THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

“BUILD A FENCE AROUND LOS ANGELES”:

LABOR, UNEMPLOYMENT, AND SURVIVAL IN THE CITY OF ANGELS, 1929-1941

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For my grandparents,

Frank and Mary Escobedo

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation traces the material experiences of low-wage workers and the unemployed in Los Angeles over the course of the Great Depression in the 1930s, in particular examining how they found work, sustenance, and shelter, how they navigated social welfare systems especially as New Deal programs rolled out, how they organized to cope with an unstable labor market, and how they met with resistance from the local elite. Accordingly, this dissertation reveals how unequal power relations in Los Angeles influenced political and economic responses to the Great Depression, and more specifically, how those power relations shaped New Deal policies at the local level. As unemployed and underemployed Angelenos searched for work and developed survival strategies by utilizing relief programs or through collective organization to cope with the ravages of economic crisis, local business and political leaders often interpreted their existence and their activities as a threat to the status quo. While these leaders, many of whom were employers and growers, required an ever-present labor supply, during times of mass unemployment, the presence of a large labor pool grew problematic. Accordingly, they sought to discipline, control, and occasionally expel members of the labor force through legal, political, and sometimes questionably constitutional means.

Ultimately, this dissertation historicizes the intersections of relief and the labor market and reveals the ways in which those in power used entitlements and welfare as blunt tools to control laboring bodies. It also underscores the contradictions between the construction of the New Deal state and a historically unstable labor market on the developmental fringes of the U.S. economy. However, it also seeks to lay bare the fact that the unemployed, the underemployed, and low-wage earners during the years of the Great Depression were not simply passive victims who wallowed in misery and hunger. Rather, people took action, whether this meant challenging

low relief payments at the local welfare office, taking to the streets to protest vagrancy raids and exorbitant employment agency fees, developing alternate economic systems by organizing production-for-use cooperatives, or simply traveling in search of work.

INTRODUCTION

In July, 1932, in the midst of the Great Depression and in an effort to relieve the scourge of mass unemployment, a self-described welfare agent, Louis Byrens, put human labor on an auction block in the middle of Los Angeles's central Plaza, attracting an audience of several hundred spectators.[1] Only the day before, the City Park Board had denied his request to hold the auction in Pershing Square, a downtown park, on the grounds that it would present an opportunity for "Communists to attempt a demonstration," revealing the anxieties about radical politics in the conservative, open-shop city.[2] Accordingly, Byrens moved his sale to a Mexican quarter of town—an area described by a contemporary sociologist as a "forum of the proletariat," where a local ordinance prohibiting public speaking was rarely enforced.[3] At the auction, former stenographer Marie Hultsch informed the crowd that "she would do anything," and at least one bidder offered 30 cents an hour for her services, in violation of a state law setting the minimum wage at 33 1/3 cents an hour. Twenty-two-year-old would-be law student Emil Kaninsky's services were sold for 35 cents an hour, while his companion on the auction block, 27-year-old waitress Vivian Roberts, saw her services sold at the rate of 50 cents an hour. Both Hazel Wall, a divorcee, and José Mendoza, a cement worker and father of six, brought in 50 cents an hour to work for a café owner and a moving company respectively.[4] And Henry Marion, "a big strong fellow" who had formerly worked as a salesman, shipping clerk, truck driver, and typist, but who had been out of work for four years, incited a flurry of "spirited bidding," finally going for 50

[1] "Human Labor Put on Block," *Los Angeles Times*, July 8, 1932, A3
[2] "Auction of Jobs in Park Debated," *Los Angeles Times,* July 5, 1932, A3.
[3] Paul Herbold, "Sociological Survey of Main Street, Los Angeles, California" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1936), 128.
[4] "Unemployed Persons 'Sold' at Auction in Los Angeles," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, July 8, 1932, 1 & 9.

cents an hour like many of his peers.[5] By the close of the auction, Byrens had managed to sell the services of eight job seekers.[6]

Many of the newspapers covering this event referred to it as a "slave market," a label that Byrens rejected.[7] This description, however, was not unusual. Angelenos commonly referred to the neighborhood just one mile south of the Plaza as a "slave market," an extension of the idea by some that the wage system as a whole constituted "wage slavery." This term applied to regions in large cities housing employment agencies that offered jobs to unskilled or manual laborers—a site where mechanics, agricultural workers, common laborers and others who made a living with their hands came in search of work.[8] What was unusual about Byren's "slave market" was that the group of people standing on that auction block consisted of a mix of white-collar and blue-collar workers as well as men and women, Mexican and white. Was the auction a publicity stunt? Or an act of desperation? That the Great Depression devastated the nation is well known. Less understood are the various ways ordinary citizens pieced their lives together from one day to the next—how they coped, how they went about finding work or relief, how they participated in local politics, and how they survived. Byren's auction thus offers a brief window into the desperation and disruption wrought by the Great Depression in a major city.

This dissertation explores the material experiences and aspirations of Los Angeles residents during the Great Depression as they grappled with the longstanding instability of its

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[5] "Unemployed Persons 'Sold' at Auction in Los Angeles."
[6] "Human Labor Put on Block," *Los Angeles Times*, July 8, 1932, A3.
[7] "Human Labor Put on Block."
[8] Herbold, "Sociological Survey of Main Street," 40. In his landmark study of postwar Detroit, Thomas J. Sugrue suggests that these casual labor markets—indeed called "slave markets" in several cities—crystallized an "image of black male shiftlessness that came to represent the African American urban 'underclass.'" He finds that as cities entered hard economic times in the late 1960s, police increasingly cracked down on young black men who "loitered" on street corners. The slave market thus became a site of racial marking as each time suburban whites drove by, they "saw an embodiment of the stereotypes that they held about black men." This image of perpetual black joblessness "became a tool that reinforced the politics of racial domination." Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 120-121.

labor market. Its cast of characters largely includes casual and seasonal laborers, but also encompasses newly destitute white-collar workers, households, business owners, politicians, and vagrants. These city dwellers all played a role in shaping the political economy of Los Angeles as it reached its status as a major American metropolis in the 1930s. Accordingly, this study seeks to unravel the city's political response to the Depression while keeping the activities of its residents at the center of its analysis. Primarily, this dissertation traces the social experience of economic crisis and the political, urban, and spatial transformations fueled by that experience. It asks how capitalist crisis affected the inhabitants of a metropolis as it became an epicenter of urban transformation. How were the shocks of crisis felt within the public and private spheres, in workplaces, households, neighborhood associations, and city council meetings? What were the political aims and efforts of the city's residents? How did they find work or relief, and how was this quest structured by differences of race, gender, ethnicity, and age? What did it mean to scrape by during the Great Depression in the city of Angels, in the shadow of Hollywood? By the close of the decade, who were the winners and who were the losers—both economically and politically? Did material difficulties generate demands for economic justice—for income equality? And what lasting transformations in American urbanity arose from this moment?

Specifically, this study closely examines the livelihoods of men and women whose labor collectively built and maintained Los Angeles as it developed into what its boosters called an agricultural and manufacturer's paradise as well as the "all-year playground of America."[9] In this urban space, casual laborers wandered throughout the city and county in search of daily work, whether at a downtown construction site, a restaurant in Hollywood, an oil field in Signal Hill, at the Firestone Tire Plant in South Gate, or in the lima bean fields of West Los Angeles. All of

[9] Tom Zimmerman, "Paradise Promoted: Boosterism and the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce," *California History* 64, no. 1 (Winter 1985): 26, 30, 33.

these workers – men and women, native-born Americans and immigrants, white, Black, Mexican, and Asian – struggled to make ends meet from one day to the next. In many ways, the Great Depression merely compounded their already stressful lives. A large portion of these workers would turn to private or public welfare programs at some point during the decade, and many had already been accustomed to doing so. The promises and profits of the capitalist project was largely out of reach for these precarious working people.

This project fuses the study of labor, politics, household economies, immigration, and urban history in its quest to understand the various pressures placed on social relationships during a crisis in capitalism. Fundamentally a social history, this project recreates the texture of everyday life among newly emerging impoverished communities. It follows Los Angelenos to the employment agencies where they sought work and to the charities and welfare agencies where they sought relief. It considers the work they did in their homes to supplement their incomes. It follows them as they walked down Main Street in search of food, shelter, and clothing. It asks how their gender or race or immigrant status impinged on their ability to find work or relief and how various groups—including local government officials—mobilized to respond to the effects of the Depression. It examines local ordinances and asks how the city and county governments attempted to regulate the activities of Angelenos—how they attempted to impose order out of chaos. Ultimately, it will map how the Depression affected the life of the city of Los Angeles.

Accordingly, this project operates on three levels. First, it tracks the social and material experiences of and responses to the Depression, to local politics, and to the effects of urbanization. Secondly, it examines the political culture of the city: local political responses to the Depression and how these responses were shaped, framed, and understood. Third, it

examines metropolitan space: how inhabitants navigated the city and mapped its resources and what bearing those activities had on political responses to the Great Depression. By merging these histories—social, political, and urban, this project offers a rich history of place and space during a crucial moment in time and shed light on larger processes at work for the nation as a whole.

The extensive existing scholarship on the Great Depression has focused on its causes—identifying a variety of factors from a restriction of the money supply to a secular economic shift coinciding with a cyclical downturn to the problem of overproduction and underconsumption.[10] It has also examined the New Deal, including its origins, its character, and the political and social forces behind it.[11] Moreover, while a number of excellent syntheses of the Depression exist, they are national in scope, precluding a fine-grained examination of the local forces at work in an urban space.[12] In fact, the best close examinations of the lived experience and local responses to

[10] See for example Michael A. Bernstein, "Why the Great Depression Was Great: Toward a New Understanding of the Interwar Economic Crisis in the United States," *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*, eds. Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989); Milton Friedman & Anna Jacobson Schwartz, et. al., *The Great Contraction* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965); John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Great Crash, 1929* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1955); Robert S. McElvaine, *The Great Depression: America, 1929-1941* (New York, N.Y.: Times Book, 1984); and Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Age of Roosevelt,* 3 vol. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957-1960).

[11] Alan Brinkley, for example, charts the path of liberal reform as it transitioned from a focus on supply-side to demand-side policies—consumption rather than investment became critical during the later years of the New Deal. Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York: Knopf, 1995). See also Colin Gordon, *New Deals: Business, Labor, and Politics in America, 1920-1935* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994; Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); William E. Leuchtenburg, *The FDR Years: On Roosevelt and His Legacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995). Scholars have also investigated the various ways in which racism and segregation influenced New Deal policies. See Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold Story of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005); Mary Poole, *The Segregated Origins of Social Security: African Americans and the Welfare State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); David Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2006). Scholars have also mapped out the connections between New Deal federal policies and postwar residential segregation. See Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

[12] David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Robert S. McElvaine, *The Great Depression: America, 1929-1941* (New York,

the Depression are primary sources, which, while offering a rich trove of material, lack the analysis and synthesis that this project offers.[13] This project thus switches the vantage point from these broader narratives and emphases on policy and economics to local politics, the lived experiences of ordinary people, and a careful attention to city space.

In tracing the lives and material experiences of laborers, this dissertation reveals how unequal power relations in Los Angeles influenced political and economic responses to the Great Depression, and more specifically, how those power relations shaped New Deal policies at the local level. As unemployed and underemployed Angelenos searched for work and developed survival strategies by utilizing relief programs or through collective organization to cope with the ravages of economic crisis, local business and political leaders often interpreted their existence and their activities as a threat to the status quo. While these leaders, many of whom were employers and growers, required an ever-present labor supply, during times of mass unemployment, the presence of a large labor pool grew problematic. Accordingly, they sought to discipline, control, and occasionally expel members of the labor force through legal, political, and sometimes questionably constitutional means.

Los Angeles offers a compelling vantage point for examining the pressures and possibilities of the crisis of the Depression years. Between 1910 and 1930, the city grew at a rate unmatched by any other American city at that point, quadrupling its population.[14] By 1930—with

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N.Y.: Times Book, 1984); T.H. Watkins, *The Hungry Years: A Narrative of the Great Depression in America* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1999).

[13] Cathy D. Knepper, *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt: Letters to Eleanor Roosevelt through Depression and War* (New York: Carrol & Graf, 2004); Richard Lowitt and Maurine Beasley, eds., *One Third of a Nation: Lorena Hickok Reports on the Great Depression* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983); Robert McElvaine, ed., *Down and Out in the Great Depression: Letters from the "Forgotten Man"* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983); Studs Terkel, *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970).

[14] George J. Sánchez*, Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 71.

1.2 million residents—it was the largest city in the West and the fifth largest in the nation.[15] As California scholar and journalist Carey McWilliams noted, "the growth of Southern California since 1870 should be regarded as one continuous boom punctuated at intervals by major explosions."[16] The real estate, oil, and motion-picture industries helped drive this population boom along with the arrival of eastern industrial branch plants, which had been attracted to the region for its "abundance of cheap land, easy access to raw materials, low-cost utilities, and good transportation."[17] These eastern firms were also drawn in by the promise of low labor costs in the "model open-shop city of the world."[18] It was during the Depression decade, however, that the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, which joined the CIO, played a key role in union organizing in Los Angeles along with the International Longshoremen's Association, which launched a massive 1934 strike that established collective bargaining for waterfront workers in all Pacific Coast ports.[19]

In the first few decades of the twentieth century, the city was flooded with Midwestern migrants, who were older, wealthier, and much more devoutly Protestant than the "boom-town ruffians and speculators" who had earlier made up the population.[20] The motion-picture industry—settling in Los Angeles by the 1910s—drew a significant number of women, in particular the "extra girl who went west in search of unparalleled opportunities for self-invention, artistic exploration, professional advancement, romantic adventures, and just plain fun,"

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[15] Becky M. Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 48.
[16] Carey McWilliams, *Southern California Country: An Island on the Land* (New York: Duel, Sloan & Pearce, 1946), 114.
[17] Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*, 48.
[18] Steven J. Ross, "How Hollywood Became Hollywood," in *Metropolis in the Making: Los Angeles in the 1920s*, eds. Tom Sitton and William Deverell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 260.
[19] Ruth Milkman, *L.A. Story: Immigrant Workers and the Future of the U.S. Labor Movement* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006), 3.
[20] Elaine Tyler May, *Great Expectations: Marriage and Divorce in Post-Victorian America*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 24.

suggesting that Los Angeles was—at least for a while—distinctive in terms of its female workforce.[21]

Meanwhile, located on the edge of the Pacific Rim and the U.S.-Mexican border, the city drew a racially diverse set of migrants different from those of major metropolitan centers in the East and Midwest. Mexican immigrants continually moved back and forth between the city, its surrounding agricultural regions, and their hometowns—mainly in northern Mexico. This immigration wave picked up in the wake of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) and the Cristero War (1926-1929) despite efforts of both the U.S. and Mexican governments to curb it.[22] By 1928, Los Angeles had the highest Mexican population of any U.S. city.[23] In fact, by 1930 the city housed "the second largest Mexican population of any metropolitan area in the world, second only to Mexico City."[24] In 1930, African Americans made up the second highest non-white group in the city, with Japanese coming in third in spite of the restrictions of the 1907-1908 Gentlemen's Agreement and subsequent state laws restricting land ownership by "aliens." The number of Chinese residents of the city was small due to the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and the ongoing ten-year extensions of its provisions.[25]

Notably, by 1930, Los Angeles had the second highest-percentage of nonwhite people of any major city in the nation.[26] The majority of its white inhabitants had been born in the U.S.,

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[21] Hilary Hallet, *Go West, Young Women!: The Rise of Early Hollywood,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 17.
[22] David Fitzgerald, *A Nation of Emigrants: How Mexico Manages its Migration*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 9.
[23] Sánchez*, Becoming Mexican American*, 13.
[24] Edward J. Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity: Mexican Americans and the Los Angeles Police Department, 1900-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 79.
[25] In 1930, the population of Los Angeles broken down by race was as follows: White, 1,073,584; Mexican, 97,116; African American, 38,894; Japanese, 21,081; and Chinese, 3,009. Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens? Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 7.
[26] 14.2 percent of Los Angeles residents were not considered white—including Mexicans. The city with the highest percentage of nonwhite people was Baltimore, Maryland. Robert M. Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 82; Jules Tygiel, "Introduction," in *Metropolis in*

making the region distinct from cities such as Chicago, where first-generation southern and eastern European immigrants constituted a significant percentage of the white population.[27] From early on in the twentieth century, community boosters and real estate brokers attracted white residents by promising white-only communities. Suburbs from Beverly Hills to working-class Compton and South Gate sought to exclude not only African Americans, but in many cases Mexicans, Asians, and Jews.[28] Whereas racial restrictive covenants created segregated neighborhoods in places like Chicago and Detroit "where most people were black and where most black people in the city lived," in Los Angeles they had the effect of "creating some of the most racially and ethnically diverse neighborhoods in the country."[29] Moreover, Los Angeles saw one of the earliest legal challenges to racial restrictive covenants.[30]

Los Angeles was also one of only two major U.S. cities that saw a double digit increase (25.2 percent) in its population during the Depression years.[31] The majority of the so-called Dust Bowl migrants came to Los Angeles at a higher rate than any other California region—most of them escaping urban areas in Texas, Oklahoma, and Missouri rather than the rural areas affected by the Dust Bowl.[32] What kind of pressure, then, did this population increase exert on the city, which was already straining to deal with its newly unemployed population? It is well known that

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the Making: Los Angeles in the 1920s, eds. Tom Sitton and William Deverell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 2.

[27] Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 17.

[28] Andrew Wiese, *Places of their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth-Century*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 42.

[29] Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 18. See also Isabela Seong Leong Quintana, "Making Do, Making Home: Borders and the Worlds of Chinatown and Sonoratown in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles," *Journal of Urban History* 41, no. 1 (2015).

[30] See *Los Angeles Investment Co. v.* Gary (1919), 181, Cal. 680, 186 Pac. 596; Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 18.

[31] The other city was Denver, Colorado. Carey McWilliams, *Southern California Country: An Island on the Land* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1946), 113; Bruce Cumings, *Dominion from Sea to Sea: Pacific Ascendancy and American Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 274.

[32] James N. Gregory, *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 142.

during the first few years of the Depression, local officials worked in concert with the Mexican consulate to repatriate (some would say deport) "approximately one-third of its Mexican residents from the city."[33] What is somewhat less well known is that the Los Angeles Police Department coordinated (without permission) a "bum blockade" in 1936, a border patrol set up at the state's major border crossings—including those shared with Oregon—to prevent "undesirables" such as the Dust Bowl migrants from entering the state.[34] Such drastic measures thus suggest the importance of examining issues of criminal justice and social control as a component of the city's local politics during a moment of economic crisis.

California during the Depression was marked by extreme contrasts, from the deep poverty of the agricultural workforce in the San Joaquin Valley to the luxury of Hollywood. As Carey McWilliams observed, one mindset that characterized Southern Californians had been the notion that "in the midst of such opulence, people will never starve."[35] Yet, as Lorena Hickok, a Federal Emergency Relief Administration investigator, noted in a 1934 letter to Harry Hopkins, Los Angeles was widely known as "'the blackest spot in the United States,' from the relief angle."[36] In fact, by the close of the decade, the city had the worst slums on the West Coast.[37] Initially, the city government was slow moving in responding to the effects of the Depression, largely because Mayor John C. Porter, a conservative Democrat, looked to private industry and volunteerism to solve the problem.[38] Even with the election of a new mayor, Frank Shaw, the city

[33] Sánchez*, Becoming Mexican American*, 123.
[34] Hailey Giczy, "The Bum Blockade: Los Angeles and the Great Depression," Chapman University Historical Review 1, no. 1 (2009); Gregory, *American Exodus,* 80; Leonard J. Leader, *Los Angeles and the Great Depression* (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1972), 194-224.
[35] McWilliams, Southern California Country, 303.
[36] Lorena Hickok to Harry Hopkins, June 27, 1934, in *One Third of a Nation: Lorena Hickok Reports on the Great Depression*, eds. Richard Lowitt and Maurine Beasley, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 298.
[37] Edward J. Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity: Mexican Americans and the Los Angeles Police Department, 1900-1945*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
[38] Tom Sitton, *The Courthouse Crowd: Los Angeles County and Its Government, 1850-1950* (Los Angeles, California: The Historical Society of Southern California, 2013), 192.

never did much in the way of relief and instead looked to the county, which bore the legal responsibility of caring for indigents. The county eventually passed an ordinance limiting available jobs to American citizens only, while the state raised the residence requirement for aid from one to three years. Yet migrants continued to flood into the city.

It was also in California that dissident political groups appeared to arise more quickly and in higher numbers than elsewhere.[39] The Technocracy movement, originating in the 1920s at Columbia University, found support by hundreds of thousands of Los Angelenos early on during the Depression.[40] In 1934, Upton Sinclair, who made his home in Los Angeles, ran his End Poverty in California (EPIC) campaign for governor, promising to sponsor cooperative farms and factories, which would directly employ and feed the impoverished, impose a progressive income tax, and establish state pensions for the elderly and the disabled. Dr. Francis Townsend of Long Beach initiated the Townsend Plan, which called for a national pension system for the elderly (and which eventually morphed into the Ham-and-Eggs campaign). This plan played a crucial role in local politics and also hastened the passage of the Social Security Act in 1935.[41] Additionally, the Self-Help Cooperative Movement, although national in scope, was largely concentrated in Los Angeles.[42] While studies of these various movements exist, they are driven by narrative rather than analysis, interested in the comparative aspects of the movements, or focused on the federal response.[43]

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[39] Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 222.
[40] Carey McWilliams, *Southern California Country: An Island on the Land* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1946), 294; Leader, *Los Angeles and the Great Depression* (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1972), 119-125.
[41] Edwin Amenta, *When Movements Matter: The Townsend Plan and the Rise of Social Security* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006); Tom Sitton, *The Courthouse Crowd: Los Angeles County and Its Government, 1850-1950* (Los Angeles, California: The Historical Society of Southern California, 2013), 188.
[42] Abdurrahman Pasha, "The Self-Help Cooperative Movement in Los Angeles, 1931-1940," PhD diss., (University of Oregon, 2014), iv.
[43] See for example Edwin Amenta, *When Movements Matter: The Townsend Plan and the Rise of Social Security* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006); Leonard J. Leader, *Los Angeles and the Great Depression*

This project draws its inspiration from the work on urban history of Seth Rockman, Christine Stansell, and Joanne Meyerowitz.[44] Rockman focuses on issues of dependency, spectrums of freedom and unfreedom, as well as race, Stansell on class formation, capitalism, and gender, and Meyerowitz on female urban precarity. While all three of these studies will serve as models, illustrating the salience of class, race, and problems of free and coerced labor, this project differs in turning to the West, to the city that, in terms of demographics, industry, and spatial layout, looks far more like America of the late twentieth century. It turns to a historical moment that, while not understudied per se, is lacking a deep social and material investigation of a major metropolis in a moment of economic crisis.

This dissertation also draws on the scholarship of Thomas J. Sugrue, Robert O. Self, and Mike Davis. In studying race, segregation, and urban decline, Sugrue and Self pay close attention to local politics, housing, and urban space.[45] Davis argues in *City of Quartz* that urban planning in Los Angeles increasingly emphasized security and surveillance over city and community.[46] Building on these three foundational texts but turning its lens to an earlier moment in the twentieth century, this project will pay close attention to Los Angeles's built environment and its significance for ordinary city dwellers. It examines the ways in which spaces workers utilized spaces such as the Plaza and the downtown employment agency district as they worked to string

(Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1972); William H. Mullins, *The Depression and the Urban West Coast, 1929-1933: Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, and Portland* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Kevin Starr, *Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[44] Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York: Knopf, 1986); Joanne Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930*. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988).

[45] Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

[46] Mike Davis, City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles (London; New York: Verso, 1990).

jobs together from one day to the next. And it explores how the unemployed made use of the regions resources, from agricultural fields to alleys, as they fought for survival.

Any study of Los Angeles will have to contend with leading California scholars, Carey McWilliams and Kevin Starr. McWilliams, writing in the 1940s, produced works of social history exploring problems of class and power along with the conquests and mistreatment of Native Americans, Mexicans, and Asians.[47] Kevin Starr's Depression-era study of California is in many ways a reassertion of McWilliams' findings—offering a selective narrative of various incidents in the state's political history.[48] Both argue that California, as a battleground between the far Left and the far Right, experienced the social trends of the Depression era more intensely and traumatically than the rest of the nation. Yet, Starr's study says astonishingly little about the Depression itself or its effects aside from the political conflicts. While this project will not engage with debates about whether or not California—or Los Angeles—felt the shocks of economic crisis more deeply than the rest of the country, it will build on the compelling narratives constructed by McWilliams and Starr.

In its examination of the material experience of ordinary people, this project engages with works of social and labor history. Becky Nicolaides, Kathryn M. Neckerman, and Robin D.G. Kelley have demonstrated that working-class families mitigated against the vagaries of the economy by supplementing their incomes with household production. In Nicolaides's Los Angeles-based example, property ownership translated into power, providing some economic security and political leverage during a time without a social safety net, while Kelley demonstrates that the black poor in Birmingham—while proud of their ability to survive difficult

[47] Carey McWilliams, *Southern California Country: An Island on the Land* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1946).
[48] Kevin Starr, *Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

times—insisted upon their rights to government or private aid.[49] Scholars of Latin American cities have demonstrated that slums and informal city spaces are persistent and functional features of the urban landscape.[50] And through his examination of personnel policies and business records, Walter Licht offers a study of how Philadelphians found work between 1840 and 1950.[51] This dissertation will build on the conclusions of these scholars, but expands the focus to include the multiracial communities of the propertied as well as the property-less—including those who set up squatter colonies in the Los Angeles riverbed.[52] And while it shares one of Licht's organizing questions—how did people find work?—this project will attempt to incorporate the subject position of the laborer as well as the employer.

In its focus on the private as well as the public, this project addresses work examining the gendering of the discourse on social and public aid. Linda Gordon and Alice Kessler-Harris observe that under the Social Security Act of 1935 male workers benefited from social entitlement programs tied to their jobs such as unemployment insurance and old-age pensions, whereas women were subjected to means-tested welfare programs administered by the states. These policies, shaped by a "gendered imagination," established a two-tiered welfare state that privileged men over women and reified the male breadwinner-female dependent housewife model of the nuclear family.[53] Yet in *Household Accounts: Working-Class Family Economies in*

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[49] Becky M. Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Kathryn M. Neckerman, "The Emergence of 'Underclass' Family Patterns, 1900-1940," *The "Underclass" Debate: Views from History*, ed. Michael B. Katz (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993); Robin D.G. Kelley, "The Black Poor and the Politics of Opposition in a New South City, 1929-1970," *The "Underclass" Debate: Views from History*, ed. Michael B. Katz (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 298.
[50] Brodwyn Fischer, Bryan McCann, and Javier Auyero, eds., *Cities from Scratch: Poverty and Informality in Urban Latin America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).
[51] Walter Licht, *Getting Work: Philadelphia, 1840-1950* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992).
[52] Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*, 59.
[53] Linda Gordon. *Pitied but Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890-1935* (New York: Free Press, 1994); Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th-Century America* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Suzanne Mettler, *Dividing Citizens:*

the Interwar United States, Susan Porter-Benson finds a range of attitudes among both men and women with regard to the male breadwinner ethic among working-class families whose main concerns were combatting scarcity and want.[54] How, then, do we account for the myth of the male breadwinner and the dependent housewife? Moreover, Elaine S. Abelson finds that women were not conspicuously homeless or in obvious need of aid during the Depression, contributing to a general sense that men suffered the most from the crisis.[55] Was the plight of women in Los Angeles, then, rendered invisible by virtue of their sex difference? This scrutinizes how local responses to the Depression both constructed and were constructed by gender.

This project also engages with Lizabeth Cohen's pivotal study of Chicago's industrial workers, whom she argues experienced a crisis of faith in traditional sources of authority such as employers and ethnic institutions, turning instead to the CIO and to the Democratic Party in search of the economic safety nets previously promised to them by "welfare capitalism."[56] Key to her argument is the role of mass culture, which she suggests was crucial in uniting people across race, ethnicity, and skill, as workers who shared common ground outside of the workplace were more prepared to establish a sense of solidarity. While drawing on Cohen's foundational work, this project shifts the vantage point to a less industrialized and more decentralized urban space with an entirely different racial and ethnic mix. It builds on Cohen's story by bringing in space and by centering seasonal casual laborers and in turning to the West—where both the Townsend and the Ham-and-Eggs pension plans garnered much support and where Upton

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Gender and Federalism in New Deal Public Policy (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Gwendolyn Mink, *The Wages of Motherhood: Inequality in the Welfare State, 1917-1942* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995).

[54] Susan Porter-Benson, *Household Accounts: Working-Class Family Economies in the Interwar United States* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2007), 17-18.

[55] Elaine S. Abelson, "Women Who Have No Men to Work for Them: Gender and Homelessness in the Great Depression, 1930-1934," *Feminist Studies* 29, no. 1 (Spring, 2003), 116.

[56] Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 209.

Sinclair's End Poverty in California gubernatorial campaign proved a veritable threat to the establishment.

Given the size of the Mexican population in Los Angeles in 1930, along with the nativist politics surrounding the decision to repatriate them, this study also draws on scholarship on immigration, migrant labor, and Latino studies. As George J. Sánchez demonstrates, after the dramatic repatriation of Mexicans in the early 1930s, the Mexicans who remained behind acquired an "ambivalent Americanism, marked by a contradictory feelings about their place in American society."[57] Moreover, some scholars have found that the idealized agrarian life promoted by white farmers in the Greater Los Angeles area was contingent upon the exploitation of Native American, Mexican, and Asian Labor, while others demonstrate how padrones and immigrant laborers "defined and redefined notions of voluntary contract and free labor."[58] Still others have argued that Mexican American workers not only helped to radicalize the labor movement, but also pushed it to be more inclusive and more committed to equality.[59] This was also the moment when the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 established a new, racialized category of "illegal aliens."[60] Accordingly, this project asks how this group of "ambivalent Americans" understood their place in the city as laborers, as consumers, as recipients of welfare, and as racialized "others."

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[57] George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 210.
[58] Matt Garcia, *A World of its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles, 1900-1970* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Gunther Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880-1930* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 849.
[59] Zaragosa Vargas, *Labor Rights Are Civil Rights: Mexican American Workers in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).
[60] Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 2.

Chapter 1 sets up the geographical terrain and explores the makeup of the Los Angeles labor market as the Great Depression hit the city and took its course. The city's employment agency district, frequently called the "slave market" by casual laborers, was centered downtown in the area that makes up modern-day L.A.'s notorious "Skid Row" neighborhood. This district functioned as a hub of the labor supply not only for the city itself but for the surrounding rural hinterland from California's Central Valley to as far away as Colorado. An examination of these employment agencies reveals crucial details such as the costs of finding work and the ways in which certain labor was racially coded as "Mexican" or "Anglo." In particular, this chapter explores the problem of how a casual laborer – male, female, young and not-so-young, Mexican, or Anglo – found work and how they managed (or failed) to string together jobs from day-to-day to ensure subsistence as they contended with the surge of massive unemployment wrought by the Depression. As local leaders sought to contain and punish the unemployed, many resisted through the formation of Unemployed Councils where they began to insist on their rights.

Building on the previous chapter, Chapter 2 examines the tensions simmering between those who viewed welfare recipients as "chiselers" and welfare recipients who asserted their right to sufficient benefits as federal agencies such as the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) and the New Deal's Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) started administering funds to state and local government agencies. It traces how relief was distributed, who was seen as deserving and less deserving, and traces the rise of the Relief Worker's Protective Union, which sought to organize unemployed relief workers and relief recipients to make broader demands of federal and state agencies. This chapter also chronicles the larger project of employers and growers, many of whom were centered in Los Angeles, to exert

authority over relief programs forcing them to release relief applicants when agricultural labor supplies were low.

Chapter 3 explores the private world of Los Angeles households and examines what strategies families and individuals employed to survive during this time of economic crisis. It investigates how people acquired the necessities of life when they could not translate paid labor into subsistence. That is, how they acquired food, clothing, and shelter through barter and exchange, makeshift or underground economies, or private and public relief. It traces the development of a massive self-help movement throughout the county, which in turn evolved into production-for-use. These self-help activities eventually proved problematic for local business leaders, who exerted their influence with local and state politicians to prevent New Deal administrators from further developing these programs.

Lastly, Chapter 4 examines the so-called Bum Blockade, in which the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) sent 136 police officers to key checkpoints along California's shared borders with Arizona, Nevada, and Oregon where they were directed to stop and turn back anyone who lacked "visible means of support" and who could not prove California residency. The plan was hatched by both the LAPD and the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and built upon decades of anti-vagrant hysteria and fears over unattached transient men and destitute families congregating in Los Angeles. As the Great Depression took its toll and as New Deal programs and policies shifted, Los Angeles residents grew increasingly concerned that taxpayers would be forced to bear the burden of paying for the relief of non-residents. This argument often overlooked the tradition of boosterism dating back to the nineteenth century in which the Chamber of Commerce and the All-Year Club of Southern California touted Los Angeles as a paradise and waged campaigns luring Americans from the Midwest and East Coast to set up shop

in their city. It also overlooked the role Los Angeles played as a hub for seasonal laborers who found shelter and community in the city during the off-season and migrated to the farms and ranches of the Central Valley during harvest time. Ultimately, this chapter examines one way in which the crisis of the Great Depression revealed tensions between urban growth, labor, and the responsibilities of relief for individuals and families. During a time when Californians entertained numerous political schemes in response to the Depression such as the Townsend Movement, Ham-and-Eggs, and Upton Sinclair's End Poverty in California Movement, this act by the LAPD represented a fascist-like alternative to the growing New Deal project. Accordingly, this chapter also explores a broader question about the right to freedom of movement within the United States as a privilege of citizenship.

CHAPTER 1

"UNEMPLOYMENT IS A CRIME IN SUNNY CALIFORNIA": EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES, THE LABOR MARKET, AND VAGRANCY

In the winter of 1928, Francisco Romero, a self-described labor agent, drove down Main Street in Los Angeles in search of day laborers.[1] As he headed south, he likely passed through the congested Chinatown district before approaching the Avila Adobe, the oldest residence in the city and now a decrepit, condemned building.[2] He would have then spotted *La Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de Los Angeles* – or *La Placita* Church – built in California's Mexican era between 1818 and 1822 by Tongva Indian labor.[3] Both buildings perched on the edge of the old Plaza, designed by the Spanish in 1781 and, until 1880, Los Angeles's major urban core.[4] Now fallen into disrepair as the city's financial center gradually moved southward and westward, the Plaza district still offered a "shabby but welcome living quarters" to a multiracial array of newcomers and casual workers, but especially Mexicans.[5] Rows of crowded, unsanitary, and cheap hotels, rescue missions, and flop houses lined the streets alongside scores of businesses including "odorous hash houses," barber shops, shoe-shine stands, pool halls, dance halls, all-night five-cent movie theaters, and penny arcades.[6]

Nestled among these squalid dwellings and businesses adjacent to the Plaza was the J.V. Rhoades Employment Agency, which specialized in "Mexican labor." It was here that Romero

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[1] Original in Spanish – translations are mine. J.A. Pacheco to Angel Gonzales, February 23, 1928, box 1, folder 3, J.V. Rhoades Employment Agency Collection, 1924-1931, GC-1363, Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County (hereafter J.V. Rhoades Collection).
[2] Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 23; William David Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza: Sacred and Contested Space* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 2.
[3] Estrada, *Los Angeles Plaza*, 39, 228;
[4] Mary P. Ryan, "A Durable Center of Urban Space: The Los Angeles Plaza," *Urban History* 33, no. 3 (2006): 457.
[5] George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 72.
[6] Merrill Leonard Harrod, "A Study of Deviate Personalities as Found in Main Street of Los Angeles," (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1939), 19.

placed an order for three Mexican laborers to work at a vineyard roughly two-hundred miles north of Los Angeles in Parlier, an agricultural community near Fresno known as the "buckle of the raisin belt" and the home of the Sun-Maid Raisin Growers Association.[7]

That same afternoon, after paying service fees of probably one dollar each to the employment agency's manager, José A. Pacheco, in exchange for the job referrals, three male workers gathered their tools and belongings and joined Romero in his 1924 Hupmobile to journey to the work site. About halfway there, the group stopped for dinner at a restaurant in Bakersfield where, at some point during the meal, Romero slipped away to his car and never returned. He had taken their blankets, candles, and equipment and abandoned them, forcing the men to find their way back to Los Angeles on their own.[8] They headed back that evening – most likely by walking and hitching rides with strangers – and, after arriving at the agency, alerted Pacheco to that day's events (and hopefully received a refund of their service fees).[9] Their journey is recorded in the records of the J.V. Rhoades Employment Agency, a largely untapped collection of thousands of job referral receipts of mostly Mexican casual laborers.[10]

If the job-seekers opted to linger at the Plaza, especially at a late hour, they risked arrest by Los Angeles police officers on vagrancy charges for the double infraction of being unemployed and roaming the city at night.[11] In fact, the police had instigated a massive vagrancy raid on Mexicans in the Plaza just weeks before.[12] However, the three men required employment,

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[7] Larry Trujillo, "Race, Class, Labor, and Community: A Local History of Capitalist Development," *Review* 4, no. 3 (Winter 1981): 575-576; David Runsten, "Parlier: The Farmworker Service Economy" (conference paper, Conference on the Changing Face of Rural California, Asimolar, 1995).
[8] J.A Pacheco to Angel Gonzales, February 23, 1928, box 1, folder 3, J.V. Rhoades Collection
[9] J.A Pacheco to Angel Gonzales, February 23, 1928, box 1, folder 3, J.V. Rhoades Collection.
[10] The J.V. Rhoades Employment Agency records were discovered in 1995 by a construction crew at 606 N. Main Street. The proprietor of that business alerted William Estrada, then curator of El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument, preserved, processed, and curated the documents. Thank you to Bill Estrada for alerting me to this gem of a collection. Finding Aid, J.V. Rhoades Collection.
[11] Edward J. Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 127-128.
[12] "Declaraciónes del Señor Pesqueira, Consul de Mexico," *Heraldo de Mexico* (Los Angeles), January 26, 1928.

and more importantly at this moment, needed to recover their stolen tools and camp gear, which were essential to their ability to work as casual laborers.

The central Plaza that housed the J.V. Rhoades Agency was part of a larger downtown district that served as home base for seasonal and casual workers. Such laborers had long congregated in increasingly segregated enclaves in large cities nationwide during slack seasons, often to improve their chances of finding work.[13] Cities, in turn, regularly supplied this cheap labor pool to agricultural, railroad, and mining concerns in their hinterlands. Private, fee-based employment agencies and labor agents helped facilitate this process. This was part of a larger development in which the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed ever-growing connections and integrated economies between the city and the countryside, which had lasting transformations for both.[14]

In Los Angeles, as in cities across the country, casual workers adapted to the labor market by "scuffling," that is, stringing together a series of short-term, low-paying jobs in order to piece together a subsistence-level income.[15] As they bided their time and searched for work, the lives of casual laborers in these urban spaces were marked by cycles of poverty and deprivation. This was not new. By the time the Great Depression arrived, chronic poverty, precarity, and dependence had already been forged into American social life through factors such as urbanization, seasonal labor, immigration, sex and race discrimination, low wages, periodic

[13] Kenneth Kusmer, *Down and Out and On the Road: The Homeless in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 147.
[14] Gunther Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 47; William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), xv-xxv..
[15] Jacqueline Jones, *The Dispossessed: America's Underclasses from the Civil War to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 233-268; Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 119.

depressions and mass unemployment.[16] Technological innovation and an increased drive for efficiency and productivity intensified during the 1920s, which contributed to the further destabilization of employment.[17] Indeed, the material hardships faced by casual laborers and the poverty of the Plaza district reflected not simply the immediate economic crisis but what one historian has called "a century of pell-mell, buccaneering, no-holds-barred, free-market industrial and agricultural capitalism."[18] As laborers in Los Angeles sought employment when opportunities were rapidly dwindling, they survived one day to the next by mining the city spaces for basic necessities – from free shelter to inexpensive food. They also deployed multiple strategies to find work including that of the private employment agency.

All the while, their survival strategies appeared as a threat to some members of the local elite. Los Angeles boosters and investors had long sought to draw tourists, industry, and capital to the region by promoting abstractions such as "growth" and "development," while at the same time eliding the contributions of manual labor to these processes.[19] In Los Angeles, private capital dictated political power.[20] The Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and its allies and offshoots including the Merchants and Manufacturers' Association, the Los Angeles Police Department, and the *Los Angeles Times* worked in tandem to control, discipline, manipulate, contain, and occasionally expel the region's labor force when deemed necessary. As unemployment rates skyrocketed, local leaders grew increasingly concerned about the growing population of idle men congregating in the city. The fact that they were largely contained

[16] Michael B. Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: America's Enduring Confrontation with Poverty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7.
[17] Susan Porter Benson, *Household Accounts: Working-Class Family Economies in the Interwar United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 18.
[18] David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 168.
[19] Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, *Los Angeles Today* (Los Angeles: Neuner Corporation, 1923), 25.
[20] Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 1990), 102.

downtown and on the east side proved insufficient. Their very status as "unemployed" marked them as suspect. In order to address this concern, local political and business leaders sought to determine who belonged within the city's boundaries and who did not as well as who was deserving of private and public resources and who was not. To facilitate this process, they deployed age-old tools such as vagrancy arrests and work tests.[21] However, unemployed workers, long accustomed to the material hardship of precarious labor, joined forces with the newly destitute and started to push back against oppressive forces and assert their rights in ways that had long been dormant in the city of the open shop.

BUILDING THE CITY

From a backwater town in the 1890s, Los Angeles had flourished through the 1920s, with the aid of a federally subsidized port, the discovery of oil fields, the emergence of a "citrus hinterland," the rise of the film industry in Hollywood, and corresponding population growth.[22] Feats of engineering such as the Panama Canal, the San Pedro Harbor, and a growing highway system reduced freight costs, while William Mulholland's aqueduct brought "pilfered" water into the thirst-quenched region drawing "hundreds of thousands" of midwestern migrants along with their life savings.[23] The Chamber of Commerce had been pushing for increased industrialization since the turn of the century, and these developments bolstered their efforts as they launched a campaign for "Balanced Prosperity."[24] "…Only by laying a high industrial foundation to our

[21] Risa Goluboff, *Vagrant Nation: Police Power, Constitutional Change, and the Making of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 15; Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 98-137; Tobias Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts: Hobo Workers and Community in the Midwest, 1880-1930* (Urbana-Champagne: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Kenneth L. Kusmer, *Down and Out, on the Road: The Homeless in American History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Paul T. Ringenbach, *Tramps and Reformers, 1873-1916: The Discovery of Unemployment in New York* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973); Joan Crouse, *The Homeless Transient in the Great Depression: New York State, 1929-1941* (Albany: State University of New York, 1986).
[22] Davis, "Sunshine and the Open Shop," 96.
[23] Davis, "Sunshine and the Open Shop," 96.
[24] Robert M. Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, orig. 1967), 125.

rapid growth," reported the Chamber president, "can we hope to bring about a stabilized prosperity here."[25] In the early 1920s, Los Angeles investors turned to Chicago as an industrial model for their growing city. They traveled there to study the city's manufacturing district as well as its railroad and stock yards, and in turn, the president of the Union Stock Yards and Transit Company of Chicago visited Los Angeles to offer further guidance.[26] Within a year, the Central Manufacturing District of Los Angeles, Inc., organized to assist industries seeking to relocate to Los Angeles, trumpeted the arrival of a "Chicago-style industrial center in the southeastern section of the city."[27] The local manufacturing workforce grew from 6,876 in 1905 to 66,536 in 1927, and, while its industrial output was only a fraction of San Francisco's in 1890 at 51 percent, by 1921 it had surpassed the Bay Area city and continued to climb.[28] By 1924, Los Angeles became the eighth largest manufacturing center in the U.S., with half of its workforce employed in the production of exports such as "motion pictures, aircraft, and refined oil products."[29] By 1930, eastern firms had established branch plants in Los Angeles including Willys-Overland, Goodrich Rubber, Procter and Gamble, Continental Can, Pittsburgh Plate Glass, Willard Storage Battery, American Maize Products, U.S. Steel and Bethlehem Steel.[30] These industrial plants were located southeast of the downtown Plaza in the Central Manufacturing District (CMD), as well as parts of the City of Vernon, and in the Union Pacific Industrial District on the city's eastern boundaries.[31] Although the motion picture industry, with

[25] W.T. Bishop to Robert C. Gillis, August 21, 1923, Gillis Papers, quoted in Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis*, 125.
[26] Kevin Starr, *Material Dreams: Southern California Through the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 93.
[27] H.E. Poronto, "Why Chicago Came to Los Angeles," *Southern California Business* 2 (August 1923) 45; Starr, *Material Dreams*, 93;
[28] Davis, "Sunshine and the Open Shop," 97.
[29] Davis, "Sunshine and the Open Shop," 97.
[30] Davis, "Sunshine and the Open Shop," 104.
[31] Davis, "Sunshine and the Open Shop," 99.

all its glamour, received most of the attention, this branch-plant sector held "equivalent weight in the regional economy."[32]

One way the Chamber lured industry to the region was by selling its "climate, soil, location, and raw products."[33] "Los Angeles, it should be understood, is not a mere city," declared journalist Morrow Mayo, "On the contrary, it is, and has been since 1888, a *commodity*; something to be advertised and sold to the people of the United States like automobiles, cigarettes and mouth washes."[34] "On a winter's day," according to a chamber pamphlet, "the Angeleno may breakfast by the seashore; after a dip in the ocean, have his luncheon amid the orange groves and dine in the snow fields of the Sierras."[35] In fact, Chamber propaganda argued, the climate not only promoted active outdoor lifestyles, but it contributed to a "contented labor force," which, in their view, equaled an "efficient" labor force.[36] Indeed, the Chamber referred to the region as "Nature's Workshop – where nature helps industry most."[37] However, this conception of climate and sunshine as producing a natural and utopian community free from strife obscured relations of power as well as the role laborers played, among others, in the expansion of the new industrial center and its hinterlands.[38] As the Los Angeles Central Labor Council retorted in response to the Chamber's claims, "most of the stuff is pure 'bushwa.'"[39]

Building the city and its environs required workers – hundreds of thousands of workers. The Mexican day laborer unloading gravel at a construction site downtown, the Anglo worker

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[32] Davis, "Sunshine and the Open Shop," 104.
[33] Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, *Los Angeles Today* (Los Angeles: Neuner Corporation, 1923), 2.
[34] Morrow Mayo, *Los Angeles* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1933), 319.
[35] Chamber of Commerce, *Los Angeles Today*, 8.
[36] Tom Zimmerman, "Paradise Promoted: Boosterism and the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce," *California History* 64, no. 1 (Winter 1985): 29; Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, Industrial Department, *Facts About Industrial Los Angeles: Nature's Workshop* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, 1927), reprinted in *The Suburb Reader*, ed. Becky M. Nicolaides and Andrew Wiese, 203 (New York: Routledge, 2009).
[37] Greg Hise, "'Nature's Workshop': Industry and Urban Expansion in Southern California, 1900-1950, *Journal of Historical Geography* 27, no. 1 (2001): 75.
[38] Hise, "'Nature's Workshop,'" 88.
[39] "So That Organized Labor May Know," *Los Angeles Citizen*, February 13, 1931.

widening a scenic drive in Griffith Park on a public works project, the Mexican family harvesting and canning tomatoes in the Valley, the longshoreman unloading ships at the Port of Los Angeles, at the time the world's largest man-made harbor, or the young Mexican woman tending to the children of a white middle-class Angeleno family – the daily toil of these laborers built and beautified the city and provided the care and sustenance necessary for others to live a life of relative ease in "the all-year playground of America."[40] In other words, constructing a city that was to be a "Mediterranean metropolis" isolated from the scourges of industrial capitalism, in fact, required an extensive labor force.[41] Laborers were lured to the region by the advertising campaigns of the Chamber of Commerce and All-Year Club of Southern California promoting paradise as well as the solicitations from employment agencies and labor contractors seeking a steady supply of workers to construct and run this urban oasis.[42]

In a quest to present the most pleasing version of the city, the Chamber's photographers carefully avoided producing images that revealed evidence of hard labor or "urban ugliness," and instead shot scenes where factories – absent any evidence of laborers – shimmered in the sunshine and oil fields tumbled "gracefully into orange groves."[43] A 1931 brochure published by the Chamber displayed images of the Samson Tire and Rubber Company, a factory – minus any visible smoke – featuring Babylonian priest-kings carved into its fortress-like wall, and proclaimed that "here the eye for business has not closed the eye for beauty."[44] A year later it touted the region's lack of smokestacks, dust, and fumes, setting it apart from the eastern industrial cities.[45] "Many of our own citizens," boasted R.D. Sangster, manager of the Chamber's

[40] Quoted in Tom Zimmerman, "Paradise Promoted," 26, 28.
[41] Davis, "From Oasis to Metropolis," 360; Wild, *Street Meeting*, 13-14.
[42] Wild, *Street Meeting*, 13-14.
[43] Zimmerman, "Paradise Promoted," 28; Starr, *Material Dreams*, 101-102.
[44] *Los Angeles County California To-day: 150 Anniversary* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, 1931), 48; Zimmerman, "Paradise Promoted," 30.
[45] R.D. Sangster, "Yes, We Have No Smokestacks," *Southern California Business* 11 (August 1932): 12-13.

Industrial Department, "could not tell where the machine shops, packing houses, or oil refineries are located" due to the alleged absence of smoke and environmental contamination.[46]

These assurances were contradicted in the minutes of a Los Angeles Family Welfare Association meeting in 1938. "If I were to give a one-word picture which describes the Southeast District," one social worker remarked, "that word would be SMOKE-STACKS, for indeed the district is predominantly industrial.[47] Peggy Dennis, a Los Angeles resident and member of the Communist party, also undermined these assertions as she recalled crossing over the Los Angeles River into East Los Angeles and the "pungent odor of the long-familiar gas works" immediately stinging her nostrils."[48]

Chamber promotional material also carefully managed images of the region's multiracial population. Mexicans appeared only as field workers or performing in decorative costumes at the Paseo de Los Angeles, after the city attempted to clean up the Plaza and turn it into a downtown tourist attraction, essentially an ethnic theme park.[49] Chinese residents were treated similarly, appearing in traditional dress in China City, yet another tourist site.[50] African Americans were omitted entirely.[51]

However, Mexican laborers in particular were crucial to the region's economy. After the Chinese Exclusion Acts cut off their source of labor from China, railroads and the agricultural industry were desperate for cheap alternatives. They turned to Mexican laborers and lured them

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[46] Sangster, "Yes, We Have No Smokestacks," 12.
[47] *Report: The Southeast District*, Minutes of the Board of Directors, Family Welfare Association of Los Angeles, October 24, 1938, box 1, folder 10, Family Service of Los Angeles records, Collection no. 0400, California Social Welfare Archives, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California.
[48] Peggy Dennis, *The Autobiography of an American Communist: A Personal View of a Political Life, 1925-1975* (Westport: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1977), 52. For more discussion of environmental pollution in Los Angeles, see also Daniel Johnson, "Pollution and Public Policy at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," in *Land of Sunshine: An Environmental History of Metropolitan Los Angeles*, ed. William Deverell and Greg Hise, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), 78-94.
[49] Zimmerman, "Paradise Promoted," 32; Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza*, 190-191.
[50] Zimmerman, "Paradise Promoted," 32
[51] Zimmerman, "Paradise Promoted," 32.

across the border with promises of "steady work."[52] Along with the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920, which pushed thousands of Mexicans off the land, this process helped launch a western "great migration" – that is, "the Mexican repopulation of California and the American Southwest."[53] Moreover, as commercial farmers in the Southwest increasingly lost farm labor to industry and the military during World War I, they appealed to the U.S. government, which instituted the first bracero program in 1917, years before the more well-known program was established during the Second World War.[54]

In 1929, one representative of the Southern Pacific Railroad estimated that at least a quarter of a million Mexican men along with their families supported themselves through their work on the country's transportation systems.[55] Moreover, Mexican agricultural workers migrated throughout the state in rhythm with the ebb and flow of the seasonal crop system. Members of a typical Mexican family might find themselves pruning and picking oranges in San Bernardino County during the winter months, planting onions and harvesting apricots and almonds in the spring and sweltering summer in Riverside County, and chopping cotton near the U.S.-Mexican border in the Imperial Valley throughout the fall.[56] Anyone traveling along the roads in California in the early decades of the twentieth century would likely encounter itinerant Mexican families in their "decrepit Ford cars loaded with household articles" – a scene resembling the one immortalized years later by John Steinbeck's depiction of the white Joad

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[52] Wild, *Street Meeting*, 19.
[53] Wild, *Street Meeting,* 19; Douglas Monroy, *Rebirth: Mexican Los Angeles from the Great Migration to the Great Depression* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 52.
[54] George C. Kiser and Martha Woody Kiser, "Introduction," in *Mexican Workers in the United States: Historical and Political Perspectives,* ed. George C. Kiser and Martha Woody Kiser (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1979), 9-10; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 127-166.
[55] Robert N. McLean, "Mexican Workers in the United States," *Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work* 56 (1929): 531.
[56] McLean, "Mexican Workers in the United States," 533; *Mexicans in California: Report of Governor C.C. Young's Mexican Fact-Finding Committee* (San Francisco: California Department of Industrial Relations, 1930), 156-157.

family in their Hudson Super Six.[57] As one social worker noted in 1929, Mexican agricultural laborers "have learned that they must either move with the crops or starve."[58] Laborers spent most of their little savings searching for or moving to the next job.[59]

However, there was not a sustained demand for agricultural labor throughout the state of California or even in nearby states. This resulted in a yearly "unabsorbed labor reserve" that was chronically underemployed and unemployed.[60] According to a 1930 California state government report, the main slack period in the agricultural industries occurred during the months of December, January, and February, while the period of greatest need for labor fell between July and October.[61] California agriculture required at least 143,000 casual laborers yearly but only around fifty-thousand of these workers could expect employment for more than two-hundred days.[62] Another 25,000-to-35,000 casual laborers could expect to work for up to one-hundred days.[63] Fluctuating seasonal demands meant that casual labor in California was "idle 34.7 percent of its possible working time."[64] Accordingly, this left thousands of workers to search for jobs "off the land" for large segments of the year.[65]

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[57] McLean, "Mexican Workers in the United States," 532; John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992, orig. 1939), 95.
[58] McLean, "Mexican Workers in the United States," 532.
[59] Home Missions Council, *A Study of Social and Economic Factors Relating to Spanish-Speaking People in the United States* (n.p.: Commission on Social and Economic Factors, 1926), 10.
[60] *Violations of Free Speech and Rights of Labor, Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Comm. on Education and Labor Pursuant to S. Res. 266, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 76th Cong.19548 (1940) (testimony of James E. Wood, Economist, Subcommittee of the Committee on Education and Labor under S.R. 266) (hereafter *CEL Hearings).*
[61] *Mexicans in California*, 157.
[62] George P. Clements, *A Commentary on California Agricultural Labor*, August 10, 1937, in *CEL Hearings, part 53,* 19678.
[63] Clements, *A Commentary on California Agricultural Labor*, *CEL Hearings*, part 53, 19679.
[64] Home Missions Council, *A Study of Social and Economic Factors,* 10.
[65] George P. Clements, *A Commentary on California Agricultural Labor*, August 10, 1937, in *CEL Hearings, part 53,* 19678.

During the slack periods, many Mexican laborers turned to factories, foundries, and construction work in Los Angeles or the state's large cities.[66] Social workers noted that a Mexican laborer originally recruited by growers at the U.S.-Mexican border to work on a particular crop would eventually drift to Los Angeles when labor demands reached their lowest ebb. Once he found work on a construction gang in the city, he might hesitate to return to the fields when the crops were ready.[67] The city offered more opportunities for casual laborers to pick up odd jobs that might not be available in rural areas once the crop season ended. Working families could stop traveling throughout the state and place their children in school on a consistent basis. Moreover, cities tended to offer more adequate housing options than in the country where sleeping outdoors and in tents was commonplace – a particular necessity during the chilly winter nights and mornings.[68] Occasionally called "the American Capital of Mexico," by 1930 Los Angeles housed a population of approximately 190,000 Mexicans out of a total population of 1.2 million.[69]

Nevertheless, it was often the case that seasonal trends in industrial labor in the city corresponded with those of agriculture, and migrant workers were forced either to manage without an income or appeal to county or private charities for relief.[70] Although many Mexicans found employment within the city of Los Angeles, they were often laid off during the winter months and the rainy season. Mexican construction workers could anticipate roughly a month

[66] McLean, "Mexican Workers in the United States," 534.
[67] McLean, "Mexican Workers in the United States," 534.
[68] Home Missions Council, *A Study of Social and Economic Factors,* 14.
[69] G. Bromley Oxnam, *The Mexican in Los Angeles: Los Angeles City Survey* (San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, 1970, orig. 1920), 5; Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity*, 78-79; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930: Population,* vol. 3, *Composition and Characteristics,* Part 1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1931), 61.
[70] *CEL Hearings, part 53,* 19453 (testimony of Howard A. Miller, Agricultural Department, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce).

and a half of unemployment annually.[71] In fact, Holmes Bishop, the former president of the Associate Farmers of California, Inc. and a member of the Chamber's Agricultural Committee, explained that during the off season, growers *expected* that seasonal laborers who could not find employment would be cared for by county welfare programs.[72] Indeed, the County Department of Charities corroborated such claims. In an annual report, they noted that the work of Mexicans tended to be "mostly of a casual, temporary nature, and as soon as one job terminates another must be found for them." "They throng the city in Winter, and crowd our office," the report stated, "seemingly content to rest there until provided with work."[73] Precarious employment was thus by no means limited to agriculture or migrant labor in general.[74]

Nonetheless, agriculture and industry in the Southwest were "absolutely dependent on Mexican labor."[75] As one social worker claimed, the "Mexican is the Atlas who holds upon his broad shoulders the industrial world in the Southwest."[76] The Immigration Act of 1924 exempted Mexico and other Western Hemisphere countries from its numerical quota system largely due to agricultural needs in the Southwest.[77] As Congress debated imposing immigration quotas on Mexico during the late 1920s, the large western cotton and fruit growers opposed restriction.[78] In fact, representatives of California agricultural interests argued that there were realistically only three alternatives to Mexican labor and none of them desirable: "the negro from the South, the

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[71] *A Study of Seasonal Unemployment in Californi*a (Sacramento: California Unemployment Reserves Commission, 1939), 37, cited in Douglas Monroy, *Rebirth: Mexican Los Angeles from the Great Migration to the Great Depression* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 119.
[72] Italics are mine. *CEL Hearings, part 53,* 19452 (testimony of Holmes Bishop, Howard A. Miller, and John Watson).
[73] *Annual Report of the Outdoor Relief Division, Department of Charities, County of Los Angeles, July 1, 1925-June 30, 1926*, 23-24, box 1, folder 2, Jessie E. Dean Papers, Collection no. 0410, California Social Welfare Archives, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California (hereafter Dean Papers).
[74] *CEL Hearings, part 53,* 19480 (testimony of Harry L. Strobel, Associated Farmers of California).
[75] McLean, "Mexican Workers in the United States," 536.
[76] McLean, "Mexican Workers in the United States," 536.
[77] Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 50.
[78] Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 52.

