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# The Integrated Alien: Chinese in the American West and Their Political and Legal Responses to Mob Violence, 1885-1886.

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The Integrated Alien:

Chinese in the American West and Their Political and Legal Responses to Mob Violence, 1885-1886.

A Senior Paper

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation

Undergraduate History Program of the University of Washington Tacoma

By

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## **Abstract**

In the literature on anti-Chinese violence in the American West during the 1880s, the depiction of Chinese immigrants is often limited to that of a faceless group, the pawns in an American political struggle that they did not understand nor have agency in. This historical interpretation of the Chinese as a people entirely alien to their communities is largely based on an over-reliance on contemporary white sources while ignoring Chinese accounts. Many contemporary whites were unwilling to honestly describe their relationship with Chinese immigrants, either because of racial bias or because of the threat of mob violence against those perceived as too friendly to the Chinese. In this paper I argue that eyewitness testimonies and personal papers of Chinese immigrants often demonstrate an in-depth understanding of local and national American politics. Chinese accounts also often show personal relationships with many of the leading white citizens of their communities, whom the Chinese called upon for aid in the face of mob violence. This paper examines the anti-Chinese violence in three different American frontier towns – Rock Springs, Tacoma, and Seattle – primarily from the perspective of Chinese eyewitnesses. These testimonies demonstrate that Chinese residents actively resisted efforts to force them out by appealing to both US and Chinese officials. In the aftermath of mob violence, Chinese immigrants pressured the US government to pay indemnities for Chinese losses by publicizing their accounts in China, which encouraged retaliatory anti-American violence in Chongqing. By creating international pressure on the US government, Chinese immigrants and diplomats were able to successfully force the US into agreeing to pay indemnities for Chinese loss of life and property.

## Introduction

If there is one encompassing theme in American history, it is the story of the immigrant. First colonizing the East Coast of America and then pushing inland, immigrants often settled with their countrymen in ethnically concentrated enclaves, identifying themselves based more on their national origin than by their citizenship in a new homeland. These disparate groups only eventually formed what we now think of as an American identity. By the nineteenth century, a new wave of immigrants were pushing west all the way to the Pacific Coast.

Although many of these settlers were not American citizens, and some immigrants planned only on staying long enough to make it rich and return to their family, these stories are now a core part of the American experience; they are the reason why America – and why we, Americans – are where we are today. And yet, one group of immigrants is still too often left out of this American story – the Chinese.

Chinese immigration to America was in most ways similar to white European migration. The first major wave of Chinese laborers came to California during the California Gold Rush and eventually made up as much as ten percent of California's population. From California Chinese laborers and traders expanded out across the West. While they were most well known for their role in the construction of railroads, there were Chinese in many frontier towns and cities, establishing businesses, farming, or working as servants and laundrymen.<sup>1</sup>

Although some Whites and Chinese came into conflict over jobs and land as early as the 1850s, it is inaccurate to view their relationship as entirely adversarial. Chinese immigrants were socially and economically linked with the majority-white communities in which they lived and worked. Chinese farmers and entrepreneurs sold their products to white buyers, while Chinese labor bosses contracted with white-owned companies to provide laborers. Despite facing racial hatred, official discrimination, and repeated attempts to limit the Chinese population in America, the Chinese Six Companies had

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<sup>1</sup> Lorraine Barker Hildebrand, *Straw Hats, Sandals and Steel: The Chinese in Washington State* (Tacoma, Washington State Historical Society, 1977), 6-9.

grown to more than 150,000 members by the 1870s. This rapid growth is a testament to the familiarity and insight with which Chinese leaders were able to navigate white culture.<sup>2</sup>

In 1885 a new wave of anti-Chinese hysteria swept the American West, worse than any that had come before. By the middle of 1886, thousands of Chinese had been expelled from their homes or been forced to flee by white mobs. However, the Chinese were not simply passive victims to this violence. Chinese eyewitness accounts of the violence demonstrate familiarity with their white neighbors and the political debates within white society, and Chinese business leaders and diplomats took an active role in attempting to protect as many Chinese from harm as they could. Although their success was often limited, examining Chinese viewpoints on white mob violence shows that they were not merely passive victims, and provides a valuable insight into the building of the American West that is traditionally neglected. Chinese eyewitness accounts and personal papers demonstrate that many Chinese were well-integrated into US frontier society, and actively responded to violence by appealing directly to US and Chinese officials. This activism paid off by creating international diplomatic pressure on the US to pay indemnities for Chinese loss of life and property.

Although attacks against the Chinese were scattered throughout the American West, in this paper I will examine three of the most noteworthy incidents. First, the influential attack on Chinese miners in Rock Springs, Wyoming, which then inspired anti-Chinese attacks in Washington Territory, first in Tacoma and then in Seattle. Finally, I will examine how the Chinese government responded to anti-Chinese violence through their own response to a riot against Western missionaries in Chongqing.

### **Literature Review**

In the literature on anti-Chinese violence in the American West there has long been a general agreement over the basic timeline of events. Though there have been disagreements on the importance of particular civic leaders or military officers, most debate has centered not on factual disputes such as

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 9.

how many Chinese were expelled or who leading anti-Chinese agitators were, but rather over questions of interpretation, especially in when to begin and end the historical accounts, and how to explain the motivations and ideology of the anti-Chinese movement.

### **Primary Sources**

The lack of disagreement over basic facts of anti-Chinese violence are due in large part to a large selection of quality primary sources from the contemporary white community. By the 1880s the Pacific Northwest boasted several daily newspapers. These newspapers published eyewitness accounts of mass meetings held by anti-Chinese activists and reported their arguments and the reaction to them of the white attendees. The Seattle *Daily Post-Intelligencer* accurately reported on mass meetings, as well as provided a rich supply of interviews and eyewitness accounts of the Seattle riots. *The Call* in Seattle and *The Tacoma Daily Ledger* were both allies of the anti-Chinese movement, so their factual statements are often unreliable, but they provide a record of the rhetoric used to attack Chinese immigrants in America. The Olympia-based *Washington Standard* reported on political efforts by the Washington Territorial legislature to either attack or defend Chinese in the Pacific Northwest. A variety of other small local papers have been preserved as well and provide a valuable glimpse into the structure of Northwest society, many of which are available online.<sup>3</sup>

Although these newspapers are a valuable resource, they are also often limited in their perspective. It could be dangerous to speak out in a climate of violent anti-Chinese agitation, and the attitudes expressed by individuals to newspapers do not always match the sentiments those same people expressed in private correspondences. Most newspapers were also written by white men for a white audience, and they rarely examine or discuss non-white perspectives.

Because of the limitations of newspaper sources, my main resource for this paper has been US

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<sup>3</sup> "Washington Digital Newspapers," Washington State Library, accessed April 10, 2017, <https://newspapers.sos.wa.gov/>; "Washington Online Historical Newspapers," Miriam J. Robbins, accessed April 10, 2017, <https://sites.google.com/site/onlinenewspapersite/Home/usa/wa>.

