic*

San Francisco, while it can show so many enduring marvels for its few years, has also wasted much of its means in "riotous living"; but its young hot blood will cool by and by. Then ripened years and wisdom will subdue its foolish levities and more disgraceful vices.<sup>88</sup>

Riotous living under the influence of the Gold Rush ethic epitomized the early years of San Francisco's development. Crime was rampant, as were duels, divorce, suicide, political corruption, and debauchery of every kind. The city flaunted its ribald nature in a profusion of glitzy gambling halls, seedy prostitution houses, and raucous saloons. Over 500 establishments in 1853 sold liquor, including 144 taverns and 46 casinos.<sup>89</sup> The more strong drink poured in the casinos, the faster miners parted with their gold dust at the tables. "I was thunderstruck at the Gambling Houses," Thomas Kerr remarked, "its [*sic*] nothing to see a lot of fellows Coming from the Mines sit down at a table and betting perhaps an ounce on the turn up of a single Card."<sup>90</sup> Flowing from the worn pockets of miners to the brass tills of rapacious merchants or the silk purses of seductive women, gold surged through the commercial veins of the city, invigorating and enriching every commercial segment of the society. Riding the crest of this golden boom, the citizens of San Francisco lived hard and fast—

calculating rents, interests, and profits by the month, not year—in full knowledge that the days of surfeit were inevitably numbered.

The Panic of 1855 was the first indication that the boom was ending. Although this economic slowdown did not bring San Francisco's spectacular growth to a crashing halt, it did deliver a sobering message. The hot-blooded fervor—which had driven the inhabitants of the city since the first gold nuggets were discovered—began to cool. With the realization that the heyday of instant fortunes was drawing to a close, city residents were forced to reassess their personal goals and ambitions and to reexamine the present state and future development of the city. The gold-driven, unscrupulous sojourner mentality of the Gold Rush ethic began to give way to a new set of priorities and principles—the San Francisco ethic. This new ethic elevated personal accountability over accumulation, community enrichment over individualism, and civic responsibility over imprudence. Under its influence, citizens began to eschew short-term predatory practices and adopt a more moderate course of reputable long-term investment. In the process, their goals shifted from immediate accumulation of wealth to established residency, steady employment, gradual savings, and social mobility. Such ambitions were readily attainable within the inflated market for labor in San Francisco. However, the maintenance of relatively high wage labor—with its implicit guarantees of steady savings and socioeconomic mobility—required restrictions on the size of the labor pool. Consequently, the San Francisco ethic also included a “right of exclusion,” which over time, emerged in increasingly virulent forms of racial intolerance toward the Chinese.<sup>91</sup>

By 1854, San Francisco was already shedding its transient “tent city” countenance and adopting an air of permanence, if not impending greatness. The business district, firmly anchored by nineteen banking companies and nine insurance firms, could already boast over six hundred stone or brick buildings. Twenty bathing establishments, fourteen fire stations, ten public schools, six military companies, and two hospitals provided services essential to civic stability, and eighteen churches ministered to the spiritual needs of the city's diverse population. Residents could relax in their comfortable, if not elegant, homes, or enjoy an evening stroll along gas-lit boardwalks. They could dine out or shop at any of sixty-six restaurants, sixty-three bakeries, or fifty-eight markets and attend theaters offering a variety of entertainment from minstrels to operas.<sup>92</sup> San Francisco was quickly evolving into the great Pacific Coast city it was destined to be.<sup>93</sup>

These modern conveniences, institutions, organizations, and businesses reflected and enhanced the powerful settling influence which the San Francisco ethic exerted over all inhabitants of the city—particularly the Irish laboring class. Inherent in this new ethic was the implied promise that the city's expanding commerce and industry would provide long-term, steady employment for skilled and unskilled workers. Furthermore, it implicitly guaranteed that high wages would provide social mobility for laborers, transforming the blue-collar workingman of the 1850s into the white-collar capitalist of the 1860s.<sup>94</sup> For Irish immigrants denied a livelihood at home and relegated to more destitute cir-

cumstances in northeastern factories, San Francisco was truly a promised land—a “poor working-man’s paradise on earth”—where any respectable, hardworking man was assured “not merely of subsistence, but of a competence, and indeed a fortune in the long run.”<sup>95</sup>

This optimism was hard to fault. After the brief mid-decade panic, the economy of the city and state revived, and labor shortages continued to maintain high wages. A maturing San Francisco required thousands of unskilled workers to keep up with commercial and domestic expansion and to meet the demands for improvements in transportation, water, sewer, and gas systems. Between 1856 and 1870, for example, the city spent \$9.75 million on road construction alone.<sup>96</sup> Workers were also needed in the city’s growing industrial sector. Over 200 new manufacturing enterprises employing nearly 1,600 workers were operating in the city by 1860. In many of these factories, wages were as high as 2.5 times those offered for similar work on the Atlantic coast.<sup>97</sup> Irish workers filled many of these positions, took advantage of the high wages, and began to advance. In 1852, nearly half of the 2,560 Irish males employed in the city were laborers. By 1860, the Irish male population had grown to 4,464, but the percentage of laborers had fallen to less than one-third. Conversely, the numbers of white-collar, skilled and semi-skilled blue-collar Irish workers increased over this same period.<sup>98</sup> As promised under the San Francisco ethic, workers were climbing the ladder of opportunity and success: ordinary workers were becoming foremen; foremen were opening their own shops; and the more ambitious were becoming successful merchants.<sup>99</sup> By 1875, the city directory listed a broad range of Irish-owned establishments, including dry goods, grocers, butchers, druggists, stonecutters, carriage-makers, blacksmiths, bookstores, physicians, tailors, and undertakers.<sup>100</sup> Compared to the socioeconomic situation of Irish immigrants on the eastern seaboard, “the Bay Area Irish moved more rapidly from working class to middle class status.”<sup>101</sup>

Steady work, good wages, and an accumulation of savings promoted a more temperate, “homesteader” mentality. The sojourner attitude of the Gold Rush ethic, which had influenced the actions of most early Irish immigrants to California, now began to fade. Rather than returning to families in economically depressed Ireland or the socially depressed northeastern United States, Irish workers began sending for wives, families, and sweethearts with the intention of settling permanently in the city.<sup>102</sup> Between 1848 and 1887, they remitted £34 million to relatives in Ireland, including forty percent in the form of prepaid passages to the United States.<sup>103</sup> Increasingly, women were the recipients of these tickets, and many, direct from Ireland or other Irish communities around the world, sailed for California to find work, be married, or join husbands. By 1860, the once heavily male-skewed Irish population of San Francisco had nearly equalized, with men comprising only 53.4 percent of the city’s Irish-born population.<sup>104</sup> That same year, the Irish population of California surpassed thirty-three thousand, including more than nine thousand residing in San Francisco—numbers far exceeding those of any other white ethnic group.<sup>105</sup>

The influx of women exerted a settling influence not only on Irish communities, but on the city as a whole. In 1854, the common council passed one of the first ordinances to clean up San Fran-

cisco's vice-ridden environment. Although this early attempt to restrict houses of ill repute proved generally ineffective, it did initiate an anti-vice movement which ultimately closed down or forced underground the most blatant of these attractions.<sup>106</sup> In order to improve the safety of the streets and counter the city's notorious crime, the city government in 1856 increased the number of policemen (many of whom were Irish from the police commissioner on down) from 34 to 150.<sup>107</sup> Other efforts to enhance the livability of the city included constructing miles of cobblestone or planked roads and boardwalks; introducing gas lighting, street cleaning, and water and sewer systems; and opening new schools, churches, and hospitals. By 1860, San Francisco had grown into a bustling metropolis of 56,802, and was well on its way to shedding the trappings of its riotous origins and adopting the more refined—but still dynamic—San Francisco ethic.<sup>108</sup>

