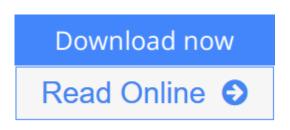


Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush

By Susan Lee Johnson Ph.D.



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Winner of the 2001 Bancroft Prize.

Historical insight is the alchemy that transforms the familiar story of the Gold Rush into something sparkling and new. The world of the Gold Rush that comes down to us through fiction and film?of unshaven men named Stumpy and Kentuck raising hell and panning for gold?is one of half-truths. In this brilliant work of social history, Susan Johnson enters the well-worked diggings of Gold Rush history and strikes a rich lode. She finds a dynamic social world in which the conventions of identity?ethnic, national, and sexual?were reshaped in surprising ways. She gives us the all-male households of the diggings, the mines where the men worked, and the fandango houses where they played. With a keen eye for character and story, Johnson restores the particular social world that issued in the Gold Rush myths we still cherish. Maps, illustrations.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The California Gold Rush is commonly identified with the peculiarly American movement of Manifest Destiny, but as Johnson reveals in this informative study of the period, the Gold Rush was in fact one of the most cosmopolitan and multicultural events of the 19th century. Mexicans, French, Chinese, African-Americans, Chileans and Miwok Indians all panned for gold alongside their WASP counterparts in the foothills of the Sierra Nevadas. The collision of these cultures sometimes led to humorous misunderstandings (as when Chinese miners mirthfully watched a white colleague struggle to use chopsticks), but just as frequently it produced ugly crimes, like when Mexican prospector Joaquin Murrieta was assaulted and evicted from his mining claim by jealous whites. Complicating relations in the mines was the almost complete absence of women; Johnson shows how men of all races found themselves reassessing gender roles in ways that had everything to do with ethnicity and cultural hegemony. For example, Anglo miners tended to feminize Chinese and French men, who made their fortunes in laundry and cooking as often as in mining gold. Johnson skillfully investigates the ramifications of these social pressures, though at times she surrenders to the ivory tower habit of interpreting the interpretations, analyzing the discourse about events instead of the events themselves. Hers is an intensely academic brand of social history: readers will find phrases like "homosocial," "gendered meanings" and "constructions of race" liberally sprinkled throughout the text. Underneath the jargon, however, is a valuable study of the complex, often troubled societies that contributed to one of America's great national mythologies. 15 photos, 1 map. (Jan.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From **Booklist**

The California gold rush and the social and cultural forces it unleashed have become part of our historical and literary tradition. Johnson, professor of history at the University of Colorado, provides an excellent survey of the mini-universe that quickly developed as a result of the massive influx of wealth seekers into the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, around the town of Stockton. While her story lacks the romanticism of a Twain or a Harte, it offers a hardheaded look at the ethnic and class diversity that frequently led to violent conflict. Yet this is not a one-sided account of the strong devouring the weak. Johnson shows that conflict frequently coexisted with tolerance and harmony, and the eventual outcome was a degree of peace and stability in a new and vibrant society. This is a well-written account that effectively mixes personal stories with broader historical trends. *Jay Freeman*

From Kirkus Reviews

A dutiful, ponderous reconstruction of daily life in the California gold fields. Johnson (History/Univ. of Colorado) argues that the commonly held view of the gold rush leaves out many of its principal actors; derived in large part from the chummy, mud-spattered writings of Bret Harte, that view centers on Anglo-American miners while elbowing thousands of Eastern-European, South-American, African-American, Mexican, and Chinese workers into the backgroundto say nothing of the Native Americans on whose territory the gold rush took place. Johnson looks beyond Hartes tales of camaraderie to depict the California gold camps as hotbeds of ethnic and cultural strife, battlegrounds on which Anglo- Americans not only sought their personal fortunes but asserted political dominion over the region, newly conquered from Mexico, a task that made them anxious about issues of gender, of race and culture, and of class. Their attempts to impose this control, Johnson suggests, were often misguided. A monthly \$20 tax on foreign (that is, non-Anglo) miners, for instance, drove away much-needed cooks, haulers, and common laborers, and it was soon done away with. Johnson turns up useful correctivesfor one, that most Chinese workers came to

California freely, rather than as indentured laborersand gives needed attention to the Miwok and other Indian peoples who often fell afoul of the gold seekers, sometimes because of simple cultural misunderstandings. The more interesting threads of her argument, however, are buried in a surfeit of incidental detail, and her narrative too often becomes a mere recitation of undigested facts, betraying its origins as a doctoral dissertation. Published a shade too late to join the flood of books commemorating the 150th anniversary of the gold rush, Johnsons study makes a useful yet decidedly secondary reference for scholars and students of the period. -- *Copyright* ©2000, *Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved*.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

James Rose:

Have you spare time for any day? What do you do when you have considerably more or little spare time? Yeah, you can choose the suitable activity intended for spend your time. Any person spent all their spare time to take a go walking, shopping, or went to the particular Mall. How about open or read a book titled Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush? Maybe it is being best activity for you. You understand beside you can spend your time with the favorite's book, you can better than before. Do you agree with the opinion or you have different opinion?

Isaias McGee:

Playing with family in a very park, coming to see the sea world or hanging out with pals is thing that usually you might have done when you have spare time, and then why you don't try thing that really opposite from that. 1 activity that make you not sense tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you already been ride on and with addition associated with. Even you love Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush, you can enjoy both. It is great combination right, you still want to miss it? What kind of hangout type is it? Oh seriously its mind hangout guys. What? Still don't buy it, oh come on its named reading friends.

Cathrine Hart:

The book untitled Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush contain a lot of information on that. The writer explains your ex idea with easy means. The language is very simple to implement all the people, so do certainly not worry, you can easy to read it. The book was compiled by famous author. The author brings you in the new time of literary works. It is possible to read this book because you can continue reading your smart phone, or product, so you can read the book inside anywhere and anytime. In a situation you wish to purchase the e-book, you can wide open their official web-site in addition to order it. Have a nice go through.

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