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Shared Spaces, Separate Lives: Community Formation in the California Citrus Industry during the Great Depression

By David Shanta

Abstract: The California citrus industry was the engine for the economic and cultural development of twentieth century Southern California. Studies have also focused on citrus as specialty crop agriculture. Its labor usage pattern required the economic, social, and political powerlessness of its workers. Growers and workers shared the spaces of the citrus groves and packinghouses, but otherwise led largely separate lives, delineated by class and race. Community formation during the Great Depression is examined from each perspective – dominant Anglo grower society and workers of Mexican descent. Benedict Anderson’s Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism provides a cultural anthropological framework, in which community forming processes of the separate groups are examined. This article aims to contribute to the literature by focusing where possible on the experiences of the small landholding “ranchers,” who collectively held the power of large landholders, and on the experiences of Mexican workers, who despite marginalization, pooled their economic and social resources, and persisted in place.
Introduction

On May 5, 1933, the City of Riverside hosted what the California Citrograph called a “magnificent spectacle,” a day of celebration honoring the sixtieth anniversary of the planting of the “parent” navel orange trees by Mrs. Eliza Tibbets. The main events of the day were a parade followed by a formal dinner for 300 growers and guests at the Mission Inn. The parade stretched two miles and included over 130 decorated floats, many of which used citrus fruit as the main decorating material. The floats represented packinghouses from local fruit exchanges across Southern California, as well as businesses connected to the prosperity of the citrus industry. Floats also represented the two largest cooperatives: the California Fruit Growers Exchange (CFGE, later Sunkist), and Mutual Orange Distributors (MOD, later Pure Gold). The floats were rolling displays of civic pride in hometown citrus groves, but also a passing in review of the established economic and social order.

Community, hierarchies, and local culture become established by such events. Historian David Glassberg calls historical pageants dramatic public rituals, portraying local community development. The imagery is controlled by economic and political power, and so the dominant culture tells the story. The historical imagery of Eliza Tibbets, as matriarchal pioneer, provides a starting point in an idealized past, leading to prosperity in the present (1933), thus providing context within which to shape and interpret future experiences. The day’s events celebrated and reinforced the sense of community among growers across Southern California.

By the time that Eliza Tibbets planted her navel orange trees in 1873, farmers and businessmen, looking for new cash

156 “Riverside Pays Spectacular Homage to Mrs. Eliza Tibbets,” California Citrograph, June 1933, 217.
Figure 1: “Brilliant Banquet at Inn is Closing Event of “Orange Day” Celebration” Riverside Daily Press. May 6, 1933.
crops, were already planting a variety of fruits and nuts across California, made possible by the state’s diverse soils and climates. These newer entrants were crops that demanded an intensified investment of capital, scientific research to maximize their potential, and a system of labor usage adapted to this new system. California’s potential as agricultural powerhouse in the twentieth century originated in this transition from extensive farming of grains to intensive farming of special crops.

The California citrus industry epitomized the specialty crop agricultural system, and in the late nineteenth century, the economies of Riverside and San Bernardino counties were built on this foundation. The idyllic outward appearances of beautiful groves and fragrant blossoms masked the hard reality of the citrus business, for both growers and workers. Before the cooperatives were formed in the early 1890s, the growers had little control over the chaotic markets into which they shipped their fruit, and they were facing ruin. Survival meant taking control of all aspects of their business: cooperative ownership of the packinghouses and locating their own sales and marketing organization in major U.S. cities and in foreign ports. The cooperatives also gave the growers collective control of labor, which was essential to the maximization of profits. The system formed classes, at least partly based on race or ethnicity, and ultimately formed separate communities of white growers and workers of Asian and Mexican descent. These labor groups were marginalized economically and socially, through segregation, discrimination, and legislation.

In Bitter Harvest, Cletus Daniel asserts that no matter the worker’s race or nation of origin, California growers sought and shaped a workforce that was economically, politically, and socially powerless. They had convinced themselves that their own economic survival depended on such powerlessness. In the early twentieth century, Mexican workers were considered desirable for

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their (perceived) willingness to fill this role. Exclusion from the dominant society resulted in limited choices for these workers and their families. Segregation and discrimination were daily realities for Mexican immigrants, yet they were willing and able to create a sense of community in the spaces left to them. Within these spaces of home, neighborhood, church, leisure activities, and work, bonds were formed based on family, shared culture, and economic class. The pageantry of the Orange Day celebration in Riverside contrasts sharply with the scale of a community celebration in a workers’ neighborhood, given in honor of a family event such as a wedding or a baptism.

Benedict Anderson’s work, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* provides theoretical structure to the study of the community-forming processes of the growers and workers. Understanding Anderson’s methodology is a necessary precursor to the application of his theory to the citrus industry. He submits his definition of community “in an anthropological spirit.” Community is based on ancient cultural roots; therefore his study of community can be described as a cultural anthropological construct. Imagined community requires the vernacularization of language, and mass communication through that vernacular. Anderson’s methodology is to use cultural institutions, such as newspapers, as reflections of daily life in an imagined community.

This study will present myriad ways that growers and workers sent and received signals of commonality. Growers with varying sizes of groves, and from distant locales, read the same monthly trade journals of their cooperatives. They understood that

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164 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 6-7. Anderson states “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined.” They are imagined in that members will never know most of their fellows, “yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” Community is conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship, despite inequalities and inequities. Anderson studies how peoples build imagined national communities, leading to the end of their colonization.
165 Ibid., 5-6.
166 Ibid., 37-46.
while they may never meet, there still existed a feeling of comradeship with fellow growers in the citrus producing regions of the state. Mexican workers\textsuperscript{167} would have found similar commonalities in Spanish language newspapers, or through Spanish-language radio broadcasts. In addition to cultural roots and universalized communication, “creole elite” is an element of Anderson’s theory that provides a context through which to examine grower-worker relationships as well as their separate community formations.\textsuperscript{168} The consciousness of imagined community awakened both groups to the possibility of independence, but with differing results.

This study aims to increase understanding of each group’s community-forming processes and how these processes reflected pre-existing values, which shaped their self-image, as well as their perceptions of the other group. The growers saw themselves as gentlemen farmers.\textsuperscript{169} They valued their Mexican workers for the role they played in a profitable enterprise, but maintained a paternalistic relationship with their workers. Perceptions of the Mexican workers as aliens, by the larger community, led to their treatment as a marginalized ethnic minority.\textsuperscript{170} In turn, these experiences shaped the perceptions held by the workers about their economic prospects and their social position within the larger community. Disappointment became bitterness, and tempered the expectations of life in America for immigrants as well as for Mexican Americans.