With steady jobs, stable families, and a more sociable environment, Irish immigrants in San Francisco began to settle permanently in the city. An essential step in this direction was the establishment of an Irish bank. Seeking to enhance the investment opportunities of Irish workers (and to capitalize on their expanding wealth), John Sullivan and other prominent Celtic entrepreneurs established San Francisco's first Irish financial institution in 1859, the Hibernia Savings and Loan Society.<sup>109</sup> From its inception, the bank proved highly successful as thousands of Irish deposited their assets in their compatriots' trusted hands. By 1870, bank deposits in 14,544 individual and business accounts exceeded \$10 million.<sup>110</sup> More importantly for the Irish community, however, the Hibernia bank provided affordable mortgage loans to workingmen. Countering exorbitant interest rates that climbed as high as three percent per *month* in 1859, the Hibernia bank offered loans "well below the going rate" to financially sound residents.<sup>111</sup> Irish workingmen took advantage of these loans to purchase property and build homes in virtually every ward of the city.<sup>112</sup> Due to steady employment, high wages, and the assistance of the Hibernia bank, "one Irishman in every three living in San Francisco owned real estate by the year 1870, a prosperous record unmatched anywhere in America."<sup>113</sup> This represented a tremendous socioeconomic advance for Bay Area Irish, especially compared to the East Coast, where even highly paid mechanics continued to live in New York ghetto tenements.

As their social and economic position improved, Irish settlers strove to enhance Celtic acceptance and standing within the city. In 1860, the Irish Benevolent Society was formed to promote the social and physical welfare of its membership. It offered aid to destitute Irish in the community and sponsored social meetings and outings to strengthen Celtic fellowship, pride, and identity. That same year, the St. Joseph's Benevolent Society was established to care for Irish indigents, and the Irish Fine Arts Aid Society raised funds for fine arts education of relatives in Ireland—an extremely generous gesture toward their homelands for such newly settled immigrants. In the late 1860s, two other benevolent societies, the Hibernia Provident Association and the Irish American Mutual Association, provided relief and aid to its membership and encouraged charity and industry within the community. Numerous other Irish associations opened during the 1860s, promoting religious, educational,



political, and social concerns of Irish citizens.<sup>114</sup> The number and diversity of these institutions reflected the growing commitment of Irish settlers in San Francisco to improving not only the welfare of their own community, but the standard of living of their adopted city. Throughout this decade, then, the Bay Area Irish were playing a prominent role in San Francisco's social development, laying the groundwork for an even more illustrious and more promising future.

To protect their social and economic investments in the city, the Irish sought power and security through their involvement in politics. The large Celtic population of San Francisco, comprising twenty-two percent of the city's registered voters in 1867, assured Irish politicians of substantial support.<sup>115</sup> Given the size of this electorate, it is not surprising that Irish candidates frequently were nominated for office and won election. In 1867, for example, Frank McCoppin captured the vote for mayor of San Francisco, the first Irishman to be elected to such an influential post in a major American city. Throughout the 1860s and 1870s, the Irish presence in California politics assured that Celtic interests would continue to be forcefully represented in local and state legislatures. In 1877, Irish political influence reached its pinnacle with the formation of the Denis Kearney-dominated Workingmen's Party of California.<sup>116</sup>

For the Irish who settled in San Francisco after 1855, the promise of steady work, high wages, and social mobility was beginning to be realized in the 1860s. Some workingmen were becoming managers or employers. Some were successful tradesmen or businessmen. Most others believed such economic advancement was assuredly only a matter of time.<sup>117</sup> Many had settled down, purchased homes, and sent for wives and family members. Irish financial, ethnic, and religious organizations fostered community cohesion and growth, and their gains were protected by supportive politicians.<sup>118</sup> Despite their advances, however, prosperity for the majority of Irish settlers rested precariously on the maintenance of high wages for unskilled labor—a situation dependent on steady demand and a limited labor pool. But this situation was seriously threatened (or so Irish workers believed) by the thousands of Chinese immigrants arriving annually at the gates of San Francisco.<sup>119</sup>

Although the San Francisco ethic had proven advantageous to the Irish and other white settlers, it had not improved prospects for Chinese immigrants. After the California Supreme Court decision of 1854 legally defined them as "colored" and therefore ineligible for naturalization, Chinese immigrants lost any real chance for equal justice, acceptance, assimilation, or advancement in California. They could not vote, hold office, attend school, or even testify against whites in court. As a result, they were politically powerless against the machinations of white workingmen who felt threatened by Chinese labor. As the city rebounded from the Panic of 1855, white settlers became more protective of their jobs, homes, and community and turned increasingly hostile to any perceived or potential threats to their prosperity. White workingmen, who less than a decade earlier had consented to equal opportunity and racial tolerance in the mines and cities, now began gathering on street corners to protest the rising numbers of Chinese "coolies" undercutting the working wage. In 1856, the

*Chronicle* poignantly captured the changed atmosphere within the city. “We are no longer a community of friends, whom like adventures and pursuits and a rather rough and checkered life have united in a brotherhood. Distrust has succeeded confidence, coldness has come like an unwelcome ghost between friends.”<sup>120</sup>

Chinese were the “unwelcome ghosts,” and the “coldness” was white callousness—the manifestation of racial intolerance inherent in the San Francisco ethic. In 1860, the number of Chinese in California had reached 34,933 (over 9 percent of the total population), ranking them just ahead of the Irish (33,147) as the largest foreign-born population in the state. Even more disturbing to white settlers than the large numbers of Chinese residing in the state, however, was their continued steady and strong immigration. An average of 5,000 Chinese per year arrived in California between 1855 and 1860 and nearly 5,800 annually between 1861 and 1865.<sup>121</sup> The majority of these new immigrants found employment outside the cities in mining, agriculture, and railroads. But approximately one-third joined the urban workforce—concentrated in San Francisco—as servants, restaurant and laundry workers, produce peddlers, diggers and graders, industrial laborers, or in other unskilled or semi-skilled positions.<sup>122</sup> Increasingly, they came in competition with Irish and other white workers with similarly limited training and skills for available wage labor.<sup>123</sup>

In the early 1870s, labor competition reached a critical point as thousands of Irish and Chinese workers descended on San Francisco following the completion of the transcontinental railroad. The Chinese population of the city rose to approximately twelve thousand in 1870, while the number of Irish-born exceeded twenty-five thousand.<sup>124</sup> The large number of relatively unskilled workers among these two immigrant populations swelled the labor pool and depressed wages. Work that paid one dollar an *hour* in 1850 brought only two dollars per *day* (if lucky) in 1875.<sup>125</sup> White workers complained that they could not pay mortgages or support a family on such low wages and blamed the problem on Chinese, who, they argued, could live cheaply in packed, squalid Chinatown tenements. Irish laborers maintained that a white family required at least four or five dollars a day to meet living expenses in San Francisco, when Chinese laborers—single men, alternately sharing beds in cramped, foul dormitories—could survive on as little as nineteen cents a day.<sup>126</sup> Even the pro-Chinese

