

Japanese Segregation in San Francisco Lesson Plan

Central Historical Questions:

Why did Teddy Roosevelt oppose the segregation of San Francisco's public schools?

Materials:

- Copies Japanese Segregation Documents A-E
- Copies Japanese Segregation Graphic Organizer
- Copies Japanese Segregation Timeline

Plan of Instruction:

1. Introduction: *As we have learned, historians often use documents to make inferences about what life was like at a particular place and time – to understand historical context. Historical documents often contain many clues about the major issues, conflicts, beliefs, customs, and prejudices of people at a certain historical moment.*

Today we are going to make some inferences about life in the United States and California by exploring a strange incident that happened in San Francisco in 1906 and President Theodore Roosevelt's reaction to it.

A few months after the earthquake of 1906, the San Francisco Board of Education decided to segregate Japanese students and force them to go to the Chinese school. This created a major crisis. President Roosevelt became involved and tried to get the Board of Education to change its decision.

We are going to examine this event by reading some of President Roosevelt's letters and speeches and analyzing a political cartoon.

Your main goal is to answer the question: Why did Roosevelt intervene in the Japanese student segregation crisis?

Another goal is to identify how these documents reflect what you might already know about this historical period and how they might help you learn more about the historical context of the time.

2. As a class, read Document A and fill out Graphic Organizer.

Discussion to follow reading of Documents A:

- Based on just Document A, why do you think Teddy Roosevelt intervened in the San Francisco law?
- Do you think he cared about the civil rights of Japanese?
- What does this document tell you about the United States in 1906?

- How does it relate to what you might have already known about this time and place in history?

4. Hand out Documents B, C, D, E.

Have students complete Graphic Organizer for those documents in small groups.

5. Discussion Questions:

- Based on all the documents, why do you think Teddy Roosevelt intervened in the San Francisco law?
- Do you think he cared about the civil rights of Japanese?
- What can you infer about the United States and California in 1906-07 from these documents? Some possible student answers:
 - *Asian Americans experienced discrimination, particularly on the West Coast;*
 - *America was an increasingly diverse nation at this time;*
 - *Japanese were used as labor in Hawaii;*
 - *the United States was becoming an international power with interests in Asia.*

6. Hand out Japanese Segregation Timeline. Read through with students.

Identify, with students, all the contextual issues that they were able to infer from the documents.

Emphasize how reading contextually not only means bringing background knowledge *to* the documents, it also means learning about the historical context *from* the documents.

Citations:

Theodore Roosevelt, Annual message to Congress, December 4, 1906.
<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=1315>

“Do Not Embarrass the Administration,” *Harper’s Weekly*, November 10, 1906.
<http://www.harpweek.com/09Cartoon/BrowseByDateCartoon.asp?Month=November&Date=10>

Theodore Roosevelt, Letter to the Secretary of Commerce and Labor, Victor Metcalf, November 27, 1906. http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?_r=1&res=9903E1D61431EF33A25752C1A9679C946395D6CF

Roger Daniels, *The Politics of Prejudice: The Anti-Japanese Movement in California and the Struggle for Japanese Exclusion*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 35.
http://books.google.com/books?id=XZedCMAUn6UC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_v2_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q=&f=false

Document A: Roosevelt Public Speech (Modified)

It is unwise to depart from the old American tradition and to discriminate for or against any man who desired to come here as a citizen. We cannot afford to consider whether he is Catholic or Protestant, Jew or Gentile; whether he is Englishman or Irishman, Frenchman or German, Japanese, Italian, Scandinavian, Slav, or Magyar.

The class of Chinese laborers are undesirable immigrants to this country, because of their numbers, the low wages for which they work, and their low standard of living.

Source: Public speech by Roosevelt, December 1905.

Document B: Roosevelt Letter to Friend (Modified)

The California Legislature has the right to protest against the immigration of Japanese laborers. Their cheapness and clannishness make them a challenge to our laboring class, and you may not know that they have begun to present a serious problem in Hawaii—all the more serious because they keep entirely to themselves. Furthermore, I understand that the Japanese themselves do not permit any foreigners to own land in Japan. . . .

I would not have objected at all to the California Legislature passing a resolution, courteous and proper in its terms, which would really have achieved their goal. But I do object to, and feel humiliated by, the foolish offensiveness of the resolution they passed.

Source: Letter from Roosevelt to a friend on May 6, 1905, in which he criticizes the California Legislature's recent move to restrict immigration from Japan.

Document C: Roosevelt to Congress (Modified)

Here and there a most unworthy feeling has manifested itself toward the Japanese [such as] shutting them out of the common schools of San Francisco [and] mutterings against them in one or two other places, because of their efficiency as workers. To shut them out from the public schools is a wicked absurdity.

It's absurd that the mob of a single city may at any time perform acts of lawless violence that would plunge us into war. A city should not be allowed to commit a crime against a friendly nation.

Source: Roosevelt's annual message to Congress, December 4, 1906.

Document D: Roosevelt Letter to Secretary Metcalf (Modified)

My Dear Secretary Metcalf:

I had a talk with the Japanese Ambassador and told him that in my judgment the only way to prevent constant friction between the United States and Japan was to keep the movement of the citizens of each country into the other as restricted as possible to students, travelers, business men and the like. It was necessary that no Japanese laboring men—that is, of the coolie class—come into the United States.

The Ambassador agreed with this view and said that he had always been against Japanese coolies going to America or Hawaii. Of course, San Francisco's action will make it difficult for most Japanese to agree with this view. But I hope my message will smooth over their feelings.

