



Beth Lew-Williams. *The Chinese Must Go: Violence, Exclusion, and the Making of the Alien in America.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018. 360 pp. \$39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-674-97601-6.

Reviewed by William Carrigan

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Commissioned by Michael J. Pfeifer (John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York)

Most Americans and many scholars know too little about the history of the Chinese in the United States. Beyond the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 and Japanese internment during World War II, textbooks and United States survey courses rarely mention Asians in America. Beth Lew-Williams's *The Chinese Must Go* is important new scholarship that, along with the works of other historians, should help change this in the future.

One reason that less attention has been paid to the Chinese is that they suffered relatively little lethal violence compared to other ethnic and racial minorities in US history, such as Native Americans, Mexican Americans, and African Americans. Lew-Williams argues that this historical focus on corpses has led to the overlooking of a truly astounding level of nonlethal vigilantism against the Chinese. The fact that the goal of so much anti-Chinese violence was exclusion, however, makes the story of the Chinese in the United States very relevant for recent American history, as national and state policies on citizenship and "aliens" have become politically and socially prominent.

The book contains seven chapters that are arranged both chronologically and topically. Beginning with the "Chinese Question" and attitudes of American elites toward trade with China, Lew-

Williams explores the complicated and ambivalent national response to Chinese immigration while also examining the impact of events on local Chinese residents before, during, and after the rise of expulsion-centered mob violence in the mid-1880s. *The Chinese Must Go* is based on an extensive examination of American and Chinese government reports, diplomatic records, court documents, newspapers, and personal accounts by Chinese immigrants themselves. The book alternates between zooming in on daily lives using local case studies of the Chinese in Washington State and fanning out to regional, national, and international levels so as provide a rich and robust blending of social, political, and diplomatic history.

The author makes several particularly interesting and compelling observations throughout the monograph. Here are brief summaries of the ones that stood out to me as worthy of further reflection and study:

- 1). Historians have not given enough attention to the role of violence in the slow development of federal immigration restriction laws as a response to anti-Chinese sentiment in the West. The threat of violence, made real by actual acts of vigilantism, was critical to the arguments put forth by those favoring exclusion.

2). Although federal officials (and subsequent historians citing federal statistics) claimed that the Chinese Exclusion Act greatly reduced Chinese entry into the US, it is difficult to say it had any impact as illegal immigration (especially from Canada) replaced legal immigration of Chinese. While some areas of the West had massive population losses of Chinese during 1880s, the impact was not a reduction of their number in the US but their concentration in urban enclaves, and much internal relocation (the percentage of Chinese living outside of the West was only 1 percent in 1880 but reached 25 percent in 1900).

3). Although violence (and the threat of violence) introduced terror into the daily lives of Chinese living in the United States, the Chinese did have options, such as the ability to relocate to a more peaceful location and to petition the Chinese government for help.

4). Contrary to the perception of a tightly united Chinese community in America, anti-Asian violence divided Chinese Americans along class lines.

5). While coverage of the 1885 Rock Springs massacre encouraged the anti-Chinese movement, the subsequent expulsions of Chinese in Tacoma, Washington, proved just as, or even more influential, as the leaders there demonstrated how to control the narrative and memory of anti-Chinese violence and how to use that violence to further the political goal of exclusion legislation.

6). As white lower-class anger increased and violence against the Chinese increased, white employers of Chinese laborers began to rethink their position on federal law, and most ended up betraying the Chinese who had helped them become rich.

7). Perhaps the most important and far-reaching conclusion of the book is that the significance of the Exclusion Act went far beyond the Chinese because it led to an entirely new approach to overseas expansion. After 1882, for the first time, Congress held the power to exclude racial minorities from entering the United States, making it

easier for the American government to exploit and expand overseas without the fear of introducing racial outsiders into the national social fabric.

As the above summary suggests, this is a deep book that has much to offer. I personally agree that historians (including myself) have focused very much on lethal extralegal violence, and that the result has been to obscure the scale and reach of the nonlethal vigilantism against the Chinese. *The Chinese Must Go* helps us recover that history. Yet, I also believe that there is still something to be learned from the systematic study of the lynching of Asians in the American West. While we know quite a bit about the Rock Springs massacre (and through this book about violence in Washington State), we know far less about other episodes of mob violence against the Chinese (and Japanese) in the West.

Lew-Williams's prose is truly exceptional for an academic book, the best I have read since the (Larry McMurtry-endorsed) *Revolution in Texas* by Benjamin Johnson (2005). The author mixes succinct narrative summaries with nuanced analysis of events. The study is that rare monograph that stands at the forefront of our knowledge in the field while being accessible enough to assign to undergraduate classes. *The Chinese Must Go* is, in short, highly recommended.

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