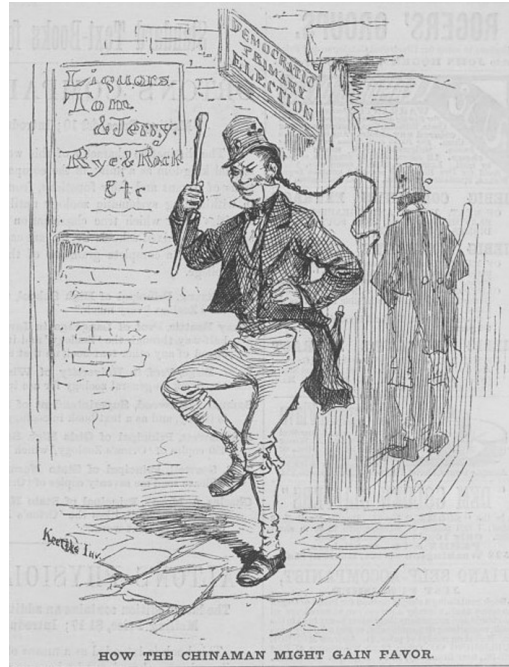


FIGURE 2-2 “How the Chinaman Might Gain Favor.” A barbed commentary by *Harper’s Weekly* employing popular American stereotypes of both Chinese and Irish. Photo credit: *Harper’s Weekly*, vol. 23 (12 April 1879) 296.

Methodist minister Otis Gibson admitted that Chinese laborers could “exist on very little indeed” and manage on “a dollar . . . [or] a dollar and a quarter a day.”<sup>127</sup>

Local employers were naturally attracted to dependable labor at such low wages, and Chinese steadily began taking over many of the unskilled positions in San Francisco. California Governor Frederick Low estimated that the majority of ditch digging and similar public works projects were worked by Chinese because they could be “commanded in any quantity easily at any time” and because “the labor is cheap.”<sup>128</sup> Similarly, Chinese began filling more and more positions in San Francisco’s fledgling industrial sector. In 1867, Chinese comprised ninety percent of the five hundred workers employed in San Francisco’s cigar industry. In 1877, as demand for the “status symbol” cigar stimulated industrial expansion, 5,500 Chinese were employed at piecework wages that amounted to only \$1.00 to \$1.40 per day. At this wage, most Irish labor was effectively excluded from the industry. Moreover, cheaper California cigars threatened the jobs of Irish cigar rollers on the East Coast, whose higher wages made their products less competitive.<sup>129</sup> In addition to the cigar industry, Chinese labor was in high demand by garment, shoe, and woolen manufacturers. In 1873, eighty percent of San Francisco’s shirt makers were Chinese, who earned approximately \$1.25 per day. That same year, one-half of all boots and shoes produced in the city were made by Chinese.<sup>130</sup> In 1882, Chinese comprised one-half of all workers employed in woolen manufacturing in California, and mill owners argued that they would be forced to close if they employed non-Chinese workers at white labor prices.<sup>131</sup>

Unskilled Irish workers were caught in a tightening vise of falling wages and rising labor competition. Unchecked immigration of Chinese labor, they argued, was limiting employment opportunities, depressing wages, and threatening the future prosperity of white workers. They responded to this threat by organizing anti-Chinese rallies, conventions, marches, boycotts, “anti-coolie clubs,” and violence. They harassed Chinese workers, lobbied businessmen and industrialists not to employ Chinese labor, and urged boycotts of Chinese-produced goods or imports. Mobs threatened non-compliant employers in the woolen mills and attacked a group of thirty Chinese (and their white foreman) employed in grading work.<sup>132</sup> In spring 1870, a mass rally was held in San Francisco against Chinese labor, followed by an angry parade of workers carrying anti-Chinese placards stating their objections and intentions: “No Servile Labor shall Pollute our Land,” “American Trade Needs no Coolie Labor,” and “The Coolie Labor System leaves us no Alternative—Starvation or Disgrace.” That summer, a state anti-Chinese convention was held. Billed as the “first Workingmen’s Convention ever held,” the chief objective of this convention was the suppression of “coolie” labor and limitation of Chinese immigration.<sup>133</sup> The anti-Chinese virulence of these rallies and clubs increased with their numbers throughout the 1870s, culminating in Denis Kearney’s “The Chinese Must Go!” Workingmen’s Party of California of 1877.<sup>134</sup> In most cases, the driving force behind the “anti-coolie” movement was the “Irish immigrant labor politicians [who] led the anti-Chinese movement as a crusade for a white working class.”<sup>135</sup>

To protect their labor interests and preserve future opportunities, Irish leaders of the white workmen lobbied for legislation to discourage, restrict, or stop the flow of Chinese laborers. Since the Irish constituted the largest white ethnic group in the state, and their influence “stretched from the union local and the volunteer fire company through city hall,”<sup>136</sup> local and state governments responded by passing a series of discriminatory taxes and provisions aimed at slowing Chinese immigration. As early as 1855, the state legislature had attempted to discourage Chinese immigration by imposing a fifty-dollar head tax on each passenger arriving at California ports who was ineligible for citizenship.<sup>137</sup> Since nearly all such passengers were Chinese, the act was clearly intended to increase the financial burden for this group, and thus restrict immigration of its less affluent labor class. In more direct, overtly discriminatory fashion, the state legislature passed two bills in 1858 specifically designed to “discourage” and “prevent” Chinese immigration. Although the state supreme court immediately invalidated all of these acts, they paved the way for even more imaginative legislation. In 1862, the state government levied a monthly “Police Tax” on all Chinese over the age of eighteen who were not employed in rice, tea, sugar, or coffee production and not already paying the Miners’ Tax. The official title of this act left no doubt about its proponents or purpose: “An Act to Protect Free White Labor against Competition with Chinese Coolie Labor, and to Discourage the Immigration of the Chinese into the State of California.”<sup>138</sup> As the labor situation in the cities worsened with the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, the state legislature again came to the aid of distressed white workers, approving an act banning Chinese laborers from working on specific public works projects in 1870, and two more laws in 1872 prohibiting Chinese from owning real estate or securing business licenses.<sup>139</sup>

On the local level, San Francisco officials also devised creative responses to the “problem” of Chinese labor. In 1873, the Board of Supervisors passed a variable license fee for laundries, assessing businesses using horse-drawn carts for laundry delivery eight dollars per year and those without horse carts an annual fee of sixty-dollars. Since almost all Chinese laundries delivered by hand, their businesses were disproportionately affected by this taxation. This same selective licensing fee was also applied to vegetable peddlers in the city using carts (mostly whites) or shoulder poles (entirely Chinese). That same year, the Board passed the “Cubic Air” Ordinance, which required a minimum living space of five hundred cubic feet per person in a San Francisco boarding house, a direct attack on Chinatown’s cramped bachelor dorms where most Chinese laborers lived. Although rarely enforced, this ordinance and the discriminatory licensing fees reflected the inventive and vindictive means by which city officials attempted to inhibit Chinese business and restrict Chinese labor.

In order to further deflate Chinese morale, the state and local legislatures passed measures which directly attacked life within the Chinese community. Citing the need to curb vice in Chinatown, the Board of Supervisors passed a law in 1865 authorizing authorities to close *suspected* brothels and impose heavy fines on Chinese running houses of prostitution. Taking these local efforts to a higher level,

the state legislature in 1870 passed an act requiring Asian women to provide character references before entering California ports.<sup>140</sup> Penalties for noncompliance with these laws ranged from heavy fines to imprisonment. Although this anti-vice legislation coincided with efforts to “civilize” San Francisco, the primary intent was clear—to make the city as inhospitable as possible to Chinese men and women.