Government records, which include a wealth of diplomatic correspondences between Chinese and American officials and civic leaders. These records also include the sworn testimony of events by eyewitnesses, including most of the few available Chinese accounts, which provide a valuable perspective often left unexamined by historians. These sources include the Washington Governor's Report to the Secretary of the Interior<sup>4</sup> and the US Department of State's annual publication *Foreign Relations of the United States*, which is hosted online as part of the University of Wisconsin Digital Collections Center.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, there are several collections of personal papers that provide valuable accounts, including the Willard G. Jue Collection, which include the personal papers of Chin Gee Hee, a prominent Chinese businessman in Seattle in the 1880s, and the Watson C. Squire Collection, a former governor of Washington Territory. Both of these collections are stored in the University of Washington Libraries Special Collections.

### **Scholarship**

One of the earliest and most influential accounts of anti-Chinese violence in the Northwest is W. P. Wilcox's short article in *The Washington Historical Quarterly* of 1929. Wilcox viewed anti-Chinese riots largely as a matter of class and labor tension in the white community. While he acknowledged that anti-Chinese violence in the Northwest was largely driven by racial hatred of the Chinese, he also accepts the argument of contemporary anti-Chinese activists that their expulsions of the Chinese in Tacoma and Seattle were non-violent. Wilcox used this idea of a non-violent expulsion to conclude his narrative with a moral victory for the territory. He ends his article by rhetorically asking, "One wonders what the outcome would have been just three years later than these events, when the Territory

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<sup>4</sup> "Report of the Governor of Washington Territory", Google Books, accessed April 10, 2017, [https://books.google.com/books/about/Report\\_of\\_the\\_Governor\\_of\\_Washington\\_Ter.html?id=kgZNAAAAMAAJ](https://books.google.com/books/about/Report_of_the_Governor_of_Washington_Ter.html?id=kgZNAAAAMAAJ).

<sup>5</sup> "Foreign Relations of the United States," University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries, accessed April 10, 2017, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS>.

of Washington applied for admission to the union, if Seattle citizens had not taken a decided stand for law and order.”<sup>6</sup>

In a trend that will be common in histories for decades to come, Wilcox does not include any Chinese accounts. Throughout his article he only refers to Chinese immigrants collectively as a passive group, external and alien to the Northwest, whose desires, politics, and leaders are unidentified and unexamined. Instead, he describes a regional outbreak of labor union driven anti-Chinese violence which is successfully repelled when it comes to Seattle, thus proving the strength of the white power structure's moral character and the readiness of Washington civil society to become a state. Wilcox's purpose is plainly not to reveal or criticize racial injustice, but rather to provide a founding myth for the white community of the new Washington State. He plainly accepted his white sources' beliefs that the Chinese were entirely separate and distinct from the rest of the population of Washington Territory, and while he condemns violence, he views the labor-based complaints against the Chinese as legitimate.<sup>7</sup> Wilcox's interpretation of anti-Chinese violence will set much of the tone and focus for later scholarship, examining anti-Chinese riots as primarily an aspect of white labor history.

In 1948 Jules Alexander Karlin reexamined the expulsion of the Chinese in *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly*. Karlin begins his narrative similarly to Wilcox and agrees with his diagnosis of economic and racial tensions as leading to the expulsions. Unlike Wilcox, Karlin avoided using racially denigrating terms for Chinese people, and went beyond simply acknowledging racial hatred in the white community to examining it as a primary driving force in the expulsion. He still examined the events from an all-white perspective, but he rejected Wilcox's assumptions about the non-violent nature of anti-Chinese agitation. Karlin showed how local newspapers' used lurid, false stories about the

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<sup>6</sup> W. P. Wilcox, “Anti-Chinese Riots in Washington,” *The Washington Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XX, no. 3 (1929): 204-212.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

Chinese to enflame popular anger in the white community. In contrast to Wilcox's victorious conclusion, Karlin concluded with the Washington anti-Chinese conspirators being found innocent, and represents it as a shameful injustice.<sup>8</sup>

Many of the differences of interpretation and emphasis between Karlin and Wilcox reflect the times in which they were writing. Wilcox wrote in 1929, five years after the Reed Johnson Act excluded most Asian immigration to America, and his ideas reflect many of the anti-Japanese attitudes of his time. Wilcox did not write in order to attack anti-immigrant, xenophobic attitudes, but rather to argue in favor of legislative solutions over mob violence by comparing the Reed Johnson Act to its spiritual predecessor, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

In contrast, Karlin wrote shortly after World War Two, during which China had been America's ally against Japan. American attitudes were still sympathetic to Nationalist China, which had not yet fallen to the Communists. The victory of the Communist Party in China would usher in a new era of American paranoia and hostility towards the Chinese, but for a short-lived period there was greater willingness to approach Chinese topics sympathetically.

Karlin's account remained a key work from which other historians drew upon for the next several decades. Although he improved on Wilcox's account, Karlin also reinforced the interpretation of Chinese expulsion as the result of conflict within the white community, with no examination of Chinese viewpoints or actions. Only well after the Civil Rights Movement did historians begin to investigate and challenge some of Karlin's core assumptions, especially regarding the complex role of race on both sides of the expulsion debate.

In 1982, Carlos Schwantes challenged many of Karlin's assumptions about the goals of anti-Chinese labor leaders. In his article, Schwantes argued that the causes of the expulsion were more than simple racial or economic strife between classes; anti-Chinese political activists based their rhetoric on

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<sup>8</sup> Jules Alexander Karlin, "The Anti-Chinese Outbreak in Tacoma, 1885," *Pacific Historical Review*, 23 (1954): 106.

an ideology that Schwantes termed a philosophy of disinheritance. Schwantes argued that white laborers, many of them first-generation immigrants, believed in the American Dream, that they had a birthright to economic prosperity and dignity. When faced with an economic downturn in the middle of the 1880s that belief was shaken, and political opportunists targeted the Chinese as a scapegoat for these economic fears. Many historic newspaper accounts had attempted to characterize the violence as an inevitable conflict between classes or races, and historians had largely accepted that interpretation. Schwantes acknowledged racial and economic divides but argued that most violence was caused by politicians and activists purposefully trying to enflame social divisions and profit from them.<sup>9</sup>

In 2003, Kristofer Allfeldt built upon Schwantes' interpretation in his own article, while arguing that even Schwantes' view of Washington's racial politics was too simple.<sup>10</sup> Allfeldt argued that the fundamental social division in the Northwest was not between whites and Chinese, nor between labor and management. Instead, he argued that the majority of Anti-Chinese violence was supported by recent immigrants, mostly Irish, who were held in low esteem by their better off Western European and native-born white American neighbors. Allfeldt, while mostly agreeing with Schwantes, argued that Anti-Chinese rhetoric, primarily originating from agitators aligned with the Knights of Labor, was not expected to result directly in better labor conditions for poor white laborers, and thus should not be understood strictly in terms of a labor movement. Instead, he contended that agitators sought to form a political base of support among whites by casting all social problems as the fault of Chinese immigration. In his interpretation, the Chinese were targeted not because of their economic impact nor their unwillingness to integrate into local communities. Rather, the relatively small Chinese population and their lack of political representation made for an easy target for Knights of Labor agitators, who

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<sup>9</sup> Carlos A. Schwantes, "Protest in a Promised Land: Unemployment, Disinheritance, and the Origin of Labor Militancy in the Pacific Northwest, 1885-1886," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (1982): 373-90.

