December 2013

ZOOM in on america

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Street corner in Chinatown, San Francisco, California, (photo) The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley BANC PIC 1963.002:0280--FR]

Direction Gold Mountain

In 1848, before California became the 31st of America's 50 states, gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill in present day Sacramento. The gold rush that followed shaped the development of California and of the entire United States. The most immediate impact of the gold rush was a huge influx of people to California, from those who dreamt of striking it rich overnight by finding gold, to the thousands of people who came in search of jobs in industries and services needed to support the gold miners.

Chinese immigrants belonged to the latter group. Most came from Guangdong Province. Those who boarded ships bound for "Gold Mountain", as they called America, were mostly young single males with only very basic education. While these were not the first Chinese immigrants in the United States, the wave of immigration that started in 1849 was much bigger than any that had come before. By 1880 there were more than 100,000 Chinese immigrants. Most but not all of these immigrants lived on the West Coast.

Dreaming of a return to their homeland

Unlike other immigrant groups, many Chinese who came to America at this time planned to return to China - also known at this time as the "Central Flowery Kingdom" or "Celestial Empire" - after earning some money in the United States.

Their life in America was very simple, if not austere, as they worked in low-paying jobs or sought their own fortunes panning for gold in areas that had already been worked and abandoned by other miners. In his book "Roughing It," Mark Twain highlights the harsh and unfair treatment the Chinese gold-seekers received. He writes:

In California he [a Chinese worker] *gets a living out of old mining claims that white men have abandoned as exhausted and worthless - and then the officers come down on him once a month with an exorbitant swindle to which the legislature has given the broad, general name of "foreign" mining tax, but it is usually*

Pacific Mail Steam Ship Company's steamer Great Republic, (photo) The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. [BANC PIC 1963.002:0953--E])

inflicted on no foreigners but Chinamen. This swindle has in some cases been repeated once or twice on the same victim in the course of the same month - but the public treasury was no additionally enriched by it, probably ...

A lot of Chinese immigrants lived in San Francisco where they worked as cooks and house servants. They provided services such as washing and ironing and earned a reputation for being honest and hard-working.

Some Chinese immigrants also took up gardening and farming. Mark Twain observes that *"They will raise surprising crops of vegetables on a sand pile."* In 1866, Samuel Bowles, author of the book "Across the Continent: A Summer Journey to the Rocky Mountains, The Mormons and The Pacific States," describes their talent for planting:

In this even climate and with this productive soil, their [Chinese immigrants'] painstaking culture, much hoeing and constant watering, makes little ground very fruitful, and they gather in three, four and five crops a year. Their garden patches, in the neighborhood of cities and villages, are always distinguishable from the rougher and more carelessly cultured grounds of their Saxon rivals.

After the gold rush ended, thousands of Chinese immigrants got jobs working to build the first Transcontinental Railroad. Their contribution to building this railroad was enormous.

In spite of their positive reputation, there was strong opposition to the presence of Chinese immigrants in America, and many examples of racial hatred toward them.

San Francisco's world famous Chinatown, which today is a great tourist attraction, began as a quarter to which Chinese immigrants had to flee for safety and support. Constance Gordon-Cumming, an Englishwoman who traveled to California, described San Francisco's Chinatown in her travel letters:

The houses are crowded and as hopelessly dirty as in many parts of the old town of Edinburgh and other British cities, where the very poor congregate. [...] But the miracle is to see what really well-washed, neatly dressed, smiling and shining men come forth from their filthy and miserable homes [...]

Even though Chinatown provided security and support for its inhabitants, it did not help Chinese immigrants to integrate into American society. On the contrary, it isolated the Chinese and was used by their opponents as proof that they were not capable of assimilating with "mainstream" society.

Chinatown, Washington D.C.(photo © AP Images)

"Gold Mountain" Closes Its Doors to Chinese Immigrants for 61 Years

The economic crisis that affected California after the gold rush in the 1870s and 1880s made competition for jobs fierce. The anti-Chinese lobby was calling louder and louder for America to close its borders to Chinese laborers. The voice of people like David Phillips, who reminded his countrymen of the democratic ideals upon which America was founded just one hundred years before, was not listened to.

