



# California's Harvest Gypsies: Race and the Reproduction of Colonial Power in the New Deal Era

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California's Harvest Gypsies: Race and the Reproduction of Colonial Power in the New Deal Era

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A Thesis in the Field of History  
for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

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## Abstract

This study challenges the prevailing narrative that agriculturally-bound southwestern migrants entering California's rural valleys during the 1930s were marginalized socio-politically as a consequence of the Great Depression, antiunionism in Western agriculture, and popular counteraction amongst rural conservatives to the liberal tenets of the New Deal. Although resource scarcity, dominant class anxieties regarding the specter of communism, and the paranoia of government overreach, undoubtedly informed local perceptions of southwestern migrant otherness, they alone insufficiently account for the discourses of inferiority that accompanied this episode of domestic migration in United States history, let alone the juridico-political measures deployed by California's sovereign authority to deprive domestic migrants of basic civic considerations as persons under the law. As this study suggests, such perspectives are historically inconsistent: discounting the proclivity of California's sovereign authority to maximize industrial farm labor's vulnerability as a caste through the withholding of certain juridico-political protections as full and equal citizens under the law from subject groups believed to be *Other*. Alternatively, this study employs a colonial modernity framework that suggests that the Great Depression and the New Deal did not cause the state's rural establishment to treat southwestern migrants as *Other* in any unique sense, but merely provided the political terrain necessary to redirect well-established colonial forms of dominance traditionally reserved for California's non-white exogenous subject groups towards *Okies* as the region's most recent corps of imported labor.

## Dedication

To my great-grandparents, Carl and Agnes Beymer; for the hardships they and their entire generation endured as outsiders in California during the Great Depression.

To my adoptive grandparents, Edward and Ann Fujimoto; for the challenges that they and their family faced as *Issei* Americans before, during, and after the Second World War.

To my good friend Nelson, who, having grown up in Kenya, told me once that he only became *Black* after coming to the United States—I only wish that I had understood what he meant at the time.

And, to the army of *invisible* workers who toil daily for less than a living wage to make my life, and this study, possible.

## Acknowledgments

This study is the culmination of a three-year journey which began with a question concerning colonial reproduction and terminated with the ideas regarding colonial modernity and race that comprise this thesis. In a sense, however, the work presented here is not solely my own. It is a collaboration—the result of countless informal conversations with friends, family, and peers; the guidance of Harvard professors; the work of dozens of scholars, researchers, intellectuals, and journalists over a span of nearly two-hundred years; and the efforts of hundreds of unrecognized bureaucrats at all levels of government and law. Although this work has benefited from all these elements, and I am indebted to their incalculable contributions, there are those deserving of special recognition, nonetheless.

Doctor Elise M. Ciregna is one such individual. Many of the ideas regarding colonial modernity presented in this study and their application in California were first conceived under her instruction. It was in her “Graduate Writing and Research in the Social Sciences” course, which I attended in Fall 2018, that I first started to explore colonialism as a form of cultural heritage and understand the ways in which colonial legacies continue to shape the social imaginary of the United States and, consequently, American identity. Since attending her course, Doctor Ciregna has continued to be a source of support and I am thankful for her unrelenting encouragement.

This study depends on the assumption that power is both revealed and reified through cognitive interpretations of landscape. I only really began to make sense of this

material aspect of history after Professor John R. Stilgoe agreed to direct my thesis and I began researching landscape as an agent of power. I truly believe that this project has benefited from this perspective. For this, and many other reasons, I remain ever grateful for Professor Stilgoe's guidance.

Lastly, I am eternally grateful for the emotional and financial support provided by family and friends throughout this process, specifically my uncle and aunt, Tod and Doreen, and my wife, Jennifer—without whom my Harvard experience, and this study, would not have been possible. Thank you all for believing in me.

## Table of Contents

Dedication .....	iv
Acknowledgments.....	v
Chapter I. Introduction: Race, Colonial Modernity, and Epistemological Blindness .....	1
Addressing Histories of Exception .....	5
The Structure.....	15
Words and Power .....	21
Definition of Terms.....	27
An Unfortunate Declaration.....	35
Chapter II. A New Rome: California’s Colonial Dynamic.....	39
Colonial Reproduction in California.....	39
Steinbeck’s Colonial Critique .....	42
A Theory of Colonial Modernity .....	48
Imported Colonialism .....	54
Internal Colonialism.....	56
<i>Settler</i> Colonialism.....	62
Landscape as a Mechanism of Colonial Reproduction.....	66
The Land Grant: A Colonial Legacy .....	70
Chapter III. Colonial Landscapes and Race Dependency.....	82
The Production of <i>Nonpersons</i> .....	84
Accounting for Biological and Construct Paradigms .....	91
Contested Whiteness.....	98



Race as a Technology of Power .....	108
The <i>Essence</i> of Race .....	109
Chapter IV. California’s Race-Dependent Landscape .....	114
The Short Road from <i>Gente de Razón</i> to <i>Other</i> .....	116
<i>Diggers</i> .....	123
<i>Chicanas/os</i> .....	132
<i>Californios</i> .....	137
The Imported.....	144
Canton <i>Coolies</i> .....	146
The <i>Other</i> Westerners .....	160
The <i>Other</i> Americans.....	183
The ‘Third Wave’ .....	191
Setting the Stage .....	201
Chapter V. Okie otherness in the New Deal Era .....	202
A Note on Extra-Juridical Forms of Violence .....	205
Marking-Out Southwesterner <i>Unruliness</i> .....	207
Locating Southwestern Migrant Transgressiveness.....	211
<i>White Others</i> : Naturalizing <i>Okie</i> Differentiation .....	230
<i>Okieness</i> .....	232
“Taxpayers” vs. “Able-Bodied Idlers”: The Charge of Laziness in the Postcolonial Landscape.....	235
Stupid and Dirty .....	241
Immoral.....	246

Reclaiming the Postcolonial Landscape: Southwestern Migrant <i>Nonpersonhood</i> and the Reproduction of Colonial Arrangements of Power .....	253
Securing the <i>Civis</i> .....	255
Anti-picketing Ordinances .....	256
Camps .....	262
<i>Okie</i> Exclusion .....	268
Chapter VI. Conclusion .....	278
Objections and Counter Perspectives.....	282
Is this race, or just discrimination? .....	282
But race prescribes permanent and insurmountable barriers to full and equal citizenship.....	286
Race as a Technology of Power: Some Final Thoughts .....	291
Bibliography .....	294
Primary Sources .....	294
Secondary Sources .....	300

## Chapter I.

### Introduction: Race, Colonial Modernity, and Epistemological Blindness

In the summer of 1939, Carey McWilliams—recently appointed head of California’s Division of Immigration and Housing by the Culbert Olson gubernatorial administration<sup>1</sup>—visited Madera, California, in an attempt to mediate a labor dispute between cotton growers, backed by the Associated Farmers, and migrant farmworkers. As congressional hearings later discovered, a strike in the San Joaquin town had turned violent that summer after cotton pickers, consisting mainly of “Mexicans, Dust Bowl whites, Texas Negroes, and native Californians of varied race,” protested a ten cent unit wage decrease by the grower-ran Agriculture Labor Bureau.<sup>2</sup> Local growers, frustrated with law enforcement’s ineptitude in policing the agricultural landscape, responded with vigilante terror: leading “300 club-carrying vigilantes” donning white armbands in “cleaning out” a park where picketers had gathered as “14 Highway Patrol officers, all of whom had side arms and 11 of whom had gas guns, stood . . . watching the proceedings.” The event left nineteen picketers hospitalized and an undetermined number injured, “for many fled the county at once.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kathryn Olmsted, *Right out of California: The 1930s and the Big Business Roots of Modern Conservatism* (New York: New Press, 2015), 221.

<sup>2</sup> The unit wage rate reduction went from 90 cents per hundred pounds of cotton in the previous two seasons to 80 cents per hundred pounds of cotton in 1939. U.S. Senate, Report of the Committee on Education and Labor, *Violations of Free Speech and Rights of Labor*, 77<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> session (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1940), 1510, quote 1512 (hereafter cited as *S. Report*).

<sup>3</sup> *S. Report*, 1523-1524.

In an article for *The Antioch Review* a few years later, McWilliams recalls the resentment that the ‘people of Madera County’—as the locals preferred to see themselves—felt towards domestic migrants—which, as McWilliams notes, “by inference” to their own position as ‘residents,’ were discernable as ‘aliens.’ The foreignness of these migrants “was so pronounced,” McWilliams writes, that “a sign appeared in the foyer of a motion picture theater in a San Joaquin Valley town [Bakersfield] reading: ‘Negroes and Okies Upstairs.’”<sup>4</sup> Although McWilliams correctly interprets the sign as a local manifestation of a greater insider/outsider dynamic brewing beneath the surface, its racial dimensions with regards to *Okies* elude him. What McWilliams fails to grasp is that the sign itself serves as a material representation of southwestern migrant otherness within the colonial space—simultaneously reflecting both dominant class prerogatives and *Okie* subalternity. McWilliams instead accounts for the local contempt faced by southwestern migrants not as a consequence of California’s colonial heritage and the sociopolitical inequities on which it depends, but as resulting from the conditions of the Great Depression and New Deal initiatives in the form of limited job options and political tensions regarding relief<sup>5</sup>—a view that dominates this history still.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Carey McWilliams, “California Pastoral,” *The Antioch Review* 2, no. 1 (Spring, 1942): 115-116, quote 116.

<sup>5</sup> McWilliams, “California Pastoral,” 116.

<sup>6</sup> See Olmsted, *Right Out of California*; Devra Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold: California Farm Workers, Cotton, and the New Deal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); James N. Gregory, *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Culture in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Cletus E. Daniel, *Bitter Harvest: A History of California Farmworkers, 1870-1941* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981); Walter J. Stein, *California and the Dust Bowl Migration* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973).

This study, however, suggests that McWilliams's interpretation of the sign in the theater lobby reflects an epistemological blind spot regarding race and its technological function in California's postcolonial space and only truly works within the extraordinary context of the Great Depression and the limited confines of class conflict.<sup>7</sup> Such accounts constitute histories of exception which not only fail to adequately account for the customarily low status of farm labor in California's long colonial history, but also conveniently reconcile perceptual inconsistencies between the ontological experience of southwesterners—as radical *Others* in the postcolonial space—with the colonial axioms of white supremacy responsible for shaping California's postcolonial landscape. This study, therefore, contends that neither the Great Depression nor the New Deal should be interpreted as points of historical rupture, or periods of historical exception, but rather as moments of colonial reproduction operating with historical continuity under the conditions of “colonial modernity.”<sup>8</sup> Viewing the sign instead through a lens of colonial modernity, where California's agricultural labor had come to represent a subaltern caste within a race-dependent colonial landscape, this study suggests that the sign indicates a

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<sup>7</sup> The concept of epistemological blindness utilized by this study was inspired by José Medina's use of blindness in *The Epistemology of Resistance*, and his concepts of “active ignorance.” According to Medina: “*Active ignorance* involves the mere absence of belief or the mere presence of isolated false beliefs—these being skin-deep epistemic failures that can be easily corrected by providing the relevant information. Active ignorance has deep psychological and sociopolitical roots: it is supported by psychological structures and social arrangements that prevent subjects from correcting misconceptions and acquiring knowledge because they would have to change so much of themselves and their communities before they can start seeing things differently. Active ignorance is the kind of ignorance that is capable of protecting itself, with a whole battery of defense mechanisms (psychological and political) that can make individuals and groups insensitive to certain things, that is, numbed to certain phenomena and bodies of evidence and unable to learn in those domains.” José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 57-58.

<sup>8</sup> See page XX for definition of colonial modernity, or see Eli Jelly-Schapiro, *Security and Terror: American Culture and the Long History of Colonial Modernity* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 9-11, quote 179n4.

process of racialization in the local vernacular and reflects the sociopolitical differentiation of *Okies* as *White Others* within rural hierarchies.<sup>9</sup> That is, the sign, as a material indicator of *Okie* otherness, serves a psychological function within the colonial space: at once signifying a questioned or disputed sense of migrant whiteness, while also serving as an indictment of migrant unruliness; functioning both as a gauge of where southwesterners fit in the colonial landscape, while symbolizing the danger they pose to it.

Utilizing a colonial modernity framework, this study examines the replicative capacity of California's colonial arrangements of power and their potential impact on domestic migrants in the state's postcolonial landscape during the latter half of the 1930s and the early 1940s. By the Great Depression, the colonial arrangements of power that characterized California's rural economy had come to constitute the social boundaries of racial difference that separated its management class from its agricultural proletariat.<sup>10</sup> As a result, California's racial discourses of inferiority became linked with farm labor's apparent material function in the colonial landscape and was heavily influenced by

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<sup>9</sup> The term "*white Other*" is borrowed from Annalee Newitz and Matthew Wray from their work "What is 'White Trash'? Stereotypes and Economic Conditions of Poor Whites in the United States." This concept is explored in further detail in Chapter II. Annalee Newitz and Matthew Wray, "What is 'White Trash'? Stereotypes and Economic Conditions of Poor Whites in the United States," in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, ed. Mike Hill (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 169-170.

<sup>10</sup> John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996 [1939]), 232; Sarah D. Wald, *The Nature of California: Race, Citizenship and Farming Since the Dust Bowl* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016), 60-61. Also see Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999 [1939]), 134-137; also see *S. Report*, 228-260; Exhibit 8762-A, "The Supply of Agricultural Labor as a Factor in the Evolution of Farm Organization in California," in U.S. Senate, Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Education and Labor, *Violations of Free Speech and Rights of Labor*, 76<sup>th</sup> Congress, 3<sup>rd</sup> Session (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1940), part 54, 19777-19898 (hereafter cited as *S. Hearings*); Walter Goldschmidt, *As You Sow* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1947); Stein, *California and the Dust Bowl Migration*, 60; Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 40-70; Douglas Cazaux Sackman, *Orange Empire: California and the Fruits of Eden* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 118-131.

perceptions of difference based on ideas of foreignness and otherness—a dynamic that was easily applied to agriculturally bound southwestern migrants entering the state’s postcolonial space during the late 1930s. This study, therefore, hypothesizes that the engenderment of southwestern migrant subalternity in California’s agricultural valleys during the late 1930s and early 1940s resulted from the same technological process of racialization traditionally deployed within the colonial space to manage colonized *Alterities* in the state’s race-dependent landscape.

#### Addressing Histories of Exception

The colonial modernity perspective endorsed by this study challenges two dominant strains of historiography. The first considers the discrimination faced by southwestern migrants in California during the 1930s as the consequences of class relations and antiunionism in western agriculture at a moment of economic distress. The second understands migrant antagonism as a popular counteraction amongst rural conservatives, growers, and the Associated Farmers (AF) to the specters of communism and Rooseveltism.<sup>11</sup> Although both viewpoints present valuable historical perspectives that should not be overlooked, neither position accounts for the legacy of California’s colonial heritage, nor the role of race in that history. Class anxieties, the specter of communism, and the paranoia of government overreach, undoubtedly informed local perceptions of southwestern migrants; however, they alone insufficiently account for the discourses of inferiority that accompanied this episode of domestic migration in United

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<sup>11</sup> Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 258-285; Gregory, *American Exodus*, 78-113; Stein, *California and the Dust Bowl Migration*, 32-70; Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold*, 137-164; Sackman, *Orange Empire*, 218-261; Kathryn Olmsted, *Right Out of California*, 127-128.

States history, let alone the countermeasures employed by Californians to physically exclude California-bound migrants from the state and marginalize them socio-politically throughout the region. The abuse suffered by southwestern migrants at the hands of California's rural establishment was not condoned by valley communities solely on the basis of these factors but were instead tolerated because dominant-class Californians were culturally conditioned to view industrial farmworkers as "aliens" and racial inferiors. In *California and the Dust Bowl Migration*, Walter J. Stein assesses the situation in these terms:

The Okies posed a problem that the social system had to resolve: they were white, old-stock Americans, but they were also field labor. California's towns faced the choice of responding to the Okies in racial or economic terms . . . . Despite their whiteness, the Okies rapidly became identified in the minds of rural Californians as field workers. Field workers had always been viewed as racial inferiors in the social order. In spite of their white skin, Okies inherited the racial prejudices that Californians had hitherto applied to the minority groups.<sup>12</sup>

In other words, as field workers in a race-dependent postcolonial landscape *Okies* occupied the lowest strata of regional hierarchy and were, consequently, already looked upon as innately inferior and somewhat less than "white," and, therefore, less deserving of full civic consideration.

Nevertheless, dominant narratives regarding this episode in United States history often fail to consider the significance of California's colonial past in determining the sociopolitical conditions of modernity in its "colonial present."<sup>13</sup> Instead, these accounts

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<sup>12</sup> Stein, *California and the Dust Bowl Migration*, 59-63, quote 59-60.

<sup>13</sup> As discussed in Chapter II, the notion of "colonial present" employed by this study, draws inspiration from the work of literary scholars and postcolonial theorists Simon Gikandi and Eli Jelly-Schapiro. Their notion of colonial modernity conveys a type of "postcoloniality," characterized not as a moment that exists beyond a formal colonial dynamic, but instead as colonial arrangements of power



frame the hostile treatment of southwesterners as a type of aberration—divorced, to one degree or another, from the state’s colonial experience. According to these histories of exception, the abuse and exploitation suffered by domestic migrants can be explained outside the colonial dynamic, typically as either the consequences of antiunionism in western agriculture; the result of popular opposition to the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt amongst rural conservatives; social angst in response to perceived communist threats; or, simply, as the natural consequence of capitalism.<sup>14</sup> These perspectives, however, neglect the importance of colonial arrangements of power in California’s agricultural sectors and its role in fostering the structural conditions of race generation—a dynamic that further obscures the social location of *Okies* in the state’s racial hierarchy.

These narratives understand colonialism as a vital prerequisite to capital modernity, rather than as a continual reproduction of power relations in a colonial present under the guise of modernity itself. Not accounting for the colonial dynamic or suggesting that its structures no longer affect the sociopolitical landscape beyond the colonial past distorts the historical record, creating artificial demarcations between the experiences of early-arriving immigrant subject groups and the experience of southwestern migrants—despite the fact that both populations were received in like fashion by rural Californians and served indistinguishable material functions in the colonial space. Such histories of exception, reinforce an epistemological blind spot that

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perfected in a in a postcolonial moment. The term “postcoloniality” is utilized by Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 14-15; Jelly-Schapiro, *Security and Terror*, 14-15.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 258-285; Gregory, *American Exodus*, 78-113; Stein, *California and the Dust Bowl Migration*, 32-70; Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold*, 137-164; Sackman, *Orange Empire*, 218-261; Kathryn Olmsted, *Right Out of California*, 127-128.

exists in the historiography regarding race and its role in managing elements in the colonial space, obscuring its continued utility as a postcolonial mechanism of power.

The most extreme example of this in the historiography is Devra Weber's 1994 monograph *Dark Sweat, White Gold*. Her New Labor approach frames the struggles of farmworkers in the state's cotton industry during the 1930s within a class-based analysis where social relations were profoundly influenced by industry. According to Weber, labor relations in the state resulted from a process of capital expansion in western agriculture during the late nineteenth century and the need for cheap labor within a system of intensive farming—a process that represents a clear break, or historical rupture, from the colonial dynamic. In her view, California's industrial transformation was so complete that nearly all migrant abuse (regardless of country of origin or perceived racial category) and exploitation can be attributed to their role as laborers in an industrial system.<sup>15</sup> Although she admits that racism played a small role in certain cases, in her view, these moments of social tension generally resulted from labor strife and were solely reserved for her Mexicana/o subjects.<sup>16</sup>

Labor historian Cletus Daniel suggests a more nuanced account. In his essential history of farm labor in California, *Bitter Harvest* (1981), Daniel asserts that this process

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<sup>15</sup> Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold*.

<sup>16</sup> In a single sentence, Weber discounts the racial dimensions of *Okie* marginalization in California, writing: "Although comments about 'white trash' reverberated in heated moments in the Valley, the new migrants were white." Failing to recognize the ways that the category "white trash" itself operates as a racial category, Weber instead views race through a type of "vulgar multiculturalism"—a term coined by sociologist Matt Wray and writer Annalee Newitz that views race as a one-way street, where racism flows in one direction from those who *are* "white" towards their victims, who *are not*. From this perspective, Weber continues in detailing the ways that southwestern migrants contributed to popular racial discourses in the state, without considering the ways that they were victimized by the same structural inequalities and processes of social othering. Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold*, 148-161, quote 148; for "vulgar multiculturalism," see also Newitz and Wray, "What is 'White Trash'?", 168.

of “Americanization”—which he associates with capitalist advancement<sup>17</sup>—began much earlier, with California statehood. However, he also finds that the totality of this cultural rupture was less evident in the state’s rural economies. Recognizing the continued material importance of the land grant as a social institution and its continued relevance in defining postcolonial agricultural conditions, Daniel writes:

Within a few short years the Americanization of California was so far advanced that the political and economic life of the state revealed few vestiges of its colonial heritage. One glaring exception, however, was to have a profound and enduring impact on California’s agricultural development: the pattern of landownership that survived from the state’s colonial past.

Long before the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ceded California to the United States, the colonial land policies of both Spain and Mexico had promoted, through grants of massive tracts of land to favored individuals and families, conditions under which the ownership and control of much of the best land rested with a relatively small colonial aristocracy. To be sure, the Americanization of California after 1848 brought rapid and substantial changes to this system of landownership. Yet the essential change, frequently achieved by fraudulent means, consisted of a displacement of the original owners by Anglo newcomers intent on putting to profitable uses the millions of rich acres that their predecessors had been content to devote primarily to pastoral pursuits. Significantly, the monopolistic pattern of landownership established earlier was left largely undisturbed, and its perpetuation became one of the controlling factors in the development of agriculture in California.<sup>18</sup>

Similar to the conclusions of Carey McWilliams in his 1939 exposé, *Factories in the Field*, Daniel considers California’s colonial past as instrumental in the region’s industrial development, yet fails to recognize the continuity of its feudal arrangements in the industrial present, instead viewing these conditions as prerequisite and structurally

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<sup>17</sup> Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 18.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 18-19.

fundamental to the advancement of capital enterprise.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, this development in agriculture, in the opinions of Daniel and McWilliams, set California on an ideological path that eroded Anglo-Californian convictions in abstract agrarian ideals, fostering an environment of exploitation where commercial gain and social progress were synonymous.<sup>20</sup> According to this view, such arrangements of power may have been the indirect consequence of colonialism in the form of capitalist advancement, but—in contrast to the class-centric conclusions that Weber would later come to—they were also the consequence of shifting cultural norms within the United States.

These narratives present compelling explanations for California's unique socioeconomic distribution, and for accounting for both the function and social location of farm labor in that system. However, many historians, Weber, Daniel, and McWilliams included, have also suggested that the political turmoil of the Great Depression accentuated the precarious position of outsiders in California's agricultural valleys, creating an atmosphere of disdain and distrust that disproportionately impacted the social standing of southwestern migrants. The common thread in this view assumes that their

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<sup>19</sup> It is worth noting that in McWilliams's 1948 book, *North from Mexico*, published nearly a decade after *Factories*, he recognizes the continuity of colonial mechanisms of power in the American Southwest in the postcolonial period as they pertain to the region's Latinx and Indigenous populations. However, there are moments in *Factories* where McWilliams alludes to the fact that, despite their white skin, the same feudal arrangements of power that governed the state's alterity labor indirectly governed those of agriculturally bound southwesterners: "As one contingent of recruits [farmworkers] after the other has been exhausted, or has mutinied, others have been assembled to take their places. Although the army has been made up of different races, as conditions have changed and new circumstances arisen, it has always functioned as an army. It is an army that marches from crop to crop... Today the army has many new faces as recruits have swarmed in from the dust-bowl area eager to enlist for the duration of the crops at starvation wages. But, in substance, it is the same army that has followed the crops since 1870." Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999 [1939]), quote 8, 11-15; McWilliams, *North from Mexico*.

<sup>20</sup> Daniel is more overt than McWilliams on this point. Although it is clear from *Factories* that this is how McWilliams felt, his assertions are more implicit. Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 15-39; McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 3-65.

mistreatment and social marginalization resulted from conservative counteractions to New Deal initiatives at a moment of national instability, as well as opposition to progressive reforms that threatened to mobilize a formerly impotent labor force—thus altering the state’s arrangements of power.<sup>21</sup>

Unfortunately, the myopia of these perspectives results in histories of exception that operate as forms of historical erasure. For example, by narrowly framing all farmworker exploitation and social marginalization as byproducts of industrial transformation and commercial enterprise, class-centric models ignore the continued relevance of California’s colonial heritage in determining the conditions of industrial agricultural under modernity, while simultaneously disregarding the continued utility of race as a colonial technology in the management of its agricultural proletariat.<sup>22</sup> Since southwestern migrants were employed in the same capacity as other exogenous subject groups in the state’s industrial agricultural sectors, frequently working side by side with them in the same fields, it should be reasonably assumed that the methods for managing these subject groups were consistent. Histories of exception that favor class-based models that reject this perspective are in fact engaging in a discourse of erasure. In essence, they establish an if/then scenario that reasons if race cannot be *a* factor, because subjects are perceived by historians as *being* white, then race must not be *the* factor—a perspective

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<sup>21</sup> Although many historians have contributed to this narrative, Walter J. Stein, Cletus Daniel, James N. Gregory, and Kathryn Olmsted present the most detailed arguments on this matter. See Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 167-285; Stein, *California and the Dust Bowl Migration*, 140-165; Gregory, *American Exodus*, 78-113; Olmsted, *Right out of California*, 127-128; see also McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 230-304; Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold*, 137-164; Sackman, *Orange Empire*, 225-261.

<sup>22</sup> This employs Falguni A. Sheth’s concept of race as a technology of power in its colonial modernity analysis. Ideas regarding race as a technology will be considered in further detail in Chapter III. See Falguni A. Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 22-85.

that clearly discounts not only the ontological experience of southwesterners in California's rural communities during the late 1930's and early 1940s, but the experiences of every other exogenous subject group prior to the Great Southwestern migration and since.

Ironically, however, models that understand migrant antagonism as merely popular counteractions to the perceived threats of communism, Rooseveltism, or as resulting from the political turmoil of the Great Depression, make little sense outside the colonial dynamic. The claim that political circumstance alone resulted in migrant discrimination runs counter to a history of violence in California and overlooks an established reliance on colonial forms of oppression in managing its agricultural landscape. Such histories of exception reveal the utility of race—or, in Hannah Arendt's assessment, "race-thinking"<sup>23</sup>—in concealing colonial reproductions behind a veil of capital modernity. Ideas regarding race, or, more specifically, "whiteness," necessitate the construction of artificial barriers between the experience of domestic migrants and other subject groups believed to be *non-white*. The empirical isolation of *Okies* from traditional narratives of farmworker inferiority required by race-thinking, however, ignores the established function of racial discourse in policing the colonial landscape, as well as the fact that rural Californians imagined southwestern migrants themselves to be outsiders, to be exogenous *Others*. On the other hand, a colonial modernity framework which recognizes the utility of race as a technology of colonial power—and, therefore, the role of discourses of inferiority in managing the colonial space—would likely conclude that southwestern otherness was not the direct consequence of the New Deal,

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<sup>23</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1976 [1948]), 159.

economic strains brought on by depression, or any other political circumstance, but rather that these affairs merely provided the sociopolitical conditions necessary to ensure the continuity of colonial arrangements of power, and their application to *Okies* as the region's latest form of exogenous labor.

This study suspects that the narrowness of these outlooks, both temporally and philosophically, stem from the same epistemological blind spot that limits McWilliams's interpretation of the theater sign. In many ways, the idea of race itself is to blame. Race, or "race-thinking," constrains the historian's gaze, forcing them to think about the same phenomena in different terms as they apply to varying subject groups, irrespective of historical context or cultural circumstance. The axioms of white supremacy—a key component in all *settler* colonial projects—prevents scholars from observing commonalities between colonized subject groups imagined to *be* white or *non-white*, domestic or foreign. "Far beyond the boundaries within which race-thinking and class-thinking have developed into obligatory patterns of thought," writes Hanna Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, "free public opinion has adopted them to such an extent that not only intellectuals but great masses of people will no longer accept a presentation of past or present facts that is not in agreement with either of these views."<sup>24</sup> As evidenced by Weber's account of this history, "race-thinking" inoculates subject groups imagined to be white, or, more specifically in the context of this study, southwestern migrants, from the same sociological conditions of racialization experienced by *non-white* subject groups providing indistinguishable material functions within the colonial landscape and occupying similar positions at the bottom of its social ladder. Such dynamics present a

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<sup>24</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 159.

paradox within the colonial space, potentially nullifying the racial precepts responsible for governing the political terrain—for how can a subject group within the United States be simultaneously white *and* inferior? Race-thinking, therefore, impedes the historian, forcing those looking for commonalities between subject groups in the colonial space to accept “class-thinking” analyses as histories of exception in order to reconcile dominant group incentives for marginalizing fellow “whites” with the prevailing colonial dynamic; rather than recognizing the ways race and class operate as contemporaneous and complementary phenomena—or, perhaps, even as the same phenomenon, differing only in name. “[I]t is utopian to try to differentiate one kind of inhuman behavior from another,” Franz Fanon reminds us in his 1952 anticolonial work *Black Skin, White Masks*, “Is there in fact any difference between one racism and another? Don’t we encounter the same downfall, the same failure of man?”<sup>25</sup>

Alternatively, a colonial modernity framework emphasizing race as a technology of power reveals what political historian Lorenzo Veracini calls the “mimetic character” of *settler* colonialism—presenting a more nuanced analytical lens through which to view this episode of United States history.<sup>26</sup> After all, outside the colonial context, class alone inadequately explains the discrimination faced by southwesterners as agricultural labor in California during the 1930s and early 1940s. “Capitalist production relations do not ‘cause’ racism,” writes sociologist Robert Miles in *Racism and Migrant Labor*, “but they

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<sup>25</sup> In this instance Fanon is comparing the racism experienced by French colonial subjects in Algeria with that experienced by the European Jewry—a form of racism where phenotypical differentiation is not a relevant factor. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008 [1952]), 67.

<sup>26</sup> Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 14.



constitute the terrain upon which racism (along with other ideologies) is articulated by real people, not simply and solely to justify certain courses of action, but also to interpret their experience of production relations and of the effects of those relations at the various levels of a social formation.”<sup>27</sup> Likewise, the Great Depression, and the political consolidation of federal power that followed by way of the New Deal, did not *cause* growers and the rural establishment to treat southwesterners as *Other* in any unique way, it merely provided the political terrain necessary to redirect well-established colonial forms of dominance traditionally reserved for California’s *non-white* exogenous subject groups to *Okies* as the most recent corps of imported labor to enter the colonial space.

### The Structure

In order to assess this history properly it is necessary to move beyond popular notions of what race and colonialism are believed to be. As the historiography reveals, historians viewing race through a “vulgar multiculturalist” lens—a term coined by sociologist Matt Wray and writer Annalee Newitz, meant to denote a one-directional view of race, where racism flows from those who *are* “white” towards their victims, who *are not*<sup>28</sup>—have been conditioned not to *see* race outside its application to those perceived as being *non-white*: they are epistemologically blind. The same holds for colonialism. Historians have overwhelmingly viewed this history as one of capital modernity, without also recognizing, or *seeing*, the ways in which capital modernity in agricultural landscapes often depend on the continuity of colonial arrangements of power.

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<sup>27</sup> Robert Miles, *Racism and Migrant Labor* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 146.

<sup>28</sup> Newitz and Wray, “What is ‘White Trash’?,” 168.

This study, therefore, engages philosophical frameworks regarding both race and colonialism to bring these structures into focus, and assist with analysis of the historical record. The following four chapters, therefore, employ an interdisciplinary approach—drawing on not only the historical record, but also literary analysis, philosophy, cognitive psychology, social geography, legal theory, theories of colonialism, critical race theory, and whiteness theory—to help identify what race and colonialism *are*, and determine their contributions to this history.

This study contends that the epistemological blindness responsible for (mis)guiding scholarly reflection of this episode is partly attributable to the very conditions of colonial reproduction itself—a culture of white supremacy in the United States likely contributes to this dynamic as well—and betrays California as a site of colonial modernity. As Veracini indicates in *Settler Colonialism*, the “mimetic character” of the *settler* colonial dynamic and its incessant disavowal of reality, “produces a circumstance where the actual operation of settler colonial practices is concealed behind other occurrences.” Such occurrences, in Veracini’s assessment, are the result of cleverly constructed narratives, cultural myths, that allow for the perpetuation of the colonial fantasies that ultimately work to “[obscure] the conditions of its own production.”<sup>29</sup> As Chapter II suggests, the narrative of capital advancement that made industrial agricultural in California possible simultaneously concealed its dependence on colonial arrangements of power and the nature of its reproduction. By recasting the harsh realities of horticultural enterprise in terms of progress or social advancement, Californians engaged a discourse of racial historicism that allowed for the perpetuation of speculative activities,

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<sup>29</sup> Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 14.

the sole purpose of which was the rapid acquisition of wealth through super exploitative practices designed to oppress those considered to be outsiders, aliens: *Others*.<sup>30</sup> This discourse helped maintain a permanent peonage—a landless proletariat composed of different indigenous and exogenous subject groups throughout California’s history, of which the *Okies* were just the latest—and supported a narrative of advancement that justified their abuse and exploitation to the benefit of the dominant community.

The leading narratives of this history, nonetheless, expose some valuable criticisms of using a colonial modernity framework. For instance, given the state’s postcolonial development under Anglo-American rule and in line with Daniel’s “Americanization” thesis, an appropriate inquiry might question how the social and commercial environments of California, as well as their resulting power structures, can be characterized as colonial. Furthermore, how do claims of colonial reproduction stack-up against the state’s record as one of the most vibrant direct democracies in the United States? And, where do southwestern migrants as old-stock Americans of Protestant descent fit in this dynamic? Other contentions, employing more dogmatic conceptions of colonialism and postcolonialism, could—to the degree that California’s history as a formal colony and zone of conquest can be ignored—question whether or not the theoretical determinants of colonial oppression and capitalist exploitation fundamentally

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<sup>30</sup> In his monograph *The Racial State*, scholar David Theo Goldberg distinguishes between two variants of racial ideology, “racial naturalism” and “racial historicism” (also referred to as “racial progressivism”). The former, framed as the ‘*ancien régime*’ of racial thinking, emphasizes innate distinctions of inferiority based on origin, ethnicity and phenotypical markers. The latter is more structural and tends to embed itself in juridical structures and public policy, often accompanying periods of progressive reform and employing narratives of social advancement. It is worth noting, however, that these ideologies rarely work independent of each other, and more often than not, work in conjunction, one reinforcing the other. David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 39-49, 104-109.

differ in praxis. All of which, in the larger context of this study, begs the question: to what degree can the racial discourse that developed in California's rural communities during the New Deal Era be attributed to the state's colonial past? The analysis that follows hopes to address such questions through its assessment of California as a site of colonial modernity.

In an effort to underscore the theoretical advantages of utilizing a colonial modernity framework in assessing this history, Chapter II, "A New Rome: California's Colonial Dynamic," first examines colonialism through a teleological lens as both political institution and cultural practice. As this study recognizes race and colonialism as contemporaneous phenomena, the intent of this first section is to engage philosophical discourses in a theoretical overview of colonialism in order to establish different ways of understanding the phenomenon and its purpose, before moving into discussions of how the institution impacted Anglo-Californian identity, normative perceptions of social boundaries, and its influence in shaping the state's distinct racial order. The second section of Chapter II builds on these theories as it details the region's colonial progression and assesses the impact of its institutions on the colonial present of the 1930s. The ultimate goal of which is to present a nuanced account which demonstrates the continued relevance of the state's—and this nation's—colonial past in determining the conditions of the colonial present.

Chapter III, "Colonial Landscapes and Race Dependency," develops a theoretical framework that challenges dominant cultural views regarding race as a biological category. It suggests instead that race is a political element, a technology of power responsible for producing the sociopolitical *nonpersonhood* required for colonial

arrangements of power to endure. Building on the theories of race as a technology of power presented by political philosopher Falguni A. Sheth in her monograph *Towards a Political Philosophy of Race*, it employs a racial framework that understands race as a technology utilized by sovereign authority within a given colonial space to police the colonial landscape and to manage what Sheth calls the *Unruly*—subject groups often conceptually exogenous to the colonial space that are perceived as threats to an established way of life or perceived natural order.<sup>31</sup> Viewed from this perspective, the aim of racialization is not merely to mark-out certain subject groups as inferior, but to justify relative subject-group inferiority by naturalizing normative deviations within the colonial space. It is a technology designed to maximize subject-group vulnerability by denying them full moral and civic consideration as persons under the law.<sup>32</sup> In other words, as a technology of power, race constitutes *nonpersons*: subject groups deemed so radically *Other* that they are considered by the dominant collective as being unworthy of the equal rights, privileges, and protections of the polity—a necessary condition of colonial exploitation.

Utilizing the racial framework developed in Chapter III, Chapter IV, “California’s Race-Dependent Landscape,” suggests that given the region’s unique colonial heritage, the racial order that developed in California was less binary than imagined in other parts of the United States and was uniquely marked by variegated distributions of *White otherness*. Given California’s industrial agricultural development, it contends that the colonial arrangements of power that characterized California’s rural economies came to

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<sup>31</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 49-56.

<sup>32</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 37-39, 49-56.

constitute the social boundaries of racial difference that separated the state's management class from its agricultural proletariat. Ultimately, it argues that as the state's rural economies became increasingly dependent on "cheap" forms of exogenous labor—labor rendered cheap, not by choice, but by the powerlessness that racial oppression engenders—and California's racial discourses of inferiority, as well as the juridico-political structures that ensured subject-group marginalization, became linked with farm labor's apparent material function in the colonial landscape. Such discourses, as this chapter details, were heavily influenced by perceptions of whiteness and otherness, determined not strictly by a racial ideology but rather by material factors and were constructed in relation to socio-normative boundaries of morality, aptitude, and cultural (non)conformity. The chapter, therefore, examines the process by which racial categories were constructed and perfected in the colonial space to meet the exacting demands of California industry. Hence, the methodological purpose of Chapter IV is threefold: 1) to examine the ways that race in California moved beyond traditional *non-white/white* binaries and was constructed to meet the unique regional demands of the *settler* colonial project; 2) to assess the utility of race as a mechanism of colonial reproduction in California; and 3) to demonstrate the flexibility of the boundary mechanisms responsible for policing California's racial landscape and determining the *Unruly*. All of which underscores the continuity of colonial reproductions from Spanish occupation to New Deal and emphasizes the continued effectiveness of regional colonial arrangements in securing its race-dependent landscape.

Employing a colonial modernity framework that recognizes the continuity of California's colonial arrangements of power and the technological utility of race in

supporting their operation, Chapter V, “*Okie* otherness in the New Deal Era,” explores the ways in which southwestern migrant otherness was constructed within valley communities in order to maintain traditional hierarchies of worth and meet the demands of the state’s rural economies. Building on the theoretical frameworks of colonialism and race developed in Chapters II and III, this chapter places the southwestern migrant case within the larger context of California’s colonial heritage—challenging the histories of exception associated with this episode of American migration and suggesting a greater degree of commonality than is generally recognized between the *Okie* experience and that of earlier arriving exogenous subject groups. Utilizing the three technological dimensions of race developed by Sheth, this chapter first examines the normative transgressions responsible for marking-out southwestern migrant unruliness within the postcolonial landscape. It then explores the discourses of inferiority adopted by California’s rural establishment to naturalize migrant otherness and construct *Okies*. Lastly, it identifies the legal repertoire of juridico-political violence deployed within the postcolonial space to encourage migrant *nonpersonhood* and secure the polity against the threat of *Okie* unruliness.

### Words and Power

At the heart of this study lies an assumption that suggests historians have the power to rectify the silences created by the narratives of erasure responsible for empowering myth. This study, therefore, employs italics to highlight the importance of signified words commonly used to perpetuate silences and mask arrangements of power. Most of these words are used in everyday discourses to reify false distinctions of differentiation. For example, the term *Black* has historically been used by white

Americans (or just Americans) to signify their negation. Unlike being white, to be *Black* in the United States is not a matter of choice, it is a social fact prescribed to *Others* by a dominant culture of oppression and a history of violence. Although many Americans who identify as *Black* have reappropriated the label as a term of empowerment, such empowerment stands in strict relief to its original purpose: to define the boundaries of whiteness. While *Blackness* is a category determined by a power other than itself, whiteness is self-designated. To *be* white, as American writer and civil rights activist James Baldwin reminds us in “On Being ‘White’ . . . and Other Lies,” “[is] absolutely, a moral choice (for there *are* no white people).” As Baldwin underscores, “America became white—the people who, as they claim, ‘settled’ the country became white—because of the necessity of denying the Black presence, and justifying the Black subjugation.”<sup>33</sup> To therefore treat whiteness in equal standing as a neutral descriptor, devoid of power, in a natural binary alongside *Blackness*, is to perpetuate the injustices of the racial order. It is for these reasons that the category white, as well as the construct “caucasian”—except where necessitated to distinguish forms of *White otherness*—in this study are neither italicized nor capitalized. Since this study suggests, however, that classifications of *White otherness*—specifically *White Trash* and *Okie*—did not operate as categories of whiteness but were instead utilized by sovereign authority to naturalize the unruliness of transgressive elements within the colonial space, these terms will be noted in the same manner as other *non-white* subject-groups in the agricultural landscape.

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<sup>33</sup> James Baldwin, “On Being ‘White’ . . . and Other Lies,” in *Black on White: Black Writers on What it Means to Be White*, ed. David R. Roediger (New York: Schocken, 1998), 178, 180.



Other subject groups constructed against the backdrop of whiteness, also deserve recognition, however. Categories such as *Indian* and *Chicana/o*, for example, operate as forms of conceptual transfer, emphasizing indigenous otherness within a colonial space that was once their own.<sup>34</sup> Such transfers, according to Veracini, occur “when indigenous peoples are not considered indigenous to the land and are therefore perceived as exogenous Others who have entered the settler space at some point in time and preferably after the arrival of the settler collective.” It is worth noting that this dynamic also operates as a form of multicultural transfer, where “indigenous autonomy is collapsed within exogenous alterity . . . [and] settler normativity is retained even if the divide between indigenous and exogenous alterities is unilaterally erased and indigenous people are discursively transferred into a different category.”<sup>35</sup>

Categories like *Asian American*, *Mexican American*, *African American*, and the like, deserve comparable recognition for similar reasons. Such labels are meant to emphasize innate difference—a *not-quite-Americanness*—as permanent and insurmountable discontinuities with the normative boundaries of whiteness. Where white Americans are generally thought of as just American—not German American, Anglo

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<sup>34</sup> This project herein uses the terminology of *Chicana/o* and *Mexicana/o* in the same demographic sense (non-political) as Mario Barrera in his 1979 study *Race and Class in the Southwest*. Barrera designates *Chicana/o* as “persons of Mexican origin who reside permanently in the United States and thus synonymous with ‘Mexican American.’” This category also accounts for the *Mestizaje* of the American Southwest. *Mexicana/o* denotes geographical origin and refers to “persons from Mexico who are in the United States temporarily or on an irregular status.” It is worth noting that in reality both terms refer to one people, and distinction between the two categories derives from an arbitrary national boundary between what became United States territory and that of Mexico. Mario Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2014 [1979]), 4; for Anglo occupation of Southern California and the myth of native transfer (de-indigenization”) see also John R. Chávez, “Aliens in Their Native Lands: The Persistence of Internal Colonial Theory,” *Journal of World History* 22, no. 4 (December 2011): 785-809; John R. Chávez, *The Lost Land: The Chicano Image of the Southwest* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 43-106.

<sup>35</sup> Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 35, 43.

American, or even Irish American (although this last category, along with Italians and Eastern Europeans, have only recently been admitted into America's pantheon of whiteness<sup>36</sup>)—these *Other* constructed subcategories of belonging infer a less than American *de jure* status relegated by a “never to be” *de facto* citizenship.<sup>37</sup> It must be noted, however, when referencing immigrant or migrant populations from geographical regions outside the United States, this study uses ethno-national labels derived from applicable countries of origin to refer to specific groups: e.g. Mexicana/o, Chinese, Japanese, Filipina/o, and so on—although this study also recommends that historians remain cognizant of the role of colonialism in shaping these very same ethno-national identities and the historical implications of reinforcing often artificial conceptual distinctions between America's Indigeneity (between Mexicanas/os and *Chicanas/os*, for example).

As noted above, this study identifies *White Others*, by the same method. The term “*white Other*” is borrowed from the work of Annalee Newitz and Matthew Wray, “What is ‘White Trash’?” The concept views *White Others* (or *White otherness*) as a sociological subcategory within constructs of whiteness and considers it a vital mechanism of analysis when examining narratives of white differentiation.<sup>38</sup> This concept is explored in further detail in Chapter III, however, two points are worth

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<sup>36</sup> See Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2009).

<sup>37</sup> This idea was originally inspired by David Theo Goldberg assessment of racial historicism, when he writes in *The Racial State*: “For historicist racial regimes . . . the tension is played out formatively in favor not principally of physical terror but rather the (never to be?) fulfilled promise of citizenship.” Goldberg, *The Racial State*, 106.

<sup>38</sup> Newitz and Wray, “What is ‘White Trash’?,” 169-170.

mentioning here: first, although culturally “white,” the otherness attributed to these subjects results from the same normative mechanisms of differentiation responsible for constructing *non-white Alterities* in the colonial space. And, second, the category *White Other* includes *Okie* and *White Trash* as signified categories of differentiation—categories which, similar to *Digger*, *Greaser*, *Coolie*, *Nip*, and so on, are reinforced by *stigmatypes* signaling normative breaches in the boundaries of whiteness.

For its powers of erasure and its ability to shape and perpetuate cultural myth, the term “*settler*” also deserves our attention. *Settler*, as commonly used in the United States, supports the myth of a virgin frontier bestowed upon a European collective by divine providence and promotes whiteness, and whiteness, as a civilizing force working to tame a hostile wilderness. The term obscures the fact that by European arrival the Americas had already been settled.<sup>39</sup> The term *settler*, then, not only applies a more benevolent face to the character of Euro-American conquest, it also implies indigenous illegitimacy—a fact that conceptually displaces natives within the colonial space, framing them as intruders, or worse, savages to be tamed, enslaved, or liquidated in the name of progress.<sup>40</sup> As sociologist and historian James W. Loewen points out in his popular work *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, the problem is a cultural one: “Replacing settlers by whites makes for a

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<sup>39</sup> These ideas regarding the term *settler* were originally inspired by James W. Loewen in *Lies My Teacher Told Me*. The term “New World” and “discover” are equally flawed for similar reasons. Loewen writes: “The term *New World* is itself part of the problem, for people had lived in the Americas for thousands of years. The Americas were new only to Europeans. *Discover* is another part of the problem, for how can one person discover what another already knows and owns?” See James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me* (New York: New Press, 2018 [1995]), 1741, 2363, Kindle.

<sup>40</sup> This type of conceptual displacement—which Veracini calls “transfer”—takes a variety of forms, and include but are not limited to, racialization, de-indigenization, *settler* narratives of “virgin” wilderness, the providence of God, “the tide of history,” *settler* destiny, the myth of the vanishing native, native backwardness, and natives as *settlers* themselves. Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 33-52.

more accurate but ‘unsettling’ sentence. Invaders is more accurate still, and still more unsettling.”<sup>41</sup> As “unsettling” as it may (and should) be, this study attempts to realize Loewen’s suggestion. Where appropriate, “occupiers,” “colonizers,” “collective,” “dominant class,” and other such terms, have been employed as substitutes for *settlers* and *settler* collective. Likewise, “Anglo American,” “Anglo-American occupant,” and “Anglo-American colonizer” are used in place of “Anglo *settler*.” In order to take advantage of scholarly perspectives on race and colonialism, however, some concessions are necessary. For example, this study employs Veracini’s *settler* colonial model in its theoretical framework. It, therefore, reluctantly employs the notations “*settler* colonial” and “*settler* colonialism” whenever necessary to maintain theoretical continuity with his model.

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<sup>41</sup> Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, 2363, Kindle Edition.

## Definition of Terms

*Colonialism.* This study understands colonialism as a socioeconomic enterprise sustained by a hierarchy of power realized by mechanisms of direct and indirect violence and political domination. It is a project of exploitation where indigenous—and, in the case of California, frequently imported<sup>42</sup>—populations are mobilized in the interests of a dominant regional collective.<sup>43</sup>

*Colonial Modernity.* As addressed in Chapter II, the model of colonial modernity advocated by this study was initially inspired by Eli Jelly-Schapiro’s postcolonial theory of the “colonial present.” In a footnote in *Security and Terror* he defines colonial modernity as signifying “the inherence of colonial forms of culture, governance, and accumulation to the constitution—the origins and enduring essence—of modernity at large.”<sup>44</sup> In other words, colonial modernity dynamics can be thought of as colonial arrangements of power reenacted under the guise of modernity in “postcolonial” moments.

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<sup>42</sup> Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 93-166.

<sup>43</sup> This understanding of colonialism was influenced by ideas presented in Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 1-88; Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004 [1963]), 1-61; Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest*, 190-202; Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2004), 94-120; Jürgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, trans. Shelley L. Frisch (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 2010 [1995]), 3-22.

<sup>44</sup> Jelly-Schapiro, *Security and Terror*, 9-11, 179n4.

*Design.* This study employs the term “design” to designate a determined function. Its use in this study does not imply that designed mechanisms—race as a technology, for example—are intentionally constructed by epistemologically aware agents to serve their current societal function. Instead, the term design must be looked at from a philosophical perspective as something that has evolved to serve a precise function in society—as something that has not only endured but has been perfected over centuries to perform specific tasks in the operation of power. The term, therefore, may not imply a direct causality, but, nonetheless, results from the agency of certain actors.

*Discourses of inferiority.* This term is meant to encompass all social discourses directed by sovereign authority through everyday language, juridical processes, and media interaction to safeguard the continuation of regional hierarchies of worth by conceptually framing elements as exogenous, alien, less deserving, innately deficient: *Other*.

*Imported colonialism.* According to Mae M. Ngai, in *Impossible Subjects*, imported colonialism reproduces many of the same imperial colonial arrangements of power within the metropole: the modern liberal state (Ngai’s specific focus is the United States). Rather than subjugating native populations in their own lands, colonial labor is imported from outside national boundaries and recruited from ethno-racial subject groups deemed alien by domestic juridical process—a dynamic that reinforces migrant vulnerability and ensures the continued success of super exploitative labor practices within the metropole.<sup>45</sup> Although Ngai focuses on seasonal agricultural labor imported from Mexico and the Philippines, the dynamic of imported colonialism—as discussed in Chapter II and

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<sup>45</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 93-166.

demonstrated in Chapter IV—is equally apparent when studying other imported minority groups in California’s long colonial history.<sup>46</sup>

*Internal colonialism.* In the United States, the theory of internal colonialism has largely been developed by *Chicana/o* Americans to explain the persistence of structural inequalities throughout the Southwest. In his monograph *Race and Class in the Southwest*, Mario Barrera, defines internal colonialism as “a form of colonialism in which the dominant and subordinate populations are intermingled, so that there is no geographically distinct ‘metropolis’ separate from the ‘colony.’”<sup>47</sup> Internal colonialism, as a sociological framework, views racial oppression as a consequence of colonial arrangements of power typically reproduced in modern liberal states comprised of formally indigenous territory.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 17-138; for contract labor “imported” from Asia, see the testimony of F. F. Low in California State Senate, “Chinese Immigration: Its Social, Moral and Political Effects,” *Report to California State Senate Special Committee on Chinese Immigration* (Sacramento, CA: State Printing Office, 1878), 76-78 (hereafter cited as *Committee on Chinese Immigration*); Patricia Cloud and David W. Galenson, “Chinese Immigration and Contract Labor in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *Explorations in Economic History* 24, no.1 (1987): 26; Edna Bonacich, “Some Basic Facts: Patterns of Asian Immigration and Exclusion” in *Labor Immigration Under Capitalism: Asian Workers in the United States Before World War II*, ed. Lucie Cheng and Edna Bonacich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 60-78; see also Moon-Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006).

<sup>47</sup> Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest*, 194.

<sup>48</sup> This understanding of internal colonialism has been influenced by Pablo Gonzales Casanova, “Internal Colonialism and National Development,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 1, no. 4 (1965): 27-37; Joan W. Moore, “Colonialism: The Case of the Mexican Americans,” *Social Problems* 17, no. 4 (Spring 1970): 463-472; Tomás Almaguer, “Toward the Study of Chicano Colonialism,” *Atzlán* 2 (Spring 1971): 7-21; Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest*, 174-233; Chávez, “Aliens in Their Native Lands,” 785-809. As Robert Blauner discusses in his book *Racial Oppression in America*, in the case of *Black* Americans, the internal colonialism model in some ways operates through analogy. However, when examining the institutions of colonialism in the United States, the efficacy of colonial control, and the violence and oppression that accommodate it, continues to define the lives of *Black* Americans. Robert Blauner, *Racial Oppression in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 1-110; see also Robert Blauner, “Internal Colonialism and Ghetto Revolt,” *Social Problems* 16, no. 4 (Spring 1969): 393-408.

*Landscape.* This study understands landscapes as both material and immaterial productions, representing regional political economies, their histories, and the cultures that produce them. Material landscapes reflect the physical structures of geography as well as the social conditions in which they exist. Immaterial landscapes, however, are ideological spaces where cultural, economic, and political predilections intersect. Landscapes, therefore, represent the arrangements of power in a given region—at once presenting the world as desired by regional authority, while simultaneously masking the historical factors, political processes, and mechanisms of violence that make them possible.<sup>49</sup>

*Okie.* This study understands the label *Okie* as a socially constructed and value-based category of *White otherness* signifying a normative breach in the social boundaries of whiteness.<sup>50</sup> Its application for the purposes of this study, refers to the subset of agricultural bound southwestern migrants that were stigmatized for taking work as migratory farm labor in California’s agricultural regions during the 1930s and early 1940s.

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<sup>49</sup> This understanding of landscape was influenced by ideas in Don Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land: Migrant Workers and the California Landscape* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 13-35; W. J. T. Mitchell, “Introduction,” in *Landscapes and Power*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994)1-4; W. J. T. Mitchell, “Imperial Landscapes,” in *Landscapes and Power*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 1-34; Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 22-34; Sharon Zukin, *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 3-23, 217-250; John R. Stilgoe, *What is Landscape?* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2018); Peirce F. Lewis, “Axioms for Reading the Landscape: Some Guides to the American Scene,” in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, ed. D. W. Meinig (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 11-32; Kay J. Anderson, “The Idea of Chinatown: The Power of Place and Institutional Practice in the Making of a Racial Category,” *Annals of the Association of American Geography* 77, no. 4 (December 1987): 580-598.

<sup>50</sup> Matt Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 23, 150n4.



*Otherness.* Otherness is a sociological term meant to describe the connection between outsiders—or those seen as socially transgressive, deviant, or morally corrupt—and a general community. Although otherness can be displayed in a number of societal forms, according to scholars Lisa Isherwood and David Harris, typically class, gender, and race are the most commonly observed. This study accepts Isherwood and Harris’s portrait of otherness as a double-edged sword, simultaneously operating as a mode of differentiation and as a mechanism of social reinforcement—at once designating those who do not fully belong, while defining dominant group homogeneity against the perceived attributes of the constructed *Other*.<sup>51</sup>

*Race.* This study understands race not as a set of socially created categories of perceived difference based on phenotypical associations but as a technology of power, and one vital to all colonial enterprise. As Chapter III details, it accepts the concept of race presented by Sheth in *Towards a Political Philosophy of Race* in which race operates as a technology of power—that is, as a sociological device operating through particular means towards certain ends. Race, according to this concept, is a psychological tool utilized by sovereign authority to manage *Unruly* subject groups within the polity<sup>52</sup>—or, as this study surmises, those perceived as threats to the replicative capacity of regional colonial arrangements of power.

*Southwestern migrants (Southwesterners).* The terms southwestern migrants and southwester(s), broadly refers to the approximately 315,000 (possibly as high as

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<sup>51</sup> Lisa Isherwood and David Harris, *Radical Otherness: Sociological and Theological Approaches* (Durham: Acumen, 2013), 22-72.

<sup>52</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 22-85.

400,000) domestic migrants that relocated to California during the 1930s from the greater Western South of the United States (Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, Missouri and Kansas) due to a confluence of economic, environmental, and political factors.<sup>53</sup> Although historically portrayed as being monolithically “white,” it is worth noting that approximately one-percent of these migrants were *Black*. And, although their numbers are difficult to verify due to the nature of migratory labor in the American Southwest, this migration stream most likely also included a small number of *Chicanas/os* and Filipinos, as well.<sup>54</sup>

Rather than “Dust Bowl migrant”—a popular, yet misleading depiction of domestic migration during this transitional moment in United States history—the label “Southwestern migrant” more accurately depicts the origins and motivations of migrants from the Western South. Framing these migrants as southwesterners readjusts the focus of our analysis away from ecological disaster, bringing other incentives for migration into view, ultimately revealing that migration to California was primarily driven by political

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<sup>53</sup> These states are arranged in order of population outflows during this period, with Oklahoma experiencing the highest percentage of outflow migration and Kansas experiencing the lowest. It is worth noting that these were not the only states to experience outflow migration to the West during this period, but due to the extreme regional impacts of depression, political dysfunction, and drought on these states, southwestern migrants made up the vast majority of inflow groups to California. *Gregory, American Exodus*, Table 3.1, 83.

<sup>54</sup> According to one California State Chamber of Commerce report including data of “migrants checked at border agricultural stations . . . according to racial stock” from 1936 to 1937, “approximately 8,000 [were classified] as Mexican, approximately 3,000 as Negro, 2,800 as Filipino, and some 1,300 as various other racial stocks.” The problem with this data is, due to the nature of migratory labor in the American Southwest, many migrants classified as “Mexican” and “Filipino” specifically, may not have migrated from the greater Western South, and indeed, may have crossed the state border several times over the study’s two-year period. See “Migrants—A National Problem and its Impacts on California—Report and Recommendations of the Statewide Committee on the Migrant Problem,” published by the California State Chamber of Commerce in 1940, printed in U.S. Congress, House, Select Committee to Investigate the Interstate Migration of Destitute Citizens, 76<sup>th</sup> Congress, 3<sup>rd</sup> Session, Part V (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1938), 2762 (hereafter cited as *Tolan Hearings*).

miscalculation, the failures of capitalism, and the decline of a popular American agrarianism. Although severe drought was a key factor, economic depression compounded by increased agricultural mechanization and a disastrous crop-reduction program implemented by the Agriculture Adjustment Administration (AAA) sustained this episode of American migration.<sup>55</sup> The AAA program was a poorly executed attempt by the Franklin D. Roosevelt Administration to control the market value of agricultural products by compensating farmers to take land out of production. Unfortunately, agriculture nation-wide never fully recovered from the recession that followed the Great War, and by the Great Depression of the 1930s many farmers in the Cotton Belt of the Western South had long been resigned to tenancies.<sup>56</sup> When the AAA implemented its crop-reduction program, large farmers reaped all the benefits—using their subsidies to purchase new tractors and farm equipment to replace tenant farmers.<sup>57</sup> Within two years of the program’s enactment, over 700,000 tenant farmers and nearly as many farmworkers had applied for federal relief.<sup>58</sup> “Southwestern migrants”—of which agriculturally-bound *Okies*, *Arkies* and *Texicans* were constructed subsets—represents,

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<sup>55</sup> Testimony of Governor Leon C. Phillips, of Oklahoma, in *Tolan Hearings*, 2033-2035; Gregory, *American Exodus*, 11-12; Stein, *California and the Dust Bowl Migration*, 6-9.

<sup>56</sup> *Tolan Hearings*, 323; Gregory, *American Exodus*, 11-12; Stein, *California and the Dust Bowl Migration*, 6.

<sup>57</sup> *Tolan Hearings*, 323; Stein, *California and the Dust Bowl Migration*, 7; Lilian Creisler, “Little Oklahoma: A Study of the Social and Economic Adjustment of Refugees in Beard Tract, Modesto, Stanislaus County, California During the Period July 1936 to May 1939,” Master’s Thesis (Berkeley: University of California, 1940), 5; Paul S. Taylor and Dorothea Lange, “Again the Covered Wagon,” *Survey Graphic* 24, no. 7 (July 1935): 349.

<sup>58</sup> Creisler, “Little Oklahoma,” 5.

then, the body of American refugees displaced by these factors and forced to migrate as a result.

*Sovereign authority.* This study accepts Falguni A. Sheth's understanding of sovereign authority in *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*: as a force operating towards its own ends through the will of the general public as an intermediary via juridico-political means. She adopts this view of sovereign power from Michel Foucault, who saw sovereign power as a force directed by a diffuse network of authoritative entities throughout a liberal polity. Although Sheth agrees with Foucault's assessment that sovereign power can be wielded diffusely, she also believes that power in a liberal society is more often wielded directly by juridico-political mechanisms designed to serve those whose interests align with the elite establishment.<sup>59</sup>

*Stigmatype.* Sociologist Matt Wray coined the term "stigmatype" to refer to boundary terms meant to signify social difference. In his monograph, *Not Quite White*, Wray identifies *stigmatypes* as labels that "simultaneously denote and enact cultural and cognitive divides between in-groups and out-groups, between acceptable and unacceptable identities, between proper and improper behaviors. They create categories of status and prestige, explicitly, through labeling and naming, and implicitly through invidious comparison."<sup>60</sup> *Stigmatypes*, Wray explains, are more specific than stereotypes (that "need not be stigmatizing"), they "[speak] both to the classifying impulse—the

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<sup>59</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 16, 169.

<sup>60</sup> Wray, *Not Quite White*, 23.

impulse to typify—and to the hierarchicalization of categories through denigration of the other.”<sup>61</sup>

*Whiteness*. This study understands whiteness as a normative function of white supremacy and the key component of racial construction in the United States. Within the discourse of race, whiteness operates as a sociological paradigm that reinforces the phenomena of individual and structural racism. As the primary structural component of race, whiteness relegates the position of all conceptually *non-white* subject groups within a social stratum of racial hierarchy determined by their proximity to the ideals of the dominant white class. Since whiteness is an ideological function rather than a biological category, commonly understood physical markers of racial distinction do not automatically determine subject group location within the racial hierarchy. Instead, such locations are value based and mutable, fluctuating in response to shifting power dynamics in the sociopolitical realm—even in response to the varying conditions of whiteness itself.<sup>62</sup>

### An Unfortunate Declaration

The history that follows is not intended to be, nor should it be interpreted as, a narrative of white victimhood—it is quite the opposite in fact. Unfortunately, in recent years popular discontent with America’s neoliberal project has led to a resurgence in fascist ideology within the United States, and histories such as the one presented in this

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<sup>61</sup> Wray, *Not Quite White*, 150n4.

