

Teaching history from **DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES:** Sixth Grade Lesson on Chinatowns in the U.S. and Latin America

GA Social Studies Standards

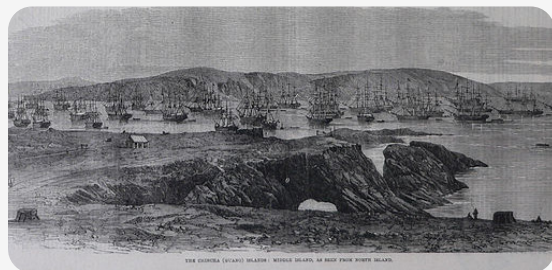
SS6HI Explain conflict and change in Latin America.

SS6G3 Explain the impact of location, climate, distribution of natural resources, and population distribution on Latin America.

Chinatowns are popular tourist attractions enjoyed by all kinds of people. However, their origins are based in racism and residential segregation. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 restricted the immigration of Chinese laborers to the United States, which led many poor, rural Chinese to look for economic opportunities elsewhere. In 1810, the slave trade to Peru ended, followed by the formal abolition of slavery in the country in 1854. After Peruvian independence in 1821, the highland silver mines that were most economically significant during the colonial period became less so. Instead, the economic focus shifted to the coast, to the sugar and later cotton plantations north and south of Lima, and to offshore guano deposits. But there were not enough laborers to meet the growing demand. This led to the recruitment and importation of Chinese contract laborers. Between 1849 to 1874, 91,412 Chinese immigrated to Peru and worked almost exclusively on plantations. After their labor contracts ended, some Chinese returned home while others stayed and signed new contracts or worked as free laborers. Chinese who settled in Peru created ethnic enclaves where they

established businesses. In the capital city of Lima, Peruvian Chinese built a neighborhood around large import companies.

The first Chinese immigrants to the United States came during the Gold Rush, while others came in later decades to work on the Transcontinental Railroad. While their labor was essential to the completion of the railroad, Chinese workers were often viewed very negatively by their Irish counterparts and by U.S. citizens broadly. This led the U.S. government to pass the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which prohibited the immigration of Chinese laborers. Consequently, many Chinese opted to emigrate to Latin America and the Caribbean. Chinese laborers who still hoped to eventually reach the United States migrated to northern Mexico, first arriving in 1876.



Most Chinese immigrants to Mexico lived and worked in the northern and Pacific states. Unlike Chinese workers in the U.S., who labored on the railroad or worked in restaurants and laundries, Chinese in Mexico had a much wider range of occupations. Most working class laborers worked in agriculture or in unskilled jobs in cities, while a larger proportion of Chinese were merchants and skilled artisans. Some only intended to stay in Mexico for a short time, later crossing the border into the United States.



After an official treaty was established between Mexico and China in 1899, the number of Chinese immigrants grew steadily. By 1926, there were 24,218 Chinese in Mexico, making up the second largest foreign population after Spaniards. However, anti-Chinese sentiment grew due to economic concerns during the Mexican Revolution. The state of Sonora passed laws that relegated Chinese houses and stores to specific neighborhoods (known as barrios chinos) and required that Mexicans make up 80% of the workforce for foreign-owned businesses.



These anti-Chinese views ultimately led to the expulsion and deportation of Chinese across Mexico. Some Chinese fled the northern and Pacific states and headed inland to Mexico City, where they built businesses around the city's historic center and formed a small barrio chino, or Chinatown. Unfortunately, like many Chinatowns around the world, barrios chinos in Mexico and Peru have mostly gone into decline as fewer ethnic Chinese continue to live in them due to other economic and housing opportunities.

Complete Article and Lesson Plan



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(Top to Bottom, Left to Right)

1. Brown University Library, Chinese in Peru
2. Chincha_guano_islands, Brown University Library, Chinese in Peru
3. Cartoon by José Ángel Espinoza depicting Chinese as Carriers of contagious diseases: "The terrible men of the East, easily contagious, that the Chinese mask with spotless clothes when they work as waiters, launderers, or dependents."
4. Barrio_Chino_Ciudad_de_Mexico, Wikimedia Commons
5. Chinesca, Wikimedia Commons

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