Filipinos, and the Porto Rican negroes." They favored the Mexican, who could be deported whereas the others held claim to American citizenship.[79] Mexicans thus constituted a disposable population. This undermined the claim of George P. Clements, manager of the Chamber's Agricultural Department that "the Mexican laborer, if he only realized it, has California agriculture and industry in the hollow of his hand."[80]

THE DEPRESSION IN LOS ANGELES

By the spring of 1929, careful observers might have noted warning signs of the coming crisis when the usual seasonal decline in applications to private and public relief agencies failed to occur.[81] However, the political and business elite of Los Angeles remained optimistic for the most part in the early months of the depression. After the initial stock market crash in October, 1929, not too many anticipated that the reverberations would be quite so devastating and long lasting. "The situation is remarkably good," announced Los Angeles mayor, John C. Porter, "I feel sure that the recent rains will bring us out of the slump. The situation is not at all alarming. We do not find it necessary to feed our unemployed men here. In San Francisco I saw free soup kitchens. There are none here. All we have to do is to give our men jobs and the problem is solved.'[82] The conservative *Los Angeles Times* continued to extol the region as the "white spot" of the nation.[83] This malleable phrase, which originated with reference to Los Angeles sometime

[79] *Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings Before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization on H.R. 6465, H.R. 7358, H.R. 10955, H.R. 11687*, 70th Cong. 325 (1928) (testimony Ralph H. Taylor, Executive Secretary, Agricultural Legislative Committee of California); Natalia Molina, *How Race is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 34-38.
[80] George P. Clements, *Notes for Talk Before the Annual Conference of "Friends of the Mexicans,"* Pomona College, Claremont, California, November 18, 1926, in *CEL Hearings part 53,* 19669.
[81] Josephine Chapin Brown, *Public Relief, 1929-1939* (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1940), 64.
[82] Duncan Aikman, "California Sunshine," *Nation*, April 22, 1931, 448.
[83] "Los Angeles Achieves Impressive Progress," *Los Angeles Times*, December 28, 1930.

in the early 1920s, took on a range of meanings but typically referred to continuous economic development unhampered by labor unrest, political radicalism, and "foreign" elements.[84]

After a long and protracted battle with organizations such as the Chamber and the Los Angeles Merchants and Manufacturer's Association (MMA), who had carried out a "powerful open shop campaign," the labor movement had grown relatively weak in Los Angeles throughout the 1910s and 1920s.[85] From this point on, the Chamber and MMA ruled Southern California "with an iron hand" until the early 1930s.[86]

At the onset of the Great Depression, local leaders in Los Angeles had some reason to be optimistic. In spite of the events on Wall Street, there were a number of projects on the horizon including the Boulder Dam project, the razing of Bunker Hill, which had long been a "barrier to city growth", and the continued expansion of the aviation industry. Eastern plants such as Ford, Procter and Gamble, Pittsburgh Place Glass, and the National Lead Company had recently arrived, promising jobs and profits.[87] Moreover, Los Angeles itself had experienced a massive rate of growth and profit in its recent past. Between 1910 and 1930, the city grew at a rate unmatched by any other American city at that point, quadrupling its population.[88] By 1930—with

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[84] The "white spot" designation seems to have originated at the hands of Merle Thorpe, editor of *Nation's Business*, which was the official publication of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. During the Depression of 1920-21, Thorpe published a color-coded map of business conditions throughout the U.S., which depicted Los Angeles as one of the few spots where conditions were "good" as indicated by a white bubble against a sea of gray and black, which signified "fair" to "poor" conditions. The Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce capitalized on this claim and ran with it continuously for the next few decades. Archer Wall Douglas, "Editor is Visitor," *Coast Banker* 28, no. 4 (April, 1922), 446; "Business Conditions with Map," *Nation's Business* (September, 1921), 26; Wild, *Street Meeting*, 38-39; Robert Gottlieb and Irene Wolt, *Thinking Big: The Story of the Los Angeles Times, Its Publishers and Their Influence on Southern California* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1977), 227; Carey McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island on the Land* (Santa Barbara: Gibbs Smith, 1973), 289-294.

[85] Louis B. Perry and Richard S. Perry, *A History of the Los Angeles Labor Movement, 1911-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 193, see also 194-236. On the open-shop in Los Angeles, see John H.M. Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough: Los Angeles Workers, 1880-2010* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 39-82; and Errol Wayne Stevens, *Radical L.A.: From Coxey's Army to the Watts Riots, 1894-1965* (Norman, Ok: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009).

[86] McWilliams, *Southern California*, 290.

[87] Leonard J. Leader, "Los Angeles and the Great Depression*"* (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1972), 2.

[88] Sánchez*, Becoming Mexican American*, 71.

1.2 million residents—it was the largest city in the West and the fifth largest in the nation.[89] As the journalist Carey McWilliams noted, "the growth of Southern California since 1870 should be regarded as one continuous boom punctuated at intervals by major explosions."[90]

However, at the close of 1929, it quickly became clear to some that the economy had started a severe downward spiral producing pervasive unemployment and residents began to demand action from their political leaders. As early as mid-December an official from a local American Federation of Labor (AFL) chapter stood up at a conference on unemployment and cautioned the room of "'an acute condition of unemployment in this city that is general in its extension and is quite serious in many directions."[91] This marked the first official recognition that unemployment was evolving into a significant problem.[92] By early January, 1930, the *Los Angeles Citizen*, the paper of record for the AFL-affiliated Central Labor Council, noted a marked decrease in the demand for labor in addition to "thousands of unemployed workers arriving from other parts of the country" resulting in a "noticeable labor surplus" throughout "practically all lines of industry."[93] According to a national census taken in 1930, 7.7 percent of men and women were unemployed and looking for work in Los Angeles. This percentage increased if one considered the 1.1 percent who were "on lay-off without pay.[94] That same year, factory employment dropped by 25 percent, while one of twelve African American men and one

[89] Becky M. Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 48; *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930: Unemployment* (Washington, DC: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1931-1932), 142.
[90] McWilliams, *Southern California*, 114.
[91] Leader, "Los Angeles and the Great Depression,," 3.
[92] Leader, "Los Angeles and the Great Depression*,"* 4.
[93] "State Employment," *Los Angeles Citizen*, January 3, 1930.
[94] Table 3: Unemployment Returns, Classes A and B, by Sex, for Cities of 50,000 and Over ,1930, United States Census Bureau, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930: Unemployment* (Washington, DC: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1931-1932), 142.

of seven Mexican men were unemployed.[95] The city council and Mayor Porter, who had entered the office with limited experience, began to throw a hodgepodge of solutions at the rapidly escalating problem, hoping something would stick. They heard, but did not necessarily implement, proposals including the expansion of public improvements by public agencies, the implementation of the five-day work week for municipal employees rather than the typical six, the completion of a new General Hospital as a public works project, and an organized drive to lure industry—but not people—to Los Angeles.[96] Nevertheless, the city's unemployment rate continued to rise, with one out of five people out of work at the start of 1931.[97] By 1932 there were 344,000 unemployed men and women in the city.[98]

How did these circumstances affect casual laborers? As business underwent a managerial revolution between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it reorganized the labor market.[99] The ensuing inexhaustible demand for increased efficiency and production pushed one group of laborers after another either out of the workforce or "into the ghettos of unskilled, dead-end employment at its margins," establishing "an easily exploitable labor surplus."[100] For the most part, employers were accustomed to consumer demands following seasonal and cyclical patterns and during slack times simply laid off their employees. At the same, they depended upon a ready labor reserve eagerly standing by at their factory or farm gates. Accordingly, due to this irregularity, workers could not count on steady employment and suffered accordingly. Moreover,

[95] Leader, "Los Angeles and the Great Depression*,"* 6; Thomas F. Dorrance, "A New Deal Every Day: Civic Authority and Federal Policy in Chicago and Los Angeles, 1930-1940" (PhD diss., University of Illinois, Chicago, 2014), 77.
[96] Leader, "Los Angeles and the Great Depression," 4.
[97] Leader, "Los Angeles and the Great Depression," 7.
[98] Thomas F. Dorrance, "A New Deal Every Day: Civic Authority and Federal Policy in Chicago and Los Angeles, 1930-1940" (PhD diss., University of Illinois, Chicago, 2014), 77.
[99] Alfred D. Chandler, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977); Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 187.
[100] Katz, *Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 187; Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 119.

workers typically had no reliable means of learning about job openings in other locations. Labor turnover reached rates as high as one-hundred percent per year on average in large companies. Workers grew accustomed to traveling hundreds of miles in search of work, while those with families might remain stuck at home.[101]

SURVIVING IN THE CITY

Sociology students at the University of Southern California as well as local politicians and social workers had long been concerned about the social problem of unemployed and underemployed transient men and women drifting and living throughout the city. These investigators traversed all corners of Los Angeles investigating conditions, interviewing neighborhood inhabitants, and revealing in their ensuing dissertations, social surveys, and reports a vast world of underground economies, survival strategies, and hand-to-mouth existence.[102] As their reports revealed, unattached jobless men of all races tended to congregate downtown near the Plaza where many resided in "missions, cheap hotels, boarding houses, and flop houses."[103] In this area, also referred to as the "Main Stem," a variety of establishments catered to the casual laborer's needs.[104] This population consisted of casual laborers, skilled, semi-skilled, and

[101] Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse,* 187.
[102] See for example, Paul Herbold, "A Sociological Survey of Main Street," (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1936), Merrill Leonard Harrod, "A Study of Deviate Personalities as Found in Main Street of Los Angeles," (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1939); Freed Koehler, "The Unattached Transient: A Study of 2,000 Unattached Adult Male Transients Registered by the Los Angeles California Area of the Federal Transient Service (master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1935); Gertrude Steel-Brooke, "The Single Woman on Relief: A Study of the Status of Two Hundred Sixty Single, Unattached, American-Born, White Women on Relief in the Heart of Downtown Los Angeles," (master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1936); and J. Albert Torribio, "Some Social-Psychological Effects of the Lack of Attachments in the Case of the Unattached Man" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1939).
[103] A "flop house" or "flop" was a lodging house where men slept on cots in a single room. *Preliminary Report: Physical Conditions and Character of Certain Population Groups: Area East of Main Street and Between 1st and 6th Streets, Los Angeles* (n.p., January 1939), box 33, folder 7a, John Anson Ford Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California (hereafter Ford Papers).
[104] Gregg W. Kettles, "Day Labor Markets and Public Space," *UMKC Law Review* 78 (2009-2010): 152; Gunther Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880-1930* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

unskilled workers, "unemployables," "mission stiffs," and newcomers to the city.[105] As they grappled with unemployment and deep poverty, the residents made use of the spaces and resources of the downtown district in their quest to survive. Carlos Bulosan, a Filipino migrant worker and aspiring writer, recalled sharing a cheap hotel room with his brother and at least eleven other men. He was later compelled, due to housing discrimination to live in Little Manila, a downtown location and red-light district "where suicides and murder were a daily occurrence."[106] Missions offered another viable alternative for shelter. When the Depression struck, the Midnight Mission had been the only agency in the city somewhat prepared to meet to meet the emergency, and, accordingly, the federal government immediately designated it as an official resource for homeless men.[107] In 1931, it provided 203,801 beds, 527,072 meals, 19,656 pieces of clothing, and 1,213 jobs to applicants.[108] All of the rescue missions in the city typically allowed unhoused men to stay for no more than three days after which they were advised to find a job or leave town.[109] Many of the regulars simply floated to the next agency that would have them.[110] When limited beds were unavailable at missions, men slept on cold bare floors. The Communist poet, H.H. Lewis, who spent time as a casual laborer in Los Angeles, reported seeing a dimly-lit hall of no more than 25 by 40 feet packed to capacity with "sardined" men laying on

[105] "Mission stiffs" refer to those who frequented missions for food and lodging. *Area East of Main Street*, Ford Papers; Vernon W. Saul, "The Vocabulary of Bums," *American Speech* 4, no. 5 (June, 1929): 340, 342.
[106] Carlos Bulosan, *America is in the Heart: A Personal History* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1946), 132, 134; Linda España-Maram, *Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles's Little Manila: Working Class Filipinos and Popular Culture, 1920s-1950s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 41.
[107] "Fifty Years of Helping Homeless, Penniless Men," *Lincoln Heights Bulletin*, August 27, 1964.
[108] George D. Nickel, "Certain Aspects of Emergency Relief in Los Angeles During 1931-32," (MA thesis, University of Southern California, 1932), 14.
[109] Minutes of the Social Welfare Committee, Community Welfare Federation, December 12, 1929, 4-6, box 1, folder 2, Council of Social Agencies of Los Angeles records, Collection no. 0480, California Social Welfare Archives, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California (hereafter CSA Records).
[110] Nickel, "Certain Aspects of Emergency Relief in Los Angeles," 43.

their sides to save room. He wrote: "Your breath warmed somebody's neck and somebody's breath warmed yours. It was a suffocating, putrid hell for us but glory hallelujah for the lice."[111]

The downtown area included the old Plaza – later *El Paseo de Los Angeles* or, more popularly, Olvera Street – which had transitioned from a civic center during the Spanish colonial period in the late eighteenth century to a blighted area largely inhabited by the city's Mexican residents by the 1930s.[112] In the surrounding neighborhoods resided communities of Mexicans, Italians, Japanese, Chinese, and a "smattering of African Americans and Anglos."[113] The area was marked by extreme poverty, leading one observer to dismiss it as "'a moron stream, muddy, filthy, unpleasant to the nose[,]…an awful stew of human life.'"[114] A contemporary sociologist offered an even more vivid description: "The streets are always dirty with pieces of rotten fruit, cuds of tobacco, vomit, papers, sacks, expectoration and in some cases men so intoxicated that they can no longer stand or walk."[115]

Yet, in this blighted space, street speaking flourished – mostly on Sundays – as one of the few avenues of political expression available to the precariously situated.[116] Here people from the surrounding neighborhoods of Sonoratown, Chinatown, Little Tokyo, and Little Manila joined the residents of Downtown along crowded benches as soapbox orators expounded in both English and Spanish on politics, religion, and the economy while standing on "low concrete

[111] H.H. Lewis, "Sidewalks of Los Angeles," *New Masses*, June, 1929, 13.
[112] The modern-day Plaza is popularly known as Olvera Street. Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza*, 20, 196.
[113] Wild, *Street Meeting*, 10.
[114] Louis Adamic, *The Truth About Los Angeles* (Girard, Kan.: Haldeman-Julius, 1927), 10, cited in Wild, *Street Meeting*, 10.
[115] Harrod, "A Study of Deviate Personalities," 28-29.
[116] Wild, *Street Meeting*, 150, 175.

platforms that in the 1870's were watering troughs."[117] A local ordinance prohibiting public speaking was only moderately enforced although LAPD officers kept a watchful eye.[118]

Formal politics was not open to the inhabitants of this area especially since middle-class and elite Anglos had eradicated the ward system at the turn of the century, thus removing any chance for an ethnic political machine, which had been one way immigrants and marginalized racial and ethnic groups occasionally had wielded some influence in local elections.[119] Street speech, on the other hand, offered "an immediate voice" regardless of race, culture, nationality, class, or citizenship status.[120] The Plaza, also known as a "forum of the proletariat," was "the spatial center of radical working-class Los Angeles."[121] Since the turn of the century, it had been a central meeting place for working-class social and political movements, and had hosted such radical groups and individuals as the Partido Liberal Mexicano (PLM), headed by the exiled Mexican brothers, Ricardo and Enrique Flores Magón, the Russian immigrant and anarchist Emma Goldman, supporters of the International Workers of the World (IWW), Socialist mayoral candidate Job Harriman, and the novelist Upton Sinclair.[122]

Given its vibrant political culture, the Plaza proved a rich resource for sociologists and social workers studying society's so-called outcasts. One Sunday afternoon in 1936, for example, Paul Herbold, a sociology PhD student at USC, wandered about the Plaza to observe and report on its denizens. Over half of the soapbox orators offered evangelical sermons and sang gospel songs while others denounced religion, called the church "the most damnable thing in the

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[117] Herbold, "A Sociological Survey of Main Street," 129; Federal Writers Project of the Work Progress Administration, *Los Angeles in the 1930s: The WPA Guide to the City of Angels* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 151.
[118] Paul Herbold, "A Sociological Survey of Main Street," (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1936), 128.
[119] Wild, *Street Meeting*, 150.
[120] Wild, *Street Meeting*, 150.
[121] Herbold, "A Sociological Survey of Main Street," 128; David M. Struthers, *The World in a City: Multiethnic Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019), 46.
[122] Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza*, 134; Wild, *Street Meeting*, 151.

world," and peddled pamphlets with titles such as "New Atheist Poems."[123] However, radical politics constituted a significant portion of the soapbox oration, and Herbold observed one man in a quest to release workers "from the thralldom of capitalistic slavery."[124] The speaker warned his audience that unemployment conditions had not improved, and had in fact grown worse since Roosevelt assumed office. "This capitalistic system," the man lectured, "stinks to high heaven. The catarrh of ignorance keeps us from smelling it."[125] The solution? Political and economic organization, he declared, was crucial to "combat the evils imposed upon the workers."[126] Another man sold copies of the *Western Worker*, the official West Coast newspaper of the Communist Party, as he discussed topics such as the Townsend Old-Age Pension Plan and Father Coughlin with his customers.[127] Insults abounded. California Governor Frank Merriam, a conservative Republican, was called "a bald-headed rat from Iowa, who teaches Sunday School class at Long Beach."[128] Both he and the Republican mayor of Los Angeles, Frank Shaw, were declared to be "tools of capitalism."[129]

In many ways, this downtown district was a male-dominated space. There were no single-family dwellings or apartment houses along a significant stretch of Main Street.[130] The area housed no parks, playgrounds or recreational areas intended for children and families.[131] In fact, a contemporary sociologist claimed that men outnumbered women in the neighborhood by a ratio of ten to one.[132] A sociology student noted the absence of women by the dearth of "gown

[123] Herbold, "A Sociological Survey of Main Street," 130, 132-133.
[124] Herbold, "A Sociological Survey of Main Street," 134.
[125] Herbold, "A Sociological Survey of Main Street," 134.
[126] Herbold, "A Sociological Survey of Main Street," 136.
[127] Herbold, "A Sociological Survey of Main Street," 136.
[128] Herbold, "A Sociological Survey of Main Street," 136.
[129] Herbold, "A Sociological Survey of Main Street," 137.
[130] Herbold, "A Sociological Survey of Main Street," 21.
[131] William Burk, *Social and Economic Conditions: Area Around 6th and Stanford, Los Angeles*, (Information Division, c.a. 1941), box 33, folder 7a, Ford Papers.
[132] Harrod, "A Study of Deviate Personalities," 92.

salons," "tea shops," and "department stores." He went on: "Even in the corner drugstores one misses the gentle sex. In the display windows the chief wares offered are things no other street would dare allow—tonics that are 10 percent testimonial and 90 percent alcohol, quack cures, erotic instruments and gadgets of a dozen kinds."[133]

However, this observation elided the presence of working-class women, who did, in fact, reside and work in the downtown area. A social work student conducted a survey of a large cross-section of women living in the "heart of downtown" near 5th and Main Streets.[134] The executive director of the Girls' Rendezvous, an organization for needy women and girls, informed a State Unemployment Commission that many of her applicants lived wherever they could – "in cheap down town [sic] hotels and rooming houses, begging for room rent, or beating the landlord whenever possible.[135] Women would crowd four or five to a single bed of a woman "fortunate enough to have a room."[136] When unable to secure lodging, women dozed in department store restrooms during the day and bus stations and train depots at night.[137] The quickness of contemporary observers to dismiss the presence of working-class women reveals the way in which women often remained invisible during the Great Depression. Women were not conspicuously homeless or in obvious need of aid, contributing to a general sense that men suffered the most from the crisis. Shelters, for example, often maintained separate lines for women in order to keep them away from public sight in the name of gender respectability. This

[133] Richard Halliburton, "Half a Mile of History," *Readers' Digest* 31 (October, 1937), 73.
[134] Gertrude Steel-Brooke, "The Single Woman on Relief: A Study of the Status of Two Hundred Sixty Single, Unattached, American-Born, White Women on Relief in the Heart of Downtown Los Angeles," (master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1936), 17.
[135] Louis Bloch, *Report and Recommendations of the California State Unemployment Commission* (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1932), 105.
[136] Bloch, *Report and Recommendations*, 105.
[137] Bloch, *Report and Recommendations*, 105.

obscured the public's sense of who was suffering the most from the economic crisis and most believed it was a male problem.[138]

Without kitchen access, many downtown habitues relied on cheap restaurants and cafeterias for sustenance. "Whatever may be the faults or merits of the ten and fifteen cent restaurants," observed sociology student Paul Herbold, who spent countless hours observing the denizens of Main Street, "it must be recognized that they offer a service to the man who is forced to 'get by' on a pittance."[139] Those with low funds often got by on "coffee and…," referring to coffee and doughnuts, pie, or other kinds of pastries" purchased for five cents.[140] Others obtained a free meal in exchange for attendance at religious services at the Union Rescue Mission.[141] These diners faced further hardship in 1935 when the state legislature passed a new three-percent sales tax, which exempted "household purchases of bread, meat, fish, eggs, and milk" but not food served in "restaurants, cafes, cabarets, hotels, boarding houses and other public eating places."[142] This legislation laid bare the problem of the single men's lack of access to the unwaged labor of women. As one news article explained: "Addicts of the 'ham-and' kitchens moaned loudly at the unfair toe-holds given those brothers who had the luck (or foresight) to acquire wives and families."[143] "'It ain't fair,' lamented Joe Zacladorf, 'They won't let you change an economic system which keeps us boys from contracting matrimony, and then they tax you for being single.'"[144]

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[138] Elaine S. Abelson, "Women Who Have No Men to Work for Them: Gender and Homelessness in the Great Depression, 1930-1934," *Feminist Studies* 29, no. 1 (Spring, 2003), 116.
[139] Herbold, "Sociological Survey of Main Street," 21.
[140] Herbold, "Sociological Survey of Main Street," 13.
[141] Herbold, "Sociological Survey of Main Street," 13-14.
[142] "'Ham-And' Means Ham and – Tax!" *United Progressive News*, June 21, 1935; "State Food Tax Off Monday!" *Los Angeles Evening Post-Record*, June 29, 1935.
[143] "'Ham-And' Means Ham and – Tax!"
[144] "'Ham-And' Means Ham and – Tax!"

While Mayor Porter and even the County Department of Charities boasted that Los Angeles had avoided establishing soup kitchens, the *Los Angeles City Directory* for 1931 listed a number of soup kitchens including the Union Rescue Mission and Midnight Mission, which had served the homeless population for years.[145] A sociology student tabulated a list of at least thirty-three soup kitchens in the city by 1932.[146] Moreover, Mexican immigrant and downtown resident, Miguel Venegas, reported walking through the Plaza district where he "was constantly approached by [white] American individuals asking for a nickel for coffee."[147] He also reported that La Placita Church's soup kitchen fed over a thousand individuals – the majority of them "Americans" – daily.[148] The female clients of the Girls Rendezvous relief agency knew where to find all the soup kitchens as well as any places where refreshments were served. The agency's director reported that some bragged openly "about getting four and five free meals daily."[149]

Movie theaters provided a common refuge – a means to avoid sleeping in vacant sheds or "packing the banner," that is, wandering the street all night for want of lodging.[150] Even mission staff members, when the facility was at capacity, gave tickets for all-night movie houses to those turned away.[151] This became such a common practice that projection operators often ceased running the film by early morning, knowing that no one would complain.[152] One sociology

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[145] Los Angeles County Department of Charities, *Annual Report, Fiscal Year July 1, 1930 to June 30,-1931*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Welfare Department, 1931), 1, box 1, folder 3, Dean Papers; *Los Angeles City Directory* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Directory, Co., 1931), 2611-2612; Aikman, "California Sunshine," 448.
[146] Nickel, "Certain Aspects of Emergency Relief, 82-83.
[147] Miguel Venegas to Juan Venegas, December 11, 1931, in *Letters Home: Mexican Exile Correspondence from Los Angeles, 1927-1932,* trans. and ed. María Teresa Venegas (self pub., 2012), 113.
[148] Miguel Venegas to Juan Venegas, December 11, 1931, in *Letters Home,* 113.
[149] Bloch, *Report and Recommendations*, 105.
[150] Another version of this phrase was "carrying the banner." Bernard O'Brien, "Gray-Head Meets Hundreds Seeking Jobs Here," *Los Angeles Record*, April 9, 1930; Bernard O'Brien, "10 and 15 Cent Meals Stave Off Starvation," *Los Angeles Record*, April 17, 1930; J. Albert Torribio, "Some Social-Psychological Effects of the Lack of Attachments in the Case of the Unattached Man" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1939), 21; Saul, "Vocabulary of Bums," 338.
[151] *Area East of Main Street*, Ford Papers.
[152] Torribio, "Unattached Man," 21.

student reported that approximately 1,400 individuals frequented these theaters every night.[153] Carlos Bulosan recalled sleeping in "five-cent theaters on Main Street, where the jobless and other denizens of the city slept." "I could hardly stand the stifling filth of the men and the monstrous rats that ran over our feet when the lights went out," he wrote, "But it was cold outside and there was no place to go, and no food to appease the hunger that was gnawing at my vitals as viciously as the rats in the theater."[154] Women, too, sought shelter in all-night movie theaters but were forced to change seats constantly to avoid men who accosted them.[155] At one point, social workers sought to close overnight screenings in an effort to clean up Main Street. When that proved ineffective, they enlisted the theaters to function as part of the local relief infrastructure: theater managers agreed to refer any boys under the age of eighteen who attempted to purchase a ticket after 9 p.m. to the Juvenile Bureau and to send an officer to question him.[156]

FINDING WORK

How did casual laborers go about finding work, especially as unemployment rose? Job-seekers searched relentlessly. Ivan Slack, a 24-year-old living near downtown, wandered "from shop to shop asking for a job" for months, even offering to work for free so as to gain experience. The few jobs he found were fleeting.[157] Dorothy Rand, a thirty-seven year old mother whose husband had deserted her due to his inability to find work, found herself strung

[153] Torribio, "Unattached Man," 21.
[154] Bulosan, *America is in the Heart*, 138.
[155] Harrod, "A Study of Deviate Personalities," 24.
[156] Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Council of Social Agencies, March 15, 1934, 3, box 2, folder 3, CSA Records.
[157] Ivan Slack, interview by Max Bogner, January, 1935, in Max Bogner, "A Case Study of the Relation of Philosophy of Life to Unemployment" (master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1935), 36.

along by promises of employment at a novelty manufacturing shop, where she had formerly worked.[158]

In Los Angeles, economic mobility depended on geographic mobility.[159] Those who could afford to travel longer distances had improved chances of securing work. Access to cheap and reliable transportation was key to survival whether it meant traveling a few miles to investigate a job prospect or hundreds of miles every few months following the seasonal labor cycles. By the 1930s, automobiles appeared indispensable in Los Angeles.[160] "Not elsewhere in the world is [the automobile's] use so common," observed one journalist writing for the *Atlantic,* "in California it is quite impossible to get along without one."[161] Miguel Venegas, a Bunker Hill resident who had recently arrived from Mexico, agreed: "here the automobile is as indispensable as a horse is to a rancher…."[162] However, transportation was costly, whether travel was by personal automobile or a public streetcar, especially when employment was not guaranteed. Five men grew so "discouraged" about the availability of jobs in private industry that they soon "hesitated to spend money on transportation" and ceased searching for work unless they had a "definite prospect."[163] Others, especially those living downtown, had only their feet to rely on. Carmen Landeros, a Mexican immigrant, recalled that her brother-in-law "used to walk and walk and walk and there was no job available."[164] Fred Rose, a self-described fruit tramp who relied

[158] Dorothy Rand, interview by Max Bogner, January, 1935, in Bogner, "A Case Study," 40.
[159] Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*, 66.
[160] Scott Bottles, *Los Angeles and the Automobile* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 59.
[161] A. Edward Newton, "The Course of Empire," *Atlantic*, September 1, 1932, 298.
[162] Miguel Venegas to Francisco Venegas, September 7, 1928, in *Letters Home,* 52.
[163] Sallye S. Masiello, "A Study of 50 Young Married Couples Applying for Relief" (master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1939), 129.
[164] Carmen Landeros, "Mexican American Community Project," interview by Christine Valencia, trans. Estella Flores, March 14, 1972, Oral History Program, California State University, Fullerton.

on hitchhiking to travel from job to job, walked fifteen miles from downtown Los Angeles to the outskirts of Burbank before a driver picked him up enroute to Fresno.[165]

Moreover, there was no efficient system to match laborers with the demand for labor. Accordingly, workers were compelled to travel unnecessarily long distances in search of work. For example, when the walnut season ended in Los Angeles County, Mexican laborers journeyed north in hopes of finding work in the cotton harvest. Meanwhile, the grape harvest was ending in the valley, and those workers headed south seeking work harvesting the oranges crops. As a social worker observed, "And so the two lines of workers passed each other, spending time and money in traveling, because no one has shown us how the various industries can coordinate, and budget, and pool, their demands for Mexican labor."[166]

Within the city, the shape-up offered a flawed solution to connecting workers with jobs. A surplus of day laborers would gather, typically in the early morning, at a job site or hiring hall in hopes that that a foreman, straw boss, or supervisor would select them for a few hours or a day's work.[167] Although the shape-up originated among longshoremen, it was used fairly extensively in other industries throughout the Depression in Los Angeles as well as nationwide.[168] Ed Paulsen recalled arising at five in the morning to head for the waterfront in San Francisco, where, he found over a thousand men standing outside the gates vying for three or four available jobs. When the gates opened, they fought "like a pack of Alaskan dogs to get through there."[169] At the Los Angeles waterfront in San Pedro, the shape-up took place at the employer-controlled "fink

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[165] Helen Dunlap Packard, "The Social Welfare Problems of Migratory Workers in the Cotton Industry of the Southern San Joaquin Valley During the 1937 and 1938 Seasons," (master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1939), 153.
[166] McLean, "Mexican Workers in the United States," 532.
[167] "Shape-Up," in *Workers in America: A Historical Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, ed. Robert E. Weir (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2013), 699.
[168] "Shape-Up," 699.
[169] "Ed Paulsen," in Studs Terkel, *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970), 32.

hall."[170] Frank Sundstedt, who had worked there as a longshoreman remembered gathering along the docks while a ship came in and watching as some job-seekers bribed the foreman to ensure a job. "…The old-timers would wear matches stuck in their hat bands. Three matches was a code,' he recalled, "Maybe it meant a duck to the boss, or a chicken or a turkey, or a bottle of wine or whiskey. It was a signal that the longshoreman would take care of the boss if he'd give him a job."[171] The movie industry also participated in a similar process; would-be "extras" stood around outside the studios "on spec," waiting for a casting director to pick them from among the crowd.[172] This proved a popular option for those over forty-five, who had an especially difficult time finding work due to age discrimination.[173]

Race, ethnicity, and nationality shaped the ordeal of finding employment. In 1930, at the outset of the Depression, the Los Angeles City Council adopted an ordinance penalizing employers who hired "any workmen but citizens, residents, and voters, on city work."[174] The following year, the state legislature passed the Alien Labor Act, prohibiting any company doing business with the government from employing "aliens" on public jobs.[175] Employers frequently applied these laws based on ethnic background and appearance, rather than "strict definitions of citizenship."[176] Th exclusions deepened the unemployment crisis for many. For example, one

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[170] In 1934, Local 38-92 of the International Longshoreman's Association in San Pedro joined a coastwide strike over hiring practices at the docks as well as the domination of open-shop shipping companies along the waterfront. Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough,* 140-143. On the 1934 strike, see also Bruce Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988; Kevin Starr, *Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 84-120; and Robert W. Cherny, "The Making of a Labor Radical: Harry Bridges, 1901-1934," *Pacific Historical Review* 64, no. 3 (August 1995): 363-388.
[171] "Frank Sundstedt," in *Solidarity Stories: An Oral History of the ILWU*, ed. Harvey Schwartz (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 65.
[172] Bernard O'Brien, "Jobless Man Over 40 Meets Many Derelicts,'" *Los Angeles Record*, April 14, 1930.
[173] O'Brien, "Jobless Man Over 40 Meets Many Derelicts.'"
[174] The city council amended the ordinance in 1931 to expand its scope to any city-funded project, whether or not it took place within the city itself. "Foreign Labor Barred by City," *Los Angeles Record*, May 2, 1930; "Aliens Barred from City Jobs," *Los Angeles Times*, April 17, 1931.
[175] Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American,* 211.
[176] Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 211.

Mexican-American man, who had served in the U.S. Army, arose early each morning and headed downtown or uptown to the construction sites where supervisors knew him and where he had formerly found employment. The supervisors emerged and instructed the white and non-white job applicants to form two separate lines. "Because I am of dark complexion," he explained, "I stay with the people of my race and of course, do not get hired because the supervisor has the order to hire only the 'white people' and that is what he does."[177] Yuri Nakahara Kochiyama, a Japanese-American resident of Los Angeles and eventual civil rights leader, recalled that Asian Americans could rarely find employment outside of Little Tokyo or Chinatown. Non-white Angelenos were even excluded from unions or, at best, relegated to auxiliaries or second-class membership.[178]

THE EMPLOYMENT AGENCY DISTRICT

The private employment agency offered a last resort in the search for work. Casual laborers commonly referred to the area south of the Plaza, in the neighborhood just off of Main Street around Towne and Fifth Avenues, as a "slave market."[179] The epithet, used throughout the United States in this era, applied to regions in large cities housing private, fee-based employment agencies that offered jobs – occasionally to skilled laborers – but mainly to unskilled laborers. It was a site where mechanics, agricultural workers, common laborers and others who made a living with their hands came in search of work.[180] Here skilled laborers could purchase a job for

[177] *La Opinión*, February 8, 1931, quoted in Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 211.
[178] Yuri Nakahara Kochiyama, *Passing It On—A Memoir*, ed. Marjorie Lee, Akemi Kochiyama-Sardinha, and Audee Kochiyama-Holman (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian Americans Studies Center Press, 2004), 11; Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 65.
[179] Herbold, "Sociological Survey of Main Street," 40; Harrod, "A Study of Deviate Personalities," 28; Torribio, "Unattached Man," 17.
[180] In his landmark study of postwar Detroit, Thomas J. Sugrue suggests that these casual labor markets—indeed called "slave markets" in several cities—crystallized an "image of black male shiftlessness that came to represent the African American urban 'underclass.'" He finds that as cities entered hard economic times in the late 1960s, police increasingly cracked down on young black men who "loitered" on street corners. The slave market thus became a site of racial marking as each time suburban whites drove by, they "saw an embodiment of the stereotypes

ten dollars, while unskilled laborers purchased work at the rate of eight percent of the monthly wage average. Short-term jobs lasting about a week typically cost the unskilled laborer anywhere from fifty cents to two dollars.[181] Male workers might also avoid the employment agencies themselves, and loiter on street corners waiting for a prospective employer to pick them up.[182] The "slave market" phrase itself was also a reference to the notion that employers, and in this case employment agencies and labor agents, held an advantage in bargaining with individual wage earners, leading many to refer to the wage system as a whole as "wage slavery."[183] Accordingly, for casual laborers, the place where they simultaneously purchased work and sold their labor constituted a space where they wielded little power –in their view, a slave market.[184]

Under such conditions of dependence, employment agencies played key roles linking prospective employers and workers in Los Angeles as nationwide, and were especially instrumental, along with the labor contractor, in recruiting Mexican immigrant workers for employment in construction, light manufacturing, agriculture, mining, and railroads.[185] The *Los Angeles City Directory* listed 97 employment agencies in 1929 – most of them based in in the employment agency district downtown. This number steadily increased to 107 in 1930 and 125

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that they held about black men." This image of perpetual black joblessness "became a tool that reinforced the politics of racial domination." Herbold, "Sociological Survey of Main Street," 40; Saul, "The Vocabulary of Bums," 344; Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis,* 120-121.

[181] Harrod, "A Study of Deviate Personalities," 28.

[182] Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 211.

[183] Herbold, "Sociological Survey of Main Street," 40. In the nineteenth-century United States, the concept of "wage slavery" (despite the obvious exaggeration in its comparison with chattel slavery) offered a means by which labor and its allies could critique the emerging system of capitalism and its accompanying workplace exploitation as well as deconstruct "the sharp contrast between slavery and freedom, to expose the forms of coercion and hidden inequalities inherent in ostensibly free economic institutions." See Eric Foner, "The Meaning of Freedom in the Age of Emancipation," *Journal of American History* 81, no. 2 (September, 1994), 446-447.

[184] Herbold, "Sociological Survey of Main Street," 40.

[185] On private employment agencies, see Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor*; Walter Licht, *Getting Work: Philadelphia, 1840-1950* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992); Emily H. Huntington, *Doors to Jobs: A Study of the Organization of the Labor Market in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1942).

in 1931.[186] Yet, by 1932, the number of agencies listed declined to 88, likely due to the unemployment crisis.[187]

Many of these agencies specialized in the recruitment and sale of racialized labor in Los Angeles. The agencies names were revealing. For example, the Eagle Japanese Employment Agency, Japanese ABC Employment Agency, Sunshine Japanese Day Work Company, and China Employment Agency likely supplied affluent Hollywood households with Japanese and Chinese house servants and gardeners.[188] The Filipino Club Employment Agency and Philippines Employment Agency probably sent young Filipino men to work throughout the city as houseboys, chauffeurs, bellboys, kitchen helpers, dishwashers, and busboys.[189] Meanwhile, the Swedish Employment Agency offered a supply of "high-class domestic" labor – in this case, the whiteness of the labor implied a superior type of service.[190] The directory listed a few employment agencies focused solely on supplying women's labor, including the Woman's Vocational Alliance of Los Angeles and the Women's Service Exchange.[191]

A casual laborer wandering into the employment agency district would have seen what, at first glance, looked like a riot. One observer walking down Towne Avenue noted hundreds of men "milling" on the sidewalks along the entire length of the block.[192] Clusters of men gazed at "scrawly blackboards" posted in windows, which listed "brief notations of jobs offered" ranging

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[186] *Los Angeles City Directory* (Los Angeles: The Los Angeles Directory Company, 1929), 2420-2421; *Los Angeles City Directory* (Los Angeles: The Los Angeles Directory Company, 1930), 2543-2544; *Los Angeles City Directory* (Los Angeles: The Los Angeles Directory Company, 1931), 2642-2643.
[187] *Los Angeles City Directory* (Los Angeles: The Los Angeles Directory Company, 1932), 2608.
[188] *Los Angeles City Directory* (Los Angeles: The Los Angeles Directory Company, 1929), 2420-2421; *Los Angeles City Directory* (Los Angeles: The Los Angeles Directory Company, 1930), 2543-2544; Kurashige, *Shifting Grounds of Race*, 37; Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens?: Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 31.
[189] *Los Angeles City Directory* (1929), 2420-2421; España-Maram, *Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles's Little Manila,* 22.
[190] "Employment Agency," *Los Angeles Evening Express*, November 12, 1928.
[191] *Los Angeles City Directory* (Los Angeles: The Los Angeles Directory Company, 1929), 2608; *Los Angeles City Directory* (Los Angeles: The Los Angeles Directory Company, 1932), 2608.
[192] Bernard O'Brien, "Gray-Head Meets Hundreds Seeking Jobs Here," *Los Angeles Record*, April 9, 1930.

from restaurant cooks, dishwashers, and waiters to sheet metal workers, carpenters, and mechanics.[193] The message boards singled out jobs for women as well, including listings for a "girl or woman for housework."[194] Laborers might work within the city or be sent to work on farms, ranches, or railroads, from the outskirts of Los Angeles County to as far away as Utah or Oregon.[195] Clerks—also known as "man catchers"—occasionally strolled through the waiting rooms, calling out for men "qualified for some particular work."[196] Often the "old-timers" arrived with their sacks in tow, "ready to hop off with the first gang" should they "be lucky enough to 'get on.'"[197] A cultural critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, Alma Whitaker, noted the despondent pall of the district in general: "Down there the problem is mainly masculine, hard, grim, often desperate....."[198] The problem was not entirely "masculine" – anterooms set aside for women were packed with applicants waiting to register.[199] When Bernard O'Brien, writing for the *Los Angeles Record*, headed to the city's free employment agency, he found along the alley "men, standing, drifting or just leaning against the wall of the building."[200] In the waiting room were at least three-hundred men crowded together on benches and looming in any available open space. Many of them, he noted "seemed to be there because they lacked the energy to go and stand somewhere else."[201] The room remained eerily quiet, with the conversation levels rarely rising above "a low hum." They all stared at the board on the wall, which remained blank – no jobs were available.[202] This casual labor market of course, was not a new phenomenon. Casual

[193] Herbold, "Sociological Survey of Main Street," 41; Kettles, "Day Labor Markets," 152; William Edge, *The Main Stem* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1927), 18.
[194] Herbold, "Sociological Survey of Main Street," 41.
[195] Herbold, "Sociological Survey of Main Street," 40. See also J.V. Rhoades Collection, 1924-1931.
[196] Herbold, "Sociological Survey of Main Street," 41; Kettles, "Day Labor Markets," 153.
[197] Alma Whitaker, "How the Other Half Lives," *Los Angeles Times*, March 18, 1928.
[198] Whitaker, "How the Other Half Lives."
[199] Bloch, *Report and Recommendations*, 108.
[200] Bernard O'Brien, "Jobless Man Over 40 Tours 'Slave Market,'" *Los Angeles Record*, April 10, 1930.
[201] O'Brien, "Gray-Head Meets Hundreds Seeking Jobs Here."
[202] O'Brien, "Jobless Man Over 40 Tours 'Slave Market.'"

laborers and employers had long sought to find each other at a low cost, which occasionally placed the labor market "on the street, square, or other public place" in a space "both readily known and accessible to the community as a whole."[203]

However, while job-seekers referred to this space as a "slave market" as a mark of desperate and downtrodden dependence and blight, the social world of the employment agency district also was largely one of camaraderie and support. "Buddies on former jobs find each other again," one observer wrote, "much as American tourists meet their former fellow-passengers in Westminster Abbey, the Louvre, or at the American Express."[204] Those returning from jobs passed crucial information along to their fellow-job seekers. After working on "two or three jobs advertised," one man returned to the employment agency district and warned his friends "against them all."[205] When agents posted a job on the blackboard, Whitaker observed men step aside and decline the position "in favor of someone whose situation was deemed more desperate: "That was one of the tragedies of job-hunting—there were always men who needed the job 'worser'n you'… men with babies at home, sometimes sick and hungry babies."[206]

THE J.V. RHOADES EMPLOYMENT AGENCY

The J.V. Rhoades Employment Agency collection, and its accompanying thousands of job referral cards, offers a rare glimpse into the world of casual labor in Los Angeles. Situated in a Spanish-style brick building on Main Street just off of the Plaza, the agency was managed by José A. Pacheco, a Mexican American born in Colorado, who also served as interpreter and owned a one-sixth share of the company.[207] A private employment agency with headquarters in

[203] Kettles, "Day Labor Markets," 151.
[204] William Edge, *The Main Stem* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1927), 19.
[205] Edge, *Main Stem*, 19.
[206] Whitaker, "How the Other Half Lives."
[207] 1930 U.S. Federal Census, Los Angeles County, California, population schedule, Los Angeles, Supervisor District 17, p. 9188, enumeration district 407, sheet 19B, dwelling 97, Joe Pacheco, NARA microfilm publication 2339883, Ancestry.com.

Denver and a third branch in Salt Lake City, the Los Angeles branch hired seasonal – mostly Mexican – workers for service-sector, construction, agricultural, railroad, mining, and light industrial labor. It also frequently supplied workers to larger employment agencies, such as the C&C Employment Agency, which furnished day laborers to the construction industry. The jobs ranged from those centered in the city such as cooks, waitresses, housekeepers, brick layers, and general laborers, to agricultural and railroad labor in the city's hinterland and beyond, including picking cotton, tomatoes, or sugar beets, working on ranches, and building and repairing railroad tracks.[208]

The Los Angeles branch specialized particularly in "Mexican labor," as noted from the slogan on their letterhead: "Mexican Labor Our Specialty." This was in contrast to the Denver branch's more general but still gendered slogan, "Men Finders." This particular specialization suggests that race and ethnicity itself functioned as a category of employment—that not only were certain positions designated for "Mexicans," and by extension, African Americans, Japanese Americans, Anglo Americans, and so on—but that people conceptualized certain types of employment through race and ethnicity in the same ways they did for gender. For example, employers from Tulare sent telegrams to Pacheco requesting "Italian laborers."[209] Moreover, in 1929, Mabel Ross lost a potential position as a housekeeper in Glendale for thirty dollars a month including room and board due to her "Americanness." On the back of Ross's receipt was a note from the prospective employer: "*Fabor [sic] de no mandar me mujer Americana por que [sic] yo la puedo tener en Glendale*" ("Please do not send me an American woman because I can find one in Glendale").[210] In other words, the employer had a specific idea of who should fill a

[208] Receipt books, boxes 5-6, J.V. Rhoades Collection. See also Finding Aid for the J.V. Rhoades Collection.
[209] Frank Giannini to J.V. Rhoades, May 26 and June 9, 1927, box 1, folder 4, J.V. Rhoades Collection.
[210] Receipt 5022, May 15, 1929, box 12, folder 1, J.V. Rhoades Collection.

particular job and in this case it was not an "American," which likely was a synonym for "Anglo American."

As did most private employment agencies, J.V. Rhoades charged service fees to the job applicant for what typically amounted to short-term work. These fees ranged anywhere between 25 cents, for a housekeeper, waitress, or general laborer position, for example, to five dollars for a janitor, porter, or chauffeur.[211] Additionally, neither the agency nor the employer covered the cost of transporting the laborer to the work site – this expense fell to the worker. In one instance, laborers and their families were expected to fund their own travel to jobs harvesting sugar beets as far away as Salt Lake City.[212] Indeed, as the Rhoades letterhead announced: "We hire and deliver FREE to the Employer."[213] Moreover, if a laborer journeyed to a work site, only to find that the job did not materialize, they were responsible for their own fare should they desire to return home.[214] Additionally, while employers occasionally offered to house agricultural workers in tents or bunkhouses or simply provided blankets, they often required workers to provide their own lodging.[215] For example, the Elba Land Company in Tulare wrote to the Rhoades Agency to request families to pick prunes for five weeks but indicated that they workers should provide their "own camping outfit[s]."[216]

Often, private agency fees were beyond the reach of an applicant's ability to pay, especially during the Depression years. A close reading of the Rhoades receipt books reveals that

[211] Receipt books, 1929-1931, box 10, folders 13-14, 16, box 11, folders 2-3, box 12, folder 4, J.V. Rhoades Collection.
[212] Original in Spanish. Translation is mine. Val J. Gonzales to Frank Gutierrez, September 15, 1928, box 1, folder 4, J.V. Rhoades Collection.
[213] George Kerr to J.A. Pacheco, January 14, 1927, box 1, folder 1, J.V. Rhoades Collection.
[214] "Fate of Job 'Sharks' Put Up to Council," *Los Angeles Record*, May 20, 1925.
[215] Jesus Jiménez, August 1, 1930, Receipt No. 7321, box 10, folder 17, J.V. Rhoades Collection; Agapito Montez, March 18, 1929, Receipt No. 3882, box 12, folder 1, J.V. Rhoades Collection; Calletano Castro, March 31, 1929, Receipt No. 4243, J.V. Rhoades Collection.
[216] Elba Land Company to J.V. Rhoades Employment Agency, September 17, 1927, box 1 folder 4, J.V. Rhoades Collection.

when a worker could not afford the service or transportation fees, they were advanced by the agency, and the employer later deducted the amount from the employee's wages.[217] In 1927, for example, Pacheco sent a note to the Los Alamitos Sugar Company requesting that they deduct three dollars from the wages of Ramón Díaz and Antonio Martinez "for office fee and fare" to be remitted to the Rhoades agency.[218] Later, in 1929, when Pacheco referred Maria Ruíz to work as a housekeeper for Mrs. B. Fuss six miles away in South Los Angeles, at a rate of nine dollars per week plus board, Pacheco deducted seven cents from her wages to cover transportation fees.[219] The employer and employment agency thus maintained a crucial level of cooperation. In some cases, employers themselves received a percentage of the fees charged to the employee—another incentive for them to make use of the private employment agencies and an opportunity to degrade wages further.[220] In one extreme case, two Mexican laborers were sent by an employment agent, Ricardo Rodriguez, to work at the Natural Soda Products Company, a salt works near Keeler in the desert. After working twelve hours despite being assured a nine-hour day, the men quit and started heading back to Los Angeles when they were arrested and jailed for evading their board bills.[221]

Many – if not most job seekers –considered service fees to be "payments" for a job. Ventura Sanchez scrawled a note regarding a cook position that he had "bought from J.V. Rhoades Employment Agency."[222] Carlos Bulosan found that those who could best afford to purchase a job tended to prevail: "I went to the employment agencies, but every job in the list was taken. The agencies sold jobs to the highest bidder. I did not have the money to compete

[217] See receipt books, boxes 2-6, J.V. Rhoades Collection.
[218] Note to Los Alamitos Sugar Company, March 8, 1927, box 1, folder 5, J.V. Rhoades Collection.
[219] Job referral card for Maria Ruíz, October 7, 1929, box 12, folder 2, J.V. Rhoades Collection.
[220] Harrod, "A Study of Deviate Personalities," 28.
[221] "Labor Office Probes Story of Mexicans," *Los Angeles Evening Express*, October 31, 1925; "'Peonage' Case Principals Hit," *Los Angeles Times*, November 19, 1925.
[222] Note, September 20, 1928, box 1, folder 7, J.V Rhoades Collection.

with them."[223] In 1938, County Supervisor John Anson Ford reported learning that a private employment agency, the Hotel Personnel Bureau, was charging as much as a $22.50 advance deposit for jobs paying between $75 and $90 per month.[224]

Critics derisively called private agencies that charged unreasonable fees "job sharks," but they had little recourse.[225] In 1917, the United States Supreme Court had ruled in *Adams v. Tanner* that states could not prohibit private employment agencies from charging fees, finding that such a law would violate the due process rights of liberty and property guaranteed under the Fourteenth Amendment.[226] However, by 1927, state law required that employment agencies post their fee schedules publicly in their offices as well as submit copies to the Commissioner of Labor.[227] One of the few avenues open to local and state authorities to regulate private employment agencies was through the municipal business license.[228] Moreover, free public employment agencies were established partially in response to ongoing issues of unemployment and as a means to counter the abuses of fee-charging agencies.[229]

Even after paying the required fees, jobs were not guaranteed for many of the applicants at the Rhoades Agency. In February, 1930, Loreto Guerrero lost a job paying fifteen dollars per week at the Fior d'Italia restaurant, mainly because he did not know how to cook American-style

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[223] Bulosan, *America is in the Heart,* 138.
[224] John Anson Ford to William Michener, Labor Coordinating Committee, March 9, 1938, box 31, folder 6b.4, Ford Papers.
[225] "Fate of Job 'Sharks' Put Up to Council," *Los Angeles Record*, May 20, 1925; Huntington, *Doors to Jobs*, 286.
[226] In his dissent, Justice Louis Brandeis cited a 1912 U.S. Bureau of Labor report, which summarized common fraudulent methods utilized by employment agencies including, to name a few, charging the applicant fees without providing work, "sending applicants where no work exists," colluding with the employer to provide an employee with only a few days' worker, discharging them, and then hiring a new worker and splitting the fees. Adams v. Tanner, 244 U.S. 590 (1917) at 598, 601; David G. Van Arsdale, *The Poverty of Work: Selling Servant, Slave and Temporary Labor on the Free Market* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 128.
[227] "Employment Agencies Must Display List of Fees," *Los Angeles Record*, October 31, 1927.
[228] "'Inhuman' Labor Agencies Probed," *Los Angeles Record*, May 14, 1925.
[229] Shelby M. Harrison, *Public Employment Offices: Their Purpose, Structure and Methods* (New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 1924), 19.

food.[230] A woman lost a prospective position as a restaurant cook in 1929; the restaurant manager sent her back to the Rhoades Agency with a note explaining "I need a man because the work is too hard for a woman."[231] And in 1929, Josefina Flores missed out on a job cleaning apartments for ten dollars per week due to an inability to speak English.[232]

Amid the bleak prospects offered by these profit-seeking agencies, employment remained elusive. After long and excruciating searches for employment, many job seekers grew increasingly despondent. Miguel Venegas observed that his fellow Mexican immigrants often took "up to six months to find work" and many "lost their minds" after "losing hope."[233] As the Depression dragged on, its pervasive grasp reached ever-increasing numbers of job seekers. In 1932, after registering "with every employment office in town," a middle-aged mechanic from Los Angeles who previously had worked for years in a tire factory, expressed frustration at the thought of having to string together one job to the next: "Oh, it hurts to think that for the rest of my days I must do odd jobs, ring door bells to ask for a few hour's work—any kind of work. What good is a trade? They take it out of your hands and you have nothing to say, nothing to fall back on. I am licked."[234] His sense of defeat went further and he pled the precarious worker's cause to the State Unemployment Commission: "I am a human being, but have been thrown on the rubbish pile like a bundle of rags. I am a discard. Nobody wants me any more. 'Don't need you!' they shout at me, and dismiss me with a wave of their hand. Are we to die like old dogs? What's the State going to do with us? I wish they lined us up in a vacant lot and shot us to a finish…."[235]

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[230] February 19, 1930, J.V. Rhoades Employment Agency, Box 12, Folder 4.
[231] Receipt 5048, May 22, 1929, J.V. Rhoades Employment Agency, Box 12, Folder 1.
[232] Receipt 5790, August 1, 1929, J.V. Rhoades Employment Agency, Box 12, Folder 2.
[233] Miguel Venegas to Francisco Venegas, August 23, 1928, in *Letters Home,* 51.
[234] Bloch, *Report and Recommendations*, 93.
[235] Bloch, *Report and*, 93.

VAGRANCY RAIDS AND THE WORK TEST

As the economic crisis deepened, more unemployed individuals turned up in the employment agency district, both as residents and as job seekers, "hastening its transformation from a home base for casual laborers to a home of last resort for the mostly unemployed."[236] Meanwhile, the local elite grew increasingly alarmed at the sheer number of unemployed in Los Angeles. Such a legion of seemingly unattached individuals required discipline and, in many instances, expulsion.

The migrant worker who drifted to the city during the winter months during slack times had long been a point of contention. This tension resurfaced with a vengeance in the early years of the Depression when the Chamber warned of the coming winter "threat of an increased influx of 'floating undesirables' to pray upon the charity of this community."[237] The Chamber turned its blame to eastern and midwestern states for pushing tramps out of town, leading them to head west, where California became the "dumping ground."[238] The County Welfare Department issued a report warning of the "encroachments of 'organized pauperism.'"[239] Local elites also renewed their focus on the racialized space of the downtown district as a site of undeserving and dangerous figures. They sought to discipline, block, and remove so-called undesirable elements – in this case the unemployed – from what they perceived as "their" territory.

As one means of addressing the problem of men without work, the Chamber urged police to enforce vagrancy laws more rigidly.[240] The state's vagrancy statute – enacted in 1872 –

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[236] Kettles, "Day Labor Markets," 154-155.
[237] "Resisting the Invasion of Undesirables," *Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce Bulletin* 6, no. 9 (October 12, 1931): 3.
[238] "Resisting the Invasion of Undesirables," 3.
[239] *Report of the Investigating Committee on Expenditures of the County Welfare Department*, August 17, 1931, box 63, folder cc1, Ford Papers.
[240] "Vagrancy Act to Be Enforced," *Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce Bulletin* 6, no. 10 (October 19, 1931): 2; "Vagrancy Action Asked," *Los Angeles Times*, October 7, 1931.

vaguely defined vagrants, in part, as "every person (except a California Indian) 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"[241] The law also included any person who wandered "about the streets at late or unusual hours of the night, without any visible or lawful business" in its definition of a vagrant.[242] A half century later, as writer and cultural critic Louis Adamic observed of the 1920s, "'Unemployment is a crime in Sunny California…. The state is advertised as a paradise, and when 'come-ons' come and fail to get work they are jailed. Shabby-looking men are stopped in the streets, dragged out of flophouses, asked if they have work, and if they answer in the negative, are arrested for vagrancy….'"[243] It was the ambiguity and extent of vagrancy laws that bestowed the police with "virtually unlimited discretion," granting the police officer alone the power to decide what it meant to loiter or roam, the legal historian Risa Goluboff has explained.[244] These laws provided "an escape hatch" from the Fourth Amendment's "protections against arrest without probable cause."[245] Moreover, vagrancy laws made it illegal simply to *be* a "certain type of person," as opposed to laws that penalized *doing* something criminal.[246]

The concern over vagrancy was hardly unique to the Depression era. The country had been gripped by a "tramp panic" as "new classes" of men wandered throughout the nation at the turn of the century.[247] Vagrancy laws in the South had long focused on limiting the "physical,

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[241] CAL. PEN. CODE §647, at 389; Arthur H. Sherry, "Vagrants, Rogues and Vagabonds: Old Concepts in Need of Revision," *California Law Review* 48, no. 4 (October 1960): 562.
[242] CAL. PEN. CODE §647, at 390.
[243] Quoted in McWilliams, *Southern California,* 292.
[244] Goluboff, *Vagrant Nation*, 2.
[245] Goluboff, *Vagrant Nation*, 2.
[246] Goluboff, *Vagrant Nation*, 2.
[247] Kelly Lytle Hernández, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1881-1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 45; Risa Goluboff, *Vagrant Nation: Police Power, Constitutional Change, and the Making of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 15. For more discussion on vagrancy as a social threat, see also Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 98-

political, economic, and social mobility" of the formerly enslaved while, in the rest of the nation, reformers and legislators used the laws to discipline those who – by begging or avoiding work – appeared to shun the wage labor system.[248] Since the late nineteenth century, local elites in Los Angeles had railed against the army of low-wage and casual laborers who migrated to Los Angeles each winter during the slack season.[249] Each winter the *Los Angeles Times* sounded the alarm of a "hobo horde headed west," and LAPD officers obligingly swept the city arresting men on street corners and in parks and "tramp camps."[250]

Local elites had deployed vagrancy raids periodically for multi-faceted reasons. In 1917, after the Chamber of Commerce declared an acute labor shortage in Southern California, the city's mayor ordered the police to "'arrest all Mexicans unemployed, in the Plaza District, as vagrants,'" including those who had only been unemployed for a "'day or two.'"[251] Later, in 1928, the LAPD conducted a series of mass vagrancy arrests of Mexican laborers at the downtown Plaza. After receiving multiple complaints, the Mexican Consul, Alfonso Pesqueira, investigated the matter and determined that, due to the scarcity of agricultural employment, these men had taken refuge in the city and were searching for industrial work, which was scarce. The Chamber had estimated a surplus of between thirty and forty-thousand Mexican workers in the city at that point.[252] Meanwhile, the Spanish-language, Los Angeles-based newspaper, *La opinión*, observed that the city was ill-prepared to provide either work or relief to Mexican

137;; Tobias Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts: Hobo Workers and Community in the Midwest, 1880-1930* (Urbana-Champagne: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Kenneth L. Kusmer, *Down and Out, on the Road: The Homeless in American History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Paul T. Ringenbach, *Tramps and Reformers, 1873-1916: The Discovery of Unemployment in New York* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973).

[248] Goluboff, *Vagrant Nation*, 15; Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract*, 98-137

[249] Hernández, *City of Inmates*, 50-51.

[250] "Hobo Horde Headed West," *Los Angeles Times*, October 12, 1908; Hernández, *City of Inmates*, 53-54.

[251] Don Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land: Migrant Workers and the California Landscape* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 88-89.