<sup>10</sup> Kristofer Allfeldt, "Race and Restriction: Anti-Asian Immigration Pressures in the Pacific North-west of America during the Progressive Era, 1885-1924," *History* 88, no. 1 (289) (2003):53-73.

could use their success as a demonstration of an ability to force social change. Allerfeldt argued that Washington Territory was not divided simply between white and Chinese, or between labor and management, as previous historians had presented it. Instead he showed equally important divisions between Native or well-to-do whites, Immigrant whites, and the Chinese. While this interpretation suggested a more complex interaction between racial communities in the Northwest, it continued to leave the Chinese viewpoint itself unexamined.

As historians such as Allerfeldt and Schwantes continued to challenge the descriptions of frontier white society written by previous historians, other historians finally began to focus on the viewpoints of Chinese immigrants. In *Coming Home in Gold Brocade: Chinese in Early Northwest America*, Bennett Bronson and Chuimei Ho provide first-hand accounts of Chinese living in Western towns and cities in the 1880s, giving the Chinese a voice to counter the long tendency of treating the Chinese in the West as a faceless mass.<sup>11</sup> Bronson and Ho also challenge the assumption that anti-Chinese violence in the Northwest was unique, instead placing Tacoma and Seattle as part of a continuing series of violent attacks and lynchings against Chinese and other minorities across the American Northwest that continued through the rest of the decade. While Bronson and Ho provide a valuable wealth of sources of Chinese immigrant life across the American West, they largely focused on individual immigrant experiences. So their work does not attempt to integrate Chinese accounts into reexamining previous scholarship on anti-Chinese violence.

Bronson and Ho draw on sources that should have been available to historians like Wilcox in 1929, and certainly should have been available to Karlin by the 1940s. Yet even modern writers like Schwantes and Allerfeldt, who directly challenge many of the assumptions of earlier historians and acknowledge the complicated nature of attitudes on race and class, still tend to leave out any accounts

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<sup>11</sup> Bronson, B., & Ho, Chuimei. *Coming Home in Gold Brocade: Chinese in Early Northwest America*. Seattle: Chinese in Northwest American Research Committee, 2015.

from the Chinese community or try to examine how Chinese immigrants responded to the violence. That lack in the historical narrative is what motivates my own topic for this paper. As much as possible, I eschew white sources, in favor of presenting the viewpoint of Chinese people who were often engaged members of their communities and actively tried to resist the force of mob violence.

### **Rock Springs**

On the night of September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1885, a bell rang in a meetinghouse in Rock Springs, Wyoming, not far from a large coal mine where most of the town's residents worked. This signal called to order a meeting of an anti-Chinese conspiracy formed from some of the white miners in Rock Springs, who resented their fellow Chinese workers for refusing to join a recent strike. The Chinese workers noticed the bell and the meeting, and rumors spread among them that white workers were making threats against the Chinese.<sup>12</sup>

These rumors were confirmed the next morning as more than ten white men ran into Coal-Pit Six, a Chinese-worked section of the mine, and declared that the Chinese were no longer allowed to work there. A fight broke out, a few whites were hurt, and three Chinese miners sustained more serious injuries before the white foreman could intercede. The foreman ordered a work stoppage, and the Chinese miners assumed the fight was over. While the Chinese miners stayed in the pit waiting for work to resume, the white miners in and around Coal-Pit Six assembled and marched along the railroad tracks back to Rock Springs, some carrying firearms, others wielding mining tools. As the white miners arrived in town, the meetinghouse bell rang again, and they joined more local whites inside the meetinghouse. Though the Chinese noticed the mob forming, they expected only threats. Some of the Chinese workers had lived at Rock Springs for as long as fifteen years, and they knew most of the white miners. Except for disagreements over unionizing, they felt they had few quarrels with the

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<sup>12</sup> United States Department of State, *The Executive Documents of the House of Representatives for the Second Session of the Forty-Ninth Congress. 1886-'87*, (Washington, DC 1887), 127-8.

whites. A white woman even helped teach Chinese laborers English, and most whites used the Chinese laundry and stores that were scattered throughout Rock Springs.

Around two in the afternoon, the white mob left the meetinghouse, split into two groups, and began to surround the Chinese section of town. After one group had cut off the easiest route of escape, both groups opened fire. They first struck Lor Sun Kit, and then shot him in the arm as he attempted to flee.<sup>13</sup> Shortly afterwards the mob shot the 56-year-old father of two Leo Dye Bah in the chest, killing him. As the mob moved through the Chinese quarter, they beat and robbed other Chinese, sometimes shooting those they could not catch to rob from their bodies, other times burning alive those too sick or wounded to flee from their cabins. While most of the Chinese in Rock Springs fled in panic up the hills to the east, the owner of the Ah Lee laundry attempted to stand his ground and fired back at the crowd outside of his laundry. After a brief standoff, the whites rushed through his door firing shots. Ah Lee fell to the floor dead, shot through the back of the head. His laundry was then burned.<sup>14</sup>

By the end of the attack twenty-eight Chinese miners and laborers were killed, fifteen were wounded, and more than 500 had fled on foot to nearby Evanstown. With the flight of the Chinese, the white mob robbed and then burned Chinese homes, businesses, and their small temple.<sup>15</sup> Only with the arrival of federal troops to maintain order could the Chinese miners return to Rock Springs to bury their dead and recover what belongings they could. A joint statement addressed to the Chinese Consul in New York by 559 of the Chinese residents at Rock Springs described the effects of the attack, “Some of the bodies were not found until they were dug out of the ruins of the buildings. Some had been burned beyond recognition. It was a sad and painful sight to see the son crying for the father, the uncle for the

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<sup>13</sup> To avoid confusion, I am using the contemporary transliterations of all Chinese names. Spelling is often inconsistent depending on the writer, in which case I try to use the individuals preferred spelling.

<sup>14</sup> United States Department of State, *Executive Documents 1886-'87*, 121.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

nephew, and friend for friend.” It went on to request, “the punishment of the murderers, the relief of the wounded, and compensation for those despoiled of their property.”<sup>16</sup>

In response to reports of the massacre at Rock Springs, the Chinese legation at Washington DC ordered Colonel F. A. Bee, an American who served as the Chinese consul in San Francisco, Huang Sih Chuen, the Chinese consul in New York, and Tsang “Sam” Hoy, an interpreter, to Rock Springs to investigate. Escorted by the US Army, Huang Sih Chuen collected testimony from the Chinese laborers and estimated their monetary losses, while Colonel Bee interviewed English-speaking witnesses and attempted to drive the local authorities to action. Bee secured nine sworn statements by white employees of the mine who witnessed the massacre, as well as the railroad company's guarantee of safety for Chinese who testified in the company's internal investigation.<sup>17</sup> One Chinese miner who testified was wounded from a blow to his head by a pick handle and was then shot through the arm after he had regained consciousness and attempted to flee. When asked if he could identify the man who had struck him,

the answer was prompt and unhesitating: “Oh yes; I have known him a long time.” “Can you give me his name?” was then asked, and the witness at once replied, “Isaiah Whitehouse.”<sup>18</sup>

White witnesses corroborated his story, stating that Isaiah Whitehouse was the leader of the gang of whites who had first started a fight in the Chinese coal pit. The Union Pacific bosses were convinced, and fired a number of white miners whom they suspected as part of the massacre. Chinese eyewitnesses' ability to recognize and name their attackers demonstrated Chinese familiarity and regular interaction with their white neighbors, unlike the divided communities that are often presented in historical accounts of the American West.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>17</sup> The Rock Springs coal mine was owned by the Union Pacific Railway.

