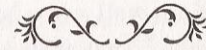


These strikes reflected a feeling of Mexican ethnic solidarity. “*Abajo los Gerentes*,” the workers chanted, “down with the bosses.” Mexican musicians provided entertainment for the parades and meetings, while Mexican merchants, *comerciantes*, offered food and clothing to the strikers. More important, the *huelgas* (strikes) were often supported by Mexican *mutualistas* (benevolent associations). “The Mexicans belong to numerous societies and through these they can exert some sort of organizational stand together,” reported a local newspaper during the 1903 strike at the Clifton-Morenci mines.<sup>52</sup>

The *mutualistas* reinforced this consciousness of being Mexican north of the border. Everywhere in the barrios of Arizona, Texas, New Mexico, and California, there were organizations like Sociedad Benevolencia, Miguel Hidalgo, Sociedad Mutualista, Sociedad Obreros, and Sociedad Mutualista Mexicana. Members of the *mutualistas* were laborers as well as shopkeepers and professionals such as lawyers, newspaper editors, and doctors. These associations helped individual members cover hospitalization and funeral expenses, provided low-interest loans, and raised money for people in time of dire need. Taking some of their names from national heroes and conducting their meetings in Spanish, they reminded Mexicans of their common origins as children of “the same mother: Mexico.”<sup>53</sup>

The *mutualistas* dispelled the myth of Mexicans as a quiet, siesta-loving, sombreroed people. Through these ethnic organizations, Mexicans were resisting labor exploitation and racism. In 1911, several Texas *mutualistas* came together in a statewide convention, the Congreso Mexicanista. Concerned about anti-Mexican hostility and violence, the congress called for ethnic solidarity: “*Por la raza y para la raza*,” “All for one and one for all.” One of the delegates, the Reverend Pedro Grado, defined their struggle as that of class and race: “The Mexican braceros who work in a mill, on a hacienda, or in a plantation would do well to establish Ligas Mexicanistas, and see that their neighbors form them.” United, they would have the strength to “strike back at the hatred of some bad sons of Uncle Sam, who believe themselves better than the Mexicans because of the magic that surrounds the word *white*.” The *mutualistas* reflected a dynamic Mexican-American identity—a proud attachment to the culture south of the border as well as a fierce determination to claim their rights and dignity in “occupied” Mexico.<sup>54</sup>

## 8



## SEARCHING FOR GOLD MOUNTAIN

### *Strangers from a Different Shore*

CALIBAN ALSO COULD have been Asian. “Have we devils here?” the theatergoers heard Stephano declare in *The Tempest*. “Do you put tricks upon’s with savages and men of Inde, ha?” The war against Mexico reflected America’s quest for a passage to India. During the nineteenth century, this vision inspired Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri to proclaim the movement toward Asia as America’s manifest destiny. The “White” race was obeying the “divine command, to subdue and replenish the earth,” as it searched for new and distant lands. As whites migrated westward, Benton pointed out, they were destroying “savagery.” As civilization advanced, the “Capitol” had replaced the “wigwam,” “Christians” had replaced “savages,” and “white matrons” had replaced “red squaws.” Under the “touch” of an “American road to India,” Benton exclaimed, the western wilderness would “start” into life, creating a long line of cities across the continent. Crossing the Rocky Mountains and reaching the Pacific, whites were finally circumnavigating the earth to bring civilization to the “Yellow” race. “Orientalized,” to use the concept of Edward Said, Asians had become the “Other.”<sup>1</sup>

The annexation of California led to not only American expan-



sion toward Asia but also the migration of Asians to America. In a plan sent to Congress in 1848 shortly after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, policymaker Aaron H. Palmer predicted that San Francisco, connected by railroad to the Atlantic states, would become the "great emporium of our commerce on the Pacific." Chinese laborers, he proposed, should be imported to build the transcontinental railroad as well as to bring the fertile lands of California under cultivation. "No people in all the East are so well adapted for clearing wild lands and raising every species of agricultural product... as the Chinese."<sup>2</sup>