We have boasted, for a century past, that this is a land of refuge for the oppressed and down-trodden of all nations; that under our flag the family of man might gather, assured of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." For a century we have accepted the grand announcement as true, that God has made of one flesh all the nations that dwell on the face of the whole earth, and that all have the same inalienable rights. Let us stand by these grand old truths, and bid the Chinaman, the Japanese and all others, welcome.
(from Phillips' book "Letters from California")

In the spring of 1882, the U.S. Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act. It provided an absolute 10-year moratorium on Chinese labor immigration. Any Chinese in the United States at that time had to obtain a re-entry permit, if they planned to depart for any reason. In addition, Congress prohibited Chinese immigrants from becoming naturalized citizens of the United States. Chinese teachers, students, merchants and travelers could come, but they had to have a certificate from the Chinese government.

When the Exclusion Act expired in 1892, Congress extended it for another 10 years in the form of the Geary Act. Before the Geary Act expired, it was extended indefinitely. Each Chinese resident was required to register and obtain a certificate of residence, without which they faced deportation.

The Geary Act regulated Chinese immigration until the 1920s. With increased immigration from all over the world during the postwar period, Congress implemented a new means of regulating immigration: it established quotas on the number of immigrants from any one country.

In recognition of its role during World War II as an ally of the United States, Congress repealed the Exclusion Act in 1943. At first the quota for Chinese immigrants was set at 105 persons a year. In 1965 Congress passed a new Immigration Act. In 1968, up to 170,000 immigrants from outside the Western Hemisphere were allowed to enter the United States, with a maximum of 20,000 immigrants from any one country. The Immigration Act of 1990 established a "flexible" worldwide cap on family-based, employment-based and diversity immigrant visas.

In the U.S. census of 2010, about 3.79 million people identified themselves as having some Chinese heritage.

Immigration papers are seen on display Wednesday, May 25, 2005, at the Chinese-American Museum of Chicago in the city's Chinatown neighborhood. The museum, which opened in 2005, introduces visitors to the history of Chinatown and the Chinese-Americans who settled there. (photo © AP Images)

Chinese Imprint on American Life in Pictures

(top left): Chinese, gold mining in California; (photo The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley [BANC PIC 1963.002:0499--A])

(top right): In a Chinese Theater in San Francisco, 1900 (photo William Henry Bishop, source Wikimedia Commons)

(middle left): "Group of Chinese Children"; (photo California Historical Society, SF Chinatown (ii): postcards: 23273 (recto)

(middle right): Chinatown, San Francisco at the turn of the twentieth century, (photo Arnold Genthe, source Wikimedia Commons)

(bottom left): Hsing-Hsing and Ling-Ling are playing at the National Zoo. They were two Giant Pands given to United States as gifts by the government of China following President Richard Nixon's visit in 1972. (photo © AP)

Chinese Imprint on American Life

The first "**Chinatowns**" - areas with mostly Chinese residents - were located on America's West Coast in big cities like San Francisco and Los Angeles. Later, Chinatowns started to appear in cities on the East Coast as well, like New York, Boston and Washington. Chinatowns offered a support network for Chinese laborers who arrived in the United States without knowing how to speak English and without anywhere to live. Those who succeeded and were able to save some money often moved out. Some of the historic Chinatowns still have a large number of Chinese-American residents. Others have emptied out. Many continue to be tourist attractions and popular places for local residents to visit.

The impact of China and Chinese-Americans extends far beyond Chinatown. Chinese architecture inspired American entrepreneurs. Sid Grauman, who had already built the Egyptian Theatre in Los Angeles, decided to construct a spectacular **Chinese Theatre** a few blocks away. Temple bells, pagodas, and stone sculptures were all brought from China. The theatre's grand opening in 1927 was a spectacular event with movie stars and celebrities that drew thousands of spectators to Hollywood Boulevard. The theatre is still famous today for its "Forecourt to the Stars," where many of the most famous movie actors have left handprints, footprints, autographs, and other unusual imprints, for example, the magic wands of *Harry Potter* stars Daniel Radcliffe, Emma Watson and Rupert Grint, John Wayne's fist, and the noses of Jimmy Durante and Bob Hope.

