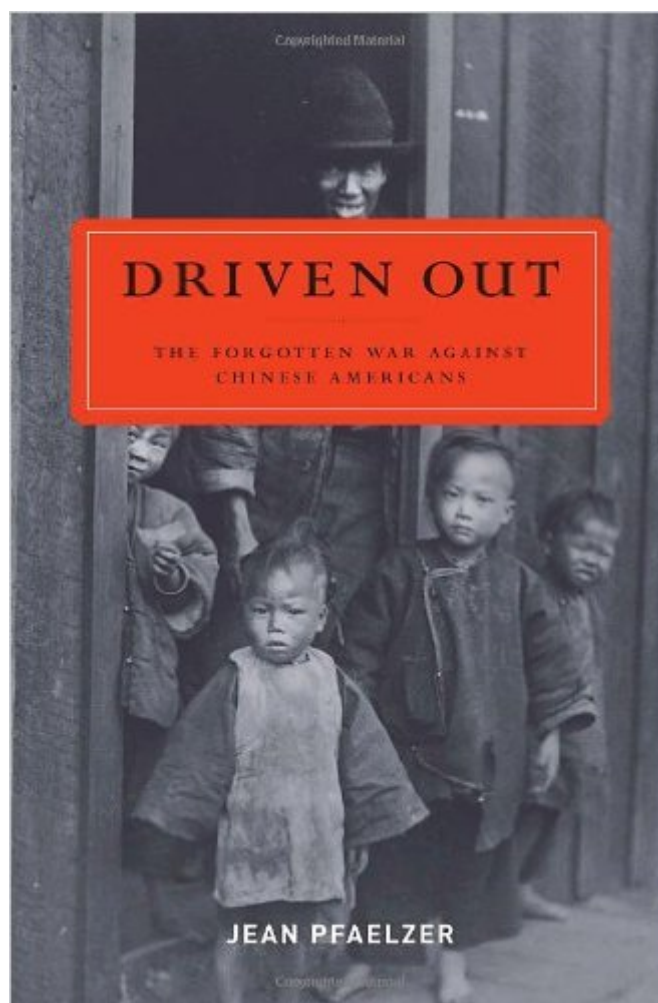


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Driven Out: The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans



Synopsis

A NEW YORK TIMES NOTABLE BOOK The brutal and systematic “ethnic cleansing” of Chinese Americans in California and the Pacific Northwest in the second half of the nineteenth century is a shocking “and virtually unexplored” chapter of American history. *Driven Out* unearths this forgotten episode in our nation’s past. Drawing on years of groundbreaking research, Jean Pfaelzer reveals how, beginning in 1848, lawless citizens and duplicitous politicians purged dozens of communities of thousands of Chinese residents—and how the victims bravely fought back. In town after town, as races and classes were pitted against one another in the raw and anarchistic West, Chinese miners and merchants, lumberjacks and field workers, prostitutes and merchants’ wives, were gathered up at gunpoint and marched out of town, sometimes thrown into railroad cars along the very tracks they had built. Here, in vivid detail, are unforgettable incidents such as the torching of the Chinatown in Antioch, California, after Chinese prostitutes were accused of giving seven young men syphilis, and a series of lynchings in Los Angeles bizarrely provoked by a Chinese wedding. From the port of Seattle to the mining towns in California’s Siskiyou Mountains to “Nigger Alley” in Los Angeles, the first Chinese Americans were hanged, purged, and banished. Chinatowns across the West were burned to the ground. But the Chinese fought back: They filed the first lawsuits for reparations in the United States, sued for the restoration of their property, prosecuted white vigilantes, demanded the right to own land, and, years before *Brown v. Board of Education*, won access to public education for their children. Chinese Americans organized strikes and vegetable boycotts in order to starve out towns that tried to expel them. They ordered arms from China and, with Winchester rifles and Colt revolvers, defended themselves. In 1893, more than 100,000 Chinese Americans refused the government’s order to wear photo identity cards to prove their legal status—the largest mass civil disobedience in United States history to that point. *Driven Out* features riveting characters, both heroic and villainous, white and Asian. Charles McGlashen, a newspaper editor, spearheaded a shift in the tactics of persecution, from brutality to legal boycotts of the Chinese, in order to mount a run for governor of California. Fred Bee, a creator of the Pony Express, became the Chinese consul and one of the few attorneys willing to defend the Chinese. Lum May, a dry goods store owner, saw his wife dragged from their home and driven insane. President Grover Cleveland, hoping that China’s 400,000 subjects would buy the United States out of its economic crisis, persuaded China to abandon the overseas Chinese in return for a trade treaty. Quen Hing Tong, a merchant, sought an injunction against the city of San Jose in an important precursor to today’s suits against racial profiling and police brutality. In *Driven Out*, Jean Pfaelzer sheds a harsh light on America’s past. This is a story of hitherto unknown racial

