You Are There!

TIME

San Francisco 1906



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Goodnight, San Francisco

It's another beautiful San Francisco sunset. Under the shades of pink and gold, dockworkers, shopkeepers, and business people head home. It is the evening of April 17, 1906. It has been a day like any other for the citizens of the city. San Francisco is alive and buzzing.

The city has grown immensely over the last 60 years. With a population of over 400,000 people, it is the ninth-largest city in the United States. Following the California Gold Rush, San Francisco is the economic center of the West Coast. The bustling city is located right on a bay. Because of this prime location, San Francisco is the busiest port in the region, and it is here that countless ships are loaded and sent all around the world. The city is even referred to as the "gateway to the Pacific" because of its links to the rest of the world.

Unstable Ground

San Francisco sits on the San Andreas **Fault.** This is a strike-slip fault, where the Pacific Plate moves northwest relative to its neighbor, the North American Plate. The San Andreas Fault is among the most active fault lines in the world, and earthquakes along it are common.

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Gold Rush Boom

In January 1848, gold was discovered in the Sacramento Valley. About 20,000 people flocked to San Francisco in hopes of finding gold. By the end of 1849, 100,000 more people moved to California to make their fortunes.

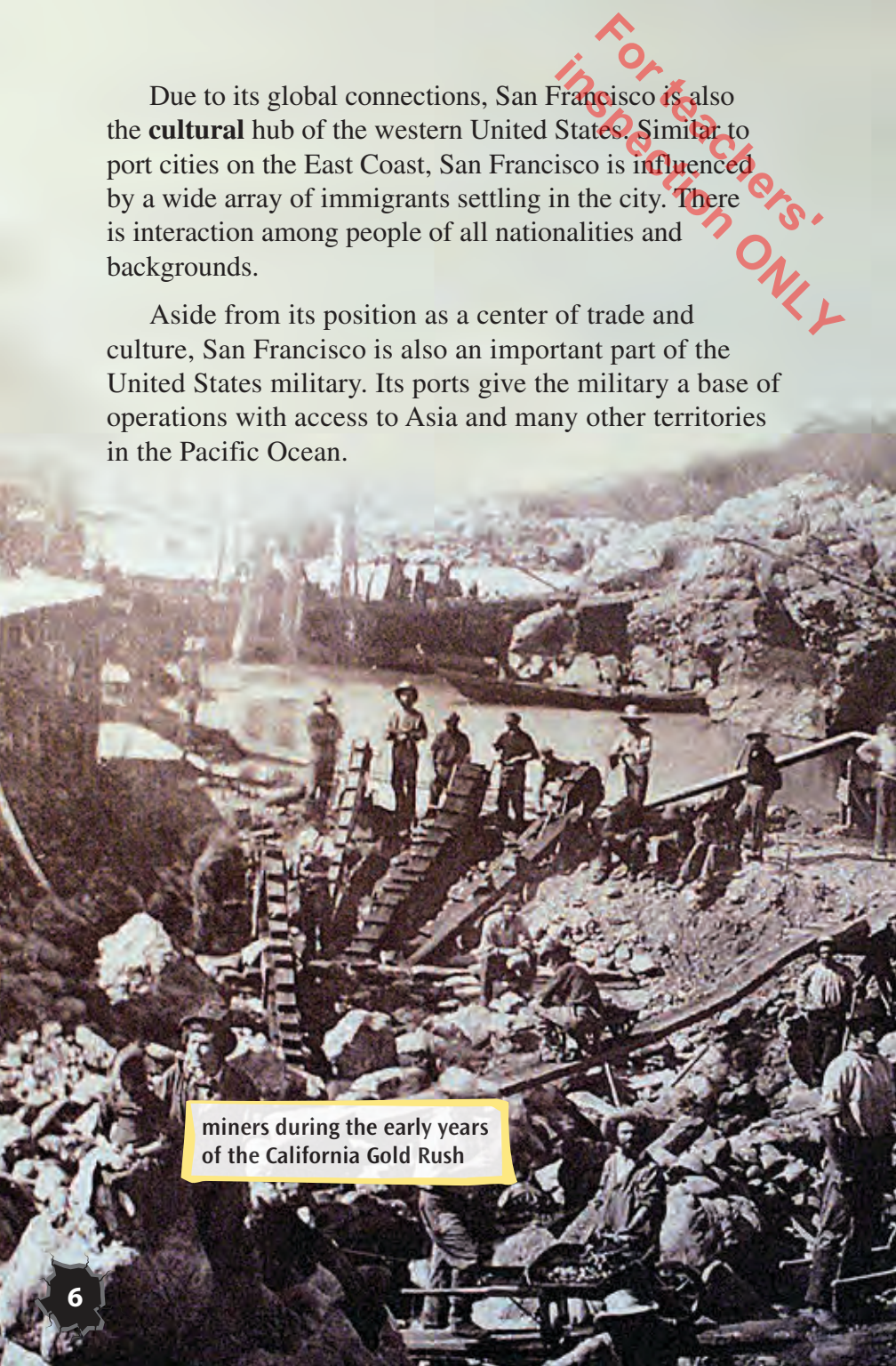


Market Street before the earthquake

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Due to its global connections, San Francisco is also the **cultural** hub of the western United States. Similar to port cities on the East Coast, San Francisco is influenced by a wide array of immigrants settling in the city. There is interaction among people of all nationalities and backgrounds.

