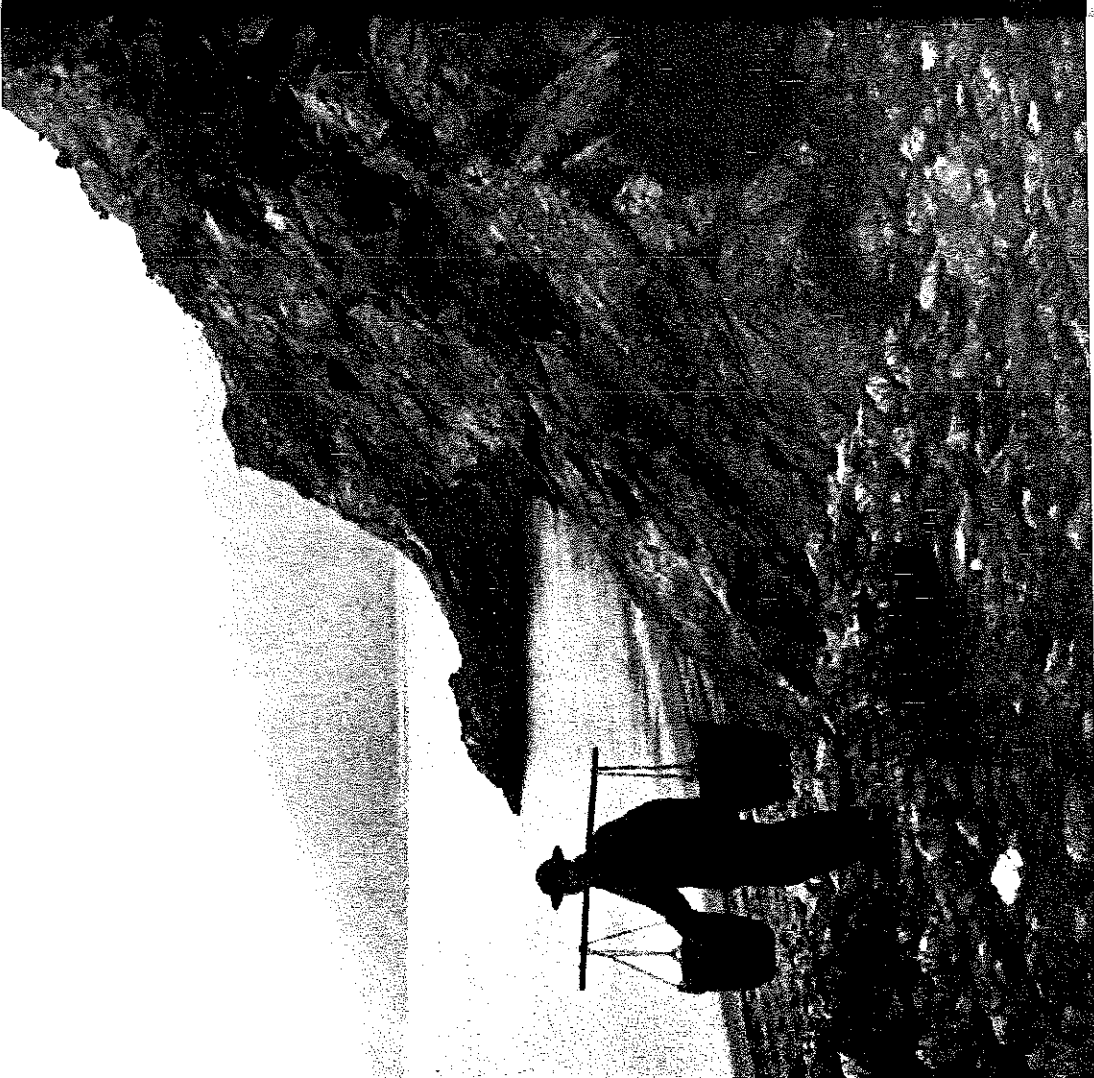




DRIVEN OUT

THE
FORGOTTEN WAR AGAINST
CHINESE AMERICANS

JEAN PFAELZER

2007

RANDOM HOUSE  NEW YORK

GOLD!

"PEACEABLY IF WE CAN,
FORCIBLY IF WE MUST"

On February 2, 1848, a vanquished Mexico signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and ceded California to the United States, unaware that just nine days earlier, nuggets of pure gold had been found in a creek at a sawmill in the foothills of California's Sierra Nevada range. The discovery of gold did not make the front page of the San Francisco papers until March 15, but sailing vessels quickly carried the news to countries that bordered the Pacific Ocean. Word soon spread from Mexico to Panama to Chile.¹ In April, the Pacific Mail Steamship Company launched five side-wheel steamships to carry eager South American miners north to San Francisco.

At the dawn of 1848, 150,000 native people and a few thousand Mexicans and Californios lived in the northernmost corner of Mexico. Yuroks, Miwoks, Nisenan, Yokuts, and Karuks were among fifty tribes or nations who first inhabited the area.² Mestizos, rancheros, peons, Spanish priests, and runaway African American slaves were the first settlers. Their worlds were about to collide.

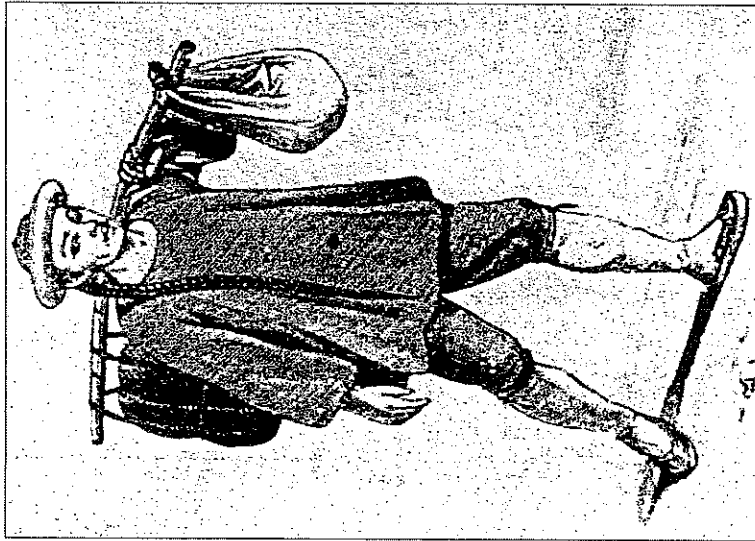
Word of gold traveled across the Pacific to the Sandwich Islands and from there to China. In port cities across Asia, captains and crews altered

their routes, sailed for California, and abandoned laden ships in San Francisco Bay. Many ships rotted and sank in its cold waters as officers and sailors headed for the Sierra mountains. Other ships anchored at the docks and were promptly rebuilt as saloons or restaurants to serve the tide of gold seekers. In San Francisco and Sacramento, stores and offices closed, houses were boarded up, crops were abandoned, and Mexicans, Californios, and white laborers, merchants, artists, and physicians all rushed into the Sierra foothills. They traveled any way they could, on burros, horses, or wagons, sometimes hiking, sometimes buying overpriced tickets on steamships to carry them up the Yuba, Bear, and American Rivers.

From the East Coast, unemployed veterans, just home from the Mexican War, returned to the West—back overland by carriage, on horseback or foot, across the mountains and jungles of the Isthmus of Panama, where they desperately awaited ships to finish their voyage up the Pacific coast. These new “argonauts” joined mechanics, ranchers, laborers, merchants, and professional men and stormed up California’s mountains, sharing an expansionist vision and a military determination. None was interested in laboring as a waiter, servant, mill worker, or field hand, even at wages of ten to twenty dollars per day.³

When news of gold reached the newly “open” port cities in China, shipmasters in Hong Kong and Canton had little difficulty convincing Chinese men to sail for California. In rice-growing and fishing villages in Guangdong Province, shipping companies circulated broadsheets and maps urging men to forswear country and clan for gold. Facing warlords, destitution, and British battleships, villagers read ads promoting America as a haven of plenty and equality:

Americans are very rich people. They want the Chinaman to come and will make him welcome. There will be big pay, large houses, and food and clothing of the finest description. You can write your friends or send them money any time, and we will be responsible for the safe delivery. It is a nice country, without mandarins or soldiers. All alike; big man no larger than little man. There are a great many Chinamen there now, and it will not be a strange country. China God is there, and the agents of this house. Never fear, and you will be lucky. Come to Hong Kong, or to the sign of this house in Canton and we will instruct you. Money is in great plenty and to spare in



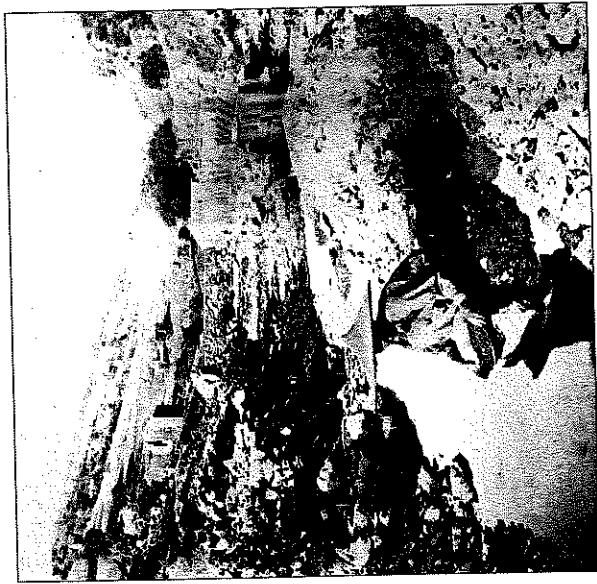
“A Chinaman en Route for the Mines”
GLEASON’S PICTORIAL DRAWING ROOM COMPANION, 1852

America. Such as wishes to have wages and labor guaranteed can obtain the security by application at this office.⁴

Dreaming of wealth on “Gold Mountain,” as California came to be known, Chinese villagers sold their fields or fishing boats, or borrowed money to sail to California. They landed in a raw new territory, a land without traditions of nationhood, authority, ethnic commonality, or even clear geographic borders.

Few Chinese women journeyed across the Pacific. Unlike their brethren, most Chinese women who entered California in the mid-1800s were slaves. Kidnapped for prostitution from the southern ports of China, they were brokered and owned by Chinese merchants who also emigrated to San Francisco.

The Chinese arrived as California was growing from a cluster of harbor



Chinese miner by creek (1849)

towns and mining camps into a national financial and political force. From San Francisco up through the Sacramento delta and north to Crescent City, fishing villages and small towns built to trade in hides and tallow rapidly became staging and supply centers for miners eager to move into the mountains.⁵ Ninety percent of California's workforce was tied to gold.

California's new leaders promptly abandoned the area's ties to Spanish priests and Mexican ranchers. They identified with the Anglos and debated how to govern thousands of Chinese, Chilean, French, Mexican, and Peruvian prospectors. In the Sierra Nevada the Chinese argonauts encountered Native Americans and Mexican Americans who were facing death, enslavement, or violent pogroms by white men eager to quickly gather the golden ore that had lain sparkling in California's rivers for thousands of years.

The gold rush also offered a serendipitous finale to a war premised on national expansion and the extension of slave territory. By 1845 abolitionists had lost their decadelong struggle to prevent the annexation of Texas.⁶ The *Washington Union*, a paper of southern Democrat views, wrote, "Who can arrest the torrent that will pour onward to the West? The road to California will be open to us. Who will stay the march of our Western people?"

That year John O'Sullivan, editor of the *Democratic Review*, declared that it was "our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions."⁷

Ideas of white superiority bracketed the image of white expansion, "free development" and industrial inevitability in California and the West. The *Illinois State Register* insisted, "Shall this garden of beauty be suffered to lie dormant in its wild and useless luxuriance? . . . myriads of enterprising Americans would flock to its rich and inviting prairies; the hum of Anglo-American industry would be heard in its valleys; cities would rise upon its plains and sea-coast, and the resources and wealth of the nation be increased in an incalculable degree." Mexicans, wrote the *American Review*, must yield to "a superior population, insensibly oozing into her territories, changing her customs, and out-living, out-trading, exterminating her weaker blood."

At the same time, the final push for the abolition of slavery was taking hold. The American Anti-Slavery Society declared that the Mexican War was "waged solely for the detestable and horrible purpose of extending and perpetuating American slavery through the vast territory of Mexico." The poet and abolitionist James Russell Lowell, through his character Hosea Biglow, a New England farmer, announced,

They just want this Californy

Sós to lug new slave states in

To abuse ye, an' to scorn ye,

An' to plunder ye like sin.

