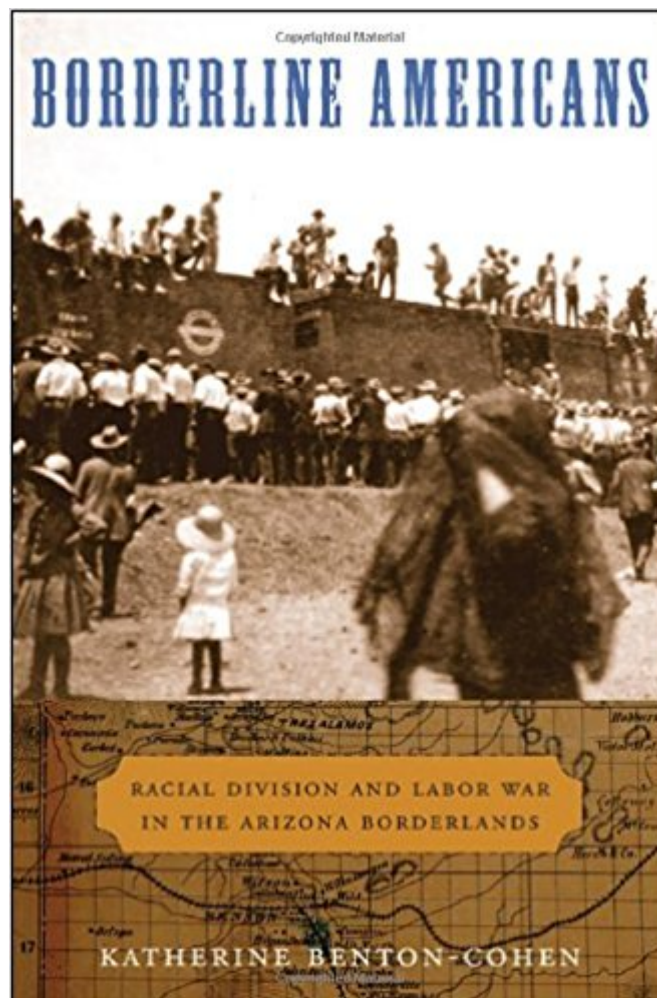




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Borderline Americans: Racial Division And Labor War In The Arizona Borderlands



Synopsis

“Are you an American, or are you not?” This was the question Harry Wheeler, sheriff of Cochise County, Arizona, used to choose his targets in one of the most remarkable vigilante actions ever carried out on U.S. soil. And this is the question at the heart of Katherine Benton-Cohen’s provocative history, which ties that seemingly remote corner of the country to one of America’s central concerns: the historical creation of racial boundaries. It was in Cochise County that the Earps and Clantons fought, Geronimo surrendered, and Wheeler led the infamous Bisbee Deportation, and it is where private militias patrol for undocumented migrants today. These dramatic events animate the rich story of the Arizona borderlands, where people of nearly every nationality “drawn by free land or by jobs in the copper mines” grappled with questions of race and national identity. Benton-Cohen explores the daily lives and shifting racial boundaries between groups as disparate as Apache resistance fighters, Chinese merchants, Mexican-American homesteaders, Midwestern dry farmers, Mormon polygamists, Serbian miners, New York mine managers, and Anglo women reformers. Racial categories once blurry grew sharper as industrial mining dominated the region. Ideas about home, family, work and wages, manhood and womanhood all shaped how people thought about race. Mexicans were legally white, but were they suitable marriage partners for “Americans”? Why were Italian miners described as living “as no white man can”? By showing the multiple possibilities for racial meanings in America, Benton-Cohen’s insightful and informative work challenges our assumptions about race and national identity.

