



Foreign Miner's Tax

Many of the prospectors who rushed to California during the Gold Rush were Mexican and Chinese. Over time, gold miners of European descent — especially the German and Irish — were unhappy with the presence of the foreign miners. They felt that the Mexicans and Chinese were discovering gold that should have been discovered by the white miners. To appease the most vocal opponents of foreign miners, the first California legislature put the Foreign Miner's Tax into effect in 1850. The intent of the tax was to discourage immigration by making it financially difficult to enter or stay in the country. Targeting mainly Latinos, the law required that anyone who was not born in America, or who had not been naturalized under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, had to purchase a twenty-dollar license in order to mine. The law made an exception for California's Native Americans. The law succeeded in reducing the number of foreign miners. Mexican miners refused to pay the tax, which was about the equivalent of five hundred dollars today. When the Mexican miners withdrew, the Chinese became the largest non-white mining population, eventually giving rise to anti-Chinese sentiment. A second Foreign Miners Tax in 1852 targeted the Chinese. This second law would eventually lead to the federal Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which prevented any Chinese workers from entering the United States.

Do you think the Foreign Miner's Tax was fair? Was it justified? Explain.
