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Laboring for the Day: The Pacific Coast and the Casual Labor Economy, 1919-1933

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**Abstract**

Laboring for the Day: The Pacific Coast and the Casual Labor Economy, 1919-1933  
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This dissertation explores the economic and cultural (re)definition of labor and laborers. It traces the growing reliance upon contingent work as the foundation for industrial capitalism along the Pacific Coast; the shaping of urban space according to the demands of workers and capital; the formation of a working class subject through the discourse and social practices of both laborers and intellectuals; and workers' struggles to improve their circumstances in the face of coercive and onerous conditions. Woven together, these strands reveal the consequences of a regional economy built upon contingent and migratory forms of labor. This workforce was hardly new to the American West, but the Pacific Coast's reliance upon contingent labor reached its apogee after World War I, drawing hundreds of thousands of young men through far flung circuits of migration that stretched across the Pacific and into Latin America, transforming its largest urban centers and working class demography in the process. The presence of this substantial workforce (itinerant, unattached, and racially heterogeneous) was out step with the expectations of the modern American worker (stable, married, and white), and became the warrant for social investigators, employers, the state, and other workers to sharpen the lines of solidarity and exclusion. Beginning in the 1920s, and coming to a point under the economic weight of the Great Depression, these various constituents created new urban spaces, expressive cultures, and discourses, along with new regulations and forms of protest that would shape the politics of labor in the coming decades. Highlighting the centrality of contingent labor, this study calls into question predominant liberal narratives about modern industrial capitalism. It challenges our understanding of capitalism's stability and the opportunities afforded to workers in a so-called free market, while laying plain the economic and cultural realities of a workforce segmented by class and race.

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To my family and friends, who have been remarkably supportive of this endeavor, particularly my parents who redefined the word helpful during the last weeks of writing: Thank You. Fittingly, I have reserved the final keystrokes of this dissertation to dedicate the contents to my fiercest ally, lifelong intellectual traveler, and partner in all things, Sarah Hale.

*And the investigator peers through his instruments  
At the inhuman provinces, the virile bacillus  
Or enormous Jupiter finished:  
"But the lives of my friends. I inquire. I inquire."*

*And the poor in their fireless lodgings, dropping the sheets  
Of the evening paper: "Our day is our loss. O show us  
History the operator, the  
Organiser. Time the refreshing river."*

...  
*To-morrow for the young the poets exploding like bombs,  
The walks by the lake, the weeks of perfect communion;  
To-morrow the bicycle races  
Through the suburbs on summer evenings. But to-day the struggle.*

---W.H. Auden

## **Introduction | Laboring for the Day: The Pacific Coast and the Casual Labor Economy, 1919-1933**

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This dissertation explores the economic and cultural (re)definition of labor and laborers. It traces the growing reliance upon contingent work as the foundation for industrial capitalism along the Pacific Coast; the shaping of urban space according to the demands of workers and capital; the formation of a working class subject through the discourse and social practices of both laborers and intellectuals; and workers' struggles to improve their circumstances in the face of coercive and onerous conditions. Woven together, these strands reveal the consequences of a regional economy built upon contingent and migratory forms of labor. This workforce was hardly new to the American West, but the Pacific Coast's reliance upon contingent labor reached its apogee after World War I, drawing hundreds of thousands of young men through far flung circuits of migration that stretched across the Pacific and into Latin America, transforming its largest urban centers and working class demography in the process. The presence of this substantial workforce (itinerant, unattached, and racially heterogeneous) was out step with the expectations of the modern American worker (stable, married, and white), and became the warrant for social investigators, employers, the state, and other workers to sharpen the lines of solidarity and exclusion. Beginning in the 1920s, and coming to a point under the economic weight of the Great Depression, these various constituents created new urban spaces, expressive cultures, and discourses, along with new regulations and forms of protest that would shape the politics of labor in the coming decades. Highlighting the centrality of contingent labor, this study calls into question predominant liberal narratives about modern industrial capitalism. It challenges our

understanding of capitalism's stability, the opportunities afforded to workers by a so-called free market, and lays plain the economic and cultural realities of a workforce segmented by class and race.

These broad statements about the function of capitalism and political economy can be grounded in the work histories of two individuals. When Trinidad Vega was interviewed in 1923 by an ethnographer for a study of Mexican laborers in America, he had resided in the United States for at least a decade. As a young man, Vega left his home in Cuernavaca, Mexico on news that “there were some good jobs here in the United States.” Traveling with a group of friends first to Mexico City and through Ciudad Juarez, he eventually found work through a *renganche* or labor contractor in El Paso, Texas laying railroad tracks throughout the Southwest. He traveled to Kansas, back to Texas, returned to Mexico, and eventually made his way to Los Angeles. He found work in a stone quarry, several meatpacking plants, a cement factory, and ended up as a farm laborer picking cotton in Southern California where he might earn \$2 to \$3 dollars a day at the peak of the season. These positions were neither remunerative nor easy. “Here in the United States,” described Vega, “they drive one crazy from working so much. They squeeze one here until one is left useless.”<sup>1</sup>

Harry Lundeberg arrived in the United States at roughly the same time and followed a similarly circuitous path of work and migration. At the age of fourteen, Lundberg left his home in Oslo, Norway, as a workaway aboard sailing ships and

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<sup>1</sup> The interview with Trinidad Vega first appeared in an edited form under the pseudonym Elias Garza, in Manuel Gamio, *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant* (New York: Dover Publications, 1971) 149-151; the full transcript of the interview in Spanish is available in Manuel Gamio, *El Inmigrante Mexicano: La Historia de Su Vida, Entrevistas Completas, 1926-1927* (Mexico City: Miguel Angel Porrua, 2002) 317-374.

steamers, which took him through Europe, India, Oceania, and Africa. Life at sea was hardly one of freedom and adventure, but rather, an existence also marked by contingency. As a young man, he described himself as a “roustabout”; one could run “all over the waterfront with a cap in your hand to get a job.” Eventually he landed in the Port of Seattle and later filed as an Able Seaman in San Francisco in 1923. For a decade, Lundeberg continued to labor aboard vessels, mostly traveling up and down the Pacific Coast. Hardly romantic about these jobs, he wryly noted, “a man who went to sea for a living was paid the big sum of \$40.00 a month. On some of the intercoastal ships you made \$32.50 a month, and they made you work 56 hours a week, and if you squawked, they fired you.”<sup>2</sup>

The overlapping work histories of these two men raise questions about the consequences of a regional economy defined by contingent work. First, how did the emergence of a casual labor economy shape the Pacific Coast’s working class demography as well as the composition of its urban space? Trinidad Vega and Harry Lundeberg were part of a substantial workforce of nearly one million workers that found employment in some form of contingent arrangement during this period. They filled out the labor demands of the largest employment sectors, including timber and coalmines, salmon canneries and agricultural fields, those who moved cargo, constructed buildings, and built railroads. Moreover, their movement through jobs defined the core of the region’s largest cities - Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle. These metropolises, in turn, became nodes on a circuit of labor migration during the early twentieth century. Cities provided the casual labor economy’s infrastructure, in the form of employment

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<sup>2</sup> “Harry Lundeberg: Centennial Tribute, 1901-2001,” *West Coast Sailors* (March 30, 2001) 1-2.

agencies, temporary housing, transportation, and spaces for leisure. This study weaves together multiple industries into one narrative, uncovering a well-worn network of migration through West Coast cities during the early twentieth century. In total, this aggregation of distinct, yet connected occupations accounted for more than one-third of the region's total labor force.

Second, how did changing notions of race shape the experience of these workers? Vega and Lundeberg may have shared similar experiences of migration, contingency, and hard work, yet they came to be categorized and even view themselves as somehow racially distinct. Put simply, workers like Lundeberg benefitted from the privilege of white skin, while those like Vega became the target of exclusion and violence. That racial paradigm was hardly invented on the Pacific Coast, but it certainly affected workers' access to the best jobs or housing. Equally important, this segmentation of the labor market was hardly set in stone. The following chapters highlight the fluidity of labor, interactions on the street, and the shared experience of hypermobility to illustrate the constant flux and contradiction of racialized meaning. The laborer's geography displayed a notable heterogeneity and very few of these occupations were completely segregated. While many white workers sought to build up walls of exclusion using the tropes of citizenship and white supremacy, Japanese, Filipino, and Hispanic laborers eroded the privilege of whiteness by generating their own alliances through expressive culture and language. The following chapters emphasize how contingent workers, along with employers, public officials, and intellectuals, were all active participants, rather than just passive observers, in the construction of racialized categories through social and discursive practices.

Finally, given their hypermobility and isolation from the traditional sources of working class solidarity, what capacity did contingent workers have for organization? To read the investigations and reports penned by social scientists and public officials, the answer would seem to be very little. These observers rendered workers on the move as fiercely individual outcasts and the archetype for contemporary theories about social distance. Employment agencies appeared chaotic; lodging houses were often filthy; dance halls and street corners were populated by a motley crowd. In an era that prized the rational and scientific ordering of society, the casual labor economy was anathema. This articulation of casual labor as a social problem became infused with a discourse of racialized fitness, which singled out workers of color for exclusion and empowered the racial segmentation of the casual labor economy. Workers like Vega and Lundeberg, however, would have offered a different answer. Contingent work was hardly isolating. Like many migrant workers, Vega traveled with siblings and friends from his home in Mexico. Lundeberg found camaraderie among the thousands of sailors and longshoremen, many of them Norwegian, who collectively forged a strong identity as maritime workers. Jobsite bunkhouses in far removed locations and boarding rooms in cities provided the structure for a remarkably social experience. That is not to say they failed to recognize the erratic nature of their working lives and the limits of solidarity. As Vega noted, “there are some who are neither united, nor do they want to defend themselves; that is why the Americans look down on us as they do.” But they sought collective solutions that might improve their condition. Urban spaces, along with fictive kin networks, and shared expressive cultures helped give life to some of the most

organized and radical forms of labor organizing in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These contrasting interpretations of the social status of casual workers animate much of this dissertation.<sup>3</sup>

These questions and answers take on additional complexity during a period of intense historical change. Between 1919 and 1933, the casual labor economy pivoted from prosperity to depression. In the decade after World War I, the industries that employed this contingent labor force reached their peak of employment. Each year, employers recruited tens of thousands of new workers, many of them circulating into and through the region's largest cities. As the economy grew, workers learned to move adroitly through occupations to earn modest but relatively stable incomes, leading employers to complain about a chronic labor shortage. But the Great Depression ended any illusions of perpetual expansion. In the wake of the 1929 the stock market crash, rising unemployment and waning economic demand led to an influx of newly unemployed workers, including many native-born whites, while employers struggled to hold onto their profit margins. This dissertation concludes in 1933, a year in which the mounting pressure and desperation of workers became the catalyst for agitation, protest, and labor organizing across the nation. Many of the earliest and sharpest iterations of this strike wave emerged along the Pacific Coast among contingent workers in jobs like cotton picking and maritime work. That placed men like Trinidad Vega and Harry Lundeberg at the leading edge of one of the largest strike waves in American history.

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Elias Garza, in Gamio, *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, 153.

## **Reframing Casual and Contingent Work**

Piecing together the work histories of men like Lundberg and Vega has led me to question some of the well-established narratives that frame our understanding of American capitalism, particularly in the American West where labor demand, migration, and radicalism converged in powerful ways. First, this dissertation emphasizes the central role of labor contingency in the development of capitalism in America, particularly along the Pacific Coast. The late nineteenth century witnessed the ascendance of the corporation and factory as the dominant forms of economic organization, particularly in the industrial Northeast and Midwest. Historians disagree over the effect of this economic transformation for workers. Some emphasize the role of behemoth factories like the McCormick Reaper Works or Ford Motor Company's River Rouge Plant in eliminating the unpredictability of working class life; a steady job meant consistent hours and a regular paycheck. Some of the largest American corporations went so far as to develop a system of welfare capitalism to cultivate a stable workforce through profit-sharing and benefits packages. The rationalization of production, however, did not do away with contingency of labor. Borrowing from the Marxist concept of the reserve army of the unemployed, other scholars emphasize how employers discovered the value of contingency and chronic employment as a technique of labor management. In times of prosperity, when demand justified greater hiring, employers could tap the pool of workers sitting idle just outside the factory gates. In times of recession, when the profits came under threat, employers relied upon this pool of workers to act as a bulwark against higher wages and mutualism.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Labor historians offer contrasting assumptions about the stability of the working-class in the context of modern industrial capitalism. Many view the emergence of factories and urban metropolises under

This dissertation emphasizes labor contingency as the defining feature of the Pacific Coast's political economy during the early twentieth century. Along the Pacific Coast, economic and demographic realities made it difficult for employers to rationalize their workforce to an extent similar to those in the Midwest or Northeast. Agriculture, fisheries, timber, and railroad construction, were defined by boom and bust cycles, seasons, and local conditions. The West also had a demographic problem – there were not enough workers to meet the demand for labor. Or, more accurately, there were never enough workers in a particular location, at a particular time, to satisfy the employer's desire for labor. Labor contingency in the West was also a reflection of space. The largest sectors of employment were not located in the centers of population, but rather in the hinterland. That required workers to sometimes traverse vast distances to remain consistently employed throughout the year. Likewise, employers had to facilitate their movement, and came to rely upon labor agents. It would be dangerous, however, to naturalize contingency as an intrinsic feature of labor in this region. Indeed, workers and employers both sought to use contingency to their advantage. As the first chapter describes, employers were always seeking ways to expand the size of the labor pool or

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capitalism as a factor in the making of a shared working class identity. The most influential of these is certainly E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966); subsequent studies associated with the new labor history that offer similar perspective include Elizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Sanford Jacoby, *Modern Manners: Welfare Capitalism Since the New Deal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); and Bruce Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990) 20. Others emphasize the disaggregating effects of capitalism upon the working class. See Walter Licht, *Getting Work: Philadelphia, 1840-1950* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); Jonathan Levy, *Freaks of Fortune: The Emerging World of Capitalism and Risk in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012); Joyce Appleby, *The Relentless Revolution: A History of Capitalism* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2011); Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); M.C. On the division between stable and casual work in American economic history, see also Alexander Keyssar, *Out of Work: The First Century of Unemployment in Massachusetts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Howard and J.E. King, *The Political Economy of Marx* (New York: NYU Press, 201, 93-95; Don Lescohier, *The Labor Market* (New York: MacMillan, 1923) 99.

keep workers on the knife's edge of stability as a coercive technique. For their part, workers exploited the shortage of labor to demand higher wages or work only during the most lucrative seasons. Speaking for employers throughout the region, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce executive George Clements concluded in 1926 that the grand challenge of the region's economy was "the necessity for a fluid supply of casual labor."<sup>5</sup>

The constant motion of these workers invites a much larger contextual frame. In particular, the demand for labor to extract wealth from nature and build infrastructure thrust this region into a larger Pacific World. Lacking access to the seemingly endless supply of impoverished labor from Europe, as did their counterparts along the Atlantic Coast, the employer's gaze turned to Asia. I rely upon a large and growing body of scholarship that pivots the historiography of the American West away from models of the trans-Mississippi frontier to a space of empire and complex borderlands. Placed in this larger Pacific World, this geographic space became the destination for a multinational workforce, linked by economic exchange and cultural connection, the competing interest of expansionist nation-states, and crucial for this dissertation, labor migration. In 1920, nearly one-fifth of the workers engaged in casual occupations came from somewhere on the Pacific Rim. Native-born whites comprised only a small percentage of the overall workforce. I use this framework of empire and transnational exchange to underscore how

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<sup>5</sup> On the development of capitalism and the distinctiveness of Western labor, see Gunther Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880-1930* (Cambridge University Press, 2000); William G. Robbins, *Colony and Empire: The Capitalist Transformation of the American West* (University Press of Kansas, 1994); Carlos A. Schwantes, "The Concept of the Wageworkers' Frontier: A Framework for Future Research," *The Western Historical Quarterly*, 1987, 39–55; Michael Kazin, "The Great Exception Revisited: Organized Labor and Politics in San Francisco and Los Angeles, 1870-1940," *Pacific Historical Review* 55, no. 3 (1986): 371–402.

the reliance upon foreign workers, particularly those from Asia and Latin America infused the region's labor politics with additional anxieties and opportunities.<sup>6</sup>

Second, this dissertation reframes our understanding of the Pacific Coast economy to emphasize the connections between a broad set occupational and racial categories. For decades, the prevailing historiographical interpretations of the region during the early twentieth century focus on the racial segmentation of the labor market and the discrete definition of industrial sectors. To a certain extent, that framework has been valuable. Guided by a liberal impulse to document the multicultural experience of America's working class, a generation of scholarship yielded a wealth of research about labor in a variety of industries – cannery work, stevedoring, logging, construction, agriculture, etc. The same is true of historical studies devoted to various ethnic and racialized communities. Japanese, Scandinavian, Chinese, Italian, Filipino, Latino communities are well documented, many of them from a working class perspective. Through tireless archival work and creative research methods, these historians recovered the voice of the subaltern. Indeed, the new labor history enabled many subsequent studies, such as this one, as is clearly evident in the footnotes.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> On the circulation of labor throughout the Pacific Rim, Cheng and Edna Bonacich, *Labor Immigration Under Capitalism: Asian Workers in the United States Before World War II* (University of California Press, 1984) Kornel Chang, *Pacific Connections: The Making of the U.S.-Canadian Borderlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Rob Wilson, *Re-imagining the American Pacific: From South Pacific to Bamboo Ridge and Beyond* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Juan Mora-Torres, *The Making of the Mexican Border* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001); Adam McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change: Peru, Chicago, and Hawaii 1900-1936* (University of Chicago Press, 2001); Yuji Ichioka, *The Issei: The World of the First Generation Japanese Immigrants, 1885-1924* (Free Press, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> Chris Friday, *Organizing Asian-American Labor: The Pacific Coast Canned-Salmon Industry, 1870-1942* (Temple University Press, 2010); David Wellman, *The Union Makes Us Strong: Radical Unionism on the San Francisco Waterfront* (Cambridge University Press, 1997); Cletus Daniel, *Bitter Harvest: A History of California Farmworkers, 1870-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981); William Robbins, *Hard Times*; and Michael Kazin, *Barons of Labor: the San Francisco Building Trades and Union Power in the Progressive Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

The separation of ethnic and occupational categories, however, is not without limitations. Such an approach fails to reflect the actual experience of workers and separates them from the larger, coherent socio-economic structure that governed their lives. Even more problematic, it reifies the divisions of labor and race imposed by employers and bourgeois understandings of professional job categories. Unlike a working professional or factory laborer, many of these individuals did not lay claim to a particular trade. Workers like Alfred Moltke, Ponce Torres, John McCloskey, and Naonobu Mizukami – some of the men featured in these pages – often strung together multiple jobs over months and decades of work in the casual labor economy of the Pacific Coast. Their employment patterns make it nearly impossible to place them in discrete categories or define their skill set. For example, as the state attempted to make its citizenry legible in broad terms, a census taker categorized Moltke as a logger and Torres as a cannery worker in 1930. But these narrow categorizations obscure weeks and months of employment they used to fill in the down time between their primary seasons - picking hops, driving trucks, or gutting salmon. Even in the so-called skilled industries, workers moved around. Oral history interviews with longshoremen and carpenters, for example, indicate a great deal more travel and migration than historians have previously appreciated. Other workers, the so-called tramps and hobos, defied all traditional definitions of work, floating from job to job. To isolate these communities, or elide the interconnections that existed between them, is to ignore the kinds of social power that governed them. Ultimately, the new social historians' privilege of specificity, detail, and texture sacrifices the power of breadth and comparison. This dissertation features a

number of individuals that break down the all-too- neat occupational categories established by labor economists, census takers, and historians.<sup>8</sup>

More than just break down cultural categories, however, the casual labor economy offers an ideal location to illustrate how categories of race and class emerge and change over time. As a generation of historical research has shown, the meanings often ascribed to material differences like skin color or poverty have no original meaning or bearing in science. On the contrary, the language and significance of race and class are cultural formations. That is, they are brought into being, organized, and enforced through the social interaction and discourse of various overlapping constituencies. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, for example, it was unclear how Filipino workers would fit into the paradigm of race and class on the Pacific Coast. As American nationals, educated by colonial authorities, and traveling under a United States passport, Filipino men expressed their entitlement to first-class status in the United States. Many white workers, however, viewed these men as yet another wave of low-wage workers from Asia deserving of exclusion. Terms like “casual laborer,” along with tramp, hobo, and vagrant, also carried complex and shifting meaning. Where did this itinerant population fit into the social order? Were they idle loafers that sloughed off the ethic of American industry or helpless victims of a new economic modernity? Perhaps they were dangerous radicals bent on revolution? In this respect, the interwar period marks an important moment for the

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<sup>8</sup> Examples that include excellent scholarship, yet discretely defined interpretive scope include Sucheng Chan, *This Bittersweet Soil: The Chinese in California Agriculture, 1860-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Matt Garcia, *A World of its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles, 1900-1970* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); and Dorothy Fujita-Rony, *American Workers, Colonial Power: Philippine Seattle and the Transpacific West, 1919-1941* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003); and Carol McKibben, *Beyond Cannery Row: Sicilian Women, Immigration, and Community in Monterey, California, 1915-99* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

establishment and redefinition of these two intersecting categories – race and class. While the labor power of workers from the Philippines and Mexico was highly desired, there was no place for them in the existing narrative of white supremacy in the American West. With the illusory, yet enduring, image of the white yeoman farmer placed firmly at the center of the project Anglo-European settler colonialism, where would these laborers fit? Placing them into the social order required new discourses of race and class that would debase their contribution to social and economic life and justify their continued exclusion.<sup>9</sup>

Third, this dissertation brings much needed historical perspective to contemporary discussions about the growing number of workers in America laboring in flexible, informal work routines. Driven by the global restructuring of financial systems and capital, casual labor has become the new emergent employment regime. According to the American Staffing Agency, the leading trade organization of profit-driven employment agencies, one in ten workers in the United States locates their jobs through an employment agency. Each year, staffing agencies supply 2.91 million workers to a broad spectrum of industries from retail stores, to business offices, to construction sites. By 2006, a multinational corporation like Labor Ready, Inc. could proudly report “sales” of 1.34 billion dollars and nearly one thousand placement agencies. In addition to these

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<sup>9</sup> The literature on race as a social formation and cultural construction has been influenced by Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994). On the Pacific Coast specifically, see Natalia Molina, *How Race Is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts* (Univ of California Press, 2013); Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (University of California Press, 2001); Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton University Press, 2014). The literature that explicitly addresses the fluid meanings of social class has received relatively less attention in the last decade, though the scholarship is perhaps older. See Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*; Alice O'Conner, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton University Press, 2001). Rick Baldoz addresses the racialization of Filipinos in *The Third Asiatic Invasion: Migration and Empire in Filipino America, 1898-1946* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

formalized channels of job acquisition, informal channels have reemerged. Street corners, home improvement parking lots, and warehouse districts have become the twenty-first century shape-up. In the wake of the Great Recession in 2008, even the largest corporations are in search of an ever more flexible workforce and temporary staffing agencies are growing more rapidly than ever. In 2013, Wal-Mart stores throughout the nation began to hire temporary workers exclusively, to ensure stores were always “staffed appropriately.”<sup>10</sup>

While a wealth of new research draws attention to this growing precarity, it carries an implicit assumption that contingent labor is somehow unique to our present moment. For some, the rise of day labor centers and staffing agencies are the unprecedented products of neoliberal deregulation since the 1970s. William Robinson has contended that “new capital-labor relations based on deregulated, informalized, flexibilized, part-time, immigrant, contract, and precarious labor arrangements” are the innovative “core processes” of a new form of capitalist globalization.<sup>11</sup> Saskia Sassen has similarly argued that new forms of global capital have accelerated the direct recruitment of migrant workers and the formation of informal labor networks. That may be true. But it would be dangerous to suggest that labor precarity and contingency are the invention of a new phase of global capitalism. When researchers do account for the history of labor contingency, it is treated as a transhistorical phenomenon, worthy of a passing paragraph, but often little more. For example, in an otherwise thoroughly researched report from a day labor survey in Southern California, sociologist Abel

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<sup>10</sup> Statistics for the Labor Ready Corporation are available in *Gale Directory of Company Histories*, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> William Robinson, *Global Capitalism and the Crisis of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014)

Valenzuela, asserts “this type of labor has existed for centuries throughout the world.” Neither of these historical understandings seem to offer perspective or material for productive comparison.<sup>12</sup>

The lack of historical perspective prevents us from understanding how the economy of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century is, in fact, eerily similar to our own. Much like the early twentieth century, employers have discovered the value of employing a flexible and mobile workforce. One extensive study of workers in the so-called “new economy” suggests that one-third of all working Americans labor under some kind of contingent work arrangement, much like the labor force of the Pacific Coast in the early 1900s. Likewise, employment agencies, labor contractors and even the morning shape-up, whose economic function had been curtailed briefly during the second half of the twentieth century, have returned to a place of prominence. The subject of immigration, along with anxieties about racial difference, is once again at the center of political debate over guest worker programs and undocumented immigration. The most significant difference seems to be that contingent work has spread to new sectors of the economy. Once the domain of extractive industries, transportation, construction, and agricultural production, employers in retail, higher education, nursing, and the high-tech rely upon a “flexible”

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<sup>12</sup> Saskia Sassen, *Guests and Aliens* (New York: New Press, 1999); Abel Valenzuela, *On the Corner: Day Labor in the United States* (Los Angeles: UCLA Center for the Study of Urban Poverty, 2006) 2; For the connections between globalization and temporary work see Manuel Castells and Alejandro Portes, “World Underneath: The Origins, Dynamics, and Effects of the Informal Economy,” in *The Informal Economy: studies in advanced and less developed countries*, Alejandro Portes, Manuel Castells, and Lauren A. Benton, editors (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); Saskia Sassen, *Cities in a World Economy*, Thousand Oaks, California: Pine Forge Press, 2000). For recent sociological surveys of day labor see Arne Kalleberg, *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs: The Rise of Polarized and Precarious Employment Systems in the United States, 1970s to 2000s* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2011); and Abel Valenzuela, “Day Laborers in Southern California: Preliminary Findings from the Day Labor Survey,” (UCLA: Center for the Study of Urban Poverty Institute for Social Science Research, May 30, 1999); For an example of the recent work in anthropology and geography see Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Domestica: Cleaning and Caring in the Shadow of Affluence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

workforce. The whiggish notion that we progress beyond the past is a powerful narrative in the United States, but one filled with hubris. Labor policies adopted by the New Deal and during the post-war period certainly expanded the rights of workers and grew the middle class, but given the current state of labor in this country, it is worth asking what, if anything has been accomplished? The findings of this dissertation would seem to suggest that labor precarity, rather than labor stability is the normative condition for much of the working-class under capitalism.<sup>13</sup>

## **Chapter Outline**

This dissertation explores the economic and cultural (re)definition of the casual labor economy along the Pacific Coast in three parts. Part one considers the productive tension that existed between the desire of workers and employers and its role in transforming the Pacific Coast region. The first chapter, “The Casual Labor Economy and the Pacific Coast,” examines the rising dependence upon seasonal and contingent forms of labor along the Pacific Coast during the early twentieth century. Two imperatives defined the Pacific Coast economy during this period – the development of industrial capitalism based largely on extractive capitalism and the insatiable desire for inexpensive and mobile forms of labor. These twin imperatives yielded a particularly intense form of political economy, with contingency and the segmentation of labor its defining features. That system, in turn, created a distinct working class sector: a mobile pool of young, male, immigrant workers marked by growing racial heterogeneity.

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<sup>13</sup> Yaarit Silverstone, Himanshu Tambe, and Susan Cantrell, “The Rise of the Extended Workforce,” accessed May, 2015, <http://www.accenture.com/SiteCollectionDocuments/PDF/Accenture-Future-of-HR-Rise-Extended-Workforce.pdf>; Oxford Economics, “Workforce 2020,” accessed May, 2015, <http://www.oxfordeconomics.com/recent-releases/workforce-2020>

The second chapter, “The Laborer’s Geography: Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles,” traces the role of the casual labor economy in the development of the region’s largest metropolitan centers. During the interwar years, the same productive tension that transformed the region also shaped urban space. That urban space also came to resemble the distinct demography of contingent capitalism, particularly in its homosocial, yet racially heterogeneous character. New working class districts, what I term the laborer’s geography, responded to both employer’s demand for flexible labor, but also the need of workers for jobs, housing, and sociability. Although the ostensible chaos and ephemeral nature of these areas caused headaches for middle-class bureaucrats and moral watchdogs, the laborer’s geography of the city and hinterland nonetheless served the purposes of an economy built upon ready access to a large workforce.

Part two juxtaposes an array of social investigators with the social practice of workers to suggest how the very idea of the casual labor was in fact an unstable category, subject to contest and change. More than just a conveyor of labor power, contingent capitalism also carried ideas about class and race. The third chapter, “Social Investigation and the Casual Labor Economy,” examines an array of academic and government inquiries into the “social problems” associated with the casual laborer. In the pages of social science research, the young, male, immigrant laborers, pulled to the region by employers’ demand for labor became an archetype for the dis-associative powers of modernity and capitalism. Innovating new social scientific methods of research, these investigators fashioned a discourse of class and race that turned casual laborers into a vehicle for broader social concerns, namely radicalism and racial heterogeneity.

While public officials and scholars sharpened their definitions for casual labor during the 1920s, workers did the same. The fourth chapter, “Laborlore and the Solidarities of Exclusion,” examines the social practices and discourses developed by contingent and migratory laborers. In the absence of common sources of working class power – a community rooted in space, kinship, or consistent work routine – men like Harry Lundeberg and Trinidad Vega forged their own. Occupation, ethnicity, language, along with a mutual sense of isolation and contingency became important lodestars for casual workers to form a sense of community. This gathering of stories, clothing, songs, and other symbols of identification, however, cut both ways. Competition for work meant that lines of solidarity and inclusion also functioned as lines of exclusion, as groups of workers sought to coalesce a common identity for the protection of skill and power.

The final chapter and epilogue document the restructuring of the casual labor economy under the exigencies of the Great Depression. Between 1929 and 1933, high unemployment and declining economic demand significantly altered the logic of contingent capitalism. Newly unemployed workers, many of them native-born whites, flooded the labor markets for contingent labor and overwhelmed cities. Contingent work was no longer the realm of a distinct demographic of worker. Competition for jobs and rising desperation generated both reactionary and revolutionary responses among the diverse population. Federal interventions, in the form of Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal, sought to regularize work and encourage working class power through a flood of legislative reform. These sweeping actions, however, perpetuated some of the most fundamental inequities in the casual labor economy.

## Documenting an Elusive Working Class Sector

When I describe my project, the most common response is, “what kind of sources do you use?” A good question, to be sure. Much like the workforce described in these pages, the history of casual work is elusive and scattered. Institutions that catered to tramps and migrant workers were often fleeting. Employment agencies and labor contractors avoided careful accounting to stymie state investigators and the organizational materials from groups like the Industrial Workers of the World did not survive the anti-red purges. Few of the institutions that did endure kept records. Inquiries to nearly every charitable organization that serviced this population – the Salvation Army, Volunteers of America, Midnight Mission, Millionair Club – yielded little material. Ethnic newspapers like the *Philippine-American Chronicle* and *La Opinión* thrived during this period, but most catered to an emerging middle class, rather than transient workers. Finally, and most significantly, a life of instability and mobility was simply not conducive to retaining personal papers, correspondence, and other manuscript materials. This lack of resources has made it difficult for historians to assemble a comprehensive history of the contingent migratory worker.

This dissertation employs two publications from the United States census, available in new accessible digital formats, to provide a picture of the casual labor force that would have been impossible just ten years ago. The first are the Integrated Public Use Microdata Samples, known as IPUMS, compiled by the University of Minnesota’s Population Research Center. IPUMS is a sample of census data released by the federal census bureau. I utilize two data sets, one from 1920 and another from 1930, totaling a sample size of 13,770 individuals extracted from the federal census counts of Pacific

Coast states. Aided by the Statistical Software Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) I can isolate occupations, cross-reference them by birthplace, citizenship status, age, or race, and chart trends from one decade to another.<sup>14</sup> To place that in context, consider that for nearly a century, historians have relied upon Carleton Parker's *The Casual Laborer and Other Essays* to advance claims about the size and demographic character of this labor force. It is rarely noted his sample size included a mere 222 individuals taken from a small farm district in California in 1913-14, of which half were Native American. I am confident this dissertation is more comprehensive and precise than any previous study on the subject.<sup>15</sup>

Central to this comprehensive picture is a list of twenty-one employment categories that I group together and define as casual labor economy. I select these categories from the United States Census bureau's exhaustive classification of occupations established in 1950, known as the *Alphabetic Index of Occupations and Industries: 1950* or Occ1950. I emphasize these occupations in searching samples of census data, along with newspaper sources, oral history interviews, and government materials and tracking historical change in these industries. This choice of occupational categories emerged from the materials of research. My examination of oral history interviews with workers, economic studies from the period, and the secondary literature, made clear that these positions shared an overriding commonality of instability and contingency. Moreover, such positions were connected by a vast social and economic network of lodging houses, labor contractors, and routes of migration. Workers shifted

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<sup>14</sup> This sample (N=13,770) represents the 1% sample taken by IPUMS from the total population of Alaska, Washington, Oregon, and California in both 1920 and 1930.

<sup>15</sup> Parker, *The Casual Laborer and Other Essays*, 70.

between worksites and occupations throughout the year by choice and necessity. Even stable unionized workers in the building trades, boilermakers, metalworkers, and plasterers, followed the boom and bust of the casual labor economy and shifted between cities to exploit a local construction boom.

These data are not without problems. For large populations of workers (cities, states, and regions) the sample size is sufficient to yield reliable estimates, but establishing accurate results for smaller populations (neighborhoods and specific occupations) is not possible. To rely upon the IPUMS samples to count, for example, the number of Filipinos employed as domestic workers in the city of Seattle, requires greater scrutiny. As such, I reference these statistics as estimates, rather than exact counts. In some cases, I corroborate my figures with other sources of data, namely industrial labor counts conducted by trade groups and state agencies and the records of state and city employment agencies. Generally, these localized data confirm the larger census counts. It is important to note, however, the federal level census chronically undercounts certain populations, particularly immigrants and communities of color. Further, workers often evaded detection and enumeration, much to the dismay of labor economists, politicians, and charity workers.<sup>16</sup>

The second tool is the original manuscript pages of the United States census. Released every ten years, the manuscript pages are the raw documents filled in by the

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<sup>16</sup> Given the uniformity and wide geography of its sample, the IPUMS census data is ideal for estimating and comparing the number of workers for the region. The accuracy of my regional count is further substantiated by the findings of two earlier studies of the casual-migratory workforce. See Orlando Lewis, "Tramp Problem," *Country Life* (Philadelphia: American Academy of Political Science, 1912) 217-227; Carleton Parker, *The Casual Laborer and Other Essays* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1920) 17. On these racialized census inaccuracies, see Margo Anderson, *The American Census: A Social History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) 131-159; and Stephen Fienberg, "Race and Ethnicity and the Controversy Over the US Census," *Current Sociology* 48:3 (2000): 87-110.

enumerator's who provided a block-by-block, person-by-person detail of the country's population. These pages have served as a cornerstone of social history, but a new database – ancestry.com – allows scholars to search and catalog manuscript pages with ease. The search interface has allowed me to track individuals as they move throughout the region, in and out of various jobs. This database also reveals the micro-geography of the casual labor economy. Ancestry.com allows me to sort individuals within selected enumeration districts according to race, residential status, age, etc. These remarkable collections form much of the basis for chapters one and two respectively.

Within the piles of statistical data and public records, lies the voices of the workers themselves. I rely upon a disparate, yet surprisingly large amount of oral history in university and state archives. The State of Washington and the University of California each conducted large oral history projects with labor leaders and the rank and file in timber work, salmon canneries, and the longshoring industry. I unearthed a number of excellent interviews at the oral history division at California State University, Fullerton. I also read government reports, interviews, and institutional records against the grain. For labor economists, high rates of labor turnover were often interpreted as an unreliable workforce. But from the perspective of the worker, they suggest poor working conditions, or simply better opportunities elsewhere. Finally, I have embraced the work of Archie Green, particularly his invitation to take the words of workers seriously. As such, songs, poems, stories, and work banter provide the break bulk cargo of chapter four (and break up the monotony of statistical and governmental records).

Finally, a note on language and terminology. Throughout this dissertation, I use “casual labor” as shorthand to describe those workers employed in a manner that was imprecise, informal, and/or ephemeral. This term emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to describe a broad umbrella of occupational categories that existed outside the so-called “formal” sectors of the economy – tramps, migrant workers, and day laborers, but also those working in maritime trades, construction, and sawmills laborers. The term has maintained its currency with the disciplines of social science, particularly among labor economists, sociologists, and historians. As such, it has a certain utility in communicating with literatures across time and discipline and can be useful to connect a broad economy rooted in the experience of contingency. When possible and appropriate, I prefer to specify the status of these workers when by employing terms like contingent, flexible, migratory, temporary, and seasonal when appropriate.

We should be critical and cautious in using terms like casual labor, however, for they often carry unintended valences and are embedded in larger structures of power. “Casual labor” was a neologism created and bolstered by employers and social scientists during the early twentieth century, but from I can tell, workers rarely, if ever, referred to themselves in this way. The reasons are, perhaps, obvious. “Casual” would seem to imply levity or freedom, two conditions these workers rarely enjoyed. It reflects the employers’ demand for a tractable labor supply and serves as a euphemism for the violence and coercion of capitalist labor management. The use of such a blanket term might also elide salient differences between workers and occupations. There are meaningful distinctions to be made of the skills and work routines of sailors, farm hands, and loggers. They are all physically demanding, but the skills they utilize are quite

different. Likewise, they were casual for different reasons. While the length of employment for a longshore worker might be determined by the size of shop or cargo they unloaded, the farm hand was often employed for a particular season. To complicate matters, the high rate of turnover among loggers was, in part, by the choice of the individual. It was exhausting, not to mention isolating, to remain in a logging camp.

To avoid reproducing these assumptions, this dissertation emphasizes the emergence and continued instability of the vocabulary we use to describe the working class. The question of terminology sits at the heart of this dissertation. I want to know how this large sector of nearly one million workers came to identify, as well as be identified, in such starkly divided categories, despite their shared economic condition of contingency? Perhaps more importantly, what role did those divisions play in determining access to the best jobs or expanded labor rights? This process of dividing and categorizing occurred through the craft of language and words, but a variety of other social and discursive practices.

## Chapter 1 | The Casual Labor Economy and the Pacific Coast

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On a cold February evening, Kakichi Tsuboi lowered himself into the waters of Seattle's Elliott Bay from the decks of the *Sado Maru*. Hardly a career sailor, Tsuboi had been working onboard the ship with the intention of reaching the Pacific Coast and making an unsanctioned entry into the United States. He had attempted a similar act twice before aboard different ships, but was caught by immigration officials. This time, he and a fellow ship jumper had planned their escape well. They knew the optimal time to leave the ship, swam quietly, kept a lookout for guards that patrolled the pier, and reached land undetected. From there, the plan ended. The two men headed towards the center of the city following lines of transportation and the outline of tall buildings in search of a safe resting spot. Tsuboi and his companion eventually reached the working-class center of Seattle, which was easily identified by its concentration of taverns, pool halls, and employment agencies as well as its mixed ethnic and racial character. They knocked on the door of a house occupied by an elderly black woman who they saw through a lit window and asked for help. She and her husband provided them with clothing and a place to sleep. The following morning, the couple contacted a Japanese friend in Seattle who was familiar with jobs in the canned salmon industry and several days later a labor contractor whisked Tsuboi away to Alaska, one of many jobs he would hold in the coming years.<sup>1</sup>

Aside from a brief oral history account, the archive only contains fragments of Kakichi Tsuboi's life history following his quiet entry to the United States. We know he

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<sup>1</sup> Kazuo Ito, *Issei: A History of Japanese Immigrants in North America*, Translated by Shinichiro Nakamura and Jean S. Gerard, (Seattle: Japanese Community Service, 1973) 67.

was physically fit and eighteen years old when he came to the United States. During the next two decades, he returned to the canneries, worked in a large-scale vegetable growing operation, lived in a bunkhouse along Seattle's skid road, worked a stint at a sawmill, and eventually peddled vegetables around the city. For at least the first decade of his time in the United States he traveled as a single man, though he eventually married a Japanese immigrant sometime later. He worked for one of Seattle's most prominent Japanese businesses, the Furuya Company, which contracted a large number of immigrant workers for the region's varied industries. In other words, Tsuboi was a contingent migratory laborer who worked in a variety of industrial and service industry occupations that were available to new migrants, and especially to workers of color.<sup>2</sup>

While the full picture of Tsuboi's life evades the historian's gaze, the fragments we have conform to broad patterns of social and economic change. During the first three decades of the twentieth century, the labor power of Tsuboi and thousands of others transformed the Pacific Coast. While employers found value in building a labor force based on contingent and migratory labor, this workforce of nearly one million learned to utilize the geography of the Pacific Slope to squeeze a living out of a demanding economy. Some men like Tsuboi navigated a network of urban centers and hinterland migrations that extended from the salmon canneries of Seward, Alaska down to the agricultural valleys of Brawley, California. Others remained close to the cities, floating between jobs in construction or maritime work. The recruitment of labor tied the Pacific Coast into a much more larger geography that extended across the United States, as well

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<sup>2</sup> Nakamura and Jean S. Gerard, (Seattle: Japanese Community Service, 1973) 67; Death Certificate for Frank K. Tsuboi, 27 December 1987, Reference number 534-18-3591, Social Security Death Index; Asian Crew List, Kakichi Tsuboi, April 11, 1914 (United States Department of Labor, Immigration Service; Ito, *Issei*, 62-3.

as Japan, Croatia, Mexico, the Philippines, and Scandinavia. As this chapter contends, the ongoing struggle to control the labor supply yielded a demographically diverse, yet racially segregated workforce, pulled through a complex network of labor migration.

This chapter develops in three parts. First, I trace the maturation of a distinct form of industrial capitalism based largely on extraction, cultivation, and transportation, along with the insatiable desire for inexpensive and mobile forms of labor that made it possible. With its roots in the turn of century, during the post-World War I period, labor contingency became the defining feature of this region's political economy, which, in turn, shaped the demography of the working-class. Second, the hypermobility and the demand for labor made for a constantly shifting balance of power between workers and their employers. During a decade of relative prosperity and economic growth, workers exploited the shortage of labor to minimize their contingency and maximize their gains. But that growth was hardly consistent throughout the decade and was locally erratic. Employers did their best to cut their labor costs and maximize profits by inflating the size of the labor supply. The wax and wane of the seasons also exposed workers to the abuses of employers and labor agents. Third, that system of political economy created a distinct working class sector: a mobile pool of young, male, immigrant workers. As new restrictions slowed the rate of immigration from Europe, employers looked to the spaces shaped by American Empire - namely the Philippines and Latin America - to satisfy their labor demands. Those patterns of migration yielded a multi-tiered economic order, which gave native and some foreign-born whites access to the most desirable jobs, while workers of color remained relegated to the lowest paying positions.