[252] Translations are mine. "Declaraciónes del Señor Pesqueira, Consul de Mexico," *Heraldo de Mexico* (Los Angeles), January 26, 1928.

immigrant workers who had been lured to the region through propaganda from the Chamber of Commerce, railroad concerns, and merchants.[253] Sacramento authorities subsequently reported an increase in vagrancy arrests due to an influx of Mexican laborers driven out of Los Angeles by the police.[254] As Pesqueira observed, "This is an unusual example in the world where people are jailed due to unemployment."[255] A month later, a special committee of the unemployed petitioned both the City Council and the County Board of Supervisors to protest the wholesale arrest of men while they searched for work and to plead that "no more law abiding, jobless men be thrown into the city jail as 'vags."[256]

By 1930, Chamber representatives were calling for a "more drastic ordinance to eliminate the nuisance" of begging.[257] Its September, 1930, bulletin claimed that the city's private charitable institutions, such as the Community Chest agencies, were "fully capable of coping with any distress which may exist temporarily or otherwise among our people." Accordingly, it continued, there was no apparent reason to allow the practice of begging to continue.[258] In fact, the Community Chest, which operated out of the Chamber of Commerce building, encouraged residents to donate to its campaign rather than give "financial assistance to every individual who

[253] *Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings Before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization on H.R. 6465, H.R. 7358, H.R. 10955, H.R. 11687*, 70th Cong. 57 (1928) (testimony of John C. Box, Congressman, Texas).
[254] *Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings Before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization on H.R. 6465, H.R. 7358, H.R. 10955, H.R. 11687*, 70th Cong. 56-57 (1928) (testimony of John C. Box, Congressman, Texas).
[255] Translations are mine. "Declaraciónes del Señor Pesqueira, Consul de Mexico," *Heraldo de Mexico* (Los Angeles), January 26, 1928.
[256] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, February 14, 1928, 498, Council Minutes Archive, Los Angeles Archives and Records Center, Los Angeles, California (hereafter CMA); "Police Scored for Action in Arresting and Jailing Unemployed as Vagrants," *Los Angeles Evening Express*, February 14, 1928.
[257] "Street Begging a Growing Nuisance," *Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce Bulletin*, 5, no. 5 (September 29, 1930): 2.
[258] "Street Begging a Growing Nuisance," *Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce Bulletin*, 5, no. 5 (September 29, 1930): 2.

asks it of you."[259] In July, 1931, the city council passed a strengthened anti-begging ordinance in the business district downtown.[260] Violations now included busking and petty vending without a permit issued by the LAPD.[261]

As a part of the vagrancy crackdown, the LAPD arrested Angelenos on charges broken down into the following categories: idleness, being out during late hours, posing as a "lookout," simply roaming, or sleeping in public.[262] Between 1931 and 1932, the LAPD arrested at least 9,078 individuals on vagrancy charges, the majority of which – 33 percent – were for "roaming" the city.[263] Accordingly, anyone who looked suspicious to a police officer and who was walking around searching for employment was subject to arrest. LAPD officers arrested one 25-year-old man "every time" he walked down Main Street."[264] Another reported being arrested for no reason at all: "Sometimes I didn't even do anything but the coppers knew me and they figured if I didn't I probably would before the day was over."[265] The threat of vagrancy arrests certainly worked as a deterrent for some. Two young men, recently arrived in Los Angeles, after finding it "impossible for them to 'purchase' a position" at an employment agency, opted to steal a car to return to their homes in the Midwest rather than get arrested for vagrancy.[266]

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[259] "Important Notice," Community Welfare Federation of Los Angeles Operating the Community Chest, May 11, 1929, box 1, folder 3, J.V. Rhoades Collection.
[260] "To All Officers (New Begging Ordinance), Ordinance No. 69,873," *Los Angeles Police Department Daily Police Bulletin* 24, no. 173 (July 24, 1931), box B-2281, Police Commission Records, Los Angeles City Archives and Records Center.
[261] "To All Officers (New Begging Ordinance)"; "Begging Banned in Business Zone by Councilmen," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), June 23, 1931.
[262] *Annual Report of the Police Department, City of Los Angeles, California, for the Fiscal Year, 1931-1932* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Police Department, 1932), 102.
[263] *Annual Report of the Police Department, City of Los Angeles, California, for the Fiscal Year, 1931-1932* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Police Department, 1932), 102.
[264] Torribio, "Unattached Man," 29.
[265] David Holz, interview by Max Bogner, March, 1935, in Max Bogner, "A Case Study," 48-49.
[266] Marion Elderton, *Case Studies of Unemployment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1931), 360-361.

H.H. Lewis, who was unemployed and living downtown, recalled having to maintain "constant vigilance" to avoid "being vagged" by police, a term likely originating where the seasonal laborer mingled with the criminal underworld.[267] Those arrested were typically jailed for thirty days and then told to "get out of town." The LAPD also made a practice of raiding employment agencies and arresting those standing outside, who were often simply reading the job listings posted in the windows. The men were informed that if they really wanted a job, they should have been standing inside the crowded rooms.[268]

Unemployed men fought back in multifaceted ways. Lewis reported that to avoid being picked up for lacking a visible means of support, many of the unemployed would "wag dinner-pails, carry saws, hammers, tools of various kinds—anything to give that on-the-job effect." He described one man who "wore a carpenter's work-apron with nails in the pocket." Yet another dressed as a preacher.[269] Others made direct appeals to authorities. As one man entreated the State Unemployment Commission: "[A]m I a prisoner because I am unemployed? I am treated like one. Why do we lose our rights because we can't get work? It's not our fault, but they treat us like it was…"[270]

As it became increasingly clear that the nationwide unemployment problem was not disappearing, local and national politicians and business leaders assembled to offer alternate solutions. Accordingly, these early years witnessed another tactic intended to expel surplus labor – targeted deportations and the Mexican repatriation campaign. Local and national leaders had been arguing that foreigners – especially Mexicans – were taking jobs and welfare resources

[267] Lewis, "Sidewalks of Los Angeles," 13; Kate Mullen, "Westernisms," *American Speech* 1, no. 3 (December 1925): 151.
[268] Lewis, "Sidewalks of Los Angeles," 13.
[269] Lewis, "Sidewalks of Los Angeles," 13.
[270] Louis Bloch, *Report and Recommendations of the California State Unemployment Commission* (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1932), 96.

away from American citizens.[271] In February, 1931, a federal agent and over two dozen LAPD officers raided the Plaza and rounded up approximately four-hundred Mexicans, detaining them for over an hour.[272] Although they ultimately arrested only eleven Mexicans, five Chinese, and one Japanese individual, the broader purpose of the raid was to operate as a scare tactic. Mexican casual laborers and their families were placed on notice – they were not wanted in California.[273] While the Chamber and welfare officials had participated in placing pressure on the Immigration Service to carry out these raids, other business leaders were ambivalent about losing access to a large local labor supply.[274] Nevertheless, this movement spurred such a massive exodus of Mexicans from the Southwest that in 1931 the *Washington Post* referred to it as "'the greatest exodus since the Huguenot hegira in the sixteenth century."[275]

Another solution championed by local business and political leaders included combining the work test with vagrancy arrests to maintain control over the idle unemployed. Members of the Chamber supported an expanded system of public works, but framed it as a more responsible way of providing welfare assistance as opposed to later New Deal conceits of promoting consumption spending.[276] As early as 1930, the Chamber met behind closed doors with representatives from the City Council, Board of County Supervisors, and Community Chest officials and proposed the reinstatement of the "work test," a centuries-old method of deterring the "willfully idle."[277] Put simply, the work test entailed "offering a man four hours of hard labor

[271] Stevens, *In Pursuit of Utopia*, 47-48.
[272] Abraham Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929-1939* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974), 59; Stevens, *In Pursuit of Utopia*, 49-50.
[273] Stevens, *In Pursuit of Utopia*, 48-49.
[274] Fox, *Three Worlds of Relief*, 129.
[275] "Exodus of 75,000 Mexicans Alarms Western Growers, *Washington Post*, June 21, 1931; Fox, *Three Worlds of Relief*, 129.
[276] Dorrance, "A New Deal Every Day," 86-87.
[277] "Danger! Go Slow!," *Los Angeles Record*, November 14, 1930; "Work Provision Urged," *Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 1930; Joanna Colcord, *Emergency Work Relief: As Carried Out in Twenty-Six American Communities, 1930-1931, with Suggestions for Setting Up a Program* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1932), 12.

in return for something to eat and a place to sleep."[278] Relief applicants were to be given a work test in city parks in return for food and lodging while able-bodied vagrants who refused, were to be sent to prison work farms – often characterized as a "rock pile" – rather than housed "in comfort and idleness at the County Jail."[279] By January, 1931, the County Welfare Department had implemented a version of this plan wherein able-bodied relief applicants were assigned to work in the Sanitary Division of the County Health Department, woodyards, and parks, as well as perform miscellaneous street improvements and road building in exchange for food and shelter.[280]

Work tests had recent antecedents in the treatment of the Mexican jobless. Prior to the Depression, the County Charities Department viewed Mexicans as posing a particular problem of dependency.[281] The Employment Department had attempted to place the applicants in jobs but this typically proved difficult during the winter.[282] By 1929, in order to save the taxpayer's money from massive relief expenses, especially during the winter months "when seasonal and occasional labor is practical impossible," they instituted a program wherein they provided every male Mexican relief applicant with a "hose, spade, rake, paint brush, etc. and gave groceries into [sic] the family if the man would dig up the yards of other clients, repair out-buildings, plant gardens, etc." This work test was reserved specifically for Mexicans.[283]

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[278] "Work Test Soon to Cut Hobo Ranks," *Los Angeles Times*, January 22, 1931.
[279] "Work Provision Urged," *Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 1930; "County Acts on Unemployment," *Los Angeles Times*, November 4, 1930; "Rock Pile Urged for Floaters," *Los Angeles Times*, June 29, 1931.
[280] Louis Bloch, *Report and Recommendations of the California State Unemployment Commission* (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1932), 370.
[281] Cybelle Fox, *Three Worlds of Relief: Race, Immigration, and the American Welfare State from the Progressive Era to the New Deal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 73-123.
[282] R.R. Miller, "The Mexican Dependency Problem," *Municipal League Bulletin* 6, no. 7 (March 1, 1929).
[283] Fox, *Three Worlds of Relief*, 85-86.

Local leaders and relief officials spent much time placing the unemployed into categories and closely guarding the distribution of relief funds.[284] The new work test plan, to be applied to all of the able-bodied unemployed, would serve as a means of distinguishing between the deserving and the undeserving poor.[285] As the Superintendent of the County Charities Department explained, the purpose of the work test was two-fold: it provided a means of "eliminating malingerers, shirkers, and men looking for an easy living, with little or no effort on their part," and also provided the honorable man the opportunity to "save their self-respect and eliminate from their minds what to them was the stigma attached to the acceptance of charity."[286] It also functioned as a way to discipline the urban workforce and ensure that the extended period of unemployment did not corrupt work habits.[287] More specifically, however, the work test functioned as a way to compel unemployed transients "to leave the city."[288]

The work test and rock pile plans were not without opposition. County officials reported that roughly sixty percent of the unemployed refused work assignments.[289] One man wrote to the *Los Angeles Record* about his own decision to refuse the work test: "I hardly expected to do a dollar's worth of work for a dime's worth of something to eat. Where is the limit to the exploiting of labor?"[290] At a meeting of the Los Angeles Community Welfare Federation, social worker Dorothy Wysor criticized the work test proposal. "I think he who works should be paid wages," she observed, "I should think, except for the fact that we have a weak labor

[284] Dorrance, "A New Deal Every Day," 87.
[285] Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 58.
[286] A.C. Price, Los Angeles County Department of Charities, *Annual Report, Fiscal Year July 1, 1932 to June 30, 1933*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Welfare Department, 1933), 9-10, box 1, folder 3, Dean Papers.
[287] Dorrance, "A New Deal Every Day," 91.
[288] Minutes of the Executive Committee of Council of Social Agencies, Social Welfare and Advisory Committees, Community Welfare Federation, October 2, 1930, 1-6, box 1, folder 3, CSA Records.
[289] Dorrance, "A New Deal Every Day," 87.
[290] Frank Clemmer, "Bread Lines," *Los Angeles Record*, May 3, 1932.

organization, we would have trouble with organized labor.[291] "Who gets the benefit of digging these trenches?" added Miss Burleigh, another committee member, "The city, doesn't it? Why should the men give to the city these things?[292] Indeed, the Lodge of the International Association of Machinists sent a protest to the Board of Supervisors. "Thousands of men are walking the streets seeking honorable employment," it stated, "We feel that the chamber of commerce [sic] should carry out the purpose of that organization in stimulating business and adopt a policy of live and let live instead of attempting to throw people on a rock pile for asking for food when they are unable to secure work."[293] The *Los Angeles Record*, the city's socialist-leaning newspaper, announced that to compel "hungry, desperate men" to submit to work tests was a "silly and dangerous mockery of primal need."[294]

Resistance arrived from other quarters as well. Building on a rich tradition of street speaking and demonstrations in the Plaza and downtown district, the Communist and Socialist Parties sought to build a mass movement to counter the oppressive treatment of the unemployed by public officials and business leaders.[295] To do so, they formed satellite groups, called Unemployed Councils, which functioned as a protest vehicle and mouthpiece for the newly jobless.[296] They dispatched soapbox speakers with regularity to the Plaza and near the employment agency district where they distributed leaflets, held meetings, and advertised demonstrations.[297] They did so under the constant threat of the LAPD's notorious Red Squad,

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[291] Minutes of the Executive Committee of Council of Social Agencies, Social Welfare and Advisory Committees, Community Welfare Federation, October 2, 1930, 1-6, box 1, folder 3, CSA Records.
[292] Minutes of the Executive Committee of Council of Social Agencies, Social Welfare and Advisory Committees, Community Welfare Federation, October 2, 1930, 1-6, box 1, folder 3, CSA Records.
[293] "Rock Pile Proposal Brings Protests," *Los Angeles Times*, July 6, 1931; "Union Men Protest L.A. Rock Pile Plan," *Los Angeles Record*, July 3, 1931.
[294] "Danger! Go Slow!," *Los Angeles Record*, November 14, 1930; Rob Leicester Wagner, *Red Ink, White Lies: The Rise and Fall of Los Angeles Newspapers, 1920-1962* (Upland, Calif.: Dragonflyer Press, 2000), 10.
[295] Wild, *Street Meeting*, 178.
[296] Wild, *Street Meeting*, 183.
[297] Wild, *Street Meeting*, 182.

established to contain subversive activities.[298] Meyer Baylin, a Russian-Jewish immigrant and member of the Communist Party, helped establish an Unemployed Council in Los Angeles. "We soapboxed about six times a day," he recalled, "telling the unemployed the reasons why they were unemployed, and what they should do about it."[299] To evade arrest from waiting members of the Red Squad as they gave soapbox speeches, his group rented a private lot in an alley near the employment agency district to bypass the anti-public speaking ordinance.[300]

In February, 1931, over two-thousand unemployed men gathered at the Labor Temple Auditorium downtown to discuss the unemployment problem and to charge the Midnight Mission with feeding rotten food to hungry men.[301] William Busick, chairman of the California Socialist Party, emerged as the group's leader, although the majority of the participants did not consider themselves to be socialists.[302] Establishing themselves as the Unemployed Conference, they planned to march to city hall the following week to present a list of demands to Mayor Porter, which included the abolition of private employment agencies and the establishment of a free employment agency.[303] Those who registered at the free employment agency were not to be arrested as vagrants, and the Unemployed Conference declared that it would supply legal defense services to any of its members arrested on vagrancy charges.[304] They also demanded the immediate institution of a public works program, the establishment of a six-hour day and a five-day week with a five dollar minimum wage, and that the Board of Supervisors stop providing the

[298] Wild, *Street Meeting*, 185.
[299] Meyer Baylin, interview by Howard Kimeldorf, January 23, 1984, Oral History Center, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 45.
[300] Baylin, interview, 45.
[301] "Unemployed Will Parade Next Friday," *Los Angeles Record*, January 31, 1931.
[302] "Meeting to Organize for Hunger Parade," *Los Angeles Record*, January 30, 1931; "City Council Refused Permit," *Los Angeles Citizen*, February 6, 1931.
[303] "Meeting to Organize for Hunger Parade," *Los Angeles Record*, January 30, 1931.
[304] "Meeting to Organize for Hunger Parade."

Chamber of Commerce and the All-Year Club with taxpayers' money so they could "bring suckers out for the real estate sharks."[305]

They had applied for a parade permit with the city council, but insisted they would march regardless of the outcome.[306] Prior to granting the permit, the mayor held a conference with Busick, Chief of Police R.E. Steckel, William "Red" Hynes of the LAPD's Red Squad, and City Councilman Ebenezer Ingram. Hynes declared his opposition to the parade on the grounds that Busick might eventually run for city council and the parade would grant him prestige. He also faulted Busick for having made statements "against police brutality." "Anybody who makes statements against police brutality is inciting to riot," declared Hynes, "Such statements are the advocation of resistance to police authority."[307] When Busick pointed out that other groups, such as the Shriners, had received permits to march, Ingram retorted: "Well, they had fancy uniforms and the people liked to see them. Your people will come from Fifth and Towne streets. They will be a bunch of bums with ragged clothes."[308] Mayor Porter chastised Ingram for "sneering at the rags of the workingmen."[309]

The officials indicated that they were mainly concerned about violence. They were certain they would be able to arrest any Communist agitators who might appear, but the Unemployed Conference consisted of an overwhelming three-thousand members. They worried that the march would not stop at city hall. "It wasn't the right time to hold a hunger parade," they explained, "If times were better, things would be different, but the times were not right for a demonstration. Men are too hungry, too desperate…."[310] "We're doing all we can," they assured

[305] "Meeting to Organize for Hunger Parade."
[306] "Passing the Buck on Hunger Parade," *Los Angeles Record*, February 3, 1931.
[307] "Death Warning to Hunger Parade," *Los Angeles Record*, February 4, 1931.
[308] "Death Warning to Hunger Parade." *Los Angeles Record*, February 4, 1931.
[309] "Death Warning to Hunger Parade."
[310] "Death Warning to Hunger Parade."

Busick, "We're going to have apples for them to sell."[311] Ultimately, the City Council denied the permit.[312] "It is quite apparent," the Council noted, "that Mr. Busick is fostering some special ideas of his own and is therefore trying to promote them through a parade."[313] They offered instead to allow Busick and a "small committee representing his group" to present their demands to the Council in writing.[314]

Despite the denial, Busick insisted that they had a "right to march" and "to petition their government for a redress of their grievances."[315] Chief Steckel was ready with a response. "If your parade is going ahead against the wish of the city council," he replied, "then some of your people will be killed. If it takes bloodshed to preserve constituted authority, then there will be bloodshed."[316] The Unemployed Conference acquiesced in the face of such threats. Instead, the Socialist-leaning *Los Angeles Record* published Busick's response, which juxtaposed the deprivation of the unemployed with the brutality of the city's leaders. "We retreat before a brutal superior force which would kill hungry men, women and children in cold blood," he wrote, "When we asked for food, they offered to fill our stomachs with lead. We will continue to build our unemployed organization and make it a power for law, order and the return of constitutional government in Los Angeles. They threatened us with bullets; we will answer them with ballots."[317]

On the day of the cancelled parade, LAPD officers anticipated a riot and patrolled Fifth and Towne, where hundreds of men stood about employment agencies "in peaceful groups."[318] A

[311] "Death Warning to Hunger Parade."
[312] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, February 6, 1931, 231, CMA.
[313] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, February 6, 1931, 231, CMA.
[314] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, February 6, 1931, 231, CMA.
[315] "Passing the Buck on Hunger Parade."
[316] "Death Warning to Hunger Parade."
[317] William Busick, "Unemployed Men Plan Vote Fight," *Los Angeles Record*, February 5, 1931.
[318] "Plots of Reds Dismal Flop," *Los Angeles Times*, February 7, 1931.

week later, Busick and a committee of the Unemployed Council presented their demands at a city council meeting.[319] The council listened "politely" and then referred the list of demands to the Welfare Committee with no follow-up remarks.[320] While the city continued to endorse small publics works projects, none of the Unemployed Conference's demands were met.

A year later, leaders of a Communist-sponsored Unemployed Council planned a hunger march, which would start in the heart of the employment agency district and journey four-hundred miles north to San Francisco to appeal to Governor James Rolph for unemployment relief.[321] This time, the city granted a permit.[322] On January 2, 1932, a multiracial group of approximately 200 gathered downtown at Towne and Fifth, and some carried banners and mounted soapboxes to address the crowd.[323] At this point, Hynes led fifteen officers in an attack on the speakers.[324] Reserve officers who had been standing by in case of violence, arrived at the scene and engaged in "hand-to-hand battles" with the marchers as hundreds of spectators arrived to watch the commotion.[325] Police officers hurled tear gas cannisters, transforming the meeting into a brawl.[326] Two women caught up in the melee required medical assistance for head injuries.[327] Hynes later declared that as a condition of receiving a permit, the marchers had promised to refrain from flaunting "radical banners" and making "communistic speeches."[328]

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[319] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, February 12, 1931, 391, Los Angeles County Archives and Records Center, Los Angeles, CA.
[320] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, February 12, 1931, 391, Los Angeles County Archives and Records Center, Los Angeles, CA.
[321] Rolph's main residence was in San Francisco. "Red Propaganda Turns Hunger March Into Riot," *Los Angeles Times*, January 4, 1932.
[322] "City to Allow Hunger March," *Los Angeles Record*, December 30, 1931; "'Marchers' Fight Police at Start of Ride to S.F.," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), January 4, 1932.
[323] "Red Propaganda Turns Hunger March Into Riot," *Los Angeles Times*, January 4, 1932; "Negroes Join Hunger March," *California Eagle*, January 1, 1932; "'Marchers' Fight Police at Start of Ride to S.F.," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), January 4, 1932.
[324] "'Marchers' Fight Police at Start of Ride to S.F.," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), January 4, 1932.
[325] "Red Propaganda Turns Hunger March Into Riot," *Los Angeles Times*, January 4, 1932.
[326] "Hunger March Begins with Street Fight," *Los Angeles Record*, January 4, 1932.
[327] "Red Propaganda Turns Hunger March Into Riot," *Los Angeles Times*, January 4, 1932.
[328] "Red Propaganda Turns Hunger March Into Riot," *Los Angeles Times*, January 4, 1932.

One of the speakers, he claimed, had "advocated 'force in the overthrow of the United States government," and so his force "attempted to silence" him.[329]

As the fracas subsided and police removed speakers and banners from soapboxes, groups of approximately seventy-five marchers reconvened once again along Fifth Street, hauling knapsacks and bags of food.[330] Some members of the press noted the irony of such a "well-fed" group daring to embark on a "hunger march."[331] Nevertheless, the marchers paraded through the downtown district once again wielding signs calling for the abolishment of vagrancy laws and declaring the absurdity of hunger amid "a bounty of food" until they reached awaiting vehicles.[332] After pausing at the Plaza in an unsuccessful attempt to recruit more participants, they embarked on their journey northward to demand action on the unemployment problem from the state.[333]

CONCLUSION

The Los Angeles city and county governments had never been generous with their relief programs and had maintained tight control over expenditures.[334] However, by 1932, the Los Angeles County Welfare Bureau no longer held sufficient funds to meet the growing need of the unemployed.[335] Its work relief program only provided employment for a small fraction of the county's approximately 195,000 unemployed.[336] In order to preserve resources, vagrancy raids, work tests, and rock piles functioned as a means to deter and discipline excess pools of casual

[329] "Red Propaganda Turns Hunger March Into Riot," *Los Angeles Times*, January 4, 1932.
[330] "Red Propaganda Turns Hunger March Into Riot," *Los Angeles Times*, January 4, 1932.
[331] "The 'Hunger' March," *Los Angeles Times*, January 5, 1932; "'Marchers' Fight Police at Start of Ride to S.F.," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), January 4, 1932.
[332] "Red Propaganda Turns Hunger March Into Riot," *Los Angeles Times*, January 4, 1932.
[333] "Red Propaganda Turns Hunger March Into Riot," *Los Angeles Times*, January 4, 1932.
[334] William H. Mullins, *The Depression and the Urban West Coast, 1929-1933* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 102.
[335] William H. Mullins, *The Depression and the Urban West Coast, 1929-1933* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 102.
[336] Richard David Lester, "Building the New Deal State on the Local Level: Unemployment Relief in Los Angeles County During the 1930s" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2001), 79.

labor as well as to determine who among them were worthy of the community's resources. This criminalization of poverty and unemployment was not a new feature of American society, but was enacted on a more massive scale than in the past in response to the severity of the economic and social crisis produced by the Great Depression. The figure of the deserving unemployed, also known as "the forgotten man," coded as a white male – and ideally a head of household – who had held a steady job until the Depression continued to command some degree of respect among the city's local elites in stark contrast to that of the undeserving transient, coded as a perennial relief applicant and precarious, seasonal laborer, often Mexican, representing danger and further degeneracy. The 1932 election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt would mark the end of local fiscal responsibility for unemployment relief – at least for the time being – but that would not spell an end to local attempts to manage, punish, discipline, and deter the unemployed.[337] Nevertheless, the unemployed would seeks ways to organize, frame themselves as right-bearing individuals, and make new demands on the state in the face of social and economic crisis.

[337] Mullins, *Depression and the Urban West Coast*, 115.

CHAPTER 2

"THE CURE FOR UNEMPLOYMENT IS WORK": THE UNEMPLOYED MOVEMENT AND THE BATTLE OVER RELIEF

At midday on August 17, 1933, a few thousand day laborers dropped their picks and shovels and assembled near a dusty hill at the entrance to Griffith Park where they threatened to strike in protest of the reduction of their work hours by half.[1] For several months, roughly six-thousand men had been chipping away at rocks widening the park's roads on a public works project funded by the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) – a project that would ultimately add "hundreds of thousands of dollars of worth of improvements" to the 3,761-acre Los Angeles playground.[2] At the time, the largest municipal park in the United States, Griffith Park was widely promoted as a tourist destination by the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and All-Year Club of Southern California.[3] Earlier that month, Earl E. Jensen, the newly appointed superintendent of the Los Angeles County Department of Charities, had reduced the family relief budget by 30 percent.[4] This decision shifted the relief work program from eight

[1] "4000 Workers on L.A. Relief Projects Defer Strike Threat," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), August 18, 1933; "Aid Strike Move Checked," *Los Angeles Times*, August 18, 1933; "Charity Chief Plans Talk to 2000 at Park," *Hollywood Citizen News*, August 17, 1933. Newspaper accounts about the number of attendees varied, suggesting that it was somewhere between 2,000 and 4,000 individuals.

[2] "Park Drive Job Proving Unique," *Los Angeles Times*, April 4, 1933; "High and Low Wield Picks in R.F.C. Relief Project," *Los Angeles Times*, April 30, 1933; John Anson Ford, *Thirty Explosive Years in Los Angeles County* (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1961), 12-13.

[3] "Park Drive Job Proving Unique," *Los Angeles Times*, April 4, 1933; Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration, *Los Angeles in the 1930s: The WPA Guide to the City of Angels* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011, orig. 1941), 176; Official Sightseeing Map: Los Angeles City and County," (Los Angeles: All-Year Club of Southern California, 1937), Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc., https://www.raremaps.com/gallery/detail/63308/sightseeing-map-of-los-angeles-and-hollywood-where-movie-the-all-year-club-of-southern-california; A.G. Arnoll, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, to Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, January 8, 1936, box 67, folder aa.4, John Anson Ford Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

[4] Helen Jeter, *The Administration of Funds for Unemployment Relief by the Los Angeles Department of Charities Prior to November 24, 1933* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Emergency Relief Committee, 1933), 81.

hours per day, ten days per month at a rate of $34 total, to four hours per day, fourteen days per month at a rate of $24.[5]

Jensen rushed to the scene and climbed atop a county truck to address the relief workers drawn from the diverse neighborhoods of Los Angeles: "old, young, white, colored, Mexicans, almost every nationality…."[6] While Captain William Hynes of the Los Angeles Police Department's notorious "Red Squad" circulated through the crowd searching for Communist agitators, Jensen attempted to justify his decisions amid the occasional "boo" from his audience.[7] Faced with "dwindling relief funds," he opted to provide fewer hours to everyone rather than a full day's work to some and none to others. "'We cannot, and we will not let half of you work eight hours a day while the other half is permitted to starve,' he explained. "'With more than 100,000 men sorely in need of work and with a limited supply of money to pay them, the only way to spread jobs among them all is to shorten the working day. Above all, men, don't strike! It won't solve your problem and it won't solve mine. Our problems are identical—how to get assistance to everyone who needs it with a given amount of money.'"[8] Jensen blamed the federal government for "constantly urging" county relief officials to terminate its work-relief programs and substitute direct relief instead. Federal officials, who tended to favor and promote work relief, might have objected to his claims.[9]

Meanwhile, members of the Relief Workers' Protective Union (RWPU) distributed handbills promoting a one-day strike of all RFC workers on August 22 and a meeting at the city's

[5] "Harriman Out as Charities Head; Jensen Awarded Post," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), August 8, 1933; "Charity Chief Wins Truce in Needy 'Strike,'" *Hollywood Citizen News*, August 18, 1933.
[6] "Charities Head Averts Strike of Relief Men," *Pasadena Post*, August 18, 1933; "Griffith Park Worker Gives Graphic Account of Fatal Fire," *California Eagle*, November 3, 1933.
[7] "L.A. Relief Workers in One Day Strike Against 50% Cut," *Western Worker*, August 28, 1933.
[8] "4000 Workers; "Charity Chief Wins Truce."
[9] Richard David Lester, "Building the New Deal State on the Local Level: Unemployment Relief in Los Angeles County During the 1930s" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2001), 115.

downtown Plaza, a center of "soapbox politics" and the "historic heart" of Los Angeles.[10] One handbill read: "'Now is the time to take action against this tremendous relief cut of more than 30 per cent. This cut is only the beginning.'"[11] Another stated, "'Full pay will be demanded for day of strike with no discrimination because of race, color, creed, political belief or strike activity.'"[12] For months, relief workers had been holding mass meetings throughout the county.[13] The *Hollywood Citizens News* described the "threatened 'walkout'" by the unemployed as having the "atmosphere of a traditional labor dispute."[14]

Recipients of charity and welfare had long been stigmatized and isolated from the rest of society.[15] In periods of mass unemployment, local authorities provided relief in part as a means of disciplining the able-bodied poor as much as simply providing humanitarian aid.[16] In fact, historically, much of the function of relief has been to regulate the labor supply by expanding to subdue labor unrest during times of mass unemployment and by contracting to release labor from the relief rolls so they enter the labor market.[17] Nevertheless, as New Deal programs slowly rolled out at the local level, recipients of work relief and direct relief in Los Angeles organized across racial and ethnic lines to contest the terms of relief and to influence relief programs with their own set of values and aspirations. They made connections between their rights and privileges as citizens and the promises of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, even as forces of

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[10] "Charity Work Decision Near," *Los Angeles Record*, August 19, 1933; "One-Day 'Strike' Is Proposed Here," *Long Beach Sun*, August 19, 1933; William David Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza: Sacred and Contested Space* by William David Estrada (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 160; Devra Weber, foreword to *The Los Angeles Plaza: Sacred and Contested Space* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), ix.
[11] "Aid Workers Get Promise," *Los Angeles Times*, August 19, 1933.
[12] "Six-Hour Work Day Probable," *Long Beach Sun*, August 21, 1933.
[13] ""Harriman Out as Charities Head; Jensen Awarded Post," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), August 8, 1933; Change for Aid Jobs Indicated," *Los Angeles Times*, August 21, 1933.
[14] "Charity Chief Wins Truce.
[15] Michael B. Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: America's Enduring Confrontation with Poverty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 2.
[16] Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993, orig. 1971), 22.
[17] Piven and Cloward, *Regulating the Poor*, 3.

capital such as the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, the Los Angeles Police Department, and even growers throughout the state attempted to manipulate relief programs to influence the local labor markets to serve their needs.

THE RELIEF WORKERS' PROTECTIVE UNION AND THE UNEMPLOYED MOVEMENT

As early as 1929, over the course of the Depression in Los Angeles – and throughout the U.S. – the unemployed organized themselves into pressure groups such as the Unemployed Citizens' League, Unemployed Councils, the Bonus Army, the Unemployed Cooperative Relief Association, the Relief Workers' Protective Union, the Public Workers' and Unemployed Union, and, in later years, the Workers' Alliance.[18] As a form of self-help in which the jobless united in their demands for relief or work, many of these groups were sponsored by the American Communist Party, which originated in Chicago in 1919, and, to a lesser degree, by the Socialist Party and the Musteites.[19]

While difficult to estimate accurately, participation in unemployed organizations likely fluctuated.[20] Although membership in the Communist and Socialist parties was not especially robust in Los Angeles (the Communist Party boasted a membership of approximately one-

[18] Clark Kerr, "Productive Enterprises of the Unemployed, 1931-1938" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1939), 19; Steve Valocchi, "The Unemployed Workers Movement of the 1930s: A Reexamination of the Piven and Cloward Thesis," *Social Problems* 37, no. 2 (May 1990): 193.

[19] The Communist Party unsuccessfully attempted to organize the unemployed in the early 1920s. It would try again periodically throughout the 1920s, and in 1929, the Party made another attempt by issuing a directive calling for its members to organize employed and unemployed workers "into councils of the unemployed to force federal, state, and city governments to provide direct relief to the unemployed." This was largely implemented by the newly organized Trade Union Unity League (TUUL). Mauritz A. Hallgren, *Seeds of Revolt: A Study of American Life and the Temper of the American People During the Depression* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1933), 192; Daniel J. Leab, "United We Eat": The Creation and Organization of the Unemployed Councils in 1930," *Labor History* 8, no. 3 (Fall 1967): 300-301; Steve Valocchi, "The Unemployed Workers Movement of the 1930s: A Reexamination of the Piven and Cloward Thesis," *Social Problems* 37, no. 2 (May 1990): 193; Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression* (New York: Grove Press, Inc, 1984), 34-35; Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1910-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 261; Roy Rosenzweig, "'Socialism in Our Time': The Socialist Party and the Unemployed, 1929-1936," *Labor History* 20, no. 4 (Fall 1979):485-509; Roy Rosenzweig, "Radicals and the Jobless: The Musteites and the Unemployed Leagues, 1932-1936," *Labor History* 16, no. 1 (Winter 1975): 52-77.

[20] Piven and Cloward, *Regulating the Poor*, 106.

thousand by 1935), voting patterns in the 1930s reveal signs of slightly more leftist leanings than the otherwise conservative, open-shop city might suggest.[21] In 1932, Franklin D. Roosevelt earned 57.2 percent of the vote in Los Angeles, while the following year, the pro-New-Deal-Republican mayoral candidate, Frank L. Shaw, won by a margin of ten percent over the conservative Democrat.[22] Additionally, rather than generating mostly middle-class support, Upton Sinclair's gubernatorial End Poverty in California (EPIC) campaign in 1934 mobilized a large segment of the working-class electorate in Los Angeles.[23] The socialist Sinclair, who ran as a Democrat, won 42 percent of the vote in Los Angeles County which was the third highest in the state.[24] Moreover, 70 percent of the electorate voted for him in Belvedere Gardens, a section east of downtown, and made up of a multiracial and ethnic community of "Russian, Polish, and Armenian Jews, Mexicans, Italians, Greeks, [and] Slavonians."[25] Most of the residents of this

[21] Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 182. While statistics as to the exact membership of the Communist Party are difficult to assess, scholars have calculated that the party membership across the U.S. was as follows in the early part of the Depression decade: 1930: 7,500; 1931: 9,527; 1932: 14,475; and 1933: 19,165. However, as Michael Denning argues, Communist Party membership was not a central factor – rather, many people associated with the Party at different times and were never actually members, but considered themselves to be "generic 'communists.'" Leab, "United We Eat," 306, fn. 34; Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1996), xviii.

[22] In the 1928 presidential election, Herbert Hoover carried Los Angeles County with 70 percent of the vote. Errol Wayne Stevens, In Pursuit of Utopia: Los Angeles in the Great Depression (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2021), 53; Tom Sitton, "Urban Politics and Reform in New Deal Los Angeles: The Recall of Mayor Frank L. Shaw," (PhD diss., University of California, Riverside, 1983), 50.

[23] Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. argues that the EPIC movement was a direct outcome of the Depression anxieties of California's middle-class, a claim echoed in Kevin Starr's series on California history, and based largely on the writings of Carey McWilliams and George Creel, Sinclair's opponent in the Democratic primary. However, upon close examination of the election data, James Gregory finds that EPIC primarily mobilized the working class in California. James N. Gregory, "Upton Sinclair's 1934 EPIC Campaign: Anatomy of a Political Movement," *Labor Studies in Working-Class History* 12, no. 4 (2015): 53-81; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt*, vol. 3, *The Politics of Upheaval, 1935-1936* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1960), 109-122; Kevin Starr, *Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 121-155; George Creel, *Rebel at Large: Recollections of Fifty Crowded Years* (New York: Putnam, 1947), 268-288; Carey McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island on the Land* (Santa Barbara: Gibbs Smith, 1973), 293-313.

[24] Michael J. Dubin, *United States Gubernatorial Elections, 1932-1952: The Official Results by State and County* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2013), 29.

[25] Gregory, "Upton Sinclair's 1934 EPIC Campaign," 78; "Area Description: Belvedere Gardens, Area Number D-54," Home Owners' Loan Corporation, April 19, 1939, in Robert K. Nelson, LaDale Winling, Richard Marciano, Nathan Connolly, et al., "Mapping Inequality," American Panorama, ed. Robert K. Nelson and Edward L. Ayers,

district were a mix of laborers, artisans, and white collar workers.[26] Local voting patterns thus suggest a populace that might be receptive to unemployed organizations, especially once they witnessed their activities on behalf of the jobless.

Typically designating themselves as "Unemployed Councils" in the first few years of the Depression, the main goal of these organizations at the local level was to mediate between the unemployed and relief authorities.[27] At the national level, they coordinated Hunger Marches and issued demands such as "federal unemployment insurance; federal appropriations for relief; no discrimination against rehiring workers because of race, religion, or sex; exemption from taxes and mortgage payments for the jobless; and a fair distribution of all available employment."[28] Unemployed Councils encouraged the employed and non-employed alike to protest evictions, low relief payments, and discriminatory or neglectful treatment by relief authorities, especially in the early days when local relief efforts were chaotic, disorganized, and insufficient.[29] They also followed the Communist Party's policy, unlike that of the AFL, of appealing across racial and ethnic lines. Karl Yoneda, for example, recalled attending his initial May Day meeting in Los Angeles surrounded by Japanese members plus "hundreds of whites, Mexicans, and Negroes, men, women, and children…."[30]

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https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=14/34.022/-118.191&city=los-angeles-ca&area=D54&adimage=4/14.562/-124.102.

[26] "Area Description: Belvedere Gardens, Area Number D-54," Home Owners' Loan Corporation, April 19, 1939, Mapping Inequality, https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=14/34.022/-118.191&city=los-angeles-ca&area=D54&adimage=4/14.562/-124.102.

[27] Leab, "United We Eat," 315; Roy Rosenzweig, "Organizing the Unemployed: The Early Years of the Great Depression," *Radical America* 10, no. 4 (July-August 1976): 43.

[28] Irving Bernstein, *The Lean Years: A History of the American Worker, 1920-1933* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1966), 429-432; Leab, "United We Eat,"309.

[29] Cohen, *Making a New Deal*; Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 48-40;

[30] Karl Yoneda, *Ganbatte: Sixty Year Struggle of a Kibei Worker* (Los Angeles: Resource Development and Publications, Asian American Studies Center, University of California, Los Angeles, 1983), 17.

Unemployed Council members traveled from neighborhood to neighborhood enlisting residents into block committees, which then reported to Neighborhood Unemployment Councils, which in turn sent delegates to a city or county unemployment councils.[31] Dorothy Healey remarked that organizing in East Los Angeles was relatively easy because unemployment was so extensive: "You could go anywhere and knock on doors and you were going to find the unemployed."[32] Once she formed a committee, they would participate in a form of "direct action," such as demanding jobs and higher relief payments at the local relief office.[33] Those new members would in turn lead the next action while she and the organizers formed yet another block committee and repeated the process.[34] Direct action could also include soapbox orations on streetcorners discussing issues such as unemployment insurance and social security.[35] LaRue McCormick, a housewife who joined the unemployed movement after a woman named Sadie Goldstein knocked on her door was shocked when, upon arrival at her first streetcorner meeting her comrades told her, "You're speaking."[36]

In Los Angeles, the Communist-led Relief Workers' Protective Union (RWPU) was initially formed – most likely – in 1933 to organize those on work relief.[37] Its particular purpose

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[31] Helen Seymour, "The Organized Unemployed" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1937), 11-12.
[32] Dorothy Healey, "Tradition's Chains Have Bound Us," interview by Joel Gardner, October 10, 1972, transcript, Oral History Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles.
[33] Seymour, "The Organized Unemployed," 20.
[34] Healey, "Tradition's Chains Have Bound Us."
[35] LaRue McCormick, "Activist in the Radical Movement, 1930-1960: The International Labor Defense, The Communist Party," interview by Malca Chall, May 6, 1976, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
[36] McCormick, "Activist in the Radical Movement, 1930-1960."
[37] "Organizations Operating Among Employed and Unemployed in the United States of America," in *Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities in the United States, Hearings Before a Special Committee on Un-American Activities,* Vol. 1, 75th Cong. 331 (1938); Seymour, "Organized Unemployed,"14; James J. Lorence, *The Unemployed People's Movement: Leftists, Liberals, and Labor in Georgia, 1929-1941* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 91. Based on the best available, yet sparse, records, it appears that the most likely formation date of the RWPU was sometime in the late spring or summer of 1933. See Edward H. Reimer and Edward Elliot, *The Struggle for Life in Los Angeles County* (Los Angeles: self-pub, 1936), in Towering Minor Masterpieces," J.F. Ptak Science Books (website), https://longstreet.typepad.com/thesciencebookstore/2014/08/towering-minor-masterpieces.html and James M. Landis, *In the Matter of Harry R. Bridges: Findings and Conclusions of the Trial Examiner* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939), 20.

was to operate within the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), which was tasked with providing funds for both direct and work relief.[38] It planned parades to "protest against hunger and starvation of workers; to expose the extent of suffering and hunger; and to secure relief and redress of grievances from the public authorities."[39] Two members of the RWPU wrote that the organization had risen in response to "the rise of the relief question, the recognition in a small way of the state's duty to care for the hungry and the growing intensity of the struggle of unemployed people for food and shelter."[40] "It is clear that we are in an era of social change," they explained, "The movement of the unemployed, the most oppressed section of the common people, seems destined to play an important part in effecting this change toward a freer and happier life."[41] Daniel Sullivan, the RWPU's leader at one point, announced at a Board of Supervisor's meeting: "'We can do as our ancestors did—work and fight. The depression cannot be solved by reducing the standards of the living.'"[42]

In practice, the RWPU did not limit its focus to issues of work relief, but rather addressed a wide array of problems. Like most Communist-led groups throughout the country at this time, the RWPU promoted broader causes such as the defense of the Scottsboro Boys – nine Black teenagers wrongly accused of raping two white women on a train in Alabama – as well as the defense of Tom Mooney – a Socialist convicted of bombing a Preparedness Day parade in San Francisco based on "trumped up charges."[43] However, like many unemployed organizations, it

[38] "Organizations Operating Among Employed," *Un-American Activities Hearings,* vol. 1, 331; William H. Mullins, *The Depression and the Urban West Coast, 1929-1933* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 170. "
[39] Sullivan v. Shaw, 6 F. Supp. 112, 1 (S.D. Cal 1934).
[40] Reimer and Elliot, *Struggle for Life in Los Angeles County.*
[41] Reimer and Elliot, *Struggle for Life in Los Angeles County.*
[42] "Riot Threats Voiced in L.A. Dispute Over Jobs," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), June 26, 1933.
[43] "Great Meeting on Scottsboro Case Saturday," *California Eagle*, July 6, 1934; Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 78; Starr, *Endangered Dreams*, 48.

viewed local issues as key organizing tools.[44] A main focus of the RWPU was organizing neighborhoods to protest evictions. For example, in late August, 1933, when the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department attempted to evict an ailing elderly Black woman from her home in the Central Avenue district, members of the RWPU quickly mobilized four-to-five hundred supporters. While women tended to the sick woman, others returned her furniture to her home, reconnected the gas, and raised five dollars for her support.[45] A few months later, when a family of six was evicted, the RWPU "collected a 'flying squadron,'" piled their furniture onto a truck, and drove to a county welfare office just west of the Central Avenue district to demand assistance.[46]

The RWPU also adapted its focus according to the needs of the community. For example, in the West Adams district, largely populated by "skilled artisans and white collar workers [sic]" with a growing number of Polish, Russian, and Armenian Jewish homeowners, they held a mass meeting announcing that the RWPU had been "organized for the purpose of protecting property owners in the Western Los Angeles area," especially those who rented to relief workers.[47] In Long Beach, the RWPU investigated "'insurance racketeers'" who were reportedly promising relief applicants that they would use "their 'influence' at the City Hall to get them steady work" on RFC projects.[48] And at a city council meeting in Redondo Beach, members of the RWPU protested a pending anti-handbill ordinance, arguing that it violated the freedom of speech,

[44] Rosenzweig, "Organizing the Unemployed," 40.
[45] "Sheriff Ousts Sick Woman," *California Eagle*, September 1, 1933.
[46] R.A. Burton, "Welfare Work," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), December 8, 1933.
[47] "Area Description: West Adams, Area Number C-117," Home Owners' Loan Corporation, March 13, 1939, Mapping Inequality, https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=15/34.031/-118.365&city=los-angeles-ca&area=C117&adview=full&adimage=3/36.102/-147.656; "Relief Workers to Gather Tomorrow," *Venice Evening Vanguard*, September 4, 1933.
[48] "Relief Workers Protective Body to Meet Tonight," *Long Beach Sun*, September 5, 1933.

placed a hardship on small merchants who could not afford to advertise in newspapers, and prevented "many unemployed men from earning a few dollars at distributing dodgers."[49]

Although Communist-led, organizations centered on work relief such as the RWPU were careful to project a "non-partisan" appearance.[50] Indeed, Ben Dobbs credited the RWPU with mobilizing residents in parts of the city aside from the largely Jewish and Mexican neighborhood of Boyle Heights, which was a major Communist center of activity, and bringing more multiracial and multiethnic groups into Los Angeles's Communist Party.[51] The Los Angeles-based journalist C.H. Garrigues noted that while the RWPU was a radical group, it tended to coordinate with organizations of "varying degrees of radicalism or conservatism."[52] Many of those who participated in actions led by the RWPU were not necessarily radicalized, but willing to accept help from those offering it. As Garrigues explained, many who joined in the demonstrations and hunger marches were "interested in food rather than in economic theories."[53] "All are steeped in capitalistic backgrounds, he declared, "Most of them will tell you frankly that, if capitalism will not save them from starvation, they are willing to give any theory a trial."[54]

Nevertheless, some chose to join groups such as the RWPU because they saw the organization as one of the few willing to help them in their economic plights. Many city dwellers on relief, according to a 1934 federal survey of 79 cities, had been out of steady work for two years and thus struggled to stay afloat.[55] John Leech, an unemployed painter and decorator,

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[49] "Handbill Ordinance is Passed," *Redondo Reflex*, November 10, 1933.
[50] Seymour, "Organized Unemployed," 14.
[51] Dobbs, "Democracy and the American Communist Movement."
[52] C.H. Garrigues, "The Spotlight," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), September 23, 1933.
[53] Garrigues, "Spotlight," September 23, 1933.
[54] Garrigues, "Spotlight," September 23, 1933.
[55] Harry L. Hopkins, *Spending to Save: The Complete Story of Relief* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1936), 161.

decided to join the RWPU in the fall of 1933 when the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department used axes, shovels, and torches to raze the homeless encampment on the outskirts of the city where he had been living with his wife and children.[56] Loren Miller, an African American attorney and journalist living in Los Angeles, reported that his friend decided to join the Communist Party because "they are the only ones that are doing anything."[57] After moving to Los Angeles from Arkansas, Joshua Anderson, an African-American father of six endured years of unemployment, irregular employment, and "insufficient earnings," and was "firmly told" by Los Angeles County relief officials that county aid was "only temporary. He joined an unemployed organization in late 1932 after members "restored [his] family to their home following eviction."[58]

THE NEW DEAL IN LOS ANGELES

By 1932, Los Angeles had an unemployment rate of almost 30 percent.[59] That same year, the California State Unemployment Commission found that the largest concentration of the state's unemployed population -- 49.2 percent –resided in Los Angeles County.[60] In California, counties bore the responsibility of caring for the community's needy, and in 1933, this included

[56] Sheriff's deputies evicted one-hundred residents of "Ragtown," which had sprung up on private property near Alameda and East 82nd Street near the Firestone Tire Plant. Activists "sought to arouse the evicted inhabitants to action" as the event unfolded. One woman later reported to the County Board of Supervisors that a deputy sheriff "perched in a tree with a machine gun" as the others burned the settlement to the ground. Landis, *In the Matter of Harry R. Bridges*, 20; "Doom Sounds for 'Ragtown,'" *Los Angeles Times*, September 13, 1933; "The Core—No More," *Los Angeles Record*, September 13, 1933; "Machine Gun Threat at Hooverville Charged," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), September 19, 1933; Errol Wayne Stevens, *Radical L.A.: From Coxey's Army to the Watts Riots, 1894-1965* (Norman, Ok: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 189; William H. Mullins, *The Depression and the Urban West Coast, 1929-1933* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 99.
[57] Loren Miller to Frank Crosswaith, Socialist Party of America, March 3, 1933, in Loren Miller papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California (hereafter Miller papers).
[58] Loren Miller, "Irregular Employment," n.d. (likely 1933), in Miller papers.
[59] Mullins, *Depression and the Urban West Coast,* 92.
[60] The county with the next highest percentage of the state's unemployed was San Francisco, with 12.3 percent. Louis Bloch, *Report and Recommendations of the California State Unemployment Commission* (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1932), 39, 192; Mullins, *Depression and the Urban West Coast,* 91-92.

the able-bodied unemployed as the federal and state governments accelerated New Deal programs.[61]

Earlier, in January 1932, Herbert Hoover signed a relief bill creating the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC), a "turning point" in his longstanding policy of promoting voluntarism over direct government action.[62] The original intention of the RFC was to make federal funding available to "banks, railroads, insurance companies," and other private financial institutions.[63] However, by July, 1932, Hoover felt compelled to sign off on the Emergency Relief and Reconstruction Act, which authorized the RFC to allocate $300 million in federal funds to be loaned – not given – to states for relief purposes.[64] When Los Angeles county welfare funds were exhausted in 1932, the department procured funding from the RFC for both direct and work relief programs.[65]

Next, Roosevelt's inauguration in 1933 saw the arrival of the New Deal and significant changes for local relief administrations. RFC funds – effective in Los Angeles County in February, 1933 -- continued to offer loans even as the newly established Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) started initiating matching grants for both work relief and direct

[61] Leonard Leader, *Los Angeles and the Great Depression* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991), 65; Lester, "Building the New Deal State on the Local Level," 2.
[62] David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 84.
[63] Anthony J. Badger, *The New Deal: The Depression Years, 1933-1940* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1989), 48.
[64] Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 223; Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear,* 91.
[65] William Harriman to County of Los Angeles Board of Supervisors, August 7, 1933, box 64, folder aaa.1, John Anson Ford Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California (hereafter Ford papers).

relief.[66] Established in May, 1933, FERA allocated $500 million for grants to the states for the purposes of relief, but that distribution would take time.[67]

Meanwhile, Los Angeles County Department of Charities staff reported that the fiscal year ending on June 30, 1933 was "the most abnormal year in the history, not only of Los Angeles County, but of the State of California as well."[68] By summer 1933, the county Charities Department had spent $12 million over its typical annual budget.[69] The Bureau's case load – totaling 156,693 cases – was the highest ever recorded since its inception. Moreover, each case typically represented a family, not an individual person, meaning that the numbers were even higher than perceived at first glance. Both the RFC and FERA programs would channel their funds through the county welfare agencies because, in the summer of 1933, they lacked the extensive federal bureaucracy necessary to get relief into the hands of the unemployed quickly.[70]

Despite the onslaught of relief applications, the budget allotted to the Charities Department for that fiscal year of 1933-34 was $2,878,000 less than that of the previous year.[71] Due to the uncertainty of federal funding, the county directors assumed that the county would need to bear the full cost of relief.[72] Barring federal funding or raising taxes, the Charities

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[66] A.C. Price, Los Angeles County Department of Charities, *Annual Report, Fiscal Year July 1, 1932 to June 30, 1933*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Welfare Department, 1933), 2, box 1, folder 3, Jessie E. Dean Papers, Collection no. 0410, California Social Welfare Archives, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California (hereafter Dean papers); Tom Sitton, *The Courthouse Crowd: Los Angeles County and Its Government, 1850-1950* (Los Angeles: Historical Society of Southern California, 2013), 198; Cybelle Fox, *Three Worlds of Relief: Race, Immigration and the American Welfare State from the Progressive Era to the New Deal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 190.
[67] Piven and Cloward, *Poor People's Movements*, 66; Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear,* 170; Lester, "Building the New Deal State on the Local Level," 118.
[68] A.C. Price, Los Angeles County Department of Charities, *Annual Report, Fiscal Year July 1, 1932 to June 30, 1933*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Welfare Department, 1933), in 1, box 1, folder 3, Dean papers.
[69] Lester, "Building the New Deal State on the Local Level," 149.
[70] Lester, "Building the New Deal State on the Local Level," 16-117.
[71] William Harriman to County of Los Angeles Board of Supervisors, August 7, 1933, in box 64, folder aaa.1, Ford Papers.
[72] Lester, "Building the New Deal State on the Local Level," 149.

Department would consume forty four cents of every tax dollar.[73] As cases rose at an "alarming rate" of almost 600 per day during the summer of 1933, the Board of Supervisors called for a reorganization of the Charities Department and appointed Earl Jensen as Superintendent on August 8, 1933.[74]

The Board of Supervisors expected Jensen to "bring about a radical savings" in the Charities budget, which cost taxpayers approximately $4 million a month. [75] In order to achieve a 30-percent reduction in the county's estimated relief budget of $22 million, Jensen immediately instituted a four-hour work day for all county unemployment relief workers, which effectively reduced their monthly allowances.[76] He hoped that reducing work hours and increasing the number of days worked would "prompt many relief program workers to seek permanent employment elsewhere" and result in a drastic reduction of the charity rolls.[77] In fact, he expected that his plan would result in the elimination of "thousands of persons from the charity rolls."[78] This policy change affected 65,000 relief workers throughout the county.[79]

Responses were numerous. A *Los Angeles Times* editorial declared that cutting the relief budget "down to the minimum" was necessary "both to conserve tax funds and to prevent the pauperization of the unemployed."[80] One salesman from Long Beach argued that the poor were "taxed on every side" and "large contributors to the $60,000" that Jensen was attempting to save.[81] Another took issue with Jensen's characterization of the "army of unemployed" as

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[73] Lester, "Building the New Deal State on the Local Level," 149.
[74] Sitton, *Courthouse Crowd,* 199; Notes on Activities of Department of Charities, December 21, 1934, box 64, folder aaa.2, Ford Papers.
[75] "Two Department Employes Not to Lose, Jobs Indication," *Hollywood Citizen News*, August 9, 1933.
[76] "County's Aid Slash in Effect," *Long Beach Sun*, August 10, 1933; "Welfare Cost Cut Shortens Working Days," *Pomona Progress Bulletin*, August 10, 1933..
[77] "County's Aid Slash in Effect," "Welfare Cost Cut Shortens Working Days."
[78] "Welfare Cost Cut Shortens Working Days."
[79] "Welfare Cost Cut Shortens Working Days."
[80] "'More' is the War Cry," *Los Angeles Times*, August 22, 1933.
[81] Thomas Ward, "Welfare Economy Program," *Long Beach Sun*, August 14, 1933; *Polk's Long Beach California City Directory* (Long Beach, CA: R.L. Polk & Co., 1933), 579.