pogroms, purges, roundups, and brutal terror, but also a record of valiant resistance and community. This deeply resonant and eye-opening work documents a significant and disturbing episode in American history.â œJean Pfaelzer has pulled back the veil on one of the most horrendous, frightening, violent, and little known moments in American history, when the Chinese were driven from their homes and businesses in an effort to expel them from communities, states, and ultimately the country. This is the most comprehensive history of this period I have ever read, and Pfaelzer has written it with sensitivity and a keen eye for the horrifying, heartbreaking, and often uplifting and triumphant details. Driven Out couldn't be more timely or important. Lisa See, Author, Snow Flower and the Secret Fan Driven Out: the Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans is a meticulously researched and very readable recounting of America's systematic effort to purge all Chinese immigrants, from the mid-19th into the early-20th centuries. Jean Pfaelzer documents hundreds of cases in which the Chinese were lynched, maimed, burned out of their neighborhoods, and forced at gunpoint to leave mining camps, small villages, Indian reservations, and Chinatowns. The methodical and ruthless nature of this ethnic cleansing was matched only by the resistance from the Chinese sometimes with guns and knives or fists and sometimes with savvy recourse to their government representatives as well as petitions, public confrontations, and hundreds of lawsuits using white attorneys up to the U.S. Supreme Court. Pfaelzer has names and stories for these incidents making the actors real and accessible. This is a valuable addition to our understanding of the making of modern America. Franklin Odo, Director, Smithsonian Institution Asian Pacific American Program; Author, The Columbia Documentary History of the Asian American Experience Thanks to this gripping narrative, Chinese immigrants to the Far West so long overlooked now stand front and center in the saga of the struggle for civil rights in these United States. Kevin Starr, University of Southern California; Author, California, A History Too few Americans have any idea that these events mark the nation's past. Pfaelzer capably reconstructs a shameful history. Kirkus Reviews

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Customer Reviews

"Driven Out: The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans" is the first book I have ever read to address this particular issue, the "brutal and systematic" treatment accorded the Chinese immigrants to America during the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth. Oh, yes, I knew that some Chinese laborers came to the American West to work on the railroads during the heydays of their construction. But that is about all I knew. This, of course, is somewhat shameful for me to admit now because one of my majors during my undergraduate days was history (with a specialty in American history to boot!), and I taught American history to junior high school students for seven years early in my teaching career. Moreover, as a requirement for a teaching certificate I had to take a course specifically in Pacific Northwest history (the area where most of the anti-Chinese incidents took place) and at no time was this matter discussed in the textbooks or in class. Whether this unexplored chapter in American history was deliberately overlooked or ignored, I cannot say. But I can say that it was, in my opinion, a disgrace that it was not presented and discussed. Jean Pfaelzer, who is a professor of English and American studies at the University of Delaware, has written a comprehensive and gripping account of the "ethnic cleansing" of the Chinese residing in California and the Pacific Northwest. Since I was born and still live in the Pacific Northwest, this detailed narrative about the barbaric treatment of a group of fellow human beings who either came here voluntarily or were forced to come here to work on the railroads, in the mines, in the fields, and elsewhere, is especially disturbing.

Let me start out by praising this author. I normally start a review by listing mistakes. As you read my kudos, you will see why I made that exception for this book. Kudos Today, it is nearly unheard of to write a nonfiction book and stay on topic. Nearly all allegedly nonfiction authors contaminate their work with large doses of their personal political opinions. Most of those opinions reveal a myopic understanding of the topic on which the author is opinionating. Pfaelzer's editorial integrity is especially noteworthy because this book is directly relevant to the hot button political (non)issue of

immigration, but the author doesn't impose her political view. I enjoyed reading a book that breaks the current trend of writing in Pidgin English. Whether such writing is done to obfuscate or done out of ignorance, I don't know. Either way, this common practice of saddling the text with confusing errors in grammar, composition, and word choices is annoying. Pfaelzer is a professor of English (and of East Asian History and of American Studies), so perhaps she felt obligated to break from the herd on this issue. If this book had errors of fact, I didn't catch them. I'm not sure that this characteristic (free of errors of fact) is normal, either. What it's about Driven Out addresses the atrocities committed against Chinese people who were living and working on the American west coast (mostly California) at a particular time. That time was the half-century or so between the post-Civil War reconstruction era and the first part of the Twentieth Century. The same psychodrama plays out today as then, except today "we" hate Mexicans instead of the Chinese.

...and thank goodness! The efforts to expel by violence and exclude by law the Chinese from joining the great migration of peoples from the "Old World" to the "New" seem, from our vantage point in 2008, to have been as unsuccessful as they were vicious. May it ever be so! I picked this book up because 's marvelous computer "recommended" it to me after I reviewed the book "Island", about the INS quarantine barracks on Angel Island in SF Bay. This is a more vivid account of the violent campaign waged after the building of the transcontinental railroad, to drive the Chinese out of rural America and into urban ghettos, to deny them the rights and opportunities of ordinary citizens, and even to deprive them of life. It's based on, and includes, some powerful first-person narratives, and it reaches well beyond the Bay Area in the agricultural counties of California, Oregon, and Washington. It also includes vivid accounts of Chinese resistance to ethnic cleansing, from evasion to self-defense to legal activism. These acts of resistance will be news to most readers, including American-born Chinese. They were exciting news to me. One previous review, by Dr. Dolhenty, which praises the book's even-handedness and gives it five stars, also contains some amazing statements concerning the possibility that such information could fuel an imagined "Blame America" sentiment. The doctor proceeds to justify America, not absolutely but relatively, using the argument that "we" weren't nearly as bad as X, Y, & Z. So no apologies needed! We were only doing what "everyone" did in those days; we just weren't as good at it! What an incredibly infantile self-justification! Just come out and say, I chopped down the cherry tree, and stop equivocating!

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