<sup>62</sup> This understanding of whiteness was influenced by ideas regarding whiteness in W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* (New York: Free Press, 1992); David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 2007); Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010); Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*; Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*.

study—which seek to deconstruct systems of oppression—are often twisted by alt-right factions to discount the grievances of their victims. The most blatant example being the myth of the “Irish slave,” which attempts to construct equivalencies between indentured Irish servants in colonial British North America and chattel slaves from Africa, despite clear structural and onto-juridical differences. Such accounts distort historical facts to create false equivalencies that reinforce narratives of white supremacy—for if Irish and *Blacks* were both slaves, and Irish Americans succeeded in *becoming* culturally white within American society, then, by inference *Blacks* must be innately incapable of doing the same. They must be naturally deficient in some way.

The aims of this study are not to distort the historical record but to shed light on the ways that race operates as an agent of erasure. Its task is a straightforward one: to explore race beyond dogmatic notions of biological difference and examine it as a technology of power in order to identify how it works; who exactly it continues to benefit; and—if indeed a technology of power originally deployed in colonial spaces to manage the *Unruly*—to identify its current functions in society, so its elements may be identified and deconstructed. Such inquiries may lead to the realization that race is more than just an ideological lens, it is a crucial element in the national project—or, as sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant have concluded, a “master category” of social structuring within American culture.<sup>63</sup> Race may even be structurally necessitated by the theoretical dictates of liberalism itself and may result from its interminable need to define itself against an *Other*.<sup>64</sup> The most “unsettling” aspect of such inquiries, therefore,

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<sup>63</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 106.

<sup>64</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 22-25, 29-35; Goldberg, *The Racial State*, 23-24;

is the realization that each and every American, as a result of a culture of epistemological blindness, *is* racist. Narrow assessments of race as something biological perpetuate this blindness. Ultimately, such assessments prevent us from confronting the truths required to deconstruct race, ensuring both the perpetuation of hierarchies of worth (including gender and class) and race-thinking.

The history that follows seeks to eliminate such blindness. It does so by embracing the nuances of California's racial landscape. Although a narrative of differentiation, it does not suggest an equivalency between the *Okie* experience and that of California's other racialized minority subject groups. It is not a history of how domestic migrants were treated in the same manner or racialized to the same degree as California's racial *Others*, but instead an exploration of how the region's colonial determinants shaped the otherness of all conceptually exogenous subject groups, including *Okies*, in varying degrees and in response to everchanging sociopolitical inducements. It is, however, arguing that if southwesterner differentiation shares common characteristics with other experiences of racialization, then understandings of race need to be adjusted to accommodate this history and other histories where phenotypical variance is not readily apparent. To equate the southwesterner experience with that of the United States' most oppressed racial subject groups—such as the native peoples of North America or *Black* Americans—would be irresponsible and categorically false. On the other hand, to discount the role of race in this episode of American migration entirely on the basis of perceived phenotypical whiteness, without considering the sociopolitical

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Jelly-Schapiro, *Security and Terror*, 30.

functions of race as a technology of colonial arrangements of power, would be equally irresponsible.



## Chapter II.

### A New Rome: California's Colonial Dynamic

As mentioned in the Introduction, this chapter is divided into two main sections. In an effort to underscore the theoretical advantage of utilizing a colonial framework in assessing this history, the first section, “Colonial Reproduction in California,” examines colonialism through a teleological lens as both a political institution and a cultural practice. As this study recognizes race and colonialism as contemporaneous phenomena, the intent of this section is to engage philosophical discourses in a theoretical overview of colonialism in order to move beyond common understandings of the phenomena before discussing its normative impacts on Anglo-Californian identity and its influence in shaping the state's distinct racial order in the following chapters. Detailing the region's colonial progression, the second section builds on these theories to assess the impact of California's colonial heritage in determining the sociopolitical conditions of the state's postcolonial landscape. The ultimate goal of which is to present a nuanced account demonstrating the continued relevance of the state's—and this nation's—colonial past in defining its colonial present.

#### Colonial Reproduction in California

Framing modern California in colonial terms, especially under Anglo-American rule during the twentieth century, at first seems like a theoretical stretch—if not wholly inaccurate. The story of this country's national formation combined with the Turnerian

myth of a “virgin” frontier—or, a pristine “wilderness,” existing at a “meeting point between savagery and civilization”<sup>65</sup>—ready for American settlement, has engendered a common understanding of colonialism as a phenomenon that exists *outside* the temporal and spatial boundaries of the United States.<sup>66</sup> This perception of colonialism is typically understood in the American context as either a *settler* dynamic that preceded independence—that is, within the context of the original thirteen colonies of British North America that became the United States—or in developmental terms that apply to foreign territories outside the geographic and cultural boundaries of the United States which have yet to achieve full statehood—such as Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the Virgin Islands, and, formerly, the Philippines. In other words, colonialism is either a temporary, formative, arrangement of power that Americans as a sovereign people overcame, or it is imagined to be a “mutually beneficial” arrangement of power

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<sup>65</sup> Fredrick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1986 [1920]), 1-3.

<sup>66</sup> Tracing the myth of a vacant continent back to Fredrik Jackson Turner, and noting the role of historians in perpetuating that myth, in his 1950 monograph *Virgin Land*, scholar Henry Nash Smith writes, “one of the most persistent generalizations concerning American life and character is the notion that our society has been shaped by the pull of a vacant continent drawing populations westward through the passages of the Alleghenies, across the Mississippi Valley, over the high plains and mountains of the Far West to the Pacific Coast.” This perspective, Smith indicates, influenced a “whole generation of historians in this nation,” and although many scholars had started to reject Turner’s thesis by mid-century, Smith notes that it “is still by far the most familiar interpretation of the American past” (Chávez also references this passage when comparing *Chicana/o* myths of the Southwest with those of Anglo Americans). Veracini regards this dynamic as a form of “perception transfer,” in which “indigenous people are disavowed in a variety of ways and their actual presence is not registered (perception transfer can happen, for example, when indigenous people are understood as part of the landscape) . . . One of its consequences is that when really existing indigenous people enter the field of settler perception, they are deemed to have entered the settler space and can therefore be considered exogenous.” As Veracini also theorizes, many other forms of transfer are also prerequisite to the *settler* colonial project, not the least of which are “conceptual displacement” and “necropolitical transfer” (military liquidation). Within this complex of narrative and disavowal, Veracini also includes the “Providence of God” narrative—first demonstrated by William Bradford in his history *Of Plymouth Plantation*. Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 35, 37; Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (New York: Vintage Books, 1950), 3-4; see also Chávez, *The Lost Land*, 2; William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation* printed in *The Mayflower Papers: Selected Writing of Colonial New England*, ed. Nathaniel Philbrick and Thomas Philbrick (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), 4.

maintained in foreign territory—over foreign people—under the auspice of national interests.<sup>67</sup> In either case, colonialism as an institution seems somewhat out of step with American values. In a sense, it is a distinctly “un-American” institution, being an arrangement of power that is neither geographically nor temporally applicable *within* the United States. In the case of California, this—combined with the saliency of rapid statehood and, as Daniel suggests, prompt “Americanization”<sup>68</sup>—lends credence to further colonial disavowal.

This logic, however, obscures the social hybridity of California’s Spanish past, and the myriad of ways that colonial mechanisms of power are reproduced in the postcolonial space—manifest in political ideologies, social discourses, industrial relations, as well as the physical landscape itself. In order to understand the continued institutional relevance of California’s colonial past in shaping the sociopolitical environment of the state during the New Deal era this section engages a philosophical discourse on colonialism, with the ultimate aim of identifying sites of colonial reproduction and assessing their efficacy in maintaining the state’s rural hierarchies. More precisely, the goal of this section is to establish a colonial dialectic that facilitates further analysis of California’s unique racial hierarchy (Chapter IV), including the location of southwesterners in its strata (Chapter V), and the normative function of its discourse in maintaining social boundaries in the region and reproducing the colonial arrangements of power on which the state’s agribusiness relied.

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<sup>67</sup> J. H. O’Dell, “A Special Variety of Colonialism,” *Freedomways* 7, no.1 (Winter 1967): 7; O’Dell article also quoted in Robert L. Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America: An Analytic History* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1992), 8.

<sup>68</sup> California established itself as a republic and petitioned for statehood within two years of annexation. Kevin Starr, *California: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2005), 80.

## Steinbeck's Colonial Critique

From the late nineteenth century onwards, California enjoyed an almost mythic status in its own right. Since the 1880s growers in California's citrus belt had invested heavily in promoting the region as a veritable Eden. Fruit crate labels, advertisements and elaborate displays at expositions—funded by boosters in an effort to encourage investment and foster tourism in the region—reinforced the idea of the state's landscape as an agricultural paradise at the pinnacle of capital advancement.<sup>69</sup> Markedly absent from this mythical landscape, however, are the formerly colonized and imported peoples who made it possible—California's displaced indigenous, *Chicana/o*, *Mexicana/o* and immigrant subject groups. This carefully fabricated representation of the Californian landscape obscured the harsh reality of the state's agricultural practices and its dependence on “tractable” labor—ingeniously functioning as a form of historical erasure in which the contributions of these laborers were supplanted by narratives of progress, myths of natural abundance and depictions of grower superiority.<sup>70</sup> Douglas Sackman underscores the symbolic importance of this process in America's imperial project, noting in his monograph, *Orange Empire*, that Southern California's “gardens [citrus groves] naturalized social inequality and sublimated the facts of conquest, proclaiming

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<sup>69</sup> Sackman, *Orange Empire*, 20-116; see also Douglas Cazaux Sackman, “By Their Fruits Ye Shall Know Them’: ‘Nature Cross Culture Hybridization’ and the California Citrus Industry, 1893-1939,” *California History* 74, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 82-99; Anthea M. Hartig, “‘In a World He Has Created’: Class Collectivity and the Growers’ Landscape of Southern California Citrus Industry, 1890-1940.” *California History* 74, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 100-111; Michael C. Steiner, “Commentary: Reading the Citrus Landscape: Comments Concerning Papers by Douglas Sackman and Anthea Hartig,” *California History* 74, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 112-117.

<sup>70</sup> Sackman, *Orange Empire*, 44.

instead that California's verdant landscape was simply a manifestation of natural evolution and American destiny."<sup>71</sup>

The social turbulence of the Great Depression, however, pulled back the veil of capitalist advancement to reveal a colonial arrangement of power at work—ultimately eroding California's mythical image and threatening regional grower sovereignty in the process. Although John Steinbeck's literary masterpiece *The Grapes of Wrath* is largely considered a critique of capitalism gone awry, and a call for middle-class solidarity in response to the destructive nature of super-exploitative industrial practices that transcend traditional boundaries of race, his portrayal of the Joads also sheds light on the continued relevance of California's colonial dynamic during this period.<sup>72</sup> Born and raised in the Salinas Valley, Steinbeck was intimately familiar with agriculture and the continuity of the state's colonial past. In one of *Grapes'* sixteen intercalary chapters—a chapter that at first seems anachronistic—Steinbeck betrays the importance of the state's colonial past in defining the conditions of its colonial present, and along with it the mindset of growers in its agricultural valleys. The chapter traces California's continuity of colonial arrangements of power back to the region's Anglo-American conquest, reminding its

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<sup>71</sup> Sackman, *Orange Empire*, 52.

<sup>72</sup> It is clear from his letters to George Albee and Elizabeth Otis that Steinbeck understood the injustices of the industrial agricultural system, as well as the ability of his writing to draw attention to them and initiate change. Scholars such as Douglas Cazaux Sackman, Don Mitchell, and Kathryn Olmsted, have also commented on the ability of Steinbeck's novels to disrupt the regional status quo. Sackman, *Orange Empire*, 262-288; Olmsted, *Right Out of California*, 220-225; Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 16-17; letter to George Albee, [month and day unknown] 1936, printed in John Steinbeck, *John Steinbeck: A Life in Letters*, ed. Elaine Steinbeck and Robert Wallsten (New York: Penguin Books, 1976 [1975]), 132-133; letter to George and Anne, January 11, 1937, printed in Steinbeck, *Life in Letters*, 133-134; letter to Elizabeth Otis, February [day unknown], 1938, printed in Steinbeck, *Life in Letters*, 157-158; letter to Elizabeth Otis, February 14, 1938, printed in Steinbeck, *Life in Letters*, 159; letter to Elizabeth Otis, March 7, 1938, printed in Steinbeck, *Life in Letters*, 161-162; see also Marci Lingo, "Forbidden Fruit: The Banning of *The Grapes of Wrath* in Kern County," *Libraries & Culture* 38, no. 4 (Fall, 2003): 351-377.

audience at its opening that, “Once California belonged to Mexico and its land to Mexicans; and a horde of tattered feverish Americans poured in.”<sup>73</sup> In the chapter that follows, Steinbeck, after detailing the process of land monopolization under Anglo-American occupation, details a fairly complex argument that not only frames California as a site of colonial reproduction, but also situates southwestern migrants in the colonial narrative as California’s next batch of imported “serfs.”<sup>74</sup>

Framing the state’s commercial enterprise in colonial terms while reinforcing its dependence on a process of disavowal, Steinbeck writes, “Now farming became industry, and the owners followed Rome, although they did not know it.” This passage, according to literary scholar Sarah D. Wald in her critique of *Grapes*, is an “accusation” meant to emphasize the incongruity of California’s commercial environment, and growers themselves, with America’s democratic principles, asserting that “Americans desire an emulation of Greek democracy, not the fall of decadent imperial Rome. By comparing California to Rome, Steinbeck represents it as a place *outside* of the United States. [emphasis added]”<sup>75</sup> This interpretation, as Wald points out, is supported in other parts of the book that frame California as a land separate, if only ideologically, from the rest of the United States. For instance, before the Joads can officially enter into the state, they

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<sup>73</sup> Tracing the roots of this conflict back to Anglo-American land monopolization, Steinbeck anticipates the internal colonial literary critiques of later *Chicana/o* writers which frame seizure and industrial privatization in neocolonial terms, and “Mexicans” as just one of the regions indigenous populations displaced by occupation. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 231; see also Gloria Anzadúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Meztiza*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 2007 [1987]); José David Saldívar, *The Dialectics of Our America: Genealogy, Cultural Critique, and Literary History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 82-84; Chávez, “Aliens in Their Native Lands,” 802-803.

<sup>74</sup> Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 232-236.

<sup>75</sup> Wald, *The Nature of California*, 61.

have to pass through an agricultural inspection checkpoint.<sup>76</sup> Another example that Wald uses to illustrate this point is when the “tubby man from unit 3” in the Weedpatch Camp Committee meeting draws a territorial distinction between the autonomy of the people within the FSA camp and grower sovereignty outside it, exclaiming “This here’s United States, not California.”<sup>77</sup> The dehumanizing effects of the colonial dynamic, however, are made far more poignantly by the dichotomy Ma presents when she reflects upon the hardships and injustices that the Joads experienced before reaching Weedpatch and the sense of dignity that the camp provides. Ma reflects, “‘An’ in Needles, that police. He done somepin to me, made me feel mean. Made me feel ashamed. An’ now I ain’t ashamed. These folks is our folks—is our folks. An’ that manager, he come an’ set an’ drank coffee, an’ he says, ‘Mrs. Joad’ this, an’ Mrs. Joad’ that—an’ ‘How you gettin’ on, Mrs. Joad?’” She stopped and sighed. ‘Why, I feel like people again.’”<sup>78</sup>

It is Steinbeck’s focus on “imported slaves,” however, that truly frame California’s agricultural landscape in colonial terms as a race dependent landscape. Steinbeck continues, “They [the owners] imported slaves, although they did not call them slaves: Chinese, Japanese, Mexicans, Filipinos. They live on rice and beans, the business

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<sup>76</sup> Although Steinbeck refers to this as a simple “Agricultural inspection,” it is clear that Steinbeck meant for it to be more intrusive and something synonymous with a border patrol checkpoint (as eluded to by Wald), which, given the testimony of some southwestern migrants, may have been how it felt. As will be addressed in Chapter V, officers from the Los Angeles Police Department acting under orders from Chief James Davis were also unconstitutionally deployed along the state’s ports of entry in 1936 to prevent “vagrants” and “transients” from entering the state. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 225-226; Wald, *The Nature of California*, 61; see also, the interviews of Ethel Belezzuoli; Edger Combs; Vera Criswell; Lewis Kessler; and Hazel Mitchell digital access, California Odyssey Project: Oral History Archive, California State University, Bakersfield (Bakersfield, CA) <https://hrc.csub.edu/odyssey/dbinterviews/>.

<sup>77</sup> Wald, *The Nature of California*, 61; Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 334.

<sup>78</sup> Wald also comments on the importance of this passage, though in a different context, associating instead with a process of resettlement and a reaffirmation of democratic values on the part of the Joads. Wald, *The Nature of California*, 62-63; Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 307.

men said. They don't need much. They wouldn't know what to do with good wages. Why, look how they live. Why, look what they eat. And if they get funny—deport them.”<sup>79</sup> In addition to its racial dimensions, this passage is revealing for two reasons. First, it indicates that the state's colonial project had come to depend upon a form of imported colonialism, where exogenous *Others* were brought into California, often through coercive practices, and exploited under the constant threat of deportation. Second, this passage reflects the function of California's discourses of inferiority in both constructing and perpetuating the social boundaries of normativity that defined rural mores of acceptability.

This second point is made more complex when southwesterners are accounted for. By casting *Okies* in the same context as other “[o]utlanders” and “foreigners,” Steinbeck not only expresses the preference of California's growers to maintain a labor force composed of exogenous *Others*, but also demonstrates the normative function of social boundaries in constructing perceptions of radical otherness that move beyond traditional discourses of racial inferiority. Drawing a direct comparison between perceptions of foreign laborers (in the quote above) and *Okies*, Steinbeck evokes the grower's voice in writing, “Sure, they [*Okies*] talk the same language, but they ain't the same. *Look how they live*. Think any of us folks'd live like that? Hell, no! [emphasis added]”<sup>80</sup> Steinbeck further indicts California's rural establishment in overtly racial terms, this time conjuring the voice of pseudo-fascist law enforcement, writing, “Give ‘em [*Okies*] somepin to think about. Got to keep ‘em in line or Christ only knows what they'll do! Why, Jesus, they're

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<sup>79</sup> Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 232.

<sup>80</sup> Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 236.



as dangerous as niggers in the South! If they get together there ain't nothing that'll stop 'em."<sup>81</sup> While "Such comparisons," according to Wald, "make the threat to the Joads' freedom clear," they also underscore the racial dimensions of California's colonial dynamic.<sup>82</sup> By associating *Okies* with Southern *Blacks*, and grower justifications for violence and oppression with well-established racial scripts of white supremacy in the American South, Steinbeck employs a cognitive inference that links California's factory farm with the Southern plantation; the grower with the master; and the state with the colony.<sup>83</sup>

These views obviously challenge leftist critiques which view Steinbeck's narratives in both *Grapes*, and his previous reportage in *The Harvest Gypsies* (1936), as discourses of exceptionalism meant to underscore the whiteness of his subjects.<sup>84</sup> However, if Steinbeck's goal in writing *Grapes*—as he indicates in a letter to literary agent Elizabeth Otis in March of 1938—was to "put a tag of shame on the greedy bastards who are responsible for this [abuse],"<sup>85</sup>—by which he meant banks and

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<sup>81</sup> Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 236.

<sup>82</sup> Wald, *The Nature of California*, 58.

<sup>83</sup> This type of inference can be seen as a type of "bridging inference." Bridging inferences, as defined by the psychologist and political scientist Robert P. Abelson, is a "type of locale inference often studied by psycholinguists...in which the reader must make implicit links explicit in order to produce connections in the text." Robert P. Abelson, "Psychological Status of the Script Concept," *American Psychologist* 36, no. 7 (July 1981): 716.

<sup>84</sup> Charles Cunningham, "Rethinking the Politics of *The Grapes of Wrath*," *Culture Logic: An Electronic Journal of Marxist Theory and Practice* 2 (2002): 7-18, accessed November 14, 2020, <https://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/clogic/article/view/191933>; Wald, *The Nature of California*, 52-65.

<sup>85</sup> It is worth noting that if it was not for a sizable body of corroborating evidence from a multitude of sources, this statement would have the adverse effect of leaving Steinbeck's credibility in question. It is clear from a quote in *Life* in 1939 that Steinbeck understood the gravity of the situation. He is quoted as saying 'I'm trying to write history while it is happening and I don't want to be wrong.' However, according to several oral interviews recorded by California State University, Bakersfield, many southwestern migrants felt that Steinbeck's portrayal was inaccurate or exaggerated, and some even held him responsible for the prevalence of the *Okie* stereotype. John Steinbeck *Life* quote reprinted in John Steinbeck, *A Life in*

California growers—then such narratives should not be viewed within the singular light of racial affirmation, but instead deserves to be viewed as an indictment of California’s colonial structures, the racial hierarchy on which they depend, and the institutions and individuals which empower them.<sup>86</sup> Although this study clearly regards *Grapes* as a primary document, as a fictional account its value is purely sociological. The true value of Steinbeck’s work is not only his insights into the state’s social atmosphere during this period of domestic migration and resettlement, but also his ability to expose the continued relevance of California’s colonial arrangements of power in determining the region’s local discourses of inferiority and social boundaries of exclusion.

#### A Theory of Colonial Modernity

Taking a Eurocentric perspective of the phenomenon in his 1995 study *Colonialism*, Jürgen Osterhammel synthesized a widely accepted definition of formal colonialism that emphasizes its nature as a socioeconomic commercial enterprise rooted in a hierarchy of power made possible by mechanisms of violence and political domination, stating:

*Colonialism* is a relationship of domination between an indigenous (or forcibly imported) majority and a minority of foreign invaders [emphasis added]. The fundamental decisions affecting the lives of the colonized people are made and implemented by the colonial rulers in pursuit of

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*Letters*, 162; see also, the interviews of Ethel Belezuoli; Talmage Collins; Clara Davis; Myran Frane; Martha Jackson; Frank Manies; Quinn Martin; Hazel Mitchell; Juanita Price; and Ruth Woodall, digital access, California Odyssey Project.

<sup>86</sup> With his neo-Marxist analysis of *Harvest Gypsies* and *Grapes of Wrath*, Cunningham argues a similar point in his journal article. He critiques Michael Denning’s racial analysis of *Grapes of Wrath* in *The Cultural Front*, positing that any analysis of Steinbeck’s work seen through the singular lens of racism, is “reductive,” and more importantly, discounts the importance of the ways class and race intersect under conditions of exploitation. Cunningham, “Rethinking the Politics of *The Grapes of Wrath*,” 2-3; letter to Elizabeth Otis, March 7, 1938, printed in Steinbeck, *Life in Letters*, 161-162.

interests that are often defined in a distant metropolis. Rejecting cultural compromises with the colonized population, the colonizers are convinced of their own superiority and of their ordained mandate to rule.<sup>87</sup>

Although it can hardly be denied that California as a zone of conquest was invaded by Anglo Americans, who were considered foreign to the region, this definition is wholly inadequate for assessing California as a colonial space. A literal application of this definition to California automatically discounts colonial claims. First, Anglo California has never had an “indigenous majority.”<sup>88</sup> The Gold Rush of 1848 to 1849 swiftly shifted the demographics of the region and it is estimated that within three years of the first initial wave of speculation the regions dwindling indigenous population was outnumbered by non-indigenous occupants nearly four to one.<sup>89</sup> In the northern portion of the state, during the rapid process of “Americanization” that Daniel describes, most of California’s surviving indigenous population died from disease, was swiftly transferred to reservations, or were simply liquidated.<sup>90</sup> A generation later in Southern California, the state’s *Chicana/o* and *Mexicana/o* populations experienced, in essence, a form of “de-

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<sup>87</sup> Osterhammel, *Colonialism*, 16-17.

<sup>88</sup> Indigenous in this instance refers to both California’s remaining tribal indigenous population and the neophyte communities of the mission complex. However, even if the *Mestiza/o* populations of the state, mainly located in Southern California, were accounted for, as they can also be considered conceptionally indigenous, they would still be part of a minority.

<sup>89</sup> According to Kevin Starr, in his general history of California, “Within three years of President Polk’s announcement [that gold had been discovered in California], the non-Native American population had soared to 255,000.” What Starr fails to state, however, is during this same period, two thirds of California’s Native American peoples disappeared, when more than 100,000 were killed, mostly by civilians, in what historian Edward D. Castillo has called and unparalleled episode of “theft and mass murder” in the United States, leaving no more than an estimated 70,000 survivors. Starr, *California*, 80; Edward D. Castillo, “A Short Overview of California Indian History,” *California State Native American Heritage Commission*, accessed December 14, 2020, <http://nahc.ca.gov/resources/california-indian-history/>.

<sup>90</sup> Sherburne F. Cook, “The Destruction of the California Indian,” in *Racism in California: A Reader in the History of Oppression*, ed. Rodger Daniels and Spencer C. Olin (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 13-19.

indigenization” which permanently marked them *Alterity* and exogenous in the state’s local discourses<sup>91</sup>—a fact that was later solidified through federal immigration policy.<sup>92</sup>

Second, it can hardly be said that California, with its inflated sense of regional grower sovereignty, has a distinct metropole. Given the unique character of absentee landownership in the state and agriculture dependence on finance and other services, any relationship between “colony” and “metropole” that exists in the state can be viewed as internal, characterized through purely economic arrangements between growers and managerial staff in the state’s rural economies, and the owners, banks, railroad companies, brokers and service providers situated in San Francisco and Los Angeles.<sup>93</sup>

Third, although Anglo Californians may have been convinced of their “own superiority” and their “ordained mandate to rule” in the West is clearly reflected in larger national narratives of Manifest Destiny, it is apparent from California’s cultural and physical landscapes that this process clearly affected the region’s dominant collective identity. Anglo Americans in California appropriated a distinctly Spanish heritage (or at least idealized version of it), making “cultural compromise with the colonized

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<sup>91</sup> Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest*, 4; for Anglo-American occupation of Southern California and the myth of native transfer (de-indigenization”) see also Chávez, “Aliens in Their Native Lands,” 785-809; Chávez, *The Lost Land*, 43-106.

<sup>92</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*.

<sup>93</sup> Starting in the 1870s, growers began investing heavily in irrigation projects that made the water supply more reliable for specialized crops such as citrus, nuts, and melons, as well as a network of railroads to get their products to eastern markets. Building and maintaining irrigation and railroad projects on this scale however, required access to capital, and banking and finance played an ever-increasing role in the state’s agriculture. Norris Hundley, *The Great Thirst: Californians and Water, 1770s-1990s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 119-160; McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 59-65; Sackman, *Orange Empire*, 32-34, 87-96, 121; Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft: California, Vol. XXIV. Vol VII.* (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft & Company, Publishers, 1890), 534-634; Henry George, “Our Land and Land Policy,” *The Complete Works of Henry George, Speeches, Lectures and Miscellaneous Writings*, (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1911), 47-50, 68-69.

population” apparent, at least at some level.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, as Nayan Shah indicates in his monograph *Stranger Intimacy*, the success of California’s agriculture—as well as the survival of its inhabitants—was contingent upon intricate arrangements of “interdependent relationships” between “migrant workers, labor contractors, sharecroppers, farm owners, food distributors, railroad companies, equipment dealers, and bankers,” a dynamic that crosscut regional distinctions of class, race, ethnicity and gender.<sup>95</sup>

Further ambiguities surround Osterhammel’s exception of “forcibly imported [slaves/labor].” Although it is clear that California agriculture was successful due to a procession of cheap, easily deported or removed, foreign labor—a corpus that, as Steinbeck suggests, can easily be considered “imported”—what is less clear is what qualifies as “forced.” Each group came to California under different circumstances, for different reasons and under varying degrees of autonomy. And, although none of them can be depicted as being “forced” to migrate to California—that is, under the threat of direct violence—this does not mean that a certain amount of coercion was not evident in their calculous to migrate.

For these reasons, Anglo California eludes the traditional classifications of formal colonialism, and yet—as Steinbeck reveals—California in practice, and its agricultural sectors in particular, benefited greatly from a colonial dynamic that it maintained throughout its postcolonial (post Ibero-American) experience. In reality, the state can be

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<sup>94</sup> Chávez, *The Lost Land*, 85-90; McWilliams, *North from Mexico*, 16-25.

<sup>95</sup> Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 90-125, quote 92.

seen as benefiting from a series of intersecting colonial phenomena. For these reasons, this study endorses a colonial modernity framework.

The theory of colonial modernity that this study promotes can be understood as a colonial arrangement of power reenacted under the guise of modernity in a postcolonial moment.<sup>96</sup> This connotation of “postcolonial,” as applied here, should be understood as a state of conditions in and of itself. Drawing inspiration from the work of literary scholars and postcolonial theorists Simon Gikandi and Eli Jelly-Schapiro, this notion of postcolonialism conveys a type of “postcoloniality,” characterized not as a moment that exists beyond the formal colonial dynamic—in other words as a period of time or development *after* formal colonialism—but instead in evolutionary terms, as colonial arrangements of power perfected in a “colonial present.”<sup>97</sup> In his 1996 monograph *Maps of Englishness*, Gikandi notes in the African context of decolonization (although his insights are useful here as well) that he uses “the term *postcolonialism* as a code for the state of undecidability in which the culture of colonialism continues to resonate in what was supposed to be its negation.”<sup>98</sup> Clarifying distinctions between his notion of postcolonial and that of neocolonial, he continues “‘postcolonial’ is not only a fiction, but a pernicious fiction, a cover-up of a dangerous period in our people’s lives. For unlike

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<sup>96</sup> As mentioned in the Introduction, this model of colonial modernity was initially inspired by Eli Jelly-Schapiro’s postcolonial theory of the “colonial present.” In a footnote in *Security and Terror* he defines colonial modernity as signifying “the inherence of colonial forms of culture, governance, and accumulation to the constitution—the origins and enduring essence—of modernity at large.” Jelly-Schapiro, *Security and Terror*, colonial modernity 9-11, 179n4.

<sup>97</sup> The term “postcoloniality” is utilized by Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 14-15; Jelly-Schapiro, *Security and Terror*, 14-15.

<sup>98</sup> Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness*, 14; Jelly-Schapiro also utilizes this quote in Jelly-Schapiro, *Security and Terror*, 14.

‘neocolonial,’ for instance, ‘postcolonial’ posits a notion of *something finished*.<sup>99</sup>

Expanding on these perceptions—while utilizing Aimé Césaire’s notion of *choc en retour*<sup>100</sup>—Jelly-Schapiro, in *Security and Terror*, suggests that the term postcolonial “read literally, denotes the time beyond modern colonialism. In a different interpretation, however, the postcolonial names the resumption or rearticulation of colonial culture, in the metropole and the colony, after the moment of independence,”<sup>101</sup>—or, as this study suggests in the case of California, after annexation and statehood.

This study, herein understands colonial modernity as a repertoire of colonial rationales and dominant class disavowals reproducing and perfecting colonial arrangements of power within postcolonial landscapes, consequently constituting the colonial present under the semblances of capital enterprise and social advancement. As such, colonial modernity as a framework can be understood as encompassing and accounting for the elements of multiple colonial phenomena, the most relevant of which in the context of California are imported colonialism, internal colonialism and *settler colonialism*.<sup>102</sup> Although these colonial modes frequently operate independent of each

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<sup>99</sup> Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness*, 14.

<sup>100</sup> Jelly-Schapiro expands on the concept of *choc en retour* utilized by Césaire in *Discourses on Colonialism*, which, as Jelly-Schapiro notes, “shed[s] light upon the colonial origins of intra-European genocide” under the Nazi regime. Jelly-Schapiro proposes a drastic expansion of the application of *choc en retour*, stating that it “signifies the reenactment in the postcolonial metropole—including the ‘Homeland’ of the U.S. imperium—of various modes of governance and accumulation that were innovated or perfected in the space of the colony; it names, even more capaciously, the contemporary reverberation, in the global North and South alike, of intersecting, often unacknowledged imperial histories.” Jelly-Schapiro, *Security and Terror*, 9-10; see also Aimé Césaire, *Discourses on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000 [1955]), 35-39.

<sup>101</sup> Jelly-Schapiro, *Security and Terror*, 14.

<sup>102</sup> Commenting on the flexibility and utility of colonial modernity as a framework, Jelly-Schapiro asserts that it “encompasses manifold expressions of economic and political domination by territorial and extra territorial entities—from the settler-colonization of the New World, to European imperialism in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean, to neo-colonial or neo-imperial forms of capitalist or military power.” Jelly-Schapiro, *Security and Terror*, 180n19.

other—the perceivability of one mode over others being more apparent at certain periods than others—more often than not they are mutually reinforcing and benefit from common mechanisms of socioeconomic domination. The review that follows briefly assesses these models in order to underscore their importance in perpetuating the circumstances of colonial modernity before moving into a historical narrative of California’s colonial past. Furthermore, as this study also emphasizes the importance of landscape in perpetuating cognitive associations of space, identity and group position in California’s agricultural valleys, it presents a theory of landscape as a mechanism of colonial reproduction.

Imported Colonialism. According to Mae M. Ngai, in her book *Impossible Subjects*, imported colonialism reproduces many of the same social arrangements of power as imperial colonialism with the noted exception that rather than subjugating native populations and pressing them into service in their own lands, colonial labor is “imported” from outside national boundaries from ethnic subject groups legally framed as “foreign.”<sup>103</sup> The crux of Ngai’s argument is that federal legislation—the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 in particular—gave Americans the legal tools necessary to reimagine previously colonized ethnic populations as foreign and “justify their exclusion from the polity.”<sup>104</sup> This understanding of Filipina/o and Mexicana/o labor as foreign, as Ngai discusses, ignores the imperial context of these histories. Prior to the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934, Filipina/o workers had migrated to California’s valleys not as “foreign” labor but as colonial “nationals” operating within the greater imperium of the

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<sup>103</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 93-166.

<sup>104</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 95.



United States.<sup>105</sup> Likewise, Mexicana/o labor in the American Southwest can only be considered foreign by ignoring the historical conditions of military conquest and formal colonialism that made Ibero-American and Anglo-American occupation possible to begin with. For this reason, this study's Mexicana/o subjects will also be viewed through the same internal colonial lens as its *Chicana/o* subjects.

Although Ngai focuses on seasonal agricultural labor imported from Mexico and the Philippines, the dynamic of imported colonialism is equally apparent when studying other imported minority groups in California's agricultural history. As this study finds Ngai's model useful when examining other laboring subject groups originating from outside America's formal colonial holdings, it proposes a corollary to her model: this project herein considers any population coerced to migrate to another geographic region governed by a foreign authority where power asymmetrically benefits the host group, with the primary purpose of providing labor (agricultural or otherwise) as an imported colonized group.<sup>106</sup> Within the context of this study, the model is useful not only for framing the nature of relations between Californians and Filipina/o and Mexicana/o laborers, but also relations with "contract" workers from Eastern Europe; 'credit -ticket' emigration via Hong Kong and Guangzhou (Canton); a broad range of "assisted" migration arrangements from Latin America, South Asia and the Middle East; and, theoretically, if Steinbeck's claims are supported, possibly southwestern migrants as well.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 96-97.

<sup>106</sup> This definition is equally applicable to African slaves brought to the colonies of British North America and the West Indies. These plantation societies were not just formal colonies, they operated as import colonies.

<sup>107</sup> Although it is beyond the scope of this project, it is worth noting that as a postcolonial model

Internal Colonialism. In the United States, the theory of internal colonialism has largely been developed by *Chicana/o* theorists to explain the persistence of structural inequalities throughout the American Southwest.<sup>108</sup> According to John R. Chávez, in his journal article “Aliens in Their Native Lands,” internal colonialism “seeks to explain the subordinate status of a racial or ethnic group in its own homeland within the boundaries of a larger state dominated by different people.”<sup>109</sup> In short, internal colonialism is an explanatory model that, as Chávez asserts, should be “Understood as a subset of the colonial paradigm,” and one of particular value to historians seeking to explain the continued relevance of colonial mechanisms of domination in the modern nation state.<sup>110</sup> Where imperial colonialism is traditionally understood as an external territorial model where dominance is exerted over a foreign territory via political mechanisms of violence, internal colonialism explains domestically applied social domination irrespective of territorial distinctions or the geographic origin of oppressed groups; a point made clear by Pablo Gonzalez Casanova when he first introduced the internal colonial model in “*Sociedad Plural, Colonialismo Interno y Desarrollo*” in 1963 (an article reproduced in the journal *Studies in Comparative International Development* in 1965 under the English title “Internal Colonialism and National Development”) where he asserts that “Internal

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the flexibility and broad applicability of imported colonialism also has the potential to inform analyses of other episodes of migration and resettlement resulting from displacement due to conflict and social change in the post-World War II era. For contract labor “imported” from Asia, see Low testimony in *Committee on Chinese Immigration*, 76-78; for “‘credit-ticket’ immigration,” see Cloud and Galenson, “Chinese Immigration and Contract Labor in the Late Nineteenth Century,” 26; for an overview of *Asian* migration and exclusion see Bonacich, “Some Basic Facts: Patterns of Asian Immigration and Exclusion,” 60-78.

<sup>108</sup> Chávez, “Aliens in Their Native Lands,” 785-798.

<sup>109</sup> Chávez, “Aliens in Their Native Lands,” 786.

<sup>110</sup> Chávez, “Aliens in Their Native Lands,” 809.

colonialism corresponds to a structure of social relations based on domination and exploitation among culturally heterogeneous, distinct groups. If it has a specific difference with respect to other relations based on superordination, it inheres in the culture heterogeneity which the conquest of some peoples by others historically produces.”<sup>111</sup>

It must be noted that this theory has endured several criticisms—and although many seem irrelevant in the light of recent scholarship which draw our attention to the sometimes arbitrary distinctions between imperial holding and naval air station, colonialism and commercial enterprise, native and alien, guestworker and slave, as well as the social inequities and racial oppression that still exist in the United States<sup>112</sup>—for the sake of clarity, however, two of these claims, being of particular relevance to this thesis, deserve our attention.

The first critique questions the appropriateness of the internal colonial model in assessing the racial oppression of non-indigenous or non-*Latina/o* minority groups in the United States, particularly *Black* Americans. The reasoning here is that since the ancestors of *Black* Americans were not colonized in their native territory, but instead captured, enslaved, and extracted from their aboriginal homeland only to be enslaved in

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<sup>111</sup> Pablo Gonzales Casanova, “Internal Colonialism and National Development,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 1, no. 4 (1965): 33; see also Chávez, “Aliens in Their Native Lands, 789; Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest*, 194.

<sup>112</sup> See Cindy Hahamovitch, *No Man’s Land: Jamaican Guestworkers in America and the Global History of Deportable Labor* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011); Daniel E. Bender and Jana K. Lipman, *Making Empire Work: Labor and United States Imperialism* (New York: New York University Press, 2015); Mireya Loza, *Defiant Braceros: How Migrant Workers Fought for Racial, Sexual, and Political Freedom* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2012 [2010]); Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*; Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Jelly-Schapiro, *Security and Terror*.

colonial territories that once belonged to Native Americans, the application of an internal colonial model to their experience can only be achieved through analogy, and, thus, any attempt to do so leaves itself open to criticism.<sup>113</sup> This critique, however, misses the point. Internal colonialism, as Casanova makes clear, reproduces the political and social mechanisms of colonial domination, regardless of territorial distinctions or the geographic origin of oppressed groups; a view reinforced by social activist and Marxist theorist J. H. O'Dell in his 1967 article for the African American journal *Freedomways*:

A people may be colonized on the very territory in which they have lived for generations *or* they may be forcibly uprooted by the colonial power from their traditional territory and colonized in a new territorial environment so that the very environment itself is “alien” to them. *In defining the colonial problem it is the role of the institutional mechanisms of colonial domination which are decisive.* Territory is merely a stage upon which these historically developed mechanisms of super-exploitation are organized into systems of oppression. The status of the Afro-American, Indian and Mexican populations in the United States today, each a colonized people, confined as they are to the bottom of the pyramid of economic and political power, confirms the point.<sup>114</sup>

Echoing these sentiments and recognizing the utility of the internal colonial model as a tool of social analysis, sociologist Robert Blauner further responds to the analogy criticism in his 1972 study, *Racial Oppression in America*, stating:

Native Americans, Chicanos, and blacks are the third world groups whose entry [into the United States] was unequivocally forced and whose subsequent histories best fit the colonial model. Critics of the colonial interpretation usually focus on the black experience, emphasizing how it

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<sup>113</sup> Robert Blauner first addresses this critique in “Internal Colonialism and Ghetto Revolt,” noting that internal colonial frameworks have the potential to “integrate the insights of caste and racism, ethnicity, culture and economic exploitation into an overall conceptual scheme. At the same time, the danger of the colonial model is the imposition of an artificial analogy which might keep us from facing up to the fact (to quote Harold Cruse) that ‘the American black and white social phenomenon is a uniquely new world thing.’” Blauner, “Internal Colonialism and Ghetto Revolt,” 394; see also Blauner, *Racial Oppression in America*, 54; Chávez, “Aliens in Their Native Lands,” 791-92.

<sup>114</sup> O'Dell, “A Special Variety of Colonialism,” 7.

has differed from those of traditional colonialism... Whether oppression takes place at home in the oppressed's native land or in the heart of the colonizer's mother country, colonization remains colonization. However, the term *internal colonialism* is useful for emphasizing the difference in setting and in the consequences that arise from it.<sup>115</sup>

However, it wasn't until Mario Barrera's comprehensive analysis of internal colonialism in *Race and Class in the Southwest* that internal colonialism as a paradigm was completely severed from its territorial provisos. Invoking Casanova's conception of internal colonialism, Barrera defines the colonial dynamic in strictly sociopolitical terms as "a form of colonialism in which the dominant and subordinate populations are intermingled, so that there is no geographically distinct 'metropolis' separate from the 'colony.'" <sup>116</sup> As we will see, such distinctions are necessary for understanding the arrangements of power that developed in California, the continuity of its colonial culture, its mechanisms of oppression and their replication in the postcolonial space, and the inferior social position of exogenous *Others* in its local hierarchies.

The second objection, according to Chávez, comes from the Marxist camp and critiques the efficacy of the internal colonial model in accounting for intraclass subordination.<sup>117</sup> The most scathing of these objections was advanced by Mario T.

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<sup>115</sup> Blauner, *Racial Oppression in America*, 53-54.

<sup>116</sup> The "domination" focus of this perspective also seems to counter objections stemming from perceptions of "voluntary" immigration. It is worth noting, however, that the ambiguities surrounding these perspectives likely inspired Mae Ngai to develop the imported colonial model to address the conceptual weaknesses of internal colonialism with regards to episodes of immigration. In a footnote to *Impossible Subjects*, Ngai states: "I distinguish the concept of imported colonialism from internal colonialism which some scholars have used to describe the subordination of ethnic Mexicans in the territory ceded from Mexico in 1948...I use imported colonialism more narrowly to describe colonial like relations in agriculture labor in-migration." Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 301n3; Chávez, "Aliens in Their Native Lands," 790-791, 793,794; for Barrera quote see Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest*, 194.

<sup>117</sup> Chávez, "Aliens in Their Native Lands," 792-795.

Garcia, in his 1978 journal article “Internal Colonialism: A Critical Essay.” Taking an extreme stance on the internal colonial model, Garcia charges that not only is an internal colonial model inadequate for explaining racial subordination under the conditions of capitalism, it also, falsely, frames all whites in monolithic terms as oppressors:

[T]he ‘internal colony’ theory fails to recognize the historical development of a black and Mexican working class and its integration—although admittedly hampered by racial discrimination—into the multi-racial working class of the United States. In reality, we do not have a separate white America, a separate black America, and a separate Mexican America, but rather a society characterized by a relatively small number of capitalists dominating the wealth of the country and a complex working population composed of men and women and of a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds... This basic objection—from a political perspective—to the internal colonial model is that it implies that racial minorities and white workers have nothing in common. That blacks and Mexicans are exploited by all whites, whether workers or bosses.<sup>118</sup>

Paradoxically, prior to Garcia’s assertions, social theorists such as Robert Blauner had begun to utilize colonial theory not to displace Marxist analysis but instead to augment it, expressly to address its weaknesses in explaining race formation. Blauner notes in “Internal Colonialism and Ghetto Revolt,” that “Important as are economic factors, the power of race and racism in America cannot be sufficiently explained through class analysis. Into this theory vacuum steps the model of internal colonialism.” Remaining optimistic about the theory’s potential to present a viable “framework,” Blauner speculates that internal colonialism “can integrate the insights of caste and racism, ethnicity, culture, and economic exploitation into an overall conceptual scheme.”<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Mario T. Garcia, “Internal Colonialism: A Critical Essay,” *Revista Chicano-Riquea* 6, no. 3 (Summer 1978), 38-39; for a response, see also Chávez, “Aliens in Their Native Lands,” 795.

<sup>119</sup> Blauner, “Internal Colonialism and Ghetto Revolt,” 394.

Drawing on Robert Allen's neocolonial class analysis of "domestic colonialism" in *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*, Barrera actualizes Blauner's vision in *Race and Class in the Southwest*, linking race and class in a theoretical framework of internal colonialism. In terms reminiscent of W. E. B. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction* and foretelling of David Roediger's neo-Marxist analysis in *The Wages of Whiteness*, Barrera suggests that the internal colonial model is consistent with Marxist understandings of capitalism as a cultural determinant because colonial mechanisms of domination and social stratification have historically served the interests of societal elites.<sup>120</sup> Colonialism, like its ideological descendant capitalism, is a system of alienation. It separates indigenous populations from each other and the land; it separates its slaves from their homelands, their culture, even their personhood; it creates divisions between "civilized" and "savage," white and *non-white*, master and slave, owner and laborer, dominant and subordinate, and subdivisions between house servant and field slave, boss and farmworker, foreman and laborer, superior and inferior.<sup>121</sup> In this way, the social stratification that characterizes class-based societies should not be viewed solely as the consequence of commercial enterprise, but instead within a larger continuum of alienation perfected under colonial arrangements of power. Recognizing this, Barrera further concludes that whatever small amount of material and psychological satisfaction

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<sup>120</sup> Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest*, 202, 212; see also Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*, 1-20.

<sup>121</sup> According to David Roediger, by the early nineteenth century, American wage laborers adopted the Dutch term for master, *boss*, to avoid the use of "master" in the workplace, a term they associated with servitude. Roediger notes that the "*OED* [Oxford English Dictionary] records *boss* as a word adopted particularly in the United States in the early nineteenth century to avoid the use of *master*." David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 2007), 53-54, see also 65-92.

noncolonized (white) workers may experience from the subordination of indigenous and exogenous groups, their social position is ultimately predicated on a false racial ideology that makes class consciousness unachievable, their own social position less static, their labor more vulnerable to exploitation, and their alienation perpetual—all of which serve the interests of the dominant class in a capitalist society.<sup>122</sup>

Nowhere in California were the linkages between race and class, and the state's colonial past and industrial present, more evident than the agricultural landscapes of its rural valleys. As we shall see, the observations presented in this subsection on internal colonialism are critical to the historical narrative in the following section, and this study as a whole, not only for understanding California as a transitional space where colonial mechanisms of oppression were reaffirmed in response to a changing political landscape and a new national trajectory, but also for understanding it as a *postcolonial* space of contention where the narrative of capital advancement was challenged; where regional grower sovereignty was undermined; where racial constructs transcended traditional socio-normative boundaries of inferiority and superiority; and the “whiteness” of *Okies* was in dispute.

*Settler Colonialism*. The *settler* colonial model utilized by this study defers greatly to the conditional elements established by Lorenzo Veracini in his work *Settler Colonialism*. In Veracini's view, the *settler* colonial dynamic differs fundamentally in form and function from formal colonialism (imperial, exploitative, or externalized colonialism), and to such a degree that both colonial forms should be viewed not only as separate colonial phenomena operating in “dialectic tension,” but as “antithetical” phenomena operating in

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<sup>122</sup> Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest*, 212-213.



“dialectic opposition,” through different means and towards particular ends—this, however, should not imply that both colonial forms do not regularly coexist and intersect in the colonial space.<sup>123</sup> Juxtaposing his *settler* colonial model in reference to Osterhammel’s Anglo-orientated definition of colonialism (sited above), Veracini claims that unlike formal colonialism, which is directed politically from *without* by an “expanding metropole that remains permanently distinct” from the colony, the settler dynamic is defined by an autonomous political arrangement that garners a “special sovereign charge and a regenerative capacity” amongst the *settler* collective residing *within* the territory.<sup>124</sup> Additionally, where imperial colonialism in particular can be understood demographically as an asymmetric distribution of political control where power is concentrated within the body of “colonial sojourners”—envoys, generally operating in a temporary capacity as representatives of the metropole, unlike *settlers*, who, by their very definition, permanently occupy a colony<sup>125</sup>—or a small cadre of foreign elites over a large number of imperial subjects; *settler* projects are directed by politics of exclusion where *settler* collectives, generally outnumbering indigenous (or “imported”) populations, monopolize power in the aims of their own interest<sup>126</sup>—a power

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<sup>123</sup> Although many scholars frame formal colonialism and *settler* colonialism in different terms, the *settler* dynamic is typically understood as a subset of the formal colonial paradigm—the two often operating in “dialectic tension,” as Veracini notes. Veracini, on the other hand, is proposing that formal colonialism and *settler* colonialism be considered completely different dynamics, operating through different means with particular ends—in dialectic opposition—thus, both deserve their own fields of inquiry. Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 11-12.

<sup>124</sup> Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 3, 6.

<sup>125</sup> Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 5, 6.

<sup>126</sup> Veracini comments on the paradox of Osterhammel’s demography clause, stating: “According to these characterizations, colonizers cease being colonizers if and when they become the majority of the population. Conversely, and even more perplexing, indigenous people only need to become a minority in order to cease being colonized.” Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 3-15, quote on 5.

arrangement that should be recognized when addressing objections to claims of collective hegemony in California on the grounds of direct democracy.<sup>127</sup> Ultimately, Veracini concludes that formal colonial models are too rigid to be of use outside the imperial context, and that a more expansive *settler* model is necessary to uncover the “mimetic character” of *settler* colonialism and its reproduction within national projects where colonial mechanisms of power remain embedded in the polity.<sup>128</sup>

Veracini’s framework identifies the structural and psychological mechanisms unique to the *settler* colonial dynamic. Within the California context, the most evident developments are a population economy characterized by a triangular relationship between Euro-American occupants, and indigenous and exogenous *Others*; and a distinct substantive sovereignty reinforced by a repertoire of occupant disavowals, narratives, and myths. In the first instance, rather than a colonial dyad—a common depiction of the colonial polity as an arrangement of power existing between colonizers and colonized—Veracini suggests that a triangular relationship that also accounts for the experience of

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<sup>127</sup> A common criticism of direct, or hybrid, democracy, such as the one that exists in California, is that the initiative process marginalizes minority rights in favor of majority preferences. Although the two laws figuring prominently in this study (California’s Criminal Syndicalism Act and the so-called “Anti-Okie Law”) were enacted through legislation, it must be noted that they came about at the behest of California growers and industries related to agriculture. Kenneth P. Miller, “Direct Democracy: The Initiative, Referendum, and Recall,” in *Governing California: Politics, Government, and Public Policy in the Golden State*, ed. Ethan Rarick, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Berkeley: Berkeley Public Policy Press, 2013), 144; Shaun Bowler and Amihai Glazer, “‘Hybrid Democracy’ and its Consequences,” in *Direct Democracy’s Impact on American Political Institutions*, ed. Shaun Bowler and Amihai Blazer (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 7-8.

<sup>128</sup> Noting the United States and Israel as prime examples (although the same may be said for many western nations), Veracini charges: “Awareness of a resilient mimetic quality...can help [in] explaining why settler colonialism remains currently invisible where a settler order is most unreconstructed (e.g., Israel and the United States). In these instances, early settler independence ensured that the establishment of a settler colonial order would not need to contend with competing and distorting forms of imperial and colonial interference. And yet, it is in these two polities where...the very invisibility of settler colonialism is most entrenched. The more it goes without saying, the better it covers its tracks.” Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 14-15.

migrants and other *Alterities* in the territory represents a more accurate reflection of the power dynamics in *settler* “population economies.”<sup>129</sup> Noting the operational dependence of *settler* locales, as imagined communities and substantive sovereign projects, on the formation of outsiders as radically *Other*, Veracini notes that “two negatively defined alterities are *brought into existence* [emphasis added]: they comprise those who *have not* moved out to establish a political order (migrants are not settlers), unlike those who belong to the settler collective, and those who *have not* automatically moved in, unlike those who belong to the settler collective. They are the exogenous and indigenous Others.”<sup>130</sup> The colonial space is ensured—along with *settler* identity and “reality”—as Veracini concludes, through a series of conceptual and physical “transfers” designed to disavow and exclude indigenous and exogenous claims, or even their very right to exist, while encouraging a mythical “indigenization” of the occupying body within the colonialized territory.<sup>131</sup> These transfers will be referenced in more detail at various spots throughout this study when addressing colonial arrangements of power in rural California and the processes by which they were instituted.

The transfers that ensure the colonial space, and contribute to its regional occupant consciousness, are also largely responsible for the articulation of regional sovereignty that develops within the collective body politic. These mechanisms combine with collective understandings of privilege, political entitlement, convictions regarding

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<sup>129</sup> Population economy, as Veracini notes, refers “to recurring settler anxieties pertaining to the need to biopolitically manage their respective *domestic* domains [*settler* locales].” Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 16-32, quote on 16.

<sup>130</sup> Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 17.

<sup>131</sup> Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 33-52.

authority and jurisprudence, as well as narratives of righteousness, destiny, or the superiority of a particular way of life, to substantiate a sovereign outlook that guides the colonial project and fundamentally defines regional autonomy.<sup>132</sup> Although California's Anglo collective clearly benefited from similar developments, and Veracini's observations will be of use throughout this project, this study proposes that the substantive sovereignty that developed within the state's dominant class was uniquely encouraged by a colonial landscape that witnessed their mastery over the land as well as the people in it. The process of Americanization that Daniel emphasizes was made possible by developments in science, industry, finance, and transportation that allowed California's landowners to transform the desert into a veritable Eden—a Mediterranean landscape whose products, enjoyed throughout the nation, projected myths about the state's natural abundance, and cloaked its colonial mechanisms of power behind a veil of capitalist advancement.<sup>133</sup> All of which falsely reassured narratives of grower superiority and garnered a sense of regional autonomy that would later be challenged by the constraints of the Great Depression, the imposition of New Deal initiatives, and the noticeable presence of a new breed of "white" farmworker in the landscape that brought rural Californians face to face with the realities of the myths they had constructed.

Landscape as a Mechanism of Colonial Reproduction. Atop the Tehachapi pass in the light of "the morning glow," Steinbeck writes that the Joads "stood, silent and awestruck, embarrassed before the great valley" of the San Joaquin as they looked down upon "The

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<sup>132</sup> Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 53-74, for the importance of *settler* consciousness and the role of narratives, see also 75-116.

<sup>133</sup> See Sackman, *Orange Empire*, 84-122; Sackman, "'By Their Fruits Ye Shall Know Them,'" 82-99.

vineyards, the orchards, the great flat valley, green and beautiful, the trees set in rows and the farm houses.” The mythical landscape that Steinbeck describes, with its “grain fields golden in the morning, and the willow lines, the eucalyptus trees in rows,” was one that Americans had become familiar with.<sup>134</sup> Fruit crate labels across the United States reinforced this iconic vision of California within the social imaginary as they engaged consumers daily with narratives of California’s natural bounty.<sup>135</sup> This dreamlike depiction of California, as noted by cultural geographer Don Mitchell, with its “peach trees and walnut groves, and dark green patches of oranges,” represents “the American Apotheosis that is California.”<sup>136</sup> However, just like the fruit-crate labels displayed at grocers throughout the Midwest and East, it is a construct, a framed landscape, and one that “can only be seen from afar.”<sup>137</sup> Elaborating on the dichotomy that Steinbeck sets up with this passage—between the produced landscape of magnificence and wonder, and the landscape of violence and misery that the Joads will soon discover make it possible—Mitchell elucidates that, “[h]idden in the bushes along the creeks and irrigation ditches is the other side of the California Dream, a side that has been there all along, but that is easy to overlook from atop the hill: the invisible army of migrant workers who *make* the landscape of beauty and abundance that awed the Joads.”<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 227; cultural geographer Don Mitchell also references this passage to make similar comparisons in Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 13-14.

<sup>135</sup> See Sackman, *Orange Empire*, 84-122; Sackman, “‘By Their Fruits Ye Shall Know Them’,” 82-99.

<sup>136</sup> Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 227; Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 13-14.

<sup>137</sup> Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 14.

<sup>138</sup> Mitchell quote in Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 14.

Mitchell's critique echoes that of writer and New Left scholar Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City*. Through his critical analysis of English poetry, Williams encounters a similar invisibility of labor in the bucolic English landscape. Such erasure through art—as the poets' work is made possible through the charity, and at the behest, of country landlords—in his estimation, is a necessary component of the “neo-pastoral dream” of Capitalism. Williams asserts that “by the power of art” the landscape can be reimagined as:

. . . a magical recreation of what can be seen as a natural bounty and then a willing charity: both serving to ratify and bless the country landowner, or, by a characteristic reification, his house. Yet this magical extraction of the curse of labour is in fact achieved by a simple extraction of the existence of labourers. The actual men and women who rear the animals and drive them to the house and kill them and prepare them for meat; who trap the pheasants and partridges and catch the fish; who plant and manure and prune and harvest the fruit trees: these are not present; their work is all done for them by a natural order.<sup>139</sup>

This juxtaposition between the real and manufactured landscape, in many ways, lays at the heart of this study. This project hinges on a cognitive assumption that California's produced landscape, in all its splendor, reinforced the normative social boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable, of superiority and inferiority—of visible and invisible—that defined its colonial arrangements and made industrial agriculture in the state possible.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 32.

<sup>140</sup> This cognitive assumption in some ways complicates a standard view in the field of psychology that insists that culture is socially determined. However, theories of cognitive associations between supra-individual socio-material relations and cultural identity, as well as collective memory—especially within the realms of “automatic” and “deliberative cognition”—have increased in relevance within the fields of Psychology, Sociology and Cognitive Anthropology since the 1990s. See Paul DiMaggio, “Culture and Cognition,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 23 (1997): 263-287; Roy D'Andrade, *The Development of Cognitive Anthropology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000 [1995]), 130-149.

According to art historian W. J. T. Mitchell, in his introduction to *Landscape and Power*:

Landscape . . . doesn't merely signify or symbolize power relations; it is an instrument of cultural power, perhaps even an agent that is (or frequently represents itself as) independent of human intentions. Landscape as a cultural medium thus has a double role with respect to something like ideology: it naturalizes a cultural and social construction, representing an artificial world as if it were simply a given and inevitable and it also makes the representation operational by interpellating its beholder in some more or less determinate relation to its givenness as sight and site.<sup>141</sup>

Landscapes, in this sense, can be considered cultural agents in and of themselves, concurrently reifying and obscuring the conditions of their production (or reproduction). They act, therefore, as instruments of erasure and agents of invisibility, at once representative of the arrangements of power in a given region—presenting the world as it desires—while simultaneously obscuring the conditions of their reproduction and naturalizing the historical factors, political processes, modes of production and systems of labor on which they rely. In short, landscapes, rather than static spaces imbued with inherent arrangements of power, are cultural productions, willed into existence to serve a regenerative purpose.<sup>142</sup> Seen in this way, landscapes, in many ways, can be understood as having the same (or, at least providing many of the same) mimetic qualities of *settler* colonial forms, acting in much the same manner as narratives or myths.

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<sup>141</sup> W. J. T. Mitchell, "Introduction" to *Landscapes and Power*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 1-2; Don Mitchell also analyzes this passage in Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 30-31.

<sup>142</sup> As mentioned in the Introduction, this understanding of landscape was influenced by ideas in Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 13-35; W. J. T. Mitchell, "Introduction," 1-4; W. J. T. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscapes," 5-34; Williams, *The Country and the City*, 22-34; Zukin, *Landscapes of Power*, 3-23, 217-250; Stilgoe, *What is Landscape?*; Peirce F. Lewis, "Axioms for Reading the Landscape"; Anderson, "The Idea of Chinatown," 580-598.

As visual representations of the naturalized order, colonial landscapes reinforce the normative position of colonizers in the regional hierarchy while arranging all colonized subject groups on the sociopolitical fringe, thus reifying a natural insider/outsider dynamic which automatically *makes* perceptually exogenous subject groups appear radically *Other*—and the perpetuation of injustices and discrimination that they endure as the intrinsic consequences of regional political economies. In what follows, we shall see how this process not only influenced the ways in which rural Californians saw themselves at the top of the state’s social hierarchy, but also how the presence of southwestern migrant families in the agricultural landscape—providing the same material functions as *non-white* subject groups—challenged the constructed discourses of superiority and inferiority that defined the state’s unique racial hierarchy and betrayed the state’s continued reliance on colonial mechanisms of power.

### The Land Grant: A Colonial Legacy

Although these colonial models seem primarily concerned with social arrangements of power, it is important to remember that they all typify the dominant quality of all colonial enterprise: the acquisition of territory and the control of individuals in it. California, as Steinbeck reminds us in *Grapes*, was once Mexico. When Mexico was conquered, and its northern territory ceded to the United States at the conclusion of the Mexican-American War in 1848, provisions were made under articles VIII and IX of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that guaranteed the preservation of *Californio* land grants (*ranchos*).<sup>143</sup> Rather than serving as a possible point of historical rupture that would have

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<sup>143</sup> Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Article VIII: “Mexicans now established in territories previously belonging to Mexico, and which remain for the future within the limits of the United States as defined by



upset the colonial dictates of California's agriculture and made Anglo-American land appropriation in the state more egalitarian, agrarian partisans have long criticized that these provisions simply ensured that feudal dominance transferred from Mexican grantee to American capitalist, and, in equal measure, the continuity of colonial control from one ruling class to the next.<sup>144</sup>

Due to the sheer size of rancho lands, and the fact that the treaty nullified the dictates of the Homestead Acts, land acquisition in California lay beyond the financial means of most Anglo Americans.<sup>145</sup> Monopolization of agricultural land in California would instead come about through a process of agrarian industrialization—or, Americanization, in Daniel's view—and take two notable forms: growers—generally comprised of absentee landowners, usually consisting of corporations and wealthy East Coast elites with political ties and access to finance—who controlled the vast majority of the state's farmland and largely determined which crops would be grown; and Anglo-American tenants, who generally engaged in contracts with colonization companies and

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the present treaty, shall be free to continue where they now reside, or to remove at any time to the Mexican republic retaining the property which they possess in the said territories, or disposing thereof, and removing the proceeds wherever they please, without their being subjected, on this account, to any contribution, tax, or charge whatever. . . ." Article IX: "Mexicans who, in the territories aforesaid, shall not preserve the character of the Mexican republic, conformably with what is stipulated in the preceding article, shall be incorporated in the Union of the United States, and be admitted at the proper time (to be judged of by the congress of the United States) to enjoyment of all the rights of citizens of the United States, according to the principles of the Constitution; and in the meantime shall be maintained and protected in the free enjoyment of their liberty and property, and secured in the free exercise of their religion without restriction." "Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo," signed February 2, 1848. <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/us-treaties/bevans/b-mx-ust000009-0791.pdf>.

<sup>144</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 15; George, "Our Land and Land Policy," 72-73; Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 15-39.