\textsuperscript{167} Use of the term “Mexican” is appropriate when we are discussing Mexican cultural commonalities that apply to all persons of Mexican descent. Historians (including those of Mexican descent) frequently use the term for brevity, when it can be implied that the discussion applies to all persons of Mexican descent. The term has also been used with intent to insinuate that regardless of legal status (citizen or resident alien), the social status of these groups remained undifferentiated. This usage was discriminatory in the 1930s, claiming that all persons of Mexican descent were taking jobs and social services that white Americans were entitled to, as a pretense for Repatriation.

\textsuperscript{168} Anderson, 47-65.

\textsuperscript{169} Kevin Starr, \textit{Inventing The Dream: California Through the Progressive Era} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 140-44.

Historiography

The citrus industry had an immense impact on the economic and cultural development of Southern California, and continues to be the subject of studies focusing on both labor history and grower culture.171 Studies of the experiences of immigrant and migrant labor groups do more than describe worker powerlessness and misery; they also document the agency that these groups exercised in their lives at home, in the community, and where possible, in the workplace.

Cletus Daniel and David Vaught both examine the conflict between the profit demands in California’s specialty crop agriculture and the agrarian ideal of small family farms that distributed economic and political power. Daniel roots it in the continuation of the pattern of large-scale land ownership from the Spanish-Mexican era, and the same “single-minded, get-rich-quick orientation”\(^\text{172}\) of bonanza wheat farms,\(^\text{173}\) a mindset reminiscent of the gold miners. Vaught views history from the perspective of the growers, whom he believes have been less represented or misrepresented in recent, labor-oriented histories. Vaught presents specialty crop growers as horticulturalists,\(^\text{174}\) who believed that they were serving a larger purpose by improving the nutrition of the nation. They were not true yeoman farmers in the Jeffersonian sense, but neither were they amoral industrialists, fixated solely on profits.

Citrus growers were horticulturalists, but they were also inheritors of the legacy of the bonanza wheat farmers. The cooperatives enabled the small ranchers to appear as family farmers in the traditional sense, while collectively controlling their labor, in a manner similar to that of the large landholders. The development of the citrus industry in Southern California\(^\text{175}\) also created a demand for year-round labor, facilitating a more settled life for citrus workers that allowed them to seek permanent housing.

Histories of the citrus industry in California have tended to focus on the large landholding growers; recent labor histories, of

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\(^\text{173}\) “Bonanza wheat farm” refers to the large California grain farms that were established as commercial ventures in the early Gold Rush era (1852-1855). California growers so rapidly increased wheat (and barley) production, that local demand was satisfied and the state became a grain exporter in this short space of five years. See James Gerber, “The Gold Rush Origins of California's Wheat Economy,” *America Latina En La Historia Economica, Boletin De Fuentes* 34 (December, 2010): 35-44.


\(^\text{175}\) Summer-ripening Valencia oranges were concentrated along the coastal plains, where loss to freezes were less likely; winter-harvested navels were planted in the hot inland valleys, where their yields could be maximized; lemons were planted in both coastal and inland locations.
necessity include growers, but do not study community formation among the small landholding ranchers. This study adds to the literature in its focus on community formation in this specific socio-economic group.176

**Shared Spaces, Separate Lives**

On January 31, 1934, the front page of the Corona Daily Independent illustrated just how separate were the lives and perceptions of the growers and their workers. In the upper left corner, a photograph shows three local beauties “beaming a smiling welcome to San Bernardino, home of the National Orange Show, California’s Greatest Midwinter Event.” In the very next column, a headline reads “Alleged Agitators Given Boot Out of County After Trial.” The two agitators were arrested by police for “asserted efforts to cause a strike among Mexican orange pickers of this district.” They were charged with vagrancy, and released on the condition that they leave the county immediately and never return.177

Both stories represented the economic, social, and political order that arose in conjunction with the citrus industry. The former announces a celebration of citrus culture; the latter reports on enforcement of that established order. In the 1930s, citrus culture in Southern California was a way of life, and events like the National Orange Show were tangible expressions of the culture. The backbone of citrus culture, as celebrated by the shows, was the growers. They transformed a desert into a garden, but their success depended on cheap labor, and the workers acceptance of their role in the system. Blaming outside forces for labor unrest made it easier to justify the repression of labor organizing and to rationalize the status quo.178

176 According to Tobey and Wetherell, the vast majority of growers owned ranches or groves in the range of ten to fifteen acres. Grower is the general class and rancher, in this study, is specific in that it refers to citrus growers. Ronald Tobey and Charles Wetherell, “The Citrus Industry and the Revolution of Corporate Capitalism in Southern California, 1887-1944,” California History 74, no.1 (Spring 1995): 14.
177 “Alleged Agitators Given Boot Out of County After Trial,” Corona Daily Independent, January 31, 1934.
It was essential for growers to control labor costs, in order to maximize profits. The best way to control wages was to create competition among workers. California growers welcomed Mexican workers as a plentiful source of cheap labor, and by the 1930s, they had become the dominant ethnic group working in California agriculture. They were also the most numerous group working in the citrus groves of Riverside and San Bernardino counties. Their story of community formation in California begins with their exodus from Mexico to the American Southwest. Pushed by economic and political turmoil, and then a violent revolution, they were drawn northward to better paying jobs and a chance at a new life in the United States. The stability of the citrus harvest cycles allowed these immigrants to create a communal life, based on family, their commonalities of culture, and their shared economic class. This was true whether they lived in grower-provided housing or in neighborhoods and villages close to the groves. The paternalistic relationship between growers and workers was bound to become adversarial, as the extraordinary event of the Great Depression put downward pressure on both prices and wages. The growers’ efforts to repress labor organizing, backed by the power of the state, resulted in strikes that peeled away the facade of paternalistic concern for worker welfare, which the growers had constructed since the First World War.

Benedict Anderson’s concept of a creole elite is useful to the understanding of grower community formation and self-image. Colonial creole elite were educated and trusted administrators and were a key to the stability that was essential for the transfer of wealth to the colonizing power. While they retained bloodlines to the colonizing power, they were treated as inferiors by the pure-born metropolitans. This hard line of demarcation awakened them to the fact that they had more in common with fellow creoles and

natives, than with the metropole. This element of Anderson’s theory has a special relevance for the weak and disorganized citrus growers, before they formed the cooperatives in the early 1890s. Commission brokers, packers, and shippers were enriching themselves at the expense of the growers, and posed an existential threat. By organizing themselves through cooperatives, the growers bypassed the middlemen who were exploiting their weakness. It was a stroke for self-determination.

