ABSTRACT

This article offers a corrective to the way in which the history of reconstruction and the construction of whiteness in the early decade of the 1900s in South Africa has been understood. In the aftermath of the Anglo-Boer War in 1902, South Africa on the whole and, in particular, the Transvaal Colony not only experienced economic instability, but also a crisis in the black-white racial hierarchy. This article shows that even though the presence of indentured laborers from North China was a threat to the livelihood of English workingmen and Afrikaner farmers, their presence helped to strengthen a racial division of labor and regime that privileged white men. The restrictions attached to the recruitment of indentured Chinese labor to work in the gold mining industry in the Transvaal clearly defined who would be regarded as the cheap and unskilled laborers. Additionally, the means of control resorted to by the industry and colonial government in response to their disturbances and riots, desertions, breaking into white peoples’ homes, and murdering of Afrikaner farmers treated non-white peoples as pariah, subject to control and exclusion. The sense of control and authority resorted to by the Dutch- and English-speaking peoples against this backdrop engendered a kind of racial coalescence among Afrikaners and English as whites.