## The Casual Labor Economy

The decade after World War I marked a period of vibrancy and maturity for the Pacific Coast economy. Beholden to Eastern capital and industry for much of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles emerged as centers of financial power. By nearly any measure, the economic growth of Alaska, Washington, Oregon, and California outpaced the rest of the country. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the United States Census Bureau recorded a 409 percent increase in manufacturing capacity in the Pacific region, more than twice the rate of growth of any other in the country. While extractive and agricultural industries drove that expansion, the production demands of World War I brought new industries like shipbuilding and international trade, transcending the region's dependence upon timber, fisheries, and mining. The growing economy had a number of very distinct facets, but together they formed a cohesive political economy rooted in the demand for a flexible and mobile labor supply.<sup>3</sup>

The primacy of labor fluidity and mobility was nothing new to the economy of the American West. Since the late nineteenth century, industrialists and developers had seen value locked away in the natural resources of the American West and employers mobilized tens of thousands of workers to unlock it. Many of them were employed on

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<sup>3</sup> The United States Census based the percentage growth in manufacturing upon a weighted geometric average of the individual percentages for the net change in wage earners and total industrial horsepower. United States Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Atlas of the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1925) 81. Much of the economic history of the West and the Pacific Coast has been interpreted through the lens of metropole and hinterland, borrowing cues from the analytical model of "core and periphery" from the World System's theory developed by Immanuel Wallerstein and others. See William Robbins, *Colony and Empire: The Capitalist Transformation of the West* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1994) and Richard White, *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991). Among many monographs that consider the Pacific Coast as an integrated regional political economy, the model remains, Earl Pomeroy, *The Pacific Slope: a History of California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Utah, and Nevada* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1965).

loosely defined contracts, often arranged by a labor contractor, padrone, or renganche. Charles Ashleigh, a visitor to the region in 1900, himself a transient worker and writer from England, took note of this laboring population as he traveled through Montana, San Francisco, and Los Angeles: the “immense army of unskilled or semi-skilled workers of no fixed abode, who are forever engaged in an eternal chase for the elusive job.” “A mighty wave of fertility,” he wrote, “the ripening of fruits, the construction of railroads, aqueducts, and other signs of an onward-marching capitalism employs temporarily thousands of laborers, teamsters and the like.”<sup>4</sup>

The demand for casual labor may have arrived with the very first mine prospector or surveyor team that traveled from the East coast, but the growing specialization of industry and labor in the region following World War One intensified the salience of this working class category. Increasingly, the work required in sectors like agriculture was divided between a small number of technically skilled employees and a much larger pool of casual workers. Writing for the *Los Angeles Times*, George Clements, director of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce’s Agricultural Department, noted his state’s reliance on a fluid, mobile body of casual workers. Clements editorialized, “there is no shortage in expert farm labor – this question need not trouble us. Our whole concern is roustabout labor. The more specialized our agriculture becomes, the greater is the necessity for a fluid supply of casual labor to take care of the crop.”<sup>5</sup> At any given moment, there may have been enough laborers statewide to satisfy the demand of California’s agricultural sector, but they were often not in the right place at the right time. The shifting of the seasons required constant movement. Clements, and others involved in agricultural

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Ashleigh, “The Floater,” *International Socialist Review* 15 (July 1914) 35, 37.

<sup>5</sup> George Clements, *Los Angeles Times*, July 18, 1926, J3.

planning, worried that migrant workers might be unwilling to move from the Imperial Valley, to the San Joaquin Valley, out to the coastal region around Watsonville, and back to Los Angeles all in one year. Clement's statement, though specific to the agricultural industry, described a broader transformation of capital and industry along the Pacific Coast during this period. The specialization of the region's economy meant that large numbers of workers were demanded during very particular times of the year.

As the Pacific Coast economy boomed, irregularity and mobility became the overarching features of the region's labor market. One labor economist summarized the broad significance of casual workers thusly: "They perform a definite economic function and must be accepted as a relatively permanent working-class group.... Industry does not seem able to function without the odd-jobbers."<sup>6</sup> The fluctuating demand for labor throughout the year came to define jobs in a number of different industries, including salmon canneries, urban construction projects, and railroad maintenance. Maritime work was among the least stable. Seeking to control their bottom line, shipping companies constantly adjusted their workforce. Deepwater vessels could employ large work crews for several days, but smaller tramp steamers might only require a small team for several hours. Likewise, the demand for rigging and set-up involved a large number of workers, but the discharge of cargo required relatively few. As one federal report on longshoring concluded, "these are the conditions which deservedly place it at the head of the list of casual industries."<sup>7</sup> Another suggested that, "modern industrial society requires that

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<sup>6</sup> Edward Berman, "Odd Jobbers," *The Survey* 46 (January 15, 1925) 46.

<sup>7</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Longshore Labor Conditions in the United States," *Monthly Labor Review* 31 (October, 1930) 550, 70.

individual human units be movable and inter-changeable in much the same manner as the raw materials of industry.”<sup>8</sup>

The labor power of Kakichi Tsuboi and thousands of others served as the foundation for that rising economic strength. Taken together, workers in extractive industries, railroads, salmon and produce canneries, agriculture, and construction constituted an economy of casual labor. In a given year, approximately one-third of the entire Pacific Coast labor force found work in an industry that demanded flexibility and mobility from its employees. By 1930, this labor market exceeded one million workers [See Table 1.1]. These industries were in many ways distinct; each occupation carried its own set of particular skills, as well as workplace culture. Yet, workers in these occupations shared a commonality in their lack of stability and the contingency of their worker arrangement. Skilled workers in the building trades, semi-skilled positions in timberwork and maritime trades, and the general laborers working in farms, canneries, and warehouses all struggled to deal with irregular hours, high turnover, and indefinite periods of employment. Moreover, many workers moved fluidly between these jobs, often in the same year, linking together a range of industries. The abstract concept that grouped together these seemingly disparate industries was made concrete in the movement of these workers.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Andrew Lind, *A Study of Mobility of Population in Seattle* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1925) 34.

<sup>9</sup> Using census data from Alaska, Washington, Oregon, and California, I derive this figure from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Sample (IPUMS). IPUMS uses a 1 percent sample taken from the United States Census manuscripts for all but the 1890 census. The sample was abstracted and analyzed with the use of the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS). See Steven Ruggles, Matthew Sobek, Trent Alexander, Catherine A. Fitch, Ronald Goeken, Patricia Kelley Hall, Miriam King, and Chad Ronnander, *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 3.0* (machine-readable database) (Minneapolis, 2004). For more on the use of IPUMS for historical research, see James Gregory, “The Southern Diaspora and the Urban Dispossessed: Demonstrating the Census Public Use Microdata Samples,” *Journal of American*

**Table 1.1 | Workers in Primary Industries of Casual Labor, Pacific Coast, 1920 and 1930**

Industry	1920	1930	% Change
Agriculture	383879	430159	12
Construction	137182	235532	42
Extractive Industries	176716	207252	15
Sawmills, planing mills, and mill work	80446	80598	.2
Logging	50656	55146	8
Crude petroleum and natural gas extraction	11303	36663	69
Metal Mining	19780	21008	6
Non-metallic mining and quarrying	9685	8282	-17
Coal mining	4846	5555	13
Railroad Construction and Maintenance	113115	112312	-1
Canneries <sup>1</sup>	21803	30704	29
Total, Casual Industries	832695	1015959	22

Note: These numbers include two categories of workers, those considered by the census to be “wage workers” and “working on own account,” which included self-contracted and piece work laborers. Those workers laboring on their “own account” constituted more than half of all agricultural workers, one quarter of mining workers, and one fifth of construction workers.

<sup>1</sup>The census combined together workers in the canning of vegetables, fruits, and seafoods under a single category.

Source: 1% sample of selected categories in Industry, 1950 basis for California, Oregon, Washington, and Alaska, 1920, 1930. IPUMS

Between 1920 and 1930, the demand surged in these industries that relied upon a flexible and or seasonal workforce. Following a painful, yet brief, postwar war downturn, overall employment in casual industries grew by twenty-seven percent, adding a quarter of a million new workers to the region. Between 1920 and 1930, the number of loggers increased by 4,490 (8%); agricultural work added 46,280 jobs (11%); railroad employment was the only large employer of casual labor to record a decline, though it

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*History* 82 (June 1995). I draw from IPUMS samples for industrial categories that employed large numbers of casual workers, as well as occupational census counts.

was a mere 803 positions (-1%) [See Table 1.1].<sup>10</sup> The institutions that connected workers to jobs were another bellwether of the importance of casual work to the region. Public employment agencies in Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles reported a sharp rise in the demand for workers in the years that followed the postwar depression. In Seattle, the Men's Division of the municipal employment office reported a record 34,000 placements for temporary work in 1923, a sixty-two percent increase over the previous year. The city agency reported similar increases throughout the decade. Employment agencies operated by the state of California in San Francisco and Los Angeles experienced similar trends.<sup>11</sup>

The rising demand for migratory and casual workers along the Pacific Coast stood in stark contrast to the Northeast and Midwest. Throughout the country, the floating workforce that had powered the transportation revolution and harvested the Great Plains from the mid to late nineteenth century was in decline. Employment in factories, meatpacking plants, and steel mills supplanted the demand for labor in casual and migratory sectors and timber stocks were depleted, particularly in the Midwest. The boom of railroad construction had concluded and new forms of mechanization replaced hand labor in agriculture. Between 1920 and 1930, the population of Midwestern loggers declined by 23,183 (-85%); Railroads shed 54,084 employees (-9%); agricultural work

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<sup>10</sup> Industries (Ind 1950), sorted by state and grouped according to United States Census Districts, 1920 one percent sample and 1930 five percent sample, *IPUMS*. On the development of the Pacific Coast economy during the 1920s, see Federal Employment Report; United States Bureau of Fisheries, *Report of the United States Commissioner of Fisheries* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1919-30).

<sup>11</sup>Report of J.H Shields, Superintendent, Public Employment Office, "Twenty-Seventh Annual Report of the Civil Service Commission of the City of the Seattle, Washington for the Year ending December 31, 1922," Unpublished Report, Civil Service Commission Collection, Seattle Municipal Archives.

lost 42,641 jobs (-2%).<sup>12</sup> After more than a half century of spectacular growth, this part of the country experienced its first declines in these employment sectors. A report on the labor situation in Kansas declared the “passing” of the hobo harvester. Workers coming and going to work, it reported, no longer filled the train cars and highways of the bread belt.<sup>13</sup> Jim Tully, fiction writer and a former tramp, wrote in 1922, “the phase of life that produced Josiah Flynt and Jack London has gone to the land of dead gypsies, and the nightly camp fires of hoboland are at last going up in smoke forever.”<sup>14</sup> In Chicago, one employment agent commented, “labor is not as dependable now as it was a few years ago. Once we could hire fifty men and notify them to maybe five.”<sup>15</sup> The observations of writers and labor agents gesture towards what one historian has described as “the beginning of a reorientation in the labor markets of the Midwest” and the shrinking of the range for the tramp and hobo worker.<sup>16</sup>

As these occupations declined in other regions, a number of factors assured the growth of labor-intensive industries along the Pacific Coast in the 1920s. Resource extraction and industrial development remained undercapitalized, relative to similar operations in other parts of the country. Coal mining towns in the Cascades, for example, never reached the size or intensity of the coal industry in other places like Ohio and Pennsylvania. Smaller amounts of capital investment in some locations and industries

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<sup>12</sup> Industries (Ind1950), sorted by state and grouped according to United States Census Districts, 1920 one percent sample and 1930 five percent sample, *IPUMS*.

<sup>13</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, July 3, 1926, 16.

<sup>14</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, June 18, 1922, II13.

<sup>15</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, August 8, 1929, 5.

<sup>16</sup> Frank Tobias Higbie, *Indispensable Outcast: Hobo Workers and Community in the American Midwest, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003) 207; on the decline of the casual labor economy in the Midwest, see also Todd DePastino, *Citizen Hobo: How a Century of Homelessness Shaped America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

meant that resource extraction was powered by hand labor, rather than large mechanical steam shovels. Even in the presence of large-scale capital investment, the region's economic priorities meant that the labor market would continue to rely upon contingent labor. In the logging industry, large companies like Weyerhaeuser and Pope and Talbot controlled much of the timber land, but they relied upon independent logging companies, known as "gyppos." The persistence of these small-scale operations also explains the slow adoption of mechanical logging techniques like trucks, steam engines, and chainsaws. Similar conditions dominated in the agricultural sector. The emphasis on citrus, vegetable, and other specialty produce crops meant the region continued to demand a large workforce of mobile and flexible workers. In 1910, the United States census calculated that the Pacific Coast had the highest proportion of laborers to landowners in the nation, a distinction it would hold onto for the rest of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>17</sup>

Between 1920 and 1930, five industries defined the Pacific Coast's demand for casual workers – extractive industries, railroads, canneries, agriculture, and construction. Occupations like loggers, sawmill workers, and miners – those employed in extractive industries – had been at the leading edge of the region's capitalist development and one of the largest recruiters of itinerant and casual work for a half century. The discovery and commodification of petroleum in California made extraction of natural resources even more crucial to the economy. These industries were also one of the region's largest employers, accounting for more than 200,000 workers by 1930. Loggers epitomized the casual labor force. The work was seasonal, itinerant, and subject to extreme labor

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<sup>17</sup> On the relative scale of capital and investment, see William Robbins, *Hard Times in Paradise: Coos Bay, Oregon, 1850-1986* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988); John Schideler, *Coal Towns in the Cascades: A Centennial History of Roslyn and Cle Elum, Washington* (Spokane: Melior Publications, 1986); Frank Herman Maier, *The Tenure Status of Farmworkers in the United States* (Washington D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, 1960) 21.

turnover. Employment in sawmills tended to be more stable and its workers less itinerant than in timber camps, but an oversupply of workers, limited work season, and constant turnover defined the industry overall.<sup>18</sup> Miners and oil drillers were less susceptible to seasonal shifts. Nonetheless, the physical pressure of these jobs, combined with their remote locations and inherent danger, meant that workers churned through these labor camps, returning to the city to locate other work or unwind. These were also among the largest hinterland casual labor sites. While the most logging and mining operations never exceeded 50 workers, large oil companies like Standard Oil maintained numerous work camps with 150 to 850 men.<sup>19</sup>

Railroad construction and maintenance also demanded large teams of labor and demanded flexibility and mobility. Employment in rail construction reached its peak in 1920 at 113,000, but remained steady over the next decade. By 1930, the major railroad corporations, including Southern Pacific, Northern Pacific, and Union Pacific, employed more than 112,000 workers. Railroad labor was physically demanding and the duration of positions varied according to the season and size of project. Workers recruited by railroad agents in Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles traveled as far as Montana and New Mexico for work. Not only did workers rely upon the railroads for employment, but they also utilized them for transportation around the region. In addition to the countless

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<sup>18</sup> On the timber industry, see; Carol Lind, *Big Timber, Big Men* (Seattle: Hancock House Publishers, 1978); Carlos Schwantes, *Hard Traveling: A Portrait of Work Life in the New Northwest* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994); Andrew Prouty, *More Deadly Than War!: Pacific Coast Logging, 1827-1981* (New York: Garland, 1985).

<sup>19</sup> California Division of Immigration and Housing, "Camp Inspection Registry, 1928," Unpublished Manuscript Collection, University of California, Bancroft Library, Carton 41, Folder 17. On extractive industries of the Pacific Coast, see Schwantes, *Hard Traveling*; Robbins, *Hard Times in Paradise: Coos Bay, Oregon* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006); Ronald Brown, *Hard-Rock Miners: The Intermountain West, 1860-1920* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1979); Andrew Mason Prouty, *More Deadly Than War*; White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own*; Nancy Qualm-Wickham, "Petroleocrats and Proletarians: Work, Class, and Politics in the California Oil Industry, 1917-1925" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California Berkeley, 1994).

labor camps they operated in the hinterland, rail companies operated camps in urban areas as well. Southern Pacific organized camps in Los Angeles and San Francisco to maintain the maze of lines in and out of the city.<sup>20</sup>

Salmon and produce canneries comprised another central industry of the Pacific Coast's casual labor economy. Employment in the salmon canneries of the North Pacific peaked at more than 14,000 in the decade after World War One, sourcing the majority of its workers from labor contractors located in Seattle and San Francisco.<sup>21</sup> While cannery work varied depending on the climate and weather as well as the health of salmon runs, the season was generally dependable. Given this stable labor demand over a discrete period, employers signed workers to contracts to lower turnover. Cannery contractors paid premium rates for casual workers when they were needed, but only if they could commit to work an entire season or harvest, typically a period of three months from July to September.<sup>22</sup> Hiring in vegetable and fruit canning followed a similar pattern, though twenty-five percent of the produce cannery workforce were comprised by women, while the canned-salmon industry was dominated by men. Employers and contractors attempted to maintain steady production for much of the summer, but individual harvests would only last several days or weeks. Canneries often closed abruptly due to lack of

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<sup>20</sup> California Division of Immigration and Housing, "Camp Inspection Registry, 1928," Unpublished Manuscript Collection, University of California, Bancroft Library, Carton 41, Folder 17; on the history of railroad construction workers, see William Deverell, *Railroad Crossing: Californians and the Railroad, 1850-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); John Fahey, *The Inland Empire: Unfolding Years, 1879-1929* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986); Donna Gabaccia, "Constructing North America: Railroad Building and the Rise of Continental Migrations, 1850-1914," in Marc Rodriguez, editor, *Repositioning North American Migration History: New Directions in Modern Continental Migration, Citizenship, and Community* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2004), 27-53; Robbins, *Colony and Empire*, 121-142.

<sup>21</sup> Lauren Wilde Casaday, "Labor Unrest and the Labor Movement in the Salmon Industry of the Pacific Coast" (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of California, 1938) 35.

<sup>22</sup> Casaday, "Labor Unrest and the Labor Movement in the Salmon Industry of the Pacific Coast" 167, 173; Max Stern, "Daily News Man Sails for North on Salmon Ship," *The Daily News*, 27 September 1922.

incoming produce and furlough or layoff employees. Even under the best circumstances, work in the canneries was limited to the peak harvesting months. [See Table 1.1].<sup>23</sup>

As the single largest employer on the Pacific Coast, the agriculture industry played a unique role in the casual labor economy. Although employment in the canneries, railroads, and extractive industries furnished more stability and reliably higher wages, farm labor allowed migrant workers to bridge the gaps between other occupations. In the spring, for example, European immigrants traveled to the Pajaro Valley near San Francisco to thin apple trees. Filipino workers journeyed inland to pick hops in Yakima Valley or grapes near Lodi after a season in the Alaskan canneries. Lumbermen and sawmill workers were known to work the apple harvest in the Columbia Gorge for several weeks before returning to Seattle for the winter. This flexibility was, in part, due to the fact that agricultural jobs drew upon a large workforce over a short period. The immediate demand of apple growers in Washington's Yakima Valley, for example, might require only require 1,000 workers during the middle of September, but 3,500 a month later. Other times of the year, the demand for general laborers was negligible. [See Table 1.1].<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> California Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Twenty Fourth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics* (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1929-1930) 30; on the history of salmon canning, see Casaday, "Labor Unrest and the Labor Movement in the Salmon Industry of the Pacific Coast"; Arthur McEvoy *The Fisherman's Problem: Ecology and Law in the California Fisheries, 1850-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Chris Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor: The Pacific Coast Canned-Salmon Industry, 1870-1942* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Joseph Taylor, *Making Salmon: An Environmental History of the Northwest Fisheries Crisis* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999); and Fujita-Rony, *American Workers, Colonial Power*.

<sup>24</sup> Paul Landis, *Farm Labor in Yakima Valley, Washington* (Pullman: State College of Washington, Agricultural Experiment Station, 1936) 18; on agriculture and agricultural workers, see Cletus Daniel, *Bitter Harvest: A History of California Farmworkers, 1870-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981); Greg Hall, *Harvest Wobblies: The IWW and Agricultural Laborers in the American West, 1905-1930* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2001); Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Fields: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California* (Santa Barbara: Peregrine Smith Inc., 1935); Sucheng Chan, *This Bittersweet Soil: The Chinese in California Agriculture, 1860-1910* (Berkeley: University of California

A fifth industry, construction and the building trades, occupied an equally significant, if distinct position in the casual labor economy. A building boom in Pacific Coast cities throughout the twenties generated tremendous demand for workers in the construction industry. Employing over 250,000 in 1930, the variety of tasks and skills required by the industry varied. The single largest numbers of workers in the industry were employed as carpenters (nearly 71,000), while the general category of laborer also comprised a significant portion of the labor force. Other skilled laborers, such as brickmasons, electricians, plasterers, and plumbers found work in the building trades, totaling less than 30 percent of the industry [See Table 1.2]. Backed by powerful unions, carpenters, painters, and plumbers in Seattle and San Francisco enjoyed a greater degree of security than most in the casual labor economy. Hiring halls operated by employers and unions helped smooth workers' transitions between jobs and limit layoffs. But unions or occupational skill could not protect all construction workers from contingency. Although Pacific Coast building trades workers generally had steady jobs during the interwar period, their work patterns were also highly irregular. Some assignments might last for several weeks or months, but most workers returned to the hiring hall each day to look for a new job. Likewise, the large pool of general laborers lacked the security of a union. These men were more likely to acquire their positions through profit-driven employment agencies. Such jobs were plentiful, but came with much less stability.<sup>25</sup>

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Press, 1986); Matt Garcia, *A World of its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles, 1900-1970* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

<sup>25</sup> Kazin, *Barons of Labor*; Grace Palladino, *Skilled Hands, Strong Spirits: A Century of Building Trades History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); William Haber, *Industrial Relations in the Building Industry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930); Frederick L. Ryan, *Industrial Relations in the San Francisco Building Trades* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1936); Jeffrey W. Riemer, *Hard Hats: The Work World of Construction Workers* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1979).

**Table 1.2 | Construction Industry by Occupational Category, Pacific Coast, 1920 and 1930**

Occupation	1920	1930
Carpenters	51862	71003
Laborers	26535	47975
Painters, construction and maintenance	16150	31310
Managers, officials, and proprietors	12409	26462
Plumbers and pipe fitters	7467	9595
Electricians	2926	7474
Brickmasons, stonemasons, and tile setters	2925	5151
Plasterers	2220	8383
Other Occupations (<2000)	21091	46056
Total	143585	253409

Source: 1% sample, of selected categories in Industry, 1950 basis and Occupation, 1950 basis for California, Oregon, Washington, and Alaska, 1920, 1930. IPUMS.

Port facilities proved a vital source of jobs in the city, many of which were among the most contingent of occupations. By 1930, there were 14,000 longshoremen, 9,300 sailors, and 2,500 general laborers performing unskilled work such as shipscaling along the Pacific Coast. But the maritime industry was far from the only urban employer. For example, in Seattle the public employment agency connected men with a variety of positions near the urban core. In 1923, the office placed 6,298 workers as warehousemen; 2,420 were sent to work as concrete finishers; and 2,345 were dispatched as private household servants. Others found temporary work in restaurants as dishwashers or cooks. Much like the temporary work in agriculture, service industry jobs allowed contingent workers to bridge periods of unemployment or generate additional income while they waited for the next job to materialize. Each year, sixty-seven percent of the agency's placements remained in the downtown Seattle [See Table 1.3]. Warehouse districts along the Embarcadero or near the central train stations in Los

Angeles and Seattle provided work to those willing to subject themselves to the shape-up each morning. Working close to home and rarely traveling outside the metropole, these workers, like those in the construction trades, earned the label the “homeguard.”<sup>26</sup>

**Table 1.3 | Frequently Filled Positions, Men’s Division, Seattle Public Employment Office, 1923**

Occupation	Total	% of Placements
Laborers	9601	23.28%
Warehousemen	6,298	15.27%
Fuel Handlers	3,343	8.11%
Concrete Workers	2,420	5.87%
Housemen	2,345	5.69%
Lumber Millmen	2310	5.60%
Miners	1710	4.15%
Shipyard Laborers	1653	4.01%
Gardeners	1233	2.99%
Helpers (Machinery)	896	2.17%
Farm Hands	895	2.17%
<b>Total Positions Filled</b>	<b>41,329</b>	

Source: Seattle Public Employment Office, *Annual Reports* (Seattle: City of Seattle, 1923), 11-12a, City of Seattle Municipal Archives, Civil Service Commission Collection, 1922-23, Box 2 / Folder 4.

<sup>26</sup> The Los Angeles city council authorized each budgetary appropriation for laborers hired by city offices and each was noted in the minutes. Los Angeles City Archives, City Council Minutes, 1920-1930, Los Angeles, California; for references to homeguard workers, see Nels Anderson, *The Hobo: the Sociology of the Homeless Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1923); William Z. Foster, *Pages From a Worker’s Life* (New York: International Publishers, 1939); Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, *The Rebel Girl: An Autobiography, My First Life (1906-1926)* (New York: International Publishers, 1973).

## The Labor Supply

Despite the Pacific Coast's steady and growing demand for labor during these years, the employment picture for casual laborers could hardly be described as stable. Hiring in the casual labor economy waxed and waned according to the seasons and was particularly susceptible to periods of economic boom and bust. Each year, when the California Division of State Employment Agencies published their annual report, the tables revealed a smooth trendline in labor demand. January and February were slow months with little hiring, but as industry and agriculture picked up steam in March and April, the need for workers increased quickly. By May and June, the state's employment agencies dispatched nearly twice the number of workers as in the winter months. From July to August, hiring surged as the rush to complete building projects competed with the enormous labor demand for harvesting crops. September was consistently the highest month for labor demand, followed by a precipitous drop in November and December, as demand for workers fell by fifty percent [See Figure 1.1]. Even in the leanest years of employment, such as the 1921 depression, the demand for labor followed this well-established pattern.<sup>27</sup>

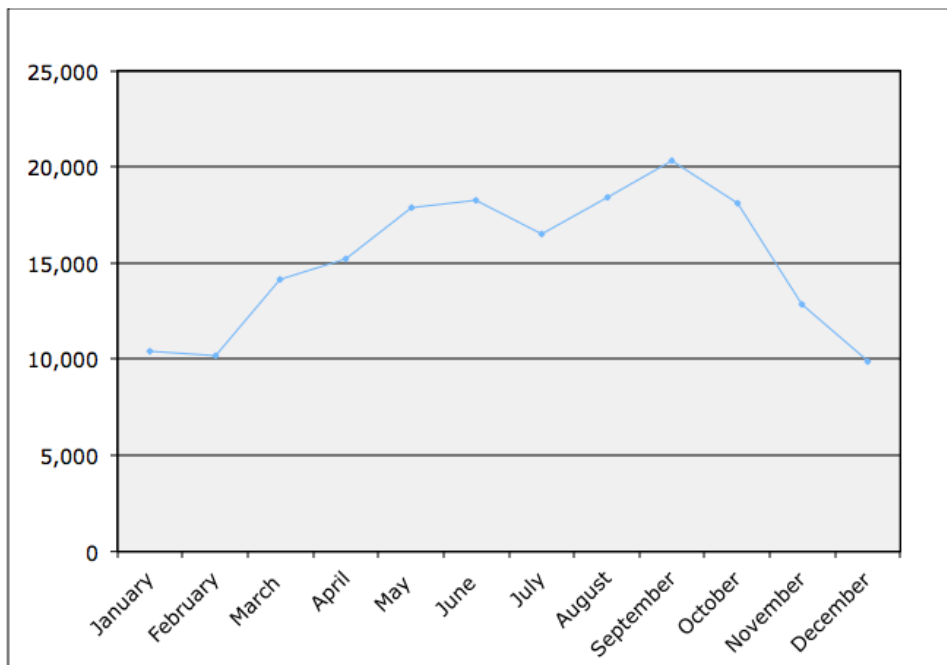
On the ground, the arc of hiring did not appear so smooth for those struggling to maintain consistent employment throughout the year. Contingent positions were, by definition, always unreliable and impermanent. Seasons were short. Stints aboard ships were limited. Labor in the mines and forests was isolating and physically taxing. In the agricultural industry, labor demand could vary drastically from one county or region to the next and by the month or even the week. Individual farms only required a substantial

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<sup>27</sup> Department of Industrial Relations, *Report of the Division of State Employment Agencies* (Los Angeles: Division of State Employment Agencies, 1928) 16.

number of workers for a period of days or weeks during the year. After the harvest was in, laborers were cut loose to find new work. The strong hiring in the spring, summer, and fall left many workers destitute during the winter months. When jobsites closed down in November, large numbers of workers returned to the cities to hope their stake, or savings, would last until the work camps and fields reopened in the spring. The gentle wax and wane of hiring across the region depicted in the government report obscured intense highs and lows.

**Figure 1.1 | Placements made by California Public Employment Agencies, Averaged for 1920-1927**



Calculated from Department of Industrial Relations, *Report of the Division of State Employment Agencies* (Los Angeles: Division of State Employment Agencies, 1928), 9.

By the early 1920s, many had become concerned about the impact of seasonal unemployment. Three years after the end of World War I, the economic picture was grim. As the United States Employment Service (USES) reported in September, 1921

“unemployment and part time exist in practically all lines of industry.” One month later, the federal agency drew a similarly bleak picture in California, particularly for unskilled and transient workers: “Reports from several cities throughout the State show considerable unemployment. Fruit harvest going on, but no demand for help. Building fair in most places. Lumber operating 65 percent... Cities on the main railroad lines continue to report large number of unemployed passing through searching for work.”<sup>28</sup> The *Industrial Worker*, the newspaper of the Industrial Workers of the World, described the situation more starkly: “take a walk into that part of the city known to the stiff as the ‘skid road’ - Great crowds of idle men hang around the curbs, they lean against the wall, they stand in little groups and talk about lord knows what... despair has left a heavy hand on them.”<sup>29</sup>

Workers of color felt these labor market fluctuations most intensely. As the economy struggled to pull out of a postwar depression, these workers continued to feel the pains of unemployment. In May 1921, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that “colored, Chinese, Japanese, and Mexican workers appear to have been particularly hard hit by the labor situation, with their standard of living being forced to new low levels.” In contrast to employment agencies that dealt with “the Caucasian element,” which the newspaper reported had witnessed steady improvement in the spring of 1921, workers at Japanese agencies in Los Angeles were “abundant and becoming clamorous.”<sup>30</sup> Even during good economic times, workers of color were more susceptible to the wild swings in hiring from one year to the next. Railroad construction, salmon fisheries, and agriculture were

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<sup>28</sup> United States Employment Service, *Industrial Employment Service Bulletin*, September 1921, 16; United States Employment Service, *Industrial Employment Service Bulletin*, October 1921, 20.

<sup>29</sup> *Industrial Worker*, May 28, 1921.

<sup>30</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, May 1, 1921, 11

the most affected by cyclical unemployment. These industries were not coincidentally those with the lowest concentration of white workers. Analyzing the employment figures for railroad workers in California and other parts of the Southwest, labor economist Paul Taylor put it bluntly: “Mexicans were obviously the last hired and the first fired.”<sup>31</sup>

The ongoing rounds of hiring and firing were hardly accidental; Pacific Coast employers deliberately cultivated an oversupply. In his investigations of the labor situation in California, economist Carleton Parker found an established pattern of over recruitment on the part of employers. Farmers widely circulated hiring notices throughout the nation, exaggerating their demand and inflating rates of pay. Employers also exploited the destabilized situation in Philippines and Mexico to recruit more workers. Employers went so far as placing newspaper advertisements and employment agency postings in these homelands to paint an overly optimistic and rosy picture of the job situation. Some labor recruiters screened movies to entice workers from their towns and villages. In Parker’s estimation, such promises were “well-nigh impossible to fulfill” and designed to bring more workers into the market to lower wages. The various employer’s associations in the maritime industries, according to one historian, had “developed a conscious policy of flooding the merchant marine with workers from China and the Philippines, unemployed drifters, college boys on vacation or out to see the world, and desperate ‘workaways’ who would sail a ship for no wages at all.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Paul Taylor, “Some Aspects of Mexican Immigration,” *Journal of Political Economy* 38:5 (October 1930) 612.

<sup>32</sup> Parker, *The Casual Laborer*, 179; Bruno Lasker, *Filipino Immigration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931) 61; Bruce Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990) 20.

Cultivating a labor surplus was part of a concerted strategy by employers to draw down pay rates and keep a lid on dissent. Industrialists had chafed under the labor militancy of the war years. In many sectors of the casual labor economy, workers had leveraged the demand for labor to secure union recognition and pay raises. At the war's end, however, the return of veterans to the Pacific Coast and continued flow of new migrant labor shifted the fulcrum of leverage back onto the side of the employer. In the fall of 1920, Los Angeles shipyard owners went on the offensive, cutting pay across the industry, citing an "oversupply of workers."<sup>33</sup> Although the poor health of the ship building industry after the war was well known in the Pacific Coast cities, especially by the workers, the announcement was sudden and alarming. In Seattle and San Francisco, employers used the new ratio of jobs to men to dismantle union hiring halls and prevailing wage scales, and return to the open hiring policies of the 1910s. Sawmill and timber workers witnessed a similar reassertion of employer control, as independent unions were replaced by company unions and agricultural workers helplessly watched their wages fall. Throughout the casual labor economy, employers pursued an agenda that affirmed the notion of "freedom of contract," which essentially allowed them to hire, fire, and manage their workforce as they saw fit.<sup>34</sup>

Profit-driven employment agencies had their own incentive to saturate the labor market. Generating all their income from the placement of workers, labor agents sought to maximize their earnings. Each year, workers filed hundreds of complaints with the

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<sup>33</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, November 14, 1920, p113.

<sup>34</sup> See Louis Perry and Richard Perry, *A History of the Los Angeles Labor Movement, 1911-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963); Ronald Magden, *A History of Seattle Waterfront Workers, 1884-1934* (Seattle: International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union 19 of the Washington Commission for Humanities, 1991) 189.

California State Labor Commissioner, alleging the abuses of for-profit agencies. A State of California investigation found widespread corruption designed to generate fees and promote turnover. Investigators observed postings on agency walls that embellished or misrepresented the duration, kind of work, and location to entice applicants. Other abuses included the inflation of pay rates, misrepresentation of fees, and dispatching workers to jobsites without actual need for work. A national survey from *The American Labor Legislation Review* in 1928 compounded those findings. Writing for the *Review*, John Andrews noted the “deliberate encouragement of labor turnover, collusion with gang-bosses and superintendents, or providing unsuitable jobs” among profit-driven agencies. The most systematic form of corruption was known as “fee-splitting,” whereby foremen and labor agents colluded to create a constant churning wheel of applications. Employers forced workers to return to the labor agent for a new appointment through routine layoffs, rotating furloughs, or requiring short contracts. In turn, agents provided a kickback to their conspiring foremen. In the 1910s, loggers derisively referred to this situation as “the system of perpetual motion.”<sup>35</sup>

Employers had a difficult time in flooding the general labor market, but they did instill a sense of contingency and oversupply among many. When Frank Robinson arrived in San Francisco as a young man in the winter of 1922, he was shocked to find

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<sup>35</sup> On the abuses of for-profit employment agencies after World War I, see Louis Bloch, “Employment Agencies in California,” *American Labor Legislation Review* 19 (1929) 363-366; Margery Loeb, “Abuses Practiced by Private Employment Agencies,” *The American Labor Legislation Review* 13 (1923) 248-249. *The American Labor Legislation Review* published a series of articles on these exploitative practices in the March, 1930 edition (Volume XX, No. 1). On the practice of fee-splitting in particular, see George Trafton, “Employment Agencies Officially Exposed,” *The American Labor Legislation Review* March, 1930, 27-35. Earlier references to the system of perpetual motion, appear in the Testimony of William D. Haywood before Industrial Relations Commission, *Senate Documents*, vol. XX, Mo. 415, Washington 1916, vol. XIII, 10573; Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, *I Speak My Own Piece: Autobiography of “The Rebel Girl”* (New York: Masses and Mainstream) 95-96; Philip Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World, 1905-1917* (New York: International Publishers, 1976); Robert Tyler, *Rebels of the Woods: The IWW in the Pacific Northwest* (Eugene: University of Oregon Books, 1967) 34.

“scores of people” gathered outside the Murray and Ready employment agency on Market Street, intently watching the job postings go up into the window.<sup>36</sup> A similar scene existed at the American Legion’s Employment Bureau in the center of the laborer’s geography in Los Angeles. Pressed inside the office each day, men vied for a handful of positions at the counter, while others in the back of the room crowded over the top, raising their hands in expectation. The jobs board could not possibly meet the needs of all the men gathered to locate work. In the spring and summer, the office placed more than 1,500 individuals, most of which were temporary. Many more were turned away for lack of work. [See Figure 1.2]<sup>37</sup>

**Figure 1.2 | “A crowd of Ex-service men seeking jobs at the American Legion’s Employment Bureau, 321 South Main Street.”**



Source: *Los Angeles Times*, June 12, 1921

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<sup>36</sup> Frank Bruce Robinson, *The Strange Autobiography of Frank B. Robinson: Founder of “Psychiana”, Moscow, Idaho* (Psychiana, 1941).

<sup>37</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, “Gets Work For Many Veterans” Jan 9, 1922; “The Legion in California” *The American Legion Monthly* (May, 1921) 6.

## **Strategic Mobility**

The intricacies and inconsistencies of the labor supply, provided workers an opportunity to develop their own methods to exploit the expansive landscape. Whether they moved through the interstate network of farm labor, or simply shifted frequently between jobsites in a single city, casual laborers utilized mobility to their advantage. The work history of John McCloskey illustrates the kind of hypermobility of life as a casual laborer. Born in Illinois in 1893, he moved with his family to a small town north of Seattle at an early age. Frustrated by the prospects of his small town, he ran away from home at the age of 13, working aboard a steamer ship bound for California. On shore leave in San Francisco, he was “taken in by the sights of the big city,” missed his boat, and found employment in a restaurant. The duration of his stay in the Bay Area or how he eventually found work as a longshoreman is unclear. He returned to the Puget Sound several years later, with vague mention of some interim work in San Diego’s service industry. He worked in sawmills, aboard a lumber schooner, and shingle factories near Everett and Vancouver, British Columbia. He settled in Seattle for a short time, got married, and worked on the docks until the General Strike of 1919, though he offered no details about these experiences. Following two marriages and two divorces, he told the aid official, “since then, I have been knocking around Washington working here and there at odd jobs.”[See Figure 1.3].<sup>38</sup>

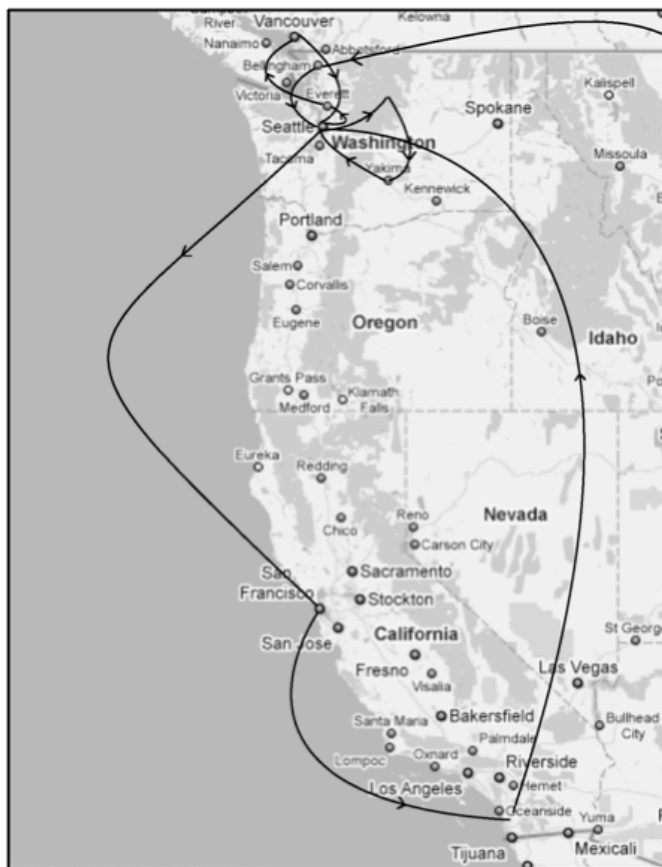
McCloskey’s employment history seems to encompass every form of casual work. He labored as a sailor and longshoreman from Seattle to San Diego, found work as a porter and busboy in hotels in San Francisco, and cut shingle bolts and cordwood in the

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<sup>38</sup> John Webb, *The Migratory-Casual Worker* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1937) 91-2.

timber fields north of Seattle. In the High Cascades, he blasted tunnels for the railroad and harvested apples and picked hops in eastern Washington. For more than two decades before the Great Depression, McCloskey strung together employment in nearly every occupation available to a wageworker along the Pacific Coast. He fluidly navigated travel between the urban metropole and jobsites in the hinterland. Recording his work history for a federal study, McCloskey wrote, “stayed awhile [in California]. Struck out for Seattle. Got job as flunky in logging camp. Never stayed long in one place. Get a few dollars, go to Seattle, go broke – then go back and work some more. After a while I

**Figure 1.3 | John McCloskey’s Labor Migrations, 1910-1932**



Derived from: John Webb, *The Migratory-Casual Worker* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1937) 91-2.

would get sick. Go home. Stay a short time. Gone again.” Throughout the late 1910s and 1920s, he claimed to have only worked 4 months out of each year.<sup>39</sup>

The routes of McCloskey’s migration suggest the strenuous demands of the capitalist economy as well as the calculated and coordinated movements of these workers. In work crews or individually, some casual laborers traveled a circuit of migration that often extended north to the salmon canneries around Ketchikan, Alaska and south to the agricultural fields of California’s Imperial Valley or west to work on rail lines in Montana. Likewise, it was common for casual migratory workers to string together four or five different jobs in one year. Takeji Minegishi, a Japanese immigrant who came to Seattle in 1919, described these patterns of movement: “For a period I worked in a cannery where there was a group of migratory birds who in summertime worked there, and when they left Alaska they did apple picking at Hood River, and after that they went to pick grapes at Lodi, California. They worked all year that way.”<sup>40</sup> In Los Angeles County, the seasonal hiring of agricultural laborers followed such a consistent pattern, it prompted one observer to note that workers “are like swallows at the old mission. They come and go about the same time every year.”<sup>41</sup>

Given the premium employers and workers placed on fluidity and mobility between jobs, casual industries carried a remarkably high rate of turnover. In his work for the California Commission of Immigration and Housing, Carleton Parker described the ephemeral nature of these occupations. According to Parker, in the most transient

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Takeji Minegishi, in Ito, *Issei*, 399.