The objective, then, of all state and local discriminatory legislation was to discourage Chinese laborers from immigrating to California, and failing this, to limit employment opportunities and social mobility, and at all cost, to prevent permanent settlement. In essence, the white residents of California, one-third of whom were Irish or of Irish descent, used their influence and political power to deprive Chinese of the right to pursue social and economic prospects open to other immigrant groups as defined by the San Francisco ethic.<sup>141</sup> The legislation legally denied Chinese access to one opportunity after another—steady work, savings opportunities, a family homestead, social mobility, and civic participation—forcing them to follow the only immigrant option available, the sojourner’s pursuit of wealth under the Gold Rush ethic. Cut off from the white route to success, they were forced back into the work-centered, male-dominated, China-oriented track dictated by the precepts of maximizing income and minimizing expenses. Confined now to their Chinatown borders as much by white antagonism as cultural preference, Chinese workers concentrated on earning (in whatever licit or illicit way possible) savings sufficient to return home to a life of respectable ease. Ironically, having restricted the Chinese to this antiquated “predatory” system, whites then further attacked them for depressing wages, fostering degeneracy, rejecting assimilation, and draining California of its riches.

In order to protect themselves from legal and slanderous attacks and to preserve even the limited rights and freedoms they still possessed, Chinese merchants and laborers formed their own immigrant organizations. In 1854, several traditional village associations, which had previously been established to aid hometown immigrants in San Francisco, coalesced into a larger, more powerful institution called the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association. Popularly known as the Six Companies, this association served San Francisco’s Chinese community as employment agency, charitable society, legal counsel, banking facility, social center, arbitration board, political delegation, clearing house, and police force. Similar to other immigrant associations, the Six Companies served as a mutual aid association—locating housing and employment for new arrivals, providing assistance for sick and indigent residents, and guaranteeing passage for returning citizens. In addition, it functioned as a legal and political organization, opposing prejudicial legislation, promoting merchant and labor concerns, and representing Chinese issues in local and national politics.<sup>142</sup> Comparable to the various private and public organizations established for the benefit of Irish and other white immigrants, the Six Companies offered a comprehensive range of services to assist Chinese immigrants in maximizing their opportunities in this new and increasingly hostile environment.

The overarching goal of the Six Companies was to protect the interests and welfare of the Chinese community, particularly business opportunities for wealthy merchants and the right of free immigra-

tion and employment for Chinese laborers. To achieve this goal, the association hired Colonel Frederick A. Bee as legal counsel to challenge the barrage of discriminatory legislation passed by local and state governments to restrict those rights and opportunities. Colonel Bee, a notable attorney and future Chinese consul in San Francisco, appeared constantly in court to oppose petty municipal ordinances enacted to harass Chinese merchants and workers, or to challenge state legislation impinging on constitutional rights guaranteed to all aliens entering or residing in the United States.<sup>143</sup> Bee and other representatives of the Six Companies repeatedly argued the positive attributes of Chinese immigration before state and federal courts, organizations, and investigative committees. They opposed the workingman's condemnation of Chinese "coolie" labor with tributes from leading, white San Francisco businessmen attesting to the unparalleled economic contribution Chinese had made to the development of California agriculture, industry, and transportation. They countered negative stereotypes of Chinatown's corruption and depravity with testimonials from white employers praising the cleanliness, sobriety, diligence, and punctuality of their Chinese workers.<sup>144</sup> Despite the considerable efforts of Bee and the Six Companies, however, they were unable to overcome the racial intolerance of the San Francisco ethic, which by 1880 had become institutionalized in California politics.

The line separating "colored" Chinese and "white" Irish, which had clearly been drawn in 1854, widened with every downturn in employment or wages. White workingmen blamed the growth of cheap Chinese labor for California's economic decline in the 1870s and were convinced that unrestricted Chinese immigration would ultimately destroy the socioeconomic advancements guaranteed under the San Francisco ethic.<sup>145</sup> Consequently, they intensified pressure on local, state, and national politicians for passage of legislation to protect the future of white labor in San Francisco and California. This time, the issue was settled in Washington. The clash between Irish-led white workingmen and Chinese laborers in California ultimately resulted in the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which prohibited the immigration of Chinese laborers for ten years—a term which eventually was extended indefinitely.<sup>146</sup>

The Irish-led white workingmen's movement against Chinese labor had succeeded. They were free to pursue economic security and social mobility under the conditions of the San Francisco ethic without the threat of competition from cheap Chinese labor. Chinese had few alternatives but to pursue an uncertain fate under the Gold Rush ethic—enduring the regulations and restrictions imposed on them as individuals, a community, and a labor force—in order to accumulate as much savings as possible before the door of opportunity was completely closed and barred against them.

### *Inclusion versus Exclusion*

Thus, in general with but a poor beginning, in a manner friendless, strangers in a strange land, have our people struggled and fought, and been victorious. Their bones will lie far away from the hallowed dust of their kindred; yet every mountain, hillside, and valley in this favoured land will give evidence to posterity of their toil, enterprise, and success.<sup>147</sup>

Although this quotation is attributed to an Irish settler, it applies almost equally well to the Chinese experience in California. Both immigrant groups struggled amid strangers to quarry the wealth and reap the benefits this new land had to offer. In the process, both groups significantly contributed to the settlement and economic development of San Francisco and the state. Many enterprising but unfortunate Irish and Chinese died building a promising future for “posterity.” “Victory,” however, remained the sole possession of the accepted and established Irish, while racial contempt and disdain marred the legacy of the “defeated” Chinese.

The contrasting destinies of these two immigrant groups stemmed from the different developmental paths open to each. During the initial period of racial tolerance under the Gold Rush ethic, California’s abundant surface gold and unlimited business opportunities were open to all immigrants adventurous enough to risk the journey to this remote Pacific outpost. By the mid-1850s, however, declining yields from independent placer mining and diminishing profits from inflation-inspired speculation forced sojourning immigrants in California to reassess their goals. The predatory, hedonistic, and debased activities prevalent under the Gold Rush ethic proved incongruent with efforts to expand commerce, improve agricultural production, and develop urban enterprises, services, and facilities. Consequently, a new San Francisco ethic emerged, promoting civic responsibility, financial security, and social mobility for skilled and unskilled labor. In order to sustain the steady employment and high wages necessary to attain this workingman’s dream, it was necessary that demand for labor continue to exceed supply. Although that ratio was occasionally reversed by temporary economic slumps and labor excesses, the continually expanding population of San Francisco, particularly the conspicuous numbers of newly arrived Chinese workers, threatened to saturate the labor pool and permanently depress wages.

As immigration continued unchecked, competition increased between Chinese and Irish and other white workingmen for steady, unskilled work. Misunderstanding and mistrust between the two ethnic groups grew into animosity and racial antagonism. White workers viewed Chinese, and the millions of their countrymen anxious to immigrate to California, as a direct and potent threat to the San Francisco ethic’s guarantee of economic and social mobility. Consequently, they pressured local and state governments to enact legislation restricting opportunities for Chinese laborers and businessmen. Repressive legislation and racial harassment limited Chinese laborers to pursuit of a sojourner existence under the Gold Rush ethic in Chinatown—a life of bachelorhood, cramped dormitories, hard labor, and limited diversions. Denied the right of naturalization, barred from specific fields of employment, physically and legally harassed in urban occupations, and refused access to open housing and public schools, Chinese immigrants were forcibly denied, rather than willingly rejected, assimilation with whites under the San Francisco ethic.

