



## TITLE

# THE MASSACRE AT ROCK SPRINGS, WYOMING, SEPTEMBER 2, 1885



GRADE LEVEL: HIGH SCHOOL

**SUBJECT:** Social Studies, History

**THEME:** Bias and Stereotype, Civil Rights, Identity and Culture, Immigration, International Affairs, and Labor

**STANDARDS:** From UCLA Public History Initiative: United States History Content Standards Era 6 (The Development of Industrial America, 1870-1900), Standard 2 (Massive immigration after 1870 and how new social patterns, conflicts, and ideas of national unity developed amid growing cultural diversity.)

## OBJECTIVES:

### Students will be able to:

- Students will learn that Chinese who came to America faced discrimination in many ways that included many acts of violence.
- Students will be able to show that the resistance to these kinds of acts were met by resistance through the legal system and diplomatically.
- Students will make the connection between the prejudice shown towards Chinese workers and the labor conflicts with White workers based on the belief that the Chinese workers threatened their livelihood.

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- Why is what happened in 1885 in Rock Springs, Wyoming important?
- Why did Chinese come to the U.S. and how was it that they came to be in Wyoming?
- What impact did the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 have on this incident?



CREDIT AUTHOR  
AND CONTACT: TING-YI OEI

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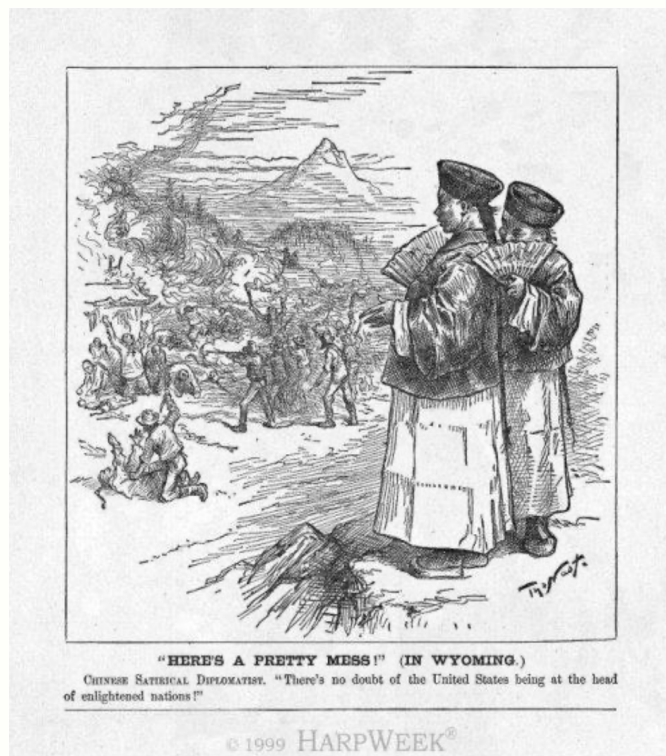
**ACTIVITIES:**

1. Use a document analysis process in small groups to help students interpret the cartoon. (available through DocsTeach.com or other sources) <https://www.docsteach.org/tools/analyzing-documents>). In DocsTeach.org, the following acronym, MOTU, serves as a guide:

- Meet** the document
- Observe** its parts
- Try** to make sense of it
- Use** it as historical evidence

2. Following the document analysis by small groups, have the groups report out their thoughts for the whole class. Be sure to address the whole caption to the cartoon besides the title, "There's not doubt about the United States being at the head of enlightened nations."

**Document A: "Here's a Pretty Mess! (in Wyoming)" Harper's Weekly Illustration, September 19, 1885**



3. Follow the document analysis process as in Activity 1.  
Document B: Editorial: "The Wyoming Massacre," Harper's Weekly, September 19, 1885, p. 611

**ACTIVITIES:**

*The massacre of the Chinese laborers in Wyoming is one of the crimes which disgrace a people, because it is due to the jealousy and hatred of a race. In excluding the Chinese from the country by law we have especially stigmatized them, and common decency and humanity should lead us to protect those of them who unfortunately happen to be among us, and whom the law shows that we wish were somewhere else.*

*To carry a gang of Chinese laborers far away from the usual safeguards of civilization and beyond the reach of protection, among those who hate them, and who will not hesitate to maim and murder them, is to do something which should not be allowed except under ample security of proper protection. ... [I]f we may properly prohibit the coming of a people into the country, we may not also properly prohibit their employment, since it is the prospect of employment which tempts them to come.*

*...[I]t would seem that if the coming of a particular people is so dangerous and threatening as to justify exclusion, those who are not or can not be excluded should be held under such surveillance that they would be protected from wanton injury.*

4. Once more, have the small groups report back to the whole class. Use the following questions for further discussion:

- How does looking at the two documents together help you better understand the question of what happened at Rock Springs?
- According to the editorial in Harpers Weekly, what should the reaction of the American people be to this event?
- Given that the massacre occurred following the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, what is the editorial’s view on the connection between the Act and the event in Rock Springs?

5. Have students read excerpts from the resource below (<http://chineseworkers.blogspot.com>) about Chinese workers to provide context about how Chinese workers came to the United States to work in mines and on the Transcontinental and other railroads. Depending on the familiarity and grade level of students with this history, the teacher may want to turn the reading into another activity to provide context for the labor conflict.

**Assessment:** Using the essential questions, students should write out answers to those questions and add these reflection questions:

- How does this incident in Rock Springs, Wyoming help you better understand the period which we are studying (1870-1900) in terms of the growth and expansion of the country?
- Do the events at Rock Springs have relevance to issues related to immigration and prejudice today?





## RESOURCES

<https://immigrants.harpreweek.com/ChineseAmericans/Items/Item088L.htm>

Lexi Strom, Chinese in Wyoming  
<http://chineseworkers.blogspot.com>

Pfaelzer, Jean. *Driven Out: The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans*. Berkeley: U. of California Press, 2007.



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