Newly organized workingmen in New England well understood that despite the military's promises to enlistees of plunder, pay of seven dollars per month, and a land grant of 160 acres, territories seized from Mexico "would be giving men that live upon the blood of others an opportunity of dipping their hand still deeper in the sin of slavery. . . . Have we not slaves enough now?" As the war began, a convention of the New England Workmen's Association announced that its members would "not take up arms to sustain the Southern slaveholder in robbing one-fifth of our countrymen of their labor."

The young labor movement had reason to be fearful. Under the Treaty

of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the vast territory seized by the United States could extend southern slavery to the Pacific coast. And so, in the Compromise of 1850, in return for admitting California as a free state, the United States would absorb remaining territories without "any restriction or condition on the subject of slavery." That year Congress also passed the Fugitive Slave Law, which stated that any federal marshal who did not arrest a runaway slave could be fined one thousand dollars; any person suspected of being a runaway slave could be arrested without a warrant and turned over to anyone claiming to be the owner; a suspected slave could not ask for a jury trial or testify on his or her behalf; and any person who aided a runaway slave by providing shelter, food, or transportation faced six months' imprisonment and a one-thousand-dollar fine. The law also offered a "fee" or bribe for every slave remanded back into slavery. The presumptions of the treaty, of the law, of national entitlement, and of race would soon shape the history of Chinese America.

At the end of the Mexican War, most returning veterans could not hold on to their allotments of land, but they still clung to the myth of white possibility and expansion in the West. Wrote a young naval officer, "Asia . . . will be brought to our very doors. Population will flow into the fertile regions of California . . . public lands . . . will be changed from deserts into gardens, and a large population will be settled."

This "large population" was to come to the Pacific Northwest from all over the globe. From 1845 to 1849, the Great Hunger in Ireland, caused by Britain's long interference with Ireland's agriculture and also by a potato fungus, killed between five hundred thousand and a million people from 1845 to 1849 and destroyed the Irish economy. Some two million desperate Irish refugees immigrated to England, Canada, Australia, and the United States—and thousands hopefully made their way west.

In France, Austria, Hungary, Italy, and Germany, between February and June 1848, radical movements of working people and students erupted. These seemingly spontaneous protests demanding liberty and revolution were soon crushed, and many dissidents fled to the United States. Some went west.

The cry "California for Americans!" soon boomed across the foothills of the Sierra Nevada and the lower Siskiyou Mountains. In 1849 a mob of white miners in Mariposa County declared that any "Chinaman" who



Chinese gold miners in Tuolumne

mined for gold must "leave on twenty-four hours notice, otherwise the miners will inflict such punishment as they deem proper."⁸ In Marysville, demonstrators proclaimed that "no Chinaman shall hence forth be allowed on any mining claim in the neighborhood."⁹

Rain had finally come to the arid creek at Camp Salvado, washing down the dry dark dirt to expose clusters of golden nuggets to Chinese miners working for an English stock company.¹⁰ News of the Chinese discovery quickly spread. A gang of white miners promptly rode down to Salvado and assaulted the Chinese, who fled from their prosperous claim. Stunned by this first mass purge, the English investors abandoned the diggings, and the sixty remaining Chinese miners trekked over the mountain into Tuolumne County. There they built Chinese Camp, likely the first all-Chinese town in the United States. The roundup at Camp Salvado ignited the brutal firestorm of purges that burned in the West for fifty years.

Like white miners, the Chinese built bunkhouses or boardinghouses

or pitched tent camps—rough male villages. During the gold rush, the proportion of both Chinese and white women to men was low, about three to one hundred. Few miners of any nationality asked their wives or fiancées to join them in the gold fields.¹¹ Across the country, abandoned white wives exercised their new rights under California's liberal laws and divorced the men who had rushed to the diggings. Until the end of the nineteenth century, the divorce rate in California was the highest in the world.¹²

The low number of Chinese women probably made the Chinese communities in America particularly vulnerable to persecution. Chinese women would have foretold family, civilization, and permanence, and their very presence would have stood as a barrier to the idea that the Chinese had come to the United States as "sojourners"—temporary and enduringly foreign.

The first Chinese woman in the gold town of Sonora was an enslaved young girl who worked in a bar selling drinks and sex to white miners.¹³ Known to whites as "China Lena," she grew vegetables in a large garden and peddled them on the hilly streets, carrying them in two baskets hanging from a pole across her shoulders. But Lena was forced to live in China Camp, supervised by a Chinese pimp. In an era when southern whites warned that abolition would lead to interracial sex and "amalgamated" races, the California State Legislature banned marriage between Chinese and whites. But the enslaved prostitution of Chinese women grew quickly into a tolerated and profitable business.

"CALIFORNIA FOR AMERICANS!"

In the spring of 1852, sixty white miners, accompanied by a brass band, rode through a chain of Chinese diggings along the sandy shore of the American River. They assaulted two hundred Chinese men who shared a claim at Mormon Bar, then rode a few miles down the river and attacked four hundred Chinese miners camped along Horseshoe Bar. Although the Chinese miners greatly outnumbered the vigilantes, they abandoned their river claims, no doubt fearful for their lives. The white miners boasted to the press that they helped the Chinese dismantle their tents.¹⁴

Early that summer, white miners in El Dorado County barricaded the dusty stage road and turned back all wagons and coaches carrying Chinese



"Pacific Chivalry"
HARPER'S WEEKLY, AUGUST 7, 1869

passengers and freight. At nearby Weber Creek, vigilantes set fire to the tents and tools of Chinese miners, burning out the Chinese camp.¹⁵

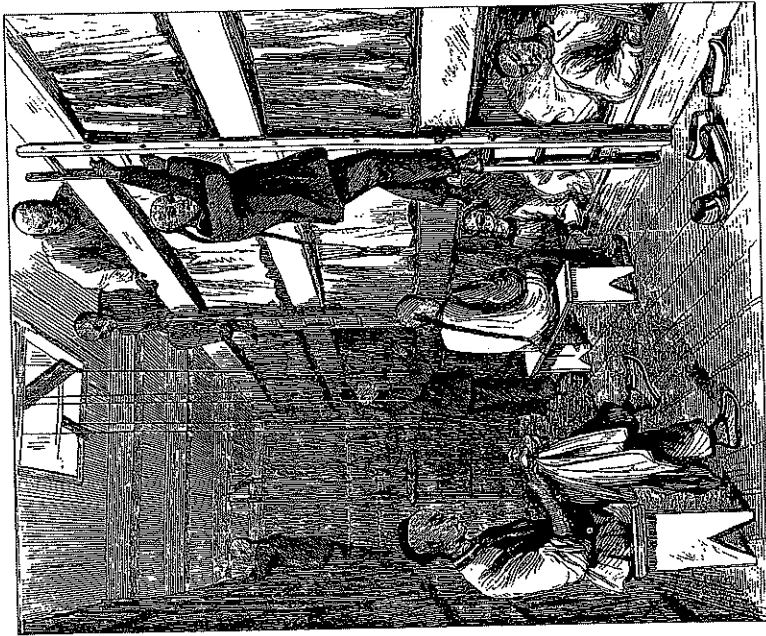
In Columbia, white miners facing Chinese competition along the riverbeds blamed capitalists, shipowners, and merchants, men who "engaged in the importation of these burlesques on humanity," thus "fastening . . . a system of peonage" in the gold fields. These greedy investors "would crowd their ships with the long-tailed horned and cloven-footed inhabitants of the infernal regions, and contend for their introduction in the mines on an equality with American laborers, if they could add one farthing to the rates of freight, or dispose of one pound more of pork or for a few shillings of rice by the operation."¹⁶ The Columbia miners announced that they were "empowered to take such steps as they may deem necessary" to make sure that "no Asiatic or South Sea Islander . . . be permitted to mine any longer in Columbia, or any where else in California . . . either for himself or for others."¹⁷

But more and more Chinese flocked to Tuolumne County, and in September 1852, white miners called the first Jamestown Miners Convention and demanded that no immigrant from Asia, Polynesia, or South America be given citizenship. They agreed to vote only for state legislators who would "drive the coolies from some of our mining districts."¹⁸ Their de-

mand, wrote the *Daily Alta California*, was "harsh and unlawful in design and dangerous in tendency" and was conceived in a spirit of "hatred and hostility" without parallel in California.¹⁹

Yet the mob's decrees traveled up the rivers and along the lupine valleys where few lumps or even grains of gold still shimmered in the green waters. Pioneer Alfred Jackson wrote in his diary that whenever white miners found a group of Chinese miners along the sandbars of the Yuba River, they would quickly make a law that the Chinese could not "take up or hold ground." Some "thought it would be a good thing to sell them claims, as it was an easy way to make money," but most "were for driving them out of the country entirely."²⁰

Without women in the gold fields, both Chinese and white miners did their own domestic work—they cooked, sewed, and washed their own



"Chinese Sleeping Accommodations"
FRANK LESLIE'S ILLUSTRATED SUNDAY MAGAZINE, MARCH 1881

clothes. But in songs, sermons, plays, cartoons, speeches, and advertisements, Chinese men were depicted as lacking virility. In this mostly male world, Chinese men became targets of white men's fears of homosexuality or the objects of their desire.

The ruthless evictions went on. On January 21, 1854, at an open meeting at Watles and Granger's General Store in Placer County, miners unanimously voted that "no Chinaman shall be allowed, from this date, to hold any mining claim, or to work upon any claim in the district of Green Valley."²¹ Late on the evening of August 21, during that hot and dry mountain summer, a hundred white men roamed through Nevada City's Chinatown, breaking into the Chinese brothels, dragging frightened women into the streets, and pitching their furniture into the dirt. By the next morning, the Chinese men and women had disappeared from town. But when many returned, frustrated white miners turned to the state legislature to drive the Chinese off the mountain and bar them from registering claims at rich spots along the crowded narrow shores and sandbars of the Sierra rivers.

In the cold and snowy January of 1855, Chinese miners in Shasta's "Hong Kong" heard that hundreds of Anglo miners were coming into town on foot, on horseback, and in wagons to hold an anti-Chinese convention. Frustrated, greedy, and cold, the white miners bitterly complained that the state had failed to rid Shasta of its Chinese residents: "We the miners of Shasta County forbid Chinamen from working in the mines of this county." After February 25, 1855, they decreed, no white man in Shasta County could ever again employ a Chinese person.²²

A RACE WAR IN THE GOLD FIELDS

In the winter of 1858–59, a race war began. The Chinese had refused to leave the gold fields, and a mob of two hundred white men rode out from Shasta City armed with rifles, shotguns, and ropes. Following the twisting trail above the rocky canyons of the McCloud River, they came upon a Chinese camp at Lower Springs and ordered the Chinese at gunpoint to forsake their claim and never return. Grabbing their pans, shovels, and clothes, the Chinese took flight. The aroused white mob then found another group of Chinese miners a few miles down the rough river gorge and forcibly expelled them too.

Unbeknownst to the mob, a young new county sheriff was in pursuit. Thin, wiry, and determined, Clay Stockton, a twenty-five-year-old Kentuckian, had been chasing the gang along the stage road and, even as white runners scattered to remote diggings to announce that the purge from Shasta County had begun, he arrested seven or eight vigilantes. He forced them back to Shasta City and locked them in the jail. At sundown, several hundred white men burst into the courtroom where the trial was about to begin and demanded that Stockton hand over their friends. The frightened judge quickly dismissed the trial and "yielded up" the sheriff's prisoners.

Defiant, Shasta's Chinese miners bought arms and returned on foot to their claims. A few, however, remembering brutal evictions at Middle Creek and Lower Springs, abandoned the diggings.

Over the next three years the purges of Chinese miners—the threatening conventions and propaganda, the night raids, the destruction of their camps, and the forced marches—spread farther into the gold fields, up the

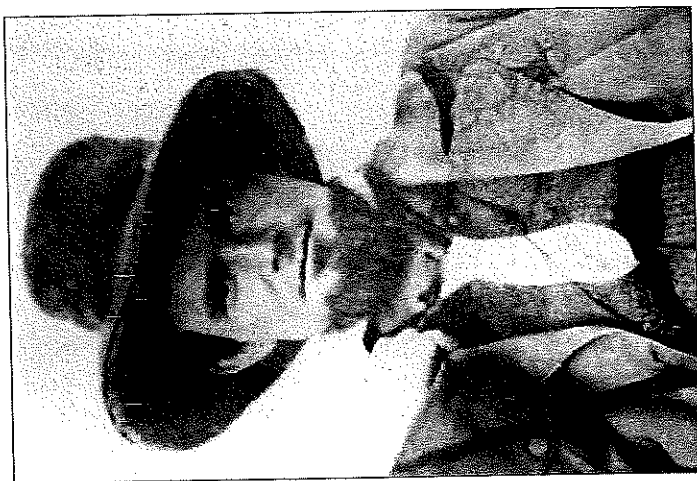
riverbanks, and into the makeshift mining towns in the Siskiyou Mountains. In 1859, white miners convened at Brannan's General Store on Middle Creek in the Siskiyou. Amidst the barrels of crackers, coffee, and dried meat, the Shasta Miners Convention determined to expel the Chinese from the surrounding mines once and for all. On February 5, the convention gave the Chinese three weeks to wind up their business. After that date, "if any Chinese are found working in our claims we will . . . assemble and expel such Chinese, peaceably if we can, forcibly if we must."²³

On a cold mountain night three weeks later, hours before the deadline, two hundred armed white miners hiked up the ice-crusted trails to the remote Chinese claims at the mouth of Rock Creek. Disobeying the convention's order to leave, the Chinese miners had remained by the frozen rivers to protect their claims, sleeping in tents and lean-tos. Suddenly the gang of white miners burst into their camp and ordered them off the mountain. Rushing across the creek and scaling the high canyon wall, most of the Chinese escaped, but about seventy-five Chinese were seized, and their tents, sluices, tools, and clothing were destroyed.