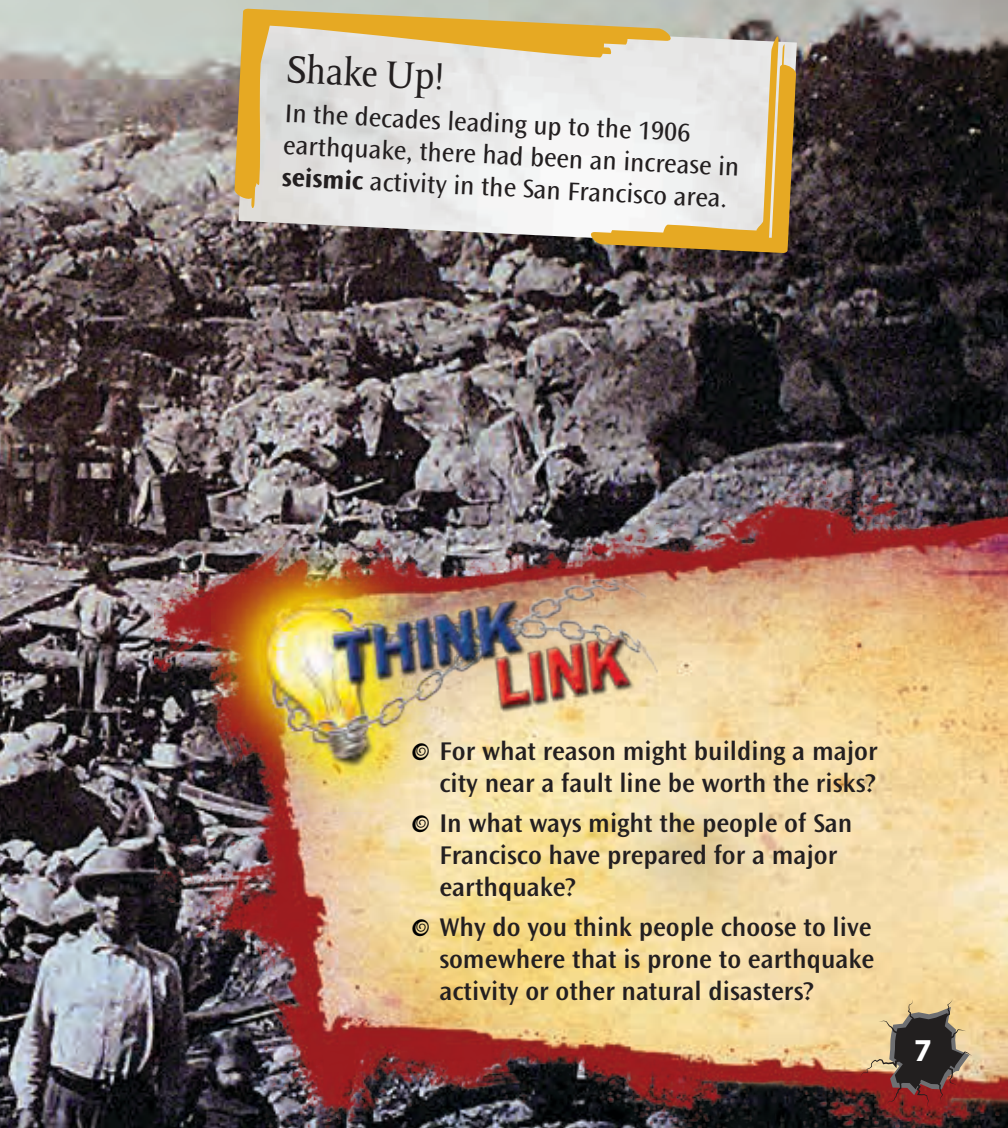
Aside from its position as a center of trade and culture, San Francisco is also an important part of the United States military. Its ports give the military a base of operations with access to Asia and many other territories in the Pacific Ocean.



miners during the early years of the California Gold Rush

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Until this point, nothing seems to stand in the way of San Francisco's rise. It is among the largest cities in the United States. It is prosperous and vibrant. But when night falls on this April day, an unexpected shift is stirring. With the new dawn, the landscape is in danger of being changed forever. Will the city be able to withstand the earth-rattling events to come?



Shake Up!

In the decades leading up to the 1906 earthquake, there had been an increase in **seismic** activity in the San Francisco area.

THINK LINK

- For what reason might building a major city near a fault line be worth the risks?
- In what ways might the people of San Francisco have prepared for a major earthquake?
- Why do you think people choose to live somewhere that is prone to earthquake activity or other natural disasters?

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A Morning Jolt!

BOOM! The citizens of San Francisco rise from their beds as a shock hits the city. It is 5:12 on the morning of April 18, 1906. Some local workers have begun their days, but the sun isn't up yet. As seconds pass quietly, the shaking slows, and everything seems fine. This region has experienced increased earthquake activity in recent years, so this isn't too alarming.

Another boom! This time, the shock lasts 45 seconds. Any residents who weren't awakened by the initial shock are certainly disturbed now. The **tectonic plates** of Earth's surface shake with violent fury as people scramble for safety wherever they can find it. The city rattles for what seems like an eternity, and buildings across San Francisco begin to crumble as the **tremors** continue. The big earthquake has hit.

A Wide Radius

The 1906 earthquake affected about 375,000 square miles (971,000 square kilometers). About half of that area was in the Pacific Ocean.



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Careful Construction

At the time of the earthquake, buildings were not made with the same safety measures they are built with today. Structures were not designed to withstand the intense shaking that occurred. Consequently, the damage was massive.

Chinatown after the earthquake

Reader's Guide

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1. What other cities and places were affected by the earthquake?
2. What were some of the lasting damages caused by the earthquake and fires?
3. Earthquakes continue to occur in this area. What safety tips could you offer someone living in the San Francisco area today?
4. How might the western United States be different today if the earthquake had never happened?