<sup>145</sup> Daniel, as well as others, have also indicated that the infrastructure needed to turn California's arid landscape into productive farmland and get its products to market, such as irrigation and transportation, required a wealthy business class that could work in conjunction to mold laws in their favor, manipulate regional ecologically, and bring its agricultural regions to yield. See Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 18-22; Hundley, *The Great Thirst*, 119-160; Sackman, *Orange Empire*, 32-34, 87-96.

worked as part of a cooperative or fruit exchange.<sup>146</sup> These structural determinants impacted not only the character of the California farmer, but society at large. In a 1920 journal article, the social theorist Walter V. Woehlke described the effects of this transition while alluding to its social implications:

[I]n California the safety valve of free or cheap land became useless long before it quit functioning in the other Far Western States. Wheat and cattle barons controlled the bulk of the fertile land in huge tracts, having acquired their principalities through purchase of old Spanish grants or through evasion of the laws protecting the public domain... Thus the Golden State developed a class of landless tenants and drifters before the last of the Dakota and Nebraska homestead land had been preëmpted.<sup>147</sup>

The language utilized by Woehlke attests to the feudal character of California's agriculture; a dynamic that, in his view, opposes traditional modes of American settlement and directly challenges principles of Manifest Destiny. Progressive and agrarian partisan Henry George observed as early as 1871, in *Our Land and Land Policy*, that this inequitable distribution of land in California—directly inherited from the Spanish and Mexican institution of the land grant—preserved the feudal vestiges of California's colonial arrangements of power and challenged the democratic ideals of Jeffersonianism. "These men are the lords of California," George writes of the

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<sup>146</sup> It is worth noting that homesteads and family farms could be found in nearly every agricultural community in California at this time, however, as Daniel describes, "after 1900 family farming survived only as a marginal appendage of a rural economy dominated in fact and in spirit by agribusinessmen as single-minded in their pursuit of profits as the most unwavering urban capitalist." Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 15-39, quote 43; McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 20-27; George, "Our Land and Land Policy," 69-72; California State Commission of Land Colonization and Rural Credits, *Report of the State of Commission of Land Colonization and Rural Credits* (Sacramento: State Printing Office, 1916) (hereafter cited as *Commission of Land Colonization*); H. Vincent Moses, "'The Orange -Grower is Not a Farmer': G. Harold Powell, Riverside Orchardists, and the Coming of Industrial Agriculture," *California History* 74, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 22-37.

<sup>147</sup> Walter V. Woehlke, "Food First," *Sunset* (October 1920): 76.

landowners, “lords as truly as ever were ribboned [*sic*] Dukes or belted Barons in any country under the sun.” He continues:

We have discarded the titles of an earlier age; but we have preserved the substance, and, though instead of “your grace,” or “my lord,” we may style them simply “Mr.,” the difference is only in a name. They are our Land Lords just as truly. If they do not exert the same influence and wield the same power, and enjoy the same wealth, it is merely because our population is but six hundred thousand, and their tenantry have not yet arrived. Of the millions of acres of our virgin soil which their vast domains enclose, they are absolute masters, and upon it no human creature can come, save by their permission and upon their terms. From the zenith above, to the centre [*sic*] of the earth below (so our laws run), the universe is theirs.<sup>148</sup>

Suggesting that California’s population economies were dependent upon material understandings of superiority and inferiority, George’s assessment frames the region in distinctly colonial terms. More than sixty years later, Steinbeck testifies to the enduring character of this feudal dynamic in *Harvest Gypsies*, stating: “The will of the ranch owner, then, is law; for [his] deputies are always on hand, their guns conspicuous . . . A glance at the list of migrants shot during a single year in California . . . will give a fair idea of the casualness of these ‘officers’ in shooting workers.”<sup>149</sup> Reflecting on the grower’s belief in California’s social hierarchy, Steinbeck adds, “It is difficult to believe what one large speculative farmer has said, that the success of California agriculture requires that we create and maintain a peon class. For if this is true, then California must depart from the semblances of democratic government that remains here.”<sup>150</sup> This

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<sup>148</sup> George, “Our Land and Land Policy,” 72-73.

<sup>149</sup> John Steinbeck, *The Harvest Gypsies: on the Road to the Grapes of Wrath* (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 1988 [1936]), 35.

<sup>150</sup> Steinbeck, *The Harvest Gypsies*, 23; this attitude amongst growers is evident in their preference for *non-white* farmworkers. See *S. Report*, 255-260; Lloyd Welker Fellows, “Economic Aspects of the Mexican Rural Population in California with Special Emphasis on the Need for Mexican Labor in

California, as described by George and Steinbeck, is a foreign land with its own sense of sovereignty and a region distinctly out of sync with American democratic ideals—a dynamic that only serves to reinforce California’s colonial attributes.<sup>151</sup>

Of course, both George, an agrarian progressive, and Steinbeck, an advocate for the people and one who saw himself as “writing history while it is happening,” had their objectives for framing California in such terms.<sup>152</sup> Nonetheless, the idea that the ownership of property determined the worth of one’s position—indeed, the worth of one’s self—was a common aspect of California’s political landscape; and concerns over land monopolization, its connections to the state’s colonial past, and the social implications of inequitable land distribution persisted well into the twentieth century. For instance, in 1916, a report commissioned by the State of California on land colonization and rural credits concluded:

The evils of such ownership are every year becoming more apparent. We have at one end of the social scale a few rich men who as a rule do not live on their estates, and at the other end a body of shifting farm laborers or a farm tenantry made up largely of aliens, who take small interest in the progress of the community. Political stability, the best results in agriculture, and satisfactory social conditions require that this inheritance from a Mexican land system and former laws of the United States be abolished.<sup>153</sup>

Since the early days of the republic, this dynamic has disillusioned the fulfillment of a classless rural Jeffersonian society in California. This realization was made

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Agriculture,” Master’s Thesis (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 1929), 18-43; McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 103-151.

<sup>151</sup> Wald makes a similar comparison in Wald, *The Nature of California*, 61.

<sup>152</sup> Steinbeck, *A Life in Letters*, 162.

<sup>153</sup> *Commission of Land Colonization*, 7-8.

apparently clear during California's Constitutional Convention of 1849, where the potentialities of industrial agriculture in the state were seen as threats to free white labor. At the convention moderate delegates argued along well established working-class republican lines that if *Black* Americans (free or otherwise) were permitted into the state, wealthy capitalists—who had already begun to acquire old Spanish and Mexican grants in the region—would use *Black* labor to devalue white labor, essentially impoverishing both groups.<sup>154</sup> Representing the San Joaquin District, Oliver Meredith Wozencraft summarized this stance before the assembly in Monterey on September 11, 1849:

I desire to protect the people of California against all monopolies—to encourage labor and protect the laboring class. Can this be done by admitting the negro race? Surely not; for if they are permitted to come, they will do so—nay they will be brought here. Yes, Mr. President, the capitalists will fill the land with these living laboring machines, with all their attendant evils. Their labor will go to enrich the few, and impoverish the many; it will drive the poor and honest laborer from the field, by degrading him to the level of the negro.<sup>155</sup>

In a way, Wozencraft's fears were not all that far off. Although the framers of California's constitution would leave the "slavery question" for the legislature to decide, and California would soon enter the Union as a free state, the realization of its industrial scale farming would ultimately be made possible by a "free labor force," whom, in the words of Llyod H. Fisher, "competed favorably with slavery": Chinese laborers.<sup>156</sup> As we

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<sup>154</sup> With the development of capitalist modes of production in the United States, the threat of "white slavery" or "wage slavery," according to David Roediger, remained a common concern of working-class republicanism until the 1850s. See Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, 66-87.

<sup>155</sup> See the statements of Oliver Meredith Wozencraft, September 11, 1849 in J. Ross Browne, *Report of the Debates of the Convention of California, on the Formation of the State Constitution, in September and October, 1849* (Washington D.C.: John Towers, 1850). <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/gdc/calbk/196.pdf>.

<sup>156</sup> Llyod H. Fisher, "The Harvest Labor Market in California," *The Oly Journal of Economics* 65, no. 4 (November 1951): 466.

shall see in Chapter IV, one of the bases for anti-Chinese sentiment in California stemmed from the popular notion that the Chinese, similar to their *coolie* counterparts on the sugar plantations of Cuba and the West Indies, were slaves.<sup>157</sup> Although California-bound Chinese immigrants worked under a “credit-ticket” immigration scheme that operated as a type of indentureship—meant to ensure that the broker was repaid for the cost of transporting migrants from Hong Kong to San Francisco—these immigrants, unlike those trafficked under *coolie* trade, were legally free to work for whomever they wished as long as they made their minimum payments.<sup>158</sup> However, as Elmer Sandmeyer notes in “The Bases of Anti-Chinese Sentiment,” most “Californians . . . either doubted that this difference existed or discounted its significance, holding that the living and working conditions of the Chinese were those of slavery, even if legal evidence were lacking.”<sup>159</sup> Whichever the case, slave or temporary indentureship, their labor transformed the agricultural landscape and normalized the role of seasonal migratory labor in the rural vernacular as agriculture throughout the state transitioned from extensive rural economies based on grain production, to more lucrative, and far more labor intensive, specialized crops, such as fruits, nuts and melons.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> For more on this distinction see Cloud and Galenson, “Chinese Immigration and Contract Labor in the Late Nineteenth Century,” 24-26; Elmer Sandmeyer, “The Bases of Anti-Chinese Sentiment,” in *Racism in California: A Reader in the History of Oppression*, ed. Rodger Daniels and Spencer C. Olin (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 80-81; Jung, *Coolies and Cane*.

<sup>158</sup> Low Testimony in *Committee on Chinese Immigration*, 77-78; Sandmeyer, “The Bases of Anti-Chinese Sentiment,” 77-85; Cloud and Galenson, “Chinese Immigration and Contract Labor in the Late Nineteenth Century,” 24-26.

<sup>159</sup> Sandmeyer, “The Bases of Anti-Chinese Sentiment,” 81.

<sup>160</sup> Bonacich, “Some Basic Facts,” 60-78; McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 66-80.

According to Sackman, this development combined with absentee landownership and managerial capitalism to alter the function of the California farm. As owners and stockholders became more interested in profit, and less interested with good stewardship, land and labor became viewed in terms of production, as a resource to be utilized.<sup>161</sup>

Writing in the 1930s, McWilliams describes the effects of this transition in agriculture:

Today, 'farming' in its accepted sense can hardly be said to exist in the State. The land is operated by processes which are essentially industrial in character; the importance of finance, in all of the 180 or more crops produced in California, has steadily increased as more and more emphasis has been placed on financial control; the "farm hand" of folklore, has been supplanted by an agricultural proletariat; ownership is represented not by physical possession of the land but by ownership of stock; farm labor, no longer pastoral in character, punches a time clock, works at piece or hour wage rates, and lives in a shack or company barracks, and lacks all contact with the real owners of the farm factory on which he is employed.<sup>162</sup>

As California's agriculture inched towards modernity, capitalism itself became a medium of colonial reproduction, and, as the state's growers sacrificed notions of Jeffersonian agrarianism in the drive for industrial efficiency, the factory farm replaced the *rancho* as the new agricultural paradigm. Ultimately, however, as the Chinese demonstrate, the changes that Sackman and McWilliams describe were facilitated by grower access to cheap forms of imported (and deportable) labor. Next came the Japanese, East Asian Indians, Filipinos and, once again, Mexicanas/os<sup>163</sup>—as grower operations increasingly utilized labor segmentation across racial lines to play one migrant

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<sup>161</sup> Sackman, *Orange Empire*, 121.

<sup>162</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 48.

<sup>163</sup> Since immigration from the Philippines during this period was predominantly male, this study adopts the masculine form "Filipino" instead of the gender-neutral "Filipina/o."

subject group off another in order to keep labor costs low, specialized agriculture in the state became increasingly dependent upon the importation and exploitation of exogenous labor.<sup>164</sup> Elucidating this history in *Grapes*, Steinbeck writes:

And all the time the farms grew larger and the owners fewer. And the imported serfs were beaten and frightened and starved until some went home again, and some grew fierce and were killed or driven from the country. And the farms grew larger and the owners fewer.

And the crops changed. Fruit trees took the place of green fields, and vegetables to feed the world spread out on the bottoms: lettuce, cauliflower, artichokes, potatoes—stoop crops. A man may stand to use a scythe, a plow, a pitchfork; but he must crawl like a bug between the rows of lettuce, he must bend his back and pull his long bag between the cotton rows, he must go on his knees like a penitent across a cauliflower patch.

And it came about that the owners no longer worked the farms. They farmed on paper; and they forgot the land, the smell, the feel of it, and remembered only that they owned it, remembered only what they gained and lost by it. And some farms grew so large that one man could not even conceive of them any more, so large it took batteries of bookkeepers to keep track of interest and gain and loss; chemists to test the soil, to replenish; straw bosses to see that the stooping men were moving along the rows as swiftly as the material of their bodies could stand...And the owners not only did not work the farms any more, many of them had never seen the farms they owned.<sup>165</sup>

This passage is revealing for many reasons. Not only does it demonstrate how grower access to cheap labor changed the nature of farming in California, among other things, it demonstrates the effects of this transition on growers and farmworkers themselves. In the case of the former, it seems likely that Steinbeck intended to highlight the feudal dimensions of this arrangement of power. By setting the “farmer” apart from nature, Steinbeck once again reinforces the idea that California, with its colonial

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<sup>164</sup> McWilliams, 134; *S. Report*, 228-260; Exhibit 8762-A, “The Supply of Agricultural Labor as a Factor in the Evolution of Farm Organization in California,” in *S. Hearings*, 19777-19898.

<sup>165</sup> Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 232.



arrangements of power, is a region *outside* the United States, or at least out of step with its Jeffersonian ideals—a damning juxtaposition when compared to the Joads, who were farmers, who hoped to farm again, and who were now working side-by-side other “serfs” in the agricultural landscape.<sup>166</sup> In the latter case, this passage demonstrates that race, rather than a measure of perceived difference, is a normative function with a purpose. The racial fixity of Steinbeck’s “serfs” reflects the dehumanizing material circumstances of their labor.<sup>167</sup> No longer capable of standing like human beings, the demeaning nature of California’s agriculture forces them to their knees, to “crawl like a bug.” As the next two chapters theorize, ubiquitous scenes such as these, between those who stood and those who stooped, provided material evidence of innate superiority and natural inferiority—ultimately reinforcing the rural discourses of inferiority that would later impact *Okies* as they took to the fields to stoop alongside other exogenous labor in the agricultural landscape.

According to the American historian Richard Lowitt, by 1930 California’s farmworkers were regarded less as human and more as tools in production, meant to be used for certain tasks at certain times, then to be shelved.<sup>168</sup> Recognizing that Mexican farmworkers by virtue of proximity were uniquely situated to respond to the seasonal demands of California’s specialized agriculture, growers sought to preserve access to this

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<sup>166</sup> Wald, *The Nature of California*, 61.

<sup>167</sup> *Fixity*, as a sociological concept in the discourse of colonialism, is defined by critical theorist Homi Bhabha as “the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, [it] is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition.” Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 94.

<sup>168</sup> Richard Lowitt, *The New Deal and the West* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 182.

labor pool by employing a key technique of racialization: stereotyping.<sup>169</sup> In Washington D.C. in 1926, in an attempt to exclude Mexican labor from national immigration quotas set by the Immigration Act of 1924, delegations from California's farm associations perpetuated the myth of the "Mexican homing pigeon" in congressional hearings. The "homing pigeon" narrative universally depicted Mexican laborers as "homing pigeons" who happily went "crop to crop, seeing Beautiful California, breathing its air, eating its food, and finally doing the homing pigeon stunt back to Mexico with more money than their neighbors dreamed existed."<sup>170</sup> The homing pigeon narrative is racial historicism in praxis. It demonstrates the power of sovereign authority to frame the exogenous *Other* not only by perceptions of *natural* inferiority based on perceived biological or cultural difference, but by embedded stereotypes of *natural* utility based on geographical proximity and a narrative of mutual benefit.<sup>171</sup>

Obviously, within the era of Jim Crow in the United States—and Juan Crow in the Southwest—these two perceptions of *natural* suitability cannot be differentiated. Perceptions of natural suitability based on perceived biological difference still serves a very real material purpose: it justifies the systems of exploitation on which the colonial project depends. As Sackman asserts, "to assuage Jeffersonian objections of a permanent class of wage laborers in the state," growers emphasized narratives of perceived racial

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<sup>169</sup> *Stereotype*, as a sociological concept in the discourse of colonialism: "[T]he stereotype, which is [fixity's] major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 94-95.

<sup>170</sup> *S. Report*, 257; McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 126-127.

<sup>171</sup> For the sociological process of *naturalization*, see Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Richard Howard and Annette Laver (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012 [1957]), 240-242; Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 94-95.

difference, the basic elements of which explained “why each wave of workers—Indians, Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos and Mexicans—could be left to wallow in the mud while the growers preserved a clear conscience.”<sup>172</sup>

As the contents of this chapter suggest, however, narrowly framing farmworker subalternity as the mere consequence of industrial transformation simultaneously overlooks the relevance of California’s colonial heritage in determining the sociopolitical conditions of labor relations in the state during the 1930s, as well as the continued utility of race in managing the region’s agricultural proletariat. Race was (is) something generated in California. It was (is) a technology of colonial power, as economically vital to the state’s agribusiness as the innovations that help(ed) bear and transport its fruit. In California, race was (is) produced and commoditized as a technology of colonial reproduction, made possible by the plantation-like nature of the land grant. As the realities of California’s population economies irreversibly linked race with an agricultural proletariat—making migratory labor synonymous with immigrant or foreign labor—the cultivation of migrant otherness remained a vital component of sovereign authority throughout the New Deal era as growers played on communal fears of outsiders as radicals and communists in order to maintain traditional forms of dominance and control the region’s physical and political landscapes.

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<sup>172</sup> Sackman, *Orange Empire*, 126-131, quote 128.

### Chapter III.

#### Colonial Landscapes and Race Dependency

As previously mentioned, this study considers colonialism and race to be concomitant phenomena. They are concomitant not merely by fact of codependence, but in the sense that both phenomena evolved in tandem and work towards similar ends: the maintenance, management, and reproduction of colonial power. The analysis that follows explores this dynamic in California. In the subsequent four sections, this study lays out a theoretical framework that demonstrates how race, as a boundary mechanism, operates as a technology of colonial power and aids in its reproduction under the guise of modernity. These sections, however, not only seek to establish a racial framework useful for analyzing California's history as a race dependent landscape, but also attempt to demonstrate why many traditional understandings of race are inadequate, or, may in fact, actually obscure the true sociopolitical function of race within the United States.

Set to that task, the first section, "The Production of *Nonpersons*," seeks to frame race in broad terms as a political phenomenon, and one instrumental to the western liberal project. Borrowing a term from sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant, this section emphasizes the role of race as a "master category" of social structuring within American culture.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 106.

The following sections build on the assertions presented in the first, examining race as an onto-political agent, a technology of sovereign authority, produced and deployed within the colonial space to preserve hierarchy and ensure the reproduction of colonial arrangements of power.<sup>174</sup> The second and third sections, therefore, are designed to highlight the deficits in current racial thought and theory. The second section, “Accounting for Biological and Construct Paradigms,” presents objections to two of the most common views on race: race as a visually obvious trait, and the equally flawed notion that race is a mere social construct. It emphasizes the advantages of a sociopolitical racial framework that accounts for perceived biological and nonbiological markers as deeply embedded cultural signifiers in the service of regional authority.

The third section, “Contested Whiteness,” briefly assesses the benefits and limitations of current whiteness theory, and, following the example of sociologist Matt Wray, suggests that whiteness studies would benefit from a more nuanced approach that expands the theoretical category of whiteness to account for social environments, such as California’s, uniquely marked by variegated distributions of *White otherness* amongst its laboring class.<sup>175</sup>

The fourth and final section, “Race as a Technology of Power,” presents a theory of race production, or replication, in California based on sociopolitical theory and cognitive interpretations of landscape. Drawing heavily on Sheth’s work in *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, as well as other social theories, it presents an operational framework of race as a technology of power and explores the normative conditions of

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<sup>174</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 7.

<sup>175</sup> See Wray, *Not Quite White*; Newitz and Wray, “What is ‘White Trash’?”

racialization inherent to California's colonial landscape. These sections are designed not only to allow for the analysis of California's race dependent agricultural landscape, but also to demonstrate the value of race as a productive and reproductive agent of colonial arrangements of power.

### The Production of *Nonpersons*

Contrary to the dominant cultural view within the United States, race is a fairly recent sociological innovation, not a biological fact—although, as this chapter addresses, this is not to say that indicators of biological difference do not signify very real political meanings within American culture. All civilizations throughout human history have recognized some group, or groups, as *Other* in some respect, and the insider/outsider dynamic seems to be a universal societal element. However, prior to modern imperial colonialism the social boundaries that designate otherness were far more fluid—after all, “barbarians” on the Roman periphery often transcended the boundaries of otherness that marked their *savageness* to become fully *civilized* citizens of the empire.<sup>176</sup> The ontology

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<sup>176</sup> This is not to imply that prejudice, prisoner or slave status, privilege distribution, and understandings of class, gender, religion, and morality did not guide everyday discourses of exclusion. However, social discourses of exclusion alone do not constitute race, which ascribes some generally understood notion of inferiority to the entirety of a subject group in order to exclude them wholesale from the polity. The analogy stated here is simply meant to underscore the efficacy of race as a boundary mechanism, even within liberal democracy. In a speech before the Roman senate the Emperor Claudius, as relayed by Tacitus, illustrates the importance of welcoming outsiders into Roman society and in granting them all the rights and privileges of full citizenship, including the ability to hold office. To Claudius, the providence of Rome itself depends on this practice: “What was the ruin of Sparta and Athens, but this, that mighty as they were in war, they spurned from them as aliens those whom they had conquered? Our founder Romulus, on the other hand, was so wise that he fought as enemies and then hailed as fellow-citizens several nations on the very same day. Strangers have reigned over us. That freedmen's sons should be entrusted with public office is not, as many wrongly think, a sudden innovation, but was a common practice in the old commonwealth.” Although the historian Greg Woolf, in his account of Gallic Romanization, generally supports Claudius's assertions, he reminds us that Roman inclusion in the provinces of the empire was more nuanced than Claudius (or Tacitus) claims. Woolf reminds us that privileges of citizenship were hardly universal and were likely reserved for those willing to pledge fealty to, and be in the service of, the empire. Tacitus, *The Annals: Book XI (47-48 C.E.)*, printed in Tacitus, *The Annals and the Histories*, trans. Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb (New York: Modern

of race in the United States, on the other hand, permanently excludes certain minority groups from fully securing *de facto* citizenship, despite *de jure* assurances to the rights of citizenship. Race, as a boundary mechanism, is a rigid instrument and one designed to serve a single divisive purpose: the production of *nonpersons*<sup>177</sup>—subjects viewed as so radically *Other* that they are deemed unworthy of full civic consideration, and thus, excluded from fully participating in, and enjoying the rights, privileges, and protections of the polity.<sup>178</sup>

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Library, 2003), 207; Greg Woolf, *Becoming Roman: The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 48-76, references to Claudius's speech, see 64.

<sup>177</sup> Within the context of race discourse, the 'racial coding of the world' was the direct result of colonial state formation and the subjection and exploitation of the people on which the colony depended. Jelly-Schapiro, *Security and Terror*, 30-32. In biopolitical terms, Foucault describes the development of racism in this way, "The appearance within the biological continuum of the human races, the distinction among races, the hierarchy of races, the fact that certain races are described as good and that others, in contrast, are described as inferior: all this is a way of fragmenting the field of the biological that power controls." That is, race and the techniques of racism, and their implementation in the colony, are "*deployed* in order to fragment and stratify the 'biological continuum,'" which ultimately benefits the dominant class. Michel Foucault, quoted in Jelly-Schapiro, *Security and Terror*, 83-84.

<sup>178</sup> This study's understanding of legal persons is socially constitutive and a variant of the "Orthodox View" examined by Visa A. J. Kurki. *Personhood*, from this perspective, is onto-political and contingent upon the social worthiness of subject groups for moral consideration. Unlike *human*, which is a biological category, or *individual*, which is a state of being, *personhood* constitutes a normative social category where subjects are recognized as deserving of equal moral consideration. Theoretically, by contrast, anything not afforded such consideration by society constitutes a *nonperson*—or *thing*. This, as Kurki demonstrates, does not necessarily indicate a lack of rights or right-holding ability, but society's willingness to recognize such rights. Visa A. J. Kurki, *A Theory of Legal Personhood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 55-87. Sheth makes a similar claim to the one being made here, stating that the transformative process of racialization alters the subject group into "a separate species," that is, one undeserving of legal protection. Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 51. Similarly, Goldberg finds that "Racially configuring discourse did not follow from a social contract but emerged coterminous with modern state formation. Racial discourse may be seen as such to have rendered or established—in that sense created—some people in the world, those *without history*, as not white and others, supposedly historical beings or Europeans, as white. [emphasis added]" Goldberg, *The Racial State*, 37. In addition to Kurki, Sheth and Goldberg, many of the ideas regarding race found in this study take their lead from Foucault's notions of disciplinary partitioning—the binary of division and branding—as well as panoptic theory. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1995 [1977]), 195-228; for further perspectives on personhood, see also Ngaire Naffine, "Legal Persons as Abstractions: The Extrapolation of Persons from the Male Case," in *Legal Personhood: Animals, Artificial Intelligence and the Unborn*, 2<sup>nd</sup>ed., ed. Visa A. J. Kurki and Tomasz Pietrzykowski (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International, 2017), 15-27; Denis Franco Silvia, "From Human to Person: Detaching Personhood from Human Nature," in *Legal Personhood: Animals, Artificial Intelligence and the Unborn*, 2<sup>nd</sup>ed., ed. Visa A. J. Kurki and Tomasz Pietrzykowski (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International, 2017), 113-125.

Race seeks to exclude outsiders, to keep them beyond the gates of societal protection<sup>179</sup>—and where there are no outsiders, it must construct them.<sup>180</sup> Race brands its victims *Alterity*, ensuring their perpetual vulnerability and subordination.<sup>181</sup> In its most benign *historicist* form, it hides behind a veil of meritocratic neutrality, justifying disparity through discourses of equal opportunity; it influences working class notions of labor, morality, and fairness; and manifests in debates over partisan gerrymandering, cash bail, prison malapportionment and coded bias.<sup>182</sup> In its most extreme *naturalist* form, it emphasizes the innateness of subject inferiority—rationalizing permanent subjugation, exploitation, enslavement, expulsion, internment, incarceration, and liquidation.<sup>183</sup> Ostensibly, both racial modes appear to operate by completely different means. However, although they differ by design, both historicist and naturalist modes serve the same

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<sup>179</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 37-39.

<sup>180</sup> Commenting on this phenomenon—while expanding Goldberg’s naturalist/historicist model—Jelly-Schapiro explains: “From the inception of the state form, liberalist promises of progress and assimilation coexisted, uneasily but necessarily, with essentialist racial narratives that confined the other to an ahistorical emptiness from which there can be no escape. This two-fold racial imagination endures. *Naturalist* racisms ensure the reproduction of the imaginary state of nature, the outside that continues to occupy a central discursive role in western political orders. *Historicist* racisms ensure the adaptability of racial thought, which must undergo perpetual transformation in response to evolutions in the mode of production and periodic crises of accumulation. The other who yesterday lacked the capacity for industry may tomorrow be required as a critical source of cheap wage labor.” Jelly-Schapiro, *Security and Terror*, 30.

<sup>181</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 37, 49-50.

<sup>182</sup> Craig Haney and Aida Hurtado, “The Jurisprudence of Race and Meritocracy: Standardized Testing and ‘Race-Neutral’ Racism in the Workplace,” *Law and Human Behavior* 18, no. 3 (June 1994): 223-248; Michèle Lamont, *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class, and Immigration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 55-96; Jowei Chen and Nicholas O. Stephanopoulos, “The Race-Blind Future of Voting Rights,” *Yale Law Journal* 130, no. 4 (February 2021): 862-946; Alaa Chakar, “Prison Malapportionment: Forging a New Path for State Courts,” *Yale Law Review* 130, no. 5 (March 2021): 1250-1287.

<sup>183</sup> It is important to note that “racial naturalism” and “racial historicism,” more often than not, operate in conjunction with one another. For Goldberg’s distinctions between the two dynamics, see Goldberg, *The Racial State*, 39-49, 104-109.



sociopolitical function: withholding the rights and privileges of full citizenship from subordinate subject groups. Elaborating on this dynamic in *The Racial State*, scholar David Theo Goldberg writes:

For historicist racial regimes . . . the tension is played out formatively in favor not principally of physical terror but rather the (never to be?) fulfilled promise of citizenship. If for racial naturalism the inherently inferior could never qualify for citizenship, for racial historicism racial subjugation was effected through the holy grail of legal citizenship and its attendant rights. Citizenship was a status and standing not only never quite (to be) reached for the racial immature but for whom the menu of rights was never quite (as) complete.<sup>184</sup>

Viewed in this way, it is tempting to understand race as an aberration of liberal political thought in Western Civilization—as a sociopolitical mechanism injudiciously employed in the colonial space to secure the privileges of the polity for its “deserving” members, while simultaneously justifying their prohibition from the region’s “undeserving” subaltern inhabitants. Of course, as Sheth asserts in *Towards a Political Philosophy of Race*, the danger in viewing race in this manner is that it obscures the relationship between sovereign power, the rule of law, and society; framing the development of racial reasoning, structural inequities, and other injustices as irregularities within liberal society, rather than the consequence of the liberal project itself.<sup>185</sup> Elaborating on this point, Sheth argues that if we accept a view of liberal society—by which she means polities founded on the liberal principles of individual freedom and equality, governed by the consent of the people, and maintained through “the rule of law”—as just and rational, than the “atrocities” that occur under liberal governments “are

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<sup>184</sup> Goldberg, *The Racial State*, 106.

<sup>185</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 15-16.

invariably considered accidental, incidental, or misapplications of liberal tenets or the rule of law.” She continues:

Thus, for example, in the history of the United States, events such as slavery, Jim Crow laws, the exclusion and denaturalization of Chinese, Japanese, and other immigrants, the internment of citizens of Japanese, German, and Italian descent, and countless other tragedies are thought to have been the consequence of flawed thinking, or a misunderstanding of how liberal tenets should be applied—because supposedly in liberal societies, political power has been systematically checked and thus is not vulnerable to be usurped or abused except under extraordinary circumstances.<sup>186</sup>

In order to better account for race in liberal society, Sheth suggests that such views of the liberal political project need to be abandoned in favor of metaphysical approaches that recognize race as a political category and acknowledge it as a mechanism of sovereign power—not as a mishap or the unfortunate “consequence of flawed thinking,” but as a technology of power, “built in to the very juridico-political structure that emerges from liberalism.”<sup>187</sup>

Drawing a more direct connection between race and modernity (as well as postcolonial states), Goldberg supports Sheth’s assessment of race as a necessary component of the liberal project itself. In *The Racial State*, he describes the historical role played by race in securing sovereign power against the threats of heterogeneity. He explains:

Race is imposed upon otherness, the attempt to account for it, to know it, to control it. So to begin with in modernity what is invested with racial meaning, what becomes increasingly racially conceived, is the threat, the external, the unknown, the outside. It is only through the racial configuration of the external, of the other, by implication, that the

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<sup>186</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 15-16.

<sup>187</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 16.

internal—the self—becomes (and at first by implication, silently) racially defined also. But, paradoxically, once racially configured with modernity that threat becomes magnified, especially fraught, because in the being named racially in a sense it is named *as* threat. In being so named the threat is reified, rendered real, realized. Race, especially as scientifically understood, appears then to inject control (or at least to claim it), to furnish comprehension (and perhaps comprehensibly) where it otherwise is clearly absent, or to reestablish determination in the face of threatened indeterminacy. The racial conception of the state becomes the racial definition of the apparatus, the project, the institutions for managing this threat, for keeping it out or ultimately containing it—but also (and again paradoxically) for keeping it *going*.<sup>188</sup>

In a similar vein, Jelly-Schapiro, in *Security and Terror*, theorizes that the security project that guides liberal state formation rests on sovereign power’s ability to delineate between those who belong from those who represent potential threats to civic order. Utilizing Goldberg’s concept of race as a mechanism of “crisis management,” Jelly-Schapiro theorizes that modern liberal polities are both constructed and reinforced by sovereign authority in a perpetual state of insecurity, and race is but one instrument of establishing order.<sup>189</sup> Expanding on this arrangement, Jelly-Schapiro states:

The state arises to secure the *civis*, the space of law and reason, from the anarchy and inhumanity of the state of nature. The distinction is a racial one. With the foundation of the state, the crisis of the state of nature is not left behind but delimited and counterposed, remaining that against which the inside is defined, the pretext for and antithesis of the secured body politic . . . . Race is both that against which society must be secured and the means of its securing.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Goldberg, *The Racial State*, 23-24.

<sup>189</sup> Jelly-Schapiro, *Security and Terror*, 30.

<sup>190</sup> Jelly-Schapiro, *Security and Terror*, 30.

Race, therefore, far from an objective category of biological distinction, operates as a mode of division, a mechanism of social structuring and resource allocation. It is, at its core, political: a social boundary of normativity designed to justify the withholding from certain segments of society the status and privilege that comes with full and equal citizenship, while simultaneously maintaining the liberal paradigm “that all men [persons] are created equal”<sup>191</sup>—a juxtaposition that only serves to highlight the dehumanization of racialized minorities, for if one group does not enjoy the “self-evident” and “unalienable” qualities of liberal society, then it can be presumed that its members are not equal, and should therefore not be understood (in an onto-juridical sense) as full legal persons. Under the guise of modernity, race naturalizes the social boundaries separating the permissible from the excludable, creating exceptions to the tenets of liberalism itself.<sup>192</sup> Such exceptions, in turn, only serve to normalize the dehumanization inherent to the colonial space. As Sheth determines, race, rather than a biological category, is a technology of power produced by sovereign authority within liberal society to manage populations within the polity, and it does so in the interests and aims of said authority.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Sheth makes a similar observation when examining the disconnect between liberalism’s promise and reality. “The only method by which to circumvent this fundamental tension, then, is to create categories of those to whom universal protection of the law will apply—selectively, that is, *in such a way as to justify the exclusion of some while reiterating the importance of the law’s protection for ‘everyone,’—that is, for everyone who counts.*” Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 38.

<sup>192</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 13-19.

<sup>193</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 22-25, 29-35.

## Accounting for Biological and Construct Paradigms

It has almost become cliché in academia to claim that race, rather than a biological category, is merely a social construct. However, for numerous cultural reasons many Americans still understand race as somehow connected to visual perceptions of phenotypical variance, or worse yet, as a neutral category of physical distinction.<sup>194</sup> Such ideas on race are not only reinforced by cultural understandings of white and *non-white*, and the ontological experience of race in America, but are often reified within academia itself by the very agents who work to deconstruct it. In their widely used text *Racial Formation in the United States*, Omi and Winant present what has become the gold standard of race definitions. They define race as “*a concept that signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and intersects by referring to different types of human bodies.*”<sup>195</sup> On the one hand, the strength of Omi and Winant’s definition is that it emphasizes the role of race as a social signifier. In this case, phenotypical perceptions stand in for a wide range of deeply embedded cultural projections of innate qualities, such as “intelligence, athletic ability, temperament, and sexuality, among other traits.”<sup>196</sup> Unfortunately, however, Omi

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<sup>194</sup> According to Sheth, a further problem of biological racism is that it portrays race as a neutral category of human interaction, and thus a reflection of fact. A view that discounts, or ignores, the way race functions with certain aims, and disproportionately benefits some groups over others. Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 6.

<sup>195</sup> Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 110.

<sup>196</sup> Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 111.

and Winant's emphasis on phenotype, via "*different types of human bodies*," limits their notion of race to observable biological traits.<sup>197</sup>

Although phenotypical signifiers, as Omi and Winant note, stand in for other socially constructed ideas regarding innate subject-group inferiority, limiting race to what is physically obvious raises a host of other questions. For example, as legal scholar Osagie K. Obasogie asks in his study *Blinded by Sight*, if race is visually observable—or at the very least signified through visible biological markers—how do the blind perceive race?<sup>198</sup> Additionally, how do we make sense of conflicts where race is clearly a factor, yet no concrete phenotypical variable is discernable, such as in both Rwandan genocides; the genocide of Bosnians by Serbians in the 1990s; and the conflicts in Darfur?<sup>199</sup> How do we make sense of India's caste system? How do we account for the phenomenon of "passing" within the United States, or, for that matter, the historic use of the "one-drop rule" in the American South?<sup>200</sup> Can race be signified through non-biological markers

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<sup>197</sup> Osagie K. Obasogie also makes this critique of Omi and Winant's definition of race in Osagie K. Obasogie, *Blinded by Sight: Seeing Race Through the Eye of the Blind* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), 28-29.

<sup>198</sup> Obasogie, *Blinded by Sight*, 1-7.

<sup>199</sup> Sheth also lists these conflicts in a footnote. Such conflicts, as Sheth notes, "[appear] to be fundamentally distinguished—even excluded—as 'not really' about race, *because of the nonbiological grounds by which 'Othering' occurs . . . the discussion of BR [biological racism] preclude us from recognizing conflicts among the 'same' populations as being about racial identity and division.*" Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 24-25, 183n24.

<sup>200</sup> Drawing connections between race and property in her article "Whiteness as Property," Cheryl Harris writes "The persistence of passing is related to the historical and continuing pattern of white racial domination and economic exploitation that has given passing a certain economic logic . . . being white automatically ensured higher economic returns in the short term, as well as greater economic, political, and social security in the long run. Becoming white meant gaining access to a whole set of public and private privileges that materially and permanently guaranteed basic subsistence needs and, therefore survival. Becoming white increased the possibility of controlling critical aspects of one's life rather than being the object of others' domination. Cheryl Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (June 1993): 1713; for one-drop rule, see Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 27-29, 184n36.

such as language adherence? Religious belief? A type of dress? What about a yellow badge? Furthermore, phenotypical prerequisites mask the role of race in maintaining colonial spaces where biological differentiation does not seem to be a factor. If race is contingent upon observable biological difference, how do we make sense of unresolved colonial dynamics in Northern Ireland, or between Israeli Jews and Palestinians?

Phenotype, contrary to Omi and Winant's definition, is but one mechanism of signification in race's repertoire of misdirection.<sup>201</sup> Its perceived connection with race creates an epistemological blind spot that obscures, not only race's sociopolitical function, but even our ability to see it clearly for what it *is*: a mechanism of power.

How then, do we account for the influence of phenotypical associations with regards to race in the United States? The biological distinctions that mark the boundaries of racial difference are the result of two main processes: the centuries-old ontological experience of race making in America, as well as the development of race science in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the first case, cognitive associations of inherent difference are grounded in the political realities of America's cultural landscape. Under this scheme, the assumptions embedded in phenotypical displays reflect a cultural environment where the myth of white supremacy is extended as truth by a race dependent social hierarchy made possible by the historical subordination of *Others*<sup>202</sup>—a process that, in the words of philosopher Roland Barthes, represents “the very principle of myth: it transforms history into nature.”<sup>203</sup> Here, phenotypical markers act as social signifiers,

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<sup>201</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 4, 6, 9; Obasogie, *Blinded by Sight*, 50.

<sup>202</sup> Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 111; Goldberg, *The Racial State*, 23-24.

<sup>203</sup> Barthes, *Mythologies*, 240.

normalizing constructed beliefs of innate superiority and inferiority—a point where, as Barthes contends, the signified becomes rationalized “by means of the signifier.”<sup>204</sup> The cultural equity of such signifiers serves a normative function, ultimately naturalizing the boundaries of difference that separate whites from *non-whites* in the public imagination.

Employing a constitutive analysis that situates phenotypical construction within the context of social practice, Obasogie expands on this dynamic, theorizing that:

. . . race is not a visually obvious or objective engagement with, for example, variations in skin tone or body types. Rather, social practices produce the objectivity that we ascribe to racial boundaries while also masking their own existence. Social practices at once constitute the ability to see race while, at the same time, hiding themselves so that race is experienced at an individual level as visually obvious; race becomes simply what is seen.<sup>205</sup>

With the advent of race science during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, observable racial markers largely became regarded as objective visual representations of intrinsic biological characteristics. As Nell Irvin Painter details in her monograph, *The History of White People*, the emerging disciplines of anthropology and pseudosciences, such as anthroposociology, eugenics, and human racial taxonomies, not only provided a scientific basis for a natural racial order, they represent a larger desire in Western Civilization to categorize humans by trait.<sup>206</sup> These “scientific” methodologies, rather than examining the sociopolitical mechanisms of subaltern domination, were designed to justify the social station of those at the top and bottom of the social ladder on

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<sup>204</sup> Barthes, *Mythologies*, 240.

<sup>205</sup> Obasogie, *Blinded by Sight*, 50.

<sup>206</sup> Painter, *The History of White People*, 165-342.



the basis of biology and provide a scientific basis for determining individual social worth.<sup>207</sup>

Stressing the importance of science as a normative agent in racial construction—as well as phenotypical association—historian Matthew Frye Jacobson, in his 1998 study *Whiteness of a Different Color*, expounds on this dynamic with his examination of the pseudoscientific category of caucasian.<sup>208</sup> “The idea of a ‘Caucasian race’ represents whiteness ratcheted up to a new epistemological realm of certainty,” Jacobson asserts. “If the idea ‘white persons’ has become so naturalized that we still speak of ‘whites’ as if this grouping refers to a natural fact beyond dispute, then the idea ‘Caucasian’ naturalizes both the grouping and the authority by which that grouping is comprehended.”<sup>209</sup> The presumed objective lens of science imbued discourses of innate superiority and inferiority with a new cultural saliency, ultimately naturalizing the connections between observable phenotypical markers and social station within the collective imaginary.

On the other hand, neither is race *just* a social construct—a claim meant to discredit racial thinking and racialized structures at an epistemological level, as something “made up” or “not real.” Given the ontology of race within the United States, however, this claim often discounts the material conditions in which race is constructed, along with its social impacts. To view race as *just* a construct often ignores the ways that perceived biological differences are imbued with political meanings that reflect regional

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<sup>207</sup> Painter, *The History of White People*, 190-244; Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 39-135; see also Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996 [1981]).

<sup>208</sup> Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 91-136.

<sup>209</sup> Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 94.

distributions of power, as well as deeply embedded, culturally specific, dominant class fears.<sup>210</sup> As a master category and normative mechanism, it operates in a similar fashion to gender or class, managing subject groups and inter-group relations, by ascribing and reinforcing social boundaries based on arbitrary, yet culturally significant, measurable qualities.<sup>211</sup>

It is easy to write race off as the mass delusion that it is. The danger in doing so, however, is that it naively disregards race's ability to shape the world around us, cloaking its productive ideological functions behind a veil of denial. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt writes that ideologies are “systems based upon a single opinion that prove[s] strong enough to attract and persuade a majority of people and broad enough to lead them through the various experiences and situations of an average modern life. For an ideology differs from a simple opinion in that it claims to possess either the key to history, or the solution for all the ‘riddles of the universe,’ or the intimate knowledge of the hidden universal laws which are supposed to rule nature and man.”<sup>212</sup> As an ideology, race operates as an optic—similar to capitalism, socialism, or religion—presenting the world through culturally specific beliefs and ingrained assumptions shaped by cognitive associations of space, identity and group position.<sup>213</sup> Specifically relating

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<sup>210</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 2-8.

<sup>211</sup> Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 91.

<sup>212</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 159.

<sup>213</sup> Andrew Heywood, in his text *Political Ideologies*, states that “ideologies provide a perspective, or ‘lens,’ through which the world is understood and explained. People do not see the world as it is, but only as they expect it to be: in other words, they see it through a veil of ingrained beliefs, opinions and assumptions.” Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Palgrave, 2017), 2-3; in *Capital and Ideology*, Thomas Piketty describes ideologies as “a set of a priori plausible ideas and discourses describing how society should be structured . . . It is an attempt to respond to a broad set of questions concerning the desirable or ideal organization of society. Thomas Piketty, *Capital and Ideology* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020), 3.

this process to California's colonial landscape, social geographer Don Mitchell concludes that "'race' is constructed out of very real material circumstances and then set into motion as a set of representations about how the world *should* be. 'Race' is thus not descriptive, but rather, especially as it intersects with the brutalizing processes of California agriculture, *normative*."<sup>214</sup>

This normative aspect is key in any understanding of race as a sociopolitical category rather than a biological one. In a following section we will review Sheth's political philosophy on race in more detail, however, it is worth noting here that she understands phenotype to be a social signifier used, not as a mechanism of biological distinction, but rather as a way of visually marking outcaste groups. "In my argument," Sheth states, "[biological markers] are not the ground of race, but the marks ascribed to a group that has already become (or is on the way to becoming) outcast."<sup>215</sup> Phenotype, therefore, is a marker embedded with sociopolitical significance and is but one means of identifying racialized subject groups: those deemed radically *Other* by sovereign authority. Emphasizing the difference between racialization and racial identity, Sheth explains that: "Racialization is the process of delineating a population in contrast to a dominant (or powerful) population and a corresponding political tension; this population can be highlighted according to any range of characteristics—none of which have to be 'racial' qua phenotype or blood or physical characteristics; they might be religious, economic, social, etc."<sup>216</sup> In other words, phenotype, along with nonbiological identifiers,

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<sup>214</sup> Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 91.

<sup>215</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 9.

<sup>216</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 51

signals to the dominant members of a polity that a subject group's nonconformity challenges the normative boundaries of society. As Sheth concludes, such identifiers are but a means of distinguishing transgressive elements in society—for delineating the *Unruly* from the *civis*.<sup>217</sup>

### Contested Whiteness

As Chapter V illustrates, the racial experience of Southwesterners in California is remarkable in the sense that it represents a unique case where old-stock, culturally “white,” Americans were racialized and then deracialized within a relatively short amount of time. Unfortunately, given the character of California's industrial agriculture and its history of super-exploitative practices with regards to exogenous labor, this experience, as a migratory history, is somewhat less remarkable. In order to make sense of this episode in American history, and account for the ways that geographic relocation from the American Plains to the valleys of California—or, more importantly, class transition from farmers to farmworkers—left the “whiteness” of Dust Bowl migrants in dispute, one of the methods of analysis that this study endorses, in both the following section and preceding chapters, is a variant of whiteness theory. Drawing upon themes presented in a number of histories regarding whiteness as a sociopolitical process of racial construction within the United States, this section seeks to develop an idea of *White otherness* meant to augment the sociopolitical framework developed in the following section.

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<sup>217</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 49-56.

Assessments of whiteness as a sociological phenomenon typically lead back to W. E. B. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction*. Widely considered a foundational work in whiteness studies, Du Bois's insights in *Black Reconstruction* regarding race and class in postbellum America are critical because—contrary to other Marxist writers of the period who understood race as a function of class<sup>218</sup>—he not only presents race as a cross-class phenomenon, he also connects whiteness with personhood and, by extension, race with full citizenship within the United States. By way of what David Roediger would later coin “the wages of whiteness,” Du Bois argues that this “public and psychological wage” not only made class disparities less burdensome for poor white labor, it added to their social capital as full American citizens:

It must be remembered that the white group of laborers, while they received a low wage, were compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage. They were given public deference and titles of courtesy because they were white. They were admitted freely with all classes of white people to public functions, public parks, and the best schools. The police were drawn from their ranks, and the courts, dependent upon their votes, treated them with such leniency as to encourage lawlessness. Their vote selected public officials, and while this had small effect upon the economic situation, it had great effect upon their personal treatment and the deference shown them. White schoolhouses were the best in the community, and conspicuously placed, and they cost anywhere from twice to ten times as much per capita as the colored schools. The newspapers specialized on news that flattered the poor whites and almost utterly ignored the Negro except in crime and ridicule.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Roediger also makes this observation in *The Wages of Whiteness*, crediting Du Bois's ability to link race with class, rather than framing race as a consequence of class. In comparison, Roediger critiques the class-based explanation of race presented by Oliver Cromwell Cox as well as the market incentive explanation of racial construction later put forth by Edmund Morgan. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, 6-13.

<sup>219</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880*, 700-701.

Whiteness, in DuBois's view, represents more than just a visually obvious phenotypical association. Whiteness is a construct, perhaps even the principal construct, responsible for signifying the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion within American culture. It is a moral archetype, set by dominant class values, by which all *Others* are measured, categorized and constructed. It is not *just* a measure of physical distinction but a measure of sociological difference, designed to marginalize subject groups viewed as *nonwhite*—for what is *Blackness* without the fixity of whiteness? Where whiteness signifies the normative ability to fully engage with, and participate in, the polity; *Blackness*, as the negation of whiteness, signifies deviation, the inability to adhere to normative boundaries and moral standards, innate otherness, and therefore, permanent political exclusion. Within the United States, whiteness is *the* determinant of personhood.

Building on the insights of Du Bois, David Roediger's neo-Marxist analysis in *The Wages of Whiteness* is essential to the study of whiteness and race generation in the United States for two main reasons. First, drawing on Du Bois's dialectics of race and class, Roediger demonstrates that class consciousness within the United States cannot be understood without also accounting for racial identity.<sup>220</sup> Secondly, Roediger departs from Du Bois's top down evaluation of racial construction by emphasizing the agency of white labor in constructing the meanings of whiteness itself. In his assessment, whiteness, as a racial construct, is a project of modernity that developed from the uncertainties of a white working class at a moment of capitalist expansion and in light of shifting republican principles.<sup>221</sup> These perspectives are essential in assessing California's rural

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<sup>220</sup> Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*.

<sup>221</sup> Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, 43-92.

economy as a race-dependent colonial landscape. As we shall see in the following section, the caste system responsible for managing California's valleys and designating the boundaries of difference that separated the state's landowning elites and middle-class management from its propertyless proletariat, were reinforced by normative class boundaries that came to be associated with racial distinction. As industrial agriculture in the state increased its dependence on exogenous forms of labor, middle-class Anglo Californians were increasingly conditioned to view agricultural production through a racial lens where whiteness was characterized by the ability to own and manage capital, and *non-whiteness* was associated with the means of doing so. The super-exploitative practices of California's industrialized agriculture turned on the marginality of its labor, necessitating the "importation" of easily managed and civically disenfranchised *non-whites* better suited to "tasks repugnant to whites."<sup>222</sup> In California during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this dynamic ultimately galvanized class divisions along racial lines, permanently ascribing middle-class values to distinctions of whiteness, while assigning subordinate forms of exogenous labor with a radical otherness that can only be characterized as racial inferiority.

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<sup>222</sup> This quote references a survey of growers and farmers conducted by Lloyd Welker Fellows in 1929. Fellows found that one of the most common reasons for the "preference shown for Mexicans," was that "Mexicans work at tasks repugnant to whites." Other responses included in the survey suggest that "Mexicans" were perceived as "more available" than white workers; "dependable"; that they "stay with the job"; they are "more satisfactory"; "cheaper"; "more willing workers"; and, engaging a common racial trope regarding stoop labor, growers felt that "Mexicans stand the heat better." Fellows, "Economic Aspects of the Mexican Rural Population in California", 25. Variants of themes found in this sentence can also be found in McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 103-151; *S. Report*, part 3, 228-260; Exhibit 8762-A, "The Supply of Agricultural Labor as a Factor in the Evolution of Farm Organization in California," in *S. Hearings*, 19777-19898; Stein, *California and the Dust Bowl Migration*, 32-38; Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 40-70; Sackman, *Orange Empire*, 119-131.

In the same vein, Noel Ignatiev, in his monograph *How the Irish Became White*, details a history of racialization (and deracialization) that links democratic citizenship in the United States with whiteness appropriation. Ignatiev presents a history of migrant assimilation that, in a sense, is not all that different from the *Okie* experience. As was the case with southwesterners when they entered California, Ignatiev's Irish immigrant subjects brought with them certain hierarchical preconceptions that were challenged, often in strange and contradictory ways, by their host community's regional sense of racial hierarchy. For the Irish, as with southwestern migrants, their political disenfranchisement left their whiteness questioned.<sup>223</sup>

However, in terms of “becoming white”—or, in the *Okie* case, reaffirming whiteness—Ignatiev's Irish subjects enjoyed two structural advantages that southwesterners lacked. The first being that the Irish, able to work and live in communities that allowed them to collectively exert a certain amount of political pressure through class solidarity, were able to leverage the political prerogatives of whiteness to their advantage.<sup>224</sup> Secondly, in the form of slaves and free *Blacks*, there existed “beneath” Ignatiev's Irish subjects a permanently colored class, devoid of whiteness, that they could always measure themselves against.<sup>225</sup> For a number of reasons, that will be covered in greater detail in the following section and proceeding chapter, neither remedy was at the disposal of southwestern migrants in California. In the first case, the migratory nature of industrial agriculture deprived southwesterners, along with other subject groups,

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<sup>223</sup> Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, 40-70.

<sup>224</sup> Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, 72-141.

<sup>225</sup> Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, 106-168.



the ability to organize effectively. Although efforts by the *Confederación de Uniones Obreros Mexicanos* (CUCOM) enjoyed some success amongst California's Latinx laborers in the 1930s, the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union (CAWIU) always struggled to recruit southwestern labor and a true class consciousness amongst seasonal agricultural workers never materialized.<sup>226</sup> This failure can be attributed to many causes—of course grower counteraction in the form of the Associated Farmers of California (AF) cannot be overlooked<sup>227</sup>—however, as James N. Gregory notes in *American Exodus*, domestic migrants themselves shoulder part of the blame. As he explains, southwestern unionization was often thwarted by a worldview that valued independence and “plain folk populism,” and looked unfavorably on organizations considered communist or unpatriotic:

When Okies talked of social equality, they usually meant equality for whites and often only native-stock whites. When they sorted out their pantheon of enemies, the frequently figured Communists to be more dangerous than bankers. And when faced with organizational opportunities that might yield collective benefits, they typically fell back on habits of individualism and family self-sufficiency . . . . Even as many Southwesterners continued to use a class-based terminology of the plain versus the powerful, more persuasive commitments to patriotism, racism, toughness, and independence were pointing towards the kind of conservatism populism that George Wallace would articulate three decades later.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 214-219, 263-282; Gregory, *American Exodus*, 154-164; Sackman, *Orange Empire*, 218-224; Adrian Cruz, “There Will be No ‘One Big Union’: The Struggle for Interracial Labor Unionism in California Agriculture, 1933-1939,” *Cultural Dynamics* 22, no. 1 (2010): 29-48.

<sup>227</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 219-263; Olmsted, *Right Out of California*, 107-217; Nelson A. Pichardo, “The Power Elite and Elite-Driven Countermovements: The Associated Farmers of California During the 1930s,” *Sociological Forum* 10, no. 1 (March 1995): 21-49; Nelson A. Pichardo Almanzar and Brian W. Kulik, *American Fascism and the New Deal: The Associated Farmers of California and the Pro-Industrial Movement* (New York: Lexington Books, 2013).

<sup>228</sup> Gregory, *American Exodus*, 154-164, quote 154.

Moreover, agriculturally bound domestic migrants were thrust into a vastly unfamiliar caste system; one determined, not by the color of one's skin, but by one's material function. Shown little deference by growers, and faced with no other alternative, southwesterners engaged an equally alien agricultural tradition where, in the words of Cletus Daniel, the "farmworker...was more commodity than a human being: more an expendable cog than a productive partner."<sup>229</sup> Southwesterners quickly found that under such conditions their perceived sense of whiteness meant little, and although many accepted this arrangement, others felt that California's agricultural landscape was unnatural. As white American citizens, southwesterners such as Ed Morrow—a domestic migrant working near Bakersfield in the late 1930s—often resented the preference shown "foreigners" by the state's growers. "I just don't feel like it's right to work foreigners in preference to native Americans," Morrow stated when interviewed by James Bright Wilson, a graduate student in Sociology at the University of Southern California. "If we was over there we'd probably eat out of the garbage or starve. Over here they git the cream of the crop, they git the jobs. They do them cheaper than we would. That crowds us out. That's the truth about it. It ain't right. The United States Government could deport them if it would."<sup>230</sup>

When pressed for solutions, Morrow's thoughts automatically turned, not to the system of industrialized agriculture, but to the exogenous labor that he felt did not belong

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<sup>229</sup> Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 69.

<sup>230</sup> Ed Morrow interviewed by James Bright Wilson, Bakersfield California (date unknown), printed in James Bright Wilson, "Social Attitudes of Certain Migratory Agricultural Workers in Kern County, California," Master's Thesis (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 1942), 149-150.

in the first place. “Let me illustrate what I mean,” Morrow explains, “If I have a good job, a substantial way of livin’, a good home, I’d be crazy as a loon to leave it and go back East. Or if I had it there I’d be crazy to leave it and come here or any other place. Before *everybody* can have that we have to deport these damn foreigners. [emphasis added]” Interestingly enough, when Morrow’s wife (just identified as “Wife” in the transcript) reminds her husband of the citizenship status of some of these “foreigners,” Morrow replies:

It don’t make no difference. They never belonged here in the first place. I’m quarter Cherokee Indian and *I belong* here. There’s a potato field about half a mile from here, and they’re diggin’ now. Out of thirty-five workers there’s only one white worker. The rest are Philipinos [*sic.*] and Mexicans. Go out there and ask fer a job and they will say, ‘We’ve got our help.’ You might as well ask the side of that wall there fer a job as to ask them fer it. If I had a hundred acres of spuds out here to be picked up, if I could git a crew of white Americans, I’d git ‘em. If I couldn’t, I’d take foreign help. But the first unemployed American that come along would be put to work. I’d lay one of them “boogers” off, he’d git canned. I hate everyone of them, don’t like a bone in their body. Ninety-nine percent of them foreigners would let you lay and die in the boilin’ hot sun. Wouldn’t even put a spoonful of water on you if they had a gallon. We’ve got to git rid of them guys if we ever want to have good work in this country. [emphasis added]<sup>231</sup>

Ostensibly, Morrow’s testimony betrays the efficacy of white supremacy as a mode of division: permanently preventing the development of a class consciousness that would ultimately benefit all farmworkers, regardless of perceived ethno-racial identity, during a very painful period in United States history—potentially changing California’s postcolonial nature in the process. Beneath the surface, however, where Morrow’s comments appear to be about job competition with exogenous labor, resides deeper

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<sup>231</sup> Morrow in Wilson, “Social Attitudes of Certain Migratory Agricultural Workers in Kern County, California”, 392.

anxieties about *belonging*. Whiteness, as a theory, provides a valuable tool when analyzing ethnography of this type. Viewed through the lens of whiteness, several themes immediately become clear. First, Morrow—invoking Jeffersonian notions of the naturalness of white property ownership—warns Wilson that foreigners, not industry, pose a threat to the American way of life. “Before everybody”—excluding other laborers as persons, for Morrow’s use of “*everybody*” (which is all inclusive) somehow excludes *them*—can achieve the American dream as he sees it, foreigners must be cast outside the polity. Second, when faced with the fact that many of these “foreigners” may in fact be citizens, Morrow discounts their *de jure* citizenship by *de facto* otherness. Engaging in what Veracini calls “transfer by conceptional displacement,” Morrow—ironically ignoring the same indigenous provenance that he claims for himself as “quarter Cherokee”—perceives his *Chicana/o* and *Mexicana/o* competition as exogenous, and thus less deserving of citizenship.<sup>232</sup> Reproducing a common racial trope that implies that *they* as *non-whites*—unlike he, as a white “native American”—are not real Americans anyways, Morrow implies that their claims to citizenship, or, in the Filipino case, status as United States colonials, are worthless, or, at the very least, do not equate to his. Ultimately, however, by insisting that southwestern labor, as “white Americans,” should still be given preference over *Others* when growers hire, Morrow is appealing to an American sense of racial justice. Drawing on the privilege that his whiteness traditionally afforded him in Oklahoma—in other words, the social capital attributed to the “wages of whiteness”—Morrow is asserting that the conditions in California defy a natural order

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<sup>232</sup> Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 35.

where he and other white Americans are more disserving than those they consider *non-white*.

Despite this, it would be a mistake to view Morrow's testimony, as racist as it may be, through a "vulgar multiculturalist" lens. Instead, his statements stress the need for an expansion of whiteness theory itself and for the development of frameworks that account for his experience as a *White Other* in California's sociopolitical landscape. The idea of *White otherness* suggested here differs from those explored by Roediger, Ignatiev and Jacobson—who regard "white others" as categories of distinction applied to those who tend to have white skin and also appear to be *Other* in some respect. That is, as a classification that applies to groups of European descent who have yet to fully assimilate to the local dictates of whiteness. Unfortunately, such narratives treat otherness as a temporary condition that can be overcome (in time) via assimilation and the virtue of white skin, without fully considering the ways that whiteness itself functions as a series of stratified subcategories, where whiteness can be, and often is, contested. This study, on the other hand, as detailed in the Introduction, views *White otherness* as a sociological subcategory within constructs of whiteness, and considers it a vital mechanism of analysis when examining narratives of white differentiation.<sup>233</sup>

Viewing whiteness as a boundary mechanism, rather than a biological fact, leads to an understanding of race making where subject-group location is determined by perceived transgressions of the constructed boundaries of whiteness. Once violations have occurred, and the violating subject group is marked-out as *Unruly*, a process of racialization likely follows. Taking the regional fixity of whiteness into consideration,

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<sup>233</sup> Newitz and Wray, "What is 'White Trash'?", 169-170.

this study theorizes that the withholding from subordinate subject groups the rights and privileges commonly attributed to full citizenship and personhood—in other words, the “public and psychological wage” of whiteness identified by Du Bois—signifies a group marked out as *Other*, and one vulnerable to a process of racialization.

As the next chapter indicates, this process is evident in every episode of racialization in California’s long colonial history with exogenous labor. With every new group of labor, the social boundaries that separated white from *non-white* were fortified, and the criteria for whiteness grew evermore exclusive. As for southwestern migrants, Chapter V incorporates this concept of whiteness into its larger framework of racial analysis to locate the *Okie* within California’s complex racial discourse and reveal the sociopolitical factors responsible for group position within its hierarchy. Speculating on the nature of southwestern marginalization it suggests that *Okies*, as poor whites on the margins of society, disenfranchised from the wages of whiteness and subject to vigilante terror and routine violations of civil liberties, did in fact experience a process of racialization as *White Others* in California’s rural agricultural communities during the New Deal Era.

#### Race as a Technology of Power

As mentioned above, this study understands race as a technology of colonial power, and more specifically, in the context of California agriculture, a technology employed by sovereign authority to ensure the regenerative capacity of its imagined colonial project. As a normative mechanism of division, race manufactures *nonpersons*, or what Veracini refers to as “negatively defined alterities”: those imagined by the dominant collective as not belonging, undeserving of full moral consideration—

exogenous *Others*.<sup>234</sup> Through this process, race lends credence to the repertoire of *settler* disavowals, narratives, and myths that define the *settler* colonial project. In other words, race, in its production of *nonpersons*, ultimately naturalizes colonial arrangements of power. Exploring this process, the operational framework presented here is in large part a corollary of Sheth's work in *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*. Although Sheth's original political framework more than adequately accounts for the sociopolitical function of race, the following analysis also draws on themes presented in works by Matt Wray, Michèle Lamont, Lorenzo Veracini, Eli Jelly-Schapiro, Michel Foucault and other scholars to expand on her model.