"loafers and bums."[82] A journalist found Jensen's new budget unrealistic and ultimately costly for the relief workers.[83] Moreover, he wrote, "anybody who thinks that men go out to toil eight hours in the hot sun for $3.20 a day because they're too lazy to look for a job is crazy."[84] Even the Los Angeles City Council passed a resolution protesting Jensen's plan after finding it inconsistent with the spirit of Roosevelt's National Recovery Act, which was "the reemployment of the nation's vast army of the unemployed without any decrease in individual earning power."[85] When members of the Unemployed Cooperative Relief Organization complained about Jensen's cut in the relief budget at a Board of Supervisors' meeting, Chairman John Robertson Quinn retorted with exasperation that the next step would be replacing the entire system of work relief for the able-bodied unemployed with soup kitchens.[86] He would hate to do it, he assured his audience, since he was of the opinion that "there is only one cure for unemployment – that is employment.'"[87]

After the RWPU responded to the budget cut by calling for a one-day strike, Jensen met with a three-person grievance committee appointed from their ranks.[88] Their main grievances centered on the cut in the daily rate from $3.20 to $1.60 as well as the increased number of days' work, which added additional expenses for carfare. [89] Jensen agreed to reconsider the plan and,

[82] Perry O. Brown, "Challenges Statement," *Los Angeles Record*, August 22, 1933.
[83] C.H. Garrigues, "The Spotlight," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), August 19, 1933.
[84] Garrigues, "Spotlight," August 19, 1933.
[85] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, August 16, 1933, 755, Council Minutes Archive, Los Angeles City Archives and Records Center, Los Angeles, California (hereafter CMA).
[86] "Unemployed Besiege Supervisors," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), August 16, 1933; "Soup Kitchens Seen as Work Ban's Aftermath," *Hollywood Citizen News*, August 16, 1933.
[87] "Soup Kitchens Seen as Work Ban's Aftermath," *Hollywood Citizen News*, August 16, 1933; "L.A. Soup Kitchens Due as Job Aid Fades," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), August 17, 1933.
[88] "Aid Chief Combats Shortage," *Long Beach Sun*, August 19, 1933.
[89] "Six Hour Day Plan Ordered," *Long Beach Sun*, August 22, 1933; "Six-Hour Day in Job Relief Work Fixed," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), August 22, 1933.

after a week of "vigorous protests" and fielding distress calls from "many thousands of relief workers," he increased the four-hour day to a six-hour day. [90]

Although they had succeeded in curbing slightly the budget decrease, the RWPU went ahead with the strike. Newspapers reported that approximately 5,000 men, women, and children gathered at the Plaza to listen to the "fiery oratory of speakers."[91] Banners dotted the crowd with slogans such as "We Demand $4 a Day, Not $1.60," "Where is the American Standard of Living?," and "Soup Kitchens? No!"[92] The relatively short one-block street between Main and Los Angeles Street was "completely filled with listeners of various races and walks of life."[93] Mayor Frank Shaw had ordered the LAPD not to interfere with the Plaza meeting; however, throughout the day at least ten were arrested for distributing handbills.[94]

RWPU representatives then led a delegation of 150 protestors to present their demands to the mayor and the board of supervisors, where they the following demands: four dollars for a six-hour day, a minimum of seven days' work per month for single men and women, a minimum of ten-days work per month for married men plus two additional days for each dependent, a two-and-a-half increase in all pay to cover the sales tax, free transportation to and from work projects in cases where the fare was more than fourteen cents, the immediate abolition of "forced labor" on river beds, and the recognition of the Relief Workers' Protective Union and the appointment of two of its members to the county relief commission, no discrimination based on "race, creed, nationality or for strike activity," "no appropriation of county relief funds for stool pigeon work,"

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[90] "Aid Workers Get Promise," *Los Angeles Times*, August 19, 1933; "Six-Hour Day Seen in County," *Pasadena Post*, August 21, 1933; "Change for Aid Jobs Indicated," Los Angeles Times, August 21, 1933; "Jensen Hints Relief Work Change," *Hollywood Citizen News*, August 21, 1933; "Six-Hour Day in Job Relief Work Fixed," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), August 22, 1933.
[91] "5000 Rap Six-Hour Day Plan," *Long Beach Sun*, August 23, 1933; "5000 Harangued by Agitators, But Job Aid Strike Fails," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), August 23, 1933.
[92] Gilbert Brown, "The Voice of the People," *Los Angeles Record*, August 23, 1933.
[93] "Plea to Strike Goes Unheeded," *Los Angeles Times*, August 23, 1933.
[94] "5000 Harangued by Agitators, But Job Aid Strike Fails," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), August 23, 1933.

and the "immediate audit of income and expenditures of the county welfare department books, where graft and racketeering is rampant."[95] In response, they were told to be satisfied with their relief allowances "until the 'wheels of industry' start[ed] turning."[96]

Several days after the strike, Jensen issued an order banning "collective bargaining between organized groups of individuals on the county charity lists and the county government."[97] Instead, he decreed that individuals would be responsible for presenting their own complaints to relief officials.[98] He also dismantled the Welfare Adjustment Complaints Adjustment office, and instructed directors of relief offices to investigate future complaints. "'If a complaint is just,' Jensen explained, 'the individual needs no help from a delegation to obtain an adjustment. If it is unreasonable, collective bargaining will be of no avail.'"[99] The RWPU objected to Jensen's decision calling it "'high-handed and arbitrary'" and "'an open defiance of Section 7 of the National Recovery Act that guarantees to workers the right of collective bargaining.'"[100]

Jensen also called a meeting of county welfare directors at Patriotic Hall three blocks from the RWPU headquarters in downtown Los Angeles and made clear his stance on the distribution of relief.[101] His first priority was that of the taxpayers, who were "burdened" by "the

[95] "15,000 at Plaza to Back L.A. 1 Day Relief Strike," *Western Worker*, September 4, 1933; "5000 Harangued by Agitators, But Job Aid Strike Fails," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), August 23, 1933. In 1933, California governor James Rolph signed into law an unpopular 2.5 percent sales tax on all retail items except gasoline. See Loren B. Chan, "California During the Early 1930s: The Administration of Governor James Rolph, Jr., 1931-1934," *Southern California Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (Fall 1981): 277.
[96] "5000 Harangued by Agitators, But Job Aid Strike Fails," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), August 23, 1933; "15,000 at Plaza to Back L.A. 1 Day Relief Strike," *Western Worker*, September 4, 1933.
[97] "L.A. County Bans Bargaining Plan in Charity Work," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), September 7, 1933.
[98] "L.A. County Bans Bargaining Plan in Charity Work."
[99] "L.A. County Bans Bargaining Plan in Charity Work."
[100] "Relief Workers Protest Ruling of Charity Head," *Long Beach Sun*, September 8, 1933.
[101] Address of Earl Jensen, Superintendent of Charities, Meeting of Directors, Patriotic Hall, August 28, 1933, 1, box 64, folder aaa.1, Ford Papers.

problem of caring for the needy in Los Angeles."[102] Such a problem could not continue. He suggested that welfare officials were blinded by their "human sympathy" and their belief that "there should be no need or want in Los Angeles," which led them to provide aid for the undeserving.[103] He confessed that the original purpose of the 30-percent budget cut was to "immediately reduce the number of cases."[104] Jensen observed that people journeyed to Los Angeles with the belief that they were entitled to jobs if they received aid.[105] "Los Angeles is not in the employment business," he proclaimed.[106] He also pondered over the philosophy behind work relief – that "if a man worked for what he got, it would remove some of the stigma attached to a man who simply applied as a destitute."[107] Work relief "may preserve the dignity of some of them," he noted, "but it has encouraged too many to come in under the guise of seeking employment when they really want aid."[108] Finally, he tasked the welfare officials with making it "hard for people to get aid and get on the Charity rolls."[109] To ensure that he was absolutely clear, Jensen reiterated his point: "If you want authority for doing this, take it from the statement I am making right now – I want to make it harder – not easier, to get on [the charity rolls]."[110]

Relief authorities and politicians had a long tradition of constructing impediments to relief programs.[111] As historian Errol Wayne Stevens notes, Los Angeles "politicians and county officials were more interested in restricting the number of people receiving relief than in

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[102] Jensen Address, Ford Papers. Taxpayer organizations in Los Angeles County typically represented mostly businesses and large property owners. See Lester, "Building the New Deal State on the Local Level," 186, fn 36.
[103] Jensen Address, Ford Papers.
[104] Jensen Address, Ford Papers.
[105] Jensen Address, Ford Papers.
[106] Jensen Address, Ford Papers. By 1935, a nationwide poll revealed that 89 percent of respondents agreed that "'the government should see to it that every man who wants to work had a job.'" See Hadley Cantril and Mildred Strunk, *Public Opinion, 1935-1946* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 893, cited in James T. Patterson, *America's Struggle Against Poverty in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).
[107] Jensen Address, Ford Papers.
[108] Jensen Address, Ford Papers.
[109] Jensen Address, Ford Papers.
[110] Jensen Address, Ford Papers.
[111] Piven and Cloward, *Regulating the Poor,* 3-42.

expanding benefits."[112] In 1931, for example, after much pressure from Los Angeles officials, the state legislature strengthened its settlement law, popularly known as the "Pauper Act," and required individuals to reside in the state for three years (as opposed to the former one year) in order to qualify for county charity.[113] The law also allowed relief officials to return non-residents to their counties of origin.[114] Later, in 1933, the state again amended the Act to stipulate that work might be required as "a condition of relief" and it also obliged adults to contribute to the care of their indigent parents or indigent adult children.[115] Further, in early 1931, Los Angeles officials joined national leaders in a deportation and repatriation campaign against undocumented Mexican nationals and Mexican Americans in part to remove them from the relief rolls.[116] In addition, relief allowances – especially before federal intervention – were often set to bare subsistence levels to discourage applications and to encourage recipients to seek private employment. In 1933, California ranked nineteenth in relief spending among the states, with its average relief budgets typically below the national average.[117] Later, in 1934, the County Board of Supervisors very publicly considered publishing the names of all relief recipients so that local residents might help identify fraudulent cases, much to the consternation of professional social

[112] Stevens, *In Pursuit of Utopia,* 199.
[113] 1931 Cal. Stat. 110, at 146; "Pauper Act Change Passed by Senate," *Los Angeles Times*, March 13, 1931; Mullins, *Depression and the Urban West Coast,* 70.
[114] Fox, *Three Worlds of Relief,* 189.
[115] 1933 Cal. Stat 761, at 2005, 2006; "Indigents May Be Forced to Work for Aid," *Oakland Tribune*, June 7, 1933; "Adult Children Held Liable for Pauper Parents," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), July 13, 1933.
[116] Stevens, *In Pursuit of Utopia*, 47-51; Abraham Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929-1939* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974); Francisco E. Balderrama and Raymond Rodríguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s*, rev. ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006).
[117] Lester, "Building the New Deal State on the Local Level," 177, fn 9. Even Harry Hopkins acknowledged that the problem of inadequate relief was prevalent throughout the Federal Emergency Relief Administration's programs. Between 1934-1935, FERA paid families $25-29 per month, which had been "the average *weekly* pre-Depression wages of a regularly employed industrial worker." See Patterson, *America's Struggle Against Poverty*, 57.

workers.[118] Although they never followed through with this plan, there was a decline in the relief rolls in the weeks after the newspaper coverage.[119]

Discrimination against non-white relief applicants was also widespread in both private and public welfare agencies in Los Angeles and functioned as another impediment to relief.[120] Mexicans and African Americans were generally the first to lose their jobs once the Depression hit.[121] Nevertheless, relief officials often automatically deducted twenty percent of the standard budget for Mexican applicants, which they justified by referencing "lower rents in Mexican districts" and by flatly stating that Mexican standards differed from "American standards."[122] "Get it out of your mind," Jensen informed his staff at the Charities Department, "that each family, Mexican, Chinese, and white should have the same average monthly requirements."[123] Anglos and Mexicans simply lived according to differing standards, he explained, and Mexicans were accustomed to surviving on less.[124] A few years later, the head of the Los Angeles County Relief Administration in response to a demand retorted that "ten dollars per month per capita"

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[118] "Would Publish Charity Rolls," *Los Angeles Evening Post-Record,* May 22, 1934; "Jensen Would Post Charity Rolls Names to Curb 'Chiselers,'" *Long Beach Sun*, May 23, 1934; Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Council of Social Agencies, May 31, 1934, 8-9, box 2, folder 3, Council of Social Agencies of Los Angeles records, Collection no. 0480, California Social Welfare Archives, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California (hereafter CSA records).
[119] "Many Drop Off Charity Rolls," *Los Angeles Evening Post-Record,* May 23, 1934.
[120] Fox, *Three Worlds of Relief*, 188-213; Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 29-30; Emily K. Abel, *Tuberculosis and the Politics of Exclusion: A History of Public Health and Migration to Los Angeles* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 93; Mary Odem, "Single Mothers, Delinquent Daughters, and the Juvenile Court in Early 20th Century Los Angeles," *Journal of Social History* 25, no. 1 (Autumn, 1991), 29; Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens?: Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006),116-178. On discrimination in relief distribution throughout the U.S., see also Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2005), 25-52; Cohen, *Making a New Deal*; Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994), 47-48.
[121] Bloch, *Report and Recommendations*, 370; Abel, *Tuberculosis and the Politics of Exclusion*, 93.
[122] Department of Charities, *Gross Expenditures and Analysis, July 1, 1928 to June 30, 1929*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Welfare Department, 1929), box 1, folder 3, Dean Papers.
[123] Jensen Address, Ford Papers.
[124] Jensen Address, Ford Papers.

was too much for Mexican families, who were unaccustomed to such sums.[125] The Department of Charities also issued a separate and lower budget for Jewish families in 1933.[126] Black residents fared no better. One study by the Los Angeles Urban League found that Black Angelenos received relief budgets equal to that of whites, but given differentials such as "exorbitant rents" in redlined Black districts, they often amounted to less.[127] It also found that authorities denied relief to African Americans if they refused to accept work in household employment, which paid less than relief wages.[128] Relief officials also tended to discriminate in assigning work relief jobs. An African American political activist from Watts, Eusebia Small, recalled that only her personal acquaintance with a case worker at SERA allowed her to get "a few days' work."[129] "'There was no equality in the distribution of jobs,' she explained, 'When we pledged allegiance to the flag, we used to end, "With Liberty and Justice for some!"'"[130]

THE LAPD'S RED SQUAD

In the 1920s, the Los Angeles Police Department established a special unit, the Intelligence Bureau, to quell labor unrest and maintain the city's open shop standing.[131] This unit, informally called the "Red Squad" and commanded by Captain William "Red" Hynes, was tasked with the "'investigations, surveillance, arrest and prosecution of illegal activities in

[125] "Mexicans Dumb, Says LACRA Head," *United Progressive News*, June 14, 1935.
[126] Helen Jeter, *The Administration of Funds for Unemployment Relief by the Los Angeles Department of Charities Prior to November 24, 1933* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Emergency Relief Committee, 1933), 82.
[127] Floyd C. Covington, "Relief and Housing," Los Angeles Urban League, May 25, 1940, in box 2, folder 11, Los Angeles Urban League Records (Collection 203), Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles; Juanita Ellsworth-Miller, "Relief and Housing" (final report), Los Angeles Urban League, May 25, 1940, in box 2, folder 11, Los Angeles Urban League Records (Collection 203), Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.
[128] Floyd C. Covington, "Relief and Housing," Los Angeles Urban League, May 25, 1940, in box 2, folder 11, Los Angeles Urban League Records (Collection 203), Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.
[129] Eusebia Small, interview by Patricia Rae Adler, October-November, 1970, cited in Patricia Rae Adler, "Watts: From Suburb to Black Ghetto" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1977), 227.
[130] Small, interview, in Adler, "Watts," 227.
[131] Edward J. Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity: Mexican Americans and the Los Angeles Police Department, 1900-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 77, 81.

connection with ultra-radical organizations and individuals."[132] This included "anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists, Communists, syndicalists, socialists, I.W.W.'s and 'outlaw' radical labor groups and sympathetic organizations and group directly affiliated…."[133]

The Red Squad became notorious for breaking up (often violently) rallies, meetings, and demonstrations, many of which were sponsored by radical organizations such as the Communist Party or the John Reed Club.[134] The African American attorney and journalist, Loren Miller, compared Hynes to Supreme Court Justice Roger Taney given his oft-repeated dictum that Communists had "no rights which police officers are bound to respect."[135] An investigator for Hoover's Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement (the Wickersham Commission) described the Red Squad's attack on a 1930 Hunger March, for example, as "'an eight-hour clubbing party'" in which police "clubbed demonstrators and news reporters alike."[136] Elaine Black Yoneda of the International Labor Defense, who witnessed the event, added that "'some were almost clubbed to death.'"[137] In fact, at an unemployed protest one year later the Red Squad beat Isidor Brooks about the head so badly that he eventually suffered a stroke and died from his injuries.[138] In response to a planned Hunger March on October 2, 1933, by the RWPU in which

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[132] "Statement of William F. Hynes, Commanding Officer of Intelligence Bureau, Outlining Scope and Function of Burau," July 1, 1938, in *Violations of Free Speech and Rights of Labor, Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Comm. on Education and Labor Pursuant to S. Res. 266, part 64, Supplementary Exhibits*, 76th Cong. 23509 (1940) (hereafter CEL Hearings).
[133] "Statement of William F. Hynes, Commanding Officer of Intelligence Bureau, Outlining Scope and Function of Burau," July 1, 1938, in CEL Hearings*, part 64, Supplementary Exhibits*, 23509.
[134] Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity,* 81.
[135] Miller is describing a meeting of the Friends of the Soviet Union held at Polytechnic High School with the permission of the Los Angeles Board of Education on April 22, 1933. The Red Squad allegedly had conspired with the American Legion to stop the event, and roughly 75 Legionaires surrounded the school building armed with blackjacks. When attendees asked Hynes to disburse the Legionaires for disturbing a lawful meeting, Hynes is said to have replied "I ain't protecting no Communists." Loren Miller, "Judge Taney in Uniform," n.d., in Miller papers; "City Officials Sued by Soviet Group in Meet Breakup," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), May 5, 1933.
[136] Edward J. Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity: Mexican Americans and the Los Angeles Police Department, 1900-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 81.
[137] Quoted in *Vivian McGuckin Rainer, The Red Angel: The Life and Times of Elaine Black Yoneda, 1906-1988* (New York: International Publishers, 1991), 23.
[138] Daniel Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles and the Making of Modern Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 152, 157.

the City Council had rescinded the parade permit, Chief of Police James Davis promised his officers would not use any more force than was necessary.[139] However, once he had participants in custody and they were sent to jail, he added, "'I will do my utmost to see that they are sent to the police pistol range, because I have good men there to take care of them.'"[140]

The Red Squad was an almost ubiquitous presence throughout Los Angeles. Dorothy Healey and Ben Dobbs, a member of TUUL, explained that it was not possible to have a meeting or send a delegation of the unemployed to a relief office without the Red Squad breaking it up.[141] Elaine Black Yoneda recalled that there were "almost daily arrests with the unemployed demonstrations, the evictions…putting back furniture for the people who were evicted, going to whatever welfare agencies were available…."[142]

As Simon Balto notes, police departments in the United States were generally intended "to serve the needs of capital and to uphold racial and ethnic hierarchies."[143] The Red Squad was no different in its connections with the Los Angeles business community. Hynes's main office was located in the Chamber of Commerce building rather than police headquarters to expedite responses to labor disputes.[144] Employers, not the police department, paid overtime wages for the Red Squad officers and also supplied their tear gas bombs and projectiles, which they used to break up strikes and demonstrations.[145] In fact, one member of the Young Communist League claimed that the Chamber of Commerce sponsored the Red Squad to prevent union

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[139] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, September 27, 1933, 607, in CMA; Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, September 29, 1933, 650-651, in CMA; "Police Chief Davis Warns 'Hunger' Group," *Los Angeles Record*, September 30, 1933.
[140] "Police Chief Davis Warns 'Hunger' Group," *Los Angeles Record*, September 30, 1933.
[141] Dorothy Healey, "Tradition's Chains Have Bound Us;" Ben Dobbs, "Democracy and the American Communist Movement."
[142] Rainer, *Red Angel*, 44-45.
[143] Simon Balto, "Policing's History Argues Against Reform," in *The Long Year: A 2020 Reader*, ed. Thomas J. Sugrue and Caitlin Zaloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022), 192.
[144] Frank Donner, *Protectors of Privilege: Red Squads and Police Repression in Urban America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 59-60.
[145] Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity*, 83.

organization.[146] For her part, LaRue McCormick recalled that Hynes "was considered the 'ace' Red hunter" who "sold himself as a 'Marxist' specialist and expert on 'labor' to any industry that would hire him."[147] The Red Squad also operated outside of its jurisdiction, most notably during the Imperial Valley lettuce strike led by Mexican farmworkers in 1934.[148]

THE JUNE 1, 1934 CHARITY OFFICE RIOT

At noon on June 1, 1934, roughly 300 unemployed protestors marched from Boyle Heights to the County charity offices at First and North Broadway in downtown Los Angeles to present a series of demands to Earl Jensen.[149] As they marched, they shouted slogans such as, "'We want bread and milk for our babies'" and "'We want money to feed our families.'"[150] LAPD officers, who had prior knowledge of the plan, stood at the doors of the welfare building and blocked the leaders – many of them members of the RWPU – from entry.[151] According to an eyewitness, a tall African American man, James McShann, then proceeded to climb atop a car and shout, "'Why don't you let them go in? We want to make our demands peaceably.'"[152] At that point, a police officer knocked him to the street and "the battle cry went up."[153] While police and the unemployed "traded blows in a milling, shouting melee in the street," sympathetic onlookers crowded the sidewalks "booing the officers."[154] Approximately 3,000 people gathered

[146] Meyer Baylin, interview by Howard Kimeldorf, January 23, 1984, Oral History Center, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
[147] McCormick, "Activist in the Radical Movement."
[148] Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity*, 82.
[149] "Police Fight Jobless Men Seeking Dole," *Los Angeles Evening Post-Record*, June 1, 1934.
[150] "Mob Routed in Wild Riot," *Los Angeles Times*, June 2, 1934.
[151] "Police Fight Jobless Men Seeking Dole," *Los Angeles Evening Post-Record*, June 1, 1934; "Mob Routed in Wild Riot," *Los Angeles Times*, June 2, 1934.
[152] "Police Fight Jobless Men Seeking Dole," *Los Angeles Evening Post-Record*, June 1, 1934; James McShann reported that he was arrested and charged with disturbing the peace. LAPD officers took him to the Central Police Station, where they beat him for thirty-five minutes while his hands were handcuffed behind his back. His head was split open as a result and he required several stitches. See "Riot Trial Set for Wednesday," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 21, 1934.
[153] "Police Fight Jobless Men Seeking Dole," *Los Angeles Evening Post-Record*, June 1, 1934.
[154] "Police Fight Jobless Men Seeking Dole," *Los Angeles Evening Post-Record*, June 1, 1934.

along the entire length of North Broadway from First to Temple Streets as one-hundred police officers battled the unemployed in hand-to-hand fighting while bricks flew.[155] Jensen stood on a fire escape overlooking the scene as clerical workers emerged from nearby offices in the civic center to watch the brawl and were held back by reserve members of the LAPD.[156] Half an hour after it started, approximately fifty people – both police officers and the unemployed – had been injured.[157]

Many members of unemployed organizations – in particular, women – were prepared for such violent encounters with the police. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that "scores of women and children" had participated in the altercation."[158] Months earlier Chief Davis made special note of women's roles in such demonstrations. "'After we have arrested one or two men leaders,' he noted, 'without a doubt women will step into their places. And when my men attempt to arrest them[,] they will start biting, fighting, kicking and then later shout about how brutal police officers in this city have been to them.'"[159] At the Philharmonic Auditorium riot in 1931, Elaine Black Yoneda placed herself between members of the Red Squad and the man they were clubbing, who was already on his knees. After they started beating her too, she kicked back and was hauled off to jail.[160] Miriam Johnson, who as a very young girl participated in a Hunger March at the Plaza, recalled that the Red Squad would "smack" girls across the legs with straps. Because they wore dresses, not pants, the girls returned home with "terrible welts" on their

[155] "Mob Routed in Wild Riot," *Los Angeles Times*, June 2, 1934; "Six Held After Riot at Charities Office," *Hollywood Citizen News*, June 2, 1943.
[156] "Jensen Moves to Bar Jobless Who Refuse Work," *Hollywood Citizen-News*, June 2, 1934; "Police Fight Jobless Men Seeking Dole," *Los Angeles Evening Post-Record*, June 1, 1934.
[157] "Mob Routed in Wild Riot," *Los Angeles Times*, June 2, 1934; "Jensen Moves to Bar Jobless Who Refuse Work," *Hollywood Citizen-News*, June 2, 1934.
[158] "Mob Routed in Wild Riot," *Los Angeles Times*, June 2, 1934.
[159] "Police Chief Davis Warns 'Hunger' Group," *Los Angeles Record*, September 30, 1933.
[160] Rainer, *Red Angel,* 37-38; Stevens, *Radical L.A.,* 184.

legs.[161] Dorothy Healey, speaking of her experiences at similar protests in Oakland in 1930, noted an almost indescribable feeling when the police started hitting protestors with batons. "When you look around and you see people lying on the ground," she explained, "that expression 'their heads broken open' is a literal expression as far as your feeling. You're looking at pulp and gray matter coming out, and blood dripping all over." She described feeling "anger and fury" rather than fear – "fury at them daring to do this."[162]

Women also came prepared with self-defense strategies for these occasions. Johnson watched as the Red Squad beat her friend so extensively that his head started " 'pouring blood.'" She "jabbed" a hairpin into the neck of one of the officers to disrupt the beating; in response, he knocked her unconscious.[163] Healey deployed similar strategies. "[T]here were a lot of mounted police around in those days," she explained, "We always had marbles with us to throw in front of the horses. Or you'd have a hatpin to jab at the horses with."[164] Critically, "one of the first things" she learned as a Communist agitator "was how to knee a cop at a demonstration."[165]

During the Charity Office Riot, members of the RWPU distributed handbills with a list of their demands, which included "adequate food and milk;" "adequate cash relief for all unemployed," including ten dollars per week plus three dollars for each dependent; and support for the Workers Unemployment and Social Insurance Act.[166] The Workers' bill, as it was popularly known, provided insurance "'for all workers, including all wage earners, all salaried workers, farmer, professional workers, and the self-employed'" at prevailing wages and

[161] Miriam Johnson, interview by Mark Wild, June 21, 1999, cited in Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 188.
[162] Healey, "Tradition's Chains Have Bound Us."
[163] Johnson, interview, in Wild, *Street Meeting,* 188.
[164] Healey, "Tradition's Chains Have Bound Us."
[165] Healey, "Tradition's Chains Have Bound Us."
[166] "Police Fight Jobless Men Seeking Dole," *Los Angeles Evening Post-Record*, June 1, 1934.

prohibited discrimination based on "age, sex, race, or color."[167] It also provided funds for "loss of wages due to maternity, sickness, accidents, and old age" plus support for mothers of underage children without male support.[168] This bill garnered significant support from unemployed organizations across the nation.[169]

The following day, Jensen announced that in direct response to the riot, he would take steps to remove anyone who refused work from the relief rolls.[170] The following week, a delegation made up of men and women from the RWPU, TUUL, the Communist Party, the International Labor Defense League, the International Workers' Order, and the League of Struggle for Negro Rights appeared before the Board of Supervisors and demanded Jensen's removal.[171] The Board demurred, but, by August, Jensen resigned.[172] Nevertheless, in the wake of the June 1 riot, Chief of Police James Davis announced, "Your police department would like to make this city one to which men may come and invest capital, a place where they may operate without social agitation harassing them and where their property will be protected against lawlessness, disorder and violence."[173]

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[167] The Workers Unemployment and Social Insurance Bill (H.R. 7598), popularly known as the "Workers' bill" or the "Lundeen bill," found support among communists, socialists, radicals, the National Negro Congress, some local unions and "a surprisingly large number of social workers," but was strongly opposed by those who supported "more moderate unemployment insurance programs," including the American Federation of Labor leadership. Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 79; Kenneth Casebeer, "The Workers' Unemployment Insurance Bill: American Social Wage, Labor Organization, and Legal Ideology," in *Labor Law in America: Historical and Critical Essays*, ed. Christopher L. Tomlins and Andrew J. King, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 231-259; Paul H. Douglas, *Social Security in the United States: An Analysis and Appraisal of the Social Security Act* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1939), 77; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Coming of the New Deal, 1933-1935* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003, orig. 1958), 2: 295-296.
[168] Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity*, 79.
[169] Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Coming of the New Deal, 1933-1935*, 295-296.
[170] "Jensen Moves to Bar Jobless Who Refuse Work," *Hollywood Citizen-News*, June 2, 1934.
[171] "Jensen Ouster Demanded by Delegation in Charity Fight," *Illustrated Daily News*, June 7, 1934.
[172] "Jensen Quits as Chief of L.A. Charities, *Los Angeles Evening Post-Record*, August 10, 1934.
[173] "Aid Pledged in Red Curb," *Los Angeles Times*, June 8, 1934.

THE LOS ANGELES CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND RELIEF

By 1930, over a third of all large-scale farms in the U.S. were in California; the average value of its farms was "more than three times the national average."[174] California agriculture largely consisted of "perishables and off-season crops," which were sold throughout the U.S. and the world during the autumn, winter, and spring months.[175] California's distinct climate plus the addition of intensive irrigation allowed for growing fruits and vegetables that were not possible to cultivate in short temperate seasons in much of the U.S. George P. Clements, manager of the Agricultural Department of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, noted that the California farm was highly scientific – a "man-made affair" due to the need for humans to devise systems to divert water to the land and to manipulate that land so would be "in a condition" to use the water.[176] The scientific nature of the California farm meant that the farmer did not require constant casual labor. Rather, in order for a farmer to turn a profit in California, he must work solo for much of the year and then quickly acquire multiple hands at harvest time. "'Fluid casual labor is his only salvation;' he explained. 'it is a necessity.'"[177] A spokesperson for the Chamber of Commerce declared: "'The old-fashioned hired man is a thing of the past…. There is no place for him, and the farmer who does not wake up to the realization that there is a caste in labor on the farm, is sharing too much of his dollar with labor…. We are not husbandmen. We are not farmers. We are producing a product to sell.'"[178]

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[174] Stuart Jamieson, *Labor Unionism in American Agriculture*, U.S. Department of Labor, Bulletin No. 836 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1945), 70.
[175] George P. Clements, *A Commentary on California Agricultural Labor*, August 10, 1937, in CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities, 19677.
[176] George P. Clements, *Notes for Talk Before the Annual Conference of "Friends of the Mexicans,"* Pomona College, Claremont, California, November 18, 1926, in *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, (1940).
[177] Clements, *Notes for Talk,* in *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 76th Cong. 19670-19671.
[178] Statement attributed to Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce spokesperson (1926), in *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 19444 (testimony of Holmes Bishop, Howard A. Miller, and John Watson).

Many growers and ranchers themselves resided in Los Angeles.[179] Banks, railroads, oil companies, and utility companies owned "thousands of acres of land under cultivation in California."[180] The Bank of America, for example, was instrumental in the financing of "half the cotton crop" in the San Joaquin Valley by 1929.[181] Los Angeles investors were critical in the injection of finance into the farms and irrigation district in the Imperial Valley.[182] *The Los Angeles Times* owned roughly 80,000 acres in the Imperial Valley.[183]

As Christina Heatheron describes, the long highways connecting Los Angeles with places like the Imperial Valley "traced an urban-rural continuum across the capitalist landscape, where migratory workers, crops, and capital moved in symbiotic circulation."[184] California agriculture was deeply interdependent with business and commerce in the city of Los Angeles.[185] Many of the crops grown throughout the state were "manufactured or otherwise handled through Los Angeles," for example, in the canneries and in the garment district.[186] The city itself held roughly

[179] James Bright Wilson, "Social Attitudes of Certain Migratory Agricultural Workers in Kern County, California," (master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1942), 308.
[180] Wilson, "Social Attitudes of Certain Migratory Agricultural Workers," 296.
[181] In 1908, California legalized branch banking – the first state to do so. This permitted the rise of A.P. Giannini's Bank of Italy. It was rechristened as Bank of America in 1927, and by 1930 it controlled "almost half of all California bank units, mostly country banks it had purchased." Giannini also held "almost one in every ten farm mortgages in the state by then." Richard Walker, *The Conquest of Bread: 150 Years of Agribusiness in California* (New York: New Press, 2004), 260, 265.
[182] In 1908, California legalized branch banking – the first state to do so. This permitted the rise of A.P. Giannini's Bank of Italy. It was rechristened as Bank of America in 1927, and by 1930 it controlled "almost half of all California bank units, mostly country banks it had purchased." Giannini also held "almost one in every ten farm mortgages in the state by then." Walker, *Conquest of Bread*, 260, 265.
[183] Healey, "Tradition's Chains Have Bound Us."
[184] Christina Heatherton, "Relief and Revolution: Southern California Struggles Against Unemployment in the 1930s," in *The Rising Tide of Color: Race, State Violence, and Radial Movements Across the Pacific*, ed. Moon-Ho Jung (Seattle: Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest, in association with the University of Washington Press, 2014), 160-161.
[185] *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 76th Cong.19432 (1940) (statement of Howard A. Miller, manager, Agricultural Department, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce).
[186] *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 76th Cong.19432 (1940) (testimony of Howard A. Miller, manager, Agricultural Department, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce); Douglas Monroy, *Rebirth: Mexican Los Angeles from the Great Migration to the Great Depression* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 121-122.

thirty-thousand acres of agricultural land while the county contained 520,000 acres.[187] Agricultural production in Southern California generated monthly retail sales of approximately $30 million.[188]

Agricultural industries in California depended on their labor supply – Mexican or otherwise – being fluid. It must be capable of moving rapidly from field to field according to "the demands of the maturing crops."[189] This specialized agriculture resulted in an uneven demand for seasonal labor. Cheap and readily available labor necessitated a large pool of unorganized and chronically unemployed – or transient – workers.[190] Since the late nineteenth century, California agriculture had been built on the foundation of cheap labor. In fact, cheap labor was "so deeply embedded in the industry that its elimination would have necessitated a readjustment of the entire capital structure of California agriculture."[191] Traditionally, California growers had relied upon nonwhite and often immigrant labor: Native Americans, Chinese, Japanese, Southeast Asians, Filipinos, and Mexicans.[192] These groups shared a "lack of political rights, vulnerability to deportation, and low social status," all a which made placed them at risk for exploitation.[193] Since World War I, Mexicans had constituted a transnational work force. As Devra Weber points out, labor and capital "spanned the border" over several generations.[194]

Growers required large numbers of workers for short spurts during peak harvest time, but at the close of that season, expected those workers to leave. Both private and public relief

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[187] W.J. Braunschweiger, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, to Nels Anderson, Works Progress Administration, September 24 ,1935, in *CEL Hearings, part 63, Supplementary Exhibits*, 22988-22989.
[188] *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 76th Cong.19432 (1940) (testimony of Howard A. Miller, manager, Agricultural Department, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce).
[189] Home Missions Council, *A Study of Social and Economic Factors Relating to Spanish-Speaking People in the United States* (n.p.: Commission on Social and Economic Factors, 1926), 13.
[190] Devra Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold: California Farm Workers, Cotton, and the New Deal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994),37.
[191] Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold*, 37.
[192] Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold*, 37.
[193] Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold*, 37.
[194] Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold*, 8.

programs in Los Angeles essentially subsidized large growers in other parts of the state – in effect granting them access to a large labor pool without the responsibility of maintaining workers and their families during slack times.[195] In 1929, the Los Angeles County Welfare Bureau reported that homeless men constituted "the largest problem" in terms of sheer numbers for their transient division, which they attributed to the fact that they typically followed "mining and agricultural pursuits" during several months of the year, and then needed "to return to us during the winter season" for relief.[196] During the fiscal year 1925-1926, Mexicans made up approximately 33 percent of the county's relief cases.[197] The following fiscal year, they constituted roughly 27 percent of the county's relief cases.[198] By 1934, those numbers had declined to less than 20 percent: a WPA study found that in 76.4 percent of relief households in Los Angeles were white, while 11.7 percent were African American.[199] The Catholic Welfare Bureau, a Community Chest-funded agency, reported that it diverted at least 50 percent of its budget to Mexican families. In addition, 25 percent of the County General Hospital's budget went to the care of Mexicans, who made up 48 percent of its cases.[200]

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[195] *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 76th Cong.19457 (1940) (testimony of Holmes Bishop, Howard A. Miller, and John Watson); Donald L. Zelman, "Mexican Migrants and Relief in Depression California: Grower Reaction to Public Relief Policies as They Affected Mexican Migration," *Journal of Mexican American History* 5 (1975): 2; Fox, *Three Worlds of Relief,* 189.

[196] *Annual Report, July 1, 1928 to June 30, 1929*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Welfare Department, 1929), 26, box 1, folder 3, Dean Papers.

[197] Department of Charities, *Gross Expenditures and Analysis, July 1, 1928 to June 30, 1929*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Welfare Department, 1929), Table showing percentage of Mexican cases, for fiscal years 1919-20 to 1928-29, inclusive, box 1, folder 3, Dean Papers.

[198] Department of Charities, *Gross Expenditures and Analysis, July 1, 1928 to June 30, 1929*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Welfare Department, 1929), Table showing percentage of Mexican cases, for fiscal years 1919-20 to 1928-29, inclusive, box 1, folder 3, Dean Papers; Zelman, "Mexican Migrants and Relief in Depression California," 2.

[199] Katherine D. Wood, *Urban Workers on Relief, Part 2: The Occupational Characteristics of Workers on Relief in 79 Cities, May 1934,* Works Progress Administration Research Monograph 4 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1937), 5-6.

[200] *Seasonal Agricultural Laborers from Mexico: Hearing Before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization on H.R. 6741, H.R. 7559, H.R. 9036,* 69th Cong. 15 (1926) (statement of John C. Box, Congressman, Texas).

Growers had variable responses to their workers' activities in the off season. A. Ahlf, president of the California Farm Bureau Federation, claimed in 1926 that the farm laborers he dismissed at the close of the crop season were "well enough fixed to live without work throughout the winter."[201] He noted that agricultural workers arrived when the season began and disappeared when it closed. "Where they come from or where they go," he explained, "doesn't interest us."[202] For his part, George Clements observed that because casual labor in California must be fluid and mobile, it "must be fostered and cared for by some organization cooperative or corporate, that will not only be able to supply it to the farms as needed, but to undertake responsibility as to health, sanitation, advantages of education and character upbuilding, religious training and standards of living of the workers."[203]

Perhaps most importantly, since the 1920s, growers in California had "relied heavily on the labor reservoir in Los Angeles."[204] In fact, more Mexican migrants resided in the city during the slack season than anywhere else in California.[205] Devra Weber found that most Mexican migrant workers in fact "came from Southern California and the Mexican communities around Los Angeles and the Imperial Valley."[206] Clements stated that "Los Angeles had always constituted the reservoir of labor from which the state and particularly the southern half of the state drew its labor supply."[207]

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[201] *Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings Before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization on H.R. 6465, H.R. 7358, H.R. 10955, H.R. 11687*, 70th Cong. 155 (1928) (testimony of A. Ahlf, California Farm Bureau Federation).
[202] *Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings Before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization on H.R. 6465, H.R. 7358, H.R. 10955, H.R. 11687*, 70th Cong. 155 (1928) (testimony of A. Ahlf, California Farm Bureau Federation).
[203] George P. Clements, *Notes for Talk," CEL Hearings,* part 53, Open-Shop Activities, 19671.
[204] George P. Clements, "A Brief History of California's Agricultural Labor (speech, Southern California Economic Conference, November 4, 1935), in *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 19674; Zelman, "Mexican Migrants and Relief in Depression California," 7.
[205] Zelman, "Mexican Migrants and Relief in Depression California," 7.
[206] Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold*, 35.
[207] George P. Clements to Arthur G. Arnoll, Internal memo, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, October 8, 1935, *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 19708.

Devra Weber observes that a constant problem "plagued" California agriculturalists: this labor system required both cheap and mobile labor at the ready, but these often conflicting needs produced "an inherent instability in the system."[208] Growers constantly struggled with finding enough workers to harvest their crops mainly because they relied so heavily on a disorganized and fluid system, which was necessary to ensure cheap labor.[209] They contended with outside factors such as local or federal repatriation drives or competition from other agricultural sectors.[210] Labor was often distributed unevenly, with an oversupply in one part of the state and an undersupply in another.[211] As Weber explains, "this uncertainty fueled growers' hysteria over 'labor shortages.'"[212] Rather, for growers, "labor shortages" typically "meant not a lack of labor but a labor pool too small to insure both abysmally low wages and a readily available supply of workers."[213]

When the peak season for crops approached and growers found themselves short on labor, they would often reach out to both public and private relief organizations in the cities – especially Los Angeles. As early as 1929, the Anaheim Citrus Growers' Association sent a letter to the Los Angeles Social Service Commission protesting the "caring for homeless men in Los Angeles when there was a shortage of labor in Anaheim."[214] Upon investigation, however, the Commission found that the proposed wages of six cents per box would not cover the worker's board at $2.25 per day during the work period. In addition, the grower required a payment of $4.35 for the necessary tools to pick oranges, which the men under the Commission's care did

[208] Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold*, 37.
[209] Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold*, 37.
[210] Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold*, 37.
[211] Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold*, 37-38.
[212] Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold*, 38.
[213] Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold*, 38.
[214] Minutes of the Social Welfare Committee, Community Welfare Federation, October 3, 1929, 8, box 1, folder 2, CSA records.

not possess.[215] In the past, when the wage rates were higher, the Commission had sent out men so they could earn some money.[216]

In 1933, Jensen reported that he was approached by "a man representing farm labor" who informed him that "they were faced with a shortage of 10,000 people to harvest the crops" largely due to the relief system.[217] In fact, charity in Los Angeles "had become so popular to a certain group of people that they did not want to work for $20 or $30, or for thirty days, but would rather accept charity and play checkers the rest of the time."[218] He instructed the welfare officials in his department that if a relief applicant rejected a job offer, they were no longer entitled to county aid.[219] Moreover, relief recipients could not expect to turn down job offers at lower wage scales than they had been accustomed to.[220] "If my family were starving," he suggested, "and I am a lawyer by profession, a pick and shovel would look mighty good to me, and I think others should look at the matter in the same way."[221] In October Los Angeles County Supervisors promised local officials in San Joaquin County that they would "supply as many cotton pickers from its welfare rolls" as possible "to relieve the dearth of labor" due to the cotton strike.[222] Jensen "denied any coercion" by the county welfare office in their recruiting tactics.[223]

By 1935, many growers started expanding their acreage and suddenly required more workers.[224] However, by this time, relief was increasingly available to those who needed it.

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[215] Minutes of the Social Welfare Committee, Community Welfare Federation, October 3, 1929, 8, box 1, folder 2, CSA records.
[216] Minutes of the Social Welfare Committee, Community Welfare Federation, October 3, 1929, 8, box 1, folder 2, CSA records.
[217] Jensen Address, in Ford Papers.
[218] Jensen Address, in Ford Papers.
[219] Jensen Address, in Ford Papers.
[220] Jensen Address, in Ford Papers.
[221] Jensen Address, in Ford Papers.
[222] "L.A. County Will Send Workers to Pick Cotton Crop," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), November 3, 1933.
[223] "L.A. County Will Send Workers to Pick Cotton Crop."
[224] Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold*, 127.

Additionally, the state's residency requirements to qualify for relief encouraged more workers to stay put in local areas, which slowed work migration patterns.[225] Thus, the agricultural work pool of skilled Mexican workers had shrunk.[226]

Nevertheless, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce continued to blame relief programs for the shortage of workers. Clements connected the labor shortage of 1933 with "the beginning of relief measures."[227] He lamented that "'with hundreds of thousands of people on the relief rolls…California has experienced the most disastrous labor famine in her history.'"[228] And by 1935, with increasing numbers of people "on a direct dole," he complained that "the natural source of agricultural labor, which ha[d] always been southern California, became sealed up against the farmer."[229] Arthur Clark, also of the Los Angeles Chamber, noted that "the groups of people" who typically performed the migratory labor now had access to relief including a relatively large number of Mexicans in the city of Los Angeles, many of whom were on relief.[230]

The Chamber also targeted the wage scale as designed under the Emergency Relief Act, which they contended effectively concentrated the labor supply in cities such as Los Angeles and depleted the "normal reservoir of casual labor ordinarily available to the agricultural districts."[231] Clements suggested that the WPA program was luring "hordes of workers" from outside counties

[225] Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold*, 128.
[226] Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold*, 128.
[227] George P. Clements, "A Brief History of California's Agricultural Labor (speech, Southern California Economic Conference, November 4, 1935), in *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 76th Cong. 19674 (1940).
[228] Clements, "A Brief History of California's Agricultural Labor," *CEL Hearings*, *part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 19674.
[229] Clements, "A Brief History of California's Agricultural Labor," *CEL Hearings*, *part 53, Open-Shop Activities* 19674.
[230] Balderrama and Rodríguez conservatively estimate that approximately one million Mexicans and Mexican Americans were "repatriated" during the Depression decade. "Repatriated" is in quotation marks because the word implies that the individual was being returned to their homeland, which was not always the case. Balderrama and Rodríguez, *Decade of Betrayal*, 150-151; *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 76th Cong.19531 (1940) (statement of Arthur Clark, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce).
[231] W.J. Braunschweiger, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, to Nels Anderson, Works Progress Administration, September 24 ,1935, in *CEL Hearings, part 63, Supplementary Exhibits*, 22988-22989.

into cities like Los Angeles "in the hopes of a promised wage 55 per cent greater than their earnings within their own domestic territories."[232] One WPA worker observing the situation noted: "'It is a dismal commentary on the wages paid to agricultural workers when the workers indicate that they prefer a stipend placed by authorities as the absolute minimum for normal subsistence to the average wage received in agricultural employment.'"[233] After noting that SERA officials would not permit their clients to accept "any less wage" than the WPA's minimum base wage of $55 per month, Clements suggested that California's relief administration take its cues from the southern states.[234] "The State of Florida and all the Southern States have a wage base of $19 a month for the same class of work," he declared.[235] Clements argued that Mexican migratory laborers, when given the choice, were opting for idleness for an average of $51 per month from SERA rather than work for the farmer for $48 per month.[236] "By the time the new deal [sic] and the more abundant life get through with these Mexicans," another Chamber member observed, "agriculture is not going to get any satisfactory labor supplies from the big cities and the sooner they realize this, the soon they will get command of their own situation."[237]

Although white migrants from Oklahoma and the surrounding states had begun to pour into California, their labor was less desirable for the big growers.[238] A.G. Arnoll, secretary and

[232] George P. Clements to Arthur G. Arnoll, internal memo, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, October 8, 1935, *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 19708.
[233] *Los Angeles Vegetable Workers' Survey* (n.p.: Works Progress Administration, 1936), 56, cited in Zelman, "Mexican Migrants and Relief in Depression California," 7.
[234] Clements, "A Brief History of California's Agricultural Labor," *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 19674.
[235] Clements, "A Brief History of California's Agricultural Labor," *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 19674.
[236] Clements, "A Brief History of California's Agricultural Labor," *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 19674.
[237] Arnoll to George P. Clements, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, internal memo, June 20, 1936, in *CEL Hearings, part 63, Supplementary Exhibits*, 22989.
[238] Policies of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (1933) ultimately favored big growers and helped drive tenants and sharecroppers in the Southeast and Southwest off the land and to join in the westward migration. This

general manager of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce explained: "We do not speak of the laborer coming in from the middle-south and the south-east as migratory labor. We speak of it as transient labor…." For him, white laborers would not pose a permanent solution to the growers' labor problem. In fact, they might cause further problems if they attempted to claim their civil rights. "Is it possible," he asked, "to expect that these people—white Americans who will anticipate American standards of living—to be satisfied with the conditions which the agricultural practices of the state of California impose in labor needs? Are they going to be satisfied with from one hundred to one hundred fifty days of labor in the field as was the Mexican? Will they be adaptable to rough industry and public utility requirements, and if not, who is going to take care of these people? Another thought is, they are American laborers, susceptible to organization, unionization and, under the depressing circumstances which much result through lack of employment during valleys in the agricultural employment field, will they not be the finest pabulum for subversive influence?"[239]

The white migrants, however, posed a problem due to their sheer numbers. In smaller doses, they could be absorbed into the labor supply. But as their in-migration to Southern California intensified, they found little agricultural work available for them. Those who brought their entire families with the goal of improving their conditions in California discovered that any employment they found could "never be expected to give more than a precarious living, much less support the upkeep of the type of locomotion which they are forced to employ."[240] "It is hard

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was exacerbated by the drought and Dust Bowl plaguing the Great Plains and Southwest between 1933 and 1935. Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold*, 11, 117; James N. Gregory, *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3-6; Paul S. Taylor and Tom Vasey, "Drought Refugee and Labor Migration to California, June-December 1935," *Monthly Labor Review* 42, no. 2 (February 1936): 313.

[239] A.G. Arnoll, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, to G.J. Brunske, December 18, 1936, in *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*,19714.

[240] George P. Clements, *A Commentary on California Agricultural Labor*, August 10, 1937, in *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 19679.

to realize how these people can ever expect under these conditions to earn sufficient to take care of their families," Clements observed, "let alone the upkeep of their automobile, and save even sufficient money to take them back to the district from which they came—even if they did want to go back."[241] Previously, during the slack seasons, the Mexican casual laborers would be "absorbed in rough industries in the cities" while the white transient laborers would return to their homes in the Midwestern and Eastern states. However, the Depression and drought drastically changed this practice.[242] The white migrant workers were now more likely to remain in the state and become a public charge.[243]

After pressure from the California farm lobby, the SERA director, Frank McLaughlin, formally agreed to supply labor from the relief rolls.[244] The California Works Progress Association, established in May, 1935, by the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act, followed suit.[245] Both programs established a policy that anyone who refused "to accept work where the wages and working conditions were satisfactory would be immediately dropped from the relief rolls."[246] The SERA assisted in making the "working conditions as favorable as possible" by providing clothing, blankets, kitchen equipment, and even cooks from the transient camps.[247] Some relief workers who had been earning forty-to-fifty cents per hour on construction relief

[241] George P. Clements, *A Commentary on California Agricultural Labor*, August 10, 1937, in *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 19679.
[242] George P. Clements, *A Commentary on California Agricultural Labor*, August 10, 1937, in *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 19679.
[243] George P. Clements, *A Commentary on California Agricultural Labor*, August 10, 1937, in *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 19679..
[244] David Ziskind, *The Suspension of Relief in Agricultural Areas* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Farm Security Administration, 1935), in *CEL, part 3, Supplementary Hearings*, 1001; Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold*, 128.
[245] California Works Progress Administration, "Special for Agricultural Periodicals," November 6, 1935, 1, in Institute of Governmental Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley; Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear.*
[246] CA WPA, "Special for Agricultural Periodicals," 1.
[247] CA WPA, "Special for Agricultural Periodicals," 1.

projects in the city were instead transferred to farms where they received thirty cents per hour.[248] That same month, state relief officials had removed over 2,396 individuals from the relief rolls, and reported a savings of $63,000.[249]

Despite the agreement with SERA officials, by July, 1935, growers had run into continued resistance from local relief officials in Los Angeles.[250] That month representatives from the cotton, citrus, walnut, and vegetable industries, including the California Fruit Growers' Exchange (aka Sunkist) and the Western Growers' Protective Association, hired a "special labor committee" within the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce to deal with "the problem of providing agricultural labor from SERA rolls."[251] One of their key tactics was to wage a publicity campaign in opposition to the relief officials who would not cooperate.[252] By September, they had made "some progress" but "with stubborn resistance still being put up by relief authorities, the committee decided to continue its publicity activity until the end of the year."[253] Arthur Clark from the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce was certain that their "educational publicity" effectively helped "the taxpayers realize the stupidity of keeping people on the dole when private employment was available and changing the attitude of officials charged with the dispensation of relief money."[254] "Until we opened our attack," Clark wrote, the position of the relief officials

[248] David Ziskind, *The Suspension of Relief in Agricultural Areas* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Farm Security Administration, 1935), in *CEL, part 3, Supplementary Hearings*, 1001.
[249] Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold*, 128; David Ziskind, *The Suspension of Relief in Agricultural Areas* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Farm Security Administration, 1935), in *CEL, part 3, Supplementary Hearings*, 1001.
[250] Arthur Clark, to F.J. Palomores, Manager, Agricultural Labor Bureau of the San Joaquin Valley, April 2, 1936, in *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*,19705.
[251] Clark to Palomores, in *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 19705; *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 19530 ((statement of Arthur Clark, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce).
[252] Clark to Palomores, in *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 19705.
[253] Clark to Palomores, in *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 19705.
[254] Clark to Palomores, in *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 19705.

was "'keep as many on relief as possible' and now as you know they are really bending an effort to supply farm labor wants for 1936."[255]

Still, by September, 1935, Harold Pomeroy, assistant director for the Los Angeles County Relief Administration (LACRA), a local branch of SERA, responded to an inquiry from the Farm Placement Service in the San Joaquin Valley and indicated that "it would not be wise" for his agency to send agricultural workers from the relief rolls to that county.[256] LACRA would need to assume responsibility for the welfare of any clients sent out of the county to work and would be liable for their eventual return.[257] Further, given the poor employment conditions in the San Joaquin Valley, a "large scale movement of relief clients into the harvest sections" was not reasonable.[258] He cited a "total lack of housing facilities and other living and sanitary necessities" as the reasons governing this decision.[259] He recommended instead that the Farm Placement Service confer with relief administration officials in San Joaquin Valley who would in turn contact LACRA. Then the agencies could determine if it was "reasonably sound and practical" to send relief clients to harvest crops.[260]

Pomeroy noted the multiple considerations behind an official's decision to release an applicant to work in the fields or to keep them on the relief rolls. "Once a public agency has taken up the responsibility of a family," he explained, it was "a difficult thing" to decide "for that

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[255] Clark to Palomores, in *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 19705.
[256] Harold Pomeroy, Los Angeles County Relief Administration, to W.V. Allen, Farm Placement Service, U.S.E.S., September 21, 1935, in *Violations of Free Speech and Rights of Labor, Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Comm. on Education and Labor Pursuant to S. Res. 266, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 76th Cong.19707 (1940).
[257] Harold Pomeroy, Los Angeles County Relief Administration, to W.V. Allen, Farm Placement Service, U.S.E.S., September 21, 1935, in *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*19707.
[258] Pomeroy to Allen, in *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 19707.
[259] Pomeroy to Allen, in *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 19707.
[260] Harold Pomeroy had served as administrator for the State Relief Administration until he resigned in December, 1938, to work as the Executive Secretary of the Associated Farmers of California. Pomeroy to Allen, in *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 19707; Robert E. Burke, *Olson's New Deal for California* (Berkeley, University of California Press: 1953), 79.

family whether it should travel some several hundred miles for a job."[261] Typically, "work that was available over an extended period of time in any agricultural operation was generally known to provide at least as much as the relief budget," and was presumably sufficient to sustain the family.[262] However, due to weather and other circumstances, agricultural work was often intermittent and the worker would only gain a few days' pay.[263] Given that so many relief recipients applied to relief programs to supplement their earnings from exactly this type of precarious employment, Pomeroy stated, "the relief agency found it very difficult to make fair and impartial decisions."[264]

Pomeroy also asserted that due to the lack of appropriate housing facilities in many of the farm communities, migrant laborers were often required to provide their own camping supplies and cooking utensils.[265] Relief officials faced the problem of potentially sending non-migrant families, who lacked those supplies, to the agricultural fields, and could not in good conscience attempt to send a large number of unequipped individuals and families away from their homes.[266] He noted that in very specific cases LACRA officials would sent relief clients to work as agricultural laborers, but only "when it was a reasonable thing to do."[267]

On October 5, 1935, the Chamber's Agricultural Subcommittee met with representatives from the Los Angeles County Farm Bureau and the State Chamber of Commerce. The

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[261] *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 19533-19534 (statement of Harold E. Pomeroy, Executive Secretary, Associated Farmers of California, Inc.).
[262] *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 19533-19534 (statement of Harold E. Pomeroy, Executive Secretary, Associated Farmers of California, Inc.).
[263] *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 19533-19534 (statement of Harold E. Pomeroy, Executive Secretary, Associated Farmers of California, Inc.).
[264] *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 19533-19534 (statement of Harold E. Pomeroy, Executive Secretary, Associated Farmers of California, Inc.).
[265] *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 19533-19534 (statement of Harold E. Pomeroy, Executive Secretary, Associated Farmers of California, Inc.).
[266] *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 19533-19534 (statement of Harold E. Pomeroy, Executive Secretary, Associated Farmers of California, Inc.).
[267] *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 19533-19534 (statement of Harold E. Pomeroy, Executive Secretary, Associated Farmers of California, Inc.).

Subcommittee produced evidence for Colonel Jerome Sears, the California State National Emergency Council Director that Harold Pomeroy had refused to cut agricultural workers from the relief rolls and send them to work in the San Fernando Valley and the Whittier District.[268] Clements noted that Roy W. Pilling, the director of the state Civil Works Service, a division of FERA, "had agreed to liberate all agriculture workers and fully cooperate not only with Los Angeles County agricultural labor requirements but those of adjoining counties."[269] The following day the LACRA agreed to release agricultural workers from their relief rolls.[270] After his meeting with Sears, Clements expressed his belief that they had effectively "blasted this labor off of the relief rolls."[271] He also hinted that certain administrators at the SERA might lose their jobs.[272]

Relief applicants found ways to evade the system. Some avoided being removed from the relief rolls by registering as non-agricultural workers.[273] Clements complained of "false registration" in which relief applicants categorized themselves as "roustabout labor in rough industry," which he claimed essentially constituted "casual labor in agriculture."[274] Others who were sent to work in agricultural jobs simply did not show up. Due to a lack of coordination, relief officials never quite knew if a worker actually followed through on a job.[275] In 1935, a

[268] George P. Clements to Arthur G. Arnoll, Internal memo, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, October 8, 1935, *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 19708; Lester, "Building the New Deal State on the Local Level," 378.
[269] Clements to Arnoll, *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*,19708.
[270] Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold*, 130.
[271] Clements to Arnoll, *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*,19708.
[272] Clements to Arnoll, *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*,19708.
[273] Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold*, 128.
[274] George P. Clements, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, to Nels Anderson, Works Progress Administration, n.d. (letter written but not sent), in *CEL Hearings, part 63, Supplementary Exhibits*, 22989.
[275] Minutes, Labor Committee, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, October 5, 1935, in *CEL Hearings, part 63, Supplementary Exhibits*, 22991.

representative from the State Employment Bureau noted that 500 workers had been released from the relief rolls for farm work but only 75 had reported to the employers.[276]

Rather than preserving the male breadwinner-female dependent model promoted by New Deal policies, the practice of removing people from relief rolls to work in the fields occasionally brought more hardship to families. Social workers at private agencies expressed concern about LACRA's practice of sending entire families including children to work in the fields in "intolerable conditions" and send children to segregated schools for agricultural workers' children.[277] They questioned if it was appropriate to ask heads of families to seek employment outside of Los Angeles County and whether or not children should be compelled to live in agricultural camps under such conditions. [278] By 1937, many families who had been removed from LACRA's relief rolls were applying to private agencies, such as the Catholic Welfare Bureau, as well as the federal Bureau of Indigent Relief. [279] In some cases, families sought assistance because they had not received money from the family heads who had been "forced to accept work in the cotton fields."[280] It was possible that the husband had not received sufficient payment from the grower to remit back home, but in some cases the families had been deserted.[281] Some families had refused to take on field work because it would mean too much disruption in their lives -- giving up their home and removing their children from school.[282] Others turned down agricultural work because of illness or because they worried they would not

[276] Minutes, Labor Committee, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, October 5, 1935, in *CEL Hearings, part 63, Supplementary Exhibits*, 22991.
[277] Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Council of Social Agencies, December 16, 1937, 6, box 2, folder 4, CSA records.
[278] Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Council of Social Agencies, December 16, 1937, 6.
[279] Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Council of Social Agencies, December 16, 1937, 7-8.
[280] Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Council of Social Agencies, December 16, 1937, 7-8.
[281] Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Council of Social Agencies, December 16, 1937, 7-8.
[282] Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Council of Social Agencies, December 16, 1937, 7-8.

be able to find a place to live upon return to the city.[283] As one SRA social worker recalled, "So many times they have valid reasons for refusing to work—reasons the general public cannot be aware of. It gives so many people a totally wrong impression about those who request and need assistance."[284]

Unemployed organizations pushed back more openly. The RWPU seemed to have disappeared by the end of 1934 and a new organization emerged – the Public Works and Unemployed Union (PWUU).[285] In 1936, a grievance committee from the PWUU entered the LACRA offices in downtown Los Angeles where they "fought for two hours" with officials regarding Mexican agricultural workers who had been released from the rolls.[286] The workers had been sent to work in the beet fields north of the city where they earned between "70 cents to $1 per day" and were compelled to pay 75 cents per day for board, which consisted of bread, meat, and coffee.[287] The grower neglected to provide adequate housing, and many of the men slept outside in their cars.[288] Several of the workers could not earn enough money to send to their families, and some ended up in debt due to the cost of board.[289] While some workers simply abandoned the job, others were "afraid of being arrested" if they tried to leave.[290]

Attempting to leverage the voting power of the unemployed, in June, members of the PWUU and the American-Spanish Association and Coordinated Committee stood up at a Board

[283] Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Council of Social Agencies, December 16, 1937, 7-8.
[284] Catherine Sullivan, "California Odyssey: The 1930s Migration to the Southern San Joaquin Valley," interview by Judith Gannon, February 27, 1981, California State College, Bakersfield, 3.
[285] See table of contents in Reimer and Elliott, *Struggle for Life in Los Angeles County*.
[286] "Relief Clients Forced to Slave by LACRA Bosses," *Unemployed Leader*, July, 1936 in box 43, folder 5, Reuben W. Borough Papers (Collection 927), UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA (hereafter Borough Papers).
[287] "Relief Clients Forced to Slave by LACRA Bosses," *Unemployed Leader*, July, 1936 in Reuben W. Borough Papers (Collection 927), in box 43, folder 5, Borough Papers; "Beet Workers Slave 9 Hours for 70s Cents," *Unemployed Leader*, July, 1936, in box 43, folder 5, Borough Papers.
[288] "Relief Clients Forced to Slave by LACRA Bosses"; "Beet Workers Slave 9 Hours for 70s Cents."
[289] "Beet Workers Slave 9 Hours for 70s Cents."
[290] "Beet Workers Slave 9 Hours for 70s Cents."

of Supervisors' meeting to protest LACRA's actions. While LACRA was a state agency, and the county board had no jurisdiction, the groups' tactics revolved around reminding the supervisors that since they were "running for office," they "should be much interested."[291] The PWUU's representative, Pat Callahan, complained – among other things – that LACRA was sending relief workers to pick apricots in the San Fernando Valley, where they earned up to 63 cents per day while many paid 25 cents for car fare. "This," he declared, "is absolutely forced labor."[292] For Callahan and the PWUU, relief workers were faced with a choice of taking undesirable labor at below-subsistence wages or being cut off relief entirely.[293] Supervisor John Anson Ford, a New Deal Democrat, noted that "a very vigorous minority" appeared to be abusing the unemployment situation to "force wages down to the lowest possible level."[294] He also accused the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and Harry Chandler, publisher of the Los Angeles Times, of "making a drive against the unemployed to force them into the agricultural fields…."[295] "The Board of Supervisors," he declared, "must be aware of what is going on."[296]

The administration of unemployment relief shifted from county to partial state control by mid-decade, and when the Chamber of Commerce representatives realized that they wielded less political influence at the state level, they began to push for the return of administrative control to the counties.[297] In an internal memo, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce staff suggested that "if the farmer controls his politics in his agricultural counties, and he can if he wants to, then he

[291] "Hog Deal Rocks City: Supervisors Hear Story of Slavery on State Ranch," *Unemployed Leader*, July, 1936, in box 43, folder 5, Borough Papers.
[292] "Hog Deal Rocks City."
[293] "Hog Deal Rocks City."
[294] Sitton, "Urban Politics and Reform in New Deal Los Angeles," 107; "Hog Deal Rocks City: Supervisors Hear Story of Slavery on State Ranch," *Unemployed Leader*, July, 1936, in folder 5, box 43, Borough Papers.
[295] "Hog Deal Rocks City."
[296] "Hog Deal Rocks City."
[297] *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 19545 (statement of Robert La Follette, Chairman, Subcommittee on Senate Resolution 266).

should arrange to have the difference in labor between his mean and middle peak employed part of the time by his County Government in proper projects and released to him during his peak crop seasons."[298]

CONCLUSION

The early years of the New Deal were marked by a tension between the demands of organized relief recipients who insisted on their human rights to not go hungry and receive a fair relief wage and local employers who sought to manipulate county and state welfare programs in order to control the local labor supply. Many of the unemployed and underemployed would also turn to other forms of organization to solve the vexing problem of hunger and want. These organizations would eventually add an additional threat to local elite business leaders who would continue in their attempts to assert control over New Deal and local relief agencies to protect their own interests.

[298] Arthur G. Arnoll to George P. Clements, Internal memo, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, April 9, 1937, in *CEL Hearings, part 53, Open-Shop Activities*, 19526.

CHAPTER 3

"A Person Couldn't Have His Malnutrition in a Nicer Place Than Los Angeles": Household Economies, Survival, and the Self-Help Cooperative Movement

"But carrots, carrots, carrots,
Are nine-tenths of all you eat,
Your 'inners' got to hank'rin'
For a good old chunk of meat.
So I can't refrain from lifting
This prayer to God on high,
Grant me one more leg of chicken
On my plate before I die."

-Popular poem recited at self-help cooperatives in Los Angeles ca. Fall, 1932.[1]

"Hoover gave the signal,
Mellon rang the bell,
Wall Street blew the whistle,
And the country went to hell."