But was this an inevitable solution to Irish-Chinese labor tensions? Rather than actively opposing Chinese access to pursuit of opportunity under the San Francisco ethic, what might have been the

consequence of “inclusion”—promoting the settlement of Chinese immigrants within the San Francisco community? By allowing Chinese access to social and economic mobility, to purchasing homes, sending for wives and brides, and enrolling children in integrated schools, would they, like the Irish, then have had a greater stake in improving the city and maintaining high wages?<sup>148</sup> Could both groups have achieved assimilation and success? Perhaps this was a proposition too complex (and ultimately, too problematic) for white workingmen, raised with nativist intolerance and racial prejudice and protecting a rare opportunity for a better life, to have seriously considered in the frontier atmosphere of nineteenth-century California. As the largest ethnic immigrant groups in San Francisco, competing for limited resources and opportunities in a dynamic but finite economic market, Irish and Chinese laborers in San Francisco were destined to clash. Inevitably, only one side would prevail.

## Notes

1. The *Eighth Census* lists the total population of Irish (born in Ireland) in California as 33,147 and Chinese as 34,935. Together, these two groups comprised nearly fifty percent of the total foreign-born population of the state (146,528). “State of California, Table No. 5: Nativities of Population,” *Population of the United States in 1860: Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census under the Direction of the Secretary of the Interior* by Joseph C. G. Kennedy (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1864), 34.
2. R. A. Burchell, *The San Francisco Irish, 1848–1880* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979), 34 and *passim*.
3. Roger Daniels, *Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States since 1850* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), chapter 1.
4. There are a number of excellent studies of the movement to restrict and prohibit Chinese immigration. A few of the most comprehensive are Gunther Barth, *Bitter Strength: A History of the Chinese in the United States, 1850–1870* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964); Mary Roberts Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration* (New York: Arno Press, 1969); Eliot Grinnell Mears, *Resident Orientals on the American Pacific Coast: Their Legal and Economic Status* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1928); Stuart C. Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant: The American Image of the Chinese, 1785–1882* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); Elmer C. Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973); and Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).
5. Frank Soule, John H. Gibson, and James Nisbet, *The Annals of San Francisco* (New York: Appleton, 1855), 425.
6. Doctors and medicine in the camps were rare, and when available in the city, prices could be prohibitive. In 1849, a doctor’s fee for consultation and prescription in San Francisco was one hundred dollars, and a dose of Laudanum cost forty dollars. Alexander McLeod, *Pigtails and Gold Dust* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, 1947), 20.
7. Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 212.
8. Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 210.
9. Jack Chen, *The Chinese of America* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), 39.



10. Chen, *Chinese of America*, 39.
11. *Daily Alta California*, 31 August 1849.
12. David Lavender, *California: A Bicentennial History* (New York: Norton, 1976), 63.
13. Col. Albert S. Evans provides a vivid description of the San Francisco gambling houses and miners trying their luck for the first time at the gaming tables. *A la California: Sketch of Life in the Golden State* (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft, 1873), 372–373.
14. William Taylor, *Seven Years' Street Preaching in San Francisco, California* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1856), 113.
15. Taylor, *Seven Years' Street Preaching*, 291 [Taylor's emphasis].
16. *Era*, 28 October 1855, quoted in Roger W. Lotchin, *San Francisco, 1846–1856: From Hamlet to City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974; reprint, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 276 (page citations are to the reprint edition).
17. Taylor, *Seven Years' Street Preaching*, 304 [Taylor's emphasis].
18. Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 217.
19. A commentary in the *Daily Alta California* indicates the miserable condition of San Francisco's streets: "A horse and cart tumbled into the huge hole in Sansome Street, at the junction with Long Wharf, on Saturday night. This place ought to be filled up immediately." 1 January 1852.
20. According to Helen Throop Purdy, six major fires ravaged San Francisco between December 1949 and June 1951. "Portsmouth Square," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 3, no.1 (April 1924), 38. Herbert Howe Bancroft presents details of these fires, including property losses which totaled tens of millions of dollars. *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft*, vol. 23 (San Francisco: History Company, 1886), 202, fn 52.
21. Charles L. Camp, "An Irishman in the Gold Rush: The Journal of Thomas Kerr," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (September, 1928), 402.
22. Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 425.
23. Taylor captures both the sense of optimism and tolerance of early prospectors drawn by the Gold Rush: "The great magnet is its [California's] rich deposits of *virgin gold in banks that never fail*, and on which *every man* may draw" [author's emphasis]. *Seven Years' Street Preaching*, 282.
24. Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 412.
25. *Daily Alta California*, 21 January 1852.
26. *Daily Alta California*, 12 May 1852.
27. Chen notes that prior to World War I, approximately sixty percent of all Chinese in the United States emigrated from Taishan County in Guangdong province (*Chinese of America*, 18). Bruce E. Hall notes that Chinese miners in California sent so much gold back to Taishan during the 1850s and 1860s that it became one of China's most prosperous regions. *Tea That Burns: A Family Memoir of Chinatown* (New York: Free Press, 1998), 19.
28. Quoted in Diane Mei Lin Mark and Ginger Chih, *A Place Called Chinese America* (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 1982), 5.
29. Among the many excellent studies of Chinese emigration, some of the most comprehensive are Corinne Hoexter, *From Canton to California: The Epic of Chinese Immigration* (New York: Four Winds Press, 1976); S. W. Kung, *Chinese in American Life: Some Aspects of Their History, Status, Problems, and Contributions* (Seattle:

- University of Washington Press, 1962); Ruthanne Lum McCunn, *Chinese American Portraits: Personal Histories 1828–1988* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988); Betty Lee Sung, *Mountain of Gold: The Story of the Chinese in America* (New York: Macmillan, 1967); Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1989); Shih-Shan Henry Tsai, *China and the Overseas Chinese in the United States, 1868–1911* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1983); and Kil Young Zo, *Chinese Emigration to the United States, 1850–1880* (New York: Arno Press, 1978).
30. Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 288.
  31. McLeod, *Pigtails and Gold Dust*, 38. In Chapter 2, McLeod clearly describes Chinese participation in several civic activities in early San Francisco.
  32. Quoted in Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 214. Chen notes that in 1849, East Coast wages for farmers averaged sixteen dollars per month, and mechanics about thirty-two dollars per month (*Chinese of America*, 39).
  33. The *Seventh Census* reports the number of miners in California as 57,797 out of a total state population of 77,631 (“Statistics of California, Table X: Professions, Occupations and Trades of the Male Population,” *The Seventh Census of the United States, 1850*, compiled by J. D. B. DeBow, Superintendent of the United States Census [Washington: Robert Armstrong, Public Printer, 1853], 973). According to statistics presented in *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1869*, a total of 773 Chinese immigrated to California during this period (1869; reprint, New York: Kraus Reprint, 1965, 532). William Tung, however, reported the number of Chinese in California at the end of 1850 at four thousand (*The Chinese in America, 1820–1973: A Chronology and Fact Book* [Dobbs Ferry, NY: Oceana Publications, 1974], 8). Bancroft reported that the first immigrants were three Chinese—two men and one woman—who arrived in San Francisco in 1848 (*Works*, vol. 23, 336). The men immediately set out for the mines. Chen notes that as early as 1788, the British East India Company employed 100 Chinese craftsmen on Vancouver Island to construct sailing ships for the Pacific trade (*Chinese of America*, 4).
  34. “The white immigrant, who may never before have met with specimens of the race, involuntarily stops, and gazes curiously upon this peculiar people, whose features are so remarkable, and whose raiment is so strange, yet unpretending, plain and useful” (Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 386). McLeod describes the Chinese affinity for large American boots (*Pigtails and Gold Dust*, 45).
  35. For more details on Chinese in the mining regions, see Stephen Williams, *The Chinese in the California Mines, 1848–1860* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1930; reprint, San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, 1971).
  36. According to Tsai, the population of Chinese in the United States (almost all of whom resided in California) increased from 323 in 1849, to 447 in 1850, to 2,716 in 1851 (*China and the Overseas Chinese*, 22). Bancroft reports the number of Chinese men in California as 787 in January 1850, and 7,512 in January 1851. Five months later, that number had nearly doubled to 11,787. Though the accuracy of these figures is problematic, there is consensus of a rapid increase in Chinese immigration around 1851 (*Works*, vol. 23, 336).
  37. *Daily Alta California*, 31 August 1849.
  38. Published reports list the number of Chinese immigrants as 2,716 in 1851, and 18,434 in 1852 (*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, 532). Another 2,317 returned to China during these same years. According to Chen, about one-third of Chinese immigrants in California remained in cities while the other two-thirds worked in the mines (*Chinese of America*, 41). For more information and statis-