### *Pioneers from Asia*

A year later, Chinese migrants began arriving in America, but they came for their own reasons. Many sought sanctuary from intense conflicts in China caused by the British Opium Wars. Significantly, while British colonialism was pushing Irish westward across the Atlantic, it was also driving Chinese eastward across the Pacific. Many migrants were also fleeing from the turmoil of peasant rebellions such as the Taiping Rebellion and the bloody strife between the Punti ("Local People") and the Hakkas ("Guest People") over possession of the fertile delta lands. "Ever since the disturbances caused by the Red bandits and the Kejia bandits," a Chinese government report noted, "dealings with foreigners have increased greatly. The able-bodied go abroad."<sup>3</sup>

Harsh economic conditions also drove Chinese migrants to seek survival in America. Forced to pay large indemnities to Western imperialist powers, the Qing government imposed high taxes on peasant farmers; unable to pay these taxes, many of them lost their lands. Floods intensified the suffering. "The rains have been falling for forty days," an 1847 report to the emperor stated, "until the rivers, and the sea, and the lakes, and the streams have joined in one sheet over the land [for miles]." Behind the emigrating spirit was starvation. "The population is extremely dense," an observer explained; "the means of subsistence, in ordinary times, are seldom above the demand, and consequently, the least failure of the rice crop produces wretchedness."<sup>4</sup>

Learning about Gam Saan, "Gold Mountain," many of the younger, more impatient, and more daring Chinese left their villages for America. The migrants were mostly men, planning to work abroad temporarily. They were illiterate or had very little schooling, but they dreamed of new possibilities inspired by stories

of the "gold hills." To these hopeful migrants, America possessed an alluring boundlessness, promising not only gold but also opportunities for employment. Sixteen-year-old Lee Chew recalled the triumphant return of a fellow villager from the "country of the American wizards." With the money he had earned overseas, he bought land as spacious as "four city blocks" and built a palace on it. Then he invited his family and friends to a grand party where they were served a hundred roasted pigs, chickens, ducks, geese, and an abundance of dainties. Young Lee was inspired, eager to leave for this fabulous country.<sup>5</sup>

America seemed so beckoning. During the 1860s, a Chinese laborer might earn three to five dollars a month in China; in California, he could work for the railroad and make thirty dollars a month. A folk song expressed the emotions of many migrants:

*In the second reign year of Haamfung [1852],  
a trip to Gold Mountain was made.  
With a pillow on my shoulder, I began my  
perilous journey:  
Sailing a boat with bamboo poles across the  
sea,  
Leaving behind wife and sisters in search of  
money,  
No longer lingering with the woman in the  
bedroom,  
No longer paying respect to parents at home.<sup>6</sup>*

The immigrants migrated to America voluntarily as free laborers: some of them paid their own way, and probably most of them borrowed the necessary funding under the credit-ticket system. Under this arrangement, an individual borrowed money from a broker to cover the cost of transportation and then paid off the loan plus interest out of his earnings in the new country. The majority of the migrants were married. As they prepared to leave their farms and villages, they realized that they would probably not see their wives again for years. But they promised to return someday.<sup>7</sup>

And so they left China, by the hundreds of thousands. Three hundred and twenty-five Chinese migrants joined the "Forty-Niners" rushing to California. Like their counterparts from the eastern United States and elsewhere, they came to search for gold. A year later, 450 more Chinese arrived in California; then



suddenly, they came in greatly increasing numbers—2,716 in 1851, and 20,026 in 1852. By 1870, there were 63,000 Chinese in the United States. Most of them—77 percent—were living in California, but they were elsewhere in the West as well as in the Southwest, New England, and the South. The Chinese constituted a sizable proportion of the population in certain areas: 29 percent in Idaho, 10 percent in Montana, and 9 percent in California. By 1930, about 400,000 had made the Pacific crossing to America. Significantly, about half of them stayed and made the United States their permanent home.

