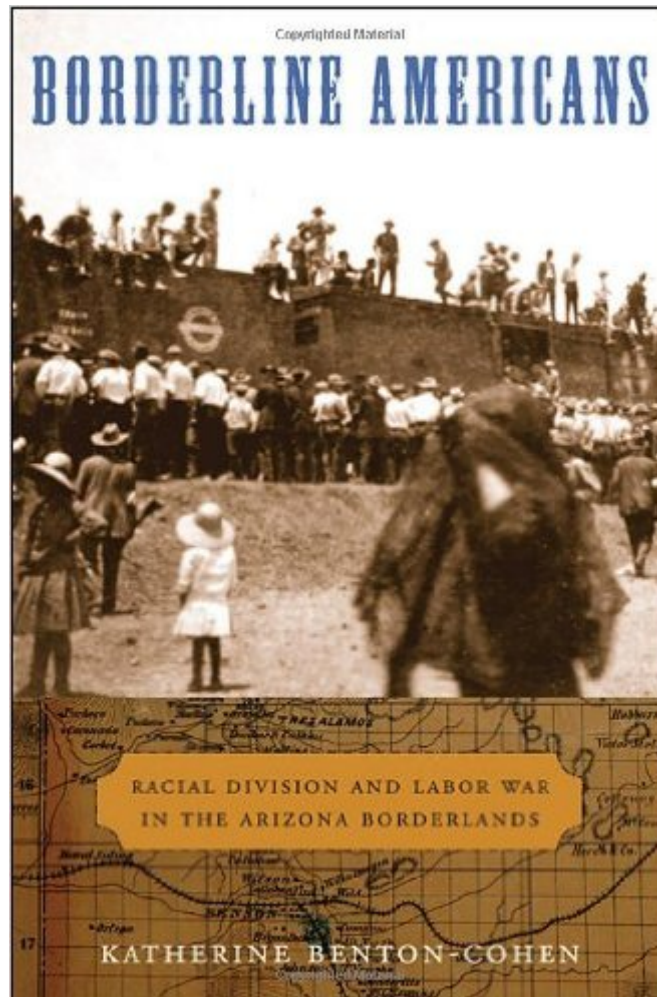


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Borderline Americans: Racial Division And Labor War In The Arizona Borderlands



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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

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.

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.

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.

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