<sup>18</sup> “The Wyoming Massacre,” *Alta-California*, October 10, 1885, 1.

In contrast to the railroad company investigation, which was undertaken in cooperation with the Chinese consuls, in early October an all-white grand jury investigating the massacre (mostly made up of residents of Rock Springs) reported that, “no one has been able to testify to a single criminal act committed by any known white person that day. Whatever crimes may have been committed, the perpetrators thereof have not been disclosed by the evidence before us.”<sup>19</sup> The grand jury declined to hear any testimony from Chinese witnesses. Colonel Bee, by then back home in California, was unsurprised at the announcement, but fumed to local reporters that he could have supplied more than a hundred witnesses.<sup>20</sup>

The Rock Springs Massacre had been much covered throughout the West, but it was the grand jury's refusal to indict even a single murderer that played the largest part in inspiring a wave of anti-Chinese violence up and down the West Coast from the Puget Sound in Washington Territory down to California. White mobs, often aligned with radical labor agitators, were assured that they would not face legal punishment for their actions, and were generally correct. The first major anti-Chinese riot took place in Tacoma about a month after the Rock Springs grand jury declined to prosecute any of the white rioters of Rock Springs.

### **Tacoma**

The earliest Chinese settler in Washington Territory was probably Chin Ching Hock, who arrived in 1868 and founded the Wa Chong Company, which focused on imports and exports from China. He later partnered with Chin Gee Hee, who widened the Wa Chong Company's focus to labor contracting. Wa Chong and other Chinese companies in the Puget Sound not only sold goods, but also formed contracts with laborers in China, paying their voyage to America and then finding them work

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<sup>19</sup> United States Department of State, *Executive Documents 1886-'87*, 124.

<sup>20</sup> “The Wyoming Massacre,” *Daily Alta California*, October 10, 1885, 1.

for American companies and households.<sup>21</sup> The contracted laborers would work to pay off their debt to the company, while the company bosses also had a degree of responsibility in looking after their workers.<sup>22</sup> Other Chinese immigrants with enough money to afford their own passage arrived on their own and founded stores, restaurants, butcher shops, and laundries.

Although Chinese laborers mostly tended to live together in Chinatowns, they did not live in exclusion from their white neighbors. Business owners especially interacted with their white patrons on a daily basis. Chinese businesses advertised in English in local newspapers<sup>23</sup> and laundry owners invited their white neighbors to celebrate the Chinese New Year and gifted them with traditional red envelopes of cash.<sup>24</sup> Before the 1880s Chinese immigrants could also expect a degree of justice in court: in 1872 a white jury convicted Henry Brown of the murder of Ah Wong, a Chinese laborer, and recommended a harsh sentence to the judge.<sup>25</sup> When a steamboat captain refused to allow Chinese passengers to sit at the same table as whites, the Chinese complained through the Chinese consulate to the shipping company and the captain was fired in response.<sup>26</sup> Just as in Rock Springs, the Chinese were not ignorant of the communities they lived in, and business leaders demonstrated success in negotiating for the rights of their countrymen.

By 1885 there were about eight thousand Chinese in Washington Territory, mostly contract laborers scattered throughout the towns and worksites of the western half of the territory<sup>27</sup>. The nation

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<sup>21</sup> “Guide to the Willard G. Jue Papers 1880-1983,” Archives West, last modified September 23, 2014, accessed February 5, 2017, <http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv71144/>.

<sup>22</sup> “The Chinese Interviewed,” *Seattle Daily Post-Intelligencer*, November 7, 1885, 1.

<sup>23</sup> “Seattle Cigar Manufactory,” *Seattle Daily Post-Intelligencer*, July 18, 1885, advertisement on page 1.

<sup>24</sup> “Chinese New Year,” *Walla Walla Statesman*, February 2, 1878, 3. and “The Chinese of La Conner,” *The Puget Sound Mail*, February 5, 1881, 3.

<sup>25</sup> “The Murder Trial,” *Puget Sound Dispatch*, February 15, 1872, 3.

<sup>26</sup> “Capt. Grant Removed from Alida for Refusing Service to Chinese,” *The Puget Sound Mail*, July 17, 1880, 2.

<sup>27</sup> “What Consul Bee says of the Seattle Trouble – The Troops,” *Daily Alta California*, February 12, 1886, 8.

had been in a recession since 1882, especially in the Northwest because of decreased railroad construction. These factors led to increased white resentment against the Chinese.<sup>28</sup> Unemployed workers, both white and Chinese, returned to the urban centers of Tacoma and Seattle. In this atmosphere of economic desperation and anger, the news of Rock Springs sparked strong feelings of racial resentment. One day after local newspapers carried headlines of the Rock Springs massacre, a band of white men and Indians fired into the tents of sleeping Chinese laborers at a hops farm in Squak Valley, killing three and wounding three others. Other less bloody attacks occurred across mines and work camps, which led to even more Chinese to flee to the cities<sup>29</sup>.

A few weeks after the Chinese consuls had finished their investigation in Rock Springs, Colonel Bee returned home to San Francisco. Hearing reports of the attack in Squak Valley and fearing more violence, Bee telegraphed Watson C. Squire, the Washington Territorial governor, who reassured him that mob violence was unlikely. Bee forwarded Squire's reassurances to his superior Cheng Tsao Ju, the Chinese Ambassador in Washington D.C.<sup>30</sup> Cheng, a former provincial governor in China, had been assigned to Washington D.C. since 1883, but had recently suffered partial paralysis, probably from a stroke.<sup>31</sup> Despite his weak physical condition, Cheng was still a talented diplomat, and unsatisfied with Squire's reassurances he found another way to try to compel the governor to act in case of violence.

Cheng wrote to Thomas Bayard, the U.S. Secretary of State, and pointed out several of the recent violent incidents. Cheng wrote that, “the Chinese Merchants in Washington Territory called [...] special attention to the fact that proclamations [...] were published in the local papers, demanding the departure of all Chinese persons from the territory before the 1<sup>st</sup> of November, 1885 and intimating that

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<sup>28</sup> Lorraine Barker Hildebrand, *Straw Hats, Sandals and Steel*, 35.

<sup>29</sup> United States Department of State, *Executive Documents of the House of Representatives for the First Session of the Forty-Eighth Congress, 1884-'85* (Washington D.C., 1885), 193-194.

<sup>30</sup> In pinyin, Zheng Zaoru.

<sup>31</sup> A.A. Hayes, “The Retiring Chinese Minister,” *Harper's Weekly*, April 17, 1886, 250.

force would be applied if this demand should fail to take effect.” He warned that, “an outbreak like that at Rock Springs may occur at any moment,” and requested Bayard to follow up with the territorial governor to guarantee the safety of Chinese residents before the November 1<sup>st</sup> deadline.<sup>32</sup>



Figure 1 Cheng Tsao Ju, illustration from Harper's Weekly, April 17, 1886, page 250.