At daylight, the mob forced the Chinese men to parade through Shasta City. Townspeople lined the dirt road, jeering and pelting them with stones. Sheriff Stockton met the march with his armed deputies, freed the Chinese captives, and arrested fifteen vigilantes. Again a mob threatened to storm the jail as news of the Rock Creek roundup spread to the coarse new towns.

Four days later, gangs of white miners, packing rifles and shotguns, attacked the rich Chinese claims close to Shasta City. Riots broke out in the small mountain towns of Horsetown, Middletown, and Oregon Gulch, where white miners vowed to behead or crucify the Chinese. Many Chinese miners were badly wounded; many were seized and paraded through Shasta City. Sheriff Stockton dispersed the mob and freed two hundred Chinese men. The vigilantes scattered.²⁴

Stockton knew that he was losing control of the county and desperately wired Governor John Weller: "An armed body of men, 300 strong and increasing, is organized for the purpose of driving the Mongolians out, in defiance of the law and its officers."²⁵ He pleaded for a large posse, two hundred rifles, and one thousand pounds of ammunition from the state armory. Weller balked—he was saving California's munitions for the wars against the Indians. Stockton flooded Weller with telegraphs, and finally, fearing a civil war, the governor sent one man to Red Bluff, partway up the



Sheriff Clay Stockton

Years later white miners still recalled "the long train of fugitives" leaving the gold diggings and returning home: "Some were going North, some South, the great body was probably bound for home, some by way of the sea; others by Los Angeles and the Great Desert."⁵⁵ The Chinese were to follow.

SLAVERY AND THE CHINESE

As the movement to abolish slavery gathered steam in the North and the issue of the expansion of slavery in the territories divided northern states from southern, slogans such as the "dignity of labor" and the "honor of the pick and shovel" took hold in California.

Just months after the discovery of gold, a group of forty-eight men—merchants, lawyers, and artisans—traveled to the fishing village of Monterey and held California's first constitutional convention. At noon on September 1, 1849, with only a few law books and a handful of state constitutions at hand, they began the process of transforming California from a territory into a state. The voice of "free labor" dominated the meetings. Californians wanted no competition from slave labor in the mining districts, for "the labor of the white man brought into competition with the Negro is always degraded." Indeed, any member of this "respectable and intelligent class . . . would leave this country" before he would dig with pick and shovel alongside the African.⁵⁶

By the end of the first week, the California delegates unanimously resolved the issue searing the country: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, unless for punishment of crimes, shall ever be tolerated in this state." But equality of work did not intend equality of rights. Over the objections of the few Mexican American delegates, the convention denied the vote to all women and to "Indians, Africans, and descendants of Africans."⁵⁷ It also denied minorities the right to testify against whites in court.

The delegates to the Monterey convention finished the constitution in six weeks and rushed it to the offices of the *Daily Alta California* in San Francisco, which printed 1,000 copies in English and 250 copies in Spanish—a small number for such a large and scattered electorate. On November 13, 1849, out of about 107,000 possible male voters, 12,061 voted for and 811 voted against the constitution. The white men of California were distracted by gold.

Chinese miners arrived in a new state that had just voted to outlaw slavery. But California's admission to the union was part of the Compromise of 1850—a group of laws that included the Fugitive Slave Act, which required the return of runaway slaves. Statehood for California was secured by a federal law that assisted the South in retaining human property.

Although Chinese men who came to the United States were not enslaved, labor contracts, newspaper reports, and shipping logs suggest that some did enter the United States indentured—often to shipping companies or ship's captains. Chinese immigrants were quickly labeled "coolies"—a term for kidnapped, enslaved, or indentured servants that most likely comes from the Chinese characters *ku* and *li*, translated by some as "rented muscles."

In 1808 the United States had outlawed the importation of new slaves. Now the California constitution promised that Chinese miners were to be free laborers, able to move from job to job; neither their labor nor their debt could be sold between employers. Most Chinese who came to work in the mines, and, later, on the railroad or in the orchards, came voluntarily; but they bore a heavy debt to labor contractors, shipping companies, or the merchants who profited from their passage, the interest on their debts, and, in the end, their labor. These profits helped the class of Chinese elites in San Francisco who quickly formed into six *huiguan*, ruling "companies" based on village and clan affiliations, known as the Chinese Six Companies.⁵⁸

By 1855, nearly forty thousand Chinese immigrants had registered with the Chinese Six Companies, who brokered their passage, found them jobs, provided medicine, organized transportation to the mountains, adjudicated disputes, and demanded discipline. They also tortured immigrants who defied them. One officer, Ah Ti, "inflicted severe corporal punishment upon many of his more humble countrymen . . . cutting off their ears, flogging them or keeping them chained."⁵⁹ In a deal with the shipping companies, the Chinese Six Companies issued exit permits that verified that a miner had paid his debts before he could sail back to China. The Six Companies learned how to negotiate with state and town governments on behalf of the overseas Chinese, thus providing them an institutional buffer unavailable to African Americans or Native Americans. By controlling emigration, the Companies maintained transnational links and forged enduring communities.

The Chinese miners who sailed for California were at the front of a

global migration of Chinese labor. Although England had emancipated slaves at home in 1772 and had abolished slavery in its colonies in August 1834, by 1850 it needed more cotton to feed its mills and turned to China for cheap labor. Between 1840 and 1900, prompted by English and American bankers and shipping companies, more than two million Chinese laborers—free and enslaved—left their homeland to work on plantations in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Caribbean, South America, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, and Russia.⁶⁰

White miners clung to the myth that all Chinese were coolies, a derelict species of slave. There were, in fact, reasons for this confusion. The United States government did not rigidly enforce the ban on trade in Chinese slaves, particularly women. American brokers in Macao and other southern Chinese ports captured, kidnapped, and indentured thousands of Chinese workers, and they carried more than six thousand “coolie laborers,” their bare chests painted with letters marking their destinations, to sugar plantations in Cuba or the deadly guano pits in Peru on ships registered to the United States, ships modeled after the slave ships of the Middle Passage. Other Chinese slaves were transported on American ships to Chile, Ecuador, Panama, and Mexico. A congressional report noticed that the “Coolie Trade . . . seems to have commenced about the time when the [U.S.] laws against the prosecution of the African slave trade were enforced with the greatest stringency.”⁶¹

In 1853 the powerful *Daily Alta California* argued that “most of [the Chinese] in the mines are not free . . . they are coolies, brought here by rich mandarins or merchants to work for little more than a bear [sic] subsistence. . . . There is one man in California who has 14,000 coolies at work in our mines—14,000!”⁶²

The Chinese, however, insisted that they were free. In 1855, Lai Chun-chuen, a merchant in San Francisco, published a notice in English on behalf of the Hak-sheung Ui-kun, or Chinese Merchants’ Exchange, challenging the rumor that the Chinese Six Companies were importing “slaves of a degraded caste.” Lai insisted, “We assure you solemnly that we do not believe that there are any Chinese coolies in this country, who have bound themselves to serve for fixed wages, and who have given their families as pledges to their employers that they would fulfill their contracts. The Chinese in this country are not serfs or slaves of any description, but are working for themselves.”⁶³

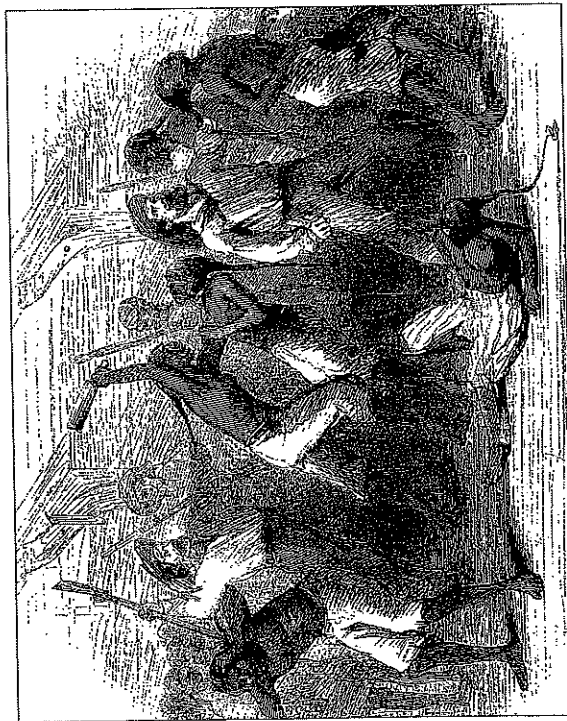
Indeed, there is evidence that some Chinese were transported out of

China as virtual slaves. In the 1850s it is likely that some Chinese immigrants to California had signed misleading contracts and unwittingly locked themselves into forms of bondage lasting up to seven years; some were kidnapped; some were sold by their clans to brokers; and some, desperately poor, sold themselves off in a voluntary form of indentured servitude.

While Chinese maritime revolts, unlike the African mutinies on the *Amistad* or the *Creole*, are virtually unknown, Chinese slave mutinies arose in 10 percent of American voyages. In the mid-1850s, four hundred Chinese in Amoy were enticed aboard the *Robert Browne*, bound for San Francisco. When the emigrants discovered that they were being transported into indentured service, they rebelled and killed the ship’s officers. Later they testified in court that they had been promised four dollars a month to work in the United States as freely hired laborers, not as “contract workers.”

In March 1860, one thousand Chinese slaves mutinied on the *Norway*, an American ship en route from Macao to Havana. The *Norway* was a copy of a slave ship, with its lower deck fitted into narrow sleeping shelves stacked to the top of the hold. After being locked belowdecks for five days at sea, the Chinese lit fires in the hold and forced open the hatches. The crew hurried to abandon the ship, and the captain threatened to cut the masts, set fire to the ship, and leave with the lifeboats and provisions. Only after the crew killed thirty slaves and wounded ninety others did the Chinese surrender.⁶⁴ Describing the mutiny, one Chinese passenger recalled, “Bands of us threw ourselves upon them; Release us or we will burn the ship! We have nothing to lose.” Not until 1862, one year into the Civil War, did Congress pass the Prohibition of Coolie Trade Act, which banned any ship that was registered to the United States from transporting enslaved laborers from China into any foreign port.⁶⁵

Yet the vision of “free labor” in California endured for white workers. When southerners campaigned to reintroduce the slave trade, the California Committee on Mines pointed to Chinese immigrants as “an inferior race in our midst, nominally free, and yet, virtually slaves.”⁶⁶ White miners organized rallies throughout the gold towns to defeat the “coolie bill” introduced in 1852 by Assemblyman George Tingley on behalf of merchants and new corporations. The bill would hold Chinese laborers to indenture contracts they signed in China, even if the contracts were illegal under American law. It would enforce agreements that fixed a number of years of labor,



Chinese slave rebellion on the Norway
HARPER'S NEW MONTHLY MAGAZINE, JUNE 1864

and it legalized the "unfree" status of unpaid or underpaid Chinese immigrants. The Tingley Bill marked their difference from American free workers.⁶⁷ Although the controversial bill failed, it highlighted the skewed relationship between race and class, and between the rising union movement and Chinese immigrants in the West.⁶⁸

Initially, Anglo miners had no employers. They purchased their own tools at exorbitant prices in San Francisco or Sacramento. Shovels and crowbars sold for ten dollars, boots for sixteen. And few fortunes were made. While white miners occasionally reported "pickings" of five hundred dollars in a day, ten to thirty dollars was unusually high. In 1852, the most prosperous year of the gold rush, a day's "take" of about two dollars (or one dollar profit) was less than the wage in many eastern mills or factories, and by all reports, most Anglo miners came out of the mountains poorer than when they entered.⁶⁹ Indeed, the Anglo miner and the Chinese miner were equally self-employed and equally in debt.

Yet still the Chinese came—twenty-five thousand of them—and most white miners viewed them as unwelcome competitors. After the South American miners were forced from the diggings in 1852, 175,000 white miners crowded California's rivers, deltas, and beaches, shoving up against the Chinese, who soon formed one tenth of the state's population.