The organizing efforts of the workers were a challenge to grower paternalism, but were not intended to overthrow the existing system. Their intentions lay only in gaining some leverage and a better life within that system. Ironically, in the grower-worker relationship, the growers had assumed the role of the colonizing power. Their collective control of labor created an exploitive relationship that the growers maintained by repression of organizing, and by refusal to recognize unions, once formed.

**A Community of Growers**

For David Vaught, specialty crop growers were best described as businessmen who also saw themselves as horticulturalists, with a mission to build “small, virtuous communities and economic development.” Their smaller groves and orchards (relative to the bonanza wheat farms) allowed proximity to the neighboring communities. This created a connection that inspired Chester Rowell, editor of the *Fresno Morning Republican*, to declare that public affairs included raisins, implying interdependence between horticulturalists and nearby communities.

Horticulture required a “specific ‘class of people,’ pursuing a ‘pleasant and profitable life’ in microenvironments where water and other natural advantages were abundant.” Vaught points to the frequent appearance of these two phrases in newspapers, farm

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186 Vaught, 1.
187 Vaught, 4.
188 Vaught, 44-45.
journals, and popular literature, as an indication that fruit and nut growers saw themselves as “a select social group.”189 The California citrus industry embodied the ideals and missions of horticulture. It was a civilized connection to the land, and it appealed to businessmen and professionals from around the U.S. It beckoned them to the land of warmth and wealth, to lead a life that was “at once healthful and refined” in the Mediterranean climate of Southern California.190 In March 1911, Sunset magazine published an article entitled “In the Orange Country: Where the Orchard is a Mine, the Human factor Among Gold-Bearing Trees of California.”191 It was a virtual advertisement of this healthful and refined life. It lauded the pluck, resourcefulness, and industry of the citrus ranchers, and exhibited the beauty of the groves and citrus towns in a photographic tour of citrus country.192

Between 1900 and 1920, over 200 letters of inquiry were sent to the Redlands, California Chamber of Commerce, expressing interest in owning citrus groves.193 Most came from the northeastern and Midwest states, and Canada. These letters offer a glimpse into perceptions formed about life as a citrus rancher in California. While it is not possible to discern serious intentions from wishful thinking, “California Citrus,” the idea, had certainly intrigued all of the inquirers. Perhaps they imagined themselves as a part of that select social group described by Vaught, and wanted to share in the life they had read about in Sunset magazine.

Industry organs such as the California Citrograph (CFGE), and conventions and fairs, became spaces for shared experiences. A subscriber to the Citrograph saw advertisements for grove heaters, tractors, and chemicals. The ads portrayed ranchers like themselves, giving testimonials of how they had solved one problem or another by using the advertised product. Ranchers could see how their fellows dealt with the everyday challenges of ranching. It was imagined community, through its portrayal of shared experiences. Readership of the Citrograph in 1922 was

189 Vaught, 44-45.
191 Walter V. Woehlke, “In The Orange Country: Where the Orchard is a Mine, the Human factor Among Gold-Bearing Trees of California,” Sunset 26, no. 3 (March 1911): 251-264.
192 Woelhke, 251-264.
193 Redlands Chamber of Commerce Collection, Box VII, Citrus Collection, Folder C., Letters of Inquiry, A.K. Smiley Public Library.
According to historians Ronald Tobey and Charles Wetherell, seventy-three percent of growers in 1921 were CFGE growers, with MOD making up another ten percent, so that eighty-three percent of growers had access to imagined community through these institutions.

The National Orange Show was only one of dozens of industry fairs or “shows.” In these spaces, participants were able to see the community of growers and comprehend that their industry was made up of thousands like themselves. Competing districts would build exhibits that looked like floats in the annual Tournament of Roses parade. Instead of flowers, the entire exhibit was covered in oranges or lemons in intricate design patterns. As in the Orange Day celebration, historical pageantry played a role in community formation. The primary purpose of these shows was ostensibly to bring together the entire industry for technical presentations and seminars, and for growers to discuss the many pressing issues of the day in their shared business. These shows also included a celebratory element, in formal dinners and balls, and in informal mingling in the amusement sections such as one would find at any county fair. Attendance at the show during the Depression ranged from 255,000 in 1929, to 136,000 in 1939.

Through their cooperatives, growers became business partners, but they were also likely to be lodge brothers, civic leaders, and fellow church members. George Stanley was a lemon grower in Corona, and worked forty-one years for the Exchange Lemon Products Company. He was active in the Lions Club.

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194 Nelson Chesman & Co.’s, *Newspaper Rate Book* (St. Louis: Nelson Chesman & Co., 1922), 12. The “sworn average circulation” for the *Citrograph* in 1922 was 12,200. The same advertisers also patronized MOD’s organ, *Citrus Leaves*, which was published in Redlands.


197 Redlands Chamber of Commerce Collection, Box VII, Citrus Collection, Folder B., Orange Show Bills, A.K. Smiley Public Library.


199 Tobey and Wetherell, 9. The Exchange Lemon Products Company and Exchange Orange Products Company were wholly owned subsidiaries of the
Toastmasters, the Garden Club, the Corona Concert Association, the Library Board, and the Riverside County Republican Committee. 200

Stanley’s many affiliations are a testament to his civic-mindedness, but also illustrate a network of business, social, and political groups, wherein affiliation in one realm could be leveraged to open doors or facilitate cooperation in the others. For instance, business colleagues at the local growers association might have found themselves working together on a community service project for their fraternal organization. If one of their lodge brothers was running for public office, their help on his campaign provided future access if they needed help with labor issues or railroad rates. In this example, a circular pattern was created, where relationships in business led to social networking, with political access that returned benefits to the business realm. Relationships like these are built over many years. Such common networking can become hierarchical if other groups are excluded from access to this marketplace, based on race, class, or gender. Workers were not business owners and so would not have joined the Rotary Club, nor is it likely that, based on class, they would have been asked to join fraternal lodges like The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks. Without these sorts of informal social interactions, they would not be able to establish the personal relationships that give access to business owners and government officials. Exclusiveness creates the perception that certain segments of society, for example Mexican Americans, would not have this type of access to government. Exclusion threatens democratic principles and replaces faith in the social contract with disillusionment.

