“The Abomination of Mankind”: Anti-Chinese Sentiment and the Borders of Belonging in San Francisco’s Chinatown

Rachel G. Shuen

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# Table of Contents

Introduction: The Politics of Policing Race and Space ................................................................. 4

Chapter I: Anti-Chinese Sentiment: The Rhetorical Conceptualization of San Francisco’s Chinatown and the Chinese .................................................................................................................. 14

Chapter II: Evolution of the Nineteenth Century San Francisco Police Department: From Specials to the Chinatown Squad .................................................................................................................. 35

Chapter III: “Living in a civilization as old as the pyramids”: Authentic Tourism in Chinatown ........................................................................................................................................ 61

Epilogue ........................................................................................................................................... 81

Bibliography ..................................................................................................................................... 83
Introduction
The Politics of Policing Race and Space

Chinese immigrants to the United States have had an extensive and complex relationship with the American criminal justice system that has largely been defined through the legal court system. *People v. Hall* (1854) prohibited Chinese Americans and Chinese immigrants from testifying against whites in court; *Yick Wo v. Hopkins* (1886) declared race-neutral laws that were enforced in a prejudicial manner (against Chinese laundries) was in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment’s equal protection clause; *United States v. Wong Kim Ark* (1898) determined Wong Kim Ark to be an American citizen since he was born in the United States, though his parents were foreign-born. By the early 20th century, the Chinese in America, particularly in San Francisco, were adept at acting collectively through their leadership organization, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association. This organization helped the Chinese to navigate the court system by hiring legal representation to meet the challenges faced in court. But facing off in legal courts was not the only aspect of criminal justice in which the Chinese gained exposure and experience. Alongside the legal cases, the Chinese in America attracted a great deal of attention as the targets and victims of urban policing.

Urban policing in the U.S. was on the rise in the nineteenth century, particularly after 1840 as a result of industrialization, which caused the rapid growth of cities as people moved towards urban centers for jobs and housing. This massive and sudden influx of people in cities facilitated opportunities for increased criminal behavior due to issues such as poverty and crowding. As a result, American police reform departed from colonial American law enforcement customs to a method of preventive policing. Colonial American law enforcement was centralized, not local, which proved to be very inefficient because there was no overarching
framework to which self-policing colonies had to adhere. In preventive policing, the police were directly linked into politics. The tasks of preventive policing included: crime and riot control, maintaining order, and sometimes providing social welfare and charitable relief programs. Professors of criminal justice policy George L. Kelling and Mark H. Moore term the introduction of police into municipalities in the 1840s through the early 1900s the “political era” of American policing.¹ During this era, American municipal police departments were closely tied to politics since their resources and authority were backed by local political leaders. Since the police was situated within municipal government, it served as the mediator between the local government and lay people, and held a responsibility to the government. The close links between police departments and politicians have led some historians to refer to the police as “local political machines.”² A symbiotic relationship between police and politicians often led to political corruption; the political agenda became the policeman’s agenda.

San Francisco’s first professional police department was established in 1849. The need for professional police can be attributed to the sudden boom in population as people moved to the city to strike it rich during the Gold Rush. As more Americans and immigrants arrived and brought business, San Francisco became more urbanized, which also meant increased crime. The citizens of San Francisco became disgruntled with the performance of the police, particularly its inefficiency due to quick turnover and the lack of enough patrolmen, and more largely, the criminal justice system. They established Committees of Vigilance in 1851 and 1856 in order to

take matters into their own hands and arrest and try criminals. The SFPD was reorganized several times, ultimately governed by a commission that included the Mayor, the Police Court Judge, and the Chief of Police. The police force expanded over time along with the growing population.

The creation of the Chinatown Squad, an extension of the San Francisco Police Department (SFPD), in the 1878 McCoppin Act serves as a marker for the social and political climate in San Francisco, and provides a snapshot of the nation during the late nineteenth-century. Why was a special police force created to police a singular ethnic space? An examination of the policing activities of the Chinatown Squad can reveal a great deal about the society. The creation of a police squad aimed at policing a particular space both criminalized and marked a racialized people and neighborhood for surveillance and discipline. Even just the moniker—the Chinatown Squad—reinforced the supposedly extra-criminal nature of the Chinese in the mindset of San Franciscans by the admission that the Chinese required a special police squad. The name of the squad also brings into question the designation of a particular space in San Francisco as uniquely Chinese. While the Chinese quarter was not solely occupied by Chinese residents but also by people of other ethnicities, this space was exclusively imagined as Chinese. This paper also explores the conceptualization of space and racialization of groups, specifically in how the designation of Chinatown as a site of “heathen immorality” was assigned, assumed, and reinforced.

The meaning of belonging and identifying the ways in which the Chinese were excluded from a sense of belonging is the undertone that runs through this project. What is belonging?

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Belonging represents the ability to be a part of group or society.\(^4\) It is determined by the relationships between the individual, local government, and federal government.\(^5\) Exclusion, the flipside of belonging, was a harsh reality faced by many Chinese immigrants. Various markers of identity such as race, sex, place of birth, and marital status, are given meaning through how they are constructed by the law, and thus, in shaping belonging.\(^6\) In the United States, the Chinese were “racialized others,” whose group identity was constructed through laws that shaped the relationship of the Chinese to other individuals, and state and federal governments.\(^7\)

In United States policing history, a recurring theme is the history of legally-sanctioned, government-supported racial discrimination. One political scientist asserts that “historically, racial minorities are not viewed as citizens entitled to civil protections; rather, they are deemed the objects of law enforcement and social control.”\(^8\) The Chinese were deemed to be just that: objects to be controlled by the Chinatown Squad rather than as local residents in need of protection. Issues of race and space are often coupled together in studies on law enforcement and police action. The production of the Chinese quarter as a criminal space simultaneously marked a particular ethnic group, the Chinese, as problematic. In the policing of San Francisco’s Chinatown in the late nineteenth-century, race played a huge role in police attitudes and behavior. Steve Herbert identifies six “normative orders” in police organizations that define their work in preserving space: the law, bureaucratic imperatives, adventure/machismo, safety, competence, and morality.\(^9\) For the Chinese, their perceived immorality as a race, concentration in a particular

\(^5\) Ibid., 5.
\(^6\) Ibid., 4.
\(^7\) Ibid., 10.
\(^9\) As cited in Bass, “Policing Space, Policing Race,” 158.
neighborhood, and the damaging effects it would have on the American public were the claim
the municipal government made in order to sanction its entry into Chinatown via the Chinatown
Squad. Using the rhetoric of nativists and anti-coolie activists, the policing of Chinatown was
declared necessary to help keep the peace, while actually masking the pointedly racial
undertones.

Although the creation and expansion of police departments has historically been in
response to a perceived necessity for maintaining order, the establishment of the Chinatown
Squad is a greater reflection of social discourse. Eric Monkkonen proposes in *Police in Urban
America: 1860-1920*, that the police are social control agents—meaning that the activities a
society controls can reveal what does and does not matter in that society. In this study of race,
labor, and municipal politics in late nineteenth-century San Francisco as examined through the
actions of the police, I argue that the Chinatown Squad functioned as a social agent—a physical
manifestation of anti-Chinese sentiment stemming from the rhetoric surrounding Chinese
immigration, who claimed its role was to “keep the peace” in Chinatown while ideologically
adhering to a nativist agenda. The Squad’s role as a social agent is further complicated by
competition between the state and city to control police power. The evolution of the SFPD’s
contact with the Chinese from privately paid special officers to municipally-controlled SFPD and
then to state-appointed positions highlights the intricate politics involved in the growth of cities
during the late nineteenth-century. Furthermore, the Squad was a racialized form of legal
surveillance. This paper also explores the racialization of space and ethnicity. The Squad
promoted the racialization of the Chinese under the guise of protection; while trying to integrate

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the Chinese into American society, the Chinatown Squad only reinforced the difference in which the general public viewed the Chinese.

The current literature on urban policing in the nineteenth century tends to focus on larger cities on the East coast, such as New York. Studies of the policing of a racial minority are more commonly conducted on African Americans, specifically to examine slave patrols and policing during Jim Crow. Comprehensive studies on police contact with the Chinese in San Francisco have not been widely conducted. The main reason is the lack of sources since the 1906 earthquake and fire in San Francisco destroyed many pre-1906 records, including those of the San Francisco Superior Court. My project draws from contemporary San Francisco newspapers, official government reports, travel literature, and other miscellaneous primary source documents.

Using the Squad as a means for understanding the social, political, and racialized climate as well as the racialization of space in late nineteenth-century San Francisco, this paper is divided into three parts. Chapter I attempts to locate the pervading nineteenth century belief of the Chinese as creatures of vice and immorality in state and local anti-Chinese propaganda and rhetoric, during which special police were placed in Chinatown. This chapter begins with a brief history of Chinese immigration to San Francisco in 1851, when Chinese began arriving in large numbers. This background contextualizes the antagonism Chinese laborers and miners faced in their work out west. Although the Chinese faced discrimination almost immediately upon their arrival to the United States, white fears of Chinese immorality and an inability to assimilate did not reach enough fervor to attract serious national attention until the Chinese began arriving to the U.S. in greater numbers, prompting the Chinese to be perceived as a threat to labor opportunities. With the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, thousands of jobless Chinese found themselves looking for work. Many moved to urban centers; San Francisco had
the largest Chinese community in 1870, accounting for almost a quarter of all of the Chinese in California. I also examine the growth of the space that would come to be known as the Chinese quarter and how the city tried to shape the location of Chinese immigrants in this moment, forever altering the conceptualization of this space.

Chapter II is a localized look at the pervasive roots of anti-Chinese sentiment that took hold in San Francisco and how that further prompted the transition from special police to Chinatown Squad. As San Francisco’s Chinese quarter grew, special police officers were assigned beats to patrol in Chinatown. In this chapter, I examine the birth of the “specials” in Chinatown as well as provide a brief historical overview of the birth of the police force in San Francisco in 1849, as influenced by the national movement toward urban policing. In 1876, five or six special police were paid by Chinese storekeepers, not from the city treasury, unlike the regular SFPD officers. The specials were meant to “keep the streets clean” and to guard the Chinese quarter because there were not enough regular SFPD officers to also patrol the Chinese quarter.11 The testimony of the 1876 California state Senate hearing on “The Social, Moral, and Political Effect of Chinese Immigration” reveals that the special police system was not working because the “specials” accepted bribes from owners of Chinese gambling and prostitution houses. There were many recommendations from SFPD officers, special police, politicians who advocated for “regulars” and an increased police force in order to adequately administer justice and suppress crime in the Chinese quarter. The results of this hearing laid the ground work and convinced politicians and the public of the need for an actual Chinatown Squad, established in 1878. The purpose of this chapter is to underscore the influence and power of dominant social

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rhetoric and feeling in affecting public perception—particularly in the matter of the “Chinese question” and the perceived need for regular police in Chinatown.

A key focus of Chapter II is the July 1877 anti-Chinese Sandlot Riots in San Francisco that influenced the expansion of the SPFD in the 1878 McCoppin Act and preceded the formal inauguration of the Workingmen’s Party of California (WPC). The size of the police force increased from roughly 150 officers to 400, which also abolished the “specials” system in Chinatown in favor of regular SFPD officers. But in light of the 1876 Senate hearing and talks of corruption, officers stationed in Chinatown were to be rotated out every four to five months in order to ensure that the officers would not become corrupted by prolonged contact with the Chinese. The officers of the Squad were charged with keeping the peace and enforcing the law in Chinatown.

As a result of the growing power of the Workingmen’s Party of California (WPC), as influenced by the labor movement occurring in the nation, and the fear that WPC members would be elected to positions of power in the municipal government, the 1878 McCoppin Act removed direct control of the SFPD from municipal officials and placed the SFPD under a commission appointed by state courts. In examining the influence of labor and municipal politics, I seek to answer this question: how does the creation of a Chinatown Squad complicate our understanding of state and municipal relationships with both labor and the Chinese in this era? The inauguration of the Chinatown Squad following the July 1877 anti-Chinese Sand Lot Riots reflected important shifts in the policies of the state and municipal government and the SFPD. Exploring these shifts—not only the expansion of the police force in the name of public safety, but also municipally-directed policing of a racialized neighborhood—complicates our historical understanding of anti-Chinese rhetoric and violence.
Finally, Chapter III evaluates the effects of the Chinatown Squad on the Chinese community—both in their daily lives and their political organization. How did primary contact with the city government through a police organization define the Chinese community’s relationship with the city and with the state? Though it took a few years after its legislative conception for the Squad to officially form and to be named the Chinatown Squad, by the 1890s, the Chinatown Squad had become a constant presence in the neighborhood. Chinatown was also a popular San Francisco tourist attraction at the end of the nineteenth century. Police officers served as guides for the safety of the tourists and also because they could provide access to the seemingly closed society. Since the police freely entered into Chinese living spaces while leading tours, magazines of the time interpreted police-guided tours as an example of police domination over the neighborhood. However, another reading of their relationship is that the Chinese and police worked together, with the Chinese getting a cut of the police guide’s profits. This chapter will conclude at the turn of the twentieth century, overall evaluating roughly thirty years of police contact with San Francisco’s Chinese population.