Many local newspapers claimed the Chinese had overrun California. In July 1852, the *Daily Alta California* wrote that "every gulch and ravine" is now filled with Chinese miners, and "an American emigrant can hardly find room to pitch his tent."⁷⁰ The area was tense, poor, and crowded.

"WHERE WILL BE THE END OF IT?"

Facing competition on all sides for increasingly scarce gold, white miners lashed out at the Chinese, forging a political voice and vigilante unity. In 1855–56, the California legislature's powerful Committee on Mines repeatedly declared that the Chinese were "odious and degrading," and the legislature shuffled through a series of bills that sought to expel them: "Mongolian and Asiatic races" were "not white in the constitutional sense of the term"; Chinese miners were threatening the "superior race." By targeting the Chinese as a race, town councils, county supervisors, the state legislature, and the courts built a judicial base for expulsion.

Despite the new constitution, slave codes seeped into California law, city codes, and town ordinances—codes that outlawed intermarriage and denied minorities the vote, the right to sit on a jury, and access to homesteads. At a miners' meeting in 1854, Springfield passed a resolution stating that "no person not an American citizen . . . shall be competent to act on any arbitration, or trial by jury." "An Act for the Protection of Foreigners" required an immigrant to have a license to prosecute an action in a California court, effectively depriving Chinese miners of judicial protection. The state's Committee on Mines resolved that the "importation by foreign capitalists of . . . peons and serfs" had become "a danger to the tranquility of the mining regions."⁷¹ By 1852, in the eyes of the American legal system, the Chinese were becoming black.

Unlike all other immigrants to the United States, a Chinese person could not be naturalized, and in 1855 the state legislature assessed a fifty-dollar fee on each immigrant who was unable to become a "citizen of California." California forced Chinese immigrants to pay medical indemnity bonds and required shipmasters to post five hundred dollars for each Chinese passenger to "relieve the government" of the expenses of sick immigrants.⁷² And still the Chinese came.

On October 1, 1858, the legislature announced that it had the constitutional right "to exclude any class of foreigners she may deem obnoxious to her interest, either socially or politically." To protect against "an interchange of population," it also had the right "to expel them entirely from her borders." The legislators hoped that when the ship *Frowning Bird* sailed into San Francisco Bay on September 28, it would be the last to arrive from China. They also hoped that soon the Chinese would return home.⁷³ But still the Chinese came.

Soon the United States Supreme Court issued the first rulings that would tolerate and, indeed, promote the roundups and expulsion of the Chinese. In 1862, the Act to Protect Free White Labor Against Competition with Chinese Coolie Labor, and to Discourage the Immigration of the Chinese into the State of California required Chinese immigrants to pay a monthly police "capitation" or head tax of \$2.50. Because the bill trespassed on federal authority over immigration, the Chinese were able to have the lower court declare the act unconstitutional.⁷⁴ But the United States Supreme Court heartily endorsed California's desire to "prevent and remove the evil." Under the doctrine of states' rights, it had upheld Indiana's

constitutional ban against a "negro or mulatto" entering or settling in the state. With this precedent, ruled Chief Justice Roger Taney, California could bar Chinese miners because "the people of the States of this Union reserved to themselves the power of expelling from their borders any person, or class of persons, whom it might deem dangerous to its peace, or likely to produce physical or moral evil among its citizens."⁷⁵

California again tried to legislate the Chinese out of the state. In 1862 it levied a "police tax" of \$2.50 per month on all Chinese over the age of eighteen who did not mine or produce rice, sugar, tea, or coffee—although rice, sugar, and tea were not grown in California at the time.⁷⁶ A Commutation Tax Act required shipowners to pay five hundred dollars for every "alien" on board, but this tax could be "commuted" if each Chinese passenger paid a five-dollar fee. And still the Chinese continued to come.

Of greatest danger was the new Foreign Miners' Tax. The 1850 tax, which had triggered the deportation of thousands of Chileans and Mexicans, had been repealed the following year. The 1852 incarnation, now targeting the Chinese, forced each foreign miner to pay three dollars per month for the right to mine (raised to four dollars in 1853 and six dollars in 1855, with a two-dollar increase each year thereafter). Half the revenue was to go to the county treasury and the rest to the state of California, with a fixed fee set aside for the local collector. In practice the Foreign Miners' Tax was limitless.

Between 1852 and 1870, years in which one billion dollars' worth of untaxed gold was mined in California, Chinese miners paid a staggering fifty-eight million dollars to the state, ranging from one fourth to one half of California's revenue.⁷⁷ While the Foreign Miners' Tax Law barred "private parties" from ejecting "aliens" who failed to pay, it gave collectors permission to seize and sell a Chinese miner's claim and tools.⁷⁸ Fraudulent collectors sprang up all over the mountains; both real and sham collectors visited the same Chinese miners over and over again, assaulting them or threatening deportation if they did not pay up. The *Nevada Journal* observed that the collectors were "a species of semi-legalized robber . . . [who] take advantage of their position to extort the last dollar from the poverty-stricken Chinese. They date licenses back, exact pay in some instances for extra trouble in hunting up the terrified and flying Chinamen, and . . . fatten themselves upon the spoils thus obtained."⁷⁹

In their logs the collectors boasted of harassing and torturing Chinese

They reminded the state senate that in 1854 the impoverished state and counties gained three hundred thousand dollars from the Foreign Miners' Tax—revenue that would be lost if the Chinese were driven out.⁸⁷

William Perkins, a merchant in Sonora, wrote to the *Stockton Times* that the tax was "illegal, unjust, abortive, and extremely prejudicial to the best interests of the state."⁸⁸ The *Times* agreed, reporting that the violence of the tax collectors had "a ruinous effect upon the traders in the southern mines. Business, in many places, is at a complete stand still; confidence is shaken; . . . man is set against man."⁸⁹ The *San Joaquin Republican* recalled how the first tax on Latin American miners had "convulsed society" and reported that small towns were losing their Chinese laborers and customers: "Have not this race of men . . . discovered new placers, and been . . . the hewers of wood and drawers of water for *our* citizens? In the cities are they not our attendants in our houses, and in our public rooms? Do they not wash our shirts? The Chinese, in this city [Stockton] alone must expend, and thus throw into circulation, money to the amount of \$500 a day."⁹⁰

In July 1850, one month after a violent purge of Latino miners from Sonora, the *Herald* declared: "We want a population each of whom is capable of sitting on a jury, of depositing a ballot, of understanding the drift of a resolution, the prayer of a petition. Such a population the Chinese can't be."⁹¹ The expulsions of early Chinese immigrants stood on the legal and ideological shoulders of a tax that effectively eliminated those rights and defined the Chinese as expendable.

The roundups of Chinese miners began in earnest. Robert Pitkin, a miner panning along the American River, wrote to his parents: "This country is fast getting filled up with Chinamen. They are coming by thousands all the time. The miners in a great many places will not let them work. The miners hear [*sic*] drove off about 200 Chinamen about two weeks ago but they have com [*sic*] back about as thick as ever."⁹²

In the spring of 1853, Governor John Bigler issued his dire "Special Message to the State Senate and Assembly on the Chinese Question," granting civic cover for the violent roundups of the Chinese. Bigler predicted that the twenty thousand Chinese immigrants living in California would swell to millions and called for "novel if not extraordinary legislation" to halt Asian immigration. One way would be to prevent the Chinese from exporting their profits from the "precious metals which they dig up from our soil without charge." Another would be to deny any Africans or Asians who

miners. From 1855: "I was sorry to have to stab the poor fellow; but the law makes it necessary to collect the tax; and that's where I get my profit." And: "He was running away, and I shot to stop him." Another logged: "I took all the dust the rascal had."⁸⁰ One miner from Agua Fria recalled: "I had no money to keep Christmas with so sold the Chinks nine dollars worth of bogus receipts."⁸¹

The tax was a ticket to violent expulsion. One common sport was to tie Chinese miners together by their queues or use their long braids to tie them to trees, as the collectors wantonly looted their bedding, boots, and tools.⁸² The editor of the *Placer Herald* reported that he witnessed a tax collector "corral" thirteen Chinese men at a stable in the town of Auburn, in order to "most energetically procure" the sum of four dollars.⁸³

The Chinese miners did their best to protect one another from the tax collectors. Some bribed them, some paid them off directly, and some refused to pay at all. Others hid in the woods. Many fought them off. In 1855 a group of Chinese men in Tuolumne and Mariposa Counties attacked the tax collectors and were killed. Reported the *Placer Herald*: "The Chinese try every way in their power to evade the payment of their taxes . . . sheriffs and Collectors cannot . . . go up in the mountains, or on the rivers, to perform their duties as officers, but that the Chinese camps are informed of it by runners. . . . The Celestials immediately scatter."⁸⁴

The tax forced many Chinese miners from their claims. Some found refuge mastering the new technologies of tunneling and quartz mining, working for absentee owners or corporations. But more Chinese kept coming. In one two-week period in 1853, one thousand new Chinese miners entered Shasta County. In Tuolumne County, they bought picked-over claims, diligently worked them until they paid off, and "placared" in the county for four more years.⁸⁵

Not all Californians supported the tax on the Chinese. One white miner argued that the Chinese license fee was "taxation without representation" and could lead to Chinese demands for citizenship.⁸⁶ Miners from Shasta predicted that the tax would force twenty thousand Chinese miners into agricultural work down in the valleys and coastal towns, reducing farm wages and local taxes to "so slow a rate that it would be impossible for them to ever raise funds sufficient to take them home; thus fastening upon the State thousands of paupers and introducing a species of slavery more degraded by far, than exists in any of the slave holding States of the Union."

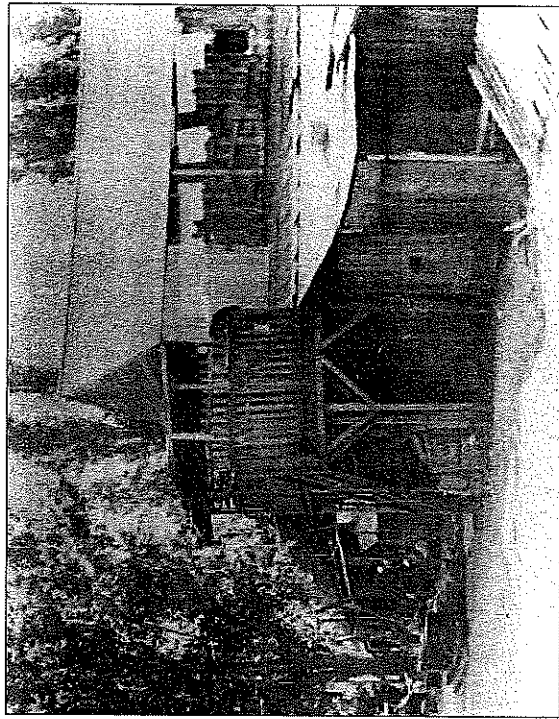
displayed any "degrees of mixture" of skin color—whether "copper-colored natives of America" or "yellow or tawny races of the Asiatics"—the legal rights of "white persons." Although he acknowledged that he knew of no Chinese contracts for "involuntary servitude," Bigler insisted that the state had the right to disregard any labor agreements that would be "injurious to the rights, the interest or the convenience" of Californians.⁹³

The Chinese's immediate response to Bigler's message was the first widespread demand for Chinese civil rights in the United States. In "Remarks of the Chinese Merchants of San Francisco . . . Upon Governor Bigler's Message" penned by Lai Chun-Chuen, a committee of Chinese leaders defied Bigler's characterization and insisted that the Chinese were honest, thrifty, and lawful. The merchants warned Bigler that if Chinese miners were not "treated with mutual courtesy . . . [and] if the rabbles are to harass us," they would "expose" Americans who lived in China and prospered from the "friendly intercourse" between the two countries. If "our Chinese people in the mines" continue to be subjected to violence and robbery, warned the merchants, "there will be unlimited trouble; and where will be the end of it?"⁹⁴

But the power of the merchants was limited. Standing between deportation and safety was the issue of land. In Montezuma, when Chinese miners, without title to the land, had begun boring into Table Mountain to "secure a portion of its great treasure," white miners confiscated this "expendient" claim and evicted them.⁹⁵ How could the Chinese miner keep any claim when towns such as Jacksonville simply decreed, "All American citizens may locate and hold claims"? How could a Chinese miner even survive on a claim limited to twenty square feet, when whites were allowed one hundred square feet, even in China Camp?⁹⁶

The answers devolved to informal associations of white miners—conventions, vigilance committees, and gangs—jealous of Chinese success. White citizens of Grass Valley, citing Bigler's special message, petitioned the state to deny Chinese miners the right to hold any claims in the township because by law they could not enter "the duties and benefits expected of citizens." Grass Valley authorities excluded all Chinese from gold and quartz mines.