Community formation among growers has been discussed in the context of shared experiences, including the pivotal establishment of cooperative marketing. Concrete cultural markers also engender community pride, whether they are the result of cumulative efforts to build them, or simply because they inspire a feeling of broad communal ownership. For example, Riverside’s Mission Inn was built for the tourist trade, to house visitors who

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CFGE, formed to process culls into juice, pectin, citric acid, and lemon and orange oils.
200 George Stanley, Interviewed by Gloria Scott, Corona, California, November 22, 1982. Corona Public Library Oral History Project HR C-039, C-040.
came to enjoy the Mediterranean climate, and to tour the scenic orange groves. Even citizens of Riverside, who could not afford to dine or stay at the Mission Inn, recognized the Mission Inn as a symbol of their town and way of life. As such, it became a focal point of external validation when hosting tourists from around the country and foreign nations. Today, the Mission Inn is a tangible and romantic connection to Riverside’s past. Though Riverside’s Loring Opera House was lost to fire in 1990, wealthy growers were entertained there by some of the biggest stars of the stage from 1890 to 1923. In Redlands, a public space contains the A.K. Smiley Library, the Lincoln Shrine, and the Redlands Bowl. Alfred and Albert Smiley - educators, humanitarians, philanthropists, and citrus growers in Redlands - donated the sixteen-acre space to the city in 1898.

Many educational institutions owe their existence to citrus benefactors, as well as to the general prosperity of the towns created by citrus wealth. Among them are Chaffey College in Ontario, The Claremont Colleges, and the University of California Riverside, a natural outgrowth of the Citrus Experiment Station. All of these institutions were founded to contribute to the community: to afford an educational experience equivalent to what the founders had experienced in the east or Midwest; also to be an economic boon, by training future businessmen, scientists, teachers, and clergy. All of them elicit community pride.

The first citrus cooperatives required communal action for survival, and, having succeeded mightily, engendered the sense of community that comes from shared risk.

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203 The original Chaffey College, founded by Canadians George and William Chaffey, opened in 1885 in Ontario, the buildings now part of Chaffey High School. Chaffey College relocated to what is now Rancho Cucamonga in 1960.
204 Pomona grower and philanthropist Russell Pitzer provided early endowment funds for the liberal arts college named after his family, founded in 1963.
205 “Dedication of Citrus Station at Riverside, March 27th,” *California Citrograph*, March 1918, 97. The article describes, “The official dedication of the graduate school of tropical agriculture and citrus experiment station of the University of California, at Riverside . . .”
The growers had a right to congratulate themselves on their successes, and a closer examination of the realities of farming citrus reveals the constant struggles and risks of being in that business. However, the growers weren’t acknowledging the indispensable contribution of the workers who made the dream real. It was their hands that turned the plump fruit on the trees into carloads heading eastward, and income returned to the grower and his community. These workers and their families also had hopes and dreams for a better life.

**Labor Problem Solved-Racial Problem Created**

Labor shortages in California agriculture were often relieved by the use of immigrant workers. The pattern of rejection of the immigrant workers by the non-grower white population could be mitigated, if those non-white workers remained on the move, following seasonal crops throughout California. This was not the case with citrus. Valencia oranges are harvested roughly from June to October and the Washington Navel orange is generally picked from December to April or May. Adding the year-round picking of lemons creates a schedule with very little downtime. This year-round source of income for growers also attracts a work force of family men, looking for a more settled life. Edward Barbo was born in Redlands in 1928 and worked with his father in the groves as a boy. Working and camping in the San Joaquin Valley during the short citrus off seasons was hard. Life was better back in Redlands. Edward Barbo was born in Redlands in 1928 and worked with his father in the groves as a boy. Working and camping in the San Joaquin Valley during the short citrus off seasons was hard. Life was better back in Redlands. For Barbo, a settled life, even in modest housing, was better than a migratory life with no roots, disrupted schooling, and no permanent community around them. Year-round labor availability was advantageous to the growers, and the steady work was a source of stability for the worker families.

Mexican immigration into the U.S. in the twentieth century began in earnest during the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920. Many fled the fighting and the resultant economic and social disruptions. A second and equally powerful draw from the north

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occurred when the United States entered the First World War in 1917. Millions of American men were in uniform or drawn to war industries. The government’s slogan that “Food Will Win the War” meant that an increase in food production was mandatory. Despite concerted state and federal efforts to mobilize all able bodies in California, the numbers were still inadequate, leading growers to advocate for increased Mexican immigration. The 1910 census reports the total population of Mexican descent in the United States as over 360,000. This increased to more than 700,000 in 1920 and doubled again to over 1,400,000 by 1930. Between 1917 and 1920, over 30,000 Mexicans entered California. A December, 1919 editorial in the *Citrograph* asserts that the citrus industry was already dependent on Mexican labor. The combination of a world war and immigration restrictions of Asian and European groups, cemented California agriculture’s dependence on Mexican labor for the foreseeable future.

The influx of cheap Mexican labor was a boon to California’s growers, but the non-grower community was not as welcoming. Restrictions or containments were applied to housing on citrus ranches, separate Mexican villages, segregated schooling, access to markets and restaurants, even to seating in movie theaters. In an early study of a Mexican village known as *Arbol Verde*, researcher Helen O’Brien observed that “the Mexican is economically (but not socially) a part of Claremont,” that is, they were welcome to provide cheap labor, but were not welcome in mainstream American society. For example, shopping for food was only permitted at stores designated for “ethno racial minorities.”

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208 Vaught, *Cultivating California*, 177-184.
211 “Growth of Mexican Labor,” *California Citrograph*, December 1919, 33.
213 O’Brien, as quoted in Garcia, 52.
Large landholding growers often housed their labor on the ranch, with schooling for the children, a company store, and community-building activities such as baseball teams or bands. These amenities were designed to appeal to the Mexican families. The benefits of a stable home life would supersede occasional higher wages from migratory work, or the temptation to go to work for another citrus ranch. Blas Coyazo worked thirty-five years for the Fairbanks Ranch in the Redlands area. He acknowledged that he might have occasionally missed a bigger payday to be had on some other ranch, but in the long run he did better financially by staying with one employer, because he was not idle in the off seasons. He was able to work for so long, because the management “protected him from the heavier work [as he got older].”\(^{214}\) This last statement by Coyazo indicates that his loyal service to this grower was returned in kind, and suggests that worker-grower relations were not invariably exploitive.