Though policing and police departments have undergone several reforms since the late nineteenth-century, the issues and questions the Chinatown Squad raises for late nineteenth-century issues concerning race, immigration and belonging, and municipal politics still appear in modern-day discussions. The 2010 Arizona Senate Bill (SB) 1070, which required aliens to have their registration documentation on their person at all times, was a stringent anti-immigration bill that encouraged racial profiling because it allowed police to act if they suspected a person was an “illegal alien.” Due to the border Arizona shares with Mexico, it is clear which ethnic group this bill targeted. The policing efforts permitted by Arizona SB 1070 reflect a moment of hysteria over the perceived immigrant threat, like the way the Chinatown Squad provides a window into
anti-Chinese sentiment in late nineteenth-century San Francisco. Policing history can provide a lens to understand a society because who was identified as in need of policing and what was deemed criminal show a society’s values and beliefs. Through an analysis of the politics of policing race and space, my localized study seeks to contribute to a national historical narrative of the intersection between race, immigrants, and the law.
Chapter I

Anti-Chinese Sentiment: The Rhetorical Conceptualization of San Francisco’s Chinatown and the Chinese

Which is why I remark,
And my language is plain,
That for ways that are dark
And for tricks that are vain,
The heathen Chinee is peculiar,
Which the same I am free to maintain.
—“The Heathen Chinee,” F. Bret Harte

A horrid, sinister scene was discovered on the evening of October 24, 1871 in El Pueblo, the center of old Los Angeles, California. The *Alta California* reported: “…fifteen staring corpses hung ghastly in the moonlight, while seven or eight others, mutilated, torn and crushed, lay in our streets, all of them Chinamen.”\(^{12}\) Despite what was reported, actually seventeen Chinese were lynched and two more were knifed to death. Their bodies were found dismembered and sprawled every which way over various public spaces and artifacts. What had happened earlier that night, over a time period of three hours, was a relentless massacre of Chinese people by a mob of five hundred Mexican and Anglo men. The conflict began two days earlier over a dispute between two Chinese companies regarding a runaway Chinese prostitute, and of course, money. The Los Angeles police became involved in the dispute after shots were fired and murder was

\(^{12}\) This is a stanza of a poem originally published as “Plain Language from Truthful James,” *Overland Monthly*, September 1870. This poem was intended to parody the prejudice Irish laborers in northern California had against Chinese immigrant laborers. Harte himself was an advocate against racial discrimination. However, the meaning of the poem was re-appropriated by those opposed to Chinese immigration to be a mockery of the Chinese. This poem became extremely popular and was re-printed as “The Heathen Chinee.” Though the colloquial interpretation of the poem deviated from Harte’s original satirical intent, this poem contributed to popular conceptions of the Chinese as immoral, heathen, and as an economic threat. See Scharnhorst, Gary, “‘Ways That Are Dark’: Appropriations of Bret Harte’s ‘Plain Language from Truthful James’,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (Dec., 1996): 377-399. *San Francisco Daily Alta California*, October 19 and 20, 1871, as quoted in Jean Pfaelzer, *Driven Out: The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans*, (New York: Random House, 2007): 47.
attempted between leaders of the two Chinese companies. As a result of the altercation, the police sent a large group of white men from the growing crowd that was observing the altercation to shoot any Chinese who tried to leave their houses. Rumors soon spread that the Chinese had massive amounts of hidden gold and were “killing whites wholesale.” It was then that the angry crowd came together and began their lynching spree of the Chinese. The Chinese tried desperately to flee, but “Every nook and corner, every trunk, chest and drawer in every apartment was...carefully and expeditiously ransacked. Locks gave way to the pressure brought to bear against them. Even the victims executed were robbed of everything of value in cash and jewelry they possessed previous to being hanged.”\(^{13}\) It was estimated that between fourteen and thirty thousand dollars in Chinese cash, gold, clothing, and furniture were stolen.\(^{14}\) Although this massacre did not take place in San Francisco, it shows how vulnerable the Chinese were in the labor conflict and racial hatred of the late nineteenth-century.

Anti-Chinese sentiment pervaded mid-to late-nineteenth century American society. Chinese people in America faced discriminatory economic, social, and legal policies, which culminated in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. This federal law targeted the Chinese as the first group for immigration and citizenship exclusion. How did Chinese immigrants, initially welcomed as laborers, become the scapegoats for economic woes, health outbreaks, and the immorality of the nation over the course of the late nineteenth-century? This chapter situates the negative attitudes toward the Chinese that pervaded the mid-to late-nineteenth century in both local and national discourse. First, I begin with an overview of the history of Chinese immigration to the United States, and more specifically, to San Francisco, California. Second, I contextualize anti-Chinese sentiment—what that meant, how it was conveyed, and its

\(^{13}\) *New York Times*, November 10, 1871, as quoted in Pfaelzer, *Driven Out*, 50.

\(^{14}\) Pfaelzer, *Driven Out*, 50.
widespread popularity. Third, I analyze the rhetorical construction of San Francisco’s Chinese quarter and the ways in which its conception shaped and contributed to an already damning public image of the Chinese. An important part of this discussion is 1876 Report of the California Special Committee on Chinese Immigration, which was an investigation into the threat of Chinese immigrants as “cheap labor.” This Report is a crucial piece of evidence for the social discourse and anxiety surrounding Chinese immigration. Through an examination of anti-Chinese rhetoric and sentiment, I argue that the city and state’s social policies and legal actions shaped the largely pejorative image of the Chinese and Chinatown, ultimately affecting the sense of belonging and citizenship of Chinese immigrants in the mid- to late-nineteenth century United States.

The number of Chinese who arrived in the United States dramatically increased in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1851, there were 2,716 Chinese immigrants in San Francisco.\(^\text{15}\) Just one year later, that number grew to 20,026.\(^\text{16}\) By 1870, there were 63,199 Chinese in the United States, with 12,022 residing in San Francisco.\(^\text{17}\) There were also concentrations of the Chinese in the South, New England, the Southwest, and other states in the West. During this period of immigration, most of the Chinese hailed from the Guangdong Province and the Fujian Province in southeastern China. The different points of origin contributed to the linguistic, social, cultural, economic, and regional differences among Chinese immigrants in the United States, from which emerged three basic groups of Chinese in California. First was the merchant class, though they did not comprise the majority of Chinese immigrants. Americans perceived merchants to be of

\(^{17}\) Sandmeyer, *Anti-Chinese*, 17.
the highest standing among the Chinese immigrants. Merchants duly assumed a leadership role, forming a political organization for the Chinese in America called the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA), or more commonly known as the Chinese Six Companies. The second group was laborers, who constituted the majority of the immigrants. Laborers were typically young men with very little education. The third and smallest group was women. As a result of Chinese custom, women were not permitted to leave their homes, and since most of the men immigrated with the mindset that they would only stay in the United States for a short period of time, most did not bring their wives with them. The majority of Chinese women who did arrive in the United States were prostitutes, brought over by single men who made prostitution into a lucrative business. However, the 1875 Page Law subsequently halted the immigration of Asian women or any other Asian “undesirable” suspected of coming to the United States as a contract laborer. It was the first United States law to prohibit the entry of “undesirable” immigrants—any individual from Asia who was going to the United States as a contract laborer, any Asian woman who would engage in prostitution, and all people who were convicts in their native countries.\(^{18}\) The effects of this law were extremely detrimental to the Chinese community in America, as it made it difficult for women to reunite with their husbands. This law perpetuated the existence of Chinese bachelor societies in the United States and affected the growth and stability of Chinese communities.\(^{19}\) The Chinese female population in the United States dropped from comprising 6.4 percent of the Chinese community to 4.6 percent

\(^{18}\) Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant*, 18, 31.

\(^{19}\) It was not until World War II (when China was an ally to the United States) and the Magnuson Act of 1943 that Chinese exclusion quotas were repealed and Chinese immigrants were allowed to become naturalized citizens. The repeal of Chinese exclusion quotas helped balance the ratio of Chinese women to Chinese men in the United States.
between 1870 and 1882. In 1882, before the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act, 39,579 Chinese immigrants arrived in the United States, and of those, only 136 were women. In many ways, this law, like the Page Act before it, sought to push the Chinese population in the United States to extinction by stopping Chinese women from immigrating.

The history of Chinese American immigration often begins with the sudden surge of immigration from China to the United States during the late 1840s and the 1850s. Like many who migrated to the American West, the Chinese journeyed to California with the hope of better economic opportunities during the gold rush. However, the Chinese did not intend to stay in the United States. After making some money, they planned to return to China and their families with their fortune. But what they soon discovered was that racial discrimination left them with few job options, and what work they could find was often at substandard wages. With little money, the mostly male Chinese immigrants could not afford passage back home, nor could they bring their wives and families to the United States. The passage of the 1852 Foreign Miners’ Tax only further exacerbated an already difficult situation, and demonstrated the racially antagonistic environment Chinese immigrants faced. The tax mainly targeted the Chinese (and Mexicans), requiring a monthly payment of three dollars from every foreign miner who did not desire to become a citizen. The caveat was that the Chinese were legally incapable of being citizens even if they tried due to the Naturalization Act of 1790 that limited citizenship to free whites. In

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21 Ibid.
22 Though the specific date of arrival of the first Chinese in California is unknown, the *Statistical Review of Immigration, 1820-1910*, Report of the Immigration Commission, William P. Dillingham, *Senate Doc. No. 756, 61st Cong. 3d sess.: 14-24*, as cited in Elmer Clarence Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973): 12, shows that between 1820 and 1850, forty-six Chinese arrived in the United States. However, it should be noted that there were certainly instances of Chinese immigration in North America prior to this period. As early as the 1600s, Chinese and Filipinos jumped ship in modern-day Mexico. Furthermore, records indicate that there were a handful of soldiers who fought during the United States Civil War who were Chinese.
addition to working in mines, Chinese immigrants also found work on the railroads in the 1860s. Work on the railroad was back-breaking, low-paying, and resulted in many injuries and deaths. The Chinese often worked at wages lower than what native-born United States workers accepted. After the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, the Chinese had difficulty finding jobs elsewhere due to racial discrimination and lack of language skills. As a result, many started their own businesses. It was in this way that the Chinese came to run many shops, restaurants, and laundries. Thousands of Chinese moved to San Francisco to seek out jobs in manufacturing.  

The laws, discriminatory practices, and the general disdain they confronted, hardened the broad belief that Chinese immigrants were a deviant group, which only further solidified their second-class status. Even after the passage of these laws, the Chinese continued to be targeted by anti-Chinese rhetoric that reflected a growing antagonistic movement toward Chinese immigration and labor. In 1852, a large increase in Chinese immigration coincided with an attempt to introduce the coolie labor system, which brought anti-foreign legislation to the forefront of national discussion as a pressing question. The increasing numbers of Chinese to the United States and their subsequent entry in the labor sector stirred the beginnings of a national anti-Chinese movement. The “Chinese question” was not just a labor or racial issue, but, in the words of San Francisco’s Mayor James Phelan, an “American question, affecting the

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24 *Coolieism* is defined as “the importation of coolies as labourers into foreign countries.” In the late-nineteenth century, *coolieism* referred to the shipment and employment of Asian laborers on sugar plantations formerly worked by enslaved Africans. See Moon-ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006): 13-14.
perpetuity of our institutions and the standard of our civilization.”

By 1852, there were already attempts to prevent the settlement of Chinese workers and to expel existing Chinese workers from mining regions. An April 1852 report by a California assembly committee argued that “the concentration, within our State limits, of vast numbers of the Asiatic races, and of the inhabitants of the Pacific Islands, and of many others dissimilar from ourselves in customs, language and education” was an evil threat to the well-being of the mining districts. A key argument made was that the Chinese came to California involuntarily as servile, coolie laborers who worked under labor contracts held by foreign capitalists. In the age of emancipation, coolies were framed always as coolies and incapable of being free; they were seen as unfair competition for laborers.

The growing population of Chinese immigrants in the United States came to be a deeply resented and despised group within California’s mining districts. In *History of California*, Theodore Hittell concisely summarizes the reason for this resentment:

As a class, [the Chinese] were harmless, peaceful, and exceedingly industrious; but, as they were remarkably economical and spent little or none of their earnings except for the necessaries of life and this chiefly to merchants of their own nationality, they soon began to provoke the prejudice and ill-will of those who could not see any value in their labor to the country.

In the eyes of their American neighbors, the Chinese seemed to work too hard, and at lower wages; this was seen as a threat to the jobs of white Americans, which whites felt entitled to as

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27 For a discussion on coolie labor in the United States South, see Moon-ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).
Americans. Furthermore, the Chinese were accused of saving too much and spending too little—which was used as evidence to show their lack of commitment to the United States. But these economic arguments were not the only manner in which the Chinese were attacked. Their behavior and dress, which differed from customs in the United States, was a constant, visible reminder to Americans of their difference and evidence of their inability to assimilate.

The growth of the anti-Chinese movement was due to both economic and political circumstances. Various interest groups sought to restrict Chinese immigration. Organized labor, in particular, deeply opposed Chinese immigration and strongly supported the anti-Chinese movement. Historian Clarence Elmer Sandmeyer argues that a unique political situation in California during the anti-Chinese agitation period allowed the anti-Chinese movement to gain momentum. Since political parties in California were nearly equal in strength, labor groups seized the opportunity to make politicians address the issue of anti-Chinese sentiment. Political parties and the concentrated efforts of organized labor groups played off of one another to bring about restrictive legislation; thus, organized labor capitalized on the “rivalry between political parties to attain its ends, while the political parties seized upon the Chinese question to capture the labor vote.”

Sandmeyer points out that though the politician and the anti-Chinese agitator suited one another’s purposes, the implication that politics and race prejudice were the sole causes of the anti-Chinese movement is not warranted by the evidence.

The perceived economic threat of the Chinese tied into labor interests were large factors driving the growth of the anti-Chinese movement. Labor historian Alexander Saxton shows that Chinese immigrants were indispensable to California’s economy, which was in transition from an industry of raw extraction on its way to industrial capitalism. The Chinese were a crucial,

30 Ibid.
definitive component of the working class—from the mines in the 1850s to the Central Pacific Railroad in the 1860s. Saxton argues that the massive contribution of Chinese labor was so important to California’s industrial growth.  

In addition to the attempt to make the “Chinese question” political, many anti-Chinese clubs were formed as labor groups with the explicit purpose of barring or removing Chinese from the United States. In 1876, the various anti-Chinese clubs combined to form the Anti-Chinese Union; its purpose was “to unite, centralize and direct the anti-Chinese strength of our Country.” Members had to pledge to uphold the missions of the club: “not to employ Chinese; not to purchase goods from the employer of Chinese; and not to sustain the Chinese or the employer of the Chinese.” The Anti-Chinese Union boasted an impressive membership of powerful men which included United States senators, congressmen, and other prominent politicians in California. Anti-Chinese clubs evolved beyond just being a labor group and instead served as a marker of white masculinity. In April 1877, when the anti-Chinese movement was at its height of popularity, a new secret political order, The Order of Caucasians, emerged in San Francisco. Its aim was to “drive Chinese out of California.” As the “bounded and solemn duty” of every Caucasian, members pledged to “pursue and injure” two classes of “enemies”. The first class was persons who hire or rent to “Mongolians” or who “countenance their existence in any way” until he has been removed from the list of public enemies. The second class, deemed to be pursued “forever,” was “Mongolians.”

33 Ibid.
Anti-Chinese rhetoric became incorporated into the political agenda and everyday discourse. The effect of the anti-Chinese movement was to create a socially oppressive and demeaning environment for the nearly thirty-thousand Chinese immigrants residing in San Francisco by the late 1880s. The anti-Chinese agitation had become the focus of national debate and part of nativists’ agenda. Nativists’ opposed immigration and instead desired a nation of only non-immigrants, whom were preferably Anglo-Protestant.\(^5\) The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act is an example of a nativist act of Congress to limit the flow of newcomers to the United States. The negative perceptions of the Chinese, as shaped by labor groups, were extremely powerful in racializing and criminalizing the Chinese as a people.

Despite these laws, the Chinese were initially welcomed upon their arrival in California. Though Americans perceived Chinese migrants as different and marked them accordingly, their value as laborers during an intense era of economic growth was readily hailed. They were seen as valuable assets to society and the nation. In fact, Chinese immigrants celebrated with American citizens when California was admitted to the Union in 1850. Justice Nathaniel Bennett stated of the Chinese and other foreigners in California: “Born and reared under different Government and speaking different tongues, we nevertheless meet here to-day as brothers....You stand among us in all respects as equals....”\(^6\) However, the political climate that initially included the Chinese soon soured. As the nation reeled through financial panic and prolonged depression, the Chinese came to be seen as competitors for white labor, and ultimately a threat to white livelihood. An 1878 pamphlet, “China’s menace to the world,” proselytized:

Will you oblige the AMERICAN LAUNDRIES to CUT THE WAGE OF THEIR PEOPLE by giving your patronage to the


\(^6\) As cited in Takaki, Strangers, 80.
This address was meant as a warning to the American public against the damaging effects Chinese immigrant labor would have on the American labor force. Politicians mimicked the change in public sentiment toward Chinese immigrants and offered their support for laws that targeted the exclusion of the Chinese.