In 1852 twenty thousand Chinese miners unwittingly landed in a race war that copied the pattern of the ethnic purges against Latinos in the region. In Yuba County, where many Chinese held lucrative claims along the



Grass Valley Chinatown

rivers, a miners' convention met at Foster and Archinison's General Store in late April and announced that no Chinese could hold a claim after May 1 and none could remain in the county after May 3, but anti-Chinese riots erupted even before the deadline, forcing the Chinese out of Yuba.

That spring, white miners returned to the gold fields around Columbia to locate Chinese claims that had been abandoned in the routs after the Foreign Miners' Tax. They discovered that a transformation of mining was under way. Surface deposits of gold nuggets, flashing among the gravel in shallow rivers or along sandbars, had become scarce. To get at the gold, miners needed water to wash the ore from the dirt and hillsides. Paradoxically, they needed the Chinese to dig the ditches to carry water from the rivers to the arid diggings. The Tuolumne Water Company eagerly hired Chinese for this project, which cost two hundred thousand dollars.

Chinese laborers reminded white miners of their new dependence on the water companies. While they waited for water, the white miners drank, gambled, and condemned the capitalists, shipowners, and merchants who profited by transporting or hiring Chinese laborers. But closer at hand were the Chinese themselves. On May 8, 1852, the white miners convened the second Columbia Miners Convention to "answer the predisposition on the part of merchants, commercial men, etc. to flood the state with Asiatics

[and] fasten . . . a system of peonage on our social organization."⁹⁷ The convention declared that "no Asiatic or South Sea Islander shall be permitted to mine in this district either for himself or for others."⁹⁸

The "lonely miner" knew that he had been replaced by capital-intensive corporations. British and American industrialists had invaded the Sierra and Siskiyou mountains to finance the expensive shafts, driving deep into the mountains to extract gold sealed in hard quartz. To expose the seams of gold, hydraulic pumps drew water from the rivers, and mountainsides collapsed under the force of the high-pressure hoses. The dream of finding a fortune with a pan, some luck, and a couple of dollars for canned beans became even more illusory.

The roundups, the tax codes, the lack of water, the absentee owners, and ultimately the lack of gold signaled the end of the multiracial, multinational gold fever. Frustrated, white miners lashed out at one another and the Chinese. In the first five years of the gold rush, forty-two hundred murders were committed in California; hundreds of the victims were Chinese. California's Committee on Mines announced that the "color, nature, and education" of the Chinese denied them the rights of citizens and the possibility of naturalization; no law would protect them "from the liability of being ousted from any mining claim by citizen miners of this state." Many frightened Chinese miners left the mother lode and trekked to increasingly remote and inaccessible claims. More than four thousand Chinese émigrés returned to China.

Yet the intensity and violence of the first purges belie how few Chinese there were. In 1849, only 325 Chinese immigrants passed through the San Francisco Customs House; 450 were cleared for entry in 1850, and 2,700 in 1851. As word of the violence reached China, the number of new Chinese immigrants temporarily fell, from more than 20,000 in 1852 to 4,270 in 1853. Ethically absolved and legally excused, the roundups of remaining miners continued. In Vallecito, Chinese miners who owned their claims were given ninety days to sell out and go.

In Sonora, harassing the local Chinese had become a "traditional sport." White miners rushed the Chinese camps at midnight, firing pistols to wake the sleeping miners and plundering their tents and cabins. They looted a large Chinese claim along the Yuba River, set fire to the buildings, and declared themselves new owners by right of possession. The legal system didn't blink; a few white friends of the Chinese tried to bring a lawsuit

against the vigilantes, but the Chinese were not allowed to testify and it failed.⁹⁹

In Mariposa, near the western entrance to Yosemite Valley, an unsigned placard appeared on a gate in 1856: "Notice is hereby given to all Chinese on the Agua Fria and its tributaries to leave within ten days, from this date, any failing to comply shall be subjected to thirty-nine lashes, and moved by force of arms." Many Chinese obeyed, but others, believing that the unsigned notice carried no weight, remained. On the tenth day the Chinese cabins were torched, driving the miners into an open field, where they were rounded up and beaten. The *Mariposa Gazette* simply remarked that the notice should have been signed so that "John" might know why and by whom he was to be whipped.

Within two weeks of the deadline set by the second Columbia resolution, vigilantes raided a Chinese camp at Deer Creek, near Nevada City, stole more than thirty thousand dollars in cash and hidden gold, and blamed the theft on Mexican "greasers." The Chinese appealed to the sheriff to prosecute members of the mob, but, recalled miner Alfred Jackson, "nobody paid any attention to them. There were over fifty [Chinese] living in the camp and they ought to have been able to protect themselves, but they seem to be great cowards and will not fight under any circumstances."¹⁰⁰

There was no respite. In 1857, Chinese residents in Columbia were blamed for a fire that destroyed many buildings and again were forced to move outside the limits of the town.¹⁰¹ In 1858, the mayor of Mariposa declared that no one could rent to the Chinese because they cooked over open fires, lit firecrackers on feast days, and burned incense sticks before their gods.¹⁰² Chinatown itself, he claimed, was a fire hazard that should be demolished.

By the tense summer of 1858, nuggets of placer gold were gone from the Siskiyou and the gold rush was coming to an end. Desperate, white miners made a final night raid at the Chinese claims on Middle Creek in Shasta, ejecting seventy Chinese and throwing their tools into the rushing river.

The close of the decade saw a last outbreak of Chinese roundups in the gold fields. Across the Siskiyou, the Chinese were given deadlines to leave. In January 1859, white miners in Texas Springs voted 122 to 3 to purge the local Chinese. In Shasta County, miners gathered in Columbia for a final convention and voted to "remove" the Chinese before July 1. Since it was

now settled that immigration law was a federal issue, the citizens of Columbia took matters into their own hands, launching a series of purges that continued until the lack of gold nuggets drove whites and Chinese alike down from the mountains, and a fragile peace held in the 1860s.

DRIVEN OUT: AFRICAN AMERICANS AND THE CHINESE

In June 1850, in the dry, hot foothills of Calaveras County, Argentinean miner Ramón Gil Navarro recorded in his diary, "The great company of Negro slaves has been replaced by another one just like it of Chinese laborers. All day long I see the stupid faces of these men who are so civilized and refined in the arts and so brutish in their customs and habits."¹⁰³

The call for "free labor" heard across California meant free white labor. Some ranchers conscripted Native Americans and forced them into the gold diggings, and scores of southerners brought their slaves to the mines.

Despite California's "free soil" constitution, by 1852 three hundred African American slaves worked in the gold diggings.¹⁰⁴ Some were runaways and desperate. Others, lured by the news of California's ban on slavery, left enslaved wives and children behind as hostages and headed west with hopes of discovering enough gold to buy their freedom.¹⁰⁵ Black freemen also traveled to the gold fields, seeking enough wealth to purchase their families out of slavery.¹⁰⁶ By 1850, one thousand free African Americans had traveled across the plains and mountains to California to pan for gold or escape slave catchers set loose by the new Fugitive Slave Act. *The Freeman*, Philadelphia's abolitionist paper, celebrated two freemen who returned to the East in 1851 with thirty thousand dollars after just four months in the gold fields. Many blacks pursued this dream and headed west.¹⁰⁷

Yet once there, they discovered that in fact California tolerated slavery. A slaveholder could safely bring his slaves into the state, force them to return to the South, or sell them if he could not afford the expense of their passage home.¹⁰⁸ In April 1852, California passed its own Fugitive Slave Law, declaring that all slaves who had escaped before California's admission into the Union were runaways who could be reclaimed. In the case of *In re Perkins*, the California Supreme Court ruled that although California was a

free state, Carter and Robert Perkins could reclaim three black slaves and compel them to return to the South.¹⁰⁹ In *Ex parte Archy* (1858), the court added that a master could keep his slaves in California if he declared that he was there as a temporary resident.¹¹⁰

Purges of African Americans shadowed those of Latinos in the gold fields. When a Georgia-born slave owner died in Placer County in 1852, his black slaves abandoned his mining claim and moved to town, where an "assembly" quickly forced their landlord to evict them. To challenge discrimination, three colored conventions met in San Francisco and Sacramento between 1855 and 1857 and pressed California to mete out justice "to all, without respect to complexion."¹¹¹

CHINESE RESISTANCE

The *Sonora Union Democrat* wrote: "Poor John; he is kicked and cuffed from one end of the state to the other. Even though he pays his foreign- and poll-tax promptly, he has to pack up and leave should he be so unfortunate as to hit upon a spot that pays him more than a couple of dollars a day, but 'might makes right,' so he dares not murmur."¹¹² But the Chinese did more than murmur. They purchased arms, created strong organizations to protect their jobs, and often refused to abandon their homes and claims. And despite overwhelming barriers, they turned to the legal system for redress.

Blocking their path, however, was the bizarre case of *People v. Hall* (1854). On August 9, 1853, George Hall, a white miner, accompanied by his brother and one other man, assaulted and robbed a Chinese placer miner on the Bear River in Nevada County. Hearing shouts, the miner Ling Sing left his tent to help but was shot and killed by Hall, who, with his companions, was arrested by the sheriff. Based on the testimony of a Chinese witness, the judge sentenced Hall to hang.

But twenty-nine-year-old Hugh C. Murray, chief justice of the California Supreme Court, overturned Hall's conviction. Murray ruled that long ago "Asiatics" migrated to the American continent across the Bering Strait and "descended" into Indians. The Indians were therefore Chinese and the Chinese were Indians, and thus unable to testify in court either "in favor of, or against a white man."

Even though Murray acknowledged that discoveries by "eminent arche-

ologists, and the researches of modern geologists" had established that tribal people were really American "aborigines" and not descended from Asians, he maintained that *race* was a "generic" term that excluded "every one who is not of white blood." Wrote Murray: "Indian as commonly used, refers only to the North American Indians, yet in the days of Columbus all shores washed by Chinese waters were called the Indies, therefore all Asians were Indians." The word *white*, he added, "necessarily excludes all other races than Caucasian."

Murray would "decide against admitting the testimony of the Chinese on the grounds of public policy" because "nature placed an impassable difference" between "us" and people "marked as inferior" and "differing in language, opinions, color and physical conformation." This "impassable difference" denied Chinese both "the right to swear away the life of a citizen" and "the privilege of participating with us in administering the affairs of our Government."¹³ It was better to release a convicted murderer than to tamper with white supremacy, asserted Murray.

People v. Hall stimulated a rash of roundups, for now, with the promise of all-white juries and the absence of any Chinese testimony, conviction of a vigilante became virtually impossible. Not until five years later, in *People v. Elyea* (1859), did the California Supreme Court overturn the ban against Chinese testimony, declaring that the color of a man's skin was not a reliable measure of his competence to serve as a witness or to testify in court.¹⁴

Yet the Chinese persisted in turning to the courts in both criminal and civil cases, and occasionally they prevailed. In *Quam or Quang Chew v. Sales and Johnson*, a Chinese man in Nevada County proved to an all-white jury that he was a merchant and not a miner, and forced the tax collectors to return his money.¹⁵ Indeed, the Chinese residents of Nevada County were successful in 51 percent of the cases they initiated against whites, particularly when they hired white attorneys.¹⁶

The violence that hounded the Chinese in gold-rush towns reveals a painful paradox: Chinese emigration was threatening the very institutions it was supposed to protect—the Chinese family, the Chinese village, and the Chinese clan.¹⁷ To preserve a national identity under assault, Chinese miners, skilled in the traditions of rural community, formed kinship organizations, wore Chinese clothes, imported food, refused to cut off their queues, and maintained extensive correspondence with families in China.¹⁸ Another kind of Chinese resistance to the roundups and, indeed, to the



Chinese man with queue

painful rupture of immigration itself was to forge communities in the United States and, at the same time, create international families, with wives and family in China who faced the long or permanent absences of their sons, fathers, and husbands.¹⁹ Funds and letters (sometimes written by scribes) were carried by *shuikes* or "water guests" on visits to China and created a strong chain of intimate communication and financial commitment.

The Chinese miners were a transnational people, facing east and facing west, migrant and immigrant, sojourner and settler. In towns such as Grass Valley, French Corral, North San Juan, Washington, Bloomfield, and Nevada City, Chinese merchants sold goods that tied the miners to their homeland, providing rice, dried fish, mail from home, notices of jobs, and links to the Chinese Six Companies. In segregated Chinatowns near their diggings, they built temples and cemeteries, constructed levees to raise catfish and trap turtles for soup, planted lilies and trees of heaven, and opened brothels, gambling halls, and opium houses.