Following Cheng's request, Bayard also telegraphed the Washington Territorial governor Watson C. Squire, who promised Bayard that he would be able to keep the peace and that in the case of a disturbance most white citizens could be depended upon to defend the rule of law. Bayard forwarded these assurances to Cheng at the Chinese embassy.<sup>33</sup> This on-the-record assurance by Bayard would be an important diplomatic tool for Cheng, as he had gotten a representative of the federal government to, at least implicitly, acknowledge the federal government's role in protecting Chinese subjects in America. Cheng's request also increased pressure on Governor Squire, who as a territorial governor served at the pleasure of the President and could be dismissed from office.

Whether Governor Squire was naive enough to believe his own assurances that he could keep

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<sup>32</sup> United States Department of State, *Executive Documents, 1884-'85*, 193-194.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 194-195.

the peace is unclear, but the white residents of Tacoma, including its mayor Jacob Weisbach, many of its civic leaders, and most of the police, had absolutely no intention of protecting their Chinese neighbors. Lewis Byrd, the Pierce County Sheriff, had deputized a large force of volunteers from the Knights of Labor, the same labor organization that had agitated for violence against the Chinese in Rock Springs.<sup>34</sup> Rather than gathering a posse to defend the Chinese in case of riot, Byrd and Weisbach had created a police force to aid in the Chinese expulsion.

While anti-Chinese conspirators prepared to force out any Chinese who stayed in Tacoma after the publicly declared November 1<sup>st</sup> deadline, some Chinese residents looked for allies. Lum May, a 51-year-old Tacoma merchant who had lived with his wife in Tacoma for around ten years, longer than Mayor Weisbach, sought protection for himself and his laborers. As a longtime resident of Tacoma, he was familiar with many of the most respected white citizens, and reached out to them for protection ahead of the deadline. He would later testify, “I asked General Sprague and other citizens for protection for myself and the Chinese people. The General said he would see and do what he could. All the Chinese [...] were frightened lest their houses should be blown up and destroyed. A rumour to that effect was in circulation. Many of them shut up their houses and tried to keep on the look out.”<sup>35</sup> Rather than fleeing, most Chinese seemed willing to take their chances and gambled that anti-Chinese agitators were only making threats that they would not follow through on.

Mow Lung was another merchant with a long history in Tacoma. He had come to Tacoma in 1875 and had lived there for ten years, managed his store, and built nine buildings nearby which he rented out to Chinese workers. In a later sworn statement, he testified that on the Third of November, two days after the deadline for the Chinese to leave Washington Territory, a white mob marched into

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<sup>34</sup> *Report of the Governor of Washington Territory, Made to the Secretary of the Interior for the Year 1886*, US Gov. Printing Office (1886), 18.

<sup>35</sup> “Affidavit of Lum May”, Washington State Historical Society, accessed February 5, 2017, <http://www.washingtonhistory.org/files/library/lumMayStatement.pdf>.

Tacoma's Chinese quarter, "I saw a mob of several hundred men on the street. They came to my store and kicked off the door. They took hold of the Chinese that were in the houses, some of whom were Chinese women, including my wife and pulled them out of the doors." The mob threatened the Chinese with pistols, and forced them towards the railway station. "The Mayor of Tacoma Mr. Weisbach was there at the time, with the mob. He came into my house and said I must go"<sup>36</sup>. As the residents of his buildings were forced out, Mow Lung successfully pled for a few extra days from the mob so that he could move out his goods.

Lum May also witnessed the violence of the mob. In his deposition he recalled, "They went to all the Chinese houses and establishments and notified the Chinese to leave. Where the doors were locked they broke forcibly into the houses smashing in doors and breaking in windows." Some in the mob were armed with pistols or clubs, and they dragged Chinese out of their homes, including Lum May's wife, who tried to refuse. "Some of the white persons dragged her out of the house. From the excitement, the fright and the losses we sustained through the riot she lost her reason, and has ever since been hopelessly insane. She threatens to kill people with a hatchet or any other weapon she can get a hold of."<sup>37</sup>

Like Mow Lung, Lum May also attempted to bargain with the mob. He spoke to Mayor Weisbach and told him, "that Mr. Sprague had said the Chinese had a right to stay and would be protected. He answered me: 'General Sprague has nothing to say. If he says anything we will hang him or kick him. You get out of here.' I cried. He said I was a baby because I cried over the loss of my property."<sup>38</sup> Although Lum May and Mow Lung had no way of resisting Weisbach's violent mob, they

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<sup>36</sup> Mow Lung Deposition, Watson C. Squire Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections, Accession no. 4004-001, Box 2/23.

<sup>37</sup> Affidavit of Lum May, Washington State Historical Society.

<sup>38</sup> Mow Lung Deposition, Watson C. Squire Papers.

were both fluent enough in English to negotiate for more time, and were familiar enough with white politics to identify both allies and enemies in the white community. Lum May's connections among the respected white citizenry could not protect him from the violence of the mob, but it may have at least helped to buy time for him and others to gather his belongings before he was forced out.

Except for the few Chinese merchants given a couple of extra days to pack their goods, hundreds of Chinese residents were marched out of Tacoma in a cold November rain while armed white men escorted them on horseback, forcing them on. Some lost blankets, trunks, or everything they owned.

Across the Tacoma area, Chinese leaders sent telegrams pleading for help from Governor Squire and to the Chinese consulate in America. In Puyallup, Ten Sin Yee Lee telegraphed Governor Squire, "Mob driving Chinamen out of Tacoma. Will you not protect us?" Tacoma merchant Goon Gau telegraphed as well, "Governor Squire: People driving Chinamen from Tacoma. Why sheriff no protect. Answer." Squire responded, "Telegraph received. I have telegraphed facts to the government at Washington." Unsatisfied, Goon Gau pressed the governor, "Governor Squire: I am notified that at three p.m. tomorrow a mob will remove me and destroy my goods. I want protection. Can I have it? Answer." Squire did not respond.<sup>39</sup>

Whether Squire was tacitly supporting the anti-Chinese mobs or was simply too weak to help, appeals to Governor Squire were ineffectual. Word of the expulsion from Tacoma reached Seattle the next day, and Chin Gee Hee with Wa Chong & Co. instead sought help from Colonel Bee in San Francisco, "Chinese residents of Tacoma forcibly driven out yesterday. From two to three hundred Chinese now in Seattle in imminent danger. Local authorities willing, but not strong enough to protect us. We ask you to secure protection for us."<sup>40</sup> With his reference to local authorities Chin Gee Hee

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<sup>39</sup> *Report of the Governor of Washington Territory, 1886.*

<sup>40</sup> Willard G. Yue Papers, University of Washington Library Special Collections, Acc. #5191-001, Box 1/13.

was probably referring to Seattle Mayor Henry Yesler, who Chin Gee Hee was personally acquainted with and considered an ally. But Yesler had no power to order military forces to defend his Chinese constituents. For that, they would still need Governor Squire.

As the San Francisco consulate was inundated with hourly appeals for protection from Seattle and Tacoma, they in turn telegraphed Cheng Tsao Ju in Washington D.C. for aid, “outrages are still going. Last night all Chinese driven from Puyallup, and matters hourly getting worse. No troops sent, the Chinese ordered to leave Seattle today. [...] The mayor of Seattle asked governor for troops on the 4<sup>th</sup>, but refused”.<sup>41</sup> The messages from Chin Gee Hee and others demonstrate an in-depth knowledge of the internal political debate in the territory, with accurate reports of the actions of local leaders reaching the Chinese consulate in Washington DC in less than a day.