Chinese immigrants continued to encounter racial discrimination and harassment. The economic panic of 1873 and the subsequent economic depression, heightened anti-Chinese attitudes. The Chinese were blamed for the nation’s high unemployment rate and low wages, as they were accused of accepting work at wages lower than what white Americans would accept, thus putting “Americans” out of work. However, they often had no choice but to accept lower wages. They were frequently violently attacked, beaten, tortured, lynched, and massacred. As early as 1850, statutes that prohibited African Americans and Native Americans from testifying in court against whites were applied to the Chinese. This mandate effectively excluded the Chinese from legal protection, stripping Chinese immigrants of even their rights and freedoms. It was in this social environment that a plethora of laws specifically targeting the Chinese developed. For example, the 1870 “Cubic Air Ordinance” stated that all domiciles must have at least five hundred cubic feet of air space for each person. Billed as a public health measure, this law was only enforced in the Chinese quarter, where living quarters were often cramped. However, this was because the Chinese were often refused housing outside of the boundaries of

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Chinatown. After a series of arrests were made in 1876 against those who had violated the Cubic Air Ordinance, many Chinese, protesting their treatment, elected to stay in jail (with the intent to overcrowd it). The jail then fell in violation of the Cubic Air Ordinance, the Chinese argued. The city’s response was to create the 1876 Queue Ordinance. Explicitly targeting Chinese males, the law stated that any prisoners in the county jail had to have their hair cut within one inch of the scalp.\(^{38}\)

The culmination of these anti-Chinese ordinances and laws was the national 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act—the only United States law to deny naturalization and halt immigration on the basis of race. It barred Chinese laborers from entering the United States for a period of ten years (which was later extended) and effectively ended Chinese immigration.\(^{39}\) Furthermore, it only allowed Chinese merchants, students, teachers, diplomats, and travelers, to continue to immigrate in small numbers. It also reified the earlier interpretations of the Naturalization law, permanently excluding Chinese immigrants already in the United States from obtaining citizenship. As a result of this legislation, until their repeal in 1943, the Chinese communities in the United States had imbalanced sex ratios, which threatened the survival of the Chinese in America. In 1860, the sex ratio of males to females was already 19:1.\(^{40}\) In 1890, the ratio widened to 27:1.\(^{41}\) Even the sexually unbalanced Chinese community was used as a point of anti-Chinese criticism by white Americans, though it was the race-targeted legislation that enforced such gendered immigration patterns. In the 1876 Senate hearing on Chinese immigration, a

\(^{38}\) Losing one’s queue was an extreme act of humiliation for Chinese men. Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement*, 51, 63.


\(^{41}\) Ibid.
witness stated that “The Chinese are bad for us, because they come here without their families. Families are the center of all that is elevating in mankind, yet here we have a very large Chinese male population.”

In the face of this nation-wide discrimination, Chinese immigrants strengthened their own communities, popularly called “Chinatowns.” The end of the gold rush and completion of the transcontinental railroad led many Chinese immigrants to urban areas. These neighborhoods served the Chinese community well, for most of the stores and businesses were Chinese-owned, and had no qualms about hiring Chinese workers. Chinatowns also served as a support network and provided a sense of community and familiarity among its Chinese residents.

An analysis of how social rhetoric and legal policies shaped conceptions of the Chinese as a group of people who were criminal, diseased, and immoral would not be complete without considering how social discourse also affected the image of San Francisco’s Chinese quarter—the United States’ oldest Chinatown. Through this rhetorical construction, Chinatown was established as a uniquely Chinese place, and in turn, the Chinese were simultaneously racialized and criminalized in any discussions regarding Chinatown. But what the impression of Chinatown reveals about the social climate of the time more accurately reflects the racial and

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43 Though the name “Chinatown” might suggest a neighborhood where only Chinese people resided, there were also a great number of whites who resided in the Chinese quarter. Historian Ivan Light describes Chinatown as “a large entertainment district for white patrons, especially those who wanted to buy prostitutes.” Ivan Light, “From Vice District to Tourist Attraction: The Moral Career of American Chinatown, 1880-1940,” Pacific Historical Review 43 (1974): 367-394.
class sentiments of those observing and criticizing Chinatown, rather than the Chinese themselves.  

Beyond being a social construct, “Chinatown” was also a political creation that reinforced a system of racial classification. As a representation of both a physical place and a racial category, Chinatown stood for everything that made the Chinese different from the society that existed beyond its arbitrary boundaries. It marked the distinction between the Chinese who existed within the space, and the whites who lived outside of it. Geographer Kay J. Anderson examines Vancouver’s Chinatown in “The Idea of Chinatown: The Power of Place and Institutional Practice in the Making of a Racial Category.” Anderson argues that the actions of the government are what legitimized ideas of the Chinese and Chinatown, “inscribing social definitions of identity and place in institutional practice and space.” The role of institutional practice in legitimizing the conception of Chinatown is central to Anderson’s argument, and to understand how the actions of the city and state helped to further propel views of the Chinese as the “Other.” Chinatown also served to reaffirm white identity through the process of other-ing and racializing the Chinese; it was the site of everything that made the Chinese simultaneously different yet curiously exotic. Chinatown was most frequently painted as a place of vice: opium

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44 In *The Racial Contract*, philosopher Charles W. Mills factors race into the Social Contract, arguing that the racial contract is a set of agreements between whites that subordinates non-whites, and that the racial contract “has the best claim to being an actual historical fact” than the Social Contract. Mills proposes the racial contract to understand racial domination, particularly how white supremacy, as a political system, is built upon racial exclusion and domination. In his philosophical musings about race, he also theorizes about space, writing: “Space must be normed and raced at the macrolevel (entire countries and continents), the local level (city neighborhoods), and ultimately even the microlevel of the body itself (the contaminated and contaminating carnal halo of the non-white body). Applying Mills’ theory on spatial construction to San Francisco’s Chinatown in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, the Chinese were the “savages” directly in contrast with “civilized” whites. Thus, the “inherently deviant” behavior of the Chinese went beyond the level of the individual. Chinatown, a space marked as explicitly inhabited by the Chinese, characterized the incivility of the Chinese. The underlying fear, at the macrolevel, was that the Chinese would “contaminate” the white American nation. Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997): 20, 44.

smoking and prostitution; immorality: gambling and joss houses; and mystery. Meanings that became attached to the classification of the space of “Chinatown” came to define the Chinese in the minds of white Americans.

Another image of Chinatown portrayed it as a site of disease, contagion, and filth. As a rhetorical tool, this was perhaps the most powerful (and harmful) abstraction of Chinatown, for the very existence of Chinatown made it a threat to the public health and safety of white America. For those who advocated for the removal and razing of Chinatown multiple times over the course of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, its status as a “cancer spot” supported their argument that Chinatown was a stain on San Francisco’s landscape.46 San Francisco had a history of smallpox, cholera, and bubonic plague outbreaks in the late nineteenth-century.47 Unsurprisingly, accusations and blame were often pinned on the Chinese without substantial evidence and falsely so. In the 1869-1870 San Francisco Municipal Report, Health Officer Bates described Chinatown as a place of subhuman conditions, where

the great majority of them live crowded together in rickety, filthy and dilapidated tenement houses like so many cattle or hogs...In passing through that portion of the city occupied by them, the most absolute squalidness and misery meets one at every turn....Nothing short of an ocular demonstration can convey an idea of Chinese poverty and depravity.48

The notion that Chinatown was a “laboratory of infection—situated in the very heart of our city, distilling its deadly poison by day and by night, and sending it forth to contaminate the atmosphere of the streets and houses of a populous, wealthy, and intelligent community,” drove

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47 See Craddock, City of Plagues and Shah, Contagious Divides for more information on racialized public health history of San Francisco.
fear into the minds of white Americans.⁴⁹ Not only was the space of Chinatown diseased, but the rhetorical construction pathologized the Chinese as well, signifying a greater threat to healthy, white American bodies.

Visual representations of Chinatown through photographs and images helped to conceptualize the rhetoric about the neighborhood.⁵⁰ Historian K. Scott Wong argues that images of Chinatown—a “contested terrain”—are abstracted as part of a larger sociopolitical agenda that attempted to define and reinforce meanings of American and Chinese culture.⁵¹ Wong shows that representations of Chinatown versus Euro-American communities as well as social conflicts between Euro-Americans and Chinese immigrants highlighted the images of Chinatown as a “forever foreign” space.⁵² The liberty artists took in mythologizing Chinatown as crowded, dark, dingy, and maze-like shaped whites’ perceptions of a space that both piqued their curiosity and repulsed them.

Chinatown was physically located in the heart of downtown San Francisco—prime real estate—spanning twelve blocks by 1885.⁵³ Due to its central location, it was almost inevitable that the Chinese and white Americans would come into contact. The fear of contagion through contact with the Chinese encouraged anti-Chinese rhetoric and sentiment. Efforts to raze Chinatown or to relocate it were particularly threatening to Chinese immigrants. Outside the

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⁴⁹ Workingmen’s Party of California, Chinatown Declared a Nuisance, 1880: 5, as cited in Craddock, City of Plagues, 80.
⁵² Ibid., 4.
⁵³ See Figure 1: Official Map of Chinatown in San Francisco, 1885. The color-coded map details the various buildings in Chinatown and their uses (e.g. gambling, Chinese prostitution, opium den, joss house, white prostitution, residence). This map was released as part of “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.”
boundaries of Chinatown, it was difficult for the Chinese to get housing due to discrimination from landlords and neighborhoods who did not want Chinese living among them.\textsuperscript{54}

The skewed image and negative depiction of Chinatown is largely related to anti-Chinese discourse. The social construction of the space of Chinatown was extremely important in affecting public perceptions of the Chinese, perceptions shaped by American xenophobia.\textsuperscript{55} In \textit{Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans}, historian Ronald Takaki claims that the existence of the notion of a white, racially homogenous America precluded the arrival of the Chinese, which predetermined the Chinese for exclusion.\textsuperscript{56} The Chinese were deemed to be inassimilable—due to their marked differences in customs, food, dress, language, appearance—amidst a national moment that pushed for racially pure American cities;\textsuperscript{57} since they were not white, they were identified as “outsiders,” unfit for inclusion. The negative imagery of Chinatown that was circulated contributed to this process of defining whiteness through the exclusion of racial others.

In 1876, the California State Senate conducted an investigation into the “moral, social, and political effect” of Chinese immigration. As a result of public discourse and demand, the Senate created a special committee to examine the impact of Chinese immigration in San Francisco. Interviews took place over fifteen days from April 11 to June 3 in San Francisco and Sacramento. 59 witnesses were selected; among those were six ex-diplomats, politicians, and merchants who had lived in China, legal professionals, policemen, four clergymen, two journalists, and two doctors. Eighteen Chinese men, six of whom were representatives of


\textsuperscript{56} Takaki, \textit{Strangers from a Different Shore}, 100.

\textsuperscript{57} Craddock, \textit{City of Plagues}, 71.
Chinese organizations in San Francisco, were also interviewed.\(^{58}\) The end result was a fifty page “Address to the People of the United States upon the Evil of Chinese Immigration,” a fifteen page “Memorial of the Senate of California to the Congress of the United States,” and a 160 page “Testimony Taken before a Committee of the Senate of the State of California” that included a transcription of the interviews.\(^{59}\)

The findings of the 1876 Senate investigation played a critical role in shaping public opinion on Chinese immigration. A main focus of the report was the impact of Chinese labor in American society. The question of whether Chinese laborers were *coolie* immigrant workers or “slaves” or “free” was a visible source of anxiety that was explored in the investigation. The Committee was concerned with the “demoralization” of “our own race” caused by “servile labor.”\(^{60}\) Specifically, the concerns of the impact of Chinese labor were mainly associated with fears of the moral degradation of white working-class men and women.\(^{61}\) In particular, Chinese men doing jobs normally occupied by white women was seen as an example of the gender disorder of the Chinese community. It was suggested in the report that the taking over of white women’s jobs by Chinese women would lead white women to fall into prostitution.\(^{62}\) This image of the helpless white woman was then used to combat any Chinese labor attempts. White American laborers sought to end the legal importation of Chinese contract laborers for fear of the loss of their own jobs and economic means. This investigation impacted immigration policies of the United States and was used as a major source to support the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act.\(^{63}\)

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 34.
\(^{60}\) Ibid., 38.
\(^{61}\) Ibid., 33.
\(^{62}\) Ibid., 43.
\(^{63}\) Ibid., 33. The Address and Memorial were passed along to the United States Congress to demand that the federal government take action to halt Chinese immigration.
The anti-Chinese movement that developed during the 1850s, reached its height in the late 1870s, and culminated with the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, was very powerful; it pervaded local and national politics as well as the perceptions of the common man. Organized labor groups, who interpreted the Chinese as threats to economic opportunity and labor, provided the main thrust behind the anti-Chinese movement.

Through the anti-Chinese rhetoric, Chinatown was conceptualized as a space that necessitated police patrol, and by association, criminalized the Chinese residents. The city’s appointment of police in Chinatown helped to shape the manner in which everyday people perceived the Chinese. The presence of special police in Chinatown, whose objective was to simultaneously police and protect the Chinese residents, was in part due to the rhetorical construction of Chinatown as a place of squalor and immorality. The exaggeration of the criminal nature of the Chinese through anti-Chinese discourse shaped the perception of a need for police in Chinatown. Although the special police officers were tasked with providing services to the Chinese—what appeared on the surface to be a positive task, in support of the Chinese, the placement of police in Chinatown also contributed to the rhetoric in which the Chinese were discussed. Since the other part of a special’s job was to contain vice within Chinatown, the actions of the specials only confirmed the anti-Chinese rhetoric that generalized all Chinese women in the United States as prostitutes, slaves, and Chinese men as opium-addicted, gamblers.

The anti-Chinese legislation, clubs, and violence, was the environment in which the Chinese were further targeted for surveillance. Following the 1867 California State Senate Hearing on Chinese immigration, anti-Chinese sentiment in San Francisco continued to grow stronger and gained momentum, coinciding with the rise of the Workingmen’s Party of
California (WPC). Following a nativist agenda interested in the rights of the laborer, the WPC led the anti-Chinese charge in San Francisco with the slogan, “The Chinese Must Go!” Tensions among working class laborers and the Chinese reached a fever pitch by July 1877.
Figure 1. San Francisco Board of Supervisors. Official Map of Chinatown in San Francisco, July 1885. Courtesy of the San Francisco Public Library.
Chapter II

Evolution of the Nineteenth Century San Francisco Police Department: From Specials to the Chinatown Squad

The police have in the past years largely broken up these laundry opium joints but there are hundreds aye thousands of our American boys and girls who have acquired this deadly habit and are doomed hopelessly doomed beyond a shadow of redemption.

