

# MARGINALIZED

~ People of the Gold Rush ~

It's important to remember that, though many people found fortune and fame during the Gold Rush, not everyone's story had such a happy ending. Certain classes and races had their rights trampled in the rush for gold.



## CHINESE-AMERICANS

When word got out about the gold in California, workers from China flooded into San Francisco. At first, the other miners were welcoming—everyone was free to seek fortune in California. But as more and more Chinese citizens showed up, the other miners began to worry that these new settlers would take away jobs and opportunities from them. Soon, Chinese-American miners began to face intense discrimination. They were often blamed for crimes they did not commit and all social ills in the lawless land. In 1850, a \$20 tax on foreign-born miners was put into place.

Still, Chinese miners had more rights in America than they did back home. They could (and did) take people to court if they felt they were being treated unfairly. However, this didn't last for long: As the public turned against them, California law, which already did not allow African-Americans and Native Americans to testify in court, was extended to include Chinese immigrants. In 1882, the U.S. government passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which had forbidden Chinese immigrants from entering the country.

However, their efforts weren't always in vain: when Chinese miners sent the money they made from mining home, their families were not only freed from poverty, but often became very rich. Neighbors in China would gossip about the family's newfound wealth, having no idea of the discrimination and hardship the miner in California had faced to get it.

Do you think it would be possible to not allow a person from a certain country to testify in court today? How about passing a tax on foreign workers?

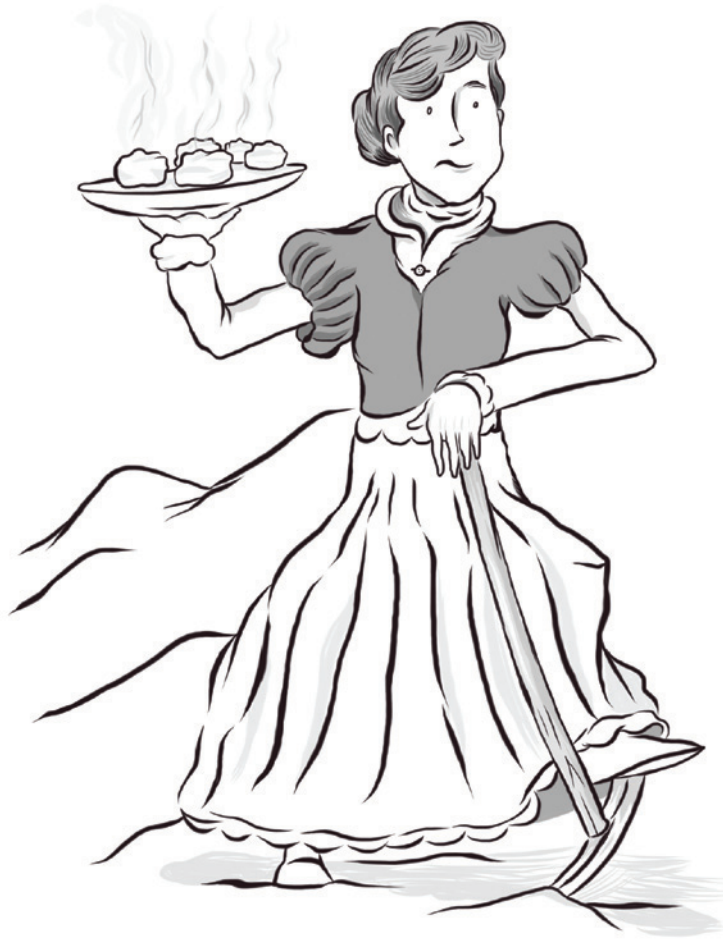
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## WOMEN

At the beginning of the Gold Rush, fathers and husbands came to California, hoping to send for their families when they struck it rich. After the first year or so, women started arriving in San Francisco and present-day Sacramento, hoping to also find their fortune.

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Though they at first were treated poorly by the men, who thought of mining as men's work, many women soon learned they had skills they could use to make money from miners. For instance, husbands depended on their wives for many things, including cooking, cleaning, and grooming. When these men struck out on their own, they had no idea how to fry an egg or patch a hole in their jeans!