-Recited by a five-year-old girl living in a Bonus Encampment self-help cooperative along the outskirts of Los Angeles, March, 1933.[2]

One evening in early 1933, a journalist and progressive reformer, Reuben Borough, visited the Unemployed Relief Association (URA), a self-help cooperative that had set up headquarters in an abandoned auto body shop in Long Beach. In this "drab" warehouse, he found the unit's leader, G.C. Todd, a one-armed former railroad worker, standing amid crates overspilling with onions, cauliflower, carrots, and potatoes along with barrels of sauerkraut, quarts of apple-butter, and bottles of ketchup prepared by the male members of the association and their wives. The small kitchen was filled with "queer-looking vats and tubs, impromptu canning accessories" and a hodgepodge of dishes. Organized on June 30, 1932, over the course

[1] Clark Kerr, "Productive Enterprises of the Unemployed, 1931-1938" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1939), 111.
[2] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 202.

of seven months the URA had managed to distribute over $6,331 worth of food to 1,585 members and their families. Todd gestured toward a bulletin board strewn with hundreds of order slips tracking the day's food issues to families. "'They may come in crying,'" he joked, "'but they go away laughing! The hungry are fed.'"[3]

Six-to-eight families were applying to the cooperative for assistance daily, and the URA harnessed the resources of the community to aid them. Local canneries donated surplus food products and women auxiliary workers repaired old clothing while ice companies provided refrigeration space. Association members stocked the woodyard by scavenging nearby oil fields and cutting up old derricks knocked over by the wind. Already in possession of a truck, which they had purchased for $150, the group was now working towards acquiring a 40-foot fishing boat. If successful, they planned to trade their surplus catch with other self-help groups throughout the county. The main problem they faced? "We can't operate without some cash," explained Todd, which they acquired through monthly member fees and by staging vaudeville shows – occasionally promising that Hollywood's "best movie stars" might appear. Working equipment was rare but also essential to success. At the time of Borough's visit, the group had exactly $1.30 in the bank.[4]

The URA emerged as households joined forces to combat hunger and want in the face of widespread unemployment. Implementing subsistence strategies and an ethos of both self-reliance and cooperation, households in Los Angeles County established exchange networks and productive enterprises outside of an economic system that no longer – or rarely had – offered them consistent and viable roles as productive citizens. "Our age is strangely contradictory,"

[3] News clipping, February 11, 1933, box 54, folder 1, Reuben W. Borough papers (Collection 927), UCLA Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA (hereafter Borough papers).
[4] News clipping, Borough papers.

Borough remarked of the politics that inspired such efforts, "We are going both individualist and socialist at the same time in our effort to get away from a disintegrating economic order."[5] However, most households turned to self-help cooperatives not so much to challenge existing power structures and the market economy, but rather as an immediate solution to the pressing problem of hunger. In fact, cooperatives typically centered their critique of the economic crisis around the problem of surplus – surplus labor and surplus commodities. In the fertile land of Los Angeles County, where, according to the Chamber of Commerce, "vegetation of all kinds" grew "with wonderful rapidity," the contrast between agricultural abundance and food insecurity was striking.[6]

Working-class Angelenos had long struggled to survive in a maturing capitalist economy, in a city that had declared war on organized labor, during a time when the welfare state at the federal level was weak and largely ineffective, and when local relief programs were inefficient and underfunded.[7] For decades, Los Angeles boosters had summoned an army of labor to the region through nationwide advertising campaigns resulting in a large population with few-to-no-attachments to kin or land.[8] As workers' households began to feel the effects of the economic collapse, they turned to subsistence practices, as they always had during times of unemployment, underemployment, and to supplement low wages. Employers, in turn, practiced a long tradition of relying on the worker's household to provide relief and continue the reproduction of labor

[5] Reuben Borough to Elwood Mead, Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, March 28, 1933, box 9, folder 10, Borough papers.
[6] Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, *Los Angeles Today* (Los Angeles: Neuner Corporation, 1923), 7.
[7] Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*, 10; Louis B. Perry and Richard S. Perry, *A History of the Los Angeles Labor Movement, 1911-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 5.
[8] Mike Davis, "Sunshine and the Open Shop: Ford and Darwin in 1920s Los Angeles," in *Metropolis in the Making: Los Angeles in the 1920s*, ed. Tom Sitton and William Deverell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 111; Perry and Perry, *History of the Los Angeles Labor Movement*, 124.

until it was needed again.[9] Subsistence activities, however, have long existed in relationship with modes of exchange.[10] As Los Angeles households translated their unwaged labor into income through strategies of makeshift, they relied on informal as well as organized exchanges to supplement their incomes. This process developed into the self-help cooperative movement.

Although the self-help movement in the era of the Great Depression likely originated in Seattle in 1931 and spread nationwide, the largest concentration of cooperatives formed in Los Angeles County.[11] As New Deal administrators developed policies and programs at the national level, the precariously situated at the local level could not afford to wait. Spurred by hunger and aghast at the vast surplus of produce and commodities all around them, Los Angeles residents embarked on a series of cooperative experiments and projects – some more politically tinged than others –exploring the limits and possibilities of potential solutions to economic crisis.

For their part, the conservative local elite promoted self-help efforts as an ideal alternative to the New Deal conceit of a strong and benevolent government funding a safety net for its citizens. They urged a focus on "temporary survival" rather than long-term social restructuring.[12] Cooperative self-help also offered a means of distinguishing between the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor, just as the work test had allegedly done. Moreover, self-help cooperatives offered another means by which unwaged labor sustained working-class households, the value of which accrued to employers who could in turn pay lower wages or avoid tax increases meant to fund county relief programs. In turn, many relief administrators at

[9] See for example Jeanne Boydston, "To Earn Her Daily Bread: Housework and Antebellum Working-Class Subsistence," *Radical History Review* 35 (1986): 7-25.
[10] James Murton, Dean Bavington, and Carly Dokis, "Introduction: Why Subsistence?," in *Subsistence Under Capitalism: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. James Murton, Dean Bavington, and Carly Dokis (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016), 6.
[11] William H. Mullins, The *Depression and the Urban West Coast, 1929-1933: Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, and Portland* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 99.
[12] Laura Renata Martin, "'California's Unemployed Feed Themselves': Conservative Intervention in the Los Angeles Cooperative Movement, 1931-1934 *Pacific Historical Review* 82, no. 1 (February 2013): 50.

the local, state, and federal levels viewed the cooperatives as a great experiment that lowered relief costs, helped the unemployed avoid the dreaded "dole," and offered a community-based solution for those who might never again be reabsorbed into the private economy. When the self-help movement turned down a seemingly more radical path of production-for-use in order to provide labor for surplus workers and potentially wielded the force of New Deal backing behind it, conservative leaders, fearful of competition and socialist implications, pushed back and managed to quash the formalization and expansion of production-for-use programs. The views of the cooperative members themselves defied easy categorization and were often seemingly contradictory. Ultimately, through their actions as well as their words, they claimed that given the real possibility that unemployment would persist indefinitely, this new permanent class of the unemployed was entitled to a means of livelihood.

Studies of Depression-era Los Angeles have often treated the self-help cooperative movement as simply one among scores of political fads such as the Utopian and Technocracy movements.[13] However, more recently, scholars have noted the significant role it played in the New Deal apparatus at the local level.[14] Laura Renata Martin finds that conservative elites intervened in the California self-help movement during its early stages in an attempt to shift its focus entirely toward anti-communism, self-sufficiency, and nativism and away from seeking state support.[15] Meanwhile, Thomas Dorrance argues that the cooperatives offered a vision of

[13] See for example McWilliams, *Southern California,* 301-303 and Leonard Leader, *Los Angeles and the Great Depression*, 111-120.
[14] Thomas F. Dorrance, "A New Deal Every Day: Civic Authority and Federal Policy in Chicago and Los Angeles, 1930-1940" (PhD diss., University of Illinois, Chicago, 2014), 72-108; Errol Wayne Stevens, *In Pursuit of Utopia: Los Angeles in the Great Depression* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2021), 54-72; Richard David Lester, "Building the New Deal State on the Local Level: Unemployment Relief in Los Angeles County During the 1930s" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2001).
[15] Martin, "'California's Unemployed Feed Themselves,'" 33.

welfare that prioritized labor over consumption as a means of maintaining social stability.[16] Lastly, Loren Gatch suggests that the federal and state relief policies ultimately hampered the self-help movement by forcing it to conform to dominant policy norms.[17] This chapter seeks to build on these studies by examining the material experiences and subsistence practices of households as they coped with economic crisis. The self-help movement emerged from organized household subsistence activities and the local conservative elite were initially supportive of placing the burden of unemployment directly on the unemployed themselves. However, when the movement turned to production-for-use as a potential solution for long-term unemployment and New Deal relief officials considered investing in a broader program, conservatives sought to block its progress. Throughout this process, while cooperative members did not consistently display a shared class consciousness, many insisted on their inherent right to work for a living, and moved with deliberate action to establish an alternate economy where they could do so should the market economy continue to exclude them.

HOUSEHOLDS AND STRATEGIES OF SURVIVAL

In many ways, the difficulties wrought by the Depression simply marked continuity for working-class families, who had contended with unemployment, underemployment, and low wages with regularity in the previous decades and struggled to make ends meet.[18] This "old poverty," as historian James Patterson terms it, persisted perennially among long-suffering groups: the "unemployables," including the aged, the infirm, the disabled, and children in single-mother-headed households; minority groups; seasonal and low-wage workers, small farmers and

[16] Thomas Dorrance, "Individualist and Socialist at the Same Time": Welfare Policy in Los Angeles During the Great Depression" (lecture, Policy History Conference, Columbus, OH, 2014), 9.
[17] Loren Gatch, "Self-Help Cooperatives and the Failure of Decentralism During the Great Depression" (conference paper, American Political Science Association, n.d.), 1.
[18] Susan Porter Benson, *Household Accounts: Working-Class Family Economies in the Interwar United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 6, 8.

sharecroppers, and displaced workers.[19] The California State Commission on Unemployment found in 1932 that not only did wage workers "fail to share" in post-World War I prosperity, but in fact saw a decrease in real annual earnings in manufacturing establishments.[20] In 1928, the Department of Charities reported that a significant majority of cases analyzed – 73 percent – included problems of unemployment, underemployment, and low wages.[21] A nationwide study found that 14 percent of those receiving federal relief in 1934 had lost their last steady job prior to 1929; in Los Angeles that number was 18.4 percent.[22] The same study found that 5.2 percent of families on federal relief had no employable members whatsoever.[23] As Patterson observes, when Roosevelt described "one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished," his was a conservative statistic even by contemporary standards. In reality closer to 40 or 50 percent of Americans lived in poverty.[24] "The administration of relief and the researches we have made into standards of living of the American family," Harry Hopkins wrote, "have uncovered a volume of

[19] James T. Patterson, *America's Struggle Against Poverty in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 38.
[20] Bloch, *Report and Recommendations*, 35.
[21] Calculations are mine. R.R. Miller, *Annual Report, Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1928* (Los Angeles: Department of Charities, Los Angeles County, 1928), box 1, folder 2, Jessie E. Dean Papers, Collection no. 0410, California Social Welfare Archives, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California (hereafter Dean Papers); Patterson, *America's Struggle Against Poverty*, 41.
[22] Gladys L. Palmer and Katherine D. Wood, *Urban Workers on Relief, Part 1: The Occupational Characteristics of Workers on Relief in Urban Areas, May 1934*, Works Progress Administration Research Monograph 4 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1936), 52; Katherine D. Wood, *Urban Workers on Relief, Part 2: The Occupational Characteristics of Workers on Relief in 79 Cities, May 1934*, Works Progress Administration Research Monograph 4 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1936), 280.
[23] The author of the study defined as "employable" those individuals between 16-64 years of age who were either working or seeking employment. "Employability" was a contested term as its definition often hinged on the agenda and budget of the agency. Some even observed that Franklin D. Roosevelt himself would be considered "unemployable" by some standards due to his "partial paralysis." Wood, *Urban Workers on Relief, Part 2*, 11, 15; *Outline of Rehabilitation Principles and Program for Submission to Special Committee of Five on Rehabilitation* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Department of Rehabilitation, 1936), 1, box 47, folder 6, Borough papers.
[24] Franklin D. Roosevelt, Second Inaugural Address, January 20, 1937, in *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt: 1937 Volume: The Constitution Prevails*, ed. Samuel I. Rosenman (New York: MacMillan Company, 1941), 4; Patterson, *America's Struggle Against*, 38.

chronic poverty, unsuspected except by a few students and by those who have always experienced it."[25]

The stock market crash in 1929 thus compounded the ongoing problem of poverty. Los Angeles reached an unemployment rate of almost 30 percent by 1932.[26] Meanwhile, the largest concentration of the state's unemployed population -- 49.2 percent –resided in Los Angeles County.[27] Under California state law, counties bore legal responsibility for assisting the so-called unemployable residents – the elderly, the infirm, and orphans, while private agencies provided an alternative to public relief.[28]

However, both private and public local relief agencies found themselves unprepared and lacking sufficient resources to meet the rapidly escalating fallout of the economic crisis and especially the massive influx of the able-bodied unemployed.[29] In Los Angeles, the Community Chest solicited donations on behalf of scores of private agencies including the Catholic Welfare Bureau, the Jewish Social Service Bureau, and the Salvation Army.[30] However, starting in 1931, the Chest saw a significant decline in donations and by 1932-1933 cut allotments to all of its

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[25] Harry L. Hopkins, *Spending to Save: The Complete Story of Relief* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1936), 111.
[26] Mullins, *Depression and the Urban West Coast*, 92.
[27] The county with the next highest percentage of the state's unemployed was San Francisco, with 12.3 percent. Bloch, *Report and Recommendations,* 39, 192; Mullins, *Depression and the Urban West Coast*, 91-92.
[28] 1931 Cal. Stat. 110, at 146; Errol Wayne Stevens, *In Pursuit of Utopia: Los Angeles in the Great Depression* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2021), 33-34; Mullins, *Depression and the Urban West Coast,* 44.
[29] Mullins, *Depression and the Urban West Coast,* 44.
[30] Members of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce (LACC) had established a chapter of the Community Chest in 1924 to centralize charitable giving and reduce the number of solicitations made directly to the local business elite by spreading donations across the broader community. *Relief Given to Cases in Family Welfare and Relief Agencies in the Los Angeles Community Welfare Federation during June, 1934* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Community Welfare Federation, 1934), 4-5, box 42, folder 7, Family Service of Los Angeles records, Collection no. 0400, California Social Welfare Archives, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California (hereafter FSLA records); Stevens, *In Pursuit of Utopia,* 34-36; Mullins, *Depression and the Urban West Coast,* 44; Frances Lomas Feldman, "Human Services in the City of Angels: Part II: 1920-1960s," *Southern California Quarterly* 85, no. 3 (Fall 2003), 309; C.A. Lyman, *Speech*, Minutes of the Executive Committee of Council of Social Agencies, January 22, 1931, 1-2, box 1, folder 6, Council of Social Agencies of Los Angeles records, Collection no. 0480, California Social Welfare Archives, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California (hereafter CSA records).

agencies by ten percent.[31] Private agencies simply could not raise enough funds to keep up with the rapid rise in applicants.[32]

Meanwhile, local government agencies such as the Los Angeles County Department of Charities, which, despite widespread belief to the contrary, typically cared for approximately 70-to-74 percent of all relief cases, proved disorganized and ineffective in providing assistance.[33] In 1932, 34,000 families applied for aid from the County Department of Charities – a one-hundred percent increase since the previous year. Meanwhile, in a year's time, the Department's funds had decreased from a budget of over $5 million to $3.2 million.[34] By May, 1934, 14.5 percent of the city of Los Angeles's total population was on relief, while, by April, 1935, the Department of Charities had received the largest number of relief applications in its history.[35]

Given the severity of the economic crisis and the dire lack of charitable aid, how did the newly unemployed and the chronically underemployed survive? Even as local business forces used every tool at their disposal to ensure an open-shop city with a weakened labor movement in which workers were compelled to function as individual units of labor, survival hinged upon

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[31] Leonard Leader, *Los Angeles and the Great Depression*, 33-34; Stevens, *In Pursuit of Utopia*, 44; *Your Community Chest, 1932-33* (Los Angeles: Community Chest of Los Angeles, 1933), 4, Community Chest and Welfare Federation of Los Angeles Area records, Collection no. 0461, California Social Welfare Archives, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California.
[32] Mullins, *Depression and the Urban West Coast,* 44; Leader, *Los Angeles and the Great Depression*, 33-34; Louis Bloch, *Abstract of Hearings on Unemployment Before the California State Unemployment Commission, April and May, 1932* (San Francisco: California State Unemployment Commission, 1932), 18.
[33] Joanna Colcord, "The Challenge of the Continuing Depression," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 176 (November 1934): 18; Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 82, 88; Jeff Singleton, *The American Dole: Unemployment Relief and the Welfare State in the Great Depression* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 73-74; Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 58.
[34] Louis Bloch, *Abstract of Hearings on Unemployment Before the California State Unemployment Commission, April and May, 1932* (San Francisco: California State Unemployment Commission, 1932), 17.
[35] Wood, *Urban Workers on Relief, Part 2*, 3; Tom Sitton, *The Courthouse Crowd: Los Angeles County and Its Government, 1850-1950* (Los Angeles: Historical Society of Southern California, 2013), 195.

collective efforts.[36] This generally took the form of households, but often spread into neighborhoods, private and public organizations, and other economic enterprises.

Households consisted of a group of relatives who lived together and pooled their resources with the objective of survival.[37] These mixed-family economies relied on wages earned both inside and outside the home as well "cash-replacement activities" or makeshifts – complex arrays of strategies to slow the process of pauperization.[38] "Economies of makeshift" or "cultures of expediency" included, as historians such as Seth Rockman explain, activities such as scavenging, begging, sharing, cooperating, hustling, budgeting, entrepreneurship, and restricting consumption practices.[39] Households thus found creative ways to make do and stretch their budgets from week to week, day to day, meal to meal. "The game of makeshifts is very much like chess," one contemporary observer noted, "The better the defensive, the slower the game."[40] Staving off poverty and hunger required full-time labor. Survival hinged on a family's ability to economize, to decide when to stay and when to pick up and move in search of employment, to manage all resources carefully and to seek new ones constantly, and to be flexible in their living

[36] Errol Wayne Stevens, *Radical L.A.: From Coxey's Army to the Watts Riots, 1894-1965* (Norman, Ok: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 40.
[37] Steven Stoll, "The Captured Garden: The Political Ecology of Subsistence Under Capitalism," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 85 (Spring 2014): 77.
[38] Benson, *Household Accounts*, 18. Historians have long reconceptualized "labor" – and, accordingly, "labor history" – to encompass not just exchanging one's labor power for wages at a workplace, but also the unwaged labor that occurs within household economies. See for example Dana Frank, *Purchasing Power: Consumer Organizing, Gender, and the Seattle Labor Movement, 1919-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 6; Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Elizabeth Faue, *Community of Suffering and Struggle: Women, Men, and the Labor Movement in Minneapolis, 1915-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).
[39] Olwen H. Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France, 1750-1789* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 69-127; Rachel G. Fuchs, *Gender and Poverty in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 14-16; Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 158. On makeshift economies, see also Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 41-62, 191-216; Benson, *Household Accounts*; Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender, and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
[40] Clinch Calkins, *Some Folks Won't Work* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1930), 97-98.

arrangements. Hard work and self-reliance – two key virtues of capitalist culture – were essential.

Working-class households functioned as units of economic production and the viability of a household hinged on a gendered division of labor. Before New Deal legislation affirmed the male breadwinner status by attaching social benefits and tax incentives to wage work, local and state laws already reinforced this household model.[41] Women relied on men's wages for survival because they could rarely earn enough cash on their own. By the close of the 1920s, women's wages averaged about 57 percent of men's.[42] Moreover, California settlement laws declared that a wife's legal residence was that of her husband's, even after divorce, separation, or his death, and, accordingly, she would not be eligible for county aid unless she had lived in the state independently for three years.[43] Additionally, throughout the Depression years, women's presence in the workforce was stigmatized due to the perception that they were taking jobs rightly owed to male breadwinners and that their retreat from the labor force would help solve the economic crisis.[44] The inevitable vocation for married women remained that of unpaid housekeeping, which working men required to translate their cash wages into subsistence.[45]

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[41] Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 4; Cornelia H. Dayton and Lisa Levenstein, "The Big Tent of U.S. Women's and Gender History: A State of the Field," *Journal of American History* 99, no. 3 (December 2012): 812. For a discussion on the male breadwinner/female dependent model, see also Michael Willrich, "Home Slackers: Men, the State, and Welfare in Modern America," *Journal of American History* 87, no. 2 (September 2000): 460-489 and Anna R. Igra, *Wives Without Husbands: Marriage, Desertion, and Welfare in New York, 1900-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

[42] Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 230.

[43] 1933 Cal. Stat. ch. 761, at 2008; Harry M. Hirsch, *Our Settlement Laws: Their Origins, Their Lack of Uniformity, Proposed Measures of Reform, Bulletin No. 1* (New York: State of New York, Department of Social Welfare, 1933), 20.

[44] Nancy Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 173.

[45] Cott, *Public Vows*, 167; Boydston, "To Earn Her Daily Bread," 7-25.

What did households need to survive? One cost-of-living study in 1935 found that in Los Angeles the monthly maintenance level for a four-person manual laborer's household was $109.01 ($1,308.11 per year and $25.16 per week). The investigator determined the emergency level for the same family to be $77.99 per month ($935.85 per year and $18.00 per week).[46]

Many earned an income that fell far below the amount authorities deemed necessary for bare subsistence. In 1931, the average wage level in Los Angeles was $1,285 and it dropped to $995 by 1933.[47] Immigrants often felt this struggle even more profoundly. Mexican immigrant Miguel Venegas found that when sales were slow at his small *groceria* in Bunker Hill he and his growing family of five were forced to survive on a "couple dollars profit per day."[48] And Carlos Munatones remembered his step-father bringing home between fifty cents and a dollar a day to provide for their family of eight, which proved unsustainable.[49] One study of working-class families in Los Angeles found that they spent an average of more than one-third of their incomes on food.[50] Even with California's abundance of fruit and vegetables, many working families spent minimal amounts on produce except for potatoes – likely because they were more filling.[51]

Relief payments rarely provided sufficient income for recipients.[52] Allowances – especially before federal intervention – were often set to bare subsistence levels to discourage

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[46] The "maintenance level" budget represented the average minimum requirements for physical needs while also considering psychological needs, including "simple leisure time activities" such as seeing a film once per week. The "emergency level" budget was intended for depression conditions and allowed mostly – but not solely – on material needs. Margaret Loomis Stecker, *Intercity Differences in Costs of Living in March 1935, 59 Cities*, Research Monograph 12 (Washington D.C.: Works Progress Administration, 1937), xii-xiii, 5.

[47] Table Showing Relationships Between Industrial Factors, in Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Oakland, 1921-1933, box 31, folder 6a2, Ford papers (hereafter Ford papers).

[48] Miguel Venegas to Francisco Venegas, August 23, 1928, in *Letters Home: Mexican Exile Correspondence from Los Angeles, 1927-1932,* trans. and ed. María Teresa Venegas (self pub., 2012), 51.

[49] Carlos Munatones, "Mexican American Community History Project," interview by Christine H. Valenciana, March 6, 1972, Oral History Program, California State University, Fullerton, 14.

[50] Greta Gray and Violet Wolfe, "Food Expenditures of Seven Industrial Families in Los Angeles," *Social Science* 8, no. 1 (January 1933): 34.

[51] Gray and Wolfe, "Food Expenditures," 35.

[52] Those in need of relief were assisted on a "budget basis" according to the number of individuals in their family. Private and public welfare agencies followed different guidelines regarding standards of relief. Relief officials in

applications and to encourage recipients to seek private employment. In 1933, California ranked nineteenth in relief spending among the states, with its average relief budgets typically below the national average.[53] The State Emergency Relief Administration's (SERA, later SRA) median monthly budget for a family of four in 1933 was between $50 and $59, while the same family applying for relief from the County Department of Charities might receive $20-29, both well below even the emergency subsistence level.[54] Those on county work relief earned 40 cents an hour until they reached assigned relief budgets, while single women on relief often received $9.23 per month.[55] A social worker observed that the county relied on "no real basis" for its budget "except a desire to cut the relief bills of the Department of Charities as much as possible."[56] One unemployed contractor estimated a much higher budget for his family of six – between $250 and $300 per month. "But now they figure you can get by on $12 a week or less," he protested, "What about clothes, doctor and dentist bills, all sorts of things you can't figure on?"[57]

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both the public and private fields tended to adjust the standard budget depending on available funds and cost of living fluctuations. *Social Service as Administered by Public and Private Agencies* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Welfare Federation, 1935), 44, box 1, folder 9, Community Chest and Welfare Federation of Los Angeles Area records, Collection no. 0461, California Social Welfare Archives, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California.

[53] Lester, "Building the New Deal State on the Local Level," 177, fn 9. Even Harry Hopkins acknowledged that the problem of inadequate relief was prevalent throughout the Federal Emergency Relief Administration's programs. Between 1934-1935, FERA paid families $25-29 per month, which had been "the average *weekly* pre-Depression wages of a regularly employed industrial worker." See Patterson, *America's Struggle Against*, 57.

[54] The state's budget included rent, which accounted for much of the difference. Helen Jeter, *The Administration of Funds for Unemployment Relief by the Los Angeles Department of Charities Prior to November 24, 1933* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Emergency Relief Committee, 1933), 87, 88.

[55] Jeter, *Administration of Funds*, 77; Gertrude Steel-Brooke, "The Single Woman on Relief: A Study of the Status of Two Hundred Sixty Single, Unattached, American-Born, White Women on Relief in the Heart of Downtown Los Angeles," (master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1936) 83.

[56] Helen Jeter, *The Administration of Funds for Unemployment Relief by the Los Angeles Department of Charities Prior to November 24, 1933* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Emergency Relief Committee, 1933), 82.

[57] John Burns, interview by Max Bogner, March, 1935, in Max Bogner, "A Case Study of the Relation of Philosophy of Life to Unemployment" (master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1935), 31.

Authorities had instituted systemic barriers to relief for the poor for centuries.[58] California settlement laws required applicants to reside in the state for three years and the county for one to qualify for county assistance.[59] A state law and county ordinance also required those who owned personal property in excess of an assessed valuation of $250 to sign over a lien on that property to the County Welfare Bureau to repay their relief debts, while owners of over $2,500 in property were deemed ineligible for relief.[60] Many refused to sign over their property and, in turn, were denied aid.[61] Moreover, relief carried with it a generations-old stigma, which prompted many of the unemployed to avoid it at all costs.[62] Some announced that they "would rather starve than accept charity," while those who did receive assistance experienced feelings of shame.[63] J. Marx Ayres, who grew up in Depression-era Los Angeles, recalled wearing county-supplied clothing, which was "always poorly sewn from the same blue denim material."[64] At school, it was easy to spot the children who were on relief, and as a result, Ayres felt like an "outsider."[65] One man expressed a deep sense of bewilderment at how far down the economic

[58] Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993, orig. 1971), 3-42.
[59] 1931 Cal. Stat. 110, at 146; "Pauper Act Change Passed by Senate," *Los Angeles Times*, March 13, 1931; Mullins, *Depression and the Urban West Coast,* 70.
[60] 1933 Cal. Stat. 110, at 2007; Ordinance No. 2168 N.S., County of Los Angeles, CA (eff. 1932, amend. 1935), quoted in *Compendium of Laws and Ordinances Governing Department of Charities*, (np: April, 1935), 15, box 63, folder dd, Ford papers; Constantine Panunzio, *Self-Help Cooperatives in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1939), 13; *Social Service as Administered by Public and Private Agencies* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Welfare Federation, 1935), 42-43, box 1, folder 9, Community Chest and Welfare Federation of Los Angeles Area records, Collection no. 0461, California Social Welfare Archives, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California; Lester, "Building the New Deal State on the Local Level," 53.
[61] Social workers occasionally attributed an applicant's refusal to sign over their property to the county to intellectual or developmental disabilities. Roth, "Compton Unemployed Co-operative Relief Association," 137-138; Panunzio, *Self-Help Cooperatives*, 25.
[62] Michael B. Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: America's Enduring Confrontation with Poverty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 2; Matthew Desmond, *Poverty, By America* (New York: Crown, 2023), 83-87.
[63] Louis Bloch, *Abstract of Hearings on Unemployment Before the California State Unemployment Commission, April and May, 1932* (San Francisco: California State Unemployment Commission, 1932), 67.
[64] J. Marx Ayres, *Red Diaper Baby in USS Bowfin: An Autobiography of J. Marx Ayres, vol. 1, 1922-1945* (Victoria, B.C.: Trafford, 2008), 84.
[65] Ayres, *Red Diaper Baby*, 84.

ladder he had fallen. “No, I never used to think of these things,” he explained, “I never thought about a man having to go and beg for shoes for his kids or worry about getting a tooth fixed.”[66]

Families fortunate enough to live in a home with access to a yard maximized the potential of the property by planting gardens and raising poultry, rabbits, and even cows and goats.[67] Just as they had done during the depression a decade prior (and for centuries), these home gardens served to supplement low incomes -- or lack of income – as residents produced goods for their own sustenance or to share, barter, or sell.[68] Ayres’s family moved to a rural section in Inglewood “to save money and to have space for a garden, chickens, rabbits and a goat that were all required for survival.”[69] They also grew popcorn in an adjacent field and sold it, along with surplus eggs, chickens, and rabbits on the street in front of their home.[70] Cynthia Vose, who lived just east of the Boyle Heights neighborhood, kept chickens and sold, bartered, and sometimes gifted eggs to her neighbors.[71] Gloria Ricci Lothrop recalled families and neighbors sharing “baskets of figs and guavas, fresh eggs, and salad greens.[72]

For homeowners who relied on their land to supplement their wages, the use-value of their property was critical.[73] Unemployment could result either in the “commodification of housing” by forcing the owner to liquidate or it could promote “higher use value.”[74] For many families the home – whether purchased or rented – was the thing they tried to keep ahold of until

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[66] John Burns, interview by Max Bogner, March, 1935, in Max Bogner, “A Case Study of the Relation of Philosophy of Life to Unemployment” (master’s thesis, University of Southern California, 1935), 32.
[67] Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*, 12.
[68] Frances Lomas Feldman, “Human Services in the City of Angels: Part II: 1920-1960s,” *Southern California Quarterly* 85, no. 3 (Fall 2003), 305.
[69] Ayres, *Red Diaper Baby*, 75.
[70] Ayres, *Red Diaper Baby*, 75.
[71] Cynthia Lisetta Vose, diary, February 5, March 1, 5, 8, 17, 1930, box 7, folder 3, Vose Stearns McCormick Family Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
[72] Gloria Ricci Lothrop, “Uno Sguardo al Passato: A Backward Look at an Italian Household During Depression Days,” *Pacific Historian* 27, no. 4 (Winter 1983): 42.
[73] Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*, 29.
[74] Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*, 29.

the bitter end.[75] Those who lived on their own property in semi-rural or suburban parts of the county found greater opportunities for survival than those who lived in the city.[76] Becky Nicolaides observes that residents in the working-class suburb of South Gate, for example, displayed traits of "semiproletarianism," a class that drew its livelihood from a combination of wage labor and subsistence labor on its own property.[77]

This unwaged labor performed by members of a worker's household had long benefited employers who could in turn pay lower wages.[78] So crucial was the home garden in supplementing wages that when the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce touted the region's "ample supply of good labor, of the open shop type…," it added the additional selling point that "much of the necessary food supply is provided from the people's own small gardens."[79] This allowed workers "a more elastic income" due to "the savings of living costs made from the produce" of their home gardens.[80] In other words, the Chamber sought to lure industry to the region with the promise of low wages and a tractable labor force, built on the ability of the worker's household to produce a large portion of its subsistence. Moreover, the Chamber credited the Los Angeles climate for producing such conditions:

> For a little effort on [the worker's] part he can have the fruits and vegetables known in the East, at much less cost, his living expenses can be sharply reduced and his family supplied with luxuries from his own backyard. To the less favored manufacturer who has and is concerned with labor difficulties, inefficient workers and a constantly rising labor cost, Los Angeles and Southern California offer a real opportunity for him to operate WHERE NATURE HELPS INDUSTRY MOST.[81]

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[75] Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*, 13.
[76] Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*, 28.
[77] Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*, 28.
[78] Boydston, "To Earn Her Daily Bread."
[79] Quoted in Davis, "Sunshine and the Open Shop,", 117.
[80] "Farm Life in L.A. County," *Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce Bulletin* 5, no. 5 (September 29, 1930): 3.
[81] Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, Industrial Department, *Facts About Industrial Los Angeles: Nature's Workshop* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, 1927), reprinted in *The Suburb Reader*, ed. Becky M. Nicolaides and Andrew Wiese, 203 (New York: Routledge, 2009).

Indeed, declared the Chamber's weekly bulletin in 1930, the California climate was so ideal that a worker's garden "contributes to the family table each day of the year."[82] These gardens took on increased importance, it noted, in light of "the new problem in employment" facing the nation.[83]

Key to the home garden was the mass-produced California bungalow, small and cheap housing intended for workers, promoting an ideal of home ownership, which the Chamber frequently contrasted with the maligned tenement of eastern cities. "The real secret of the efficiency of the workers of Southern California may be found in their home life…," boasted the Chamber's promotional literature, "A tenement is unknown here and the workers live in their own little bungalows, surrounded by plenty of land for fruits, vegetables and flowers, and where children romp and play throughout the entire year under climatic conditions that are as nearly ideal as exist anywhere on the face of the earth.[84]

During the first few decades of the twentieth century, real estate investors, the Chamber and the Los Angeles Merchants and Manufacturers' Association (MMA) fortified an abundant and cheap labor pool by luring workers with the promise of low-cost homeownership.[85] "'While

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[82] "Farm Life in L.A. County," *Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce Bulletin* 5, no. 5 (September 29, 1930): 3.
[83] "Farm Life in L.A. County," *Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce Bulletin* 5, no. 5 (September 29, 1930): 3.
[84] Despite the Chamber's claims, tenements indeed existed in Los Angeles, although probably not to the extent that they did in eastern cities. For example, tenement housing was constructed in the 1920s and 1930s in the Bunker Hill neighborhood and had already existed in the Chinatown and Plaza districts. Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, Industrial Department, *Facts About Industrial Los Angeles: Nature's Workshop* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, 1927), reprinted in *The Suburb Reader*, ed. Becky M. Nicolaides and Andrew Wiese, 203 (New York: Routledge, 2009); Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Gail Sansbury, "Lost Streets of Bunker Hill," *California History* 74, no. 4 (Winter 1995-1996): 396; César López, "Lost in Translation: From *Calle de los Negros* to Nigger Alley to North Los Angeles Street to Place Erasure, Los Angeles 1855-1951," *Southern California Quarterly* 94, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 55; Dick Whittington, *Exterior, rear view of tenement buildings*, photoprint, black and white, ca1920-1930, 24.4 x 19.6 cm, Dick Whittington Photography Collection, 1924-1987, USC Libraries Special Collections, Los Angeles, California.
[85] African Americans, Mexicans, and southern and eastern Europeans were often excluded from many of the bungalow subdivisions marketed to workers due to restrictive racial covenants and de facto discrimination by landlords and realtors. However, in the early twentieth century, African Americans in Los Angeles had comparatively high rates of homeownership compared to the rest of the nation. Kim Hernandez, "The Bungalow Boom': The Working-Class Housing Industry and the Development and Promotion of Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles," *Southern California Quarterly* 92, no. 4 (Winter 2010-2011): 351-352, 357-359; Davis, "Sunshine and the Open Shop," 113-117-118; Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*, 19.

wages are low,' they admitted, 'homes are cheap.'"[86] However, as the journalist Carey McWilliams observed, "Once lured to the region and saddled with an equity in a cheap home, most of the homeseekers had no means of escape."[87] Indeed, while the business elite argued that homeownership produced a content and efficient labor force, trade unionists highlighted the "fear and insecurity of families struggling to meet their monthly house payments."[88] Katherine Phillips Edson of the California Industrial Welfare Commission noted in 1916 that working women of Los Angeles labored in fear: "They are so afraid that they are not going to be able to meet the payment on their homes."[89] That same year Frances Noel, a representative of the National Women's Trade Union League, argued that "The mode of housing in Los Angeles, while in itself ideal, has produced more out and out slaves in the labor world than perhaps any other conditions that we have in Los Angeles."[90]

Bungalows and home gardens thus functioned as a means of reproducing industrial and seasonal labor.[91] The Chamber commodified and sold this process – both in the form of land and bungalows to workers and as a draw to industrialists who might set up shop and invest in Los Angeles based on the promise of cheap and abundant labor. Furthermore, for the worker, this was not some Jeffersonian idyll of small, self-sufficient farming. Rather, the Chamber was careful to note that homeowners should always expect to work for wages rather than anticipate producing a full family subsistence from their small plots of land.[92] Ross H. Gast of the Chamber's

[86] McWilliams, *Southern California,* 276.
[87] McWilliams, *Southern California*, 277.
[88] Davis, "Sunshine and the Open Shop," 112.
[89] *Industrial Relations: Final Report and Testimony Submitted to Congress by the Commission on Industrial Relations*, 64th Cong. 5686 (1916) (statement of Katherine Philips Edson, California Industrial Welfare Commission).
[90] *Industrial Relations: Final Report and Testimony Submitted to Congress by the Commission on Industrial Relations*, 64th Cong. 5718 (1916) (statement of Frances Noel, National Women's Trade Union League).
[91] Steven Stoll, "The Captured Garden: The Political Ecology of Subsistence Under Capitalism," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 85 (Spring 2014): 75.
[92] "Farm Life in L.A. County," *Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce Bulletin* 5, no. 5 (September 29, 1930): 3.

Agricultural Department wrote, "We have been attempting to interest workers in the small farm home for several years, for we believe it is the ideal environment for the average family, particularly where the father is on sustaining employment elsewhere. We have been very careful, however, to point out the fallacy of expecting a living from these little places, as this is seldom the case. In other words, we believe in the small farm as a home, and not as a sustaining unit.[93] Indeed, Gast eventually framed this idea as "halfway-back-to-the-land," in which workers pursued "gainful occupations in the city" while devoting "spare time to the production of food crops" in their own backyards.[94]

Given that gardens and plots of land were not enough for a household's subsistence needs, those living along the city's outskirts turned to the art of foraging for wild – or neglected – produce. In 1930s agriculture-rich Los Angeles, bean fields covered Beverly Hills and wild oats carpeted long swathes of Wilshire Boulevard.[95] Hungry families gathered with "containers, pails," and "fruit jars" at the lima bean fields in West Los Angeles. Once the Mexican laborers finished the threshing process, the families hurried to scoop up the beans left behind on the ground.[96] J. Marx Ayres, who resided in Inglewood, remembered his neighbor showing him and his siblings a spot where wild tomatoes grew alongside a hog farm.[97] Gloria Ricci Lothrop helped her mother gather olives in an abandoned grove and wild rapini on hillsides.[98] They supplemented their garden produce with peaches from "volunteer trees growing adjacent" to

[93] Underlined in original. Ross H. Gast, Agricultural Department, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, to Reuben Borough, *Los Angeles Record*, August 29, 1931, box 9, folder 5, Borough papers.
[94] Ross Gast, "It's 'Halfway-Back!' Now 'Halfway's' Enough!," *Los Angeles Times*, September 17, 1933.
[95] Robert V. Hine, "Foreclosure in Los Angeles," *Pacific Historian* 27, no. 4 (Winter 1983): 33.
[96] Ayres, *Red Diaper Baby*, 78.
[97] Ayres, *Red Diaper Baby*, 86.
[98] Gloria Ricci Lothrop, "Uno Sguardo al Passato: A Backward Look at an Italian Household During Depression Days," *Pacific Historian* 27, no. 4 (Winter 1983): 41-42.

their lot while braver souls harvested wild mushrooms.[99] An unemployed contingent from Venice petitioned the Los Angeles City Council in 1933 to request permission to fish from Hyperion Pier in order to feed their families; however, they were denied due to the pier's proximity to a sewer main, which spewed raw sewage into the ocean.[100]

Households also economized by practicing restricted consumption – sometimes severely. Carlos Munatones from the Russian Flats section of Boyle Heights recalled his family rationing their daily meals to manage their consumption activities and avoid falling into deeper debt. "Some day you'd have a tortilla," he explained, "some day you'd have half a tortilla, but as long as you're not living on that tortilla on credit, you're ok."[101] Jackson Pollock's brother attempted to survive on three dollars a week by eating a raw-food diet.[102] A representative from the Bureau of Vocational Service found that many of her female applicants were undernourished, citing instances of one "who lived for three days on a cup of rice and another who tried to live on peanut butter."[103] Newspapers included money-saving advice for consumers such as purchasing powdered skim milk at poultry feed stores or mixing oleo or margarine with evaporated milk to make a cost-effective butter-like spread.[104]

Those who lived in the urban center lacked easy access to agricultural spaces, and desperation led some to forage for provisions in dumpsters – a process called "gutter sniping."[105] One woman reportedly lived on fifty cents a week and "what she could salvage from garbage

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[99] Gloria Ricci Lothrop, "Uno Sguardo al Passato: A Backward Look at an Italian Household During Depression Days," *Pacific Historian* 27, no. 4 (Winter 1983): 41-42.
[100] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, January 4, 1933, 96, Council Minutes Archive, Los Angeles City Archives and Records Center, Los Angeles, California.
[101] Carlos Munatones, "Mexican American Community History Project," interview by Christine H. Valenciana, March 6, 1972, Oral History Program, California State University, Fullerton, 40.
[102] Jackson Pollock to Charles and Frank Pollock, 1931, in *American Letters, 1927-1947: Jackson Pollock and Family,* ed. Francesca Pollock and Sylvia Winter Pollock (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 24.
[103] Bloch, *Report and Recommendations*, 90.
[104] "Solving Food Problems," *United Progressive News*, June 14, 1935.
[105] John Haus, "Unemployed – 1933 Model," *Nation*, November 8, 1933, 541.

cans."[106] The Los Angeles correspondent to the *New York Times* spoke with an elderly man who "had been raiding garbage cans for sustenance" for three days as he waited to be approved for relief.[107] One historian who grew up in Depression-era Pasadena recalled witnessing two Mexican-American women "slugging it out in an alley" over access to garbage cans.[108] Urban foragers remapped the city as they noted where to acquire resources. Even the Midnight Mission, a Christian-based relief agency catering to homeless men, was caught collecting table scraps and food discarded by restaurants to serve to its residents including recooked onions and squash that had turned sour and coffee grounds with "hunks of fish" in it.[109]

Foraging functioned as both a provisioning strategy and as a commentary on the paradox of California's abundance of resources alongside widespread deprivation.[110] "In the presence of great wealth and natural abundance," noted the Los Angeles-based journalist Carey McWilliams, "poverty becomes absurd, anachronistic, insane."[111] Indeed, "a person couldn't have his malnutrition in a nicer place than Los Angeles,'" the journalist Matt Weinstock observed bitterly.[112] In fact, County Supervisor John Anson Ford found that malnutrition existed "at an alarming rate" among twenty-thousand Los Angeles families on state relief rolls as evidenced by "increased ill-health, anemia, and tuberculosis."[113] Social workers at the Family Welfare

[106] Gertrude Steel-Brooke, "The Single Woman on Relief: A Study of the Status of Two Hundred Sixty Single, Unattached, American-Born, White Women on Relief in the Heart of Downtown Los Angeles," (master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1936) 60-61.
[107] Chapin Hall, "What's the Answer to Our Relief Problem?," *Los Angeles Times*, December 2, 1933.
[108] Ted C. Hinckley, "Depression Anxieties Midst a Pasadena Eddy," *Pacific Historian* 27, no. 4 (Winter 1983): 30.
[109] Charles Daggett, "Spoiled Food is Given Hungry Men," *Los Angeles Record*, February 2, 1931; Stevens, *In Pursuit of Utopia*, 23; Tom Liddecoat, Midnight Mission pamphlet, n.d., in box 2, folder 16, Midnight Mission and Tom and Mary Liddecoat Papers, Collection no. 0413, California Social Welfare Archives, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California.
[110] Giovanna Capponi, "Skipping," in *The Global Encyclopedia of Informality*, vol, 2, ed. Alena Ledeneva (London: University College London Press, 2018), 42.
[111] McWilliams, *Southern California*, 303.
[112] Matt Weinstock, quoted in John D. Weaver, *Los Angeles: The Enormous Village, 1781-1981* (Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1980), 118.
[113] "Press Release," ca. 1937, box 51, folder bb7, Ford papers.

Association were informed that 2,500 families were "literally starving" in Belvedere Gardens, which housed the region's largest concentration of Mexicans.[114] During the fall of 1931, Los Angeles school officials found "scores of children in a half-starved condition," many of whom required hospitalization due to high fevers.[115] "People do not starve to death when relief stops," observed contemporary economist Ewan Clague, "they just starve, with the margin by which life persists maintained by the pity of their neighbors and by a sort of scavenging on the community."[116]

Scavenging also offered another means of survival. Along the streets and alleys of Los Angeles, the desperate and resourceful rummaged for useful materials such as "pipes, rusty tin tubs, old tires, wood, wire, and car radios" as well as "engines, carburetors, dented fenders, [and] old batteries…."[117] Mary Helen Ponce, an American-born daughter of Mexican immigrants, wrote of the junk piles that appeared in every backyard of her Mexican neighbors in Pacoima. Whereas social workers viewed "overflow piles of sodden junk" as indicators of "sordid" households, Ponce understood them to represent crucial resources "for folks who were short on money but full of ingenuity."[118] The junk pile – or *el yonque* – housed the "necessary parts to wire a car together or replace rusted pipes, and it helped keep folks from spending hard-earned cash at the hardware store in town."[119] For people living on the precipice, junk held value. Junk dealers of all nationalities flourished in East Los Angeles, a district marked by "deteriorated

[114] Minutes of the Board of Directors, Family Welfare Association of Los Angeles, August 22, 1932, box 1, folder 4, FSLA records; George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 75.
[115] Bloch, *Report and Recommendations*, 346.
[116] Ewan Clague, "When Relief Stops What Do They Eat?," *Midmonthly Survey* 68, no. 1 (November 1932), 583.
[117] Mary Helen Ponce, *Hoyt Street: An Autobiography* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 6.
[118] Camille Guerin-Gonzales, *Mexican Workers and American Dreams: Immigration, Repatriation, and California Farm Labor, 1900-1939* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 66; Mary Helen Ponce, *Hoyt Street: An Autobiography* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 6.
[119] Mary Helen Ponce, *Hoyt Street: An Autobiography* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 6.

buildings, old warehouses, and junk yards – all ripe for "junking."[120] Between 1931 and 1932, 74 percent of all permits issued by the city went to junk collectors, pawnbrokers, and second-hand dealers.[121] Junk also promoted creative problem solving for those forced to "make do" with what they had: one Mexican unemployed group fashioned a paint spray gun using an old jar and vacuum cleaner while others constructed heaters and stoves from the "sheet metal overcoats of junked automobiles" and "automobile gas tanks."[122] Mexican women sewed aprons, curtains, dishtowels, and underwear from flour sacks while cooperative groups manufactured men's shirts "from cement sacks and the inner fabric of tires."[123] Many made shirts out of old cement sacks and repaired shoes with oil-well belts.[124] Moreover, junk parts were shared with others as part of a cooperative exchange network.[125] As Ponce recalled, "Neighbors and friends would come by for a piece of pipe, a strip of tar paper or some two-by-fours, all from the junk pile and all freely given to someone in need."[126]

Households often joined forces in creative and entrepreneurial ways to earn cash or ease each other's burdens. María Olazábal organized the Cooperative Society of Unemployed Mexican Ladies to prepare and sell tamales at cost to their neighborhood's unemployed.[127] After witnessing unemployment and hunger in her neighborhood, Rita Salazar, a seamstress from

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[120] Pauline V. Young, *Pilgrims of Russian-Town: The Community of Spiritual Christian Jumpers in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932), 198-199.
[121] Calculations are mine. *Annual Report of the Police Department, City of Los Angeles, California, for the Fiscal Year, 1931-1932* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Police Department, 1932), 7.
[122] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 192; Harold M. Finley, "Self-Help Co-operative Plan Gives 100,000 Food," *Los Angeles Times*, January 15, 1933; Steve Harvey, "Hooverville—Refuge for L.A.'s Homeless in Depression Years," *Los Angeles Times*, June 15, 1987.
[123] Ponce, *Hoyt Street*, 126-127; Paul S. Taylor and Clark Kerr, "Whither Self-Help?," *Survey Graphic* 23, no. 7 (July 1934): 331.
[124] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 192.
[125] Carol Stack, "Swapping," in *Wealth and Poverty in America: A Reader*, ed. Dalton Conley (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 186-187.
[126] Ponce, *Hoyt Street,* 6.
[127] George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 209.

Boyle Heights, asked an acquaintance "'with an old delapidated [sic] truck'" to drive her to Buena Park where she solicited donations of surplus vegetables from farmers, who told her she could keep all she could pick. After adding entrails from a slaughterhouse to her list, Salazar asked the owner of the Brown Derby restaurant for leftover food from their pots and pans. All of this she distributed to her neighbors for three years.[128] Additionally, midwestern transplant Fay Van Boskirt Dwyer developed a cake recipe using figs from her yard and her neighbor's surplus duck eggs, which they both sold from their front yards.[129] To make ends meet, Miguel Venegas chauffeured neighbors to and from the county welfare office to pick up food baskets, and in turn, they paid him by sharing some of what they had received.[130] In the Central Avenue district, a predominantly African American community, trolley passengers left their transfer coupons at a local business located at a transfer point, so others could use them for a free ride.[131]

Another common survival strategy entailed committing financial fraud and making use of short-term credit. After seven months of unemployment, a married father of two small children forged a check to pay the rent and was consequently sentenced to one year at San Quentin."[132] Doris Campbell, a white thirty-four-year-old single mother of two, worked as laundress, a pieceworker in a glove factory, a domestic worker, and a telephone operator. At one point, she spent 83 percent of her small earnings for rent on her apartment. After being unemployed for over a month, she started passing bad checks in exchange for "clothing, groceries" and "other necessities of life" with the hope that she would be able to cover the funds. When she failed to

[128] Sharon Fay Koch, "She 'Begs' for Cultural Center," *Los Angeles Times*, May 11, 1971.
[129] Joyce Loranger and Mary Tyler, "Working Women in the Los Angeles Area, 1920-1939" (master's thesis, California State University, Dominguez Hills, 1984), 53-54.
[130] Miguel Venegas, interview by María Teresa Venegas, April 24, 1990, in *Letters Home*, 19.
[131] August F. Hawkins, interview by Carlos Vásquez, January 15, December 10 and 12, 1988, UCLA Oral History Program, for the California State Archives State Government Oral History Program.
[132] From the files of the Los Angeles County Child Placement Department, cited in Bloch, *Report and Recommendations*, 129.

replace the funds in time, she was arrested.[133] Many of Miguel Venegas's customers purchased goods from his store on credit and then simply could not pay after losing their jobs.[134] A number purchased goods with insufficient funds, in one case costing him sixty dollars.[135] Debt collection proved difficult, as one female customer explained to him, "You can't get water from a rock."[136]

Some created an underground market in relief goods. Relief officials frequently caught clients selling "unwanted relief items" to secure cash and their punishments ranged from a reduction in relief payments to prosecution.[137] Relief applicants also shared work orders with friends and family.[138] When the Council of Social agencies distributed restaurant meal coupons to people in need, they quickly discovered an underground traffic in the coupon books.[139]

Families frequently pooled resources by doubling (or tripling) up in a home. Social workers reported two or three families living together or situations in which one family crowded into one or two back rooms while taking in boarders and "giving up the most desirable part of the house."[140] Young couples moved in with their parents or older parents sought shelter with their adult children.[141] "Ten or twelve poor families" crowded into dilapidated summer mansions dotting the shore in the formerly fashionable summer resort of Terminal Island, now housing Japanese and Mexican communities along with a federal prison.[142] Some homeowners rented their houses and lived in tents in an isolated county campground at Crystal Lake northeast of Los

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[133] Marion Elderton, *Case Studies of Unemployment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1931), 222-223.
[134] Miguel Venegas to Juan Venegas, December 11, 1931, in *Letters Home*, 113.
[135] Miguel Venegas to Juan Venegas, February 17, 1931, in *Letters Home*, 99.
[136] Miguel Venegas, interview by María Teresa Venegas, April 24, 1990, in *Letters Home,* 19.
[137] Joanna Colcord, *Cash Relief* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1936), 100-101.
[138] "Park Aid Work Accord Gained," *Los Angeles Times*, October 10, 1933.
[139] Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Council of Social Agencies, March 5, 1931, 7, box 1, folder 6, CSALA records.
[140] Bloch, *Report and Recommendations*, 370.
[141] Bloch, *Report and Recommendations*, 115.
[142] *Report of Harbor District for Board Meeting*, Family Welfare Association of Los Angeles, February 26, 1934, box 1, folder 6, FSLA records; Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration, *Los Angeles in the 1930s: The WPA Guide to the City of Angels* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011, orig. 1941), 224.

Angeles.[143] SERA investigators often found "eight to ten" people living in two or three rooms with "deplorable" sanitary conditions. In most cases, hot water was lacking while and "'bathtubs [were] a luxury and lavatories a rarity."'[144] Other social workers reported finding "'families in cheerless furnished rooms, in comfortless basements, in rooms facing squalid firetraps, in huts across the street from railroad yards and in shacks where you would hesitate to house your cow."'[145] One social worker recalled visiting a relief applicant at a bungalow court in Long Beach which was "in such an awful location that the least bit of rain made ankle-deep mud. One had to walk in mud not only to get from the street to the little house in which they lived but also to get from the little house to the little sanitary house because there was no bath in connection with it—no toilet facilities at all."[146] Many households relocated to garages.[147] Most slum areas were designated as such "due to the practice of building several homes on a single lot."[148] Often, a small home, "rough and crude in construction, but at the same time inhabitable," sat at the front of a lot and presented a somewhat acceptable facade, while shacks "entirely unfit for human occupancy" crowded together behind it.[149]

As the economic vice tightened, people were forced into increasingly undesirable housing situations "until their next step was the street.[150] Sheriff's deputies served nearly as many

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[143] Robert V. Hine, "Foreclosure in Los Angeles," *Pacific Historian* 27, no. 4 (Winter 1983): 36.
[144] "Twenty Found Living in One Pomona Room," *EPIC News* (Los Angeles), September 24, 1934, California History Newspaper Archive, Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, Los Angeles, CA.
[145] Bloch, *Report and Recommendations*, 119.
[146] Catherine Sullivan, "California Odyssey: The 1930s Migration to the Southern San Joaquin Valley," interview by Judith Gannon, February 27, 1981, California State College, Bakersfield, 4.
[147] Greta Gray and Violet Wolfe, "Food Expenditures of Seven Industrial Families in Los Angeles," *Social Science* 8, no. 1 (January 1933): 40; "Getting a Job," *Los Angeles Record*, June 9, 1930; "They Will Be Grateful for Aid," *Los Angeles Record*, February 12, 1931; "Wants a Loan," *Los Angeles Record,* April 14, 1933; "Live in Garage," *Los Angeles Evening Post-Record*, October 13, 1934.
[148] *Juvenile Delinquency and Poor Housing in the Los Angeles Metropolitan Area* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Coordinating Council, 1937), 2, box 33, folder 7aa, Ford papers.
[149] *Juvenile Delinquency and Poor Housing in the Los Angeles Metropolitan Area* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Coordinating Council, 1937), 2, box 33, folder 7aa, Ford papers.
[150] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 117.

eviction notices between January and April, 1932, as they did for the entire year of 1929.[151] Approximately five percent of single dwellings in Los Angeles were vacant in the spring of 1933 – nine percent in low-income communities.[152] As revealed in the pages of the California State Unemployment Commission's report, so common were evictions that the gold seals attached to eviction notices were derisively called "Hoover's prosperity certificates."[153] The situation became so dire that, by September, 1933, county supervisors requested that the Sheriff's department "consult with charity department officials before serving eviction papers 'in order to ensure that small children will not have to sleep on park benches or in the streets on cold nights.'"[154] If families qualified for county relief, the Welfare Department occasionally paid their rent in emergency cases to prevent eviction, but would not assist with back rent, leaving families in massive debt.[155] Typically the County Welfare agency paid a week's or a month's rent in advance and ceased further payment until the tenants were forced to move again leaving a trail of unpaid bills behind them.[156] Investigators reported that families in Los Angeles were compelled to move as frequently as four time per year.[157] Landlords often refused rentals to tenants unless they produced evidence that they were not supported by charity.[158] As one of the most dreaded threats looming over the precariously positioned, eviction and the subsequent uprooting of the household majorly affected the material hardship of thousands of families.[159]

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[151] Bloch, *Report and Recommendations*, 116.
[152] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 89.
[153] Louis Bloch, *Abstract of Hearings on Unemployment Before the California State Unemployment Commission, April and May, 1932* (San Francisco: California State Unemployment Commission, 1932), 157.
[154] "Quinn Seeks to Soften Evictions," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), September 23, 1933.
[155] Bloch, *Report and Recommendations*, 370.
[156] Bloch, *Report and Recommendations*, 269.
[157] Bloch, *Report and Recommendations*, 116.
[158] Bloch, *Report and Recommendations*, 116.
[159] Matthew Desmond, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* (New York: Broadway Books, 2017), 297.

When families and individuals had nowhere left to go, one option of last resort was the Hooverville, an improvised and generally unauthorized camp typically found along the outskirts of cities.[160] Locals usually referred to these sites as "jungle camps" or, occasionally, "autocamps" due to the number of migratory families who used their cars as shelters. [161] In fact, many families, especially newcomers to the city, fell into the practice of living outdoors in their cars much to the concern of local authorities.[162] One 1925 study estimated that 7,500 families lived in auto camps throughout Los Angeles County.[163]

One of the first homeless encampments, sardonically called "Hoover City," appeared in February 1931 along the southern outskirts of Los Angeles where families constructed homes made of cardboard, tar paper, and even old trucks and busses.[164] Later, another camp, "New Haven Village," arose further south where forty families resided in "shacks, tents and even burlap bags stretched between four sticks."[165] Along the rural "shoe-string district" – the route between downtown Los Angeles and its harbor in San Pedro – homeless families took up residence in abandoned shacks where they were permitted to remain by county welfare officials as long as they were "industrious" and the grounds remained sanitary. [166] Twelve families set up a camp near a dump and constructed "little shanties made from tin cans and spare boxes" and planted gardens nearby.[167] Social workers noted that residents "usually share if one of them finds

[160] Bloch, *Report and Recommendations*, 98-99.
[161] Bloch, *Report and Recommendations*, 98-99, 269.
[162] Karl de Schweinitz and Ruth Hill, *Social Work with Families in Los Angeles, California* (American Association for Family Social Work, 1925), 1-2, box 44, folder 5, FSLA records; Kenneth L. Kusmer, *Down and Out, on the Road: The Homeless in American History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 206.
[163] Miriam Waters, *Youth in Conflict* (New York: Republic Publishing Company, 1926), 74.
[164] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises of the Unemployed," 86; Harvey, "Hooverville."
[165] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 86, 93.
[166] Report of Harbor District for Board Meeting, Family Welfare Association of Los Angeles, February 26, 1934, box 1, folder 6, FSLA records.
[167] Report of Harbor District for Board Meeting, Family Welfare Association of Los Angeles, February 26, 1934, box 1, folder 6, FSLA records.

work."[168] Residents of both Hoovervilles imposed order on their camps by arranging their tents and shacks in strings or "rag rows."[169] They built community by sharing resources. Ellen Osterbauer, who lived with her parents in Hoover City when she was three years old, recalled her mother making pancakes all day for their neighbors.[170] Older children organized "story hours" to entertain the younger children in the camp.[171] Transient families resided in tents on the beach on Terminal Island and, to evade the police and health department officials, attempted to blend in with the temporary tents set up by vacationers.[172] In one Hooverville northeast of Los Angeles, male transients constructed "a collection of 500-odd shacks, tents, and dugouts" along the banks of the San Gabriel River. Each day all inhabitants panned for gold with makeshift tools such as "pie plates, old skillets, sieves, screen-wire, [and] discarded granite pots."[173]

As the unemployed and underemployed struggled for sustenance, the agricultural industry destroyed crops to combat the problem of overproduction. While the Agricultural Adjustment Administration eventually coordinated this effort, the agricultural industry had been destroying crops to raise price levels for years. [174] Los Angeles dairies poured twelve-to-fifteen thousand gallons of milk into sewers daily in January 1933, while farmers destroyed half a million pounds of oranges weekly in February 1936.[175] Hundreds of thousands of crates and

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[168] Report of Harbor District for Board Meeting, box 1, folder 1, CSWA.
[169] Nancy Quam-Wickham, "'Another World': Work, Home, and Autonomy in Blue-Collar Suburbs," in *Metropolis in the Making: Los Angeles in the 1920s*, ed. Tom Sitton and William Deverell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 131; *Graham - View of 3rd Street Looking East*, *Hoover Town,* March 18, 1932, gelatin silver print, Los Angeles County Department of Health Services Collection, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
[170] Harvey, "Hooverville."
[171] *Graham – "The Children's Hour" at Hoover Town,* March 16, 1932, gelatin silver print, Los Angeles County Department of Health Services Collection, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
[172] *Report of Harbor District for Board Meeting*, Family Welfare Association of Los Angeles, February 26, 1934, box 1, folder 6, FSLA records.
[173] Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration, *Los Angeles in the 1930s: The WPA Guide to the City of Angels* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011, orig. 1941), 303.
[174] Janet Poppendieck, *Breadlines Knee-Deep in Wheat: Food Assistance in the Great Depression* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 4-5; Anthony J. Badger, *The New Deal: The Depression Years, 1933-1940* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1989), 149-163.
[175] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 89.

bushels of produce including cantaloupes, celery, onions, tomatoes, watermelon, apples, apricots, grapes, and peaches were permitted to rot throughout California.[176] An eighty-year-old rancher who had spent much of his life as a transient worker made a heartfelt plea to the California State Unemployment Commission in 1932:

> There is wheat being hidden in the bins. We can't get at it. There are potatoes rotting in the field, and we can't get at them. There is fruit rotting on the trees, and we can't get at it. They advise the planter to plant less wheat. They advise the cotton grower to plow under their cotton. They practically advise us to drown ourselves."[177]

THE SELF-HELP COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT

The self-help movement in Los Angeles started sometime in the winter of 1932 to solve the pressing problem of hunger by bridging the gap between surplus labor and surplus commodities.[178] As the story goes, in February or March, one of the unemployed members of the Disabled American War Veteran's Association, who had been trying to survive on a "meager pension," carried an empty gunny sack around the local Japanese truck farms surrounding Compton and exchanged his labor for surplus produce.[179] He shared his proceeds with his neighbors, and more joined him the next day and brought home baskets full of low-grade but still edible food.[180] The original group eventually disbanded and reformed as the Compton Veteran's Relief Association, which continued the system of bartering labor for farm produce and opened up its membership to all of the unemployed.[181]

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[176] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 89.
[177] Louis Bloch, *Abstract of Hearings on Unemployment Before the California State Unemployment Commission, April and May, 1932* (San Francisco: California State Unemployment Commission, 1932), 156.
[178] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 82; Stevens, *In Pursuit of Utopia*, 55; Sidney I. Melinkoff, "Economic Rehabilitation of the Unemployed Through Cooperative Production: A Study of the Los Angeles County Rehabilitation Department" (master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1936), 11.
[179] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 82, 84; Stevens, *In Pursuit of Utopia,* 55.
[180] Stevens, *In Pursuit of Utopia*, 55.
[181] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 84.

