

LEW-WILLIAMS, BETH. *The Chinese Must Go: Violence, Exclusion, and the Making of the Alien in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018. 360 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 9780674976016.

REVIEWED BY JOHN S. W. PARK, University of California Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara  
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Over the last four decades, Asian American history went from a peripheral subfield within United States history into something much more central, perhaps because its themes have spoken so directly to our contemporary preoccupations with immigration, exclusion, and race-based tensions. Things old are suddenly new again: we hear calls for greater immigration restrictions by nationality and by religion; we see the current president speak in racist ways, and in sympathy with racist people; and federal immigration policies have separated parents and children through methods that shock the conscience. This administration has created “tender-age shelters” for very young children, a technology that promotes fear among potential migrants even as it results in child abuse. This is a horrifying form of state-sanctioned violence, is it not?

In light of our current events, it is no wonder that so many of us have returned to histories of Chinese Exclusion, of race-based violence, and of the experiences of those “strangers from a different shore,” victimized by public officials and by private citizens alike not so long ago. On the frontier, throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, white settlers attacked Asian migrants. In her new book, however, Lew-Williams has suggested that her work is an attempt to correct the way professional historians have dealt with this period of Chinese Exclusion: “While historians often claim that racial violence is fundamental to the making of the United States, rarely are they referring to the Chinese in the U.S. West” (2–3). Furthermore, “the violent anti-Chinese movement was not a weak imitation of racial violence elsewhere. It was a distinct phenomenon that must be considered on its own terms. Even without lethal force, anti-Chinese violence had profound and lasting consequences” (3). One of the most obvious was exclusion itself, as well as the body of immigration law and procedure that grew around it: “the vigilantes made Chinese exclusion possible, even probable, when their violent protests drew the national spotlight. The federal policy of Chinese exclusion, touted as a solution to Chinese migration, was also designed to combat the more immediate threat of white violence” (7).

This white violence stemmed not from strength, Lew-Williams claims, but quite often from a recurring fear that too many Chinese immigrants would overwhelm the “white man’s republic.” She relies, in part, on readings of popular culture, including a novel by Pierton Dooner to make this point: “Fantastical as *Last Days of the Republic* may seem, Dooner echoed racial ideology that was commonplace in the nineteenth-century U.S. West . . . . An ethnically diverse group of American citizens (and aspiring citizens)—including unskilled and skilled workers, homemakers, and small businessmen—viewed the Chinese as an existential threat to their vision of a free white republic” (29). They were busy, industrious, and successful people, these Asians, according to Dooner, and all the more dangerous for being that way: “They have invariably vanquished opposition in every department of trade or manufacture in which they have succeeded in educating their people; and no sooner has this success been achieved in one department than their energies are directed to new fields” (36). And Lew-Williams is right: those parenthetical (aspiring citizens) were often the most anti-Chinese, including the notorious Denis Kearney, an Irish immigrant and the leader of the Workingman’s Party, whose words give Lew-Williams’s book its title.

Once the white folk got a sense of the existential threat posed by Asian immigrants, they became violent, all over, all the time, in every town and city west of the Mississippi, sometimes into Canada, expelling and attacking and threatening the Chinese. They didn’t so much coordinate their attacks as much as inspire one another from afar, and they didn’t always have to act out:

“Racial violence against the Chinese relied on the power of surprise. The Chinese did not know when threats would turn to violence, what form the violence would take, or when it would end. While vigilantes sometimes depended on bullets to rid their community of Chinese, they often expelled them through threats alone.” Assault worked as well as battery, and the Chinese “[lived] in terror” (93).

This is where Lew-Williams’s archival work shines: she gives names and rich descriptions of the vigilantes and public authorities who attempted to exclude the Chinese, including Aleck Macaulay and Arthur Blake, but then she also pays attention to the immigrants who lived in fear, men like Gong Heng and Lum May. She renders all of these characters in vivid detail, and by focusing on archival collections in the Pacific Northwest, Lew-Williams provides a much more detailed sense of the pleasures of exclusion for those who participated in it, in addition to the palpable sense of unease that it engendered among the victims. For white folks, exclusion provided an occasion for grassroots citizenship: “On Orcas Island, less than three miles from the U.S.-Canadian boundary, a group of white community members created their own defense against Chinese migration without any government support, organizing seaborne patrols of the San Juan Islands” (76). But then there is also the agony of being murdered, recorded as it was in sworn testimony, in the words of Chinese men themselves: “[Yung] was sorry to die. Got a son [at] home, too young, no one to send him money. [Yung] did not talk much, but hollered through the night” (93).