- tics on Chinese labor in the mining regions, see Ping Chiu, *Chinese Labor in California: An Economic Study* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1963), chapter 2.
39. For details on early legislation to control Chinese immigration, see Coolidge (*Chinese Immigration*, 32–52). The California legislature enacted the Foreign Miners' License Tax Law in 1850 in response to the large numbers of Mexicans working the mining fields. The action of the legislature served as a precedent for future anti-Chinese legislation. The Foreign Miners' Tax itself became an almost exclusively Chinese miners' tax after 1852.
  40. Lucile Eaves notes that Chinese working these claims were not generally "interfered with as they contented themselves with working such poor diggings as it was not thought worth while to take from them." *A History of California Labor Legislation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1910), 118.
  41. Tung, *Chinese in America*, 8.
  42. Quoted in Willard B. Farwell, *The Chinese at Home and Abroad: Together with The Report of the Special Committee of the Board of Supervisors of San Francisco, on the Condition of the Chinese Quarter of that City* (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft, 1885, 10). Ironically, when Haight was elected governor in 1867, he ran on a strongly anti-Chinese platform. For more on the missionary stance on Chinese immigration and the exclusion issue, see Robert Seager II, "Some Denominational Reactions to Chinese Immigration to California, 1856–1892," *Pacific Historical Review* 28 (1959), 49–66.
  43. *Monitor*, 17 April 1869.
  44. William H. Davis, *Seventy-Five Years in California* (San Francisco: John Howell Books, 1967), 4. The subjugation of the Native American Indian population of California was not one of peace and good will. Spanish militia herded Indians into the missions, guarded them against escape, and forced them to work Spanish lands as slaves.
  45. For more on the role of Native Americans in California Missions, see Robert H. Jackson and Edward Castillo, *Indians, Franciscans, and Spanish Colonization: The Impact of the Mission System on California Indians* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995).
  46. According the *Tenth Census*, the total Irish population in the United States in 1850 was 961,719. U.S. Census Office, Department of Interior, *Tenth Census of the United States: 1880* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1883), xxxvi.
  47. One of the most interesting narratives of transcontinental "drift" is found in Frank Roney's account of his life as an exiled Irish nationalist, traveling mechanic, and labor organizer. For details of his experiences in Ireland and the United States, see Ira Cross (Ed.), *Frank Roney: Irish Rebel and California Labor Leader* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1931).
  48. For details on early Irish traders and settlers in the region, see H. H. Bancroft, *History of California*, vol. III (San Francisco: History Company, 1886); and Thomas F. Prendergast, *Forgotten Pioneers: Irish Leaders in Early California* (San Francisco: Trade Pressroom, 1942), chapters 2–4. For more information on Irish emigration to the United States, see Dennis Clark, *Hibernia America: The Irish and Regional Cultures* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986); John F. Maguire, *The Irish In America* (New York: D. & J. Sadlier, 1868; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1969) (citations are to the reprint edition); Lawrence J. McCaffrey, *The Irish Diaspora in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976); Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); and William V. Shannon, *The American Irish* (New York: Macmillan, 1963).

49. Maguire relates the story of Patrick Clark who walked nearly the entire distance from Missouri to California pushing his cart of supplies (*Irish in America*, 268–269). For estimates of Irish in early San Francisco, see Burchell (*San Francisco Irish*, 3). The *Tenth Census of the United States*, lii, lists the total population of San Francisco in 1850 as 34,776. Soule et al. estimate the city's population at the close of 1850 at "between twenty-five and thirty thousand" (*Annals of San Francisco*, 301).
50. Lotchin notes that one-half of San Francisco's early Irish residents arrived from Australia (*San Francisco, 1846–1856*, 105).
51. Maguire, *Irish in America*, 270. According to Clark, American construction companies in the nineteenth century hired Irish immigrants to help build the great canal and railroad systems linking the eastern seaboard states with the interior. Relying on picks and shovels, and their physical strength and stamina, Irish workers diligently labored to dig, level and grade the nation's modern transportation lines (*Hibernia America*, chapters 2–3).
52. Prendergast, *Forgotten Pioneers*, 113.
53. Quoted in Prendergast, *Forgotten Pioneers*, 114.
54. Soule et al. report that during the first year of the Gold Rush, "Individuals made their five thousand, ten thousand, and fifteen thousand dollars in the space of only a few weeks. One man dug out twelve thousand dollars in six days. Three others obtained eight thousand dollars in a single day." Newspaper reporters traveling through the mining areas averaged about one hundred dollars per day. They also note that by the end of 1850, "great numbers of all these sea and land immigrants, after they had been some months at the mines and made perhaps a few thousand dollars, returned by way of San Francisco, to their former homes" (*Annals of San Francisco*, 211, 300).
55. Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 402.
56. The *Daily Alta California* "Prices Current" report provides a detailed list of prices for daily products in San Francisco. For prices in the mines, see Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 213.
57. Chiu lists California gold production figures for 1848–1880. Precise figures for gold production in 1852 were reported as \$81,294,700, and as \$55,485,396 in 1855 (*Chinese Labor in California*, 141).
58. Indeed, the sheer numbers of Irish prospectors at this time worked to their advantage. As the largest and most united group, they could successfully oppose nativist attacks, and sway—even dominate—opinion.
59. Theodore W. Allen presents a convincing theory of racial identification for Irish Catholics, who, due to their desperately poor economic and social position, were subjected to severe racial discrimination. After immigrating to the United States, Irish Catholics continued to struggle against ethnic bigotry exhibited by Americans, and to elevate the Irish above the ranks of non-white, poor laborers—in particular, slaves and free blacks. *The Invention of the White Race: Volume One, Racial Oppression and Social Control* (New York: Verso, 1994).
60. For more information on nativist prejudice toward Irish and Chinese, see Saxton (*Indispensable Enemy*, chapters 1–6); and Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian American in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), chapters 1–2. Saxton argues that white miners imposed limitations on mining rights to citizens or assimilable aliens. Since Chinese were not assimilable—a general perception in the early mining regions made official by the California Supreme Court in 1854—and the Irish were, Chinese became the ostracized group and colored "enemy."
61. Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 411–412.