At first, there were signs that the Chinese were welcome in California. "Quite a large number of the Celestials have arrived among us of late, enticed thither by the golden romance that has filled the world," the *Daily Alta California* reported in 1852. "Scarcely a ship arrives that does not bring an increase to this worthy integer of our population." The paper predicted that "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." Three years later, merchant Chun-Chuen Lai of San Francisco sanguinely observed that "the people of the Flowery land [China] were received like guests," and "greeted with favor. Each treated the other with politeness. From far and near we came and were pleased."<sup>8</sup>

But Lai failed to notice the rapidly changing political climate that had begun to turn against his fellow immigrants. From the goldfields of the Sierras came the nativist cry: "California for Americans." In 1852, the California legislature enacted a second foreign miners' tax. Aimed mainly at the Chinese, this tax required a monthly payment of three dollars from every foreign miner who did not desire to become a citizen. Even if they had wanted to, the Chinese could not have become citizens, for they had been rendered ineligible to citizenship by a 1790 federal law that reserved naturalized citizenship for "whites." By 1870, California had collected five million dollars from the Chinese, a sum representing between 25 to 50 percent of all state revenue.<sup>9</sup>

During the 1860s, twenty-four thousand Chinese, two-thirds of the Chinese population in America, were working in the California mines. Most of these miners were independent prospectors. Many organized themselves into small groups and formed their own companies. A newspaper correspondent described companies of twenty or thirty Chinese "inhabiting close cabins, so small that one... would not be of sufficient size to allow a couple

of Americans to breathe in it. Chinamen, stools, tables, cooking utensils, bunks, etc., all huddled up together in indiscriminate confusion, and enwreathed with dense smoke, presented a spectacle." These miners worked mainly placer claims. To extract the gold, they shoveled sand from the stream into a pan or rocker and then washed away the sand and dirt until only the heavy particles of gold remained. Chinese miners became a common sight in the California foothills, especially along the Yuba River and its tributaries and in towns like Long Bar, North-east Bar, and Foster Bar. They wore blue cotton shirts, baggy pants, wooden shoes, and wide-brimmed hats and had queues hanging down their backs.<sup>10</sup>

As mining profits declined, however, the Chinese began leaving the goldfields. Thousands of them joined other Chinese migrants to work on the railroad. In February 1865, fifty Chinese workers were hired by the Central Pacific Railroad to help lay tracks for the transcontinental line leading east from Sacramento; shortly afterward, fifty more were hired. The immigrant laborers were praised by company president Leland Stanford as "quiet, peaceable, industrious, economical—ready and apt to learn all the different kinds of work" required in railroad building. "They prove nearly equal to white men in the amount of labor they perform, and are much more reliable," company superintendent Charles Crocker reported. "No danger of strikes among them. We are training them to do all kinds of labor: blasting, driving horses, handling rock as well as pick and shovel." When white workers demanded that the company stop hiring Chinese laborers, Crocker retorted: "We can't get enough white labor to build this railroad, and build it we must, so we're forced to hire them. If you can't get along with them, we have only one alternative. We'll let you go and hire nobody but them." Within two years, Crocker had hired twelve thousand Chinese, representing 90 percent of the entire workforce. The savings derived from the employment of Chinese rather than white workers was enormous. The company paid the Chinese workers thirty-one dollars a month; had management used white workers, they would have had to pay the same wages plus board and lodging, which would have increased labor costs by one-third.<sup>11</sup>

The construction of the Central Pacific Railroad line was a Chinese achievement. They performed the physical labor required to lay the tracks and provided important technical labor such as operating power drills and handling explosives for boring the



tunnels through Donner Summit. The Chinese workers were, in one observer's description, "a great army laying siege to Nature in her strongest citadel. The rugged mountains looked like stupendous ant-hills. They swarmed with Celestials, shoveling, wheeling, carting, drilling and blasting rocks and earth." Time was critical to the company's interest, for the amount of payment it received in land and subsidy from the federal government was based on the miles of track it built. Determined to accelerate construction, the managers forced the Chinese laborers to work through the winter of 1866. Snowdrifts, over sixty feet tall, covered construction operations. The workers lived and worked in tunnels under the snow, with shafts for air and lanterns for light. Work was dangerous, occasionally deadly. "The snow slides carried away our camps and we lost a good many men in those slides," a company official reported matter-of-factly; "many of them we did not find until the next season when the snow melted."<sup>12</sup>