The *Citrograph* ran a series of articles on citrus labor housing, authored by A.D. Shamel, Plant Physiologist for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and resident at the Citrus Experiment Station in Riverside. The motive to provide such housing was certainly based on self-interest; growers wanted to reproduce their family work force. Historian Margo McBane studied the family housing on the Limoneira Ranch at Santa Paula in Ventura County\(^ {215}\) and concluded that it was part of the system of labor control that was exerted by growers. Families formed a more stable and harmonious labor force than single males, but there were other, more subtle benefits. Families recruited other relatives into the work force; those who worked together trained each other and also maintained a sort of unit discipline in work habits.

Nonetheless, if the housing was of good quality, then it also benefited the workers, intentionally or not. It reflected both the need to keep good help, and also that Mexicans were indeed considered good help, as noted in the September, 1918 issue of the *Citrograph*:

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The Mexican laborer, who has a comfortable little cottage in which he may maintain his family, is the contented man, and is less likely to be attracted by the blandishments of another 25 cents a day.216

The Limoneira Ranch provided photographs and floor plans for a showcase article in the May, 1920 edition of the Citrograph.217 It was common to segregate the workers by race, with differing levels of housing quality for each race. An article that featured the neighboring Rancho Sespe in Fillmore, described the housing for white, married men: from four to five rooms, rented for $5 to $8 per month, with free plumbing, painting, and repairs. A photo shows a fenced-in cottage, with trees and vines. For the married Mexican man, the ranch furnished a lot of approximately one-quarter of an acre. “The Mexicans build their own houses, sometimes with two rooms, sometimes more.”218 The ranch management felt that this arrangement created a home-like feeling. A photo of a family posing in front of one of these “typical homes in the Mexican village on the Sespe Ranch,” bears the caption “seven future employees in this family.”219 The cost of workers’ housing was returned in the long-term benefits of having reliable and experienced workers on hand year-round, and hopefully, for a generation. At the Chase Plantation in Corona, the dwelling for a single white male was slightly larger than that provided for an entire Mexican family. Once again, the clear message to the Mexican family was that they were of a lower class, based on their ethnicity.220

Outside of these exceptional arrangements, most of the Mexicans fended for themselves. If they could save enough money to buy a small plot of land, the location would likely be one that no one else wanted. The Arbol Verde village was built in the path of a wash running out of the nearby San Bernardino Mountains,

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220 A.D. Shamel, “Housing the Employes of California Citrus Ranches,” California Citrograph, March 1918, 86.
therefore “subject to occasional flooding.”221 They were more likely to build their own homes, using whatever materials could be afforded or that were on hand. Utility services provided by the local municipal governments were limited to water and electricity. Others who were newer and could not afford their own lot would rent, and share the space with extended family or friends.222

Leo Mott found poor housing conditions in the Eastside, Casa Blanca, and Arlington districts of Riverside in 1924. As an inspector for the California Commission on Immigration and Housing (CCIH), he rated one hundred and forty-one of the one hundred and eighty houses inspected, as “very bad” under the CCIH rating system. Some houses had four or five families living in them and the Casa Blanca village had no sewer service. The run-down neighborhoods were considered “breeding grounds for disease” that could easily “infest the other sections of the city.”223 The CCIH suggested that Riverside would do well to condemn the old, derelict houses and erect housing that would be safe and sanitary, and which could also earn rent for the city, or interest, should the new units be sold to the occupants. Otherwise, the city would attract the “skum (sic) of the Mexican population of the state.”224 The use of terms like “infest,” or “skum,” make it clear that the priority here was to mitigate the danger to the surrounding community, and only incidentally to benefit the occupants of the overcrowded housing.

Education for Mexican immigrant children placed great emphasis on learning English, and training in vocational skills, based on commonly held beliefs that Mexican children did not have potential in academic studies; the boys should be trained in manual “shop” skills, and the girls in domestic skills. These segregated Mexican schools were also inferior in quality of construction, compared to the standard schools for Anglo-American children. Anglo teachers assigned to them were also considered to be inferior. These differences (deficiencies)

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221 O’Brien, 1-2, as quoted in Garcia, 71.
223 “Better Housing Condition Sought,” Riverside Enterprise, June 17, 1924.
224 “Better Housing.”
expressed biases that the children were not equal in aptitude to white children by virtue of their ethnicity.225

The Mexicans clearly experienced the difficulties of all new immigrant groups, related to learning the language and adapting to an alien culture, but there was a deeper problem of racial stereotyping that limited assimilation. In an address to the Lemon Men’s Club in 1929, George P. Clements, Manager of the Agricultural Department of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, described the Mexican (and “oriental”) as fully adapted to tasks in California agriculture, “due to their crouching and bending habits” and desirable in that he is never a “biological” problem, that is, he doesn’t marry out of his own race.226 Clements continues that the Mexican is also honest, responsible, and considerate of his employer’s property. Most importantly, to Clements’ audience, California’s agriculture absolutely depended on their labor.

The pattern of previous labor practices in the citrus belt was being reproduced, with a new group. A cheap labor source was recruited, and their work was proven to be a major contribution to the success of the growers and to the prosperity of the community. The non-white immigrants then faced the rejection of the larger community, in the form of segregation and discrimination. Most importantly, the children learned that they were inferior in school and that, because of their skin color, they were not allowed do the same things that white children do.

Discrimination could present itself in something as simple as taking a swim on a hot summer day. In Redlands, the municipal swimming pool was known as the Sylvan Plunge. Prior to World War II, the Mexican and African American children were allowed to swim there on Mondays only. Blas Coyazo recalled that they were “chased out” about three-thirty or four o’clock in the afternoon, because the pool staff was going to drain and clean the pool. “And we went back on Tuesdays, we couldn’t get in, the water was just beautiful every day from Tuesday on.”227 Blatant acts of restriction and discrimination against Mexican immigrants

227 Blas Coyazo, 26.
and Mexican Americans alike were found in movie theaters, the skating rink, and in barbershops and cafes with “White Trade Only” signs posted in the window. Eunice Romero Gonzalez remembered more subtle forms of prejudice, such as prices “being hoisted a little more when you were a different color” and the unavailability of better jobs. Blatant discriminatory acts, segregated schools, and restrictions on upward mobility in the citrus industry sent powerful and degrading messages to the Mexicans living in their villages.

Mexican immigrants, their children, and any Mexican Americans who worked and lived in the same spaces, faced a rigid structure of restriction and containment. The workers were hired to fill a specific economic role in the specialty crop agricultural system. Housing and schooling were intended to reproduce generations of citrus workers. Presumably, future generations would be happy living in segregated housing and would be satisfied with schooling that prepared their sons for manual labor and their daughters for domestic or other gender-specific work, such as becoming a seamstress. In villages all across Southern California, Mexicans, by nationality or descent, faced these daunting conditions by first finding strength and support in a community.