This violence against Chinese immigrants overwhelmed the Christian missionaries who wished to convert Asians, or the American capitalists who wished to do business in China, or the diplomats and national politicians who saw it as a stain on the nation. It got worse after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882: “Over a period of eighteen months in 1885 and 1886, Chinese across the U.S. West experienced violence on an unprecedented scale. Chinese remembrances of this time make it clear that each story of survival was highly personal and specific to the individual, to the time, and to the place. And yet violence also had collective and cumulative effects” (111). Chinese immigrants knew by then that the point was to drive them out of the United States, and after 1885, local communities competed with one another to expel their Asians. “In 1885 and 1886, vigilantes expelled thousands of Chinese from Western communities to advance a campaign for federal exclusion and, in so doing, reinvented the anti-Chinese movement” (116). The violence dehumanized its victims, its perpetrators insisted that it was just more “manly” to attack the Chinese whenever and wherever, and many white women supported their husbands and sons in the violence. All of this vigorous local activity could have only one national solution, they insisted: “Congress could end white violence by enacting Chinese exclusion, or it could expect a race war” (136). It was either total exclusion, or else.

In time, those who had protected and even benefited from Chinese immigration came around: “White elites decided that acquiescence was the best course of action” (164). They decided that the Chinese were not worth ongoing social chaos: “They convinced themselves that sacrificing the Chinese was the only way to quiet the threat of white working-class violence. In the end, their loyalty to their Chinese neighbors proved weak compared to their desire to reestablish a semblance of social order and to preserve their positions at the top” (164). White solidarity, *uber alles*. In China, people imagined ships blowing up San Francisco to punish the white barbarians for their attacks, or at least a trade war against American goods like kerosene and flour, but nothing could stop exclusion. Like other historians, Lew-Williams explains, though, that exclusion did not stop Chinese migration, for the Chinese were very adept at getting around the law, and yet “even so, Chinese exclusion and the violence that enabled it dramatically transformed American gatekeeping at the turn of the twentieth century. At the border, in the empire, and within local communities, law and violence redefined the nation’s racial landscape and the lived experience of Chinese migrants” (196).

Forced to hide and to cover who they really were, fearing always yet more spasms of violence, during which their lives meant nothing, and having to rely on illicit networks of fictive kin, Chinese immigrants were rendered perpetually foreign, “aliens ineligible for citizenship.” In these conclusions, Lew-Williams confirms much of what we already know, thanks to excellent scholarly work

by Erika Lee, Mae Ngai, Madeline Hsu, Xiaojian Zhao, Lon Kurashige, Roger Daniels, Judy Yung, Scott Zesch, Andrew Gyory, Him Mark Lai, Yong Chen, Peter Kwong, Charles McClain, Sucheng Chan, Elliott Young, and Jean Pfaelzer, among others. The subtitle of Pfaelzer's book, published ten years ago, was "The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans," and it, too, was set in the Pacific Northwest. Many historians, I think, would agree that Chinese Exclusion was violent, terrible, and unrelenting, that it contributed to national policies that targeted immigrants of color, rather than against the white people who did the targeting. In pointing this out, I wish to note that the main thrust of Lew-Williams's argument is part of many other works already. White violence, Chinese and then Asian Exclusion—many of us have long believed that they shaped the American West, at least until 1970.

Still, I think that this volume is unique, chiefly because the narrative is so well-written and so full of compassion for the people who suffered this violence as well as the very threat of it. The archival work is meticulous. By giving names and thick descriptions, Lew-Williams reminds us that the people being held in immigration detention today, right now, are also people in agony, even as the public officials who promote such policies claim (again, like before) to be moral, upstanding lovers of this nation. They literally embrace the flag as they separate families. That so many children are being held in detention, in cages and in "summer camps," away from their parents—this makes us question whether in fact the arc of the moral universe bends anywhere near justice. How we deal with newcomers, people seeking refuge here, people who are not yet Americans—these are again urgent questions for which this volume offers many important lessons. Yet the people most in need of this book—Donald Trump, Jeff Sessions, Stephen Miller, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, John Kelly, Kirstjen Nielsen—will likely never read it. They envision themselves strong, even as they claim always to be victims of "unfairness," but their actions remind us of how exclusions past were also motivated by paranoia and fear, weakness and nothing remotely resembling strength. Incarcerating children is not strength; it is plain cruelty.

What a shame that they will never read or learn from a work like this one, for the beauty of its prose flows from the deeply personal, and from a place of great empathy for people held in cages. In the acknowledgments, Lew-Williams addresses her grandfather, Lew Din Wing, who was once detained on Angel Island for thirty-four days. Lew Din Wing was nine years old when federal authorities held him "without family or friends." As if to speak across time, Lew-Williams tells her late grandfather that she now has two children of her own, the oldest also nine. In light of our times, and perhaps because of what we have seen in our own day, how could these words not break the heart?

## FINANCE COMES OF AGE

KNIGHT, PETER. *Reading the Market: Genres of Financial Capitalism in Gilded Age America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016. 336 pp., \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-421-42521-4.

ROBB, GEORGE. *Ladies of the Ticker: Women and Wall Street from the Gilded Age to the Great Depression*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2017. 264 pp. \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-252-08271-9.

REVIEWED BY DANIEL PLATT, Brown University  
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In 1976, the populist scholar Lawrence Goodwyn wryly observed that "the subjects of money and banking do not seem to be in immediate danger of being overworked by American historians." What