<sup>41</sup> Francis Cahn and Valeska Bary, *Welfare Activity of Federal, State, and Local Governments in California* (Berkeley: The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1936), Quoted in Douglas Monroy, “Like Swallows at the Old Mission: Mexicans and the Racial Politics of Growth in Los Angeles in the Interwar Period,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 14:4 (October, 1983) 453.

industries, such as harvesting and orchard work, men only remained in one position for an average of seven to ten days. The duration for laborers on construction project tended to last a bit longer for ten or more days. In more stable work environments such as canneries, employees held positions for as many as thirty days, but typically no more than sixty days.<sup>42</sup> Meanwhile, agencies like Murray and Ready Inc., one of San Francisco's oldest and largest profit-driven employment agencies, reported that the average worker rarely labored for more than two and half days in any one job.<sup>43</sup> Employers bristled at this continuous movement of their labor pool. In order to maintain a full crew of 138 men, the manager of a sawmill in Washington State complained that he had to hire at least 100 extra men on a rolling basis. Testifying before a commission on industrial relations in Washington State, he detailed a system of hiring that was commonplace around the Pacific Coast:

The company works regular hours and is very seldom shut down. The personnel, however, of the employees is continuously changing. It is generally understood that the Grays Harbor Commercial company keeps three crews in motion – one coming to work, the crew which is actually engaged in work, and the crew leaving the works whose places they have just taken.<sup>44</sup>

The typical worker, he claimed, was never employed for more than thirty days. Some worked at the mill for as few as three to six days at a time, before collecting their paycheck and returning to the city. Labor economists and social investigators were often confused by casual workers preference for shorts jobs, only accepting positions of a few

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<sup>42</sup> Carleton Parker, "The California Casual and His Revolt," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 30 (1915) 122.

<sup>43</sup> Nylander, "The Casual Laborer in California," 27.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in John Herbert Geoghegan, "The Migratory Worker in Seattle: a Study in Social Disorganization and Exploitation," (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Washington, 1923) 32.

days and refusing work that required a long-term commitment. Employers found it to be an annoying disruption to the productivity of their operation.

In this respect, the observation of social investigators and employers about the “unreliability” of this workforce failed to comprehend how individuals used mobility to improve their situation.<sup>45</sup> In their own descriptions, men boasted about sporadic and ephemeral work patterns. As Takeji Minegishi explained, he had “saved quite a lot of money” by shifting frequently between jobs, minimizing periods of unemployment, and maximizing his income.<sup>46</sup> Returning to Seattle from a stint in the Alaskan canneries, Honorato Rapada summarized his strategy for locating a new job: “well, we go look again for job. Stick around down in hotel and then look another job... well, oh, maybe two-three weeks, then we go down Yakima picking apple. We go all over look for job. After picking apple we gonna look another job.”<sup>47</sup> They built relationships with their employers, returning to the same site each year for more work. According to one orchardist in Wenatchee, Washington, a handful of his labor force was always new, but estimated just as many “have swung around a wide circle of scenes and occupations and climes so many times that they have completely lost count.”<sup>48</sup>

Hypermobility allowed casual laborers to squeeze the largest economic return from a market centered on low wages, thus blunting the sharpest effects of this difficult labor market. Migratory laborers coordinated their travels to coincide with

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<sup>45</sup> Nylander, “The Casual Laborer of California,” 32; and Parker, *Casual Laborer and Other Essays*, 79.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Takeji Minegishi, in Ito, *Issei*, 399.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Honorato Rapada, Fil-Kng75-11ck, May, 24 1975, Washington State Oral/Aural History Program, Washington State Archives, Olympia, Washington, 12.

<sup>48</sup> Webb, *The Migratory-Casual Worker*, 18.

the height of the season in agriculture and other industries, when their labor was most valuable. Paid by the volume picked, in the words of one worker, “when the cream had been taken off” there was little reason to stay on for the remaining harvest. Unless growers offered significant bonuses or incentives to remain through a long contract, pickers often moved on. Workers in the construction or maritime trades maintained membership in multiple labor unions to capitalize upon labor differentials. On the waterfront, for example, some workers did equal time as sailors or longshoremen, depending upon rates of pay and the traffic in the port.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, carpenters, metal workers, and brickmasons took advantage of union rules that allowed workers to transfer their union card to other localities to avoid the boom and bust of building cycles. The voluntary turnover on the job was not the result of an unreliable workforce, but rather underscored a desire for better jobs and frustration with poor working conditions. Mobility became a way for workers to vote with their feet.<sup>50</sup>

Workers’ strategy of mobility coupled with employers’ desire for a flexible labor force translated into higher earnings. During World War I, the Seattle Chamber of Commerce noted a general “condition of restlessness” among workers, who recognized that the competition for labor led to advancing wage scales. “Men followed that rising scale,” the Chamber of Commerce observed, “producing the disturbing question of labor turnover.”<sup>51</sup> In San Francisco, skilled workers found

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with Henry Schmidt, by Estolv Ethan Ward, *Secondary Leadership in the ILWU, 1933-1966* (Berkeley: Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, 1983).

<sup>50</sup> Bruno Lasker, *Filipino Immigration to Continental United States and to Hawaii* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931) 70.

<sup>51</sup> The Chamber of Commerce official is quoted in Dana Frank, *Purchasing Power: Consumer Organizing, Gender, and the Seattle Labor Movement, 1919-1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 23.

they could “shop around” for better jobs, pay, and conditions, as unemployment became nearly non-existent.” Wage reports collected by the federal government in 1930 suggest the premium offered to workers along the Pacific Coast. In 1930, the average farm laborer in the earned \$88.00 per month (without board), the highest in the nation. Comparable positions in Illinois paid just \$49.25, while farmworkers in Pennsylvania received \$54.25. Laborers in the timber industry in 1930 earned an hourly wage of 47 cents per hour in Washington and 43 cents per hour in California, but just 32 cents in Michigan and 18 cents in North Carolina. On the docks, longshoremen in San Francisco could expect to earn 90 cents per hour, while their fellow workers in Baltimore and New Orleans earned only 85 and 80 cents respectively.<sup>52</sup>

The transmigrations of workers also facilitated a desire among some workers for occupational independence and a general sense of “wanderlust.” As one individual in San Francisco recalled, “[o]h I just got tired of plugging along at the same old stand, doing the same thing day after day, with nothing to show for it at the end of the month. So I thought if I was going to live and get nowhere, I’d at least get the satisfaction out of life—so here I am on the road.”<sup>53</sup> Another man explained that he had no desire for “a house and lot” and disdained the idea of “doing the average thing.” “With each experience,” he maintained, “the fascination of fruit tramping increases, for it includes travel, change, new scenes, fresh faces too, and good money.” In his study of the migratory-casual laborer, John Webb rationalized the constant motion of workers through

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<sup>52</sup> Wage comparisons are available in White, *It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own.*, 279; Michael Kazin, *Barons of Labor: the San Francisco Building Trades and Union Power in the Progressive Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989) 236.

<sup>53</sup> Nylander, “The Casual Laborer of California,” 24.

psychology. This sector of the working class, he suggested, had “the constant urge to be on the move” and tended “to treat employment as a means of gratifying this urge” for “real or fancified independence.”<sup>54</sup> While the explanations of Webb and as his interlocutors were most likely overstated, workers themselves often described their own travels in these terms.<sup>55</sup>

### **The Distinct Demography of the Contingent Worker Economy**

The work histories of men like John McCloskey and Kakichi Tsuboi yield insight about not only the rhythms of contingent capitalism, but also the employer’s demand for workers of a distinct demographic. As single young men, the details of their lives converged at many points. In addition to gender and age, like the majority of their fellow casual laborers, they were new to the Pacific Coast and shared the common experience of migration. But the casual labor economy also generated powerful points of divergence as well. While McCloskey could move fluidly between a variety of lucrative positions, Tsuboi would have encountered roadblocks. Notions about racial difference had a very real effect on the organization and structure of the casual labor economy in the early twentieth century.

Men dominated nearly every sector, with several notable exceptions. The Pacific Coast featured the highest sex ratio in the United States in early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a pattern rooted in a history of colonialism and settlement. Although this gap slowly closed

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<sup>54</sup> Webb, *The Migratory-Casual Worker*, 23; for additional statements about the urge to move and the locomotion of casual workers, see Anderson, *The Hobo*; and Robert Park, “The Mind of the Hobo: Reflections Upon the Relation Between Mentality and Locomotion,” in Robert Park and Ernest Burgess, *The City: Suggestions for Investigation of Human Behavior in the Urban Environment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925).

<sup>55</sup> Webb, *The Migratory-Casual Worker*, 19; cited from P.W. Whitaker, “Fruit Tramps,” *Century Magazine*, March 1929.

between 1920 and 1930, men still outnumbered women by a rate of about 115 to 100 in 1930.<sup>56</sup> While men constituted about 54 percent of the general population, they comprised more than 80 percent of those active in the labor force generally and 92 percent of all casual workers. Among general laborers, 97 percent of the workforce was male in 1920 and 1930. In a variety of other occupations, men comprised more than 95 percent of miners, timber workers, and sailors. The ranks of teamsters, stevedores, building trades workers, and general laborers remained entirely comprised of men at rates of nearly 100 percent. The vast majority of those hired out by employment agencies were also men. From 1920 to 1930, 84 percent of the workers hired out from the public employment agency in Seattle were male.<sup>57</sup> San Francisco and Los Angeles experienced a similar demographic, where 75 to 78 percent of the positions filled by the public employment agency went to men.<sup>58</sup>

Women occupied a parallel world of contingent employment. In agriculture, women's employment often filled the gaps in the largely male workforce during the highest peak of the harvest season in agricultural. Women commonly filled the fruit and vegetable packing sheds in large crews. In such instances, employer's often separated women from itinerant men in the fields and factory floors and separate rules often governed the work of women and men.<sup>59</sup> The number of women employed in temporary

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<sup>56</sup> Frank Hobbs and Nicole Stoops, U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Special Reports, Series CENSR-4, *Demographic Trends in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2002) 63-64.

<sup>57</sup> Seattle Public Employment Office, *Annual Reports* (Seattle: City of Seattle, 1923), 11-12a; City of Seattle Municipal Archives, Civil Service Commission Collection, 1922-23, Box 2 / Folder 4.

<sup>58</sup> State of California, *Report of the Division of State Employment Agencies*, 1930, 39-44.

<sup>59</sup> Selected occupations, 1950 basis, by sex for 1920 and 1930, *IPUMS*; on the male world of western labor see, Peter Boag, *Same Sex Affairs: Constructing and Controlling Homosexuality in the Pacific Northwest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), Susan Johnson, "Domestic Life in the Diggings: The Southern Mines oin the California Gold Rush," in *Over the Edge: Remapping the American West*, ed.

jobs in the metropole was not insignificant. In Los Angeles, 12,000 to 14,000 women found work through the public employment office.<sup>60</sup> The records of the public employment service offer evidence of a parallel economy for women. Many of the placements for the women's division were made for short term positions in domestic service, restaurant work, or secretarial work. Many service occupations, for example, remained open to women, where men only made up 78 percent of cooks, 43 percent of waiters, and 21 percent of private household workers in 1920s.<sup>61</sup> Much like the jobs in the hinterland, however, the casual employment of men and women remained largely segregated. Profit-driven agencies rarely catered to both sexes, and most specialized and advertised to either men or women. In Seattle, distance reinforced the distinctiveness of the markets for male and female labor in the casual labor economy. The women's division of the municipal employment agency operated in an entirely separate office several blocks away from the men's division beyond the day labor district. In California, the state employment service also offered separate services, with different directors, staff, and statistical records.<sup>62</sup>

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Valerie Matsumoto and Blake Allmendinger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) pp. 107-32; Gunther Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor*. Given the short nature of their work season, census takers rarely enumerated women's seasonal labor in canneries or farms. On women in the canneries and fields of the Pacific Coast, see Vicki Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican American Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987); Carol McKibben, *Beyond Cannery Row: Sicilian Women, Immigration, and Community in Monterey, California, 1915-1999* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Patricia Zavella, *Women's Work and Chicano Families: Cannery Workers of the Santa Clara Valley* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> 1% sample of selected occupations, 1950 basis, sorted by sex, 1920 and 1930, IPUMS.

<sup>62</sup> A sizable literature addresses the distinct, though connected, social and economic aspects of women who performed casual labor. On female domestic service, see Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*; Margaret Jacobs, "Working on the Domestic Frontier: American Indian Domestic Servants in White Womens' Households in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1920-1940," *Frontiers* 2007 (1-2): 165-199; Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Issei, Nissei, Warbride: Three Generations of Japanses American Women in Domestic Service* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Gendered Transitions: Mexican*

Reinforcing the sexual division of these occupations, men were most often single and lacked dependents. Across all the occupations, 61 percent of men had either never married, lived apart from their spouse, or were widowed or divorced in 1920. This figure was the mirror opposite of the rest of the economy, where more than 60 percent of working men were married. Some casual industries were notorious for their high concentration of bachelors. In 1920, 70 to 90 percent of all sailors, miners, and lumbermen on the Pacific Coast were single. Farm laborers and other general laborers were most likely to live as single men - between 64 to 73 percent. The marital status of men employed in casual occupations in the city was more mixed. In certain skilled industries that relied upon casual workers, men were more likely to establish relationships that were more permanent. Carpenters, painters, and plumbers bucked the trend among most casual workers, as 60 to 80 percent of all workers in the building trades lived with their spouse. Other urban workers, such as longshoremen, waiters, and private household workers, were more likely to live without a spouse.<sup>63</sup> Away from the city, a survey of tramp workers in California's agricultural fields conducted by the California Commission of Immigration and Housing confirmed this pattern. In the mid

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*Experiences of Immigration*; Elizabeth Clark Lewis, *Living In, Living Out: African-American Domestic Workers in Washington, D.C., 1900-1940*; Maurine Weiner, "From Hired Hand to Day Worker: Household Labor in the United States, 1800-1920," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 1985 (27): 60-71; on women service workers, see Dorothy Sue Cobble, *Dishing it Out: Waitresses and Their Unions in the Twentieth Century*; On the emergence of female office workers, see Ileen Devault, *Sons and Daughters of Labor: Class and Clerical Work in Turn-of-the-Century Pittsburgh*; Stephen Norwood, *Labor's Flaming Youth: Telephone Operators and Worker Militancy, 1878-1923*; Lisa Fine, *The Souls of the Skyscraper: Female Clerical Workers in Chicago*; Sharon Hartman Strom, *Beyond the Typewriter: Gender, Class, and the Origins of Modern American Office Work*.

<sup>63</sup> 1% sample, IPUMS.

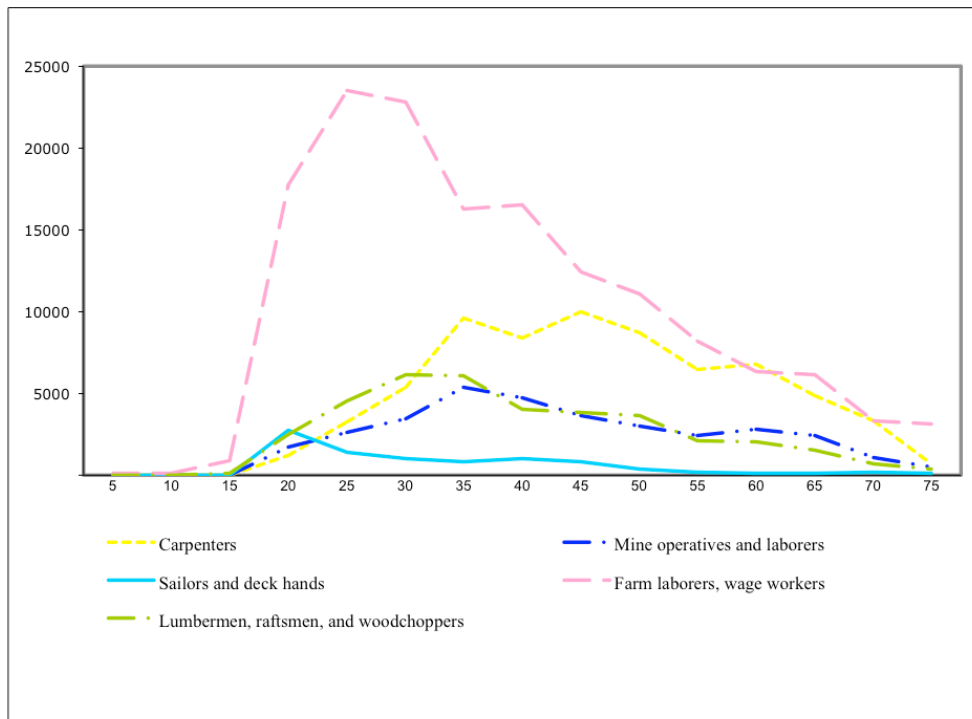
1910s, the Commission found that 76 percent of workers were unmarried. Purportedly, another 7 percent had abandoned their wives in search of work.<sup>64</sup>

Workers in the casual labor economy were also young. Across all occupations, laborers entered the casual labor economy at an early age, between 15 and 20. At the age of 35, men began to transition out of these casual occupations, presumably in search of more steady positions. In the most physically taxing and transient positions, such as farm labor, maritime work, and lumbering, the average worker tended to enter and exit the labor force at a younger age. While the average age for male workers in all occupations in the Pacific Coast hovered around 40, the average for sailors was 30 and among farm laborers was 36. Similarly, the number of workers in farm labor peaked at the age of 25, declining sharply after the age of 30. Less physically demanding positions, which privileged technical knowledge over strength, accommodated an older workforce. In sharp contrast to the youthfulness of sailors and farm hands, the average age among carpenters was about 45 [See Figure 1.4].

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<sup>64</sup> Parker, *Casual Laborer and Other Essays*, 72.

**Figure 1.4 | Age Distribution of Casual Workers in Selected Industries, Pacific Coast States, 1920**



Source: 1% sample, of selected categories in Industry, 1950 basis and Occupation, 1950 basis for California, Oregon, Washington, and Alaska, 1920, IPUMS.

### Newcomers and Natives

In addition to being young, male, and unattached, the preponderance of workers engaged in contingent work were part of a massive national and transnational migration to the Pacific Coast during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. From its inception, the development of industrial capitalism in the region had faced a peculiar problem; abundant in raw materials, the Pacific Coast was starved for workers. Migration had been the solution. In 1920, 80 percent of the casual labor force had been born outside the region and came to the Pacific Coast through some form of migration. Only 35 percent of workers had been born in the United States. These statistics held firm over the course of the decade. [See Table 1.4].

**Table 1.4 | Casual Workers in Pacific Coast States by Birthplace**

Birthplace	1920	1930
Pacific West	136424	213817
Mountain West	16038	37370
Northern Midwest	162580	185739
Southern Midwest	28462	99889
Middle Atlantic	28149	54843
South Atlantic	12818	14241
New England	9887	11211
Mexico	32700	76558
Canada	14425	15049
Japan	29369	22119
China	11606	6565
Southern Europe	58720	55247
Western Europe	26041	14645
Scandinavia	47123	49995
United Kingdom	28952	29694

Source: 1% sample, of selected categories in Industry, 1950 basis and Occupation, 1950 basis for California, Oregon, Washington, and Alaska, 1920, 1930. IPUMS.

As the opportunity for employment grew along the Pacific Coast, workers followed the lines of capitalist expansion from the vast inland territories of the United States and its periphery of influence in the Pacific and Latin America. From 1920 to 1930, the total population of Pacific Coast states - California, Oregon, Washington, and Alaska – grew substantially from 5,610,000 to 8,161,000. While natural population increases explain part of this growth, most came from internal and international migrations during the decade. In cities, the preponderance of newcomers to the region was even greater. In 1920, 80 percent of Los Angeles’s resident had been born outside of

the state of California, the highest in the nation. With 77 percent of its population born outside Washington, Seattle ranked second. San Francisco, the oldest, most established, and stable metropolitan area in the region, ranked eleventh in the country, with 50 percent of city residents born elsewhere.<sup>65</sup>

The growing demand for new workers drew upon two major streams of migration – one internal, the other global. Internal migration within the United States brought the largest number of jobseekers to the Pacific Coast during the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The most pronounced of these migrant streams originated in the states of the Northern Midwest. In 1920, more than 162,000 or nearly one quarter of those employed in the casual labor economy had come from the region around the Great Lakes and the Northern Plains. The number of casual workers from this region was so great, they outnumbered those native to the Pacific Coast. Workers from the Northern Midwest were joined by significant populations from elsewhere in the United States, including 28,000 from the Southern Midwest and the Middle Atlantic, and 16,000 from the Mountain West [See Table 1.4]. When he visited the labor camps and fields of Northern California and Washington, Carleton Parker observed this demographic trend. Studying the politics and radicalism of the casual laborer, Parker found what he considered an entirely new type of worker in Pacific Coast. The Midwest “construction work hobo,” he suggested, “added to the locals casuals a new element” as workers had abandoned their native region due to shrinking employment on the railways and other industries.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Abstract of the Fourteenth Census of the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1923) 83.

<sup>66</sup> Parker, *The Casual Laborer and Other Essays*, 70.

Alongside those who moved across the United States, a parallel flow of global migration swelled the ranks of the working class. In 1920, the casual labor economy employed more than 275,000 foreign-born workers. The majority of them came from the countries of Europe. Men like Gustav Simonson, a Norwegian immigrant, worked their way across the country to the Pacific Coast from Europe. Simonson came to United States from Norway in 1923 with the intent of living and working in Alaska. He entered in New York City, worked as a deckhand in Minnesota, and pooled his income with friends in order to purchase car and drive west. After some harvesting work in North Dakota, as well as odd jobs around Spokane and Idaho, he came to Seattle. Moving about the Puget Sound, he recalled, “there were Norwegians wherever you went. I don’t know if you smelled them or what, but you always ran into them and you had an affinity for looking up another Norwegian.” Feeling at home in the Puget Sound, he supplemented his jobs in heavy construction with episodic employment on the halibut boats that fished the waters of Alaska.<sup>67</sup>

Scandinavians were not the only Europeans attracted to the Pacific Coast. A large population of Germans came for employment in the logging camps and mines. Workers from Slavic Europe entered agricultural work in California’s growing fruit industry. Italians and Greeks flocked to California for work in the fisheries, as general laborers, and service industry workers. Working as a logger in the timber fields of the North Cascades when he was young man, Alfred Moltke, himself of German descent, remembered that many of his coworkers spoke with thick European accents. Along with many French Canadians, the Finns and Swedes “swore like troopers,” wrote Moltke in

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<sup>67</sup> Interview with Gustav Simonson, in Janet Rasmussen, *New Land, New Lives: Scandinavian Immigrants to the Pacific Northwest* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993) 150.

his memoir of logging in Washington. Many of them, in his words, had “moved west when the East was cut out.”<sup>68</sup>

In addition to the large population of ethnic whites that entered the casual labor economy during the early decades of the twentieth century, a significant and growing number of workers of color came to the region through well-worn networks of labor migration. With the promise of good wages, opportunity, and wealth, labor contractors, padrones, and boosters lured thousands across the Pacific and up from Latin America. Conveniently located at the terminus of continental railways and the Great Circle Route from Asia, as well as two national borders, the region was well situated to source foreign workers. A somewhat porous border further enabled labor contractors to move migrants across national lines and into the factories and fields of the Pacific Coast.<sup>69</sup>

Throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the shifting ground of immigration laws constricted employers’ access to some sources of casual labor, prompting them to look for new avenues to recruit workers. Beginning in the late nineteenth century and continuing up to 1924, a series of federal immigration acts closed off several pools of low wage casual workers. With passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, the United States Congress effectively barred the immigration of all Chinese workers, who had until that point been an essential component to the canneries, mines, and railroads. Similarly, the Gentleman’s Agreement of 1907 ended several decades of large-scale labor migration

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<sup>68</sup> 1% sample of select occupations, sorted according to birthplace, 1920 and 1930, *IPUMS*; Moltke, *Memoirs of a Logger*, 212.

<sup>69</sup> On immigration to the Pacific Coast during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, see Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990); George Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); David Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican American, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Camille Guerin Gonzales, *Mexican Workers and American Dreams: Immigration, Repatriation, and California Farm Labor, 1900-1939* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

from Japan into agricultural and cannery work. Finally, a new system of immigration quotas based on national origin established in 1921, but revised and made permanent in 1924, further redrew the lines of labor migration to the Pacific Coast.<sup>70</sup>

These changes to immigration laws substantially altered the demographics of the casual labor economy from 1920 to 1930. In 1920, European immigrants comprised one-third of the casual workforce in the region. Ten years later, the economy had added more than 250,000 new jobs but the proportion of foreign-born white workers in casual positions had declined to barely one-fifth of the workforce. The same was true of Asian workers in the casual labor economy. For several decades, Chinese and Japanese workers had been a consistent source of labor, particularly in key industries such as agriculture, fisheries, and railroad maintenance. In 1920, men from these two nations represented more than six percent of the casual workforce. By 1930, the proportion had declined to just three percent. Despite a tremendous increase in the size of the casual labor force over the course of the decade, the population of Japanese and Chinese workers in these occupations declined from 43,000 in 1920 to little more than 31,000 in 1930 [See Tables 1.5 and 1.6]. Although these numbers likely understate the number of Japanese and Chinese nationals working in the region, particularly in more mobile

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<sup>70</sup> On the shifting ground of immigration law during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, see John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988) and Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*; on the restriction of Chinese immigration, see Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), and Moon Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); on the restriction of Japanese immigration, see Roger Daniels, *The Politics of Prejudice: The Anti-Japanese Movement in California and the Struggle for Japanese Exclusion* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999) and Bill Ong Hing, *Making and Remaking Asian America Through Immigration Policy, 1840-1990* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); on the intersection of immigration law and labor in the United States, see Amy Fairchild, *Science at the Borders: Immigrant Medical Inspection and the Shaping of the Modern Industrial Labor Force* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

industries, the downward trend is clear. Although some foreign workers continued to move unsanctioned across a somewhat porous border, immigration restrictions fundamentally reshaped the demographics of the casual workforce.<sup>71</sup>

Faced with an expanding economy and shrinking access to historically significant pools of labor, employers predicted a substantial labor shortage in the casual labor economy. Editorials in the *Los Angeles Times* warned readers of starvation and famine if farmers were not able to find new workers. In an article entitled “Farm Workers Or Famine,” the *Times* reported that farmers were “facing a labor shortage that is rapidly becoming desperate” and predicted food shortages like those in post-revolutionary Russia. Other headlines across the front page called for the reintroduction of the “coolie trade” and the end of quota restrictions on Asian and European workers.<sup>72</sup> Such concerns spread well beyond the agricultural industry. In 1923, the Associated General Contractors of America issued a report that drew an explicit connection between immigration restrictions, labor shortages, and rising construction costs. If building activities on the Pacific Coast continued at a constant rate, argued statistician Milan Ayres, the industry would soon fall short of the number of workers needed to complete the proliferation of projects in the West. Contractors would have to abandon building projects, the report warned, and the region’s recent economic prosperity would grind to a halt for want of general laborers and skilled immigrants.<sup>73</sup> In the same year, the National Association of

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<sup>71</sup> On unsanctioned and illegal entry in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, see Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882–1943* (Chapel Hill, 2003), esp. 151–87; Patrick Ettinger, “Imaginary Lines: Border Enforcement and the Origins of Undocumented Immigration, 1882–1930” (PhD dissertation, Indiana University, 2000); Adam McKeown, “Ritualization of Regulation: The Enforcement of Chinese Exclusion in the United States and China,” *American Historical Review* 108(2) April 2003.

<sup>72</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, June 9, 1920, II4; *Los Angeles Times*, March 14, 1920, III.

<sup>73</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, January 21, 1923, V17.

Manufacturers deemed new quotas on immigration “an arbitrary, unscientific, and inflexible limitation.”<sup>74</sup> Along with agricultural employers, the construction and manufacturing trades called for greater flexibility, immigration law exemptions, and special exceptions in the event of labor shortages.

Pacific Coast employers soon looked to Mexico to resolve the gap between their insatiable demand and limited supply of low-wage laborers. Western employers were well aware of the potential labor pool in Mexico given their experience filling wartime jobs with workers from across the border. During World War I, rising labor demand and requests from business owners and growers led the government to loosen the rules governing emigration from Mexico. To encourage the flow of workers into the United States, the U.S. Department of Labor eliminated the eight-dollar head tax and discontinued the practice of literacy testing. Border officials also abandoned invasive medical inspections and visa restrictions due to wartime labor demand. In order to safeguard their access to cheap workers from Latin America, Western employers pushed Congress to permanently codify these new exceptions for the Western Hemisphere after the war. Employers’ associations from California and elsewhere took full advantage of the more liberal rules regarding emigration from Mexico and Latin America. Groups like

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<sup>74</sup> Arthur Crawford, *Los Angeles Times*, June 14, 1925, 1.

**Table 1.5 | Male Casual Occupations by Ethnicity, Pacific Coast States, 1920**

Casual Occupations, 1920	White, US Born	White, Foreign Born	Latin American	Black	Native	Chinese	Japanese	Filipino	Total
General Laborers	115549	80400	19173	5445	604	5346	10092	1515	241351
Construction	12514	9481	2725	907	101		404	303	26435
Sawmills	21699	11911	202	303			6867	101	41083
Ship and Boat Building	9081	6356	1212	303			101	606	17659
Railroad Construction	8886	13311	5043	807		100	1308	101	29556
Other Laborer Occupations	65489	39442	9991	3225	503	5246	1412	404	126618
Farm Laborers, Wage Workers	81232	34106	10096	1313	3635	2322	14433	404	148652
Building Trades	82043	33298	908	606	303			100	117258
Carpenters	48032	19579	605	101	202				68519
Painters	13626	6559	101	202					20488
Plumbers	10596	2621						100	13317
Boilermakers	5451	2623	101		101				8276
Brick masons	1815	1412		101					3328
Plasterers	1917	202		202					2321
Cement	606	302	101						1009
Service Industries	13927	11906		3230		5247	4035	707	39052
Cooks	7467	3733		808		1818	807	202	14835
Waiters	2826	4238		1414		101	202	202	8983
Private Household Workers	1313	1312		806		2925	2117	303	8776
Gardeners and Groundskeepers	2321	2623		202		403	909		6458
Mine Operatives and Laborers	17762	13929	1212	101	402	202	202		33810
Lumbermen and Woodchoppers	23011	13223	402		704		301		37641
Truck and Tractor Drivers	23205	3429		808		404			27946
Teamsters	11908	2926	1211		101		101		16247
Fishermen and Oystermen	3528	5450			2725		404		12107
Sailors and Deck Hands	4743	3229	202	404				303	8881
Longshoremen and Stevedores	2522	3028		303					5853
Total, All Casual Occupations	379430	204924	33204	12210	8474	13521	29568	3029	686477
Total, in labor force	1647499	571857	43201	27655	16345	26032	52682	5049	2393544

Source: 1% sample, of selected categories in Industry, 1950 basis and Occupation, 1950 basis for California, Oregon, Washington, and Alaska, 1920. IPUMS

**Table 1.6 | Male Casual Occupations by Ethnicity, Pacific Coast States, 1930**

Casual Occupations, 1930	White, US Born	White, Foreign Born	Latin American	Black	Native	Chinese	Japanese	Filipino	Total
General Laborers	162004	66054	45753	6868	2020	2424	2323	2828	294819
Construction	28684	9292	7979	1212	202	101		101	47571
Sawmills	22523	8585	1818	303	404		505	202	34340
Ship and Boat Building	1212	1212	101						2525
Railroad Construction	10403	6060	10504	404	303		707	707	29088
Other Laborer Occupations	102313	41208	25553	5656	1212	2323	1212	1818	181295
Farm Laborers, Wage Workers	112514	36663	43430	1818	2727	1717	13534	15453	228563
Building Trades	112514	40400	2929	1515			101		157459
Carpenters	58984	23836	1515	202					84537
Painters	28179	7575	909	404					37067
Plumbers	12423	2626	202						15251
Boilermakers	2424	909	101	101					3535
Brick masons	3636	1717		505			101		5959
Plasterers	5252	2727	101	303					8383
Cement	1616	1010	101						2727
Service Industries	26866	19089	2727	5454	101	4444	5959	4545	69185
Cooks	12120	7272	1717	1515		1717	707	808	25856
Waiters	3333	4545	404	2626		505	606	1616	13635
Private Household Workers	2222	1313		909	101	2222	1919	2121	10807
Gardeners and Groundskeepers	9191	5959	606	404			2727		18887
Mine Operatives and Laborers	33936	7878	2626		202	101			44743
Lumbermen and Woodchoppers	29189	11312	505	303	1313				42622
Truck and Tractor Drivers	57469	5959	3434	707		202	505		68276
Teamsters	5151	1111	505	101	101				6969
Fishermen and Oystermen	3434	7575	101		404		909		12423
Sailors and Deck Hands	4444	3434	202	202		1010		101	9393
Longshoremen and Stevedores	7070	6060	606		303				14039
Total, All Casual Occupations	554591	205535	102818	16968	7171	9898	23331	22927	943946
Total, in Labor Force	2491670	628523	173619	46561	10302	21311	49389	30098	3452685

Source: 1% sample, of selected categories in Industry, 1950 basis and Occupation, 1950 basis for California, Oregon, Washington, and Alaska, 1920, 1930. IPUMS

the Labor Association, a conglomerate of six California sugar companies, sourced a large number of workers directly from Mexico. Railroad, mining, and cannery companies set up recruiting offices and employment agencies in small towns deep in the interior of Mexico. Over the course of ten years, the number of Latin American workers engaged in casual jobs in the Pacific Coast nearly doubled, growing from 32,700 in 1920 to 76,558 in 1930 [See Tables 1.5 and 1.6].<sup>75</sup>

Employers found another source of labor in the American territory of the Philippines. In an era of tight immigration restrictions, American imperialism had left the islands in a kind of liminal legal space. As a colony of the United States, immigration officials deemed Filipinos to be U.S. nationals for the purposes of immigration and citizenship. This colonial label offered Filipino immigrants an enhanced status compared to that of most other immigrant workers. As nationals, Filipinos were allowed to travel unhindered across the U.S. border and free to work anywhere in the nation. Industry quickly recognized the opportunity to exploit such a large labor pool. Employers established hiring offices in the Philippines and labor contractors traveled around the islands, drawing workers from all parts of the occupied territory. Chris Mensalvas, a Filipino with experience in cannery work and field labor who later became a union organizer, was eighteen when a recruiter came to his town:

You were recruited for 1 dollar a day. That's all you get. They came to the Philippines those recruiters and their agents. "Let's go to the United

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<sup>75</sup> On the transnational movement of workers, see Lucie Cheng and Edna Bonacich, *Labor Migration Under Capitalism: Asian Workers in the United States before World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); on labor contractors see, Yuji Ichioka, *The Issei: The World of the First Generation Japanese Immigrants, 1885-1924* (New York: Free Press, 1988) 57-62; Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor*; on the Great Circle Route, see Dorothy Fujita-Rony, *American Workers, Colonial Power*, 37; on the recruitment of Mexican laborers, see Federal Writers Project, *The Contract Labor System in California Agriculture* (Oakland: Works Progress Administration, 1938) 35-40; Mario Garcia, *Desert Immigrants: The Mexicans of El Paso, 1880-1920* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

States. Come on there's a good life over there." "You people have no good life here." So we all came here, we can't have a good life. As soon as we got here the contractors and all the agents, they got us on to the farms.<sup>76</sup>

Labor agents for railroads, mining, and cannery companies also brought tens of thousands of workers across the Pacific. Much like the Mexican workforce, the number of Filipino workers employed in the casual labor economy exploded. From 1920 to 1930, the number of Filipino workers employed in casual work increased from 3,029 to 23,230 [See Tables 1.5 and 1.6].<sup>77</sup>

As employers recruited these workers to the United States, far-flung networks of information and knowledge further supported transnational migrations. Many of the Mexican and Filipino workers who came to the Pacific Coast during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century arrived at the invitation of family or village members who had already settled in the country. To take just one example, Jose Landeros came across the border to Los Angeles in 1921 with the assistance of a labor contractor to work on the railroads. His friends and relatives had already told him about the variety of occupations and the demand for workers from Mexico. "I came on my own," Landeros told an interviewer, "but I had some friends over here and they said that the jobs were open." Armed with this information, he said, "when I came to the United States, I got a job very soon."<sup>78</sup> Other Mexican workers spoke of a transnational "grapevine" that informed potential migrants about work opportunities. This network reached all the way to Michoacán, and

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<sup>76</sup> Chris Mensalvas, interview by Carolina Koslosky, Fil-Kng75-1ck, February 10, 1975, Washington State Oral/Aural History Program, Washington State Archives, Olympia, Washington, 8.

<sup>77</sup> On Filipino immigration, see Bruno Lasker, *Filipino Immigration to Continental United States and to Hawaii* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931); Fujita-Rony, *American Workers, Colonial Power*.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Jose Landeros, Christine Valenciana, interviewer, California State University Fullerton, Center for Oral and Public History, OH 746, March 17, 1972, 1.

probably much farther.<sup>79</sup> Similar conditions prevailed in the Philippines. When Honorato Rapada left his hometown of Villasis, Illocos, he was well informed about what awaited him. His brother had already traveled to America and sent home news, advice, and financial help. Rapada traveled with a close friend who had relatives in California. He recalled, “my friend and I come on the same boat then he got a brother down here first then we stay with them down in Chinatown.” After a three-month run in the Alaska canneries, Rapada and his friends traveled to Los Angeles to meet up with his brother and work in the fields.<sup>80</sup> Extended kin networks like these facilitated the spread of knowledge and information throughout the region. These international linkages, created by labor recruitment and kinship networks, informed casual workers’ movement into and around the Pacific Coast.

### **The Hierarchy of Racial Difference**

Although the shared demographic attributes of age, independence, and migration gave workers a number of ways to identify with each other, it was the perception of racial difference that most sharply and materially divided the casual labor economy throughout the 1920s. A comparison of the work histories of John McCloskey and Kakichi Tsuboi illustrate some of these occupational patterns. Like many white workers, McCloskey had access to a variety of occupations that were often dangerous and temporary, but financially lucrative all the same. Moreover, he was able to acquire valuable skills that were available to a sizable, but select group of workers. Although his positions in timber

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<sup>79</sup> Interview with Mike de la Cruz, “The Life of a Laboring Man,” Interviewed by Meri Knaster, Regional Oral History Project, University of California Santa Cruz, September 2002.

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Honorato Rapada, Fil-Kng75-11ck, May, 24 1975, Washington State Oral/Aural History Program, Washington State Archives, Olympia, Washington, 5,8.

or maritime work were seasonal and lacked permanency, they afforded an elevated pay and status in the casual labor economy. In contrast, Tsuboi and other workers of color could only access a circumscribed set of occupations. For Tsuboi, the most readily accessible avenues for employment included the service industries, agricultural work, and general laborer positions. Like all jobs in the casual labor economy, these were also dangerous and temporary, but in contrast to the work available to McCloskey, they offered little status and very low pay. In the casual labor economy, a bright line could be drawn between a worker's access to skilled, stable, high-paying occupations and whiteness.

Despite high rates of immigration from Mexico and the Philippines, white workers still comprised the vast majority of casual laborers in the region. As of 1930, nearly 59 percent of all the workers employed as casual laborers on the Pacific Coast were native-born white men. Among farm and general laborers, native whites comprised 49 percent and 55 percent of the workforce respectively, while in the mines and timber fields, native whites represented 76 percent and 69 percent of all workers. In the more skilled sectors of the casual labor economy, whites dominated the workforce in even greater numbers. Among building trades workers, native-born whites comprised more than 70 percent of the workforce and in maritime trades, 70 to 80 percent of the workforce was native white. In the least desirable lines of work, large concentrations of native white workers was less likely. Although they comprised 91 percent of the entire labor force in 1930 (both casual and otherwise), native-born white men were only a minor portion of the workforce in canneries (25%), railroad construction (30%), and household work (15%) [See Table 1.6].

A large number of foreign-born whites reinforced to the predominance of white workers. In 1930, more than 21 percent of workers employed in casual occupations were foreign-born white men. Like their native counterparts, they had access to a wide variety of occupations. Among general laborers in construction, railroad work, and sawmills, as well as trades that required some degree of skill or training, European immigrants were represented at rates proportional to their overall percentage in the population. In some cases, immigrant workers found greater access to specific labor markets. Among maritime workers, in particular, the number of foreign-born whites was well above their overall percentage of the population. Although foreign-born whites comprised slightly more than 20 percent of the Pacific Coast labor force in 1930, they constituted 60 percent of the fishermen, 43 percent of stevedores, and 48 percent of the laborers in shipbuilding. Moreover, from 1920 to 1930, foreign-born white workers moved away from the more menial occupations in the casual labor economy. The percentage of white immigrants working in mines declined from 41 percent in 1920 to 17.6 percent in 1930, while immigrant whites comprised 23 percent of the wageworkers on farms in 1920 and only 16 percent in 1930 [See Tables 1.5 and 1.6].

In certain industries, foreign-born white workers carved out ethnic niches. Employers of these casual workers spoke often of the particularized skills of different nationalities within the white immigrant workforce. Eastern Europeans from Croatia and Yugoslavia brought experience as orchard workers and easily found employment in Northern Californian apple and nut fields. According to one apple grower near Santa Cruz,

[t]here were national ethnic groups, or whatever you want to call them. There was a time when you could tell by looking at the best orchards in

the valley who worked them. The Yugoslav workers—they were very good. They know the work, of course. They come from a farming area that produced various fruits. They knew how to work the orchards, and if you had them, you kept them year after year.<sup>81</sup>

Likewise, immigrants from Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Denmark leveraged their familiarity with maritime work to move into positions as fishermen, sailors, and stevedores. A miniscule 2.4 percent of the overall Pacific Coast population in 1930, workers from Scandinavian countries comprised 33 percent of fishermen and oystermen, 15 percent of longshoremen, and 22 percent of sailors and deckhands [See Table 1.6].