#### The *Essence* of Race

Utilizing Martin Heidegger's concept of *Gestell*, or "enframing," Sheth concludes that the *essence* of race is technical. That is, if we look at race's societal effects, rather than trying to look directly at what we think race *is*—which is often obscured by cultural and ideological assumptions—then race appears to operate like a technology in that it transforms "raw material," or inputs, to create new products deemed necessary for society to function. "[W]ithin a juridico-political context," Sheth concludes, "race becomes an instrument that produces certain political and social outcomes that are needed to cohere society."<sup>235</sup> Race, in Sheth's assessment, is a psychological tool deployed in the polity to manage unpredictable or threatening elements—elements that she labels the "unruly."<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 17.

<sup>235</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 22.

<sup>236</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 22.

A brief survey of Sheth's schema reveals three operational dimensions to the technology of race. In the first dimension race is instrumental, identifying *Unruly* elements as threats to the established political order and marking them out as *Other* in some fashion. Although biological markers are often employed to mark out subject-group differentiation, such markers—along with non-biological indicators—initially only signify that a normative transgression has occurred. Transgressions interpreted as threats manifest in many forms, but most often represent intangible dangers, such as divergent ideologies, religious beliefs, or a group's association with a traumatic event, and work in conjunction with some perceived sociopolitical crisis, shift in a mode of production, or disruption to an established way of life.<sup>237</sup>

The second dimension naturalizes the otherness of those marked out as *Unruly*. Here, race operates as a form of erasure, concealing the initial process of *Unruly* categorization behind a veil of objectivity, constraining the dominant class to think about subordinate subject groups in racial terms. Through this process perceived biological and non-biological distinctions are imbued with cultural saliency, ultimately naturalizing the connections between constructed racial signifiers and perceived subject group inferiority. What is naturalized through this process, however, is the signifier itself. Such signifiers, which need not be biological, may in fact represent any perceived normative deviation and are often the result of the initial impulse to categorize the *Unruly* in a given polity. Theoretically then, the *Unruly* can be signified by any transgressive belief or behavior.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 26-28, 49-50.

<sup>238</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 28-29, 49-50.



Whiteness, as a normative boundary, operates in similar terms, accommodating both the instrumental and naturalization dimensions of race. By identifying transgressors as *Unruly* and categorizing their relative social position as *non-whites* (or *White Others*), whiteness creates outcast groups vulnerable to further discrimination, exploitation, abuse and, ultimately, sociopolitical disenfranchisement. For example, the use of labels such as *Digger*, *Greaser*, *Coolie*, *Nip* and *Okie*, on the one hand, signal a normative breach in the boundaries of whiteness.<sup>239</sup> On the other hand, their use in California's common vernacular, especially in the rural valleys, demonstrates a naturalizing effect, reinforcing the connection between the signified subject-group and the corresponding stigmatized category "farm labor."

Landscape, as something experienced, has this ability as well. As touched on in the first chapter, landscapes not only reflect the physical structures of geography and the social conditions in which they exist, they operate as ideological spaces where culture and political economies intersect. As agents of invisibility, landscapes represent the arrangements of power in a given region, typically presenting the world as desired by regional authority, while simultaneously masking the historical factors, political processes, and labor relations that make them possible.<sup>240</sup> Colonial landscapes in

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<sup>239</sup> *Stigmatype*, as noted in the Introduction, is a term coined by Matt Wray denoting a socially constructed and value-based label signifying the social boundaries of otherness. According to Wray, the need for the term arose because *stereotypes*—which need not be negative or stigmatizing—do not adequately account for stigmatizing nature of boundary terms meant to reinforce the process of social differentiation. "*Stigmatypes*," Wray notes, "speaks both to the classifying impulse—the impulse to typify—and to the hierarchicalization of categories through denigration of the other." Wray, *Not Quite White*, 23, quote 150n4.

<sup>240</sup> This understanding of landscape was influenced by ideas in Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 13-35; W. J. T. Mitchell, "Introduction," 1-4; W. J. T. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscapes, 5-34; Williams, *The Country and the City*, 22-34; Zukin, *Landscapes of Power*, 3-23, 217-250; Stilgoe, *What is Landscape?*; Peirce F. Lewis, "Axioms for Reading the Landscape"; Anderson, "The Idea of Chinatown," 580-598.

particular serve as relentless material reminders of a natural order that reinforces the normative boundaries of the dominant collective and the transgressive (or *Unruly*) qualities of all colonized and exogenous subject groups. Once transgressions occur, the classification of signified subject groups as foreigners, farmworkers, laborers, indigents, exogenous, etc. is naturalized by their visible—or, more than likely, invisible or mythologized—representation in the physical landscape.

The third dimension of race, in Sheth's assessment, works to conceal sovereign power's relationship to the vulnerability and violence necessitated by the process of racialization behind a veil of jurisprudence. Building on Foucault's biopolitical framework, Sheth puts forth what she calls the "Violence of Law framework," which holds that in sovereign authority's drive for self-preservation it utilizes the law to protect those whose interests align with its own and are most likely to ensure its conservation, while simultaneously abandoning, or working against—via legal and extra-legal mechanisms—the *Unruly* and the vulnerable.<sup>241</sup> It is important to note here that Sheth is challenging a commonly held belief in liberal society that "the *fundamental* function of the law is to ensure justice for all individuals, and the basic purpose of the law is to protect all who fall within its purview." Continuing, Sheth asserts that "In order for that narrative to hold, the story of modernity as an epoch of violence, brutality, and dehumanization must be construed as a series of never-ending aberrations, mistakes, and misapplications of justice."<sup>242</sup> Adopting a Foucauldian premise regarding the aims of sovereign power, Sheth instead suggests that the purpose of the law is to protect the

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<sup>241</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 42.

<sup>242</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 41.

sovereign interests in a given polity, which often entails creating “*a priori* legal loophole[s],” or categories of exception, for the *Unruly* elements marked out as transgressors, threats: *Others*.<sup>243</sup> Such categories, in her assessment, ultimately “have the effect (or potential) of rendering the population in question *inhuman, dehumanized*, in other words, explicitly and fundamentally unworthy of the protection of the law”<sup>244</sup>—a process that this study understands as the production of *nonpersons*.

It is worth noting that such dehumanization is frequently subtle and not always expressed in explicit forms of direct violence, discrimination, or even the use of *stigmatypes*, but instead manifests as indirect violence and is the consequence of the law’s repeated abandonment.<sup>245</sup> The creation of ‘exception’ categories allows for the rule of law, as a tool of sovereign authority, to favor the interests of the dominant population while still maintaining the pretense of neutrality. Once a particular subject group has been selected as *Unruly*, their juridical ‘exception’ becomes naturalized by the dictates of the rule of law, and the liberal ideals of justice and security.<sup>246</sup> As the following analysis demonstrates, this phenomenon is particularly useful to sovereign authority in colonial landscapes where power is arranged asymmetrically and designed to benefit the dominant class; and the exploitation of labor necessitates their ceaseless vulnerability. In California, as we shall see, this process advanced sovereign power’s ability to coopt all the juridical mechanisms of the state at moments of distress and legitimate extra-legal forms of violence, such as vigilante terror, under the guise of collective security.

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<sup>243</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 52-56, see also 38.

<sup>244</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 53.

<sup>245</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 53.

<sup>246</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 23, 55-56.

## Chapter IV.

### California's Race-Dependent Landscape

Contextualizing Sheth's model within a colonial framework, this chapter briefly surveys episodes of labor migration and farm worker discrimination from California's colonial past in an effort to emphasize the role of race as a reproductive agent of colonial power and further highlight its function in maintaining regional sovereignty. It suggests that the material demands of California's agricultural complex with its dependence on exogenous forms of imported labor—subject groups with varying claims to whiteness—was instrumental in determining a regional racial order uniquely marked by variegated distributions of *White otherness*. Although Anglo Americans entered the territory with their own preconceptions of white supremacy, without the benefit of a permanently colored class—devoid of “whiteness”—*beneath* them in the form of free *Blacks* and slaves, occupants had to accept less binary racial arrangements than imagined in other parts of the United States in order to manage the colonial landscape.<sup>247</sup> The experience of

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<sup>247</sup> It is well established that the narrative of Manifest Destiny—the idea that Americans, as the descendants of Anglo Saxons, were destined by divine blessing and the superiority of their own race to inherit the North American continent and put its lands to “proper use”—is innately racist. The formation of Anglo California, as a consequence of Manifest Destiny, must also be viewed in this light. See Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1963), 310-312; Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015 [1980]), 149-169; Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Laura E. Gómez, *Manifest Destinies: The Making of the Mexican American Race*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2018). For whiteness as a normative function of white supremacy and the key component of racial construction in the United States, see Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, 700-701; Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*; Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*; Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*.

western conquest and the inheritance of an ethnically Mexican<sup>248</sup>—yet legally white citizenry with its own racial legacy—complicated by a multicultural environment encouraged by the discovery of gold in the Sierra Nevada, challenged traditional Anglo-American ideas of white and *non-white* in California, resulting in a racial historicist order prominently shaped by perceptions of material function, rather than racial dogmas of innate biological inferiority alone.<sup>249</sup>

This chapter, therefore, contends that the colonial arrangements of power that characterized California's rural economy came to constitute the social boundaries of racial difference that separated the state's management class from its agricultural proletariat. As alluded to in the Introduction, it suggests that as the state's rural economies transitioned to intensive farming techniques and increasingly relied on imported labor, California's racial discourses of inferiority and the juridico-political structures that ensured subject-group marginalization became linked with farm labor's apparent material function in the colonial landscape. Such discourses, as we shall see, were heavily influenced by perceptions of whiteness and otherness determined, not strictly by a racial ideology, but by constructed normative boundaries of subject-group morality, aptitude, and cultural (non)conformity—a dynamic that, as the following

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<sup>248</sup> Since naturalization, under United States law, at the moment of California's annexation from Mexico was solely reserved for "free white persons," the same provisions of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that guaranteed American citizenship for formally Mexican citizens within the annexed territory, also provided the legal basis for claims to whiteness. See Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Article IX; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 50, 54; Gómez, *Manifest Destinies*, 85-95; Natalia Molina, *How Race is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 23-27; Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 142.

<sup>249</sup> H. W. Brands details the multicultural/multinational response to the news of gold discovery in California in: H. W. Brands, *The Age of Gold: The California Gold Rush and the American Dream* (New York: Anchor Books, 2003), 23-64.

chapter demonstrates, was easily applied to agriculturally bound *Okies* in rural California during the New Deal era.

### The Short Road from *Gente de Razón* to *Other*

The need for Anglo Americans to create *Mexican Americans*, as a distinct ethnoracial category unto itself stems directly from the United States' conquest of the American Southwest and was grounded in the same political ideology and pseudo-scientific rationale of Mexican/o inferiority that guided Manifest Destiny. As the direct descendants of Spaniards, Africans and Native Americans, California's *Mestizaje* not only inherited the hatred and discrimination previously reserved for their indigenous cousins, but an inherent inferiority grounded in the tenets of Anglo-Saxonism. As indigenous people of mixed blood, their removal was rooted in the same justifications as other *Indian* transfer projects during the earlier part of the nineteenth century and an emergent ideology that regarded their extinction as inevitable, natural, even necessary for world progress.<sup>250</sup> Their "*Negro*" ancestry abolished all claims to whiteness and left them vulnerable to stereotypes commonly reserved for *Black* persons in the United States.<sup>251</sup> And, although Anglo Californians would later romanticize about California's mythical pastoral heritage, as Ibero Americans living during a period of hyper Anglo-Saxonism, their marginalization was equally justified on the grounds that their indolence and lack of industriousness—deficits not inherent to Anglo Americans as a "superior" race—retarded

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<sup>250</sup> Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*; 208-228.

<sup>251</sup> See Horsman's reference to Waddy Thompson in Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 212.

human progress.<sup>252</sup> Consequently, even before occupation, California's *Mestizaje*, as with most of the Southwest's inhabitants, were perceived as threats to, or standing in the way of, an expanding Anglo-American order sanctioned by divine providence; and their demise, or at the very least, displacement, was naturalized by the discourse of Manifest Destiny and a rationale that naturalized their transfer in the name of human progress<sup>253</sup>—a position adequately summarized at the time by T. J. Farnham in his book *Life,*

*Adventure and Travels in California:*

No one acquainted with the indolent, mixed race of California, will ever believe that they will populate, much less, for any length of time, govern the country. The law of Nature which curses the mulatto herewith a constitution less robust than that of either race from which he sprang, lays a similar penalty upon the mingling of the Indian and white races in California and Mexico. They must fade away; while the mixing of different branches of the Caucasian family in the states will continue to produce a race of men, who will enlarge from period to period the field of their industry and civil domination, until not only the Northern States of Mexico, but the Californias also, will open their glebe to the pressure of its unconquered arm. The Old Saxon blood must stride the continent, must command all its northern shores...and in their own unaided might, erect the alter of civil and religious freedom on the plains of the Californias.<sup>254</sup>

Appealing to a sense of natural order—and in a manner that mirrors the insights of Sheth, Goldberg, and Jelly-Schapiro regarding the connections between liberalism and race—historian Reginald Horsman rationalizes America's need to racially justify its conquest of the Southwest in his monograph *Race and Manifest Destiny*, writing:

If the United States was to remain in the minds of its people a nation divinely orientated for great deeds, then the fault for the suffering inflicted in the rise to power and prosperity had to lie elsewhere. White Americans

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<sup>252</sup> Chávez, *The Lost Land*, 88; Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 208-228.

<sup>253</sup> Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 208-228.

<sup>254</sup> T. J. Farnham, *Life, Adventure and Travels in California* (New York: Nafis and Cornish, 1849 [1840]), 413.

could rest easier if the sufferings of other races could be blamed on racial weakness rather than on the whites' relentless search for wealth and power. In the 1830s and 1840s, when it became obvious that American and Mexican interests were incompatible and that the Mexicans would suffer, innate weaknesses were found in the Mexicans. Americans, it was argued, were not to blame for forcibly taking the northern providences of Mexico, for Mexicans, like Indians, were unable to make proper use of the land. The Mexicans had failed because they were a mixed, inferior race with considerable Indian and black blood. The world would benefit if a superior race shaped the future of the Southwest.<sup>255</sup>

The Southwest's potential was far too great to be left to an inferior, largely *Indian*, race incapable of harnessing the land's proper industrious qualities. Just as it was with the removal of America's other indigenous groups, the sociopolitical marginalization of California's Mexican population was justified by Jacksonian notions of *non-white* ineptitude.<sup>256</sup> Summarizing a common Anglo-American position on the eve of the United States-Mexican War, Horsman frames the issue in terms of natural law: "To take lands from inferior barbarians was no crime; it was simply following God's injunctions to make the land fruitful."<sup>257</sup>

With the close of the war, and the secession of Mexico's northern territory to the United States, Anglo Americans soon realize that the "mongrel" race that occupied those lands would not recede in the face of invasion.<sup>258</sup> If Anglo Americans insisted on using

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<sup>255</sup> Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 210.

<sup>256</sup> Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 208-228.

<sup>257</sup> Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 211.

<sup>258</sup> Use of the term "mongrel," as with "barbarian," to describe Mexicans seems to be commonly employed by supporters of the war with Mexico. For examples, see quotes by Lansford Hastings, Rufus Sage and Robert J. Walker printed in Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 211-215; see also Rosaura Sánchez, *Telling Identities: The California Testimonios* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1995), 58.



race as a means of managing the colonial landscape, they were going to have to contend with the racial structures of Spanish California. Although Mexico had declared its independence from Spain in 1821, the racial hierarchy that governed colonial California remained largely unaltered by the new secular government. Even though Spanish structures were no less racist than the Anglo American in orientation—in that they emphasized the racial superiority of the Spanish as white Europeans—the racial traditions of the colonial Californians differed from the Anglo model in intent and design. Undeniably, the Franciscan mission system in California and *rancho* system that accompanied it, were deeply flawed and violent instruments of cultural erasure. However, in the light of Anglo-American racism, these institutions appear somewhat benevolent. Unlike the Anglo-American racial binary that justified the removal, reservation and eradication of Native Americans, the racial attitude of the colonial Spanish in the northern territories was rooted in a Thomistic philosophy that valued the natural human rights of America’s native inhabitants—in other words, at some level they were people.<sup>259</sup> The humanistic racial discourse that Spanish theologians such as Franciscus de Victoria helped develop during the Spanish Renaissance, heavily influenced Ibero-indigenous legal relations in the region; and a cultural project meant to transform tribal *Indians* from “child-like savages” into *gente de razón* or ‘people of reason’<sup>260</sup>—combined with a Mediterranean racial outlook that considered miscegenation a normal consequence of

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<sup>259</sup> Sherburne F. Cook, “Conflict Between the California Indian and White Civilization,” in *Racism in California: A Reader in the History of Oppression*, ed. Rodger Daniels and Spencer C. Olin (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 3-8; Robert A. Williams, *The American Indian in Western Legal Thought: The Discourses of Conquest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 103-108.

<sup>260</sup> Williams, *The American Indian in Western Legal Thought*, 103-108; for *gente de razón* see Starr, *California*, 28-29; Sánchez, *Telling Identities*, 57.

colonialism<sup>261</sup>—ultimately facilitated the development of a rich hybrid culture defined just as much by station and occupation as ancestry.<sup>262</sup>

Even though race provided the same differentiatonal function in the frontier societies of Mexico's northern territories as it did in the United States and Mexico in general, race was far more fluid in these regions. California, like most frontier societies, offered opportunities for social advancement to its *Mestizaje* population through religious conversion, marriage, military service, and other occupations, in spite of their Native American and Afro-*Mestizaje* ancestry. Although ideas about racial hierarchy still influenced social standing, racial categories themselves were flexible and locally constructed in reference to socio-economic and class standing.<sup>263</sup>

*Californios*, the region's landed political class, often thought of themselves as culturally white *españoles*, and yet some of its most influential members were, in fact, *Mestizaje*. For example, Pío Pico, a *ranchero* and California's last governor under the Mexican regime, and clearly a part of the *Californio* caste, was of Afro-*Mestizaje* lineage. The Pico family illustrates the fluidity of California's racial order; not only by the mere fact that within three generations one of its members could rise to prominence within the *Californio* caste, but within a single generation siblings could transcend caste boundaries on the basis of occupation. For instance, as a young Spanish soldier at Mission San

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<sup>261</sup> Theodora Kroeber, "Episodes in Extermination," in *Racism in California: A Reader in the History of Oppression*, ed. Rodger Daniels and Spencer C. Olin (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 27.

<sup>262</sup> Gómez, *Manifest Destinies*, 49-58; Cook, "Conflict Between the California Indian and White Civilization," 4-6; Carlos Manuel Salomon, *Pío Pico: The Last Governor of Mexican California* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), 292-300, Kindle.

<sup>263</sup> Gómez, *Manifest Destinies*, 49-58; Salomon, *Pío Pico*, 292, Kindle; Sánchez, *Telling Identities*, 55-58.

Gabriel near Los Angeles, Pio's father, José Maria Pico, was listed on the 1790 census as "español," while José's father was listed as "mestizo," and his mother, Jacinita, and two brothers, Xavier and Patricio, were listed as "mulatos."<sup>264</sup> It has been suggested by Chicano author Carlos Manuel Salomon, that one of the reasons for this discrepancy was José Maria Pico's outstanding military record and that he was instrumental in defusing an Indian uprising, a fact that Governor Fages felt warranted his recognition as *español*.<sup>265</sup> However, as the Picos demonstrate, such distinctions meant little in California. Where all of José Maria Pico's brothers would eventually serve in military companies, and themselves be issued *mercedes* (land grants) by the regional authorities, José himself would never retire from service and never obtain a *merced*.<sup>266</sup>

Regardless, the Pico family's identification as *gente de razón* cannot be overlooked. According to literary scholar Rosaura Sánchez, *gente de razón* identity in California was constructed against the inhumanity of the *Indian* and represents the consolidation of a complex racial hierarchy based on caste into single category of *civilized*.<sup>267</sup> "This distinction," Sánchez argues, "(Indian versus non-Indian), the fundamental antagonism within early California society, is the linchpin around which discourses of identity are articulated." Continuing, Sánchez writes:

The othering of the Indians, both neophyte [*civilized/Christian*] and gentile [*savage/non-Christian*], perceived by the *Californios* as culturally, linguistically, and ethnically different, serves therefore not only to mask the fact that a large percentage of the original colonists as well as later

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<sup>264</sup> William Marvin Mason, *The Census of 1790: A Demographic History of California* (Menlo Park, CA: Bellena Press, 1998), 80, 85.

<sup>265</sup> Salomon, *Pío Pico*, 292-300, Kindle.

<sup>266</sup> Salomon, *Pío Pico*, 262-270, 308-331, Kindle.

<sup>267</sup> Sánchez, *Telling Identities*, 57; see also Gómez, *Manifest Destinies*, 58.

arrivals from Mexico shared the same Indian blood but more significantly to legitimate the conquest and exploitation of the Indians on the basis of a racial and cultural superiority. Caste distinctions are thus nothing more than a form of ‘culturalist’ racism, a colonial practice not based on strictly racialist considerations, especially given ongoing miscegenation, but used to ‘justify’ the racism of extermination and of oppression or exploitation.<sup>268</sup>

The desire of *Californios* to differentiate themselves from the rest of the *gente de razón*, however, intensified under the American regime. Article IX of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo bestowed upon the region’s formerly Mexican subjects the rights and privileges of United States citizenship, an act that theoretically gave all Californians a legal claim to whiteness.<sup>269</sup> Prior to the Fourteenth Amendment only “free white person[s],” as specified by the Naturalization Acts of 1790 and 1795, were legally eligible for United States citizenship.<sup>270</sup> Therefore, the mere act of naturalizing all formerly Mexican citizens who opted to stay in the territory after annexation had the unintended consequence of granting some degree of legal whiteness on that body. Citizenship, however, as legal scholar Laura E. Gómez reminds us in *Manifest Destinies*,

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<sup>268</sup> Sánchez, *Telling Identities*, 57-58.

<sup>269</sup> Article IX: “Mexicans who, in the territories aforesaid, shall not preserve the character of the Mexican republic, conformably with what is stipulated in the preceding article, shall be incorporated in the Union of the United States, and be admitted at the proper time (to be judged of by the congress of the United States) to enjoyment of all the rights of citizens of the United States, according to the principles of the Constitution; and in the meantime shall be maintained and protected in the free enjoyment of their liberty and property, and secured in the free exercise of their religion without restriction.” “Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.”

<sup>270</sup> “Section 1. Be it enacted by the Senate and the House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That any alien, being a *free white person*, may be admitted to become a citizen of the United States...[emphasis added].” Richard Peters, ed. *United States Public Statutes at Large: Third Congress*, “An Act to Establish a Uniform Rule of Naturalization, and Repeal the Act Heretofore Posed on that Subject,” passed on June 29, 1795 (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1845), 414. <https://govtrackus.s3.amazonaws.com/legislink/pdf/stat/1/STATUTE-1-Pg414a.pdf>; see also Gómez, *Manifest Destinies*, 49-58.

is not only legally conferred but socially constructed and reified. As Gómez argues, the unwillingness of the dominant Anglo-American collective to extend *de facto* rights and privileges of citizenship universally to Mexican Californians created an environment where everyone, regardless of former caste, was forced to compete for socioeconomic position within an Anglo-American racial order that valued cultural whiteness.<sup>271</sup>

### *Diggers*

Pejoratively referred to as *Diggers* by Anglo Americans—which, set against the backdrop of Anglo-American progress (and ironically, the Gold Rush) is clearly intended to underscore an idea of tribal backwardness, or primitiveness, by framing natives as people who dig in the earth for subsistence rather than farm like *civilized* people<sup>272</sup>—California’s *Indian* population, the region’s largest demographic under the Mexican regime, was swiftly marginalized socially, politically disenfranchised, and irradiated in the wake of the Anglo-American invasion.<sup>273</sup> Native American scholar and historian

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<sup>271</sup> Gómez, *Manifest Destinies*, 86-91.

<sup>272</sup> Employing a zoomorphic analogy, a common racist practice, to describe the qualities of *Diggers*, George C. Yount, in his *Chronicles of the West* explains the pejorative in these terms: “For their mode of living on roots & reptiles, insects & vermine they [the Indians of California] have been called Diggers—In fact they almost burrow in the Earth like the mole [mole] & are almost as blind to everything comely—At the time out trappers supposed they had now found the lowest dregs of humanity.” George C. Yount, *George C. Yount and his Chronicles of the West: Comprising Extractions From his “Memoirs” and from the Orange Clark “Narrative”*, ed. Charles L. Camp (Denver: Old West Publishing Company, 1966), 73; Veracini understands this dynamic—in which *Digger* is clearly reinforced though *stigmatypes*—as a form of narrative transfer, in which “indigenous people are represented as hopelessly backward, as unchanging specimen of a primitive form of humanity inhabiting pockets of the past surrounded by contemporaneity.” Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 43.

<sup>273</sup> According to Cook, as of 1845 the region’s *gente de razón* population had yet to exceed 4,000; this includes *Californios* and the lower status Mexicanos/os that would later fill California’s *Chicana/o* ranks. Although Cook places the indigenous population at approximately 100,000 as of that date, Castillo claims approximately 170,000. Cook, “Conflict Between the California Indian and White Civilization,” 5; Castillo, “A Short Overview of California Indian History.”

Edward D. Castillo estimates that within the first two years of the Gold Rush more than 100,000 aboriginal Californians lost their lives to disease, starvation and mass murder.<sup>274</sup> Although other historians claim that it is impossible to truly know just how many *Indians* were killed during this period, they recognize that the patterns of violence and injustice that characterized this period continued well into the 1870s, in what has become known as “the California Genocide”.<sup>275</sup> Regarded as *non-white*, and more importantly, *nonpersons* by the prevailing racial hierarchy of the region’s Anglo-American invaders, the lives of California’s Indigeneity meant little.

Shortly after Captain John B. Montgomery raised a United States flag over what is today San Francisco, in July of 1846, and placed Alta California under martial law, military magistrates working in conjunction with local Mexican bureaucracies issued a set of vagrancy ordinances designed to strip Native Americans in the region of their freedom, as well as all civil rights and human dignity. These ordinances, according to historian Benjamin Madley, effectively devalued *Indian* life so severely that their kidnapping, rape, murder, and enslavement caused no public offense and incited no legal redress; ultimately paving the way for further legislation, civil rights violations and the genocide of tens of thousands of Native Americans.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> Castillo, “A Short Overview of California Indian History”; The American historian and anthropologist Lizbeth Haas figures seem to be roughly in line with Castillo’s, claiming that approximately eighty percent of California’s Indians were killed during the 1850s. Lizbeth Haas, “San Juan Capistrano: A Rural Society in Transition to Citrus,” *California History* 74, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 46-57.

<sup>275</sup> Benjamin Madley, *An American Genocide: The United States and the Indian Californian Catastrophe, 1846-1873* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2016), 3247-5486, Kindle; Kroeber, “Episodes in Extermination,” 29-30.

<sup>276</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*, 2719-2777, Kindle.

Writing just before the Gold Rush, George C. Yount, one of the earliest Anglo-American occupants in the Napa Valley and a land grantee of the Mexican government, testifies to the regional impact of this devaluation on the Wappo people of Napa:

It is not eight years since the above named valley [Napa] swarmed with not less than eight Thousand human beings, of whom there are not now left as many Hundreds—They have been hunted down by the murderous white man—Ardent spirits have been afforded them by the same all exterminating foe; disease of the filthiest & most fatal kind have been contracted & disseminated from the same source, the same intruders have usurped the land, scattered & exterminated their game & fish, corrupted their habits, as well as infected the persons of their females, which has rendered them feeble, torpid & indolent—Hence they murder their offspring at birth, to rid themselves of the care & toil of nursing & raising them into life—If they do not murder them the little innocents come into life diseased & born only to suffer and die . . . The tribes are wasting away, like the dew of a summer’s morning—They have already dwindled to such an extent, that almost all distinction of tribe & nation is gone forever.<sup>277</sup>

Early legislation under the emerging republic expanded on these vagrancy ordinances to further disenfranchise and restrict the freedoms of California’s natives. A debate over suffrage at the Constitutional Convention in Monterey in September 1849, resulted in denial of voting rights to the Indians, despite the objections of a clear minority of *Californio* delegates and Anglo American grantees.<sup>278</sup> The California delegates skirted the collective naturalization granted by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo to all Mexicans within the territory, first by citing Mexican laws that restricted some Mexican *Indians* the right to vote on the basis of property qualifications or occupation, then by arguing that to

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<sup>277</sup> Yount, *George C. Yount and his Chronicles of the West*, 154.

<sup>278</sup> See statements by Edward Gilbert, Henry Amos Tefft, Louis Dent, and Pablo de la Guerra (Mr. Noriego), September 12, 1849, in Browne, *Report of the Debates of the Convention of California*; see also Madley, *An American Genocide*, 2844-2920, Kindle.

give the vote to tens of thousands of Native Americans would give “gentlemen who are very popular among the wild Indians” (certain *Californios*) too much power, as they would be able to abuse their position to control the *Indian* vote, perverting the democratic process.<sup>279</sup> In the end, it was Delegate Lansford Hastings’ argument that proved most persuasive:

[I]f, by the treaty of peace, these persons are all entitled to vote, they could not be excluded by this Convention from the enjoyment of that right. If they are not entitled to vote according to Mexican law, and hence according to the treaty, we should not allow them to vote. It would be a most injurious measure to permit the Indians of this country to vote. There are gentlemen who are very popular among the wild Indians, who could march hundreds up to the polls. There is no distinction between an Indian here and the remote tribes. An Indian in the mountains is just as much entitled to vote as anybody, if Indians are entitled to vote.<sup>280</sup>

In other words, Anglo-American dominance rested on *Indian* political disenfranchisement. To regard them as citizens and allow them to exercise their democratic franchise would pose a direct threat to the regional sovereignty of the Anglo-American collective. Ultimately, the resolution passed by a narrow margin of one vote.<sup>281</sup>

SEC. 1. Every white male citizen of the United States, and every male citizen of Mexico, (Indians, Africans, and descendants of Africans excepted) who shall have elected to become a citizen of the United States under the treaty of peace exchanged and ratified at Queretaro, on the 30th day of May, 1848, of the age of twenty-one years, who shall have been a resident of the State six months next preceding the election, and the county or district in which he claims his vote, thirty days, shall be entitled

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<sup>279</sup> See statements by Lansford Warren Hastings, Stephen Foster, William Gwin, Moton M. McCarver, and Oliver Meredith Wozencraft, September 12, 1849, in Browne, *Report of the Debates of the Convention of California*; see also Madley, *An American Genocide*, 2719-2920, Kindle.

<sup>280</sup> Hastings, September 12, 1849, in Browne, *Report of the Debates of the Convention of California*.

<sup>281</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*, 2861, Kindle.



to vote at all elections which are now, or hereafter may be, authorized by law.<sup>282</sup>

As the convention's "Spanish delegation" and their allies feared, the exceptions to this statute were ultimately used to deny the rights of citizenship to more than just "wild Indians," for California's *gente de razón* was both "Indian" and "descendants of Africans." This statute was used to deny *Indians* and many *Chicanas/os* the right to vote until the federal Citizenship Act of 1924, regardless of the fact that the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the United States Constitution (ratified in 1870) ensured that "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous conditions of servitude."<sup>283</sup>

On April 22, 1850, the first California Legislature—prior to statehood—passed the dehumanizing "An Act for the Government and Protection of Indians." This statute cemented the *nonperson* status of Alta California's *Indian* population within the general psyche. Although the law did provide some provisions aimed at benefitting the general welfare of Native Americans, its most controversial sections were easily exploited by dominant Anglo Americans. Section 3, for example, stipulates that anyone could go before a Justice of the Peace with an *Indian* child, and if the Justice was satisfied that no coercion had taken place, the petitioner could "keep *it* [the child]," until they come of age, during which time the petitioner was entitled to all the child's earnings.<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> September 12, 1849, in Browne, *Report of the Debates of the Convention of California*.

<sup>283</sup> Kimberly Johnston-Dodds, *Early California Laws and Policies Related to California Indians* (Sacramento: California Research Bureau, 2002), 3.  
[https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1033&context=hornbeck\\_usa\\_3\\_d](https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1033&context=hornbeck_usa_3_d);  
"Amendment XV," *Constitution of the United States of America*.

<sup>284</sup> "An Act for the Government and Protection of Indians," Section 3, cited in Johnston-Dodds, *Early California Laws and Policies Related to California Indians*, 28.

Section 6, declared that “in no case [could] a white man be convicted of any offen[s]e upon the testimony of an Indian, or Indians.” Although this section was amended in 1855 to read “. . . Indians shall be competent witnesses,” the added caveat, “their credibility being left with the jury,” also allowed for the dismissal of their testimony by white juries.<sup>285</sup> Furthermore, California Indian historian Kimberly Johnston-Dodds notes in *Early California Laws and Policies Related to California Indians* that the “California legal treatises of the 1860s continued to cite the general civil procedure laws that excluded Indians from being witnesses at court as valid law.”<sup>286</sup> As political *nonpersons*, Native American testimony was seen as inadmissible on the account of their perceived incompetence. With no legal recourse for the crimes and human rights violations inflicted upon them by Anglo Americans—and no fear of conviction by the dominant collective—California’s *Indians* were increasingly vulnerable to a litany of savageries.<sup>287</sup>

Section 20, which expanded on the original vagrancy ordinances issued in 1846, bolstered the legality of indentured servitude in the region:

Section 20. Any Indian able to work and support himself in some honest calling, not having wherewithal to maintain himself, who shall be found loitering and strolling about, or frequenting public places where liquors are sold, begging, or leading an immoral or profligate course of life, shall be liable to be arrested on the complaint of any resident citizen of the county, and brought before any Justice of the Peace of the proper county,

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<sup>285</sup> “An Act for the Government and Protection of Indians,” Section 6, cited in Johnston-Dodds, *Early California Laws and Policies Related to California Indians*, 28; Madley, *An American Genocide*, 2996-3005, Kindle.

<sup>286</sup> Johnston-Dodds, *Early California Laws and Policies Related to California Indians*, 8, 28.

<sup>287</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*, 3247-5486, Kindle; Kroeber, “Episodes in Extermination,” 29-30.

Mayor or Recorder of any incorporated town or city, who shall examine said accused Indian, and hear the testimony in relation thereto, and if said Justice, Mayor, or Recorder shall be satisfied that he is a vagrant...he shall make out a warrant under his hand and seal, authorizing and requiring the officer having him in charge or custody, to hire out such vagrant within twenty-four hours to the best bidder, by public notice given as he shall direct, for the highest price that can be had, for any term not exceeding four months.<sup>288</sup>

Additionally, earlier that month, the legislature enacted the state's first militia laws, which, as Madley asserts, in the light of the Gold Rush and increased Anglo-indigenous contact, "set the stage for legally sanctioned genocidal crimes against Indians."<sup>289</sup> The "Act Concerning Volunteer or Independent Companies," facilitated the formation of more than three hundred volunteer militia units throughout the territory, and were manned by Anglo-American miners who not only saw natives as inferior and fated for extinction, they trusted that their actions were sanctioned in the name of 'justifiable conquest.'<sup>290</sup> Governor Peter H. Burnett—engaging the rhetoric of "narrative transfer" indicative to the discourse of Manifest Destiny<sup>291</sup>—signaling the state's continued support for the militias and their "expeditions," affirmed these assumptions in his 1851 annual address:

[The Indians] have not only seen their country taken from them, but they see their ranks rapidly thinning from the effects of our diseases. They instinctively consider themselves a doomed race; and this idea leads to despair; and despair prevents them from providing the usual and necessary

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<sup>288</sup> "An Act for the Government and Protection of Indians," Section 20, cited in Johnston-Dodds, *Early California Laws and Policies Related to California Indians*, 30.

<sup>289</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*, 3247, Kindle.

<sup>290</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*, 3270, Kindle; Kroeber, "Episodes in Extermination," 29-30.

<sup>291</sup> One of the four types of "narrative transfers," according to Veracini, utilizes "a 'tide of history' rationale...to deny legitimacy to ongoing indigenous presences and grievances. This transfer focuses on 'fatal impacts', on indigenous discontinuity with the past, and typically expresses regret for the inevitable 'vanishing' of indigenous people." Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 41.

supply of provisions. This produces starvation, which knows but one law, that of gratification; and the natural result is, that these people kill the first stray animal they find. This leads to war between them and the whites; and war creates a hatred against the white man that never ceases to exist in the Indian bosom . . . .

That a war of extermination will continue to be waged between the two races until the Indian race becomes extinct, must be expected; while we cannot anticipate the result with but painful regret, the inevitable destiny of the race is beyond the power and wisdom of man to avert.”<sup>292</sup>

In the years that followed, regular and volunteer militias, the unorganized vigilante groups they inspired, and individuals with little regard for native lives, operating with full support of state and federal authorities, appropriated hundreds of thousands of square miles of indigenous land, massacring tens of thousands of *Indians*, and enslaving untold numbers of native children.<sup>293</sup> This devaluation of Native American life protracted the instances of random violence, and killing for sport and retribution for perceived crimes or injustices, common in the region into the 1870s. “Nothing in American Indian history,” writes Castillo in *A Short Overview of California Indian History*, “is even remotely comparable to this massive orgy of theft and mass murder.”<sup>294</sup> And even though the region’s Native Americans resisted—often fighting back through guerilla tactics, resulting in the death of whites—the response was always disproportionate.<sup>295</sup> By one

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<sup>292</sup> Governor Peter H. Burnett, Annual Address, Tuesday, January 7, 1851, printed in California State Senate, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Senate* (San José: Eugene Casserly, State Printer, 1851), 14, 15.  
[https://clerk.assembly.ca.gov/sites/clerk.assembly.ca.gov/files/archive/DailyJournal/1851/Volumes/1851\\_jnl.PDF#page=1](https://clerk.assembly.ca.gov/sites/clerk.assembly.ca.gov/files/archive/DailyJournal/1851/Volumes/1851_jnl.PDF#page=1).

<sup>293</sup> Castillo, “A Short Overview of California Indian History.”; Madley, *An American Genocide*, 3247-5486, Kindle; Kroeber, “Episodes in Extermination,” 29-30.

<sup>294</sup> Castillo, “A Short Overview of California Indian History.”

<sup>295</sup> Kroeber, “Episodes in Extermination,” 26-34.

conservative estimate, for every Anglo American killed by *Indians*, up to fifty natives suffered the same fate.<sup>296</sup> The totality of *Indian nonpersonhood* was made increasingly evident by the law's abandonment of indigenous survivors. It manifests in their inability to bear witness, as legal persons, against their transgressors, or to pursue legal recourse in such instances; in the unwillingness of authorities to enforce laws where Native Americans were victimized; and in their perpetual vulnerability to theft, assault, abduction, rape, enslavement, and death<sup>297</sup>—for which there were no realistic expectations of prosecution.<sup>298</sup>

By the late nineteenth century, once the frenzy for gold and land had sputtered out and most of the old Spanish and Mexican grants north of the Tehachapi were monopolized by corporations, railroad companies, and colonizing schemes, and the few remaining natives were resigned to reservations and obscurity, Anglo-American occupiers found that they had squandered California's greatest source of wealth, its labor. For California's future industrial agriculture sector to succeed it would become necessary to operate by both internal and imported colonial modes.

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<sup>296</sup> Kroeber, "Episodes in Extermination," 28.

<sup>297</sup> Kroeber, "Episodes in Extermination," 26-34; Madley, *An American Genocide*, 3247-5486, Kindle.

<sup>298</sup> Madley mentions one case where a white man was tried and convicted for the murder of a California native in 1850. "[I]n 1850 authorities arrested and convicted only one white person for killing a California Indian, despite many known homicides and massacres. That summer, authorities convicted a white man for killing an Indian near Grayson. Had he killed a white man, the murderer would almost certainly have been hanged by authorities or by a mob. The murder of an Indian was different. According to the *Stockton Journal*, 'The Sheriff . . . set him at work to wash his clothes, and after hanging the first half dozen up to dry he made his escape,' which the Sheriff 'permitted.' In the absence of meaningful law enforcement or legal consequences, vigilantes continued murdering and massacring California Indians that fall." Madley, *An American Genocide*, 3421, Kindle.

*Chicanas/os*

California's *Chicana/o* population fared only slightly better by virtue of their Spanish blood, moderately stronger claims to whiteness, and their ability to relocate south of the Tehachapi. In a sense, the *Chicana/o*, as an ethnoracial identity, was forged in the shadow of America's imperial project, and acutely shaped by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.<sup>299</sup> Although the category is now viewed with a sense of pride by twentieth and twenty-first century Lantinx activists seeking to rectify silences in the historical record and shed light on the agency of their ancestors in shaping the physical and cultural landscapes of the American Southwest, for much of California history *Chicana/o* has been used in a derogatory sense by dominant whites to refer to lower class *Mestizaje*.<sup>300</sup> In the minds of many Anglo-American occupiers *Chicanas/os* were nothing more than Mexicans on *our* soil. That is, the *Chicana/o*, from the start, not only inherited some of the hatred and discrimination associated with Native Americans as both their biological descendants and their sociopolitical replacements at the bottom of the Anglo-American hierarchy, but they were also, to reference Chávez, seen as "aliens in their native land," as exogenous *Others*, despite their Californian heritage.<sup>301</sup>

Gómez outlines the development of the Southwest's racial hierarchy in terms that differ from the older binary arrangements familiar in many states of the American union, and particularly the South, in which the "one-drop rule" was used to construct categories of *non-whiteness*. Inversely, from her perspective, the racial hierarchy that developed in

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<sup>299</sup> Chávez, *The Lost Land*, 1.

<sup>300</sup> Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest*, 4.

<sup>301</sup> Chávez, *The Lost Land*, 43; Chávez, "Aliens in Their Native Lands," 785-787.

Anglo California, as with most of the Southwest, was in response to a racial landscape which relegated the social position of the *Mestizaje*, which included *Chicanas/os* and *Californios*, by a type of “reverse one-drop rule” via their Spanish lineage.<sup>302</sup> This dynamic helped *Chicanas/os* legitimized their claims to citizenship, and thus legal whiteness under Anglo-American occupation via the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. However, in spite of their legal claims to whiteness, in the eyes of the dominant colonial collective they were considered socially less than white, a position Gómez describes as ‘off-white.’<sup>303</sup>

Despite such legal claims, the sovereign powers of the region’s Anglo-American collective made several attempts at restricting or denying *Chicana/o* civil engagement. As with the Native Americans, the first organized attempts to restrict their freedom occurred prior to statehood. Due to the proximity of nearly every country in the Pacific region—which, in nautical terms were closer to California than the states of the Eastern Seaboard of the United States—the rush for California’s gold began long before Anglo Americans even received news of the discovery back east, and California’s multicultural landscape developed virtually overnight.<sup>304</sup> By the time Anglo-American miners penetrated the foothills of the Sierra Nevada, they were forced to compete with an experienced corps of miners from all over the Western Pacific and parts of Asia.<sup>305</sup> As a result, Yankee miners, not willing to recognize the legal differences between *Chicana/o* Californians and

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<sup>302</sup> Gómez, *Manifest Destinies*, 6, 124.

<sup>303</sup> Gómez, *Manifest Destinies*, 88.

<sup>304</sup> Brands, *The Age of Gold*, 47-48.

<sup>305</sup> Brands, *The Age of Gold*, 259-260; Chávez, *The Lost Land*, 47; McWilliams, *North from Mexico*, 97, 110.

Mexicans, Chileans, Peruvians, or any other sort of “Greaser,” collectively organized to expel these “foreigners,” along with many Chinese immigrants, from the goldfields.<sup>306</sup>

Invoking common themes of divine providence, the California born American philosopher Josiah Royce details some of the extra-legal violence employed in the mining districts during this turbulent episode to ensure the exclusion of *Indians*, “greasers” [*Chicanas/os* and *Mexicanas/os*, as well as South American miners] and other “foreigners”:

So ill we indeed did not treat [the “foreigners”] as some nations would have done; we did not massacre them wholesale, as Turks might have massacred them: that we reserved for the defenseless Digger Indians, whose villages certain among our miners used on occasion to regard as targets for rifle practice, or to destroy them wholesale with fire, outrage and murder, as if they had been so many wasps’ nests in our garden at home. Nay, the foreign miners, being civilized men, generally received ‘fair trials,’ as we said, whenever they were accused. It was however, considered safe by an average lynching jury in those days to convict a ‘greaser’ on very moderate evidence if none better could be had. One could see his guilt so plainly written, we know, in his ugly swarthy face, before the trial began. Therefore the life of a Spanish American in the mines in the early days, if frequently profitable, was apt to be disagreeable. It served him right, of course. He had no business, as an alien, to come to the land that God had given us. And if he was a native Californian, or ‘greaser,’ then so much the worse for him. He was so much the more our born foe; we hated his whole degenerate, thieving, landowning [*Californios*], lazy and dishonest race.<sup>307</sup>

Royce’s depiction is telling for several reasons, not the least of which are, as a contemporary account it seems to confirm the rapid devaluation of Native American and

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<sup>306</sup> Josiah Royce, *California: From the Conquest in 1846 to the Second Vigilance Committee in San Francisco, a Study of American Character* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1886), 362-364; Chávez, *The Lost Land*, 47; McWilliams, *North from Mexico*, 98; Roger Daniels and Harry H. L. Kitano, *American Racism* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1970), 33-34.

<sup>307</sup> It is worth noting that Royce, though born in the mining district of Grass Valley, California, was born in 1855 and had no first-hand knowledge of these early accounts of occupational violence. Royce, *California*, 363-364.



*Chicana/o* life, amongst others, in the mining districts of the Sierra Nevada, as well as the *Chicana*'s/o's prompt construction as de-indigenized, foreign and conceptually "alienated" *nonpersons* in the Anglo-American order.

The California Legislature eagerly passed the Foreign Miners' Tax of 1850 in an effort to legitimize the exclusion of "Mexicans" and other foreigners from the mines by, as Thomas Jefferson Green argued, "requir[ing] the foreigner upon, the plainest principles of justice, to pay a small bonus for the privilege of taking from our country the vast treasure to which they have no right."<sup>308</sup> In 1855 these ordinances were further bolstered by the passing of an anti-vagrancy law designed to police California's political landscape by further tightening restrictions on *Chicana/o* liberties. Informally known as the "Greaser Act," the "The Act to Punish Vagrants, Vagabonds and Dangerous and Suspicious Persons" provides that "all persons who are commonly known as 'Greasers' or the issue of Spanish or Indian blood," could be jailed and forced to do hard labor merely for not being in the employ of an Anglo-American firm, or for simply "roam[ing] about from place to place without any lawful business."<sup>309</sup> Although most *Chicanas/os* eventually migrated to the valleys south of the Tehachapi where the Anglo-American occupation remained sparse until the late nineteenth century, or sought refuge in the

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<sup>308</sup> Thomas Jefferson Green, "Report of Mr. Green on Mines and Foreign Minors," Friday, March 15, 1850, printed in California State Senate, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Senate* (San José: J. Winchester, State Printer, 1850), 494. [https://clerk.assembly.ca.gov/sites/clerk.assembly.ca.gov/files/archive/DailyJournal/1849/Volumes/1849\\_50\\_jnl.pdf#page=1](https://clerk.assembly.ca.gov/sites/clerk.assembly.ca.gov/files/archive/DailyJournal/1849/Volumes/1849_50_jnl.pdf#page=1).

<sup>309</sup> Karen Brodtkin, "Race, Class, and Gender: The Metaorganization of American Capitalism," *Transforming Anthropology* 7, no. 2 (1998): 50.

isolated *Californio* enclaves along the coast, the social impacts of these laws on California's *Chicana/o* and *Mexicana/o* communities are still being felt today.<sup>310</sup>

These statutes—in addition to reinforcing *stigmatypes* that portray “Mexicans” as lazy and criminal, and aiding in their “de-indigenization” and “alienation” (conceptual displacement) in the dominant colonial class social imaginary—contributed to discourses of innate racial inferiority.<sup>311</sup> By prohibiting *Chicana/o* access to the goldfields and preventing their self-employment—avenues of advancement that remained available to Anglo Americans—these laws, according to anthropologist Karen Bordkin, disproportionately pressed *Chicanas/os* into a laboring class; a dynamic that, represents a “darkening,” or a racialization of California’s working class. As Bordkin argues, although legally white, these laws restricted *Mexican American* access to the privileges and status of whiteness, forcing them into stigmatized labor viewed as too menial and submissive for whites.<sup>312</sup> Segregated into ramshackle *colonias* tucked away amongst the citrus groves of Southern California’s garden landscapes during the region’s industrial agricultural expansion of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and tainted by their association with exogenous labor, the *Chicana’s/o’s* presence, when noticed by the dominant class, clashed with normative boundaries of whiteness along moral, class and

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<sup>310</sup> McWilliams, *North from Mexico*, 66; Leonard Pitt, “‘Greasers’ in the Diggings,” in *Racism in California: A Reader in the History of Oppression*, ed. Rodger Daniels and Spencer C. Olin (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 199.

<sup>311</sup> Bordkin, “Race, Class, and Gender,” 50; Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 35, 43.

<sup>312</sup> As Daniel asserts, due to the brutal nature of industrial agriculture and more attractive employment options in urban areas, farm work was already regarded as not suitable for white labor early in the industrialization process. Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 26; see also Fisher, “The Harvest Labor Market in California,” 466.

ethnic lines, underscoring their innate sociopolitical otherness.<sup>313</sup> Ultimately, their manifestation in the agricultural landscape alongside *Others*—including imported *Coolie* labor—only reinforced dominant class narratives of “the Mexican’s” natural suitability and propensity for fieldwork.<sup>314</sup> Viewed less as people by California’s growers and more as units of energy, or tools of production to be utilized and exploited at will, the material circumstances of the region’s postcolonial rural population economies only strengthened the discourses of farm labor racial inferiority.<sup>315</sup>

### *Californios*

As addressed in the previous chapter, the Anglo-American invasion and the rapid process of “Americanization” that followed, quickly dispossessed *Californios* of their land and their status. The decline of the *Californio* as a caste, however, was retarded by stronger claims to whiteness than their fellow *Mestizaje*; by their ability to mythologize their role as the descendants of conquistadors in taming the American Southwest in terms that complimented the progressive narratives of Manifest Destiny; and their ability to assimilate, and be useful to, the dominant Anglo-American collective.<sup>316</sup> With the loss of their vast properties due to a series of legal challenges under the new American regime and economic misfortune, *Californios* were ultimately reduced to nothing more than a

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<sup>313</sup> Hartig, “‘In a World He Has Created,’” 107-108; McWilliams, *North from Mexico*, 171-176.

<sup>314</sup> *S. Report*, 257; U.S. House of Representatives, Hearings Before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Immigration From Countries of the Western Hemisphere*, 70<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1928), Hearing No. 70.1.5: 153-496 (hereafter cited as *H.R. Hearings*); Sackman, *Orange Empire*, 128; Williams, *Factories in the Field*, 126-127.

<sup>315</sup> Sackman, *Orange Empire*, 126-131; Lowitt, *The New Deal and the West*, 182.

<sup>316</sup> Gómez, *Manifest Destinies*, 88-90.

buffer group to be used by the occupying regime to politically control and materially exploit *Chicana/o* and *Mexicana/o* labor in the colonial landscape.

Although the Board of Land Commissioners established by the United States Congress in 1851 verified most of the old Spanish and Mexican grants, nearly all confirmed claims were involved in further litigation.<sup>317</sup> Particularly in the state's northern region, several Anglo-American politicians and tens of thousands of squatters—who legally occupied government and *rancho* lands under state laws that recognized their rights to do so<sup>318</sup>—felt that the commission, being reasonably sympathetic to the *Californio* position and generally ruling in their favor, was not performing the function that it should: relieving *Californios* of their vast tracts of “uninhabited” or “unused” land.<sup>319</sup> It was generally feared by Anglo-American squatters that the commission was setting legal precedents that potentially challenged their traditional rights to property as Americans on the western frontier.<sup>320</sup>

In his memoirs George C. Yount reveals some of the ways that these developments impacted the *Rancheros*—Anglo American and *Californio* alike—and expresses the vulnerability and betrayal they felt by the unwillingness of both the state

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<sup>317</sup> Robert Glass Cleland, *The Cattle on a Thousand Hills* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library Press, 1941), 55-56; Donald J. Pisani, “Squatter Law in California, 1850-1858,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (Autumn, 1994): 288; Karen Clay and Werner Troesken, “Ranchos and the Politics of Land Claims,” in *Land of Sunshine: An Environmental History of Metropolitan Los Angeles*, ed. Greg Hise and William Deverell (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), 58; Haas, “San Juan Capistrano,” 47-48.

<sup>318</sup> California passed legislation expanding squatter's rights in 1850 and 1853. Under these ordinances, squatters could erect dwellings, stake out boundaries, rear livestock, and secure natural resources for fuel. Furthermore, the second statute specifically prohibited legal action against trespassers by private parties. Pisani, “Squatter Law in California,” 292-293, 293n43; Haas, “San Juan Capistrano,” 48.

<sup>319</sup> Pisani, “Squatter Law in California,” 288-289.

<sup>320</sup> Pisani, “Squatter Law in California,” 288.

and federal governments to uphold Articles VIII and IX of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, and the law's reluctance in dealing with the squatter problem. Yount laments:

Strict Justice & the conditions of the Treaty of Hidalgo Goudaloupe [*sic.*] clearly & fully required that every Rancho in California should remain in the undisturbed possession of his lands and property; & it is one of the most shameful pictures in the history of all civilized nations, to follow out & disclose the treatment which the old Mexicans have received at the hands of the Americans.

. . . . We are no advocate for the large hereditary manors—Such estates are incompatible with the genius of Republican Government—Leasehold dependents must either become serfs, entirely dependent on, & subservient to their landlords, or they be at length troublesome to the State—In all cases the experiment, in our country, has but ill succeeded . . . we are the advocates for justice, in all cases & under all circumstances—The Rancheros of California have a title to their lands no less just & unequivocal than that of the farmer of New England or Virginia [*sic.*].

. . . . We would not . . . object to a legal provision regulating the sales of these valuable lands, neither would the Rancheros themselves object to it although it would be an infringement on their inherent & inalienable rights—But the present system of wholesale robbery [*sic.*], this thrusting oneself in upon the land & territory of another, and selling, what the usurpers are pleased to call squatter's rights, which, in point of fact, are no rights at all, this seizing on the herds which another has reared & nourished, driving them to market by the wholesale, is nothing less than theft & robbery—And worst of all, & more shameful than words can well depict, for a government of the Commonwealth so far to connive at and sanction these proceedings as to allow it to become a test question in Politicks whether a candidate be squatter or antesquatter; that is whether [the government] be an open & shameless Thief & Robber or not, whether [it] will screen, or punish the guilty—Whether [the government] will or will not become partaker with the usurper of other's rights & property, whether, when [it] shall see a thief [it] will or will not consent with him; if this be not a shame & disgrace to any people, then vice has become virtue & virtue vice.<sup>321</sup>

The *rancho* system, as historian Donald J. Pisani demonstrates in his article “Squatter Law in California, 1850-1858,” was irreconcilable with popular Jeffersonian

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<sup>321</sup> Yount, *George C. Yount and his Chronicles of the West*, 176-177.

notions of legitimate land use and the general Anglo-American belief that, despite the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, California's *ranchos* should be considered "spoils of war"<sup>322</sup>—a point that Yount seems to confirm. In response to mounting public pressure, most of the verified titles were eventually challenged by appeal before federal circuit courts, and although most claims were upheld, the legal costs accrued by *Californios* during this period forced several to subdivide their land and sell it off piecemeal.<sup>323</sup> As a result, many former *Californios* who once controlled vast *ranchos* encompassing tens of thousands of acres, were reduced to small subsistence dry farmers.<sup>324</sup>

In the early 1860s, prolonged drought combined with diminished demands for beef in the mining districts of the Sierra Nevada devastated the rural economies of Southern California and the central coast.<sup>325</sup> To pay the mounting taxes on their land demanded by the new authorities, and resolve debts accrued during the economic slump of the 1860s, many *Californio* families sold their *ranchos*, or large portions of them, to corporations, colonization schemes, and, eventually, railroad companies and fruit grower

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<sup>322</sup> Pisani, "Squatter Law in California," 288-289.

<sup>323</sup> Citing evidence presented by the nineteenth century historian John S. Hittell, Robert Glass Cleland argues that "one out of ten of the bona fide landowners in Los Angeles County was reduced to bankruptcy by the federal land policy, and at least forty per cent of land legitimately owned under Mexican grants was alienated to meet the costs of complying with the Act of 1851." Cleland, *The Cattle on a Thousand Hills*, 56-58, quote 58; It is worth noting that Clay and Troesken debate this point, claiming that without further research into the sale of all rancho lands there is no way to really know if such transfers of title were that result of the Land Act, and were not instead the consequence of economic depression, poor management, and tax delinquency. Clay and Troesken, "Ranchos and the Politics of Land Claims," 59; Nevertheless, contemporary accounts by Hittell and Yount seem to support Cleland's claim. John S. Hittell, "Mexican Land Claims in California," *Hutchings' Illustrated California Magazine* 2, no.22 (April 1858): 442-448; Yount, *George C. Yount and his Chronicles of the West*, 174; see also Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest*, 20-22.

<sup>324</sup> Yount, *George C. Yount and his Chronicles of the West*, 175-176; McWilliams, *North from Mexico*, 65-66; Haas, "San Juan Capistrano," 47-49.

<sup>325</sup> Clay and Troesken, "Ranchos and the Politics of Land Claims," 62; McWilliams, *North from Mexico*, 65-66; Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest*, 21.

associations, or, falling delinquent, forfeited them all together.<sup>326</sup> An account by Carey McWilliams in *North from Mexico* gives a general idea of just how transformative these sociopolitical developments were to the regional landscape:

During two years of ruinous drought, in 1862 and 1864, nearly three million cattle perished in the ‘cow counties’ of Southern California and nearly five-sixth of the land was reported tax-delinquent. Forty percent of the land held in Mexican grants was sold to meet the cost and expenses involved in confirming land titles after the conquest. The Rancho de los Alamitos, consisting of 265,000 acres, was sold for delinquent taxes of \$152—one of many similar cases. Interest rates of five percent compounded monthly were not uncommon. The Rancho Santa Gertrudes, worth a million dollars, was forfeited for nonpayment of a \$5,000 debt.<sup>327</sup>

As California’s landed elites, the Spanish delegation at the Constitutional Convention of 1849, fearing that they may be over taxed under the new regime, took pains to ensure that county assessors would be locally elected in an effort to maintain some control over their own taxation.<sup>328</sup> What the delegation could not anticipate, however, was the rate at which their land value would appreciate as California’s rural economy transitioned from a largely pastoral model based on cattle and grain production, to intensive industrial farming of nuts, melons and citrus. Drained of capital by years of legal litigation and still recovering from the economic crises of the 1860s, many *Californio* families could ill afford to diversify to more lucrative agricultural models. Without the ability to invest in irrigation and transition from small dry farming operations to more lucrative intensive farming techniques, the remaining lands under *Californio*

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<sup>326</sup> McWilliams, *North from Mexico*, 65-66; Clay and Troesken, “Ranchos and the Politics of Land Claims,” 62; Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest*, 23; Haas, “San Juan Capistrano,” 49.

<sup>327</sup> McWilliams, *North from Mexico*, 65-66.

<sup>328</sup> Chávez, *The Lost Land*, 45.

control struggled to generate enough capital to meet their evermore burdensome tax obligations. By the early twentieth century, many *Californios*, unable to keep pace with taxes, had been forced to sell much of their remaining property and take wage labor positions alongside *Chicanas/os*, *Mexicanas/os* and other imported labor in grower operations and packing houses located on lands once controlled by their own families.<sup>329</sup>

Remaining *Californios*, deprived of most of their land and rightfully fearing further loss of status, sought to carve out a place for themselves in the new colonial order. Distancing themselves from *Chicanas/os* and migrant *Mexicanas/os*, *Californios*, aided by idealized narratives of the region's pastoral heritage—largely cultivated by citrus growers, land speculators and railroad companies to encourage investment<sup>330</sup>—and backed by an Anglo-American literary movement that romanticized California's Spanish past, rejected the hybridity of the regional *Mestizaje* culture: reproducing narratives that emphasized their own whiteness as the proud descendants of conquistadors and the guardians of a rich Spanish culture in the American West.<sup>331</sup> Such narratives not only emphasized the purity of the *Californio*'s Spanish blood, they reframed Ibero-American occupation in foundational terms that complemented Anglo-American ideas of progress and justifiable conquest.

This Anglicized Spanish “fantasy heritage,” according to Carey McWilliams, did more than just alleviate American guilt, it served a very real political function in the

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<sup>329</sup> Haas, “San Juan Capistrano,” 54.

<sup>330</sup> Sackman, *Orange Empire*, 20-116; Haas, “San Juan Capistrano,” 47; Sackman, “‘By Their Fruits Ye Shall Know Them’,” 82-99; Hartig, “‘In a World He Has Created,’” 100-111; Steiner, “Commentary: Reading the Citrus Landscape” 112-117.

<sup>331</sup> Chávez, *The Lost Land*, 87; for an overview of California's garden romanticism literary movement, see Sackman, *Orange Empire*, 46-51.



reproduction of colonial power. Writing of this dynamic's continued relevance in the 1940s, McWilliams describes its impact on the political landscape of Southern California:

These [*Californios*] are the people after whom streets are named in Los Angeles: Pico, Sepúlveda, Figueroa. It is they who are used by the Anglo-American community to reconcile its fantasy heritage with the contemporary scene. By a definition provided by the *Californios* themselves, one who achieves success in the borderlands is 'Spanish'; one who doesn't is 'Mexican.'

These *Californios* are in no small part responsible for the fact that the Mexican population [*Chicanas/os* and *Mexicanas/os*] of Los Angeles—the largest minority in the city—is so completely deprived of meaningful civic representation. Since it is impossible for any Los Angeles official to ignore the Mexican vote completely, care is taken that the roster of civic committees shall always include at least one name which is obviously Spanish or Mexican. If a quick glance is taken of the list of names appearing on the civic committees devoted to housing, juvenile delinquency, racial, and welfare problems, these same names constantly reappear.

. . . . On all ceremonial occasions, the 'native Californians' are trotted forth, in their faded finery, and exhibited as 'worthy representatives of all that is finest in our Latin heritage.' In appointing *Californios* to civic committees, most officials realize that they have achieved the dual purpose, first, of having a Mexican name on the roster for the sake of appearances, and second, that the persons chosen will invariably act in the same manner as Anglo-Americans of equal social status. Thus, the dichotomy which exists throughout the borderlands between what is "Spanish" and what is "Mexican" is a functional, not an ornamental, arrangement. Its function is to deprive the Mexicans of their heritage and to keep them in their place.<sup>332</sup>

In a typical colonial dynamic, *Californios* were reduced to a buffer group with one objective: the insulation of the dominant political class from the unruliness posed by conceptionally exogenous "Mexicans." The deference shown to *Californios* by the sovereign authority, in combination with this fantasy heritage, only served to encourage

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<sup>332</sup> McWilliams, *North from Mexico*, 17-18.

an inflated sense of grower superiority by further solidifying the regional normative boundaries of whiteness within California's colonial landscape. Ultimately, the tenuous bourgeois status of *Californios* under Anglo-American occupation remained contingent upon their willingness to disavow their true heritage and adopt a less offensive fantasy meant to deny their fellow *Mestizaje* equal civic consideration as persons under the law—ensuring the continued vulnerability, subordination, and exploitation of *Chicanas/os* and *Mexicanas/os* in the postcolonial space.

