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History of the Western United States

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Introduction

The California Gold Rush is one of the most mythologized episodes in Western American history. The traditional story has been one of white men going west and getting rich. The Gold Rush is often thought of as a short period of prospecting that ended quickly with all the industry around it disappearing overnight. However, this narrative of a quick boom with people getting rich, and then a fade into nothingness is not the whole story of the Gold Rush. Many people who went out west did not make any money. Most wound up sick. Many people stayed in California after the traditional Gold Rush years continuing to mine gold in an industrialized manner. Many of the people who went to the west were not white. There were significant populations of Chinese, Mexican, and South American immigrants who came to try to make a fortune because the stories of gold. The stories of these groups are a major part of the Gold Rush that needs to be discussed and explored.

In an effort to show these stories, I have created a video game that represents a miner’s journey through the Gold Rush. The goal of the game is to depict the myths that led people out west and then the reality of trying to make a fortune in the Gold Rush. The game opens with a menu that allows you to pick which path you want to follow. A player can choose the basic and easier path as the white migrant or the other, more challenging option as the Chinese immigrant path. As the player views the menu, gold nuggets are continuously falling on the sides of the screen. While seemingly only a minor part of the menu scenery, these nuggets help to build the idea in the player’s mind of the potential for great wealth. The gold falling down the screen is like the tales of gold that were spread to entice people to come out west.

Using various historians’ analysis of miner’s everyday life along with actual letters that miners sent home to their families and friends, both paths have been constructed to feature choices that a similar individual would have to face. Choices in the game affect how much money you have. Every turn a random number within a constantly shrinking range is calculated to represent the gold, and a number is subtracted from that gold to represent the monthly expenses. This calculated number is then added to the total money of the player. There will often be choices that force the player to put themselves in a situation where they only lose money. This design is there to show how luck was a key determiner of who got rich in the Gold Rush. The player does not choose the questions, so they need to be lucky and not stumble into bad scenarios. However, given the realities of the Gold Rush the set of questions has been designed such that it is very rare for a player to end with a lot of money.

The final piece of the game is the retire button. This button is available so long as the player has a positive amount of money. This button offers leaving as an ever present option, so long as you have money. Many miners would only stay for a short time, and I wanted to include this option within my game. This restriction helps highlight the idea of getting trapped in the gold mines after they were industrialized. Players who can’t leave before 1855 are forced to enter into an industrial gold mining operation and never get the option to go home rich. Through this overall design, the game will refute the common myths of the Gold Rush and provide players with a more complete understanding of that historical era.

Annotated Bibliography

Kanazawa, Mark. "Immigration, Exclusion, and Taxation: Anti-Chinese Legislation in Gold Rush California." *The Journal of Economic History* 65, no. 3 (2005): 779-805. [www.jstor.org/stable/3875017](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3875017). This article was useful for designing questions about descrimination against Chinese immigrants. It was also useful for information on the Foreign Miners Tax.

*American Experience: The Gold Rush*. Web Viewer. Directed by Randall MacLowry. Boston: WGBH, 2006. This documentary and the related web content was very useful for developing questions and effect outcomes. This helped with both the white and Chinese paths.

Asing, Norman. "To His Excellency Governor Bigler (1852)." In *Chinese American Voices: From the Gold Rush to the Present*, edited by Yung Judy, Chang Gordon H., and Lai Him Mark, 9-12. University of California Press, 2006. [www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pppwn.8](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pppwn.8). This is a letter from a Chinese immigrant to the governor of California. I used it as an example of Chinese opinions and used it to help build questions.

"Songs of Gold Mountain Wives." In *Chinese American Voices: From the Gold Rush to the Present*, edited by Yung Judy, Chang Gordon H., and Lai Him Mark, 7-8. University of California Press, 2006. [www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pppwn.7](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pppwn.7). This collection of songs was used to help me craft questions more tailored to the chinese experience.

"[PART ONE Introduction]." In *Chinese American Voices: From the Gold Rush to the Present*, edited by Yung Judy, Chang Gordon H., and Lai Him Mark, 1-6. University of California Press, 2006. [www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pppwn.6](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pppwn.6). This chapter was useful for writing the Chinese path of the game. This chapter is a good overview of some of the lives of Chinese immigrants.

“Hiram and Sara Pierce.” pbs.org. [https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience /features/goldrush-hiram-and-sara-pierce/](https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/goldrush-hiram-and-sara-pierce/) (November 30 2019). This specific article gave important insights into the life of a white miner from the East. It was heavily used for designing questions.

Abraham, Terry. “‘I have had a great many adventures’ The Gold Rush Letters of Samuel Stone Richardson” University of Idaho Library. [https://www.lib.uidaho.edu /special-collections/t-abraham/ssr.htm](https://www.lib.uidaho.edu/special-collections/t-abraham/ssr.htm) (November 30 2019). This was a scholarly analysis of a letter by a miner from New England back home. It was ultimately not used for questions, but was helpful for my understanding.

Ayers, Ed, Joanne Freeman, Nathan Connolly, host. “All That Glitters: Legacies of the California Gold Rush.” Backstory (podcast). January 19 2018. Accessed November 30 2019. <https://www.backstoryradio.org/shows/gold-rush/>. This podcast outlines some of the forgotten hardships of the gold rush. It was one of the major sources of questions, specifically the multiple change claim questions.

Cornford, Daniel. “Labor and Capital in the Gold Rush.” *A Golden State: Mining and Economic Development in Gold Rush California*. (1999). 78-104. This article about the labor practices was very useful for designing the questions. It was also useful for understanding the kind of price ratios I should use in game, specifically the money decreases.

Swain, William. *William Swain Letter Written on the Trail to California, July 4, 1849*. Letter. From PBS Archives of the West. (November 30 2019). [https://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/ resources/archives/three/swain1.htm](https://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/resources/archives/three/swain1.htm). This letter was helpful for understanding what it was like to travel to California to get to the gold rush. Ultimately, it was not used for questions, but it was used for understanding the mindset of some miners.

Swain, William. *William Swain Letter Written from "The Diggings" in California, January 6, 1850*. Letter. From PBS Archives of the West. (November 30 2019). <https://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/resources/archives/three/swain2.htm>. This letter was written to describe a miner’s experiences trying to join various ventures and the various difficulties of life while mining gold. It was very useful for designing the questions a player is asked.

*Newspaper Headlines Describing Gold, 1849.* Historical Newspaper Scan. From PBS Archives of the West. <https://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/resources/archives/three/63_01.htm>. This headline describes endless gold in California. It was ultimately part of the influence on the question that asks the player about sending news back home about the gold.