Despite the preponderance of white workers, both native and foreign-born, the racialized demographics of the casual labor force underwent an appreciable shift from 1920 to 1930. As new laws restricted immigration from Europe, workers from Mexico and the Philippines filled the vacuum. In certain industries, this demographic shift was negligible. White workers continued to dominate a number of sectors, such as the building and maritime trades. In other industries, the shift was far more pronounced. The burgeoning agricultural sector, which grew by over 800,000 workers during the decade, best illustrates shifting racial demographics. From 1920 to 1930, the percentage of white workers employed as farm laborers decreased by 7 percent, while the proportion of Latin American and Filipino laborers increased by 12 percent and 7 percent respectively. Among construction laborers, the proportion of white immigrant workers declined by 16 percent, while the Latin American workforce grew by 7 percent. [See Tables 1.5 and 1.6]. According to one count, the number of Mexican workers on the

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<sup>81</sup> “Mary Ann Borina Radovich : Croatian Apple Farmer, Watsonville, California, 1918-1977 / Interviewed by Meri Knaster ; Edited by Irene Reti :: UCSC Library Regional Oral History Collection,” accessed June 15, 2015, <http://digitalcollections.ucsc.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p265101coll13/id/3574>.

railroads had increased from approximately 6,000 in 1909 to 23,000 in 1928, which accounted for nearly 60 percent of all positions in the industry.<sup>82</sup> The trend was similar in cannery work, where workers from Japan and the Philippines supplanted the majority of white and Chinese workers by the mid-1920s.<sup>83</sup>

### **Occupational Corners and Contingent Capitalism**

As these demographic shifts illustrate, certain corners of the casual labor economy relied heavily upon workers of color. Despite the majority of white workers in many occupational lines, Latin Americans, Blacks, Native Americans, Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos constituted a significant portion of the casual labor workforce in the region, at rates markedly higher than their overall proportion of the general population. In 1920, this diverse mix of workers of color comprised nearly 15 percent of those employed in the casual labor economy, though they were only 7 percent of the region's overall workforce. By 1930, that percentage increased to nearly 20 percent, despite the fact that they only made up 10 percent of the region's total labor force. This overrepresentation of workers of color was even more pronounced in particular industries. In 1920, workers of color comprised 22 percent of farm laborers, 25 percent of railroad laborers, 25 percent of cooks, and 70 percent of private household workers. Over the decade, these proportions increased substantially, with workers of color representing 43 percent of railroad workers and 35 percent of farm laborers by 1930 [See Tables 1.5 and 1.6]. In a statement loaded

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<sup>82</sup> For statistics that illustrate this trend among railroad workers, see Paul Taylor, "Some Aspects of Mexican Immigration," *Journal of Political Economy* 38:5 (October 1930) 609-615.

<sup>83</sup> Casaday, "Labor Unrest and the Labor Movement," 72.

with racialized language, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce summarized the changing labor situation in California directly:

we are totally dependent at the present time upon Mexico for agricultural and industrial common or casual labor. It is our only source of supply, white labor not only being impossible to obtain, but neither physically nor mentally adapted to the demands of our casual labor.<sup>84</sup>

This assessment also held true for the proportion of Asian workers in sectors like the Alaskan salmon canneries and agricultural fields of northern California.

Casual work was the main form of employment for a large percentage of workers of color along the Pacific Coast. In 1930, 76 percent of all working Filipino men engaged in some form of casual, temporary, or migrant work. This high rate was similar for all other non-white workers, including Latin Americans (60%), Japanese (47%), and Chinese (46.4%). Entry-level positions requiring little skill or education were the domain of the non-white workforce, and workers of color were certainly more dependent upon these jobs than their white counterparts. Only 22 percent of native-born whites and 33 percent of immigrant whites labored in the casual labor economy[See Table 1.7].

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<sup>84</sup> George Clements to C.C. Young, December 28, 1927, Box 64, George Clements Papers, UCLA Special Collections.

**Table 1.7 | Percentage of Male Workers Engaged in Casual Occupations, by Race and Nationality, 1930**

	1920	1930
White, Native Born	23.0	22.2
White, Foreign Born	35.8	32.7
Latin American	76.9	59.2
Black	44.2	36.4
Native	51.8	69.6
Chinese	51.9	46.4
Japanese	56.1	47.2
Filipino	60.0	76.2
All Workers	28.7	27.3

Source: 1% Sample, selected occupations, 1950 basis, sorted by ethnic group, 1930, IPUMS.

Intimately knowledgeable about segmentations within the labor market, workers of color recognized their experiences of disparity and exclusion. From the moment an immigrant arrived in the United States from Asia or Latin America, their prospects for permanent, stable, regularized work was limited. As one Japanese worker explained,

...it is hard for Japanese people to get positions. They have to find employment in the Japanese community and the business of the Japanese firms is very poor now.... I don't think Americans will employ them, and if they can't find positions in the Japanese community, many of them are having to take common laborers' jobs.<sup>85</sup>

Immigration officials stamped the words "itinerant" on Asian workers' passports, implicitly signaling the low horizon of opportunity awaiting them in the United States. Inokichi Fukuda remembered, "it was clearly written on my passport that I

<sup>85</sup> Eliot Mears, *Resident Orientals on the American Pacific Coast: Their Legal and Economic Status* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1928) 224-6.

was going as an ‘itinerant worker.’ There was no reference to ‘immigrant’ or nonimmigrant status. I went only as an ‘itinerant worker.’”<sup>86</sup>

Despite their concentration in the casual labor economy, workers of color found themselves excluded from many of the best positions available. Although present in greater numbers in canneries and the like, workers of color were underrepresented in many other sectors. Few workers of color found employment as stevedores, truck drivers and teamsters, shipbuilders, miners, and lumbermen. Although they constituted 10 percent of the labor force along the Pacific Coast in 1930, workers of color made up only 6.5 percent of miners and 5 percent of lumbermen. In a variety of other occupations, immigrants from Mexico, the Philippines, and Asia were shut out entirely.

Asian and Latin American workers found it particularly difficult to find employment in the economic corners that enjoyed union protection, high wages, and training and skill requirements. Among the 157,000 building trades workers in 1930, less than 3 percent were Chinese, Filipino, or Japanese. While a handful of black workers were able to enter work as brick masons and painters, other jobs, such as carpenters and plumbers, were entirely off limits. Exclusion from these positions was not due to lack of familiarity with or interest in a particular industry. In building construction, for example, Latin American workers comprised 17 percent of the general labor force but only 2 percent of the more highly paid skilled construction trade work. Such patterns surfaced throughout the region in many different industries. Chinese workers might work as logging camp cooks, but not as loggers. Filipinos constituted much of the salmon cannery labor force, but were rarely employed as fishermen [See Tables 1.8 and 1.9]. Already pushed to a particular

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<sup>86</sup> Interview with Inokichi Fukuda, in Ito, *Issei*, 29.

corner of the economy, workers of color found themselves further relegated to its least desirable sectors.

The racial segmentation of the labor market reflected the status and prestige of different positions. Those parts of the economy dominated by white workers, namely positions in building and maritime trades, paid premium wages when compared to service industry and laborer positions. Throughout the 1920s, wage data published by California's Department of Industrial Relations highlighted these patterns. Carpenters, an occupational category dominated by whites, received between \$40 and \$45 per week, while laborers in building construction, the domain of many Latin American immigrants, earned approximately \$15 to \$20. Likewise, workers in the shipyards were paid \$33 to \$38 per week, while cannery workers earned just \$20 to \$23. Elsewhere on the waterfront, in positions filled largely by Scandinavian and native-born whites, longshore workers could earn as much as \$50 per week and sailors and deck hands were paid between \$70 and \$80 per week. In the service industry, where positions were disproportionately held by Filipino, Japanese, and Chinese workers, the average earnings for a porter was \$10 to \$12.50 per week, while dishwasher and waiters earned between \$15 and \$20 per week.<sup>87</sup>

Not only did workers of color lack access to the best paying jobs, but they were also paid less for comparable work. In 1930, California's Department of Industrial Relations released a variety of reports that reveal the disparity of wages in different industries. Across a variety of occupations, Filipino and Mexican workers consistently earned wages below the industry average. For example, while the

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<sup>87</sup> Estelle Stewart and Jesse Bowen, *History of Wages in the United States From Colonial Times to 1928* (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1934) 573, 570, 538.

average building construction laborer in California earned \$5 to \$5.50 per day, Mexican laborers reportedly earned just \$3.50. The average wage for miners in the state was between \$5.00 and \$6.50 per day, but Mexican miners recorded average earnings of just \$3.74. The average kitchen helper earned \$3 to \$6.50 per week, but Filipinos earned \$2.75 and Mexicans earned \$2.30. Among teamsters, the prevailing daily wage was \$4.86, but Mexicans earned just \$3.98. For employment as a general laborer, the average worker earned \$30.00 each week while Mexicans earned \$15.89 and Filipinos reportedly earned only \$8. Likewise, in other service occupations such as waiters, dishwashers, and janitors, Filipino workers consistently earned wages at the bottom of the pay scale. In the agricultural industry, wage reports were tremendously variable but statistics from the state of California suggest Filipino and Mexican workers earned less in those sectors as well.<sup>88</sup>

A variety of forces barred workers of color from the most desirable casual occupations and made it difficult if not impossible to establish a foothold in occupations outside the casual labor economy. On the one hand, many employers considered menial and casual labor to be beneath white men. George Clements, the agricultural director of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, considered farm work and other forms of casual

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<sup>88</sup> California Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Twenty Fourth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics* (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1929-1930) 30; Will French, *Mexicans in California: Report of Governor C.C. Young's Mexican Fact Finding Committee* (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1930); Department of Industrial Relations, *Facts About Filipino Immigration Into California* (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1930). While the sample size for these wage statistics is quite large, these comparisons lack precision. Although these three sources relied upon the same body of data - annual wage statistics compiled by the California Department of Industrial Relations in 1928 - wage data was presented differently in each volume. For example, while the biennial report published ranges of pay for each position, the Filipino and Mexican report calculated the average pay for workers in the occupation. For most positions, the report relied upon a similar taxonomy to describe occupations, but some variations exist. Moreover, some wage reports reflected additional compensation, including room and board. I have attempted to match like categories as they appear in the wage reports according to stated occupation and type and duration of work. Unfortunately, the original wage documents were not saved. Nonetheless, the wage numbers reflect the findings of previous historians and the earnings statistics illustrate a general trend of wage inequality.

labor to be “below par” for white workers. With “schools...teaching the child to use his mind to save his hands—not to use them,” Clements believed that subjecting whites to more menial work was not only degrading but ultimately counterproductive.<sup>89</sup> When white men did apply for these positions, employers regarded them with suspicion and sometimes avoided hiring them altogether. Agencies like the Murray and Ready employment agency, which operated numerous offices throughout the region, claimed that white men were too difficult to employ. As the agents told one investigator, “[white] men will not work, and stay on the job only long enough to get a small stake. Returned soldiers are the worst. American born are absolutely worthless.”<sup>90</sup> At the Young and Meyer employment office in San Francisco, one of the largest contractors for the Alaskan canneries, hiring agents were explicitly told to avoid white workers because they were either lazy castoffs or likely to “make too much trouble” as radical agitators looking to organize cannery workers.<sup>91</sup>

If employers avoided white workers, they actively sought workers of color in certain sectors of the casual labor economy because of their purported productivity and supposed tractability. In railroad construction, contractors considered Mexican workers to be the “best return on the dollar” according to Los Angeles Railway Company. On the Southern Pacific line, railroad contractors hired Mexicans as section hands because foremen believed them to be less expensive and less likely to complain.<sup>92</sup> Likewise, some growers believed Filipinos to be better suited for agricultural work because of an

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<sup>89</sup> George Clements, *Los Angeles Times*, July 18, 1926, J3.

<sup>90</sup> Quoted in Nylander, “The Casual Laborer in California,” 38-9.

<sup>91</sup> Casaday, “Labor Unrest and the Labor Movement in the Salmon Industry of the Pacific Coast,” 79.

<sup>92</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Fields*; Paul Taylor, “Some Aspects of Mexican Immigration,” *Journal of Political Economy*; Douglas Monroy, “Like Swallows at the Old Mission: Mexicans and the Racial Politics of Growth in Los Angeles in the Interwar Period,” *The Western Historical Quarterly*, 1983, 435–58.

adaptation to stoop labor and ability to work long hours in wet conditions, a trait supposedly developed on the islands of the Philippines. Other employers touted the productivity of Filipino workers and their nimble small hands that were perfect for harvesting lettuces and asparagus.<sup>93</sup> The Young and Meyer Company, which actively avoided hiring white workers, instructed their contractors to seek out Mexicans and Filipinos for the canneries.<sup>94</sup> One employer in California expressed his preferences plainly:

we want the Mexicans because we can treat them as we cannot treat any other living man. We can control them at night behind bolted gates, within a stockade eight feet high, surrounded by barbed wire. We make them work under armed guards in the fields.<sup>95</sup>

As one observer of the labor situation in the Alaskan canneries concluded, “there can be little doubt that these ‘backward’ groups have been forced to bear a considerable portion of the burden of risk and high overhead inherent in the salmon industry because of their weak position.”<sup>96</sup>

In addition to the hiring practices of employers, other policies and practices contributed to the racial segmentation of the casual labor economy. A number of state and federal laws targeted immigrant workers from Asia and Latin America, preventing them from establishing a foothold in the economy. For example, in 1913, the state of California enacted the Alien Land Law, which barred aliens ineligible for citizenship from owning or leasing land in the state. This restriction applied only to Asian immigrants. The state of Washington had a similar prohibition against the sale of land to

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<sup>93</sup> Lasker, *Filipino Immigration to Continental United States and to Hawaii*, 68.

<sup>94</sup> Casaday, “Labor Unrest and the Labor Movement in the Salmon Industry of the Pacific Coast,” 150-5.

<sup>95</sup> Quoted in Robin Fitzgerald Scott, “The Mexican-American in the Los Angeles Area, 1920-1950: From Acquiescence to Activity: (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Southern California, 1971).

<sup>96</sup> Casaday, “Labor Unrest and the Labor Movement in the Salmon Industry of the Pacific Coast,” 79.

Asian immigrants and in 1921 expanded the land law to include restrictions on leasing and renting land. In Washington, state law also prevented non-citizens from holding licenses to own or operate a fishing vessel. All along the Pacific Coast, rules on mining and mineral rights levied additional taxes upon alien mine owners. These kinds of regulations prevented workers from gaining skills, making long-term investments, or putting their employment experience to work for their own use. This patchwork of regulations limited the opportunities for social mobility and a transition out of the casual labor economy while also relegating workers of color to the most ephemeral and migratory forms of labor.<sup>97</sup>

Unionized white workers did their best to build and maintain the racialized hierarchy of the labor market that limited the social mobility of workers of color. Throughout the Pacific Coast, unions specifically barred “Oriental” workers from membership and denied union cards to “aliens ineligible for citizenship.” Fishermen’s unions and organizations representing white service workers were particularly exclusionist. The Hotel and Restaurant Employees and Bartenders International Union barred “Oriental” members and union cooks and waiters actively agitated against restaurants that hired non-union Asian workers. The Carpenters Union sanctioned members for patronizing “unfair places” that employed non-union Japanese workers. The restaurant workers’ union barred Asian members and pressured local establishments to avoid hiring non-union workers, who were most often Asian workers.<sup>98</sup> In San

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<sup>97</sup> On the legal limits to social mobility, see Eliot Mears, *Resident Orientals on the American Pacific Coast*; Daniels, *The Politics of Prejudice*; Charles McClain, editor, *Japanese Immigrants and American Law: The Alien Land Laws and other Issues* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1994); Lasker, *Filipino Immigration to Continental United States and to Hawaii*; Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*.

<sup>98</sup> Frank, *Purchasing Power*, 227-234.

Francisco, organized labor had long campaigned against immigrant workers from Asia. Organizing around union labels and exclusionist politicians, restaurant workers, cigar makers, and laundresses, among others, vociferously opposed non-white laborers.<sup>99</sup> The few branches of organized labor that accepted workers of color often did so with qualification and tension. Some demanded separate locals for whites. Others, such as the Central Labor Council in Seattle, embraced new Filipino workers but continued to host anti-Asian speakers and work against the interest of Japanese workers. The practice of racial exclusion placed workers of color in a double bind; White workers blamed Asians and Mexicans for undercutting the success of organized labor, which workers of color were not allowed to join in the first place.

## **Conclusion**

Although historians have often separated these discrete patterns of migration and work, the casual labor economy brought together a diverse range of people, industries, and occupations. The vocations of casual labor—picking hops, cleaning fish, felling trees, rigging a ship to unload cargo—shared little in terms of work knowledge, commodity value, or capital investment. Moreover, vast amounts of physical space separated these industries, which served to reinforce their distinctiveness. Even still, they remained linked by the travels and travails of its workforce. As the experiences of men like Kakichi Tsuboi, John McCloskey, Honorato Rapada, Gustav Simonson, and Alfred Moltke illustrate, individuals moved fluidly through several, if not all, of these occupations in a single year. Dependent upon the labor power of these men, the casual labor

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<sup>99</sup> Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 158-178.

economy etched a network of labor migration onto the vast geography of the United States' Pacific Coast.

The industries and occupations of the casual labor economy reflected the regional, national, and global character of this geographic location. The Pacific Coast economy underwent substantial change from the 1920 to 1930, with the development of new industries in the wake of World War I and demographic change caused by new immigration rules and migration influxes from elsewhere in the United States. The Pacific Coast casual labor economy was built on a diverse workforce of both immigrant and native workers. Unlike perhaps any other region of North America, the Pacific Coast became the nexus for linked flows of internal and transnational migrants during the first half of the twentieth century. While native white workers and foreign-born whites continued to occupy the majority of casual labor positions, they worked alongside a growing number of Latin American, Filipino, and Asian workers, albeit in more lucrative positions. However, this would not be the last time the Pacific Coast's casual labor economy would undergo significant change.

## Chapter 2 | The Laborer's Geography: Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles

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Figure 2.1 | The Tourist Hotel, circa 1940. Source: Seattle Municipal Archives, Photographs, Tourist Hotel, Items 41824, 41823, 41826.

Standing at the corner of Main and Occidental Streets (709 2<sup>nd</sup> Street) in Seattle's Pioneer Square neighborhood, the Tourist Hotel was the temporary home of thirty-eight men and was one fixture in the laborer's geography of the city. The enumerator's manuscript pages of the federal census offer a snapshot of the residents living in this crowded four-story hotel on January 5, 1920. Among the lodgers were Mike McKiride, a 26-year-old Serbian logger; Walter Sallstrom, a Swedish building trades laborer in his early thirties; New York native Joseph Evans, a 43-year-old house carpenter; and Plimbago Pablo, a 21-year-old Filipino working as a shipyard laborer. Thirteen of the male lodgers worked as general laborers. Eleven men worked in the nearby shipyards, while another eleven listed other occupations typical of the casual labor economy – logger, miner, kitchen helper, house carpenter. The lodger list of the Tourist Hotel matches neatly with the observations made by sociologist John Geoghegan in 1923. An inestimable number of men, he wrote, “travel in and out of Seattle, week by week, month

by month, year by year.... in search of stimulation, recreation, release, companionship, and a new job.”<sup>1</sup>

The Tourist Hotel is emblematic of the casual labor economy’s influence on early-20th-century Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles—the largest cities of the Pacific Coast at that time. Originally constructed in 1891, the building was designed to attract a highbrow urban clientele, with opulent features like a Turkish bath and large living flats. Just ten years after its construction, the investment company that owned the hotel tore out the larger multi-room apartments and replaced them with small single-room dwelling units. The opulent bath was removed to make room for other commercial space on the lower floor. Following these renovations, the number of residents staying at the address grew from a handful of families to nearly fifty single, transient men. This remodel mirrored a larger change to this part of Seattle. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the buildings and sidewalks around Occidental Park, stretching up the hill into Chinatown, came to reflect the demands of the growing number of transient and itinerant laborers living, working, and moving through the city.<sup>2</sup>

The Tourist Hotel was one of many institutions that emerged to tend to the needs and wants of the itinerant working class. The hotel shared the block with four other boardinghouses, three employment agencies, a moving picture theatre, and three church missions. Around the corner stood four more hotels filled by casual laborers, along with a penny arcade and a pool hall. At all hours of the day, men loitered on sidewalks and

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<sup>1</sup> For the complete lodger list of the Tourist Hotel, see Appendix 1. John Herbert Geoghegan, “The Migratory Worker in Seattle: a Study in Social Disorganization and Exploitation,” (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Washington, 1923) 34.

<sup>2</sup> *Seattle City Directory* (Seattle: Polk’s Seattle Directory Company, 1911) 1682 accessed electronically from University of Washington Digital Collections, ID # ADV0158; on the history of the Tourist Hotel, see Pat Dorpat, *Seattle Times*, February 22, 2009; Clarke v. Yukon Investment Co., 145. *Pacific Reporter* 624.

street corners teeming with advertisements for jobs, cheap meals, and female companionship. This block and the surrounding neighborhood attracted workers from a diverse range of regional, national, and global locations by providing them with places to reside, find new work, and socialize. For the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, urban space in Seattle was shaped by the interwoven needs of labor and capital. These mixed social and economic desires produced a space for workers on the move – a laborer’s geography.<sup>3</sup>

The laborer’s geography catered to the casual labor economy’s demand for a readily accessible pool of workers. Every aspect of this urban zone sought to ensure the flexibility of labor. Lodging houses and bunkrooms available by the day, hour, or week provided accommodations for a workforce with little need for permanent housing. . . . Employment agencies and labor contractors also responded to the employers’ demand for a flexible labor force. Finally, the network of transport lines emanating from the city center rapidly shuttled workers to far-flung job sites. Taken together, this organized urban machinery kept the casual labor economy moving. Although the ostensible chaos and ephemeral nature of these areas caused headaches for middle-class bureaucrats and moral watchdogs, these urban areas nonetheless served the purposes of an economy built upon ready access to a large workforce.

At the same time, workers shaped the urban contours to fit their own needs and wants. They made use of employment agencies and labor contractors as they pieced together a sustainable, though precarious, living. Within this district, workers found inexpensive housing in the form of large lodging houses and even more temporary jungle

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<sup>3</sup> Geoghegan, “The Migratory Worker in Seattle,” 40.

encampments. But beyond labor and lodging, the city helped workers meet other critical needs. Entertainment, leisure, and meeting places provided spaces for convivial sociability and relieved the isolation that many laborers experienced at hinterland job sites. The earnings of casual laborers, though meager, funded a micro economy of small entrepreneurs - hotel and saloon owners and managers, labor contractors, and the like.

Granted, these urban landscapes were not entirely of the workers' making. They did not build the usurious gambling parlors, nor did they welcome the close quarters of the boarding houses. Likewise, the interests of casual workers was hardly monolithic. Just as nationality, skill, and perceived ethno-racial differences structured workers' access to jobs, they also created sharp divisions in the social and demographic patterns of the city. These many forces - the dictates of the economy and the needs and desires of casual workers - existed in a productive tension that shaped the form of the city.<sup>4</sup>

After a brief geographic orientation, this chapter examines the urban landscape of contingent labor from the end of World War I to the advent of the Great Depression using three levels of increasing geographic specificity: the region, the district, and the street.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> A number of sources inform my understanding of urban space as an unfolding process of capitalist production and reproduction, as well as a site of contestation, namely Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991); and David Harvey, *Consciousness and the Urban Experience: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

<sup>5</sup> A host of terms present themselves to describe areas that housed and served casual workers and the working poor. I consciously use the "laborer's geography" to refer to an urban space that catered to the needs of casual and migratory workers. The predominant term in both popular and social science literature, skid row, only became popularized in the 1940s and 1950s, for reasons discussed later. Paul Groth suggests the term "casual worker zones." Such language echoes the vocabulary of the Chicago School of Sociology, by emphasizing the discrete sectors of the city – a concept I question in chapter 4. Urban residents in each city would have had a terms for them as well; Pioneer Square, South of Market, and Main Street are the most well known. To use these place names would lend a degree of specificity and link nicely with much of the existing historical knowledge, but they ignore adjacent districts – Chinatown, Manilatown, the International District, primarily to the exclusion of workers workers of color. Urban spaces, while in practice segregated according to racialized categories, were often more connected than the literature has suggested. Paul Groth, *Living Downtown: The History of Residential Hotels in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

On the regional scale, the chapter locates cities within a larger Pacific Coast network of casual labor migration, revealing how a variety of factors allowed Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles to exert a gravitational pull over the migration of workers. The second scale narrows in on the working class districts within these cities, highlighting how flexible work patterns gave rise to a particular set of institutions within each city that provided workers with employment, shelter, and diversion. The final scale takes an even closer look by focusing on the streets and hallways of the laborer's geography in order to better understand the residential patterns of workers. It lays out the spatial diversity of the laborer's geography on the street level, and explains how that heterogeneity often yielded to segregation.

This chapter stands implicitly challenges some of the historical and contemporary assumptions about the urban skid row. In sharp contrast to the popular image of the interwar urban Pacific Coast skid row as decaying and dangerous, this chapter demonstrates a more complex, vibrant, and often contradictory nature. It also highlights the heterogeneity of these spaces, which has often been under-appreciated by historians.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> A host of publications illustrate the tendency among scholars, public officials, and the greater population of the city to view the urban areas occupied by contingent workers as decaying and dangerous. This is the subject of chapter 3. Urban historiography emphasizes the segregated and homogenized nature of cities in America. However, a small but growing number of historians demonstrate the danger of oversimplifying the racialized boundaries of urban life. Cityscapes were often more heterogeneous than previously appreciated. See Mark Wild, *Street Meetings: Multi-Ethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Doctor Mom Chung and Her Fair Haired Bastards: The Life of a Wartime Celebrity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); and Mary Ting Yi Lui, *The Chinatown Trunk Mystery: Murder, Miscegenation, and Other Dangerous Encounters in Turn-of-the-Century New York City* (New Haven: Princeton University Press, 2007).

## The Laborer's Geography in Three Cities

Each city along the Pacific Coast had an area for workers on the move. It was neither designated nor delineated explicitly on the map, but known implicitly among workers, their employers, and the entrepreneurs that catered to them. “skidroads were where you blew in,” wrote Stewart Holbrook, a logger and writer in the Pacific Northwest. “You didn’t have to ask where to find it, for it had a character of its own... saloons, restaurants, and lodging houses were in greatest number.” The so-called slave markets and employment offices were not hard to locate, according to Holbrook. One simply had to look for the “loggers, miners, cowhands, fishermen, and sailors and construction workers.”<sup>7</sup> These portions of the cityscape shared the same form and function. In these districts, laborers congregated in multi-story residential buildings, densely mixed with commercial space, that were located near lines of transportation. Here, comfort and ornamentation gave way to utility and affordability. S.G. Garner, a longtime tramp worker familiar with the laborer’s urban geography of the Pacific Coast, summarized these characteristics when he described his first experience entering Seattle in a boxcar: “When we got to the railroad yards, it was the same thing as in cities before. The flophouse, which we found to be pretty good, was always located in the skid-row part of the city.”<sup>8</sup> For sociologist John Geoghegan, it was “a city within a city, self contained” for transient men. “It is his and all that it contains revolves about him and his interests,” he wrote.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Stewart Holbrook, *Holy Old Mackinaw: a Natural History of the American Lumberjack* (New York: Macmillan, 1956) 194.

<sup>8</sup> S.G. Garner, *Going Nowhere Fast* (Vantage Press, New York, 1979) 60.

<sup>9</sup> Geoghegan, “The Migratory Worker in Seattle,” 35.

In Seattle, the laborer's geography revolved around Pioneer Square and the area near Yesler Way. Hemmed in by the waters of the Puget Sound to the West and a series of hills to the east, this working class district was a compact zone of housing and commerce in the heart of urban Seattle. Extending north between 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> streets and south into Chinatown on Washington, Main, and Jackson, workers found an ample supply of inexpensive and temporary housing, Yesler Way, which had served as the economic lifeline of the city for decades, bifurcated the community. Connecting the rail line to the ocean, with a major sawmill in between, the Yesler thoroughfare was the original "skid road," named for the skidding of valuable timber products from water's edge up the road to the city's lumber mill. This part of the city had originally provided housing for Seattle's wealthy urbanite, made rich from the revenue of the Yukon Goldfields. But the character of the area had changed at the turn of the century. A fire in 1889 destroyed many of the opulent hotels and businesses that once ringed the square. Hotel owners quickly replaced older, grander hotels like the Tourist with less expensive single resident occupancy hotels (SROs) to accommodate the burgeoning number of workers. By 1920, the image of skid row, with all its working class associations and economic imperatives, had become a synecdoche for the entire neighborhood.

San Francisco was the oldest urban center on the Pacific Coast, with its origins in a boom economy followed by disaster, and its strategic location as the gateway to the Pacific. Surrounded by water to the East and North, the laborer's geography was bisected by Market Street, known to workers as "the Slot." In the late nineteenth century, the flatlands at the foot of Nob Hill were, "half city, half camp," according to one observer. Many casual workers resided in the boarding houses that filled the south side of Market.

After the 1906 earthquake and subsequent fire razed most of the shops and housing of the district, the few middle-class families still residing near Market abandoned the area, which had a growing rough-and-tumble reputation, in favor of other up-and-coming parts of the city. Following this exodus, the population of a once mixed-class neighborhood tilted decidedly towards the working class and the working poor. A dense conglomeration of hotels, pool halls, and cheap cafes quickly emerged along Folsom, Howard, and Mission streets after the disaster to cater to growing numbers of unattached male residents. Over time, large numbers of immigrant workers, particularly those from Spain, Italy, China, and the Philippines, pushed the bounds of the working class district to north and east along Columbus, Pacific, and Stockton. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, workers had transformed San Francisco into the largest departure point for inland California, the Pacific Ocean, and the Alaskan fishery.<sup>10</sup>

Although the laborer's geography of Los Angeles was the perhaps the least established of these three cities, it grew rapidly in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century due to its proximity to the Mexican border and the new agricultural wealth of Southern California. The main stem in Los Angeles began at the Plaza, the city's historical center, and extended south along a corridor of housing and retail buildings bordered by Spring and Main streets. This section of the city had catered to casual laborers for several decades. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Native Americans had performed much of the casual labor in the city, some of them reportedly "auctioned" out of the police jails. Describing the function of the Plaza at that time, one city resident commented, "Los Angeles had its slave mart as well as New Orleans and Constantinople – only the slave in Los Angeles was sold fifty-

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<sup>10</sup>Alvin Averbach, "San Francisco's South of Market District, 1850-1950: The Emergence of a Skid Row," *California Historical Quarterly*, XIII (1973), 198; also Groth, *Living Downtown*, for changing patterns of urban housing.

two times a year.”<sup>11</sup> As Los Angeles transitioned from a local town to regional city, the blocks surrounding the Plaza attracted investment, with large hotels built on wide streets to attract newcomers lured by seductive descriptions of the area’s economy and climate. In the 1910s, the city’s affluence slowly gravitated toward the nearby coastline, ceding the central city’s large hotels and the areas adjacent to the railroad line to the working class. Casual and itinerant workers came to dominate the area, attracted by its convenient access to the rail line, social services, and low rents.

Critical to the function of the laborer’s geography was a tertiary layer of entrepreneurs that served the overlapping desires of workers and employers. Employment agencies, pawnshops, cafes, and particularly hotels were often independently owned. These were individuals like John Cox and Jesse George, the developers behind the redevelopment of the Tourist Hotel and the Itoi family that operated the Carolton Hotel across the street. In 1930, a federal census revealed that 82% of the nearly six hundred hotels that catered to transient workers in Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles were owned by individuals. Such enterprises were also lucrative. The annual income of hotels in Seattle amounted to more than 1.6 million dollars.<sup>12</sup>

For many, the management of these businesses served as a route out of the casual labor economy. Kazuko Itoi had arrived in the United States in 1900, hoping to fulfill his dream of becoming a lawyer. Economic exigency, however, forced him to seek employment as a farm hand, railway labor, ship cook, and as a worker in hotels. There

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<sup>11</sup> Douglas Monroy, “Like Swallows at the Old Mission: Mexicans and the Racial Politics of Growth in Los Angeles in the Interwar Period,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 14:4 (October, 1983) 445.

<sup>12</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: Census of Hotels, 1930* (U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1931); Issei, 520.

were few options for Japanese workers like Itoi to escape the cycle of casual work. Alien Land laws made it extremely difficult to establish a foothold in farming, though some managed to circumvent the prohibitions by leasing land in the name of their children. Itoi, like many of his compatriots parlayed their experience in the service industry into a career. In 1903, the first Japanese-owned hotel opened in Seattle – the three story Eastern Hotel. The owner, Torakichi Doi, invited a friend to open a grocery in the lower floor, and later established a cheaper bunkhouse in the basement. Doi and his fellow entrepreneurs helped to establish the Japanese community in Seattle. And their model spread. By 1910, Japanese-owned hotels emerged in Los Angeles, inspired (and sometimes seeded) by the success of their compatriots in Seattle. Hotel and restaurant management became an ethnic enterprise that allowed a select few to rise out of the cycle of contingent labor.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, it is important to note that although the laborer's geography had a distinct economic function and cultural character, it was neither spatially discrete, nor set apart from the rest of the city. Rather, the boundaries of the laborer's geography were fluid, its edges blurring into a greater cityscape. Those fluid borders were manifest in two ways. First, the boarding hotels and rooming houses of the urban core may have been the domain of the casual laborer, but that hardly meant that all casual workers resided in this part of the city. Working class neighborhoods like Wilshire, Echo Park, and Chavez Ravine in Los Angeles or the northern reaches of Portero Hill and the Mission in San Francisco provided homes many others. Homeguard workers, particular those in the building trades took advantage of growing infrastructure of urban mass transportation to

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<sup>13</sup> Nodera, *Issei*, 520.

live in these satellite communities. Those with families, followed the exodus of middle-class out of the urban core, stretching the geography of casual labor in the city.<sup>14</sup>

Second, the porosity of the laborer's geography was also evident in the diverse range of business activity that took place in this part of the city. In San Francisco, Market Street remained a popular area for retail shoppers even after the neighborhood had been transformed into a working class enclave. Clothing stores, watchmakers, and other businesses operated between the employment agencies and second-hand shops so ubiquitous to these areas. In Seattle, the area surrounding the Tourist Hotel also supported a range of other businesses, including a drug store and a civil engineering firm. The same entertainment features that attracted workers also attracted other socio-economic groups to the district. Growing outlets of mass culture like vaudeville theatres, dance halls, and burlesque brought audiences into the heart of the city to spend their rising wages and increasing leisure hours.<sup>15</sup> Commenting on this mix, *Los Angeles Times*' writer Eddie Mar described the blocks around Main and Spring streets as a "land of a thousand wonders" and a "kaleidoscope of humanity."<sup>16</sup>

### **Regional Scales: Central Nodes in the Network of Labor Migration**

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Kazin discusses the neighborhoods of San Francisco in *Barons of Labor*, 24. See note 6 above.

<sup>15</sup> Tourist Hotel, Lebanon Building, at the Northeast Corner of S. Main St. and Occidental Avenue S., Seattle ca. 1905, Ashael Curtis Co. Collection, University of Washington Special Collections Division; *Baist's Real Estate Atlas Surveys of Seattle*, Wash (Philadelphia: Baist, 1905) Plate 1.

<sup>16</sup> Eddie Mar and Bert Wheeler, *Los Angeles Times*, 24 May 1931, L5; On the rise of the urban economy of leisure intermixed with working class space, see David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Randy McBee, *Dance Hall Days: Intimacy and Leisure Among Working-Class Immigrants in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

For contingent workers along the Pacific Coast, all roads led to the city. Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles each focused the movement of thousands of workers as they circulated between jobs each year. Urban space exerted a gravitational pull that shaped workers' travels. First, these cities were hubs of economic power and influence. Secondly, they offered places for workers to "lay up" between jobs. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, these economic centers housed the machinery for casual hiring during the 1920s. It was this last aspect that elevated the stature of these particular urban centers over smaller cities in the region. The years following World War I reinforced the power of these three metropolises, which were already prominent fixtures on the network of labor migration along the Pacific Coast.

The largest urban centers of the region were the product of more than a half century of frenzied colonial expansion and the appropriation of land. Although the national project of manifest destiny involved the conquest of vast tracts of land in North America, the focus was often most intent on the development of urban outposts. Thomas Hart Benton's vision of a manifest destiny, "luminous with the accumulated lights of European and American Civilization" could have easily described the growing skylines of Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles.<sup>17</sup> Urban growth was facilitated by an explosion of railroad construction at the turn of the century, which exposed once isolated corners of the Pacific Coast and Cascade range to regional, national, and international markets. New feeder lines from these railways efficiently brought commodities from the

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<sup>17</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 29:1 (1846), 917, 18.

timber and mining fields to urban markets and transformed inland agricultural production into a commercial enterprise.<sup>18</sup>

Those transportation lines also brought people. Washington State and California challenged the image of a wild, rural, unsettled American West. In 1920, fifty-four percent of Washington State residents and sixty-one percent of Californians lived in cities. At that time, Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles were the largest metropolitan centers in the region, together accounting for nearly one third of the Pacific Coast's total population. Indeed, by 1920, each metropolis claimed a large enough population to rank among the top twenty cities in the United States [See Table 2.1]. From 1920 to 1930, nearly 350,000 new wageworkers came to the largest cities, doubling the size of the working class. In Los Angeles, the number of wageworkers jumped from 220,000 to 479,000; San Francisco 207,000 to 269,000; Seattle 125,000 to 156,000. Although it is difficult to estimate the number with exactitude, those employed in casual occupations were a sizable proportion of this growing worker population. In Los Angeles, one labor force study estimated the population of transient men living and working in the city to be around 126,000, but acknowledged a seasonal pendulum-like swing in the number of workers, which ranged from 31,000 in the summer to 169,000 in the winter.<sup>19</sup> For a city of fewer than one million residents, a demographic shift of this kind would be akin to a tidal ebb and flow.

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<sup>18</sup> The connection between urban capital and rural commodities as a theme in the history of the American West is most thoroughly explored in William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: Norton and Company, 1991); on the urban dimensions of economic development in the West and Pacific Slope, see John Findlay, *Western Cityscapes and American Culture After 1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Tom Sitton and William Deverell, editors, *Metropolis in the Making: the Urban West at the End of the Frontier* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, "Population Gain Shown," August 1, 1928, A1.

**Table 2.1 | Pacific Coast Urban Centers by Population and National Rank, 1920 and 1930**

	Population (1920)	Rank	Population (1930)	Rank
Los Angeles	576,673	10	1,238,048	5
San Francisco	506,676	12	634,394	11
Seattle	315,312	20	365,583	20

Source: United States Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, 1789-1945* (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1949).

The reach of these urban centers extended across oceans and national borders. Carey McWilliams fittingly described the Pacific Ocean an “American Highway,” a reference to the role of Los Angeles and California to Asia and the Pacific Rim.<sup>20</sup> The draw of Asian markets sparked the entrepreneurial imagination and inspired the projection of American capital abroad. By 1920, each of the major cities on the Pacific Coast had cultivated linkages with a larger world. From its very inception, Seattle’s leaders had ambitions to build the city into the Manhattan of the Pacific, along with the attendant flow of goods and economic influence. To advance toward this vision, the city took advantage of its maritime connections to Japan and the Philippines along the Great Circle Trade route. Meanwhile, San Francisco’s Golden Gate, a term that preceded the famous bridge, invoked notions of American progress and manifest destiny over the Pacific. This imagery was rooted in reality, given that half of the products leaving San Francisco Bay during the 1920s and 1930s were bound for Asia. In Southern California, new rail lines and expanding oil interests extended the sphere of Los Angeles’ influence

<sup>20</sup> Carey McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island on the Land* (New York: Deull, Sloan, and Pearce, 1946) 3.

far across the border with Mexico.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, in the decade after WWI, Los Angeles experienced astonishing economic and urban growth, outpacing all other American cities. In these ways, the flow of goods and capital put these three urban spaces at the center of the Pacific Coast economy in the 1920s.

As the largest hubs of transportation and capital, these three metropolises exerted a gravitational pull over workers' travel. When Eduardo Carrasco, a young Mexican American, hitched a ride on a train out of Texas, all paths seemed to lead to Los Angeles. "I came by freight train," recalled Carrasco, "Not by bus, not by airplane, not by car, but by freight train... everybody, all the older guys, used to take the freight train – I mean on top of the train – and that's the way they went to Los Angeles, like hobos."<sup>22</sup> Railroads were often the preferred form of transportation, but that left workers with little choice about their destination. The map of railroad lines along the Pacific Coast was circuitous, but also coordinated by the handful of cities in the region. For Latino workers like Carrasco, there was a particular urban pattern to their migration to California along the Southwestern border. Mexican migrants like Carrasco may have found work along the tracks and in the agricultural fields, but first they had to go to the city.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The significance of the Pacific in shaping the economy of the west is a topic widely explored in the historiography of western history. White, "The West and the World Economy," in *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own*, 236-269; and Pomeroy, "The Far West and the Rest of the World," *The Pacific Slope*, 253-292. More recent literature productively views this history through the lens of empire and the imperial ambitions of the United States as well as the development of a borderland region. these include Rob Wilson, *Re-imagining the American Pacific: From South Pacific to Bamboo Ridge and Beyond* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Colleen Lye, *America's Asia: Racial Formation and American Literature, 1893-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Juan Mora-Torres, *The Making of the Mexican Border* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001).

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Edward Carrasco, Rosie the Riveter World War II American Homefront Oral History Project: conducted by Jess Rigelhaupt, 2008, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2009, 3.

<sup>23</sup> *Mexicans in California: Report of Governor C.C. Young's Mexican Fact Finding Committee* (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1930) 57.

Carrasco and thousands like him selected from a variety of transportation methods to travel both long and short distances, all of which converged in the city. In Los Angeles, the Southern Pacific railroad fanned out from the center of the city, connecting workers to inland California, the American Southwest, and northern lines to the center of the state. Seattle's Northern Pacific rail line tunneled directly into the urban core, delivering workers to housing and areas adjacent to the city's freight yards and docks. The waterfronts in San Francisco and Seattle also connected workers to work in Alaskan fisheries and longer-term jobs aboard ships bound for Asia and South America.<sup>24</sup>

An elaborate web of short lines complemented long distance travel by shuttling goods to markets and workers to jobsites. The late nineteenth century marked a feverish period of railroad construction around the region. From 1900 to 1920, railroad corporations nearly doubled the mileage of available track in Washington, Oregon, and California, increasing its reach from 7,400 to 13,900 miles. The main impetus for this massive infrastructure expansion was a desire to connect small farming districts and mines to urban markets, but workers also exploited these new connections between the city and the hinterlands. To take just one example, in 1919, the Pacific Coast Railroad Company operated fifty-four miles of track heading south out of Seattle to the coal towns of Newcastle, Coal Creek, and on to Black Diamond and Franklin. With 236 coal cars and six passenger cars, this short line was one of the primary carriers for the coal industry

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<sup>24</sup> A number of cities constituted smaller nodal points in the network of workers' movement. Portland, Stockton, and Sacramento all for large numbers of workers. Transportation on railroads made places like Oroville, Watsonville, Gray's Harbor, Cle Elum, and Eureka. Likewise, geographic lines drawn by politicians did little to contain the moving patterns of workers. For fishermen and loggers, the northern border did little to divide the salmon runs and timberfields of Washington and British Columbia. Similarly, agricultural laborers would have listed a number of other North American cities among their list, including Vancouver, Tijuana, and Juneau.

in the Puget Sound. Each day, the railroad traveled from Seattle to the end of its trident-shaped line, delivering workers and picking up coal. By the turn of the century, many of the small carriers had been consolidated or subsumed into the Northern Pacific and the Burlington Northern lines, though the miles of track remained.<sup>25</sup>

Nodes of transportation enabled the constant shuffle of workers between urban and rural areas. In Seattle, the railroad terminus was located less than one mile from the shipping piers. The interurban rail line in Los Angeles whisked workers from the main stem to the ports at San Pedro and Long Beach. San Francisco's Embarcadero provided a dizzying array of transportation options. A trolley line running along the waterfront gave workers access to numerous ferries and other shipping lines, which in turn facilitated transit across the bay to shipyards in Oakland and the agricultural fields of Alameda. In addition, a number of long rail lines maintained interchanges in the city center. On any given day, seven passenger trains departed from San Francisco to Los Angeles. Meanwhile, shorter urban lines such as the Belt Line, Ocean Shore, South Pacific Coast, Omnibus, and the San Francisco Railroad and Power Company all met near the city's Ferry Building, giving workers access to the entire city as well as nearby communities.<sup>26</sup>

Transnational migration further intensified the importance of cities as hubs within the casual labor economy. As major port cities, San Francisco and Seattle distributed transoceanic immigrant workers out to various worksites. In 1924, 14,790 immigrants entered through these two cities, which accounted for more than 90 percent of the

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<sup>25</sup> Donald Robertson, *Encyclopedia of Western Railroad History: Volume III Oregon and Washington and Volume II California* (Caldwell: Caxton Printers, 1986); Glenn Chesney Quiett, *They Built the West, an Epic of Rails and Cities* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1965); Carlos Schwantes, *The West the Railroads Made* (Seattle: University of Washington Press in association with Washington State Historical Society and the John W. Barriger III National Railroad Library at the St. Louis Mercantile Library, 2008).