—Meat vs. rice: American manhood against Asiatic coolieism, which shall survive?, American Federation of Labor

On July 23, 1877, a crowd of six to seven thousand gathered peacefully in a sandlot adjacent to San Francisco’s City Hall to rally in sympathy for the plight of workers and labor strikes in the eastern United States.¹ What had begun as an act of solidarity for fellow working-class men quickly grew out of hand. Speeches calling for an eight-hour workday and the nationalization of the railroad were interrupted by the appearance of anti-coolie clubs. The crowd turned its sights to the two groups whom they felt were most responsible for the economic plight of white workingmen in San Francisco: the Chinese and the white business elites who hired them. Many of these white businessmen owned property in Chinatown leased by Chinese businesses and residents.²

White mobs continued to threaten Chinatown over the next few days, which became known as the Sandlot Riots. The Chinese Six Companies wrote to Mayor Bryant requesting protection amid the anti-Chinese social climate. “We are not ignorant that self-defense is the

Following the Panic of 1873, the economic depression forced railroad companies to cut workers’ wages. The Great Railroad Strikes of 1877 was an antagonistic response by railroad workers in West Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Missouri, and Illinois, toward industry leaders. The Strikes in each city turned violent, lasted forty-five days, and was ultimately suppressed with the arrival of federal troops sent by President Hayes from city to city.
² Shah, Contagious Divides, 36.
right of all men; should a riotous attack be made upon the Chinese quarter we should have
neither the power nor the disposition to restrain our countrymen from defending themselves to
the last extremity, and selling their lives as dearly as possible.”\textsuperscript{3} The anti-Chinese crowd grew to
approximately five thousand people and their actions became increasingly bold, wreaking havoc
at the docks of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, the company whom mob-goers felt was
responsible for the transportation of the Chinese to California, and the Oriental Warehouse, a
storage facility for steamers carrying Chinese goods.

One result of the Sandlot Riots was the realization that the San Francisco Police
Department (SFPD) needed to increase its number of officers. The unofficial moniker of the
group of officers appointed to patrol Chinatown as the “Chinatown Squad” is significant because
much in the same way that Chinatown was abstracted as a health menace, mysterious, and
uniquely Chinese space, just the mere creation and existence of the Chinatown Squad served to
reinforce social constructions of the Chinese as in-need of policing, criminal, and deviant. The
creation of the Squad and its sustained existence until 1970 is quite curious because it was the
only police group targeted at or for a specific ethnic group in late nineteenth-century San
Francisco.\textsuperscript{4} Bordering San Francisco’s Chinatown was the Little Italy neighborhood—no
counterpart Italian Squad existed. For the large numbers of Latino miners arriving from places
such as Mexico, Chile, or Peru, no such squad was created.\textsuperscript{5}

Pointing out these discrepancies perhaps begs the question: what was the function of the
Chinatown Squad? Was it for the protection of white San Francisco against the morally

\textsuperscript{3} Chris Carlsson, “The Workingmen’s Party and the Dennis Kearney Agitation.” FoundSF.org. Last
updated 1995.

\textsuperscript{4} Although the Squad was officially abolished in 1970, the Gang Task Force eventually took its place in
order to deal with increased gang violence in Chinatown.

\textsuperscript{5} San Francisco Police historian Kevin J. Mullen writes: “Police Chief Alfred Nelder [Chief 1970-1971]
said that he saw ‘no reason why we should single out Chinatown when we don’t have special police units
for our Latino neighborhoods or any other district,’” as cited in Mullen, Chinatown Squad, 161.
questionable leisure activities of the Chinese; to monitor and punish the Chinese; or to protect the Chinese against potential rioters like during the July 1877 Sandlot Riots? To put it simply, whose interests were served by the Chinatown Squad? A couple of points may be extrapolated from the replacement of special police officers with regular Squad officers. Primarily that the specials system was not working in the eyes of the SFPD and the municipal government. It was discovered that special officers were accepting bribes from the Chinese to turn a blind eye to vice practices. Secondly, that the Squad was intentionally created to serve a different purpose than the special police who had been patrolling Chinatown. The Squad was meant to discover and prevent crime. However, was the Squad effective in accomplishing its goals at the end of the nineteenth century? There is no simple answer. The Squad’s interaction with the municipal government, whites, and Chinese residents in Chinatown was based on complex relationships, oftentimes in which mutual benefit was the goal as opposed to actually upholding the law. The United States police have a history of enforcing racial and cultural oppression that benefit some people and not others.

This chapter focuses on the creation of what would eventually become known as the Chinatown Squad and analyzes the Squad’s role and relationship to residents in Chinatown in the late nineteenth-century. In this chapter, I first provide an in-depth analysis of the “special” police system in place in Chinatown as early as 1867 and describe why this system of policing was determined to be ineffective and eventually terminated. Second, I investigate the legislation

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6 California State Legislature, Senate Special Committee on Chinese Immigration, *Chinese Immigration*, 111. In 1876, George Duffield, an officer of the SFPD, testified in the Senate Special Committee on Chinese Immigration, *Chinese Immigration*, that he joined the SFPD in 1853/54 and was called to the Chinese quarter in the last nine years. Although special officers may have been patrolling Chinatown earlier than 1867, Duffield’s date was the earliest mention of specials in Chinatown within *Chinese Immigration: Its Social, Moral, and Political Effect: Report to the California State Senate of its Special Committee on Chinese Immigration*. Special police existed in San Francisco as early as 1862, though I have not been able to find an indication of the exact date specials began patrolling Chinatown. As cited in
responsible for the expansion of the San Francisco Police Department (SFPD) in 1878 that led to the replacement of specials with the Chinatown Squad. In order to contextualize and understand the growth of the SFPD, I also briefly cover the nineteenth century policing movement in the United States. Finally, I examine the Squad itself. I argue that the Chinatown Squad functioned as a social agent—a physical embodiment of anti-Chinese sentiment resulting from increased anti-Chinese rhetoric—that implicitly promoted and reinforced negative public images of the Chinese and Chinatown, particularly affecting notions of citizenship.

As the population of Chinese immigrants increased over time, the SFPD deemed it necessary to place police in the Chinese quarter “for the effect of this large criminal population is very injurious on the morals of the community.” It seemed that unless the vice and immoral habits of the Chinese were placed under surveillance, the entire city of San Francisco was at risk for corruption. As early as 1867, special police officers were assigned to patrol the Chinese quarter. In 1876, there remained five or six “specials” in Chinatown whose job was to “keep the streets clean.” However, specials were different than regular SFPD officers. James R. Rogers, a police officer in San Francisco commented on the work of the specials in Chinatown: “The officers are all thorough, first class officers. I consider them as fine police officers as there are on
the force. I...have always found them up to the mark. They make a great many arrests, and recover much stolen property." The placement and presence of special police in the Chinese quarter served two broad purposes. One was so that the municipal government had a point of entry and legally-sanctioned contact with a steadily increasing population of Chinese—a race marked as cunning, evil, and predisposed towards deviance. The specials were supposed to regulate the immoral activities taking place in Chinatown, most easily achieved through a process of containing vice within the seven or eight blocks of Chinatown so as not to taint the Anglo American population of San Francisco. The work of the specials also helped to define and shape the boundaries of whiteness, particularly white masculinity. Second was to act as a guard for the Chinese quarter because there were not enough regular police to do the job. The Chinese quarter contained inhabitants of a variety of racial backgrounds, not only Chinese. Irish, Italian, Portuguese, Mexican, Canadian, and Anglo Americans also owned business and residences there. However, Chinatown (as evidenced by its name), was imagined as a uniquely Chinese space. In any case, the specials were there to also protect residents in Chinatown from visitors to the Chinese quarter who participated in the very sorts of leisurely debauchery that could be found in Chinatown.

Prostitution, gambling, and opium smoking were three of the vice operations in Chinatown that were of the highest concern to municipal officials and the police. Chinese prostitution, in particular, was seen as a “leading threat to the moral and social order." Popular stories abounded of how Chinese prostitution was really “sexual slavery” and that Chinese women were kidnapped, sold, or tricked into this line of work. Criticism of Chinese female

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10 Ibid., 127.
11 Ibid., 127.
12 Shah, Contagious Divides, 25.
13 Ibid., 79.
prostitution was rooted in fear of the moral corruption and medical well-being of white patrons.\textsuperscript{14} Though there were female prostitutes of other ethnic backgrounds, Chinese women were singled out in political and social discourse for their “public visibility and danger to San Francisco’s social order.”\textsuperscript{15} Chinese prostitution in San Francisco had been condemned by police, moral reformers, and politicians since at least 1854. Between 1854 and 1865, the SFPD undertook a campaign to move prostitution cribs from high-traffic locations to alleys that could “hide the degradations and vice...from the view of the women and children who patronize the streetcars.”\textsuperscript{16} Arguments against Chinese female prostitution were strongly pursued in the press, by critics, and carried out by the police.

In the eyes of San Francisco’s law enforcement officers, like the majority of the American public, the Chinese were presupposed as an “immoral, mean, mendacious, dishonest, thieving people.”\textsuperscript{17} The seven or eight blocks of Chinatown, then, were seen as the “homes of refuge for the criminal classes.”\textsuperscript{18} D. J. Murphy, District Attorney of San Francisco stated his belief that “seven-tenths to eight-tenths of the Chinese population of San Francisco belong to the

\textsuperscript{14} Historian Nayan Shah writes in \textit{Contagious Divides}, 79: “At first, when Chinese female prostitutes were perceived as providing sexual service exclusively to Chinese men, white critics viewed them as merely immoral. But once they were believed to solicit white males, their presence was considered even more dangerous.


\textsuperscript{17} Senate Special Committee, “An Address to the People of the United States Upon the Evils of Chinese Immigration,” in \textit{Chinese Immigration}, 19.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 36.
criminal classes.”\(^{19}\) This negative perception of the Chinese that permeated the minds of law enforcement officers emerged in part from the public anti-Chinese discourse. George Duffield, an officer of the San Francisco Police Force, described the Chinese as a “nation of thieves” without any regard for justice in the United States.\(^ {20}\) In examining the actions taken by special officers against the Chinese, it is difficult to separate their actions from the influence of anti-Chinese attitudes found in public discourse. Alfred Clark, Clerk of the Chief of Police of San Francisco, stated that: “Nearly every Chinaman breaks the laws and the ordinances of the city, but we cannot catch them so as to convict.”\(^ {21}\) In addition to being seen as vice-ridden, the Chinese were seen as particularly uncooperative with American laws. Henry H. Ellis, Chief of the SFPD, found that it was extremely difficult to enforce laws among the Chinese because “the Chinese will swear to anything, according to orders. Their testimony is so unreliable that they cannot be believed.”\(^ {22}\) This statement reflects the pervasiveness of anti-Chinese sentiment: even the leader of the city’s crime enforcement believed the Chinese were naturally conniving and liars. It suggests that the Chinese might not have stood a chance to defend themselves on the street, in their homes, businesses, or in court. Furthermore, the Chinese were singled out as a group who lived outside of the law. Yet there were also debaucherous whites who were patrons of operations of vice in Chinatown. But only the Chinese were thought of as innately immoral. Through this rhetoric, the immorality of whites was completely erased; they were law-abiding except when they entered the space of Chinatown, and that was only a testament of the Chinese ability to corrupt.

\(^{19}\) Senate Special Committee, *Chinese Immigration*, 32.
\(^{20}\) Ibid., 33.
\(^{21}\) Ibid., 134.
\(^{22}\) Senate Special Committee, “An Address to the People of the United States Upon the Evils of Chinese Immigration,” in *Chinese Immigration*, 19.
As the “Chinese question”—whether or not the Chinese should be allowed to stay or immigrate to the United States—became more heated and became a focus of national discussion, the efficacy of the special police system in San Francisco’s Chinatown was brought into question. A particular concern was the bribery of the special officers for two reasons since it was so prevalent. The first was driven by fear—fear that prolonged contact with the Chinese would allow their immorality to rub off on the specials. The second was that the specials were not doing their part to contain vice within Chinatown, or more broadly, to ensure the safety of Anglo San Francisco. Bribery meant that the specials were turning a blind eye to the illicit activities happening in Chinatown in exchange for personal monetary benefit. This concern was driven by the first fear that the morality of the specials would become tainted through interaction with the Chinese. F.L. Gordon, publisher of a Chinese newspaper in San Francisco, shared his knowledge about police bribery in Chinatown:

Q—Do you know anything about money being paid to protect gambling houses?
A—Yes, sir. Some two years ago one of these Chinamen went around among the gambling houses and told them that by paying a license of from eight to thirty dollars a month they could escape arrest; but if by mistake they should be arrested their fine would be paid from this money. If they did not pay this license they would be arrested, and their businesses broken up. Nearly all the gambling houses paid it, and these men went around for months collecting it. A special officer went around to see that the collections were made.23

Though special officers were assigned beats in Chinatown by the SFPD, they were employed and paid by the Chinese.24 The fact that the specials were paid by Chinese storekeepers and not the city treasury created a relationship premised on a system of bribery to

23 Ibid., 213-214.
develop between the Chinese and the specials. The specials had no regular salary from the city; rather, they depended on the Chinese residents on their beats for pay and their subsistence. George Duffield stated regarding his income as a special officer: “we depend on the voluntary contributions from the store-keepers.” However, the specials certainly tried to get as much money as they could. Wong Ben, a Chinese interpreter for the San Francisco Police Court, stated that the owners of gambling houses in Chinatown paid “five dollars a week.... These four big fellows, besides that, collect thirteen dollars a month to pay a white man to get them out of trouble. The lottery houses pay eight dollars a month.” A special’s pay and bribery were distinct. Bribes were money specials received on the side, in addition to their standard pay from Chinese residents. Two meanings can be extrapolated from the act of bribery: first, the specials wanted to make money on the side; second, the Chinese exerted agency in their relationship with the police and did not simply act the part of the victim when confronted with the law. The Chinese took it upon themselves to change the course of their relationship with the specials to become one that worked to their advantage. 

The special officers worked to make the vice in Chinatown less visible, not to completely shut it down because it was not in their best interests. The specials were paid by people living in their beats, which could include prostitutes and gamblers. Logically, then, it would not make sense for the specials to enforce or even advocate for the closing of gambling houses and prostitution houses, since these places provided the specials with an income. The interrogators of the *Chinese Immigration Report* noticed this discrepancy and wondered if closing those houses would destroy the salaries of the specials:

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25 Senate Special Committee, *Chinese Immigration*, 49.
26 Ibid., 114.
28 Senate Special Committee, *Chinese Immigration*, 167.
Q—Don’t it seem to you, in the case of special officers, they are interested in not breaking up gambling houses, but in having them in full blast?...I am asking you where the moneyed interest would be?

A—Money is a great lever. There is no doubt of that.

Q—The moneyed interest would be in favor of having them open?

A—Yes; as a matter of course, a man wants to see his business do well.

Q—And the special policeman’s business in this city flourishes when houses of prostitution and gambling houses are open?

A—He collects more. But there is a dark hour in all kinds of business.

Q—The dark hour of your business is when the houses are closed?