The Chinese workers went on strike that spring. Demanding wages of forty-five dollars a month and an eight-hour day, five thousand laborers walked out "as one man." The company offered to raise their wages from thirty-one to thirty-five dollars a month, but the strikers stood by their original demands. "Eight hours a day good for white men, all the same good for Chinamen," they declared. In response, the managers moved to break the strike. They wired New York to inquire about the feasibility of transporting ten thousand blacks to replace the striking Chinese. Superintendent Crocker isolated the strikers and cut off their food supply. "I stopped the provisions on them," he stated, "stopped the butchers from butchering, and used such coercive measures." Coercion worked. Virtually imprisoned in their camps in the Sierras and starving, the strikers surrendered within a week.<sup>13</sup>

Forced to return to work, the Chinese completed the railroad, the "new highway to the commerce of Asia." After they were released by the Central Pacific Railroad in 1869, thousands of them went to San Francisco, where their compatriots were already heavily involved in manufacturing. The formation of an urban Chinese community and the industrial development of the city paralleled each other. In 1860, only 2,719 Chinese resided in San Francisco, representing 7.8 percent of the Chinese population in California. Ten years later, the Chinese population in the city had soared to 12,022, a 343 percent increase. Meanwhile, San Francisco had begun to develop as a locus of industry: in 1860, it had about two hundred manufacturing firms employ-

ing some fifteen hundred workers. Ten years later, with nearly one-fourth of California's Chinese population living there, San Francisco had more than twelve thousand laborers employed in industrial production and was the ninth leading manufacturing city in the United States. Half of the labor force in the city's four key industries—boot and shoe, woolens, cigar and tobacco, and sewing—was Chinese.<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile, in the rural regions the Chinese were helping to develop California's agriculture. Between 1860 and 1880, hundreds of Chinese were able to become farmers through tenancy, which offered a way to enter the business with minimum capital. "We found the broad fields apportioned off and rented to separate companies of Chinamen who were working them upon shares—each little company having its own cabin," an observer reported in 1869. "Teams being furnished them, they do all the working, preparing the ground, seeding, tending the crop, and gathering the fruit, leaving nothing for the proprietor to do but to attend to the marketing, and to put into his own pocket half of the proceeds."<sup>15</sup>

Most of the Chinese engaged in agriculture were laborers. They helped to transform farming in California from wheat to fruit. "They were a vital factor," historian Carey McWilliams wrote, "one is inclined to state *the* vital factor, in making the transition possible." Experienced farmers in the Pearl River Delta before coming to America, the Chinese shared their agricultural knowledge with their white employers, teaching them how to plant, cultivate, and harvest orchard and garden crops.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, the Chinese built the agricultural industry of California. In the San Joaquin and Sacramento river deltas, they constructed networks of irrigation canals and miles of dikes and ditches. Wielding shovels and working waist-deep in water, they drained the tule swamps and transformed the marshes into agricultural lands. In 1869, a writer for the *Overland Monthly* acknowledged the change in the landscape wrought by the Chinese: "The ditches and dykes which at present protect only a few little patches here and there of the most fruitful soil that the sun shines on, may be made to perform a like service all over the Tulare swamps; and the descendants of the people who drained those almost limitless marshes on either side of their own swiftly-flowing Yellow River, and turned them into luxuriant fields, are able to do the same thing on the banks of the Sacramento and the San Joaquin." In the Salinas Valley, Chinese laborers dug six miles of ditches to drain the land, cutting the peat soil "with huge



knife-like spades and pitching it out with steel forks and hooks." Their work boosted the value of the land from \$28 per acre in 1875 to \$100 per acre two years later.<sup>17</sup>

In 1869, the *Overland Monthly* described the ubiquitous presence of Chinese laborers in California agriculture: "Visit a hop plantation in the picking season, and count its 50, 60, or 70 pickers in the garb of the eastern Asiatics, working steadily and noiselessly on from morning till night, gathering, curing and sacking the crop . . . Go through the fields of strawberries . . . the vineyards and orchards, and you will learn that most of these fruits are gathered or boxed for market by this same people." In 1880, the Chinese represented 86 percent of the agricultural labor force in Sacramento County, 85 percent in Yuba, and 67 percent in Solano.<sup>18</sup>