Within a few months of its beginnings, the Compton unit's rolls boasted the names of 2,500 families and "tons of foodstuffs" passed through the commissary each day.[182] Meanwhile, multiple similar organizations emerged throughout Los Angeles County.[183] Local public relief agencies organized barter units in Artesia and Bellflower while a contractor organized 1,600 family heads within six weeks into a unit in South Gate.[184] Units sprung up in the nearby working class suburbs of Lynwood, Maywood, and Huntington Park.[185] The first urban units formed on the northern, eastern, and southern edges of the city.[186] The short-lived Communist Unemployed Aid Society established six units in Los Angeles by 1932.[187]

In these very early days, there appeared to be little-to-no self-conscious attempt to establish a movement nor a statement of principles.[188] Rather, as one sociology student observed, members simply "sought to exist until prosperity returned."[189] However, Clark Kerr, an economics graduate student who conducted an extensive, on-the-ground study of the self-help movement in California throughout the 1930s, offered a different perspective. He observed, residents of Hoover City and New Haven instituted "democratic management and farmer-labor barter."[190] Contemporaries investigating the Los Angeles movement firsthand defined cooperative self-help as, broadly speaking, "the democratic grouping of the unemployed and

[182] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 85.
[183] Various cooperative groups existed in Los Angeles prior to the Depression decade. To name a few, the Los Angeles Industrial Exchange, a consumer cooperative, formed in 1928, while former members of the socialist Llano del Río colony established the United Cooperative Industries in 1923. Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 85-86; Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 1990), 3.
[184] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 92-93.
[185] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 92.
[186] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 104.
[187] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 104.
[188] George Knox Roth, "The Compton Unemployed Co-operative Relief Association: A Sociological Study, 1932-1933" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1934), 25.
[189] Roth, "Compton Unemployed Co-operative Relief Association," 25.
[190] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 92.

underemployed in an attempt to obtain the necessities of life."[191] Unemployment, underemployment, low wages, and the food surplus amidst severe hunger and meager relief from both private and public welfare organizations were the main impetus for these associations.[192]

Americans had formed short-lived cooperatives as early as the1830s, but the first appearance of a significant number occurred between the U.S. Civil War and the late 1880s alongside the rise of voluntary associations.[193] Scholars have credited these mid-to-late-nineteenth century cooperatives – both urban and rural – with functioning as a means for labor to challenge the hegemony of capital, as sites of social interaction and community building, as avenues of integration for European immigrants, as resources for recently enslaved African Americans, and as forums for political activism.[194] Many cooperatives formed as a direct

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[191] Clark Kerr and Paul S. Taylor, "The Self-Help Coöperatives in California," in *Essays in Social Economics in Honor of Jessica Blanche Peixotto*, ed. Ewald T. Grether (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1935), 191; Winslow Carlton, *Annual Report: Division of Self-Help Cooperative Service, June 30, 1935* (San Francisco: State Emergency Relief Administration, 1936), 2.

[192] J. Stewart Burgess, "Living on a Surplus," *Survey* 69, no. 1 (January 1933): 6; Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 85, 87.

[193] Frank, *Purchasing Power,* 41; Joan S.M. Meyers, *Working Democracies: Managing Inequality in Worker Cooperatives* (Ithaca: ILR Press, 2022), 36; Steven B. Leikin, *The Practical Utopians: American Workers and the Cooperative Movement in the Gilded* Age (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004); Jocelyn Crowley and Theda Skocpol, "The Rush to Organize: Explaining Associational Formation in the United States, 1860s-1920s," *American Journal of Political Science* 45, no. 4 (2001): 813-829; Alex Gourevitch, "Labor Republicanism and the Transformation of Work," *Political Theory* 41, no. 4 (2013): 591-617; George Cerny, "Cooperation in the Midwest in the Granger Era, 1869-1875," *Agricultural History* 36, no. 2 (1963): 187-205; John Curl, *For All the People: Uncovering the Hidden History of Cooperation, Cooperative Movements, and Communalism in America* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012); Stanley B. Parsons et al., "The Role of Cooperatives in the Development of the Movement Culture of Populism," *Journal of American History* 69, no. 4 (March 1983): 866-885; Theodore Saloutos, "The Grange in the South, 1870-1877," *Journal of Southern History* 19, no. 4 (November 1953): 473-487; Marc Schneiberg, "Toward an Organizationally Diverse American Capitalism? Cooperative, Mutual, and Local, State-Owned Enterprise," *Seattle University Law Review* 34, no. 4 (2011): 1409-1434; W.E.B. Du Bois, *Economic Co-operation Among Negro Americans* (Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, 1907).

[194] Joan S.M. Meyers, *Working Democracies: Managing Inequality in Worker Cooperatives* (Ithaca: ILR Press, 2022), 37-38; Steven Leikin, *The Practical Utopians: American Workers and the Cooperative Movement in the Gilded Age* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005); Solon Justus Buck, *The Granger Movement: A Study of Agricultural Organization and Its Political, Economic and Social Manifestations, 1870-1880* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1963); Steven Leikin, "The Citizen Producer: The Rise and Fall of Working-Class Cooperatives in the United States," in *Consumers Against Capitalism: Consumer Cooperation in Europe and North America, 1840-1990*, ed. Ellen Furlough and Carl Strikwerda (New York: Roman and Littlefield, 1999), 93-112; Nancy Grey Osterud, "Gender and the Transition to Capitalism in Rural America," *Agricultural History* 67, no. 2 (1993): 14-29; Leon Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983); Robert C. McMath et al., "*Agricultural History* Roundtable on Populism," Agricultural History 82, no. 1 (2008): 1-35; Jessica Gordon Nembhard, *Collective Courage: A History of African*

response to the problem of seasonal unemployment in agriculture such as the barrel maker cooperatives in Minneapolis in 1870.[195] Working-class Americans also established temporary self-help cooperatives to deal with the Panic of 1893.[196] Cooperatives – especially those connected to the organized left – have often aimed to provide essential goods and services under better terms and conditions that those available on the market and also to demonstrate the possibilities of a society premised on the equitable distribution of wealth and work.[197]

Half a million households participated formally in some mode of self-help cooperatives throughout the U.S. in the 1930s, but the largest concentration of units was centered in Los Angeles.[198] By the close of 1932, the self-help movement had established over one-hundred cooperatives in Los Angeles County, and by 1934, one sociologist counted 47 cooperative units in the city of Los Angeles alone.[199]

Over the course of three years, units in Los Angeles County experimented with various forms of self-help activities. Kerr identified three distinct types of cooperative activity. First, was the barter period, in which members traded labor power for produce and staple goods. Second were the scrip exchanges, which sought to facilitate the exchange of goods and services between members using substitutes for legal currency as the medium of exchange. Lastly, were the

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American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014); Jonathan Lurie, "Commodities Exchanges, Agrarian 'Political Power,' and the Antioption Battle, 1890-1894," *Agricultural History* 48, no. 1 (1974): 115-125.

[195] Steve Leikin, "The Cooperative Coopers of Minneapolis," *Minnesota History* 57, no. 8 (2001): 386-405.

[196] H. Roger Grant, *Self-Help in the 1890s Depression* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1893).

[197] Martin, "'California's Unemployed Feed Themselves,'": 35; Frank, *Purchasing Power*; Steven Leikin, *The Practical Utopians: American Workers and the Cooperative Movement in the Gilded Age* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005). For more on cooperative movements, see also Kathleen Donahue, "From Cooperative Commonwealth to Cooperative Democracy: The American Cooperative Ideal, 1880-1940," in *Consumers Against Capitalism? Consumer Cooperation in Europe, North America, and Japan, 1840-1990*, ed. Ellen Furlough and Carl Srikwerda (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1999).

[198] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," ii; Abdurrahman Pasha, "The Self-Help Cooperative Movement in Los Angeles, 1931-1940," (PhD diss., University of Oregon, 2014), 3.

[199] Martin, "'California's Unemployed Feed Themselves,'": 34; Panunzio, *Self-Help Cooperatives*, 12.

production-for-use units, which attempted to produce goods for the use of their own members.[200] Over time, organizations added new activities such as requesting donations or trading labor for bread, milk, and meat from local industries, exchanging personal services with other units, and forms of recreation and entertainment.[201] Eventually, skilled members of the group, such as barbers, were asked to stay at headquarters to cut hair rather than work in the fields.[202]

Additionally, while a majority of the groups were composed entirely of white members only one explicitly discriminated against non-white participants.[203] Several of the multi-racial groups maintained a policy of segregating Mexican and white women within their ranks.[204] One unit at Watts and 108th Avenue, an impoverished section of the city, consisted of Africans Americans, Mexicans, and white individuals. Many of its members were unable to work due to age or infirmity and they survived largely on what partially rotten vegetables and stale bread they could obtain.[205] Eight of the ten all-Black units were managed entirely by women and focused on quilting and salvaging old garments.[206]

Cooperative participation centered on the family rather than the individual with an assumption of a male-headed household. Women, who had initially joined the units through auxiliaries, salvaged old clothing, sewed quilts, prepared hot meals, and performed office work.[207] Although women managed at least six units, they were entirely excluded from others (at least in the movement's early days).[208] While membership was based on the active exchange of

[200] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," abstract.
[201] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 98; Panunzio, *Self-Help Cooperatives*, 56.
[202] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 98.
[203] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises of the Unemployed," 179.
[204] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises of the Unemployed," 179.
[205] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 232.
[206] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises of the Unemployed," 200.
[207] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 98.
[208] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 223; Roth, "Compton Unemployed Co-operative Relief Association," 139-139.

labor, family members were included as beneficiaries.[209] Accordingly, self-help units consisted of a hodgepodge of households and included veterans, small property-holders or non-residents who did not qualify for relief, or those who simply refused to apply for relief, often because they refused to pauperize themselves under the county's strict requirements.[210] Included among this group were the bungalow homeowners, who had been lured to Southern California by the Chamber's promises of cheap homes and substantial gardens. At the same time, many were relief recipients seeking to supplement their meager relief payments.[211] Older Americans, who found it particularly difficult to secure work due age discrimination, also constituted a large sector of the movement. This was compounded by the fact that between 1920 and 1930, Southern California had experienced a one-hundred percent increase in its population of people over sixty-five, making it what one historian calls "a geriatric mecca."[212] The average age of self-help members in Los Angeles was fifty-two.[213]

Cooperative members – especially women – contributed skill sets crucial to household subsistence. One woman offered her canning expertise to preserve the rotting fruit collected by unit members.[214] When she found the unit lacking sugar, a key ingredient for canning, she solicited donations from the local community. "I like to go contacting for things," she explained, "I would ask anyone whom I thought had something we needed for it."[215] LaRue McCormick, who lived along the southern outskirts of the city, described a similar resourcefulness. After joining the movement through the local Methodist church, she operated a cooperative grocery

[209] Meyers, *Working Democracies*, 250, fn. 7, Kerr, "Productive Enterprises of the Unemployed."
[210] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 95.
[211] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 95.
[212] Kevin Starr, *Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 133-134.
[213] Panunzio, *Self-Help*, 13.
[214] Roth, "The Compton Unemployed Co-operative Relief Association," 137.
[215] Roth, "The Compton Unemployed Co-operative Relief Association," 137.

store out of her home and participated in a canning cooperative. Reflecting on her involvement, McCormick noted the grit required for an individual or a unit to succeed, "I was always one of those people who could always scrounge around and find things. I knew where there were some agricultural fields where we could deal with the people, or knew where there was a milk producer or something that we could go and deal with."[216]

Many households incorporated self-help cooperative activities into their everyday subsistence practices. "I heard they had vegetables down here," explained one woman arriving at the Compton cooperative, "and so I came down to get some."[217] Carmen Landeros, a young Mexican immigrant, recalled the *cooperativas* providing regular sustenance for neighborhood families: "I don't know where those trucks came from with a lot of food and vegetables. There were certain hours, and certain days of the week when they used to get in line and receive their food. Vegetables and especially meats [sic], hams [sic], flour, bedding, everything there used to be."[218] Members often used cooperative produce to supplement meager grocery orders provided by the county, which offered a limited selection of commodities.[219] As one cooperative leader complained to the County's Citizen's Relief Committee, "you couldn't keep a cat alive three weeks with what these people are given."[220] For those households already engaged in subsistence practices, the cooperatives offered another tool in their arsenals.

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[216] LaRue McCormick, "Activist in the Radical Movement, 1930-1960: The International Labor Defense, The Communist Party," interview by Malca Chall, May 6, 1976, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 26.
[217] Roth, "The Compton Unemployed Co-operative Relief Association," 137.
[218] Carmen Landeros, "Mexican American Community Project," interview by Christine Valencia, trans. Estella Flores, March 14, 1972, Oral History Program, California State University, Fullerton.
[219] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises of the Unemployed," 196.
[220] Minutes, Citizen's Relief Committee, County of Los Angeles (Committee of 11), February 4, 1935, box 64, folder aaa.3, Ford papers.

Another major factor compelling Angelenos to participate in the movement centered on an espoused belief in self-reliance and a rejection of the relief system.[221] "'I'd rather starve than go on the county'" was reportedly a common refrain among unit members.[222] One study found that over two-thirds of the members in one group were averse to charity.[223] In fact, some found self-help activities as a means to distinguish between the deserving and the undeserving or, as one person put it, "for ambitious men and women to be segregated from the lazy and shiftless class."[224]

While cooperative members asserted individualistic aims, in disavowing dependency, they gave self-help a non-individualist meaning as they united in collective practices – that is, practices of mutuality and community that contributed not only to survival but boosted morale.[225] When the search for employment could prove degrading and discouraging, many found purpose in organized self-help where they encountered other unemployed individuals, which minimized their sense of individual failure.[226] "I thought I was the only one who had troubles, but when I came into the sewing [room] I found everybody had troubles as bad as I had," one woman reported, "Not the same kind, of course, but when we all saw we were in the same boat, the troubles seemed to leave us. It is marvelous how you can go on, when you know other people are ready to help you and are in the same situation as you are."[227] Others described the self-help unit as a place "'to win our self-respect back by making a place for ourselves where we can earn our

[221] James Gregory discusses the distinction between self-reliance and a call for personal autonomy of Southwestern Dustbowl migrants, who were rapidly arriving in Los Angeles around this time, and their simultaneous familiarity with cooperative efforts. James N. Gregory, *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 162-163.
[222] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 90.
[223] Panunzio, *Self-Help Cooperatives*, 15.
[224] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 281.
[225] Clark Kerr, "The Self-Help Co-operatives and Their Effect on Labor," *Sociology and Social Research* 19, no. 4 (March-April 1935): 367.
[226] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 96.
[227] Roth, "The Compton Unemployed Co-operative Relief Association," 140.

living until prosperity returns.'"[228] For some, cooperatives brought a sense of hope after years of despair.

By placing the burden of unemployment squarely on the unemployed themselves, the self-help movement reduced the cost of public and private relief.[229] Just as home gardens and subsistence practices subsidized low wages and intermittent employment, cooperatives subsidized relief and appeared to offer an alternative to state-sponsored relief. This fact, along with its proclamations of self-reliance and ostensible aversion to charity, garnered the support of local business leaders who were in search of solutions to the unemployment problem that would not threaten existing power structures.[230] The conservative *Los Angeles Times* extolled the movement's "pioneer spirit" and its virtue of "carrying out their program without any outside help."[231] A businessman informed cooperative members: "We want to help you help yourselves and lessen the strain on the community chest and the taxpayers.'"[232] A journalist lauded the work ethic of a unit manager who toiled for eighteen-hour-long days until exhaustion forced him to spend a month recovering in the hospital.[233] As Laura Renata Martin has demonstrated, the self-help cooperatives provided a means for the local conservative elite to distinguish between the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor.[234] Equally celebrated, was the fact that most members typically worked one day per week, which allowed them time to search for employment.[235]

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[228] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 95.
[229] "The Self-Help Idea," *Los Angeles Times*, January 20, 1933; Harold M. Finley, "Self-Help Co-operative Plan Gives 100,000 Food," *Los Angeles Times*, January 15, 1933.
[230] Martin, "'California's Unemployed Feed Themselves,'": 34.
[231] "The Self-Help Idea"; "Back to First Principles," *Los Angeles Times*, September 25, 1932.
[232] Paul S. Taylor and Clark Kerr, "Putting the Unemployed at Productive Labor," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 176 (November 1934): 108-109.
[233] "Back to First Principles," *Los Angeles Times*, September 25, 1932.
[234] Martin, "'California's Unemployed Feed Themselves,'": 50.
[235] Harold M. Finley, "Self-Help Co-operative Plan Gives 100,000 Food," *Los Angeles Times*, January 15, 1933.

Cooperatives thus performed the work of subsidizing relief payments and low intermittent wages while simultaneously ensuring a ready labor pool.

The ideological underpinning of the cooperative movement was a topic of commentary from the outset. If some worried that the emphasis on principles of economic collectivism and worker self-management too closely approximated socialism, others viewed the self-help movement with a cautious optimism, finding its aims anything but subversive. One *Los Angeles Times* editorial offered reassurances to detractors: "The emergency is only that to them; they are not out to upset any social system. They have a plan for seeing themselves through their troubles; they'll go back to jobs and businesses and professions as soon as ever general conditions will permit."[236] Indeed, Lorena Hickok, lead investigator for the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) and who traversed the nation to uncover the effects of the crisis suggested that participants regarded the cooperatives as simply another "makeshift." For them it was "just something to carry them through until they can get jobs. I have the impression that the majority of them, were they offered jobs in private industry, would say, 'To Hell with this!' and rush to the job…. Some of the participants strike me as being a little wistful – still hoping against hope that they might be able to get their 'real jobs' back."[237]

In the first few years of the movement, as long as the units remained non-partisan, supported "law and order," and rejected the radical influence of hunger marchers, the conservative local elite offered its tentative support.[238] By the fall of 1932, however, members saw a steady decline in the amount of produce available due to seasonal fluctuations in crop

[236] "The Self-Help Idea," *Los Angeles Times*, January 20, 1933.
[237] Lorena Hickok to Harry Hopkins, May 28, 1934, in *One-Third of a Nation: Lorena Hickok Reports on the Great Depression*, ed. Richard Lowitt and Maurine Beasley, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 260.
[238] Walter Furth, "Report," January 13, 1934, box 1, folder 5, Fieldnotes Concerning Self-Help, Clark Kerr Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, quoted in Martin, "'California's Unemployed Feed Themselves,'" 56.

production as well as increased competition with a growing number of cooperatives.[239] This reduction in resources corresponded to a decline in the general standard of living as the Depression deepened.[240] Unit members decried "carrot diets," "empty commissaries," "starvation life," "heatless homes," and "hungry children."[241] A woman in the Compton unit described how the small amount of second- and third-grade fruit and vegetables soon became repetitive and unappetizing: "You had a hard time to eat it. After a couple of weeks, it just made you sick, but we went on swallowing it or starve."[242]

The movement was also inhibited by a lack of sufficient tools, equipment, and cash for "such necessities as gasoline, sugar for canning, and public-utility bills."[243] Unit members started requesting "bread, milk and meat" from private industries as donations or in exchange for "a nominal amount of labor," a process called "chiseling."[244] Eventually, employers tired of providing "make-work" and simply offered donations or refused to deal with the units altogether.[245] One woman who managed a unit reported that when she requested donations from merchants "'they just run at me and say shoo.'"[246]

Recognizing their strength in numbers, several units entered the political arena and placed organized pressure on the city council and Board of Supervisors to demand public aid. Without government subsidies, the self-help cooperatives were unlikely to survive.[247] Accordingly, in July 1932 leaders from several self-help units formed the Unemployed Citizens'

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[239] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises of the Unemployed," 110-111.
[240] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises of the Unemployed," 111.
[241] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises of the Unemployed," 111.
[242] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises of the Unemployed," 112; Roth, "The Compton Unemployed Co-operative Relief Association," 139.
[243] "Self-Help Cooperative Associations," in *First Deficiency Appropriation Bill for 1937, Extract from Hearing Before the Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Statement of Harry Hopkins*, 75th Cong. 132 (1937).
[244] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises of the Unemployed," 98.
[245] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises of the Unemployed," 99.
[246] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 269.
[247] Louis H. Heilbron, "Most of a Century: Law and Public Service, 1930s to 1990s," interview by Carole Hicke, 1989-1993, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 46.

Relief Association (UCRA) to assist in the organization of new cooperatives, to coordinate inter-cooperative activities such as exchanging goods and information, and to represent the movement in dealing with local and state agencies, businesses, and farmers.[248] Between 1932 and 1933, the city and county of Los Angeles provided self-help cooperatives with resources, largely in the form of gasoline and oil.[249] Additionally, throughout 1933, several units turned to production for use: some baked bread in abandoned bakeries using flour from the Red Cross, others fished from "piers, barges, and boats," and others planted gardens.[250]

THE END POVERTY IN CALIFORNIA CAMPAIGN

It was the self-help cooperatives and especially their systems of barter, exchange, and production for use that inspired a political event that had lasting reverberations.[251] In the summer of 1933, Upton Sinclair, the novelist-cum-socialist leader, who resided in the wealthy Los Angeles suburb of Beverly Hills, launched his End Poverty in California (EPIC) campaign.[252] Within this context, cooperative self-help soon took on new meaning. Like the self-help cooperative members, Sinclair found himself disenchanted with the National Recovery Administration's policy of supporting corporate profits while simultaneously restricting

[248] Abdurrahman Pasha, "The Self-Help Cooperative Movement in Los Angeles, 1931-1940," (PhD diss., University of Oregon, 2014), 100; Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 106.
[249] Winslow Carlton, *Annual Report: Division of Self-Help Cooperative Service, June 30, 1935* (San Francisco: State Emergency Relief Administration, 1936), 4.
[250] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises of the Unemployed," 173, 176.
[251] James N. Gregory, "Upton Sinclair's 1934 EPIC Campaign: Anatomy of a Political Movement," *Labor Studies in Working-Class History* 12, no. 4 (2015): 55.
[252] The EPIC campaign took place alongside an array of political movements nationwide, including Louisiana senator Huey P. Long's "Share the Wealth" clubs, California's Townsend Old-Age Pension movement, Detroit Catholic priest Father Charles Coughlin's National Union of Social Justice. However, James Gregory argues that historians wrongly associate these movements with EPIC. Whereas the agendas for these movements were vague and untested at the polls, Sinclair was a dedicated radical with the goal of winning an election to transform the economy at the state level. His movement was more akin to Minnesota Governor Floyd Olson's Farmer-Labor Movement in 1931, which had largely inspired Sinclair. James N. Gregory, "Upton Sinclair's 1934 EPIC Campaign: Anatomy of a Political Movement," *Labor Studies in Working-Class History* 12, no. 4 (2015): 53-54; James N. Gregory, introduction to *I, Candidate for Governor: And How I Got Licked,* by Upton Sinclair (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994, orig. 1935), iv.

production when so many went hungry.[253] Running on the Democratic ticket in the upcoming gubernatorial primary, Sinclair sought to challenge the establishment led by Senator William Gibbs McAdoo.[254] His plan included $50 per month pensions for the disabled and elderly as well as graduated income and property taxes.[255] However, key to his platform was a plan for the state to seize idle farms and factories through its powers of eminent domain or confiscatory taxes and to establish a series of cooperatives for unemployed men and women to produce goods for their household own use and barter with other like enterprises.[256] Not only would this system supplant all other forms of relief, but, in Sinclair's vision, a state-run production-for-use program would run parallel to, and eventually replace, the capitalist system of production for profit.[257]

Sinclair's campaign mobilized a large segment of the working-class electorate in Los Angeles largely due to the absence of a strong Democratic infrastructure, a weak and fairly conservative labor movement, and a diluted Communist presence.[258] When the primary arrived

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[253] James N. Gregory, introduction to *I, Candidate for Governor: And How I Got Licked,* by Upton Sinclair (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994, orig. 1935), v.

[254] Starr, *Endangered Dreams*, 121-122; James N. Gregory, "Upton Sinclair's 1934 EPIC Campaign: Anatomy of a Political Movement," *Labor Studies in Working-Class History* 12, no. 4 (2015): 55.

[255] James N. Gregory, "Upton Sinclair's 1934 EPIC Campaign: Anatomy of a Political Movement," *Labor Studies in Working-Class History* 12, no. 4 (2015): 55.

[256] Upton Sinclair, *I, Governor of California and How I Ended Poverty: A True Story of the Futur*e (London: T. Werner Lauris, 1933), 7-8; James N. Gregory, introduction to *I, Candidate for Governor: And How I Got Licked,* by Upton Sinclair (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994, orig. 1935), vi; James N. Gregory, "Upton Sinclair's 1934 EPIC Campaign: Anatomy of a Political Movement," *Labor Studies in Working-Class History* 12, no. 4 (2015): 55.

[257] EPIC shared similar intellectual and socialist foundations with the Utopianism, including Sir Thomas More's Utopia along with the doctrines of Charles Fourier and Karl Marx as depicted by Robert Dale Owen in his new Harmony Colony, the New England Transcendentalists and Brook Farm, and Edward Bellamy's vision of a utopian U.S. in the year 2000 described in his novel, *Looking Backward* (1888). James N. Gregory, "Upton Sinclair's 1934 EPIC Campaign: Anatomy of a Political Movement," *Labor Studies in Working-Class History* 12, no. 4 (2015): 55; Stevens, *In Pursuit of Utopia*, 65; Starr, *Endangered Dreams*, 130-131.

[258] Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. argues that the EPIC movement was a direct outcome of the Depression anxieties of California's middle-class, a claim echoed in Kevin Starr's series on California history, and based largely on the writings of Carey McWilliams and George Creel, Sinclair's opponent in the Democratic primary. However, upon close examination of the election data, James Gregory finds that EPIC primarily mobilized the working class in California. James N. Gregory, "Upton Sinclair's 1934 EPIC Campaign: Anatomy of a Political Movement," *Labor Studies in Working-Class History* 12, no. 4 (2015): 53, 70; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt*, vol. 3, *The Politics of Upheaval, 1935-1936* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1960), 109-122; Starr, *Endangered Dreams,* 121-155; George Creel, *Rebel at Large: Recollections of Fifty Crowded Years* (New York: Putnam, 1947), 268-288; McWilliams, *Southern California*, 293-313.

in August, 1934, the extent of Sinclair's win shocked his opponents. He had captured 436,000 votes – more than any primary election candidate in California's history and more than the conservative Republican candidate and incumbent governor, Frank Merriam.[259]

Sinclair touched a nerve among the unemployed and destitute as he drew attention to the paradox of hunger amid California's agricultural bounty. Ed Paulsen recalled arriving in Los Angeles and encountering the EPIC campaign: "I had no great sense of fervor until I went to L.A. and ran into Upton Sinclair in 1934."[260] He was captivated as Sinclair "pointed out the great piles of oranges and apples, the piles of lumber laying there idle…" or destroyed by industry.[261] Sinclair helped his audience make connections between larger political and economic forces and their lived experience. "Sinclair's idea was to relate the unemployed to the resources not being used," he explained, "This appealed to me tremendously. It made sense to have this food eaten up by hungry people."[262] Kerr surveyed a sample of cooperative members and found that a majority supported Sinclair, but some opted to remain silent on the election in case Merriam won.[263] Nevertheless, many had already decided that business-as-usual in governance could not continue – that their future as well as that of their children could not be one of begging and hand-to-mouth living. In production-for-use, many saw a way out of the endless cycle of precarious living. That fall, one young married father of three and cooperative participant shared his thoughts on EPIC:

> I'm thinking that we've had enough of this hand-to-mouth living, of worrying about groceries and picking up odd jobs, and relief. The time has come when our industries can't be run by the bankers and profiteers.…The men in power don't know the first thing about what's wrong. Think of them plowing under crops and burning food when folks are

[259] James N. Gregory, introduction to *I, Candidate for Governor: And How I Got Licked,* by Upton Sinclair (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994, orig. 1935), viii.
[260] "Ed Paulsen," in Studs Terkel, *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970), 32-35.
[261] "Paulsen," in Terkel, *Hard Times*, 32-35.
[262] "Paulsen," in Terkel, *Hard Times*, 32-35.
[263] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 261, 264.

> hungry! I'm not fooling myself that we know all about it or that it's going to be easy to get the thing worked out. But we're going to try. I voted the Democratic ticket; I wasn't voting for Sinclair, I was voting for the ideas he stood for; I was voting for production for use. If he failed, I would say it's not the idea's fault. And it is more than an idea – it's got to be! There has got to be plenty of work for everybody; am I going to let my children grow up in a world of relief and chiseling?[264]

Republicans and conservative Democrats had remained relatively quiet during the primary campaign in anticipation that Sinclair would be easier to defeat than the moderate Democrat, George Creel. When Sinclair triumphed by such large margins, they launched their attack.[265] Appalled by what they viewed as a potential social revolution and a "socialization of the state," the Republican Party retained an advertising team to pore through Sinclair's vast collected works and feed the most radical and damning material to the media including William Randolph Hearst's *Los Angeles Herald-Express* and Harry Chandler's *Los Angeles Times* as well as to major Hollywood players such as Louis B. Mayer (then Republican-State chairman), Joseph Schenck, and Irving Thalberg.[266] One *Los Angeles Times* editorial, for example, lambasted "the maggot-like horde of Reds" who supported Sinclair.[267] Mayer and Thalberg of MGM produced fake newsreels with actors dressed as hobos and announcing with heavily accented voices their support for Sinclair's plan, which "worked well in Russia."[268] In what scholars later came to call one of the first "modern media campaigns," Sinclair's detractors

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[264] Max Bogner, "A Case Study of the Relation of Philosophy of Life to Unemployment" (master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1935), 51.
[265] James N. Gregory, introduction to *I, Candidate for Governor: And How I Got Licked,* by Upton Sinclair (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994, orig. 1935), ix.
[266] Charles E. Larsen, "The Epic Campaign of 1934," *Pacific Historical Review* 27, no. 2 (May, 1958): 134; Starr, *Endangered Dreams*, 143-148; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Politics of Upheaval, vol 3, 1935-1936* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003, orig. 1960), 118.
[267] "Is This Still America?," *Los Angeles Times*, August 30, 1934.
[268] Greg Mitchell, *The Campaign of the Century: Upton Sinclair's Race for Governor of California and the Birth of Media Politics* (New York: Random House, 1992), 423; Mark Wheeler, "The Political History of Classical Hollywood: Moguls, Liberals and Radicals in the 1930s," in *Hollywood and the Great Depression: American Film, Politics and Society in the 1930s*, ed. Iwan Morgan and Philip John Davies (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 35-36; James N. Gregory, "Upton Sinclair's 1934 EPIC Campaign: Anatomy of a Political Movement," *Labor Studies in Working-Class History* 12, no. 4 (2015): 60.

shifted the field of public relations such that "advertising men now believed they could sell or destroy political candidates as they sold one brand of soap and defamed its competitor."[269]

Meanwhile, after meeting with Sinclair, the newly elected president, Franklin Roosevelt, sought to distance himself and his New Deal programs from the candidate's more radical agenda.[270] Sinclair lost the election in October. However, he won 42 percent of the vote in Los Angeles County -- the third highest in the state.[271] Additionally, he drew significant support from blue-collar neighborhoods in central and east Los Angeles and especially in the industrial suburbs, which were major centers of self-help.[272] Moreover, despite the loss, a contingent of liberal candidates rode the Sinclair wave into office across local and state levels and the EPIC movement continued in the form of an increased focus on production-for-use.

THE NEW DEAL AND PRODUCTION-FOR-USE

The Los Angeles cooperatives received their first grant from the federal government in August, 1933, for the purchase of gasoline and staple foods.[273] This came as part of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), established in the first hundred days of Roosevelt's administration. FERA assigned its Work Division to aid the states in developing and providing

[269] Greg Mitchell, *The Campaign of the Century: Upton Sinclair's Race for Governor of California and the Birth of Media Politics* (New York: Random House, 1992), xii; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Politics of Upheaval, vol 3, 1935-1936* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003, orig. 1960), 121.
[270] After Sinclair refused Roosevelt's request to withdraw his candidacy – via a political operative – the Democrats made a deal with the Republican candidate, Merriam. In exchange for Roosevelt's continued boycott of Sinclair, Merriam would agree "not to claim his victory as a repudiation of the New Deal," but would instead attribute his victory to "bipartisan common sense." He would also show consideration to anti-EPIC Democrats in appointments and patronage. Starr, *Endangered Dreams*, 153.
[271] Michael J. Dubin, *United States Gubernatorial Elections, 1932-1952: The Official Results by State and County* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2013), 29.
[272] For example, he won 70 percent of the electorate in working-class sections voted for him in Belvedere Gardens, a section east of downtown, and made up of a multiracial and ethnic community of "Russian, Polish, and Armenian Jews, Mexicans, Italians, Greeks, [and] Slavonians. James N. Gregory, "Upton Sinclair's 1934 EPIC Campaign: Anatomy of a Political Movement," *Labor Studies in Working-Class History* 12, no. 4 (2015): 78
[273] Winslow Carlton, *Annual Report: Division of Self-Help Cooperative Service, June 30, 1935* (San Francisco: State Emergency Relief Administration, 1936), 4.

grants to self-help cooperatives.[274] Cooperative units could request grants through a new relief body: the State Emergency Relief Administration (SERA – later SRA).[275] However, by 1934, FERA's aimed to assist the cooperatives in becoming units of production rather than provide them with direct relief, which fell under the county's purview.[276] To that end, FERA first focused on providing the materials and equipment necessary to help the cooperatives embark on "sound production projects," which included efficiently producing goods or crops so that one hour of labor generated thirty cents worth of goods for the worker and sufficient profit to "pay for the raw materials, machinery depreciation, and overhead."[277] The end goal was to establish self-sustaining producer cooperatives.

Meanwhile, local groups in Los Angeles formed the Congress for Permanent Rehabilitation (CRP) in December, 1934, to pressure the newly elected county supervisors who had run on the EPIC ticket to follow through on their campaign promises.[278] Shortly thereafter, the Board of Supervisors established the Department of Rehabilitation to expand the cooperative

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[274] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 207; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Coming of the New Deal*, vol 2, *1933-1935* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003, orig. 1958), 20, 264; Nancy E. Rose, *Put to Work: Relief Programs in the Great Depression* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1994), 30; Josephine Chapin Brown, *Public Relief, 1929-1939* (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1940), 194-195.

[275] If approved, FERA supplied these funds to the state in excess of relief grants already made. To receive grants, the cooperative units needed to be democratically-controlled, a "bona-fide self-help cooperative," and able to demonstrate an "ability to operate successfully the project proposed." "Self-Help Cooperative Associations," in *First Deficiency Appropriation Bill for 1937, Extract from Hearing Before the Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Statement of Harry Hopkins*, 75th Cong. 133 (1937); Winslow Carlton, *Annual Report: Division of Self-Help Cooperative Service, June 30, 1935* (San Francisco: State Emergency Relief Administration, 1936), 5.

[276] Direct relief – also known as "the dole"—included cash or in-kind payments in the form of food, shelter, clothing, light, fuel, necessary household supplies, medicine, medical supplies, and medical attendance." "Bulletin No. 4: Issued by the California SERA Concerning Cooperatives," *Cooperative Self-Help: A Monthly Bulletin for Cooperatives of Unemployed* 1, no. 3 (September 1934): 6; Brown, *Public Relief*, 237.

[277] "Bulletin No. 4: Issued by the California SERA Concerning Cooperatives," *Cooperative Self-Help: A Monthly Bulletin for Cooperatives of Unemployed* 1, no. 3 (September 1934): 6.

[278] Multiple groups formed the CPR including several cooperative organizations, EPIC clubs, the End Poverty League, Inc., and the Utopian Society. The two County Supervisors pressured by the CRP were Herbert C. Legg and John Anson Ford, who had been elected with support from the EPIC campaign. These two would form an alliance – sometimes joined by the moderate Gordon McDonough – to challenge the dominant group of conservative supervisors who usually fell in line behind the region's business and agricultural elite. Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 266; Tom Sitton, *The Courthouse Crowd: Los Angeles County and Its Government, 1850-1950* (Los Angeles: Historical Society of Southern California, 2013), 213-214; *California Exposition for Rehabilitation* (Los Angeles: Congress for Permanent Rehabilitation, 1935), box 41, folder 6, Borough papers.

movement throughout the county, place the unemployed on a self-sustaining basis, and reduce county relief expenditures.[279] With robust publicity but minimal funds, the Department along with the county's newly appointed Committee of Fifteen proposed a series of projects.[280] One of the more ambitious proposals included a plan for the Rehabilitation Department to establish a countywide system of factories and commodity exchanges. Using Works Progress Administration funds, it would then pay the "employable" unemployed to work in the factories producing basic necessities to further stock the commodity exchanges.[281] The Department would also issue loans to local cooperatives to produce "non-perishable basic necessities of life," any surplus of which would be used to stock the exchanges further.[282] In turn, the commodities would be distributed on the basis of scrip to county welfare recipients in exchange for "useful work, such as beautification of the county, free entertainment, safety work or anything for which they might be fitted." Relief recipients would "work as much or as little as they chose" and raise their standards of living accordingly rather than depending on a charity budget.[283]

Despite these detailed plans, legal restrictions sharply curtailed the Department's ability to develop programs for the unemployed who failed to meet legal criteria to be classified as

[279] *California Exposition for Rehabilitation,* Borough papers; *Manual of Information About the Department of Rehabilitation of the County of Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Department of Rehabilitation, County of Los Angeles, nd), quoted in Elizabeth M. Sterkel, "Employing the 'Unemployables': A Study of Los Angeles County Rehabilitation Division" (master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1939), 19.
[280] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 267.
[281] General Outline of the Los Angeles County Plan, ca 1936, box 63, folder cc3, Ford papers; Thomas Dorrance, "Individualist and Socialist at the Same Time": Welfare Policy in Los Angeles During the Great Depression" (lecture, Policy History Conference, Columbus, OH, 2014), 8.
[282] Sidney I. Melinkoff, "Economic Rehabilitation of the Unemployed Through Cooperative Production: A Study of the Los Angeles County Rehabilitation Department" (master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1936), 24.
[283] The commodities would also be used to supply county hospitals and sanitariums. Instead of receiving cash relief, the aged and infirm would be issued scrip to redeem goods from the exchanges. General Outline of the Los Angeles County Plan, ca 1936, box 63, folder cc3, Ford papers; Thomas Dorrance, "Individualist and Socialist at the Same Time": Welfare Policy in Los Angeles During the Great Depression" (lecture, Policy History Conference, Columbus, OH, 2014), 8.

"indigents" under the state's Pauper Act.[284] Accordingly, the Department's duties were increasingly akin to welfare rather than rehabilitation and thus duplicated the work of the Department of Charities rendering it superfluous and a waste of money.[285]

Meanwhile, at the start of 1935, EPIC state congressmen, who formed a bloc in the state assembly, introduced several pieces of production-for-use legislation. Assembly Bill 653 would allow counties with populations exceeding 900,000 to "embark separately on large-scale unemployment production for use projects" – in other words, this would potentially provide the legal authority the County's Rehabilitation Department required to proceed with many of its plans.[286] And Assembly Bill 121, would provide for the establishment of a state cooperative administrator who would set up cooperatives and exchange depots as well as "purchase, lease or acquire in the name of the State factories, land materials and tools and lend or grant funds for such enterprises.[287]

The local and state attempts to bring together idle labor and idle factories to produce for use drew ire from business interests.[288] While some business leaders had supported self-help cooperatives prior to the EPIC campaign, many now "raised a howl of protest" against plans for production by these same groups.[289] Ultimately, business interests were conflicted between their desire to lighten relief and tax burdens while simultaneously discouraging competition by the units and quashing what they viewed as the socialist potential of the movement. Some offered

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[284] "Relief Store Plan Hits New Snag," Los *Angeles Evening Post-Record*, March 9, 1935; "Store Chain for 'Co-op' Barter Hits Snag," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), March 9, 1935.
[285] S.S. Griswold, *A Survey of the Department of Rehabilitation of Los Angeles County* (Los Angeles: Bureau of Efficiency, County of Los Angeles, 1935), 4-6, 14.
[286] "Many Laws Sought by Liberals Fail," *United Progressive News*, June 21, 1935.
[287] "Production Bill Beaten," *Los Angeles Times*, May 18, 1935.
[288] Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Coming of the New Deal, vol 2, 1933-1935* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003, orig. 1958), 279.
[289] Clark Kerr, "The Self-Help Co-operatives and Their Effect on Labor," *Sociology and Social Research* 19, no. 4 (March-April 1935): 373.

mild support as long as government agencies "properly encouraged and directed" the cooperatives and limited their production to "modest" levels.[290] However, business interests largely feared that cooperatives would injure private industry by removing markets through competition.[291] Small businesses, which were the first to benefit from cash relief, argued that their profits would suffer if the unemployed ceased making cash transactions and instead produced for themselves.[292] Others claimed that production-for-use would discourage initiative, promote "chiseling," and disincentivize peoples' willingness to work.[293]

At the national level, one author from the business-focused *United States News* warned of the danger of programs such as production-for-use and the Federal Surplus Relief Corporation (FSRC), which they viewed as leading the country down the slippery slope towards socialism.[294] The article faulted private industry and agriculture for prioritizing reduction in relief costs as well as its willingness to rent idle factories to government agencies and participate in programs to distribute surplus products.[295] "If the present trend continues," it warned, "the time may not be far off when a profitless industry, manned by the unemployed and managed by the Government, will be supplying the needs of the millions of relief families and their dependents, while

[290] H.L. Masser, Chairman, Committee on Cooperatives, Citizen's Committee on Welfare, quoted in Clark Kerr, "The Self-Help Co-operatives and Their Effect on Labor," *Sociology and Social Research* 19, no. 4 (March-April 1935): 373.
[291] Clark Kerr and Arthur Harris, "Self-Help Cooperatives in California," in *Legislative Problems, No. 9* (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Administration, University of California, Berkeley, 1939), 24.
[292] Kerr and Harris, "Self-Help Cooperatives in California," 24.
[293] "Our Widening Social Horizons," *Utopian News*, November 28, 1931; Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 197.
[294] Established in December, 1933, the FSRC purchased surplus commodities in an attempt to assist both farmers by removing price-depressing excess goods as well as the unemployed by providing them with food. "Uncle Sam, Producer and Distributor; An Adventure in 'Social Management,'" *United States News*, August 27, 1934; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Coming of the New Deal, vol 2, 1933-1935* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003, orig. 1958), 278.
[295] "Uncle Sam, Producer and Distributor; An Adventure in 'Social Management,'" *United States News*, August 27, 1934.

alongside will be operating private industry to supply the wants of the remainder of the population.[296]

Business interests such as the Chamber and the Los Angeles Merchants and Manufacturers' Association (MMA) opposed the proposed production-for-use state legislation and worked diligently behind the scenes to defeat it. When the state senate, dominated by conservatives, defeated AB 121—or the "EPIC plan" as it was derisively called – on June 3, 1935 by refusing to reconsider the bill, attorney and assistant secretary for the MMA, reported that the measure had been "definitely killed."[297] In fact, he noted that "All of the vicious labor bills were defeated."[298] For its part, AB 653 passed both the Senate and Assembly. However, the Department of Rehabilitation's director and members of the Los Angeles Welfare Commission reported that shortly before Governor Frank Merriam was to sign the bill on July 20, a contingent from the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce arrived in Sacramento and "were immediately admitted to see the Governor."[299] He subsequently pocket vetoed the bill.[300]

Heeding the concerns of business, FERA and local relief administrators were careful to avoid competition with private industry and from the beginning had proposed and implemented projects that maximized labor and minimized capital.[301] Producer cooperatives receiving federal grants generally were prohibited from selling products on the open market.[302] Similarly, the

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[296] "Uncle Sam, Producer and Distributor."
[297] "Production Bill Beaten," *Los Angeles Times*, May 18, 1935.
[298] C.R. Leslie to Edgar R. Perry, Los Angeles Merchants and Manufacturers Association, June 26, 1935, in *Violations of Free Speech and Rights of Labor, Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Comm. on Education and Labor Pursuant to S. Res. 266, part 63, Supplementary Exhibits*, 76th Cong. 23138 (1940).
[299] "Merriam 'Don't Mind Criticism'!," *United Progressive News*, July 26, 1935; "Rehabilitation Bill Veto Laid to 'Dictation,' *Hollywood-Citizen News*, March 18, 1936; Melinkoff, "Economic Rehabilitation of the Unemployed," 58-59.
[300] "Assembly Bills Pocket Vetoed by the Governor," *Assembly Final History, California Legislature*, 51st Sess. (1935), 81.
[301] Nancy E. Rose, "Production-for-Use or Production-for-Profit?: The Contradictions of Consumer Goods Production in 1930s Work Relief," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 20, no. 1 (1988): 55.
[302] "FERA Policies Regarding Cooperatives," *Cooperative Self-Help: A Monthly Bulletin for Cooperatives of Unemployed* 1, no. 1 (May 1934): 7; "Self-Help Cooperative Associations," in *First Deficiency Appropriation Bill*

Department of Rehabilitation's plan was careful to state that no products from their commodity exchanges "need find their way into the open market."[303] Rather, its director argued, one of its objectives was to aid "private business by relieving it of part of the heavy load of taxation."[304] Authorities at both the local and state levels further attempted to assuage business by emphasizing the self-help cooperatives' ability to discipline and maintain a ready labor reserve. The Department of Rehabilitation suggested that the "primary value" of the cooperatives centered on their ability – if they were "properly utilized" – to help a worker retain his "work habits until he can find a place in regular employment."[305] SERA officials agreed and argued that cooperatives provided a social benefit by providing workers with the opportunity to stay in practice with their tools and trade.[306]

While local relief administrators continued their legal battles to establish permanent and widespread production-for-use programs as a viable alternative to direct relief, numerous local cooperatives produced goods with their federal grant funding. However, given the policies meant to appease business, the only markets open to them were other cooperative members, who typically lacked cash, and government agencies such as the FSRC, FERA, and the County Welfare Bureau, all of which proved inadequate.[307] As the county relief administration switched from in-kind to cash payments in late 1934, they no longer required the staple supplies produced by cooperatives.[308] Moreover, relief agencies tended to purchase items "in carload lots and at

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for 1937, Extract from Hearing Before the Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Statement of Harry Hopkins, 75th Cong. 133-134 (1937).

[303] General Outline of the Los Angeles County Plan, ca 1936, box 63, folder cc3, Ford papers

[304] Elizabeth M. Sterkel, "Employing the 'Unemployables': A Study of Los Angeles County Rehabilitation Division (master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1939), 20.

[305] Charles J. Dexter, *A Survey of the Non-Grant Cooperative Movement in Los Angeles County* (n.p.: California State Relief Administration, 1936), quoted in Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 285.

[306] Winslow Carlton, *Annual Report: Division of Self-Help Cooperative Service, June 30, 1935* (San Francisco: State Emergency Relief Administration, 1936), 69-70.

[307] Nancy E. Rose, "Production-for-Use or Production-for-Profit?: The Contradictions of Consumer Goods Production in 1930s Work Relief," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 20, no. 1 (1988): 50.

[308] Rose, "Production-for-Use or Production-for-Profit?," 50; Colcord, *Cash Relief*, 105.

distressed prices," while other agencies, such as the Federal Transient Service, started their own production projects.[309] A federal report found that producer cooperatives required minimum cash incomes for essentials such as wages, gasoline, and public-utility services and declined due to their lack of a sufficient cash market.[310] This decline, therefore, was spurred in part by policy decisions that attempted to avoid or minimize competition with private industry.[311]

Some contemporary scholars and politicians supported production-for-use units entering competitive markets. The economists Paul S. Taylor and Clark Kerr argued that expending public funds on production for use was "as justified as the government subsidies to railroad and canal corporations, generally approved despite their very unfavorable effects upon many vested interests, and frequently upon each other."[312] Los Angeles County Supervisor John Anson Ford echoed these comments, asserting that the federal government should supply production-for-use units with "assistance comparable to that given railroads, banks, and insurance companies."[313] Sociologist and WPA official, Nels Anderson, observed in a book titled, *The Right to Work*, that, "If a project is useful it is sure to be criticized because it is competitive, while if it is non-competitive it is just as likely to be condemned by the same critics for not being useful."[314] The fact that New Deal policies capitulated to business demands for non-competition, Anderson

[309] Kerr and Taylor found that a significant source of cash payments for the producer cooperatives in 1935 were members who also received cash relief wages. Clark Kerr and Paul S. Taylor, "The Self-Help Coöperatives in California," in *Essays in Social Economics in Honor of Jessica Blanche Peixotto,* ed. Ewald T. Grether (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1935), 216-217; Nancy E. Rose, "Production-for-Use or Production-for-Profit?: The Contradictions of Consumer Goods Production in 1930s Work Relief," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 20, no. 1 (1988): 50.
[310] "Self-Help Cooperative Associations," in *First Deficiency Appropriation Bill for 1937, Extract from Hearing Before the Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Statement of Harry Hopkins*, 75th Cong. 134 (1937).
[311] Rose, "Production-for-Use or Production-for-Profit?," 55.
[312] Paul S. Taylor and Clark Kerr, "Putting the Unemployed at Productive Labor," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 176 (November 1934): 110.
[313] John Anson Ford to Robert Riddell, January 8, 1936, box 46, folder eaa3, Ford papers.
[314] Nels Anderson, *The Right to Work* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1973, orig. 1938), 65.

wrote, seemed "to recognize the proprietary right of private industry to exploit the labor market."[315]

Moreover, cooperative members themselves insisted on their rights to work at productive labor and to compete on the market with private industry. Producer cooperatives largely consisted of working-class members who viewed their participation in the movement as a means not only to evade "the ignominy of the dole," but also to avoid living on lower subsistence standards than those still employed by private industry.[316] Hunger and malnutrition frequently appeared as key preoccupations for cooperative participants and informed their struggle for the establishment of permanent production-for-use programs.[317] One unit member described his ideological transformation from one of positioning himself as a beggar to demanding his right to work and to compete: "Always before we said, 'please give us a carrot or potato.' We took an apologetic attitude. We said, 'we won't compete with you, the only thing we will compete with is the garbage can.' However, we have a right to build real cooperatives. We have a right to produce and sell for money."[318]

Others emphasized their inherit human right to basic necessities supplied by their own labor. A member of the Los Angeles Unemployed Cooperative Distribution Association (UCDA) wrote to the Board of Supervisors protesting regulations against the cooperatives selling on the open market while simultaneously being required to pay market rates for necessary goods and equipment.[319] Government agencies, according to the letter's anonymous author, were operating

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[315] Anderson, *Right to Work*, 59.
[316] White-collar workers tended to participate more in the consumer cooperatives in Los Angeles. Elizabeth Virginia Watson, "The Consumers' Cooperative Movement in Los Angeles County" (master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1935), 20; *California Exposition for Rehabilitation* (Los Angeles: Congress for Permanent Rehabilitation, 1935), box 41, folder 6, Borough papers.
[317] *California Exposition for Rehabilitation*, Borough Papers.
[318] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 226.
[319] Unemployed Co-Operative Distribution Association of Los Angeles County to Chairman, County of Los Angeles Board of Supervisors, ca 1935, box 31, folder 6b.22, Ford papers.

on the mistaken premise that cooperatives were "subject to the law of supply and demand."[320] Rather, they declared, "OUR market is, predicated upon OUR NEEDS, to be supplied by OUR inialbel [sic] right to labor therefore—oh lots of labor if need be—that OUR needs be supplied."[321] These claims contradicted the logic of the market. Rather than profit, production-for-use centered human needs. Accordingly, charges of unfair competition by private industry reflected both a fear that they might lose profits due to government interference and that production-for-use projects might encourage people "to question the rationale of basing production decisions on profits instead of needs."[322]

Indeed, by mid-decade, many cooperative participants anticipated that their unemployed status would remain permanent and viewed production-for-use as a means of creating "sound and lasting security."[323] "My age will prevent me from getting a regular job," remarked one cooperative member, "the cooperatives will furnish a moderate amount of light work in exchange for food."[324] Another saw a need for self-help units within a tumultuous capitalist system: "This depression has nothing to do with the unit; many people will need the unit just the same."[325] Out of approximately one-hundred interviewed, roughly fifty percent of self-help unit managers throughout Southern California "said that they never again expected to get cash employment."[326] As one person explained, "This depression has nothing to do with the unit; many people will need the unit just the same." Production-for-use thus offered "immediate constructive action" to

[320] Unemployed Co-Operative Distribution Association of Los Angeles County to Chairman, County of Los Angeles Board of Supervisors.
[321] Unemployed Co-Operative Distribution Association of Los Angeles County to Chairman, County of Los Angeles Board of Supervisors.
[322] Rose, "Production-for-Use or Production-for-Profit?," 48.
[323] "Forward, Rehabilitation!," *United Progressive News*, August 9, 1935.
[324] Panunzio, *Self-Help Cooperatives*, 70.
[325] Panunzio, *Self-Help Cooperatives*, 70.
[326] Carlton, *Annual Report,* A-30.

this problem.[327] Tired of being "stigmatized as indigents," cooperative members sought to "rehabilitate themselves by their own efforts."[328] The unemployed were "victims of an impersonal economy, which is crushing them." explained one advocate. He went on: "There can be no question of personal liberty until there is economic independence."[329] In fact, many participants imagined their key to independence -- production-for-use – as operating parallel to private industry. When the Congress for Permanent Rehabilitation hosted the first Production-for-Use exposition at the Shrine Auditorium in March, 1935, the cover of their program depicted a utopian scene where "co-operative effort," represented by small farms and mini-factories interspersed along idyllic rolling hills, existed alongside "private production," marked by large efficient factories with churning smokestacks.[330] This image may have served to appease powerful groups such as the Chamber of Commerce, but, nevertheless, it still offered an alternative vision of the social order.

Local and federal relief administrators approached cooperatives with ambivalence, unsure of their ability to provide economic security but simultaneously viewing them as possible long-term semi-solutions to the problem of permanent unemployment, particularly for the elderly, for workers displaced by technological innovations, and for seasonal and underemployed workers.[331] Hickok regarded cooperatives as potentially offering "some way out for the big load that I am convinced, after conversation with many employers, is never going to get back into private

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[327] Forward, Rehabilitation!"
[328] "City Council Approves PFU Plan," *United Progressive News*, July 26, 1935.
[329] "Delegates Lash Economic Order, Urge PFU System," *United Progressive News*, July 26, 1935.
[330] *California Exposition for Rehabilitation* (Los Angeles: Congress for Permanent Rehabilitation, 1935), box 41, folder 6, Borough papers.
[331] "Bulletin No. 4: Issued by the California SERA Concerning Cooperatives," *Cooperative Self-Help: A Monthly Bulletin for Cooperatives of Unemployed* 1, no. 3 (September 1934): 7; Division of Self-Help Cooperatives, *Manual of Rules and Policies Concerning Self-Help and Non-Profit Cooperatives Eligible to Federal Aid* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Emergency Relief Administration, 1934), 4282; Clark Kerr, "The Self-Help Co-operatives and Their Effect on Labor," *Sociology and Social Research* 19, no. 4 (March-April 1935): 369.

industry – that stranded generation I've been worrying about."[332] Administrators and economists also anticipated that cooperatives might also subsidize wages by providing affordable goods and services to members who eventually found employment at low wages, while providing a safety net during periods of unemployment.[333] Implicit in federal and local administrators' treatment of cooperatives was the understanding that they would not provide sufficient subsistence for a household. Rather, they imagined that the unemployed and precariously employed would find relief in these community-based organizations rather than relying entirely on the state. County Supervisor John Anson Ford argued that the millions spent on the "dole" failed to offer "adequate provision for these 30,000 families whose problem is certain to be with us for some years to come."[334] Rather, he urged SERA officials to plan ahead to help these families to self-support."[335] To accomplish this, Kerr argued that cash markets and government subsidies were imperative to cover cooperative operating costs and increase the number of projects and workers.[336]

In this spirit, and despite numerous setbacks, by mid-1935, Winslow Carlton, the Director of Self-Help Cooperatives for SERA, sought to establish production-for-use cooperatives on a permanent basis, rather than permit them to rely on inconsistent federal and state grants. Given that a significant hurdle for the cooperatives included insufficient capital and the lack of an adequate cash market, his plan called for an initial investment of $4.5 millions – $1.5 million

[332] Lorena Hickok to Harry Hopkins, May 28, 1934, in *One-Third of a Nation: Lorena Hickok Reports on the Great Depression*, ed. Richard Lowitt and Maurine Beasley, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 257.
[333] Division of Self-Help Cooperatives, *Manual of Rules and Policies Concerning Self-Help and Non-Profit Cooperatives Eligible to Federal Aid* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Emergency Relief Administration, 1934), 4282; Kerr, "The Self-Help Co-operatives and Their Effect on Labor," 375.
[334] John Anson Ford, Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, to Frank Y. McLaughlin, California State Emergency Administration, December 11, 1935, box 31, folder 6b2, Ford papers.
[335] John Anson Ford, Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, to Frank Y. McLaughlin.
[336] Kerr, "The Self-Help Co-operatives and Their Effect on Labor," 375.

from FERA and $3 million from SERA – for a three-year experiment in self-help.[337] Working closely with local liberal Democratic politicians and relief officials in Los Angeles, Carlton proposed establishing 100 producer cooperatives, 130 consumer cooperatives, and a central warehouse, which would work together symbiotically and eventually become self-sustaining.[338] In the meantime, the state would purchase surplus products while members purchased goods with credits earned from co-op work.[339]

By early 1936, Carlton had failed to convince federal and state officials to fund his plan. While FERA officials had "tentatively agreed" to fund Winslow's program, the federal government's decision to terminate its direct relief program in 1935 further complicated his efforts.[340] Moreover, the critics within the County Board of Supervisors found it to be costly and doubted the capabilities of the cooperatives to meet the levels of efficiency required to become self-sustaining.[341] One social worker pointed out that New Deal policies trended toward the stimulation of consumption by providing clients with "independent purchasing power."[342] Many relief officials simply warned that private business would oppose the plan.[343] Representatives from the State Relief Commission reported receiving immense pressure to revoke the grant proposal.[344]

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[337] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises of the Unemployed," 486; "Give Self Help This Chance," *San Francisco News*, n.d., box 31, folder 6b2, Ford papers.
[338] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises of the Unemployed," 487-488; Winslow Carlton, Division of Self-Help Cooperatives, SERA, to John Anson Ford, Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, October 1, 1935, box 31, folder 6b2, Ford papers.
[339] "Culbert Olson Demands Carlton Co-op Plan!," *United Progressive News*, November 15, 1935; Stevens, *In Pursuit of Utopia*, 69.
[340] "Self-Help Movement," *Monthly Labor Review* 42, no. 3 (March 1936): 618; Cybelle Fox, *Three Worlds of Relief: Race, Immigration and the American Welfare State from the Progressive Era to the New Deal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 216.
[341] John Anson Ford, "Statement for Board Approval Regarding Self Help and the Federal Cooperatives," October 21, 1935, box 51, folder aa3, Ford papers; Stevens, *In Pursuit of Utopia*, 69.
[342] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises of the Unemployed," 493.
[343] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises of the Unemployed," 492-493.
[344] "Culbert Olson Demands Carlton Co-op Plan!," *United Progressive News*, November 15, 1935.

