

P.S. Dorney, "Lynching the Chinese" (October 28, 1871)

In this account, journalist P. S. Dorney described the strong anti-Chinese sentiment in Los Angeles, which culminated in a mob lynching of members of the city's Chinese population. Since the first wave of Chinese immigration in the 1840s, the Chinese had been subjected to discrimination and violence by both the government and the citizens of America.

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. The whole city seemed moved by one grim and tacit purpose--it streamed down from the hills and swarmed from the suburbs, while "Sonora" poured forth a horde of swarthy avengers. 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!"

A man, then and now of standing and influence, dashed into a neighboring store and presently emerged, shaking aloft the first rope--a smooth, kinky, brand-new coil.

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. While the rope was being fastened to the neck of the corpse, two burly human beasts held it erect, while an Irish shoemaker known as "Crazy Johnson" stood guard, revolver in hand.

By this time, Chinatown, wholly surrounded, was in a state of siege. Mounted men came galloping from the country--the vaquero was in his glory, and the cry was "Carajo la Chino!" ["Damned Chinese!"]

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. Not far from eleven o'clock the Main Street side of Chinatown fell into the hands of the besiegers, and, led by Jesus Martinez, the assailants scaled the low adobe walls and mounted to the asphaltum roof. This achievement was hailed with deafening cheers by the crowd below.

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 hoarse roars 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 neck 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 doomed and bleeding miserables 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 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.