Seeking to force Governor Squire's hand, Ambassador Cheng Tsao Ju again appealed to Secretary of State Bayard, “Several hundred Chinese driven from Tacoma, Washington Territory, yesterday, are now in woods without shelter or food. Merchants given until today to pack their goods and leave. No effort made by the governor or authorities to protect them. Prompt action must be taken, or the same outrage will be enacted all over the territory.” Cheng argued that this was not just a matter of local law enforcement but an obligation of the U.S. federal government, on account of treaties between the U.S. and China.<sup>42</sup>

As pressure on Governor Squire increased, he issued a proclamation on November 5<sup>th</sup> that warned all residents against riot or actions against Chinese residents, and pointed to the deployment of federal troops in Rock Springs, Wyoming following their own anti-Chinese violence as a warning.<sup>43</sup> But in Tacoma Sheriff Lewis Byrd ignored Squire's commands to protect the Chinese, while Mayor

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<sup>41</sup> United States Department of State, *Executive Documents, 1884-'85*, 196.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>43</sup> *Report of the Governor of Washington Territory, 1886*, 25.

Weisbach didn't even respond to Squire's telegrams. Despite his proclamations Squire was at least temporarily powerless.

On the morning of the 6<sup>th</sup> of November, Mow Lung was inside his business office when a fire started in a Chinese restaurant near his buildings. When he came outside, he saw a large white crowd watching the fire spread to his property. They acted only to prevent the fire from damaging the nearby railroad timbers. Mow Lung watched helplessly as all of his property and goods were lost to the fire.<sup>44</sup> Sheriff Byrd would later arrest four Chinese residents and accused them of the arson, a claim that even other whites found ridiculous.<sup>45</sup>

Across Tacoma, Chinese homes and businesses were abandoned or burned. As many as a dozen stores, ten laundries, two groceries, a drug store, two butcher shops, a tailor, as well as numerous family homes were abandoned. Almost ten percent of Tacoma's population had been Chinese, but after the attacks only a few of the Chinese in Tacoma, Puyallup, and Sumner remained. The rest were forced to buy tickets out of town, and those without enough money for a ticket had no option but to walk along the railroad tracks south to Portland.<sup>46</sup>

The sheriff of King County, John H. McGraw, wrote to the governor in exasperation, “Order troops here at once. Delay is criminal. Have cutter bring soldiers from Port Townsend to-day. Act promptly in strict accordance with this request”. Governor Squire's predecessor Elisha Ferry and the territorial Chief Justice Roger Greene joined McGraw in urging the immediate use of force before violence spread to Seattle.<sup>47</sup>

Under pressure from all sides, Governor Squire finally telegraphed L.C.Q. Lamar, Secretary of

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<sup>44</sup> Mow Lung Deposition, Watson C. Squire Papers.

<sup>45</sup> George Kinnear, “Anti-Chinese Riots at Seattle”, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, January 1, 1911, accessed July 5, 2017, [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Anti-Chinese\\_Riots\\_At\\_Seattle](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Anti-Chinese_Riots_At_Seattle).

<sup>46</sup> List of Chinese Damages in Tacoma, Watson C. Squire Papers.

<sup>47</sup> *Report of the Governor of Washington Territory, 1886, 26-27.*

the Interior, asking for federal assistance, “Success now emboldens [the anti-Chinese] at Seattle, and within a few hours the situation has entirely changed from its peaceful phase. A repetition of the Tacoma affair is threatened. Furthermore, the plans of agitation apparently now extend to Olympia and Portland, and it would seem as if this movement is not promptly checked it may extend itself to all the towns on this northwest coast.” Squire doubted that the territorial militia could be depended on, as they were likely to side with the mob. He concluded, “I fear it will be extremely difficult to convict persons accused of assaults upon the Chinese or of complicity therein. Hence, if Chinese are to be protected the Federal Government must interfere”.<sup>48</sup>

In response, President Grover Cleveland issued a declaration to, “command and warn all insurgents and all persons who have assembled at any point within the said Territory of Washington for the unlawful purpose aforesaid to desist therefrom and to disperse and retire peaceably back to their respective abodes.” Ten companies of infantry from Fort Vancouver were sent north on the railroad to enforce order in Seattle and Tacoma. These soldiers then arrested several of the leading anti-Chinese conspirators in Tacoma<sup>49</sup>.

Although hundreds of Chinese had been expelled from the Tacoma area, Chinese efforts to bring in the federal government had finally succeeded, preventing the mob violence from spreading and growing in violence. It is largely impossible to determine just how much of this intervention can be credited to Chinese pressure on Governor Squire through direct appeals and from diplomatic pressure from the Secretary of State. However, Chinese civic leaders clearly display a thorough understanding of local politics, appealing to sympathetic white politicians while trying to use Squire's role as a federal appointee to pressure him into action.

### **Seattle**

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 29.

In Seattle this federal intercession provided only temporary relief. There had already been mass demonstrations against the Chinese in October, and Seattle would have likely followed Tacoma's lead if not for the arrival of troops. As Governor Squire had already pointed out, it was unlikely that any jury would convict the Tacoma conspirators in the climate of mass lawlessness and violence. The federal troops could only remain for so long, and anti-Chinese agitators could wait them out. Some Chinese residents who could afford to were already fleeing the city north to British Columbia, or south to Portland or San Francisco.

Even as troops remained stationed in Seattle, the leading Chinese residents of Seattle were summoned to a meeting with a committee of civic leaders, including Seattle Mayor Henry Yesler, former mayor John Leary, and three representatives from the Knights of Labor. Lue King, head of Tong Ye Chong & Co., was one of those summoned. “The committee told us that nine-tenths of the people wanted the Chinese to go, and that the authorities felt that they were unable to protect the Chinese, and that the Chinese had better go.” Chin Gee Hee was also at the meeting. The white leaders advised him to send away his contract laborers, many of whom were now unemployed.<sup>50</sup>

Lue King had lived in Seattle for 13 years, and he told the committee that he felt he had always gotten along with its people. Interviewed by the *Seattle Times*, he said, “I told them I had worked all my life, saved my money, and invested it all in Seattle. [...] I never saw such a world as this. If the people were going to drive us out, they should have said so before we invested our money here. A great many white men owe us money and won't pay.” Chin Gee Hee too pointed to the impact his firm had made on Seattle, “Our firm have bought property, built brick buildings and invested lots of money.” Rather than viewing the riots as a conflict between races, Chin felt that it was not his long-term American neighbors who were against the Chinese in Seattle, but recent foreign immigrants, “I do not think the Americans are as bad as those from other countries. I think that after a while the

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<sup>50</sup> “The Chinese Interviewed,” *Seattle Daily Post-Intelligencer*, November 7, 1885, 1.

foreigners will drive all the Americans off the Pacific Coast.” Even as anti-Chinese newspapers made incendiary claims about a flood of Chinese immigration on the West Coast, Chin Gee Hee felt that the Chinese were themselves under attack by a flood of foreign immigrants who did not care about the local community that he was a part of. This echoes the experiences of Lum May in Tacoma, who felt under attack by recent immigrants, but sought protection from his long-term American neighbors. Whether or not his American neighbors were secretly on his side or not, the committee could only promise that the Chinese businesses would be protected until they could sell their property and settle their debts.<sup>51</sup>

The Chinese labor bosses began sending many of their employees out of town on ships. The laborers, now largely unemployed and with few permanent attachments to Seattle, were often eager to go. But other Chinese with investments in Seattle had no intention of losing their livelihoods. Even as men like Chin Gee Hee publicly declared defeat and claimed that they intended to sell off their stores, they remained in contact with the Chinese consulate in San Francisco. The consuls there – already having experience in trying to estimate the losses at Rock Springs – urged them to estimate the worth of their belongings ahead of another showdown.<sup>52</sup>

In response to the destruction at Rock Springs, and probably in preparation for further losses in the Northwest, the Chinese ambassador Cheng Tsao Ju reminded Secretary of State Bayard of the treaty implications of not repaying Chinese subjects for their losses,

It has been the constant and uniform practice of the [American] diplomatic and consular representatives [...] to intervene with the Chinese imperial and local authorities in all cases [...] of injuries or losses suffered by American citizens from mob violence, and have asked these authorities not only to punish the offenders but to indemnify the citizens for all their losses.