Indeed, the State Chamber of Commerce held a two-day convention at the Biltmore Hotel in downtown Los Angeles in November, 1935, to discuss its upcoming agenda, which included "opposition to any production-for-use program in California."[345] There a committee of 260 businessmen from Southern California specifically targeted Carlton's production-for-use plan calling it "out of line."[346] Another critic worried that Carlton's proposals would penalize taxpayers by asking them to purchase goods for charity support. They argued that "the interests of the larger general public must not be discriminated against for the benefit of any minority, no matter how well intentioned that minority may be."[347]

Carlton resigned in March, 1936. His replacement, along with the newly appointed SERA director, Harold Pomeroy, was averse to the cooperative movement.[348] The expansion of the Works Progress Administration as well as increased private employment began to siphon male members away from the cooperatives.[349] Members also left units as they gradually realized the unlikelihood of receiving federal grants and that "the Rehabilitation Department's promises would not be fulfilled."[350]

The last-standing members in the self-help units tended to be those deemed the "least employable" such as the elderly, physically disabled, and women.[351] In 1936, the ratio of women to men was as high as six-to-one in some groups, whereas in 1932 many units had been composed entirely of men.[352] As membership shifted, so too did the groups' activities. Fewer

[345] "Militant Relief, Tax Stand Taken by State Leaders," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), November 9, 1935; "'We Love McLaughlin!' Sing State C. of C. Directors," *United Progressive News*, November 15, 1935.
[346] "Militant Relief, Tax Stand Taken by State Leaders," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), November 9, 1935; "'We Love McLaughlin!' Sing State C. of C. Directors," *United Progressive News*, November 15, 1935.
[347] Suggested Memorandum for Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors to Mr. Jacob Baker, Administrator, Division of Self-Help Cooperatives, September 12, 1935, box 31, folder 6b.2, Ford papers.
[348] Stevens, *In Pursuit of Utopia*, 69-71.
[349] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 480.
[350] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 281-282.
[351] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 282.
[352] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 282.

members worked in the fields for Japanese farmers, while many increased the salvage of newspapers, bottles, and clothing as well as "cleaning and sorting vegetables and fruit for the Department of Rehabilitation."[353]

At the close of 1937, SERA began shutting down cooperatives and by early 1938 proposed ceasing all funding.[354] However, that year the Democratic state senator Culbert Olson, who had run in 1934 on the EPIC ticket, defeated the conservative Republican incumbent Frank Merriam becoming the first Democratic governor of California since 1894.[355] A supporter of production for use, Olson proposed to replace traditional relief with cooperatives. However, by this point, conservative forces had lobbied to return the administration of relief from the state to the counties where they exerted more control.[356] Moreover, opponents accused Olson's administration of corruption and communist infiltration, which severely limited his ability to pursue the revised production-for-use program. The state legislature, by this time, was "conservatively inclined" but many members found that opposing production-for-use because "'it hurts our business'" proved ineffective. To address this issue, the Chamber prepared a 32-page monograph arguing against Olson's plan and printed 10,000 copies to send to legislators and leaders throughout the state ultimately defeating it.[357]

CONCLUSION

California, which hosted the majority of cooperatives in the nation, ultimately received only .37 percent of the total FERA grant funds between January, 1933, and June, 1935.[358] One contemporary scholar suggested that the federal cooperative program was deliberately kept small

[353] Kerr, "Productive Enterprises," 282.
[354] Stevens, *In Pursuit of Utopia*, 70-71.
[355] Stevens, *In Pursuit of Utopia*, 71.
[356] Stevens, *In Pursuit of Utopia*, 71.
[357] Leonard E. Read, "The Only Authority" (speech, Economic Club of Detroit, December 3, 1945), 7.
[358] Rose, "Production-for-Use or Production-for-Profit?," 58, fn. 8.

in response to the outcry from private industry.[359] John Anson Ford credited the decline of the production-for-use cooperatives to "an overpowering and unreasonable opposition by moneyed interests and conservative political forces" as well as a "lack of experience" and "legal precedence."[360] The lack of an adequate cash market and the "iron-clad rule" that cooperatives could not compete with private business in many ways doomed the production-for-use movement in Los Angeles.[361]

By 1937, a federal government report titled *Self-Help Cooperative Associations* found that despite their problems, the self-help program had proven beneficial in that it conserved food surpluses that might have otherwise gone to waste, reduced relief costs, and provided "thousands" of the impoverished with basic necessities.[362] A report from SERA's Division of Self-Help Cooperative Service lauded the self-help participants for "overcoming the demoralizing effects of idleness and dependency" by actively helping themselves and in the process saving state agencies an estimated $303,700 annually in relief costs.[363] However, the report also acknowledged that the average monthly earnings for participants amounted to $12.50—or 19 cents an hour—which measured up to between one-quarter-to-one-fifth the minimum standard of living.[364] In many ways, then, the self-help cooperative movements facilitated the self-exploitation of the worker.

[359] Edward Ainsworth Williams, *Federal Aid for Relief* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), 146.
[360] John Anson Ford to Committee on Relief, Hollywood Central Young Democrats, November 19, 1937, box 64, folder aaa5, Ford papers.
[361] Ford to Hollywood Central Young Democrats.
[362] "Self-Help Cooperative Associations," in *First Deficiency Appropriation Bill for 1937, Extract from Hearing Before the Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Statement of Harry Hopkins*, 75th Cong. 134 (1937).
[363] Carlton, *Annual Report*, ii.
[364] Carlton, *Annual Report*, ii.

CHAPTER 4

THE "BUM BLOCKADE:" TRANSIENT LABOR AND THE LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT'S BORDER PATROL

"California, here we come!
Every beggar—every bum
From New York—and Jersey—
Down to Purdue—
By millions—we're coming
So that we can live on you.
We hear that Sinclair's got your State.
That's why we can hardly wait—
Open up that Golden Gate—
California, here we come!"

-Circulated by the California League Against Sinclairism, 1934.[1]

"Lots of folks back East, they say, is leavin' home every day,
Beatin' the hot old dusty way to the California line.
'Cross the desert sands they roll, gettin' out of that old dust bowl,
They think they're goin' to a sugar bowl, but here's what they find
Now, the police at the port of entry say,
"You're number fourteen thousand for today."
Oh, if you ain't got the do re mi, folks, you ain't got the do re mi,
Why, you better go back to beautiful Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas,
Georgia, Tennessee."

-Woody Guthrie and Maxine Crissman[2]

In mid-February, 1936, a family of nine drove their 1929 Ford roadster, spewing water and oil and hauling a home-made trailer, across the Arizona border into California a few miles outside of Blythe. The small car, "spattered with oil-soaked dust" and with patches of paint missing, featured one seat, which was crammed with both parents, a teenage boy, and two toddlers. Three daughters, ages five, twelve, and fourteen, crowded behind them in the baggage compartment, which the family had converted into a rumble seat. In the eight-foot trailer an 18-

[1] Reprinted in Kevin Starr, *Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 144.
[2] Woody Guthrie, vocalist, "Do Re Mi," by Woodie Guthrie, *Dust Bowl Ballads*, 1940.

year-old boy huddled amid the family's worldly possessions.[3] The father, unshaven and with a ring of tobacco juice around his lips, informed the officers that they hailed from New Mexico and were enroute to stay with his wife's sister in California. Likely fleeing the drought and depression that had ravaged the Southwest between 1933 and 1935, this family followed the pattern of roughly half of the migrants arriving in the state during this decade by following kinfolk already settled there.[4] Southern California, the land of sunshine, orange groves, and a lower cost of living, as its boosters had historically promised, might offer them a new start.[5]

Yet as they approached the state line, perhaps they were surprised when two members of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), stationed approximately 200 miles outside of their jurisdiction, blocked their passage into the state.[6] The officers quizzed them about their finances and perhaps even requested to see bank books or cancelled checks "as evidence of financial security."[7] While the family had $30 in cash, they would be required to pay $20 to "clear the licenses on the car and trailer."[8] The officers warned them that employment was scarce in the state and that "thousands" were already "on relief in Los Angeles."[9] Clutching her one-year old daughter, the woman started to sob. After a tense ten minutes of processing their disbelief, the family reluctantly agreed to turn back. In doing so, they denied the police "the privilege of fingerprinting them as 'not desirable in California.'"[10] If they had been single men, the officers

[3] *Transients in California* (San Francisco: Division of Special Surveys and Studies, State Relief Administration of California, 1936), 258.
[4] James N. Gregory, *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 10-11, 28; Paul S. Taylor and Tom Vasey, "Drought Refugee and Labor Migration to California, June-December 1935," *Monthly Labor Review* 42, no. 2 (February 1936): 313.
[5] "Adventuring in Southern California" (All-Year Club advertisement), *Saturday Evening Post*, October 21, 1933, 80; Kevin Starr, *Material Dreams: Southern California Through the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 90-119.
[6] *Transients in California* (San Francisco: Division of Special Surveys and Studies, State Relief Administration of California, 1936), 258-259.
[7] *Transients in California*, 257.
[8] *Transients in California*, 258.
[9] *Transients in California*, 258-259.
[10] *Transients in California*, 258-259.

would likely have jailed them on vagrancy charges. Nevertheless, just before LAPD officers blocked the entry of this family to the state, they allowed "a beautiful new Packard sedan with four passengers" to pass through with no questions asked. "You see, there's really nothing to do in that case," explained the officer, "We would make enemies if we stopped people like *that*."[11]

These border activities by the LAPD made headlines throughout the nation.[12] On February 3, 1936, Los Angeles Chief of Police James E. Davis sent 136 police officers to key checkpoints along the state's borders where they were directed to stop and turn back any indigent non-residents of California arriving by automobile, rail or bus.[13] Following a plan "designed to halt the seasonal influx into California of migratory indigents," the officers took up position in Del Norte, Siskiyou, and Modoc Counties along the Oregon border, in Plumas, Lassen, and Mono counties in the central Sierra Nevada, and in the "southern desert" counties of San Bernardino, Riverside, and Imperial.[14] A few months later, Davis boasted that the action had turned back over 1,000 transients with what his detractors condescendingly called the "Foreign Legion" and the "Bum Blockade."[15] The plan, hatched by both the LAPD and the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, centered on preventing "criminal" types of transients traveling in

[11] Italics are mine. *Transients in California*, 257.
[12] "California Border Closed to Vagrants," *New York Times*, February 5, 1936; "California Turns Back Thousands of Indigents at Borders of State," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 16, 1936; "Los Angeles Bars Tramps," *New York Herald Tribune*, February 4, 1936. The border patrol was one example of a number of attempts by states to restrict in-migration during this era. For example, the governor of Colorado proclaimed martial law along a mile-strip of the state border and called the National Guard. Similarly, the governor of Florida issued an executive order during the winter months of 1934, 1935, and 1936 to halt in-migration and place state police along its border. See Monica W. Varsanyi, "Hispanic Racialization, Citizenship, and the Colorado Border Blockade of 1936," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 40, no. 1 (Fall 2020): 5-39.
[13] "Police Take Up Duty on State Lines," *Los Angeles Times*, February 4, 1936; Kevin Starr, *Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 177; H. Mark Wild, "If You Ain't Got that Do-Re-Mi: The Los Angeles Border Patrol and White Migration in Depression-Era California," *Southern California Quarterly* 83, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 334.
[14] "Police Take Up Duty on State Lines," *Los Angeles Times*, February 4, 1936; Kevin Starr, *Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 177;
[15] It's not clear where the phrase "bum blockade" originated, but historian Leonard Leader attributes it to Los Angeles County Supervisor John Anson Ford. The blockade was also popularly (and mockingly) referred to as the "L.A. Expeditionary Force." Leonard Leader, *Los Angeles and the Great Depression* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991), 219, fn 1.

automobiles, trains, and buses from passing into California.[16] Those deemed guilty of lacking funds were to be given the choice to leave the state or face arrest on vagrancy charges.[17] In cases they considered particularly suspicious, the officers fingerprinted individuals to check for previous criminal activity.[18] Davis and his supporters contended that this blockade would halt "scores of criminals and disease-carrying ne-er-do-wells" from entering the state and settling in Los Angeles, a hub for transient laborers, especially during the slack season in the winter months.[19] *The Los Angeles Times* – a staunch supporter of the blockade – referred to it disingenuously as a "State-wide program of resistance," papering over the fact that it was purely driven by Los Angeles actors without official state support. [20] As *Newsweek* described it, "a fat wallet became the passport to California."[21]

The LAPD's border patrol followed a long tradition of attempts to exclude "undesirable" members of the population. During the early days of California's statehood, framers of its constitution attempted to include clauses prohibiting the in-migration of free African Americans.[22] The white working-class lobbied to prevent Chinese and Japanese immigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[23] And just a few years before the border

[16] James E. Davis, *Report of Indigent Alien Transients*, Los Angeles: Los Angeles Police Department, March 11, 1936, 1, box 666596, Police Commission Records, Los Angeles City Archive and Record Center, Los Angeles, California; California Border Closed to Vagrants," *New York Times*, February 5, 1936; William T. Cross, "The Poor Migrant in California," *Social Forces* 15, no. 3 (March 1937): 426; Dorothy Wysor Smith, "California Liquidates the Transient," *Social Work Today* 3 (April 1936): 18.
[17] "The Transient Problem," *Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce Bulletin* 10, no. 35 (February 10, 1936): 4.
[18] "California Border Closed to Vagrants," *New York Times*, February 5, 1936.
[19] "Police Take Up Duty on State Lines," *Los Angeles Times*, February 4, 1936.
[20] "Police Take Up Duty on State Lines."
[21] "California: The Golden State Insists on Golden Passports," *Newsweek*, February 15, 1936. For an in-depth discussion of the border patrol especially with regard to white migration, see Wild, "If You Ain't Got that Do-Re-Mi." For general background, see Starr, *Endangered Dreams*,175-179; Leonard Leader, *Los Angeles and the Great Depression* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991), 194-224; and Errol Wayne Stevens, *Radical L.A.: From Coxey's Army to the Watts Riots, 1894-1965* (Norman, Ok: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 231-232. For a discussion of how the LAPD was received in the border communities, see Bill Lascher, *The Golden Fortress: California's Border War on Dust Bowl Refugees* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2022).
[22] Wild, "If You Ain't Got that Do-Re-Mi," 317-318.
[23] Wild, "If You Ain't Got that Do-Re-Mi," 318.

blockade, federal and local officials implemented a repatriation and deportation program that concluded with the mass exodus of Mexicans and Mexican Americans.[24] In these cases, the exclusionists framed their targets as some variation of lazy, diseased, or criminal or as stealing jobs perceived as rightfully belonging to white American citizens and degrading wages. The border patrol differed in that it largely targeted white native-born Americans.[25]

As the Great Depression took its toll and as federal administrators shifted and tweaked New Deal programs and policies, Los Angeles residents grew increasingly concerned that local taxpayers would be forced to bear the financial burden of relief for non-residents. This sentiment often overlooked the tradition of boosterism dating back to the nineteenth century in which the Chamber of Commerce and its allies touted Los Angeles as a paradise and waged campaigns luring tourists, homeseekers, industry, and workers. It also ignored the attempts of employers – especially major growers in California's agricultural industry – to constantly cultivate and replenish a local labor supply to tend to their ever-fluctuating seasonal labor needs. Indeed, local residents were rarely influenced by local labor-market requirements.[26] While Americans often celebrated the pioneer, they generally had less empathy for migrants in need of financial assistance.[27] In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, unemployed transients were often sent to jail, work camps, or forced to leave the community.[28] The nineteenth-century in particular witnessed a republican ideology, grounded in part on a Protestant work ethic, that elevated independence as an ideal, which functioned as a means of determining who constituted fit and productive members of society. As the country transformed into an industrial society, the work

[24] Wild, "If You Ain't Got that Do-Re-Mi," 318.
[25] Mark Wild argues that poor white migrants fleeing the Southwest during this era were often stigmatized by the same stereotypes used against non-white migrants and immigrants. Wild, "If You Ain't Got that Do-Re-Mi."
[26] Nels Anderson, *Men on the Move* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940), 260.
[27] Wild, "If You Ain't Got that Do-Re-Mi," 319.
[28] Kelly Lytle Hernández, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1881-1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 51-52.

ethic ideal held fast, despite the contradiction between a financially independent producer ideal and an industrial worker dependent on employers for wages.[29] With the rise of corporate liberalism, Americans were no longer required to follow the independent producer model, but were expected to contribute labor to the corporate liberal state.[30] Those who failed to do so, forfeited some rights of citizenship.[31]

This chapter examines the ways in which the crisis of the Great Depression revealed tensions between urban growth, labor, and the responsibilities of relief for individuals and families. During a time when Californians entertained numerous political schemes in response to the Depression such as the Townsend Movement, Ham-and-Eggs, and $30 Every Thursday, as well as potential reworkings of the economy, such as Upton Sinclair's End Poverty in California (EPIC) campaign, the LAPD's border patrol constituted a fascist-like alternative to the growing New Deal project. By instituting a regimen of surveillance at the state border, well outside of their jurisdiction, the Los Angeles law enforcement demonstrated a willingness to perform unconstitutional acts of blocking the free passage of American citizens between states, thus offering a far-right solution to the problem of surplus labor. Because so many of the migrants were jobless, their position as rights-bearing individuals was in question. Local elites built on age-old strategies of vagrancy laws, of depicting unwanted laborers as criminals and paupers, and also advocated new legal strategies to build a fortress around the city to prevent the influx of those deemed "undesirable."

Over the course of Los Angeles's rise from a small backwater town into a flourishing metropolis, this hysteria over the perceived winter arrival of transients arose periodically starting

[29] Wild, "If You Ain't Got that Do-Re-Mi," 319.
[30] Wild, "If You Ain't Got that Do-Re-Mi," 319; Martin J. Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism, 1890-1916: The Market, the Law, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
[31] Wild, "If You Ain't Got that Do-Re-Mi," 319.

in the late nineteenth century. As national markets and corporate capitalism displaced white men from farm and artisan work, they drifted throughout the country in search of seasonal labor in the agricultural, mining, or logging industries.[32] Many espoused radical or anarchist politics and joined labor unions such as the International Workers of the World and the Western Federation of Miners.[33] Moreover, they often rejected acquisitive middle-class norms and occasionally displayed non-normative gender identities.[34] The seasonal nature of their work led them to flood cities such as Los Angeles during the winter months to rest before the spring brought another round of work.[35] By the 1920s, many of these seasonal agricultural workers were Mexican migrant laborers, and they, too, often headed to Los Angeles during the main slack period, which fell during the winter months, to search for industrial work or, if necessary, apply for relief.[36] Local elites found the very existence of these itinerants of all races to be a threat and repeatedly characterized itinerant workers as loafers and criminals. "Look out for the yeggs," announced one 1908 newspaper article, "There will be more of the vicious type this year than ever before."[37] The LAPD regularly swept through vacant lots and along the banks of the Los Angeles River, arresting anyone caught sleeping on vagrancy charges.[38]

Alongside this "tramp panic," the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, founded in 1888 and motivated by a surge or real estate speculation, embarked on a campaign to sell the city, with

[32] Kelly Lytle Hernández, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1881-1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 45, 47.
[33] Hernández, *City of Inmates*, 46.
[34] Hernández, *City of Inmates*, 46; Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 92.
[35] Hernández, *City of Inmates*, 46.
[36] *Mexicans in California: Report of Governor C.C. Young's Mexican Fact-Finding Committee* (San Francisco: California Department of Industrial Relations, 1930), 157.
[37] A "yegg" is slang for a burglar – specifically, a safe cracker. "Hobo Horde Headed West," *Los Angeles Daily Times*, October 12, 1908; Vernon W. Saul, "The Vocabulary of Bums," *American Speech* 4, no. 5 (June, 1929): 346.
[38] Errol Wayne Stevens, *Radical L.A.: From Coxey's Army to the Watts Riots, 1894-1965* (Norman, Ok: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 50.

its dirt roads and "non-existent cultural life" to the rest of the nation.[39] From the time of the Gold Rush, California had enjoyed "a reputation as a place where fortunes were made" and prior to the 1930s, migration to California tended to follow the typical logic of westward movement in which people moved west in response to perceived opportunity.[40] The Chamber sought to redirect this migratory flow to Southern California. Aiming the majority of its promotional material at the Midwest, the Chamber touted the climate as well as real estate and industrial opportunities.[41] By the 1890s, Los Angeles had gained a reputation as "the best-advertised city in the nation."[42] As its promotional director asserted, "The Chamber sleeps not when it comes to keeping the country informed that Los Angeles occupies a most advantageous spot on the map of the United States."[43] Their promotional activity worked: industry grew and tourists flocked to Los Angeles during the winter months, generating "a robust seasonal economy for local business and railroads."[44]

As the country entered the "golden age of advertising" in the 1920s, the Chamber directors, including Harry Chandler of the *Los Angeles Times*, decided that "not enough was being done to promote summer tourism," and so they founded the All-Year Club of Southern California in 1921.[45] Whereas the Chamber's primary focus was on luring industry and capital to the region, the All-Year Club concentrated on enticing tourists and residents.[46] As one 1926

[39] A drought in the 1860s had ravaged the town's cattle industry and led to the dismantling of the gigantic ranchos, leaving thousands of acres of land up for sale to real estate investors. Also, the first Chamber of Commerce was founded in Los Angeles in 1873, but only lasted four years. Tom Zimmerman, "Paradise Promoted: Boosterism and the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce," *California History* 64, no. 1 (Winter 1985): 22-24.
[40] James N. Gregory, *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 7.
[41] Zimmerman, "Paradise Promoted," 23.
[42] Todd Gish, "Growing and Selling Los Angeles: The All-Year Club of Southern California, 1921-1941," *Southern California Quarterly* 89, no. 4 (Winter 2007-2008): 397.
[43] *Member's Annual* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, 1910), 18, quoted in Zimmerman, "Paradise Promoted," 25.
[44] Gish, "Growing and Selling Los Angeles," 397.
[45] Zimmerman, "Paradise Promoted," 26; Gish, "Growing and Selling Los Angeles," 397.
[46] Gish, "Growing and Selling Los Angeles," 397.

brochure boasted, "In the winter months only flowers and sunshine and spring are known here in the this All-Year land."[47] The volume and circulation of the organization's promotional material steadily increased each year. At one point in 1928, over six million advertisements inviting visitors to Southern California were inserted in roughly two-dozen metropolitan newspapers throughout the nation.[48] The All-Year Club drew the majority of its funding from an expropriation from the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, commonly referred to as the exploitation fund.[49] Ultimately, this booster activity, combined with the pervasive power of Hollywood's films, fan magazines, and gossip columns, inundated the rest of the nation with alluring images of Los Angeles.[50]

Due to these efforts, along with multiple other factors, Los Angeles's population grew from 100,000 in 1900 to 1.2 million by 1930; over half of this population surge occurred in the 1920s.[51] In fact, over two-and-a-half million arrived into the state between 1920 and 1930, which was, proportionally speaking, the "largest peacetime migration in American history."[52] Between 1930 and 1940, over one million migrants arrived in California.[53] The majority of these migrants poured into Southern California, especially Los Angeles County.[54]

Many of these Depression-era migrants were fleeing the Southwest and Great Plains region, its economy ravaged by the "worst drought of the century" along with floods, dust

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[47] *Southern California: Year 'Round Vacation Land Supreme* (Los Angeles: All-Year Club of Southern California, 1926), 2.
[48] Gish, "Growing and Selling Los Angeles," 400.
[49] The exploitation fund had formerly been called the "immigration fund." Gish, "Growing and Selling Los Angeles," 399; "County Exploitation Funds," *Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce Bulletin* 10, no. 48 (May 11, 1936): 1; Tom Sitton, *The Courthouse Crowd: Los Angeles County and Its Government, 1850-1950* (Los Angeles: Historical Society of Southern California, 2013), 161.
[50] Gregory, *American Exodus*, 22-23; Hilary Hallet, *Go West, Young Women!: The Rise of Early Hollywood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013): 3-25.
[51] Gish, "Growing and Selling Los Angeles," 397; Gregory, *American Exodus*, 26-27.
[52] Gregory, *American Exodus*, 8.
[53] Warren Simpson Thompson, *Growth and Changes in California's Population* (Los Angeles: Haynes Foundation, 1955), 25.
[54] Gregory, *American Exodus*, 8-9.

storms, boll weevils, steep price drops, market decline.[55] Later, the New Deal's Agricultural Adjustment Act, introduced in 1933, offered crop subsidies, which triggered a "major social reorganization of the rural Southwest" as landlords evicted cash and share renters, purchasing tractors in their stead.[56] Most of these rural migrants – about 48.4 percent – settled in non-metropolitan areas outside throughout the state.[57] However, nearly 100,000 Southwestern migrants settled in Los Angeles between 1935 and 1940, while it is likely that "several tens of thousands" had preceded them in the early years of the decade.[58] By 1940, the majority of Southwestern migrants to the state – 38.1 percent -- had settled in Los Angeles County.[59]

By the time the Depression arrived in 1929, the Los Angeles local elite was well-primed to simultaneously entice visitors and scapegoat transients. As unemployment rates dropped precipitously and private and public relief agencies strained under the pressure, alarm bells rang. The city reached an unemployment rate of almost 30 percent by 1932, while 49.2 percent of the state's unemployed population resided in the Los Angeles County. [60] Under state law, counties bore the responsibility of caring for the needy.[61] In 1933, the Los Angeles County Department of Charities encountered "the most abnormal year" in its history as applications skyrocketed.[62] That summer, the Department had spent $12 million over its typical annual budget and its highest

[55] Gregory, *American Exodus*, 11.
[56] Gregory, *American Exodus*, 12.
[57] Gregory, *American Exodus*, 39.
[58] Gregory, *American Exodus*, 40.
[59] Gregory, *American Exodus*, 41.
[60] The county with the next highest percentage of the state's unemployed was San Francisco, with 12.3 percent. William H. Mullins, *The Depression and the Urban West Coast, 1929-1933: Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, and Portland* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 91-92; Louis Bloch, *Report and Recommendations of the California State Unemployment Commission* (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1932), 39, 192.
[61] Leonard Leader, *Los Angeles and the Great Depression* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991), 65; Richard David Lester, "Building the New Deal State on the Local Level: Unemployment Relief in Los Angeles County During the 1930s" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2001), 2.
[62] A.C. Price, Los Angeles County Department of Charities, *Annual Report, Fiscal Year July 1, 1932 to June 30, 1933*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Welfare Department, 1933), 1, box 1, folder 3, Jessie E. Dean Papers, Collection no. 0410, California Social Welfare Archives, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California (hereafter Dean Papers).

caseload ever.[63] Meanwhile, the Municipal Service Bureau for Homeless Men, a city agency founded in 1928 mainly "to protect the interests of the community," saw a 267 percent increase in applications during the last five months of 1929.[64]

Given the unemployment crisis, heightened concern over migration of "undesirables" to Southern California appeared early in the Depression. The Chamber warned of a "crime wave" linked to the unemployment situation.[65] Editorials in the *Los Angeles Times* asserted that "jobless indigent[s]" should remain in their own communities where private and public charities could attend to them, rather than heading west and burdening Southern California's already strained relief programs.[66] In 1932, a Los Angeles-based journalist reflected on the ongoing concern over migration to California. "Men and women, desperate, hungry and cold," he declared, "set forth for this land of promise, where the sun is supposed to shine overtime and where life is said to be one grand, sweet song. But when this army runs into the Pacific surf what happens? There are no laws compelling their deportation. They cannot be passed along to the next State, as California's border neighbors do, because there is no next State, and they cannot be permitted to starve."[67] For their part, social workers at the private relief organizations discussed the problem of the transient at length. "We who are dealing with the transient men coming in are being flooded,"

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[63] Lester, "Building the New Deal State," 149; Price, *Annual Report,* 2, Dean Papers.
[64] Emily K. Abel, *Tuberculosis and the Politics of Exclusion: A History of Public Health and Migration to Los Angeles* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 121; Frances Lomas Feldman, "Human Services in the City of Angels: Part II: 1920s-1960s," *Southern California Quarterly* 85, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 307.
[65] "The Crime Wave and Unemployment Situation is the Responsibility of All Citizens," *Chamber of Commerce Bulletin* 5, no. 16 (December 15, 1930), 1.
[66] Harry Chandler, publisher of the *Los Angeles Times* and member of the Chamber of Commerce, had himself been a "vagrant" in his youth. "Handling the Floaters," *Los Angeles Times*, November 16, 1931; "Idlers Might Be Sent to Rock Pile," *Los Angeles Times*, October 31, 1930; Stevens, *Radical L.A.*, 181.
[67] Chapin Hall, "Jobless 'Floaters' Worry California," *New York Times*, December 25, 1932.

announced one director, "The men are simply making the rounds of the agencies."[68] The County Department of Charities had yet to develop a program for dealing with the transient.[69]

THE INDIGENT ACT

During the early years of the Depression, local elites experimented with a series of legal and political strategies to address the problem of the transient heading to Los Angeles. In January, 1931, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors submitted a proposed amendment to the state's Indigent Act, which would extend the required residence period to five years within the state, instead of one, before paupers could be deemed eligible for county charity aid.[70] Such a proposal, Board Supervisor Frank Shaw stated, would save the county approximately one-million dollars a year, and he journeyed to Sacramento in March to plead Los Angeles's case before the state legislature.[71] The Deputy Counsel for Los Angeles County noted that paupers in other states "scraped up a bare year's provender" and then emigrated to California "to eke out the year" before throwing "themselves on public charity."[72] This proposed amendment was generally met with approval in the local papers, which stated that it would "remedy a fault in the Pauper Act which has long permitted hundreds of potential indigents to pour into Los Angeles county yearly, thereby necessitating huge expenditures for their public care."[73] The state legislature ultimately extended the residency requirements to three years in the state – instead of the

[68] Minutes of the Executive Committee of Council of Social Agencies, Social Welfare and Advisory Committees, Community Welfare Federation, December 4, 1930, 3-6, box 1, folder 3, Council of Social Agencies of Los Angeles records, Collection no. 0480, California Social Welfare Archives, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California.
[69] Frances Lomas Feldman, "Human Services in the City of Angels: Part II: 1920s-1960s," *Southern California Quarterly* 85, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 314.
[70] "County Will Ask 51 New Statutes in Legislature," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), January 3, 1931; "Supervisor Shaw Drafts New Laws," *California Eagle*, January 9, 1931.
[71] "Supervisors Approve Proposed Bill to Curb Special Levies," *Pasadena Post*, January 3, 1931; "Shaw Seeking New Laws," *Los Angeles Times*, March 13, 1931.
[72] "New Laws to Benefit State," *San Pedro News-Pilot*, August 11, 1931.
[73] "Supervisor Shaw Drafts New Laws," *California Eagle*, January 9, 1931; "State Financial Aid Sought by Shaw," *Southwest Wave* (Los Angeles), January 9, 1931.

proposed five – and one year in the county to qualify for public assistance.[74] The following November the Los Angeles County Committee on Unemployment printed 50,000 cards warning newcomers entering the state that no jobs were available in Los Angeles and that under the revised Indigent Act, the county would not provide charity aid to non-residents. The cards were to be distributed by officers of the State Agricultural Department to motorists entering the state on all public highways.[75]

Later that same year, Chamber representatives urged the Los Angeles Peace Officers' Association to employ "more rigid enforcement of laws to discourage unwelcome visitors."[76] The group resolved to send circulars to all peace officers within the state requesting "closer co-operation and concerted action in carrying out the provisions of the vagrancy law."[77] In doing so, they aimed to curb unwanted migration by rendering all parts of the state – not just Los Angeles – inhospitable to indigent transients. The Chamber also sent messages to thirteen Eastern States warning job hunters who might wish to escape colder winter climates to stay away from California. [78] Directors of the Chamber suggested that those who flocked to Southern California did so largely "'to escape a more rigorous winter elsewhere and to participate in our charity,'" forcing the state's own residents to "divide their bread" with non-residents and suffer further distress.[79]

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[74] 1931 Cal. Stat. 110 at 146; "Pauper Act Change Passed by Senate," *Los Angeles Times*, March 13, 1931; Mullins, *The Depression and the Urban West Coast*, 70.
[75] "Cards to Tell Job Shortage," *Los Angeles Times,* November 13, 1931; "Greeting Cards for Visitors to Send Jobless On," *Los Angeles Evening Express*, November 13, 1931.
[76] "Vagrancy Act to Be Enforced," *Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce Bulletin* 6, no. 10 (October 19, 1931): 2; "Vagrancy Action Asked," *Los Angeles Times*, October 7, 1931.
[77] "Vagrancy Act to Be Enforced," 2; "Vagrancy Action Asked," *Los Angeles Times*, October 7, 1931.
[78] "We Are Not Inviting Job Hunters," *Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce Bulletin* 6, no. 16 (November 30, 1931), 4.
[79] "We Are Not Inviting Job Hunters," 4.

In these early days, the Chamber also toyed with the idea of a blockade along the state's borders. In 1930, the Chamber's weekly bulletin appraisingly reported that the Salvation Army of the South had issued an official warning to job hunters and transients to stay in their communities rather than journeying south in search of work during the cold northern winters.[80] Turning people back at the state line would be ideal, reflected the author, but the state could not "lawfully set up a barrier to immigration, nor deny entrance to anyone who comes from another State, no matter how undesirable that person may be."[81]

However, the following year, the Chamber sent a delegation to meet with Governor James Rolph in San Francisco where they urged that the state immediately take "drastic action" to solve the problem of itinerants and job-seekers flooding Los Angeles from every part of the nation.[82] They demanded that Rolph issue a proclamation announcing that California would not permit "any more immigrants" and that he institute a border patrol, installing a "corps of men" or the National Guard along the state lines to arrest "vagrants the moment they set foot over the state line.'"[83] Rolph acquiesced to the proclamation, but fell short of establishing a border patrol. Instead, he vaguely instructed "authorities "to deal" with any non-resident, indigent unemployed who attempted to cross into the state at its points of entry.[84] He also threatened transients with a work test by announcing the establishment of labor camps throughout the state where "indigent non-residents" would be placed and "provided with food and shelter in exchange for labor in making the trails and roads and breaking rock."[85] They would not receive wages for their

[80] "Warning to Transients," *Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce Bulletin*, 5, no. 16 (December 15, 1930); 4.
[81] "Handling the Floaters," *Los Angeles Times*, November 16, 1931.
[82] "Halt Influx of Jobless, L.A. Demands," *Oakland Tribune*, November 23, 1931.
[83] "Halt Influx of Jobless, L.A. Demands," *Oakland Tribune*, November 23, 1931.
[84] Governor James Rolph, Jr., "Proclamation," State of California, Governor's Office (November 24, 1931), in "Executive Orders and Proclamations," California State Library, Sacramento, California.
[85] Rolph, "Proclamation."

efforts.[86] "'California has all it can do to take care of its own," he proclaimed, "We will take care of all Californians, but this State will not be the dumping ground for the indigent or the lazy from all other western States. We want the word to go around that vagrants from other states will be put to work—and not at pleasant work, either—as soon as they hit the State border.'"[87] That same day he issued an order establishing labor camps throughout the state "to care for the mounting list of transients entering California from the east."[88]

THE DUST BOWL MIGRANTS

A complex array of push and pull factors typically contributed to migrants' decisions to journey to California. Southwesterners certainly had economic incentives for leaving the region and heading to California. The Rose family arrived from Arkansas in 1933, and planned to settle permanently. Mr. Rose observed that there was "no future" in the Southwest. "'It is through,' he declared, 'The land is worn out. There is no way to make a living.'"[89]

California's relief system played a small factor. Starting in 1933, the California State Emergency Relief Administration (SERA, later SRA) offered eligible unemployed residents up to forty dollars a month for a family of four, which was twice the amount offered in most Southwestern states.[90] Oklahoma, for example, at one point offered less than four dollars per

[86] The California labor camps later served as a model for Roosvelt's Civilian Conservation Corps camps established in 1933. Rolph, "Proclamation;" James Worthen, *Governor James Rolph and the Great Depression in California* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, 2006), 124.
[87] "Vagrants to Sweat," *Los Angeles Times*, November 24, 1931.
[88] "Labor Camps Will Provide Work But Not Pay for Idle," *Appeal-Democrat* (Marysville/Yuba City), November 24, 1931.
[89] Helen Dunlap Packard, "The Social Welfare Problems of Migratory Workers in the Cotton Industry of the Southern San Joaquin Valley During the 1937 and 1938 Seasons," (master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1939), 154.
[90] Gregory, *American Exodus*, 25.

month for families.[91] Missouri furnished $12.82 per family, while Texas provided $7.08.[92] Migrant workers learned of these facts through word of mouth and made decisions accordingly. Sam Bowman travelled to California with his family because "people who had been here told us that relief was better than in Arizona or anywhere else."[93] He described an information network in which migratory laborers and families kept each other apprised of relief conditions in various parts of the country. Bowman explained: "Heard first in Arkansas that relief was better [in California], then agin [sic] in Arizona. Shoot, they know it everywhere. People travellin' talk about conditions. We tell one another about things. We meet and say, 'How is it over in so and so?'"[94] Also, given California's long list of requirements to qualify for relief, those who had been through the system imparted their hard-earned knowledge to others. "If there is any ketch [sic] to it anyway that we don't understand they tell us how to git on," Bowman revealed, "Fer instance, an industrial worker can't git on relief out here. This relief is only fer farm laborers and we are forced to tell them we are farm laborers whether we are or not."[95]

Some migrants were drawn to the state by perceived promises of radical politics and innovative welfare programs. For example, when interviewed in 1935, some migrants explained that they had selected California because they believed that the Townsend Plan was in effect and that everyone over sixty would receive two-hundred dollars a month. A cotton cropper travelled over "a thousand miles with his family of fifteen because he 'had heard somewhere how California was giving out forty acres and a free house to white Protestants.'" Others were under

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[91] *Hearings Before the Select Committee to Investigate the Interstate Migration of Destitute Citizens Pursuant to H. Res. 63 and H. Res 491, Part 7: Los Angeles Hearings*, 76th Cong. 2924 (1940) (statement of Rev. Clarence Wagner, Pastor, Florence Avenue Methodist Church, Los Angeles, CA) (hereafter Interstate Migration Hearings).
[92] James Bright Wilson, "Social Attitudes of Certain Migratory Agricultural Workers in Kern County, California," (master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1942), 106.
[93] Wilson, "Social Attitudes of Certain Migratory Agricultural Workers," 111.
[94] Wilson, "Social Attitudes of Certain Migratory Agricultural Workers," 111.
[95] Bowman was likely referring to the Farm Security Administration's relief program, which started in California in 1937. Wilson, "Social Attitudes of Certain Migratory Agricultural Workers," 111.

the impression that California had been selected as "the first state to taste the sweetness of Huey Long's Share-the-Wealth plan." Several apparently believed that Sinclair had been elected governor and that "poverty had been outlawed in California." These beliefs appeared to be based on hearsay because, when asked if they had read this information in newspapers, many replied that "they didn't believe what they read in newspapers."[96]

In fact, unofficial investigators, convinced that many of the migrants were radicals sent into the state by Moscow itself, travelled up and down the state's borders asking migrants "who had paid for the gasoline, who told them they couldn't starve in California, what they thought of the Constitution, Rexford Guy Tugwell, and pacifism." One reporter observing these interactions noted that "the interrogated breadhunters were eager to cheer loudly for everything from John Quincy Adams to the United States Chamber of Commerce if there was reason to suspect the imminence of a hamburger sandwich. Those we talked to appeared to be quite willing to swap a hotel full of Karl Marxes and Nicolai Lenins for a ham, and throw in Benito Mussolini and a couple of beer putsches." [97]

Upon their arrival at the border, many migrants were surprised to hear that to qualify for California's relief lists, they must reside in the state for a year. [98] As one reporter explained it, "No one had told them that the California state treasury was nearly if not quite as empty as Arkansas' or Alabama's. In fact no one seems to have told them anything of the doleful truth."[99] Nevertheless, as the author noted, "why should they leave?" The climate was warm and the land produced fruit and vegetables as if by magic, and the migrants had been told that this produce

[96] Walter Davenport, "California, Here We Come," *Collier's* 96, August 10, 1935, 47.
[97] Davenport, "California, Here We Come," 47.
[98] Davenport, "California, Here We Come," 47.
[99] Davenport, "California, Here We Come," 47.

"would ripen only to be left to rot on the round for the want of markets." Therefore, "they could afford to wait. Government wouldn't let them starve."[100]

Most importantly, however, migrants were largely drawn to the state because of already-established chain migration patterns. Those migrants who had journeyed to California in the 1920s shared positive news with the folks back home about opportunities available in the state.[101] Many offered optimistic or exaggerated descriptions of their experiences or simply neglected to mention how long they had been unemployed or the fact that they were half-starved while living in rooms with dirt floors.[102] Nevertheless, for those with relatives already settled there, a move to California was not quite as "drastic" as it might have otherwise been.[103] In fact, almost half of the migrants who travelled to the state followed relatives already residing there.[104]

Equally crucial were the long-established traditions of mobility and "occupational fluidity" among Southwesterners.[105] As one sociology student interviewing migrants observed, most did not simply "pull stakes and come to California at the first pinch of poverty."[106] However, they were accustomed to moving about in search of agricultural and non-agricultural opportunities.[107] The westward migration patterns of "rural folk from Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas and adjacent states" was not a new phenomenon, but grounded in the rise of cotton production in the Imperial and San Joaquin Valleys in the 1910s.[108] Many Southwesterners journeyed to California as seasonal transient laborers only to return to their home states at the

[100] Davenport, "California, Here We Come," 47-48.
[101] Gregory, *American Exodus*, 27.
[102] Wilson, "Social Attitudes of Certain Migratory Agricultural Workers," 104.
[103] Gregory, *American Exodus*, 27.
[104] Gregory, *American Exodus*, 28.
[105] Gregory, *American Exodus*, 29.
[106] Wilson, "Social Attitudes of Certain Migratory Agricultural Workers," 74.
[107] Gregory, *American Exodus*, 30.
[108] Paul S. Taylor, "Again the Covered Wagon," *Survey Graphic* 24, no. 7 (July 1935): 349.

close of the harvest season. The channels followed by the 1930s migrants were "cut historically."[109]

Indeed, migrants sought out California because of the perception that it offered at least some chance at work. As one migrant, Ed Morrow, explained, the possibility of employment was better than none at all: "But there's a workin' season here that we don't have back there, maybe a little cotton pickin' once in a while at 40 cents a hundred. But there's at least three workin' seasons here—spuds, cotton pickin', and fruit. There's a lot of people here to do it, but at the same time it makes you feel a little better settin' around near where there is work. You live in hopes of getting' a little of it. But in a country where there is no work you've not got a damn thing to look forward to. No way to take care of your family, nuthin' to do but just set there and mold over."[110] In fact, many were lured by the promise of employment as advertised through handbills distributed by labor contractors "telling of thousands of jobs available."[111]

The boosting work of the Chamber and the All-Year Club over the past few decades also helped draw a favorable picture of the state, but migrants were not simply "victims of out-of-date promotional schemes."[112] And while boosters attempted to dissuade the unemployed from traveling to the state, they continued to promote its attributes, and merely succeeded in muddling the issue.[113] As early as 1932, the All-Year Club started warning jobseekers to steer clear of California.[114] "Come to California for a glorious vacation," announced one *Saturday Evening*

[109] Taylor, "Again the Covered Wagon," 349.
[110] Wilson, "Social Attitudes of Certain Migratory Agricultural Workers," 76.
[111] *Interstate Migration Hearings* 2924 (1940) (statement of Rev. Clarence Wagner, Pastor, Florence Avenue Methodist Church, Los Angeles, CA).
[112] Gregory, *American Exodus*, 22.
[113] Gregory, *American Exodus*, 22.
[114] "Club Praised for Warning," *Los Angeles Times*, January 26, 1932.

Post ad. "Advise anyone not to come here seeking employment, lest he be disappointed," noted the fine print, "but for the tourist, the attractions are unlimited."[115]

THE NEW DEAL ARRIVES

Despite these efforts to limit applications for relief by curtailing indigents from entering the state, cases at the County Department of Charities rose at a worrying rate of almost 600 per day during the summer of 1933.[116] However, that same year, Roosevelt's and the New Dealers implemented the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), and, with it, the Federal Transient Program (FTP).[117] The FTP, the only FERA program to receive one-hundred percent federal funding, provided both direct and work relief through the establishment of a nationwide system of camps and shelters for mostly male transients.[118] In order to expedite services as it rolled out in Los Angeles, the FTP entered into contract agreements with existing local private agencies such as the Municipal Service Bureau for Men and the Traveler's Aid Society to provide temporary care to transients until the camps were available.[119] Many made use of the FTP: while the state of California composed 4.7 percent of the nation's population, its FTP aid recipients composed 13.5 of the national total between 1933 and 1935.[120]

Additionally, the state of California established the State Emergency Relief Administration (SERA, later SRA), to oversee the implementation of FERA programs and

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[115] All-Year Club of Southern California, "Relax Taut Nerves," *Saturday Evening Post*, October 29, 1932, 57.
[116] Tom Sitton, *The Courthouse Crowd: Los Angeles County and Its Government, 1850-1950* (Los Angeles: Historical Society of Southern California, 2013), 199; Notes on Activities of Department of Charities, December 21, 1934, box 64, folder aaa.2, John Anson Ford Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
[117] Canaday, *Straight State*, 92.
[118] Canaday, *Straight State*, 92, 102; Josephine Chapin Brown, *Public Relief, 1929-1939* (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1940), 260.
[119] This practice violated the federal policy of only working with public agencies. *Social Service as Administered by Public and Private Agencies* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Welfare Federation, 1935), 99-100, box 1, folder 9, Community Chest and Welfare Federation of Los Angeles Area records, Collection no. 0461, California Social Welfare Archives, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California.
[120] Emily K. Abel, *Tuberculosis and the Politics of Exclusion: A History of Public Health and Migration to Los Angeles* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 109.

funding.[121] The SERA initially funded, and later, took over unemployment relief from the overburdened counties.[122] By 1935, the State Unemployment Relief Bond Act established a residency requirement of only one year in the state to be eligible for unemployment relief with SERA, as opposed to the three-year requirement delineated in the Indigent Act for county-based aid.[123] Meanwhile, the FTP cared for the non-residents – those who had resided in the state less than a year.[124]

The arrival of FERA and the FTP seemed to calm some nerves – at least temporarily. FTP officials reported that the influx of transients into the state had been reduced by more than 90 percent "through the combined efforts of railroad authorities, police, and government officials."[125] However, as the "indigents' tide turn[ed] eastward," the county relief load continued to climb.[126]

Although they greeted the New Deal with ambivalence or outright hostility, conservatives in Los Angeles generally preferred that the federal government or the state carry the relief load for transients. However, they worried about the seemingly radical elements of the federal program, and they grew especially concerned that the migrants would vote for radical candidates and support the welfare schemes already proving popular throughout the state such as the Townsend Old-Age Pension Plan.[127] The specter of migration also proved a useful tool during the 1934 gubernatorial election, when prominent socialist Upton Sinclair launched his End

[121] Mullins, *The Depression and the Urban West Coast*, 127.
[122] Mullins, *The Depression and the Urban West Coast*, 127; James Leiby, "State Welfare Administration in California, 1930-1945," *Southern California Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (Fall 1973): 308.
[123] Richard David Lester, "Building the New Deal State on the Local Level: Unemployment Relief in Los Angeles County During the 1930s" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2001), 351.
[124] Brown, *Public Relief*, 260.
[125] "Transient Influx Cut," Los Angeles Times, February 22, 1934;
[126] "Indigents' Tide Turns Eastward," *Los Angeles Times*, April 13, 1934; "County Relief Load Jumps," *Los Angeles Times*, April 13, 1934. See also "Transient-Aid Figures Given," *Los Angeles Times*, March 19, 1934 and "Transient Aid Greatest Here," *Los Angeles Times*, April 10, 1934.
[127] Gregory, *American Exodus*, 92; Edwin Amenta, *When Movements Matter: The Townsend Plan and the Rise of Social Security* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

Poverty in California (EPIC) campaign in the summer of 1933. Running on the Democratic ticket, Sinclair's plan included $50 per month pensions for the disabled and elderly as well as graduated income and property taxes.[128] However, crucial to his platform was a program in which the state would seize idle farms and factories through its powers of eminent domain or confiscatory taxes and establish a series of cooperatives for unemployed men and women to produce goods for their own use and to barter with other like enterprises.[129] During what was perhaps an unguarded moment, Sinclair remarked that should he win, "one-half of the unemployed in the United States would hop the first freights to California."[130] The *Los Angeles Times* warned its readers that "hundreds" of impoverished individuals and families were already crossing into the state each day, lured by Sinclair's promises.[131] The article featured a large photograph of a family piled into a dilapidated truck with the caption: "the 1934 version of the covered wagon."[132] Except in this case, the caption noted, "the moving households do not represent pioneers striking out for a new and undeveloped land but only emigrants lured westward by the prospect of being supported by idleness by the taxpayers of a highly developed community – that is, if Sinclair is elected."[133] The *Los Angeles Examiner* went so far as to publish photographs of transients climbing out of boxcars in order to reap the benefits of EPIC – except in this case the images were actually stills taken from the film, *Wild Boys of the Road*.[134]

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[128] James N. Gregory, "Upton Sinclair's 1934 EPIC Campaign: Anatomy of a Political Movement," *Labor Studies in Working-Class History* 12, no. 4 (2015): 55.
[129] Upton Sinclair, *I, Governor of California and How I Ended Poverty: A True Story of the Future* (London: T. Werner Lauris, 1933), 7-8; James N. Gregory, introduction to *I, Candidate for Governor: And How I Got Licked,* by Upton Sinclair (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994, orig. 1935), vi; Gregory, "Upton Sinclair's 1934 EPIC Campaign," 55.
[130] "Sinclair Promise Draws Hordes of Idle to State," *Los Angeles Times*, September 30, 1934; Gregory, *American Exodus*, 92.
[131] "Poor Flock into State," *Los Angeles Times*, October 24, 1934.
[132] "Poor Flock into State."
[133] "Poor Flock into State."
[134] Greg Mitchell, *The Campaign of the Century: Upton Sinclair's Race for Governor of California and the Birth of Media Politics* (New York: Random House, 1992), 423.

Hollywood also got involved: movie mogul Louis B. Mayer and Irving Thalberg, head of production at MGM established a special film unit to produce fake newsreels attacking Sinclair. One in particular featured actors dressed as "California-bound" hoboes piled into in boxcars and gondolas and supposedly drawn by Sinclair's campaign promises.[135] Ultimately, Sinclair lost the election, and the conservative Frank Merriam continued as governor.[136]

A few months later, in his January, 1935, State of the Union address, Roosevelt announced his intention of shifting away from direct relief in favor of new reforms, including a focus on work relief programs.[137] FERA had been, in his view, a temporary solution until his administration developed a more permanent program.[138] "The Federal government," he announced, "must and shall quit this business of relief."[139] "The echo of those momentous words," the *Los Angeles Times* reported, "fell heavily on Los Angeles county, to say nothing of California as a whole."[140] Both FERA and, with it, the FTP were to be liquidated.[141] Crucially, Roosevelt noted that the federal government had been caring for one-and-a-half million individuals, the majority of whom were "unable for one reason or another to maintain themselves independently."[142] Prior to the "great depression," he said, they had been dependent on local welfare efforts – "by States, by counties, by towns, by cities, by churches, and by private welfare

[135] California Election News No. 3, November 11, 1934, Fox Movietone News Story 23-691, Fox Movietone News Collection, Moving Image Research Collections, University of South Carolina; Mark Wheeler, "The Political History of Classical Hollywood: Moguls, Liberals and Radicals in the 1930s," in *Hollywood and the Great Depression: American Film, Politics and Society in the 1930s*, ed. Iwan Morgan and Philip John Davies (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 35.
[136] Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Politics of Upheaval, vol 3, 1935-1936* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003, orig. 1960), 121.
[137] David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 241-242, 249.
[138] James Leiby, "State Welfare Administration in California, 1930-1945," *Southern California Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (Fall 1973): 309.
[139] Franklin D. Roosevelt, State of the Union Address, January 4, 1935, 79 Cong. Rec. S95 (1935).
[140] "New Relief Fears Rise," *Los Angeles Times*, January 10, 1935.
[141] Brown, *Public Relief*, 301.
[142] Franklin D. Roosevelt, State of the Union Address, January 4, 1935, 79 Cong. Rec. S95 (1935).

agencies."[143] "It is my thought," he went on, "that in the future they must be cared for as they were before."[144]

A week later the *Los Angeles Times* published an editorial expressing reservations about Roosevelt's proposals on behalf of those "upon whom the burden will fall if and when the government lets go."[145] At this point, local relief authorities remained in the dark as to what would succeed FERA and the FTP.[146] So far, FERA had been spending $4 million a month in Los Angeles County on direct relief payments as well as hundreds of small work-generating projects while supporting 337,173 individuals in the process. Meanwhile, the FTP had supported 6,300 people on family relief, 600 men and 1000 boys in camps, and 14,000 individuals in daily shelters.[147]

By September, 1935, FERA officials notified all state administrators that no more applicants should be accepted for FTP funds.[148] The federal government's plan was to transfer FTP clients to the Works Progress Administration, but this would take months and, in the meantime, FERA offered few clear answers to state and local relief administrators.[149] Many men left transients camps rather than wait for reassignment. Meanwhile, authorities reported "an influx of transients from other states during the usual winter migration" along with increased unemployment among seasonal laborers due in part to a reduction in cotton production in Southern California counties.[150] These factors led to a sharp increase in an "uncared-for

[143] Roosevelt, State of the Union Address, S95.
[144] Roosevelt, State of the Union Address, S95.
[145] "New Relief Fears Rise," *Los Angeles Times*, January 10, 1935.
[146] "New Relief Fears Rise," *Los Angeles Times*, January 10, 1935.
[147] "New Relief Fears Rise," *Los Angeles Times*, January 10, 1935.
[148]"The 'Liquidation' of the Federal Transient Service," Social Service Review 9, no. 4 (December 1935): 763.
[149] "The 'Liquidation' of the Federal Transient Service," 763; Dorothy Wysor Smith, "California Liquidates the Transient," *Social Work Today* 3 (April 1936): 18.
[150] S.G. Rubinow, *The Problem of Interstate Migration as it Affects the California State Relief Administration*, in *Hearings Before the Select Committee Investigating National Defense Migration, Part 26: Washington Hearings*, 77th Cong., 10033 (1942); "A Million on Relief," *Los Angeles Times*, April 14, 1935 (hereafter *National Defense Migration Hearings*).

population" roaming throughout California.[151] By the end of 1935, the state saw a marked increase in panhandling and begging on city streets, as well as a rise in jungles and shantytowns.[152] Accordingly, as time passed following Roosevelt's announcement, local elites grew increasingly concerned about the transient problem. By April, a city councilman warned that the "recent wiping out thousands of Midwestern farms" meant an "even greater stress of indigent persons" in the city, who would likely become paupers or criminals, thus burdening relief programs and taxpayers as well as menacing "the peace and safety of our citizens." [153] That same month, the *Los Angeles Times* warned of an "army of transients" heading west.[154]

THE JONES-REDWINE BILL

Concerned about the withdrawal of the FTS, local elites in Los Angeles turned once again to the idea of preventing so-called indigents from entering the state. On May 16, 1935, state assemblymen from Los Angeles, William Mosely Jones, an EPIC Democrat and Kent H. Redwine, a conservative Republican, introduced a bill prohibiting "paupers, vagabonds, indigent persons, persons likely to become public charges, and persons affected with contagious or infectious diseases" from entering the state.[155] These individuals, the bill asserted, exacerbated the unemployment problem, further burdened the relief rolls, and forced California workers to compete with "pauper labor."[156] Moreover, it claimed that the "influx of unemployed and unemployables" seriously threatened "the safety and welfare of the people of this State," and, if

[151] Rubinow, *The Problem of Interstate Migration,* 10033.
[152] S.G. Rubinow, *The Problem of Interstate Migration,* 10033.
[153] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, April 29, 1935, 804, Council Minutes Archive, Los Angeles City Archives and Records Center, Los Angeles, California (hereafter CMA); "Action by Council Sought to Curb Transients," *Los Angeles Times*, April 30, 1935.
[154] "Army of Transients Begins to Move West," *Los Angeles Times*, April 21, 1935.
[155] Assembly Bill 2459, Journal of the Assembly of the Legislature of the State of California, 51st Sess. (1935) 3422.
[156] An Act to Prevent the Entry Into California of Paupers, Vagabonds, Indigent Persons, and Persons Likely to Become Public Charges, Assembly Bill 2459, May 16, 1935, in *Interstate Migration Hearings Part 7: Los Angeles Hearings*, 3035-3036.

left unchecked, would ultimately "destroy the State."[157] The Jones-Redwine bill would empower the governor to establish "armed guards" along the state's borders.[158] Moreover, those individuals deemed suspect by authorities would be required to prove that they were not, in fact, members of the prohibited class.[159] In other words, the burden of proof fell upon them to demonstrate their right to enter the state. Those who violated the law were to be fined five-hundred dollars or imprisoned for up to a year and, eventually, deported.[160] Economist Paul S. Taylor compared the proposed bill to California's Chinese exclusion policies in the nineteenth century, except in this case, he observed, the legislature was considering the exclusion of "American 'immigrants' without money."[161]

Supporters offered a multifaceted defense. The *Los Angeles Times* asserted that the bill affirmed the state's police power "to protect itself against the spread of crime, pauperism or disturbance of the peace, by closing its doors to migrants not self-supporting."[162] Betrayed by the federal government, which had turned back on California the "unjust burden" of "caring for the armies of indigents pouring across her borders," another editorial declared that the state had a "constitutional right common-sense duty to protect herself."[163]Indeed, as one of the bill's sponsors asserted, "'The state… has the power to protect itself from economic disaster. This is the justification… It transcends legalistic argument.'"[164] Another editorial drew comparisons between indigents and "plant and animal diseases and pests" – the state already maintained a

[157] A.B. 2459, May 16, 1935, in *Interstate Migration Hearings, Part 7: Los Angeles Hearings*, 3035.
[158] "Assembly Body Backs Bill to Bar Indigents," *Los Angeles Herald-Express*, May 17, 1935, in *Interstate Migration Hearings Part 7: Los Angeles Hearings*, 2961; "Bill Asks State Border Guard to Bar Paupers," *Los Angeles Times*, May 17, 1935; "Pauper Ban Bill Backed," *Los Angeles Times*, May 18, 1935; An Indigent Quarantine," *Los Angeles Times* May 18, 1935.
[159] A.B. 2459, May 16, 1935.
[160] A.B. 2459, May 16, 1935.
[161] Paul S. Taylor, "Again the Covered Wagon," *Survey Graphic* 24, no. 7 (July 1935): 350.
[162]"An Indigent Quarantine," *Los Angeles Times* May 18, 1935.
[163] "The Anti-Indigent Bill," *Los Angeles Times*, June 15, 1935.
[164] Paul S. Taylor, "Again the Covered Wagon," *Survey Graphic* 24, no. 7 (July 1935): 350.

station at the border to guard against the latter, and, the author reasoned, it could simply expand these services to include the inspection of human beings.[165]

Democratic assemblymen from Los Angeles questioned the bill's constitutionality in addition to calling it "rotten," 'disgraceful and inhuman.'[166] Many made light of the bill's stipulations, and used their critiques to shed light on broader inequalities in the economic system. For example, one EPIC Democrat assemblyman from Los Angeles suggested "an amendment to bar millionaires also as menaces to society," which failed.[167] Senator Culbert L. Olson, an EPIC Democrat from Los Angeles, also proposed an amendment expanding the excluded class to include "'and financial racketeers, stock and bond jobbers, industrial monopolists, watered stock manufacturers, corporation plunderers, despoilers of the savings of the poor, bank wreckers and defaulters, sweat shop owners and child labor exploiters, defrauders of widows and orphans, fraudulent promoters, family deserters, violators of private or public trusts, bribers of public officials, recipients of bribes, beneficiaries of fraudulent contracts secured through public agencies, millionaire wartime profiteers, and promoters of war.'"[168] By June, the bill had passed the Assembly but failed in the Senate.[169]

FERA AND THE FTP DISSOLVE

Meanwhile, federal administrators were in the process of dissolving FERA and the FTP, which included returning transients to their original states of residence or to absorb them into California's pending WPA work-relief programs.[170] The federal government would soon cease

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[165] "An Indigent Quarantine," *Los Angeles Times* May 18, 1935.
[166] "Pauper Ban Bill Passed in Assembly," *Los Angeles Times*, May 30, 1935; "Indigent Bill Dies," *Los Angeles Times*, June 16, 1935.
[167] "Pauper Ban Bill Passed in Assembly," *Los Angeles Times*, May 30, 1935.
[168] "Sublimely Absurd, Olson Kills Bill," *United Progressive News*, June 26, 1935.
[169] "Pauper Ban Bill Backed," *Los Angeles Times*, May 18, 1935; "Indigent Bill Dies," *Los Angeles Times*, June 16, 1935.
[170] S.G. Rubinow, *The Problem of Interstate Migration as it Affects the California State Relief Administration*, in *National Defense Migration Hearings, Part 26: Washington Hearings*, 10034.

funding the care of non-residents.[171] The FTP thus ceased accepting new applicants as they turned their focus to reassigning those transients already under their care to different agencies.[172] The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, however, refused to provide assistance for non-residents, citing the three-year requirement stipulated in the 1933 Indigent Act.[173]

That summer, the *Los Angeles Times* continued to criticize what it described as "penniless families from other States … overrunning California and creating a terrific drain on available relief funds."[174] Roughly "8,048 men, women and children" had arrived in August, breaking previous records.[175] Another article estimated that one-thousand transients were arriving daily in the state, and would soon "add materially to the unemployment burden in Los Angeles and Southern California."[176]

Writing for Collier's, a journalist, journalist, Walter Davenport, described a meeting of Los Angeles's "sociologists and ladies and gentlemen of society and business" one August evening where they discussed the "ways and means of ridding California of the unwelcome rabble that was growing even as they talked."[177] "They deplored the increased taxation that feeding the invaders would cost," he wrote, "They denounced the government's relief policies that had made 'idleness a virtue' and had 'taken the shame out of charity.'"[178] Crucially, the meeting's attendees grew "very indignant" that Governor Merriam had not yet "done something about shutting the state's gates."[179] However, when a social investigator recounted "finding

[171] Rubinow, California State Relief Administration, 10034.
[172] Rubinow, California State Relief Administration, 10033.
[173] "Transient Rules Cited," *Los Angeles Times*, September 12, 1935.
[174] "Carleton Wakes Up," *Los Angeles Times*, August 30, 1935.
[175] "Transients Still Arrive," *Los Angeles Times*, September 6, 1935; "And Still They Come," *Los Angeles Times*, September 8, 1935.
[176] "Transients' Aid to End," *Los Angeles Times*, September 8, 1935; "New Relief Burden Put on County," *Los Angeles Times*, September 11, 1935.
[177] Walter Davenport, "California, Here We Come," *Collier's* 96, August 10, 1935, 49.
[178] Davenport, "California, Here We Come," 49.
[179] Davenport, "California, Here We Come," 49.

fourteen people living in a tin-can hovel," Davenport observed a "shocked silence" [180] Such reports, he noted, "kept the meeting stirred with indignant horror until quite late."[181] Nevertheless, the group adopted a resolution calling upon the state "to starve these intruders out."[182]

That September, approximately fifty local social service leaders gathered at the Chamber of Commerce's headquarters to voice their indignation over the decision of the federal government to abandon the care of transients. The city, they declared, would be "overrun with panhandling transients, the setting up of soup lines to feed them and even possible riots…."[183] "'There will be a police problem among the larger number of floating men and boys,'" announced the director of the Volunteers of America, "'We may, I fear, see such a crime wave as we never saw before.'"[184] They warned that local agencies did not have the capacity to shoulder this new relief burden. The general manager of the Community Chest explained that the private agencies were in no financial condition to care for transients – this should be the role of the federal government.[185] The only solution, as he saw it, was to establish a municipal lodging house and state work camps, should the federal government abandon the relief field. "'All we can do,' he declared, 'is to make it so disagreeable for those who come that they will have to go back where they came from.'"[186]

Chamber representatives urged Harry Hopkins, the FERA director, to continue federal funding for the care of transients until the WPA was fully up and running.[187]

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[180] Davenport, "California, Here We Come," 49.
[181] Davenport, "California, Here We Come," 49.
[182] Davenport, "California, Here We Come," 49.
[183] "Transients Stir Alarm," *Los Angeles Times*, September 13, 1935.
[184] "Transients Stir Alarm," *Los Angeles Times*, September 13, 1935.
[185] "Transients Stir Alarm," *Los Angeles Times*, September 13, 1935.
[186] "Transients Stir Alarm," *Los Angeles Times*, September 13, 1935.
[187] A.G. Arnoll, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, to Harry Hopkins, Federal Emergency Relief Administration, September 13, 1935, box 67aa, folder 3, John Anson Ford Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, CA.