### The Imported

While many Anglo Californians retained their contempt for the region's formerly Mexican inhabitants, such disdain was largely the consequence of a pan-American white supremacy established well before United States occupation and not strictly a response to the challenges of colonial modernity in the Southwest. Although such precepts—along with the acts of foundational and replicative violence they encouraged—would invariably continue to influence the unique nature of California's racial hierarchy, it was the state's experience with imported colonialism as a consequence of industrialization that ensured its continued departure from more traditional binary mechanisms of racial difference. Having severely reduced, if not eliminated altogether, indigenous labor in the north during the transformative experiences of the Gold Rush and the period of land monopolization that followed, it was apparent early on that for large scale intensive industrial farming to be successful in California cheap forms of abundant, easily deportable, exogenous labor would be required.<sup>333</sup> Initially, in the north, where wheat

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<sup>333</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 64-65; Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 27-28.

barons controlled vast stretches of former grant land, this demand for labor was met by conscripted *Indian* labor.<sup>334</sup> In the south, a reserve of *Chicana/o* and *Mexicana/o* labor satisfied the demands of ranching and dry farming until the 1870s.<sup>335</sup> However, as California's agriculture transitioned to more profitable labor-intensive models of agriculture based on fruit, nut, melon and cotton production, these corps of farm labor would eventually prove incapable of satisfying the seasonal demands of industry—Chinese workers, on the other hand, fit the bill nicely.<sup>336</sup>

Although anti-Chinese sentiment ran high in San Francisco and other large towns—and California generally represented the vanguard of American Chinese exclusion during the 1870s—growers in the state's rural valleys welcomed Chinese labor. Their presence in the fields so fundamentally transformed the nature of agriculture in the state that Carey McWilliams later characterized grower expectations for labor as suffering from a sort of “Oriental nostalgia.”<sup>337</sup> As Chinese numbers decreased in the late nineteenth century as a consequence of federal restrictions, their vacancy was filled by other Asian and Latinx subject groups; each of which indelibly left their mark on the region's social imaginary. With every new body of foreign labor, the juridico-political mechanisms of exclusion responsible for managing the colonial space grew in efficacy. By the 1930s, local perceptions of innate difference based on foreignness, morality, and cultural nonconformity combined with “scientific” rationales underscoring the suitability

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<sup>334</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 55.

<sup>335</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 64-65; McWilliams, *North from Mexico*, 66-67; Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 27-28; see also Haas, “San Juan Capistrano,” 47.

<sup>336</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 64-65; Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 27-28.

<sup>337</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 179-184.

of certain subject groups for manual labor, to constitute the socio-normative and legal boundaries of innate otherness that separated the state's management class from its agricultural proletariat—hardening the rural associations of racial difference that characterized the “farmworker” as a subaltern social category in the local hierarchies of California's postcolonial landscape.

### Canton *Coolies*

No legislative acts in United States history have so blatantly and completely denied a foreign subject group the considerations of personhood under the law as the acts of Chinese exclusion. These laws, despite the guarantees of the Fourteenth Amendment—which grant “any *person* within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws, [emphasis added]”—prohibited Chinese immigration and citizenship for a sixty-one-year period, from 1882 until its repeal 1943.<sup>338</sup> Even though Chinese exclusion was federally enacted, its legislation resulted from a wave of anti-Chinese sentiment that began in California during the Gold Rush.<sup>339</sup> Exclusion itself, however, merely represents the culmination of decades of local prohibitions designed to exclude Chinese migrants from civic consideration and perpetuate their vulnerability in the colonial space through discourses of inferiority in order to capitalize on their labor and control the political landscape. Even so, although the historical record clearly indicates that Anglo

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<sup>338</sup> Forty-Seventh Congress, “An Act to Execute Certain Treaty Stipulations Relating to Chinese,” *The Statutes at Large of the United States America* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1883), 58-61. <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/l1/l1sl/l1sl-c47/l1sl-c47.pdf>; Seventy-Eighth Congress, “An Act to Repeal the Chinese Exclusion Acts, to Establish quotas, and for Other Purposes,” *The Statutes at Large of the United States America* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1943), 600-601. <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/l1/l1sl/l1sl-c78s1/l1sl-c78s1.pdf>.

<sup>339</sup> Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 35-45.

Californians found the transgressive otherness of Chinese offensive along many sociopolitical lines, it also indicates that such prejudice was hardly universal and most often varied in degree by region and class. That is, Anglo Californians, rather than responding monolithically to the threat of “Chinese inundation,” received Chinese labor throughout the state by different socioeconomic metrics depending on regional and group interests.<sup>340</sup>

Nonetheless, two common themes are discernable in both the local discourses of exclusion responsible for governing the colonial space and the larger national dialogues of exclusion in the 1870s. The first manifests early in the mining districts of the northern Sierra Nevada and frames Chinese labor as threats to free white labor in terms reminiscent of earlier American discourses of white working-class republicanism. The second exposes middle-class anxieties of an *Orientalized* threat and reflects the transgressive social qualities of the Chinese presence in cities like San Francisco, Sacramento, and Stockton. This latter theme often underscores innate Chinese difference along moral lines—reinforcing subject-group racial inferiority and their inability or unwillingness to assimilate or adhere to dominant socio-normative standards. Both themes, though conceptually different, serve the same sociopolitical function: to highlight Chinese discontinuity from the dominant collective. They not only reinforce subject-group inferiority, alienness and unruliness, they justify the withholding of subject-group juridico-political protections as United States citizens on those grounds—thus perpetuating group vulnerability to violence and exploitation within the colonial space.

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<sup>340</sup> Mark Kanazawa, “Immigration, Exclusion, and Taxation: Anti-Chinese Legislation in Gold Rush California,” *The Journal of Economic History* 65, no. 3 (September 2005): 787-791; Sandmeyer, “The Bases of Anti-Chinese Sentiment,” 85.

In the first case, initial transgressions were the result of competition between Anglo-American and Chinese prospectors in the diggings of California's mining districts. By the time Anglo Americans arrived in California in large numbers in 1849, thousands of Chinese miners were already operating in the region.<sup>341</sup> As the Anglo-American population in the Sierras soared, frustrated miners competing with exogenous labor in the diggings responded to the Chinese in the same manner as they had to *Chicana/o* competition, by harnessing their collective power to exclude them from the mines.

Several mining districts wrote prohibition measures into their bylaws.<sup>342</sup> And, in 1852, The Committee on the Mines and Mining Interests—reproducing working class republican fears of *Coolie* slavery at the hands of “foreign masters” and “capitalists”—recommended to the California State Assembly that, to “protect American labor upon its own soil against the labor of imported and taxed slaves,” it pass “a law which shall prevent our mines from being overrun by the class above described.”<sup>343</sup> However, in a point that many historians overlook, no state legislation was ever successfully enacted to exclude Chinese from the mines.<sup>344</sup> Admittedly, the California State Legislature passed the nation's first exclusionary law in 1858 with “An Act to Prevent the Further

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<sup>341</sup> According to Daniels and Kitano this trend continued, by 1852 the Chinese population was estimated at 25,000. Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 36; According to U.S. Census data, by decade's end, the Chinese still consisted of approximately nine percent of California's general population: totaling 34,933 Chinese residents. See ,” Table 2.4 (“Asian Population of California as Percentage of Total California Population, 1860 to 1940”) in Bonacich, “Some Basic Facts, 65; see also Brands, *The Age of Gold*, 47-48.

<sup>342</sup> Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 36; Kanazawa, “Immigration, Exclusion, and Taxation,” 783.

<sup>343</sup> James K. Gardner et al., “Report on the Committee on the Mines and Mining Interests,” printed in California State Assembly, *Journal of the Assembly* (San José: Eugene Casserly, State Printer, 1852), 831-832.

<sup>344</sup> Kanazawa, “Immigration, Exclusion, and Taxation,” 787-788.

Immigration of Chinese or Mongolians to the State,” but the act was initiated during a period of decline in entrepreneurial mining in the Sierra Nevada and, being found unconstitutional soon after enactment, was short lived, having little effect on the activities of Chinese miners already in the Sierra.<sup>345</sup>

It has been suggested by economist Mark Kanazawa that such measures were never enacted, not because they lacked popular support, but because the fledgling State of California had grown dependent on revenue generated by the evermore burdensome Foreign Miners’ Tax.<sup>346</sup> In actuality, such tax schemes had the added benefit of further marginalizing Chinese, and other subject groups, while simultaneously allowing state representatives to demonstrate their willingness to generate conditions favorable to white labor. Nevertheless, Chinese labor quickly became preferred by largescale mining operations due to their economy and vulnerability to exploitation<sup>347</sup>—a dynamic that set the *condicio sine qua non* for all large-scale California enterprise to come. According to Kanazawa, the tangible benefits for government brought by industrial interest in mining—as well as railroad construction and agricultural development—plausibly accounts for the thirty-year delay between the initial Chinese socio-normative and political transgressions in California during the Gold Rush and their federal exclusion in

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<sup>345</sup> California State Legislature, “An Act to Prevent the Further Immigration of Chinese or Mongolians to the State,” *The Statutes of California Passed at the Ninth Session of the Legislature* (Sacramento: John Omeara, State Printer, 1858), 295-296; Bonacich, “Some Basic Facts, 74. <https://clerk.assembly.ca.gov/sites/clerk.assembly.ca.gov/files/archive/Statutes/1858/1858.pdf#page=21>.

<sup>346</sup> Kanazawa, “Immigration, Exclusion, and Taxation,” 779-805.

<sup>347</sup> See the testimonies of Rev. Otis Gibson, November 9, 1876; Donald McLennan, November 11, 1876; and Henry K. W. Clarke, November 14, 1876, in Forty-Fourth Congress, *Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration*, Report No. 689, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1877), 398-99, 424, 622, 689.

1882.<sup>348</sup> Sharing this suspicion, the editor of Sacramento's *Record-Union* groused in 1879:

The Chinaman is here because his presence pays, and he will remain and continue to increase so long as there is money in him. When the time comes that he is no longer profitable *that* generation will take care of him and will send him back. We will not do it so long as the pockets into which the profit of his labor flows continue to be those appertaining to our pantaloons.

They do not go because the people of California, while protesting against their presence, continues to utilize their labor in a hundred ways. In this matter private interest dominates public interests.<sup>349</sup>

Unfortunately, anti-Chinese sentiment was only encouraged by Chinese association with capitalist interests. Within the hyper-entrepreneurial atmosphere of the diggings, the material presence of the Chinese as wage labor clashed with widespread Anglo-American beliefs about the destructive power of monopolies.<sup>350</sup> By the 1880s, this same attitude was appropriated by agrarian reformers guided by a Jeffersonian idealism that viewed Chinese labor in industrial agriculture as barriers to small-scale farming and democratic republicanism. As cheap and easily exploitable labor, their presence in the fields, reformers argued, perpetuated an asymmetrical status quo that upset land redistribution efforts and stifled democratic progress.<sup>351</sup> In either case, Chinese were not

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<sup>348</sup> Kanazawa, "Immigration, Exclusion, and Taxation," 779-805.

<sup>349</sup> *Sacramento Record Union*, January 10, 1879, printed in Sandmeyer, "The Bases of Anti-Chinese Sentiment," 83-84.

<sup>350</sup> Sandmeyer, "The Bases of Anti-Chinese Sentiment," 78-85.

<sup>351</sup> Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 27-39.



only perceived as foreign labor competition, but as tools of industrial expansion and threats to an “American way of life.”<sup>352</sup>

As larger mining operations shouldered out smaller ones, frustrated Anglo-American miners—as well as remaining *Chicana/o* and *Californio* miners, often taking advantage of the Chinese as a group more vulnerable than themselves—increasingly turned to extra-legal forms of intimidation and violence as a means of controlling the colonial space.<sup>353</sup> Even though Chinese exclusion from the mines was never legislatively endorsed, other *de jure* assurances safeguarding the regional prerogatives of white supremacy resulted in similar *de facto* outcomes. In 1854, for instance, the California Supreme Court, ruling on the appeal to *People v. Hall*, determined that the same laws that prevented other “degraded and demoralized castes,” chiefly, the “Indian or Negro,” from testifying against white citizens in a court of law, were equally applicable to Chinese. Writing the opinion for the court, Chief Justice Hugh Campbell Murphy—applying the racial science of the day—argued that Chinese, as a distinct inferior “species” when compared to caucasians, were incapable of fulfilling the requirements of full citizenship, and to allow them the right to testify against superior whites, posed a very real threat to the protections of life and property that characterized American citizenship.<sup>354</sup> Warning of the social dangers associated with extending this basic human right to Chinese, whilst reinforcing the normative boundaries of whiteness responsible for managing the colonial space and ensuring the supremacy of its sovereign authority, Justice Murphy harangues:

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<sup>352</sup> Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 27-39; Sandmeyer, “The Bases of Anti-Chinese Sentiment,” 78-85.

<sup>353</sup> Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 38.

<sup>354</sup> *People v. Hall*, 4 Cal. 399 (1854). <https://cite.case.law/cal/4/399/>; see also Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 37.

We are not disposed to leave this question in any doubt. The word “white” has a distinct signification, which *ex vi termini*, excludes black, yellow, and all other colors...

We are of the opinion that the words “white,” “negro,” “mullatto,” “Indian,” and “black person,” wherever they occur in our Constitution and laws, must be taken in their generic sense, and that, even admitting the Indian of this continent is not of the Mongolian type, that the words “black person,” in the 14th section, must be taken as contradistinguished from white, and necessarily excludes all races other than the Caucasian.

The same rule which would admit [Chinese] to testify, would admit them to all the equal rights of citizenship, and we might soon see them at the polls, in the jury box, upon the bench, and in our legislative halls.

This is not a speculation which exists in the excited and over-heated imagination of the patriot and statesman, but it is an actual and present danger.

The anomalous spectacle of a distinct people, living in our community, recognizing no laws of this State, except through necessity, bringing with them their prejudices and national feuds, in which they indulge in open violation of law; whose mendacity is proverbial; a race of people whom nature has marked as inferior, and who are incapable of progress or intellectual development beyond a certain point, as their history has shown; differing in language, opinions, color, and physical conformation; between whom and ourselves nature has placed an impassable difference, is now presented, and for them is claimed, not only the right to swear away the life of a citizen, but the further privilege of participating with us in administering the affairs of our Government.<sup>355</sup>

*People v. Hall* cemented Chinese *nonpersonhood* in the Californian imaginary.

Without legislative backing to enforce Chinese ejection from the mines, and no legal recourse for acts of violence committed against Chinese, Anglo-American miners responded to Chinese miners with what becomes California’s extra-legal *modus operandi* for managing *Unruly* threats within the colonial space: vigilante terror. As with the Native Americans before them, the denial of the basic human right to testimony only left

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<sup>355</sup> *People v. Hall*.

Chinese vulnerable to indiscriminate murder, robbery, and open hostility<sup>356</sup>—effectively disenfranchising them from any reasonable expectation to peacefully engage in entrepreneurial or collective mining endeavors.

Still, Chinese migrants endured. Despite the *carte blanche* violence directed at them by Anglo-American miners, many even flourished in the mining districts of the Sierra Nevada and larger cities of the West Coast. Throughout the Gold Rush years, the presence of Chinese was largely tolerated by the dominant collective because they were willing to perform work that Anglo-American miners considered effeminate in nature. According to Daniels and Kitano, an extreme shortage of women labor during this period led to vacancies in domestic service and related industries and Chinese men stepped in to fill these roles. Initially, this arrangement was welcomed by many in California as a way of checking the inflation on basic services that had accompanied the Gold Rush.<sup>357</sup> However, as their population increased, and the demand for workers in mining and railroad construction decreased, Chinese labor became increasingly associated with domestic service and other “feminized” occupations, such as laundry operations, cigar making, and textile manufacturing.<sup>358</sup> Historian Nayan Shah speculates in his study regarding South Asian labor in the American West during the early twentieth century, that such gender normative transgressions not only encourage dominant class anxieties about waning socio-normative boundaries regarding race, gender, and nationality, in

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<sup>356</sup> Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 38.

<sup>357</sup> Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 36; Kanazawa, “Immigration, Exclusion, and Taxation,” 787-789.

<sup>358</sup> See Table 2.6 (“Industrial Distribution of Chinese and Japanese, Ten Years and Older, 1870”) and Table 2.8 (“Industrial Distribution of Chinese and Japanese, Ten Years and Older, 1910”) in Bonacich, “Some Basic Facts,” 66, 69; see also Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 113.

California's multicultural landscape they also reinforced innate migrant difference, stressing their inability to adhere or assimilate to an American way of life.<sup>359</sup> According to Shah:

Gender-normative womanhood and manhood were fashioned and anxiously stabilized in reaction to widespread transient and international mobility, the racial stratification of society, and nationalist defense of privileged membership.

Drawing racial and civilizational distinctions of dress, behavior, recreation, and livelihood shored up white supremacy and nationalism. At the same time, it naturalized subordination of racialized migrants' presumed incapacity for maintaining the 'natural' gender binary and inequality. In the transient migrant world populated by masculine adult males, gender ambiguity and the diminishment of gender distinction in dress, labor, and recreation underscored a world turned upside down.<sup>360</sup>

Nowhere was this disruption to the natural order more materially evident than in the Chinatowns of San Francisco and other principal towns of Northern California. In the Anglo-American imagination, Chinatowns were filthy, disease ridden areas occupied by an immoral and generally backwards race.<sup>361</sup> They were material manifestations of Chinese otherness and physical proof of, in the words of Justice Murphy, the "impassable difference" that "nature [had] placed" between Chinese and Anglo Americans.<sup>362</sup> According to social geographer Kay J. Anderson, Chinatowns are more than just ethnic enclaves, they are western social constructs—nexuses of "race and place," reflecting and

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<sup>359</sup> Shah, *Stranger Intimacy*, 40; see also Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 87-89.

<sup>360</sup> Shah, *Stranger Intimacy*, 40.

<sup>361</sup> Samuel Bowles, *Our New West: Records of Travel Between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean* (Hartford, CT: Hartford Publishing, 1869), 407-408; Sandmeyer, "The Bases of Anti-Chinese Sentiment," 87-91.

<sup>362</sup> The ideas regarding race and material landscape developed here, were influenced by Anderson, "The Idea of Chinatown," 580-598.

reifying cultural arrangements of power within a given colonial landscape.<sup>363</sup> Chinatowns represent the material boundaries of difference responsible for shaping race in the colonial mind, simultaneously marking out both the physical and psychological boundaries of otherness responsible for maintaining distinctions between an *us* and a *them*, white from the *non-white*, and, in this specific case, Anglo-Californian ingroup from imported *Oriental* outgroup.<sup>364</sup>

Of course, this colonial dynamic was familiar to Anglo Americans. European colonizers were accustomed to using physical dichotomies of landscape—contrasting differences in dwellings, livelihoods, diets, and social mores—to justify their treatment of Native American’s and reaffirm their own sense of superiority. Chinatowns represent an enhancement of this dynamic, its efficacy ratcheted up to a new epistemological level, and one that was easily reproduced in a colonial landscape dependent on exogenous labor perceived as profoundly alien and unassimilable. Although Californians would never again respond to an imported subject group in quite the same way, or with the same severity, as they had to Chinese, the Chinatown dynamic became a staple of race making in California as the material conditions of *colonias*, *barrios*, Hoovervilles, FSA camps, and ditch encampments during the 1930s, were utilized in similar manners to justify local discourses of inferiority and superiority when managing potentially *Unruly* exogenous subjects. These spaces, read in the landscape, are enduring material reminders of the state’s colonial realities and its continued departure from the classless ideals of America’s Jeffersonian traditions.

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<sup>363</sup> Anderson, “The Idea of Chinatown,” 581.

<sup>364</sup> Anderson, “The Idea of Chinatown,” 583.

The steady increase in the population of San Francisco's Chinatown during the 1860s only exacerbated Anglo-Californian anxieties. Throughout the decade anti-Chinese sentiment in San Francisco paced the growth of its Chinatown, and as its population surged with the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869—with the influx of more than ten thousand Chinese workers—calls for national prohibitions on Chinese immigration could no longer be ignored.<sup>365</sup> In San Francisco, the symptomatic discourses of Chinese exclusion found in other industrial towns such as Chicago, Pittsburgh and Baltimore, were amplified by concerted efforts to couple social concerns of innate Chinese otherness with an emerging anti-capitalist rhetoric and lingering republican anxieties of labor degradation as the result of competition with an inferior race.<sup>366</sup> City officials, pressured by a militant organized labor front utilizing the antislavery rhetoric of the postbellum period, passed ordinances specifically targeting Chinese labor in order to discourage their settlement in the city; and when those measures failed to do so, San Franciscans resorted to trade union boycotts, riotous behavior, and direct violence to ensure employer preferences for white labor.<sup>367</sup> As a result, by the 1880s, Chinese employment was largely limited to domestic service, industrial mining (which remained a

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<sup>365</sup> According to Daniels and Kitano, the census of 1870 records more than 50,000 Chinese living in San Francisco, which indicates that the population of the city's Chinatown experienced a twenty-five percent increase in just one year due to the completion of the transcontinental railroad. Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 39.

<sup>366</sup> Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 43; see also William C. Blackwood, "A Consideration of the Labor Problem," *Overland Monthly* 3, no. 5 (May 1884): 449-460; McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 69-70.

<sup>367</sup> Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 43-44; McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 69-70.

major employer of Chinese labor into the twentieth century), and California's still developing intensive farming sectors.<sup>368</sup>

In time, the trajectory of California agriculture most likely would have trended toward intensive methods of factory farming even without access to Chinese labor. Nonetheless, such access, as McWilliams speculates, expedited its feasibility by roughly twenty-five years.<sup>369</sup> McWilliams' conjecture is supported for several reasons, but primarily on the account that intensive farming techniques, especially citriculture, likely would not have experienced the same initial degree of success without Chinese labor and knowhow. Not only was Chinese labor instrumental in implementing the technological advancements that made land reclamation and, thus, largescale intensive agriculture in the state possible—chiefly, the construction of levees, irrigation canals and railroads<sup>370</sup>—as émigré of the citriculture providence Guangdong, many of these laborers arrived in California with a knowledge set perfectly suited to the state's fledgling fruit industry—a situation that growers were quick to exploit.<sup>371</sup>

As growers would later argue when pressed by proponents for exclusion, these were just some of the benefits in maintaining access to Chinese labor. More vulnerable, tractable (so the claim went), and far cheaper than white labor, the Chinese, they argued,

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<sup>368</sup> Table 2.6 and Table 2.8 in Boacich, "Some Basic Facts: Patterns of Asian Immigration and Exclusion," 66, 69; McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 70-72.

<sup>369</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 67.

<sup>370</sup> George Chu, "Chinatowns in the Delta: The Chinese in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, 1870-1960," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (March 1970): 22-25.

<sup>371</sup> Jared Farmer, *Trees in Paradise: A California History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013), 267, Nook; Sackman, *Orange Empire*, 137; McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 71-72; see also in June Mei, "Socioeconomic Origins of Emigration: Guangdong to California, 1850 to 1882," in *Labor Immigration Under Capitalism: Asian Workers in the United States Before World War II*, ed. Lucie Cheng and Edna Bonacich (Berkeley: university of California Press, 1984), 219-246.

were perfectly suited for the plantation-like system of agriculture developing in the state.<sup>372</sup> Lamenting the loss of a near perfect peonage in his 1884 assessment, “A Consideration of the Labor Problem” published in *Overland Monthly*, William C. Blackwood exemplifies this stance in his reasoned plea to maintain access to Chinese labor. “The laborers of China are born to servitude—it has become ingrained in their natures,” Blackwood declares, “[t]hey never rise above it.” Recognizing Chinese strangeness, he continues, arguing that their behavior, though offensive to some, should not diminish their importance to the political economy. “The simple and only question effecting our welfare, in connection with the Chinaman,” he asserts, “is, Can we use him profitably in our industries without [social] contamination?”<sup>373</sup> Unlike independent Anglo-American and European “tramp” labor, Chinese, working through labor contractors, required far less accommodation. They could also be hired as gang labor for a fixed price and required neither lodging nor board, and often no equipment—all of which cut costs for growers, and, as they argued, made Californians richer.<sup>374</sup> Contextualizing the social implications of this dynamic, Cletus E. Daniel underscores its appeal to regional growers, as well as the importance of Chinese *nonpersonhood*—or, as he puts it, sociopolitical “estrangement”—in the replication of colonial power:

Chinese workers, because they were not white, did not, indeed could not, have aspirations or expectations comparable to those that white workers might reasonably harbor or consider a matter of right on the basis of their whiteness alone. As farm employers saw it, Chinese workers offered the perfect solution to the central dilemma of California’s large-scale

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<sup>372</sup> Blackwood, “A Consideration of the Labor Problem,” 458; Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 27-30; McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 70-74.

<sup>373</sup> Blackwood, “A Consideration of the Labor Problem,” 458.

<sup>374</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 69-74; Chu, “Chinatowns in the Delta,” 24; Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 27; Blackwood, “A Consideration of the Labor Problem,” 449-460.



agriculture. They provided cheap labor power that was indispensable to its success but were immune to the democratizing forces of tradition, circumstance, and social contract that afforded the lowly just enough opportunity for advancement to keep the popular expectation of upward movement alive. Not without reason, the big farm employers in California believed that the agricultural industry they envisioned could not be erected on a secure basis if the cheap labor that was the most essential prerequisite for its success was forever being siphoned away by real or imagined promises of even modest preferment. The path to industrial security lay in the recruitment of a work force whose estrangement from the social and cultural mainstream was so profound and unalterable as to render it captive economically. In Chinese laborers the advocates of large-scale farming saw, if not slaves, at least the practical equivalents of slaves.<sup>375</sup>

Economic benefit, or no, many Californians viewed the Chinese presence, more than anything else, as a social ill. Agrarian reformers saw them as barriers to national democratic progress: both as an instrument of capitalist advancement and further corporate land monopolization, as well as mechanisms of colonial power.<sup>376</sup> San Francisco's merchant class found the Chinese socially offensive, often viewing them as an immoral subspecies that potentially threatened America's social fabric.<sup>377</sup> And, viewing them as imported *Coolies* or slaves, working-class whites struggled to perceive them as anything other than a threat.<sup>378</sup> Ultimately, the objections of California's mining and agriculture interests were no match for the proponents of exclusion and their concerns that economic and social degradation accompanied Chinese residency. The first federal Chinese Exclusion Act was enacted in 1882, with subsequent acts, designed to

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<sup>375</sup> Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 27.

<sup>376</sup> Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 27-39.

<sup>377</sup> Bowles, *Our New West*, 407-408; Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 41-42; Sandmeyer, "The Bases of Anti-Chinese Sentiment," 87-91.

<sup>378</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 71-80; Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 42-44.

perpetuate its outcomes, to follow.<sup>379</sup> For the California grower, however, Chinese labor set the standard by which all successive imported subject groups would be measured<sup>380</sup>—a dynamic that only complicated lines between class and caste in California’s already complex racial landscape.

### The *Other* Westerners

To characterize the discrimination that Japanese and Punjabi Sikhs experienced in California during the first half of the twentieth century as simply an extension of Asiatic prejudice, or obsessions with a pending “yellow peril,” distorts both the socioeconomic crudeness of California’s race-dependent arrangements of power, as well as the sociocultural significance of immigrant normative transgressiveness. These immigrants were certainly not immune to such discourses. Early arriving *Issei* (first-generation Japanese) on the Pacific Coast in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, for example, were met by cries of ‘Japs must go!’<sup>381</sup> In an effort to segregate Asian students from Anglo-Californian students, the San Francisco School Board attempted to force Japanese children to attend school in Chinatown (an initiative with geopolitical implications, and one that resulted in the Gentlemen’s Agreement between the United States and Japan in 1906).<sup>382</sup> South Asian Indian men in California’s farm communities

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<sup>379</sup> Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 44; see also Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 203-204.

<sup>380</sup> Blackwood, “A Consideration of the Labor Problem,” 449-460; McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 71, 179.

<sup>381</sup> Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 46.

<sup>382</sup> Yamato Ichihashi, *Japanese in the United States: A Critical Study of the Problem of the Japanese Immigrants and Their Children* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1932), 236-237; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 39.

faced discrimination on multiple fronts, including other migrant subject groups. They were subjected to episodes of vigilante terror from rural whites who believed there was a need to protect white women and children from the indecency of *Rag Heads*—as they were characterized in the rural local discourses.<sup>383</sup> Competing Japanese workers harassed Punjabis for underbidding their labor, and finding themselves superior, mocked Sikhs as slaves of the British. Legally prohibited from bringing their wives to the United States, Punjabi men were also met with a certain amount of disdain from Mexican/o immigrants for their tendency to date and marry Mexican women.<sup>384</sup> In both the Japanese and South Asian case, local politicians and newspaper editors such as V. S. McClatchy, struggling to maintain an anti-Asian platform in West Coast cities, continually warned of the imminent threat of Asian invasion—a fear commonly replicated in local discourses through midcentury and fervently during the Second World War as Japanese were often characterized as stealthy, cunning and determined foes, with designs on taking California from “real” deserving Americans.<sup>385</sup> The attractiveness and longevity of such beliefs in the popular imagination, though irrational in the light of history, reflect deeper contemporary Anglo-Californian anxieties over a disrupted natural order.

At the turn of the century, Japanese labor, especially in agriculture, was imagined to be the perfect remedy to California’s labor woes. Thought of in similar terms as

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<sup>383</sup> Shah, *Stranger Intimacy*, 35; McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 117.

<sup>384</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 149.

<sup>385</sup> Testimony of Earl Warren, San Francisco, February 21, 1942 in U.S. House of Representatives, “Hearings before the Select Committee Investigating National Defense Migration,” *National Defense Migration*, 77<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1942), 11009-110021 (hereafter cited as *Committee Investigating National Defense Migration*); Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 148-149; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 39, 47-48; Shah, *Stranger Intimacy*, 42-43; Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 52-53.

Chinese labor, they were imagined to be servient, tractable, and easily exploited.<sup>386</sup> Arriving in California after the Japanese, the presence of South Asian Indians, on the other hand, was tolerated in California's agricultural valleys not only because they were imagined to possess similar qualities, but because their presence allowed growers and labor contractors to practice labor segmentation along perceived racial lines, maintaining low wages by pitting one exogenous group off the next.<sup>387</sup> "A notable fact about farm labor in California," McWilliams observes in *Factories*, "is the practice of employers to pay wage scales on the basis of race, i.e. to establish different wages rates for each racial group, thus fostering racial antagonism and, incidentally, keeping wages at the lowest possible point."<sup>388</sup> California, however, got more than it bargained for with these immigrants. Japan, unlike China at this time, had imperial aspirations and was engaged in ambitious modernizing projects throughout the country. Many of its émigré, therefore, similar to their South Asian British colonial counterparts, were familiar with western customs, and often sought to assimilate to the local conditions whenever possible.<sup>389</sup> But, perhaps most significantly, and most offensive to Anglo Californians, both Japanese and Punjabis signaled their intention to permanently stay in the state, not as wage labor, but as farmers themselves.<sup>390</sup>

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<sup>386</sup> See Table 2.1 ("Asian Population in the United States 1860 to 1940") and Table 2.9 ("Selected Occupations of Gainfully Employed Chinese and Japanese, Ten Years and Older, 1910") in Bonacich, "Some Basic Facts," 62, 70; Ichihashi, *Japanese in the United States*, 229; McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 105-107.

<sup>387</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 117-118.

<sup>388</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 118.

<sup>389</sup> Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 46; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 38-39.

<sup>390</sup> McWilliams makes a similar claim, stating: "The real prejudice against the Japanese [and "Hindustani"] . . . dates from the time when they began to be small owners, rather than farm laborers." McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 111.

By the second decade of the twentieth century, it was clear that many Japanese immigrants, and second-generation *Nisei* Americans, were less than content with being mere farmworkers; they desired more and dared to harness the wages of whiteness for themselves as yeomen farmers and entrepreneurs—an unforgiveable act of hubris, in the eyes of many California growers, and one that could not be abided. “The Californians are the Southerners of the West,” declares contemporary social theorist Walter V. Woehlke in a 1913 article for *Outlook*, and the “Japanese is the first immigrant who has not only failed to pay homage at the shrine of American nativity, but who has also challenged the right of the Caucasian to march at the head of the procession. By his assertion of equality the yellow Japanese immigrant has stung American pride to the quick.”<sup>391</sup> Although the Japanese may have been the first non-European subject group in California to assert their equality upon arrival, South Asian Indians soon followed. As it would be with future exogenous subject groups in the state, as long as Japanese and Punjabis were willing to remain cheap labor and engage in seasonal work considered beneath whites, they were welcome in most of its agricultural regions. The moment they decided to farm themselves, however, to stay in California and have families, and compete with Anglo Californians in the rural economy—in short, to exercise agency over their own destiny by “[securing] the Blessings of Liberty to [themselves] and [their] Posterity”—they were considered *Unruly* by the sovereign authority, and they had to go. Where the Chinese were despised by the local dominant class for being too foreign, too strange, too slavish,

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<sup>391</sup> Walter V. Woehlke, “White and Yellow in California,” *Outlook* 104, no. 2 (November 1913): 63.

Japanese and, to a similar extent, South Asian Indians were despised for the opposite reason: being too familiar, *too* American.<sup>392</sup>

In an era where race and American nationality were synonymous with whiteness, Japanese and Punjabi transgressions could not be tolerated. Anglo Californians responded to these slights through concerted efforts to solidify Asian sociopolitical *nonpersonhood* by denying these immigrants full civic consideration under the law, ultimately robbing them of equal access to the wages of whiteness<sup>393</sup>—a necessary reaction, as many Anglo Californians saw it, lest regional collective hegemony be threatened.<sup>394</sup> The social effects of these efforts cannot be overstated. Depriving these subject groups full civic consideration as persons under the law, the primary intention of these initiatives was to maximize immigrant vulnerability by erecting legal categories of otherness based on perceptions of ethno-racial difference, thus ensuring the replicative capacity of California’s colonial arrangements of power. Moreover, this dynamic consequently hardened racial categories of white and *non-white* within the colonial hierarchy, and more significantly adjoined racialized exogenous labor with the sociopolitical category “farmworker” within the rural psyche. Restrictionist efforts, most drastically the state’s Alien Land Acts, were transformative in the sense that they further solidified legal

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<sup>392</sup> Woehlke, “White and Yellow in California,” 62; Ichihashi, *Japanese in the United States*, 231; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 39; Shah, *Stranger Intimacy*, 19-20.

<sup>393</sup> According to Ngai, “The nativism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century comprised a cultural nationalism in which cultural homogeneity more than race superiority was the principal concern. Restrictionists did not entirely discount the possibility of assimilation but complained that the high volume of immigration congested the melting pot, creating ‘alien indigestion.’ But by World War I, restrictionists spoke increasingly of ‘racial indigestion’ and rejected the idea of the melting pot altogether.” Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 23.

<sup>394</sup> See Woehlke, “White and Yellow in California,” 61-65; Walter V. Woehlke, “III—Two Aspects of the Japanese Problem in California,” *Outlook* 104, no. 4 (November 1913): 479-480.

boundaries of whiteness and citizenship within the colonial space at a pivotal moment of capitalist expansion, further augmenting rural cognitive associations of farmworker alterity<sup>395</sup>—permanently binding agricultural labor with an idea of foreignness, or *non-whiteness*, within local discourses of inferiority.<sup>396</sup>

The subject groups prohibited by restrictionist policies were determined by the racial category ‘aliens ineligible to citizenship’: a contemporary euphemism for Asian.<sup>397</sup> Provisions in the 1882 Exclusion Act barred Chinese naturalization indefinitely.<sup>398</sup> Congress, however, never enacted legislation designed to specifically exclude Japanese.<sup>399</sup> Although Californians saw it differently, it was generally believed in Washington that the Gentlemen’s Agreement negotiated between the United States and Japan throughout 1907 and 1908—in which Japan agreed to voluntarily restrict the emigration of farmers and agricultural laborers to the United States—successfully thwarted Japanese immigration, and there was no need for dedicated exclusionary measures.<sup>400</sup> The Japanese were also exempt from the restrictions of the “Asiatic Barred

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<sup>395</sup> According to Woehlke, the perception of farm labor as something performed by *non-white*, exogenous, labor was already reflected in California’s rural psyche by the 1910s, the restrictionist efforts just hardened these associations. Speaking as a contemporary, Woehlke states: “The yellow man occupied the same niche in California that the Negro fills in the South. The consequences were identical. Labor lost its dignity. The [Anglo-Californian] youth . . . grew up to despise [farm] work, to look down upon the [agricultural] worker.” Woehlke, “III—Two Aspects of the Japanese Problem in California,” 479; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 7, 38, 46; Shah, *Stranger Intimacy*, 232, 246.

<sup>396</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 93.

<sup>397</sup> Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 50; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 39; Shah, *Stranger Intimacy*, 119, 123.

<sup>398</sup> Shah, *Stranger Intimacy*, 182.

<sup>399</sup> Raymond Leslie Buell, “Some Legal Aspects of the Japanese Question,” *The American Journal of International Law* 17, no. 1 (January 1923): 29.

<sup>400</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 39; Keith Aoki, “The Yellow Pacific: Transnational Identities, Diasporic Racialization, and Myth(s) of the ‘Asian Century,’” *UC Davis Law Review* 44, no. 3 (2011): 917-924.

Zone” specified in the Immigration Act of 1917; South Asian Indians, on the other hand, were not so fortunate.<sup>401</sup> Nevertheless, in a series of immigration challenges, starting with *In re Saito* (1894), state and federal courts determined that the Japanese in particular were ineligible of becoming United States citizens on racial grounds, as they failed to meet the criteria set forth in Title XXX, Section 2169 of the 1875 Revised Statutes of the United States, neither counting as ‘free white persons’ nor ‘aliens of African nativity [or] persons of African descent.’<sup>402</sup>

Drawing on a history of legislative intent and relying on the racial taxonomy of the day, Judge LeBaron Bradford Colt of the United States First Circuit Court of Appeals determined in *In re Saito* that the Japanese were racially excluded for the category

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<sup>401</sup> Chapter 29, Section 3 of “An Act to Regulate the Immigration of Aliens to, and Residence of Aliens in, the United States” specifies that the “Asiatic Barred Zone” includes all persons “of islands not possessed by the United States adjacent to the Continent of Asia, situate[d] south of the twentieth parallel latitude north, west of the one hundred and sixtieth meridian of longitude east from Greenwich, and north of the tenth parallel latitude south, or who are natives of any country, province, or dependency situate[d] on the Continent of Asia west of the one hundred and tenth meridian of longitude east from Greenwich and east of the fiftieth meridian of longitude east from Greenwich and south of the fiftieth parallel of latitude north, except that portion of said territory situate[d] between the fiftieth and the sixty-fourth meridians of longitude east from Greenwich and the twenty-fourth meridians and the thirty-eighth parallels of latitude north.” Sixty-Fourth Congress, “An Act to Regulate the Immigration of Aliens to, and Residence of Aliens in, the United States,” *Public Laws of the United States, 1915-1917* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1917), 874. <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/ll/llsl/llsl-c64/llsl-c64.pdf>; see also Shah, *Stranger Intimacy*, 43, 232.

<sup>402</sup> *In re Saito*, 62 Fed. 126. <https://law.resource.org/pub/us/case/reporter/F/0062/0062.f1.0126.pdf>; New York Times, “Japanese Not White Persons. Hence Not Entitled to Naturalization, Judge Colt Says,” *New York Times*, June 28, 1894, 9-12. <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1894/06/28/issue.html>; Buell, “Some Legal Aspects of the Japanese Question,” 29-30; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 38, 39; see also *In re Yamashita*, 30 Wash. 234. <http://courts.mrsc.org/washreports/030WashReport/030WashReport0234.htm>; *In re Buntaro Kumagai*, 163 Fed. 922. [https://www-jstor-org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/stable/2186149?refreqid=excelsior%3A56b8b8ae1fdb4a36a7c7ac4bd6ca5965&seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www-jstor-org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/stable/2186149?refreqid=excelsior%3A56b8b8ae1fdb4a36a7c7ac4bd6ca5965&seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents); *Ozawa v. United States*, 260 U.S., 178. <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/ll/usrep/usrep260/usrep260178/usrep260178.pdf>; *Yamashita et al. v. Hinkle*, 260 U.S. 199. <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/ll/usrep/usrep260/usrep260199/usrep260199.pdf>; *United States v. Thind*, 261 Fed. 204. <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/ll/usrep/usrep261/usrep261204/usrep261204.pdf>.



“white” on both scientific and socio-juridical grounds, and were, therefore, ineligible for citizenship under § 2169 of the Revised Statutes. Utilizing a “scientific” rationale to justify his denial of Shebata Saito’s application for naturalization, Colt argues that Japanese immigrants share common “Mongolian”—like caucasian, a “scientific” classification in common use at the time—ancestry with the Chinese, and therefore, cannot possibly be considered “Caucasian” or what the nation’s founders considered “white” when they first pondered the question of naturalization, and consequently should not be granted the privileges of citizenship. In an opinion that would have lasting repercussions for Asian communities in the United States, and California in particular, Judge Colt reasons that “At that time, the country was inhabited by three races, the Caucasian or white race, the Negro or black race, and the American or red race. It is reasonable, therefore, to infer that when congress, in designating the class of persons who could be naturalized, inserted the qualifying word ‘white,’ it intended to exclude from the privilege of citizenship all alien races except the Caucasian.”<sup>403</sup> Read in its entirety, Judge Colt’s opinion, which relies on the seeming *objectivity* of science and an accurate interpretation of congressional history—as exclusionary as it may be—has an air of legal impartiality that future legal opinions on this question lack. The fact remains, however, that although Colt’s opinion is legally sound—at times even suggesting a measure of regret that “after careful consideration” this was “the only conclusion [he was] able to reach”—it was racially reasoned, and thus, representative of race’s ability to constitute power while maintaining a façade of neutrality. The primary beneficiaries of Colt’s opinion were, after all, dominant class Anglo Americans residing on the Pacific Coast,

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<sup>403</sup> *In re Saito*.

and its wounded were anyone in the colonial space imagined to be Asian by predominant racial taxonomies. As such, California's legislators, along with future state and federal judges, utilized Colt's opinion as legal precedent to buttress the structures of white supremacy in the American West and further marginalize California's colonial *Alterities*.

Such decisions were not always overtly racist, but more often structurally racist, resulting from a legal terrain tainted by racial reasoning and a legislative history of exclusion that omitted specific guidance on the Japanese and South Asian Indian questions. In *In re Buntaro Kumagai* (1908), for example, a District Court Judge (using *Saito* as precedent), "having no objection to his citizenship on personal grounds," reluctantly denied Buntaro Kumagai's—by the judge's account, an "educated Japanese gentleman" and an "honorably discharged" veteran formerly "enlisted as a soldier in the regular army of United States"—application for naturalized citizenship "on the single ground that Congress has not extended to the Japanese people not born within the United States the privilege of becoming adopted citizens of this country."<sup>404</sup> The influence that *Saito*, *Kumagai*, and similar cases had on the cultivation of Asian otherness in the American West cannot be overlooked. The arrangements of power they helped perpetuate, and the racialization they engendered on behalf of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Pacific Islander, and South Asian Indian immigrants as political *nonpersons* within the colonial space, perfectly illustrates the juridico-political qualities of race as a colonial technology of power.

This dynamic was most evident in the design and implementation of California's alien land laws. Sections 2 and 3 of the so called Alien Land Act of 1913 prevented the

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<sup>404</sup> *In re Buntaro Kumagai*.

sale of real estate and limited the lease of land to all aliens ineligible for citizenship or “Any company, association or corporation . . . of which a majority of its members are [ineligible] aliens . . . or in which a majority of the issued capital stock is owned by such aliens.”<sup>405</sup> The purpose of the law, as its co-author, then California Attorney General Ulysses S. Webb, suggested in a speech at the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco that very same year, was to curb the immigration of “undesirable” races by “curtailing their privileges which they may enjoy here; for they will not come in large numbers and long abide with us if they may not acquire land. [The law] seeks to limit the numbers who will come by limiting the opportunities for their activity here when they arrive.”<sup>406</sup> Mr. Webb’s assertion, that the law will stem inbound migrant flows by denying Asians property, in one sense, is flawed, as it hangs on a fairly large assumption regarding potential immigrant incentives. In another sense, however, his assumption betrays the cultural value that Webb himself places on the right to own and use land in a liberal democracy, and the cultural significance that property plays in the constitution of personhood in the United States.

The relationship between property ownership and race in this country has a long history, and for much of that history, those denied property, were property themselves—

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<sup>405</sup> California State Legislature, “An Act Relating to the Rights, Powers and Disabilities of Aliens and of Certain companies, Associations and Corporations with Respect to Property in this State, Providing for Escheats in Certain Cases, Prescribing the Procedure Therein, and Repealing All Acts or Parts of Acts Inconsistent or in Conflict Herewith,” *The Statutes of California and Amendments to the Codes, 1913* (Sacramento: State Printing Office, 1913), 206-208 (hereafter cited as *Alien Land Act, 1913*). <https://clerk.assembly.ca.gov/sites/clerk.assembly.ca.gov/files/archive/Statutes/1913/1913.pdf#page=59>; see also Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 39-40; Shah, *Stranger Intimacy*, 120-123; Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 50.

<sup>406</sup> Ulysses S. Webb, cited in Aoki, “The Yellow Pacific,” n113.

chattel slavery representing the ultimate manifestation of *nonpersonhood*.<sup>407</sup> The right to own property, as Webb and California's restrictionist front understood, is intimately connected to the ideas of whiteness and personhood within the United States.<sup>408</sup> The extension of this right to specific immigrant subject groups, Europeans for example, is an indicator of civic fitness for considerations of citizenship, both signaling dominant class recognition and garnering feelings of belonging, acceptance and loyalty amongst late arrivals in the colonial space.<sup>409</sup> Moreover, the right to property in capitalist society is instrumental to substantive personhood in that it gives one agency over one's own life, providing enough welfare and security to allow individuals the ability to think about the future, to dream and project their desires on to the external world—all of which are essential to some aspect of personhood.<sup>410</sup> Legal scholar Margaret Jane Radin, in her work *Reinterpreting Property*, also argues this point, stating: "If an object you now control is bound up in your future plans or in your anticipation of your future self, and it is partly these plans for your own continuity that make you a person, then your personhood depends on the realization of these expectations," and, consequently, the right to secure property as a mode of that realization.<sup>411</sup> In short, the right to property

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<sup>407</sup> Harris, "Whiteness as Property," 1716-1724.

<sup>408</sup> Indeed, as race theorist and legal scholar Cheryl I. Harris reminds us, whiteness itself can be thought of as a form of property in America, as historically it has ensured "access to a whole set of public and private privileges that materially and permanently guaranteed basic subsistence needs and, therefore, survival." Harris, "Whiteness as Property," 1713.

<sup>409</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 155.

<sup>410</sup> William Bernard, "Persons, Character and Morality," in *The Identities of Persons*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 197-216; see also Margaret Jane Radin, *Reinterpreting Property* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 35, 37-39, 43.

<sup>411</sup> Radin, *Reinterpreting Property*, 43.

provides its bearer with the agency necessary to live free and dignified lives. Contrary to Mr. Webb's assertions, therefore, the sole purpose of the Alien Land Act was not to minimize potential inflows of racial "undesirables," instead it represents an attempt to perpetuate Asian vulnerability by depriving them of a type of freedom. The act was designed to maintain a permanent class of exogenous labor within the colonial space by legally depriving *Others* access to a fundamental mode of social mobility. Ultimately, the withholding from the Asian community the ability to provide for themselves through the ownership and use of land was an attempt to permanently deprive them of full civic consideration as free and equal persons within the postcolonial landscape.

Despite this, and to the frustration of California's restrictionists, the 1913 act was poorly conceived and easily circumvented by its primary targets: Japanese farmers. First, the law failed to nullify titles already held by ineligible aliens in the state. Second, titles held by Japanese *Issei* were easily transferred to their American *Nisei* offspring or distant relatives of equal status. Third, although the law specified that land leases to ineligible aliens could not exceed three years, it failed to limit the renewal of leases. Lastly, property could be held in joint corporations with sympathetic Anglo Californians.<sup>412</sup> According to Daniels and Kitano, in a move that testifies to the historic tension between California's sovereign authority and the Federal Government, the administration of California Governor Hiram Johnson, "had foreseen these evasions, but had pushed the law in order to increase their popularity within the state and on the national scene to embarrass their political rival, the democratic administration of Woodrow Wilson."<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> *Alien Land Act, 1913*; Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 50-51.

<sup>413</sup> Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 50-51.

Criticisms aside, the 1913 Alien Land Act was an effective exclusionary measure that successfully justified depriving foreign subject groups, ethnic Japanese in particular, within the colonial space of property, basic civil liberties, and human dignity on racial grounds. Unfortunately, such measures became political mainstays in California's postcolonial hierarchy—in the Japanese case, ultimately culminating in General John L. DeWitt's decision to intern Japanese Americans residing on the Pacific Coast at the onset of war with Japan and in accordance with Executive Order 9066, because, as he reasoned, "The Japanese race is an enemy race and while many second and third generation Japanese born on United States soil, possessed of United States citizenship, have become 'Americanized,' the racial strains are undeluded."<sup>414</sup>

As the decade progressed, however, political pressure mounted to amend loopholes in the 1913 Alien Land Act and make its measures more stringent.<sup>415</sup> According to McWilliams, the Japanese and, to a lesser extent, newly arriving South Asian Indians, sparked the hatred of small farmers for two reasons: they began to imagine Asians as direct competition—though evidence suggests otherwise<sup>416</sup>—and, having amended and reclaimed large swaths of Californian wasteland (raising its quality and price), they were viewed increasingly as barriers to the development of an American

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<sup>414</sup> General John L. DeWitt quote from "Final Report: Japanese Evacuation from the West Coast, 1942," printed in U.S. Commission on Wartime Evacuation and Relocation of Civilians, "Personal Justice Denied: Report of the Commission on Wartime Evacuation and Relocation of Civilians," *Report of the Committee Interior and Insular Affairs* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1982), 6 (hereafter cited as *Personal Justice Denied*); see also Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 176; Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 152.

<sup>415</sup> Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 52-53; McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 112-116.

<sup>416</sup> Daniels and Kitano note that "Japanese farmers, it should be understood, did not displace existing white farmers, but instead pioneered with new crops and new techniques in a market that was rapidly expanding." Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 51.

agrarianism.<sup>417</sup> Writing nearly three decades before McWilliams, Woehlke appears to be in agreement, although he suggests that rural contempt for Japanese and incentives for exclusion were also influenced by Japanese assertions of dignity and the challenges they posed to regional dominance: “Lifting chin and squaring shoulders, the Japanese asserted by their bearing that they were at least as good as any white man . . . What was worse, they proved the assertion . . . On the farm, in trade and business, they outstripped their competitors, [and] exerted an influence far greater than their number warranted.”<sup>418</sup>

Paradoxically, large-scale shipper-grower operators also supported such measures, as Japanese ownership of land challenged the replicative qualities of colonial power on which the industrial agriculture system had come to rely. According to McWilliams, this dynamic “threatened the continued existence of large units of production and it decreased the supply of labor,” thus justifying the denial of full civic consideration to Asian subject groups.<sup>419</sup> “Having permitted the Japanese to convert large tracts of waste land into immensely valuable farming properties,” McWilliams adds, “the large industrialists were quite willing to use the Alien Land Act as a club to force the Japanese to sell to them. From this point of view the Alien Land Act was designed to consolidate and to safeguard large ownership units in California. Whether so designed or not, it clearly had that effect.”<sup>420</sup>

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<sup>417</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 112-116, 118-119.

<sup>418</sup> Woehlke, “White and Yellow in California,” 64.

<sup>419</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 112.

<sup>420</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 112-113.

Overriding the representative process, Californians overwhelmingly passed the citizen-initiated Proposition 1 in November of 1920 to counter the continued threat of Asian landownership in the state. Prop. 1 closed apparent “loopholes” in the original Alien Land Act, making its controls even tighter. Most significantly, the act restricted the transfer of property from ineligible parents or guardians to their American dependents and prohibited even the short-term lease of land to ineligible aliens.<sup>421</sup> A further provision, had it not been deemed unconstitutional, would have placed property-possessing minors of alien parents under court appointed guardianships.<sup>422</sup> A glance at the *Voter Information Guide* for the General Election of 1920, however, reveals Prop. 1 for what it really is: an exclusionary measure designed to further monopolize power in the state in the interests of the colonial project. Betraying the paranoia and misinformation surrounding the issue of Asian landownership in the state, and reinforcing the perceived threat that the Japanese in particular posed to the dominant collective, proponents for the measure argued: “In defiance of [the Alien Land Act of 1913], through various subterfuges including use of dummy corporations and minor native born children, Orientals, largely Japanese, are fast securing control of the richest irrigated lands in the state . . . Control of these rich lands means in time control of the products of the soil by a unified interest such as the Japanese will lead to economic control of the country. That will be followed in time by political control through force of numbers induced by the heavy birth rate.”<sup>423</sup> In other words, the provisions of Prop. 1 were politically necessary

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<sup>421</sup> *California State Voter Information Guide, General Election (1920)*: 3. [https://repository.uchastings.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1149&context=ca\\_ba\\_lilot\\_props](https://repository.uchastings.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1149&context=ca_ba_lilot_props); Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 5.

<sup>422</sup> See Sec. 4 in *Voter Information Guide*, 3; Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 51.

<sup>423</sup> *Voter Information Guide*, 5.



to protect the colonial project from being overrun by a foreign horde, and its dominant collective being socioeconomically marginalized in the same way Anglo Americans had relegated Alta California *Mestizaje*.

Following their decision in *Takao Ozawa v. United States* (1922), the United States Supreme Court finalized the question of alien eligibility to citizenship on racial grounds in *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923). Oddly enough, both Ozawa and Thind, rather than challenging the constitutionality of the “free white persons” clause in the immigration code, embraced racial arguments that suggested that they met the racial requirements dictated by § 2169 of the Revised Statutes. In the *Ozawa* brief, attorneys George W. Wickersham and David L. Withington argued that the term “free white person” under the law is applicable to the Japanese, as “American statute law” had traditionally understood the term “white” as “expressing a superior class against a lower class, or, to speak explicitly, a class called ‘white’ as against a class called ‘black’; the white man against the negro,” and racially as “a person without negro blood.”<sup>424</sup> Employing the dominant racial taxonomy of the 1920s, Wickersham and Withington ultimately asserted that “The Japanese are ‘free.’ They, or at least the dominant strains, are ‘white persons,’ speaking an Aryan tongue and having Caucasian root stocks; a superior class, fit for citizenship.”<sup>425</sup> Delivering the opinion of the court, Justice Sutherland, in somewhat circular reasoning and invoking rhetoric reminiscent of Judge Colt’s decision in *Saito*, argued that the intention of the term ‘white persons,’ “was to

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<sup>424</sup> *Ozawa*, 182, 184; see also Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 38.

<sup>425</sup> *Ozawa*, 185.

confer the privileges of citizenship upon that class of persons whom the fathers knew as white, and to deny it to all who could not be so classified.”<sup>426</sup> Furthermore, in the eyes of the law, this classification was “meant to indicate only a person of what is *popularly* known as the Caucasian race. [emphasis added]”<sup>427</sup> And, since the Japanese are not popularly considered as belonging to the Caucasian race, a view “sustained by numerous scientific authorities,” they cannot also be considered ‘white persons,’ and are, therefore, “clearly ineligible for citizenship.”<sup>428</sup>

A mere three months after *Ozawa*, in January of 1923, the court heard arguments in *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind*. An educated Punjabi, Thind served in the United States Army during the Great War and was granted citizenship in October of 1920, only to have it revoked on the grounds of racial ineligibility.<sup>429</sup> The primary question placed before the court in *Thind* was did Bhagat Singh Thind, “a high caste Hindu of full Indian Blood, born at Amrit Sar, Punjab, India,” count as a “white person within the meaning of § 2169, Revised Statutes?”<sup>430</sup> Attorneys Will R. King and Thomas Mannix—evidently familiar with the *Ozawa* ruling—argued that Thind, as a high born Punjabi, was not of the “aboriginal Indian Mongoloid” race, but instead was ‘Aryan,’ sharing common ancestry with the “Aryan of Europe,” and therefore, must be considered Caucasian, or as a white person eligible for citizenship.<sup>431</sup> Once again, Justice Sutherland delivered for the

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<sup>426</sup> *Ozawa*, 195.

<sup>427</sup> *Ozawa*, 197.

<sup>428</sup> *Ozawa*, 198; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 44.

<sup>429</sup> Shah, *Stranger Intimacy*, 242-245; *Thind*, 207.

<sup>430</sup> *Thind*, 206.

<sup>431</sup> *Thind*, 205-206.

court. Emphasizing the significance of social mechanisms of diversification in the construction and codification of racial categories, Sutherland loosened the classification ‘Caucasian’ from its “scientific” mooring, breaking with long-standing legal precedent that understood the term as synonymous with “white person,” arguing that a “narrower,” popular, determination of caucasian, as something visibly obvious, is most relevant when assessing applicability of the clause in § 2169.<sup>432</sup> Furthermore, “the term ‘race,’” Sutherland argues, somewhat hypocritically, “is one which, for the practical purposes of statute, must be applied to a group of living persons *now* possessing in common the requisite characteristics, not to groups of persons who are supposed to be or really are descended from some remote, common ancestor, but who whether they both resemble him to a greater or lesser extent, have at any rate ceased altogether to resemble one another.”<sup>433</sup> In essence, the scientific rationales traditionally utilized by the lower courts—rationales Sutherland himself used in *Ozawa*—to exclude certain exogenous groups from full civic consideration on racial grounds, cease to be reasonable and reliable modes of exclusion within the colonial space when faced by socially transgressive and undesirable subject groups with common ethnic claims to a shared genealogical heritage.

In one sense *Ozawa* and *Thind* represent the continuation of America’s racial project—a hardening of the social and legal categories of difference responsible for managing the colonial space.<sup>434</sup> In quite another sense, however, they highlight the ability of race to masquerade as common-sense boundaries, as something given, even natural, in

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<sup>432</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 45.

<sup>433</sup> *Thind*, 209.

<sup>434</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 7, 38, 46; Shah, *Stranger Intimacy*, 232, 246.

the application of colonial power. By reducing the factors of whiteness down to one ethnoracial variable, the Supreme Court consolidated Asian *nonpersonhood* in the political landscape—providing Californians with the racial reasoning required to eliminate the legal uncertainties associated with the category “alien ineligible to citizenship,” while increasing the efficacy of exclusionary measures inherent to the Alien Land Act.<sup>435</sup>

Asian *nonpersonhood*, however, reached a new pinnacle the year after *Thind*, when Congress—at the behest of California governor turned United States senator, Hiram Johnson, his cohort, Senator James Phelan, and Sacramento newspaper editor and anti-Japanese lobbyist, V. S. McClatchy—used Justice Sutherland’s reasoning as legal precedent to exclude exogenous *Others* from the colonial space and consolidate ethnonational hegemony.<sup>436</sup> Popularly dubbed the “Japanese Exclusion Act,” Section 13 of the 1924 Johnson-Reed Immigration Act effectively eliminated all further immigration from Asia on racial grounds, stipulating that “No alien ineligible to citizenship shall be admitted to the United States.”<sup>437</sup> The justification for this exclusionary measure, as

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<sup>435</sup> Shah and Ngai come to similar conclusions. Shah comments on this consolidation with regard to South Asian Indians, stating: “In courts across the United States, official calibration of “whiteness,” which for seventeen years had weighed South Asian applicants’ religion, education, class, caste, military service, political allegiances, and complexion, now judged these men as “non-white” solely because of their geographic origin.” Shah, *Stranger Intimacy*, 248; Ngai, concludes: “These developments [exclusionary measures by way of the Johnson-Reed Act] resolved the legal ambiguities and conflicts over the racial status of Asians that had vexed the law since their arrival in the mid-nineteenth century. They also simultaneously solidified the legal boundaries of the ‘white race.’” Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 7.

<sup>436</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 47-48; Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 54.

<sup>437</sup> Sixty-Eighth Congress, “An Act to Limit the Immigration of Aliens into the United States, and For Other Purposes” *Public Laws of the United States, 1923-1925* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1917), 153-170. <https://govtrackus.s3.amazonaws.com/legislink/pdf/stat/43/STATUTE-43-Pg153a.pdf>; Henry Pratt Fairchild, “The Immigration Law of 1924,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 38, no. 4 (August 1924): 660, 664; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 7.

contemporary sociologist Henry Pratt Fairchild details in a journal article for the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, was to bring “immigration law into consistency with [America’s] naturalization law”—augmenting the legal boundaries of whiteness in the process. “[T]he United States is to be a white man's country,” writes Fairchild, “[t]his determination has been inherent in American thought from the very beginning . . . It will help in the just judgment of this section of the law, to remember that its effect is not to put the Japanese into a class by themselves, but to cease to give them a unique legal position, and to put them into the same category with the rest of the non-white [excludable] world.”<sup>438</sup> In other words, Section 13 of the Johnson-Reed Act had but one aim: the preservation of an ethnically pure Anglo-American homeland, free from the threat of *Unruly* outsiders in the form of racial “undesirables.”

In the wake of Johnson-Reed, attorneys for the Nationalization Service used the racial determination in *Thind* to retroactively denaturalizes sixty-five South Asian Indian men who had been granted citizenship as Aryans. Local officials in California continued the attack, using denaturalization as justification to confiscate land acquired under false racial pretenses by South Asians.<sup>439</sup> Those who married local women or Mexicanas, stayed in Northern California, establishing vibrant communities throughout the

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<sup>438</sup> Fairchild, “The Immigration Law of 1924,” 664.

<sup>439</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 49; Shah, *Stranger Intimacy*, 247; McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 119.

Sacramento Valley.<sup>440</sup> Most, however, finding their treatment in California intolerable, and banned from sending for wives and family, returned to India.<sup>441</sup>

A generation later, in the wake of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, Japanese American *nonpersonhood* in the colonial landscape reached new epistemological levels as 92,785 *Issei*, *Nisei* and *Sansei* (third generation) Californians, deprived of due process, were relieved of their property and interned as "enemy aliens."<sup>442</sup> The racial dimensions of this history are apparent in the frank assertions of General DeWitt, as well as the subtle denunciations of Earl Warren in his testimony before the Tolan Committee in San Francisco in February of 1942. Warren's statement is telling, not only reflecting the hysteria that gripped Californians at the time and the stock that Americans placed in the connections between ethnicity and nationality, but also race's ability to obscure the political landscape, to twist it to the advantage of sovereign authority, poisoning the soil of discourse to such an extent that even educated, typically reasonable and well-intentioned people, so mired by distrust and suspicion, abandon their principles.