Though they were paid low wages, Chinese farm laborers did not always passively accept what their employers offered them. In 1880, fruit pickers in Santa Clara County went out on strike for higher wages. After the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act reduced the supply of farm labor, Chinese agricultural workers demanded higher rates for their wages. In 1900, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported: "Relieved, by the operation of the Exclusion Acts, in great measure from the pressing competition of his fellow-countrymen, the Chinese worker was not slow to take advantage of circumstances and demand in exchange for his labor a higher price, and, as time went on, even becoming Americanized to the extent of enforcing such demands in some cases through the medium of labor organization."<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile, Chinese workers became targets of white labor resentment, especially during hard times. "White men and women who desire to earn a living," the *Los Angeles Times* reported on August 14, 1893, "have for some time been entering quiet protests against vineyardists and packers employing Chinese in preference to whites." Their protests soon became violent as economic depression led to brutal anti-Chinese riots by unemployed white workers throughout California. From Ukiah to the Napa Valley to Fresno to Redlands, Chinese were beaten and shot by white workers and often loaded onto trains and shipped out of town. These immigrants bitterly remember this violence and expulsion as the "driving out."<sup>20</sup>

"Ethnic antagonism" in the mines, factories, and fields forced thousands of Chinese into self-employment—stores, restaurants, and especially laundries. Chinese washhouses were a common

sight as early as the 1850s. By 1890, there were sixty-four hundred Chinese laundry workers in California, representing 69 percent of all laundry workers. During this period, the ratio of Chinese laundry workers to all Chinese workers jumped from one out of every seventeen to one out of every twelve.<sup>21</sup>

The "Chinese laundryman" was an American phenomenon. "The Chinese laundryman does not learn his trade in China; there are no laundries in China," stated Lee Chew who came to America in the early 1860s. "The women there do the washing in tubs and have no washboards or flat irons. All the Chinese laundrymen here were taught in the first place by American women just as I was taught." In China, observed Chin Foo Wong of New York, laundry work was a "woman's occupation," and men did not "step into it for fear of losing their social standing."<sup>22</sup>

Why did Chinese men in America enter this line of work? Unlike the retail or restaurant business, a laundry could be opened with a small capital outlay of from seventy-five to two hundred dollars. The requirements were minimal: a stove, trough, dry room, sleeping apartment, and a sign. A Chinese laundryman did not need to speak much English to operate his business. "In this sort of menial labor," said one, "I can get along speaking only 'yes' and 'no.'" He could also manage without knowing numbers. "Being illiterate, he could not write the numbers," another laundryman said, describing a fellow operator. "He had a way and what a way! See, he would draw a circle as big as a half dollar coin to represent a half dollar, and a circle as big as a dime for a dime, and so on. When the customers came in to call for their laundry, they would catch on to the meaning of the circles and pay accordingly."<sup>23</sup>

But "Chinese laundrymen" were also "pushed" into their occupation. Laundry work was one of the few opportunities that were open to Chinese. "Men of other nationalities who are jealous of the Chinese have raised such a great outcry about Chinese cheap labor that they have shut him out of working on farms or in factories or building railroads or making streets or digging sewers," explained Lee Chew. "So he opens a laundry." Thus the "Chinese laundry" represented a retreat into self-employment from a narrowly restricted labor market. "You couldn't work in the cigar factories or the jute or woolen mills any more—all the Chinese had been driven out," old Chinese men later sadly recalled. "About all they could be was laundrymen or vegetable peddlers then." Racial discrimination drove Chinese into work they disdained as degrading to them as men.<sup>24</sup>