**Always a Sense of Community**

Mexican immigrants came to California in search of a better economic future. Those who found work in the citrus groves of Riverside and San Bernardino counties also had the opportunity to live a fairly settled life, compared to those who followed a seasonal migratory cycle. Nonetheless, they inhabited the same class structure, which preferred them in a subservient role, economically and socially. The Mexican citrus workers were largely unwelcome outside their villages, but from that exclusion, community was created in the spaces left to them, and bonds were forged that would later help to break the grip of prejudice in the community at

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229 Matt Garcia, 74-75.
230 Garcia, 68.
A community may be imagined when the group rises above differences and recognizes their shared cultural roots. Mexican immigrants came to the citrus ranches from diverse locations in their country. Rather than carry those differences into their present circumstances, they drew closer together based on their cultural commonalities and the common enemy of prejudice. Community was built through familial, cultural and economic relationships, in the spaces of home, neighborhood, church, leisure, and work. Further, family events create and embody a sense of community. The Mexican family also provided a cultural bulwark in an alien, and at times, hostile environment. Family included more than immediate kin; it also meant extended family as well as the custom of compadrazgo, or god-parentage. This system provided mutual support, the next circle outside of kin. Women particularly felt the absence of their mothers and sisters, who were their immediate support in raising their children in their home villages in Mexico.

Rose Ramos remembered another Mexican tradition, the charitable work performed in the village by the Cruz Azul (Blue Cross), a mutualista (aid society). They provided benefits to indigent people, such as burial for those with no family; they also provided unemployment relief. Mutual aid societies burgeoned with the increase in immigration, and though they charged nominal dues, perhaps $2 per month, the obligations were not treated as legally binding, but rather as a moral obligation of reciprocity. In what might be called their highest form, these societies engendered cohesiveness in the immigrant settlements, providing structure and leadership.

Culturally specific events such as tardeadas (informal gatherings, often on a Sunday afternoon), quinceaneras (the fifteenth birthday and coming out party for young women), and jamaicas (street fairs or church charity bazaars), further reinforced ties among people with common roots. Many of these family

231 Alamillo, Making Lemonade Out of Lemons, 142-167.
234 Weber, 61.
235 Mario Garcia, 223.
236 Alamillo, 82, 147.
events would take place in the home, where music, laughter and people often spilled out into the yards. 

_Cinco de Mayo_ celebrations were more formalized expressions of Mexican culture and solidarity, which included parades, speeches, performances, and dances. Jose Alamillo described the significance of this expression of ethnic pride in Corona, on May 5, 1936. Corona was celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of its founding, with a historical pageant portraying the settlement of the citrus colony by European Americans.237 The Mexican Americans chose _Cinco de Mayo_ as their way to celebrate Corona’s birthday.238 In this instance, historical pageantry was enacted by each culture separately. The dominant society did not prohibit alternative pageantry, possibly because it did not specifically challenge the dominant society’s “story.”239

The Mexican citrus workers formed a common bond, simply by working with each other in the groves, and in the leisure activities that workingmen pursue: sports teams, the pool hall, and saloons. These venues also provided spaces where the men could network, to find out where the jobs were and who was paying good wages. The Mexican citrus worker community was not monolithic, and different experiences naturally yielded different memories and attitudes about that time; some of these occurred along generational, religious and economic lines. Over time, the first generation of immigrants came to feel an entitlement to the jobs they held, and saw newcomers as competition. These newcomers were referred to as “Texas Mexicans,” based on their residence in the El Paso area for their first few years in the United States.240

Another type of generational difference developed between first generation Mexicans and their children. The bilingual second generation, having been born in the U.S., were more able and willing to adapt to the dominant culture. As teenagers, they wanted to go to movies and dances with their friends, to move about in the world around them, and to do the things that other young Americans did. Tradition-minded parents would be restrictive, especially of their daughters. For example, it was forbidden for a

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238 Alamillo, 12.
240 Matt Garcia, 74.
young Mexican American woman to go out at night without a chaperone. The family’s standing in the community depended on the purity of its women. Tensions between tradition and the expectations of young Mexican American women were particularly manifested in personal appearance and in behavior toward young men. Nevertheless, within these bounds, young Mexican Americans could begin to see themselves as part of the larger community.

The vast majority of Mexicans were Catholic, and churches also provided community dances and movies (with no restrictions on where people could sit!). However, not all Mexicans were Catholic. Armando Lopez recalled the division on the north side of Redlands, based on religion. The Catholic priest forbade the Mexican children from going to the House of Neighborly Service, a youth club started by the Presbyterian Church. The club was designed to appeal to them with recreational, cultural and educational programs, but also had designs on converting Catholic children to the Presbyterian faith. Gilbert Rey discussed the competition between the Presbyterian and Catholic religions in the north side and sums up what he thought established the better path (to success):

Many of the Hispanic people in Redlands that came from that original group [of Presbyterians or Presbyterian converts] went on to higher education, became college graduates, and many became professionals and that was very, very noticeable in comparison to Hispanics of the Catholic persuasion.

This sentiment illustrates a dichotomy within the Mexican community. Rey implied that his success was attributable to his

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242 Ruiz, 66-67.
leaving the Catholic Church for the Presbyterian denomination. Vicki Ruiz describes a Methodist-run settlement house in El Paso that was founded in 1912. After failing to gain many converts, the Houchen Settlement returned to focusing on providing social services, such as medical care.245

Memories of a good life among the citrus trees seem to be directly related to the quality of the relationship between grower and worker, and to the economic status of the working family. Because Oddie Martinez’ father managed groves for the Langford family, they lived on the ranch. They never lacked food, even in the Great Depression. Their father’s managerial role afforded a stability that allowed them to keep animals, improving their diet and outlook on life.246 Eunice Romero Gonzalez had warm memories of life on the Fairbanks ranch, likely tied to her father’s position as majordomo or manager.247

Just as the Mexican community was not monolithic, neither was there a solid wall of discrimination or uniform support for it. Joe Herrera experienced discrimination, but also saw a voice raised against it. Joe was refused service at a cafè. When his employer heard about it, he confronted the people at the cafè. Joe’s employer was Frank Gunter, a grower who also happened to be the mayor of Redlands. Gunter’s simple reply to “white trade only,” was to mingle his money with Herrera’s, and then dare the cafè owner to differentiate Herrera’s money from his. After determining that Herrera was not drunk or disorderly, Gunter threatened to close that business down. “I don’t tolerate this kind of business while I’m mayor.”248 This story suggests that not all members of the dominant society supported discriminatory acts, and that a few were willing to challenge the bigotry underlying such discrimination. Joe Herrera remembered this incident, more than fifty years later.