Ieoh Ming Pei (born April 26, 1917), commonly known as I.M. Pei is a Chinese American architect who earned himself a reputation of the master of modern architecture. He designed buildings in the United States such as L'Enfant Plaza Hotel in Washington, the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Colorado, and the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library. In China he designed a skyscraper in Hong Kong for the Bank of China and a hotel at Fragrant Hills. His most famous design, however, is the pyramid of glass and steel that he made for the Louvre Museum in Paris.

The **giant panda**, a bear native to south central China, is recognized internationally as the emblem of China. In 1972, to commemorate President Richard Nixon's historic trip to China, the Chinese government gave two giant pandas to the United States. Ling-Ling and Hsing-Hsing lived at the National Zoo in Washington until the 1990s, attracting millions of visitors each year.

The **New Year Dragon Parade** and the **Dragon Boat Festival** have also joined the long list of traditions introduced to the United States by different ethnic groups. The Chinese New Year falls on different dates in January or February in the Gregorian calendar. Celebrations include dragon dances to the rhythm of drums and loud firecrackers. Dragon parades draw crowds of spectators to the streets of Chinatowns. The Dragon Boat Festival is a holiday that originated in China, but found fertile soil in the United States. The Festival is held on the 5th day of the 5th month of the Chinese calendar (in the Gregorian calendar it usually falls in June). Racing dragon boats is one of the main activities of this holiday; another is eating rice dumplings.

Chinese American Architect I.M. Pei poses in front of the Louvre glass pyramid, in the museum's Napoleon Courtyard, in Paris. (photo © AP)

Activity Page

Win a Prize!
December 2013 CONTEST

Where is Grauman's Chinese Theater?

Send the answer (with your home address) to:
zoom@usinfo.pl

Deadline: January 15

Win a Prize!
The answer to the November contest was:

Alaska

The winners are:

Renata from Wodzislaw Slaski, Irina from Balti and Marek from Lipnica Wielka

CONGRATULATIONS

The prizes will be sent to you by mail

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ZOOM IN ON AMERICA ANNUAL CONTEST
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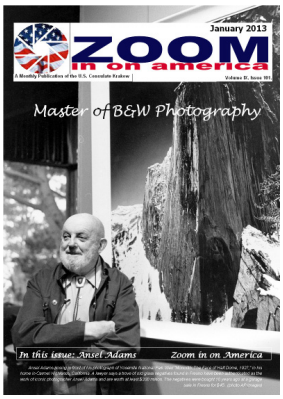

THERE ARE NO CORRECT ANSWERS IN THIS CONTEST. EACH PARTICIPANT STANDS A CHANCE TO WIN AN ALBUM ABOUT AMERICA

CHOOSE YOUR FAVORITE 2013 COVER AND SEND YOUR CHOICE - JUST THE NAME OF THE MONTH - TO:
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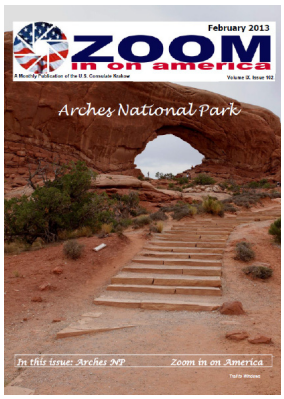

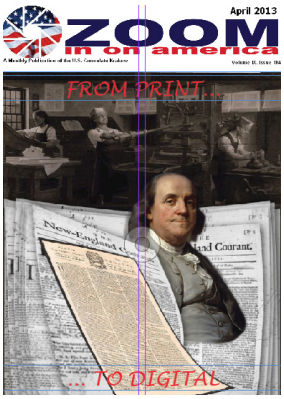

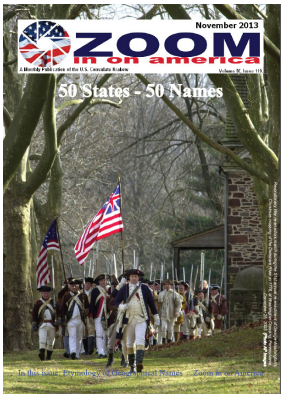

Grauman's Chinese Theatre (photo Visit California)

Chinatown parade, New York City (photo © AP)