In the town of Sonora, Chinese stores were built protectively, side by

side. Off narrow alleys, merchants, laborers, and boarders shared small shacks and visited Chinese doctors, herbalists, barbers, launderers, vegetable peddlers, and cooks. Jinshanzhuang (Gold Mountain Firms) imported books and magazines, preserved lichees, pineapples, ginger, smoked flower fish, and dried blackfish and eels. By 1867 China had shipped more than eighteen million pounds of rice to the West Coast.¹²⁰ In 1855 a Chinese theater opened in Auburn's Chinatown. Many Chinese communities had their own gold buyers and assay offices; one group of miners even constructed a separate fort on Shepley Flat to protect their gold. In many Chinatowns, such as Antioch's, homes and stores were connected by a web of hidden underground tunnels—built for cold storage, for communication, and for escape.

By the winter of 1851, China Camp had become the commercial, social, and religious center for the Chinese in the southern Sierra Nevada and a depot for every item brought into the diggings. Stagecoaches, freight wagons, and mule trains arrived daily, laden with food, clothing, and tools. Fifteen hundred pack animals and five hundred wagons brought Chinese goods into the mountains. Ancient traditions of food preservation made it possible for Chinese miners to have a much more varied diet than white miners, who disdained the unfamiliar salted duck eggs, cabbage, and turnips, the dried fish and mushrooms, and the melons, squashes, and persimmons grown from seeds carried from China.

Christians hoped that mining areas would provide an evangelical stepping-stone to Asia, but eager home missionaries found no converts.¹²¹ China Camp, like Oroville to the north, had three temples to serve Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian miners. White Americans' contempt for the endurance of Chinese culture emerged in the popular tune "John Chinaman," sung throughout the mining camps:

*I thought you'd cut your queue off, John
And don a Yankee coat,
And a collar high you'd raise, John,
Around your dusky throat.¹²²*

The Foreign Miners' Tax had cut the Chinese population by the thousands, but after a few years new arrivals equaled and quickly doubled the number of those who departed the Sonora foothills. Many of those who re-

turned to China stayed only temporarily.¹²³ Despite the ice and wind, the blackmail, the brutality, and the tax collectors, thousands of Chinese remained in the mother lode and thousands more continued to find their way. In Placer County, at the end of November 1856, there were 12,540 white men, 1,860 white women, 400 male and female Negroes, and 125 Indians. But there were more than 3,500 Chinese men and women, almost one fifth of the population.

Over the years Chinese refugees also returned to Shasta County. Many stayed until railroad work pulled them toward the Rocky Mountains. Indeed, despite the purges, the persecutions, and the lure of railroad work, during the Civil War over 80 percent of the Chinese population in California was still engaged in mining.¹²⁴

FROM GOLD TOWN TO COMPANY TOWN

By the end of the gold rush, California had become a giant company town, owned by and for white men, almost all of whom were seeking to profit from gold.¹²⁵ The state required no land surveys, sought no royalties, and refused to interfere with the transfer of mining claims between Anglo and European miners. It placed no limits on placer or quartz mining on once tribal lands. Miners and mining companies could build or wash away trails or roads, dig up farms and fields, or even tunnel under a town's streets, buildings, and houses.¹²⁶ The fluming, sluicing, and diverting of water moved forward unabated, filling the rushing clear rivers with slag, tree stumps, and dirt, killing trout, steelhead, and salmon.

Most of the miners who remained in the mountains were Chinese, "scratching" for gold along the riverbeds, particularly during the dry season, or working for the new corporations—in blasting, digging, construction, and extraction. When industry took over the gold fields, white miners lost not only their income and but also their pride as independent adventurers. Prices collapsed, rents fell, investors and lenders withdrew their capital, and stores and mills shut down. And again the blame fell on Chinese miners, the "indispensable enemy,"¹²⁷ who had willingly built the water, timber, and mining companies—because they had been driven from their claims.

Despite its evolution into statehood, California functioned as a colony,

a faraway land viewed as empty, awaiting civilization and inviting settlement, a tempting place of vast natural resources. With its Chinese population, it offered a seemingly unlimited source of low-paid workers. The "great, detestable, and damnable object" of Chinese immigration, observed one miner, is the "reduction in the price of labor."¹²⁸ A correspondent to the *Alta California* well understood the trade-off: "By allowing innumerable hordes of semi-human Asiatics to come to our shores, the trade with Asia will be increased; there will be an increased demand for shipping; the ship owners will make larger dividends; the trade and profits of many large commercial houses will be increased, and the general interests of commerce will be promoted."¹²⁹

Yet gold also launched a union movement in California that thrived in the 1860s and wove together the cry for free labor with the attacks on growing corporate, shipping, and banking forces. Racial issues and economic pressures together provided a platform for the Chinese roundups. As mining towns grew, white carpenters, bricklayers, stonemasons, sailors, and musicians formed labor organizations that gave shape and ready members to the anti-Chinese clubs that sprang up throughout the mountains and along the rivers. Even after the gold rush collapsed, the image of the enslaved Chinese laborer endured in the demands, the newspapers, and the speeches of white miners living in the mountains. During the roundups of 1853, white laborers struck for a ten-hour day and higher wages—demanding shorter hours and higher pay than the Chinese. These early labor unions may have been temporary, issue-oriented, and unstable, but they held to their racial prerogative.

By 1853 San Francisco and Sacramento were overbuilt, jobs were hard to find, and merchants and miners went bankrupt; hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of supplies were abandoned or sold at ruinous losses. Then, in early February 1855, the financial foundation of California collapsed. Large banking houses in San Francisco—Adams and Company, Bacon and Company, and Argenti and Company—suspended business. In the gold-mining area, local banks, such as George C. Plume's Bank of Marysville and Hamlet Davis's bank in Nevada City, closed their doors. To add to the desperation, the winters of 1854 and 1855 saw little rain, and placer gold stayed locked in the dirt.

The technological inventions of the mid-1850s added pressure to both the white miner with a pick, pan, and shovel and the Chinese miner with

wing dam and sluice. The isolated miner gave way to the company that could hire hundreds of men to tunnel into the hills. Journalist Bayard Taylor, having watched a sixteen-foot nozzle blast a hillside with water at 120 pounds of pressure per square inch, wrote that the mountain washed itself away "like a giant bleeding to death from a single vein."¹³⁰ By 1859 small river claims lay buried under the gravel tailings as mountains literally dissolved into rivers and streams. Thousands of miners came down from the Sierras and Siskiyou, drifting into manual work in the new vineyards and orchards or in construction for the railroads. When the Civil War came, many white miners joined the Union Army, supporting the North as a fight for the rights of free labor.

Like most whites, few Chinese discovered significant amounts of gold. Forced from the diggings by the violence and by the Foreign Miners' Tax, many moved to rural towns. As cattlemen and sheepherders moved into the foothills of the mother-lode country, ranchers hired the Chinese to build rock fences that would fortify the land against mountain lions, panthers, and grizzly bears. These rock fences still mark the landscape of the Siskiyou, where once Chinese mined in towns named Montezuma, Celestial Valley, Shanghai Diggings, and Canton. Other Chinese who emigrated for the gold rush now worked in restaurants, laundries, stores, and barber-shops; some took jobs just to earn enough money to pay their debts and buy a return ticket home.

The mass exodus of white miners from the gold fields during the late 1850s and early 1860s ended the first wave of Chinese purges. For several years Chinese miners were, more or less, left alone. By the end of the 1860s, as Democrats campaigned "No Negro or Chinese Suffrage," the overall population in the mining regions dropped 70 percent, giving the rest of California an abundant supply of white labor for the first time. But the Chinese had not disappeared. Many Chinese went to work for the Central Pacific Railroad Company. After the Civil War, as the economy in the West settled down, Chinese men and women became the workforce for California's new manufacturing industries and construction projects—road building, irrigation, land reclamation, in canneries, jute mills, and cigar-rolling factories, and large-scale agriculture on the new vineyards and orchards.

The few hundred Chinese who remained in the Siskiyou Mountains purchased "washed-out" claims from white miners, reworking the tailings with picks, shovels, and teaspoons. Some Chinese formed their own mining

companies, from small cooperatives to corporations that would employ more than one hundred workers by the 1880s. Some who owned their own claims invested in hydraulic or drift mining, extracting up to fifteen hundred dollars in gold each week—an amount that would have resulted in immediate and violent expulsion in the early 1850s. This period of stability lasted until Charles Crocker drove a golden spike into the railroad tracks on May 10, 1869, in Provo, Utah, linking the transcontinental tracks and ending the monumental construction made possible by Chinese laborers, who were immediately excised from the photographs and fired from the Central Pacific Railroad.

The roundups in the gold fields ended, but the legend of the vigilante lived on in sagas and songs. During the first five years of the gold rush, the Chinese became a favorite target of the mountain outlaw Joaquín Murietta, who declared that he loved to “smell the blood of Chinamen.” In one mythic story, Murietta robbed a camp of six Chinese miners at Murphy’s Diggings, tied the men together by their queues, drew his long bowie knife, and slowly cut their throats. To protect themselves from the famous bandit, Chinese miners collected three thousand dollars in gold for Murietta’s capture, a figure large enough to track him down and kill him.

Long after the gold rush, the story of the roundups was sung in bars and at campfires throughout the mountains in the miners’ song “John Chinaman”:

*John Chinaman, John Chinaman,
But five short years ago,
I welcomed you from Canton, John—
But wish I hadn’t though.*

2

DEAD BRANCHES

Recently the treatment of blacks has been carried over to yellow people. When cobra is unable to release its poison fully it vents its anger by biting wood and grass. Afterwards, no one who touches the poisoned dead branches will escape death. We the yellow people, have we touched its dead branches.

Lin Shiu (Lin Qinnan) of Min County, composed at Seaview Tower Over the Lake, on Chongyang festival of year Xinchou during the Guangxu reign, in a preface to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1901)

Gazing at the evening sky over Los Angeles on October 18, 1871, a reporter for the *Los Angeles Daily News* observed, “The young moon, in setting, has presented a most peculiar appearance for the last few evenings, strongly resembling a semi-circular Chinese lantern of bloodshot hue, suspended in the air over the Western horizon.”¹ This sinister glare over the Los Angeles sky: “Twelve hours ago . . . fifteen staring corpses hung ghastly in the moonlight, while seven or eight others, mutilated, torn and crushed, lay in our streets, all of them Chinamen.”²

Actually, seventeen Chinese were lynched and two others were knifed to death on the night of October 24, 1871. Their mangled bodies were found hanging from a wooden awning over a carriage shop, from the sides of two prairie schooners parked around the corner, from a gutter spout, and from a beam across the wide gate of a lumberyard. One of the victims wore no trousers, and a finger had been severed from his left hand.

AMERICAN PANIC

A
HISTORY
of
WHO SCARES US
and
WHY

MARK STEIN

2014

palgrave

no man is denied public office merely because [of] his religion." Directly addressing the Catholic American loyalty written in blood on battlefields, Kennedy said, "This is the kind of America I believe in, and this is the kind I fought for in the South Pacific, and the kind my brother died for in Europe. No one suggested then that we may have a 'divided loyalty,' that we 'did not believe in liberty,' or that we belonged to a disloyal group that threatened the 'freedoms for which our forefathers died.'" Kennedy then invoked the nation's founders when he added, "And in fact, this is the kind of America for which our forefathers died."²⁵ His assertion, though stirring, filtered out the fact that the founders in five of the nation's first thirteen states prohibited Catholics from holding public office. But those states no longer did, nor did most Americans still fear that Catholics endangered democracy. In November 1960, John F. Kennedy was elected president of the United States.

Five

"The menace to the Western world lies in the ... MILLIONS OF YELLOW MEN.... There is a certain integrity ... a sympathy and comradeship and warm human feel which is ours ... and which we cannot teach to the Oriental."

—Jack London, "The Yellow Peril" (1910)

Upon a signal at 9:30 am on November 3, 1885, "many hundred citizens congregated" in Tacoma, Washington, the *San Francisco Bulletin* reported, "marching quietly along the streets to the Chinese houses, requesting the occupants to pack their goods and leave." Three weeks earlier, a circular had informed the town's Chinese residents that if they remained in Tacoma after November 3, they would be killed.¹ The *Bulletin* correspondent, omitting that detail, went on to report, "No trouble occurred, order prevailed and everything was quietly consummated. . . . Six weeks ago, there were 700 Chinamen at Tacoma." No law or ordinance led to this expulsion. Nevertheless, sheriff's deputies observed the proceedings but did not intervene. The expulsion resulted from a rally at which the speakers denounced

the Chinese as a menace to their community and a danger to the United States. The rally's keynote speaker was the mayor, Jacob Weisbach, an immigrant from Germany.