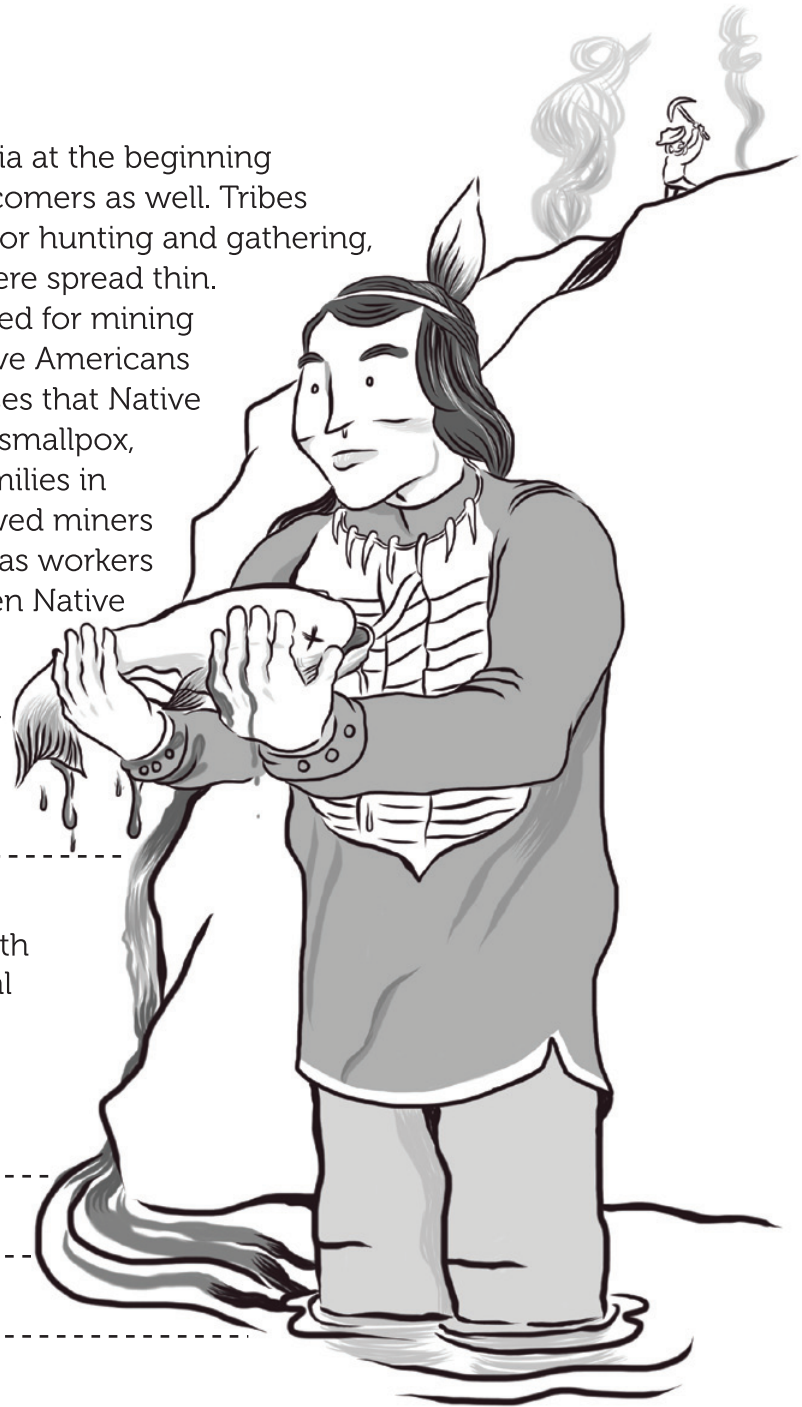
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One famous story involves Luzena Wilson, the wife of a miner. One day, she was baking a biscuit when a passerby noticed the smell. He offered to pay her \$5 for the biscuit (that's almost \$130 in today's money!). She stared at him in shock, which he mistook for a bargaining tactic. "OK, I'll pay you \$10," he said. Luzena started up a popular restaurant business. Many women like her made money from miners by cooking for them, doing their laundry, and even by singing, dancing, and acting as towns grew into cities.

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Are there any jobs that people still consider "woman's work" today? Are there jobs that are thought of "a man's job?" What are they? Do you think that's fair?

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## NATIVE AMERICANS

The Native Americans who lived in California at the beginning of the Gold Rush had trouble with the newcomers as well. Tribes near gold fields depended on local wildlife for hunting and gathering, and as more people moved in, resources were spread thin. Additionally, the chemicals some miners used for mining poisoned the lakes and streams where Native Americans caught fish. Miners also brought new illnesses that Native Americans had never been exposed to, like smallpox, measles, and influenza, which put many families in danger. In 1850, a law was passed that allowed miners to capture Native Americans and use them as workers in their mining camps. The tensions between Native Americans and the miners often resulted in violent fights between the two groups. By 1870, the Native American populations near Gold Rush towns dropped significantly.



Imagine you're a lawman in a mining camp. What would you do to keep both the citizens of your town and the local Native American tribes happy and peaceful?

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