



★ **Pushed: Miners, a Merchant, and (Maybe) a Massacre**

Ana Maria Spagna

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Ana Maria Spagna's fascinating true crime book *Pushed* investigates the possible mass murder of a group of Chinese immigrants by a mob of Indigenous people.

While a mob may have pushed the immigrants to their deaths, the book explores three explanations in total for the 1875 event, which took place on a bluff high above the Columbia River. Spagna questions the dominant accounts; the book ultimately asks if the event happened at all. Each possibility is investigated using methods including conventional research, spiritual dowsing, and on-the-ground exploration.

The book's three parts each begin by distilling the terror of the alleged massacre into narrative form, folding it into each possible explanation in turn. Spagna's reportage and research follow, used to pick apart the differing narratives and show how much implicit racism is inside of them, weighing it against historical realities.

Questions about what happened nag at Spagna, who first comes to the story as someone who lives in the area and who was drawn to understand the land in a deeper fashion. Her narrative achieves a strange beauty, including with its ground-level explorations, as when Spagna travels up and down the Columbia River looking for just the spot that matches the newspaper accounts. This beauty also comes from listening to people as they reckon with historical memories (or a lack thereof), wondering how stories reflect national racism and xenophobia.

In the end, the mystery remains: audiences can choose which of the three possibilities they find most probable. But the particulars of the crime, Spagna's work suggests, matter less than understanding how something awful can change a place and its people.

Pushed is a compelling true crime book that explores issues of race and justice in the American West.

JEREMIAH ROOD (January / February 2023)

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