Cheng concluded that it cannot “be believed that the United States would [...] require of China

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> *Report of the Governor of Washington Territory*, 55.

that which under similar circumstances it would not concede to China in reciprocity.”<sup>53</sup> Cheng's argument subtly highlighted a future risk for Americans in China: if Chinese immigrants were not protected by treaties in the US, China may in turn feel little obligation to protect Americans in China.

Troops remained in Seattle until the 17<sup>th</sup> of November, and for another month the city waited for the results of the conspiracy trial against the Anti-Chinese ringleaders in Tacoma. Unsurprisingly, they were found innocent in January of 1887, and anti-Chinese agitation began to increase again.<sup>54</sup> More Chinese fled and by February only a few hundred Chinese were left in Seattle. Some were unemployed laborers who could not afford passage out of the city. Others were business owners like Chin Gee Hee who were determined not to be expelled from their homes.

On February 7th, early on Sunday morning, an anti-Chinese mob, aided by the Seattle Police, launched their assault on the remaining Chinese in Seattle. The mob headed to Chinatown, and began forcing any Chinese they found to load their belongings onto wagons. They planned to force the Seattle Chinese onboard the steamer Queen of the Pacific, which was due to leave for San Francisco later that day.

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<sup>53</sup> United States Department of State, *The Executive Documents of the House of Representatives for the Second Session of the forty-ninth Congress, 1886-'87* (Washington D.C., 1887), 105-107.

<sup>54</sup> George Kinnear, “Anti-Chinese Riots at Seattle”, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, January 1, 1911, accessed July 5, 2017, [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Anti-Chinese\\_Riots\\_At\\_Seattle](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Anti-Chinese_Riots_At_Seattle).



Figure 2 Chin Gee Hee in his Seattle office, black and white photographic print, The Wing Luke Museum, Seattle, Washington.

The mob broke into houses, including Chin Gee Hee's. The mob dragged his pregnant wife down the second-story stairs and into the street, and the couple was forced down to the docks.<sup>55</sup> Eventually there were around three hundred to three hundred and fifty Chinese assembled on the docks, but the Captain of the *Queen* refused to take on unpaid passengers.

Other Chinese residents resisted. Woo Gen, a cigar merchant, locked his door, “I get my gun ready and my axe ready and if anyone come, why, I try to kill him. So these mob drive all the other Chinese out from other Chinese houses, but they didn't come near me”.<sup>56</sup>

As the mob attacked Chinese residents, the Chinese consulate in San Francisco again messaged Governor Squire, “we are in receipt of information that Chinese at Seattle have been notified by the so-called 'Knights of Labor' to leave that place or take the consequences. Will you please give your immediate attention to this matter?” This time Squire reacted swiftly. Already in Seattle, he alerted the

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<sup>55</sup> “VIOLENCE□□□□□□”, Chinese in Northwest America Research Committee, Accessed February 6, 2017, <http://www.cinarc.org/Violence.html>.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

local Home Guard and sent for a ship to bring more troops to Seattle.<sup>57</sup>

Meanwhile, an unknown Chinese friend of Chief Justice Roger Greens alerted him to the ongoing expulsion, and he filed a writ of *habeas corpus* for the Chinese held at the docks, summoning them to his courtroom. Greene, a former Lieutenant of a black regiment in the Civil War who had been injured in the battle of Vicksburg had no tolerance for mob rule. One by one, he asked each Chinese resident whether they wished to stay or leave on the steamer. Two hundred and twelve opted to leave on the steamer, either because they genuinely wished to leave or purely out of fear of what would happen if they stayed. The rest, perhaps one hundred to one hundred and fifty, were escorted by the Home Guard to the docks to get their belongings and then headed back to their homes.

Not every Chinese person in Seattle was at the courthouse. Ah How, Governor Squire's servant, was busy using his position to help out other Chinese. He appealed to Ida Remington Squire, Governor Squire's wife, to help one of his friends, “Ching Ing wants to get his money [from the bank] but is afraid to go there. Mrs. [Yesler, wife of Mayor Yesler] says she will go with him, and How begs me to go too – so we march out, Mrs. Y first, Ching next, and I bring up the rear. Nobody pays any attention to us – the crowd are all down on the wharf. The poor fellow gets his money, and will go I suppose.”<sup>58</sup>

Tensions come to a head between the mob and the Seattle militia when the militia began to escort the remaining Chinese residents back to their homes. The mob wished to force the remaining Chinese into the woods out of town, and on a signal several rioters attempted to wrest away the guns of the militia. Shots were fired and four rioters were wounded or dead.<sup>59</sup>

The Chinese, including Chin Gee Hee and his family returned to their homes and locked their

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<sup>57</sup> *Report of the Governor of Washington Territory*, 32.

<sup>58</sup> “Ida Remington Squire Account of the Anti-Chinese Riots in Seattle, February 7-14, 1886”, Watson C. Squire Papers, University of Washington Special Collections, Acc. No. 4004-002, box 1/27.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

doors. However, the mob had now largely forgotten them, its anger was focused instead on the militia and the civil authorities who had fired at the rioters. Whether to protect the Chinese, or in fear that the city was about to enter a state of all-out warfare, Governor Squire telegraphed Washington D.C. once again for military aid. Shortly afterwards President Grover Cleveland declared a state of martial law in Seattle, with federal troops again stationed in the city to maintain order, this time for more than three months.<sup>60</sup>

By the time federal soldiers left, the mass white anger against the Chinese had largely passed, helped in part by a swiftly recovering job market as the railroads began new construction. Unemployed white workers began to drift out of the towns and back to work sites across the Territory. The Chinese in Tacoma were almost all gone. Lum May and Mow Lung had both fled north to Vancouver, Canada. But there were still a few hundred Chinese residents left in Seattle, and others in Portland and Olympia where the mob violence had not reached. Chin Gee Hee and Wa Chong & Co.'s new brick building was standing. Even for those who had been expelled, their appeals for extra time had given them the chance to inventory their losses, so they had proof of their losses. Now it was the Chinese consulate's task to seek indemnities for the damages Chinese subjects had suffered.