The Los Angeles assistant city attorney, Newton J. Kendall, fanned the flames when he announced that crime typically increased 100 percent during the winter months in Southern California due to unemployed transients who refused work when it was offered to them. They preferred, he asserted, to "'panhandle, rob and commit other crimes'" while there were not enough jails to hold these "nomadic wanderers" who were "flocking" to Los Angeles.[188] As a solution, he suggested "the establishment of State-controlled quarantine stations at all points of ingress on the border; examination of all transients to ascertain if they have communicable diseases and their immediate exclusion if they are found so afflicted; fingerprinting all indigent transients and the creation of municipal rock and wood piles where persons arrested for vagrancy will be forced to work for their livelihood.'"[189]

THE BUM BLOCKADE

This was the political climate when the Police Commission established the Committee on Indigent Alien Transients and appointed as chairman, LAPD chief James "Two Gun" Davis.[190] The Committee defined "alien transients" as a "transient entering the state of California without visible means of support and where legal residence is foreign to the state of California," with "foreign" implying that perhaps that California was not part of the Union.[191] The committee investigated the problem of "male, unattached, adult, indigent, alien, employable transients,'" and, on November 4, submitted a series of recommendations including establishing peace officer

[188] "Relief Policy Changes Urged to Reduce Crime," *Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 1935.
[189] "Relief Policy Changes Urged to Reduce Crime," *Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 1935.
[190] James Davis earned the moniker "Two Gun" due to his ability to shoot with both hands as well as his policy of instructing his officers to "fire first and ask questions later." He was also partial to posing for photos with two guns aimed at the camera's lens as well as demonstrating his firearm prowess by shooting cigarettes out of the mouths of apprehensive volunteers. *Transients in California* (San Francisco: Division of Special Surveys and Studies, State Relief Administration of California, 1936), 245; Wild, "If You Ain't Got That Do-Re-Mi," 333, fn 27; Bruce Henstell, *Sunshine and Wealth: Los Angeles in the Twenties and Thirties* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1984), 20-21; Mary June Burton, "The Runaway Boy Who Became Our Chief of Police," *Los Angeles Times*, September 24, 1933; Steven J. Ross, *Hitler in Los Angeles: How Jews Foiled Nazi Plots Against Hollywood and America* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), 31.
[191] *Transients in California*, 245; Starr, *Endangered Dreams*, 176.

stations at entry points along the state border to arrest individuals guilty of vagrancy.[192] They also suggested setting up labor camps with "means of subsistence, and a very nominal wage" for transients willing to work as well as vagrancy penal camps where those arrested would labor on public works projects.[193] They urged the "policing of the common carriers and main arterial highways or other means of ingress into the State of California," which would require the cooperation of the railroad companies.[194] The committee also envisioned the role publicity would play as a "deterrent" – potential transients would note the series of obstacles they would face should they attempt to travel to California and would ideally avoid it.[195] Moreover, they hoped to recommend this programs to Governor Merriam and encourage neighboring states to join forces with this attempt to curb migration.[196] When the California state departments failed to heed their recommendations, Davis and the Chamber of Commerce moved forward independently.[197] On February 3, 1936, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that police headquarters at City Hall "resembled a railroad station scene in war times" as 136 LAPD officers, carrying army knapsacks and shaving kits, bid farewell to their wives and children.[198] As if preparing for battle with unemployed transient laborers and their families, Davis dispatched officers to the far reaches of the state along sixteen major highway and railroad entry points. Their orders were to turn back all transients who could not prove California residence.[199]

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[192] *Transients in California*, 245.
[193] *Transients in California*, 246.
[194] *Transients in California*, 246-247.
[195] *Transients in California*, 247.
[196] *Transients in California*, 247.
[197] "California Border Closed to Vagrants," *New York Times*, February 5, 1936; *Transients in California*, 249.
[198] "L.A. Police Sent to Borders," Hollywood Citizen News, February 3, 1936.
[199] Starr, *Endangered Dreams*, 177; *Transients in California*, 251; "The Transient Problem," *Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce Bulletin* 10, no. 35 (February 10, 1936): 4.

Davis had served as chief from 1926 through 1929, until the newly elected Mayor John C. Porter replaced him. He was reappointed when Frank Shaw became mayor in 1933.[200] During the first half of the twentieth century, the LAPD had largely functioned as a "crude instrument" by which local business associations enforced and maintained the "citadel of the open shop" in the city.[201] Davis proved no exception to this tradition. Under his administration, the Department's notorious Red Squad office was moved to the Chamber of Commerce building to facilitate the exchange of information and to ensure efficient police response to strikes.[202] The Chamber had also presented Davis with a check for one-thousand dollars for the construction of a library at the police clubhouse in "appreciation" for the "fine work done by the Chief and his men during the strike of the marine workers at the harbor."[203]

Davis also followed the LAPD tradition of proposing or engaging in activities that bordered on illegality. The department notoriously had long been zealous in its efforts to protect the city from so-called subversive elements.[204] In the early 1920s, for example, Chief George K. Home proposed that as a condition of entering the city all U.S. citizens be compelled to carry documents demonstrating that they had no prior criminal record as well as an "adequate means of financial support."[205] For his part, Davis suggested that constitutional rights benefitted "nobody but crooks and criminals" and that law-abiding citizens had no cause ever to invoke

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[200] Scott Allen McClellan, "Policing the Red Scare: The Los Angeles Police Department's Red Squad and the Repression of Labor Activism in Los Angeles, 1900-1940" (PhD diss., University of California, Irvine, 2011), 204.
[201] Edward J. Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 13.
[202] McClellan, "Policing the Red Scare," 204.
[203] Minutes, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, December 13, 1934, in *Violations of Free Speech and Rights of Labor, Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Comm. on Education and Labor Pursuant to S. Res. 266, part 63, Supplementary Exhibits*, 76th Cong. 22943 (1940); McClellan, "Policing the Red Scare," 205.
[204] Errol Wayne Stevens, *Radical L.A.: From Coxey's Army to the Watts Riots, 1894-1965* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 179; Joseph Gerald Woods, "The Progressives and the Police: Urban Reform and the Professionalization of the Los Angeles Police" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1973), 246-247.
[205] Stevens, *Radical L.A.,* 179.

such protections.[206] He at one point sought to fingerprint all Los Angeles residents – apparently not an uncommon goal among police leadership during this era.[207] This attempt failed but the sentiment was clear – Davis behaved as though all citizens were best regarded as "potential criminal suspects."[208] This was abundantly clear when he established the Dragnet Squad in 1927, which was a specialized police unit tasked with blockading busy intersections and thoroughly searching each car passing through.[209] Much like his fingerprinting scheme, this procedure, "and the abusive, bullying behavior of the officers who carried it out," drew so much public ire that a surprised Davis was forced to abandon it. [210]

Nevertheless, Davis, by his own admission, employed these same dragnet tactics at the state's border as the LAPD scrutinized individuals and families in cars and trains entering the state. With the conservative *Los Angeles Times* as his mouthpiece, he insisted that his action did not violate American citizens' constitutional rights to cross state lines but instead was "'protecting our citizens against enemies of society who roam about the country seeking green pastures in which to forage and who are not looking for gainful employment.'"[211] He framed the blockade as primarily focused on crime prevention, particularly in Los Angeles, and he cited the example of the police capturing Jesse Gaines, a Black man, as he attempted to cross in Imperial County and whom they discovered was wanted for murder.[212] "'If this be treason against the

[206] "Why Liberals Oppose Davis," *Los Angeles Record*, December 23,1929; Stevens, *Radical L.A.,* 179.
[207] Woods, "The Progressives and the Police," 246.
[208] Stevens, *Radical L.A.,* 179.
[209] "Davis Explains the Dragnet," *Los Angeles Record*, December 14 ,1929; Stevens, *Radical L.A.*, 179; Joe Domanick, *To Protect and To Serve: The LAPD's Century of War in the City of Dreams* (New York: Pocket Books, 1994), 53-54.
[210] Steven Ross finds that Davis also likely supported the Silver Shirts or may have been a member himself. Stevens, *Radical L.A.,* 179; Joe Domanick, *To Protect and To Serve: The LAPD's Century of War in the City of Dreams* (New York: Pocket Books, 1994), 53-54.
[211] "Border Patrol's Success Told," *Los Angeles Times,* February 10, 1936.
[212] "Border Patrol's Success Told," *Los Angeles Times,* February 10, 1936; Alexander Kahn, "Strategy Revealed," *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, February 8, 1936.

Constitution and in the protection of our good citizens,' Davis declared, "'we intend to keep the dragnet at work.'"[213]

One month after the border patrol began, Davis formally attempted to establish its legal justifications.[214] Some transients were to be arrested for evading payment of railroad fare.[215] Davis had previously requested permission from railroads to search freight trains, which was granted. He had also requested that the border county sheriffs deputize the LAPD officers. All but four complied -- the sheriffs from Del Norte, Modoc, Plumas and San Bernardino Counties refused. Undaunted, Davis sent his officers anyway, insisting that they had the authority to enforce state law under the California penal codes permitting both peace officers and private citizens to make arrests "for a public offense committed or attempted in his presence."[216] He also advised his officers to arrest – or threaten with arrest – anyone for vagrancy who was found to be roaming "from place to place without any lawful business."[217] Lastly, he cited legality for the blockade under California's Indigent Act, which, since 1901, had prohibited anyone from transporting indigent non-residents into the state.[218]

The blockade drew protests and scrutiny from the start. Annoyed SRA officials sent agents to the various border checkpoints to observe the police in action, which they carefully documented in a report produced later that year, *Transients in California*. Cataloguing the blockade under a section they entitled "Futile Remedies," the SRA's depiction was less than

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[213] "Border Patrol's Success Told," *Los Angeles Times,* February 10, 1936.
[214] Starr, *Endangered Dreams*, 179.
[215] California Penal Code §587(c) *Penal Code of the State of California* (1935) at 172; James E. Davis, *Report of Indigent Alien Transients* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Police Department, March 11, 1936), 1, box 666596, Police Commission Records, Los Angeles City Archive and Record Center, Los Angeles, CA.
[216] California Penal Code §836(1) and §837(1) *Penal Code of the State of California* (1935) at 239; *Transients in California*, 249; "Police Take Up Duty on State Lines," *Los Angeles Times*, February 4, 1936; Davis, *Report of Indigent Alien Transients*, 10.
[217] California Penal Code §647(3) *Penal Code of the State of California* (1935) at 193; Davis, *Report of Indigent Alien Transients*, 10.
[218] 1933 Cal. Stat. 761 at 2010; 1901 Cal. Stat. 210 at 636; Davis, *Report of Indigent Alien Transients*, 10.

flattering.[219] The non-deputized officers stationed at Del Norte along the Oregon border explained that they "had a right to arrest anyone they wished" whom they "believed to be committing a crime," referring to the state penal code cited by Davis. When pressed as to what crimes transients might be committing along the highway, they "were not clear."[220] Other officers, encountering no transients to arrest, practiced target shooting instead. At Cadiz, near both the Nevada and Arizona borders, officers boasted of ordering an elderly Black man, recently released from Folsom Prison, to board an eastbound train. When he attempted to evade them by circling back into California, they forced him to walk into the Mojave Desert "until 'his feet were so tender he could step on a dime and call it heads or tails.'" Then they placed him on a train once again.[221] Near Blythe, police officers informed SRA agents that "they were being careful not to offend anyone who might be rich or have political influence."[222]

Further accounts of the border activities spread through other channels. An Oregon state officer took the statement of a California resident who had been prevented from returning to Los Angeles. The fifty-four-year-old engineer had journeyed north to visit his ill sister, and LAPD officers arrested him when they found him walking along the road on the California side of the border as he headed home. His California operator's license and a letter from his sister were not sufficient proof of residence for the officers. After he spent a night sleeping on the floor of a makeshift jail with only bread and water for dinner, they forced him and four other men to board a northbound train. The train had not stopped moving and he fell, injuring his leg and knee.[223] County Supervisor John Anson Ford also investigated the situation at the border checkpoint in

[219] *Transients in California*, 243.
[220] *Transients in California*, 250.
[221] *Transients in California*, 254.
[222] *Transients in California*, 256.
[223] Margaret Cochran Bristol, "Transients in Recent Reports," *Social Service Review* 10, no. 2 (June 1936): 314-315.

Riverside County. He reported one of the LAPD officers wondering if their actions constituted fascism: "Well, we have extended the city limits. I guess we are still in the United States and have not seceded from the Union. But this may be the beginning of Fascism."[224]

While he dispatched officers to patrol the state's borders, Davis simultaneously set up a second front within the city itself targeting itinerant transients, further linking them with criminality. [225] Special "flying squads" of LAPD officers were directed to support the regular vagrant police squad and initiate "a clean-up of all persons in the city 'without visible means of support.'"[226] Those arrested would be forced to either "prove their innocence," "accept 'floaters' out of town," or be sent to a labor camp.[227] Collaborating with the Los Angeles County Sheriff, Eugene Biscailuz, Davis assigned thirty detectives and forty-five patrolmen "to drag the city for bums and 'persons unable to explain their presence" in the city."[228] Meanwhile, Biscailuz instructed his officers to distinguish between the deserving and undeserving –the "clean-up of vagrants," he clarified, did not apply to "law-abiding citizens" who simply could not find employment.[229] The *Whittier News* aptly pointed out that the sheriff failed to explain how his deputies were to differentiate between the two.[230]

Davis also enlisted Los Angeles housewives "in his 'Make California Safe from the Hobo' campaign." He broadcast over the radio an appeal for housewives to participate in his surveillance apparatus by contacting the police whenever beggars appeared at their doors asking

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[224] John Anson Ford to *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), February 1936, box 51, folder bb4, John Anson Ford Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, CA.
[225] "Vagrants Rounded Up in City and County," *Los Angeles Times*, February 7, 1936.
[226] "Border Guard Turning Back Undesirables," *Whittier News*, February 7, 1936; "Vagrants Rounded Up," *Los Angeles Times*, February 7, 1936.
[227] "Vagrants Rounded Up in City and County," *Los Angeles Times*, February 7, 1936.
[228] "Border Guard Turning Back Undesirables," *Whittier News*, February 7, 1936.
[229] "Border Guard Turning Back Undesirables," *Whittier News*, February 7, 1936.
[230] "Border Guard Turning Back Undesirables," *Whittier News*, February 7, 1936.

for food.[231] "'Many beggars merely are 'finger men,'" he declared, "out to look over houses for prospective burglars and are far more dangerous than they appear."[232]

The special squadrons swept the "tangled other-world habitat" of the city in their quest for vagrants. They combed "hobo jungles, beer halls, poolrooms and public parks" as well as downtown streets and, in particular, Pershing Square – all places where people could frequently be found begging.[233] Those rounded up, including "families, single women, juveniles, and men unable to work because of illness or infirmities," were to be transported back to their "legal homes."[234] However, the majority of those arrested were simply shipped on trains dumped in Arizona just across the border. The city exported its "first carload of vagabond refugees" from the Lincoln Heights jail in a railway box car on February 11 and dropped them off in Yuma.[235] Many of these individuals were reported as "'jungling up' in increasingly large numbers opposite Needles, Blythe and Parker, Calif., to await the recall of the foreign legion.'"[236]

On March 11, 1936, Davis produced a report defending the blockade. His argument for stopping transients at the state borders hinged on linking unemployment and transiency with criminality, and cited the liquidation of the FTP coupled with a massive influx of transients as major motivators for this action.[237] He reminded his audience that crime in Los Angeles increased by approximately 20 percent each winter.[238] However, his own charts demonstrated at most an 18 percent increase in all crimes in December, 1935; a 17 percent increase in December,1934; and a 13 percent increase in December, 1933. Crime rates declined in January

[231] "Federal Action Sought to End Border Patrol," *Hollywood Citizen News*, February 6, 1936.
[232] "Federal Action Sought to End Border Patrol," *Hollywood Citizen News*, February 6, 1936.
[233] "Police Trap at Border Nets Killer," *Los Angeles Times*, February 8, 1936; "Vagabonds Will Labor in Quarry," *Los Angeles Times*, February 9, 1936.
[234] "Police Trap at Border Nets Killer," *Los Angeles Times*, February 8, 1936.
[235] Don Ashbaugh, "Carload of Vagabonds En Route Out of State," *Los Angeles Times*, February 11, 1936.
[236] "L.A. Police Chief Uses Freights to Move Out 'Bums,'" *Nevada State Journal*, February 11, 1936.
[237] Davis, *Report of Indigent Alien Transients*, 1.
[238] Davis, *Report of Indigent Alien Transients*, 1.

and February, 1934 and 1935, while March, 1934 and 1935 showed an increase of 1 percent and 6 percent respectively. Nevertheless, by isolating burglary, auto theft, and robbery, there was a 27 percent increase in crime from November to December, 1936. Ultimately, however, the overall crime rate for the winter months was on the decline from 1933 through 1936.[239] Moreover, a separate January 1936 report issued by the police department announced a "reduction in major crimes" for three years in a row.[240] Essentially, this simply reveals the unreliability of crime reporting during this era. LAPD crimes statistics typically meant "arrest" statistics, which did not accurately reflect the actual extent of crime. Rather, crime statistics were politically constructed to serve multifaceted ends.[241] In this case, Davis was likely employing statistics to justify the blockade.

Davis also reported that 48 percent of those arrested at the border checkpoints were found to have prior criminal records. [242] The SRA agents took issue with these numbers, claiming that the percentage was far lower.[243] Additionally, the LAPD considered anyone to have a record who had been previously arrested for any reason, including vagrancy – a lack of funds – or even minor traffic violations.[244] Many transients reported seeking overnight shelter in jails, which they often achieved by purposefully getting arrested.[245] Accordingly, a survival tactic registered as a criminal record. Moreover, at some point in 1936, Davis asked LAPD Captain Bernard Caldwell

[239] The LAPD's *Annual Reports* did not publish crime statistics for all crimes prior to 1941 so double-checking Davis's numbers there proves difficult, especially given the vague categories he uses in his March report on indigents. Davis, *Report of Indigent Alien Transients*, 1; Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity*, 314fn1.
[240] "Creation of Permanent Safety Commission Recommended by Mayor in Annual Report," *California Eagle*, January 17, 1936.
[241] Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity*, 121, 307fn39.
[242] Davis, *Report of Indigent Alien Transients*, 1, 12.
[243] *Transients in California*, 265.
[244] *Transients in California*, 265.
[245] *Transients in California*, 42, 50.

to compile a report on the effects of the influx of Dust Bowl on Los Angeles."[246] Caldwell did so using data compiled from the Chamber of Commerce, tax rolls, and anecdotal evidence from various LAPD detectives. He found that a large portion of the transients were not in fact "parasites," but "hardworking assets." In an interview with a journalist in 1991, Caldwell recalled informing Davis of this fact, much to Davis's own surprise.[247]

Another tool for deterring transients and sorting out the undeserving was the rock pile. On February 7, Davis announced plans to make Los Angeles "'too hot' for vagrants" by establishing a rock pile where those arrested for vagrancy would be compelled to perform hard labor and produce sand and gravel for city projects.[248] He planned "to force vagrants to break rock" until they decided that Los Angeles was "a place of too much hard work" and would "be glad to leave" after serving their time.[249]

PUBLIC RESPONSE AND THE BUM BLOCKADE'S LEGALITY

The blockade elicited a great deal of support, especially for those who viewed Davis's stand as a defense of the rights of taxpayers. For them, property rights outweighed human rights. M.W. Jones wrote to the *Hollywood Citizen News* to declare that those protesting the blockade in defense of constitutional rights must not be taxpayers themselves: "'Many have raved about the Constitutional rights of the paupers who wish themselves on the taxpayers of California—already staggering under the burden of their own unemployed and indigents—but so far I've failed to see one of them offer to contribute a nickel toward support of the incoming vagrants.'"[250] When State Senator Thomas Scollan called Davis's blockade a "damnable

[246] Joe Domanick, *To Protect and To Serve: The LAPD's Century of War in the City of Dreams* (New York: Pocket Books, 1994), 62.
[247] Joe Domanick, *To Protect and To Serve: The LAPD's Century of War in the City of Dreams* (New York: Pocket Books, 1994), 62.
[248] "Big Rock Pile Waiting for Vagrants," Van Nuys News, February 10, 1936.
[249] "Big Rock Pile Waiting for Vagrants," Van Nuys News, February 10, 1936.
[250] M.W. Jones, "The Pauper's Rights," *Hollywood Citizen News*, February 15, 1936.

outrage," a *Los Angeles Times* editorial jumped to its defense.[251] "Let's have more outrages!," it declared and depicted Davis as a man of action in contrast to the "interminable talkers" in Sacramento.[252] Taking aim at the Assistant State Attorney-General 's suggestion that the blockade was "illegal," the editorial claimed that, in this case, the ends justified the means. Better to send a message to migrants that they were unwelcome in the state and save taxpayer dollars, than to worry over technicalities of the law.[253] Moreover, the editorial argued, if liberal senators had not defeated the Jone-Redwine Act the previous year, Davis's actions would not have been necessary, and California would not now be the paradise for radicals and trouble-makers that it is."[254]

However, the critiques poured in – many of them declaring Davis's actions to be fascist. Many were especially troubled by the specter of law enforcement official questioning an individual's right to move freely and made allusions to rising fascist activities in Europe. One person wrote into the *Hollywood Citizen-News*: "This is not Europe, where man is compelled to wear a tag (passport) from town to town seeking employment. Thumbs down on this political move, and be an American."[255] Another asked if Davis's actions were "trial balloons to see if the people will stand for Fascism."[256] Some critics observed the contradiction between the local elite obsession with rooting out Communism as a threat to American values, while at the same time turning a blind eye to unconstitutional and fascist-like activities by authorities. As another remarked, "It seems as though behind the Communism screen Chief Davis had a fascism all planned, with himself as dictator. If he wants to keep the poor people out of our golden state he

[251] "Let's Have More Outrages," *Los Angeles Times*, February 5, 1936.
[252] "Let's Have More Outrages," *Los Angeles Times*, February 5, 1936.
[253] "Let's Have More Outrages," *Los Angeles Times*, February 5, 1936.
[254] "Let's Have More Outrages," *Los Angeles Times*, February 5, 1936.
[255] "The Mayor's Duty," *Hollywood Citizen News*, February 12, 1936.
[256] "Trial Balloons," *Hollywood Citizen News*, February 14, 1936.

should take the money this stunt of his is costing and build a fence around Los Angeles."[257] Others added to this the observation that Davis, in dictator-like fashion, sought publicity – or perhaps notoriety: "For months, Big Interests have had locally a corps of lawyers, preachers and club women beating the brush for imaginary Communists and loudly shouting: 'Save the Constitution.' Under this smoke-screen Chief Davis surreptitiously – almost, but not quite – launches his high-handed, unconstitutional and outrageous movement to police the State; this to gain personal publicity and to try out the temper of the people of California. It is Fascism afoot, and if today we stand meekly for it, there will be a Mussolini in the saddle tomorrow, placed there by Big Interests of Wall Street."[258] Others questioned the pragmatics of the LAPD action as well as the legitimacy of its motivation. In other words, how far would this police action go? As another concerned citizen wrote: "If Los Angeles has this right then any other city in any other state has a similar right. Imagine the chaos that would ensue if every city had policemen on guard at the borders of all states forbidding entrance on one pretext or another. An economic problem is Chief Davis's pretext, but any other excuse would do just as well. Entrance could be denied on account of race, color, religion or politics. This would be just as legal."[259]

Migrants themselves largely disdained the police action as an insult to their person and to their rights as citizens. When a social worker interviewed migrants to California on their motivations and experiences, he found they had much to say about the border patrol. Lee Moss put his views concisely: "Anybody that's a citizen of the United States has a right to go anywhere in the United States."[260] Upon learning of the blockade, Arthur Brown did his own research – he purchased a copy of the U.S. Constitution to determine if the LAPD action held

[257] "For Stay at Home Police," *Hollywood Citizen News*, February 7, 1936.
[258] "Already Under Way," *Hollywood Citizen News*, February 13, 1936.
[259] "An Astounding Usurpation" *Hollywood Citizen News*, February 14, 1936.
[260] Wilson, "Social Attitudes of Certain Migratory Agricultural Workers," 77.

validity. He decided it did not. “I’m a full blooded American, natural born, and feel that I’ve got a right to stay in the United States anywhere I want to,” he explained, I decided they had no right to stop me so I come on, and I still think I got a right to come.”[261] Another migrant, Ed Morrow, was similarly undeterred by the border patrol: “Back in Oklahoma you hear a lot of talk about the authorities not lettin’ the Oklahoma people in California unless they go on a visit or have relatives here. California has got no walls around it, you ain’t sentenced in it and you ain’t sentenced out. No laws can make you stay or leave or keep you from comin’.”[262]

What did government officials make of Davis’s actions? For his part, Governor Merriam proved supportive and noted that “the matter of Los Angeles sending expeditions to the borders ‘is up to them, if they can get away with it.’”[263] However, on the day after the LAPD started the blockade, the Los Angeles City Council debated its legality and merits.

Councilman P.P. Christensen, an EPIC Democrat, accused Davis of setting up the blockade without the city council’s knowledge even as the state legislature had in its last session “refused to enact legislation authorizing such conduct.”[264] He demanded that Davis explain to the City Council “by whose authority” he sent his officers to the state border.[265] Councilman Baumgartner responded that the city’s first priority should be its “‘own citizens and taxpayers’” and noted that relief budgets for long-time residents were inadequate due to the influx of indigents on relief. Florida, he noted, had practiced these types of policies “’for years.’”[266] Councilman MacAllister declared that the council should support the LAPD in their efforts to prevent indigents from venturing to Los Angeles “‘to live off the taxpayers.’”[267] Councilman

[261] Wilson, “Social Attitudes of Certain Migratory Agricultural Workers,” 77.
[262] Wilson, “Social Attitudes of Certain Migratory Agricultural Workers,” 77.
[263] “Police Plan Draws Fire,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 7, 1936.
[264] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, February 4, 1936, 347, CMA.
[265] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, February 4, 1936, 347, CMA.
[266] “Davis Tells Need of War on Indigents,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 5, 1936.
[267] “Davis Tells Need of War on Indigents,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 5, 1936.

Evan Lewis asserted Davis was "'aiming at the wrong people.'"[268] The single men targeted by Davis's campaign were "'harmless,'' he declared, whereas the true threat were the families coming into the state "'in automobiles loaded down with bedding and children'" who would "'become a burden on the community'" and "'work in opposition to our own people.'"[269]

Revisiting the issue of the blockade the following week, Christensen offered a critique that laid bare its fascist implications. On the one hand, he framed the blockade as a "ridiculous spectacle." "I am disgusted and ashamed," he stated, "We are the laughing stock of all friends of freedom and liberty."[270] However, the blockade was much too menacing to be written off as a joke. Christensen hinted as much when he referred to the officers stationed at the border checkpoints as "storm troops" and described Adolph Hitler as Davis's "preceptor" and Davis himself as "our strutting Mussolini."[271] Davis had, Christensen remarked, "pulled a boner – a most obvious violation of a fundamental right of Americans, who derive their citizenship, not from California or Kansas, but from the U.S.A., and who have a perfect right to pass from one state to another, though they may not be of the 'better class' or possessed of wealth."[272] Essentially, by demonstrating an easy willingness deprive American citizens of their constitutional rights, Los Angeles law enforcement had offered a far-right alternative to one of the key problems of the Depression. Christensen closed his remarks by presenting a motion that the Police Commission order the recall of "James E. Davis' Foreign Legion."[273]

After these remarks, several councilmen leapt to their feet. Councilman MacAllister expressed incredulity at Christensen's "attitude" especially "'when vagrants from other States are

[268] "Police Border Guard Stirs Attacks," *Hollywood Citizen News*, February 4, 1936.
[269] "Police Border Guard Stirs Attacks," *Hollywood Citizen News*, February 4, 1936; "Davis Tells Need of War on Indigents," *Los Angeles Times*, February 5, 1936.
[270] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, February 13, 1936, 477, CMA.
[271] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, February 13, 1936, 477, CMA.
[272] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, February 13, 1936, 477, CMA.
[273] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, February 13, 1936, 477, CMA.

coming into Los Angeles and taking relief money and other benefits from our own citizens who need protection.'"[274] Ultimately, the council awaited the ruling of City Attorney Ray L. Chesebro on whether or not the Police Commission held the legal authority to detail police personnel to the state border lines.[275] They were less concerned – aside from Christensen – with determining the legality of stopping Americans from crossing state lines.

It turned out that Davis had not acquired the "blessing" of Chesebro, as he had previously claimed but rather sought an opinion from "certain local law firms engaged by business men."[276] Seemingly caught off guard, Chesebro dodged the constitutional issue. He found that the LAPD could make investigations extraterritorially if they were officially related to "actual or potential crime within the boundaries of the city," although "no statutory authority" conferred "such right."[277] Accordingly, the question hinged on whether or not the blockade was an official duty. Most of the sheriffs in border counties had deputized LAPD officers to curb any doubts regarding territorial jurisdiction.[278] Given that any citizen could make an arrest for misdemeanors or felonies committed in their presence, Chesebro noted that "any want of such direct or implied authorization" would become important only if the arrests required a warrant or if the offenses were not "committed in the presence of the person making the arrest."[279] However, he was careful to note that the legality of the border patrol hinged on "express or implied" cooperative agreements with local officials in the respective counties.[280] Absent of such agreements, such as

[274] "City Police Patrol Halt 1000 at State's Borders," *Los Angeles Times*, February 14, 1936.
[275] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, February 4, 1936, 347-348, CMA.
[276] "Federal Action Sought to End Border Patrol," *Hollywood Citizen News*, February 6, 1936.
[277] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, February 13, 1936, 478, CMA.
[278] This deputization raised questions as to whom wielded authority over the police officers: were they to report to Chief Davis or to the sheriff of the county that deputized them? Nevertheless, the California courts historically had not characterized this as a conflict over authority given the longstanding practice of deputizing peace officers of a city as "unpaid deputy sheriffs" in nearby counties. Given that securing "adequate enforcement" of the penal laws had historically been a priority, no one had raised a significant objection to this practice. Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, February 13, 1936, 479, CMA.
[279] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, February 13, 1936, 479, CMA.
[280] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, February 13, 1936, 479, CMA.

was the case in Modoc and Del Norte counties, he held that the City Attorney's office was not prepared to "hold the program valid."[281] Accordingly, the failure to establish cooperative agreements with the respective counties would possibly jeopardize "the splendid internal comity which has hitherto prevailed."[282] In fact, if any non-deputized LAPD officer were to make an arrest under the legal authority as a private citizen, the question of individual liability could potentially come into play.[283]

Given these findings, Chesebro maintained that the LAPD was within its legal rights to establish the border detail, with some limitations.[284] He explained that the police officers were simply under direct orders from Chief Davis to investigate transients entering the state to determine whether or not they were wanted by the LAPD on a prior warrant.[285] This connected their action directly to the business of the city of Los Angeles. Moreover, the LAPD officers had been ordered to arrest individuals caught evading railroad fare, trespassing on trains or generally guilty of vagrancy.[286] According to Chesebro, they held the power to do this either as deputized officers or as private citizens. These arrests were made under the state laws and therefore, he argued, no one's constitutional rights were violated. [287]

Chesebro then turned to the question as to whether or not the Los Angeles could legally spend city funds to enforce state laws extraterritorially.[288] He ultimately determined that "in some instances at least" the city could legally fund extraterritorial duties by LAPD officers. The question then became whether or not the border patrol was "so closely connected with law

[281] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, February 13, 1936, 479, CMA.
[282] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, February 13, 1936, 479, CMA.
[283] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, February 13, 1936, 479, CMA.
[284] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, February 13, 1936, 479-480, CMA.
[285] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, February 13, 1936, 479-480, CMA.
[286] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, February 13, 1936, 479-480, CMA.
[287] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, February 13, 1936, 479-480, CMA.
[288] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, February 13, 1936, 480,

enforcement within the City of Los Angeles" that it could be considered "a municipal purpose."[289] To determine this, Chesebro relied largely on the information provided by the police themselves. He repeated statistics from Chief Davis's reports highlighting the increased number of transients headed to Los Angeles on a regular basis, many of whom were found to be "vagrants, paupers, and beggars" as well as convicted felons.[290] The sheer size of Los Angeles, Chesebro contended, made it "an almost impossible task" for the LAPD to "physically police the entire city" and prevent the entry of paupers, vagrants, beggars, and convicted felons.[291] Accordingly, making arrests at points of entry to the city would be an effective means of catching these individuals before they were "lost in the metropolis." For Chesebro, "points of access to the city" apparently included those over 600 miles away in Modoc County near the Oregon border. By essentially setting up a drag net at the state borders, the LAPD would be in a position to catch violators of penal code sections, "such as illegal transportation and registration of automobiles, as well as riding on railroad trains unlawfully." In fact, Chesebro noted, the mere announcement of LAPD presence at the border ready to enforce penal code violations "stemmed the rush of vagrants" to the state, which would no doubt have "a salutary effect upon purely local crime, upon mendicancy, and to some extent upon the tremendous relief burden borne by our citizens."[292]

A few days later, State Attorney General U.S. Webb unofficially advised Arthur G. Arnoll, General Manager of the Chamber, that under the provisions of California's political code, no person was eligible to be appointed a deputy sheriff within one of the counties of the state unless they were electors of that county. This meant that no LAPD officers could legally be

[289] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, February 13, 1936, 481.
[290] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, February 13, 1936, 481.
[291] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, February 13, 1936, 481-482.
[292] Minutes, Los Angeles City Council, February 13, 1936, 481-482.

deputized by sheriffs in counties outside of Los Angeles.[293] Crucially, he explained that "the right of citizens to ingress and egress" between the states had generally "recognized and upheld" under the privileges and immunities clause of Article 4, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution.[294] There were, however, some exceptions. States could opt to protect themselves from a certain class of persons by barring their entry, he noted, but this power resided with the legislature.[295] As he explained it, Section 647 of the State's Penal Code, which defined and established the penalties for vagrancy, might permit officers to arrest vagrants "immediately upon their entry into this State," but did not confer on the officers the right to prevent their entry by force.[296] Although he sympathized with the Chamber's concerns over the "invasion" of migrants, he stressed that any response must be lawful. An evasive Arnoll reported that since Webb's letter was not "a formal opinion," the "letter had been pigeonholed."[297] Instead, both Davis and the Chamber had opted to follow Chesebro's informal opinion.[298]

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) soon joined the fray. During the first week of the blockade, LAPD officers stopped John Langan at the Arizona border as he returned from a three-day job inspecting a mica mine.[299] Already aware of the border patrol from newspaper

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[293] U.S. Webb, California State Attorney General, to Arthur G. Arnoll, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, February 18, 1936, in *National Defense Migration Hearings, Part 26: Washington Hearings*, 10148; "A Million on Relief," *Los Angeles Times*, April 14, 1935.
[294] U.S. Webb, California State Attorney General, to Arthur G. Arnoll, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, February 18, 1936, in *National Defense Migration Hearings, Part 26: Washington Hearings*, 10149; "A Million on Relief," *Los Angeles Times*, April 14, 1935.
[295] U.S. Webb, California State Attorney General, to Arthur G. Arnoll, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, February 18, 1936, in *National Defense Migration Hearings, Part 26: Washington Hearings*, 10150; "A Million on Relief," *Los Angeles Times*, April 14, 1935.
[296] California Penal Code §647(3) *Penal Code of the State of California* (1935) at 193; U.S. Webb, California State Attorney General, to Arthur G. Arnoll, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, February 18, 1936, in *National Defense Migration Hearings, Part 26: Washington Hearings*, 10150; "A Million on Relief," *Los Angeles Times*, April 14, 1935.
[297] "Federal Judge Refuses to Enjoin Border Patrol," *Los Angeles Times*, March 18, 1936.
[298] "Federal Judge Refuses to Enjoin Border Patrol," *Los Angeles Times*, March 18, 1936; "Chief Davis to Defy Patrol Ruling," *Hollywood Citizen-News*, March 17, 1936.
[299] "Federal Court Asked to Ban Davis' Border Patrol in Suit of Local Man Halted at Line," *Hollywood Citizen News*, February 19, 1936.

reports, Langan decided the LAPD would not violate his rights as an American citizen to freely pass through, even if he looked "like a bum" due to his crumpled, dust-covered clothes, uncombed hair, and unshaven face.[300] The officers threatened to block his entry into the state unless he proved to their satisfaction that he was not a resident of another state and was not an undesirable citizen.[301] When he refused to respond to their questions, they arrested him and took his fingerprints.[302] One week later, John C. Packard, ACLU of Southern California attorney, filed suit against James Davis in federal court on behalf of Langan to halt the blockade on the grounds that the action was illegal under both the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments.[303] Moreover, he would argue that city funds could not be spent to support extra-territorial activities.[304] Specifically, Langan sought to enjoin Davis from "stopping, molesting, questioning, fingerprinting, arresting, or otherwise interfering" with anyone entering California or traveling within the state.[305]

The court initially dismissed the case, ruling that the federal court held no jurisdiction in the matter as the suit had not specified that Davis was acting under the authority of the State of California.[306] Accordingly a few days, Langan filed a new suit, this time making both Davis and the City of Los Angeles defendants.[307] However, Langan failed to appear at the new hearing and

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[300] Bill Lascher, *The Golden Fortress: California's Border War on Dust Bowl Refugees* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2022), 131-132.
[301] John Langan v. James Davis, Chief of Police of the City of Los Angeles, No. 844-S (1936), in *Hearings Before the Select Committee Investigating National Defense Migration, Part 26: Washington Hearings*, 77th Cong., 10169 (1942).
[302] Lascher, *Golden Fortress*, 133.
[303] Langan also sued for $5,000 in damages. *Langan v. Davis,* No. 844-S (1936); "Federal Court Asked to Ban Davis' Border Patrol;" "ACLU Challenges Fascist Border Patrol," *American Civil Liberties Union-News* 1, no. 3 (March 1936): 2, PER ACLUN, California Historical Society.
[304] "Miner Halted in Bum Blockade Sues Davis," *Illustrated Daily News* (Los Angeles), February 20, 1936.
[305] *Langan v. Davis,* No. 844-S (1936).
[306] "Webb, Stephens Rule on 'Border Patrol," *Open Forum* 13, no. 12 (March 21, 1936), PER ACLUS; Starr, *Endangered Dreams*, 179.
[307] "A.C.L.U. Attorneys Start New Attack on 'Border Patrol," *Open Forum* 13, no. 13 (March 28, 1936): 1, PER ACLUS.

then sent a telegram requesting to call off the action, and the case never moved forward.[308] A few weeks later, Davis quietly withdrew his officers from the state's borders.[309] Despite his claims to the contrary, the blockade only halted a small percentage of migrants.[310] Most evaded officer by taking alternate routes, or simply waited out the blockade by camping out in the nearby states.[311]

CONCLUSION

The LAPD's border patrol laid bare the problems of labor and migration that had plagued the nation for decades. As economist Paul Taylor, who had acutely studied the migrant problem, observed, "Migrants are tolerated or welcomed only when their work is needed or they have money to spend."[312] The National Committee of Transient Homeless published their platform in 1936, just a few months after the border patrol ended where they noted that "the 'problem of the transient' is primarily one of employment and the wise use of labor at an adequate wage rather than a problem of relief."[313] Nevertheless, Davis continued to push for less-constitutionally questionable versions of his blockade, and in the fall of 1936 attempted to draft California to

[308] "Police Terrorism Hint Seen in Blockade Case," *Hollywood Citizen-News*, March 30, 1936. Rumors swirled that Earl Kynette, of the LAPD's Intelligence Bureau (also known as the Spy Squad) had intimidated Langan by threatening his wife and daughter. According to available evidence, Langan never made this accusation. However, it is worth noting that two years later, Kynette went to prison for planting a bomb beneath the driver's seat of an investigator looking into corruption within Mayor Frank Shaw's administration. For more on the alleged intimidation of Langan, Dwight F. McKinney and Fred Allhoff offer a fascinating albeit sensational telling in *Liberty* magazine. Dwight F. McKinney and Fred Allhoff, "The Lid Off Los Angeles: Part Three: The Spy Squad That Floored Uncle Sam," *Liberty*, November 25, 1939, 21-24, 26, 28-29. For background on the Kynette bombing, see Tom Sitton, *Los Angeles Transformed: Fletcher Bowron's Urban Reform Revival, 1938-1953* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005) and Simon J. Judkins, "Citizen Surveillance: CIVIC and the Investigation of Vice in the City of Los Angeles, 1935-1938," *California History* 93, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 75-91.
[309] *Transients in California*, 266; Wild, "If You Ain't Got that Do-Re-Mi," 329.
[310] "Raids Net Vagrants," *Los Angeles Times*, February 17, 1936.
[311] Wild, "If You Ain't Got that Do-Re-Mi," 329.
[312] Paul S. Taylor, "Migratory Agricultural Workers on the Pacific Coast," *American Sociological Review* 3, no. 2 (April 1938): 225.
[313] Margaret Cochran Bristol, "Transients in Recent Reports," *Social Service Review* 10, no. 2 (June 1936): 323.

participate in a coordinated winter campaign against transients.[314] The California legislature also managed to raise the state's residency requirement from three years to five by 1940.[315]

However, the problem of massive unemployment during the Great Depression had undermined "the legal assumption" that joblessness and poverty were inherently immoral, dangerous, and criminal.[316] John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and Dorothea Lange's haunting portraits of migrant families enduring hardship, elicited a great deal of empathy across the nation.[317] Moreover, sociological studies and a Congressional investigation into the problem of transiency and interstate migration found that Depression-era migration was grounded in economic motivations and restricting it might impede economic recovery.[318] The looming possibility of U.S. entrance into World War II led to concerns that anti-migrant legislation might impede a much-needed labor supply from reaching the emerging defense industries.[319]

In 1939, Fred Edwards drove to Spur, Texas, to pick up his sister, her newborn baby, and her husband, Frank Duncan, who was unable to sustain the family on his $40 per month from his WPA job.[320] He brought them back to live with him at his home in Marysville, California, where after ten days, Duncan began receiving $20 per month in financial assistance from the federal Farm Security Administration. As a result of this act, the State of California prosecuted and convicted Edwards for the crime of bringing an indigent into the state in violation of California Welfare and Institutions Code section 2615.[321] This was the codified version of California's

[314] "Davis Acts to Block Hobos' Trek to City," *Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 1936; "Counties Join in Move for Vagrant Blockade," *Los Angeles Times*, October 31, 1936.
[315] Lester, "Building the New Deal State," 517.
[316] Risa Goluboff, Vagrant Nation: Police Power, Constitutional Change, and the Making of the 1960s (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 81.
[317] Wild, "If You Ain't Got that Do-Re-Mi," 329.
[318] Wild, "If You Ain't Got that Do-Re-Mi," 329.
[319] Wild, "If You Ain't Got that Do-Re-Mi," 329.
[320] John S. Caragozian, "The Joads Go to Court: A True-Life Melodrama with Implications for Today," *California Legal History* 15 (2020): 54.
[321] Edwards v. California, 314 U.S. 160 (1941); John S. Caragozian, "The Joads Go to Court: A True-Life Melodrama with Implications for Today," *California Legal History* 15 (2020): 54.

Indigent Act, which had drawn so much attention over the course of the Depression decade. The Yuba County Superior Court upheld Edwards's conviction, and since California criminal procedure did not allow further appeal at the time, his only recourse was to appeal the constitutionality of the vagrancy law to the U.S. Supreme Court in April, 1941.[322]

Samuel Slaff, a New York City attorney, represented Edwards and made two key claims in his defense. He argued that the law "unconstitutionally burdened interstate commerce" and that "freedom of movement within the United States" was a "fundamental privilege of national citizenship," which could not be abridged by a state."[323] The prosecution cited nineteenth-century precedent "about a state's police power" to protect the "health, safety, morals, and general welfare" of a state's citizens.[324] He also highlighted key arguments used in the defense of the LAPD's blockade, noting that "'events of the last ten years have made this problem increasingly acute because of the attraction to California of paupers from other States because of higher relief benefits, old age pensions, etc."[325] The prosecution's brief stated, "Their coming here has alarmingly increased our taxes and the cost of welfare outlays, old age pensions, and the care of the criminal, the indigent sick, and the insane. Therefore, how can it be said that California should not have the power in the protection of the safety, health, morals and welfare of its people, to bar proven paupers…from our State?"[326]

When the U.S. Supreme Court ordered a re-argument of the case in October, 1941, the California Attorney General—Earl Warren—avoided restating the previous claims about poor whites and instead noted that the state held the police power to bar indigents and that "section

[322] Caragozian, "Joads Go to Court," 58.
[323] Caragozian, "Joads Go to Court," 58.
[324] Caragozian, "Joads Go to Court," 58.
[325] Caragozian, "Joads Go to Court," 58.
[326] Caragozian, "Joads Go to Court," 60.

2615 was not overly harsh." Rather, the phrase "indigent persons" was narrowly defined and meant that the state could prevent the entry of people who lacked "money and other resources" and who did not have "relatives or friends" within the state "willing and able to support them."[327] On November 24, 1941, the Supreme Court ruled that the law was unconstitutional under the Commerce Clause, with all nine justices concurring.[328] Justice Byrne noted that the idea that local communities should care for their own was obsolete. "…The theory of the Elizabethan poor laws no longer fits the facts," he announced.[329] He also observed that the Constitution was framed "upon the theory that the peoples of the several States must sink or swim together, and that in the long run prosperity and salvation are in union and not division."[330]

Within two weeks of the *Edwards* decision, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, and California became a center of war industrialization. Meanwhile, Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, and with the full support of Los Angeles's Mayor Fletcher Bowron, established the legal basis for the mass removal of Japanese immigrants and Americans with Japanese ancestry, thus triggering an agricultural labor shortage.[331] Nevertheless, three million people migrated to the state, and Southern California was "awash in defense contracts."[332]

The LAPD's "Bum Blockade" has largely been forgotten in the public imagination, and understandably so, given the significant events that followed. When it is occasionally remembered, it is often presented as a fluke or as a comedic example of California's typical oddball activities. However, it was much more than that. It was also an example of law

[327] Caragozian, "Joads Go to Court," 60-61.
[328] Caragozian, "Joads Go to Court," 61.
[329] Edwards v. California, 314 U.S. 160 (1941) at 174.
[330] Edwards v. California, 314 U.S. 160 (1941) at 174.
[331] Yu Tokunaga, "Japanese Interment as an Agricultural Labor Crisis," *Southern California Quarterly* 101, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 100; Abraham Hoffman, "The Conscience of a Public Official: Los Angeles Mayor Fletcher Bowron and Japanese Removal," *Southern California Quarterly* 92, no. 3 (Fall 2010): 243-274.
[332] Bruce Cumings, *Dominion from Sea to Sea: Pacific Ascendancy and American Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 319, 327.

enforcement officers aligning themselves with illegal, unconstitutional behavior during an era when fascism was on the rise. That the LAPD, one of the most organized and efficient police departments in the nation at the time, essentially seized state authority, however briefly, and with much support from the community, deserves deep reflection and scrutiny.[333]

[333] Starr, *Endangered Dreams*, 179.

CONCLUSION

By 1941, the city's downtown Plaza had undergone significant change. The J.V. Rhoades Employment Agency had disappeared, and in its place were vendors peddling colorful *piñatas*, Mexican pottery, *serapes*, and giant *sombreros* alongside Mexican restaurants staffed by attractive *señoritas* in bright costumes.[1] In the early 1930s, city boosters, along with Harry Chandler of the *Los Angeles Times,* had sought to transform downtown Los Angeles by removing undesirable residents and building an imagined version of "old Mexico" to attract tourist dollars and capitalize on the city's storied Mexican past.[2] Describing their vision as "a mixture of romance and capitalism," boosters instituted increased policing at the Plaza along with the installation of "bum-proof" diagonal bricks around the water fountain at its center to discourage loitering and public demonstrations.[3] By 1935, the City Council had banned free speech at the Plaza at the behest of the Chamber of Commerce, which had complained that "radical speech makers" proved a "bad advertisement" for the "early California atmosphere."[4] As previous chapters have established, many of these actions had limited effect – protests and agitation continued in spite of these attempts at curtailment. Ultimately, however, the intention of the downtown renovation was to expel the "bad" Mexicans – impoverished, rebellious casual laborers who made demands on relief programs – and replace them with "good" Mexicans – quaint, unproblematic, and docile workers who served and entertained tourists and customers, while performing a caricature of themselves.[5]

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[1] William David Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza: Sacred and Contested Space* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 187, 192; William David Estrada, "Los Angeles' Old Plaza and Olvera Street: Imagined and Contested Space," *Western Folklore* 58, no. 2 (Winter 1999): 107.
[2] Estrada, "Los Angeles' Old Plaza and Olvera Street," 107.
[3] Estrada, *Los Angeles Plaza*, 197.
[4] "Free Speech Ends at the Plaza," *Los Angeles Times*, July 14, 1935; "Council Hits at Plaza Free Speech Zone," *United Progressive News*, June 14, 1935.
[5] Estrada, *Los Angeles Plaza*, 193, 197.

The contested space of the Plaza reveals the attempts of local boosters to present a sanitized version of the city in order to lure tourists, homeseekers, and industry all in the name of development and profit. To accomplish these ends, the individuals whose manual labor was essential to the building and growth of the region must be carefully controlled, expelled, contained, and hidden.

Local business leaders in Los Angeles had long been simultaneously dependent on and fearful of seasonal casual laborers, whose precarious situation often worked to the employer's advantage but also manifested as a threat when workers made demands on the state. Throughout the 1930s, this tension manifested in multifaceted ways, from the attempts to contain and discipline unemployed workers through vagrancy arrests and work tests, to attempts to control New Deal programs in order to manipulate the labor force and extinguish perceived economic threats, to attempts to block the unemployed and impoverished from entering the city and even the state.

Moreover, although Los Angeles was marked by rapid industrial growth throughout the 1920s, the region's labor market had not achieved the ability to absorb labor with any degree of stability. Accordingly, by the time the Great Depression arrived, it upended an already insecure labor market. This was apparent in the long-standing practice of job seekers visiting profit-seeking private employment agencies as a last resort, in the attempts of the Chamber of Commerce and California growers to expel relief recipients from the charity rolls and force them to work in the fields at lower wages to ease purported labor shortages, and in the evolution of the self-help cooperatives, whose participants faulted a limited market economy that failed to adequately absorb surplus labor.

In her indispensable study of the New Deal in Chicago, Lizabeth Cohen finds an already fairly stable labor market disrupted by economic crisis. Building on a foundation of mass culture, workers eventually turned to the CIO and the Democratic party as they sought the economic safety nets previously promised to them by welfare capitalism.[6] By the end of the decade, they had found some degree of stability once again, this time from the government and unions, as they sought protection from layoffs, illness, and unstable banks.[7] However, the composition of Los Angeles's political economy and labor market was distinct from that of cities such as Chicago especially in its longstanding instability. Accordingly, as a region situated on the developmental fringes of the U.S. economy, Los Angeles affords an alternate view of the New Deal construction of the state, especially in the construction of economic citizenship, in which some members of society gained the independent status necessary to allow them to participate fully in the polity.[8]

As the New Deal rolled out, the federal government would eventually funnel economic citizenship through employment by legislating an assortment of social benefits and tax incentives designed to safeguard the family. However, it did so by attaching its most valuable benefits such as pensions and unemployment insurance to certain categories of wage work, rather than families.[9] By linking benefits to some jobs while excluding others, the New Deal affirmed the status of some as appropriately "independent and upstanding citizens" while marking others as holding secondary positions.[10] Casual and agricultural laborers, who constituted the largest group

[6] Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 209.
[7] Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 362.
[8] Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 5.
[9] Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity*, 4.
[10] Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity*, 4.

of workers in California, were excluded from New Deal programs by design.[11] Moreover, the overall instability of Los Angeles's labor market would perhaps mean a less direct path to economic citizenship for many of the region's workers. Those who did not qualify for unemployment insurance due to casual labor status or underemployment, for example, would be forced to rely on county relief programs, with its accompanying stigma.

Additionally, throughout the 1930s, Los Angeles witnessed a series of battles between workers, the Chamber, and the Merchants and Manufacturers' Association over the recognition of AFL and CIO unions.[12] By the close of the decade, the Chamber and MMA had lost much ground in their ability to enforce the open-shop as they had for years. This was due to a variety of factors but largely a result of federal legislation starting with Section 7a of the National Industrial Recovery Act in 1933 and ending with the Fair Labor Standards Act in 1938, both of which established a new set of labor laws designed to protect workers' safety and the bargaining position of unions as well as render illegal many practices of the open-shop lobby.[13] The Senate Subcommittee on the *Violations of Free Speech and the Rights of Labor* – also known as the La Follette Committee – further injured the Chamber and its allies by exposing their practices in defense of the open shop including propaganda campaigns, the hiring of labor spies, the use of the LAPD to bust unions, setting up illegal company unions, and funding networks of anti-union employers.[14] Moreover, with World War II on the horizon, many open-shop employers in Los Angeles – especially those in the aircraft and shipbuilding industries – found it expedient to accept the principles of collective bargaining in exchange for government defense contracts.

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[11] Emily H. Huntington, *Doors to Jobs: A Study of the Organization of the Labor Market in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1942), 418; Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2013), 156-194.
[12] John H.M. Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough: Los Angeles Workers, 1880-2010* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 153.
[13] Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 173.
[14] Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 173.

Whereas in 1932 Los Angeles had an unemployment rate of almost 30 percent, by 1940, on the eve of World War II, that number was 14.6 percent.[15] Indeed, the coming of the war meant more employment opportunities. Nevertheless, the labor market retained signs of instability. Business leaders continued to express concern over transient labor flooding the city and relying on relief programs when the labor market failed to absorb them. As the 1940 *Interstate Migration Hearings* reveal, even as aviation and shipbuilding firms sought laborers, they warned against "unskilled" laborers migrating to the state in search of employment who might "become a social burden."[16] However, the World War II era laid the foundations for another round of massive growth in Southern California's economy, although any benefits resulting from this situation did not accrue equally to Mexican, Asian, and African-American workers nor to women.[17]

Ultimately, this dissertation has attempted to historicize the intersections of relief and the labor market and reveal the ways in which those in power used entitlements and welfare as blunt tools to control laboring bodies. However, it also seeks to lay bare the fact that the unemployed, the underemployed, and low-wage earners during the years of the Great Depression were not simply passive victims who wallowed in misery and hunger. Rather, people took action, whether this meant challenging low relief payments at the local welfare office, taking to the streets to protest vagrancy raids and exorbitant employment agency fees, developing alternate economic systems by organizing production-for-use cooperatives, or simply traveling in search of work.

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[15] William H. Mullins, *The Depression and the Urban West Coast, 1929-1933* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 92; Jacqueline Rorabeck Kasun, "Some Social Aspects of Business Cycles in the Los Angeles Area, 1920-1950" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1956), 33.
[16] R.B. Robertson, Lockheed Aircraft Corporation, to Dr. Edward J. Rowell, in *Hearings Before the Select Committee to Investigate the Interstate Migration of Destitute Citizens Pursuant to H. Res. 63 and H. Res 491, Part 7: Los Angeles Hearings*, 76th Cong. 2804-2805 (1940).
[17] Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 203.

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