While most Chinese lived in the West, they were present elsewhere in the United States, including the South. A year after the end of the Civil War, a planter declared: "We can drive the niggers out and import coolies that will work better at less expense, and relieve us from the cursed nigger impudence." The plan was to turn from black to Chinese labor. "Emancipation has spoiled the negro and carried him away from the fields of agriculture," the editor of the *Vicksburg Times* in Mississippi complained in 1869. "Our prosperity depends entirely upon the recovery of lost ground, and we therefore say let the Coolies come." That same year, the southern planters' convention in Memphis announced that it was "desirable and necessary to look to the teeming population of Asia for assistance in the cultivation of our soil and the development of our industrial interests." In his address to the convention, labor contractor Cornelius Koopmanshoop announced that his company had imported thirty thousand Chinese laborers into California and offered to make them available in the South.<sup>25</sup>

Planters soon saw that the Chinese could be employed as models for black workers: hardworking and frugal, the Chinese would be the "educators" of former slaves. During the 1870s, Louisiana and Mississippi planters imported several hundred Chinese laborers and pitted them against black workers. They praised the foreign workers for outproducing blacks and for "regulating" the "detestable system of black labor." A southern governor frankly explained: "Undoubtedly the underlying motive for this effort to bring in Chinese laborers was to punish the negro for having abandoned the control of his old master, and to regulate the conditions of his employment and the scale of wages to be paid him." An editor in Kentucky spoke even more bluntly when he predicted that the introduction of Chinese labor would change the "tune" from "forty acres and a mule" to "work nigger or starve." Planters welcomed their new workers. "Messrs. Ferris and Estell, who are cultivating on the Hughs place, near Prentiss," a Mississippi newspaper reported in 1870, "recently imported direct from Hong Kong, a lot of Chinese, sixteen in number, with whom as laborers, they are well pleased."<sup>26</sup>

The Chinese did not stay long on the plantations, however. As early as 1871, the *New Orleans Times* noted that the Chinese preferred to work in the city rather than do the "plodding work of the plantations." In 1880, about a hundred Chinese were living in New Orleans, where they worked as laundrymen, cigar makers, shoemakers, cooks, and woodcarvers. By then the southern plant-

ers had overthrown Reconstruction; with their political power over blacks restored, they quickly lost interest in Chinese labor.<sup>27</sup>

The use of Chinese labor and its success raised two crucial questions. "What shall we do with them is not quite clear yet," remarked Samuel Bowles in 1869 in his book *Our New West*. "How they are to rank, socially, civilly, and politically, among us is one of the nuts for our social science students to crack,—if they can." And what would happen to white workers as America's industrial development depended more and more on Chinese labor?<sup>28</sup>

One answer to both questions was the concept of a yellow proletariat in America. According to this view, the Chinese would constitute a permanently degraded caste labor force. They would be in effect a unique "industrial reserve army" of migrant laborers forced to be foreigners forever. Thus, unlike European immigrant laborers, the Chinese would be a politically proscribed labor force. Serving the needs of American employers, they would be here only on a temporary basis. "I do not believe they are going to remain here long enough to become good citizens," Central Pacific manager Charles Crocker told a legislative committee, "and I would not admit them to citizenship." The employers of Chinese labor argued that they did not intend to allow the migrants to remain and become "thick" (to use Crocker's term) in American society.<sup>29</sup>

The advocates of Chinese labor offered assurances to white laborers. They explained that Chinese "cheap" labor would reduce production costs, and the resulting low prices for goods would be equivalent to a wage increase for white workers. They also argued that Chinese labor would upgrade white labor, for whites would be elevated to foremen and directors. "If society must have 'mudsills,'" they elaborated, "it is certainly better to take them from a race which would be benefited by even that position in a civilized community, than subject a portion of our own race to a position which they have outgrown." Charles Crocker explained:

I believe that the effect of Chinese labor upon white labor has an elevating instead of degrading tendency. I think that every white man who is intelligent and able to work, who is more than a digger in a ditch... who has the capacity of being something else, can get to be something else by the presence of Chinese labor.... There is proof of that in the fact that after we got Chinamen to work, we took the more intelligent of the white laborers and made foremen of them. I know of several of them now who never expected, never had a dream that they were going to be anything but shovelers



of dirt, hewers of wood and drawers of water, and they are now respectable farmers, owning farms. They got their start by controlling Chinese labor on our railroad.<sup>30</sup>

