

Violence Against Chinese Immigrants

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OVERVIEW

A great number of Chinese immigrants had arrived in California by the 1860s. American workers resented the Chinese because of the competition for jobs and the resulting lower wages, and Americans sometimes reacted violently. One of the worst episodes of violence occurred in Los Angeles in October 1871. Writer P.S. Dorney was there and wrote about it years later. Some excerpts from the account follow.

GUIDED READING As you read, consider the following questions:

- Why did this violence erupt?
 - Do you think the Senate shares some of the blame for this atrocity?
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In 1854 the state senate appointed a committee . . . to investigate the "Chinese evil." An exhaustive investigation was had; and, read in the light of latter days, the report of that committee proves the far-seeing judgment of those who made it. The report declared:

The Chinese are destructive to the best interests of the state and dangerous to its peace. They come not as freemen but as serfs and hirelings of a master. It needs no Solomon to predict the result: disputes will take place and blood will flow, to be followed by the expulsion of a population who will be driven from the state by violence instead of law.

. . . For two days that portion of the city cursed by the presence of the Mongols was in a state of war. Every house was barricaded, and the crack of revolvers and the bursting of bombs reverberating throughout the city kept the people in a constant state of anxious excitement. Crowds gathered at the intersection of Commercial and Los Angeles Streets, and some of the most daring ventured as near the Mongol quarter as Carillo's or Caswell's corner; but they were quickly dispersed by a shower of bullets from the pistols of the Mongolian shooters.

Business and travel in and about the Chinese quarter being wholly suspended, the authorities resolved to quell the disorder. To this end the police made a raid upon the fighters late on the afternoon of October 28. This show of authority had a singular effect upon the Chinese. The storm of internecine fury instantly lulled. Upon all sides a peculiar cry went up; the fighters, as one man, united in opposing the police; and, taken wholly by surprise, the "peelers" were routed in a moment.

The town was now thoroughly moved. A feeling of deep alarm, not unmingled with fear, spread abroad. Places of business and residences adjacent

to the scene of war were closed and abandoned, and an immense concourse of anxious spectators collected at the intersections of Main and Aliso, and of Commercial and Los Angeles Streets.

The police prepared for another charge and were joined by a few citizens, among whom was "Bob" Thompson, a well-known and very popular character. The second charge was better calculated and more determined than the first but was met as before; the police were again routed, leaving behind them Officer Bilderrain, desperately wounded, a Spanish boy shot in the foot, and citizen Thompson writhing in the agonies of death. . . .

About 8 o'clock the death of Thompson was announced. The announcement was received in sullen silence; but in a moment the crowd melted away, and Main Street was deserted. In another moment, armed men were seen hastening, singly and in clusters, from every street and avenue, all heading toward Chinatown. . . . Businessmen closed their shops and joined the gathering clans, and in less than fifteen minutes after the announcement of "Bob" Thompson's death, the cracking of rifles, the roar of shotguns, and the rattle of small arms proclaimed the investment of Chinatown.

About 9 o'clock the first Chinese was captured. He was armed with a hatchet and was taken while attempting to break through the cordon of whites that surrounded the Chinese quarter. A dozen hands clutched him, and a hundred throats hoarsely shouted: "A rope! To the hill! To the hill!" . . .

As the maddened men surged up the hill (Temple Street), the little ill-favored prisoner, borne bodily along, was stabbed in the back and side and was dead as a doorstep before General Baldwin's corral was reached, to the gate-beam of which the dead man was hanged. . . .

Among the Spaniards whose boldness and vigor attracted attention that night was Vasquez, afterward famous as a bandit, and Jesus Martinez, his chum and relative. . . .

After the assault became general, the Chinese never returned shot or blow; but securely barricading every avenue of approach, each like a badger retired to his den and in sullen silence awaited his fate. But few attempted to escape, and all who made the attempt fell riddled with bullets. . . .

The condition of the Chinese had now become wretched indeed. The "Quarters," it will be remembered, were an old Spanish hacienda one story high, with an open courtyard in the center. Martinez and his companions, armed with axes as well as firearms, cut holes in the asphaltum roof, through which the cowering creatures below were shot in their hiding places or hunted from room to room out into the open courtyard, where death from the bullets of those on the roof was certain. Within or without, death was inevitable. The alternative was terrible. As each separate wretch, goaded from his covert, sought in his despair the open space, a volley from the roof brought him down; a chorus of yells telegraphed that fact to the surrounding mob, and the yells were answered by a hoarse roar of savage satisfaction.

A simultaneous rush from Los Angeles Street forced the doors upon that side, and the work of real diabolism began. Men were dragged forth, many of them mortally wounded, and hurled headlong from a raised sidewalk to the ground. To the necks of some of the most helpless the mob fastened ropes and, with a whoop and a hurrah, rushed down Los Angeles Street to the hanging place, dragging some writhing wretch prone upon the ground. More of the doomed and bleeding miseries were jerked along by as many eager hands as could lay hold of clothing and queue, cuffed and cursed in the meantime by the infuriated multitude. A boy was thus led to the place of slaughter. The little fellow was not above twelve years of age. He had been but a month in the country and knew not a word of English. He seemed paralyzed by fear—his eyes were fixed and staring, and his face blue-blanché and idiotic. He was hanged.

Close behind the boy followed the Chinese doctor; a man of extreme age, well known, and reputed wealthy. The doctor begged piteously for his life, pleading in English and in Spanish; but he might as well have pleaded with wolves. At last he attempted to bribe those who were hurrying him to his death. He offered \$1,000—\$2,000—\$3,000—\$5,000—\$10,000—\$15,000! But to no purpose. He was hanged, and his \$15,000 was spirited away none the less. At his death the old man wore a valuable diamond ring upon his left index finger, but when his corpse was cut down it was found that the left index finger had been wrenched from its socket, and finger and ring were gone. . . .

It was midnight, and a body of men appointed by the sheriff cut down the dead—twenty-three in number. Nearly all had been dragged through the streets at the end of a rope, and all were found shot and stabbed as well as hanged. Such was the first completed act of the drama prophesied by the senate of 1854.