62. For more information on racist and nativist attitudes in the United States at this time, see Daniels (*Asian America*, chapter 2, and *passim*).
63. For a comprehensive examination of anti-Chinese legislation in California, see Coolidge (*Chinese Immigration*, chapter 5, and *passim*).
64. Prendergast, *Forgotten Pioneers*, 183.
65. Edwin R. Bingham (Ed.), *California Gold* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 9.
66. Prendergast, *Forgotten Pioneers*, 90–91.
67. For more on James Phelan, see Patrick J. Dowling, *California: The Irish Dream* (San Francisco: Golden Gate Publishers, 1988), chapter 7.
68. Dowling, *California: The Irish Dream*, chapter 7.
69. An early San Francisco lawyer, John McCracken, remarked that “the startling chances that are thrown open to confront the industrious, energetic and determined mind” cannot be imagined by those who have never visited the city (Lotchin, *San Francisco, 1846–1856*, 296).
70. Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 498.
71. Burchell reports the labor rate in San Francisco for 1849–1850 as \$1 per day (*San Francisco Irish*, 66). Soule et al. note that laborers refused ten dollars per day and mechanics rejected twenty dollars per day in 1849 (*Annals of San Francisco*, 214).
72. Lotchin, *San Francisco, 1846–1856*, 83.
73. Taylor, *Seven Years’ Street Preaching*, 11.
74. Camp, “An Irishman in the Gold Rush,” 396.
75. Soule et al. note, “A fair proportion of the recent immigrants remained in San Francisco, while many who had been laboring in the mines for the previous year or two with indifferent success . . . now visited the city with the view of permanently residing [there]” (*Annals of San Francisco*, 413).
76. Lotchin reports the early San Francisco population as 850 to 1000 in 1848 (*San Francisco, 1846–1856*, 8). The *Seventh Census* lists the city’s population as 34,776 (*Seventh Census of the United States, 1850*, lii). Soule et al. estimate the population of the city at 50,000 in 1853, with about two-thirds “Americans (including British and Irish born—who probably amounted to one-sixth of the number),” or about 5,000 Irish and 3,000 Chinese (*Annals of San Francisco*, 488).
77. The *Eighth Census* lists the population of San Francisco as 56,802. “State of California, Table No. 3: Population of Cities, Towns, etc.,” *Population of the United States in 1860*, 31.
78. Cleveland to Browne, 27 July 1868, states the exact figures as 18,275 arriving and 5,714 departing. *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, 532.
79. Burchell reports the Irish population in San Francisco’s twelve wards as 25,735 (*San Francisco Irish*, 47).
80. A consummate speculator in early San Francisco trade was Isaac Friedlander, who made—and lost—a fortune shipping wheat to Europe. For more on Friedlander and his role in monopolizing California’s wheat trade, see Rodman Paul, “The Wheat Trade Between California and the United Kingdom,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 45 (December, 1958), 391–412.
81. Chiu records the total debt attributed to these bankruptcies as \$8,317,827, with a net deficit (after liquidating assets) of \$6,838,652 (*Chinese Labor in California*, 4).
82. Lotchin, *San Francisco, 1846–1856*, 84.

83. Camp, "An Irishman in the Gold Rush," 400–401.
84. Bancroft, *Works*, vol. 24, 110, fn 17.
85. Burchell concedes that the large number of Chinese laborers in California, accentuated by their "alien" features and customs, made them an obvious target of nativist resentment. However, he argues that if not for the Chinese, nativist objection to foreign mining and labor would have fallen on the next most populous "alien" population—the Irish. Therefore, an Irish-white alliance against Chinese labor was essential to the preservation of labor opportunities for the Irish, but also necessary to deflect nativist resentment away from the large Irish population of San Francisco (*San Francisco Irish*, 181).
86. Tung reprints the full text of the Supreme Court of the State of California, 1854 decision in the case of *The People, Respondent, v. George W. Hall, Appellant*. (*Chinese in America*, 96–97). Walton Bean notes that Chief Justice Hugh Murray was only twenty-nine years old at the time of this decision (*California: An Interpretive History*, 3rd ed. [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978], 142).
87. For more on the issue of color and Irish inclusion in white Anglo-Saxon society, see Matthew F. Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).
88. Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 426.
89. Soule et al. quote the *Christian Advocate*, which reported that liquor could be purchased at 537 outlets in San Francisco (*Annals of San Francisco*, 452).
90. Camp, "An Irishman in the Gold Rush," 395.
91. Burchell notes that by 1860, as workingmen and politicians were focusing on the Chinese as the root of San Francisco's various problems, "The city forgot its qualms about other immigrants to the direct advantage of the Irish immigrants" (*San Francisco Irish*, 37).
92. Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 492. Lotchin, *San Francisco, 1846–1856*, 288–289. Dowling recounts the experiences of the renowned Irish songstress, Catherine Hayes, who performed to enthusiastic crowds in San Francisco between 1852 and 1854 (*California: The Irish Dream*, chapter 15).
93. Soule et al. note, "San Franciscans can now ask for nothing more on the score of domestic comforts. Their streets and houses are well lighted by a beautiful gas-light; [and] they dwell in elegant and handsomely-furnished houses" (*Annals of San Francisco*, 548).
94. A *Sacramento Union* editorial succinctly summarizes the workers' positive attitude toward economic upward mobility: "The workingman of today is the capitalist of tomorrow." 2 February 1878.
95. Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 423.
96. Burchell, *San Francisco Irish*, 21.
97. Burchell gives the exact numbers as 229 factories and 1,564 employees (*San Francisco Irish*, 17). Shumsky notes that this higher wage existed in 12 industries, including foundries, cigar, flour, agricultural implements, lumber, woolen goods, leather, and brick factories (Neil L. Shumsky, *The Evolution of Political Protest and the Workingmen's Party of California* [Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1991], 49–50).
98. Burchell reports the exact figures as 45.1 percent laborers in 1852, and 32.5 percent in 1860 (*San Francisco Irish*, 54).
99. Dowling, *California: The Irish Dream*, 20–21.
100. Dowling, *California: The Irish Dream*, 40–41.

101. Shumsky, *Evolution of Political Protest*, 57.
102. Lotchin lists a number of reasons why early California immigrants did not immediately send for, or come with, wives and families: uncertainty of mine yields and length of stay; long, dangerous and costly journey; high living expenses; frequent fires; high crime rate; vice-ridden streets; and scarcity of social organizations (*San Francisco, 1846–1856*, 303–304).
103. Ide O’Carroll, *Models for Movers: Irish Women’s Emigration to America* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1990), 17.
104. Burchell notes that the Irish immigration population in California was never as heavily male-dominated as other ethnic populations. In 1852, women already comprised 30.3 percent of the Irish-born population of San Francisco (*San Francisco Irish*, 49).
105. *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*, xxxii, 34.
106. Soule et al., *Annals of San Francisco*, 550. Evans relates how strong the gambling environment of the city remained even in the 1870s. However, due to anti-vice initiatives, gambling was forced underground in both the white and Chinese quarters (*A la California*, chapter 12).
107. The increase in the number of policemen was only temporary. In 1862, the number had dropped to 54 (Burchell, *San Francisco Irish*, 22–23).
108. *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*, xxxi–xxxii.
109. Prendergast lists Hibernia’s first board of directors as John Sullivan, John McHugh, Edward Martin, J. Horan, D. J. O’Callaghan, C. C. O’Sullivan, Robert Tobin, William McCann, James Ross, N. K. Masten, M. Cody, and John Mell. For more on the formation, expansion, and influence of this financial institution, see Prendergast, *Forgotten Pioneers*, 199, chapter 26.
110. Burchell, *San Francisco Irish*, 97.
111. Burchell, *San Francisco Irish*, 41–43. Burchell notes that in addition to the Hibernia bank, other Irish lending institutions were also active in San Francisco. Moreover, after 1861, the legislature approved the establishment of homesteading associations which sold urban and rural homesteads to workers for a membership fee and monthly installments. Also see Dowling, *California: The Irish Dream*, 40.
112. Burchell, *San Francisco Irish*, 47. Otis Gibson testified before a joint congressional committee in 1877 that the value of houses in San Francisco ranged from \$800–\$2,000. *Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1877), 424.
113. Dowling, *California: The Irish Dream*, 40. Maguire reports an even higher incidence of home ownership among the city’s working class: “Almost every working-man whether mechanic, labourer, or drayman, owns the house in which he lives, and the lot on which it stands.” Though probably exaggerated, the number of workingman homeowners in San Francisco was certainly unique (*Irish in America*, 275).
114. Burchell, *San Francisco Irish*, chapter. 6.
115. Burchell, *San Francisco Irish*, 116.
116. For more on Irish involvement in the WPC, see Shumsky, *Evolution of Political Protest*, chapters 7–8.
117. Cross notes that throughout the 1850s and mid-1860s, “The prevalent opinion among working people . . . was that the workingman of today might become the employer of tomorrow, or at least he might be his own employer” (*Frank Roney*, 229).
118. According to Lee, “[Irish immigrants] were eligible for naturalization and enjoyed access to the legal and political systems. Their concentration in large numbers in urban centers and their eligibility to vote as