Tacoma's ethnic cleansing of its Chinese residents, like similar acts seen involving Native American settlements and African American communities, was the product of those elements that create political panic. But the nation's anti-Chinese panic marked a new milestone. Three years before Tacoma's Chinese residents were rounded up and escorted out of town, the federal government participated in the panic by enacting the Chinese Exclusion Act. The law prohibited any further Chinese immigration for the next ten years. Ten years later, Congress renewed the prohibition for another ten years, and did so again when that period expired. As for those Chinese already in the United States, the law stated that "hereafter, no State court or court of the United States shall admit Chinese to citizenship."² Never before had a panic resulted in federal legislation prohibiting a particular race from entering the United States. Race had, of course, long been a primary fissure in the nation's social groundwork, both in regard to African Americans and Native Americans. With the emancipation of the slaves, the nation's racial groundwork shifted, fissures intersected, and social earthquakes erupted. In the case of the Chinese, historian Najia Aarim-Heriot has observed that "the best way to reconstruct the dynamics of the Chinese exclusion movement . . . is to relate it to the dynamics of black-white relations."³

Commencement of the Panic

In 1849, news that vast gold deposits were being discovered in the Sierra Nevada range in California triggered a gold rush by the now proverbial "Forty-Niners." Among those pouring into this region were immigrants from China who, along with other immigrants and native-born Americans, hoped to get rich quick. In that first heady year, a correspondent for New York's *Albany Evening Journal*, fascinated by these oddly dressed men with long hair worn in pigtails, wrote how "the quietness and order, cheerfulness

and temperance which is observable in their habits is noticed by everyone . . . and their cleanliness exceeds that of any other people."⁴ Their readiness to adopt American customs was described in San Francisco's May 1, 1851, *Weekly Pacific News* when it reported that the growing number of Chinese in the city "have already become so much anglicized as to distinctly pronounce, 'How d'ye do.'"

But competition in the gold-bearing regions was causing conflict. Within months of the "How d'ye do" article, a spark of ethnic cleansing was reported. A confrontation between American and Chinese miners near Marysville, California, turned violent. The Chinese miners "were vanquished and driven off," Virginia's *Richmond Enquirer* reported on June 15, 1852. Other such sparks followed. On November 16, 1852, San Francisco's *Alta California* reported on miners in Jacksonville, California, "expelling the Chinese." In Oroville, California, a white mob set fire to the town's Chinese section, destroying its shops and approximately 100 homes.⁵

Anti-Chinese resolutions were cheered into effect at rallies in Calaveras County (1857), Shasta County (1859), and Siskiyou County (1860).⁶ The Calaveras County resolution invoked the Founding Fathers when it proclaimed "that the requirements of patriotism to preserve the 'inalienable rights' of American freemen . . . demand of us decisive and energetic action on the momentous question of Asiatic aggression in the mines." This assertion was saturated with elements of political panic. Aside from the widespread pre-Civil War filtering of the phrase "inalienable rights," which in the Declaration of Independence follows from "all men are created equal" (not "all American freemen"), the resolution asserted an unverified claim regarding Chinese aggression in the mines. This unverified claim itself filtered out the fact that the only verified instances of aggression in the gold mines had been attacks upon the Chinese. The Calaveras resolution went on to declare that the Chinese must leave the area within six months, after which its signers bound themselves, at "the risk of our lives, to carry out the spirit and intention of these resolutions to the very letter." The Chinese miners complied. So too, in response to similar resolutions, did Chinese miners in nearby Mariposa, Diamond Springs, Horsetown, French Gulf, and Rock

Creek. In all, some 200 such incidents of ethnic cleansing of the Chinese took place in the states west of the Rocky Mountains.⁷

This panic that now flared in the West attracted the attention of the rest of the nation. In Massachusetts, the *Barre Gazette* told readers on October 31, 1851, "The Chinese are destined to exert an important influence in this country. For the last six months they have supplied a larger number of immigrants than any other country." But its report was not panicked, even as it predicted tectonic social changes soon to come, possibly because those changes were (at the time) 3,000 miles away. "Events of great moment in the history of the world are destined to grow out of the rapid colonization of this Pacific shore," it stated. "A turning and overturning is at hand. The Chinese emigration to California is one link in the chain." An item in a Sacramento newspaper was far terser. "Six hundred and fifteen Chinese arrived on Monday," it reported, adding, "it is said that there are ten thousand awaiting passage to this country."⁸ San Francisco's *Alta California* estimated the Chinese population in California to have grown from fifty, at the outset of 1849, to nearly 12,000 in June 1852. Still, it told readers that "there is no necessity for the hue and cry which has been raised relative to this particular class of foreigners."⁹

While there may have been no necessity for the "hue and cry," California governor John Bigler had a necessity for votes if he was to win reelection. He had previously been elected by a 370-vote margin, 1 percent of the total. Though he had never advocated anti-Chinese legislation, Bigler now declared that "measures must be adopted to check this tide of Asiatic immigration."¹⁰ Being the governor, his warning significantly spread the fear by enhancing its credibility.

The spread of panic over Chinese immigrants was further fueled by its intersection with yet another fissure in America's industrial landscape, this one between labor and management. Many business owners and corporations welcomed this influx into the labor supply. Some actively sought it, contracting to pay voyage costs in return for labor at prearranged rates. Such Chinese workers were called *coolies*, a derivation of the Chinese word for *slave*. The derivation of the term did not go unnoticed by Governor Bigler in

his quest for votes from the growing working class. In urging that the gates be closed to Chinese immigrants, he declared, "I allude particularly to a class of Asiatics known as 'Coolies,' who are sent here . . . in a state of voluntary or involuntary servitude."¹¹ In one stroke, vote-hungry Bigler tapped into three of the era's panics: fear that the nation faced danger from the Chinese; fear of a virtual expansion of the slave-holding South; and fear of capitalist corporations. One week after delivering this message to the legislature, a bill was introduced "to prevent coolie labor in the mines and to prevent involuntary servitude."¹² On Election Day, Bigler became the first California governor to win reelection.

But a question remains. By seeking the votes of angry white miners, didn't Bigler worry about alienating the multitude of Chinese miners? At this point in time, Chinese immigrants were not yet prohibited from becoming citizens. Bigler himself raised the question in the same message to the legislature when he noted, "A question around which there has been thrown some doubt is whether Asiatics could, with safety, be admitted to the enjoyments of all the rights of citizens."¹³ He then went on to speculate that, since federal law (at the time) enabled any "free white person" to become a citizen, the case could be made that the Chinese were not white, and therefore could be banned not only from citizenship, but from serving as jurors or giving testimony against a white person.

The following year, Bigler's legal musings became legal precedent. George Hall, a white miner in California, robbed and murdered Ling Sing, a Chinese miner. Three other Chinese miners witnessed the deadly assault. Hall was found guilty and sentenced to death. But the California Supreme Court overturned the conviction, ruling that a section of California law—"No black or mulatto person, or Indian, shall be allowed to give evidence in favor of, or against, a white man"—was intended to exclude all non-Caucasians. George Hall went free.

The court ruling didn't stop there. The opinion handed down by the court justified this exclusion of Chinese testimony on the basis of the Chinese being a race "whose mendacity is proverbial; a race of people whom nature has marked as inferior, and who are incapable of progress or intellectual

development beyond a certain point."¹⁴ Following the court ruling, a man identified in the press only by his last name, Alden, drew his pistol when passing a small group of Chinese men and murdered one without provocation.¹⁵ Alden was arrested later that night but released the next day, since the only witnesses were the dead man's Chinese friends. Two weeks later, a group of white men robbed a Chinese mining camp near Auburn, California, and lynched three of its miners. Those who survived knew who the assailants were, but the inadmissibility of Chinese testimony against white people prevented prosecution.¹⁶ When, in 1868, the Fourteenth Amendment bestowed citizenship and guaranteed equal protection and due process of law not only to the recently freed slaves but to all persons born in the United States, California was not among the states that voted to ratify it (although it did so symbolically in 1959).

Backed by the credibility of California's governor and state supreme court, alarm over Chinese immigrants had sufficient fuel to spread widely. But it did not yet do so. While one reason was the massive influx of Chinese being confined to the West Coast, another was that widespread panic over capitalist corporations was just beginning to harness steam. Not only did industrialists look with favor on this added supply of cheap labor, but most of the nation's newspapers were either owned by, or financially dependent on, the advertising of wealthy industrialists or their corporations. The effectiveness of this blockade around the anti-Chinese panic in California, and the intensification of rage resulting from that blockade, can be seen in an August 1, 1853, letter to the editor of the *Alta California*. "I notice with sorrow that the newspapers throughout the State avoid the discussion," it calmly began in regard to Chinese immigration. Anger toward industrialists then began seeping out as it continued, "Truly there is an object to be gained by this course—a great, a detestable, a damnable object—and that object is the degradation and reduction of the price of labor." Full-throated rage against the Chinese followed. "The only force to oppose this inundation of half humans is the outraged and insulted American laborer," the letter writer declared, brandishing unnamed consequences if "he may see himself surrounded by

long-tailed blue skins . . . contact with whom his very soul revolts, and himself put on a level with them."

The Civil War sidetracked the anti-Chinese panic, just as it did the panic over Catholics. Shortly before the onset of the war, however, a portent appeared of what would later dominate the nation's fear of a "Yellow Peril." On March 22, 1860, the *San Francisco Bulletin* told readers of a Japanese ship docked in the harbor. What, the paper pondered, is "the difference . . . 'twixt tweedle-dum and tweedle-dee?"

Anti-Chinese Fears Go Coast-to-Coast

On May 10, 1869, the last spike was driven into the wooden tie that connected the eastern and western segments of the Transcontinental Railroad. Chinese workers constituted the vast majority of the 4,000 laborers who built the western segment.¹⁷ The completion of the project was a milestone in the nation's industrialization and in the anti-Chinese panic—since the low-cost Chinese labor that helped build the railroad now had a low-cost means of spreading across the country.

Just over a year later, the Lowell, Massachusetts, *Daily Citizen* reported on June 14, 1870: "Seventy-five Chinamen . . . arrived in North Adams yesterday to work in the shoe factory of C. T. Sampson and Company. A large crowd assembled at the depot to witness their arrival. . . . They were followed from the depot to Sampson's factory by the crowd, amid ominous hisses and hooting." Unbeknownst to these Chinese workers, they had been provided transportation to Massachusetts to take over the jobs of white workers who were on strike. A union leader sought to enlist the arriving Chinese in the union, but before they could comprehend the situation the company whisked them into the factory, where they were also housed. With emotions raw, the union adopted a resolution within days declaring "Chinese menials . . . degrading to American labor" and calling on "all of the workingmen throughout the country to hold meetings and urge upon Congress the passage of a bill making the importation of such labor unlawful."¹⁸

Even before this episode, an abstract fear that the Chinese threatened the nation's future had branched throughout the country. One month prior to the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad, on April 3, 1869, an editorial in Georgia's *Macon Weekly Telegraph* warned, "They will control California probably in less than ten years, and California itself will become but a way station in the onward march of Western colonization by the Chinese." The following month, the *New York Commercial Advertiser* upped the volume. Referring to the Chinese as "the most degraded race in the world," it warned, "They are ready and anxious to step over by millions to possess the land."¹⁹ In addition to the panic-inducing use of the absolute "most," the statement was built upon a blank to be filled in: the phrase "degraded race" left it to the reader to decide what constitutes the gradations of race. Just as panic over Catholics was premised on an implied absolute that all Catholics behave as a bloc, so too this warning asserted all Chinese immigrants were coming with the intention of possessing the land. An additional absolute resided in the wording of this claim. Its phrase, "to possess the land," suggested the Chinese sought to possess *all* the land, as opposed to the phrase "to possess land." Ominously, the editorial went on to ruminate, "It was useless to [s]hoot them in the streets, kill them in the mines, and persecute them everywhere." Concluding in a crescendo of absolutes, it warned, "If we do not rise superior and conquer it . . . it will swamp and sink us in a darker, fouler destiny than ever overwhelmed any of the lost nations of the world."

As has been seen among the works previously cited, and will continue to be seen, literary fiction (or genres, in the case of the ostensibly nonfiction *Awful Disclosures*) periodically contributes to political panic. In the panic over Chinese immigrants, so many were so blinded by emotion that their clear misinterpretation of a poem became coin of the realm in the realm of panic. Misinterpreted was the opening stanza from Bret Harte's 1870 poem, "Plain Language from Truthful James":

Which I wish to remark,
And my language is plain,
That for ways that are dark

And for tricks that are vain,
The heathen Chinese is peculiar,
Which the same I would rise to explain.²⁰

The "heathen Chinese," however, turned out not to be the villain in the poem, which goes on to tell of a card game between Ah Sin, a Chinese immigrant, and Bill Nye, a notorious cheater. Nye ends up losing to this seemingly naive immigrant who, it turns out, is a more skillful cheater. Nye's shocked reaction is to attack Ah Sin as he shouts, "We are ruined by Chinese cheap labor."