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Customer Reviews

In 2005, a rancher and newspaper editor named Chris Simcox set out to maintain the border between the southwestern states and Mexico. He and his Minutemen Civil Defense Corps, dedicated to reporting undocumented migrants crossing into the U.S., were merely the latest in a lineage of self-appointed patriots patrolling the border. Nearly 100 years earlier, Harry Wheeler, an Arizona sheriff, stormed through Cochise County asking illegal residents, Are you an American, or are you not? before rounding them up in the Bisbee Deportation. At the turn of the last century, Cochise County represented the New America that emerged from the nation's incorporation of northwestern Mexico, the immigration of Europeans to work as miners and the passage of constitutional amendments loosening the racial strictures around citizenship. Benton-Cohen uses the backdrop of the Wild West, with its bustling commerce and growing population, to wage a discussion on racial division and the power of white privilege—even where the black-white dichotomy didn't necessarily exist—in this richly detailed anthropological look into the creation of racial boundaries and their application in present-day immigration reform debates. (May) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Starred Review. In a riveting display of first-rate scholarship, Benton-Cohen (history, Georgetown Univ.) shows how entangled ideas of race and nation shifted as conditions changed in the place that became Arizona's 6000-square-mile Cochise County. She traces tumultuous interactions among Indians, Mexicans, Europeans, a smattering of Chinese, and a few blacks who grappled to civilize the land, one another, and themselves in the territory acquired from Mexico in the 1853 Gadsden Purchase. To solidify their grasp, Benton-Cohen explains, the increasingly dominant groups used an ideology of a self-constructed Americanness that combined antilabor, industrial capitalism with white supremacy to define the place and its peoples. Her complex story of community creation and cleaving details the hardening of race as a community divider and determiner of the status and norms of class, family, and gender. She unmasks many fictions in the invented political economy touted in the imagined identity of "white Americans." Telling more than local or regional stories, this is essential for all those deeply concerned with U.S. history, race relations, and society. —Thomas J. Davis, Arizona State Univ., Tempe Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

As a historian, the book was well written, extensively researched, and easy to digest. Author does a great job of showing how race was dealt with in one Arizona county, not a subject easily discussed.

Only downside was a seeming lack of information regarding Blacks and Native Americans. However a must for historians examining borderlands behavior past and present.

I loved this book as it is about the history of Cochise County, Arizona from the late seventeen hundreds. Personally I do not know that most Arizonans have no idea what was the reason of the OK Corral Gun Fight(s), the Gadsden and the Guadalupe Hidalgo Treaties, Tres Alamos and how they played a big part in the development. Arizona's Indian wars with the Chiricahua Apaches and how Geronimo was caught. The Bisbee Deportation, how Phelps Dodge play an important part in a decision in the nation's capitol before Arizona was a state. How Tombstone and Tres Alamos was caught up in the was in a race and conflict during the Bisbee racial hiring for it's Copper Mines and how the two towns invoked race and nation simultaneously started Anti Chinese campaigns in 1866. How the Federal Soldiers (Gringos) as the Mexican could not pronounce Green Coats. Cochise County was very involved in not allowing illegal Mexicans starting as far back in the eighteen hundreds and remain very much the same today. How Arizona was involve in the US - Mexican war in 1848, the Indian Wars ended when the resistance leader surrendered along with the Medicine man at Cochise County's Skeleton Canyon 1886 In 1917 the US Army was still chasing Geronimo. in 1861 the Civil War was fighting for freedom of slavery and the US Army Posts throughout Arizona began moving to the east to choose a side to fight on. I highly recommend this book for all Arizonan's to read or if you are a history buff gives a better idea of why Arizona is the way it is today.

My husband saw this book and thought about my current job. This is very educational and I would recommend to others.

author made us buy it because he taught the class. pretty good book tho. ha ha ha.

Although the Bisbee Deportation has been written about in other places, no one has gotten as close to the complex heart of the story as Benton-Cohen. A native of the region, she combines the skill of a trained historian with the interest of someone who knows the area and its multi-racial inhabitants. Americans who don't live at our borders like to think of them as lines with distinct cultures on either side, but Benton-Cohen demonstrates that the Borderlands are anything but clear, and she does so in an intelligent and accessible way.

Benton-Cohen tells nuanced and very readable history of race relations on the Arizona borderlands. Outlaws, homesteading families, American Indians, African-Americans, and Mexican, European, and Chinese immigrants negotiate complex relationships of gender, race, social class and power as they struggle to survive and to define what it meant to be an American. A must-read for anyone interested in Arizona or borderlands history, this book also complicates our understanding of contemporary race relations and immigration policy.

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