We [California's law enforcement community] believe that when we are dealing with the Caucasian race we have methods that will test the loyalty of them, and we believe that we can, in dealing with the Germans and Italians, arrive at some fairly sound conclusions because of our knowledge of the way they live in the community and have lived for many years. But when we deal with the Japanese we are in an entirely different field and we cannot form any opinion [regarding their loyalty] that we believe to be sound.

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<sup>440</sup> Due to the Expatriation Act of 1907, however, the nationalities of these women were tied to their husbands'. So, although they had the right to stay in the United States and own property, as free white persons, or often persons of African descent, by law they became aliens by marriage, no longer entitled to the benefits of American citizenship. See Shah, *Stranger Intimacy*, 251-259.

<sup>441</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 119.

<sup>442</sup> Adon Poli and Warren M. Engstrand, "Japanese Agriculture on the Pacific Coast," *The Journal of Land & Public Utility Economics* 21, no. 4 (November 1945): 352; Dorothy Swaine Thomas and Richard S. Nishimoto, *The Spoilage: Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 1, 5.

. . . . It seems strange to us that airplane manufacturing plants should be entirely surrounded by Japanese land occupancies. It seems to us that it is more than circumstance that after certain Government air bases were established Japanese undertook farming operations in close proximity to them.

. . . . So we believe, gentlemen, that it would be wise for the military to take every protective measure that it believes is necessary to protect this state and this Nation against the possible activities of these people.<sup>443</sup>

The fact is, race was deployed as a technology of power throughout the western states at a moment of national crisis to further marginalize an already disenfranchised subject group whose perceived otherness, despite the evidence and half a century of co-habitation, was still believed to pose an unknown threat to regional sovereign authority. Whether by design or circumstance, the effect of Executive Order 9066 and Public Law 503 (passed by Congress on March 24, 1942), which criminalized civilian violations of military evacuation orders, allowed for further monopolization of “alien” land under Anglo-Californian control.<sup>444</sup> During the military evacuation, lasting from March through October of 1942, corporations and large independent growers, realizing that evacuee farmers (tenant and landowning alike) in many instances had no choice but to consider offers on property, equipment, livestock and planted crops, far below market value, seized the opportunity to remove Japanese competition, while expanding their own operations.<sup>445</sup> By war’s end, California growers, working in conjunction with the Farm

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<sup>443</sup> Testimony of Earl Warren in *Tolan Hearings*, 11015.

<sup>444</sup> Aoki, “The Yellow Pacific,” 929; Poli and Engstrand, “Japanese Agriculture on the Pacific Coast,” 359-361, 364.

<sup>445</sup> Poli and Engstrand, “Japanese Agriculture on the Pacific Coast,” 361; Thomas and Nishimoto, *The Spoilage*, 16; Donna K. Nagata, *Legacy of Injustice: Exploring the Cross-Generational Impact of the Japanese American Internment* (New York: Plenum Press, 1993), 18-19.

Security Administration (FSA), the agency responsible for safeguarding and managing internee agricultural land, controlled 266,120 acres of farmland formerly registered to Japanese operators.<sup>446</sup> Although the transfers of evacuee land was justified under the strains of war and the need to maintain vegetable production, such transfers, nonetheless, conclude a pattern of disenfranchisement that started with the Alien Land Act of 1913.<sup>447</sup> Families fortunate enough to hold on to their land while interned, fared only slightly better. With little capital to replace damaged property and stolen equipment, many *Nisei* and *Sansei* Americans were forced to sell their land anyways and relocate to cities<sup>448</sup>—leaving many to start over in menial occupations in hostile post-war locales where, despite their citizenship and demonstrations of loyalty, they were still considered aliens and looked on with suspicion as racial enemies.<sup>449</sup>

Although the true beneficiaries of the Alien Land Acts, the Supreme Court's decisions in *Ozawa* and *Thind*, and *Johnson-Reed*, were California's expanding shipper-grower operations, these measures affected them as well—forcing them, once again, to find supplies of cheap imported labor. With *Nisei* and *Sansei* Americans preferring to work family operations or leave agriculture altogether; with Punjabi men leaving the state; and in a postcolonial environment where farm labor had become viewed as beneath

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<sup>446</sup> Poli and Engstrand, "Japanese Agriculture on the Pacific Coast," 359.

<sup>447</sup> According to Poli and Engstrand: "Farm ownership by Japanese amounted to about 30 percent of their total pre-war farm operations. Ownership transfers to nonevacuees during and after evacuations has probably reduced these farm ownership interests to less than a fourth of the total pre-war Japanese land holdings, including leaseholds." Poli and Engstrand, "Japanese Agriculture on the Pacific Coast," 364; Thomas and Nishimoto, *The Spoilage*, 16; Aoki, "The Yellow Pacific," 929.

<sup>448</sup> Poli and Engstrand, "Japanese Agriculture on the Pacific Coast," 360; *Personal Justice Denied*, 296.

<sup>449</sup> Poli and Engstrand, "Japanese Agriculture on the Pacific Coast," 360, 361-363.



whites, but *non-white* immigration was strictly prohibited, growers scrambled to find replacements for their rapidly evaporating peonage—first looking to Mexico, then to America’s extended empire in the Pacific.<sup>450</sup>

### The *Other* Americans

Mexicanas/os, by virtue of their Spanish heritage—or, similar to Southern California’s *Chicana/o* and *Californio* contingents, the “reverse one-drop rule”<sup>451</sup>—were still considered, as far as immigration law was concerned, legally white, and were, therefore, exempt from the prohibitions of Johnson-Reed.<sup>452</sup> Although Mexicana/o labor had been a persistent force in California’s agricultural history, especially in Southern California, it was not until the First World War that they began to overshadow other exogenous subject groups from Asia. Due to a confluence of factors—chiefly political instability in Mexico, improved transportation, labor shortages in California brought on by stricter immigration policies and the decline of Asian field labor, and the War itself—by 1920 Mexicana/o *campesinos* (farmworkers) comprised the largest ethnonational body of labor in the state’s agricultural sectors.<sup>453</sup> Eager to maintain access to this labor pool in the face of restrictionist attacks on *non-white* exogenous subject groups throughout the West, Southern California growers in the San Joaquin, the citrus belt, and the newly

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<sup>450</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 124, 130-131; Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 66; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 50, 93-95, 97, 129-131.

<sup>451</sup> Gómez, *Manifest Destinies*, 6, 88, 124.

<sup>452</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 54.

<sup>453</sup> Brian Gratton and Emily Merchant, “Immigration, Repatriation, and Deportation: The Mexican-Origin Population in the United States, 1920-1950,” *The international Migration Review* 47, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 946; Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 69-70.

irrigated vegetable and melon region of the Imperial Valley in particular, argued that both by temperament and advantage of proximity to Mexico, Mexicana/o laborers were uniquely situated (racially and geographically) to respond to the seasonal demands of California's specialized agriculture.<sup>454</sup> As with previous relationships with imported labor, however, grower fantasies of a sustainable source for cheap, tractable, easily deported labor from Mexico quickly buckled under the realities of California's oppressive social hierarchy and the systemic inequalities that sustained its rural economies and defined its colonial arrangements of power.

By the 1930s farm labor and Mexicana/o labor were largely synonymous in California's colonial landscape: the latter comprising seventy percent or more of the former in some regions.<sup>455</sup> Throughout the latter half of the 1920s, growers used *campesinos* to drive down the price of agricultural labor—a system that maximized the utility of Mexicana/o labor in virtually mechanical terms, and increased grower returns annually.<sup>456</sup> During the depression of the 1930s, however, the strains inherent to this arrangement began to be more apparent and less tolerable for both Mexicana/o migrants

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<sup>454</sup> In Washington D.C. in 1926, in an attempt to defeat the Box Bill, which would have excluded Mexicana/o labor had it passed, delegations from California's farm associations perpetuated the myth of the "Mexican homing pigeon" in congressional hearings. Mexicana/o laborers, as the narrative depicts, happily go "crop to crop, seeing Beautiful California, breathing its air, eating its food, and finally doing the homing pigeon stunt back to Mexico with more money than their neighbors dreamed existed[.]" This myth presents a clear case for the material construction of race in California. Rather than drawing on perceptions of "natural" inferiority based on perceived biological or cultural difference, these representatives drew on embedded stereotypes of "natural" utility based on geographical proximity and a narrative of mutual benefit. *Report*, 257; *S. Hearings*, 19857-19869; McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 126-127; for the sociological process of *naturalization*, see Barthes, *Mythologies*, 240-242; Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 94-95.

<sup>455</sup> *S. Hearings*, 19859, see also Table. 20; *S. Report*, 255-256; Charles Wollenberg places this figure at ninety percent in the Imperial Valley. Charles Wollenberg "Huelga, 1928 Style," in *Racism in California: A Reader in the History of Oppression*, ed. Rodger Daniels and Spencer C. Olin (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 203.

<sup>456</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 128; Lowitt, *The New Deal and the West*, 182.

and the Anglo-Californian establishment.<sup>457</sup> As the decade progressed, and the regional threats of Mexicana/o unionization to agricultural production increased, concerted efforts by growers, increasingly through organizations such as the Associated Farmers of California, worked in conjunction with local and state authorities to institute state-wide surveillance programs that have been criticized as nothing less than fascist.<sup>458</sup> The AF helped shape anti-picketing and “emergency-disaster” ordinances, which, as McWilliams asserts, provided “for a mobilization of all the forces of the community in case of a ‘major disaster,’” a criteria that arguably included strikes in rural monoculturalist communities.<sup>459</sup> It is clear from the historical record that the anti-unionism proliferated by the AF and groups like it during this period combined with an underlying anti-foreigner sentiment in the colonial space to create a social atmosphere where vigilante terror and extra-legal forms of coercion as countermeasures were justified, if not actively endorsed by industry and law enforcement, to meet the threats of communism—a dynamic that, as the following chapter addresses, remained an enduring facet of grower/laborer relations until the Second World War, as growers continued to play on communal fears of outsiders as radicals in order to maintain regional sovereignty and control the postcolonial landscape.<sup>460</sup> The strikes by Mexicana/o labor that occurred in

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<sup>457</sup> Gratton and Merchant, “Immigration, Repatriation, and Deportation,” 950-951; Benny J. Andrés Jr., “Invisible Borders: Repatriation and Colonization of Mexican Migrant Workers along the California Borderlands during the 1930s,” *California History* 88, no. 4 (September 2011): 5-6.

<sup>458</sup> Herbert Klein and Carey McWilliams, “Cold Terror in California,” *The Nation* 141, No. 3655 (July 24, 1935): 97-98; McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 230-263; Olmsted, *Right out of California*, 126-131; 151-158; Pichardo Almanzar and Kulik, *American Fascism and the New Deal*, 67-86; Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 172-175.

<sup>459</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 235-236; *Report*, 195.

<sup>460</sup> Olmsted, *Right Out of California*, 11-37; Stein, *California and the Dust Bowl Migration*, 60; Lowitt, *The New Deal and the West*, 179; McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 136-137; Pichardo Almanzar and Kulik, *American Fascism and the New Deal*, 67-122.

California's agricultural valleys during the 1930s are pivotal episodes in the state's labor relations. Equally essential to that history, however, and the ideas of race as something generated in the colonial space, are the responses of growers and the Associated Farmers of California to the threat of unionization—responses that betray the economic necessity and sovereign preference for maintaining a socially vulnerable, “less-than-white,” proletariat.

The transgressions of Mexicana/o migrants and *Chicana/o* Americans, in this case, were more political than social. In one sense, as Olmsted illustrates, the counteractions of growers and the AF should be viewed as a pro-industrial front, the objectives of which were to maintain the status quo. As sociologist Nelson A. Pichardo Almanzar details in his study with Brian W. Kulik, *American Fascism and the New Deal*, the vigilante violence that these forces encouraged, and, in fact, mobilized to their own benefit, can also be viewed through a pro-industrial lens, as the livelihoods of local Anglo Californians were intimately connected to the success of regional industrial farming interests. In social dynamics such as these, Almanzar argues, vigilantism is sustained, not only by economic threats to the community, but economic threats to individual livelihoods.<sup>461</sup>

In another sense, however, farm labor's fight for recognition and basic human dignity challenged grower regional hegemony, shedding light on a hidden facet of Californian society at a politically volatile moment in United States history. The strikes simultaneously shattered the illusion of what New Left scholar Raymond Williams calls

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<sup>461</sup> Pichardo Almanzar and Kulik, *American Fascism and the New Deal*, 107-111.

the “neo-pastoral dream” of Capitalism while revealing the vibrance and continued use of the state’s colonial mechanism of violence during a political transition which increasingly found, white, dispossessed southwestern farmworkers in California’s fields and a labor-friendly executive in the White House.<sup>462</sup> As discussed in Chapter II, the image of California’s agriculture was constructed around a myth of natural abundance, and for the growers, shippers and boosters who cultivated that myth and continued to profit from it, the landscape itself, if only in the American psyche, needed to remain bountiful, bucolic and vestal. Striking *campesinos* jeopardized that image, threatening to reveal to the American public the inequities inherent to California’s colonial space, but more importantly, the forms of violence required to maintain its arrangements of power just as the state was beginning to experience increased migration from the greater western South<sup>463</sup>—a dynamic that brought with it the potential for increased national scrutiny and federal intervention. In short, this “invisible army of migrant workers,” as Don Mitchell describes them, “who *make* the landscape,” were no longer willing to stay invisible nor

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<sup>462</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City*, 32; For perceptions of the Franklin D. Roosevelt’s administration as labor-friendly, or the New Deal as benefiting American labor, see McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 28-304; Olmsted, *Right Out of California*, 29-37; Stein, *California and the Dust Bowl Migration*, 140-189; see also letter from Roy M. Pike, of the El Solyo Ranch, December 11, 1935, copied from the files of California Farm Bureau Federation under subpoena for senate hearing on *Violations of Free Speech and Rights of Labor*, Exhibit 11583, *S. Hearings*, 25169-25170.

<sup>463</sup> Critiquing Sheriff John Miller’s efforts to control the political landscape in Brentwood, California, during the 1935 harvest, Don Mitchell makes a similar argument based on Williams’ “neo-pastoral dream,” concluding: “Sheriff Miller’s efforts in Brentwood, as much as the vigilante tactics in Imperial, indicate just how much work is necessary to ease all signs of work, and all signs of the contentious reproduction of workers. As revolt threw into question the standard practices that provided the structure of the agricultural landscape at the beginning of the Depression, violent control, and less violent surveillance, provided tools to reestablish ‘peaceful’ social relations in the second half of the 1930s.” Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 174.

silent<sup>464</sup>—an act that inherently challenged regional authority, the myths that constituted its realities, and its continued sovereignty.

As these conflicts and the financial challenges of the Great Depression intensified throughout the valleys of Southern California, local authorities working in conjunction with the Mexican government increasingly supported repatriation programs as a means of keeping migrant workers and their *Chicano* offspring off relief rolls, but also as a way of mitigating mounting Anti-Mexicana/o sentiment throughout the state. Historians, starting with Carey McWilliams, have often interpreted repatriation in Southern California during the 1930s through an immigration framework that assumes that all Mexicana/o migrants intended to become citizens of the United States.<sup>465</sup> Unfortunately, such narrow frameworks ignore the circular nature of farmworker migration and the historic use of repatriation, going back to the 1920s, in that migration cycle, as well as the active participation of the Mexican government in those schemes.<sup>466</sup> As a result, the narrative of repatriation has often been misrepresented as a type of forced expulsion or deportation scheme, the sole objective of which was to get Spanish sounding names off local relief rolls at a moment of fiscal uncertainty.<sup>467</sup> Scholars have recently reappraised this

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<sup>464</sup> Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 14.

<sup>465</sup> Gratton and Merchant, “Immigration, Repatriation, and Deportation,” 947; Andrés Jr., “Invisible Borders,” 6.

<sup>466</sup> Gratton and Merchant, “Immigration, Repatriation, and Deportation,” 949-951, 954; Andrés Jr., “Invisible Borders,” 5-6.

<sup>467</sup> For example, McWilliams asserts in *Factories in the Field*: “The burden of the Mexican in the winter months became oppressive, and thousands were ‘repatriated.’ Beginning in February, 1931, thousands of Mexicans, many of whom were citizens of the United States, were herded together by the authorities and shipped back to Mexico, to get them off the relief rolls.” McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 129; for “forced expulsion” of Mexicana/o migrants see Gratton and Merchant, “Immigration, Repatriation, and Deportation,” 944-954.

narrative as immigration data in Mexico seems to suggest that repatriation, more often than not, was mutually beneficial and frequently made migrant lives less precarious during the hard years of the Great Depression.<sup>468</sup> Due to recent reexaminations of U.S. Census data and *Departamento de Migración de Mexico* records, many historians now believe that approximately 219,732 Mexicana/o migrants and 135,720 Chicana/o Americans voluntarily utilized repatriation programs from 1930 to 1940 as part of their return strategy to Mexico—estimates that fall well below the commonly suggested 500,000 to one million—or to take advantage of assistance schemes organized by California civic groups (which preferred the cost of repatriation to the expense of relief), Catholic charitable organizations, *mutualistas*, and the Federal Government of Mexico.<sup>469</sup> Although *campesinos* commonly returned to California to work the following agricultural season, the data suggests that this trend declined after 1933 as the depression hardened; as growers became more resistive to labor's demands; as job competition with southwesterners increased; and colonization programs designed to lure *campesinos* back to Mexico, convinced many to settle as yeoman farmers in Baja California's Mexicali Valley.<sup>470</sup>

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<sup>468</sup> Gratton and Merchant, "Immigration, Repatriation, and Deportation," 944-954; Andrés Jr., "Invisible Borders," 5-21.

<sup>469</sup> Gratton and Merchant, "Immigration, Repatriation, and Deportation," 959; see also Andrés Jr., "Invisible Borders," 5-21.

<sup>470</sup> Gratton and Merchant, "Immigration, Repatriation, and Deportation," 949, 952-954; *mutualistas* were worker based mutual aid societies based throughout the Southwest. They provided a number of social, financial and often legal services for local *campesinos* and Chicano farmworkers. Andrés Jr., "Invisible Borders," 12; it is worth noting that colonization schemes in Mexicali during this period were made possible by the displacement of ethnically Chinese tenant farmers. Andrés Jr., "Invisible Borders," 8; Gratton and Merchant, "Immigration, Repatriation, and Deportation," 949; see also *Report*, 255.

Of course, the incentives for migrants were never purely economic, and, as one *mutualista* report suggested in 1934, the popularity of repatriation strategies amongst *campesinos* only revealed the hopelessness of their situation in Southern California.<sup>471</sup> Certainly, some repatriation was coercive, and civil rights violations surely occurred, but to what extent is difficult to assess.<sup>472</sup> And, although the data for economic incentives is compelling, it cannot ignore the social motivations for these schemes, nor the concerns voiced by the Mexican government over the treatment of its diaspora by growers, law enforcement, ad hoc vigilante groups such as the American Legion, and the Associated Farmers.<sup>473</sup>—all of which speaks to the state of ethnic Mexicana/o *nonpersonhood*, and the devaluation of farm labor as a class, in the colonial space. Furthermore, the economic incentive model—although useful for demonstrating the complexity of this episode and the agency of migrants themselves as they navigated the socioeconomic challenges of migrant life during this turbulent period—is itself narrow in scope, failing to fully account for what repatriation *is* at a sociological level. After all, repatriation is more than just a mode of removal, it is a means of colonial reproduction. It is a boundary mechanism designed to assign permanent alterity to specific subject groups while relaying the psychological message that exogenous labor is civically undesirable, and their presence in the colonial landscape will only be tolerated as long as it is economically advantageous to the dominant group.<sup>474</sup>

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<sup>471</sup> Report referenced in Andrés Jr., “Invisible Borders,” 10.

<sup>472</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 72-73; Gratton and Merchant, “Immigration, Repatriation, and Deportation,” 960.

<sup>473</sup> Gratton and Merchant, “Immigration, Repatriation, and Deportation,” 959; Andrés Jr., “Invisible Borders,” 15.

<sup>474</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 71-75; Mae M. Ngai, “The Architecture of Race in American



## The ‘Third Wave’

Where the Mexicana/o racialization that occurred in California’s agricultural valleys during the early 1930s was dominated by political currents, Filipino racialization within the colonial space followed a more common social trajectory.<sup>475</sup> As colonial subjects of the United States, migrants from the Philippines enjoyed the unique status of American “nationals”: a classification largely constructed to deny them the direct benefits of citizenship, yet one that—similar to their Mexicana/o counterparts by way of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo—also bestowed upon them a certain degree of legal whiteness.<sup>476</sup> This classification, much to the frustration of growers and labor contractors, however, granted agricultural-bound Filipinos in the colonial space two advantages over *campesinos*: the right to travel anywhere within the United States while also enjoying safeguards from deportation—a fact regularly emphasized by growers as a negative aspect of Filipino labor and one that exaggerated their perceived unruliness in the colonial space.<sup>477</sup> Lacking the traditional mechanisms of coercion typically employed to marginalize and control exogenous labor, Anglo Californians quickly turned to mechanisms of direct violence to rectify social transgressions, while restrictionist

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Immigration Law: A Reexamination of the Immigration Act of 1924,” *The Journal of American History* 86, no. 1 (January 1999): 67-92; see also Cruz, “There Will be No ‘One Big Union,’” 40.

<sup>475</sup> As mentioned in Chapter II, since immigration from the Philippines during this period was predominantly male, this study adopts the masculine form “Filipino” instead of the gender neutral “Filipina/o.”

<sup>476</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 98-100; Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 66; McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 131.

<sup>477</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 125; Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 66; Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 127.

politicians lobbied to nullify Filipino safeguards as nationals<sup>478</sup>—along with their legally white status.

Anglo-American prejudice against Filipinos predates their appearance on the West Coast. Again, similar to California's *Mestizaje*, the seeds of anti-Filipino discrimination were sown within the context of America's cultural and territorial conquests. As Mae Ngai details in *Impossible Subjects*, Philippine annexation—and, paradoxically, denial of statehood—was rationalized through an expansionist narrative that framed America's imperial project as a civilizing venture, bringing economic progress to a *savage*, backwards race.<sup>479</sup> In a bloody counterinsurgency often overlooked in American history, these negative characterizations of Filipinos as savages were reinforced by U.S. soldiers fighting Filipino rebels in the years after the Treaty of Paris in 1898.<sup>480</sup> During the engagement, Anglo American personnel commonly engaged in racial tropes that not only pegged insurgents as primitive tribesmen—reproducing an ancient dynamic of colonial conquest—but due to their dark complexion, Filipinos were often forced into America's ridged racial binary as 'niggers,' a "familiar epithet," as Ngai notes, "applicable to all uncivilized, dark-skinned peoples."<sup>481</sup> Stereotypes such as these were not limited to the theater of war, and they clouded Anglo-Californian assessments of migrant Filipinos as *non-whites*—or worse yet, indigenous savages, possibly even *Blacks*—long before their importation as replacement stoop-labor during the 1920s.<sup>482</sup>

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<sup>478</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 132; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 114-117.

<sup>479</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 97-99.

<sup>480</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 99-100.

<sup>481</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 110.

<sup>482</sup> Ngai notes that America's racism towards Filipinos "shocked a delegation of the Federalist

The history of Filipino labor in California followed the same general pattern of acceptance and rejection as other attempts with imported labor. Shuttled crop to crop as organized gang labor at harvest, these migrants were initially favored by growers and welcomed by rural communities as they were generally considered congenial and hardworking, and, since they were hired through contractors, needed little supervision or accommodation.<sup>483</sup> As with *campesinos*, McWilliams argues, they were favored by growers for another reason as well, “their isolation was exploited to beat down wage rates.”<sup>484</sup> Comprising only eight percent of farm labor in the state as of 1930, McWilliams’s statement at first glance seems to overestimate the total impact of Filipino labor as a market variable.<sup>485</sup> The point takes on saliency, however, when one examines the concentration of Filipino labor in the asparagus fields of the Sacramento River Delta and the lettuce growing regions of the San Joaquin Valley, where they comprised eighty

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Party of the Philippines,” to such an extent during a visit in 1906, that “Upon their return to the Philippines the Federalists reconsidered the party’s position for U.S. statehood and rewrote its platform for national independence...” Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 304n49; see also 103; Howard A. DeWitt, “The Watsonville Anti-Filipino Riot of 1930: A Case Study of the Great Depression and Ethnic Conflict in California,” *Southern California Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (Fall 1979): 292.

<sup>483</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 131; *Report*, 256.

<sup>484</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 131.

<sup>485</sup> According to 1930 census data, “Mexican” labor accounted for twenty-one percent of farm labor in the state. “Native White” labor was still the largest ethnoracial group of farm labor in the state at forty-three percent. It is worth noting, however, that these are statewide figures, and they are not representative of local conditions in certain regions of Southern California and other regions where intensive farming was the norm. In contrast, operators in labor intensive regions—primarily truck crops, melons, nuts, citrus, grapes and cotton—in the late 1920s reported that Mexicana/o labor comprised seventy to eighty percent of their employees. It is also worth noting that white labor in the industrial sectors was virtually nonexistent by the 1920s. Those typically employed as field bosses, ranch hands, or as cannery management were likely counted as agricultural workers in this data. Likewise, Mexicana/o workers were underrepresented as agricultural workers because many, especially in Los Angeles, worked seasonally in other, less stigmatized, professions such as construction and domestic service. *S. Hearings*, 19859, Table. 20; *S. Report*, 255-256; see also Walter Goldschmidt, *As You Sow* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1947), 18-19, 49; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 106.

percent of the work force by the end of the 1920s, shouldering out Mexicana/o and Japanese labor.<sup>486</sup> Set apart by trade, crop and position in the agricultural landscape, Filipino labor, as stoop labor, rarely competed directly with “Native White” labor throughout the 1920s<sup>487</sup>—a dynamic that would change as the depression deepened and southwestern labor became more prevalent in California agriculture during the 1930s.<sup>488</sup> Despite this fact, exclusionists such as V. S. McClatchy, commonly reproduced charges of a lower standard of living and unfair job competition—rhetoric originally used by anti-Chinese factions—to stoke anti-Filipino sentiment throughout the state’s rural communities, and characterize the Filipino presence nationally as a ‘Third Wave’ *Oriental* threat.<sup>489</sup>

The visibility of Filipino men in the colonial landscape was also an issue. Unlike labor from Mexico, Filipino migrants did not “disappear” into the colonial landscape (or vanish *from* it) the same way *campesinos* were imagined to; nor did they seclude themselves in ethnic enclaves like the Chinese, preferring instead to spend their hard-earned cash in the towns of California’s agricultural valleys and the communities along the coast.<sup>490</sup> Their legal standing as United States nationals imparted on them a status just above Mexicanas/os, but just below California’s *Other* “off-white” majority, the

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<sup>486</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 104.

<sup>487</sup> The term “Native White” is taken from census data, see *S. Hearings*, Table. 20; see also *S. Report*, 255-256; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 106; footnote 433.

<sup>488</sup> DeWitt argues that the Depression, and the increased competition for jobs, acted as a catalyst for organization vigilante groups and served as a model for future responses to *Unruly* labor, including “Oakies [*sic.*]” in California’s agricultural sectors. DeWitt, “The Watsonville Anti-Filipino Riot of 1930,” 291-302.

<sup>489</sup> DeWitt, “The Watsonville Anti-Filipino Riot of 1930,” 291, 292-293.

<sup>490</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 101-116.

*Chicana/o*.<sup>491</sup> Like *Chicanas/os*, Filipino status as U.S. nationals also conferred a certain degree of legal whiteness upon Filipino migrants—an uncomfortable reality for rural Californian’s, who preferred to view their labor as both *non-white* and foreign. Unlike their Latinx counterparts, however, Filipinos, lacking the benefit of well-established homogenous communities—segregated zones of refuge such as *barrios* and *colonias*, where they could recede (or be stored away) in the offseason—deviated from the by then well-established custom of farm labor to “fade away” at the end of harvest. As English speaking, “Americanized,” migrants of the United States, their status, as Filipino men saw it, entitled them to a more equitable social position in the political landscape.<sup>492</sup> Refusing to be tucked away like farm equipment in the offseason until summoned by Anglo-California growers when needed, Filipino migrants insisted on exercising their right to move about the West Coast—their continued presence in the material landscape confronting Anglo Californians with uncomfortable truths about the nation’s imperial realities and the state’s colonial present.

Most offensive, however, was the perceived propensity of Filipino men to associate with white women. Once again, industry had imported a subject group population consisting primarily of young, single, male laborers; a dynamic that virtually guaranteed conflict along social lines in California’s rural communities as Filipino men associating with white women transgressed locally constructed boundaries of race, class, and morality.<sup>493</sup> It was charged, especially in areas with high concentrations of Filipino

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<sup>491</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 101-109; Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 66.

<sup>492</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 213-215; DeWitt, “The Watsonville Anti-Filipino Riot of 1930,” 293-295.

<sup>493</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 109-116; Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 67; Cruz, “There Will be No ‘One Big Union’,” 40; DeWitt, “The Watsonville Anti-Filipino Riot of 1930,” 291-302.

farmworkers, that these men spent all their money on nice clothes and at taxi dance halls—what Ngai refers to as “the physical and metaphorical site for Filipinos’ sudden visibility as a social and sexual menace to white society.”<sup>494</sup> By the mid-1920s, California’s social landscape directly reflected the hierarchy of its agricultural landscape. With the virtual disappearance of “Native Whites” from the fields, farm labor in California over the course of industrial expansion in agriculture had solidified into a socially inferior caste defined just as much by perceived racial difference as by material function.<sup>495</sup> Viewed in this light, the social transgressions inherent to the dance halls, both real and imagined, encompassed dimensions of class as well as race. Similarly, although narratives framing Filipinos as sexually aggressive paralleled Jim Crow narratives commonly attributed to *Black* men in the American South, these characterizations were not strictly racial in the common sense, but instead reflected dominant class desires to differentiate between an *us* and a *them*, in order to naturalize innate differences in the colonial landscape, and more importantly, justify the location of people in it.

The response to the Filipino threat at the local level was one that Anglo Californians had become intimately familiar with over their eight decades of occupation: vigilante violence. Starting in the late 1920s, race riots became fairly common occurrences in locations with high concentrations of Filipino migrants—so much so that cities such as San Francisco and El Centro instructed law enforcement to arrest any Filipinos seen accompanying white women.<sup>496</sup> From the Filipino perspective, their

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<sup>494</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 110; see also Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 67; DeWitt, “The Watsonville Anti-Filipino Riot of 1930,” 294, 296, 299.

<sup>495</sup> The term “Native White” is taken from census data presented in *S. Hearings*, Table. 20.

<sup>496</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 114; DeWitt, “The Watsonville Anti-Filipino Riot of 1930,” 291-

sufficient “Americanization” and special position as U.S. nationals, and the whiteness that status inferred, provided them an elevated position in the social hierarchy in reference to other unassimilated immigrant subject groups—a fact that they felt warranted their courting of white and *Latina* women.<sup>497</sup> Nevertheless, conflicts arose, and with them reports of fights, mob violence, night raids on migrant camps, the burning of property owned by growers who employed Filipinos, and shootings.<sup>498</sup> In 1933, the California Legislature, finding the threat of ‘race-mixing’ with Filipinos abhorrent, also responded to this societal danger, amending the state’s anti-miscegenation law, which already prohibited “All marriages of white persons with negros, Mongolians, or mulattoes,” to include “members of the Malay race ”—of which, according to the dominant racial taxonomy of the day, Filipinos presumably *belonged*.<sup>499</sup>

Restrictionists capitalized on this perceived unruliness of Filipinos in California’s colonial landscape, seizing the opportunity to once again direct national policy by advancing a regional interest as a national problem. After failing twice to enact exclusionary measures that would have reclassified Filipino migrants as aliens, thus relieving them of their special status as American nationals, U.S. Senator Hiram Johnson

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302; McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 137-141.

<sup>497</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 115; DeWitt, “The Watsonville Anti-Filipino Riot of 1930,” 294-295.

<sup>498</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 114-115; DeWitt, “The Watsonville Anti-Filipino Riot of 1930,” 294-300; McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 137-141.

<sup>499</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 115; Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 68; California State Legislature, “An Act to Amend Section 60 of the Civil Code, Relating to Illegal and Void Marriages,” *The Statutes of California Passed at the Fifteenth Session of the Legislature* (Sacramento: State Printing Office, 1933), 561.  
[https://clerk.assembly.ca.gov/sites/clerk.assembly.ca.gov/files/archive/Statutes/1933/33Vol1\\_Chapters.pdf#page=2](https://clerk.assembly.ca.gov/sites/clerk.assembly.ca.gov/files/archive/Statutes/1933/33Vol1_Chapters.pdf#page=2); see also *Roldan v. Los Angeles County*, 129 Cal. App. 267, 18 P.2d 706 (Cal. Ct. App. 1933).  
<https://casetext.com/case/roldan-v-los-angeles-county>.

and Congressman Richard Welch, both with backing from V. S. McClatchy and the California Joint Immigration Committee, embraced the Philippine independence movement.<sup>500</sup> “Exclusionists were not, of course, motivated by a desire for freedom for the Philippines,” Mae Ngai criticizes in *Impossible Subjects*, “rather, they sought to free the United States of the Philippines and, with it, the Filipino problem.”<sup>501</sup> On March 24, 1934, Congress passed the Philippine Independence Act, otherwise known as the Tydings-McDuffie Act. Section 10 of the act specified that after ten years of commonwealth status, the Philippines would be granted full nationhood.<sup>502</sup> Filipino nationals residing within the United States, however, became aliens, subject to deportation and exclusion, literally overnight: “Effective upon the acceptance of this Act . . . all other laws of the United States relating to the immigration, exclusion, or expulsion of aliens, citizens of the Philippine Islands which are not citizens of the United States shall be considered as if they were aliens.”<sup>503</sup> Although the act did not exclude Filipino immigration entirely, it was restricted to a mere fifty migrants per annum, half the minimum allotted to other eligible nationalities by Johnson-Reed’s quota scheme<sup>504</sup>—“a gratuitous gesture meant to degrade Filipinos to a status something short of nationhood,”

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<sup>500</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 116-117; McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 132; DeWitt, “The Watsonville Anti-Filipino Riot of 1930,” 293.

<sup>501</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 117.

<sup>502</sup> Seventy-Third Congress, “An Act to Provide for the Complete Independence of the Philippine Islands, to Provide for the Adoption of a Constitution and a form of Government for the Philippine Islands, and for Other Purposes,” *The Statutes at Large of the United States America* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1934), 456, 463 (hereafter cited as *Tydings-McDuffie*). <https://govtrackus.s3.amazonaws.com/legislink/pdf/stat/48/STATUTE-48-Pg456.pdf>.

<sup>503</sup> *Tydings-McDuffie*, 462.

<sup>504</sup> *Tydings-McDuffie*, 462, Sec 8. a.



writes Ngai, “their American tutelage placing them just barely above the fully excludible Asiatic races.”<sup>505</sup> Furthermore, the law resolved a long-running grievance on the part of California growers regarding the inability of officials to deport Filipino migrants—a dynamic that, as they saw it, threatened their ability to police the local landscape. Filipino alien status under Tydings-McDuffie, however, made these migrants subject to deportation for a number of offences, including acts considered “revolutionary,” such as those provided for in California’s criminal syndicalism statute—a charge increasingly utilized by state prosecutors on behalf of growers and the Associated Farmers during the 1930s, as these groups reframed farm labor’s collective action, and perceived unruliness, as a communist threat.<sup>506</sup>

Tydings-McDuffie paved the way for the Welsh Act the following year, which provided a federally guided repatriation program for Filipinos wishing to return to the Philippines.<sup>507</sup> Unlike the repatriation schemes deployed in Southern California, which were organized by a coalition of public and private entities and allowed Mexicana/o workers to return to the United States legally (provided they paid a head tax), Congressman Welsh ensured that his act functioned as an exclusionary measure,

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<sup>505</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 119-120.

<sup>506</sup> See testimony of Pelham D. Glassford, *S. Hearings*, 20148-20152; Exhibit 8916, *S. Hearings*, 20304; Olmsted, *Right Out of California*, 127-128, 193; Pichardo Almanzar and Kulik, *American Fascism and the New Deal*, 81, 101, 107-113; McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 230-239; highlighting the intersects of class, nationality and race, Mitchell observes that the more tenacious Filipino militancy was believed to be, “growers more clearly associated “Americanism” with “white” . . .” Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 133.

<sup>507</sup> Seventy-Fourth Congress, “An Act to Provide Means by which Certain Filipinos can Emigrate from the United States,” *The Statutes at Large of the United States America* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1935), 478-479 (hereafter cited as *Welsh Act*). <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/ll/lsl/lsl-c74/lsl-c74.pdf>; see also Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 121; McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 132.

stipulating that “no Filipino who receives the benefits of the act [free transportation to Manila] shall be entitled to return to the continental United States except as a quota immigrant . . .”<sup>508</sup> Few Filipino migrants utilized the program, however, many choosing to stay in California for a variety of reasons<sup>509</sup>—pride, no doubt, being a principal factor.

Nevertheless, these laws achieved the twin goals of securing the colonial space from the perceived unruliness of Filipino labor and reducing its visibility in the colonial landscape. Although many Filipino migrants resisted and built fierce reputations as unionists, their success during this period was generally confined to the Salinas and Imperial Valleys—a dynamic that Don Mitchell charges is partly responsible for “the common assumption that before the rise of the United Farmworkers in the 1960s farmworker militancy was the exclusive purview of white workers.”<sup>510</sup> The reality is, after the passage of these two laws and the successful prosecution of Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union (CAWIU) leadership under California’s criminal syndicalism law in 1935—and in the light of a new threat, as Californians became increasingly preoccupied with migration from the Western South—the visibility of Filipino labor, and the offensiveness of their normative transgressions, faded to the peripheries of California’s political and physical landscapes; where they remained—political *nonpersons*, silent and unnoticed—until spurred to become visible once more a generation later under the leadership of famed union organizer Larry Itliong and his Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC).

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<sup>508</sup> *Welsh Act*, 479, Sec. 4; see also Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 121, 125.

<sup>509</sup> According to Ngai, “From the first sailing in April 1936 to the last in July 1941, a total of 2,064 Filipino nationals returned to the Philippines.” Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 122.

<sup>510</sup> Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 134.

## Setting the Stage

A complete history of racial development in California and its connections with regional colonial arrangements of power, is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this study. Such an undertaking would, no doubt, fill several volumes—the subject itself possibly warranting its own subfield of study. Nonetheless, this chapter represents an attempt to plot the development of the state’s caste system as a replicative mechanism of colonial power. Such a development was, by no means, a forgone conclusion, but instead represents the culmination of ever-tightening sociopolitical measures designed to police the colonial space against the threat of outsiders, foreigners, *Others*—against those in the colonial landscape perceived as *Unruly*. This dynamic, as the next chapter demonstrates, set the stage for the social drama that unfolded in California during the New Deal era, as the presence of southwesterners in the colonial landscape<sup>511</sup>—performing material functions traditionally reserved for *non-white*, foreign, labor—challenged regional perception of racial normativity.

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<sup>511</sup> Cultural Anthropologist Victor Turner defines “social dramas” as “units of aharmonic or disharmonic social processes, arising in conflict situations.” The social drama comprised four phases: a “*breach*” phase, in which societal norms are challenged; a “*crises*” phase, in which the breach widens and conflict becomes inevitable; a “*redressive action*” phase, in which social and legal mechanisms may be employed to resolve the crises or “to legitimate other modes of resolution; and, the final phase, which consists of the “*reintegration* of the disturbed social group, or the social recognition and legitimation of irreparable schism between the contesting parties.” Victor Turner, *Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986), 74-75; Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982), 70-71; see also Sackman, *Orange Empire*, 229.

## Chapter V.

### Okie otherness in the New Deal Era

As this study's hypothesis assumes that southwesterner otherness and *Okie* construction resulted from the same technological process of racialization traditionally deployed within the colonial space to manage colonized *Alterities* in the state's race-dependent landscape, it follows, then, that the most suitable approach for analyzing southwesterner racialization during this period is the same method employed in Chapter IV to appraise previous episodes of racialization in the state. That is, by first identifying potential sights of normative transgressions and examining the process by which *Okies* were marked-out as *Unruly* threats to the dominant collective. Then, by identifying methods employed within the colonial space to naturalize *Okie* otherness. And, finally, identifying the repertoire of legal and extra-legal mechanisms of juridico-political violence deployed in the colonial space to secure the *civis*. Set to this task, this chapter employs a colonial modernity framework that recognizes the continuity of California's colonial arrangements of power and the technological utility of race in maintaining the regional hierarchies of worth that governed its spaces. Utilizing Falguni A. Sheth's three technological dimensions of race, each of the following sections focuses on a single dimension of this process in the southwestern migrant context.

For nearly two decades before the Great Depression, southwestern migrants had been traveling to California as seasonal cotton pickers. And, although prior to the Great Depression they never comprised a large portion of the industrialized agricultural workforce, their presence in the agricultural landscape was largely tolerated, if not

welcomed, by the rural establishment.<sup>512</sup> Their treatment in valley communities during the 1930s, and the increased hostility directed towards domestic migrants throughout the decade, suggests, then, that they were increasingly perceived by residents—or the people who *belong* in California—as violating the normative boundaries responsible for governing the colonial space; a fact that, in the light of the Great Depression and New Deal, admittedly, lends credence to the histories of exception addressed in this study’s Introduction. However, as Sheth reminds us, transgressions interpreted as threats most often represent intangible dangers or group association with a traumatic event, and work in conjunction with some perceived sociopolitical crisis or disruption to an established way of life.<sup>513</sup> As the record indicates, California growers commonly understood New Deal initiatives as affronts to regional autonomy, and within local discourses southwestern migrants were often associated with, or blamed for, their application in the state.<sup>514</sup> This chapter’s first section, “Marking-Out Southwestern *Unruliness*,” examines this dynamic in California’s agricultural valleys. It suggests that southwesterner unruliness was shaped by dominant-class convictions that New Deal initiatives—designed to aid domestic migrant adjustment—weakened the regional substantive sovereignty that sustained their mastery over the postcolonial landscape.

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<sup>512</sup> See Combs, digital access, California Odyssey Project; *S. Hearings*, 19859, Table. 20; *Report*, 255-256; Taylor and Lange, “Again the Covered Wagon,” 349; Goldschmidt, *As You Sow*, 19.

<sup>513</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 26-28, 49-50.

<sup>514</sup> See speech by Roy M. Pike before the Commonwealth Club of California, in San Francisco, December 12, 1935, printed in Roy M. Pike, “The Point of View of The Large Farmer,” *The Commonwealth* 12, no. 14 (April 7, 1936): 160-166; letter from Roy M. Pike, December 11, 1935. Exhibit 11583, *S. Hearings*, 25169-25170; Pichardo Almanzar and Kulik, *American Fascism and the New Deal*, 9-10; Olmsted, *Right out of California*, 3-4, 8-9.

The second section, “*White Others: Naturalizing Okie Differentiation*,” utilizes Sheth’s second technological dimension of race to explore some of the strategies utilized in California to naturalize domestic migrants as *White Others*—as *Okies*—within the rural imagination. As discussed in Chapter III, this dimension of race obscures the initial process of *Unruly* identification via seemingly objective, yet culturally specific, boundary mechanisms, forcing members of the dominant class to think of *Others*, and their normative deviations, in racial terms as innate characteristics—“dirty,” “ignorant,” “backwards,” “lazy,” “disease ridden,” “immoral,” “criminal”—a process that ultimately naturalizes connections between constructed racial signifiers and subject group *Alterity*. What is naturalized through this process, however, are signifiers themselves—which, as Sheth reminds us, may represent any perceived normative deviation.<sup>515</sup> Keeping with the socio-juridical framework employed in Chapter IV, this section illustrates this process via the theoretical lenses of whiteness and landscape. Exploring the moniker *Okie* as a category of *White otherness*, it examines four key tropes commonly employed in the colonial space—lazy, stupid, dirty, and immoral—to evaluate perceived southwesterner deviation from the regional constructs of whiteness in California’s postcolonial landscape.

The final section, “Reclaiming the Postcolonial Landscape: Southwestern Migrant *Nonpersonhood* and the Reproduction of Colonial Arrangements of Power,” employs Sheth’s Violence of Law framework to explore how *Okie nonpersonhood* in California’s postcolonial space was shaped by attempts to limit southwestern migrants’ full civic consideration under the law during the latter half of the 1930s and early 1940s.

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<sup>515</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 28-29, 49-50.

Ultimately, through an examination of the juridical mechanisms of violence deployed by California's regional sovereign authority during this period to secure the *civis* against the destitute "hordes," this section illustrates the utility of law in rendering the sociopolitical *nonpersonhood* required to maintain the replicative capacities of regionally constructed colonial arrangements of power<sup>516</sup>—a dynamic that further legitimized southwestern otherness within the postcolonial space and perpetuated their vulnerability as subjects deemed fundamentally unworthy of the rights and privileges of full citizenship.

#### A Note on Extra-Juridical Forms of Violence

There is no doubt that extra-legal forms of direct violence and vigilante terror were utilized by California's rural establishment to police the agricultural landscape. As the decade progressed and the Associated Farmers expanded its front on communism to include all forms of labor organization, such tactics became vital mechanisms in managing the *Unruly*.<sup>517</sup> As demonstrated in Chapter IV, vigilante terror was California's extra-legal *modus operandi* for managing *Unruly* threats within the colonial space. The *Okie* case was no different. Vigilante violence served a very specific psychological function in California's postcolonial space: the reification of power through migrant vulnerability. In fact, by the late 1930s, vigilante terror and threats of lynching in the rural valleys had become so disruptive that local sheriffs, such as John A. Miller of

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<sup>516</sup> California State Department of Public Health, "Migration and Communicable Diseases," *Weekly Bulletin* 17, no. 21 (July 18, 1938), 82.

<sup>517</sup> Pichardo Almanzar and Kulik, *American Fascism and the New Deal*, 107-147.

Contra Costa County, conveniently used the pretext of saving lives to justify the preemptive arrests of potential agitators.<sup>518</sup>

Despite this fact, a detailed review of vigilantism lays beyond the scope of this study and is not warranted here, and therefore, will not be a major focus in this chapter. Vigilante terror, like all terrorism, is a vital characteristic of the politics of colonial modernity.<sup>519</sup> It is designed to compel the *Other* through fear and intimidation to comply with some normative dictate via extra-judicial means—a dynamic which implies a previous process of subject group devaluation. In a sense, extra-legal forms of violence are post-racialization phenomena, meant to maintain the vulnerability, powerlessness, and worthlessness garnered by juridico-political *nonpersonhood* through a process of racialization. Native Americans, for example, were subjected to vigilante terror on account of a juridico-political *nonpersonhood* constructed over centuries of cohabitation with Anglo Americans, and the Chinese experience in which direct forms of extra-judicial violence largely resulted from a *nonpersonhood* cemented in *People v. Hall*. In both cases, their vulnerability to indiscriminate murder, robbery, and open hostility resulted from a racialization process terminated by legal abandonment.<sup>520</sup> The same process is apparent in the *Okie* case.

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<sup>518</sup> See testimony of Sheriff John A. Miller, Monday, December 18· 1939, in *S. Hearings*, 18034.

<sup>519</sup> According to Jelly-Schapiro in *Security and Terror*, “As the ongoing history of Euro-American imperialism makes especially plain . . . terror is a central technology of the mature and not merely nascent form of the liberal state. Terror is also, crucially, one basic *condition* for the birth of political modernity. The emancipation of the bourgeoisie in Europe was enabled by the terrors of primitive accumulation—the extraction of resources and exploitation of slave labor in the New World. Jelly-Schapiro, *Security and Terror*, 45.

<sup>520</sup> Daniels and Kitano, *American Racism*, 38.



This is not to say that episodes of mob violence, such as the one that brought McWilliams to Madera in the summer of 1939, are irrelevant. They are simply not necessary to assess the hypothesis that southwestern migrant subalternity resulted from the same technological process of racialization traditionally deployed within the colonial space to manage colonized *Alterities*. The technological process of racialization, as demonstrated thus far, is juridico-political. The normalization of mob violence in a society, on the other hand, is social—resulting from the perceived failures of the traditional liberal order to protect the interests of the dominant class. For these reasons, extra-judicial forms of violence will not be specifically covered in this chapter.

#### Marking-Out Southwesterner *Unruliness*

Unfortunately, due to the sociopolitical conditions of the Great Depression and the New Deal, the initial source of southwestern migrant unruliness—transgressions so offensive to the established political order that it justifies constructing *Okies* as permanent *Alterities* within the postcolonial space—is often obscured by a variety of smaller, more tangible transgressions. The popular vernacular provides clues but is also misleading. For instance, in a manner reminiscent of earlier periods of racialization, newspapers—traditionally controlled by conservatives like William Randolph Hearst and V. S. McClatchy—habitually used sensational language to characterize migrants as an “army” of “criminals,” “vagrants and hobos,” and “disease-carrying ne’er-do-wells,” and typically applauded state and local law enforcement efforts to stop this “invasion.”<sup>521</sup>

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<sup>521</sup> Goldschmidt, *As You Sow*, 73; Pichardo Almanzar and Kulik, *American Fascism and the New Deal*, 113; see also “Police Take Up Duty On State Lines,” *Los Angeles Times* (February 4, 1936): 1, 2; “City Police Patrol Halt 1000 at State’s Borders: Anti-Vagrant Drive Ruled Valid as Epic Councilman Asks End; Round Nets 308 Felons,” *Los Angeles Times* (February 4, 1936): 1, 3.

County health officials warned of spreading “suburban slums,” framing them as “insistent invitations to epidemics of communicable diseases which might spread to other areas.”<sup>522</sup> Growers, routinely backed by the Associated Farmers and its corresponding organization, Southern Californians, Inc., tailored anticommunist propaganda designed to transform collective bargaining campaigns, strikes, and marches into everyday attacks on an American way of life.<sup>523</sup> And, residents commonly reproduced by then cliché working-class republican fears regarding unfair job competition and degrading living standards.<sup>524</sup> No doubt, these discourses contributed to southwesterner vulnerability and helped shape local perceptions of migrant otherness within the colonial space. But such discourses are universally symptomatic of refugee scenarios and hardly challenge an established political order, and therefore, as the next section theorizes, are best understood as reflecting dominant class anxieties over a changing political landscape and as rationalizations for the discontinuity of migrants with the regional dictates of whiteness.

The colonial modernity model advocated by this study, on the other hand, provides a theoretical framework particularly suited for detecting transgressions severe enough to initiate a process of racialization. Ostensibly, southwestern migrants, being intimately connected to the political and economic realities of the Great Depression and the New Deal, meet both of Sheth’s premises for identifying *Unruly* elements in the

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<sup>522</sup> Kern County, Sanitary Division, “Survey of Kern County Migratory Labor Problem: Supplementary Report as of July 1, 1939”: 9.

<sup>523</sup> Olmsted, *Right out of California*, 128; see also *S. Report*, 771-772, 929-948, 1288-1297, 1375-1384.

<sup>524</sup> See survey responses in Lillian Creisler, “Little Oklahoma: A Study of the Social and Economic Adjustment of Refugees in the Beard Tract, Modesto, Stanislaus County, California,” Master’s Thesis (Berkeley: University of California, 1940), 90-94.

polity: first, that *Unruly* subjects represent some intangible danger *or* are likely associated with a traumatic event; and, second, they are also believed to have some association with a sociopolitical crisis *or* disruption to an established way of life.<sup>525</sup> Unfortunately, if this appraisal is accepted, the mere presence of southwestern migrants within the colonial space—as economic refugees dispossessed by years of depression and, more acutely, New Deal policies by way of the Agriculture Adjustment Administration’s poorly implemented crop-reduction program<sup>526</sup>—qualifies their *Unruly* categorization, as both the Great Depression and the New Deal undoubtedly qualify as traumatic events and sociopolitical crises.

However, as this study employs a colonial modernity framework that assumes sovereign authority is defined by its replicative capacity, it proposes a corollary to Sheth’s first technological dimension of race. It contends that to truly warrant *Unruly* categorization, threats (both real and imagined) must not only meet the basic criteria presented above but must also be believed to constitute some fundamental danger to the regenerative capacity of regional arrangements of power. That is, *Unruly* classification—and the initiation of a racialization process—is dependent upon the austerity of interpreted threats within the colonial space and general dominant class anxieties regarding an apparent challenge to the natural order. This analysis, therefore, understands *Unruly* subject groups in the colonial modernity contexts as those which satisfy *both* conditions of Sheth’s first *and* second premise: subject groups must represent some

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<sup>525</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 26-28, 49-50.

<sup>526</sup> Testimony of Governor Leon C. Phillips, of Oklahoma, in *Tolan Hearings*, 2033-2035; Gregory, *American Exodus*, 11-12; Stein, *California and the Dust Bowl Migration*, 6-9.

intangible danger *and* be associated with a traumatic event; they must also be associated with a sociopolitical crisis *and* a disruption to an established way of life. The historical record indicates that federal and state relief schemes—as well as domestic migrants’ need for, and supposed abuse of, relief—satisfy these criteria.

Relief is an umbrella term for a number of forms of aid including food stamps, supplies, fuel, county hospital services, Work Progress Administration (WPA) projects, and federally managed migrant camps, as well as general relief in the form of direct financial assistance—a practice offensive to rural Californians and southwesterners alike.<sup>527</sup> At the popular level, relief was detested by rural Californians because it was perceived (framed) as a type of “liberal cash dole.”<sup>528</sup> However, when the discourses around relief are examined in more detail, at their most fundamental level, they are less about financial burden and more about control of space and people. From the perspective of California’s rural establishment, it was one thing to pay migrants not to work, but it was quite another to pay them so that they do not *have to* work. It may have been necessary, for instance, to provide aid to farm labor from time to time between harvests in order to maintain a large body of readily available farm labor in the state; but it was quite another matter altogether for liberal metropolitans in Washington with “no sympathy or actual experience with the employers’ needs and responsibilities”—as one large farmer put it—and no concept of how things work in California, to offer a wide range of aid and financial assistance to families regardless of the local dictates of the

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<sup>527</sup> For popular migrant attitudes towards relief, see interviews of Ethel Belezzuoli; Terry Clipper; Robert Dinwiddie; Lillie May; and Dorothy Rose, digital access, California Odyssey Project; Taylor and Lange, “Again the Covered Wagon,” 349.

<sup>528</sup> Alice Richard, “California’s Adult Children,” *Country Gentlemen* (February 1940): 34-35.

rural economy.<sup>529</sup> Likewise, in an environment where industrial farmers historically exercised mastery over the colonial landscape and its people, Farm Security Administration camps operating beyond the legal and extra-legal reach of growers posed direct material threats to a regional sense of substantive sovereignty.<sup>530</sup> In this sense, relief itself—as a practice and an institution designed to ameliorate the lives of agricultural labor in a super-exploitative colonial space—should be regarded as the transgressive element. This section, therefore, suggests that migrant unruliness was shaped by analogy: through their imagined connection to the Franklin D. Roosevelt Administration by way of New Deal initiatives aimed at limiting grower leverage over a traditionally powerless caste in the colonial space—initiatives that directly challenged grower collective political hegemony within the postcolonial landscape.

#### Locating Southwestern Migrant Transgressiveness

On September 20, 1940, Oklahoma Governor Leon C. Phillips, in his testimony before the Tolan Committee—a legislative select committee chaired by Congressman John H. Tolan of California tasked with investigating the circumstances of domestic interstate migration during the Great Depression—addressed the elephant in the room. After briefly acknowledging common tropes employed by Californians to characterize Oklahoman migrants as “naturally shiftless” loafers, who only moved to the state to receive relief in the way of “money, food and clothing,” Phillips levied a criticism of the

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<sup>529</sup> Pike, “The Point of View of The Large Farmer,” 165; “I Wonder Where We Can Go Now,” *Fortune* (April 19, 1939): 119.

<sup>530</sup> Pike, “The Point of View of The Large Farmer,” 165; Exhibit 11583, *S. Hearings*, 25169-25170.

New Deal that not only betrayed the paradoxes of crop-reduction schemes, but also the hypocrisy of large farmers on their own type of “liberal cash dole.” “Reduced acreages and payments for idle land has tended to increase owner-farming and mechanical farming,” Phillips insists, “thus releasing a large number of tenant farmers in all sections of the state. In addition, Government subsidies and the manner of the administration of this program has made large-scale farming profitable and has likewise resulted in wholesale elimination of tenant farmers.”<sup>531</sup> The hypocrisy that Phillips addresses was just as palpable in California, if not more so. For unlike Oklahoman farmers, California’s growers benefited from both the subsidies of the Agriculture Adjustment Administration and the labor surplus that the administration’s policies generated.

The surplus labor issue gained national attention in 1939 when Steinbeck accused growers of deliberately distributing misleading handbills throughout the greater Western South, advertising the ‘need [for] folks to pick fruit,’ in *The Grapes of Wrath*. In a scene from Chapter 16, the Joads, stranded at a campground in North Texas somewhere along Route 66, met a stranger ‘comin’ back’ from California, ‘going back [to Oklahoma] to starve.’ The “ragged man” suggests to the Joads that they do the same, and that the “han’bill” that informed their decision to relocate was a ploy to maintain a pool of cheap labor. “‘Look,’ said the man. ‘It don’t make no sense. This fella wants eight hundred men. So he prints up five thousand of them things an’ maybe twenty thousan’ people sees ’em. An’ maybe two-three thousan’ folks gets movin’ account a this here han’bill. Folks that’s crazy with worry.’”<sup>532</sup> It is clear from migrant testimonies that labor contractors

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<sup>531</sup> Phillips, *Tolan Hearings*, 2034.

<sup>532</sup> Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 189.

did in fact issue handbills in the states of the Western South in the early years of the great westward migration that began in 1935, most likely to assuage grower fears of labor shortages brought on by Mexicana/o and Filipino repatriation schemes.<sup>533</sup> Describing his personal experience with fake handbills, Harris Wallace, a migrant from Oklahoma interviewed by James Bright Wilson for his 1942 study on migrant attitudes, states: ‘There was some advertisin’ in Oklahoma fer workers in Arizona. That didn’t cause me to pull up and leave but it encouraged me . . . . As we hit the port of entry on the Arizona line, we got the handbills advertising’ fer workers in California. They was just exactly like the ones we saw in Oklahoma askin’ fer workers to come to Arizona.’<sup>534</sup> Finding the handbills to be fakes, Wallace reiterates a common accusation (one taken up by Steinbeck as well) leveled at the AF and its allies at the state’s Chamber of Commerce: ‘I ain’t positive who does that [prints and distributes fake handbills], some say the Chamber of Commerce does it and are encouraged by the Associated Farmers. I don’t know what their motives are unless it would be to git wages down.’<sup>535</sup>

Despite evidence to the contrary, the handbill narrative has been criticized by California growers and scholars alike as an intentionally deceptive myth perpetuated by *The Grapes of Wrath*, but they miss Steinbeck’s point entirely.<sup>536</sup> The Associated

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<sup>533</sup> Stein, *California and the Dust Bowl Migration*, 19-23; see statements of John Beaven and Harrison Wallace in Wilson, “Social Attitudes of Certain Migratory Agricultural Workers in Kern County, California,” 98-100.

<sup>534</sup> Wallace, in Wilson, “Social Attitudes of Certain Migratory Agricultural Workers in Kern County, California,” 99-100.

<sup>535</sup> Wallace, in Wilson, “Social Attitudes of Certain Migratory Agricultural Workers in Kern County, California,” 100.

<sup>536</sup> Stein, *California and the Dust Bowl Migration*, 19-21.

Farmers, as it claims may not have actively recruited labor in the greater Western South, but they did benefit from a diverse array of misinformation in the form of newspaper articles, radio ads, second-hand accounts, letters from family and friends, even the rogue issuance of handbills.<sup>537</sup> Nonetheless, in its final report to the United States Senate in 1942 the La Follette Committee—a congressional subcommittee, led by Wisconsin senator Robert M. La Follette to investigate civil rights violations in industrial settings—ostensibly confirms the criticism of Steinbeck on this point, finding that, at worst, grower organizations were negligent, failing to act when it became apparent that more migrants were entering the state than were required to satisfy the demand for labor or could reasonably be accommodated by Farm Placement Services.<sup>538</sup>

Steinbeck's larger point, however, was that growers historically benefitted from practices perpetuating the powerlessness of its workers, and an oversupply of unregulated farm labor in California reflected the undaunted reliance on such tactics as well as their employment against fellow Americans. The ragged man from the camp explains:

You'll be a-campin' by a ditch, you an' fifty other famblies. An' he'll [the grower or labor contractor that issued the handbill] come in. He'll look in your tent an' see if you got anything lef' to eat. An' if you got nothin', he says, "Wanna job?" An' you'll say, "I sure do, mister. I'll sure thank you for a chance to do some work." An' he'll say, "I can use you." An' you'll say, "When do I start?" An' he'll tell you where to go, an' what time, an' then he'll go on. Maybe he needs two hunderd men, so he talks to five hunderd, an' they tell other folks, an' when you get to the place, they's a thousan' men. This here fella says, "I'm payin' twenty cents an hour." An' maybe half a the men walk off. But they's still five hunderd that's so goddamn hungry they'll work for nothin' but biscuits. Well, this here

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<sup>537</sup> Stein, *California and the Dust Bowl Migration*, 19; in his study of the social attitudes of migrant labor, Wilson states that "Seventeen of the [sixty] persons interviewed discussed letters about relief as a factor which influenced them or other migrants to come to California. Wilson, "Social Attitudes of Certain Migratory Agricultural Workers in Kern County, California," 104, see statement of John Beaven, 98-99.

<sup>538</sup> *S. Report*, 322; Stein, *California and the Dust Bowl Migration*, 21.



fella's got a contract to pick them peaches or—chop that cotton. You see now? The more fellas he can get, an' the hungrier, less he's gonna pay.<sup>539</sup>

On this point La Follett's committee agreed with Steinbeck's appraisal, finding that California's excessive and unregulated supply of labor “has resulted in widespread abuse of labor.” Furthermore, it concluded that:

the methods of unregulated labor recruiting employed in California and Arizona have resulted in (1) bringing about an excessive mobility of labor, (2) concentrating oversupplies of labor in given places at different times in the year, which has caused unemployment, employment of shortened duration, and lower earnings, and (3) in general, a spreading of employment and earnings thinly over many laborers. Unregulated labor recruiting in a labor market in which there exists a large mobile reserve of labor constantly seeking work is one of the basic conditions responsible for the depression of living and working conditions.<sup>540</sup>

The surplus labor issue reveals one of the great paradoxes of California's agriculture: it is believed that in order to remain profitable labor is required in over abundance, and a reserve of unemployed must be maintained for industrial scale operations to function optimally.<sup>541</sup> Yet, growers despised these features of the system in the offseason, framing them as unwanted burdens. In his testimony before the La Follett Committee in San Francisco on December 6, 1939, California Governor Culbert Olson—in a statement drafted for the governor by Carey McWilliams<sup>542</sup>—describes the benefits of such a system to agricultural interest and the role surplus labor plays in encouraging farmworker migration:

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<sup>539</sup> Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 189-190.

