



TITLE

"OUR COMPOSITE NATION"

GRADE LEVEL: MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL

DISCIPLINE: American History, Government and Politics

TOPIC: Frederick Douglass on Chinese coming to America, 1869.

STANDARDS:

- 1) UCLA History: Public History Initiative, U.S. History Content Standards: Era 6, Standard 2: The Development of Industrial America: Massive immigration after 1870 and how new social patterns, conflicts, and ideas of national unity developed amid growing cultural diversity.
- 2) Educating for American Democracy, Theme 3, "We the People: Who are "We the People" and how the nation's population changed over time?"

OBJECTIVES:

- Explain who Frederick Douglass is and what he is best known for.
- Expand their understanding of his life through expressing how he viewed other people who made up the "composite "nation" including Chinese immigrants.
- Expand their understanding of his life through expressing how he viewed other people who made up the "composite "nation" including Chinese immigrants.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- Who gets to be an American?

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Projector
- Loose-leaf paper
- Printer paper + printer + ink
- Pencils

CLASSROOM HOURS NEEDED:

1 to 2 class periods (~1.5 hours)

FINAL ASSESSMENT TYPE:

Worksheet / Essay

CREDIT AUTHOR AND CONTACT: *TING-YI OEI*
TING-YI@1882FOUNDATION.ORG

RELEASE DATE: MARCH 24, 2022
LAST UPDATE: JUNE 14, 2022

BACKGROUND

Frederick Douglass (1817 or 1818–1895) is an important figure in American history best known for escaping from slavery and speaking eloquently for its abolition. He wrote three autobiographies, supported women’s rights, worked to advance the rights of freed slaves after the Civil War, and held several public offices. Lesser known is his broader vision for America as seen in a speech he gave in 1869 called “Our Composite Nation.” In the speech, he addresses the variety of people in America, urging acceptance of all. Notably, he speaks also of the Chinese who only fairly recently, within Douglass’ lifetime, made it to the shores of the United States. The excerpt used for this lesson captures his sentiments of why the Chinese should be allowed to come to the U.S. in the context of American ideals and the history of other racial groups and ethnicities here already.

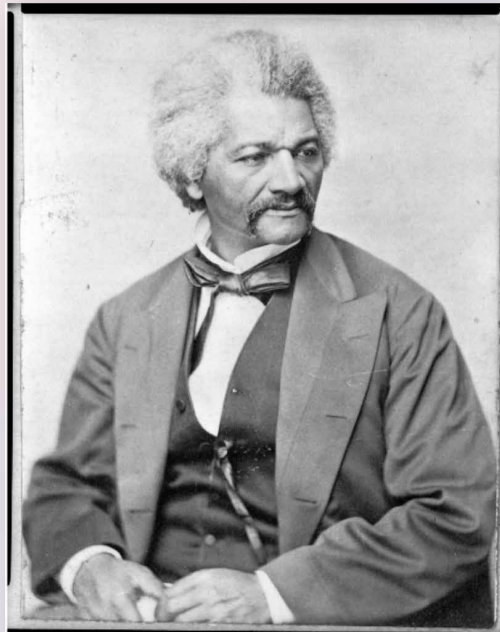
ACTIVITY:

- 1) As an icebreaker, show the photo (Appendix A): See if students can identify Frederick Douglass. This is not a familiar photo of Douglass; however, it is one of him close to the time he was delivering his speech.
- 2) Once Douglass has been recognized, review some basic aspects of his life (see background above or supplement with commonly available resources or textbook).
- 3) Have students read the excerpt from “Our Composite Nation” (Appendix B) and complete the accompanying worksheet.
- 4) To complete the circle on the outcome of this question, have students read and answer questions from excerpts of the Chinese Exclusion Act, Congressional Record, May 6, 1882: Appendix C.

QUESTIONS:

- 1) What specifically does the Act say about Chinese coming to the U.S. in Section 1. How long is the Act supposed to be in force?
- 2) Section 2 deals with an aspect of enforcing the Act. Who is being held responsible in this section for seeing that Chinese do not enter the country? Why do you think this provision is included in the Act?
- 3) Besides not being allowed in the country, in what other way does Section 14 limit the Chinese coming to America?

APPENDIX A:
PHOTO OF
FREDERICK
DOUGLASS,
APRIL, 1870.
LIBRARY OF
CONGRESS



Frederick Douglass sits for a portrait in April 1870.
George Francis Schreiber / Library of Congress

APPENDIX B:
CHINESE
EXCLUSION
ACT, 1882,
SELECTED
PROVISIONS
OF THE ACT.
FROM THE
CONGRESSIONAL
RECORD,
SESS. I,
CH. 126, 1882.

FORTY-SEVENTH CONGRESS. SESS. I. CH. 126. 1882.

59

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That from and after the expiration of ninety days next after the passage of this act, and until the expiration of ten years next after the passage of this act, the coming of Chinese laborers to the United States be, and the same is hereby, suspended; and during such suspension it shall not be lawful for any Chinese laborer to come, or, having so come after the expiration of said ninety days, to remain within the United States.