<sup>26</sup> "The Port's Railroad Has the Best Connections," Virtual Museum of San Francisco, Accessed September 27, 2010, <http://www.sfmuseum.org/hist8/beltrr.html>.

immigrants entering Pacific Coast ports.<sup>27</sup> For those crossing the border from Mexico into the United States, the path was often more circuitous given that labor contractors transported workers directly to railroad projects or agricultural fields in Texas, Arizona, or Colorado. Even still, in a remarkably short period of time, these migrants also gravitated toward an urban area. According to historian George Sanchez, 45 percent of Mexican immigrants that came to Los Angeles during the 1920s had found their way to the city within three years of their arrival in the United States.<sup>28</sup>

The need for a place to lay up between jobs also contributed to the gravitational pull of these cities. The wax and wane of the economy created a need for temporary housing that encouraged workers to shape their migrations around cities. Workers flocked to cities to “lay up” between seasons, especially during the winter. In his study of itinerant workers, Carleton Parker observed that the vast majority of the California’s casual laborers were annually “driven out of the mountains by poor weather or finished crops.” Parker cited a “mass of direct and indirect information that suggested that more than two-thirds of casual laborers ‘faced sustained winter unemployment.’” Even in the city, employment stalled over the winter months as road and building construction slowed and other urban occupations shut down for the season. Canvassing the cheap lodging houses in San Francisco and Los Angeles, Parker and other social investigators found tens of thousands of workers, in their words, “laying up.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, *Annual Report of the Commissioner General of Immigration* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1924) 65.

<sup>28</sup> On immigration centers of the Pacific Coast, see Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco’s Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press) 179-203.

<sup>29</sup> Carleton Parker, *The Casual Laborer and Other Essays* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1920) 80.

Workers also used cities as safe harbors from the unwelcoming environment of rural towns. When seasonal work in the hinterland subsided, small communities could not, and would not, support a large population of unemployed workers. Towns recognized the significant contribution that migrant workers made to the local economy, but as labor demand dipped, casual laborers were deemed extraneous. At best, this population of drifters was seen as a nuisance and a drain on community resources. At worst, itinerant workers were viewed as a threat to social order. In his travels throughout the West as a harvest hand, truck driver, and maritime worker, wobbly agitator Ralph Chaplin encountered a widespread sense of antagonism directed towards itinerant workers. “Farmer bosses, rich and poor alike, were inclined to treat us as human outcasts beyond the law,” he recalled. “If a stiff had as little as twelve dollars on him when arrested, the judge would fine him ten of that.” The alternative was more than a month in jail on “a trumped-up charge of vagrancy or disorderly conduct.” “The real punishment,” Chaplin wrote in his autobiography, “consisted of being released in the middle of winter without warm clothing... as he ‘rode the rods; back to his native ‘skid road.’” and raconteur. Thus during the slow times, workers were often shoved out of town using vagrancy and drifter laws as well as local ordinances that required able-bodied men to work or actively seek work.<sup>30</sup>

Often, rural areas resorted to threats and vigilante violence to push casual migratory workers out of town. In some of the starkest examples of vigilantism in the American west, throughout the 1910s and 1920s local mobs in Yakima, Washington; Sacramento, California; Cle Elum, Washington; and Exeter, California arrested, attacked,

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<sup>30</sup> Robert Chaplin, *Wobbly: The Rough-and-Tumble Story of an American Radical* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1972) 110-134.

and expelled those accused of labor agitation or undercutting the wages of locals. Rumors circulated through small towns about charitable food for hungry workers laced with arsenic and strychnine to “solve the problem” of tramp workers. Vigilance committees patrolled the highways, railroads, and city streets to drive out those they deemed labor agitators—individuals who often looked strikingly similar to unemployed workers. During the harvest of 1915, Yakima authorities arrested nearly one hundred workers on suspicion of radical activities after a series of confrontations over low wages and poor working conditions. Although no formal charges were filed, probably because the arrests were untenable, the workers only secured their release after agreeing to sign a statement that each would “remain at useful employment and avoid agitation among workers.”<sup>31</sup>

For workers of color, the specter of racialized violence in rural areas made the relative safety of the city even more attractive. A consistent pattern of violence against Asian workers marked the turn of the century. In towns like Tacoma, Washington; Truckee and Chico, California; and rural encampments like Hells Canyon, Idaho and Issaquah, Washington, white mobs attacked Chinese workers, destroyed their property, and forced them out. Similarly, Japanese workers commonly faced the claim that they displaced locals from employment. In 1921, a Japanese work crew in Turlock, California was roused from their beds and deported from the city by a group of white vigilantes. To the south, in Porterville, a group of “night riders” harassed farmers and ranch owners for employing Japanese help. This treatment was part of a larger pattern of violence and

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<sup>31</sup> James Newbill, “Yakima and the Wobblies, 1910-1936,” in Joseph Conlin, *At the Point of Production: The Local History of the I.W.W.* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981) 170; Greg Hall, *Harvest Wobblies: The Industrial Workers of the World and Agricultural Laborers in the American West, 1905-1930* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2001); on the hostility towards transient workers beyond the Pacific Coast see See Higbie, *Indispensable Outcast* and Kenneth Allsop, *Hard Travelin’: The Hobo and his History* (New York: Penguin, 1972).

intimidation in towns and rural areas throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>32</sup>

Cities were hardly immune to intolerance. For several decades, officials had decried the flow of unemployed and idle men that filled the center of the city, particularly in the winter. They used local statutes against vagrancy, drunkenness, and disorderly conduct to police casual laborers. The City of Los Angeles was quite familiar with methods for discouraging transients in the city. Between 1890 and 1910, as Kelly Lytle Hernández observes the city of Los Angeles was incarcerating more tramp workers each year than any city in America in an attempt to sanitize its image as the idyllic city of angels. “Using incarceration to literally cage the seasonal “tramp menace,” the city’s commercial and civic elite steered one of the nation’s most dramatic booms in incarceration,” she writes.<sup>33</sup> Throughout the 1920s, city officials had declared “war on mendicants,” as in the case of 1923, when police raided boarding houses and razed tents encampments. Again, in 1927, the city organized a dragnet to rid the city of unemployed workers, arresting 3,141 men for vagrancy along the streets of Main Street, because they lacked proof of a current job. Although many of them claimed to be agricultural workers

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<sup>32</sup> Raymond Berry, editor “The Parade of Races in California Agriculture” (Oakland: Federal Writers Project, 1938) 3. On the systemic persecution of workers of color, see Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), Roger Daniels, *The Politics of Prejudice: The Anti-Japanese Movement in California and the Struggle for Japanese Exclusion* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999); Jean Pfaelzer, *Driven Out: The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans* (New York: Random House, 2007); Rick Baldoz, *The Third Asiatic Invasion: Migration and Empire in Filipino America, 1898-1946* (New York: NYU Press, 2011); California Department of Industrial Relations, *Facts About Filipino Immigration Into California* (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1930) 9.

<sup>33</sup> Kelly Lytle Hernandez, “Hobos in Heaven,” *Pacific Historical Review* 83:3 (August, 2014) 415.

on their way north for a new harvest, they were shipped to a city quarry to break rocks as physical demonstrations of the seriousness of the city program.<sup>34</sup>

The built environment of the city acted as a literal and metaphorical shield against these forms disproportionate urban policing and rural vigilantism. The safety of numbers afforded residents a degree of anonymity. Densely packed urban spaces allowed casual laborers to recede into the background. In public parks and busy street corners, workers floated through the crowd and loitered on park benches without being singled out. Locations like the Plaza in Los Angeles or Pioneer Square in Seattle became notorious haunts for casual workers who could gather and socialize, but quickly disperse. Much to the dismay of Progressive-era reformers, owners of worker hotels and billiard halls often screened the door and windows, effectively shielding the activities (and identities) of the occupants from public view. The upper floors of a bunkhouse were even further removed from the gaze of authorities. In these respects, the city offered quite a contrast to the exposure of life in hinterland worksites and small towns.

Finally, perhaps more than any other function, the mechanisms of hiring maintained the gravitational pull of Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles within the network of labor migration. The combination of remote work locations and tremendously variable demand for laborers throughout the year made it impossible for employers to rely upon workers coming directly to them. Equally, casual laborers could not risk extended stretches of travel or unemployment while looking for work. Instead, employers and workers depended on the vast infrastructure of hiring that existed within major cities.

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<sup>34</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, December 12, 1927, 122.

A number of different outlets existed in these cities to help connect workers to jobs. Formal licensed operations operated alongside the far less structured channels of the shape-up, labor contractors, and a web of word-of-mouth connections. As one observer of San Francisco's South of Market neighborhood noted, "If the cheap hotels have their on and off seasons the 'flop houses' and the slave market are always running full blast. For even in summer there are males looking for a job, with only a quarter in their pockets between them and a park bench."<sup>35</sup> By the middle of the decade, the elaborate network for job acquisition made cities "the clearing houses for agricultural job hunters" and the "machinery to locate labor."<sup>36</sup>

Casual laborers in search of a job could choose from an array of labor agents, varying from brick and mortar locations to informal shape-up corners. Formal employment agencies, which were licensed by the municipal government, operated highly visible storefronts. Much like the purveyors of goods or entertainment along the block, employment agencies advertised their services through sandwich boards, loud lettering, or "a man catcher," who invited potential employees in off the street to examine the job openings, their duration, location, and pay rate. Hopeful workers crowded the windows, watching attentively as new jobs were posted. San Francisco writer Charles Dobie described the frenetic scene at one employment agency on Howard Street:

It is crowded with sweating males standing before a huge blackboard which lists the jobs. Simon Legree, in person, but minus his rawhide boots and blacksnake, chants the prospects. "One flunkey at \$45 a week!... Two more machinists – any machinists in the house?" "Ten muckers for Oregon!" Time keepers for Mendocino County!: Two lumberjacks for Nova Scotia!" Railroad gangs, road

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<sup>35</sup> Charles Dobie, *San Francisco: a Pageant* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1933) 236.

<sup>36</sup> Federal Writers Project, *The Contract Labor System in California Agriculture* (Oakland: Works Progress Administration, 1938) 39-40.

builders, bridge workers, cannery hands, codfishers, stable-boys, apricot pickers, workers in the prune orchards, fig gatherers, waiters, cooks for harvest crews, oil-well drillers, waiters, night clerks, raisin packers, job after jobs.<sup>37</sup>

Alongside the many profit-driven employment agencies, each city also operated public employment agencies, funded by a combination of city, state, and federal resources. The city of San Francisco opened the first public not-for-profit employment agency for workers along the Pacific Coast in 1868, with Seattle following suit in 1896. The state of California's Division of Immigration and Housing argued strongly for a more robust coordination of labor in the state, asserting that it was "vital" that an agency "have knowledge of the labor situation in the entire state; and prevent a man from being idle in Los Angeles when there was work for him in Fresno." Despite continual funding challenges, these public agencies fulfilled thousands of employer requests for workers each month.<sup>38</sup>

Despite the emergence of public employment agencies and the expansion of federally-run employment coordination under the United States Employment Service during World War I, private parties remained the dominant players in the urban employment system. The number of for-profit employment agencies expanded rapidly in the years after World War I and by the 1920s, private agencies had become a permanent fixture in the streets. In California, 328 licensed private employment agencies operated in 1928, nearly double the number during the previous decade. [See Table 2.2] If anything, federal intervention during the war had only strengthened the economic position of these businesses by making workers and employers alike grow accustomed to working through

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<sup>37</sup> Dobie, *San Francisco*, 240.

<sup>38</sup> "Employment agencies, 1925," Carton 7, Federal Writers' Project Source Material on Migratory Labor, District no. 8, BANC MSS C-R 2, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

a labor agent. As the USES scaled back after the war's end, private agencies were perfectly positioned to take on the role of helping unemployed veterans and other laborers find work. Indeed, private employment agencies were big business. In 1928, private agencies made 450,000 placements, garnering a total of \$1,772,000 for the fees they charged to the workers placed in jobs.

**Table 2.2 | Licensed Private Employment Agencies, California, 1919-1928**

Year	Licensed Agencies
1919	184
1920	204
1921	238
1922	240
1923	248
1924	295
1925	315
1926	326
1927	317
1928	328

Source: California Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State of California* (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1919-1928).

Which is not to say that public options disappeared entirely after the war. Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles all continued to operate public employment agencies in order to provide workers an alternative to the for-profit system. In Seattle, the main public employment office was located at 77 South Washington Street, just one block east from the waterfront and one block west from the Tourist Hotel. This office provided job counseling as well as transportation to for occupations located outside city limits. The men's division of Seattle's municipal employment office reported a record 34,000 placements for casual work in 1923, a sixty-two percent increase over the previous year. In Los Angeles, the state-operated public employment agency accounted for 52,000

placements that the same year.<sup>39</sup> However, despite strong hiring statistics, these public employment agencies continued to struggle for funding in the decades following World War I.<sup>40</sup>

Whether workers chose the public or private agencies, the machinery for employment was centrally located in the laborer's geography of these three cities. A map of Seattle's employment agencies between 1920 and 1930 illustrates this concentration. Roughly ninety employment agencies operated in the city during that time period, with at least sixty-eight located within one mile of the center at Yesler and First Avenue [See Figure 2.2]. The three blocks of Occidental Street running south from Yesler were particularly dense, with twenty-six individual offices. Charitable organizations operated a handful of these agencies. The Millionair Club, a charitable organization founded to help war veterans locate work operated a placement agency at 98 Main. Other agencies, like the Filipino Employment Agency at 516 Jackson or Togo Company at 407 Main advertised their services to specific communities, Filipino and Chinese respectively. A handful of others opened shop in the warehouse district just a bit further south, while others established a presence along the waterfront. Some of these agencies operated on a more regional basis, such as Murray and Ready, with offices in Portland, San Francisco, and Sacramento. The remaining twenty that do not appear on the map were located a bit further away on the southern end of the warehouse district, or north along the waterfront.

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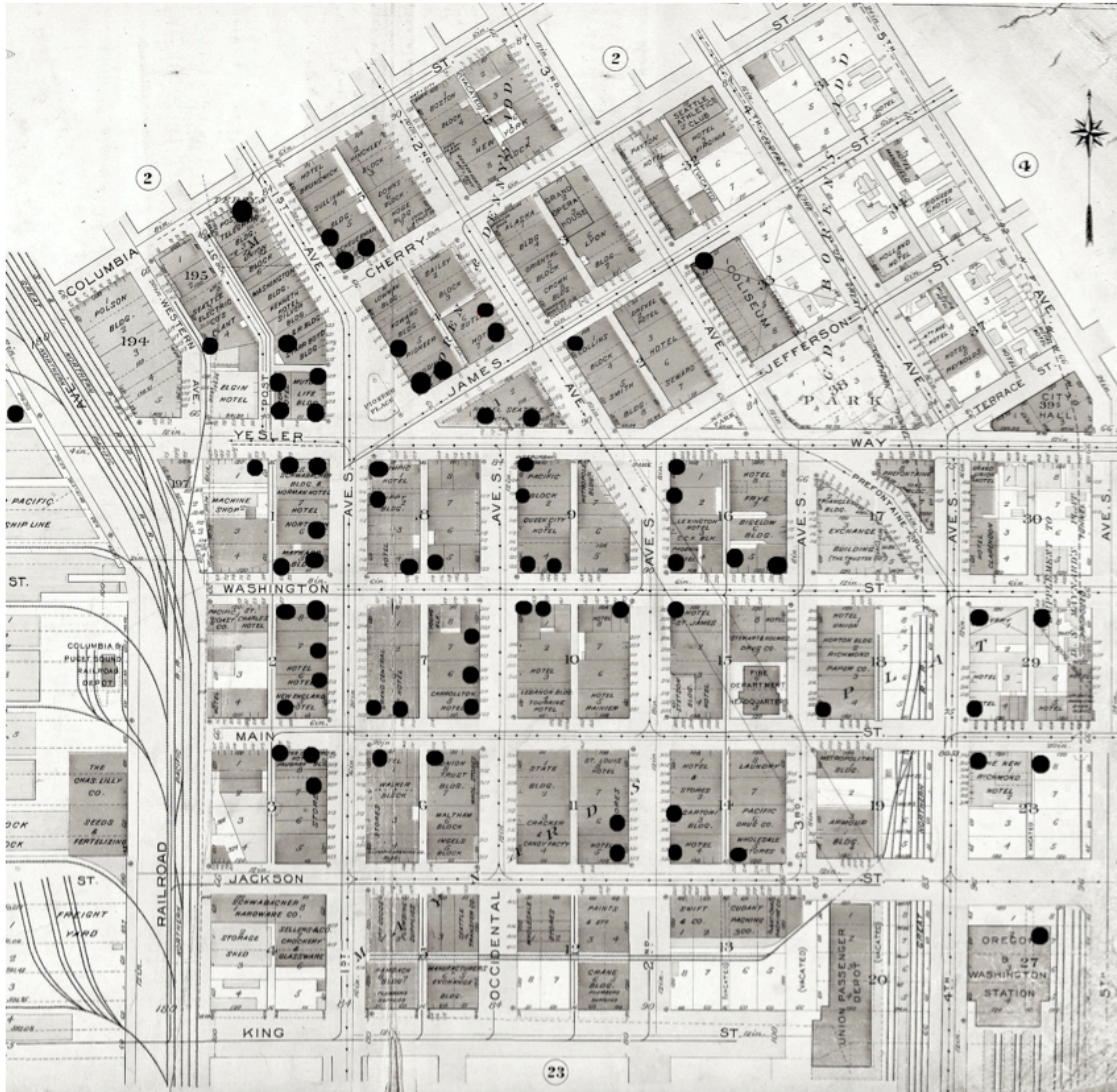
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<sup>39</sup> California Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State of California* (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1919-1928) 37.

<sup>40</sup> Report of J.H Shields, Superintendent, Public Employment Office, "Twenty-Seventh Annual Report of the Civil Service Commission of the City of the Seattle, Washington for the Year ending December 31, 1922," Unpublished Report, Civil Service Commission Collection, Seattle Municipal Archives.

<sup>41</sup> *Polk's Seattle City Directory* (R.L. Polk & Co., 1930).

Figure 2.2 | Sixty-Eight Seattle Employment Agencies, 1920-1930



Source: *Polk's Seattle City Directory, 1920-1930* (Seattle: Polk's Seattle Co.) and George William Baist, *Baist's Real Estate Atlas, 1912* (Philadelphia: Baist, 1913).

The employment machinery reflected and reinforced the racialized hiring patterns in the casual labor economy. While one set of agencies catered to white workers, a parallel system serviced the demand for workers of color, and all the rest. Agencies catering to a white clientele “did not encourage” Asian or Mexican applicants and would often refer employers seeking a Mexican or Asian workforce to competitor agencies that specialized in placing workers of color. In such instances, white agencies would receive a

referral fee, but would forego the total commission for the placements.<sup>42</sup> Through the 1920s, the number of agencies catering to Asian workers increased. In Seattle the number of firms advertising services for Chinese, Filipino, and Japanese workers quadrupled, growing from two in 1919 to eight agencies by 1927.<sup>43</sup> Clustered around Seattle's Main Street, large outfits like the Japanese AB agency, the Togo Employment Agency, and the Wah On Company focused almost exclusively on an Asian clientele. In some cases, contracting agencies operated as intermediaries for much larger concerns, as was the case for the Young and Mayer Company, which worked for Quong Ham Wah, the largest supplier of Asian workers to the Alaskan canned-salmon industry.<sup>44</sup> Still other agencies were run less formally, as part of another business, such as a pool hall or café. These types of agencies were more common in the spaces inhabited by Asian workers, namely Chinatown and Manilatown.<sup>45</sup>

Many contingent workers chose to forego licensed agencies in favor of the more informal channels of labor contracting. In some cases, employers worked directly with owners of hotels and rooming houses to find workers. When the Dillingham Commission investigated the urban institutions frequented by immigrants in 1911, they found extensive connections between the proprietors of large boarding houses and construction and railway companies, fish canneries, and ranches. Many boarding house owners earned

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<sup>42</sup> California Department of Industrial Relations, *Facts About Filipino Immigration Into California* (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1930) 48.

<sup>43</sup> This information is derived from petitions for municipal licenses from the city of Seattle, available in the Seattle Municipal Archives, Comptroller and Clerk Files Index and *Polk's Seattle City Directory* (R.L. Polk & Co., 1930)..

<sup>44</sup> Lauren Wilde Casaday, "Labor Unrest and the Labor Movement in the Salmon Industry of the Pacific Coast" (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of California, 1938)

<sup>45</sup> "Employment agencies, 1925, Federal Writers' Project Source Material on Migratory Labor, District no. 8, BANC MSS C-R 2, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

generous incomes from their work as labor agents, sometimes exceeding their income from the hotel itself. One boarding house owner earned \$ \$1,200 in lodging fees and an additional \$500 for contracting workers, while another earned \$1,000 from the boarding house and \$2,500 from contracting.<sup>46</sup>

Independent labor contractors also played an important role in the more informal hiring system. Contractors found potential workers and handled all labor expenses, including hiring, transporting, and feeding, and paying workers. For this service, contractors earned a flat fee as well as a portion of the profits. In Alaskan canneries, for example, contractors earned a generous return if the salmon run was strong and work at the facility went smoothly. The size of contracted work gangs varied. Some contractors worked closely with a dozen workers, moving throughout the region and its many industries as a team. Others mobilized much larger crews, with the largest labor contractors securing several hundred workers for a single cannery in Alaska.<sup>47</sup>

Contractors viewed the city as the center of an extensive network of hiring. At the height of the season, labor contracting was a frenetic activity in the metropolises of the Pacific Coast. One observer described the scene outside Young and Mayer, one of the largest organizations devoted to finding workers for the Alaskan canneries:

Just a few doors south of Pacific on San Francisco's always congested Grant Avenue the sidewalks are virtually blocked. The men mill idly about peering over one another's shoulder or through the dirty, partially-curtained windows into the interior... From time to time, also a swarthy foreman appears and moves among the throng outside talking to the men. At a

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<sup>46</sup> U.S. Congress, *The Dillingham commission: Abstract of Reports of the Immigration Commission*, vol. 23, 61<sup>st</sup> Congress, 3<sup>d</sup> Session, 1911, S Doc 747, 204.

<sup>47</sup> While historical studies of labor contracting in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and very early 20<sup>th</sup> century are quite good, there is very little treatment of the subject after World War I. See Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor*; Jack Masson and Donald Guimary, "Asian Labor Contractors in the Alaskan Canned Salmon Industry," *Labor History* 22:3, 377-397; Yuji Ichioka, "Japanese Labor Contractors and the Northern Pacific and the Great Northern Railroad Companies, 1898-1907," *Labor History* 21 (1980): 325-50.

gesture from the foreman several of the workers follow him back into the building.<sup>48</sup>

Contractors like Young and Mayer commonly signed up several hundred men in one day, hoping to fill an entire train or boat bound for places like Juneau and Ketchikan. Arranging a job through these kinds of informal connections, like many aspects of the casual labor economy, relied upon social connections and intimidation rather than formalized channels. Unlike licensed agencies or the hiring kiosk outside the shipyard, organizations like Young and Mayer did not advertise. There was no signage, sandwich board, or even a permanent location.

Throughout the region, contractors maintained arrangements with pool hall, beer parlor, and hotel owners to funnel men into the city, often to a particular office, in exchange for a finding fee. “Unofficial agents” of the labor contractor, according to one investigation, did “a certain amount of discreet advertising among their clients.”<sup>49</sup> Labor contractors culled the bars and lodging houses and growers filled their trucks with workers.

For many workers in the casual labor economy, the labor contractor was the most reliable and consistent source of employment. The experiences of Ponce Torres, a Filipino laborer on the Pacific Coast, demonstrate the critical role that labor contractors played for many workers in the region. With few connections aside from his brothers, Torres recalled arriving “in Seattle not knowing any place to go in here because we did not know of anybody at all.... we were seven from our home town and that’s all we know... we were among the early ones.” Needing work, Torres and his brothers turned to

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<sup>48</sup> Casaday, “Labor Unrest and the Labor Movement in the Salmon Industry of the Pacific Coast” 178.

<sup>49</sup> Casaday, “Labor Unrest and the Labor Movement in the Salmon Industry of the Pacific Coast” 90.

a labor contractor. “Patring was his name, Patring Pascua,” he remembered. “He was the one who led us to get a job from the contractor. He was given a commission to furnish the worker. He knew a contractor and he introduced us to him and so we got a chance to go to Alaska that summer.” When they returned from Alaska, Torres went back to the contractor for more work, a process he would repeat again and again over the following decade.<sup>50</sup>

Labor contractors cultivated relationships with casual laborers that often tended toward paternalistic forms of dependency. Some contractors extended lines of credit to workers in need of cash as they waited to depart for their next job. When Ben Rinonos, a Filipino worker in Seattle, returned to the city after a twenty-five day stint on the railroad, his search for work was brief. He recalled, “we come back to get a job in Alaska cannery, so we got a chance, but we didn’t leave until the specified time, about, that’s over a month we stayed in Seattle. But they give us credit see, those contractors give us credit.”<sup>51</sup> Labor contractors would also provide housing for workers as they waited for a particular season to start. One Seattle labor agent was known to rent a house for Filipinos as they waited to be shipped to Alaska. With promises of free rent for days, even months, workers built ties with particular agents, often establishing relationships that would span years and hundreds of miles of travel. The provision of credit lines, cheap accommodations, transportation, and supplies for the season often cut a fine line between benevolence and economic exploitation.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with Ponce Torres, Washington State Oral History Program, August 25, 1975, 3 and 6.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Ben Rinonos, Washington State Oral History Program, May 27, 1975, 9-10

<sup>52</sup> *Report on Alaska Cannery Labor Conditions*, made by special federal investigator to hon H.L. Kerwin, Director of Conciliation, U.S. Department of Labor, Washington, D.C., September 7, 1920.

Although licensed employment agencies and labor contractors controlled the bulk of hiring in the cities, even more informal channels remained. Some workers relied on the connections of pool hall and boarding house operators, who notified workers of upcoming job opportunities in exchange for kickbacks from the contractors. According to one investigation, these “unofficial agents” of the labor contractor did “a certain amount of discreet advertising among their clients.”<sup>53</sup> A billiard room, for example, might advertise new jobs on a chalkboard hung quietly in the corner.<sup>54</sup> For maritime workers, the “crimp” or boarding house man often functioned as a shipping agent who arranged jobs and extended lines of credit. Filipino migratory workers found work through hotel owners, who often had close relationships with labor agents. At Seattle’s Olympic Hotel, Filipinos received cheap or even free lodging in exchange for signing up to work through a particular Alaskan contractor. To avoid licensing fees and official scrutiny, these informal contractors rarely advertised, preferring to operate through word of mouth. State officials regularly voiced frustration about the existence of this parallel market and their inability to regulate it.

Workers also took their job-hunting to the street corner. Widely known but never advertised, hiring corners and other designated spots served as critical spaces for connecting employers and employees. As one study of farm labor in California explained, “each locality has some place where labor ‘hangs out,’ and to this place the employer experienced in getting help goes and gets his men.”<sup>55</sup> University of Southern California

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<sup>53</sup> Casaday, “Labor Unrest and the Labor Movement in the Salmon Industry of the Pacific Coast” 90.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Leo Aliwanag, Washington State Oral History Program, August 19, 1976, 14.

<sup>55</sup> R.L. Adams and T.R. Kelly, “A Study of Farm Labor in California,” *Report of the College of Agriculture and the Agricultural Experiment Station of the University of California* (Berkeley: University of California, 1918) 71.

sociologist Emory Bogardus noted the presence of these hiring corners in his study of Mexican workers around Los Angeles. Mexican *jornaleros*, he wrote, “congregate at certain centers, sometimes on given street corners, to which employers come whenever they want a ‘hand’ or any number of unskilled laborers.”<sup>56</sup> In Seattle, writer Carlos Bulosan offered his own description of the hiring corner. Tired of the tumble of the city, the central character of his semi-autobiographical novel, *America is in the Heart* obtains a job outside a Filipino church late at night in Seattle. Few words were exchanged between his main character, Carlos, and the prospective employer: “you looking for a job? Yes, sir. Then get in the truck and let’s go.”<sup>57</sup> To the inexperienced Bulosan, the informal arrangement seemed odd, confusing, and a bit exciting. Wages might be negotiated then and there, but more often than not, men would jump in the back of the truck and work out the details later. In Bulosan’s case, he woke up the next morning in Central Washington, unsure of precisely where he was or what the work would be. Regarding the hiring corner, Bogardus plainly commented: “work, thus, is irregular.”<sup>58</sup>

### **The Urban Laborer’s Geography**

The urban laborer’s geography concentrated the worker population and proved critical to the functioning of the regional economy. Federal Census records from 1930 Los Angeles offer a window into the demographic composition of this community. Within the city’s urban core, large boarding houses and lodging hotels abounded. The blocks surrounding Main and Spring streets between Sunset Boulevard and 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue –

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<sup>56</sup> Emory Bogardus, *The Mexican in the United States* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press, 1934) 38.

<sup>57</sup> Carlos Bulosan, *America is in the Heart* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973) 106.

<sup>58</sup> *Seattle Times*, July, 29, 1905; see Friday, Organizing Asian American Labor, 95; Emory Bogardus, “The Mexican in the United States,” *Journal of Applied Sociology* 1934, 38.

a space of less than one half square mile - were home to nearly 8,000 people. Of those residents, eighty-one percent recorded a temporary status as lodgers, boarders, and roomers [See Figure 2.3]. The vast majority were single men living in large boarding houses with two hundred or more lodgers. At the center of this map, itinerant workers sought the services of a number of boarding houses. The thirty-two lodgers residing at 230 West First Street, just one block from Spring Street, found employment in temporary and casual positions. Janitors, restaurant dishwashers, construction laborers, and various types of railroad employment were all common types of employment. This heavy concentration of temporary residents contrasted sharply with the greater cityscape of Los Angeles, where only thirteen percent of the residents lived in these kinds of ephemeral situations. Of the few permanent residents living in this part of the city, many owned or operated the boarding houses and businesses that catered directly to casual workers and other members of the working class, though a small residential community of Mexican families existed at the northern end of the district.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Calculated from United States Bureau of the Census, 1930 Manuscripts, Enumeration Districts 727-30, Los Angeles, California.

Figure 2.3 | Boundaries of Los Angeles Enumeration Districts, 727-730, 1930

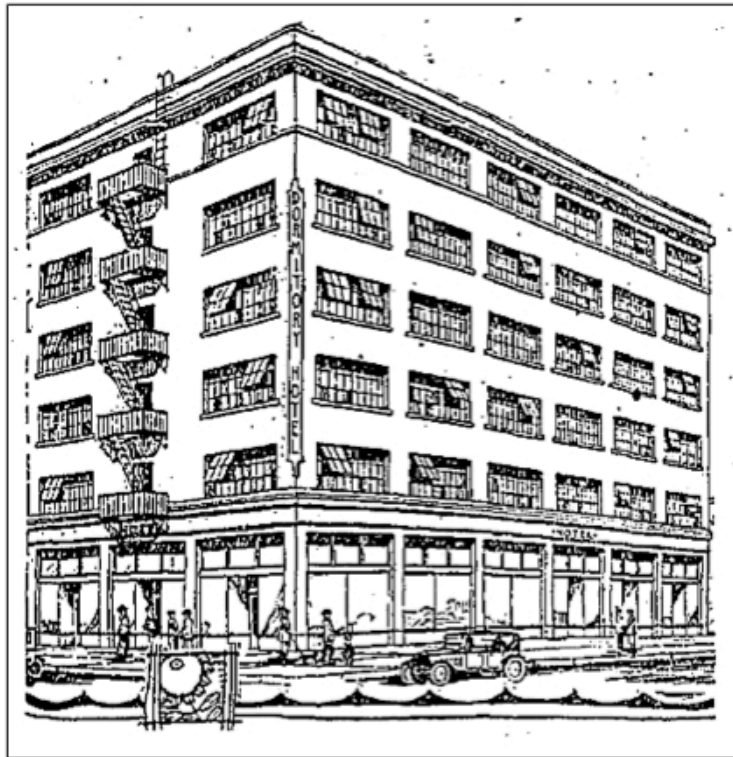


Source: Drawn from United States Census District Microfilm Locator.

Growing demand for working class housing in Los Angeles determined the priorities of urban space. In the spring of 1926, workers broke ground on a new hotel on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Towne, several blocks from the center of the city. According to owner James Cox, hundreds of men were searching for inexpensive, temporary rooms in the area. His hotel sought to fill this market need. Advertised as a “glorified flophouse,” the Towne Hotel would supply 450 beds for transient men “who are in the habit of spending not more than fifty cents for a bed when night-time comes.” Transient workers, he suggested, were under the impression that “jobs hang on trees in California and they come to reap the harvest” from other places along the Pacific Coast

as well as well as the fields of the Mid-West. Confident that demands among migratory workers for housing spread beyond Los Angeles, Cox had plans to open similar hotels along the Pacific Coast. There does not seem to be any further record of Cox's expansionist dreams.<sup>60</sup>

**Figure 2.4 | The Towne Hotel, Towne and Fifth Avenue, Los Angeles, California**



Source: *Los Angeles Times*, May 9, 1926.

Just four years later, the census records indicate sixty-three residents at the Towne Hotel, ranging in age from eighteen to seventy-one and representing a variety of casual industries, including several building trades worker from Finland, Germany, Missouri, and Oregon; a handful of miners, and a number of men who listed their occupation as “laborer – odd jobs.” Two women were lodged at the hotel – Anna Heron, a fifty-three

<sup>60</sup> “Hotel to Erected” *Los Angeles Times*, May 9, 1926, E5; United States Bureau of the Census, 1930 Manuscripts, Enumeration District 19-745, 7a, 7b, 8a.

year old dry goods clerk and Ella Bellamy, a thirty-two year old hotel clerk. In early April, apparently a period of low labor demand within the city limits, thirty of the residents at the Towne Hotel were unemployed. [See Appendix 10]

By the end of the 1920s, when the dust had settled from new construction and building conversions, hotel proprietors had constructed an urban space that catered to a narrowly defined demographic. A study of urban hotels and residences taken by federal census officials in 1932 illustrates the extent of this transformation. In Los Angeles, 146 of 235 hotels catered to “mixed transient and permanent” residents, with an additional twenty-six reportedly catered to “mainly transients.” Among the hotels in San Francisco, 191 of 333 hotels housed so-called mixed residents and another eighteen catered to transient guests. Seattle had the largest number of transient hotels; of the 358 hotels then operating, thirty-three catered exclusively to transient guests and 253 were open to both short-term and more permanent residents.<sup>61</sup>

The size of these residences varied, with Seattle’s transient hotels, most of which dated back to the end of the nineteenth century, accommodating an average of 113 guests, San Francisco hotels averaging 164 guests each, and the newer structures for transients in Los Angeles, built during the city’s economic boom of the 1910s and 20s, averaging 218 guests.<sup>62</sup> The majority of casual workers found a place to sleep in small to medium-sized hotels with room for twenty to sixty residents. Locations like the Tourist Hotel or the Carrollton, offered affordable lodging for just a few dollars a week. Monica Sone, whose family owned the Carrollton fondly described the interior of her family’s hotel:

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<sup>61</sup> Groth, *Living Downtown*, 306.

<sup>62</sup> Groth, *Living Downtown*, 306.

It had twenty outside rooms and forty inside ones, arranged in three block formations and separated by corridors. The hallways and inside rooms were lighted and ventilated by the ceiling skylight windows. During the cold of winter, these inside rooms were theoretically warmed by a pot-bellied stove in the lobby, which was located just at the left of the top stair landing. There was only one bathroom, with a cavernous bathtub, to keep sixty-odd people clean. A separate restroom, For Gents Only, eased the bathroom congestion somewhat. For extra service all the rooms were equipped with a gigantic pitcher of water, a mammoth sized washbowl, and an ornate chamber pot.<sup>63</sup>

Hotels like the Carrollton offered occupants a degree of privacy and comfort in the form of a small room, typically ten feet by ten feet. These rooms rarely had individual toilet facilities and offered sparse furnishings – a single light, a bed, and perhaps a dresser. Such accommodations could cost three to five dollars per week, which was significantly more expensive than a bunk in a flophouse, which might cost less than two dollars per week .<sup>64</sup>

For workers who came to the city with less money in their pockets, the most affordable facilities were also the least accommodating. Hotels that advertised bunk beds for as little as five cents were a ubiquitous feature. The large bunkhouses that lined Main and Spring streets in Los Angeles are emblematic of this trend. In 1930, 115 residents lived at 207 South Spring, most of them casual workers or unemployed. Farther down Spring Street, between 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> streets, more than 240 largely casual and unemployed men found housing in some of the tallest building in the city. The cheapest lodging houses were designed to accommodate the seasonal nature of laborers' migrations. These accommodations, which were typically open only during the winter when migrant

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<sup>63</sup> Sone, *Nisei Daughter*, 42.

<sup>64</sup> On housing costs see, Geoghegan, "The Migratory Worker in Seattle"; Paul Herbold, "Sociological Survey of Main Street, Los Angeles, California," (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Southern California, 1936); and Groth, *Living Downtown*, 145-7.

workers returned to the city, operated out of vacant warehouse space or businesses. Much like the seasonal labor contractor, the operators of these flophouses skirted city and state housing regulations and fire codes.<sup>65</sup>

Flophouses and bunkrooms were spartan. Stuffed onto large open floors, tiers of stacked beds offered little privacy from fellow inhabitants and a single stove in the center of the drafty building provided warmth. Toilets and bathing facilities were limited, often one per floor to be shared by 30-40 individuals. Many lodging houses separated each sleeping stall with wood partitions or chicken-cage wire, which provided the residents a degree of security for their possessions. Among transient workers, the cramped, austere accommodations came to be known derisively as the “cages” or “cubicles.” [See Figure 2.5] Such names might also have aptly described the small number of exits, fire escapes, and windows, which were often nailed shut to retain heat. Flophouse operators often supplied blankets, but many workers opted to go without, preferring their own jackets to ward against what one observer described as “the miscellaneous insect life that usually infested the bedding” at such establishments.<sup>66</sup> Paper-thin walls made nearly every conversation - even coughing - “a communal act.”<sup>67</sup>

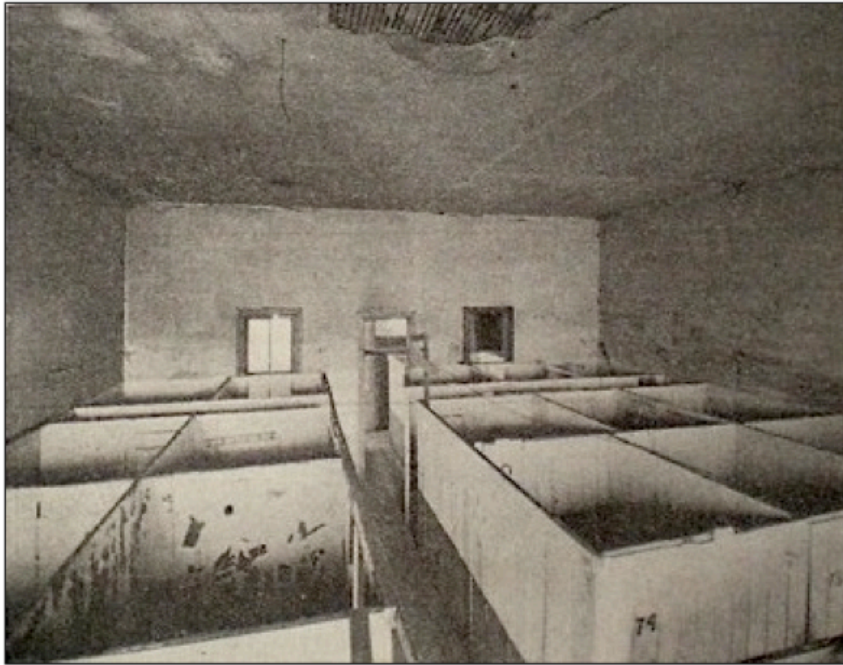
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<sup>65</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, 1930 Manuscripts, Enumeration District 728; Housing and immigration inspectors in California often complained about the evasion of state housing and sanitation laws. See Commission of Immigration and Housing in California, *Annual Report* (California: State Printing Office, 1925) 12 and *Report of the Department of Health and Sanitation* (Seattle: City of Seattle, 1921).

<sup>66</sup> Towne Nylander, “The Casual Laborer of California,” (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of California, 1922), 47

<sup>67</sup> Groth, *Living Downtown*, 101

**Figure 2.5 | California Lodging House “Sleeping Stalls”**



Source: Commission of Immigration and Housing of California, *Annual Report* (California State Printing Office, 1915) 70.

More fortunate laborers might find space at one of the handful of lodging houses operated by charitable organizations. Most often associated with religious evangelism, the Salvation Army, Volunteers of America, and a variety of other church missions provided inexpensive housing for hundreds of men. In Los Angeles, the Midnight Mission—known on the street simply as Brother Tom’s or the Mission—home to more than two hundred transient men. Although the Mission publicly billed itself as a place for the indigent and homeless, the list of lodgers suggests otherwise. Railroad workers, construction and building tradesmen, and ranch hands and truck drivers filled the beds of the Mission, with another sixty-six men listing their occupation as “Laborer – Odd Jobs.”

