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Title
Lynching in San Francisco

Date
15 November 1851

Primary Maker
Illustrated London News

Medium
Ink on paper

Dimensions
Overall: 402 x 271 mm

Name
Engraving

History
A diverse mix of miners from Britain, Europe, America and China lived in harsh conditions on the American and

Australian gold diggings. This instigated challenges to people’s beliefs, politics, economics and technology. It also caused tension. Newspapers in Sydney, Melbourne and the wider world carried sensational reports of lynchings on the Californian diggings and many feared a repetition of these events in Australia. In America groups of private citizens had banded together to form Vigilance committees for self governance. This often resulted in the public lynching of suspected criminals. As droves of diggers descended on San Francisco, citizens became alarmed at the escalating crime. Members of two street gangs, the Australian Hounds and the Sydney Ducks, were notorious villains. While not always Australian, they were branded as ex-convicts from Sydney and Tasmania. Their looting and killing prompted irate locals to form the first Vigilance Committee in 1851. The Committee enacted its own form of justice, capturing and executing some of these men before they could be tried legally. Stories of these lynchings and the high level of criminal activity in the Californian gold rush circulated around the globe, featuring in the popular pictorial weekly magazines. These magazines contained numerous illustrations and articles on politics, war, travel, exploration, fine arts, science and literature. The coverage of the Gold rush was a popular story in America, Australia and England as many people were interested in seeking their fortune on the gold diggings. The Illustrated London News was a popular and leading weekly magazine during the 19th century. It was established in England in 1842 to cover news and current affairs of national and international interest. It was supplemented with large illustrations.