A—Yes, sir.29

The resolution to the problem of bribery, which was believed to be the primary impediment to the diminution of vice in the Chinese quarter, was this: to replace the special officers with regular policemen on the same beats, but to enact a different system of payment. Basically, the regular policemen would be paid like regular policemen—from the city treasury—rather than by Chinatown’s residents. That way, the regular officers would be able to do their duty without being tempted by bribes. Clark, Clerk of the Chief of Police, suggested that that it would be best to use regular officers to close up gambling and prostitution houses because they have no obligations to favor gamblers or prostitutes.30 However, he noted that as soon as the special officers left their beats, the gambling and prostitution houses would open again since “so many of these people are law-breakers that it would require a small army of police to look after them, were we to try to weed our crime altogether.”31

Moving beyond the issue of bribery, the California legislature’s Special Committee on Chinese Immigration probed into the efficacy of the special officer system in the Chinese quarter. In a portion of the legislative investigation into the Chinese population, a section titled “The State Government Powerless,” reveals the incompetency and “evils” of the special police:

30 Ibid., 9.
31 Senate Special Committee, *Chinese Immigration*, 135.
The City of San Francisco is one of the best governed cities in the world. Its police force is as able and efficient as any, and yet the concurrent testimony of its most experienced and reliable officers is that it is impossible to suppress or punish crimes committed by the Chinese population.  

Several reasons surfaced to explain why special officers faced difficulties enforcing the law in Chinatown while on the job. In the opinion of SFPD Chief Ellis, the reason why it was so difficult to suppress prostitution and gambling in Chinatown was because to do so would “require a police force so great that the city could not stand the expense.” It is clear that the cost of providing regular officers to patrol Chinatown was not within the SFPD’s budget. Since special police were paid directly by Chinese store-keepers, it saved the city some money. Furthermore, the five or six specials stationed in Chinatown were deemed an insufficient number, considering the number of arrests to make, the witnesses to procure, and the trials to attend. Matt Karcher, former Chief of Police of Sacramento, expressed his opinion that “more policemen would be required for the Chinese quarter than for all the rest of the city. Taking into consideration the present state of taxation, the extra expense would be more than we could stand.” Clark agreed, stating that “crime cannot be entirely suppressed in the Chinese quarter without having a largely increased police force, and an additional number of Courts.” In addition, language barriers made communication between officers and the Chinese difficult. Chief Ellis claimed, “It is difficult to administer justice, because we do not understand their language.” James Duffy, a former member of the SFPD, noted that it was impossible to “get

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32 Ibid., 36.  
33 Senate Special Committee, “Policy and Means of Exclusion: Memorial of the Senate of California to the Congress of the United States,” in Chinese Immigration, 19.  
34 Ibid., 197.  
35 Ibid., 135.  
36 Senate Special Committee, “Policy and Means of Exclusion: Memorial of the Senate of California to the Congress of the United States,” in Chinese Immigration, 19.
interpreters whom we can trust.” Karcher remarked that the interpreters “would tell us that they would be killed if they spoke the truth; that their tribunals would sentence them to death, and pay assassins to dispatch them.”

But despite the criticisms of the special police system, the specials attempted to serve at least some useful function for Chinese residents in Chinatown. Protecting the Chinese was part of a special’s job and what Chinatown’s residents paid them for. Clark summarized precisely in what way the specials helped the Chinese: “if a drunken sailor, or other persons drunk, violating the law, or attacking women, the special officers are useful.” However, one historian argues for a different perspective of the usefulness of the specials—one which he identifies as police extortion. Instead of the Chinese bribing the specials, he writes about the weekly payments specials collected from merchants to “clean their respective quarters” and to provide protection. Yet, the merchants often did not receive the sanitary services they were supposed to have been provided. In addition, a letter to Henry H. Ellis, the Chief of the SFPD, from the heads of the Chinese Six Companies addressed the inadequate services provided by the specials:

Sir: We wish to call your attention to the fact that at the present time frequent and unprovoked assaults are made upon our Chinese People while walking peacefully the streets of this city. The assaulting party is seldom arrested by your officers, but if a Chinaman resists the assault he is frequently arrested and punished by fine or by imprisonment. Inflammatory and incendiary addresses against the Chinese, delivered in the public streets to the idle and irresponsible element of this great city, have already produced unprovoked and unpunished assaults on some of our

Ibid., 192.
Chinese interpreters for the police or police court were placed at a difficult crossroads between a loyalty to their Chinese community and a desire to participate and have a say in white American society. Senate Special Committee, “Policy and Means of Exclusion: Memorial of the Senate of California to the Congress of the United States,” in Chinese Immigration, 17.
Shah, Contagious Divides, 23.
people, and we fear that is such things are permitted to go on unchecked a bloody riot against the Chinese may be the result.  

This letter is a powerful testament to the dangerous level of anti-Chinese rhetoric and actions taking place in San Francisco in 1876—enough to elicit a response by leaders of the Chinese Six Companies, who feared for the safety and well-being of their constituents. Though it is not known how Chief Ellis responded to this letter and whether any changes were immediately made in Chinatown in response to this letter, it is important for the Chinese voice and perspective it provides. This letter confirms the prevailing message that the special officer system in Chinatown was ineffective, as gleaned from the testimonies of the 1876 California State Senate Hearing on Chinese Immigration. It highlights the discrepancies in treatment the Chinese faced in comparison to white Americans. The Chinese Six Companies were speaking out on behalf of their community for better protection—protection that they ought to receive as residents in the United States and that they paid for.

The special police system in Chinatown clearly was not functioning under the original intent in which it was established. By 1878, the special police system in Chinatown was abolished and prohibited under “An Act to enable the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco to increase the police force of said city and county, and provide for the appointment, regulation, and payment thereof.” The sections of the Act that addressed the problem of bribery among special police officers by the Chinese to allow vice businesses to operate were a response to the corruption brought to light in the 1876 California State Senate Hearing regarding the relationship between Chinese residents and specials. By 1878, the San

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41 Signed by the Yeong Wo Co., Ming Young Co., Hong Chow Co., Hop Wo Co., Yin Wo Co., Sam Yap Co. Senate Special Committee, Chinese Immigration, 46.
42 Section 3 of “An Act to enable the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco to increase the police force of said city and county, and provide for the appointment, regulation, and payment thereof,” as listed in A. E. T. Worley, The Consolidation Act and Other Acts Relating to the Government of the City and County of San Francisco, (San Francisco: WM. M. Hinton & Co., 1887): 259.
Francisco municipal government had become much stricter in regards to clamping down on the immoral activities available in Chinatown. As a result, the Act thoroughly addressed and clarified any possible points of confusion regarding the job description of a special police officer, should the Police Commissioners elect to appoint one:

Any special officer asking for, soliciting, demanding, collecting, or receiving, or causing others to do so for his benefit, any money, or other valuable thing, upon pretense of guarding for protection of the persons, or property of the persons, from whom the same shall be asked, demanded, solicited, collected, or received, except the persons, firms, or corporations so petitioning for his said appointment, and named in said warrant, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor, and on conviction punished accordingly, and shall be dismissed from the service;\(^\text{43}\)

However, section four of the Act stated that a special police officer could never be again appointed in San Francisco’s Chinese quarter. In addition, the regular police officers that were to replace the specials in Chinatown had to be rotated out regularly and continuously.\(^\text{44}\) This measure was to ensure that the police officers would not develop relationships with residents of Chinatown over a prolonged period of time.

The end of the special police in Chinatown and the expansion of the “new police” in San Francisco coincided with the policing movement happening across the nation. There were a few major changes to policing in most United States’ cities in the nineteenth century. An urban historian cites riots as the most typical cause for a city to change its form of policing to the “modern form.”\(^\text{45}\) He writes that the creation of the modern police force was a “reflection of growing intolerance for riots and disorder rather than a response to an increase in crime.”\(^\text{46}\) First, the police became organized under a hierarchical structure, which allowed for an ordered and

\(^{43}\) Ibid.  
\(^{44}\) Section 4, Ibid.  
\(^{46}\) Ibid.
centralized form of organization that made the chain of command more efficient.\textsuperscript{47} Second, police officers began to wear uniforms, which increased their visibility to the public.\textsuperscript{48} Third, the police became more active as they were paid regular salaries instead of responding and being paid on a case-by-case basis.\textsuperscript{49} Steady incomes made police jobs quite attractive. Political parties in office took advantage of the desirability of police jobs and often gave these jobs to officers who would work in their favor at the ballot box.

The role of the new, reformed police was to discover and prevent crime. Specifically, the police were supposed to “protect citizens from assault and theft as well as to combat vice in the form of drunkenness, gambling, and prostitution.”\textsuperscript{50} However, the intended goals of the police and the actuality of their practice were and are often two different things. \textit{The Iron First and the Velvet Glove: An Analysis of the U.S. Police} published by the Institute for the Study of Labor and Economic Crisis states that the “police have \textit{primarily} served to enforce the class, racial, sexual and cultural oppression that has been an integral part of the development of capitalism in the U.S.”\textsuperscript{51} Furthermore, the “police were not created to serve ‘society’ or ‘the people,’ but to serve \textit{some} parts of society and \textit{some} people at the expense of others.”\textsuperscript{52} The Chinatown Squad, for instance, is an example of how the needs of some but not all were met. Anglo San Francisco was being served at the expense of Chinese residents in Chinatown, for the Squad’s creation was a reaction to the fears and racism of white Americans toward the Chinese, and not created because the Chinese were also seen as Americans deserving of police protection.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 550.
\textsuperscript{48} Uniforms spread to most cities 1850-1880. Ibid., 553.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 551.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 12.
While those were the general trends of the policing movement in the nineteenth century, it is necessary to examine San Francisco’s own specific history with regards to policing. In April 1850, when San Francisco received its first city charter, a police force of 75 men was also established. Chief of Police Martin Burke (Chief 1858-1866) oversaw the implementation of the special police. By 1870, there were twice as many specials as regular officers. While the Committee of Public Safety that quickly formed in response to the racially motivated labor unrest known as the Sandlot Riots, acting alongside the police to the violence and rioters, an ad-hoc Committee was not enough for crime prevention and to maintain order in a growing city. The events of the Sandlot Riots precipitated structural and legal changes in the SFPD.

During the labor rally outside of City Hall that incited the Sandlot Riots, the racially charged rhetoric stirred the feelings of the white laborers in attendance, and a group of approximately 500 men splintered off from the rally and descended upon Chinatown as well as other areas where there were Chinese residences to try to burn them down. Police Chief Ellis had stationed most of his men around Chinatown in anticipation of this riot. Though some damage was done to twenty or thirty Chinese wash houses and groceries, the 150-man SFPD was able to hold off much of the initial mob attack. A report in the *San Francisco Chronicle* described the way the SFPD handled the rioters: “The front rank made a right wheel, driving a portion of the rioters before them. Steadily and firmly they pressed forward, the mob falling back

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53 Ethington, “Vigilantes and the Police,” 204.
54 San Francisco has a history of Vigilance Committees, one in 1851 and one in 1856, prior to the Committee of Public Safety. These Vigilance Committees were created by citizens seeking municipal purification in the spirit of extra-legal violence by taking matters into their own hands. The *San Francisco Chronicle* (March 20, 1878, p. 2, col. 2) criticized the Vigilance Committees: “The Vigilance Committee argument is unreliable, dangerous, and revolutionary. It incites one class, one party, one faction, one caste against another. ...San Francisco—no American city—no class of citizens can safely rely on the vigilance Committee for protection to life and property. ...We must have a good and sufficient police force, or we must expect riot, disorder, confusions, and all sorts of crime.”
more and more rapidly—The mob wavered, broke, and fled. The most dangerous body of rioters was broken up and subdued.\textsuperscript{56} Their police’s intervention was not primarily to protect the Chinese, though that was a side effect. Their intervention in the rioters’ presence indicates their desire to protect the image of San Francisco as a place safe for capital.

In response to the violence of the mobs, the Committee of Public Safety was organized on July 24 to assist the SFPD, which did not have enough officers to control the violent rioters. Four thousand to five thousand men joined the Committee of Public Safety, led by William Tell Coleman, a business leader in San Francisco who was the President of the Committee of Vigilance in 1856 and was known as the “Lion of the Vigilantes.”\textsuperscript{57} The SFPD and rapidly organized Committee of Public Safety worked in tandem to counter the efforts of the mobs, ending the riotous environment in San Francisco by July 30. Coleman’s Committee of Public Safety came to be known as the “Pick-Handle Brigade” because the volunteers were armed with hickory pick-handles, used as makeshift police clubs only when it was necessary. The federal government also sent three naval vessels, arms, and munitions to San Francisco to assist in quelling the riots.\textsuperscript{58} While the violence was suppressed, damage estimated at ten thousand dollars had already been done to Chinatown and other Chinese-owned businesses.\textsuperscript{59} The Committee of Public Safety officially disbanded on September 3.\textsuperscript{60} Over the next few decades, the SFPD served as the principal means by which city leadership maintained municipal contact with its Chinese residents. The entry of the police into controlling the riots and the dispelling of working

\textsuperscript{56} San Francisco Chronicle, July 24, 1877 as cited in Ethington, “Vigilantes and the Police,” 207.

\textsuperscript{57} Ralph Kauer, “The Workingmen's Party of California,” Pacific Historical Review 13, no. 3 (Sep., 1944), 279.

\textsuperscript{58} San Francisco Chronicle, July 26, 1877, as cited in Kauer, “The Workingmen’s Party.”

\textsuperscript{59} Kauer, “Workingmen’s Party,” 279.

\textsuperscript{60} Issel and Cherny, San Francisco, 1865-1932, 126.
class rioters showed that power and authority in San Francisco lay firmly in the hands of the municipal government.

The Sandlot Riots were certainly not the first occasion of anti-Chinese violence in San Francisco, nor did they mark the beginnings of anti-Chinese sentiment in the United States. The Riots are significant because they escalated discussions of Chinese labor and immigration, increasing calls for Chinese exclusion. This moment of mass anti-Chinese attacks spotlights a state-wide and nation-wide attempt and movement towards Chinese exclusion, as seen in mob violence as well as through the platform of a rising political party, the Workingmen’s Party of California (WPC). The Riots clearly delineated the division of interests among San Francisco’s working class and property-owning, business elite. The WPC, for instance, did not want to compete economically with the Chinese in labor. Furthermore, the Sandlot Riots demonstrated to municipal authorities that as a growing cosmopolitan city, its police force was not enough for its increasing population.

In the wake of the Sandlot Riots, it became very clear that the SFPD did not have enough officers to sufficiently police the growing city. The 150 officers were no match for the thousands of men who descended upon Chinatown in July 1877, and the city could not always rely on its residents to form volunteer Committees of Public Safety in times of need. California State Senator Frank McCoppin proposed the McCoppin Bill that would allow for the increase of San Francisco’s police force. It called for an increase of the force from 150 officers to 400. The police force was divided into two classes: the Old and the New. The Old were to be paid $125 a month until January 1, 1879. The New were to be paid $80 per month until the same date, following which both classes would receive a salary of $100 per month. McCoppin’s Police Bill
also sought to increase the number of Captains in the SFPD from four to eight, with a monthly salary of $125 per month.