Bayard and the U.S. Department of State argued to Cheng Tsao Ju that the Federal government had no responsibility for the outrages committed against Chinese subjects. He pointed to the foreign nature of many of the anti-Chinese mobs, mostly made up of recent immigrants who were not yet American citizens, and to the nature of a territory being not truly part of the United States, "Whatever occurred was between private individuals wholly devoid of official character. [...] The assailants, equally with the assailed, were strangers in our land." While Bayard granted the injustice of the acts, he pointed to local courts as the proper avenue for redress. Cheng in turn pointed to the obvious impossibility of getting any kind of justice through territorial courts, and the fact that since the

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<sup>60</sup> *Report of the Governor of Washington Territory, 29-31.*

territorial officials were directly appointed by the federal government, the federal government had responsibility for those regions, a fact that Bayard had previously effectively admitted.

At this point China's options seemed limited. Chinese immigrants in Rock Springs, Tacoma, and Seattle had worked with the Chinese consulate to document their losses and pressure local and national leaders to respond. With the worst of the violence now past, China seemed to have no way to force the United States into a settlement that they did not wish to pay. However, Chinese immigrants were soon able to find a new way to pressure US officials into action, by publicizing their accounts in China. Soon Americans in China would themselves face mob violence.<sup>61</sup>

### **Chongqing**

Throughout the first half of 1886, American diplomats in China had worried over the impact of reports of anti-Chinese violence in the US that were reaching China. When rumors of anti-Western riots were feared in Canton in March, American diplomat Charles Denby wrote to Washington DC that Chinese there were intimating hints of reprisals unless the US agreed to pay indemnities to the Chinese, “the excitement is kept up by telegrams from the Chinese in America [describing anti-Chinese violence in America], which are posted throughout the city.”<sup>62</sup> The American delegate to China complained to Secretary Bayard that, “It is argued, with some show of truth, that Americans will be hampered in China [...] by the outrages committed in the Western States and territories. Accounts of these outrages are all published in the Chinese Papers.”<sup>63</sup>

Although no violence arose in Canton, on July 1<sup>st</sup> a Chinese mob attacked the western residents of Chongqing. A new Catholic Cathedral was burned down, missionaries were attacked and fled

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<sup>61</sup> United States Department of State, *The Executive Documents of the House of Representatives for the Second Session of the forty-ninth Congress, 1886-'87* (Washington D.C., 1887), 160.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-75.

without so much as a change of clothes, and the English consul also had to flee for his life.<sup>64</sup> As the Western buildings burned, Chongqing authorities did nothing, intervening only on the second day when the mob began to threaten local officials. The American consulate felt that this was, at least to some degree, a reprisal for violence against the Chinese in America. One of the American missionaries wrote home, “The news of Chinese persecutions in America has much to do with the affair. It is said the Catholics blame us bitterly as the cause of the outbreak.” Though it's likely that the Chinese rioters simply didn't differentiate between Americans and other Westerners in their attack, the riot created an international complication for American diplomats, who now faced not only anger from China, but resentment from other Western diplomats who were put into danger. Charles Denby wrote to the State Department that one of the difficulties “about questions arising out of these occurrences is that other foreigners claim that they arise from our Anti-Chinese trouble at home.”<sup>65</sup>

Whether the riots were a direct political response to anti-Chinese violence in the United States or not, when US diplomats inquired about indemnifications for their missionaries, the Zongli Yamen (the foreign affairs department of the Qing Imperial government) were eager to point out the similarities between what had just happened and events in the US, “While the local officials were desirous of according protection (to the missionary property) they found that they were powerless to do so. This state of affairs happens rather too often in western countries, and your excellency's observation in regard to a 'willful failure on the part of local authorities'[...] seems to the prince and ministers as a needlessly severe criticism.”<sup>66</sup> Chinese diplomats had had few options when dealing with violence in America, but they were now making it plain that they had other ways to drive the U.S.

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<sup>64</sup> United States Department of State, *The Executive Documents of the House of Representatives for the First Session of the Fiftieth Congress, 1887-'88* (Washington D.C., 1888), 160.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 159-160.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 164-165.

to an agreement.

Secretary Bayard wrote to the American consulate in China, “I am not surprised at the reference in the yamen's note [...] to the outrages on Chinese in certain of the northwestern Territories of the United States, as in some sense an answer to the complaints of this government on account of the riot.” Bayard worried over the possibly escalating consequences to an American presence in China, “If a policy of supposed retaliation be once commenced, it is not difficult to foresee in its lamentable progress its necessary deplorable effect upon the current friendly relations of the two governments”.<sup>67</sup>

Acknowledging these fears of an escalation with China, Charles Denby attempted to strike a conciliatory tone with the Zongli Yamen, “I believe that this condition of things is temporary, and I have the highest confidence that the wisdom and love of justice which so eminently belong to your imperial highness and your excellencies will find a remedy for such lamentable occurrences in China, as I believe my government will in the United States.”<sup>68</sup>

Chang Chih Tung, the Viceroy of Canton, recognized an opportunity to strike an unofficial deal, and agreed to pay the American missionaries an indemnity for their losses, although delaying the actual payment. He wrote to Denby, “China has exerted to her utmost in administering the small cases of America; so America ought to immediately and satisfactorily settle the serious cases on China. Your honorable consul ought to personally telegraph and petition [...] your country's honorable Secretary of State (within this day) to consider satisfactorily and pay the indemnities to the Chinese minister.”<sup>69</sup>

Chang Chih Tung's admonishment seems to have struck home. President Cleveland urged the U.S. Congress to agree to two indemnity payments, although the United States admitted no official liability. The first payment, for the Rock Springs Massacre, was based on the estimates established by

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 178.

the Chinese consuls on their trip there in 1885, and totaled roughly \$147,000. The second, for more than \$276,000, was for other attacks across the West in 1885 and 1886, and were based on the estimates made of losses by many of the local leading Chinese merchants including Chin Gee Hee.<sup>70</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Although the Chinese in America were politically unincorporated, they were not powerless. Nor were they disconnected from the communities they lived in. Throughout 1885 and 1886 Chinese in Rock Springs, Wyoming and throughout the Pacific Northwest reached out to prominent white members of their communities for aid, with their voices often reaching to the highest levels of the US government. Unlike Americans in China, the Chinese had no warships off the American west coast ready to enforce their rights. Yet when local legal systems failed Chinese immigrants, Chinese leaders still managed to pressure American interests enough to gain some small measure of justice for their subjects who had been affected.

In contemporary scholarship, Chinese immigrants to America are still often depicted as a curiosity in the history of the white American West; an external, alien group that played only a supporting role in the settlement of the west, before eventually falling prey to the complex race and class struggles in white society. Yet as we reexamine these events from Chinese viewpoints, we see them as members of a complex and racially mixed community. While they were not treated as equal members, they were still active and engaged members of their frontier communities. Chinese local leaders and diplomats actively campaigned for aid, identified their white allies and enemies, and were able to pressure the Washington governor by appealing directly to the federal government. After their immediate safety was secured Chinese immigrants publicized their plight internationally until the US government was forced into agreeing to pay indemnities for their losses. Furthermore, by pressuring the US into acknowledging responsibility for Chinese losses, it is likely they discouraged further

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<sup>70</sup> Hildebrand, *Straw Hats, Sandals and Steel*, 77.

government passivity in the face of violence. Only by understanding the active role that Chinese immigrants played in resisting mob violence can we fully understand the history of the American West.

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