What enabled businessmen like Crocker to degrade the Chinese into a subservient laboring caste was the dominant ideology that defined America as a racially homogeneous society and Americans as white. The status of racial inferiority assigned to the Chinese had been prefigured in the black and Indian past.<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, the newcomers from a Pacific shore found that racial qualities previously assigned to blacks had become "Chinese" characteristics. Calling for Chinese exclusion, the *San Francisco Alta* warned: "Every reason that exists against the toleration of free blacks in Illinois may be argued against that of the Chinese here." White workers referred to the Chinese as "nagurs," and a magazine cartoon in California depicted the Chinese as a blood-sucking vampire with slanted eyes, a pigtail, dark skin, and thick lips. The Chinese were described as heathen, morally inferior, savage, childlike, and lustful. Chinese women were condemned as a "depraved class," their immorality associated with a physical appearance "but a slight removal from the African race."<sup>32</sup>

Like blacks, Chinese men were viewed as threats to white racial purity. At the 1878 California Constitutional Convention, John F. Miller warned: "Were the Chinese to amalgamate at all with our people, it would be the lowest, most vile and degraded of our race, and the result of that amalgamation would be a hybrid of the most despicable, a mongrel of the most detestable that has ever afflicted the earth." Two years later, lawmakers prohibited marriage between a white person and a "negro, mulatto, or Mongolian."<sup>33</sup>

In the minds of many whites, the Chinese were also sometimes associated with Indians. The editor of the *California Marin Journal* declared that the winning of the West from the "red man" would be in vain if whites were now to surrender the conquered land to a "horde of Chinese." Policies toward Indians suggested a way to solve the "Chinese Problem." "We do not let the Indian stand in the way of civilization," stated former New York governor Horatio Seymour, "so why let the Chinese barbarian?" In a letter published in the *New York Times*, Seymour continued: "Today we are dividing the lands of the native Indians into states, counties, and townships. We are driving off from their property the game upon which they live, by railroads. We tell them plainly, they must

give up their homes and property, and live upon corners of their own territories, because they are in the way of our civilization. If we can do this, then we can keep away another form of barbarism which has no right to be here." A U.S. senator from Alabama "likened" the Chinese to Indians, "inferior" socially and subject to federal government control. The government, he argued, should do to the Chinese what it had already done to the Indians—put them on reservations.<sup>34</sup>

All three groups—blacks, Indians, and Chinese—shared a common identity: they were all Calibans of color. This view was made explicit in the 1854 California Supreme Court decision of *People v. Hall*. A year before, George W. Hall and two others were tried for murdering Ling Sing. During the trial, one Caucasian and three Chinese witnesses testified for the prosecution. After the jury returned a guilty verdict, the judge sentenced Hall to be hanged. Hall's lawyer then appealed the verdict, arguing that the Chinese witnesses should not have been permitted to testify against Hall. An existing California statute provided that "no black or mulatto person, or Indian, shall be permitted to give evidence in favor of, or against, any white person," and the question was whether this restriction included the Chinese. In its review, the California Supreme Court reversed Hall's conviction, declaring that the words "Indian, Negro, Black, and White" were "generic terms, designating races," and that therefore "Chinese and other people not white" could not testify against whites.<sup>35</sup>

This view of a shared racial status among all three groups led President Rutherford B. Hayes to warn Americans about the "Chinese Problem." The "present Chinese invasion," he argued in 1879, was "pernicious and should be discouraged. Our experience in dealing with the weaker races—the Negroes and Indians—is not encouraging. I would consider with favor any suitable measures to discourage the Chinese from coming to our shores."<sup>36</sup>

Three years later, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusionary Act, which prohibited the entry of Chinese laborers. Actually, there was very little objective basis for viewing Chinese immigrants as a threat to a homogeneous white society. The Chinese constituted a mere .002 percent of the U.S. population in 1880. Restriction was rooted in racism.

