

islation, Supreme Court cases, documented public policy, and recorded real estate transactions. National newspapers and local periodicals include the *Los Angeles Times*, *La Opinión*, the *New York Times*, and the Nayarit, Mexico-based, *El Eco*. Molina also compiled an oral history through dozens of interviews and conversations with former Nayarit employees between 2014 and 2020. Utilized in tandem with written archival sources, the oral tradition provides essential emphasis when constructing a modern historical narrative.

Molina aims to inspire budding historians to document grassroots voices and this pedagogical work models how to utilize oral tradition when constructing historical narratives. This monograph is especially useful for graduate students learning the craft of producing modern scholarship. By combining institutional evidence such as demographic studies and legislative records with oral tradition and local history, the author demonstrates the level of investigation required to uncover stories that support one's thesis.

*A Place at the Nayarit* explores numerous themes central to migration studies, including push and pull factors, transnational connections, segregation, gentrification, hostility, state-sponsored abuse, arbitrary variations of "whiteness", and classism. The book also understatedly elevates previously silenced queer voices while contributing to modern scholarship on immigrant history in Los Angeles.

*Stephen P. Legaspi*

Daughton, J.P. *In the Forest of No Joy: The Congo-Ocean Railroad and the Tragedy of French Colonialism*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2021. Pp. 384. Hardcover \$12.76.

Daughton, Professor of History and (by courtesy) French and Italian at Stanford University, argues that the abuses committed in Central Africa during the early twentieth century, particularly the torture and murder of Africans by French colonial officials, were not simply the result of individual cruelty. Instead, these atrocities emerged from a colonial system that demanded authority over vast territories with minimal oversight, and tolerated violence as a routine method to maintain this control.

In thirteen chapters and an introduction, Daughton offers a powerful and unsettling probe of French colonial violence in Central Africa at the turn of the twentieth century. Focusing on the building of the Congo-Ocean railroad between 1921 and 1934, its purpose was to connect the inland capital, Brazzaville with the Atlantic port of Pointe-Noire, allowing France to transport resources, such as rubber, timber and other raw materials, from the interior to the coast for export. Daughton reconstructs the brutal realities of imperial rule in the region that became French Equatorial Africa. Through painstaking research and vivid storytelling, he argues that extreme violence was not an anomaly within the French colonial system but rather a predictable result of the governing empire. Deeply compelling and at times troubling to read, the book contributes meaningfully to the historiography of colonialism. However, its narrow narrative focus and heavy emphasis on atrocities can overshadow its analytical aims.

While most of the horrific details this book describes were not widespread until the publication (2021), we now know the human cost of building the 500-mile long railroad. French colonial administrators relied heavily on forced African labor, coercing workers from across Central Africa. Disease, exhaustion, malnutrition and physical punishment were ingrained in the daily lives of these laborers. Exact numbers are not known but upwards of tens of thousands of Africans died in the pursuit of this railroad.

One of the book's major strengths lies in its reconstruction of the political and cultural context surrounding the bureaucracy of death. He carefully examines how reports of violence traveled from the African interior to France's metropolis and how journalists, missionaries, politicians, and activists processed or even justified the information. It highlights the tension between France's self-image as a "civilizing power" and the brutal practices that sustained it. Structured in chronological order, we see the beginnings of the railroad construction, as a time of hope and promise through to the unraveling, mismanagement and high toll of African lives. In chapter five, we learn of the Mayombe Forest, nicknamed the "forest without joy" by the African workers who labored in this dense, humid and interminable stretch of forest that required constant clearing. By chapter eight we have a lengthy depiction of starvation, malaria, dysentery and the

inevitable death toll.

Daughton also excels in his use of diverse sources. Drawing on court records, newspapers, missionary reports, and government archives, he pieces together a complex narrative that moves between Africa and France. This transnational approach is particularly effective because it shows how colonial violence was embedded within a network of imperial politics, public opinion, and bureaucratic decision-making. Rather than treating the African colony as isolated from metropolitan debates, the book shows the interconnectedness of imperial power.

Moreover, the author contributes to a growing body of scholarship that challenges older interpretations of European colonialism that portrayed atrocities as rare abuses by rogue individuals. He instead emphasizes the structural nature of this violence becoming commonplace. By showing how weak oversight, economic pressures, and racial ideologies shaped colonial behavior, he demonstrates that brutality was not an exception but an integral cog in the machine.

Overall, *In the Forest of No Joy* is an important and thought-provoking contribution to the history of European imperialism. By exposing the systemic nature of colonial violence, Daughton challenges readers to reconsider how empires functioned and how the imperial heads responded to revelations of brutality. For students and scholars interested in colonial history, imperial politics, and the relationship between violence and governance, Daughton's work offers a meaningful and sobering account.

*Sylvia Walker*