

San Francisco's Chinatown

Introduction

This Workingmen's Party of California pamphlet, which is representative of widespread anti-immigration sentiment, attacks President Ulysses S. Grant and calls San Francisco's Chinatown "rampant with disease." On May 8, 1882, President Chester A. Arthur signed the Chinese Exclusion Act—the only immigration law in the United States history that targeted a specific country. The act suspended immigration from China to the United States and prevented Chinese who were already in America from going home and reentering the country, effectively stranding thousands of Chinese men and women in the United States. However, between 1882 and 1943, when the act was repealed, tens of thousands of Chinese came to America illegally.

The photograph by Arnold Genthe depicts San Francisco's Chinatown, the largest in the United States, as a crowded but vibrant turn-of-the-century community where immigrants owned their own businesses, raised families, and established schools.

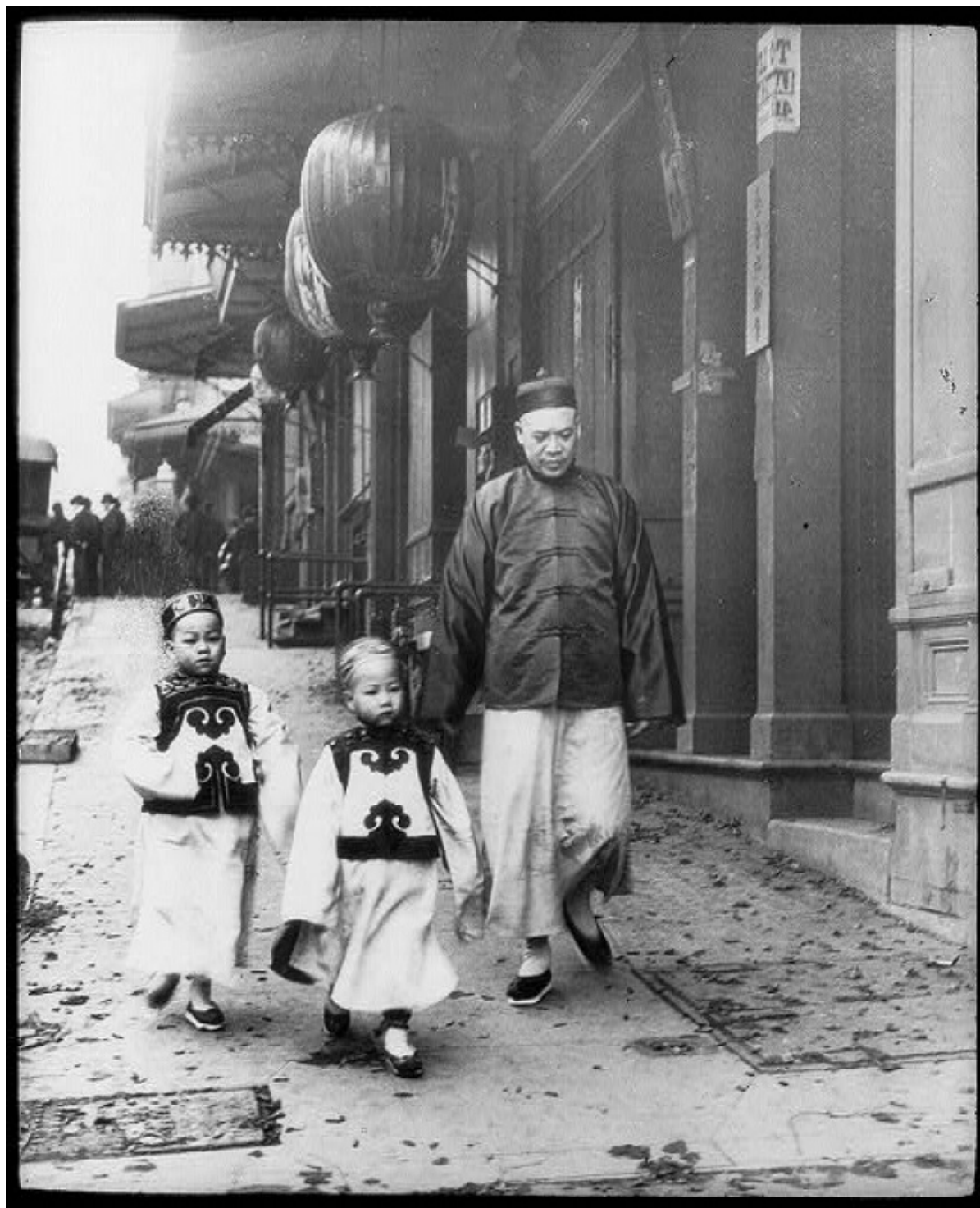
Questions for Discussion

View the pamphlet cover, the photograph, and the introduction. Then apply your knowledge of American history in order to answer the questions that follow.