As the Depression wore on, the reduced demand for citrus fruit and consequent downward pressure on prices, worked its way back to the ranches, reducing the earning potential of the pickers

245 Ruiz, 33.
247 Eunice Romero Gonzalez, 3.
and packers. Picking for a given day depended on marketing orders, so work might last only part of a day, or only for a few days in a given week.249 When wages reached a level so low that families could not earn enough to eat, conditions were ripe for union organizing and for strikes to break out. When citrus workers struck, they met organized and fierce resistance from the growers, who were well organized under the guidance and funding of the Associated Farmers.250 The strikers needed the support and solidarity of their communities more than ever.

Communities Clash

North Orange County was the battleground in the largest citrus workers strike in Southern California, over a six-week period in June and July of 1936.251 In the inland counties of Riverside and San Bernardino, the most notable citrus labor clash occurred in Corona in 1941. That strike was called when the Jameson Packing House refused to recognize the United Cannery, Packing, Agricultural, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA).252

In the aftermath of the Orange County strike the CFGE, Mutual Orange Distributors (MOD), and American Fruit Growers cooperatives formed the Agricultural Producers Labor Committee (APLC).253 The express purpose of the APLC was to thwart any attempts by UCAPAWA to organize the packinghouse workers. Their strategy was to form company unions, through which the workers could seek redress of grievances. Seen as transparent tools of management, they were soon abandoned by workers for legitimate representation.254

The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) of 1935, also known as the Wagner Act, excluded farm workers from its establishment of collective bargaining rights, but it did not exclude

249 Blas Coyazo, 13.
251 Gonzalez, 135-160; see also Carey McWilliams, “The Rise of Farm Fascism: Gunkist Oranges,” in Factories In The Field (Santa Barbara: Peregrine, 1971), 249-254. “Many Jailed as Rioting Flares In Citrus Strike,” Riverside Daily Press, July 7, 1936, 1. All of the 150 men arrested were picketers.
252 Alamillo, 123-241.
253 Ibid., 125.
254 Ibid.
canning and packing workers, who were considered to be industrial. A lawsuit seeking to affirm this distinction was brought against the North Whittier Heights Citrus Association in 1937, seeking a ruling that would disallow their exemption from the Wagner Act for fruit packing workers. In 1940, the California Ninth District Court ruled against the exemption and in favor of the organized workers.\textsuperscript{255}

UCAPAWA was successful in winning approval at the Jameson packinghouse, by a 54-14 vote, in July of 1940. The new union faced immediate opposition by the Corona Citrus Growers Association (CCGA), in the form of an anti-picketing ordinance passed by the Corona City Council.\textsuperscript{256} Associated Farmers was organized as a reaction to the 1933 cotton strike, and was supported by large contributions from bankers and industrialists. Their strategy was to defeat the organizing of farm workers in any shape or form, and to break unions and strikes throughout California. Among their tactics was “localism,” an attempt to invalidate union organizing by claiming that the local workers were being duped by outside agitators, who were most likely Communists, espousing foreign political ideas.\textsuperscript{257}

The Jameson Company refused to meet with the union, and after six months of stalling, the union declared a strike on February 27, 1941. In a case of community in action, the local baseball team used the baseball leagues as a network to urge workers in the region to honor the strike, and not come to Corona as strikebreakers.

The strike reinforced classes and divided the town. Italian employees took the side of management and crossed the picket line. The Mexicans felt especially betrayed by this action, because they believed that the Italians were “motivated by the promises and privileges of whiteness.”\textsuperscript{258} Neither did all workers in the area join in the walkout.

The nearby Foothill Ranch housed its workers free of charge, and offered other benefits such as company store credit, a


\textsuperscript{256} Alamillo, 127-128.


\textsuperscript{258} Alamillo, 137.
community center and recreational facilities. Consequently, there was less to be gained by unionization there, and it did not succeed. Further, Foothill increased bonus payments and improved conditions, a clear, though indirect, victory for the workers. This practice of using benefits to influence workers may be called paternalistic, but it may also be described as good business. The growers at Foothill firmly believed that decent housing on the ranch was a powerful incentive in keeping families of workers on the ranch, long term. It also deterred organizing, when losing a job also meant losing a home, and proved to be effective in keeping the union out. Foothill made further efforts to keep the workers quarantined on the ranch by offering recreation and entertainment on site. Those workers had little desire to go to town anyway, since they had become “scabs”\(^{259}\) in the eyes of the pro-union workers.\(^{260}\)

Despite these divisions, the strike against the Jameson packinghouse held for twenty-four days, until March 21, when picketers pelted a police car with rocks, hitting one officer in the head. The police moved in and arrested forty-nine picketers, who were charged with disturbing the peace, inciting a riot, unlawful assembly, and aggravated assault with a deadly weapon.\(^{261}\) In the ensuing trial, an all-Anglo jury acquitted all but four of the picketers.

The strike highlighted divisions within the entire Corona citrus community and conflicts within factions, as individuals weighed loyalties to employers, fellow workers, and to families and friends. In the end, the effort to unionize the citrus industry failed, but in mounting a serious challenge to the power of the growers, the Mexican American community learned valuable lessons in organizing strategies and tactics. In doing so, they gained the confidence needed to effect real changes in the advancement of their civil rights in the post-war period, including the election of the first Mexican American to the Corona City Council in 1958.\(^{262}\)

The growers maintained their solidarity and succeeded in keeping the union out, but needed the active support of the city

\(^{259}\) Derogatory term for strikebreakers.
\(^{260}\) Alamillo, 128-134.
\(^{261}\) “Charges Filed Against 49 Alleged Rioters,” Riverside Daily Press, March 27, 1941.
\(^{262}\) Alamillo, 167.
government, law enforcement, and the mainstream media to do so. Their strategies were driven by fear: first, to characterize union organizers as outside agitators who either intimidate workers into joining the union, or mislead them with unrealistic expectations, and promises that could not be fulfilled; second, to create an atmosphere of impending violence and anarchy in the community, such that, hundreds of local growers and other citizens are sworn in as armed deputies for undefined emergencies;\textsuperscript{263} third, framing the allegations and emergency preparations as “news stories” in the local newspapers, to promote fear and to generate support among the town and county population.\textsuperscript{264}

\textbf{Grower’s Response}

In 1941, six thousand citrus workers walked out in Ventura County, including from the famous Limoneira Ranch.\textsuperscript{265} President of the Limoneira, and also President of the CFGE, Charles C. Teague commented that it was the sole mark in an unblemished relationship with his employees. He believed that innocent workers were simply ill advised: “I am not opposed to organized labor but I am unalterably opposed to exploitation of workers by irresponsible labor leaders.”\textsuperscript{266} Clearly, the fact that the workers continued to organize and strike was not based on bad advice from outsiders, but on a persistent need for a living wage.