Some forms of housing were even more ephemeral. On the margins of the city center, workers appropriated empty warehouses, vacant lots, and other unoccupied

spaces. Tent encampments and shantytowns popularly known as “Jungles” became common features of the urban landscape near the railroad tracks and waterfront. In Seattle, the city health inspector noted at least twenty dwellings constructed along the railroad tracks leading south from the city occupied by what he termed “hobo men.” Deemed “intolerable” by Seattle’s department of health and sanitation “such places were destroyed” by the city.<sup>68</sup> But these extreme measures did little to constrain the emergence of these “Jungles.” By the middle of the 1920s, the department of health and sanitation determined that the number of encampments in Seattle had grown out of control. Inspectors were unable to cope with the thousands of formal and informal locations that required inspection. The city’s department razed 1,504 similarly intolerable sites throughout the city between 1919 and 1929.<sup>69</sup>

California’s Commission on Immigration and Housing noted a similar rise in hastily constructed and ephemeral housing in San Francisco and Los Angeles. In its 1924 annual report, the Commission reported the existence of many new encampments on the edges of the two cities. Such areas were “nothing more or less than groups of small, cheaply constructed, one-room huts, crowded closely together, where living accommodations of a most limited character are to be had.” The investigators indicated this kind of encampment “offers a rendezvous for an undesirable element, composed largely of nomads, who will constantly roam about the state from camp to camp.”<sup>70</sup> In 1925, the Los Angeles police discovered an abandoned two-story building filled with

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<sup>68</sup> *Report of the Department of Health and Sanitation* (Seattle: City of Seattle, 1921), 90

<sup>69</sup> *Report of the Department of Health and Sanitation* (Seattle: City of Seattle, 1930), 8; see also Matthew Klingle, *Emerald City: An Environmental History of Seattle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) chapter six.

<sup>70</sup> Commission of Immigration and Housing in California, *Annual Report* (California: State Printing Office, 1925) 18.

squatters. Officials were startled by the size of the encampment which was composed of a highly organized series of rooms and common areas, showers, and even a library.<sup>71</sup>

For workers teetering on the edge of poverty, ephemeral housing filled a critical need. Tramping his way across the United States from Mississippi 1926, Eluard McDaniel recalled “there were not hotels in the city of Los Angeles for the price we had to pay. Twenty-five cents would only pay for one in a common flop-house.” Unable to afford traditional lodging, men like McDaniel sought out other more economical alternatives. According to McDaniel and his friends, the Southern Pacific Railroad yard had some of “the most comfortable box-cars” and they made a home there every time they came through Los Angeles.<sup>72</sup> Likewise, Ralph Strom, an immigrant from Sweden, routinely found shelter in abandoned warehouses when he came to Seattle in between his work in the woods and fields. As he recalled, “we had our own bedding, so we used to go and sleep there at night in that warehouse. And then walk down and keep the blanket bundle with the saloon keepers in the daytime and pick them up and go up there at night.”<sup>73</sup> With some ingenuity, even the seemingly inflexible landscape of concrete, metal, and wood could be adapted, rearranged, and made to accommodate the housing needs of workers.

Beyond the ongoing search for adequate housing, workers also sought opportunities for leisure and relaxation. Along with employment agencies and boarding

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<sup>71</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, January 18, 1925.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Eluard Luchell McDaniel in Adriane Ruggiero, *American Voices From the Great Depression* (New York: Cavendish Square Publishing, 2004) 73. McDaniel joined the Communist Party in 1930 and later traveled to Spain to fight with the Abraham Lincoln Brigade.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Ralph Strom, in Janet Elaine Rasmussen, *New Land New Lives* (Seattle: University of Washington Press) 192.

houses, recreational spaces constituted a mixed-use landscape that emerged in support and as a consequence of the casual labor economy.

Pawnshops, theatres, cheap diners, and other corollary institutions served a critical function in the urban lives of casual workers. Describing the “immigrant bachelor subculture” among Filipinos in Los Angeles in the early twentieth century, historian Linda España-Maram suggests that “the immense popularity of leisure places dedicated to masculine pleasures testifies to the importance of public spaces for communal experience.”<sup>74</sup> With such little space available in bunkhouses, workers’ desire for some kind of social and quasi-domestic venue spilled out into the public streets. Cafes and cheap eateries became their kitchen and dining room, a park bench served as a porch, and billiard and dance halls became spaces for socializing.

The corner of Jackson and Kearny in San Francisco provides a particularly fine example of the clustered and mixed-use nature of the laborer’s geography. This site was home to the International Hotel, which was built after fire destroyed the block in 1906. With 184 rooms, the hotel sheltered a large number of Filipino migrant workers. More importantly, the International and the businesses that surrounded it served as an anchor for the broader Filipino community. A line of shops on the street level catered to the population of transient workers, including several Filipino-owned barber shops, a dance hall, and several cafes. Across the street, the Café Luneta offered workers food as well as several gambling games in the back. Just around the corner was the Santa Maria, which served traditional Visayan food. Scholar Esteban Habal has suggested that the shops and

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<sup>74</sup> 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) 39-40.

recreation sites around the hotel “constituted an urban ‘ghetto,’ known to the residents simply as the ‘Kearny Block,’ and they were essential to the neighborhood’s Filipino community.”<sup>75</sup>

For transient workers looking to relax and socialize, the laborer’s geography provided many options. By one count of the area, Los Angeles’ Main Street was home to sixty-three lunch counters, sixteen theatres, seven taxi dance halls, five pool halls, three burlesque shows, three honky-tonks, and one Turkish bathhouse.<sup>76</sup> This was also, according to a 1931 article in the *Los Angeles Times*, “the zone of the all night picture theaters,” where cheap talking pictures and even cheaper silent pictures filled the storefronts. One theatre had a reputation for its raucous and “laughter-convulsed crowds,” who made up for the lack of sound with their own interjections and improvised dialog. Just down the street, another building was home to a “combination dance palace and boxing arena” where workers could be entertained during the day by some of the “names that rank high in the pugilistic world.” In the evening, the boxing ring gave way to a dance floor “patronized by sleek and niftily dressed Filipinos.”<sup>77</sup> The article continued:

The numerous colored electric signs, which advertise the business establishments... stand out in bold relief against the darkness to attract the visitor.... Theatres where famous stars once played became the homes of burlesque, “As You Like It.” Taxi dance halls offered the society of white girls alike to Filipino or the white man.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Quoted from Esteban Habal, *San Francisco’s International Hotel: Mobilizing the Filipino American Community in the Anti-Eviction Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007) 34-5. See also James Sobredo, “From Manila Bay to Daly City: Filipinos in San Francisco,” in *Reclaiming San Francisco: History, Politics, Culture*, James Brook, Chris Carlson, and Nancy Joyce Peters, editors (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1998) 278; Anonymous interviewee, “The Seeds of community were sown in the early 1900’s,” Manilatown Heritage Foundation, accessed November 14, 2013, <http://www.manilatown.org/ourpast.htm>.

<sup>76</sup> Herbold, “Main Street,” 88-106

<sup>77</sup> Eddie Mar, *Los Angeles Times*, May 24, 1931, L5.

<sup>78</sup> Herbold, “Main Street,” 8-9.

The entertainment spots popular with itinerant workers often straddled the line between illicit and illegal. To Stewart Holbrook, Western skid roads “were wilder tougher, and more openly sinful than anywhere in the Midwest.” “In keeping with the bigger, taller timber,” he wrote, “They were gaudier; everywhere they were bigger, wider, and more of it.” Prohibition did little to curb the consumption of alcohol in San Francisco, enforcement of such laws was notoriously lax. Illicit alcohol consumption simply went underground or workers fortified their beverages themselves in “bottle bars” where bartenders looked the other way. Stories of urban stills and bootlegging were quite common in the shadowy back halls of the districts.<sup>79</sup>

Writing in 1927, author Louis Adamic characterized the areas around Los Angeles’s Plaza as “various camouflaged bawdy houses, dance halls, forlorn-looking hotels, bootleg dives, hop joints, movie shows, tamale stands, peep shows, shooting galleries, and stores selling rosaries and holy pictures.” Adamic did not conceal his disdain for these parts of the city, which he and others often cast in racialized terms. The seedy side of Los Angeles’s central core was facilitated by “cheap wooden tenements occupied by Mexicans and chinks” and “an awful stew of human life.”<sup>80</sup>

Prostitution, a common feature of the laborer’s geography, functioned as a corollary and intersecting casual labor economy for women and some men. As a wide-eyed young girl, Monica Sone remembers the “Brunette haired women with powdered faces and chewing gum” from the “forbidden” burlesque houses that lined the street in

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<sup>79</sup> Mildred Andrews, *Pioneer Square: Seattle’s Oldest Neighborhood* (Seattle: Pioneer Square Community Association, 2005) 96.

<sup>80</sup> Louis Adamic, *The Truth About Los Angeles* (Kansas: Haldeman-Julius Publications, 1927) 9-10.

front of her parents' Seattle hotel.<sup>81</sup> In Seattle's Japantown, one laborer estimated there were approximately 200 prostitutes in brothels and another 350 prostitutes ostensibly working as barmaids and other service industry jobs. Another of Seattle's larger brothels near Pioneer Square advertised 600 women. In Los Angeles, near the intersection with Alameda Avenue, Aliso Street was filled with "red lights, curtains, music, and other signs of the Tenderloin," according to one account. The area was notorious for being the center of a vibrant sex trade. Although anti-prostitution crusades during the 1910s closed many of the brothels operating in this area, operations were soon re-established in more secretive locations nearby.<sup>82</sup>

Gambling joined prostitution as an integral part of this illicit economy. Gambling facilities were highly organized and connected in networks that ran the length of the Pacific Coast. For example, the Toyo Club of Seattle, a Chinese-run gambling parlor and operator of employment agencies and lodging houses, maintained branches in many of the smaller towns up and down the coast, as well as San Francisco. Expensive pastimes like gambling and prostitution interfered with workers' efforts to save money. Especially for immigrant workers, gambling and prostitution conflicted with desires to attain greater

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<sup>81</sup> Sone, *Nisei Daughter*, 16.

<sup>82</sup> The description of Aliso Street brothels is located in *Los Angeles Daily Times*, December 14, 1907. As Richard White observes, in the West, "Prostitution usually has emerged on a large scale where there are large ratios of men to women, where the men are rootless and mobile, and where sufficient money is available to pay for sexual favors." Richard White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own: A New History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992) 304. The coincidence of prostitution and the casual labor economy is well-established in the historiography. In Los Angeles, see Julia Castello, "A Night with Venus, a Moon with Mercury," in Gail DuBrow, *Restoring Women's History Through Historic Preservation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003) 177-196; Wild, *Street Meetings*; and España-Maram, *Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles's Little Manila* See, Asbury, *The Barbary Coast*; Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service – Series A, Part 5; Prostitution and "White Slavery"; on Seattle, see Andrews, *Pioneer Square: Seattle's Oldest Neighborhood*, 98 and Ito, *Issei: A History of Japanese in North America*, 403.

social mobility, return to their homeland with large savings, or send remittances to family members. One Japanese worker expressed his experience in haiku:

At Chinese gambling,  
Each 'one more chance' pulls me down  
Further into debt<sup>83</sup>

But some immigrant workers were able to resist the temptations of these recreational activities. Ralph Strom expressed strong dislike for this illicit economy. In his recollection of the streets around Seattle's Yesler way, "I was with the worst – gamblers, prostitutes, everything you could think of – and no homelife. I had no use for crooked stuff. I had no use for the shady stuff."<sup>84</sup> Likewise, Shoichiro Katsuno, another Japanese migrant worker, later recalled that he and his fellow migrant laborers abstained from these practices. They were commonly known as the "three no boys" – that is, no drinking, no woman-buying, no gambling."<sup>85</sup>

Hoping to avoid exploitation, but in need of socializing, men like Katsuno and Strom bent parts of the laborer's geography to their own purposes. Throughout the district, workers appropriated public space in impromptu fashion. According to San Francisco writer Charles Dobie, the "industrial nomads who come in from the countryside" filled the park benches, loitered on street corners, and filled the lobbies of hotels and employment agencies. Accounts of parks and street corners like the Plaza in Los Angeles or the Embarcadero in San Francisco describe a "scene of intense activity

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<sup>83</sup> Kazuo Ito, *Issei: A History of Japanese in North America* (Seattle: Japanese Community Service, 1973) 745

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Ralph Strom, Rasmussen, *New Land New Lives*, 192.

<sup>85</sup> Ito, *Issei*, 403.

going on; one can see the incessant movement of men.”<sup>86</sup> Men played dice games, cards, and chess while evangelists, socialists, and traveling salesman preached their messages, often to a lively and interactive crowd. Los Angeles’s population of transients transformed a spare lot at Aliso and Alameda into a handball court, much to the dismay of the police, who conducted raids on several occasions to rid the area of “floaters.”<sup>87</sup> In the estimation of Giichir Mizuki, a Japanese immigrant living in Seattle, any location could be transformed into a place of interaction and entertainment. Mizuki recalled the interior of an employment agency, where he often sought employment: “The waiting room was fifteen to twenty feet square with benches set by the walls and a table in the center on which a couple of *go* or *shogi* boards had been placed. Issei who came to get jobs spent time there playing games until they got calls.”<sup>88</sup> When men like Mizuki recorded their memories of life on the road during the 1920s and 1930s, some told stories of the difficulties, the dangers of their work, or the excitement of jumping trains. But nearly all of them described the sights and sounds of the city and the various forms of entertainment and leisure that they enjoyed when seeking respite from the strains of the casual labor economy.

### **The Street: Diversity and Division**

The dense conglomeration of employment agencies, lodging houses, and multi-use spaces of entertainment brought together a diverse and heterogeneous community on

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<sup>86</sup> A.W. Griewe, “A Study of the Habitués of the Downtown Parks of Los Angeles, With a View to Ascertaining Their Constituency, Their Social Processes, and Their Relation to the Larger Community Life,” 61, 69.

<sup>87</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, February 22, 1923

<sup>88</sup> Ito, *Issei*, 858

the streets of the laborer's geography. However, the heterogeneity of the street elided the homogeneity behind the façade of the boarding house. In contrast to the hinterlands, where employers policed racial boundaries by routinely segregating workers according to their perceived race, the urban laborer's geography embodied tremendous diversity of ethnicity and nationality. Places like Los Angeles's Plaza were emblematic of the mixed crowd of transient and unemployed men. In 1925, A.W. Griewe, a graduate student in sociology at the University of Southern California, wrote about the "social habitués" of the large public park. He found "Japanese, Chinese, Mexicans, Caucasians, Negroes" interacting, conversing, and arguing, seemingly without "artificial distinction." The economic exigency of the unemployed men, he wrote, had given way to a "common-to-all feeling" among those in the park. He described unemployed Mexican workers who were "on intimate terms with other jobless habitués" of different racialized groups. At the Plaza, "The Negro," he suggested, "had found white men who will listen to him" on equal terms. The casual labor economy, in his estimation, was like a blender that "obliterates the color and race line."<sup>89</sup>

The diversity of the laborer's geography Griewe observed in public spaces extended in some limited ways into laborers' habitations. Lodging houses that catered to contingent workers could be diverse and multinational. In San Francisco, a five-block cross section of the city offers a window into one such heterogeneous space. Located at the interface between Chinatown, the Barbary Coast, and Little Manila, this area housed nearly 2,500 individuals, most of whom were single men from all sectors of the casual labor economy. Men like Jose Yiarte, a forty-three year old immigrant from Spain who

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<sup>89</sup> On the plaza, A.W. Griewe, "A Study of the Habitués of the Downtown Parks of Los Angeles, With a View to Ascertaining Their Constituency, Their Social Processes, and Their Relation to the Larger Community Life" (M.A. Thesis, University of California, 1926) II.

found work as a laborer in the rail yards; John Smith, a native Californian working on the docks as a shipyard carpenter; Serapio Boteros, a thirty-five year old Filipino employed as an apartment house janitor; Bruce Lyle, a twenty-three year old hotel bus boy from Minnesota; and Joe Wallace, a black Texan who labored as a train waiter all lived in close proximity. The lodger rolls for this particular section of the city were remarkably diverse, including more than 300 white Californians, 500 residents from China, 129 Italians, 69 Filipinos, 18 Mexicans, and 10 Canadians.<sup>90</sup> [See Figure 2.6]

**Figure 2.6 | A Cross Section of San Francisco's Day Labor District, North of Market**



Source: 1930 Census Enumeration District 391; and August Chevalier, December 15th 1903, Galloway Lithograph Company, San Francisco.

<sup>90</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, 1930 Manuscripts, Enumeration District 391.

Across Market Street, on the southern side of San Francisco's laborer's geography, the lodgers boarding at 356 Third Street illustrate the multinational and multiethnic character that could be found in a single building [see Appendix 3]. Of the 23 residents lodged at this medium sized hotel, most were between the ages of 25 and 45 and all but one were single. These men came from a range of places – Greece, Turkey, the Philippines, West Virginia, and Mexico – and they spoke a variety of different languages. The men recorded different occupations, but each was a part of the casual labor economy – laborer, truck driver, seamen, and dishwasher. Charles Dobie described the diversity of the residents in this part of the city:

[It] is given over to a sprinkling of trivial industrial plants, and hotels and boarding houses catering to alien ship crews run by a Chinese, but the patrons who lounge about its squeezed lobby are unmistakably from Central and South America... Japanese stewards and cabin boys, and the unpleasant smell of pickled-cabbage drifts out from shops on the ground floors.<sup>91</sup>

In Seattle, a similar mix of workers could be found in the lodging houses around Yesler Way. In Los Angeles, the lodging houses that lined Main and Spring streets were also international in their clientele. Indeed, the lodger rolls for the largest metropolises of the Pacific Coast offer some evidence for a world of working class diversity and comingling. In many of the boarding houses that filled the major cities of the Pacific Coast, conversations in Greek, Spanish, Japanese, or German would have been equally if not more common than English.

However, the ostensible heterogeneity of the laborer's geography should not be overstated. While the street corners and parks offered evidence of diversity and some residential addresses were open to a mix of workers, the world behind closed doors was

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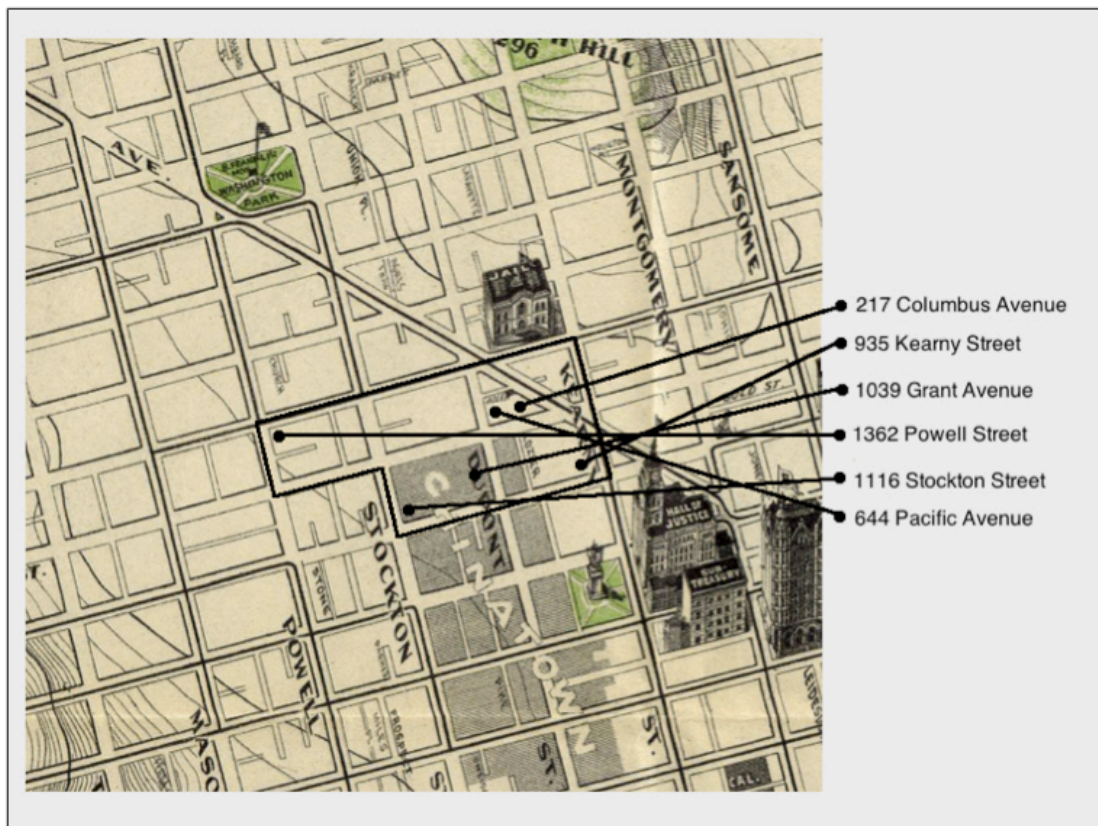
<sup>91</sup> Dobie, *San Francisco: a Pageant*, 234.

often remarkably segregated. Among casual laborers, racialized boundaries carved up urban space. In Seattle, , rooming houses from the edge of the water to Fourth street were almost entirely filled by native born white men and European immigrants, while a large population of Asian immigrants lived just up the hill. In Los Angeles, Latino and Asian workers were pushed to the margins, away from the core area around Main and Spring streets. In San Francisco, some Mexican and Greek workers managed to find niches south of Market Street, but that area remained dominated by native-born whites and immigrant workers from Western Europe. Asians and other workers of color almost exclusively laid up across Market Street, on the north side near Pacific, Powell, and Kearny.

Even neighborhoods that have the appearance of diversity were in fact homogenous. The boarding houses clustered in the five-block space discussed above underscore the tension between the diversity of the street and the segregation that existed within these residences [See Figure 2.7]. The lodging house at 217 Columbus Avenue, for example, catered exclusively to Italians and Swiss Italians who worked as farm and factory laborers, cooks, dairy milkers, and hotel janitors. Just around the corner, at 644 Pacific, a Japanese-owned hotel was home to a group of immigrants from the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Mexico, and Portugal working as cooks, shipyard workers, and construction laborers. , Though hailing from different countries, contingent workers would have shared at least some level of linguistic commonality. Nearby, the German and Swiss proprietors of the hotel at 935 Kearny Street predominantly catered to a Filipino clientele employed as general laborers in the iron works, candy factory, or nearby hotels. In addition, a large number of residents at this location worked in the maritime industry. One block to the south, at 1039 Grant, a small lodging house only housed Chinese

laborers, most employed on farms or in urban service industries. One block to the east, on a street otherwise filled completely with Chinese lodgers, the hotel at 1116 Stockton catered solely to African American men. This Japanese-owned hotel lodged a group of 15 general laborers, longshoremen, janitors, and waiters who came from all over the country, including many from the southern United States. [each lodger list is recorded in Appendices A.5-A.7].

**Figure 2.7 | Mixed Hotels, San Francisco, 1930**



Source: United States Census, San Francisco, California Enumeration District 391, 1930; and August Chevalier, December 15th 1903, Galloway Lithograph Company, San Francisco.

Ethnic whites found particular niches in these cityscapes, establishing small concentrated ethnic communities throughout the city. At 1362 Powell Street in San Francisco, near the other hotels discussed above, was the Hotel Du Midi, operated by

Dominica Olargue. The Du Midi was the center of a small but tight Basque community, known to the men who circulated in and through this part of the city as the *Ostatuak*. [See Appendix 9] The majority of the city's Spanish-born population, which did not exceed 300 boarding house residents, lived within a few blocks of each other. Gathered in the bars and boardinghouses of this small area, this community of Basque men was the largest in the American West. Along with the Du Midi, other hotels such as the Lugeas brothers' Hotel Espana, and "Gernika" Basabe's Hotel Iriarte, comprised San Francisco's Basque district, which was located around 7<sup>th</sup> and Broadway.<sup>92</sup>

Residential patterns were determined by other factors as well, including the industries in which one worked. Perhaps due to its proximity to the port, some of San Francisco's hotels near the Embarcadero catered directly to sailors and maritime workers, often operating specialty services for these men. In many cases maritime labor agents, known as crimps, operated these hotels, locating jobs for roomers, extending lines of credit, and seeing to other needs. Of course, the segregation of housing according to industry had its own racialized dimensions, given that very few workers of color were able to work in skilled occupations such as longshoremen, carpenters, or fishermen. In this respect, segregation according to industry could serve to reinforce racial divisions within the casual labor economy.

Discrimination by lodging house owners limited options for workers of color. Hotel owners carefully chose occupants to fill their hotels, often catering to particular ethnic or national groups. A Japanese hotel owner in Seattle described his conscious choice of clientele: "I had to make some drastic change in my business policy or to enter

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<sup>92</sup> Jeronima, Echeverria, "California-Ko Ostatuak: A History of California's Basque Hotels" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Texas, 1988).; enumeration district 391

some other new field. I thought deliberately about and finally I made up my mind to start a hotel for white customers rather than Japanese.” White lodgers had more money, he reasoned.<sup>93</sup> Leo Aliwanang, a Filipino laborer who spent a great deal of time traveling the Pacific Coast for different jobs, recalled the difficulty of locating an apartment in certain parts of these cities. “It’s alright in the downtown district, he recalled, “but outside you know, higher class, it’s very hard to get.” Even when Aliwanang and his compatriots returned from good paying jobs, flush with money and capable of paying higher rent for more luxurious accommodations, they were turned away when the landlord met them in person.<sup>94</sup> In Los Angeles and Seattle, white community groups initiated efforts to eliminate lodging houses, employment agencies, and recreation sites frequented by workers of color. Los Angeles was also home to a coalition of white community organizations that tried to keep several Japanese landowners from constructing boarding houses in their neighborhood, to stop what they called an “embryo Jap colony.”<sup>95</sup>

More often, however, discrimination was difficult to see - implicit but no less powerful. Middle-class and working-class whites regularly associated workers of color—particularly those who traveled around the region for work—with myriad social and economic problems. From the late nineteenth century on, Mexicans and Latinos were considered vectors of disease, competitors for jobs, and contributors to the moral and

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<sup>93</sup> Interview with anonymous hotel owner Isamu Nodera, “A Survey of the Vocational Activities of the Japanese in the City of Los Angeles” (Unpublished Master’s Thesis, University of Southern California, 1936) 50.

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Leo Aliwanang, Washington State Oral History Program, August 19, 1976, 24.

<sup>95</sup> *Hollywood Citizen* 17 April 17, 1923, located in the Survey of Race Relations, 1924-1927, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University, Stanford California, Box 2 Folder 52.

economic decay of the city's interior.<sup>96</sup> In some instances, passive hostility evolved into open aggression on the street. On his many returns through Seattle, Zacarias Managan was harassed by white men and physically confronted for merely walking down the street.<sup>97</sup>

Inside some lodging houses, workers of color encountered an unfriendly reception from white residents. When Ponce Torres arrived in Seattle from the Philippines, for example, he and his friends found a room in a hotel conveniently near Pioneer Square, in close proximity to the waterfront where they had disembarked from a season in Alaska. As Torres recalled, the white inhabitants were generally unfriendly and loud and gave them strange looks. Torres also remembered abuse at the hands of the police: "we were very badly treated by the police force like we are being kicked in the sidewalk if we were walking three or four at a time, the policemen can just kick us and tell us to spread and things like that because they are afraid that there was always trouble."<sup>98</sup>

Latino workers also formed communities at the edges of the laborer's geography. In both Seattle and San Francisco, the absence of ethnically segregated hotels relegated to Latino workers to large boarding houses. Often, they would find rooms in hotels with other Spanish-speaking residents. In Los Angeles, some Mexican workers lived in the hotels of Main Street, but the largest community of Latino casual laborers resided in smaller buildings across the Los Angeles River and the railroad lines, around Anderson, Clarence, and Boyle Streets. This area was still in close proximity; the railroad was only

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<sup>96</sup> Three particularly excellent examples are William Deverell, *White Washed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides*; and Dana Frank, in Dana Frank, *Purchasing Power: Consumer Organizing, Gender, and the Seattle Labor Movement, 1919-1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Zacarias Managan, Washington State Oral History Program, September 30, 1975, 24.

<sup>98</sup> Interview with Ponce Torres, Washington State Oral History Program, August 25, 1975, 37.

a two-mile walk to the central employment agencies and entertainments of the Plaza. Historian Bill Deverell notes that proximity to the Los Angeles river “had long been one marker of Mexican Los Angeles. The riverbed itself, for at least much of the year, had also been claimed as Mexican space, home to poor communities or *colonias* forged from scrap wood or abandoned rail boxcars.” Other Latino workers roomed with one of many Mexican families that relied upon boarders to generate additional income. The railroad was only a short two-mile walk to the central employment agencies and entertainments of the Plaza.<sup>99</sup>

Excluded from other parts of the city, workers of color formed their own communities that responded to their needs. This section of the laborer’s geography also helped newly arrived immigrants orient themselves and find work more easily. According to one study of Japanese-owned hotels in Los Angeles, Japanese immigrant workers had an “immediate need... to find some places where they could room, eat their native meals together and feel quite easy in the midst of their new environment.” Hotel owners capitalized on this need for a familiar space, providing traditional food, information, and signage in languages other than English. As Mr. Kumanoto, a Japanese lodging house owner in Los Angeles, put it, ethnic hotels were built by those “who had better knowledge of English as well as American customs.”<sup>100</sup> In this way, hotel owners became cultural interlocutors for workers in a foreign place. In Seattle, lodging houses like the Hotel Milwaukee not only gave Filipino men a place to sleep, but also put them in touch with lines of employment, credit, information, and community.

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<sup>99</sup> William Deverell, *White Washed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) 130.

<sup>100</sup> Interview with Nodera, “A Survey of the Vocational Activities of the Japanese in the City of Los Angeles,” 52

Many years after he had retired from a life of contingent work and moving around the Pacific Coast for work, Al Robles recalled the many years he spent living in San Francisco's Manilatown and drew attention to a shared sense of history. "The Filipino boys all know each other," he told his interviewer. "We are drawn together. We all come from the same place. We feel at home here."<sup>101</sup> Undoubtedly Robles could have told stories of exclusion, white supremacy, and hardship, but instead he focused on the lively sense of community he experienced. For those races, ethnicities, and nationalities that lacked a critical mass of workers in a particular place, they could not obtain their own neighborhood. In such cases, they often pulled together, forming a very mixed company. Seattle's Asian population was not big enough to have clearly defined communities by Asian nationality. A pan-Asian community emerged in Seattle, which drew workers from Japan, China, and the Philippines.

## **Conclusion**

The laborer's geography embodied two sides of life for casual laborers. On one hand, it was a world of sociability and reprieve from the drudgery of work. As Peter Mendelsohn, a longtime resident of San Francisco's South of Market, characterized his experience, the neighborhood was "the happiest in the city" in large part because people "lived in the same hotel, because you like living with your buddies. Drinking, talking, gossiping, playing cards or dominoes, the people had a sense of the neighborhood as their home... Most were friends, but a different kind of friend, seasonal."<sup>102</sup> On the other hand,

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<sup>101</sup> Al Robles, quoted in, Habal, *San Francisco's International Hotel*, 21.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Peter Mendelsohn, in Ira Nowinsky, *No Vacancy: Urban Renewal and the Elderly* (San Francisco: Carolyn Bean Associates, 1979) 47.

the laborer's geography represented some of the worst conditions endured by casual workers in the region. Ralph Strom's memory of the time he passed in the city was less than positive: "how in the name of God could anyone have had a worse environment than I had when I lived in the Union Hotel? I was with the worst – gamblers, prostitutes, everything you could think of – and no homelife" Perhaps his attitude was informed the by an errant gunshot that had struck him in the leg as he walked past a gambling parlor in Seattle. Unsanitary living conditions, lack of work, and economic exploitation tempered workers' experience of the city.<sup>103</sup>

Employment agencies, cheap housing, and sites of leisure were the imprint of the casual labor economy on Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Workers and employers participated in making an urban space that fulfilled the critical function of the casual labor economy—employment—as well as laborers' need for socialization and leisure. As large numbers of workers continued to travel throughout the region at the close of the 1920s, the laborer's geography of the Pacific Coast bustled with activity. Each month, thousands of new migrants moved in and through urban areas, seeking employment in the region's casual labor economy. Capital demanded a flexible and mobile workforce; workers desired access to employment as well as locations for leisure and socialization. Sometimes competing, at other times complementary, these were the forces of urban change.

While the economic function of the laborer's geography was easy to grasp, the cultural meaning of this space was not so clear. This part of the city certainly had distinct meaning for men like Ponce Torres, Ralph Strom, and Peter Mendelsohn, who relied

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<sup>103</sup> Interview with Ralph Strom, in Rasmussen, *New Land New Lives*, 195.

upon Pioneer Square, the Embarcadero, and the Plaza for work, housing, and leisure. But that meaning and image was often at odds with the vision of those who sought to “reform” the city and viewed casual labor (and, by extension, laborers) as a problem to solve. As the size of this urban phenomenon grew and more workers filled the streets, it increasingly became the object of scrutiny for public officials, reformers, and social scientists. Those competing visions are the subjects of chapter three and four.

### Chapter 3 | Social Investigation and the Casual Labor Economy

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In the winter of 1926, A.W. Griewe sat on a park bench in the Plaza, one of Los Angeles's oldest public spaces and the social epicenter of the city's working class geography. Most days, Griewe simply observed the park's soapbox orators, mingled among the crowds, or quietly ate his lunch, while recording field notes about the habits of the unemployed men:

Young men are constantly walking about. These men are dressed in dirty, worn out clothes. Their faces have already the look of indifference in them. They are old young men... The Plaza habitué of the sidewalk has had a try and has failed. All of these men of the hobo class have failed. They are successful and persistent failures. Their whole, though young, lives behind them.

After nearly two months of careful observation, and armed with the transcript of nearly one hundred interviews and detailed notes, Griewe returned to the halls of the University of Southern California (USC) to write up his research. His thesis project, for which he earned a graduate degree, carried the verbose title, "A Study of the Habitues of the Downtown Parks of Los Angeles, With a View to their Constituency, Their Social Processes, and Their Relation to the Larger Community Life." Griewe's findings were not earth shattering, but it was the first serious scholarly study of the topic, featured a careful eye to detail, and wielded the conclusive authority of a social scientist. "Most of these floaters, as the name implies, have lost their social, moral, and economic bearing," he wrote. "The million men habitually unemployed in the United States present a pathologically economic condition," he concluded, "which calls for the wisest efforts of social educators, as well as political scientists." The observations contained in his thesis

project represent one of the most detailed accounts of the life and leisure of casual laborers in Los Angeles during this period.<sup>1</sup>

A.W. Griewe's research was part of a wave of interest in the casual labor economy, which I describe in this chapter as the apparatus of social investigation. From the end of World War I to the eve of the Great Depression, an array of social investigators associated with the best universities and well-funded governmental agencies descended upon this economic sector to explore the link between casual labor and a variety of "social problems." Graduate students rented rooms in bunkhouses to observe their subjects first-hand. Governors and mayors commissioned surveys of unemployment, health, and housing that centered on this population of workers. Researchers developed cutting-edge methods and deployed theoretical models from the nascent social sciences. Despite their diverse levels of funding, scope, and coordination, overall, they demonstrate a common intellectual and methodological project. Social investigators produced a shared understanding about the forces of social disorganization in the context of an emerging modernity and political economy. These studies rendered the casual worker as a social problem, in need of more research and intervention.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A.W. Griewe, "A Study of the Habitues of the Downtown Parks of Los Angeles, With a View to Ascertainning Their Constituency, Their Social Processes, and Their Relation to the Larger Community Life" (M.A. Thesis, University of California, 1926) 110-111, 59, 63.

<sup>2</sup> I use the term social investigator to signify an intellectual bloc of academic and government officials that utilized the emerging methods of social science research to investigate the casual labor economy during the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century along the Pacific Coast. The term is borrowed and adapted from Frank Tobias Higbie's "Crossing Class Boundaries: Tramp Ethnographers and Narratives of Class in Progressive Era America," *Social Science History* 21:4 (Winter 1997) 559-92. In doing so, this chapter brings together a range of researchers under a broad tent. I fold together the literature on industrial relations (itself an innovation of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century) with the growing number of studies on race relations. The core relationship between these various studies remains their interest in the demographic of casual workers and the use of new social science research methods most often associated with the Chicago School of Urban Sociology.

This chapter offers an intellectual history of the cultural category of the “casual laborer,” along with its many subcategories. The emergence of social science in America owes a great deal to this particular economic sector. During the first half of the twentieth century, academic and government researchers cut their teeth on studies of itinerant and immigrant workers that performed seasonal and contingent work along the Pacific Coast. Intent upon understanding the relationship between casual work, radicalism, and immigration, researchers descended upon the working class districts that supported this young, unattached, mostly male, and largely migrant population. In the process, they introduced and refined some of the methodological tools that would become the mainstay of social science research in the United States for decades. For example, social mapping and participant observation both found their start in this community of researchers. In the ivory tower of the academy, these scholarly inquiries were at the center of the development of social science in America.

This chapter explores casual labor as a cultural category brought into being by social investigators in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. While the terms of social class may be grounded in a material experience, their full definition and significance is the product of a cultural process. Researchers like A.W. Griewe, Robert Park, and Nels Anderson did not encounter the casual laborer as a fully formed working class subject. That is, the term “casual laborer,” or for that matter tramp, sojourner, traquero, or transient, was not always already there. The exigencies of profit and work may have defined the lived experience of the casual laborer, but it was an intellectual machine that gave it meaning. With a claim to objectivity and wielding the authority of social science, these researchers produced a discourse about casual workers. That discourse, in turn, sharpened the

internal and external lines that distinguished the casual labor economy, particularly those about racialized difference. Intent on demonstrating the social distance of casual laborers, a watch phrase of early 20<sup>th</sup> century sociology, researchers portrayed them as a threat to economic, political, and social order. There were many participants in that process, including the workers themselves, but social investigators were arguably the most powerful.<sup>3</sup>

To make that argument, this chapter turns attention on the archive of social investigation that comprises the footnotes of much of this dissertation. I have become quite familiar with the archive of social investigation in the process of constructing a detailed image of urban space during the early twentieth century. Maps of working class districts, first-hand accounts of employment agencies, and interviews with laborers have been invaluable for historians in search of the subaltern voice. The records generated by public officials and sociologists can be “read against the grain” and enables “history from the bottom up.” The time A.W. Griewe spent in the Plaza is invaluable, because it provides one of the only first-hand accounts of the park, and a detailed one at that. As such, his research notes appear in a number of other scholarly works on the history of urban Los Angeles. The work of Griewe’s contemporaries – people like Cloice Howd,

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<sup>3</sup> My argument for the discursive formation of social class models the work of Margot Canaday, who suggests a similar process for the formation of the homosexual subject during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The progenitor for this analysis is Michel Foucault. Using the example of the history of sexuality, Foucault makes a strong argument for studying the language, rhetoric, and institutions that give rise to social and cultural meaning: “to account for the fact that [sex] is spoken about, to discover who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak, the institutions which prompt people to speak about it and which store and distribute the things that are said. What is at issue, briefly, is the over-all ‘discursive fact,’ the way in which sex is ‘put into discourse.’” See Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); and Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990) 11.