The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported on McCoppin’s Police Bill on January 18, 1878. It was of the opinion that the Bill was a sound improvement to the SFPD. The new Bill, it pointed out, abolished the problematic specials system. In 1876, five or six special police were paid by Chinese storekeepers to “keep the streets clean” and to guard the Chinese quarter because there were not enough regular SFPD officers to patrol the area.\(^61\) The testimony of the 1876 California state Senate hearing on “The Social, Moral, and Political Effect of Chinese Immigration” revealed that the special police system was not working because the specials accepted bribes from owners of Chinese gambling and prostitution houses. There was disjunction between what white San Franciscans expected the police to do, and what the Chinese paid them to do. There were many recommendations from SFPD officers, special police, and politicians who advocated for “regulars” and an increased police force in order to adequately administer justice and suppress crime in the Chinese quarter. The results of this hearing laid the ground work and convinced politicians and the public of the need for an actual Chinatown Squad, established in 1878.\(^62\)

The McCoppin Bill proved to be the answer to concerns about the inadequacies of the SFPD. By 1878, San Francisco had grown to a population of roughly 310,000 inhabitants and only had 150 policemen.\(^63\) In contrast, when San Francisco’s population was 140,000, the total

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\(^62\) Although the moniker “Chinatown Squad” was not given until many years after its creation, I will refer to this unit assigned to patrol San Francisco’s Chinatown until it was disbanded in 1970 as the Chinatown Squad.

\(^63\) *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 20, 1878, p. 2, col. 2.
police force was 100 men for an area one-fourth of the inhabited area in 1878.\textsuperscript{64} The argument, then, was that one policeman per every 2,066 inhabitants was not enough; San Francisco had the smallest per capita force in the country.\textsuperscript{65} The \textit{San Francisco Chronicle} printed an article urging for the passage of the McCoppin Bill:

\begin{quote}
None is of greater necessity to this city than the Police bill, and it will be a calamity if it fails to become a law.... No city in the Union nor in the world, with pretensions to legal methods of the preservation of peace and order, is so meagerly polices as this; and yet no other city is likely within the next two years to stand in as great need of an adequate and efficient police force.\textsuperscript{66}
\end{quote}

The police force was just too small in relation to the number of people in San Francisco. When the Bill was passed, it more than doubled the size of the force to 400 officers.\textsuperscript{67} The increase in the number of regular officers pushed the special police “out of existence,” and in doing so, the “last vestige of the unprofessional police systems.”\textsuperscript{68} As a result of the changes brought about by the McCoppin Bill, officers of the SPFDP were the highest-paid urban police in the United States from 1880-1899.\textsuperscript{69}

The McCoppin Bill, passed on March 30, 1878, also changed the legal structure of the SFPD. The Chief of Police was no longer to be an elected position; instead he was to be appointed by the Board of Police Commissioners. Prior to 1878, the Chief of Police was elected and sat on this Board with two other elected officials. While this was in part an effort to end

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{65} \textit{S.F. Municipal Reports}, v. 1870-71, p. 82; v. 1883-4, p. 199, as cited in Ethington, “Vigilantes and the Police,” 208.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{69} Ethington, “Vigilantes and the Police,” 213. \textit{San Francisco Chronicle}, March 20, 1878, p. 2, col. 2: “The President of the Board of Commissioners shall receive a monthly salary of $250 and each of the other members of $160. The Board of Supervisors shall have power to increase the police force to 400 men: the pay of the new officers shall be $102 per month;...”
corruption, this shift from election to appointment was in response to the politicization of labor agitation, manifested most notably in the Workingmen’s Party of California (WPC).70 Governmental officials were fearful that the WPC would win seats in city government at the next election and perhaps even the police commission. If the WPC won, the Democrats feared that they would then fill not only the police force but other city seats with their own members, thus increasing the chances of corruption. This provision of the McCoppin Bill placed power of the SFPD under a commission appointed by state courts instead of by local authorities, because it had the potential to become filled with corrupt officials depending on the political party in power.

By the mid-1880s, the police officers assigned to patrol Chinatown had been dubbed the “Chinatown Squad.”71 The purpose of the Squad was to suppress vice and enforce the law in Chinatown. The Squad was comprised of a sergeant and four to six patrol officers.72 In the twentieth century, the Squad’s duties were often expanded to include the suppression of fighting tongs, or community organizations.73

As is often the case with police departments, the Squad (as well as the SFPD) was quite susceptible to bribery. Though the specials were abolished due to their ineffectiveness, it seems that officers on the Squad did not exhibit morals any stronger than their earlier counterparts; they too colluded with the Chinese and accepted bribes. In one case in April 1894, police Chief Patrick Crowley requested a dismissal of Deputy Chief Clerk William E. Hall along with three officers of the Chinatown Squad. The Police Commission approved the dismissal, which led to a great deal of interest and inquiry by the press. Chief Crowley and the Police Commission were rather tight-lipped about the reasons behind the dismissal, which led the press to speculate about

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71 Mullen, Chinatown Squad, 55.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
the police situation in Chinatown. The *San Francisco Chronicle* expressed the belief that the dismissals were just a part of a grander scheme to break a corrupt ring within the SFPD. Rumors within the SFPD pointed to whistle blowing on the Squad’s corruption by Henry Robinson, the new head of the Squad. Apparently, Chief Crowley was unaware of the corrupt officers on the Squad and believed that the system of rotation in Chinatown was effective in preventing corruption.

Officers on the Chinatown Squad were distinct from other SFPD officers in that they wore plainclothes while on duty. It was believed that plainclothes would make the Squad less conspicuous on the streets of Chinatown. Police uniforms were introduced during the policing reform movement in the mid-nineteenth century. The uniforms symbolized the unification of the police force and emphasized their availability and accessibility. One urban historian notes that the uniforms were originally “mocked by commentators and shunned by police officers.” However, the uniforms made the police more visible to the public; it gave them a stronger presence on the streets. Although the Squad officers had no uniform, they were well-equipped with sledgehammers and axes. These tools were used to break into the doors of gambling dens, other vice operations, and sometimes residences. The tools show that the Squad was prepared to do its job through violent means.

But despite its obvious failure in preventing crime, the Squad succeeded in its underlying mission—the continual abstraction of the Chinese as un-American and inassimilable. For

74 Ibid., 76-77.
75 Ibid., 77.
76 Ibid.
80 Mullen, *Chinatown Squad*, 54.
example, an 1885 map that detailed all of the residents and businesses in Chinatown greatly affected the conceptualization of the space of Chinatown and the Chinese as a danger to American society (see Fig. 1). Mainly, they were a danger to white Americans, for it was believed that Chinatown tempted and encouraged white, male Americans to participate in immoral activities. Additionally, the debaucherous reputation of Chinatown was seen as a potential blow to San Francisco’s image. The *Official Map of “Chinatown” in San Francisco*, now often referred to as the “Vice Map of Chinatown,” was the result of two decades of surveillance and visits of “every floor and every room” in Chinatown (see Fig. 1).\(^{81}\) The map was prepared by the Special Committee of the Board of Supervisors as part of a report on the conditions in Chinatown. The Special Committee accompanied the surveyors on their trips to document the “conditions of occupancy of every room,” which included the number of inhabitants, sanitary condition, and use of each room.\(^ {82}\) This color coded map identified different places of vice in Chinatown: “General Chinese Occupancy,” “Chinese Gambling Houses,” “Chinese Prostitution,” “Chinese Opium Resorts,” “Chinese Joss Houses,” and “White Prostitution.”\(^ {83}\) Any businesses owned by whites were noted as “white” on the map. This map is significant because it is the product of and contributor to anti-Chinese discourse of the period.

This map is useful for interpreting the knowledge that was disseminated to the public, and in particular, to the officers of the SPFD. It is a visual presentation of the street knowledge officers would have used while patrolling. The wealth of knowledge of the entrances, exits, dimensions, and number of floors in each building in Chinatown represents the amount of extensive surveillance required to have created the map.\(^ {84}\) Though the report that accompanied

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\(^{82}\) Ibid., 38.  
\(^{83}\) Ibid.  
\(^{84}\) Ibid.
the map mainly focused on public health violations in Chinatown, the amount of effort and surveillance required to obtain a map with precise representations of the buildings in Chinatown was impressive. The literal “mapping of vice onto Chinatown buildings” reflected the rhetorical, perhaps abstract fears of the invasive vices and corrupt morals of the Chinese.85 The SFPD was doing on the ground what the map was doing rhetorically and visually. Police corruption was rampant, as an anonymous individual identified in writing on a copy of an 1885 map:

This ‘Official Map of Chinatown’ shows official knowledge of the illegal gambling resorts, houses of prostitution, opium dens and houses of white prostitutes, which by the payment of blackmail have secured immunity from prosecution etc. and continue collecting filth and unhealthy surroundings which provided the ostensible excuse for the fraudulent quarantine and plague scare of 1900 by the Board of Health.86

Thus, while the 1885 map was meant as a way for municipal officials to investigate Chinatown, particularly the public health code violations, it was also the corrupt policeman’s floor plan to the places of vice in Chinatown.

Like prostitution, opium smoking was viewed as another Chinese vice that was marring white society. After laws were passed in 1875 that cracked down on opium dens in Chinatown, other opium houses opened in areas outside of Chinatown. Articulating the fears of those concerned with the activities of the Chinese, one police officer feared the spread of opium smoking to “schoolboys and clerks who would never have gone into a Chinese den,” and who instead were “learning to like the habit” in “respectable places.”87 To concerned moral reformers and critics, opium dens were disturbing because of the way that smokers were able to mingle in the same room without regard to distinctions of class or race. In 1877, San Francisco police

85 Ibid., 40.
86 SFBS, Official Map of “Chinatown” in San Francisco (San Francisco: Bosqui Engraving and Printing, 1885), in Maps Collection, Bancroft Library. Copy 1 has manuscript annotation, as cited in Shah, Contagious Divides, 40.
87 San Francisco Chronicle, July 25, 1881, cited in H. H. Kane, M.D., Opium Smoking in America and China, (New York, 1882): 10-14, as cited in Shah, Contagious Divides, 94.
counted eight opium dens “conducted by Chinamen, and patronized by both white men and women.” When a physician toured Chinatown’s opium dens in 1882, he was both surprised and horrified to find great numbers of white addicts in them: “Men and women, young girls [...]...hardened prostitutes, representatives of the ‘hoodlum’ element, young clerks and errand boys...were to be found smoking [opium] together in the pestilential dens of Chinatown.” Thus, confirming the concerns voiced by critics, police raids in Chinatown’s opium dens turned out many white smokers.

As a social agent, the sort of work that the Chinatown Squad did as well as the hostile yet sometimes corrupt interaction with Chinese residents, only amplified rumors and fears of Chinese immorality. Though the creation of the Squad and its actions were not directly responsible for the largest piece of anti-Chinese legislation, the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, its work as a social agent may have swayed the opinions of Californians on “the Chinese question.” Clearly, anti-Chinese sentiment and legislation existed prior to the creation of the Squad and the Squad in no way single-handedly brought about the Exclusion Act, but this was a crucial moment in the history of the Chinese in the United States because it stood for the belief that the Chinese could never, and would never, be accepted as American, let alone United States citizens. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion prohibited the immigration of Chinese laborers, though merchants, students, diplomats, and their families were allowed. However, Chinese immigrants were barred from ever becoming naturalized citizens. They were “aliens ineligible for citizenship.”

89 Kane, *Opium Smoking*, 2, as cited in Light, “From Vice District to Tourist Attraction,” 371.
90 Light, “From Vice District to Tourist Attraction,” 371.
With the daily presence of SFPD officers in Chinatown who were stationed to suppress vice, residents and business owners were under constant surveillance. The Squad served as a reminder to inhabitants and visitors of Chinatown that the Chinese were criminal, in need of policing. However, the relationships that developed between Chinese residents and business owners and the police were not limited to bribery, arrests, or residential inspections, but also in tourism. Chinatown was the most popular tourist destination in San Francisco at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries. And members of the Chinatown Squad served as guides that accompanied visits through all of the “dangerous” sites of Chinatown.
Chapter III

“Living in a civilization as old as the pyramids”¹: Authentic Tourism in Chinatown

John Chinaman is the dirtiest neighbor anyone can have they have their filthy habits from childhood up the moment you cross the borders of Chinatown you experience a peculiar strange smell a sort of combination of opium mixed with tobacco fish and vegetables but unlike anything else you cannot get used to it and a great many people get sick at the first smell of it . . .

—The Chinaman as he is, George B. Miller

During a night-time tour of San Francisco’s Chinatown, a policeman led a group of ministers to the living quarters of some Chinese residents. It was a violent visit. Upon entering the living space, the policeman “pulled away the apology for a curtain from before the miserable hole in which a poor Chinaman was peacefully sleeping.” To allow for a better view for his guests, the policeman “then brought the full glare of his lamp upon the face of the sleeper.” Recounting this event, Reverend Otis Gibson wrote that the sleeping man “feeling annoyed naturally growled his dissatisfaction.” Gibson continued, writing that “policeman for the delectation of those pious men seized the poor fellow and brutally pounded and punched his head with his...fist.” He ended the story sarcastically, “How our civilization must shine in the eyes of those poor underground Chinamen!” As a missionary in Chinatown, Reverend Gibson strove to dispel the negative image of the Chinese. His story of the policeman who invaded a Chinese man’s personal living space is one of many stories that came out of journeys to Chinatown. For instance, local photographers went into different spaces in Chinatown to “show the Chinaman taken by surprise, as the flash light illuminates his den.”² While on excursions in Chinatown, many visitors sought the expertise and care of policemen. Police guides were sometimes

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preferred for two main reasons: their ability to provide protection and safety, and their knowledge of Chinatown and ability to access spaces within Chinatown because of their mandated presence.³

The perceived authenticity of Chinatown and its residents was an important factor in tourism. Wayfarers had certain ideas of what they would see in Chinatown. Guidebook writers often portrayed Chinatown as similar to a city in China, thus cementing the peoples of Chinatown as “authentic relics of other cultures,” and unlike white Americans.⁴ Some residents of Chinatown found it to their economic advantage to display themselves as what the visitors presumed they would see.⁵ Residents of Chinatown played with the boundaries of authenticity and their ethnic identity by participating in staging scenes for travelers. In so doing, they played a role in producing their own cultural meaning.⁶ The Chinese participated in what a historian terms “scripting the space”—essentially that tourist space is scripted physically and psychically. In scripted space, excursionists are catered to so that they believe their experience is the locals’ reality.⁷

This chapter explores tourism in San Francisco’s Chinatown in the late nineteenth-century. The pull and tug over the shaping of identity and community of Chinese in America is demonstrated through the contestation of the presentation of Chinatown by whites and by the

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⁴ Cocks, Doing the Town, 197.
⁶ Raibmon, Authentic Indian, 206.
⁷ Rotham, Devil’s Bargain, 12.
Chinese. In the same manner that the Chinatown Squad contributed to the racialization of the Chinese, tourism affected the interactions between whites, Chinese, and police guides, while creating images of authentic Chinatown that worked to alienate the Chinese. I begin by situating the rise of tourism in San Francisco and then presenting the rhetoric used to describe Chinatown in travel literature. The language used to craft a portrayal of Chinatown was important in shaping how Chinese residents in Chinatown and Chinese culture were viewed in a historic moment when Chinese membership in American society was being hotly contested. Secondly, I focus on the guides who led visitors through Chinatown. Wayfarers were recommended to follow a guide through Chinatown for their own safety and in order to understand what is was they were looking at. In particular, police guides were quite popular, not only for their protection, but also because they were expected to know the ins-and-outs of Chinatown and be familiar with the Chinese residents. Finally, I analyze how Chinese residents responded to the throngs of travelers parading through not only Chinatown, but their private living spaces.