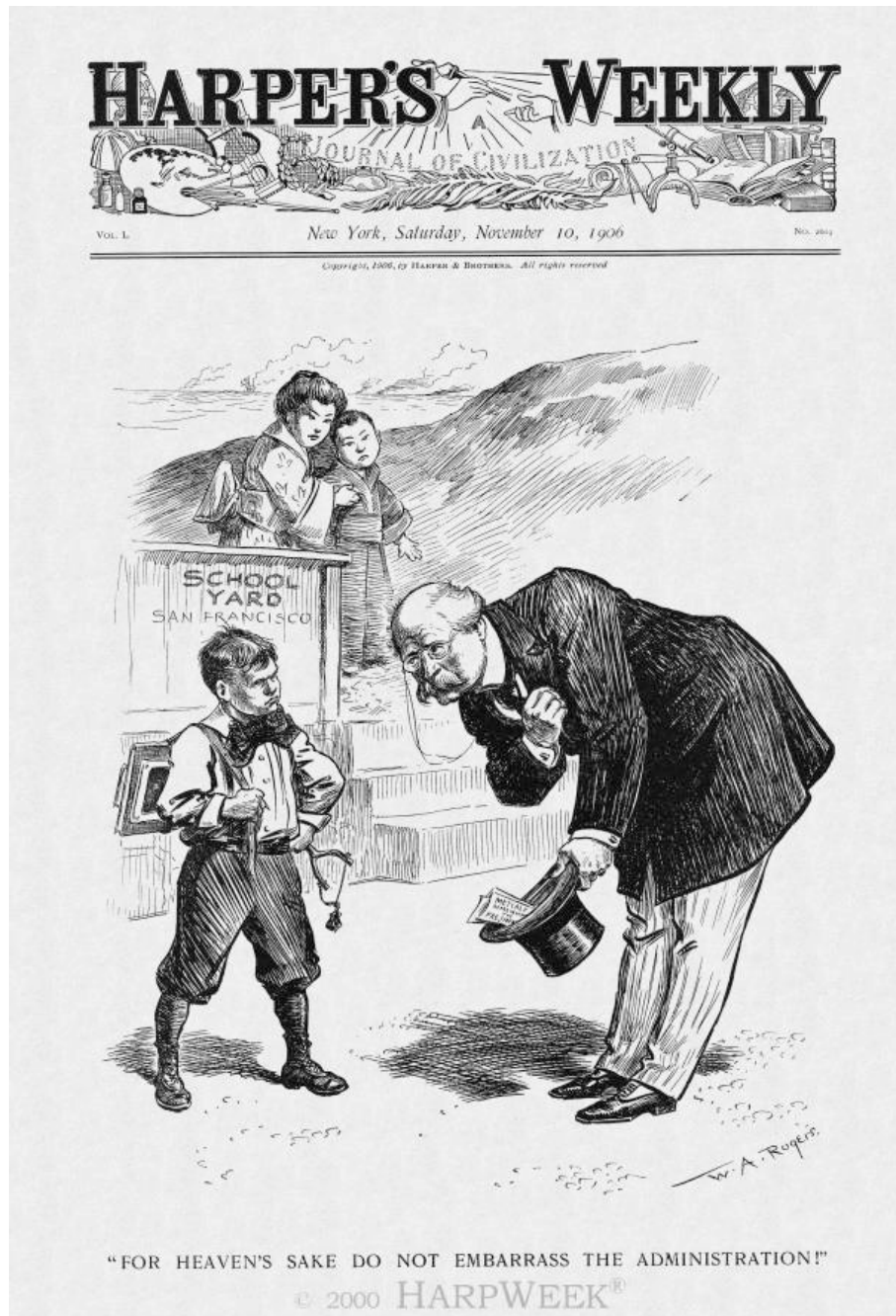
Sincerely yours,
Theodore Roosevelt

Vocabulary

Coolie- derogatory term for unskilled Asian labor

Source: Letter from Roosevelt to Secretary Metcalf, who went to San Francisco to investigate the Japanese segregation crisis, November 27, 1906.

Document E: Political Cartoon



Source: This cartoon was published in Harper's Weekly, a New York-based magazine, in November 1906. It shows Secretary Metcalf speaking to a young schoolboy, who represents San Francisco.

San Francisco Japanese Segregation Crisis Timeline

- 1882** Chinese Exclusion Act prohibits Chinese immigration (in one year, Chinese immigration drops from 40,000 to 23).
- 1884** Japanese government allows Japanese workers to emigrate to Hawaii to work on sugar plantations.
- 1890** Approximately 2,038 Japanese in the United States.
- 1902** President Roosevelt declares victory in the Philippines.
- 1903** President Roosevelt signs treaty with Panama to begin construction of the Panama Canal.
- 1904-1905** Russo-Japanese War between Russia and Japan. Japan surprisingly defeats Russia and establishes itself as a military power. President Roosevelt mediates the treaty and wins a Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts in 1906.
- May 1905** Anti-Asiatic League formed in San Francisco. Supported by 67 labor unions. Pushes for legislation to exclude Japanese, Koreans, Chinese.
- April 1906** San Francisco earthquake destroys 29 out of 72 school buildings.
- Oct. 11, 1906** San Francisco Board of Education passes a law forcing Japanese students to attend the Chinese school. Japan angers when it hears of the law.
- Oct. 26, 1906** President Roosevelt publicly opposes the San Francisco law.
- 1907** President Roosevelt signs “Gentlemen’s Agreement” in which Japan agrees to restrict the immigration of Japanese workers to the United States. In return, San Francisco reverses law and allows Japanese into the public schools.