<sup>540</sup> *S. Report*, 322.

<sup>541</sup> Testimony of California Governor Culbert Olson, *S. Hearings*, 17256.

<sup>542</sup> Sackman, *Orange Empire*, 283.

The large grower interest in the State—the interest that employ the bulk of migratory farm labor—have always insisted that a pool of unemployed labor was an essential to the continuance of their large-scale operations in order to show profit . . . it is the very nature of these farming operations that give rise to . . . social problems. The long insistence upon the creation of a pool or reserve of unemployed labor is understandable from the point of view of those who conduct these large-scale operations. In the first place the pool, to meet their requirements, must necessarily be of unemployed labor, for the obvious reason that workers do not migrate because they desire to. The hazards of migration and the expense and insecurity involved are such that it is only those whose desperation is greatest who will migrate, and consequently, to secure migratory workers in sufficient number to conduct these large-scale operations it is imperative from the point of view these interests to create a large, relative oversupply of unemployed labor, so that the pool thus created will have the necessary element of mobility . . . The pool or reserve of labor must be of large proportions in order that wage rates can be kept at a minimum, to enable rapid replacement in a type of labor in which there is a great turnover; and to force workers to accept working conditions and wage rates that would not otherwise be acceptable.<sup>543</sup>

Prior to the great southwestern migration, the relief burden in rural communities was minimal as many farm labors being ineligible for citizenship were also ineligible for county relief, and those who were eligible typically wintered in the larger cities of the West Coast where social services were available in times of need.<sup>544</sup> However, the presence of southwesterners in the agricultural landscape, under the conditions of the Great Depression and New Deal, confronted rural communities with the harsh reality that the state’s rural economies and postcolonial structures necessitated relief. “Thus, in California we find a curious attitude toward a group that makes our agriculture successful,” writes Steinbeck in *The Harvest Gypsies*, “the migrants are needed, and they are hated. Arriving in a district they find the dislike always meted out by the resident to

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<sup>543</sup> Olson, *S. Hearings*, 17256.

<sup>544</sup> Olson, *S. Hearings*, 17257.

the foreigner, the outlander.”<sup>545</sup> The reasons for this contempt and alienation according to Steinbeck are that migrants are not only perceived as “dirty people that are carriers of disease,” but also as tax burdens, criminals and radicals that if “allowed to organize they can, simply by refusing to work, wipe out the season’s crops.” And for this, continues Steinbeck, “They are never received into a community nor into the life of the community. Wanderers in fact, they are never allowed to feel at home in the communities that demand their services.”<sup>546</sup> According to a 1939 *Fortune* article, most Californians recognized the importance of migrants in the state’s rural economies and felt that relief was an obligation during periods of low or no employment, yet growers typically opposed aid for “uninvited surplus workers”—which, under the state’s brutal system of industrialized labor, was code for any unemployed person remaining in the vicinity after the demand for labor was met, or after harvest had concluded and labor was no longer necessary.<sup>547</sup>

The discourses of inferiority around the relief issue are irrational by their very nature: the culmination of foundational myths of white supremacy and traditional modes of disenfranchisement designed to maximize control and exploitation within the colonial space. Rather than reasoned pragmatism, they reflect grower anxieties over a changing sociopolitical landscape and the loss of a *non-white* peonage—a fact relentlessly reinforced by the material presence of *Okies* in the rural landscape. These “white transients,” Dr. George P. Clements of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce stressed in his testimony before the Tolan Committee, as “American citizens” posed a direct threat

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<sup>545</sup> Steinbeck, *The Harvest Gypsies*, 20.

<sup>546</sup> Steinbeck, *The Harvest Gypsies*, 20.

<sup>547</sup> “I Wonder Where We Can Go Now,” 119.

to the region's industrialized agriculture.<sup>548</sup> Unlike "Mexicans," Clements warned, who, "[as] the result of years of servitude, has always looked upon his employer as his padrone, and upon himself as part of the establishment," domestic migrants "are going to demand the so-called American standard of living," and are "the finest pabulum for unionization."<sup>549</sup> Furthermore, in contrast to their *Mexicana/o* and *Chicana/o* competitors, who, as one Kern County Health Department report characterizes, "miraculously appeared on harvest day and silently slipped away after their work was done," this new body of migrant workers remained conspicuous everywhere, in Hoovervilles, ditch encampments, riverbank jungles, and disease ridden "suburban slums."<sup>550</sup>

Obviously, *Mexicana/o* and *Chicana/o* labor did not literally disappear into the landscape, but instead had learned over the course of decades to avoid rural communities in the offseason through a variety of methods and were accustomed to recoiling to the many *barrios* and *colonias* of Los Angeles, San Francisco, and the large valley towns of Sacramento, Stockton, and San Bernardino and, to a lesser extent, back to Mexico. In this sense, the maintenance of an excessive pool of labor was subsidized by social services in large cities<sup>551</sup>—a dynamic that allowed migratory labor to remain invisible in rural communities most of the year, revealing themselves only when needed, but also one that perpetuated locally constructed myths of regional superiority amongst rural Californians

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<sup>548</sup> Testimony of Dr. George P Clements, *Tolan Hearings*, 379.

<sup>549</sup> Clements, *Tolan Hearings*, 376, 379; see also *Gregory, American Exodus*, 89.

<sup>550</sup> Kern County, "Survey of Kern County Migratory Labor Problem: Supplementary Report as of July 1, 1939," 8-9.

<sup>551</sup> Olson, *S. Hearings*, 17257; *S. Report*, 1228.

and encouraged the development of a substantive sovereignty based on cognitive interpretations of the colonial landscape and their perceived mastery over it. The constant visibility of southwestern migrants in valley communities, on the other hand, challenged local narratives of superiority, forcing residents to confront uncomfortable truths regarding its race-dependent landscape and the structural inequities on which it both replicated and relied. Relief, as it was perceived by California's rural residents, prolonged the time migrants remained (unwelcome) in valley communities—along with the discomfort associated with their material presence.<sup>552</sup>

Admittedly, southwestern migration was a national crisis and Californians rightfully had cause for concern. As James N. Gregory details in *American Exodus*, there were two streams of migration: one urban in character; the other rural. The latter of these streams made up the majority of southwestern migration to the state, and its participants generally sought work in California's agricultural valleys.<sup>553</sup> According to Governor Olson's testimony before the La Follett Committee, the state received approximately 315,000 southwestern migrants in a three-year period from 1935 to 1938. The eight counties of the San Joaquin Valley received a disproportionate share of this migration, and this sudden influx of migrants overtaxed county social services. Referencing a State Relief Administration (SRA) report, Olson states that 65.1 percent of all relief claims in this region were made by agricultural workers. Additionally, in 1939 these same counties experienced an average 344.4 percent increase in claims over 1937, where all other counties experience a 76.6 percent average increase over the same period. Emphasizing

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<sup>552</sup> Clements, *Tolan Hearings*, 379.

<sup>553</sup> Gregory, *American Exodus*, 15-17.

agriculture's reliance on surplus labor, Olson concludes that "it should be noted, however, that the increase in the SRA caseload for all counties between 1937 and 1939 has been very largely due to the curtailment in the WPA program, whereas the increase in the eight San Joaquin counties is directly related to the problem of employment in agriculture, and therefore the contrast is perhaps even greater than I have indicated."<sup>554</sup>

The SRA and the WPA may have been funded by the state and federal governments, but there were other financial burdens associated with this influx that fell disproportionately on the counties of the San Joaquin. For instance, a study conducted by the California State Chamber of Commerce found that the five southern counties of the valley as a whole experienced a 126 percent increase in levied school taxes, "compared to a 70-percent increase in the 6 adjacent Valley counties to the north, a 67-percent increase in Los Angeles County, and a 61-percent increase over the remainder of the State."<sup>555</sup> These economic strains, and their burden on the communities of the San Joaquin, largely contribute to dominant theories framing rural contempt for migrants as the unfortunate result of an insider/outsider dynamic and the "stigmatized" nature of farm labor in California at a moment of political turmoil and resource scarcity.<sup>556</sup> However, economic strain alone, even when associated with an exogenous subject group, insufficiently accounts for the negative characterizations of southwestern migrants as "shiftless," "able-bodied idlers" living off "the liberal cash dole granted by the state," nor does it account

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<sup>554</sup> Olson, *S. Hearings*, 17259-17260.

<sup>555</sup> "Migrants—A National Problem and its Impacts on California—Report and Recommendations of the Statewide Committee on the Migrant Problem," *Tolan Hearings*, 2760.

<sup>556</sup> Gregory, *American Exodus*, 36-113; see also McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 230-304; Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold*, 137-164; Sackman, *Orange Empire*, 225-261

for the forms of direct and indirect violence inflicted upon migrants throughout the state during this period.<sup>557</sup> Unfortunately, the evidence suggests that some other variable is missing from this equation; that some deeper transgression was responsible for the reception of these migrants. After all, these negative stereotypes are largely unfounded, and frequently the result of anecdotal evidence, conjecture, misinformation regarding state aid, and an unfamiliarity with the logistical requirements of industrial agriculture and its reliance on surplus labor—all of which undoubtably added to discourses of migrant inferiority, but alone insufficiently account for the *need* for such discourses to exist.

It is true that most of these migrants—though not all<sup>558</sup>—were propertyless, and, therefore, as a group their tax obligations were minimal. However, despite the popular rhetoric regarding relief, the evidence suggests that abuse of relief benefits was not the norm, quite the opposite in fact, many migrants underutilized SRA services. First, general relief was difficult to secure. Prior to June 1, 1940, California law required state residency for relief eligibility.<sup>559</sup> In order to establish eligibility, applicants had to prove that they had remained in the state continuously for at least three years. After 1935, FSA relief in the form of indirect aid, such as food stamps and labor camps, was available to newly arriving migrants, but there was no mechanism for receiving any type of county

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<sup>557</sup> Richard, “California’s Adult Children,” 34-35.

<sup>558</sup> Building schemes, such as the Beard Tract in Modesto, often provided cheap housing options and low interest home loans to southwestern migrants. According to Creisler’s findings, most of the 376 plots sold in the Beard Tract were purchased through Federal Housing Administration (FHA) programs. Creisler, “Little Oklahoma,” 15-26.

<sup>559</sup> Wilson, “Social Attitudes of Certain Migratory Agricultural Workers in Kern County, California,” 254.

aid, including hospital care, or general relief in the form of payments before residency was established.<sup>560</sup> If a family or person in need was ineligible for relief, charities such as the Salvation Army were likely the only option. Once eligible, if the SRA classified the applicant “employable”—the designation used for any able-bodied adult under sixty-five years of age—the applicant was referred to the Work Progress Administration. If the WPA could place the applicant in a position, they received a “security wage,” which was generally less than fieldwork. It was only in the case that the WPA could not place an applicant that they were granted general relief, which, as the scholar James Leiby reminds us, “drew from state and federal (not local) funds.”<sup>561</sup> If, on the other hand, applicants were “unemployable”—children and adults over sixty-five, although individuals from both groups typically worked as well—they were referred to county welfare services, which were partly subsidized by state and federal grants.<sup>562</sup> However, with the defunding of the SRA in June of 1940—a goal long sought by the Associated Farmers and a coalition of conservative state legislators working at their behest—responsibility for relief management transferred to county welfare services.<sup>563</sup> This act virtually eliminated general relief throughout the state, as county welfare departments operating under the state’s punitive welfare code were prevented from approving benefits to any applicant who had not met the residency requirements, and/or had secured aid in

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<sup>560</sup> Bertha S. Underhill, “A Study of 132 Families in California Cotton Camps with Preference to Availability to Medical Care,” (Sacramento: California State Department of Social Welfare, 1937): 3.

<sup>561</sup> James Leiby, “State Welfare Administration in California, 1930-145,” *Southern California Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (Fall 1973): 312.

<sup>562</sup> Leiby, “State Welfare Administration in California, 1930-145,” 309, 312.

<sup>563</sup> Leiby, “State Welfare Administration in California, 1930-145,” 313.



any form during the previous three years, including food or lodging from the FSA, or work from the WPA. A dynamic which, as Wilson notes in his study, left “all migrants who have not had a three year history of employment . . . barred from county aid.”<sup>564</sup>

Second, domestic migrants were fiercely independent people, and although the majority accepted some form of relief pragmatically as a means of survival, general aid was regarded a disgrace by many in their community.<sup>565</sup> It was one thing, for instance, to visit a county hospital in a moment of desperation, because, as Ethel Belezouli of Tulare County described in an oral interview in 1981, “you have no choice and that is the only thing available—you don’t have a doctor and you don’t have the money to pay the doctor”; it was quite another to live, as Lillie May of San Luis Obispo put it in her interview, “that kind of life”—a life on “welfare” or by the charity of others.<sup>566</sup> Cognizant of the fact that southwesterners tended to view relief negatively as a type of charity rather than a public entitlement, Federal Emergency Relief Administration (precursor of the FSA) officials went to great lengths to bureaucratize relief—constructing a uniform public scheme administered by objective policies.<sup>567</sup> Nevertheless, relief remained so stigmatized within the southwestern migrant community that, according to a report submitted to the La Follett Committee by Dr. Omer Mills, an FSA official, it resulted in the need for food warehouses to be opened at SRA grant offices, “because it was

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<sup>564</sup> Wilson, “Social Attitudes of Certain Migratory Agricultural Workers in Kern County, California,” 260.

<sup>565</sup> Elizabeth Day, Belezouli, Clipper, Dinwiddie, Rose, digital access, California Odyssey Project.

<sup>566</sup> Belezouli, May, Clipper; Dinwiddie, May; Rose, Dorothy, digital access, California Odyssey Project.

<sup>567</sup> Leiby, “State Welfare Administration in California, 1930-145,” 307.

discovered that most agricultural families do not seek aid until they are entirely destitute and hungry, and unable to wait for a week or more for the delivery of a check.”<sup>568</sup>

Interestingly enough, this attitude toward relief by migrants often extended to other government programs, such as the WPA—which, for many, was an option of last resort. According to Wilson’s observations, since the founding principle of the WPA “is based upon the philosophy that every person has an inalienable right to work,” migrants considered the program a form of “work relief”<sup>569</sup>—a claim supported by a number of oral histories collected by the California Odyssey Project.<sup>570</sup> Although it is true, as AF spokesmen frequently reminded the public, that relief benefits in California were higher than they were in drought states, so were the costs of living, the pay for agricultural work, and the quality of life (even during the Depression and after labor surpluses are factored).<sup>571</sup> Contrary to the dominant narrative, many migrants came to California to avoid going on federal relief, not to obtain it.

In addition, the drought that struck the greater Western South during the mid-1930s—in combination with ecological damage caused by years of unsustainable agricultural practices—destroyed the region’s local economies, leaving many families little choice but to move.<sup>572</sup> In a sense, the term “migrant” assigns too much agency to

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<sup>568</sup> Omer Mills, “Farm Labor Programs of the Farm Security Administration,” Exhibit 9376, in *S. Hearings*, 21930.

<sup>569</sup> Wilson, “Social Attitudes of Certain Migratory Agricultural Workers in Kern County, California,” 268.

<sup>570</sup> Belezouli, May, digital access, California Odyssey Project.

<sup>571</sup> Pike, “The Point of View of The Large Farmer,” 169; Wilson, “Social Attitudes of Certain Migratory Agricultural Workers in Kern County, California,” 105-106, Table XXI.

<sup>572</sup> Phillips, *Tolan Hearings*, 2033-2036; Stein, *California and the Dust Bowl Migration*, 6-9; Gregory, *American Exodus*, 11-12.

these people—implying optionality, or at the very least, suggesting a degree of calculation. “Refugee,” on the other hand, as the economist Paul Taylor first argued in 1935, more adequately accounts for the southwesterner experience. For many families, the only real choice was to head east, or to head west. Steinbeck first cemented the refugee characterization in *Harvest Gypsies* in this way: “Their lands are destroyed and they can never go back to them. Thousands of them are crossing the borders in ancient rattling automobiles, destitute and hungry and homeless, ready to accept any pay so that they may eat and feed their children.”<sup>573</sup> Three years later, Steinbeck once again stressed the direness of these circumstances in *The Grapes of Wrath*:

And then the dispossessed were drawn west—from Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico; from Nevada and Arkansas families, tribes, dusted out, tractored out. Carloads, caravans, homeless and hungry; twenty thousand and fifty thousand and a hundred thousand and two hundred thousand. They streamed over the mountains, hungry and restless—restless as ants, scurrying to find work to do—to lift, to push, to pull, to pick, to cut—anything, any burden to bear, for food. The kids are hungry. We got no place to live. Like ants scurrying for work, for food, and most of all for land.<sup>574</sup>

Migrants (refugees) were not just landless, they were stateless, “dusted out, tractored out,” of both a way of life and an identity.<sup>575</sup> Weighed in the balance of these factors—not to mention the economic toll and physical danger involved in migration—the most compelling reasons for these people to come to California was the prospect of work and the hope of one day reclaiming a part of their identity as farmers themselves.

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<sup>573</sup> Steinbeck, *The Harvest Gypsies*, 21.

<sup>574</sup> Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 233.

<sup>575</sup> Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 35-36, 233,

‘All I want is a chance to make a living,’ a pea picker in Calipatria insisted to Taylor in an interview for *Survey Graphic*, ‘When a person’s able to work, what’s the use in begging? We ain’t that kind of people.’<sup>576</sup> Prospects for the future, respite from hunger, and the hope of once again living dignified lives, drove this migration, not relief.

This is not to say that relief did not play *a* factor in decisions to eventually relocate to California. As with all refugees, a certain amount of aid is required to resettle, to adapt, to obtain housing and food—to get on one’s feet. Although, many migrants took pride in the fact that, as one pea picker in San Jose bragged, they “haven’t had to have no help yet,” most understood relief in the form of food stamps, fuel subsidies, county hospitals, WPA projects, and FSA camps, in more pragmatic terms as necessities in times of severe hardship.<sup>577</sup> For many, California was not their first intended destination but a final terminus in an odyssey of odd jobs, WPA assignments, and seasonal labor, and, as one migrant indicated to Wilson, having ‘more types of relief’ may have been a deciding factor for several families looking for a better life.<sup>578</sup> As Wilson concludes, just as there were a number of factors influencing people to leave drought states, relief was not the only factor attracting migrants to California, but one of a number of considerations.<sup>579</sup>

Considering these factors, the “able-bodied idler” dynamic insufficiently accounts for *Okie* unruliness within California during the 1930s—as it fails to meet the criteria

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<sup>576</sup> Taylor and Lange, “Again the Covered Wagon,” 349.

<sup>577</sup> Taylor and Lange, “Again the Covered Wagon,” 349.

<sup>578</sup> Wilson, “Social Attitudes of Certain Migratory Agricultural Workers in Kern County, California,” 112-113.

<sup>579</sup> Wilson, “Social Attitudes of Certain Migratory Agricultural Workers in Kern County, California,” 112-113.

established by this study's colonial modernity framework: neither presenting a fundamental threat to the established order, nor a disruption to the reproduction of the regional arrangements of power. As with all racial categorization, the charge of idleness, rather than a reflection of fact, operates as a mode of (mis)characterization intended to naturalize *Okie* otherness as a constructed subject group. As the following section details, such characterizations are essential to the racialization process, however, since they generally rely on inaccurate assumptions and fictitious *stigmatypes*—and are, therefore, themselves constructs—they must be considered reactions to initial normative violations, rather than transgressive elements themselves.

As the introduction to this section suggests, however, an alternative explanation is that relief itself, as a practice and an institution, was the transgressive element, not domestic migrants or any negative attributes assigned to their character. It is clear from the evidence that growers regarded relief as federal intervention in regional affairs and, as Roy M. Pike (a large grower and AF member) put in a speech before the Commonwealth Club in December of 1935, as an infringement on “well established American principles of local autonomy.”<sup>580</sup> Relief, in their view, was an external mechanism, employed by a labor friendly (and possibly communist) federal executive to undermine their authority and disrupt labor relations throughout the state's rule economies.<sup>581</sup> That is, relief was seen at the local level as a uniquely un-American institution: as a threat animated by a foreign ideology with the potential to encourage worker disobedience amongst a formerly

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<sup>580</sup> Pike, “The Point of View of The Large Farmer,” 166.

<sup>581</sup> Olmsted, *Right out of California*, 211-225; Pichardo Almanzar and Kulik, *American Fascism and the New Deal*, 130-138.

powerless proletariat—and one, therefore, ultimately capable of disrupting regional arrangements of power.

Further complicating this dynamic, however, it was feared by the rural establishment that relief's imagined capacity to draw "hordes" of homeless and hungry from the drought states would ultimately transform the region's demographic makeup, giving farm labor (or, at least one subgroup of farmworker), for the first time in California history, some degree of political equity.<sup>582</sup> Until this point, as indicated in the previous chapter, California's dominant collective had successfully denied a vast majority of its industrial agricultural labor force the right to vote on racial grounds via a number of juridico-political strategies designed to consolidate dominant class power. For obvious reasons, such strategies were inapplicable to southwestern migrants as ethnically "white" Americans. As we shall see, however, this did not prevent growers from attempting to mitigate this threat via other legal and extra-legal methods.

It is true that growers feared spreading "slum conditions" and associated migrant tenancy with impending "financial disaster," but ironically, and perhaps too late, they also realized the "transient tide" responsible for sustaining California's labor surplus during the depression—a necessary condition of the states' rural economies—potentially contained the seeds of their own destruction.<sup>583</sup> Between 1936 and 1938, the state as a whole experienced a more than seven percent increase in voter registration, and the five southernmost counties of the San Joaquin all experienced a more than twenty percent

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<sup>582</sup> "Dustbowlers Worry California," *Business Week* (September 24, 1938): 33.

<sup>583</sup> "Dustbowlers Worry California," 33; "Transient Tide Turns," *Los Angeles Times* (February 10, 1936): A1.

increase, with Kern County experiencing a twenty-seven percent increase.<sup>584</sup> Inferring that the influx was intentionally guided by Washington progressives in an attempt to disrupt the state's political status quo, one Valley grower speculated in an interview for *California, Magazine of the Pacific* in October 1938 that it 'Looks to me . . . as if someone, somewhere, was packing our relief rolls and our voting lists with white trash. Most of them come from safely Democratic states . . . Add two and two under those conditions and you don't get merely four—you get 1940.'<sup>585</sup> Grower suspicions were realized just weeks later, when End Poverty in California (EPIC) candidates Culbert Olson and Sheridan Downey, both defeated Republican incumbents for the offices of Governor and U.S. Senate, respectively.<sup>586</sup>

In his monograph, *How Fascism Works*, political philosopher Jason Stanly reasons that hierarchies of worth are built on powerful 'legitimation myths'—a term Stanly borrows from social psychologist Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto—of natural superiority. Consequently, any attempts at power sharing, promotion of more equitable arrangements, or efforts to level the playing field—by democratic process or otherwise—are automatically viewed in zero-sum terms by sovereign authorities vested in hierarchies of worth as relative losses in total power, and illegitimate assaults on established natural orders.<sup>587</sup> Relief, therefore, was not only transgressive because it had the imagined power

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<sup>584</sup> "Dustbowlers Worry California," 33.

<sup>585</sup> California Chamber of Commerce, "Migrants Becoming Voters," *California, Magazine of the Pacific* (October, 1938): 21.

<sup>586</sup> Sackman, *Orange Empire*, 238; "California Votes Against Pension," *New York Times* (Wednesday November 9, 1938): 11.

<sup>587</sup> Jason Stanley, *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them* (New York: Random House, 2018), 80, 85-89, 178.

to draw hundreds of thousands of Democrats to the state who were likely to vote for “candidates . . . offering liberal support for the unemployed,” as the article in *California* speculated, but also because such demographic shifts challenged an imagined mastery over the colonial landscape<sup>588</sup>—threatening grower authority at a fundamental level.

### *White Others: Naturalizing Okie Differentiation*

In the spring of 1938, Lilian Creisler, a master’s degree candidate in Sociology at the University of California, Berkeley, working with English professors at Modesto Junior College, surveyed 107 local college students about their attitudes towards migrants, asking them to write letters regarding their experiences with the southwesterners of the town’s “Little Oklahoma.”<sup>589</sup> What her sample indicates is, despite glaring paradoxes, Modesto’s rural populous regularly sided with grower assessments of *Okies* as shiftless “indigents” looking for handouts in the form of relief.<sup>590</sup> Although such attitudes were hardly universal, what she discovered was even residents who typically sympathized with the migrants’ plight often resorted to tropes of innate indolence, ineptitude, and immorality. According to her findings, 51.4 percent of survey respondents “had tolerant attitudes” toward Little Oklahomans, and 48.5 percent of respondents expressed negative feelings, some characterizing migrants as ‘poor white trash,’ others suggesting that they should be left to ‘starve,’ or ‘should be on

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<sup>588</sup> *California, Magazine of the Pacific*, 20.

<sup>589</sup> Creisler, “Little Oklahoma,” 67-68.

<sup>590</sup> Olson, *S. Hearings*, 17247; Creisler, “Little Oklahoma,” 90-94; see also Pichardo Almanzar and Kulik, *American Fascism and the New Deal*, 34-39.



reservations’<sup>591</sup> In their letters, respondents commonly characterized migrants as “being stupid, lazy, dirty, and immoral.”<sup>592</sup> A glimpse at the most frequently used descriptors suggests that although locals may have tolerated their presence, migrants were less than welcome in rural communities and were regularly perceived as violating normative middle-class boundaries of appropriateness. Although fifteen respondents claimed that they “sympathized” with the migrants, twenty-two claimed they were a “burden on people.” Ironically, seventeen claimed that migrants “take jobs”—presumably from more deserving locals<sup>593</sup>—while an equal number asserted that migrants “won’t work.” Fifteen responded that migrants were “dirty.” Twelve categorized them as “ignorant.” And ten claimed that they “lowered standards of living,” while another ten determined that they were a “detriment to the city.”<sup>594</sup>

Such tropes masquerade as everyday discourses of exclusion, yet they have long functioned in California’s colonial space as culturally specific boundary terms meant to signal the normative deviations of *Others*. As demonstrated in Chapter IV, boundary terms such as stupid, lazy, dirty, and immoral, have long been utilized by California’s rural establishment to naturalize the perceived racial difference of its colonized labor. As Sheth argues, such tropes naturalize connections between constructed racial signifiers,

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<sup>591</sup> Creisler, “Little Oklahoma,” 68.

<sup>592</sup> Creisler, “Little Oklahoma,” 65.

<sup>593</sup> Although unfair job competition—indicated by the response “take jobs”—was a source of resident contempt, Creisler suspects that the high frequency of this response in her study may be influenced by her sample’s composition and may not accurately reflect aggregate attitudes within the larger community of Modesto. As her sample consisted of primarily middle-class college students, it is unlikely that most of the respondents competed with southwestern migrants as field labor, however, many may have competed for summer or part-time positions at local canneries. Creisler, “Little Oklahoma,” 68.

<sup>594</sup> Creisler, “Little Oklahoma,” 95.

such as *Okie*, and subject group alterity. They operate as agents of erasure, concealing the initial normative breach and process of *Unruly* categorization behind a veil of objectivity, constraining dominant class members to think of subaltern deviations in innate terms as something wrong with *them*. Through this process perceived biological and non-biological distinctions are imbued with cultural saliency, ultimately naturalizing the connections between constructed racial signifiers and perceived subject group inferiority. What is naturalized through this process, however, are signifiers themselves—which, as Sheth reminds us, may represent any perceived normative deviation.<sup>595</sup> “Racialization does not necessarily happen solely at the level of skin color and phenotype,” states Sheth. “Other gestures also—clothes, modes of dress, religious customs, strange practices, lack of ‘proper deference’ to law and culture norms—will become lightning rods by which a group will be noticed and held for scapegoating.”<sup>596</sup> As stated in this chapter’s introduction, this section illustrates this process via the moniker *Okie* as a category of *White otherness*, examining four key tropes expressed by Creisler’s subjects—“stupid, lazy, dirty, and immoral”—to evaluate perceived southwesterner deviation from the regional constructs of whiteness in California’s postcolonial landscape.

### *Okieness*

In Chapter 18 in *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck first introduces the construct “Okie” as a signifier via an encounter between Tom and some other men, “Goin’ back home,” swimming amongst the reeded banks of the Colorado River, near Needles,

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<sup>595</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 28-29, 49-50.

<sup>596</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 173.

California. After listening to the men describe how they had been hated by residents of California and pushed around by law enforcement, Tom naively asks one of the men “Okie? What’s that?” To which the man replies, “Well, Okie use’ ta mean you was from Oklahoma. Now it means you’re a dirty son-of-a-bitch. Okie means you’re scum. Don’t mean nothing itself, it’s the way they say it.”<sup>597</sup> These few lines strike at the heart of this study, exhibiting the saliency of Sheth’s model, demonstrating the way *Okie* signifies something *Other*.<sup>598</sup> It is a socially constructed and value-based boundary term designed to operate as something more than just a moniker. It is meant to signify the innate otherness of its subjects, to naturalize their inferiority as “stupid, lazy, dirty, and immoral” *nonpersons* undeserving of full moral consideration.

Reproducing many of these *stigmatypes* in his 1947 study of California’s agricultural communities, American anthropologist Walter Goldschmidt notes the dominant class perception of *Okies* in *As You Sow*. Similar to McWilliams, Goldschmidt fails to recognize the racial dimensions of this history, instead attributing it to an insider/outsider dynamic. Characterizing domestic migrants as “white outsiders” and dominant-class residents of the San Joaquin as the “nuclear” group, Goldschmidt summarizes local perceptions of the *Okie*:

Members of the nuclear group usually describe the “Okie” as ignorant and uneducated, dirty of habit if not of mind, slothful, unambitious, and dependent. He may be viewed now as an emotional, again as phlegmatic; sometimes as sullen and unfriendly; again as arrogant and over-bearing. Not rarely is he accused of being dishonest. These characteristics are sometimes considered innate (a local physician spoke of them as a separate breed); sometimes lack of education is held responsible.<sup>599</sup>

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<sup>597</sup> Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 205-206.

<sup>598</sup> Wray, *Not Quite White*, 23, 150n4.

<sup>599</sup> Goldschmidt, *As You Sow*, 61.

There is evidence to suggest that the term *Okie* may have started with southwestern migrants themselves, just to designate, as Steinbeck mentions, “you was from Oklahoma.” In his 1981 oral interview for the California Odyssey Project, local Bakersfield farmer Edger Combs describes: “At first, they called them Arkies and Okies. They started that themselves. Some of the women who were chopping cotton for me one day were talking amongst themselves, they said, ‘Now these Arkies . . .’ and ‘this one is Okies,’ so they got that started themselves. A lot of people thought that the farmers got that name started, but it started from these workers. They called themselves Arkies and Okies.”<sup>600</sup> However, given the use of *Okie*—and to a lesser extent *Arkie*—by the rural establishment, the term clearly took on new meaning within the agricultural landscape.

Matt Wray describes a similar phenomenon in his study of *White Trash*—in many ways a precursor to *Okie*, and in the imagination of California’s agricultural elite a boundary term synonymous with *Okie*<sup>601</sup>—in the United States. According to Wray, the term “*poor white trash*” originated with and was used by *Black* slaves in the South before being appropriated by upper-class whites as a stigmatized moniker. As Wray notes, what matters is:

that upper-class whites found the term exceedingly useful and well worth repeating. Whites quickly appropriated the term and pushed it into wider circulation than it would have otherwise had. Blacks may have invented and used the term *poor white trash* as an act of symbolic and mircopolitical protest, but it was literate, middle-class and elite whites who invested its meaning with social power, granting it the powers of

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<sup>600</sup> Combs, digital access, California Odyssey Project.

<sup>601</sup> Newitz and Wray, “What is ‘White Trash’?,” 182.

social stigma and prejudice and enforcing its discriminatory effects with regard to labor.<sup>602</sup>

This distinction is key to understanding the term *Okie*, not merely as a label but as a signified category of differentiation reinforced by culturally specific *stigmatypes* designed to support perceptions of innate otherness. As the remainder of the section details, the *stigmatypes* reproduced by Creisler subjects—“stupid, lazy, dirty, and immoral”—imbued the category *Okie* with a social power meant to signify the innate inferiority of southwestern migrants in the postcolonial space.

“Taxpayers” vs. “Able-Bodied Idlers”: The Charge of Laziness in the Postcolonial Landscape. Many of the negative tropes listed above were often regarded as innate characteristics of southwestern otherness by Creisler’s survey respondents. Even the most sympathetic letters received by Creisler characterized southwestern migrants as innately lacking in some capacity, frequently taking the position that domestic migrants, by virtue of some flaw in character, were ultimately to blame for their own misfortune. “I really feel sorry for these people,” writes one student, “but I believe that it is almost impossible to help them, for some of them are content as they are. Of course, I cannot say that all of the people from the dust bowl are of this type . . . there is probably some very fine people from this region, but we have not, as yet, encountered any worth real worry.”<sup>603</sup> One letter, from the son of a “landowner in the county,” is of particular interest, however, because it intertwines common tropes of *Okie* otherness—stupid, lazy, dirty, and, possibly immoral—within a moral discourse of inferiority that suggests that imagined

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<sup>602</sup> Wray, *Not Quite White*, 43.

<sup>603</sup> Author unidentified, letter printed in Creisler, “Little Oklahoma,” 67.

migrant indolence poses some intangible danger to the colonial space—or at least the interests of its landed elite.

[My father] has had dealings with these Oklahomian workers, and has found that they do not and will not work efficiently. I do not know whether this is due to a lack of intelligence in the ways in which farming is done in California, or whether it is because they are shiftless and expect to survive by ‘living off of the county.’

. . . . I actually heard one man tell another that he would not shock hay because that was too hard work . . . by going on relief one didn’t have to work so hard and got better pay besides! When they take that attitude, and plenty of them do, I think it is time to do something about it.

Occasionally there is a family among this class that is willing to work and learn our methods and to become permanent residents of the state, but the majority try to get all they can for nothing. They are just “drifters” following crops up and down the valley and living under unsanitary conditions.

Each family has several children that get the benefits of our schools, yet these people do not pay taxes to support the schools. During the winter months, the California taxpayers have to support these people and their families.

For these reasons the California farmers have become disgusted with this class of people. The Oklahomian situation in California is one that needs to be dealt with immediately before it gets any worse than it already is.<sup>604</sup>

At first glance, the letter’s author, as someone intimately familiar with the brutal realities of industrial agriculture in California and its dependance on seasonally migratory labor, seems surprisingly naïve. After all, the state’s industrial farm system, as the letter’s author would have been aware, was completely dependent on ‘drifters’ as a mobile corps of disenfranchised and vulnerable exogenous labor—a fact that further naturalizes migrant farmworker alterity in the agricultural landscape. His characterization of

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<sup>604</sup> Author unidentified, letter printed in Creisler, “Little Oklahoma,” 66.

migrants and their attitudes towards work, however, can also be understood as a form of disavowal: conveniently reconciling the perceived discontinuity of domestic migrants—as less deserving non-taxpayers—with the normative constructs of regional whiteness, ultimately emphasizing the innate and irredeemable differences of migrants in the agricultural landscape. Invoking the “able-bodied idler” dynamic, the author not only illustrates the normative transgressiveness of relief, but also reproduces the widely held belief that *Okies*, as naturally indolent, preferred relief over hard work due to some innate flaw in their character.

As addressed in the previous section, the idler dynamic insufficiently accounts for *Okie* unruliness within California during the 1930s. Nevertheless, as a discourse it indicates a process of conceptual displacement and the need for sovereign authority to naturalize migrant unruliness, framing *Okies* as outsiders and radical *Others* within the colonial space. Idleness, indolence, and laziness, are charges of differentiation frequently levied against *Others* by the dominant class to naturalize subject group deviation. In one sense, the idler charge, as Wray argues in *Not Quite White*, is a common characteristic of the colonial dynamic which attests to the need for colonial elites to divide populations—to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable subject behavior—in order to encourage worker discipline and protect colonial interests. Tracing the arc of the idler charge back to the British Colonial period in North America, Wray contends that “fragile colonial order[s]” depend on boundary terms such as “idler,” and its latent indictment of laziness, in order to maintain subject-group obedience—morally condemning subjects

who, by choice or by structural dictate, violate normative social boundaries, and are, therefore, perceived as threats by sovereign authority.<sup>605</sup> Wray explains:

To describe an individual or social group as “idle” or “lazy,” was to simultaneously express moral condemnation and the highest degree of contempt. Moral condemnation and contempt, it must be noted, are highly emotionally charged judgements, and they mobilize visceral feelings of disgust. Moral condemnation is directed against what people do, while contempt is directed against who they are . . . . The boundaries separating those who worked hard from those who did not operated as important cultural resources in the colonial struggle to transform labor regimes and enforce labor discipline upon unruly natives and truculent colonists. Cultural inducements to labor—in the form of boundary terms that separated good colonist from bad—were propagated by colonial elites with missionary like fervor. Indeed, the reputation of the colonies as places where the poor, the indigent, and the criminal could be redeemed through hard work served as a major ideological justification for the entire colonial enterprise.<sup>606</sup>

Colonial (and postcolonial) spaces are, by their very nature, zones of extraction. As such, they are also spaces acutely dependent on worker discipline. Indolence, or the charge thereof, is perceived by the dominant class as a threat to colonial enterprise, and therefore represents a threat to the colony itself. Hence, idleness signifies a paramount threat to the colonial order, ranking equally with (and often adjoining) criminality. In terms similar to Wray, literary scholar Stephen Greenblatt, in his New Historicism critique, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, explores this dynamic within the context of the 1610 shipwreck of the *Sea Venture* in Bermuda.<sup>607</sup> Relating the construction of normative

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<sup>605</sup> Wray, *Not Quite White*, 25-26.

<sup>606</sup> Wray, *Not Quite White*, 26.

<sup>607</sup> Wray references Greenblatt’s work in *Not Quite White* in his analysis of “Lubberand” as an idea and its implications for the colonial order, as well as the construction of *Lubbers* as colonial *Others*. Wray, *Not Quite White*, 25.



boundaries of hard work back to dominant class anxieties regarding possible rebellion, Greenblatt writes:

. . . the deepest fears [of colonial elites] lie not with the human or natural resources of the New World but with the discipline of the English colonists and common seamen. And the principal questions—whether obedience is willing or forced, whether religious observance is sincere or feigned—suggest an interest in inner states, as if the shareholders in the Virginia Company believed that only with a set of powerful inward restraints could the colonists be kept from rebelling at the first sign of slippage or relaxation of authority. The company had an official interest in shaping and controlling the minds of its own people.<sup>608</sup>

Racial regimes have appropriated these terms as boundary mechanisms throughout United States history to differentiate between an *us*—“good,” “industrious,” “deserving” whites—and a *them*—“bad,” “indolent,” “undeserving” *non-whites*.<sup>609</sup> In fact, the remnants of this dynamic and its racial underpinnings are still apparent in the “makers vs. takers” rhetoric utilized by some conservative politicians today.<sup>610</sup> As Chapter IV demonstrates, Anglo Californians were intimately familiar with the nuances of such rhetoric, having weaponized it against numerous subject groups as justifications for direct and indirect violence from conquest to Great Depression, and most acutely against the region’s internally colonized indigenous and *Mestizaje* populations. In short, the idler dynamic, by virtue of its use in United States history, is racial.

Rhetorically, the idler discourse is one of differentiation frequently utilized by the dominant class to naturalize the deviation of certain subject groups marked out as *Unruly*

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<sup>608</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 150.

<sup>609</sup> Lamont, *The Dignity of Working Men*, 19-20, 54, 57-58, 64, 65, 68.

<sup>610</sup> Stanley, *How Fascism Works*, 83, 121, 157, 159, 167, 169.

from regional normative constructs. Where “taxpayers” are citizens, and more importantly, citizens fulfilling their civic duty, “able-bodied idlers,” those who are not only believed to be non-taxpayers but also public charges—although they are more often than not people forced to take relief (or welfare) as a matter of survival within an innately inequitable socioeconomic system that demands their perpetual subjugation—are, to borrow a phrase from social geographer Toni Alexander, “shadow citizens”: persons with *de jure* assurances, by birth or naturalization, to full and equal rights and privileges under the law but who are regarded socially, at the local level, as *Other* in some aspect and undeserving of *de facto* consideration.<sup>611</sup> To universally frame subject groups with equal claims to *de jure* citizenship as tax burdens, can, therefore, be understood as a form of conceptual transfer. As discussed in Chapter II, conceptual transfer is a process of disavowal and exclusion initiated by sovereign authority to ensure the colonial space—and its constructed “reality”—against perceived exogenous threats. It achieves this by discounting subject-group claims to exist in common territory on equal grounds, while encouraging a mythical “indigenization” of the *settler* collective.<sup>612</sup> The rhetoric of the “able-bodied idler,” then, is more than just a value judgement. It is a charge that aims to solidify dominant class narratives of belonging, while conceptually displacing those on relief as radically *Other* and potentially “un-American.” In other words, within the postcolonial space, “tax burden” can also be conceptualized, or indeed thought of as code for, “alien.”

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<sup>611</sup> Toni Alexander, “Citizenship Contested: The 1930s Domestic Migrants Experience in California’s San Joaquin Valley,” *Social Geographer* 51, no.1 (Spring 2011): 189.

<sup>612</sup> Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 33-52.

Stupid and Dirty. It should go without saying that negative stereotypes characterizing migrants as stupid or dirty, are categorically false. As *stigmatypes*, they deserve to be viewed in the same light as “lazy” and “immoral”: as perceived normative deviations that say more about the insecurities of dominant class Californians—their own epistemological blindness and prevalent attitudes towards poverty—rather than any innate deficit on the part of migrants. As historian James M. Gregory notes in *American Exodus*, “In education and sophistication some did lag behind California norms, but few were illiterate or ignorant of modern standards.”<sup>613</sup> As for being dirty, Steinbeck criticized in the *Harvest Gypsies* that it is hard to stay clean when you are forced to live “on the banks of a river, near an irrigation ditch or on a side road . . . .” and cannot afford soap.<sup>614</sup> Still, as with other exogenous subject groups in California’s long colonial history, such depictions played a formative role in naturalizing migrant otherness in the state’s rural communities and have become cemented with the idea of the *Okie*, and therefore deserve our attention.

As the record indicates, these categories were not always depicted in distinct terms in California’s discourses of inferiority, but instead manifest in traditional narratives of migrant inferiority, often mirroring those deployed against Native Americans, California’s *Mestizaje*, and the Chinese in particular, to reinforce stereotypes of migrants as backward and disease ridden. Such *stigmatypes* were persistently reinforced by newspaper editorials and conservative journals, but more disquietingly they

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<sup>613</sup> Gregory, *American Exodus*, 108; see also Goldschmidt, *As You Sow*, 61.

<sup>614</sup> Steinbeck, *The Harvest Gypsies*, 26.

were engaged by public and private officials.<sup>615</sup> For instance, in January of 1940, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce manager and AF representative Howard Miller stated before the La Follette Committee that in many cases the “standards of living [southwestern migrants ] are lower [than Mexicans],” and goes on to state that “because of the conditions under which they have lived for many years, [domestic migrants] are going to take a long while and several generations, perhaps, before they can become worth-while citizens for their own good and the good of [their] communities . . .”<sup>616</sup> Obviously, Miller—who was neither a sociologist nor a social anthropologist—as a representative of the AF, had incentives for characterizing migrants in these terms. But his assessment, although biased, mirrors those of county and state officials, teachers, doctors, and nurses throughout the state.<sup>617</sup>

Public concerns over hygiene in California’s rural valleys also stoked dominant class fears of migrants as carriers of communicable disease. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries such concerns frequently shaped nativist policies of exclusion in the United States.<sup>618</sup> Drawing on the work of anthropologist Mary Douglas in his book *Silent Travelers*, American historian Alan M. Kraut explains that:

The medicalization of preexisting nativist prejudices occurs when the justification for excluding members of a particular group includes charges that they constitute a health menace and may endanger their hosts. While some members of an immigrant group may or may not have a contagious

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<sup>615</sup> Alexander, “Citizenship Contested,” 199-204; Gregory, *American Exodus*, 108.

<sup>616</sup> Testimony of Howard Miller, *S. Hearings*, 19519.

<sup>617</sup> Gregory, *American Exodus*, 108; Goldschmidt, *As You Sow*, 61; see Kern County, “Survey of Kern County Migratory Labor Problem: Supplementary Report as of July 1, 1939”; Richard, “California’s Adult Children,” 34-35.

<sup>618</sup> Alan M. Kraut, *Silent Travelers: Germs, Genes, and the “Immigrant Menace”* (New York: BasicBooks, 1994), 78-135; Wray, *Not Quite White*, 2-3, 126-132.

disease that can cause others to become sick, the entire group is stigmatized by medicalized nativism, each newcomer being reduced from “a whole and usual persons to a tainted, discounted one,” because of association with diseased in the minds of the native groups.<sup>619</sup>

Expanding on Kraut’s observations in *Not Quite White*, Wray rationalizes that the same “patterns of stigmatization” provided by medicalized nativism also applies to “those groups of native-born ‘Americans’ who [are] not fully assimilated to ‘the established order’s cultural preference and priorities’—those who live in rural or hinterland areas into which the ‘established order’ [has] not yet penetrated.”<sup>620</sup> In other words, subject groups historically considered poor *White Trash*.

Mirroring this national dynamic, *stigmatypes* like “dirty” and “diseased” had been utilized throughout Anglo-American occupation in California to justify episodes of indigenous transfer and nativist policies of Chinese exclusion.<sup>621</sup> Their application to southwestern migrants during the 1930s was no coincidence. Dominant class Californians were accustomed to using such characterizations in local discourses of inferiority to describe farm labor within the postcolonial landscape. As with other exogenous subject groups, these narratives ultimately accentuated domestic migrant discontinuity from normative middle-class standards of hygiene—cementing their perceived alterity within the local imaginary. In fact, paranoia over domestic migrant disease ran so high throughout California’s rural communities that Governor Frank Merriam asserted in 1937 that the State Board of Health had the authority to screen all inbound “transients.”<sup>622</sup>

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<sup>619</sup> Kraut, *Silent Travelers*, 2-3.

<sup>620</sup> Wray, *Not Quite White*, 127.

<sup>621</sup> Kroeber, “Episodes in Extermination,” 29; Kraut, *Silent Travelers*, 65.

<sup>622</sup> “Border Health Test Looms: Merriam of Opinion Law Permits Such Check on Transients,” *Los Angeles Times* (January 29, 1937): 9.

Admittedly, the data clearly shows that non-resident children in particular experienced far higher rates of nutrition illness, such as rickets and malnutrition, resulting in higher rates of common childhood infections such as tonsilitis.<sup>623</sup> These illnesses, however—which were further complicated by a lack of healthcare, as families remained ineligible for county relief, including hospital care, until they established residency<sup>624</sup>—speak more of migrant poverty than some innate character defect.

Despite the popular rhetoric, in June of 1938, the California State Department of Public Health (DPH) reports:

Under the application of modern public health procedures . . . communicable disease among these migrants have been kept under control. In spite of their malnutrition, due to long use of faulty diets, tuberculosis is no more of a problem than it is among local residents. By means of immunization neither diphtheria nor smallpox has developed into an important epidemic and typhoid fever has been kept in check. This record is unique in the annals of migration.<sup>625</sup>

Contrary to the evidence, however, disease narratives persisted, likely sustained by reports of overrun county hospitals and county health official warnings regarding spreading disease-ridden slums<sup>626</sup>—both of which say more about California’s inability to cope with the influx of migrants displaced from the Western South, than it does about migrants themselves.

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<sup>623</sup> See Table VII, “Health Defects among 122 Children Having no Residence,” in Underhill, “A Study of 132 Families in California Cotton Camps with Preference to Availability to Medical Care,” 10.

<sup>624</sup> Underhill, “A Study of 132 Families in California Cotton Camps with Preference to Availability to Medical Care,” 3.

<sup>625</sup> California State Department of Public Health, “Migration and Communicable Diseases,” *Weekly Bulletin* 17, no. 19 (June 4, 1938), 74.

<sup>626</sup> California State Department of Public Health, “Migration and Communicable Diseases,” 82.

Of course, no other element contributed more to these stereotypes of migrant otherness than the material conditions of Hoovervilles, ditch encampments, and riverbank jungles, that littered valley communities. These camps, set in the landscape “From a distance look like a city dump,” writes Steinbeck in *Harvest Gypsies*, “and it well may, for the dumps are the sources for the materials of which it is built . . . It is only on close approach that it can be seen that these are homes.”<sup>627</sup> One Kern County Health Department report warning of spreading “suburban slums,” described encampments in similar terms as places where “houses have been constructed of any materials that can be salvaged from the alleys, or retrieved from dismantled structures in exchange for labor.”<sup>628</sup> To reference Kay Anderson’s interpretation of Chinatowns introduced in Chapter IV, these spaces represent the physical nexuses of race and place responsible for constructing the *Other* and reifying a natural order. As with the state’s many Chinatowns, Little Tokyos, Little Manilas, and *colonias*, read in the landscape they stand as physical reminders of innate difference—as physical boundaries distinguishing an *us* from an imagined *them*. Given the historical legacy of white supremacy in California’s race-dependent colonial landscape these camps were instrumental in reifying the innate difference that sustained its hierarchies of worth during the New Deal era. The perceived whiteness of camp occupants only enhanced migrant strangeness, further highlighting their discontinuity from the regional constructs of whiteness—their material conditions not only reinforcing *stigmatypes* associated with *White Trash*, but also suggesting a literal

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<sup>627</sup> Steinbeck, *The Harvest Gypsies*, 26.

<sup>628</sup> Kern County, “Survey of Kern County Migratory Labor Problem: Supplementary Report as of July 1, 1939,” 7.

connection with trash: as something worthless, to be abandoned or discarded, and undeserving of full moral consideration.

Immoral. Two characterizations of migrant otherness impacted dominant class perceptions of *Okie* immorality more than any others: depictions of migrants as criminals and Communists. Although popular depictions of migrants as “drunks, chiselers, exploiters and social leeches,” were prevalent throughout valley communities and were no doubt key aspects of everyday discourses of exclusion, the transgressiveness of criminality and communism stand out as the most egregious violations of local normative constructs of moral decorum in California’s rural valley communities. As the following section details, efforts by California’s pro-industrialist establishment to secure the *civis* against the perceived dangers posed by *Okie* migration, instantly transformed underemployed migrants into criminals, and laborers engaged in collective bargaining into Communists. Both characterizations deserve our attention here, however, because of the saliency of these narratives in defining *Okie* otherness in the postcolonial landscape.

Although California’s sovereign authority deployed a number of legal mechanisms in response to the “transient tide”—as one *Los Angeles Times* article portrayed southwestern migration<sup>629</sup>—no factor was more instrumental in shaping local perceptions of migrant criminality than the charge of vagrancy. Penal Code 647 was passed in the 1870s to control the state’s “fruit tramp” population in times of labor surplus and low employment.<sup>630</sup> The direct descendent—both in structure and intent—of California’s original 1846 vagrancy ordinances employed against the region’s native

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<sup>629</sup> “Transient Tide Turns,” *Los Angeles Times*, A1.

<sup>630</sup> Gregory, *American Exodus*, 79.



inhabitants and the “Greaser Act” of 1855, pc 647 identified ‘Every person who *roams about from place to place without any lawful business*, [emphasis added]’ as a vagrant<sup>631</sup>—the implication being that vagrants, as subjects *without any lawful business*, must be, by inference, engaged in *unlawful business*. The law further defines “‘Every person without visible means of living who has the physical ability to work, and who does not seek employment, nor labor when employment is offered him’ a vagrant.”<sup>632</sup> The intent of the state-wide ordinance, as with its predecessors, was to control the (post)colonial space by limiting migrant options; keeping them moving in times of labor surplus; keeping them working where and when needed; keeping them surveilled and feeling vulnerable, always.<sup>633</sup> In addition to these aims, however, its effects were to enhance migrant discontinuity with the normative dictates of law and order.

In terms that seem to forecast modern “stop and frisk” strategies deployed to control inner-city neighborhoods of color, civil rights attorney Aubrey Grossman criticizes in his 1935 article, “Who Is a Vagrant in California,” for the *California Law Review*:

That thousands of men are “picked up” at random and charged with vagrancy is well known. The admitted purpose of these arrests is to show these homeless men that the particular city does not want them, and to allow the police to take their fingerprints in order to discover whether they are wanted for the commission of crimes elsewhere. Arrest of a person who is not known to have done so someplace, or simply because he is unemployed is clearly unjustifiable . . . . At a time when probably one-third of the working population of the country is unemployed without individual fault, to compel those who are jobless and without recourses to

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<sup>631</sup> Karen Brodtkin, “Race, Class, and Gender,” 50; Aubrey Grossman, “Who is a Vagrant in California?,” *California Law Review* 23, no. 5 (July 1935): 508.

<sup>632</sup> Grossman, “Who is a Vagrant in California?,” 506.

<sup>633</sup> Grossman, “Who is a Vagrant in California?,” 506; Gregory, *American Exodus*, 79; Steinbeck, *The Harvest Gypsies*, 36.

take any employment no matter the conditions or be declared vagrants, is dangerously close to involuntary servitude.<sup>634</sup>

Vagrancy was perceived as such a threat by California residents that in February of 1936, Los Angeles Police Chief James Davis—backed by the Los Angeles City Chamber of Commerce, the AF, and Southern Californians, Inc. and working in conjunction with the ten county sheriff departments situated along the state’s borders and with the cooperation of railroad companies—deployed Los Angeles city patrol units to the state’s ports of entry to deter inbound migration and, as one *Los Angeles Times* article describes, “halt the seasonal influx into California of migratory indigents, among whom are believed to be scores of criminals and disease carrying ne’er-do-wells.”<sup>635</sup> Engaging the rhetoric of security often used in times of war, *Los Angeles Times* headlines reify the message that migrants are criminals who pose a direct threat to California society—“City Police Patrols Halt 1000 At State’s Borders . . . Round-up Nets 308 Felons”; “Police Posted Along Borders . . . 73 per cent of those checked had been previously arrested”; “Police Take Up Duty On State Lines, Veritable Army Corps Formed: All Ne’er-do-wells Will Be Turned Back in Move to Check Crime.”<sup>636</sup>

Statistics presented in these articles further cemented associations of criminality with domestic migrant alterity. One article, for instance, states that during the first week

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<sup>634</sup> Grossman notes that as of 1935 approximately fifteen percent of all arrest in the City of Los Angeles are charges of vagrancy. Grossman, “Who is a Vagrant in California?,” 506, 508.

<sup>635</sup> “Police Take Up Duty on State Lines,” *Los Angeles Times* (February 4, 1936): 1.

<sup>636</sup> “City Police Patrols Halt 1000 At State’s Borders; Anti-Vagrant Drive Ruled Valid as Epic Councilman Asks End; Round-up Nets 308 Felons,” *Los Angeles Times* (February 14, 1936): 1; “Police Posted Along Borders,” *Los Angeles Times* (February 14, 1936): A1; “Police Take Up Duty on State Lines,” *Los Angeles Times*, 1.

of their deployment, LAPD officers “turned back . . . more than 1000 penniless transients,” resulting in a twenty-five percent decrease in crime in Los Angeles “since the drive on vagrants and beggars began a week ago.” Continuing, the article states: “Of the 1479 persons arrested in Los Angeles on charges of evading railroad fare, vagrancy or begging, between January 8 and February 8, a total of 308 were found to have previous felony records and 295 previous misdemeanor records. Chief Davis said a goodly number of them are wanted for offenses ranging from murder to parole violation.”<sup>637</sup>

To the modern reader the connections between vagrancy and morality may not be readily apparent, but to the average middle-class resident living in California’s valleys during the 1930s they would have been. Vagrancy was an illegal act, and to the conservative mindset of law and order, illegal acts carry with them moral consequences. As philosopher Jason Stanley argues, once a subject group is associated with criminality in the imagination of the dominant class, they are perceived as “character deficient,” and are, therefore, “beyond societies help.”<sup>638</sup> They are immoral. Criminals, according to Stanley, are “people who by their nature are insensitive to society’s norms, drawn to violate the law by self-interest or malice.”<sup>639</sup> To associate migrants with criminality is to mark them permanently *Alterity*—not merely out of step with the normative dictates of a community, but opposed to them by some innate flaw in character.

The Communist charge performed a similar function in California’s postcolonial landscape, not just framing southwestern migrants as different, but ideologically *Other*

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<sup>637</sup> “City Police Patrols Halt 1000 At State’s Borders,” *Los Angeles Times*, 1.

<sup>638</sup> Stanley, *How Fascism Works*, 124.

<sup>639</sup> Stanley, *How Fascism Works*, 113.

and incompatible with local mores. As previously addressed in Chapter III, the charge of communism as applied to southwestern migrants was unwarranted. As the record indicates, partly due to southwestern migrants' own sense of white supremacy, a true class consciousness amongst seasonal agricultural workers never materialized in California during the 1930s.<sup>640</sup> The reality is, the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union struggled to recruit Southwestern labor throughout the early 1930s, and after the successful prosecution of CAWIU leadership under California's criminal syndicalism law in July of 1935, union organizers, including those from the Congress of Industrial Organizations (C.I.O.), constantly struggled to recruit southwestern labor.<sup>641</sup> Additionally, as Gregory addresses in *American Exodus*, unlike their Mexicana/o and Filipino counterparts, southwesterners as a group looked unfavorably on organizations they considered Communist or unpatriotic.<sup>642</sup> Goldschmidt appears to support Gregory's assessment on this point in *As You Sow*, noting: "Union organization fails to unify the farm labor group [Okies] . . . because the workers are not willing to identify themselves as laborers. This is partly because such identification, and the whole philosophy of unionism is foreign to their background, and partly because such identification, constitutes a denial of community values. Instead, the individual worker strives for status as an individual."<sup>643</sup> This is not to say that there were not radicals and, perhaps, even the

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<sup>640</sup> Gregory, *American Exodus*, 154-164

<sup>641</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 214-219, 263-282; Gregory, *American Exodus*, 154-164; Sackman, *Orange Empire*, 218-224; Adrian Cruz, "There Will be No 'One Big Union': The Struggle for Interracial Labor Unionism in California Agriculture, 1933-1939," *Cultural Dynamics* 22, no. 1 (2010): 29-48.

<sup>642</sup> Gregory, *American Exodus*, 154-164.

<sup>643</sup> Goldschmidt, *As You Sow*, 71.

occasional Communist amongst their ranks, but the truth is that most domestic migrant laborers were neither. The fact is, that as the decade came to a close, and the Associated Farmers became increasingly dependent on vigilantism to police the landscape and keep labor organization in check, more southwestern migrants began to picket out of frustration, not out of class solidarity. Tired of being treated without dignity, being pushed around and undervalued, many joined the occasional picket line, not as union members, but as mere people demanding to be treated as such.

Nevertheless, from the perspective of the Associated Farmers, the fact that southwestern migrants were culturally discordant with the dictates of communism, was irrelevant. During their early struggles with Mexicana/o and Filipino unionization, growers realized the utility of painting labor “Red” in policing the agricultural landscape.<sup>644</sup> They recognized that by associating farm labor with communism, they could deploy the charge whenever politically convenient to counter collective bargaining efforts, to mobilize the full juridical mechanisms of the state to incarcerate labor agitators, blacklist them, and expel them from counties.<sup>645</sup> And, when the liberal mechanisms of state violence proved insufficient to meet their ends, the charge could be used—as General Pelham D. Glassford’s investigation of mob violence in the Imperial Valley in 1934, concludes—to exploit “communist hysteria” to justify acts of vigilante

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<sup>644</sup> Glassford, *S. Hearings*, 20148-20152; Exhibit 8916, *S. Hearings*, 20304.

<sup>645</sup> *S. Report*, 46-47, 549; testimony of Sheriff John A. Miller, Monday, December 18, 1939, in *S. Hearings*, 17999-18001, 18031-18036, 18045-18050; Gilbert González, *Labor and Community: Mexican Citrus Worker Villages in a Southern California County, 1900-1950* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 149; Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 172-175.

terror.<sup>646</sup> Jack Neill, a migratory farm worker invited to speak before the Commonwealth Club in December of 1935, criticized his host's practice of red-baiting in this way:

Suppose all the workers decide they want more wages. The only thing to do is to go to the ranches collectively and demand a raise. I believe an act of Congress and our President gave us a right to organize, to strike and to picket peacefully. But try and do that and see how it works! As soon as you start an organization, if there is not a law to cover it somehow, they pass an emergency ordinance. This migratory worker is a good fellow, but the minute he strikes it is a curious fact that he suddenly becomes a Communist.<sup>647</sup>

Continuing, Neill recognizes the utility of the term in framing workers as *Other*, as outsiders and threats to the community at large: "Mind you, that is a great word [Communist]. You can picture it in your mind—a man with a bomb in one hand, a knife in the other."<sup>648</sup>

Again, to the modern reader the connections between communism and morality may be hard to distinguish. But communism at the time was seen as more than just a challenge to capitalism, it was imagined to be a social evil with the power to disrupt, if not entirely destroy, the American way of life. In *Right Out of California*, Kathryn Olmsted argues that the anticommunist propaganda of the AF turned strikes into

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<sup>646</sup> In his report to the La Follette Committee, General Pelham D. Glassford's investigation of mob violence in the Imperial Valley in 1934, concludes that: "After more than two months of observation and investigation in Imperial Valley, it is my conviction that a group of growers have exploited communist hysteria for the advancement of *their own interests; that they have welcomed labor agitation,*" which they could brand as 'Red' as a means of sustaining supremacy by mob rule, thereby preserving what is so essential to their profits—*Cheap labor*; that they have succeeded in drawing into their conspiracy certain county officials who have become the principle tools of their machine." Glassford, *S. Hearings*, 20148-20152; Exhibit 8916, *S. Hearings*, 20304.

<sup>647</sup> See speech by Jack Neill before the Commonwealth Club of California, in San Francisco, December 12, 1935, printed in Jack Neill, "The Migratory Laborer's Point of View," *The Commonwealth* 12, no. 14 (April 7, 1936): 173.

<sup>648</sup> Neill, "The Migratory Laborer's Point of View," 173.

“Communist tools to promote revolution, to plant the ‘red rag of sedition’ on American soil.” Continuing, Olmsted asserts that “growers designed their propaganda to exploit anxieties about challenges to racial, gender, and sexual norms. According to anticommunists speakers, Reds menaced more than democracy and capitalism: they taught poor (mostly brown) people to be ungrateful, children to disrespect their parents, preachers to ignore the Gospel, and man and women to stray from proper roles.”<sup>649</sup> The dynamic is a moral one, as Communists themselves—or anyone labeled such—were imagined by California’s rural establishment to be agents of a foreign ideology bent on the destruction of a natural order designated by divine providence.