Though hard to imagine today, Harte's poem was a smash hit. Apparently, it was hard to imagine then, too. "The popular favor with which Bret Harte's 'Plain Language from Truthful James' has been received all over the country is somewhat marvelous," the *Boston Daily Advertiser* wrote on October 22, 1870. "In deference to numerous and oft-repeated requests, we republish the poem."

Sadly but significantly, readers who understood the poem's irony and sought to correct the misinterpretation failed. "The point of the satire lies, of course, in the virtuous indignation of the Yankee cheat," wrote one critic in 1871. "But so dull and prejudiced is the political party that opposes itself to immigration [the Know Nothing Party] . . . that a leading member of it is said to have . . . written to Mr. Bret Harte to thank him for such a contribution to the good cause."²¹ Despite this and other articles informing readers of the poem's irony, the misreading prevailed. The phrase "heathen Chinese" went on to appear more than a thousand times in American newspapers over the next fifty years.²² The significance of this clear misinterpretation withstanding correction is that panic—being passion prevailing over reason—is immune to logic.

Bret Harte stands as further proof that alarmists—or, in this case, one who has "alarmist" thrust upon him—cannot be stereotyped. Harte stated that he wrote the poem "in an hour of idleness and threw it carelessly into his desk," retrieving it only to fill blank space in the magazine he edited.²³ But while he publicly belittled the poem, Harte never clarified that what it

ridiculed was *prejudice* against the Chinese, not the Chinese themselves. As seen with politician/minister/novelist Thomas Dixon in the panic over African Americans, anti-Catholic author/late feminist Anna Ella Carroll, and socialist/late anti-Catholic author Paul Blanshard, Bret Harte had a dream toward which political panic provided an avenue. Harte's dream was to be a famous writer. A measure of recognition had recently come to him after he published, in the magazine he was hired to edit, his short story, "The Luck of Roaring Camp." When the now nationwide anti-Chinese panic raised his poem to heights so great that one phrase entered the American vernacular, Harte's desire to be a famous writer overtook any desire that his writing be understood.

As often, or more frequently, used than the phrase "heathen Chinese" was the term "inscrutable," in reference to the Chinese. While its use by Europeans predated the Gold Rush arrival of Chinese in the United States, it too became part of the American vernacular, so socially acceptable that a correspondent accompanying Ulysses S. Grant on a world tour following his presidency wrote of China, "Here you meet John, the inscrutable John, who troubles you so much in California." So long did the phrase remain socially accepted, it appeared in the government's 1940 Federal Writers' Project, *New York: A Guide to the Empire State*, which described men in New York City's Chinatown as gathering "in little clusters before shop doors, discussing in the native tongue affairs of the moment with inscrutable expressions and in modulated tones."²⁴ This use of "inscrutable" implied that the Chinese were mysterious, even cryptic, and in so doing the term conveyed a panic-inducing blank to be filled in. For many non-Asians, credibility was bestowed on that blank by virtue of the Chinese language being so different from those of Europe as to be incomprehensible to Westerners. Many recognized their inability to perceive meanings from the Chinese as inscrutability of the Chinese.

Those Americans who were growing concerned about the influx of Chinese immigrants were susceptible to claims that would have been undetermined by knowledge of their language. "They have their secret societies among themselves . . . by whose edicts they are governed," an article in the

August 15, 1854, issue of *United States Magazine* warned, adding that they "dare not testify against [these societies] for fear of secret death; thus rendering our very laws powerless." The charge referred to the "Six Companies," the number of which actually varied, but none of which was akin to tongs, organized crime gangs that formed later. The "Six Companies" were societies created by more established Chinese immigrants to aid newcomers from China who were themselves bewildered by America's language and customs. The accusation arose from the fact that these groups offered to arbitrate disputes between Chinese immigrants and—contrary to the claim that they enforced a separate set of laws—to help fellow Chinese avail themselves of the American judicial system.

Emerging from this misunderstanding is a significant form of blanks to be filled in. Secrecy and its siblings, mystery and inscrutability, frequently fuel political panic by virtue of being such blanks. In the panic over Chinese immigrants, the inscrutability was unintentional and the secrecy was imagined. In other instances, however, the secrecy is real. Not surprisingly, then, conspiracy theories abound regarding organizations intentionally cloaked in secrecy, such as the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency. And there are instances in which the secrecy is not only real, but exists for the sole purpose of creating fear. The secrecy that cloaks the Ku Klux Klan—quite literally in its use of robes and face-covering hoods—was implemented to create a panic-inducing blank to be filled in regarding who in the community was part of the organization's forces.

The claim that the Chinese Six Companies were a separate judicial system became a misbegotten assertion for those who believed it. Just as we saw a misbegotten assertion—that Africans were descendants of Noah's son Ham—grow to interpret three lines in the Bible as an explanation of all racial differences and inherent behaviors, so too did this misbegotten assertion grow to enormous proportions. In his 1880 book *The Last Days of the Republic*, P. W. Dooner declared the Six Companies were "treasonable associations," going on to warn, "The control of the United States would give [China] virtual control of the Western Hemisphere. . . . As the introductory act, she proceeded to transport her surplus population to the 'Six

Companies' . . . commissioned by the Emperor; and by the same authority, exercised the functions of legislative and judicial officers as well as virtual governors of the Chinese people in America."

In this climate, an ominous term began to appear, one that also appeared in the racially fueled panics over Native Americans and African Americans. "An Organization Being Perfected to Exterminate the Chinese in San Francisco," headlined a March 1, 1870, article in the *Cleveland Herald*. Anti-Chinese organizations had started to form a decade earlier, but went dormant during the Civil War. A November 13, 1861, item in the *San Francisco Bulletin* told of fifty people in an Anti-Coolie Club hearing a speaker denounce, as "a curse to all mankind . . . the disease-engendering, morals-lacking, filthy Chinese scum." The organization aimed "not only to prevent further immigration of Chinese-Tartars, but to wipe out those that are here." After the Civil War, the newly revived group put forward Thomas Mooney as its 1870 candidate for California's governor on a platform that, the Cincinnati's *Daily Enquirer* reported, vowed "to exterminate the Mongolian Race."²⁵ Though Mooney's candidacy ended when he fled the state amid accusations of embezzlement, the panic did not. In October 1871, a disturbance in Los Angeles' Chinatown was all the cause needed for a mob of 500 whites to attack the community, burn homes and businesses, and lynch nineteen Chinese men. In 1876, the Chinese quarter in the town of Antioch, fifty miles east of San Francisco, was burned down. While such ethnic cleansing of Chinese was not new, what was new were the endorsements they received and the genocidal tone of those kudos. "The actions of the citizens will, without doubt, meet with the hearty approval of every man, woman, and child on the Pacific coast," the *San Francisco Chronicle* declared of the pogrom at Antioch, "and will go a long way toward convincing the people of the Eastern States that the Chinese nuisance on our seaboard has assumed such vast proportions that it . . . must be wiped out."²⁶

The following year, an Irish immigrant named Denis Kearney linked panic over Chinese immigrants with the now widespread panic over capitalist corporations when he formed the Workingmen's Party of California. Its slogan was "The Chinese Must Go!" Kearney, who had been active in

the city's Drayman & Teamsters Union, formed his party during a year of nationwide labor unrest stemming from a strike of railroad workers. A charismatic speaker, he attracted some 10,000 listeners to a July 23, 1877, rally in San Francisco, after which a throng headed off to that city's Chinatown, where it smashed windows and set several buildings ablaze.

Kearney set off on a nationwide tour, fueling the now twinned panics by declaring at rallies, "I advise every man within the sound of my voice, if he is able to, to own a musket and a hundred rounds of ammunition."²⁷ He then aimed those firearms with statements such as, "I will give the Central Pacific just three months to discharge their Chinamen, and if that is not done, [company cofounder Leland] Stanford and his crowd will have to take the consequences."²⁸ This use of the word "consequences" functioned as a blank to be filled in and, as such, contributed to inducing panic among those who filled it in as a threat to do that which they feared. Afraid that industrialists and Chinese immigrants endangered the republic, "consequences" could be interpreted to mean endangering the republic by replacing the Constitution's guarantee of due process of law with due process of Kearney. At other times in his speaking tour, Kearney filled in this blank in precisely that way. "I want Stanford and the press to understand that if I give an order to hang [company cofounder Charles] Crocker, it will be done," he declared in one speech.²⁹ He then rang even larger liberty bells of panic when he advocated that the nation be saved by replacing the Constitution of the United States with the Constitution of Denis Kearney. "When I have thoroughly organized my party," he proclaimed, "I will lead you to the City Hall . . . hang the Prosecuting Attorney, burn every book that has a particle of law in it, and then enact new laws for the workmen."³⁰

Twinned Panics Beget Scapegoat

With the United States on the brink of economic and political calamity due to the turbulence surrounding the nationwide railroad strike of 1877, the linking of the panic over Chinese immigrants to the panic over capitalist corporations provided Congress an opportunity to reduce the danger of those panics

by weakening their link. In 1878, it sent legislation to President Rutherford B. Hayes prohibiting further immigration of Chinese. Putting eyeglasses on the Founding Fathers, a March 1, 1879, editorial in the *Portage, Wisconsin, State Register* entered the portal to panic when it asserted, "Who can suppose that . . . the makers of the Constitution . . . saw, even in imagination, the weird form of John Chinaman, with his almond eyes, yellow skin, and pig tail, coming under that rule?" The editorial then crossed the threshold into the realm of panic when it continued, "It may be that necessity, which it is said knows no law, or which, perhaps, finds a higher law, may justify, nay, even compel us to restrain a people who may come down upon us like the frogs of ancient Egypt." The editorial then filled in the blank created by the phrase "higher law" when it concluded, "Self-preservation is the first law of nature, either for an individual or a nation." As with Denis Kearney, panic resided in the editorial advocating that which it feared—in this instance, protecting the endangered United States by replacing its Constitution with survival of the strongest. President Hayes vetoed the bill.

But he could not veto panic. Indeed, his veto added more genocidal fuel to those in panic, some of whom now employed secrecy to combat their fear of secrecy among the Chinese. "At a secret meeting last night of a [San Francisco] workingmen's club, styling itself 'The Council of Thirteen,'" the *Boston Journal* reported on February 23, 1880, "a long preamble was read, winding up by saying, 'Chemistry has placed in the hands of this generation means of removing obnoxious races in a more sure and effective manner than by firearms.'" After Denver's *Rocky Mountain News* declared on December 6, 1879, "We trust that the day is near at hand when these degraded human beings will be driven out of our country," precisely such violence followed. A mob of some 1,500 people tore down houses belonging to Chinese residents; one Chinese immigrant, after being dragged from his home by a rope around his neck, had his skull crushed by boot kicks and bricks.³¹

Panic now covered the country. Denver's riots were reported in the November 2, 1880, *New Orleans Times-Picayune* under the headline, "Broken

China—The People of Denver Express Themselves in an Emphatic Way on the Chinese." At the 1880 Republican National Convention, an anti-Chinese plank was included for the first time in the party's platform. After that convention's presidential nominee, Chester Arthur, won the election, he signed the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act into law.

As it turned out, the law's scapegoating of the Chinese had no impact on the panic over corporations. It did, however, decrease the intensity of the panic over the Chinese. Only a single sentence appeared, under "Short Specials," in Michigan's March 30, 1898, *Jackson Daily Citizen*: "The United States Supreme Court has decided that children of Chinese parents born in this country are entitled to citizenship." What remained of the panic over Chinese Americans no longer found fuel in legal issues.

But a good deal of fuel could still be pumped from the nation's racial groundwork. Moreover, its octane could be raised by connecting racial fears to fears now emanating in the nation's industrialized cities: pollution. The 1885 book *The Chinese at Home and Abroad* asserted that Chinatowns were "the source of the most terrible pollution of the blood of the younger and rising generations among us, and that it is destined to be the source of contamination and hereditary diseases among those who are to come after us [is] too frightful to contemplate." As seen in the way Catholicism was linked to witchcraft, the connection was effected by describing one panic with the terminology of another—a panic-inducing technique that recurs, most notably in links between the panic over homosexuals and the panic over women. In addition, this particular assertion employed a panic-inducing absolute in its use of "most terrible," and a blank to be filled in with its phrase "too frightful to contemplate." The 1908 book *Race or Mongrel* told its readers, "The Californians, having seen . . . other yellow-white mixtures, either knew that the white-yellow mongrels were among the most worthless of mongrels, or their instinct told them the same truth." More significant in this instance than the double-absolute ("most worthless") is the widening of the panic in a statement that followed. This "instinct," it asserted, explained "the clamor against the admission of the Japanese."³²