Tourism in the United States began to increase in the latter half of the nineteenth century, coincident with the rise of the middle class and development in transportation and communication. Cities began to market themselves to attract capital and visitors. Easier travel and the emergence of a middle class coincided to allow for the requisite leisure time and financial resources one needed to explore America. San Francisco began to grow as a city during this period. San Francisco’s tourism industry was pushed forth and supported by local business and political elites in the 1880s. It was written about in travel literature, which

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8 Berglund, “Chinatown’s Tourist Terrain,” 8.
9 Berglund, Making San Francisco American, 99.
ultimately worked to attract many excursionists. Chinatown, among other destinations in San Francisco, was often depicted in similar language across various guidebooks, pamphlets, and brochures. The rhetoric used to describe Chinatown reveals the image of Chinatown as aberrant space, which subsequently affected those who lived within it.

Initially, Chinatown was far from being one of San Francisco’s main attractions. Promoters often did not consider Chinatown as a potential visitor’s site in their list of attractions in San Francisco. Or if they did, it was recommended with great caution. Promoters warned visitors of the filth, overcrowding, and danger that had become synonymous with Chinatown. In this way, Chinatown was further marginalized. Beyond the descriptions that marked it as an “other” space, it was deemed to be inappropriate and unfit for travelers’ consumption. Furthermore, anti-Chinese hostility and sentiment was reason enough for tourist promoters to avoid Chinatown.

Travel literature in the late nineteenth-century tended to focus on the negative aspects of Chinatown a sightseer might encounter during a visit. These descriptions of Chinatown reveal more than just what Chinatown might have been like in the late nineteenth-century from the perspective of someone outside of Chinatown, and instead, shine a light on the attitudes and beliefs of those who were observing Chinatown. There were several themes common to portrayals of San Francisco’s Chinatown in the late nineteenth-century: vice—gambling, opium smoking, prostitution; depravity; underground labyrinths; tongs, secret societies; female slave trade; unsanitary living conditions; danger and mystery. As one historian argues,

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“representations of the Chinese and Chinatown were often part of the larger racial and political agenda of promoting segregation and exclusion.” These portrayals of Chinatown were disseminated not only through word of mouth and literature, but also in newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, and government documents. Implicit in these descriptions of Chinatown was a sense of foreignness that marked Chinatown as distinctly different from other parts of American society.

This passage, an account by Captain Willard Glazier during his travels through the American West in the 1880s, describes his experience as a journeyer in Chinatown:

Here congregate the roughest and rudest elements, and here stand, shamelessly revealed, crime and bestiality too vile to name...In one cellar is a gambling-hall, for John Chinaman’s besetting weakness is his love of gambling....Nearby is an opium cellar, fitted up with benches or shelves, on each of which will be found a couple of Chinamen lying, with a wooden box for a pillow....The Chinese tenement houses are crowded and filthy beyond description, and [are] the breeding places of disease and crime. They are scattered thickly throughout the quarter.

Glazier’s account of Chinatown as a place of disease and crime echoed the anti-Chinese rhetoric of the late nineteenth-century. His account reflects many of the stereotypes that circulated about the Chinese as opium smoking, gambling criminals. Located in the heart of San Francisco, Chinatown had come to be known as the Chinese “cancer.” In travel literature, as in official police reports and Senate hearings, Chinatown was often portrayed as a place of opium dens, gambling houses, brothels, and filthy, overcrowded tenements. This condemnation of

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14 Ibid., 5.
15 Ibid., 4.
17 Ibid.
Chinatown was not only limited to public discourse or visitors’ literature, but was often re-affirmed by excursionists.

However, voyagers still managed to make their way over to Chinatown. One historian notes: “the curiosity of visitors [was] stimulated by anti-Chinese agitation and newspaper articles describing the traffic in women [enslaved as prostitutes] and the opium dens, and most [tourists] want[ed] to see these places in action.”19 Thus, some sightseers ventured into Chinatown out of their own curiosity to witness first-hand the accounts they had read and heard about Chinatown. By the 1890s, tourism in Chinatown increased, largely due to visitors’ penchant to personally witness the depravity that had essentially become the calling card of Chinatown. Sensational reports and stories of the dangers, vice, and moral corruption in Chinatown had disseminated into public discourse and knowledge.20

In a book about her travels in the American West, Mary H. Wills recorded her perceptions of San Francisco’s Chinatown, “the abomination of mankind,” in 1889:

Dilapidated in appearance, with streets narrow and exceedingly dirty, the sidewalks are filled with a motley assortment of cheap wares and edibles, and the entire locality is buzzing with Chinamen, of all degrees, who go clattering along in their uncomfortable, ungainly shoes, with pig tail flying and gesticulating and vociferating in their strange unearthly lingo.21

The language Wills uses to describe Chinatown was similar to the language found in promotional pamphlets or guidebooks that travelers used to prepare themselves for the horrors they presumed to encounter in Chinatown. In tour literature of the late nineteenth-century, Chinatown was presented as an other worldly place—a little China inside San Francisco—where “your catalogue contains almost every form of vice and with beating heart you await it.”22 Mills further noted that,

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20 Light, “From Vice District to Tourist Attraction,” 368.
21 Mary H. Wills, A Winter in California, (Norristown, PA: Morgan R. Wills, 1889): 103-104.
22 Ibid., 107.
“Their vices are many and such as unfit them to dwell in your homes or obtain your confidence.” Thus, not only was the space of Chinatown an abomination to white American society because of its “underworld of vice,” but Chinese San Franciscans who lived within the space were at once incriminated with these habits.

A wayfarer might have experienced the opium dens of Chinatown much in the same way that Wills recalled:

Carefully picking our way down two pairs of rickety stairs our only light a single taper in the hand of our guide we found ourselves in a narrow subterranean passage or tunnel which led to the lodging houses of this homeless race I had no idea of the number around us they seemed to grow and multiply and all showed the same pictures of abject misery. The atmosphere was thick with smoke and heavy with the fumes of opium. There was not a breath of fresh air or chance for ventilation yet here these people live year after year in some instances with only an occasional glimpse of the outer world.

This description of Chinatown’s “underworld” reinforced how separate Chinatown seemed from the rest of American society—“the outer world.” However, Wills found that her experience in Chinatown did not live up to the horrors described in guidebooks. She wrote, “Our dark night’s experience was not entirely satisfactory; we had heard so much of these midnight horrors we expected to see what was really bad or at least vicious. We expected vice and were disappointed that we found only depravity.” Wills had been prepared to encounter “murder, arson, gambling, opium smoking, and robbery.” Instead, what she saw was “a disgusting sight free from the least suspicion of crime or violence. My feeling was pity and disgust, not horror.” The reality of what visitors saw in Chinatown was often different from what they had been told to anticipate and expected to see.

23 Ibid., 115.
24 Ibid., 109.
25 Ibid., 115.
26 Ibid., 107.
27 Ibid., 107.
The presumptions of sightseers and travel guide writers helped to sustain the narratives and tours of Chinatown.\textsuperscript{28} One historian writes that urban tourism was “often voyeuristic...[and] had important social and spatial aspects."\textsuperscript{29} For example, a guidebook writer, C.A. Higgins, described San Francisco’s Chinatown as “a panopticon of peep shows,” which emphasizes the voyeurism that defined ethnic slumming.\textsuperscript{30} Ethnic slumming was a respectable way for voyagers to experience the ethnic neighborhoods that they would not normally visit on their own due to concerns of impropriety or safety. It solidified ethnic and racial boundaries to tourists, who saw themselves as visitors to the neighborhood or scene they were observing.\textsuperscript{31} Like in Chinatown, residents of ethnic areas were romanticized and became public commodities for sightseers. The commercialization of guided visits through Chinatown relieved the boredom and stress of wealthy white Americans.\textsuperscript{32} Tours of Chinatown were a way for sightseers to develop social and spatial relationships as well as first-hand knowledge of cultural differences.

White travelers’ experiences in San Francisco’s Chinatown led them to posit their existence and lives against the racial other: the Chinese. One historian argues that journeyers in the American West in the late nineteenth-century “positioned and distinguished themselves by commenting on the work, culture, and behavior of others they encountered on their journeys.”\textsuperscript{33} Essentially, wayfarers treated the people and things they saw in Chinatown as spectacles—scenes upon which they could direct their gaze. In denigrating the space of Chinatown, white tourists were unconsciously reinforcing the “racially defined, hierarchical social order in which

\textsuperscript{28} Cocks, \textit{Doing the Town}, 3.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 190.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 203.
\textsuperscript{33} Rast, “Tourist Town,” 183.
American civilization represented the highest stage of development.” Chinatown was a spectacle in which visitors could judge the scenes and the people, while feeling socially distant and racially superior.

Images of Chinatown that observers hoped to see and often encountered worked to shape the notion of “Chinese-ness” in late nineteenth-century San Francisco. Tourism ensured interactions between whites and Chinese. Though Chinatown was seen as a racialized space with specific boundaries, its Chinese residents were frequently working out their relationship to visitors who were passing through. One historian writes that the Chinese were on the lowest rung of San Francisco’s racial hierarchy. In San Francisco, then, “Chinese” and “white” were conflated against one another, as opposed to “black” and “white.” The historian argues that Chinatown was the “cultural arena” in which whites and Chinese were confronted with acknowledging one another and was the space in which the city’s racial hierarchy was negotiated.

Visitor J. W. Ames wrote that the Chinese immigrant was “an object of curiosity...to be stared at, but rousing no other emotions.” Upper-middle-class tourists tended to lump the Chinese residents they encountered in Chinatown together as an undifferentiated group of racial others. Records kept by such spectators never referred to the Chinese as individuals, but used analogies such as: “Up and down the streets they poured like so many ants rushing for their anthill.” Writer John Buel wrote: “Shepherds...can distinguish any one in a flock of a thousand by its face,” but, he claimed, “John is too much alike for me. I pass him on the street, and then in a minute I meet him [again]. To be sure he has changed his shirt....but he has kept his face.”

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34 Ibid.
35 Rast, “Tourist Town,” 190.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., 7.
Visitors’ accounts of the Chinese are indicative of the ways they tended to see Chinese residents as a collective. In denying Chinese residents their individuality, and rhetorically positing them as the “other,” white excursionists affirmed their own racial superiority.  

Secure in their own superiority, travelers viewed Chinatown as a curiosity and as a foreign place. Writer Thomas J. Vivian described Chinatown as a “curious panorama”—“what a strange place, what a strange people.” A contemporary description of Chinatown warned of the dangers that lie waiting for any visitor: “Many places there are in this miniature China of San Francisco...to which no European has ever been admitted, or, if admitted, he has never survived to return to the world.” Chinatown was emphasized as a segregated place in America, but one so radically different that “you would hardly realize yourself in America.” Descriptions of Chinatown invoked images of the exotic Orient that reminded visitors that the Chinese community was in America, but not of America. A travel magazine writer remarked that Chinatown was “an agglomeration of Oriental paganism, [with] reeking sidewalks, foul with unknown trash, the nauseous odors vomited from black cellars; the wilderness of alleys...and sphinx-like crafty yellow men who glide along the narrow pavements.”

In the 1890s, white, male, middle-class wayfarers visited Chinatown not only for entertainment through tours, but as clients of prostitution houses, gambling houses, and opium dens. White men had been a fixture in San Francisco’s Chinatown since at least the 1860s,

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43 Ibid., 113.
participating in the same sort of vice activities that American society decried in Chinatown. White patronage to these places of vice supported the businesses to the point of being able to open more resorts.\textsuperscript{45} Chinatown’s vice industry was particularly profitable for the owners of the vice business, white property owners who collected rent, and the corrupt officials who permitted the resorts to remain open. \textsuperscript{46}

Visitors wanted the opportunity to witness the spectacles they had heard about in Chinatown. Tourism promoters recommended visiting Chinatown during the daytime. A daytime journey through Chinatown included stopping at a theater, restaurant, joss house, and a few shops.\textsuperscript{47} Guests were also taken on tours through Chinatown at night, where “many odd things are seen, some of which are not told.”\textsuperscript{48} Nighttime visits included stops at brothels, gambling halls, opium dens, residential spaces, and alleyways, in addition to the stops of the daytime excursion.\textsuperscript{49}

Tourists’ reactions to their Chinatown visits both met and fell short of their anticipations. Mary Wills wrote of her tour experience: “The horrors of the place have been [described] so often, and with so much latitude,...that you scarce know what to expect, and are ready for murder, arson, gambling, opium smoking, and robbery.”\textsuperscript{50} Wills had been prepared to see the worst in Chinatown, yet left with a sense of disappointment or dissatisfaction in not seeing what had been promised in travel literature. On the other hand, after his visit in Chinatown, John Buel

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{46} Rast, “Tourist Town,”187.  
\textsuperscript{47} Rast, “Tourist Town,”187.  
\textsuperscript{49} Berglund, “Chinatown’s Tourist Terrain,” 6.  
\textsuperscript{50} Wills, \textit{A Winter in California}, 107, as cited in Rast, “Tourist Town,”189.
concluded, “Chinamen may be found at any time after nightfall, smoking opium.” His guide had taken him through a subterranean passageway to see a room full of opium smokers and then a gambling hall. Thus, in contrasting these two experiences: the former’s whose expectations were not met, and the latter whose preconceived notions of Chinatown were proven to be true, it is possible to see how varied a tourist’s experience could have been in Chinatown. And in so many ways, these experiences were shaped by the guides who led their tours.