The tone went from paternalistic to threatening, when the vice president of the Associated Farmers, C.E. Hawley, lauded the necessity of the new organization in thwarting agricultural strikes, such as the one that was occurring in Orange County (June, 1936). According to Hawley, such strikes were part of a Communist plan to overthrow the American government. In an article published in the June, 1936 \textit{Citrograph}, Hawley states that the Associated Farmers was not alone in its fight; that it was “shoulder to shoulder” with the American Legion and the American Federation

\textsuperscript{263} “125 Deputized To Guard Groves,” \textit{Corona Daily Independent}, February 4, 1929.
\textsuperscript{264} “County On Guard Against Possible Labor Agitation: 200 Officers Will Protect Groves in Event of Red Flareup,” \textit{Corona Daily Independent}, November 28, 1933.
of Labor (AF of L). Hawley closes with the remark: “The present situation is more dangerous than at any other time in the history of the state.”\textsuperscript{267} The violence orchestrated by the Associated Farmers in Orange County in June and July of 1936 was not surprising in light of the threat described by Hawley.\textsuperscript{268}

These two statements embody the growers’ perception of events and their response. Workers who want to work, have become victims of manipulation by outside agitators who are also known to be Communists, and whose master plan is the overthrow of the government of the United States. In light of such overheated rhetoric, it was unfortunate that the growers could not or did not want to see that agitators and organizers cannot succeed if the workers feel that they are being treated fairly by their employers. These strikes, and the growers’ responses to them exposed deep fault lines between the communities of growers and the communities of workers, ostensibly their “children,” based on paternalistic policies. The strikebreaking tactics described herein resembled corporal punishment administered by a very stern father.

Frank Stokes was a grower from Covina, California, who read the biased newspaper accounts of the unequal battle that was being waged in the summer of 1936, by growers and their forces, against striking Mexican pickers in Orange County. He wrote an article, published in the December 19, 1936 issue of The Nation.\textsuperscript{269} In it, he shamed the growers for cracking down on workers, for having done the very thing that had saved the growers themselves – organizing in order to get fair payment for their asset within the capitalist system.\textsuperscript{270} Stokes was only one man, but possibly represented many other growers who were afraid to speak up, for fear of ostracism by their community, or of being branded as communist sympathizers. Stokes’ challenge of discrimination, like Frank Gunter in Redlands, was a first step in a long journey.

\textsuperscript{267} C.E. Hawley, “Associated Farmers of California Is Formed For Mutual Protection,” \textit{California Citrograph}, June 1936, 298.
\textsuperscript{268} McWilliams, 249-254.
\textsuperscript{269}Frank Stokes, “Let the Mexicans Organize!” \textit{The Nation}, 143, no.25 (December 19, 1936): 731-732.
Conclusion

The cooperatives were the primary structure of economic organizing in the citrus grower communities. A community of growers could be imagined through industry institutions such as the *Citrograph*, and real connections could be made at events such as the National Orange Show. Growers broadened and deepened their networks by building relationships in fraternal, civic, and political organizations. In the groves, cheap labor was needed on a continuous, even a permanent basis. The growers came to rely on Mexican immigrant and Mexican American workers, but growers and the larger communities sought to segregate this group socially. The citrus workers found, through the limited spaces available to them, the ability to create their own communities, just as the growers had done, only separately. Their communities were formed around family, common cultural roots, and their economic class.

These two groups continued to lead separate lives based on class and ethnicity. Flare-ups over wages occurred through the 1930s, but little changed in the basic system of labor usage. The hardships of the Depression had a dampening effect on the social and economic mobility of Mexican workers in the citrus industry. Mobility seems a distant dream when survival becomes paramount.

The citrus industry in Southern California was either in decline or very close to that point, just before the outbreak of World War II. Economic depressions, great or otherwise, tend to freeze people in place. No one wants trouble at work, with a long line of the unemployed ready to fill their spot. Businessmen do not expand operations, and banks are loath to risk the money anyway. The war gave impetus to the forces that relentlessly chipped away at acreage in the old citrus belt; it also opened the door to opportunity for many Mexican Americans, especially the rising second generation that wanted more than picking oranges and lighting smudge pots. For many, wartime service meant educational opportunities. Others landed better paying jobs in new industries like aerospace, or the Kaiser Steel plant in Fontana. Mexican American women became the predominant workers in the packinghouses, but also found work at nearby Norton Air Force Base. They too achieved a small piece of the American Dream.

Finally, as the old growers retired or passed on, and as the groves, one by one, were turned to homes, schools, and shopping
centers, almost all that are left are memories and vestiges of a past glory of an empire of citrus that had once stretched from Pasadena to Redlands. Separate communities of growers and pickers no longer exist. When Redlands High School plays its archrival Redlands East Valley High in football, the prize is a trophy known as “the smudge pot.” It is likely that some of the players on both sides have roots in the local groves.

The institutions that were founded by the wealth of the grower elite, such as the Smiley Library or the Summer Music Festival at the Redlands Bowl, were institutions that once helped to create community for the growers. Today, they provide common ground, where class lines become less recognizable. The broad, horizontal comradeship of imagined communities becomes real, if only for a little while. The grandchildren of the citrus growers and the citrus workers read together in the library and are likely sitting side-by-side in the audience at “The Bowl.” Community is tangible in these common spaces today. Economic, social, and ethnic divisions that were once inherent in Redlands and other towns of the old citrus belt, were broken down by assertive members of the Mexican American community and by fair minded members of the “Anglo” community, in order to foster the formation of a greater community.

The towns that were created by the citrus industry live on, with diversified economies, and with some managing to save small enclaves of citrus groves, so that the heritage is not forgotten. Standing alongside a citrus grove today, it is easy to imagine little Eunice Romero “running through the groves barefooted, and wading in the water of the ‘Sankee,’ and then, of course, eating the fruit, which was supreme, because my Dad was a good orange grower.”

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Shared Spaces, Separate Lives

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