Benicio Catapusan, Manuel Gamio, and Bruno Lasker - fill out the bibliography of the finest studies of comparative race and working class history.<sup>4</sup>

While social historians prize these documents, other scholars have warned caution. Emerging from the fields of ethnic and cultural studies, a growing literature demonstrates how the archive cannot be simply plucked from the stream of history. It is subject to the same biases, errors, and oversights of any other source material. A.W. Griewe's description of workers churning through the Plaza was hardly objective. Social investigation worked much like a photographer's snapshot. Griewe carefully selected his subject, focused his interpretive lens, framed it with words, and snapped the shutter. Rather than locate social investigators as passive recorders of history, this study recasts them as active participants in the construction of twentieth-century narratives about working-class migrants and transient laborers.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Apparatus of Social Investigation**

At the turn of the century, the American public developed a voyeuristic appetite for accounts of itinerant men in the American Midwest and Pacific Coast. Journalists, scholars, and fiction writers commanded the attention of readers with stories about the

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<sup>4</sup> Histories of urban Los Angeles, to cite one example, rely upon Griewe's study of the Plaza; see Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) and William Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza: Sacred and Contested Space* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> My understanding of the intersection between discourse and social power is informed by several works, including Kay Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991); Elizabeth Lunbeck, *The Psychiatric Persuasion: Knowledge, Gender, and Power in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Henry Yu, *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Alice O'Conner, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton University Press, 2001). Also, James Clifford, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography: a School of American Advanced Research Advanced Seminar* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

hobo, tramp, and bindle stiff. Flophouses, saloons, and the “long grey road” became the subject of muckraking journalists, novelists, and filmmakers. Jacob Riis’ *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), arguably the first to cast open the doors of cage hotels and employment agencies to the literate public, exposed the middle and upper classes to a previously invisible world of urban poverty. Other writers, like Josiah Flynt and Edwin Brown masqueraded as tramp workers and published their accounts in widely circulated newspapers. Alice Solenberger’s *One Thousand Homeless Men* (1911) not only presented the largest amount of data previously seen by the public, but also categorized them and speculated about the effect of poor housing and contingent employment upon their mental condition. Revelations of this kind seemed to contradict the reading public’s prevailing notions of progress and civilization. Though they lacked consolidation as a field of study, these were among the first accounts of the life and political economy of the casual migratory worker.<sup>6</sup>

Americans were also introduced to the casual labor economy through the pages and moving pictures of mass culture. Jack London took up the subject several times in his semi-autobiographical novels and serial stories published in daily papers. First published in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1909, his short story “South of the Slot,” featured the life of casual laborers that along San Francisco Market Street (the Slot), which London described as the “abode of the working class” and home of the unskilled laborer. The story features Freddie Drummond, a university professor who in the course of his research is drawn into life as an odd-jobs man and labor agitator. A few decades later, Jim Tully innovated the genre of “hardboiled” fiction through his chronicles of

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<sup>6</sup> On the antecedents to 1920s social investigation, see Todd DePastino, *Citizen Hobo: How a Century of Homelessness Shaped America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); and Kenneth Kusmer, *Down and Out on the Road: The Homeless in American History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

travel and work as a hobo, published in 1924 as *The Beggars of Life*. Tully's work was adapted into a Broadway play and eventually the first talking picture produced at Paramount Pictures. The most iconic of these working class narratives was Charlie Chaplin's little tramp, which he developed for Keystone Studios in 1914. Chaplin's character became the icon of the casual laborer in the 1910s - affable, yet bumbling, lazy, and not above petty crime. Fictional characters of this kind fed the public's appetite for the salacious details of life on the other side of the tracks.<sup>7</sup>

While this body of journalism and fiction catered to the public's desire for a window into the back alleys and hobo jungles, studies of the casual labor economy did not gain credibility and coherence until they became associated with powerful institutions, namely the largest research universities in the United States. It was the University of Chicago's School of Sociology where the study of tramps, transients, and immigrant workers received the earliest attention and institutional support. The Chicago School, as it came to be known by its students and interlocutors, rose to prominence in the 1920s. Turning away from what they considered a kind of armchair sociology that privileged theory and abstraction, the school's intellectual lodestar Robert Park encouraged his students to "get the seat of their pants dirty in real research." Scholars at the Chicago School promoted a rigorous form of social research based upon fieldwork, observation, and data collection. They built a praxis around the study of "social problems," often framed according to concepts like social distance, human ecology, and marginalization. While researchers in Chicago focused on a variety of these social problems, including delinquent youth, "the negro problem," taxi-dance halls, and

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<sup>7</sup> Jack London, "South of the Slot," in *Short Stories of Jack London* (Toronto: Collier MacMillan, 1990); Jim Tully, *Beggars of Life* (London: AK Press, 2003); See also Kenneth Lynn, *Charlie Chaplin and His Times* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997).

unconventional sexual behaviors, they maintained an abiding interest in the migratory and transient worker. Indeed, many of the research questions at the heart of modern sociology originated with the study of the casual labor economy. In the bunkhouses, employment agencies, and railroad jungles, these scholars found the ideal subject to study the social forces of dislocation unleashed by a modern, urban, industrial world. Casual workers were an emblem of these forces – a community of young men, many of them recent immigrants, who lived without familial attachment, moving continuously through the city, shifting from job to job.<sup>8</sup>

Tramp workers, and the social friction they engendered, were at the center of Robert Park's work. The first formal articulation of Chicago School methodology, *The City*, featured Park's essay, "The Mind of the Hobo: Reflections upon the Relation Between Mentality and Locomotion." Park argued the rise of large cities and the division of labor coupled with machines, industry, and transportation had undermined the capacity for the family and community to exert old forms of social control. Unlike the peregrinating workers of the past, these migrants were unable (or unwilling) to reintegrate themselves into society. The hobo, suggested Park, had come unmoored from community and the constant state of motion had relegated "the marginal man" to a permanently liminal state. That emphasis on the sociological fallout of modernity and

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in John McKinney, *Constructive Typology and Social Theory* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1966) 71; on the development of the Chicago School, see Fred Matthews, *Quest For an American Sociology: Robert E. Park and the Chicago School* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1977); on the rise of social science more generally, Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Craig Calhoun, editor, *Sociology in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

capitalism would define the agenda for Chicago School researchers in particular, and more generally the discipline of sociology, for decades.<sup>9</sup>

Just a few years after its development, the gravitational center of social science research into the casual labor economy shifted towards the Pacific Coast. For scholars, the draw of the region was quite practical. As contingent and migratory work declined in the Midwest, it was on the rise along the Pacific Coast. As Thomas Minehan, a sociologist at the University of Minnesota argued, social scientists could not fully comprehend the culture of the transient worker without traveling among them. For Minehan, who had undertaken a project on adolescent tramps, that meant extensive research and fieldwork in California. Others cited the opportunity to study the social problems wrought by economic change, social upheaval, and high rates of migration and immigration. As the major urban centers of the Pacific Coast underwent massive demographic growth, cities like Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles were seen as ideal laboratories to test the emerging theories of social disorganization. Newly minted graduate students from the University of Chicago took faculty positions at all the major Universities along the Pacific Coast, including Emory Bogardus (USC), Roderick McKenzie (UW), and Jessie Steiner (UW). Researchers already in the region turned their attention to topics of migrant work, as well. At the University of California, zoologist and eugenicist Samuel Jackson Holmes and economist-turned-ethnographer Paul Taylor both developed an interest in the subject. Under the tutelage of these faculty, students embarked on a range of research projects. Suddenly a landscape of previously mundane or taboo subjects became the cutting edge - the lodging houses of Main Street, working

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Park, "The Mind of the Hobo: Reflections upon the Relation Between Mentality and Locomotion," in Robert Park and Ernest Burgess, *The City: Suggestions for Investigation of Human Behavior in the Urban Environment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925) 155-160.

class leisure in Chinatown, the occupational mobility among Japanese workers, or the adjustment (or failure to do so) of Filipino, black, and Mexican migrant workers.<sup>10</sup>

Along the Pacific Coast, the academy's interest in social disorganization and the contingent labor intersected with another scholarly preoccupation – racial difference. Robert Park increasingly turned his vision West after 1925, composing a brief, yet influential, commentary for one of the leading journals of social investigation, *Survey Graphic*. Entitled, “Our Racial Frontier on the Pacific” and published in 1926, Park consciously invoked the rhetoric of the frontier, echoing the thesis of Frederick Jackson Turner several decades earlier. Out west, Park suggested, white workers were coming into competition with fellow workers from Japan, the Philippines, and Mexico. The economic forces and social tendencies “drawing the races and peoples about the Pacific into the ever narrowing circle of a common life” would lamentably lead to racial conflict and antagonism. Paul Taylor, at the University of California invoked similarly powerful images of the West in a paper delivered to the American Sociological Society. “The Far Western United States,” he said:

stands as the westernmost boundary of the white man's frontier and marks the end of the great epoch of expansion of European culture through the increase and migration of its population.... It is psychically the portal through which many of our contacts with the nations and people of the Orient and Latin America are received and interpreted.

Both Park and Taylor were excited by the opportunity to understand the sociology of race relations presented by research along the Pacific Coast. They hoped that research might

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas Minehan, *Boy and Girl Tramps of America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976). Emory Bogardus, *Graduate Studies in a World Reborn: The Proceedings of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Founding of the Graduate School of the University of Southern California* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press, 1945); see also Emory Bogardus Papers, Collection no. 0264, University Archives, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California.

prevent the renewal of racial antagonism and forestall new calls for immigration restriction and violence seen during previous decades.<sup>11</sup>

Trained at the University of California, Towne Nylander's research exemplifies Pacific Coast academic's interest in the world of casual work. One of Paul Taylor's first advisees, Nylander completed his thesis entitled, "The Casual Laborer of California," in 1922. Following methodological cues from the Chicago School, Nylander took up residence in a small apartment south of Market Street in San Francisco for two months, in order to live with casual laborers and hobos in what he termed their "natural environment – the road, the jungle, and on the job." Based upon these observations, Nylander created a taxonomy for different types of casual laborers, estimated their numbers, explained their various social and economic conditions, and attempted to explain the origins of the casual labor economy. His ninety-six page thesis reports his first hand observations, including field notes of interviews, a glossary of hobo language, and the results of a survey sent out to a variety of missions, police agencies, and charities. Throughout, he framed his argument around the casual worker as a prototype for modern social problems. Nylander's graduate research on migratory workers, like many of his colleagues, formed the basis for his subsequent work as a professor at Princeton University, head of the Los Angeles Works Progress Administration, architect of the Wagner Act, and eventually regional director of the National Labor Relations Board. Even after Nylander took up government work, he continued to publish articles in academic journals.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Park, "Our Racial Frontier on the Pacific," in *Race and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950); Paul Taylor, "Opportunities For Research in the Far West," *Publication of the American Sociological Society* 29:3 (August 1935) 102.

<sup>12</sup> Towne Nylander, "The Casual Laborer of California," (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, 1922) 28-9.

Nylander's trajectory from the academy to government was common. Social investigators often bridged the methods of social science research into public service. In some cases, social investigators floated in and out of academic and government work. Cloice Howd who received his Ph.D. from the University of California in 1923, with a dissertation entitled, "Industrial Relations in the West Coast Timber Industry," was later hired by the federal government to inspect labor camps around the Pacific Northwest in the mid-1920s. He went on to chair the department of sociology at William Jewell College in Missouri and continued to write about labor issues until his premature death in 1933. Other social investigators parlayed their academic research into long careers in the public sector. Nels Anderson likewise maintained an affiliation with several academic institutions, but also worked with Harry Hopkins, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's advisor on social welfare issues.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Growing Apparatus of Social Investigation**

Social investigation of the casual labor economy emerged at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, though slowly and with little commitment from government or academic institutions. What then explains the rising interest in this particular economic sector during and after World War I? While the maturing of universities and the ballooning of government agencies provided some impetus, three factors in particular drove social investigation of the casual labor economy during this period. There was growing concern that the casual labor economy represented a dangerous triad of problems, namely economic inefficiency, political radicalism, and the specter of racial heterogeneity due to

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<sup>13</sup> Cloice Howd, *Industrial Relations in the West Coast Lumber Industry* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1924); Nels Anderson government work is described in Noel Iverson, "Nels Anderson: A Profile" *Labour Travail* 63 (Spring, 2009) 189-190.

high rates of immigration. Scholars, along with their partners in government, built their research apparatus at the intersection of these social problems.

### **The Problem of Economics**

First, the irrational economics of the casual labor economy proved disturbing to social investigators. Perpetual unemployment, seasonal highs and lows, combined with the lack of a system to connect workers to jobs ran counter to reform-minded scholars imbued with progressive-era ideals. At the turn of the century, as one historian describes it, public officials had made “the discovery of unemployment.” The co-incidence of industrialization and speculative capital investment in the late nineteenth century had introduced the wide swings in production that would plague the economy of the twentieth century. In this respect, cyclical and chronic employment on a large social scale was a relatively new problem. In a political age guided by the search for order, this economic sector seemed a prime candidate for the rationalizing methods of social science.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century however, the State remained largely ineffective in both collecting data and imposing order upon the casual labor economy. Officials were well aware of chronic unemployment and seasonal shifts in hiring, along with their attendant difficulties, but they seemed ill prepared to do anything about it. The federal government had no way of calculating, let alone defining, unemployment prior to the creation of the Department of Labor in 1913. It would take nearly two decades for the agency to develop a reliable, consistent method. Local

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<sup>14</sup> Paul Ringenbach, *Tramps and Reformers, 1876-1916: The Discovery of Unemployment in New York* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1973). On unemployment, federal policy, and economic order during the Progressive Era see, Udo Sautter, *Three Cheers for the Unemployed: Government and Unemployment Before the New Deal* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and Robert Wiebe, *The Search For Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).

governments were similarly ill equipped. Insufficient funding made it impossible for state and municipal employment agencies to alter the swing in employment during the year. Some states worked to end corruption and chaos by targeting private employment agencies and poor housing conditions. The state of Washington imposed limits on the fees charged by labor agents. California rewrote the urban building code to ensure that single-resident occupancy hotels were not sources of disease and a fire hazard. But flophouse owners easily skirted these measures. A business-friendly United States Supreme Court overturned Seattle's attempts to regulate the agents of labor.<sup>15</sup>

The lack of rational planning in the casual labor economy became acutely evident during the conduct of World War I. Plagued by shortages in key wartime industries and struggling to manage the constant movement of workers around the region, the war was a nightmare of economic planning. Workers moved rapidly about the region to exploit shortages of labor and demanded higher wages. Employers and public officials bemoaned the lack of infrastructure to handle the shifting labor demands. In some key industries, like wood products, the War Department took the unprecedented step of developing their own corporations to spur production. The size and scale of the war effort required economic planners to conceptualize labor problems on a more grand scale. Such integrated planning was particularly evident on the Pacific Coast. At the end of the war, President Warren Harding implored states and localities to generate "more accurate

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<sup>15</sup> On unemployment statistics, see Sautter, *Three Cheers for the Unemployed*, 46. On California's efforts to regulate transient housing, see *Annual Report of the Commission of Immigration and Housing* (Sacramento: California State Printing Office: 1921); and Anne Marie Woo-Sam, "Domesticating the Immigrant: California's Commission of Immigration and Housing and the Domestic Immigration Policy Movement, 1910-1945" (Unpublished dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1999). The City of Seattle's regulation of private employment agency fees was overturned in *Adams v. Tanner* in 1917. The literature on the topic is strikingly thin. See Tomás Martínez, *The Human Marketplace: An Examination of Private Employment Agencies* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1976).

knowledge” about employment patterns in the United States and appointed Herbert Hoover to oversee a nationwide conference on the issue. The disorderly logistics of industrial production in these key industries was galling to the progressive-eras’ commitment to order and rationalism.<sup>16</sup>

Confronted by wide-scale unemployment after the War, officials along the Pacific Coast hastened to examine the casual labor economy. In the summer of 1921, the state of California created a new agency, the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations, in order to consolidate information about hiring. The appropriation for the department included substantial new appropriations for the creation of public employment agencies throughout the state and increased funds for immigration and housing concerns. Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles all commissioned their own studies of the labor situation. In San Francisco, the Mayor’s office organized a blue ribbon committee of industrial leaders and social workers to combat unemployment. Los Angeles canvassed business leaders, charities, and religious organizations to fully understand the extent of the unemployment problem. In this particular case, the committee focused nearly the entire study on “the casual laborer, those changing from one job to another, others holding out for better wages or more pleasing conditions, or for other personal reasons which were no legitimate element of the general industrial life of the community.” After several months of study, the Mayor confidently reported that the city’s economy was structurally sound and there were no “serious unemployment problems.” To the extent

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<sup>16</sup> “Harding Announces Unemployment Commission,” *New York Times*, 4 October 1921, 1 On World War I and economic planning, see chapter one; also Harding David Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) chapter 3; Robert Tyler, *Rebels of the Woods: The IWW in the Pacific Northwest* (Eugene: University of Oregon Books) 1967. The Conference on Unemployment produced a substantial document, *Report of the President’s Commission on Unemployment* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1921).

that unemployment existed, his document conclude, it could be blamed entirely on the “influx of the itinerant class of unemployed from less favorable localities.”<sup>17</sup>

The reports of state and local government underscored the perceived danger of fluid and mobile casual labor. In 1921, California state officials warned that “the most important aspect of the unemployment situation” was the “inassimilable migratory population of unemployed continually coming into the state.” Using the numbers published by the Southern Pacific railroad, 26,000 men had used rails to reach the state in one month, equaling the figures of the entire previous year in one month. They surmised the situation would only get worse in future months and years. State officials feared the movement of large numbers of the “inferior unemployed” would overwhelm social welfare systems and clog city streets with undesirables. The undertaking of the report was significant, involving researchers from the governor’s office, several state agencies, the participation of private employers and transportation agencies, and many more. Reporting on the work of the state commission, the *Los Angeles Times* featured the bold headline: “Floaters Prove State Menace.” The tenor of the State’s study, and coverage in the press, foreshadowed the attitude that many Californians would develop for more than a decade.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> “Legislative Report: California,” *American Labor Legislation* 11 (1921) 328; Seattle Municipal Archive, “Communication of Acting Mayor Transmitting report of Committee for Relief of Unemployment” February 14, 1922. Comptroller file number 84048; “Report of the Mayor’s Unemployment Committee of the City and County of San Francisco,” unpublished report, 1922, San Francisco Public Library History Center, 8.

<sup>18</sup> “Floaters Prove Menace,” *Los Angeles Times* October 6, 1921, I16; California Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Annual Reports* (Sacramento: State of California Printing Office, 1927) 45.

## The Problem of Radicalism

In isolation, unemployment was a problem, but became a crisis in the eyes of social investigators when coupled with concerns about the rising tide of labor unrest in the region. Radicalism and revolution sprang to life along the Pacific Coast in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A number of violent confrontations, including the Wheatland Riots of 1913, the massacre of members of the Industrial Workers of the World in Everett, a shootout in Centralia, and the bombing of San Francisco's Preparedness Day parade in 1916 had convinced some that revolution was unfolding before their eyes. The years before the war and continuing into the following decade had been wracked by strikes, protests, and calls for industrial sabotage. Membership of radical groups like the I.W.W and Socialist Party swelled. Their notoriety swelled even more. Between 1916 and 1921, the United States experienced the most active period of labor unrest in its history. More than three thousand formal work stoppages occurred each year. The activity peaked in 1919, when more than one fifth of the wage-earning workforce in the United States participated in some kind a strike.<sup>19</sup>

The wave of labor actions had been particularly powerful along the Pacific Coast and concentrated in casual industries. For two decades, syndicalism and agitation had remained isolated within sectors like mining, agricultural work, or the maritime trades. In 1919, nearly 60,000 walked off their jobs in Seattle to participate in one of the largest general strikes in American history. The epicenter of the conflict began within the ranks

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<sup>19</sup> For strike statistics, see Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, 1789-1945, Part 1* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1949) 73. On labor radicalism during this period, see Howard Kimmeldorf, *Reds or Rackets?: the Making of Radical and Conservative Unions on the Waterfront* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988; Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Philip Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World, 1905-1917* (New York: International Publishers, 1976).

of shipyard workers, but the message of class conflict found a much wider audience and the shockwave spread quickly. The sympathy of skilled workers, as well as many middle class residents, caught public officials and owners of industry off guard. The experience of Seattle suggested that frustrations in the casual labor economy could ignite wider animus and discontent.<sup>20</sup>

Social investigators worried the events in Seattle were a bellwether for future labor conflict. Several decades of economic growth in the region had been predicated upon sectors that relied upon contingent and seasonal workers. Agriculture, timber work, salmon canneries, and construction had all recruited nationally and globally to ensure an overflowing pool of workers, but could not guarantee stable work. The rising tide of agitation suggested the mobility and anger of the workforce could no longer be contained. Labor economists began to describe the casual labor economy one of “blind alley jobs.” Irregular work, wrote Don Lescohier, a labor economist at the University of Wisconsin, “undermines his physique, deadens his mind, weakens his ambition, destroys his capacity for continuous endeavor.” For August Vollmer, Berkeley police chief, and a leading figure in the study of criminology, the problem of “California’s Wanderers” had become a pressing concern and warranted more study. These men “have haunted the employment agencies and sought every kind of work.” “If the state doesn’t help these men, he

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<sup>20</sup> On Seattle’s general strike, see <http://depts.washington.edu/labhist/strike/index.shtml>; Robert L. Friedheim, *The Seattle General Strike* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964). On radicalism in the American west more generally, see Clark Norm, *Mill Town* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1970); Robert Tyler, *Rebels of the Woods: the I.W.W. in the Pacific Northwest* (Eugene: University of Oregon Books, 1967); Carlos Schwantes, *Radical Heritage: Labor, Socialism, and Reform in Washington and British Columbia, 1885-1914* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979).

concluded, “they will help themselves.” Vollmer eventually took a position at the University of Chicago to teach criminology.<sup>21</sup>

Among the many studies during this period to focus attention on the sources of radicalism, *The Casual Labor and Other Essays*, written by University of Washington professor Carleton Parker led the way. The volume built a strong argument about the link between the casual labor economy and rising unrest. Drawing upon his investigations of hop worker protests in Wheatland, California in 1913, Parker suggested the organization of the labor situation set the stage for widespread radicalism. Polling employers, police officials, and investigating labor camps throughout California and Washington, Parker’s study was widely cited as the authoritative work on the subject. Seasonality of work, jobs with little opportunity for advancement, and remote work sites, he argued, had become a tinderbox of ill will. For Parker, the reliance upon contingent labor was “menacing it its potentiality for spasmodic waves of unrest and sudden perplexing strikes of unorganized workers.” Parker’s scholarship built an image of the casual laborer as a social danger and pariah, incapable of functioning in polite society.<sup>22</sup>

For those seeking to understand the source of events like Seattle’s general strike, the publication of *The Casual Laborer* in 1920 seemed prophetic. Parker had published selections of his research in a number of periodicals, including the *Atlantic Monthly* and *American Economic Review*. After the General Strike of 1919, however, his writing gained a much wider audience. The University of Washington professor offered a broad explanation for the source of radicalism along the Pacific Coast. The deplorable

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<sup>21</sup> Don Lescohier, *The Labor Market* (New York: MacMillan, 1923) 80. August Vollmer, quoted in *The Survey*, December 15, 1929, 349.

<sup>22</sup> Carleton Parker, *The Casual Laborer and Other Essays* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1920) 72.

conditions of labor were one source of the region's radical impulses. But the problem of casual labor had deeper roots. Employers tended to hire men with low intelligence even lower moral fiber. "They should never be studied as isolated revolutionaries," he wrote, "but rather, on the whole, as tragic symptoms of a sick social order." For a bloc of scholars in search of explanations to the General Strike and other conflicts, Parker provided the only sustained analysis insights. *Published posthumously* after he succumbed to influenza during the epidemic of 1918, *The Casual Laborer* would remain his final comment on the subject.<sup>23</sup>

Despite his premature death, Parker's endeavor to locate the wellspring of radicalism within the industries of the casual labor economy was carried by a growing number of researchers both in and out of the academic world. At the University of California, Cloice Howd merged the insights of Carleton Parker with his knowledge of Chicago School sociology to produce one of the first formal studies in the emerging field of industrial relations. Howd had spent a good deal of time traveling among timber workers and inspecting labor camps in Western Washington State. He was also familiar with the emerging work of Chicago School research and well versed in academic research. In one hundred twenty pages, his publication, "Industrial Relations in the West Coast Lumber Industry," highlighted the enormous rate of turnover among timber workers, the deplorable conditions of labor camps, and the poor quality of management. But all that information and detail was the foundation for the heart of his analysis, namely labor unrest and the role of casual migratory labor. For Howd, "it is the hobo workers who present the really dangerous element in the labor problem. These are foot-loose

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<sup>23</sup> Parker, *Casual Laborer and Other Essays*, 88. Carnelia Parker, *An American Idyll: The Life of Carleton Parker* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1919); and Carleton Parker, *The Atlantic Monthly* vol. 120 no. 5 (November 1917) 655.

rebels who no longer recognize the ordinary conventions of society by challenging the whole industrial system.”<sup>24</sup>

Public officials echoed the concern of scholars and joined the clamor to link casual labor with the wave of radicalism. A study by the Los Angeles Civil Service Commission warned of widespread unrest in the absence of economic stability and regularity. Quoted in the *Los Angeles Times*, the lead commissioner suggested that “if work is not found for or by these workers, there will be suffering... [and] many men out of work may become vagrants or agitators.”<sup>25</sup> On a speaking tour in Los Angeles to warn city officials about the dangers of the growing transient workforce, Ole Hanson, the mayor of Seattle who had presided over the General Strike of 1919, described the situation bluntly:

With \$50 in his pocket, he comes to town and lives a month. The IWW agitator mixes with him, is one with him; in fact, he buys the agitators literature. In sordid dens beneath the sidewalk he spends the social part of his existence debating, in his half-baked way, political economy. Society passes him by. It has cast him and his aside.<sup>26</sup>

By the close of the 1920s, public officials and academic researchers had exerted tremendous efforts to establish a link between the casual labor economy and political radicalism.

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<sup>24</sup> Cloice Howd, *Industrial Relations in the West Coast Lumber Industry*, 53. Bruce Kaufman observes that Howd’s dissertation was the first to adopt the term “industrial relations” in the title, an important marker in the development of labor studies in the United States. See Bruce Kaufman, *The Origins & Evolution of the Field of Industrial Relations in the United* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

<sup>25</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, January 20, 1921, 115.

<sup>26</sup> Ole Hanson, quoted in *Los Angeles Times*, February 25, 1920.

## The Problem of Immigration

Concerns about the incubation of radicalism within the casual labor economy were tied to the third and final impetus for the growth of social investigation - the specter of immigration. Since the late nineteenth century, employers had recruited workers from abroad to provide the physical power to drive economic growth. While congress had substantially restricted immigration to the United States in 1917, foreign-born workers continued to dominate the ranks of casual labor for the following decade. Many of these immigrants had arrived in the country prior to restrictive legislation. Even after the golden door had been closed, however, the casual labor economy continued to draw thousands of workers each year. Many were lured by labor contractors from Mexico or the Philippines, while others from Europe followed unsanctioned channels of migration across a very porous border. That continued flow of immigration during the 1920s was a source of tremendous concern for social investigators.<sup>27</sup>

Social investigators connected immigration with the problem of radicalism. For more than a decade, working class immigrants had played an active role in labor agitation. Socialist Finns in Oregon, anarchist Lithuanians in New York, and syndicalist Mexicans in Los Angeles all contributed to concerns about the link between radicalism and immigration in the United States. Where was the wellspring of all this agitation? The ideologies of anarchism and socialism were not problems of native soil, but rather imported and invasive. Immigration was interpreted as a vector for radicalism. Fears of

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<sup>27</sup> On immigration restrictions, see John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988) and Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); several recent works have explored undocumented immigration after the restrictive legislation of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. See Mae Ngai, "How Grandma Got Legal," *Los Angeles Times* May 16, 2006; and Libby Garland, *After They Closed the Gates: Jewish Illegal Immigration to the United States, 1921-1965* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

sedition and sabotage during World War I had prompted a federal campaign to limit dissent, including mass arrests, deportations, and other forms of suppression. Central to that campaign of suppression was the targeting of immigrant radicals.<sup>28</sup>

While fears of radicalism drove some of the studies of immigration, social investigators framed the problems engendered by casual labor and immigration more broadly as one of race, ethnicity, and assimilation. Debates over racial difference and equality had dominated public discussion in America since at least the end of Reconstruction. In large measure, the department of sociology at the University of Chicago had been formed around the subject of social tensions, its causes and solutions. Scholars at the Chicago School, most notably Robert Park, viewed these issues through the lens of their own theoretical model – the race relations cycle. As a framework for understanding the social tensions between dominant and marginal groups, the race relations cycle proposed that all ethnic or racial groups proceeded through a process of contact, competition, conflict, accommodation, and eventually assimilation. At USC Emory Bogardus proposed a parallel theory to that of Park, though his “cycle” placed much greater emphasis on the cultural and legislative antagonisms directed at newcomers.<sup>29</sup>

For Park and others interested in the “racial frontier,” the mixture of immigrant groups along the Pacific Coast was particularly fertile ground to test their theories. As Henry Yu has suggested, sociologists in Chicago viewed the “Oriental Problem” as one

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<sup>28</sup> On the suppression of immigrant workers, see Mark Wild, *Street Meetings: Multi-Ethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); William Preston, *Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903-1933* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963).

<sup>29</sup> For the first articulation of the Chicago School’s cycle of race relations, see *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*, 252-4. Emory Bogardus, “A Race Relations Cycle,” *American Journal of Sociology* 35 (January 1930) 612-617

possible bridge for understanding larger national issues regarding race. “Social scientists became interested in Orientals,” Yu writes, “and in doing so they created an intellectual and institutional construction” that focused on their supposed “exotic” and “foreign” characteristics. A number of individuals grafted these theories of the “Oriental Problem” onto explorations of Filipinos and Mexicans. Ultimately, this cadre of social investigators hoped that research and greater understanding might alleviate and diminish the racial and ethnic antagonisms that marked the new American modernity. In this manner, they were the self-appointed allies of racial minority in America. Their diagnosis for the problem and solutions of immigrant workers and the casual labor economy, however, often positioned them as apologists for economic inequality.<sup>30</sup>

Unlike the well-intentioned, yet flawed, reading of those guided by the Chicago School theories, other scholars were motivated by less complicated forms of white supremacy. Speaking to a large conference of scholars and public officials gathered to discuss race relations on the Pacific Coast, Samuel Holmes a professor at the University of California urged the audience that “the Mexican problem is by far the greatest race problem which confronts the people of California at the present time.” Holmes, a professor of genetics and graduate of the University of Chicago several decades earlier, was alarmed by the growing rates of migration from Mexico and Asia and subsequent decline of California’s Anglo majority. “We are in a considerable amount of trouble before we see the amicable adjustment of the whole Mexican situation,” he told the gathering of scholar and officials. “The Mexican problem urgently needs to be studied very thoroughly.” Holmes sentiment was shared by many of his colleagues on the Pacific

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<sup>30</sup> Henry Yu, *Thinking Orientals*, 7-8; see also chapter two.

Coast. At the University of Washington, sociology professor Jessie Steiner pursued lines of inquiry that deviated from his training at Chicago under Robert Park. Steiner's research into the constellation of small businesses that revolved around the casual labor economy blamed immigrants for a variety of social maladjustments. Labor contracting, bootlegging, and gambling were all "parasitic trades" engendered by the circulation of immigrant workers around the Pacific Coast."<sup>31</sup>

As the 1920s drew to a close, these distinct yet complementary concerns about immigration merged in a pair of substantial studies of immigration in California. Commissioned by Governor C.C. Young in the late 1920s, *Facts about Filipino Immigration into California*, and its companion, *Mexicans in California*, combined the vast array of public and private agencies to document the social and economic situation of immigrants in the state. Statisticians poured over demographic data and wage reports. Ethnographers interviewed labor contractors and social workers. Health and housing experts toured neighborhoods populated with immigrants. Sociologists surveyed the boarding houses, pool halls, and slum dwellings popular with casual workers. Given the close connection between labor and immigration in the state, execution and administration of the projects was overseen by the new Department of Industrial Relations. The results came packaged in two slim volumes replete with data and charts and circulated throughout the state and around the country. Will French, the director of one of the studies, dressed the report in a mantle of scientific objectivity: "the bulletin is not presented as an argument for or against Filipino exclusion. As its name implies, its

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<sup>31</sup> Samuel Holmes, "Findings Conference of the Survey of Race Relations," Survey of Race Relations Collection, Stanford University, Box 4 Folder 11. Steiner, 1925.

purpose was to present *Facts About Filipino Immigration into California*. It furnished data.”<sup>32</sup>

In framing their research questions and selectively presenting data, French’s team of researchers spoke to deeply seated concerns about the implications of a growing number of Filipinos employed as casual laborers migrating in and through California. One section of the report highlighted alarm about declining wage rates for citizens by examining Filipinos’ displacement of whites in agricultural harvesting, rail maintenance, and maritime trades. Another section underscored the largely male character of these migration patterns and the lack of formal households, thus, raising the specter of interracial sexual contact. The study of Filipinos lent traction to a set of measures that targeted Filipino workers in particular, and transient workers in general. The information presented in *Facts About Filipino Immigration*, and reports like it, enabled calls for restricted immigration, the regulation of employment agencies and contractors, work tests for social welfare programs, and heavy-handed policing measures. Despite its purported objectivity, the report became a statement about the problem of casual laborer and a call for solutions.

### **The Methods of Social Investigation**

Guided by a firm belief that the “problems” of casual labor could be remedied through examination and study, following World War I, social investigators developed and refined their techniques for research and data collection. Two methodologies came to prominence during this period. Social cartography and participant observation

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<sup>32</sup> California Department of Industrial Relations, *Facts About Filipino Immigration Into California* (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1930) 9.

embodied the new era of social investigation. In literal terms, maps and research notes became the ways that social investigators documented the casual labor economy. But they were more than mere empirical observations or placing locations on a page. They constituted the foundation and schema for the development of a discourse - ways of knowing and seeing - the casual labor and the cultural meanings of social class.

### **Sociological Cartography**

The first of these techniques emphasized mapping the influence of social forces in physical space, primarily in cities. Certainly, the use of maps was not new. For several decades, social reformers had employed visual representations to display poverty, immigration, and crime. Since the 1830s and 1840s, European scholars had introduced the use of maps to illustrate social problems. By the 1890s, Americans interested in agendas of reform had borrowed from the map-making techniques of progressives in Europe such as Charles Booth, who had demonstrated the expository powers of multi-colored and layered maps of cities. Progressives at Hull House, among others, conducted their own community surveys, which placed poverty, education, prostitution, or crime on a map. Reformers throughout the country repeated the process in New York, Philadelphia, Cleveland, or San Francisco. While they were often effective in moving public opinion, these spatial accounts of social problems remained pieces of visual display, rather than analytical and diagnostic tools for investigation.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Alice O'Conner highlights the importance of Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People of London* in the visualization of poverty at the turn of the century. See O'Conner, *Poverty Knowledge*, 28. O'Conner also notes the relevance of W.E.B DuBois' *Philadelphia Negro*, which used maps extensively. Susan Schulten notes the influence of cartography from England on American social reformers, particularly Francis Amasa Walker. See Susan Schulten, *Mapping the Nation: History and Cartography in Nineteenth Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 163-170. On the importance of empirical spatial

Using the casual labor economy as one of their primary subjects, social investigators of the 1920s pushed the use of cartography and spatial analysis in new directions. Rather than use maps for mere description, investigators invested a great deal of power in sociological cartography. In maps, they saw tools for diagnosing problems and proposing solutions. Chair of the sociology department at USC, Emory Bogardus believed, “people arrange themselves in geographic relations somewhat like iron filings do under magnetic influence.” Maps revealed those magnetic influences at work underneath the surface of society. Bogardus trained his students in the construction of “social base maps” and included a chapter on the subject in his textbook on sociological method. Mapping the various ethnic and racial neighborhoods, correlating them with local businesses, and examining patterns of socializations would help scholars better understand the social forces at work in cities. As historian Alice O’Conner observes, the social scientific maps of this period “offered a new way to *look* at poverty – in a way, in contrast to the poignant but voyeuristic and individualized photographs” generated by reformers at the turn of the century.<sup>34</sup>

Elaborating his concept of human ecology, Roderick McKenzie found the transient worker, presumed to exist without ties to community or society, to be a particularly useful object. For McKenzie, urban environments should be studied much like “natural” environments. The competition between immigrant and native workers was not unlike plants or animals battling for control of resources, mates, or prestige and stature. Crime and antisocial behavior among transient men were simply markers of an

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research for the Progressive movement, particularly at Hull House, see Jeffrey Isaac, *The Poverty of Progressivism* (Maryland: Rowan and Littlefield, 2003) chapter 3.

<sup>34</sup> Emory Bogardus, *The New Social Research* (Los Angeles: Jesse Ray Miller, 1926) 34; O’Conner, *Poverty Knowledge*, 28.

unhealthy human ecology. When Roderick McKenzie left Chicago to take a position at the University of Washington, he brought his methodology of the social base map with him. Scholars and students traveled block by block of the laborer's geography creating an inventory of storefronts, employment agencies, and residential quarters. Chicago sociologist Ernest Burgess also placed the casual migratory worker at the center of his spatial research into urban mapping, both literally and figuratively. Burgess developed a widely adopted theory of urban growth, which proposed that all American cities could be sub-divided into a series of co-centric circles of development, prosperity, and social normalcy. At the center of his circular model was what Burgess labeled "the zone in transition," marked by its rooming house district, slums, and immigrant ghetto. But this space, and the workers that inhabited it, represented more than just the literal center of the city. "This deteriorating area... the teeming rialto of the homeless migratory man" wrote Burgess, had become "the purgatory of lost souls." The zone in transition was a figurative symbol of the modern city, with all its disorienting and disorganizing effects.<sup>35</sup>

The importance of spatial analysis in the study of the casual labor economy is immediately apparent in the research of individuals like Thomas Geoghegan, a graduate student at the University of Washington. Closely following the cues of his mentor Roderick McKenzie, Geoghegan embarked on his study, "The Migratory Worker in Seattle" in 1923. He stressed the important role of an urban survey in the introduction to his thesis: "Considerable time has been spent in the area which is described" and each feature, he wrote, "had been very carefully surveyed and careful counts had been made and rechecked." To Geoghegan, this meant the drawing of elaborate maps, scatter plots,

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<sup>35</sup> See Roderick McKenzie, *Roderick McKenzie on Human Ecology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); and Ernest Burgess, "The Growth of the City," in Park, *The City*, 54-55.

and descriptions of pedestrian patterns. These tools allowed him a “proper appreciation of the forces which tend to exploit the migratory worker, or profit from his peculiar personal and social needs.” required more than “a mere classification; they must be described, analyzed, and evaluated.” Geoghegan’s thesis offers a meticulous accounting of each lodging house, employment agency, and pool hall in Seattle, which he labeled the migrant worker’s “leisure area” [See Figure 3.1]. Along with maps, he offered description:

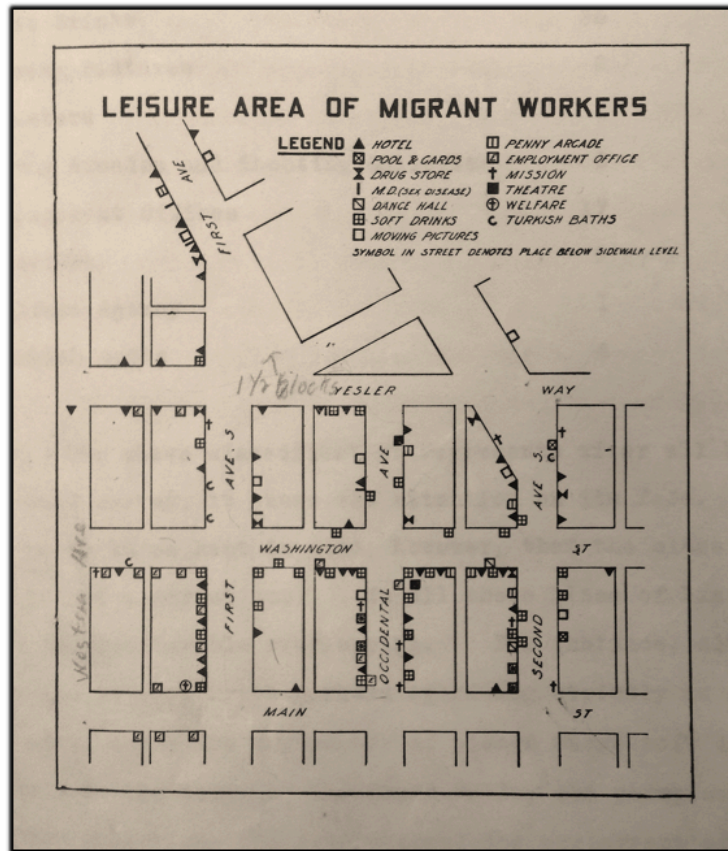
Two distinct swarms of men are to be found at almost any hour of the day and into the late evening hours about the corners of Occidental Avenue and Washington Street (on the south side). From these two groups there runs a constant stream; the crowd mill constantly about these two centers... The boundaries just described are no mere fancy, they represent fact... it places its mark upon them and the men soon acquiesce to the claim. The glamour of this district is a very active factor in the problem of migrant labor and an inefficient, expensive labor turnover.

Adding texture to his maps, his thesis describes, with meticulous detail, the odor of flophouse hotels, the “enticing charms of ‘Oriental’ dancers’ outside the burlesque parlors, and the “ballyhoo” of the employment agents in search of workers.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> John Herbert Geoghegan, “The Migratory Worker in Seattle: a Study in Social Disorganization and Exploitation,” (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Washington, 1923) 42-3.

Figure 3.1 | Map of Seattle's "Leisure Area of Migrant Workers"



Source: John Herbert Geoghegan, "The Migratory Worker in Seattle: a Study in Social Disorganization and Exploitation," (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Washington, 1923) 40.

### Participant Observation

While maps allowed social investigators to pull and abstract information from the space inhabited by casual workers, the technique of participant observation offered a much closer, hands-on method of research. Maps could reveal patterns of settlement, habit, or commercial development, but that information only rendered social forces at a bird's eye view. To understand a human subject, social investigators saw a need to walk among their subject. Robert Park admonished his students: "you have been told to go grubbing in the library... but one more thing is needful; first hand observation." He

called upon sociologists to sit on the doorsteps of flophouses, on slum shakedowns, and the star and garter burlesque to encounter their subject first-hand. An innovation of early 20<sup>th</sup> century sociology, participant observation put researchers in close contact with their subjects, often for extended periods of time, to examine and analyze their habits, customs, and living conditions. Again, investigations of the casual labor economy were central to the development of this research technique.<sup>37</sup>

The work of Nels Anderson, a protégé of Robert Park and Ernest Burgess at the Chicago School, is widely regarded as the first to formally introduce the method of participant observation into the academy. As a young man, Anderson left his family in Chicago and traveled the West as a casual laborer, drawn to a life on the road by the many transient men he encountered in his own neighborhood. He used that experience to gain admission to the prestigious Chicago School of Urban Sociology in 1920. Albion Small, the chair of the department, and Robert Park were intrigued by his background and encouraged and supported his work. They pushed him to develop a research project that would exploit his insight and access to Chicago's "hobohemia." In 1923, he published *The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man*, which inaugurated the University of Chicago Press's influential series in sociology.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Robert Park quoted in McKinney, *Constructive Typology and Social Theory*, 71; On the development of participant observation, see Marjorie DeVault, "Knowledge From the Field," in Calhoun, *Sociology in America*, 155-182; also see Paul Atkinson, editor, *Handbook of Ethnography* and Richer Dentler, *Practicing Sociology* 50.

<sup>38</sup> Anderson, *On Hobos and Homelessness*, 26; Also Nels Anderson, *The Hobo: the Sociology of the Homeless Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1923). Some have questioned whether Anderson's research constituted actual participant observation, because he did not actively participate in the life and work of his subject. While he did reside in a "hobo hotel" and interviewed many in the community, he drew heavily upon his prior work experience traveling the West. See Harvey, *Myths of the Chicago School* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 1987) 49, 58-59.

Although he was not averse to collecting quantitative data, Anderson relied upon his skill for close, sustained, personal observation. When he began his graduate education, the young man had no familiarity with research methodology. "I found myself engaged in research without the preparation a researcher is supposed to have," he later recalled. The instruction he had received from Park and Burgess had been notably "indirect"; "write down only what you see, hear, and know, like a newspaper reporter." Anderson did so dutifully. For his fieldwork, Anderson spent two years living in the heart of what was known as Chicago's hobohemia. He rented a room at a boarding house on Halsted Street, conducted interviews with the men he encountered, and otherwise observed the action on the street. With the knowledge of an insider, Anderson had a keen eye and willing sensitivity. Years later, Chicago School colleague Pauline Young described the significance of his approach in a text on scientific social surveys and research:

An intimate participant observer of the life of the hobo on the road, in the 'jungle,' in lodging houses, at Hobohemia, at work and at Hobo College in Chicago. He identified himself with the life of the hobo for an extended period and gained insight into the inner life, which would have been almost impossible, had he not been able to eliminate social and mental distances through intimate participation.

Anderson's method and findings would become a model for all subsequent investigations of the casual labor, and all other social problems for that matter. Perhaps more than any other publication from the Chicago School, his work is responsible for promoting the techniques of participant observation within modern sociology. Widely read and cited, Anderson's publication laid the groundwork for

subsequent studies of other “social problems” at the Chicago School, including youth gangs, crime, delinquency, and ethnicity.<sup>39</sup>

Anderson’s methodology inspired a cadre of students on the Pacific Coast to apply the methodology of participant observation to the kinds of social problems they saw around them. A.W. Griewe’s investigations of the transient men that inhabited the Plaza explicitly relied upon *The Hobo*. During his two-month stint in the Plaza, the USC student recorded his conversations with nearly one hundred men. “I gained their confidence and then their friendship by making myself one of them,” he described. Griewe was one among many to place themselves within close reach of their subject. Towne Nylander traded the quietude of life in the East Bay’s University district for a boarding house along Market Street for two months. Benicio Catapusan sat in barbershops, billiard rooms, and dance halls, quietly observing and listening to the conversations of his fellow Filipino expatriots, most of who relied upon migratory work. Albert Shulman spent several nights in Los Angeles’ Midnight Mission to ascertain the social attitudes of transient men, which he described as quite miserable. Miriam Louise Gaertner, also from USC, explored the experience of young transient women by hitchhiking around the state’s highways.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Anderson, *On Hobos and Homelessness*, 26; Pauline Young, *Scientific Social Surveys and Research* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1951) 203. On the development of participant observation as a methodology, see Paul Atkinson, editor, *Handbook of Ethnography* and Richer Dentler, *Practicing Sociology* 50 . Some have questioned whether Anderson’s research constituted actual participant observation, because he did not actively participate in the life and work of his subject. While he did reside in a “hobo hotel” and interviewed many in the community, he drew heavily upon his prior work experience traveling the West. See Harvey, *Myths of the Chicago School*, 49, 58–59.