- naturalized citizens gave the Irish an almost immediate foothold in American politics at the local level. Irish ethnic political organization stretched from the union local and the volunteer fire company through city hall, and ran deeply through the Democratic Party and the union movement" (*Orientalists*, 70).
119. White labor fear of unchecked immigration of Chinese laborers was heightened in 1868 with the confirmation of the Burlingame Treaty, which guaranteed equal protection under the law for Chinese citizens residing in the United States.
  120. *Chronicle*, 25 June 1856.
  121. The *Eighth Census* lists the Chinese and Irish populations of California, and reports the aggregate state population as 379,994 ("State of California, Table No. 5: Nativities of Population," *Population of the United States in 1860*, 34). Sandmeyer reports the total Chinese immigration for 1861–1865 as 28,814 or 5763/year (*Anti-Chinese Movement in California*, 16). Tsai notes, however, that from 1855–1860, 16,339 Chinese (or an average of 2,723 per year) returned to China, and from 1861–1865 12,693 (or an average of 2,539 per year) left for China (*China and the Overseas Chinese*, 22).
  122. Chen, *Chinese of America*, 35, 41. Saxton reports that in 1860, Chinese comprised eight percent of San Francisco's population. By 1880, their proportion of the city's population had jumped to nearly 30 percent (*Indispensable Enemy*, 4). An 1868 government survey listed in Tsai reports that about 60 percent of all Chinese workers in California were employed in either Pacific railroad construction (10,000) or mining (13,000) (*China and the Overseas Chinese*, 21). For a good introduction to the use of Chinese laborers on the Union Pacific, see Stan Steiner, *Fusang: The Chinese Who Built America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979). For an excellent, recent publication on the construction of the transcontinental railroad, see Stephen Ambrose, *Nothing Like It in the World: The Men Who Built the Trans-Continental Railroad, 1863–1869* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).
  123. Sandmeyer, *Anti-Chinese Movement in California*.
  124. Eaves reports that with the completion of the transcontinental railroad, approximately 10,000 Chinese and 2,000 white laborers entered California's cities seeking employment (*History of California Labor Legislation*, 135). Coolidge lists the precise numbers for Chinese residents of San Francisco as 12,030 in 1870 (*Chinese Immigration*, 503). The *Ninth Census* lists the number of Chinese residents of San Francisco as 11,729. Table xviii (401) lists the number of Irish-born residents as 25,864, and the city's aggregate population as 149,473 (U. S. Census Office, Department of the Interior, *The Ninth Census of the United States, 1870*, 3 vols., compendium [Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1872], table xx, 448). According to Chen, during the latter half of the 1860s, one-half of Chinese immigrants were employed by mining companies (*Chinese of America*, 48).
  125. Burchell reports the wage for laborers in 1868 ranged from \$25 to \$50 per month. He also notes, "At the end of the decade [1869] labor was plentiful and wages were correspondingly low" (*San Francisco Irish*, 66, 71).
  126. Philip S. Foner and Daniel Rosenberg (Eds.), *Racism, Dissent and Asian Americans, 1850–Present: A Documentary History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 30.
  127. Testimony of Rev. Otis Gibson, *Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration*, 423.
  128. Testimony of Governor Frederick F. Low, *Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration*, 78.
  129. Chen notes that low-priced California cigars forced eastern cigar manufactures to introduce new technology and specialized divisions of labor to compete (*Chinese of America*, 109–110).



130. The percentage of Chinese labor in the shoe industry remained constant throughout the decade. The *Oriental* reports that San Francisco's six shoe factories employed 1,000 Chinese and only 200 whites (13 January 1876).
131. Chen, *Chinese of America*, 111–113. Chiu notes that in the San Francisco woolen industry, “white workers, outside of foremen, were a rarity in the early 1860s” (*Chinese Labor in California*, 90).
132. Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration*, 259.
133. Sandmeyer, *Anti-Chinese Movement in California*, 47.
134. Chen notes that two of the most “potent” anti-coolie clubs were formed in 1876: the United Brothers of California and the Anti-Chinese Union of San Francisco (*Chinese of America*, 137).
135. Lee, *Oriental*s, 67.
136. Lee, *Oriental*s, 70.
137. “An Act to Discourage the Immigration to This State of Persons Who Cannot Become Citizens Thereof” (Tung, *Chinese in America*, 51–52).
138. The tax was set at \$2.50 per month (Tung, *Chinese in America*, 54–56). Coolidge notes that in 1863, the state Supreme Court declared this act unconstitutional (*Chinese Immigration*, 72).
139. Herbert Hill, “Anti-Oriental Agitation and the Rise of Working-Class Racism,” *Society* (January/February, 1973): 47–48.
140. Sandmeyer, *Anti-Chinese Movement in California*, 51.
141. Burchell reports that Irish (including immigrants and those born in the United States) comprised one-third of San Francisco's total population in 1880, and thirty-seven percent of the city's white population (*San Francisco Irish*, 3–4).
142. Chen, *Chinese of America*, 28–29; Daniels, *Asian America*, 23–26; Saxton, *Indispensable Enemy*, 8–9; Tsai, *China and the Overseas Chinese*, 31–38.
143. For a brief example of Frederick Bee's support of the Chinese and the Six Companies, see Foner and Rosenberg, *Racism, Dissent and Asian Americans*, 42–46.
144. For a comprehensive source of information on the positive contributions of Chinese immigration on California's economic development, see *Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration*. See also George F. Seward, *Chinese Immigration, Its Social and Economic Aspects* (New York: Arno Press, 1970).
145. Burchell notes that after the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, labor in San Francisco became “plentiful and wages were correspondingly low” (*San Francisco Irish*, 71).
146. Chinese exclusion proved an embarrassment to the United States during World War II, when our Chinese allies were still legally prevented from entering the country. Consequently, the act was repealed in 1943.
147. Unnamed source quoted in Maguire, *Irish in America*, 279.
148. The immigration history of Hawaii suggests that this indeed might have been the case. For more on settled Chinese communities, see Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, chapter 4.