The use of guides was encouraged in tourist literature. There were a variety of guides—police officers, white businessmen, Chinese entrepreneurs—who provided distinct views of Chinatown. It was widely perceived that tours of Chinatown should be conducted with a guide because “Without a guide...a stranger would be lost in the labyrinth of lanes and turns and numberless stalls and bewildering darkened lights.” Guides then were a crucial factor in a tourist’s Chinatown experience. They were the middle men between a space marked as uniquely Chinese and white interlopers. A short story from 1897 describes Chinatown: “In reality there are three parts of Chinatown—the part the guides show you, the part the guides don’t show you, and the part that no one ever hears of.” A guide was supposed to be a local expert and was trusted by the travelers to lead them safely through “dangerous areas.” Mary H. Wills wrote of her excursion experience: “At night the scene shifts and it would indeed be a valorous heart who would go into the inner courts of this strange wicked spot without the guardianship of the law.... It is an experience which will last a lifetime. The party generally consists of not more than eight

52 Berglund, “Chinatown’s Tourist Terrain,” 10.
55 Berglund, “Chinatown’s Tourist Terrain,” 11.
persons and the guide.”\textsuperscript{56} A guide could provide an experience through Chinatown that was much different than a journeyer venturing through Chinatown on his/her own. In part, this was the result of the rise in tourism. Visitors expected a particular experience, and guides, be they police officers or others, were happy to provide that experience for a fee. In turn, in an effort to market themselves as guides, tour leaders gave the people all that they desired, escorting visitors to the worst parts of an otherwise vibrant community. As early as the 1860s, white police officers escorted excursionists through Chinatown. Through the 1870s, wayfarers were usually led by officers who were on patrol. An increase in tourism in San Francisco and Chinatown led to the growth of the tour guide business. By 1883, professional guides could be hired in the lobbies of first-class hotels or through their own businesses.\textsuperscript{57}

Visitors’ accounts and tourist literature reveal the prominent police presence in Chinatown. White visitors often used police guides, which compounded the police presence and surveillance that already existed in Chinatown. For example, E.G.H., a teen-age female sightseer visited Chinatown in 1886 with a Chinese guide named Chin Jun, but he did not take them to see the opium dens, which was an attraction that E.G.H. wished to see. Thus, she returned to Chinatown a few days later and “hired a detective” to take them “through Chinatown, and to the opium dens.”\textsuperscript{58} A wayfarer’s interaction or relationship with Chinatown’s residents depended on being led around by a police guide, a local Chinese, or their own willingness to explore on their own. The varied experiences of exploring Chinatown shaped the different meanings made about the space of Chinatown and the Chinese. W.H. Gleadell wrote about his tourist experience in Chinatown, stating that there were there were “certain parts” of Chinatown “which, at his own risk, the white man is free to traverse” but also cautioned that “in no case is it prudent to visit

\textsuperscript{56} Wills, A Winter in California, 106.
\textsuperscript{57} Rast, “The Cultural Politics of Tourism,” 45.
\textsuperscript{58} E.G.H., Surprise Land: 75, 94, as quoted in Berglund, “Chinatown’s Tourist Terrain,” 8.
even these without the escort of a properly armed police officer well known on the Chinatown beat.”

Thus, the police guide, and the power dynamics between police and the Chinese, became a definitive part of a traveler’s relationship to Chinatown and its inhabitants.

Police guides were believed to have established personal and economic connections with Chinese residents that allowed them to strike a deal with the Chinese and enter into their private spaces due to their constant presence in the neighborhood. A tourist, J.W. Ames, observed of the interaction between a Chinese-speaking police officer and Chinese: “The sidewalks are thronged with passers, who all seem to know the officer, for they jump aside and bow with unfeigned respect. The officer now and then hails one, and sometimes pauses to carry on a short conversation.”

The Bancroft’s Tourist Guide recommended a specific police guide because his interaction with the Chinese has “acquainted them with him to such a degree, that they allow him to enter and pass through their houses and rooms whence another might be shut out.”

A traveler’s experience published in London’s Cornhill Magazine described that the Chinese had been “so thoroughly...cowed by the San Francisco police” that they were unable “to utter the faintest exclamation of annoyance.”

J. W. Ames described his experience in Chinatown with a police guide, highlighting the familiar relationship between his Chinese-speaking officer and Chinese residents: “The sidewalks they jump aside and bow with unfeigned respect. The officer now and then hails one, and sometimes pauses to carry on a short conversation.” Of course part of this deference was the result of sustained police brutality, something that police guides continued when leading their visitors through Chinatown. They often kicked open doors, woke

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60 Berglund, Making San Francisco American, 106-107.
people from their sleep, shined bright lights in their faces, and forced their way into private living spaces.\(^{64}\) W.H. Gleadell wrote about his experience invading the living quarter of a Chinese couple, an act he was encouraged to do by his police guide. The officer reportedly directed him, “Now, if you would really wish to see how some of the lower class of Chinese live, this is not a bad place for the purpose. Go down that stair, push open the door at the foot, and walk right in.”\(^{65}\) The go-ahead from his guide in addition to the sense of privilege that accompanies spectatorship, which was only solidified by the widely held belief in Chinese inferiority led Gleadell, and countless others, to kick open the door and witness the life of a Chinese couple in Chinatown.\(^{66}\) This shockingly regular occurrence demonstrates the extent to which Chinese residents were often violently interrupted or invaded during explorations of Chinatown, as well as the dominating presence of the specials and the state-sanctioned Chinatown Squad. Long-time San Franciscan Charles Warren Stoddard told a story of how when his “‘special,’ by the authority vested in him” demanded admittance to a particular closed door, “a group of coolies” who lived in the vicinity and had followed the travelers tried to divert his attention by assuring him that the place was vacant. The officer refused to leave, decided to employ force to open the door, and when he did, succeeded in revealing four sleeping men, “packed” into what Stoddard described as an “air-tight compartment” and “insensible” to the “hearty greeting” the sightseers offered.\(^{67}\)

Another interpretation of the police guides’ violent intrusions into Chinese spaces is that the Chinese had struck a deal with policemen to allow visits to be taken of their private living spaces. The Chinese and the police may have worked together in taking a cut of the profits from  

\(^{64}\) Berglund, “Chinatown’s Tourist Terrain,” 13.  
\(^{66}\) Berglund, “Chinatown’s Tourist Terrain,” 16.  
\(^{67}\) Berglund, *Making San Francisco American*, 107.
the tour: the police for their guide work, and the Chinese for allowing their lives to be interrupted and on display. The corruption of officers in the Chinatown Squad was widely known, particularly in the 1880s and 1890s, when the vice industry played a key role in sustaining Chinatown’s economy. The police department had a policy of containment, not eradication, when it came to suppressing vice in Chinatown. Officers of the Squad accepted bribes from the owners of the vice businesses. W.H. Gleadell suspected that the owners of vice businesses who were bribing police officers allowed the officers to escort journeyers through their operations. This collusion between the police and the Chinese, which included the Chinese commodifying their own culture, provided opportunities for the Chinese to make a living while retaining aspects of their heritage.

Tour guides began to stage scenes that represented the authentic Chinatown. Not content with the bucolic scenes of everyday life in Chinatown, promoters began staging the depravity and danger that had become synonymous with Chinatown. In part, this was the result not only of local boosters’ representations of Chinatown, but also reflected wayfarers’ increased demands for authenticity. The “bustle of crowded streets and the cacophony of a foreign language” were touted by promoters of tourism as markers of Chinatown’s authenticity. They continued to advise the services of tour guides and police guides through Chinatown, for it was not “prudent to visit even these without the escort of a properly-armed police officer.” One writer explained, “You will need a guide to take you through its labyrinths and point out to you its hidden recesses and explain the strange sights and interpret for you the language which sounds so oddly to your

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68 Ibid., 13.
70 Ibid.
71 Berglund, Doing the Town, 203.
72 Ibid., 32.
ears.” By the 1880s and 1890s, visitors’ guides collaborated with Chinese residents of Chinatown to have them perform certain scenes and put themselves on display. However, the continual marketing of Chinatown as a segregated space within the city of San Francisco contributed to the other-ing of Chinatown as an authentic space. Chinatown was a demarcated space where the apparent differences between Chinese and whites were reaffirmed. It is within this context of searching for an authentic Chinatown that new opportunities were created for local entrepreneurs and a chance for Chinese San Franciscan resistance.

Strides to present an authentic Chinatown did not silence Chinese San Franciscans voices. Rather, Chinese residents responded in various ways to the manner in which tourism affected their daily lives. Chinese residents frequently resisted against the push to present an “authentic” Chinatown. White guides and travel literature strove to present an ideal of Chinatown that would meet voyagers’ anticipations of a dangerous, dirty, vice-ridden place. However, Chinese guides were one way that Chinese residents found themselves contesting the images of authentic Chinatown set forth with the intention of attracting visitors. By the 1890s, tourists became more aware of the fact that Chinese residents could provide access to the scenes of Chinatown which they desperately sought to see. Chinese guides thus carved out a space for themselves among white guides in providing jaunts of Chinatown. Chinese residents worked to claim a piece of the tourism industry taking place in their own neighborhood. For some Chinese, they played into tourists’ expectations and put themselves on display; others committed acts of resistance against visitors; and some worked to present their own version of an authentic Chinatown. Between the 1890s and the 1920s, the efforts of Chinatown’s merchants placed

76 Rast, “The Cultural Politics of Tourism,” 44.
77 Ibid., 51.
Chinatown as the “starry diadem of tourist attractions” in San Francisco. Chinese merchants worked together to create the presentation of an authentic Chinatown in order to rid its image of depravity and instead demonstrate Chinese American respectability.

Some Chinatown guides were local Chinese men. In comparison with white, male guides, whose tours were made by appointment, Chinese guides seemed to operate on a much less formal and impromptu level. Chinese San Franciscans seized the opportunity afforded them through tourism to make money. William Bode, a guidebook author wrote of the Chinese guides that “Solicitations are made, at every crossing, to guide and conduct you to the various shrines and objects of curiosity, which abound here.” The Chinese were willing to partake in creating the image of an authentic Chinatown because it granted them some control over their space. In leading visits, the Chinese were participating in their own form of resistance. Instead of allowing police guides to assume complete control over the neighborhood and the journeys, the Chinese seized the opportunity to have a cut of this growing business.

But these guides did not simply want to divert the guide industry to themselves; as tour leaders they actively sought to redirect the traveler’s gaze and thus redefine authentic Chinatown. Instead of focusing on the depravity and danger that tourist literature and public discourse associated with San Francisco’s Chinatown, Chinese merchants sought to present the exoticism of Chinatown as respectable. They focused on the exotic architecture, performances, curios, and cuisine in Chinatown. However, this still stressed the otherness of the Chinese, because their

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79 Ibid., 60.
place was rooted in the Chinese quarter. And yet, given the contests over their very presence in the United States, the Chinese had little choice but to find a space within the dominant paradigm where they could survive. Doing so did nothing to undermine the idea that the idea of Chinatown as spectacle, but it did allow Chinese merchants and guides the opportunity to undermine white representations of authentic Chinatown and Chinese-ness. These local guides confounded wayfarers’ expectations and reshaped their interests.

Other forms of resistance on the part of the Chinese were less charged. Some Chinese residents were indifferent, contemptuous, or mildly hostile towards travelers. For example, they pretended not to know English or disrupted photographs in a setting that so often seemed outside of their own control. In addition, when tourists bold enough to wander around Chinatown without a guide would peer into the windows of Chinese homes and stand in open doors, the Chinese would snub the visitors by shutting the doors or drawing the curtains. Some took part in touristic interest in Chinatown, often perpetuating the scenes of authenticity that journeyers sought in order to make a profit. Both Chinese men and women placed themselves on display for sightseers: staging scenes of depravity; smoking opium; showing off living quarters—“the dirtier the better”; and offering tourists a “two-bit looked” as prostitutes. Some Chinese staged scenes such as pretending to smoke opium, plotting kidnappings, and bartering slaves.

Tourism is an important lens to view the ways in which the city attempted to market itself, how it was marketed, who was attracted to visit, and to try to make sense of the interactions

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82 Rast, “The Cultural Politics of Tourism,” 60.
85 Berglund, Making San Francisco American, 111.
86 Ibid., 47.
between residents and journeyers. The actions and responses of both whites and Chinese in San Francisco to tourism in Chinatown were important in shaping Chinese San Franciscan’s identities and sense of belonging within the local and broader community. Clearly, the draw of Chinatown served to promote the city and provided numerous San Franciscans—Chinese and white—an opportunity to participate in the expanding vacation industry. Nevertheless, touristic interest in Chinatown, particularly showcasing the “authentic,” was rather damaging for it perpetuated the negative criticisms of the Chinese that was often quite detrimental to Chinese residents of the city, for it perpetuated the negative criticisms of the Chinese that was found in travel literature, police reports, and political rhetoric. As a result, the Chinese were further racialized through tourism of a space in which they were constantly on display. A typical excursion in Chinatown featured the restaurants, places of vice, and labyrinths that travel literature described. Often times, Chinese residents were paid money to act out the very scenes of depravity that the tourist had come with the expectation to see. Thus, visitors that attended these tours were left perspectives of the Chinese that reinforced the rhetoric present in tour literature. The perpetuation of the racialization of Chinese San Franciscans placed them at the bottom rungs of the city’s racial hierarchy, and made rigid the racial boundaries of whites and the Chinese—a group already at the fringes of society.
Epilogue

During the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the Chinese in San Francisco faced many discriminatory policies. The “Chinese question” was a debate over whether or not the Chinese should be allowed to stay or immigrate to the United States. Seen as economic and labor threats to white America, the Chinese were repeatedly excluded through legislation from fully participating in American society. They were also frequently targeted as victims of racial violence. For instance, the formation of anti-Chinese clubs demonstrates the focused intensity dedicated to barring or removing the Chinese from the United States. The anti-Chinese agitation and rhetoric created a social climate that racialized the Chinese and the space in which they lived. The anti-Chinese rhetoric and legislation only further propelled the notion that, as an ethnic group, the habits and morals of all Chinese were a threat to white America. In state and local anti-Chinese propaganda, the Chinese were depicted as creatures of vice and immorality. Thus, this seemingly aberrant racialized other, the Chinese, were deemed to be in need of policing.

It was in an era of anti-Chinese sentiment that the special police and then the Chinatown Squad were created to enforce the law and to keep vice contained within the Chinese quarter. The inauguration of the Chinatown Squad following the July 1877 anti-Chinese Sand Lot Riots reflected important shifts in the policies of the state and municipal government and the San Francisco Police Department. Namely, the testimony gathered from the 1876 California Senate hearing on Chinese immigration shows the power of social rhetoric in influencing changes in policy and legislation. The creation of the Chinatown Squad, a social agent, reinforced the idea of the Chinese as criminals; even the name of the Squad highlights this supposedly highly criminal nature of the Chinese to the extent that they required a special police squad. Furthermore, the Squad both criminalized and marked a racialized people and neighborhood for surveillance and discipline.
By the 1890s, the Chinatown Squad had become a constant presence in Chinatown. The presence of the police in the neighborhood turned out to be beneficial for tourists who desired to witness Chinatown. The Chinese quarter became a popular San Francisco tourist attraction at the end of the nineteenth century. Although tourist literature knocked the Chinese for their vice, immorality, public health risks, and unassimilability, white tourists still found themselves drawn to witnessing the apparent exoticism and curios that Chinatown represented to them. Police officers served as guides in order to ensure the safety of the tourists. Though there were also Chinese guides, tourists believed police guides to have a strong lay of the neighborhood. The police guides themselves often felt no qualms in demonstrating their power and dominance in the neighborhood, often rudely disrupting the private lives of Chinese residents with their tour groups.

An exploration into the politics of policing race and space, this project is meant to contribute to the historical narrative drawn from race, immigrants, and the law. Although initially welcomed to the United States, the Chinese became viewed as perpetual foreigners and dealt with as such. Anti-Chinese rhetoric, legislation, and police surveillance worked to exclude the Chinese from American society; this certainly hindered their sense of belonging. However, the Chinese sought to expand the terms of belonging, such as through leading their own tours of Chinatown, so that they too could make a life for themselves in the United States.
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