Behind the exclusion act were fears and forces that had little relationship to the Chinese. Something had gone wrong in America, and an age of economic opportunity seemed to be coming to an end. This country had been a place where an abundance of



land and jobs had always been available. But suddenly, during the closing decades of the nineteenth century, society was experiencing what historian John A. Garraty called "the discovery of unemployment." This new reality plunged America into a national crisis. Enormous expansions of the economy had been followed by intense and painful contractions: tens of thousands of men and women were thrown out of work, and social convulsions such as the violent 1877 Railroad Strike rocked the nation.<sup>37</sup>

Within this context of economic crisis and social strife, Congress made it unlawful for Chinese laborers to enter the United States for the next ten years and denied naturalized citizenship to the Chinese already here. Support for exclusion was overwhelming. In the debate, lawmakers revealed fears that went much deeper than race. They warned that the presence of an "industrial army of Asiatic laborers" was exacerbating class conflict between labor and capital within white society. They claimed that white workers had been "forced to the wall" by corporations employing Chinese. The struggle between labor unions and the industrial "nabobs" and "grandees" was erupting into "disorder, strikes, riot and bloodshed." "The gate," nervous men in Congress declared, "must be closed." The specter of the "giddy multitude" was haunting American society again. Six years later, the prohibition was broadened to include "all persons of the Chinese race," although exemptions were provided for Chinese officials, teachers, students, tourists, and merchants. Renewed in 1892, the Chinese Exclusion Act was extended indefinitely in 1902.<sup>38</sup>

Meanwhile, contrary to the stereotype of Chinese passivity, the Chinese fought discrimination. Time and again, they took their struggle for civil rights to court. Believing that the Chinese should be entitled to citizenship, they challenged the 1790 Naturalization Law. In 1855, Yong Chan applied for citizenship in San Francisco's federal district court. The local newspapers noted that he was more "white" in appearance than most Chinese. The court denied him citizenship, however, ruling that the 1790 law restricted citizenship to "whites" and that the Chinese were not "white." Seeking federal legislation to abolish discriminatory state laws, Chinese merchants successfully lobbied Congress to include protections for them in the 1870 Civil Rights Act, which declared that "all persons" within the jurisdiction of the United States shall have "the same right" to "make and enforce contracts, to sue, be parties, give evidence, and to the full and equal benefit of all laws and proceedings for the security of person and

property as is enjoyed by white citizens." Furthermore, "no tax" shall be imposed "by any State upon any person immigrating thereto from a foreign country which is not equally imposed and enforced upon every person emigrating to such State from any other foreign country, and any law of any State from any other foreign country is hereby declared null and void." The new federal law voided the foreign miners' tax.<sup>39</sup>

But guarantees of equal protection by federal law had little effect on what actually happened in society. The Chinese continued to be vulnerable, victims of racial violence. Blamed as "the source of the troubles" of white workingmen, the Chinese suffered from racial attacks. They had to flee from boys who threw rocks at them and screamed, "God Damn Chinamen." "When I first came," Andrew Kan recounted, "Chinese treated worse than dog. Oh, it was terrible, terrible. At that time all Chinese have queue and dress same as in China. The hoodlums, roughnecks and young boys pull your queue, slap your face, throw all kind of old vegetables and rotten eggs at you." "The Chinese were in a pitiable condition in those days," recalled Kin Huie in his account of San Francisco's Chinatown during the 1870s. "We were simply terrified; we kept indoors after dark for fear of being shot in the back. Children spit upon us as we passed by and called us rats."<sup>40</sup>

In general, the unwelcome newcomers were apprehensive about settling in America. As a Chinese merchant in San Francisco explained, the immigrants did not find "peace in their hearts in regard to bringing families."<sup>41</sup>

### *Twice a Minority: Chinese Women in America*

A few Chinese women did come to Gold Mountain. In 1852, of the 11,794 Chinese in California, only seven were women. Eighteen years later, of 63,199 Chinese in the United States, 4,566 were female—a ratio of fourteen to one. In 1900, of the 89,863 Chinese on the United States mainland, only 4,522, or 5 percent, were female.

Chinese tradition and culture limited migration for women. Confucianism defined the place of a woman: she was instructed to obey her father as a daughter, her husband as a wife, and her eldest son as a widow. According to custom, the afterbirths of children were buried in different places, depending on the sex of the baby—in the floor by the bed for boys and outside the window for girls. This practice symbolized what was expected to happen to