Reclaiming the Postcolonial Landscape: Southwestern Migrant *Nonpersonhood* and the  
Reproduction of Colonial Arrangements of Power

Just as *Okie* unruliness was shaped by analogy through imagined connections to the Franklin D. Roosevelt Administration by way of New Deal initiatives, *Okie nonpersonhood* can be understood in terms of political counteraction to those same policies and an imagined reclamation of the postcolonial landscape. As this chapter’s first section suggests, relief was seen at the local level as a uniquely un-American institution and an illegitimate assault on regional substantive sovereignty. Perceived as limiting grower leverage over a traditionally powerless caste, relief directly challenged grower collective political hegemony within the postcolonial landscape. By insisting that farm labor was entitled to a certain level of basic human dignity, it was imagined in zero-sum terms as a challenge to the natural order and was viewed by California’s rural

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<sup>649</sup> Olmsted, *Right out of California*, 128; see also Pichardo Almanzar and Kulik, *American Fascism and the New Deal*, 112.

establishment as a threat to the replicative capacity of regional arrangements of power. *Okie nonpersonhood*, therefore, can be understood as the consequence of dominant class counteractions to New Deal initiatives and the efforts of sovereign authority to reclaim an imagined mastery over the region's physical and political landscapes.

As with earlier-arriving *Alterities*, *Okie nonpersonhood* in the colonial space was shaped by attempts to limit their full civic consideration under the law, or even deny their entry into the state altogether. The fact that many of these attempts were ultimately unsuccessful—or, being found unconstitutional, relatively short-lived—only speaks to the *de jure* assurances that southwesterner whiteness afforded them at a national level as American citizens and does not reflect the *de facto* realities of their civic consideration at the local level within California's rural population economies. In fact, as this chapter has suggested thus far, such *de jure* assurances were often perceived by dominant class Californians as challenges to regional autonomy and, paradoxically, only served to further reinforce local perceptions of *Okie* unruliness. This section, therefore, employs Sheth's Violence of Law framework to explore this dynamic in California during the New Deal era. Through an examination of the juridical mechanisms of violence deployed by the state's regional sovereign authority to secure the *civis* against the perceived dangers associated with southwestern migrant unruliness, this section illustrates the utility of law in rendering the sociopolitical *nonpersonhood* required to maintain the replicative capacities of regionally constructed colonial arrangements of power under the guise of modernity.



## Securing the *Civis*

The *stigmatypes* examined in the previous section not only encouraged dominant class Californians to think of *Okies* as *Other* in some aspect, but similar to Alta California's indigenous and *Mestizaje* populations they reinforce popular perceptions of migrant anachronism. “[T]racted out” of an agrarian way of life—as described by Steinbeck<sup>650</sup>—southwestern migrants stood in stark relief to pro-industrialist narratives of progress reproduced by dominant class Californians. They were something of a temporal anomaly, a holdover from a bygone era, and their identity as yeoman farmers was incompatible with the material dictates of California agriculture. Although many domestic migrants hoped to farm once again, California did not need farmers; it needed farmworkers. As far as the rural establishment was concerned, the frontier was closed, all its lands accounted for and put to their highest and best possible use by its most industrious class. Southwestern migrants as the latest wave of “imported labor” could either accept the role of the agricultural proletariat determined by California's population economies or be forced into it.

The legal mechanisms deployed in California's postcolonial landscape to manage *Unruly Okie Alterities* and the threats their presence in the state posed to the region's substantive sovereignty worked in a dual capacity as both reactions to perceived usurpations of the natural order by a corrupt liberal establishment in Washington D.C. and as mechanisms of coercion designed to psychologically condition domestic migrants (and their host communities) to their new role as industrial farm labor. Although these objectives appear distinct at first glance, by securing the *civis* and ensuring regional

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<sup>650</sup> Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 233.

colonial reproductions, both work towards the preservation of sovereign authority. The remainder of this section explores this dynamic via three key legal mechanisms designed to aid sovereign authority in reclaiming its imagined mastery over the postcolonial landscape and in rendering the migrant *nonpersonhood* required by California's traditional population economies. The first explores the role of anti-picketing ordinances in policing the landscape and in concealing sovereign authority's relationship to the replicative violence necessitated by the region's population economies. The next addresses grower efforts to symbolically reclaim the landscape by advocating for local control of FSA operated migrant camps. Finally, this section will explore the role of legal abandonment in reifying the juridico-political conditions of *nonpersonhood* required by California's population economies via attempts to exclude southwestern migrants from the state.<sup>651</sup>

Anti-picketing Ordinances. Local anti-picketing ordinances represent a terminative measure of colonial modernity. Like California's vagrancy code, these ordinances were crafted to control the colonial space. Activated in thirty-one counties, they are a collaborative response to perceived *Okie* unruliness by the Associated Farmers, the state's chambers of commerce, and local municipalities.<sup>652</sup> It was originally argued by the AF that the state's population economies were uniquely vulnerable to communist infiltration and such ordinances were necessary to protect the established order. As the Associated Farmers grew in strength and influence throughout the 1930s the organization

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<sup>651</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 23, 55-56.

<sup>652</sup> See testimony of District Attorney R. D. Hewitt, December 14, 1939, *S. Hearings*, 17520, 17525, 17526, 22268.

ceased to hide behind its anti-communist pretext, expanding its front to include all forms of unionization and collective bargaining.<sup>653</sup> In practice, however, these ordinances were used to perpetuate migrant vulnerability within the postcolonial space. By framing any act of collaboration or endeavor to assemble peacefully as potential threats to the established order, pro-industrial county officials were able to weaponize local anti-picketing ordinances at will to police the postcolonial space and perpetuate the migrant vulnerability required by the state's race-dependent landscape.<sup>654</sup>

For example, invoking language found in California's vagrancy code, Section Seven of the Sonoma County ordinance states that "It shall be unlawful for any person to loiter, stand or sit in or upon any public highway, street, alley, sidewalk or crosswalk so as to in any manner hinder or obstruct the free passage therein or thereon of persons . . . or so as to in any manner annoy or molest persons passing along or over the same."<sup>655</sup> Furthermore, the statute states that anyone found guilty of violating such dictates could be fined up to five hundred dollars and sentenced up to six months imprisonment.<sup>656</sup> Defining itself as an "urgency measure" and drawing on a language of threat as a justification for mass civil rights violations, Section Eleven states:

This Ordinance is hereby declared to be an urgency measure and necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health and safety, for the reason that there threatens to exist in the County of Sonoma a serious situation involving the interference of persons not directly or indirectly interested therein in the conduct of lawful enterprise; the purpose of such persons being to agitate and disturb the peace of the

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<sup>653</sup> *S. Report*, 46-47; *S. Hearings*, 22268-22273.

<sup>654</sup> *S. Report*, 47.

<sup>655</sup> "An Ordinance of the County of Sonoma to Prohibit Interference with Lawful Activities, Occupations and Business," Exhibit 95000, *S. Hearings*, 22343.

<sup>656</sup> Exhibit 95000, *S. Hearings*, 22343-22344.

people of the County of Sonoma, by inciting and prolonging disputes between employers and employees without regard to the interests of either of said groups; said interference of such persons threatens to and will seriously interfere with and hinder the carrying on of lawful business in the County of Sonoma and will particularly interfere with and hinder the business of picking, hauling packing, shipping and marketing of the products of agriculture, thus affecting the lives, peace, and property of great numbers of people in the County of Sonoma; that unless the practice of persons congregating upon the streets and highways and other public places for the purpose of unlawfully interfering with lawful business is discontinued, such practice will tend to attract criminal, vicious and undesirable characters and to cause great disorder and many breaches of peace and quiet of the County of Sonoma, and constitute a menace to life, limb and property.<sup>657</sup>

Although many local ordinances, Sonoma's included, contained clauses recognizing the constitutional right of laborers to "lawfully assemble" and "peacefully picket," the determination of who classified as peaceful, what groups were allowed to assemble, and for what purpose, most often fell on local sheriffs with vested interests in ensuring grower access to vulnerable labor.<sup>658</sup>

For instance, Sheriff John A. Miller of Contra Costa County testified before the La Follette Committee in December of 1939 that he used his county's ordinance to preemptively detain potential "agitators" blacklisted by the AF during harvests under the auspice of law and order.<sup>659</sup> Working with the Associated Farmers, as well as state and county officials, Sheriff Miller formed the Diablo Valley Public Relations Committee (DVPRC). "Composed of five small ranchers selected by [Sheriff Miller], five large

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<sup>657</sup> Exhibit 95000, *S. Hearings*, 22344.

<sup>658</sup> See testimony of District Attorney Joseph L. Heenan, December 14, 1939 in *S. Hearings*, 17579-17583; Sheriff Bert M. Ullrey, December 14, 1939 in *S. Hearings*, 17513-17514; Exhibit 95000, *S. Hearings*, 22344; see also Exhibit 8052, *S. Hearings*, 17769; Exhibit 8054, *S. Hearings*, 17771; Exhibit 8055, *S. Hearings*, 17773.

<sup>659</sup> *S. Hearings*, 18031-18033.

farmers selected by the farm organizations [the AF], and five merchants or laboring men selected by the ten farmers,” the fifteen members of the DVPRC had total authority in the supervision of harvests.<sup>660</sup> A mandatory registration system designed by Miller himself—and eventually adopted by the California State Employment Service<sup>661</sup>—allowed the county and the AF to document information on every farm worker throughout the harvest. At the close of the season, all registration cards returned to Miller’s office by DVPRC members were crossed referenced with AF records to identify and blacklist potential agitators in advance of the next harvest.<sup>662</sup> At the start of the following season, blacklisted agricultural workers were identified by the AF before their arrival in the county, and preemptively arrested by Millers deputies “on the theory” that such persons intended to disturb the peace, thus violating the county anti-picketing ordinance.<sup>663</sup>

In his testimony before the La Follette Committee, Sheriff Bert M. Ullrey of Sutter County verified that he used the ordinance preemptively as well to deputize members of the community (and several AF members) in order to “prevent any outbreak of labor trouble or to quickly control any disturbances that arise” during “peach picking season.”<sup>664</sup> When compared to arrests made in neighboring Yuba County over the same period under Sheriff Charles McCoy’s direction, Ullrey’s strategy, at first glance, appears

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<sup>660</sup> Exhibit 8264, *S. Hearings*, 18004,18137; see also Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 170.

<sup>661</sup> *S. Hearings*, 18006.

<sup>662</sup> Exhibit 8264, *S. Hearings*, 18004,18137; Exhibit 8303, *S. Hearings* 18173; Miller, *S. Hearings*, 18004-18012, 18032-18036; see also McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 233-234.

<sup>663</sup> Exhibit 8303, *S. Hearings* 18173; Miller, *S. Hearings*, 18032-18036; see also Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 170.

<sup>664</sup> Ullrey, *S. Hearings*, 17514, quote 17634.

to be an effective preventative measure.<sup>665</sup> However, the fact that Ullrey, as he himself indicates, never found the need to enforce Sutter County's ordinance—presumably because of the show of force attributed to preemptive special deputization—speaks volumes about the efficacy of these ordinances in reasserting dominance in the postcolonial space.

Sheriff McCoy, on the other hand, deputized fewer citizens in Yuba County than Ullrey did in Sutter, but relied heavily on arrests. According to his testimony, he worked with the C.I.O. to set clear parameters for “peaceful picketing, as you call it.”<sup>666</sup> But, once any altercation occurred between picketers and farmers, or their employees, he enforced his county's ordinance to its full extent, rounding up any perceived radicals throughout the county for weeks following the event, no matter the circumstances or the seriousness of the altercation.<sup>667</sup> Despite McCoy's claim that Yuba County Ordinance 105 (anti-picketing) was typically reserved for individuals believed to be “ringleaders,” a review of the “Jail Register of the County of Yuba, State of California” from the summer of 1939 reveals that sixty-three people were arrested and charged with anti-picketing and another twenty-eight were charged with vagrancy—by comparison, there were only two other charges recorded that summer: one for “Petty theft” and one for “Battery.”<sup>668</sup>

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<sup>665</sup> Ullrey, *S. Hearings*, 17524; “Jail Register of the County of Yuba, State of California,” in *S. Hearings*, 17835.

<sup>666</sup> See testimony of Sheriff Charles McCoy, December 14, 1939 in *S. Hearings*, 17585-17586.

<sup>667</sup> McCoy, *S. Hearings*, 17583-17586; “Jail Register of the County of Yuba, State of California,” in *S. Hearings*, 17835.

<sup>668</sup> McCoy, *S. Hearings*, 17584; “Jail Register of the County of Yuba, State of California,” in *S. Hearings*, 17835.

The fact that only seven of these individuals were actually prosecuted is irrelevant. What matters is how county officials and local law enforcement utilized these measures to exert control over domestic migrants in the postcolonial space by perpetuating their vulnerability as migratory labor through legally sanctioned mass violations of basic civil rights. As the La Follette Committee ultimately concludes, anti-picketing ordinances in California's rural valleys were used as "weapon[s] of discrimination, pure and simple, against the organization of agricultural employees."<sup>669</sup>

The report further states that:

Small armies of growers and ranchers were organized, drilled, and instructed in the application of these ordinances and the means of enforcing them. In some counties the antipicketing ordinance was accompanied by ordinances forbidding parades, or spurious health ordinances, the application of which was sufficient to break up camps of striking migrants. The antipicketing ordinance was also used as a means of arresting and imprisoning strike leaders.<sup>670</sup>

However, as previously addressed, the threat of communism in the southwestern migrant case was largely exaggerated, as was their proclivity for unionization. The fact is, anti-picketing ordinances had little to do with the perceived threats of communism, or even the imagined tendency of southwesterner farmworkers to unionize. They were designed to reassert dominant class hegemony over a laboring subject group devoid of traditional phenotypical distinctions in a race-dependent postcolonial landscape historically governed by visually obvious representations of biological variance. "These associations [the AF and the state's chambers of commerce] have said in so many words

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<sup>669</sup> *S. Report*, 47.

<sup>670</sup> *S. Report*, 47.

that they require a peon class to succeed,” writes Steinbeck in *Harvest Gypsies*. “Any action to better the condition of the migrants will be considered radical to them.”<sup>671</sup> Trade unions, by their very nature, are mechanisms of unity designed to erode the social atomization required by colonial hierarchies, and, therefore, represent direct threats to the replicative capacities of colonial orders.<sup>672</sup> Framing domestic migrants as radicals not only reinforces their perceived alterity in the broader community—as “lazy” idlers and potential Communists—it justifies actions designed to maximize their vulnerability as a caste of political *nonpersons* under the guise of jurisprudence, ultimately ensuring the replicative capacity of traditional arrangements of power, and the hierarchies of worth on which they depend, in the postcolonial landscape.

Camps. Similar to other forms of relief, growers fought for local control of FSA migrant camps throughout the late 1930s, arguing, as Roy Pike did before the Commonwealth Club in December of 1935, that federal operators were unaccustomed to the local dictates of the state’s rural economies and, their idealism and inexperience prevented them from properly operating these camps. “The solution to the migratory camp problem,” asserted Pike, “is merely that whenever they are established they be locally controlled and operated by the ranch operators in the districts for which they are established.”<sup>673</sup> Appealing to conservative values of small government and drawing on commonly reproduced AF assertions that growers supported housing improvement programs for

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<sup>671</sup> Steinbeck, *The Harvest Gypsies*, 44.

<sup>672</sup> Stanley, *How Fascism Works*, 171.

<sup>673</sup> Pike, “The Point of View of The Large Farmer,” 165.



migratory farmworkers as long as they are implemented with the needs of industry in mind, Pike continued:

In these days when Federal funds are available the use of them for migratory camp construction is undoubtedly defensible, but this must not carry with it the penalty of Federal Government bureaus taking control of their operation . . . . We feel the prerequisite to the proper solution of the migratory laborer camps is the acceptance of the principal that they be established not according to any standard formula, but that they be constructed in a manner best suited to each district which they are to serve, and that they be operated in a manner which will best serve the development of agriculture in such districts.”<sup>674</sup>

What is interesting about Pike’s speech, and the perspective of AF members on the camp issue in general, is that the Farm Security Administration and its camps were not the radical institutions that they are often imagined to be. Although supporters such as McWilliams understood their long-term potential in moving California towards a more egalitarian “collective agriculture economy,” in praxis, the FSA program helped maintain the regional status quo.<sup>675</sup> As social geographer Don Mitchell argues in his neo-Marxist work, *The Lie of the Land*:

Class struggle in the California fields was truly a special struggle, a struggle over the shape of the land. The experiment with the federal camps—which both McWilliams and Steinbeck heralded as great advancements—led in just the opposite direction: workers remained quite marginalized because the camp program *supported* existing spatial arrangements. Because they were white, the migrants of the Dust Bowl era attracted a good deal more interest, curiosity, and sympathy than had many farmworkers before them. But growers little cared about the “race” of their workers as long as they were cheap, temporary and powerless. The federal camps did little to redress imbalances of power.<sup>676</sup>

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<sup>674</sup> Pike, “The Point of View of The Large Farmer,” 165-166.

<sup>675</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 303-304.

<sup>676</sup> Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 193.

FSA camps may not have redressed the imbalances of power in California, but, as the growers saw it, they did jeopardize their access to “cheap, temporary and powerless” labor. As a result, grower resistance to FSA camps remained high, and progress was slow. For instance, of the twenty-four originally planned migrant camps, only fifteen were operational by 1940.<sup>677</sup> In *Factories*, McWilliams criticizes that growers opposed federal camps because their presence in the state’s agricultural valleys hampered local control of both physical and political landscapes. “The reasons [for] this opposition are obvious,” writes McWilliams, “In every strike of field workers in California, the growers have resorted to wholesale evictions as a strikebreaking device.” Continuing, McWilliams states:

In those cases where workers were housed on company premises . . . evictions could be summarily obtained; in those cases where the workers were congregated in impoverished camps, or jungles, the camps could be raided [by local authorities] on the theory that they constituted a menace to the public health. With the camps located on property owned by an agency of the Federal Government, an entirely different issue is presented. State and county agencies, for example are powerless to act: and, in the case of a strike, United States Marshals might conceivably be induced to protect workers housed in the camps from the vigilante practices of growers.<sup>678</sup>

Although southwestern migrants were less inclined to unionize than California’s other exogenous subject groups, picketing as a means of collective bargaining was not unheard of. The real threat to local growers, however, as McWilliams suggests, was their diminished mastery over the postcolonial landscape. FSA camps had the dual capacity of

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<sup>677</sup> Omer Mills, “Farm Labor Program of the Farm Security Administration” see Exhibit 9376, in *S. Hearings*, 21924-21925.

<sup>678</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 298-299.

both empowering a formerly powerless caste in the postcolonial space, while weakening traditional forms of grower dominance employed to manage said caste. The camp issue was about control of workers, as well as space. The La Follette Committee came to similar conclusions through its investigation of grower opposition to the FSA program. In its report to Congress, it states that “private camps are one of the most effective means available to the employer for controlling his labor. Squatter communities or central labor camps that are locally controlled and subject to local ordinances or police officers present no real threat to this employer control if the local group is possessed of sufficient influence. But public camps that are subject only to Federal control presents certain difficulties to the employer group.”<sup>679</sup>

As the previous chapter demonstrates, the world that growers had created in California was completely dependent on a powerless proletariat, and federal camps upset that dynamic. The problem was that the dignity and security afforded camp residents was antithetical to the dehumanizing dictates of California’s industrial agricultural practices. FSA camps were wholesome spaces where families could do more than just survive. Offering welfare and security for 3,300 migrant families, they were spaces of empowerment.<sup>680</sup> They were places of respite, where workers could heal and experience some level of dignity. But most of all, camps provided the material means necessary for families to assert agency over their own lives, to think once more about the future and dare to dream as persons. As Dr. Omer Mills describes in his report to the La Follette Committee:

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<sup>679</sup> *S. Report*, 1224.

<sup>680</sup> *S. Hearings*, 21925.

Standard permanent camps provide tent platforms or metal shelters for the separate use of resident families; utility buildings with flushing toilets, shower baths, and laundry tubs; a community building with a stage, an auditorium, a kitchen, and nursery school facilities; a health center building for use by the Public Health Service and by the Agricultural Workers Health & Medical Association; and playgrounds and athletic fields. There are also sewage and garbage plants, electric street lights, and a water system. Hot water is available in the utility buildings.

. . . . A great variety of community activities have been developed by the camp residents with help of the camp managers, the WPA, the NYA, local educational authorities, local churches and other interested and sympathetic groups. The more important of these are the camp governing body (the camp council and camp assembly); church and Sunday School; nursery and play school; libraries and reading rooms; weekly dances and holiday parties; camp newspapers; baseball and other athletic games, and educational classes such as cooking, sewing, weaving, dancing arts and crafts, etc. NYA projects in the camps afford opportunities for job training to constantly increasing numbers of the youth of the migrant agricultural group.<sup>681</sup>

Obviously, the security and dignity provided by the spaces described by Dr. Mills presents a challenge to an economic system dependent on a vulnerable corps of migratory labor. Camps were not just spaces where growers traditionally exerted authority, they are also spaces where power is withheld and reified. Juxtaposed against Steinbeck's description of a typical private camp experience, the danger to the established order becomes readily apparent. In *Harvest Gypsies*, Steinbeck writes:

The ranches operated by these speculative farmers usually have houses for their migrant laborers, houses for which they charge a rent of from three to 15 dollars a month. On most of the places it is not allowed that a worker refuse to pay the rent. If he wants to work, he must live in the house, and the rent is taken from his first pay.

. . . . The houses, one-room shacks usually about 10 by 12 feet, have no rug, no water, no bed. In one corner there is a little iron wood stove. Water must be carried from a faucet at the end of the street. Also at the head of the street there will be either a dug toilet or a toilet with a septic tank to serve 100 to 150 people. A fairly typical ranch in Kern County had one

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<sup>681</sup> S. *Hearings*, 21925.

bath house with a single shower and no heated water for the use of the whole block of houses, which had a capacity of 400 people.

The arrival of the migrant on such a ranch is something like this—he is assigned a house for his family; he may have from three to six children, but they must all live in the one room. He finds the ranch heavily policed by deputized employes [*sic.*].

The will of the ranch owner, then, is law; for these deputies are always on hand, their guns conspicuous. A disagreement constitutes resisting an officer. A glance at the list of migrants shot during a single year in California for “resisting an officer” will give a fair idea of the casualness of these “officers” in shooting workers.

. . . . On these large ranches there is no attempt made for the relaxation or entertainment of the workers. Indeed any attempt to congregate is broken up by the deputies for it is feared that if they are allowed to congregate they will organize, and that is the one thing the large ranches will not permit at any cost.

The attitude of the employer on the large ranch is one of hatred and suspicion, his method is the threat of the deputies’ guns. The workers are herded about like animals. Every possible method is used to make them feel inferior and insecure. At the slightest suspicion that the men are organizing they are run from the ranch at the points of guns. The large ranch owners know that if organization is ever effected there will be the expense of toilets, showers, decent living conditions and a raise in wages.

The attitude of the workers on the large ranch is much that of the employer, hatred and suspicion. The worker sees himself surrounded by force. He knows that he can be murdered without fear on the part of the employer, and he has little recourse to law. He has taken refuge in a sullen, tense quiet. He cannot resist the credit that allows him to feed his family, [but] he knows perfectly well the reason for the credit.

. . . . The labor policy of these absentee-directed large farms has created the inevitable result. Usually there are guards at the gates, the roads are patrolled, permission to inspect the premises is never given.

. . . . It would almost seem that having built the repressive attitude toward the labor they need to survive, the directors were terrified of the things they have created. This fear dictates an increase of the repressive method, a greater number of guards and a constant suggestion that the ranch is armed to fight.<sup>682</sup>

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<sup>682</sup> Steinbeck, *The Harvest Gypsies*, 34-36.

The conditions described by Steinbeck illustrates the role of camps in reifying a colonial order. Camps were not just spaces where California stored its human capital. Like the state's Chinatowns, Little Tokyos, Little Manilas, and *colonias* and *barrios*, they were material environments designed to reinforce psychological distinctions between an *us* and a *them*, dominant and subservient, person and *nonperson*. Traditionally, camps in California were extra-juridical spaces governed by the application of extra-legal forms of violence towards a powerless caste generally comprised of subject groups imagined to be *non-white*.<sup>683</sup> Operating beyond the normal jurical-political dictates of society, they were spaces responsible for both exemplifying power and maximizing vulnerability via the law's abandonment of the *Other*. Not only were FSA camps seen materially in the landscape as federal usurpations of space, they were also seen as encroachments on a way of life—setting dangerous precedents that jeopardized regional grower dominance of the colonial space. Grower opposition to these camps, therefore, should not be interpreted as just a form of resistance to federal intervention in California's agricultural valleys, but also as dominant class actions inspired by a belief in *Okie* subalternity within the local imaginary.

Okie Exclusion. On May 16, 1935, a conservative faction of the California State Assembly led by Kurt Redwine of Los Angeles and Herbert Jones of Santa Clara, introduced Assembly Bill No. 2459 as an emergency measure. The bill—entitled “An act to prevent the entry into California of paupers, vagabonds, indigent persons likely to

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<sup>683</sup> In *Casting Out*, critical race theorist Sherene Razack asserts that “Camps are places where the rules of the world cease to apply.” They are “created as a state of exception, [as] a place where, paradoxically, the law has determined that the rule of law does not apply. Since there is no common bond of humanity between the camp's inmates and those outside, there is no common law. For those marked as outside humanity, law reserves the space of the exception.” Sherene Razack, *Casting Out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 7.

become public charges, and persons affected with contagious or infectious diseases”—provided the legal means necessary for enforcing the exclusion of United States citizens from the State of California on the basis ingrained *stigmatypes*.<sup>684</sup> Although the bill was ultimately defeated in the State Senate on June 15, it is significant because it exposes popular middle-class anxieties regarding perceived *Okie* alterity in the postcolonial landscape, while also demonstrating the historical proclivity of California’s sovereign authority to withhold certain juridical protections from subaltern subject groups constructed as “outsiders.”<sup>685</sup>

In *American Exodus*, historian James N. Gregory frames California’s exclusionary measures, in both the domestic migrant case and the Chinese case—as well as other discriminatory measures deployed to manage other imported groups—as political responses during moments of resource scarcity. Discounting the region’s colonial heritage—and the role of race in managing its colonial space—and demonstrating the dangers of perpetuating histories of exception, he writes that:

The state was well practiced in the politics of exclusion. The flip side of its fair-weather openness was a mean-spirited habit of hostility towards certain outsiders during times of stress and uncertainty. Nonwhites had borne the brunt of it. During the state’s first major depression in the 1870s, the issue of Chinese exclusion had become first a rallying point for the white working class and after a basic touchstone of state politics . . . When economic opportunities narrowed or when war or political struggles raised anxieties, immigrants were often singled out for exclusion.

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<sup>684</sup> California State Assembly, “An act to prevent the entry into California of paupers, vagabonds, indigent persons likely to become public charges, and persons affected with contagious or infectious diseases,” *Journal of the Assembly During the Fifty-First Session of the Legislature of the State of California* (Sacramento: State Printing Office, 1935): 3422.

<sup>685</sup> California State Legislature, *Assembly Final History: Synopsis of Assembly Bills, Constitutional Amendments, Concurrent and Joint Resolutions, Fifty-First Session of the Legislature of the State of California* (Sacramento: State Printing Office, 1935): 680.

. . . . These were the precedents that fed California's . . . response to the Dust Bowl migrants. The instinct to protect scarce resources from outsiders is probably manifest in all societies, and there is no reason to ascribe any particular strain of selfishness to residents of the Golden State. But a society that turns frequently to exclusion solutions in times of crisis will find that an easy course to repeat the next time around.<sup>686</sup>

This study accepts Gregory's assessment that Californians were conditioned to use exclusionary measures as political means of managing "outsiders." However, by discounting the role of race in creating the social conditions required to justify and successfully implement acts of exclusion, Gregory's political analysis taints both his interpretation of the *Okie* experience as well as his interpretation of similar episodes of exclusion. Although it is true, as Gregory states, that "When economic opportunities narrowed or when war or political struggles raised anxieties, immigrants were often singled out for exclusion" in California, the dynamic is not purely economic. The epistemological blindness that prevents him from seeing race in the *Okie* context also restricts his interpretation of Chinese exclusion, framing it as a matter of happenstance "during times of stress and uncertainty" rather than a response necessitated by the complex material realities of the state's race-dependent landscape. Redwine and Jones, after all, did not attempt to exclude southwestern migrants on the basis of being "poor" or "impoverished"—categories which signify economic status, and terms that would lend credence to Gregory's perspective. On the contrary, these politicians sought to exclude fellow Americans with *de jure* assurances to all the rights and privileges of United States citizenship on the basis of some perceived flaw in character as "paupers, vagabonds, [and] indigent persons"—boundary terms which, similar to "lazy" and "idle," signify

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<sup>686</sup> Gregory, *American Exodus*, 79-80.



subject group alterity, betray a certain degree of moral condemnation and contempt, and have been enshrined in the language of United States law as persons “constitut[ing] a ‘moral pestilence’”<sup>687</sup>—and through the reproduction of *stigmatypes* which frame migrants as carriers of disease and are clearly meant to accentuate the dangers of southwestern migration. Attempts to exclude southwestern migrants, therefore, not only reflect the efficacy of reproduced *stigmatypes* in reifying the otherness required to initiate exclusionary measures, but, similar to Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino restrictions, they also expose a diminished sense of *de facto* local citizenship within the postcolonial space and reveal the willingness of California’s sovereign authority to perpetuate migrant vulnerability within that space as sociopolitical *nonpersons*, unworthy of the equal rights, privileges, and protections of the polity.<sup>688</sup>

Unfortunately, the Redwine and Jones bill was only the first attempt at *Okie* exclusion. As mentioned in the previous section, in February of 1936, Police Chief James Davis deployed 135 LAPD officers along the state’s ports of entry to deter inbound migration and intercept “criminals” before they entered the state. Chief Davis claimed that the purpose of his initiative, popularly coined the “bum blockade” or “hobo barrier” by the press, was to “turn back all railroad fare evaders, hitch-hikers and all other persons who have no definite purpose for coming into the state.”<sup>689</sup> Although he also claimed that “Families in automobiles or anyone who can show he or she has a good reason for

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<sup>687</sup> Wray, *Not Quite White*, 26; *Edwards v. California* in “Cases Adjudged in The Supreme Court at October Term 1941,” *United States Reports* 314 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1942): 177.

<sup>688</sup> Alexander, “Citizenship Contested,” 189.

<sup>689</sup> “Police Take Up Duty on State Lines,” *Los Angeles Times*, 1.

entrance will not be affected,” stories of mass civil liberty violations, police brutality, fingerprinting schemes of—as one LAPD officer put it—people “who looked like criminals,” and rumors of families turned back at the border to face the desert simply because they had no money, persisted in left-leaning publications like *The Nation*.<sup>690</sup> Ultimately, Chief Davis’s blockade ended in embarrassment for the City of Los Angeles. The perceived whiteness of southwestern migrants drew national attention to this social drama, resulting in public criticisms of the LAPD, increased scrutiny by federal officials and the ACLU—bringing the operation to a close after only six weeks.<sup>691</sup>

The legal basis of Chief Davis’s operation rested in Section 2615 of California’s Welfare and Institutions Code. “An Act to provide for the aid and relief of indigents,” provided the legal mechanisms necessary for the arrest and imprisonment of individuals knowingly assisting “indigent persons” in coming to the state. After the disbanding of the LAPD blockade and the failure of Assembly Bill No. 2459, § 2615 was codified in 1937 to broaden its application and increase its efficacy in stemming the migrant tide.<sup>692</sup> Traditionally, “indigents” in California law had been designated as single men. This new wave of migration, however, increasingly consisted of entire families. By omitting a definition of “indigent” in the revised statute, the now popularly labeled “Anti-Okie Law” was more subjective and was increasingly utilized in areas of the state heavily

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<sup>690</sup> “Police Take Up Duty on State Lines,” *Los Angeles Times*, 1; Rose Marie Packard, “The Los Angeles Border Patrol,” *The Nation* CXLII, no. 3687 (March 4, 1936): 295; Nancy J. Taniguchi, “California’s ‘Anti-Okie’ Law: An Interpretive Biography,” *Western Legal History: The Journal of the Ninth Judicial Circuit Historical Society* 8, no.1 (Winter/Spring 1995): 280.

<sup>691</sup> Gregory, *American Exodus*, 80; Taniguchi, “California’s ‘Anti-Okie’ Law,” 280.

<sup>692</sup> Taniguchi, “California’s ‘Anti-Okie’ Law,” 281.

impacted by domestic migrant inflow and could be applied in any case where someone sought relief after being brought to California by more established family members.<sup>693</sup>

Ultimately, California's *Anti-Okie* law was found to be unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court on the grounds that it violated the commerce clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. After reviewing dozens of cases, ACLU attorneys Philip Adams and Wayne M. Collins hand-picked the case of Fred F. Edwards to challenge the constitutionality of the state ordinance. In 1939 Edwards was charged and convicted of violating the statute—receiving a six-month suspended sentence—for aiding his brother-in-law, Frank Duncan, in the migration of his family from Texas to Marysville, California. Edwards was charged by local authorities after Duncan applied for SRA parental relief on behalf of his pregnant wife and it was determined that Duncan had received relief in Texas before coming to California.<sup>694</sup> Arguing for the appellant, attorney Samuel Slaff took a critical stance against California's rural establishment. "The protection of our form of government may not be minified by reasons of temporary economic expediency," argued Slaff. "Freedom of movement and of residence must be a fundamental right in a democratic society. Whether within the privileges and immunities clause of the Fourteenth Amendment or within the term liberty in the due process clause, it is a basic constitutional right, the more valuable to those who migrate because of economic compulsion."<sup>695</sup> Furthermore, Slaff asserted that the statute posed an "arbitrary

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<sup>693</sup> Taniguchi, "California's 'Anti-Okie' Law," 281-283.

<sup>694</sup> Taniguchi, "California's 'Anti-Okie' Law," 282-283.

<sup>695</sup> *Edwards v. California*, 163.

interference” and undue “burden” on carriers engaged in interstate commerce, “over which Congress has executive jurisdiction.”<sup>696</sup>

On behalf of the State of California, Assistant Attorney General William T. Sweigert—assisted on brief by then Attorney General Earl Warren and Senator Hiram Johnson—argued that the statute in no way excludes the “normal” migration of any migrant, and only applies to the activities of persons who voluntarily engage in bringing indigent persons into the state, and, through such actions, attribute “to a local problem affecting the health, safety, welfare and economic resources of the State.”<sup>697</sup> Sweigert further asserted that the right to move across state borders was “not referable to the privileges and immunities clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.” Referencing other episodes of exclusion, he argued that “Congress has acted to exclude alien ‘paupers,’ ‘professional beggars,’ ‘vagrants,’ and ‘persons whose ticket or passage is paid for by the money of another, or who are assisted by others to come . . .’ (U. S. C. Tit. 8, § 3), but has not provided any similar legislation for interstate migration.”<sup>698</sup> Moreover, asserted Sweigert, Edwards was not in a position to challenge the constitutionality of the state’s statute under the constitutional provisions of privileges or immunities because he was deprived of neither.<sup>699</sup>

Nevertheless, in November of 1941 the Supreme Court reversed Edwards’s conviction. Although the justices disagreed as to whether or not the State of California

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<sup>696</sup> *Edwards v. California*, 165-166.

<sup>697</sup> *Edwards v. California*, 169.

<sup>698</sup> *Edwards v. California*, 169-170.

<sup>699</sup> *Edwards v. California*, 170.

had the authority to regulate such commerce, the court agreed unanimously with Slaff's assessment that § 2615 placed an unconstitutional burden on actors engaging in interstate commerce.<sup>700</sup> Delivering the opinion for the Court, Justice James Byrnes was critical of California's attempt to "isolate itself from the difficulties common to all [states during the Great Depression] by restraining the transportation of persons and property across its borders." Quoting the late Justice Benjamin Cardozo, Byrnes concludes that such actions are antithetical to the spirit of the Constitution, which was 'framed upon the theory that the people of the several States must sink or swim together, and that in the long run prosperity and salvation are in union and not division,' and ultimately runs contrary to America's trajectory.<sup>701</sup>

In his concurring opinion, Justice William Douglas took the stance that § 2615 was clearly repugnant to the Constitution, as it violated the national rights of citizenship. After engaging in a review of the privileges and immunities clauses and its use in ensuring the personal liberty of United States citizens from the discriminatory practices of states, he concludes:

The right to move from State to State is an incident of *national* citizenship protected by the privileges and immunities clause of the Fourteenth Amendment against state interference.

. . . . The conclusion that the right of free movement is a right of *national* citizenship stands on firm historical grounds. If a state tax on that movement . . . is invalid, *a fortiori* a state statute which obstructs or in substance prevents that movement must fall. That result necessarily follows unless perchance a State can curtail the right of free movement of those who are poor or destitute. But to allow such an exception to be engrafted on the rights of *national* citizenship would be to contravene every concept of national unity. It would also introduce a caste system utterly incompatible with the spirit of our system of government. It would

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<sup>700</sup> Taniguchi, "California's 'Anti-Okie' Law," 284.

<sup>701</sup> *Edwards v. California*, 174.

permit those who were stigmatized by a State as indigents, paupers, or vagabonds to be relegated to an inferior class of citizenship. It would prevent a citizen because he was poor from seeking new horizons in other States. It might thus withhold from large segments of our people that mobility which is basic to any guarantee of freedom of opportunity. The result would be a substantial dilution of the rights of *national* citizenship, a serious impairment of the principles of equality. Since the statute here challenged involves such consequences, it runs afoul of the privileges and immunities clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.<sup>702</sup>

Douglas's words muster the currents of oppression used throughout Anglo-American occupation in the American West to marginalize the *Other*. Whether or not Douglas was aware of the ways in which race is reified as a technology through juridico-political processes in a liberal democracy is unclear. His opinion, however, clearly demonstrates that he understood the implications of the law's abandonment in naturalizing the *Other*. Although § 2615 veiled itself as a police measure designed to protect the health and safety of California citizens—a right that, as Sweigert attests and several justices concurred, clearly falls within the purview of the state's sovereign authority—Douglas and Byrnes recognized that its aims ultimately diminished southwestern migrant substantive personhood as United States citizens: relegating them “to an inferior class of citizenship” by robbing them of the basic privileges, personal liberties, and “equal protection of the laws,” guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment to “any *person* within its jurisdiction.”

Framing § 2615 not as an exclusionary measure but as a means of controlling commerce in the name of civic welfare, Sweigert attempts to skirt charges of civil liberty violations—the act, after all, does not directly prevent or attempt to criminalize the

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<sup>702</sup> *Edwards v. California*, 178, 181.

migration of *Okies* as a class of persons into the state, it merely seeks to regulate the means of aiding said migration. In praxis, however, the aims of § 2615 differed little from previous restrictionist policies. The law—along with Assembly Bill No. 2459 and Chief Davis’s Blockade—represents California’s historical prerogative for deploying exclusionary measures to secure the *civis* against imagined *Others* and for perpetuating their vulnerability as juridico-political *nonpersons* within the colonial space by depriving them of full and equal civic consideration under the law.

As evidenced by Sweigert’s argument and the equivalencies he draws between southwestern migrants and previously excluded “alien ‘paupers,’ ‘professional beggars,’ ‘vagrants,’ and ‘persons whose ticket or passage is paid for by the money of another’”—characterizations historically associated with racial inferiority, slavery and *coolieism* within the United States—domestic migrants by this point were already regarded as fundamentally *Other* in some aspect by California’s sovereign authority. The state’s “Anti-*Okie* law” attests to their diminished *de facto* citizenship within California’s postcolonial space and denotes an attempt by sovereign authority to perpetuate domestic migrant vulnerability. The fact that the law was ultimately found to be unconstitutional at a political moment when the Alien Land Law—which also operated as a measure of indirect exclusion—was still in effect in California and other exclusionary measures still operated nationally via Chinese Exclusion and Johnson-Reed, only testifies to the *de jure* assurances afforded southwestern migrants at the national level by their perceived whiteness.

## Chapter VI.

### Conclusion

In light of the evidence presented in Chapter V, it is apparent that agriculturally bound southwestern migrants entering California's postcolonial space in the latter half of the 1930s and early 1940s experienced some degree of racialization at the local level. If this study's colonial modernity framework is valid, then the evidence suggests that the same technological process of racialization traditionally deployed within the colonial space to manage colonized *Alterities* in the state's race-dependent landscape was also deployed to manage southwestern migrant unruliness. As with all colonial dynamics, the colonial arrangements of power protracted by California's industrial agriculture development necessitated the maintenance of a powerless caste of juridico-political *nonpersons*. Historically, race, as a technology of colonial power, has been deployed throughout California to preserve this pool of vulnerable labor and maintain the normative boundaries of racial difference responsible for separating its white management class from its *non-white* agricultural proletariat. As indicated by the record, southwestern migrants were not immune to this process of technological racialization on the basis of cultural whiteness—their otherness resulting, not just from their perceived discontinuity with the normative dictates of a locally constructed whiteness in California's rural valley communities, but the material necessity of their *nonpersonhood* as a caste of farm labor within the postcolonial space.



It is tempting to regard § 2615 and other measures designed to control the postcolonial space as flawed short-sighted attempts by California's sovereign authority to merely protect its interests at a moment of resource scarcity—and many historians have.<sup>703</sup> To do so, however, discounts the historical proclivity of California's sovereign authority to maximize industrial farm labor's vulnerability through the withholding of certain juridical protections as full and equal citizens under the law from subject groups believed to be *Other*. Such views ignore the role of legal abandonment in garnering the juridico-political conditions of *nonpersonhood* required by California's population economies. As with other periods of racialization in California, when one exogenous form of labor became unreliable California growers looked to marginalize the next. Due to a confluence of economic, ecological and political circumstances, southwestern migrants found themselves in California's fields just as repatriation schemes threatened continued grower access to Mexicana/o and Filipino labor. Ultimately, their vulnerability and conceptual foreignness made southwestern migrants the most suitable candidates for replacement labor, and the state's sovereign authority set out to maximize their vulnerability via traditional means.

Local contempt for southwestern migrants in rural California during the 1930s resulted from their station, as farmworkers, and the dictates of the state's race-dependent postcolonial landscape. As discussed in the Introduction, class anxieties, the specter of communism, and the paranoia of government overreach, alone insufficiently account for the discourses of inferiority that accompanied this episode of domestic migration, let

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<sup>703</sup> Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 258-285; Gregory, *American Exodus*, 78-113; Stein, *California and the Dust Bowl Migration*, 32-70; Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold*, 137-164; Sackman, *Orange Empire*, 218-261; Kathryn Olmsted, *Right Out of California*, 127-128.

alone the unprecedented restrictionist measures deployed by California's sovereign authority to secure the *civis* against fellow "white" Americans—measures hitherto only applied to *non-white* foreign subject groups. Rather than an aberration of liberal democracy brought on by short-term interests, however, these developments fit a pattern of replicative colonial violence traditionally employed by California's sovereign authority to marginalize its most vulnerable populations, exploit their labor, and manage its race-dependent landscape.

In each case explored by this study race was deployed to maintain the dramatic disparities in power required to sustain the reproduction of California's colonial arrangements of power—and the *Okie* experience was no different. As this study indicates, the racialization process is not universal, varying by region, political and material circumstance, and economic interests. However, although each process of racialization is historically specific, the replication of this process, and its accumulative effects, are historically consistent. As demonstrated throughout this study, California's rural elites were conditioned to deploy racial measures to manage newly arriving *Alterities*. With each subsequent body of exogenous labor introduced to the colonial space the categories of whiteness were tightened to justify the marginalization of threats previously unaccounted for. The *Okie* experience paralleled the processes of racialization deployed to meet the challenges posed by each form of imported exogenous labor before them. Just as with earlier arriving subject groups, southwestern migrants were marked-out as *Unruly* threats by normative transgressions identified as evidence of their discontinuity with the ever-tightening local dictates of cultural whiteness. Their transgressiveness encouraged discourses of inferiority employing *stigmatypes* meant to

naturalize their perceived alterity in the colonial landscape and justified their subaltern status within regional hierarchies of worth as exogenous *Others*. A dynamic which ultimately resulted in the deployment of juridico-political measures by California's sovereign authority to ensure traditional disparities in power and reify the conditions of migrant *nonpersonhood* required to sustain regional population economies.

In light of this history, the notion that southwestern migrant otherness in California's rural communities was determined solely by the political circumstances of the Great Depression and the New Deal, is unsubstantiated. Likewise, the idea that efforts to maximize subject-group vulnerability by denying *Okies* full moral and civic consideration as persons under the law resulted from these same influences—or, perhaps, even the natural consequences of capital modernity—is equally flawed on the same grounds. Such perspectives, as addressed in the Introduction, present histories of exception which obscure the historical record—failing to adequately account for farm labor as a marginalized caste in California's long colonial history, while conveniently reconciling perceptual inconsistencies between the ontological experience of southwestern migrants with the colonial axioms of white supremacy responsible for managing the state's postcolonial space. Alternatively, this study has embraced a colonial modernity framework which suggests that the Great Depression and the New Deal—though instrumental in shaping southwesterly otherness—did not *cause* growers and the state's rural establishment to treat southwestern migrants as *Other* in any unique way. Instead, these episodes and the sociopolitical challenges they posed merely provided the political terrain necessary to redirect well-established colonial forms of dominance

traditionally reserved for California's *non-white* exogenous subject groups to *Okies* as the most recent corps of imported labor to enter the colonial space.

Therefore, if this study's colonial modernity framework is valid, it suggests support for the hypothesis that "the engenderment of southwestern migrant subalternity in California's agricultural valleys during the late 1930s and early 1940s resulted from the same technological process of racialization traditionally deployed within the colonial space to manage colonized *Alterities* in the state's race-dependent landscape."

### Objections and Counter Perspectives

As with any work challenging deeply embedded ideas of culture and identity, this study has encountered many objections. The two addressed here are repeatedly encountered through scholarly exploration and everyday discourse. These objections deserve attention, not only because they pose a challenge to some aspect of this work, but because these doubts bring value to the nuance of ideas presented in this study by testing them at some level. Furthermore, the following objections add clarity, addressing concerns that may be shared by this study's audience.

Is this race, or just discrimination?

Admittedly, the efforts of California's sovereign authority to secure southwestern migrant juridico-political *nonpersonhood* within the state were ultimately frustrated by federal interventions and never fully realized. As evidenced by Justice Douglas's concurring opinion, domestic migrant whiteness afforded them a *de jure* national citizenship that prevented their total disenfranchisement within California. Which, given this study's own model of racialization, seems to indicate that race was not a factor, as

juridical-political nonpersonhood was never established in any meaningful way. In fact, many critical race theorists could potentially make the case that since *Okies*—recognized as full United States citizens under the law—had rights at all, they are precluded from a process of racialization. For instance, in *Casting Out*, Sherene Razack asserts that “Communities without the right to have rights are significantly different from communities who are merely discriminated against. They are constituted as a different order of humanity altogether by virtue of having no political community willing to guarantee their rights, and whatever is meted out to the ‘rightless’ becomes of no concern to others.”<sup>704</sup> According to Razack, it is the ‘rightless’ who are “most often evicted from [the] political community [and] racialized.”<sup>705</sup>

At first glance, Razack’s words seem to pose a serious challenge to this study and its claim that the *Okie* experience resulted from a historical patterned of subaltern racialization in California. However, strictly applied Razack’s criterion excludes several subject groups addressed in this study from a process of racialization, not just southwestern migrants. Her qualification of ‘rightless’ would likely discount many of the experiences explored in this work, characterizing Mexicana/o, Chicana/o, and Nisei American (outside the war years) struggles as mere episodes of discrimination—as each of these groups were never ‘rightless,’ yet never fully entitled to the complete spectrum of rights and privileges of United States or Californian citizenship either. Racial construction is never clear cut, or simple, stemming from disparities in arrangements of power which vary from subject group to subject group according to material

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<sup>704</sup> Razack, *Casting Out*, 7.

<sup>705</sup> Razack, *Casting Out*, 7.

circumstance, political necessity, and geography. As Sheth stresses in *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, under the right conditions any subject group can be racialized:

The power of race lies in the weight of ontological categories to hold sway, to instill fear and hostility, to incite hatred and justify state-sponsored—or at the very least, state approved—violence. It is a systemic part of any polity, and it can pertain to any group whatsoever, given the right conditions. Can gender be a form of racial division? In a historicized context, yes. Can sexuality be a racial description? Yes. Can different racial dynamics work simultaneously? Yes. Can one group be racialized in one light and not in another? Yes. This is not to say that race has no salience. Rather, it means that race is a metaphysical mode of dividing populations. But those divisions are concealed in everyday life through other categories, which are the residue of earlier processes of racialization. Terms like South Asian, African American, Mexican, are ontic—everyday—labels that do not tell the full story of racialization. They “paper over,” like gift-wrap, those narratives so that other more “powerful” narratives can be deployed to tell a different story: about terrorism, about dangerous and “criminal” populations, about the dangers of immigrant labor to the cohesion of a polity. And these labels can then be deployed to engage in atrocities that seem necessary at the time, and accidental in hindsight. They effectively conceal the systemic character of racial divisions, of outcasting and marginalizing a population as an integral part of cohering polities.<sup>706</sup>

The fact, then, that *Okie nonpersonhood* was never fully politically realized outside California’s rural valley communities should not imply that a process of racialization did not take place, it simply indicates that once initiated the ultimate aims of racialization—the production of *nonpersonhood*—were never successfully achieved in any lasting sense beyond these communities. By Sheth’s reasoning, however, the southwestern migrant case represents an episode of racialization, as the record shows that the presence of *Okies* in California’s postcolonial landscape instilled fear and hostility in the general public of the state’s rural valleys and incited the hatred necessary to justify

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<sup>706</sup> Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 171.

both juridical and extra-judicial forms of state approved—if not sponsored—violence. Additionally, as demonstrated in Chapter V, “*Okie*” operated as a signified category, ‘papering over’ the realities of southwestern migration and supplanting them with more ‘powerful’ narratives of migrant threats.

A key premise of this study has been that race is geographically determined to meet the material needs of a given polity. Although southwesterner *nonpersonhood* was never fully realized at the national level, that fact was also never fully recognized regionally within California’s rural valley communities. Racialization, though seen (more often than not) as a mechanism of social stratification, is also a means of dominant class cohesion.<sup>707</sup> When assessing histories of racialization, then, dominant class inclinations towards subject group marginalization or exclusion (physical and social) must be considered as the continuation of a process of *Other* devaluation within a locale. The dynamic we witness in the southwestern migrant case—a dynamic which Toni Alexander coins “shadow citizens”—demonstrates the irrelevance of national *de jure* assurances at the local level: where *de facto* civic considerations of migrant (un)worthiness to the full rights and privileges of citizenship under the law are shaped by the ontological determinants of migrant otherness.<sup>708</sup> In this case, the willingness of California’s sovereign authority to persistently deploy a repertoire of juridico-political violence within the postcolonial space to encourage migrant *nonpersonhood* attests to a devalued migrant civic consideration at the local level and stresses the severity of their otherness within the state’s valley communities—indicating a process of *Okie* racialization.

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<sup>707</sup> Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*.

<sup>708</sup> Alexander, “Citizenship Contested,” 189.

Evidence for this assertion is also reflected in the social and political acceptance of extra-judicial forms of violence in California's rural communities during the latter part of the 1930s. As briefly mentioned in an earlier section, vigilante terror was California's preferred extra-legal method for policing the postcolonial landscape. What is most important here, however, is that the normalization of such tactics in a society most often result from the perceived failures of the traditional liberal order to protect the interests of its elites. In the years leading up to the Second World War, rural Californians relied on vigilantism and mob violence to manage *Okie Alterities* with increasing frequency<sup>709</sup>—which suggests a correlation between the increased displays of extra-judicial violence and the failures of California's sovereign authority to curb migrant liberties as *nonpersons* via traditional juridico-political means. Although some forms of extra-judicial violence are symptomatic of California's industrial agriculture—the use of private camps, for example—it seems likely that vigilantism and mob violence, as forms of state approved violence, were increasingly deployed as a means of socially reifying migrant *nonpersonhood* as federal interventions, and increased public and private scrutiny of industrial practices frustrated traditional juridical-political means of controlling the postcolonial landscape.

But race prescribes permanent and insurmountable barriers to full and equal citizenship.

For much of United States history, race has prescribed permanent and insurmountable barriers to full and equal citizenship to certain subject groups. As

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<sup>709</sup> Pichardo Almanzar and Kulik, *American Fascism and the New Deal*, 107-147; *S. Report*, 1330-1528.



suggested throughout this study, however, racialization in California has always been determined geographically by material necessity. The fact is, when Japan bombed Pearl Harbor in December of 1941 California's entire economy changed virtually overnight, and along with it the material circumstances of *Okie nonpersonhood*. After the attack, California rapidly transformed its industrial economy to meet the demands of the war. "If the United States had become the 'Arsenal of Democracy'," writes Gregory in *American Exodus*, "then California was its most important factory"<sup>710</sup>—and that factory required workers. The material conditions that demanded southwestern migrant subordination before Pearl Harbor evaporated under the necessities of the state's wartime economy. Southwestern labor, in surplus one moment, suddenly had value the next, as labor shortages throughout the state drew three million new residents to California from across the United States and Mexico.<sup>711</sup>

Of course, many southwestern migrant men and women answered the call of duty, enlisting in America's armed services.<sup>712</sup> Far more, however, responded to the growing needs of California's three-shift wartime economy.<sup>713</sup> Southwesterners were essential to the war effort, helping to construct nearly one hundred military installations throughout

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<sup>710</sup> Gregory, *American Exodus*, 173.

<sup>711</sup> According to Gregory, by war's end California's population had grown by three million people. Although it is clear that Gregory assumes that California's new arrivals were comprised of United States citizens, due to the *Bracero* program and the growth of Californians Latinx communities during this period, it is likely that a good portion of this growth can be attributed to immigration from Mexicanos as well. Gregory, *American Exodus*, 173, 183.

<sup>712</sup> See the interviews of Terry Clipper; Billie Pate; Robert Dinwiddie, digital access, California Odyssey Project.

<sup>713</sup> Gregory, *American Exodus*, 174-182; Starr, *California*, 236-237; see also the interviews of Talmage Collins; Clipper; Jackson, digital access, California Odyssey Project.

California between 1941 and 1945.<sup>714</sup> In Northern California, “defense *Okies*” flooded Oakland, Vallejo, and Richmond. Filling shifts at Bethlehem Steel, Moore Dry Dock, and Kaiser, they comprised nearly thirty percent of the workforce required to produce Liberty Ships and war vessels for the U.S. Navy.<sup>715</sup> “Aviation *Okies*” filled a similar role in Southern California. Taking up residence throughout the Los Angeles Basin, Orange County and San Diego, they filled the ranks at Douglas, North American Aviation, Lockheed, Northrup, and Hughes Aircraft.<sup>716</sup> Many more still, took jobs in support industries, working as longshoreman in San Francisco and San Pedro, in factories throughout the state, and in construction trades, building housing for America’s wartime workers.<sup>717</sup>

This massive outflow from California’s rural valley communities literally changed the moral geography of regional agriculture. The sudden scarcity of agricultural labor granted southwestern migrants choosing to stay in California’s rural valleys—as well as *Chicanas/os*, *Mexicanas/os*, and *Filipinos*—a social worth never before experienced by farm labor in the state. The demands of war gave farm labor unprecedented value, forcing the rural establishment to treat the people who handled their crops with respect and dignity.<sup>718</sup> Gone were the Hoovervilles and ditch encampments that once reinforced southwesterner alterity. Growers, eager to keep what labor was left

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<sup>714</sup> Gregory, *American Exodus*, 173.

<sup>715</sup> Gregory, *American Exodus*, 175-181; Starr, *California*, 235-237.

<sup>716</sup> Gregory, *American Exodus*, 176; Starr, *California*, 236.

<sup>717</sup> Gregory, *American Exodus*, 184-189; see also the interview of James Lackey, digital access, California Odyssey Project.

<sup>718</sup> Gregory, *American Exodus*, 182-189.

happy, diversified crops to minimize migration, invested in permanent housing, and went to great lengths to provide sanitary accommodations.<sup>719</sup> Although farm labor organization would once more become a source of tension in California's valleys during the 1960s—as union leaders like Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, and Larry Itliong, fought for fairer wages and better living conditions for *Chicana/o*, *Mexicana/o* and *Filipina/o* labor—for the time being, the labor shortages that accompanied the war effort provided farmworkers with a dignified reprieve from the violence traditionally associated with California's postcolonial landscape.

Improved economic conditions of course led to social mobility. Saving money through the war, some southwesterners were able to eventually secure land as small farmers.<sup>720</sup> Others, employing trades they had acquired erecting military bases, and building ships and warplanes during the war, took on jobs as mechanics, electricians, pipefitters, and carpenters, supporting California's urban sprawl throughout the following decades.<sup>721</sup> Many others stayed in the employ of grower operations of the San Joaquin, Sacramento, and Napa valleys, working their way into management and supervisory roles on farms and in canneries.<sup>722</sup> And, by the 1950s, southwestern farmworkers had virtually vanished from the fields, giving way to *Braceros* from Mexico.<sup>723</sup> With their whiteness

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<sup>719</sup> Gregory, *American Exodus*, 183; see also the interviews of Edgar Crane; Clipper, digital access, California Odyssey Project.

<sup>720</sup> Crane, digital access, California Odyssey Project.

<sup>721</sup> Gregory, *American Exodus*, 184-189; see also the interviews of Lois Barnes; Lackey, digital access, California Odyssey Project.

<sup>722</sup> Lackey, digital access, California Odyssey Project.

<sup>723</sup> Gregory, *American Exodus*, 188; Starr, *California*, 215; see also Clipper, digital access, California Odyssey Project.

reaffirmed by the material circumstances of the war and postwar economies, they took up residence throughout the state's booming towns as Californians.

To say that the war was transformative risks understating its social significance. In addition to changing the material conditions responsible for perpetuating *Okie* otherness, the war played a tremendous part in unifying Americans. As the war rolled on and the socioeconomic inequities that once signified southwesterly alterity lost their saliency, the differences between *us* and *them*, if they ever existed at all, disappeared. Although the *Okie* epithet endured—largely due to the success of Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and its 1940 film adaptation by John Ford<sup>724</sup>—in light of the hardships faced by southwesterners during the 1930s and their response to the war effort, associations with the term as something negative started to fade by the 1950s and southwesterners began to regard the term with a sense of pride. Pondering the evolution of the term in *American Exodus*, Gregory writes:

Ultimately, the Okie is an invention, a work of collective imagination. Over the last half century, pieces of group identity have been assembled from many sources: from shared traumas of the Depression era, from ancestral legend, from popular media, from Steinbeck, Lange, and Haggard. And those pieces generally have less to do with symbols of regionalism than with Americanism. In their drive to create a positive self-construction, Okies have dipped again and again into the well of plain folk Americana, finding there sources of personal dignity and, paradoxically, sources of distinction.<sup>725</sup>

By the time second-generation southwestern Californians like Merle Haggard reappropriated the label in the 1960s the moniker no longer signified the negative

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<sup>724</sup> Gregory, *American Exodus*, 178; see also Crane; Belezuoli; Jackson, digital access, California Odyssey Project.

<sup>725</sup> Gregory, *American Exodus*, 247.

*stigmatypes* reproduced by Creisler's subjects, but instead the gritty, blue-collar, determinism that defined the *Okie* spirit.<sup>726</sup>

### Race as a Technology of Power: Some Final Thoughts

This study represents an attempt to push the boundaries of whiteness studies; to show what is possible if we abandon the dogmatic chains of vulgar multiculturalism and accept race as something more than just a mode of differentiation guided by signified perceptions of biological difference or phenotypical variance. Race, after all, is not biological. It is political. As this study demonstrates, race—in the Western liberal tradition, at least—acts as an onto-political agent, guiding our lives through laws, judicial processes, and government actions that may seem reasonable at the moment, but may indeed pose greater threats to society in the long run: reinforcing artificial divisions designed to masquerade as common-sense categories of exclusion and ensure (self-prophesizing) systemic inequities.<sup>727</sup> To continue to view race as something biologically determined, or worse yet, something natural, just reinforces the epistemological blindness that obscures its juridico-political dimensions—a dynamic that ultimately ensures the reproduction of racial regimes and the hierarchies of worth (gender and class included) on which they rely.

One of the aims of this study, as mentioned in the Introduction, has been to explore race beyond dogmatic notions of biological difference and examine it as a

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<sup>726</sup> Gregory, *American Exodus*, 238-248.

<sup>727</sup> Heather McGhee, *The Sum of Us: What Race Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together* (New York: One World, 2021).

technology of power in order to identify how it works; who exactly it continues to benefit; and—if indeed a technology of power originally deployed within colonial spaces to manage the *Unruly*—to identify its current functions in society, so its elements may be identified and deconstructed. In retrospect, this was a grand undertaking. Although this study’s colonial modernity framework—hardly a universal model of racialization—has enjoyed some modicum of success in revealing how race operates as a technology of colonial reproduction, who exactly race continues to benefit and what function it continues to play in society remain much more elusive elements in light of modern liberalism and the systemic multicultural inequalities associated with neoliberal capitalism and its narratives of limited government. The fact is, although the narrative presented by this study may shed light on the role of racialization in creating and sustaining the power disparities necessary for traditional liberal societies to endure, exactly who sovereign authority *is*, and who the exact targets of racialization *are*, become increasingly obscured by a diffusion of twenty-first century socioeconomic arrangements of power.

In light of this, several questions become immediately apparent. For example, if, as this study suggests, race operates as a juridico-political technology of power—and is not biological or something visually apparent—wielded by sovereign authority to maintain an established order, the obvious question, then, becomes: what function is race currently playing in the United States? Technologies, as human innovations, are designed to perform certain functions and be deployed towards certain aims. All technologies, however, have a tendency to die when they are no longer required to perform the function for which they were designed. The fact that race continues to operate as a “master

category” of social structuring within American culture, therefore, implies that it is still providing the function for which it was designed.<sup>728</sup> That is, rather than an aberration of Western liberal political thought, it must be assumed that race continues to serve the same juridico-political purpose in the operation of liberal state power that it was originally designed for—to secure the established order of the *civis* through the management of the *Unruly*—otherwise it would cease to exist. Which, logically, prompts the questions: if race was originally designed as a technology to control colonial space, what does that indicate about its use in the modern United States? Who exactly is it managing? How does the modern United States, as a liberal democracy operating under the guise of neoliberal capitalism differ in praxis from colonial arrangements of power? If race is technological and not determined by biological variance, as a mode of division and coherence does it differ significantly from class or gender, or are such differentiations “utopian,” as Fanon suggests? And, perhaps most importantly, if race operates through the violence of law—as Sheth suggests, and this study concurs—in a modern liberal democracy where sovereign authority is diffuse, who exactly are the beneficiaries of said violence? Because, as this study indicates—and, in light of America’s shrinking multicultural middle class, and the increasing power discrepancies between rich and poor—the answer is likely more complicated than “white people.”<sup>729</sup>

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<sup>728</sup> Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 106.

<sup>729</sup> McGhee, *The Sum of Us*; Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 16, 169.

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