Immigration of Chinese laborers to the United States suspended for ten years.

SEC. 2. That the master of any vessel who shall knowingly bring within the United States on such vessel, and land or permit to be landed, any Chinese laborer, from any foreign port or place, shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and on conviction thereof shall be punished by a fine of not more than five hundred dollars for each and every such Chinese laborer so brought, and may be also imprisoned for a term not exceeding one year.

Penalties for violation of act.

SEC. 14. That hereafter no State court or court of the United States shall admit Chinese to citizenship; and all laws in conflict with this act are hereby repealed.

Admission of Chinese to citizenship prohibited.

**APPENDIX C:
FREDERICK
DOUGLASS
SPEECH,
“OUR COMPOSITE
NATION,”
1869:
EXCERPTS**

We are a country of all extremes, ends and opposites; the most conspicuous example of composite nationality in the world. Our people defy all the ethnological and logical classifications. In races we range all the way from black to white, with intermediate shades which, as in the apocalyptic vision, no man can name or number...

Europe and Africa are already here, and the Indian was here before either... Heretofore, the policy of our government has been governed by race pride, rather than by wisdom.

Until recently, neither the Indian nor the negro has been treated as a part of the body politic. No attempt has been made to inspire either with a sentiment of patriotism, but the hearts of both races have been diligently sown with the dangerous seeds of discontent and hatred...

Men, like bees, want room. When the hive is overflowing, the bees will swarm, and will be likely to take up their abode where they find the best prospect for honey. In matters of this sort, men are very much like bees. Hunger will not be quietly endured, even in the Celestial Empire [China], when it is once generally known that there is bread enough and to spare in America. They will come here to live, where they know the means of living are in abundance...

Nevertheless, the experiment will be tried. So far as getting the Chinese into our country is concerned, it will yet be a success...

I have said that the Chinese will come, and have given some reasons why we may expect them in very large numbers in no very distant future. Do you ask if I would favor such immigrations? I answer, I would. “Would you admit them as witnesses in our courts of law?” I would. Would you have them naturalized, and have them invested with all the rights of American citizenship? I would. Would you allow them to vote? I would. Would you allow them to hold office? I would.

But are there not reasons against all this? Is there not such a law or principle as that of self-preservation? Does not every race owe something to itself? Should it not attend to the dictates of common sense? Should not a superior race protect itself from contact with inferior ones? Are not the white people the owners of this continent? Have they not the right to say what kind of people shall be allowed to come here and settle? Is there not such a thing as being more generous than wise? In the effort to promote civilization may we not corrupt and destroy what we have? Is it best to take on board more passengers than the ship will carry?

I submit that this question of Chinese immigration should be settled upon higher principles than those of a cold and selfish expediency. There are such things in the world as human rights. They rest upon no conventional foundation, but are eternal, universal and indestructible.

Among these is the right of locomotion; the right of migration; the right which belongs to no particular race, but belongs alike to all and to all alike. It is the right you assert by staying here, and your fathers asserted by coming here. It is this great right that I assert for the Chinese and the Japanese, and for all other varieties of men equally with yourselves, now and forever. I know of no rights of race superior to the rights of humanity, and when there is a supposed conflict between human and national rights, it is safe to go the side of humanity. I have great respect for the blue-eyed and light-haired races of America. They are a mighty people. In any struggle for the good things of this world, they need have no fear, they have no need to doubt that they will get their fullshare.



1882
FOUNDATION



RESOURCES:

Pamela Johnson, Frederick Douglass Was the Most Photographed American of the 10th Century, NBC News, Feb. 3, 2017.
<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/frederick-douglass-always-ready-his-close-n517391>

"There's a Reason Why Frederick Douglas Had So Many Pictures Taken." History Hustle, Jan. 8, 2021.
<https://historyhustle.com/frederick-douglass/>

Teaching American History, "Our Composite Nationality": full text. Our Composite Nationality | Teaching American History

New York Historical Society, "Our Composite Nation: Frederick Douglass' America" Exhibition: Our Composite Nation: Frederick Douglass' America | New-York Historical Society

Library of Congress: Congressional Record, May 6, 1882: Passage of Chinese Exclusion Act
<https://www.loc.gov/rr/main/images/chinese-exclusion-act.pdf>

Chinese Exclusion Act

U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, the Chinese Exclusion Act
Chinese Immigration and the Chinese Exclusion Acts

The Case of Yee Shun, the New Mexico Territory, 1882: History.com

Chinese Americans Were Once Forbidden to Testify in Court. A Murder Changed That - HISTORY



CREDIT AUTHOR TING-YI OEI
AND CONTACT: TING-YI@1882FOUNDATION.ORG

RELEASE DATE: MARCH 24, 2022
LAST UPDATE: JUNE 14, 2022

