



We All Should Remember

Editorial By Steve Yee

April 15th, is soon approaching. This day is Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day. It is a day set aside for all of us to remember the horrors of the Holocaust and the Jewish people who perished. We must never forget. But there is another Holocaust most have forgotten. In 1882 Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, the first U.S. immigration law ever to deny the rights of a people solely based on race. This began a chapter of American history as shameful and ignored as any, the "Driving Out."

The constitution of California was rewritten, in 1879, against those of "Chinese or Mongolian" ancestry. The legislature delegated "all necessary power" to towns and cities "for the removal of Chinese." The state constitution declared that the Chinese people were "dangerous to the well-being of the State." During the "Driving Out" of the Chinese who were commonly called the "yellow peril," 40,000 miners of Chinese ancestry were forcibly expelled from California in 1868. From 1924 until 1948, any American marrying a Chinese lost their citizenship. This is not myth. This is not ancient history, but what happened right here in Sacramento. How do we remember what so few even know?

Very few remember that mobs stormed through towns where Chinese immigrants lived, burning homes and looting shops. Chinese were lynched and scalped. They had their pigtailed cut off and were branded with hot irons. All of this was endorsed by the government through legislation. In Los Angeles during 1871, 20 innocent Chinese men were lynched or burned alive by mobs of white men. Four men were crucified, spread-eagle, and then executed with knife and gun. In 1885, in Rock Springs, Wyoming, 28 Chinese men were murdered by local townspeople. In an orgy of bloodletting, mobs not only burned the Chinese alive but then mutilated their dead bodies. Across California, Chinese workers suffer beatings and shootings and were herded to railroad stations, loaded on trains, and never seen again.

Vigilantes torched Chinese homes and businesses throughout the West. Newspapers of the day across California, in Sacramento, Chico, Calistoga, Truckee, Modesto, and dozens of other locales reported violent mob actions against Chinese people, who had no legal recourse. Forced removals occurred in Cherry Creek, Colorado; Tacoma, Washington; Tombstone, Arizona, and Redlands, California. A popular saying of the day became "He doesn't stand a Chinaman's chance."

From Ukiah to the Napa Valley, to Fresno to Redlands, Chinese were beaten, shot, and loaded into trains to be shipped out of town. These violent attacks on Chinese immigrants were concentrated in the Sacramento and San Joaquin River valleys, and especially right here, in the Delta region of Yee Fow. While a handful of Chinese towns remained in the Delta, the vast majority of Chinese immigrants were driven from the land and forced into marginal survival.

The levees built in this area by Chinese immigrants created huge profits for capitalists and opened up some of the most fertile and productive land in the world. In return, these immigrants were denied their most

basic rights. Their communities were burned. Dozens were murdered by racist mobs. And they were "driven out" from the very land they had created from the Sacramento and San Joaquin Delta swamps. In July, 1855, one of many mysterious fires struck Sacramento's Chinatown of Yee Fow and roared through the area so rapidly it consumed an entire half block in half an hour. This time, the Sacramento Fire Department allowed for the fire to burn as long as the wind was shifting towards Yee Fow and away from the rest of the town. Many Chinese lives were lost and their belongings scattered.

The Board of Trustees, forerunner to the Sacramento City Council, amended ordinances and created laws making it difficult for the Chinese to exist. With action, often in the form of legislation, across the US, this was America's first systematic racial profiling of immigrants as "illegals" based on race. Finally, by 1909, the Chinese were driven out of Yee Fow, Sacramento's Chinatown. There was then a concerted effort by city officials and the Southern Pacific Railroad to fill China Slough, burying Yee Fow under rock and rubble. This is where The Railyards exist today.

We need a Yee Fow Museum to tell the story of the Chinese, the ONLY people to carve out a place in The Railyard and called it "home." Anything less than a Yee Fow Museum would be historically irresponsible. The Chinese need a place of remembrance that stands for justice and human dignity. This is not out of guilt but to enlighten. The Yee Fow Museum will represent the wisdom to reach out to the angels of our higher nature and treat one another as humanly as possible.



2007 Martin Luther King Day Walk

OCA Sacramento out in force along with Sacramento's rich and diverse communities at the 24th Annual Sacramento MLK Day Walk on JAN 15, 2007 celebrating the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, JR.