1. Under what conditions and for what purpose were Chinese originally encouraged to immigrate to the United States?
2. Why did the Workingman's Party of California decide to oppose Chinese settlement as a "nuisance"?
3. Examine the photograph. How does it illustrate Chinese cultural pride? At the time it was taken, what might antagonize some white Americans?

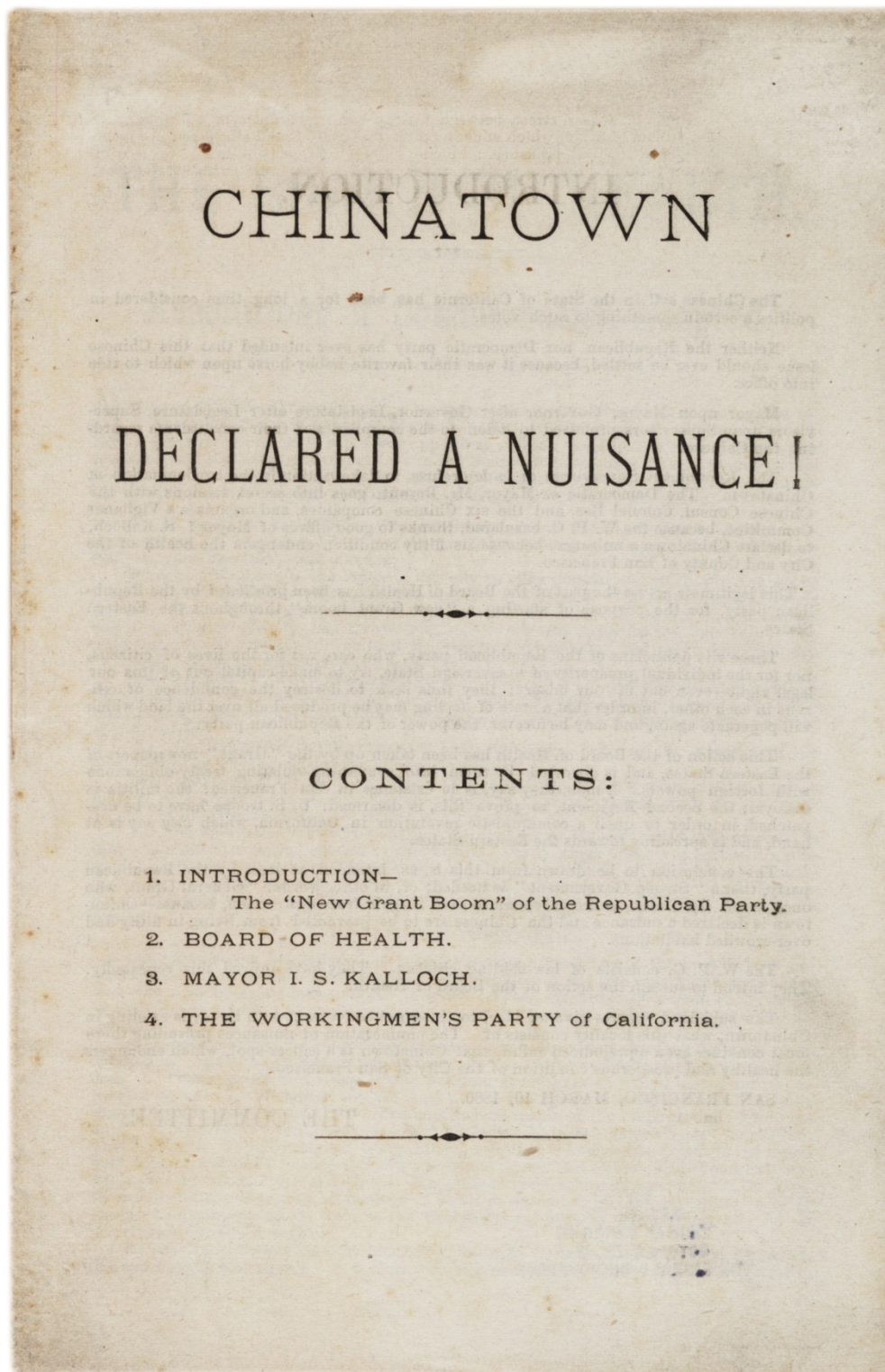
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Image



Chinatown, lantern slide by Arnold Genthe, ca. 1896. (Library of Congress)

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Workingmen's Party of California, "Chinatown declared a nuisance!", 1880. (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC06232.03)