<sup>40</sup> A.W. Griewe, “A Study of the Habitues of the Downtown Parks of Los Angeles, With a View to Ascertaining Their Constituency, Their Social Processes, and Their Relation to the Larger Community Life” II; Among the thesis projects at USC to employ participant observation are Miriam Luise Gaertner, “A Study of Transient Girls in Los Angeles Including Fifty-Eight Case Digests” (M.A. thesis, University of

Like their academic counterparts, state and federal programs sent out investigators, often anonymously, to observe the working conditions and work routines, and report their findings. While their work may have lacked methodological formality, the intentions and effects were the same. As early as 1907, the federal government had deployed undercover investigators to infiltrate and investigate the activities of immigrant workers. Individuals like Andre Seraphic and John Gruenberg conducted extensive field investigations for the Dillingham Commission on immigration, researching subjects as diverse as the “congestion of immigrants in large cities,” “contract labor and induced immigration,” and “alien criminality.” These investigators often traveled undercover to get at the problem first hand. Through the postwar period, the federal government continued to rely upon these investigative techniques. For example, in response to labor unrest in Pacific canneries, the Federal Department of Labor appointed a permanent inspector to oversee labor relations in San Francisco and Seattle. H.L. Kerwin, a federal mediator, occupied the position for several years during the 1920s, filing elaborate reports on the hiring process, living conditions in Alaska, and the end of season payout to the office in Washington D.C. In addition to detailing these aspects of the industry, Kerwin’s focus was often on the workers themselves.<sup>41</sup>

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Southern California, 1939; Benicio Catapusan, “The Filipino Occupational and Recreational Activities in Los Angeles” (M.A. thesis, University of Southern California, February, 1934); Albert Shulman, “Social Attitudes of ‘Transients’ With Particular Reference to Their Personal Problems” (M.A. Thesis, University of Southern California, 1928).

<sup>41</sup> U.S. Congress, *The Dillingham commission: Abstract of Reports of the Immigration Commission*, vol. 2, 61<sup>st</sup> Congress, 3<sup>d</sup> Session, 1911, S Doc 747 16. See Robert Zeidel, *Immigrants, Progressives, and Exclusion Politics: The Dillingham Commission, 1900-1927* (Springfield: Northern Illinois Press, 2004). H.L. Kerwin, “Report on Alaska Cannery Labor Conditions,” Unpublished Report, Director of Conciliation, United States Department of Labor, Washington D.C., September 7, 1920, excerpted in Lauren Wilde Casaday, “Labor Unrest and the Labor Movement in the Salmon Industry of the Pacific Coast” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, 1938) appendix XII.

Inherent to all these studies was a firm belief that social problems could not be examined in the abstract, but rather, required close observation. In his study of the Plaza in Los Angeles, A.W. Griewe, was quite explicit about the distinction between research that was hands on versus abstract. Previous studies of the parks inhabited by Los Angeles's working-class, he wrote, failed to gain an "intimate contact" with the residents of the urban center. Griewe, on the other hand, "was compelled to get my own material first hand." Nylander signaled a similar fetish for a close relationship to his subject. The goal was to "gain direct contact," he said, and "learn the experience of these men and thus get behind their attitudes... in their own 'natural' environment." Nylander's comment is revealing about the power that researchers saw in this kind of technique. It is difficult to know if Nylander or Griewe had any previous experience with casual laborers, like that of Anderson and Geoghegan. Through the literature of social investigation, there is a confidence that the trained researcher, with the aid of the sociological gaze, could peel away layers of obfuscation and façade.<sup>42</sup>

To "gain direct contact," researchers often chose to enmesh themselves in the community of study. In the name of social science, they slipped out of their educated bourgeois lives to assume new working class identities. In 1922, a graduate of the University of California, Max Stern published a series of articles exploring the world of salmon cannery labor. Taking the reader inside the halls of the labor contractor and aboard the steamer ships bound for Alaska. Stern described himself as "incog," "as one of the army of common laborers who put the annual salmon pack for America." For students, scholars, and federal investigators, the transition from student, scholar, or

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<sup>42</sup> Towne Joseph Nylander, "The Casual Laborer of California," Preface (unnumbered page).

federal investigator was not made easily or without effort. Stern had moved into a boarding house south of Market Street in San Francisco, taken an assumed name, and donned his oldest clothes. Before he went in search of a job with labor contractors, wrote Stern, “I let my whiskers grow, and presented what I considered the picture of a regular blanket bum.”<sup>43</sup>

For some, the masquerade was unnecessary; many of the social investigators among this cadre had prior experience with the communities they studied. Nels Anderson describes his own connection to the study of tramp and hobo men: “I did not descent into the pit, assume a role there, and later ascend to brush off the dust. I was in the process of moving out of the hobo work. To use a hobo expression, preparing the book was a way of ‘getting by,’ earning a living while the exit was under way.” Anderson’s proximity to his subject was hardly unique. Much like Nels Anderson, Thomas Geoghegan had worked as a casual for several years. Geoghegan drew authority from his years of experience as a social worker in Seattle’s skid road. Unlike others who merely “speculated” about the life of the casual, Geoghegan stressed that he had already “walked through the streets and loafed on the corners and frequented the lounging places, the card rooms and amusement palaces of the locality.”<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, the leading social investigators recruited individuals from within these communities, believing their intimate experience with the subjects of their study lent them credibility and insight. To find researchers that were familiar with their subject,

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<sup>43</sup> Max Stern, “Daily News Man Sails for North on Salmon Ship,” 27 September 1922, 1. Higbie offers a more developed discussion of social investigation as masquerade, “Crossing Class Boundaries: Tramp Ethnographers and Narratives of Class in Progressive Era America,” *Social Science History* 21:4 (Winter 1997).

<sup>44</sup> Martin Bulmer, *The Chicago School of Sociology* (Chicago 1984), 98; Geoghegan, “The Migratory Worker,” 6.

social investigators often recruited students and researchers from the communities of study. The Chicago School's investment in Nels Anderson had demonstrated the value of familiarity with one's research. Emory Bogardus, in particular, brought in graduate students from the Japanese and Filipino community with the suggestion they undertake research projects on those populations. "In social research a large number of workers may be interested in helping, but only a very small percentage will have the proper background," wrote Emory Bogardus. It could be valuable to locate investigators to whom "the research project is related to the individual's background." Benicio Catapusan was one of those recruited to join the department at USC. After his plan to employ more conventional research methods to write about Little Manila in Los Angeles failed, he relied upon connections within the community. Participant observation became critical to his work. He had "years of experience, personal contacts, and close association with some of the Filipino leaders." of study, participant observation became central to the practice of contemporary sociological research. Researchers like Catapusan did not have to rely upon assumed identities or perform a masquerade to gain entrance. They entered their community with prior credibility and exploited it for trust and legitimacy.<sup>45</sup>

The urban laborer's geography also became a site of scrutiny for public officials. Cataloging and mapping the flophouses and hotels, their goal was to render the working class occupants visible to the surveillance. The scope of these programs was substantial. In 1919, the California Commission on Immigration and Housing (CCIH), by that time a division of the state's Division of Labor and Industrial Relations, unveiled an effort to

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<sup>45</sup> Emory Stephen Bogardus, *The New Social Research* (J.R. Miller, 1926) 55; Robert A. Dentler, *Practicing Sociology: Selected Fields* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2001) 51. Henry Yu offers a more developed discussion of the recruitment of Asian Americans for social investigation in *Thinking Orientals*.

catalog and inspect every co-housing site in the state. That meant sending a CCIH official to 5,937 housing tenements, 6,863 hotels, and 26,115 dwellings. The vigorous program rolled out over the decade. In 1924, the Commission reported on the inspection of 744 boarding houses and lodging hotels in the largest cities. In 1926, CCIH housing inspectors like Leo Mott and labor camp inspectors Edward Brown filed extensive reports – in excess of 200 - per month, a number that would grow to greater than 300 by the end of the decade. In Los Angeles alone, CCIH officials inspected 356 addresses, most of them lodging and boarding houses. Other officials at the CCIH authored studies of housing congestion in San Francisco, focusing particularly on the boarding houses south of Market Street and the hotels of Chinatown and Manilatown.<sup>46</sup>

The scrutiny of such agencies, not coincidentally, fell heavily upon the districts inhabited by casual workers, immigrants, and radicals. The dark alleyways and concealed entrances drew immediate suspicion. In debating the ideal building code for entrances and public spaces in boarding houses, for example, one CCIH architect worried these kinds of structures “are uncontrolled by ordinary police inspection and unaffected by public observation and criticism. They become places of disease and vice.” Large entrances and open lobbies, which allowed for greater surveillance and regulation, became key provisions of a newly proposed building code for the construction of new boarding houses. The Commission urged “every public official, particular the health officers, building and housing inspectors, at once commence an intensive survey or investigation of conditions in their respective cities and counties.” This included

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<sup>46</sup> California Commission of Immigration and Housing, *Annual Report* (Sacramento: State of California Printing Office, 1919) 39; *Annual Report of the Commission of Immigration and Housing* (Sacramento: California State Printing Office: 1926) 39; and California Commission of Immigration and Housing Papers, carton 41:6 housing; reports; Glass, Edward, 1922, Bancroft Library, University of California.

“plating and zoning their communities into districts, attacking first the district where the worst conditions obtain, and continuing to work diligently until every building used for human habitation is made to conform.”<sup>47</sup>

The state government was not the only party to seek such reforms. Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles all maintained city departments of sanitation, housing, and public health, whose task it was to inspect, survey, and ultimately remedy municipal problems. Throughout the 1920s, the county health department of Los Angeles made weekly inspections of “poverty row” near Main Street, a variety of jungle encampments around town, and auto trailers. Weekly reports cataloged, indexed, and detailed each boarding house, the number of individuals living in the space, the number and condition of sanitary facilities, as well as the amount of common social space. In their insatiable pursuit of ever-larger amounts of information and data to build its catalog of reform, public officials and state investigators crossed the state and strolled every alley. Their goal was a total and complete understanding of the spaces of the casual labor economy on the Pacific Coast.<sup>48</sup>

### **Ascribing Meaning**

In its strident effort to document the casual labor economy, the archive of social investigation leaves us a wealth of information. Much of it is recorded in stark and arresting detail. Embedded within the pages and pages of descriptive investigation

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<sup>47</sup> CCIH, carton 41:6 housing; reports; Glass, Edward, 1922; see also Anne Marie Woo-Sam, “Domesticating the Immigrant: California’s Commission of Immigration and Housing and the Domestic Immigration Policy Movement, 1910-1945.”

<sup>48</sup> Los Angeles City Archive, Board of Health Commissioners Minutes, August 25, 1937, 110. Los Angeles City Archives.

resides a good deal of ascriptive discourse. In their studies of skid row, flophouses and employment agencies, and the workers themselves, social investigators imbued their work with social meaning. Many of the labels or significance they attached to their subjects did not necessarily originate in the pages of social research. Ideas about racial difference or the division of skill, for example, were part of a larger cultural construct. Workers, employers, and the apparatus of popular culture actively participated in erecting them. However, the power of academic institutions and their claim to use objective science organized and intensified these tropes. Mapping and participant observation gave cultural definition to an economic category of workers. Through their research, the casual labor economy came to be associated with idleness, urban decay, and deviance. Methodology and language combined to paint a picture of the isolated worker, lacking proper social ties, and out of step with American modernity.

Maps divided urban space by identifying particular streets, blocks, and discrete sections of the city. Adopting the Chicago School's urban methodology, researchers drew neatly defined boundaries around the "zone in transition." researchers like Nylander and Geoghegan cordoned off the geography of casual labor from the rest of the city. For Geoghegan, "the migrant worker who comes to Seattle lives in a well defined and confined area. This area is self-contained, a city within a city." Such descriptions presume a flat, homogeneity of race and class of these areas, rather than their diversity and mixed use. In the process, they excised the thriving business district, shopping and commerce, as well as bourgeois forms of entertainment that coexisted with casual laborers' flophouses. Social investigator's maps and descriptions transformed urban spaces filled with complexity and diversity – in both social and economic terms – into

simple, flattened geographies. For the next half century, Seattle's Pioneer Square, San Francisco's South of Market, and Los Angeles' Main Street would be marked as skid rows.<sup>49</sup>

Social investigators focused on the physical aspects of the city they considered unsavory, and in the process, elided the complexity of the laborers' geography. In the boarding houses and leisure spaces, they emphasized the power of serpentine corridors to cultivate a criminal and deviant element. Windowless rooms with poor circulation promoted disease. In Los Angeles, Leo Mott made the "discovery" of what he considered deplorable conditions in the port facilities. Nearly six hundred men were housed in makeshift encampments, others lived in box cars, a large dormitory tent, and some even slept in cots set in the lower holding area of a decommissioned boat.<sup>50</sup> In San Francisco, Towne Nylander observed a similar gathering of lodging houses: "in the lowest part of town, they are a part of the vices that are characteristic of these neighborhoods." "Red lights, cheap cabarets, dope fiends... and dilapidated houses," he described, "vie with the unclean unwholesome lodging house in corrupting the inmates." As a team of CCIH housing inspectors explained it, these structures "are uncontrolled by ordinary police inspection and unaffected by public observation and criticism. They become places of disease and vice." Encountering and examining the interior of boarding houses, the congestion of the facilities, and the stark realities of working class life, social investigators described a world that seemed wholly apart from rest of the modern city.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Geoghegan, "The Migratory Worker," 44.

<sup>50</sup> *Annual Report of the Commission of Immigration and Housing* (Sacramento: California State Printing Office: 1926) 39; and California Commission of Immigration and Housing Papers, carton 41:6 housing reports; Leo Mott, 1922, Bancroft Library, University of California.

<sup>51</sup> Nylander, "The Casual Laborer of California," 47.

The creation of a racialized landscape was certainly nothing new, but social investigators lent power and an air of objectivity to such constructions. Researchers evaluated and cataloged each racialized group according to genetic and cultural fitness. Studies like *Facts About Filipino Immigration* and *Mexicans in California* built complete profiles about the social, economic, and sanitary habits of casual laborers of color. Mexicans were said to be diligent in the field and factory, but ultimately lacked the ingenuity or industry to better their position. Filipinos also made good employees, but were prone to violent outburst and unable to withstand disease and sickness. In this respect, the construction of the laborer's geography was a teleology. By emphasizing the social distance between casual laborers, particularly Filipinos and Mexicans, they justified further investigation, which bolstered their previous findings, and in turn, justified more investigation and monitoring.

Social investigators similarly applied racialized labels to other parts of the city. Reporting the division of urban space in California, the CCIH stated, "almost every city... has a well defined slum district, its 'below the tracks,' 'Mexican village,' 'Chinatown.'" California's study of the state's Mexican population devoted a good deal of space to locating and specifying the 'distinctly Mexican' settlements in Los Angeles, such as the Plaza. The vocabulary of social investigation included numerous other racialized labels – Manilatown, Little Tokyo, Sonoratown. Such labels were not created by social investigators, but their common usage in public reports, dissertations, and publications reified them. The scientific power of maps and observation made them more real. The name "Nigger alley," for example, had remained a relatively obscure reference used primarily among casual workers to describe the corner of Los Angeles and Aliso

streets. The block remained remarkably obscure for the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but gained prominence as city officials sought to label and know this part of the city.<sup>52</sup>

Participant observation worked in tandem to mapping technologies to confirm the isolation and independence of most casual workers. Participation observation cut off the casual labor economy from the larger context, eliding the structural explanations, namely capitalism's demand for a flexible workforce. The economic dimensions of transience were explicitly secondary. Irregular employment and transience in the words of one labor economist, "constitutes a sociological problem, rather than a purely economic problem." The constant motion required by the casual labor economy had torn workers from stable communities, leaving them "womanless, voteless, and jobless." Likewise, the precarity of their employment ground down the worker's psychology, eroding their sense of dignity and self-image. Wanderlust and mental defect explained the situation of casual laborers. For Andrew Lind, "once developed, the habit of mobility leads the individual into an accentuated disposition of restlessness and discontent, which is but a stepping stone to social and economic failure." The problem of casual work, in the eyes of most social investigators, far exceeded mere economic dimensions. Even Nels Anderson, sensitive to the difficult lives of the tramp and hobo, placed most of the explanation within the individual. As he explained, industrial conditions could not fully account for the number of men on the road, because "there will always remain certain 'misfits,' the industrially inadequate, the unstable, or egocentric, who will ever tend to

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<sup>52</sup> California Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Annual Reports* (Sacramento: State of California Printing Office, 1923) 65. See Also Koyoshi Uono, "The Factors Affecting the Geographical Aggregation and Dispersion of the Japanese Residences in the City of Los Angeles," (Unpu; *James M. Guinn, Historical and Biographical Record of Los Angeles and Vicinity* (Chicago: Chapman Publishing Company, 1902), 108; Bell, Horace. *Reminiscences of a ranger: early times in Southern California* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999) 13-17.

conflict with constituted authority in industry, society, and government.” The instability of the casual worker rested not in a larger structural explanation, but rather the individual workers themselves.<sup>53</sup>

Social investigators veiled their assumptions behind a cover of objectivity. In framing their research questions and selectively presenting data, French’s team of researchers spoke to deeply seated concerns about the implications of a growing number of Filipinos employed as casual laborers migrating in and through California. Throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, internal and international migration brought thousands of new workers to the region, raising concerns about the number of casual migratory laborers. One section of the report highlighted alarm about declining wage rates for citizens by examining Filipinos’ displacement of whites in agricultural harvesting, rail maintenance, and maritime trades. Another sections underscored the largely male character of these migration patterns and the lack of formal households, thus, raising the specter of interracial sexual contact. The study of Filipinos lent traction to a set of measures that targeted Filipino workers in particular, and transient workers in general. The information presented in *Facts About Filipino Immigration*, and reports like it, gave new ammunition to new calls for restricted immigration, the regulation of employment agencies and contractors, work tests for social welfare programs, and heavy-handed policing measures. Despite its purported objectivity, the report became a statement about the problem of casual laborer and a call for solutions.

Social investigation reified the beliefs of state and municipal officials that linked casual labor with the threat of disease and epidemic. Housing, transience, and poor

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<sup>53</sup> Don Lescohier, *The Labor Market* (New York: MacMillan, 1923) 80; Andrew Lind, *A Study of Mobility of Population in Seattle* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1925) 49; and Anderson, *The Hobo* (\*)

personal hygiene all constituted a substantial threat to public health. A special investigator for the California Department of Labor reported the health conditions of workers aboard cannery ships coming and going from San Francisco. “The state of physical health in which many of these men are in could cause a public revolt if widely known,” he reported. Many of the workers appeared to be “afflicted with such loathsome diseases.” Such concerns about contagion were often racialized and laid unequally upon casual workers of color. The housing districts inhabited by immigrant workers from Mexico, the Philippines, and Asia became places to fear. Health and sanitation studies depicted Mexican housing districts in their pages, with images of the “over-crowded rooming houses and temporary shacks on the back lots.”<sup>54</sup>

On the issue of public health, the intersection of race and class became particularly salient. “If we look at the ancestry of the majority of these people, we find them of Anglo American stock whose families have for generations lived in the more retarded areas of the United States, whose customs, education, and standard of living are far below the average for this country. We further find that they come from an area where the incidence of the communicable disease is high, where the sanitation is poor and where the public health activities have been limited. On their migration to California they therefore brought with them a lower standard of living, endemic foci of communicable diseases, and a long background of malnutrition.” Medical examinations of those entering was “not sufficient” and “in general, the Filipinos are not particularly

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<sup>54</sup> Casaday, “Labor Unrest and the Labor Movement in the Salmon Industry of the Pacific Coast,” 212. On public health, see Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens?: Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (University of California Press, 2006); Deverell, “Plague in Los Angeles, 1924: Ethnicity and Typicality” in Valerie J. Matsumoto and Blake Allmendinger, *Over the Edge: Remapping the American West* (University of California Press, 1999); and Shah, *Contagious Divides*.

good physical specimens are subject to many of the common diseases. The question of susceptibility is more important than the presence of disease at the time of admission”<sup>55</sup>

Using the evidence gathered from their investigations, public officials embarked on a cleansing program for certain “undesirable” parts of the city. In Seattle, the division of Housing and Sanitation condemned and razed a number of habitations in the name of public health and safety. In 1921, the department proudly reported the removal of a tent city “occupied by hoboes” that ran south from the city along the railroad tracks. “Needless to say,” the report stated, “that such places were destroyed by this department, being intolerable.” In all, the Seattle department would raze, condemn, or order the vacation of as many as 519 buildings per year, the majority situated in the heart of Seattle’s laborer’s geography. The CCIH had a similar record in California. During its first decade, the CCIH forced the removal of over 2,000 boarding house rooms that did not comport with the law. In 1926, they approved the demolition of 35 shack homes near the city center, inhabited by “a poor class of Mexican casuals who worked from time to time in the Japanese truck gardens nearby or wherever else they could secure employment.” Later that year, in what the CCIH referred to as a “section survey,” officials inspected 356 homes and demolished 12 boarding houses that were deemed “unfit for habitation.” In both Seattle and San Francisco, health and housing inspectors staged similar campaigns against what they deemed urban blight. Programs for public

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<sup>55</sup> *Health of the migratory worker*, SF Farnsworth, MD, Assistant chief, bureau of county health work, state dept of public health, page 3 (given before Health Officers Section, League of CA municipalities San Jose, Sept 15, 1937.) FWP, carton 17, folder, “Native Whites”; Carton 4:18 Correspondence; Filipinos; 1929 “summary of Filipino immigration problems and recommendations by the commonwealth club’s section on immigration” sept. 19, 1929.

health, pest fumigation, rat abatement, and housing improvement became the pretext for a redrawing of the urban center.<sup>56</sup>

Ultimately, social investigators research seemed to confirm their worst fears about the link between the casual labor economy and social problems. The language they applied to casual laborers and migrant works transmitted the a sense of urgency: Transients had “over-run” the Pacific coast precipitating an “emergency,” “a human disaster,” and ushered in a “ new era in social problems.” The large number of Mexican and Filipino workers coming to the Pacific Coast, in particular, constituted an “invasion” and a “flood” that would inevitably overwhelm the region. Using evidence from their investigations of camps and boarding houses, the CCIH wrote letters to members of Congress advocating for tighter immigration restrictions. Reverend Edward Hanna, CCIH president, argued Mexicans “drain our charities, affect the health of our communities, create a problem in our labor camps, diminish the percentage of our white population, and remain foreign.” The objective lens of the social scientist gave way to the fear mongering of cultural politics.<sup>57</sup>

## **Conclusion**

During the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, social investigators sought to understand and bring attention to what they perceived to be the emanation of social problems from the casual labor economy. Irrational economics, labor radicalism, and the

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<sup>56</sup> Seattle Department of Health and Sanitation, *Report of the Department of Health and Sanitation of the City of Seattle, Washington* (Seattle: Lowman and Hanford, 1921) 90; California Commission of Immigration and Housing Papers, carton 4:36, Correspondence; Mexican Data, 1926-7, Bancroft Library, University of California.

<sup>57</sup> The CCIH president wrote members of the House of Rep, lobbying for restrictions to Mexican immigration; California Commission of Immigration and Housing Papers, Letter to chas. F Curry, February 24, 1926, carton 4:36, Correspondence; Mexican Data, 1926-7, Bancroft Library, University of California.

specter of immigration - these all worried an array of public officials and social science researchers. The amount of knowledge produced in the process was truly remarkable. Through the examination of casual laborers and immigrant workers, social scientists developed some of their most influential and enduring methods. For the first time, an apparatus of social investigators - students, scholars, and public officials – emerged to perform extensive qualitative studies of the working class. Mapping and participant observation became critical techniques for this work, which laid the groundwork for decades of subsequent social research.

In the process, social investigators defined what it meant to be a casual laborer. They brought into being this working class subject, with all its spatial, cultural, and racialized assumptions. Despite their claims to objectivity and science, social investigators were active participants, not just passive observers, in shaping definitions of social class in the age of modern industrial capitalism. The scientific methods of mapping and participant observation pushed casual workers further to the margins. Through the focused gaze of the sociologist, denizens of the laborer's geography became viewed as both menace and victim of a modern urban world. At their core, these studies cast the laborer's geography, including the workers that comprised it, to be a social problem.

It would be overreaching to suggest that social investigators were the only participants in defining the meaning of casual labor. The cultural and political landscape of the casual labor economy contained competing and overlapping discourses. As the following chapter makes clear, workers developed their own categories and distinctions, solidarities, and divisions. And at times, the discourse of workers and social investigators

merge. Each reified forms of exclusion and privilege through language and social practice. But they diverge in significant ways. Despite their substantial apparatus for research and the collection of data, social investigators were unable to see, or willfully ignored, the larger structure of social and economic power at work. Likewise, social investigators missed, or remained willfully ignorant of, the many layers of casual worker's lives. The casual labor economy could be isolating, but it was also a tremendously social experience, as the stories of workers would suggest. The narrative offered by social investigators was one of marginalization, depravity, and psychic torture. The humor and shared moments of mutualism had no place in their understanding of this economic sector. As the next chapter makes clear, the vast archive of laborlore offers contrasting descriptions of their experience.

Nonetheless, the powerful institutions of social investigation assured the discourse of social problems would ascend over that of the diminutive casual worker. History left us a story of the lone, disenfranchised worker, cut from all social ties. That narrative would change rather dramatically during the following decade, when at least some portion of the casual labor force would gain a voice and allies in the apparatus of social investigation.

## Chapter 4 | Laborlore and the Solidarities of Exclusion

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In the cities, fields, and along the roads of the Pacific Coast, casual migratory laborers shared the story of the “Millpond” with their fellow workers:

Walking along the road, desperate for a job, an out of work tramp came upon a man drowning in a “Millpond”. As the man cried for help, the tramp called out, “I’ll save you, but before that, where do you work?” The man replied, “I’ve got a job at the sawmill down the road.” On that information, the tramp ran off down the road, leaving the man for certain doom. He arrived at the sawmill and inquired with the foreman about an opening. When the foreman told him there were no openings, the tramp replied, “that’s impossible, a man down the road drowning in a pond told me he worked here.” The foreman said, “yes, he used to work here, but I gave the job to the man who pushed him in.”<sup>1</sup>

The “Millpond” is an exemplary working class tall tale, filled with irony and dark humor. Despite its questionable veracity – surely, that did not happen - the general thrust of the story spoke to underlying issues. The casual labor economy was rife with exploitation and difficulty. Work was scarce and unstable. That instability created rifts between workers, and in turn, employers capitalized on them. Put more directly, the “Millpond” story reveals not only the employers’ indifference to their workers but also the lack of solidarity among workers themselves. While this particular story deals with the timber industry, the theme could be easily mapped onto many other casual industry or include the entire community of exploiters – gambling bosses, contractors, foremen – who sought to profit from the labors of casual workers. The “Millpond” captures just a few of these

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<sup>1</sup> The story is adapted from Archie Green, *Calf’s Head and Union Tale: Labor Yarns at Work and Play* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996) 189. According to Green, “Millpond” was shared among workers across North America and found wide audience between the years of Seattle’s general strike through the New Deal during the days of the Popular Front.

dimensions of life as a casual laborer along the Pacific Coast in the years following World War I.

However, this account of the rivalry between workers invites alternative reading. While it is a story of cutthroat competition, it is at least a century old, and has survived because it was passed between generations of workers. They chose to share it with one another. It is impossible to know how many workers heard the “Millpond” in their travels from job to job. But the oral history record would suggest stories of this kind were commonly shared among fellow workers in the morning shape-up, around the campfire of the hobo jungle, or in the cramped space of the bunkhouse. In this particular case, the retelling was not even the exclusive domain of those in the timber or sawmill trades. Variations crop up in the stories of textile mill workers in North Carolina and iron workers in the Northeast. However grim the “Millpond”’s tale’s of rivalry and competition, it must be juxtaposed with the social web responsible for its broadcast and circulation.

Stories like the “Millpond”, along with jargon, workplace argot, and music occupy an important place in working class history. Among enslaved African Americans, verbal games and proverbs became a reserve for traditional values, as well as an outlet for dissent. Rhythmic songs allowed gandy dancers to coordinate the strikes of their hammers while driving railroad spikes, but also provided an opportunity to celebrate working class heroes. A longshoreman’s durable hickory shirt was not only practical, but also a symbol of his membership in a fraternity of working men. Taken together, these all constitute examples of laborlore, described by folklorist Archie Green as the “expressivity by workers themselves, and their allies: utterance, representation, symbol,

code, artifact, belief, ritual.” Such a definition delineates forms of culture produced for working class consumption from those that emerge from within the ranks of workers. While movies, popular music, and pulp fiction were all influential media by the end of World War I, laborlore was unique in its origins within the working class. More importantly, in all these cases, working class folklore was more than just a pastime or diversion from the daily grind. Writing in the context of the folklore of American slavery, Lawrence Levine suggests that expressions of this kind “served the dual function of not only preserving communal values and solidarity, but also providing occasions for the individuals to transcend, at least symbolically, the inevitable restrictions of his environment and his society by permitting him to express deeply held feelings that he ordinarily was not allowed to verbalize.”<sup>2</sup> These were attempts re-create the social order.<sup>3</sup>

Among casual workers in the 1920s, laborlore was a ubiquitous feature, broadcast around the region by their travels through multiple jobsites, occupations. Some forms were tied to particular types of occupational knowledge or ethnic communities, but there

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<sup>2</sup> Lawrence Levine, *The Unpredictable Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 37-58; see also Scott Nelson, *Steel Drivin' Man: John Henry, the Untold Story of an American Legend* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this chapter, I refer to a wide range of argot, vocabulary, and language that comprised the lexicon of contingent capitalism. To signify words that carried unique meaning or a definition that departed from a more literal translation (i.e. *scissorbill*) these are highlighted in italics. These words and definitions are largely derived from two sources: George Milburn, *The Hobo's Hornbook: a Repertory for a Gutter Jongleur* (New York: Ives Washburn, 1930) and Dean Stiff, *The Milk and Honey Route: A Handbook for Hobos* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1931). As a supplement, I draw a number of additional glossaries, including Nicholas Klein, “Hobo Lingo” *American Speech* 1:12 (September, 1926) 650-653; Guy Williams, *Logger Talk: Some Notes on the Jargon of the Pacific Northwest Woods* (Seattle: University of Washington Bookstore, 1930); Nels Anderson, *On Hobos and Homelessness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); F.H. Sidney, “Hobo Cant,” *Dialect Notes* 5:1 (1919) 41-41; Charlie Samolar, “The Argot of the Vagabond,” *American Speech* (June, 1927) 385-392; Howard Barker, “More Hobo Lingo” *American Speech* (June, 1927) 506; Vernon Saul, “The Vocabulary of Bums” *American Speech* (June, 1929) 337-346; Robert Oliver, “Junglese” *American Speech* (June, 1932) 41; Irwin Godfrey, *A Dictionary of Tramp and Underworld Slang* (London: Eric Partridge LTD, 1931); Ben Reitman, *Sister of the Road* (Oakland: AK Press, 1998).

was a remarkable amount of cross-pollination of form and content. This chapter contends that laborlore became a discursive tool, used by workers to navigate the challenging material and cultural landscape of the casual labor economy. On one hand, workers used expressive culture as a didactic tool, used to teach lessons about obtaining jobs and avoid injury in world of contingency and physical danger. On the other hand, argot, self-styling, and storytelling were employed to create lines of identification both among, but also between workers on the move.

That second point deserves further explication. In the absence of many of the traditional sites of working class power – a community rooted in space, kinship, or consistent work routine – stories, costume, and jargon became important lodestars for workers to form a sense of community. These expressions of solidarity cut two ways, however. Competition for work meant that a shared sense of identity could also be used as solidarities of exclusion mobilized for the protection of privilege and skill. Racial slurs made some workplaces inhospitable and clothing choices created exclusive fraternities. In the face of these divisions, some of this laborlore discourse actively sought to break down those divisions. In particular, the Industrial Workers of the World generated a prodigious amount of laborlore, aimed at disrupting these lines of exclusion by emphasizing the common experience of contingency and class identity.

Several generations of scholars have offered their own interpretations of this body of worker expression that emerged from this period. In the early twentieth century, tramp ethnographers and social investigators catalogued the vocabulary, songs, and symbols of this distinct sector of the working class. For them, laborlore constituted the peculiar and strange evidence of a working class subculture marked by maladjustment and social

distance. During the Great Depression, interest in laborlore shifted, as ethnographers sought out symbols of American grit and determination. For collectors of working class lore – like Stewart Holbrook, Robert Sonkin, and Alan Lomax – ballads, language, and tales were part of an authentic, but vanishing Americana. Beginning in the 1960s and later, a third wave of collectors associated with the New Left and Folk Revival did their own scavenging of working class expression bent on locating a recoverable ancestry of solidarity and common cause. Taken together, these scholars have managed to preserve a great deal of ephemeral material. Indeed, much of the evidence for this chapter is drawn from these glossaries, encyclopedias, and appendices of worker lore, a feature that is clearly evident in the footnotes of this chapter.<sup>4</sup>

Despite those debts, this chapter departs from that century of scholarship to recast the expression of workers from mere by-products of economic change to ones of response and negotiation. As the previous chapter indicated, the cultural meaning of casual labor neither preexisted modern industrial capitalism, nor was it a stable category. To interpret jokes, argot, and working class tales as clear evidence of an existing social formation or worker consciousness – whether that was maladjustment, American authenticity, or labor solidarity – is to flatten the manifold meanings of language and culture. Perhaps more importantly, it denies workers any role in the process of cultural formation. Much like social investigators, contingent workers were active participants in forming the image of the casual laborer. Such an approach reinterprets working class expressions as a form discourse, used by workers as a tool or technology to craft their

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<sup>4</sup> While the ideological bent of the collectors associated with the 1910s and 1920s and also the 1960s have been understudied, the Great Depression is well documented. See, Stephen Fender, *Nature, Class, and New Deal Literature: The Country Poor in the Great Depression* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1998).

own subjectivity. Ultimately, the discourse of laborlore is about remaking social power. These were expressions created by workers in an economy based upon contingency, stratification, and exclusion. Workers did not develop and share laborlore to merely describe the world as it was, but rather prescribe the kind of world they longed for.<sup>5</sup>

### **Contingent Work and the Ubiquity of Laborlore**

Stories, songs, and argot, along with other working class expressions were a ubiquitous feature of contingent capitalism. Each expression responds to a working class life on the move, built upon an oral tradition, and communicated in line at the shape up, around campfires, or bunkhouses. Tramp worker and wobbly agitator George Hodin describes a common setting:

“Traveling in the jungles, I found that sitting around the fire the fellows would loosen up a lot... You could learn all kinds of things. I don’t think I have ever lived so freely as I did those years. Around the fire you didn’t split up into groups. You sat in a bunch and listened or put in your two bits worth.”

As a raconteur and radical, Hodin surely sugarcoats the years he spent on the road, but the central place of banter and tales on the job-site was a sentiment held by many. For

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<sup>5</sup> Here, and throughout the chapter, I rely upon analytical tools from the fields of anthropology, cultural studies, and folklore studies. The field of folklore studies is quite immense, though the subset concerned with the working class is mores compact. The central figure and proponent of the term laborlore, is Archie Green. I rely heavily upon Green’s accounts of working class lore, but also his interpretive acumen and desire to treat the subject with creativity and rigor. His scholarship figures prominently in the following pages, including *Wobblies, Pile Butts, and Other Heroes* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); *Calf’s Head and Other Union Tale*; and *Torching the Fink Books and Other Essays on Vernacular Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001). On the complexities of community formation, see Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine, 1995); on the relationship between cultural form and structural context, see Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture” in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973) 3-30; For more on the subject of etymology, language and argot, and vocabulary, the most extensive source is the journal *American Speech*; On occupational cultures, see Harrison Miller Trice, *Occupational Subcultures in the Workplace* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993) and Archie Green, editor, *Songs About Work: Essays in Occupational Culture For Richard A. Reuss* (Bloomington: Folklore Institute, Indiana University, 1993).

contingent workers, storytelling was a way to pass the time, which they often had lots of. “Pauses between work offered ample opportunities to share jokes and tell stories,” recalled Germain Bulcke, a longshoreman on San Francisco’s waterfront during the 1920s. His recollection of work describes the extensive time spent in the shape-up or dispatch office waiting work. On the job, his work crew was often relegated to “smoke,” or standby status. Bulcke became fond of those idle hours, which allowed him to chat with the “old timers,” discuss work routines and employer rules, or share their thoughts about the foremen. Much of it was spent sharing jokes and tall stories about stevedoring and the waterfront.<sup>6</sup>

These moments of shared conversation were hardly limited to the waterfront, or even contingent jobs for that matter. The advent of industrial capitalism in the nineteenth century had removed laborers from the isolation of the artisan workshop and off the family farm and thrust them into the factory and packing shed. These new settings may have exerted more discipline over the time and movement of workers, eliminating some of the casual informality of the workshop, but they also transformed a solitary activity into a remarkably social one. The mass experience of the starting whistle, the lunch hour, and the sound of quitting time was simultaneously shared among tens and hundreds of coworkers. The new industrial order also meant shorter workdays, which provided more opportunity for sociability. As Roy Rosenzweig observes of the industrial workers of Worcester, Massachusetts, the rather sudden emergence of leisure hours at the turn of

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with George Hodin, Stewart. Bird et al., *Solidarity Forever: An Oral History of the IWW* (Chicago: Lake View Press, 1985) 167; interview with Germain Bulcke, “Longshore Leader and ILWU-Pacific Maritime Association Arbitrator,” an oral history conducted by Estolv Ethan Ward, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1984.

the century gave workers a whole new realm for shared experience. Conversation, chat, and gossip were an integral part of working class, both on the job and off.<sup>7</sup>

Laborlore may have been a common feature of working class life, but contingent capitalism created particularly ideal conditions for the wide circulation of these working class forms. The “poesy of the jungle,” as one scholar described, seemed to pervade every corner of the casual labor economy along the Pacific Coast. Investigating the causes of labor unrest on California’s farms, Carleton Parker described in detail the importance of “crude, but virile song and verse” to these laborers. Not only were the men he encountered familiar with a common set of working class stories, but they enthusiastically sang a virtual songbook of sharp-witted tunes and whip workers into frenzy with encouragement to “knock the blocks off the scissor bills.” Parker’s contemporary, Cloice Howd observed a similar situation among loggers in Washington State. During his tour of work camps, he found a simmering anger about low wages and working conditions, but also a surprisingly intellectual community: “The men are away from home and ordinary social environment. They spend much of their time about the fire in the bunk house, playing cards or discussing all kinds of topics, from sports or scandal to abstruse discussions of economic theory.” Social investigators like Parker and Howd had stumbled into a world of world of working class sociability designed to both document and make light of the exploitation of their working conditions.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The relationship between modern modes of production and mass culture is explored in E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966); Roy. Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Lizabeth. Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>8</sup> George Milburn describes hobo language as the “poesy of the jungle,” in Milburn, *Hobo Hornbook*, 3. Carleton Parker, *The Casual Migratory Laborer and Other Essays* (Seattle: University of Washington

The ubiquity of laborlore should come as no surprise. The life of a contingent worker was defined by mobility, whether that was around the region or between various worksites, and they carried these forms of expressive culture with them. According to ethnographer George Milburn, labor camps could turn into “a very convivial assembly, and on occasion, many extemporaneous epics, as well as the hobo classics are sung and recited.” Milburn’s account of Homer-esque epics may be a bit exaggerated, but the number and similarity of the accounts would suggest that storytelling was commonplace at many gathering of workers. Likewise, workers transformed salmon canneries, agricultural packing sheds, and bunkhouses into impromptu gambling parlors and concert halls as a way to pass their time off the job. For laborers, playing cards and musical instruments were common objects. When they did not provide their own forms of entertainment, labor contractors transported musicians to remote locations like Ketchikan and Cordova to satisfy the demands of their workers. Spanish-speaking bands toured the farm circuit, delivering Tejano sounds and worker corridos in the workers’ native language. As one Filipino migrant described, “these bands gave workers an object to coalesce around, celebrate.”<sup>9</sup>

Remote work camps were not the only points of circulation. Much as cities structured the movement of workers, they also became important locations for

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Press, 1920) 191; and Cloice Howd, *Industrial Relations in the West Coast Lumber Industry* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1924) 43.

<sup>9</sup> Milburn, *Hobo Hornbook*, 16; Bruno Lasker, *Filipino Immigration*. (New York: Arno Press, 1969) 32. The importance of popular entertainment among Filipino workers is also noted in Fujita-Rony, *American Workers, Colonial Power: Philippine Seattle and the Transpacific West, 1919-1941* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003); and 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) 105-134.

conviviality and the sharing of information, songs, and language. Carlos Bulosan described the urban scene of Los Angeles. His brothers roamed the streets and “talked to the Pinoys, ate Filipino food, and went to a movie when night came.” “They met in a dingy restaurant or a dark poolroom to exchange news; then they scattered for another week of endless drudgery.” For historian Linda *España-Maram*, working class Filipinos used the city to form “a shared knowledge of cultural forms.” Bulosan and his brothers surrounded themselves with “people with whom they felt kinship, people with whom they shared stories about the day or the latest joke, people who shared a vernacular whose grammar and vocabulary struggled to articulate the beauty and burden of their lives.” The laborer’s geography encouraged, even forced, these kinds of shared space.<sup>10</sup>

The social and economic ties that connected these industries together proved to be powerful in moving forms of expression between seemingly distinct occupations. One of the largest collections of argot in the timber industries noted the close ties that linked together a number of industries in the Pacific Northwest. Loggers cut the trees; sawmills processed the timber; railroad operators, teamsters, sailors and longshore workers oversaw their transportation; and carpenters and pile drivers both worked with the final products. Those connections guaranteed that workplace argot indigenous to a particular industry would slowly drift into other occupations. The evidence for that drifting appears through these industries. Traditional logging songs like “Little Red Bulls,” “The Jam at Gerry’s Rocks,” “Logger’s Alphabet” were commonly heard aboard sailing vessels. Among the many songs that jumped occupations, “Logger’s Alphabet” seemed to inspire the largest number of alternative versions. Various songbooks of labor include examples

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<sup>10</sup> Carlos Bulosan, *America is in the Heart* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973) 255; Linda España-Maram, 126.

of “The Sailor’s Alphabet,” The Fishermen’s Alphabet,” “Building a Slide,” and “The Air Force Alphabet,” among others. Chains of process and supply joined the terminology of workers, and their experience.<sup>11</sup>

Borderland corridos also suggest some of the ways that laborlore followed the movement of workers. While the earliest corridos emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is hardly surprising the first formal commercial recordings were made in Los Angeles in 1926. By the end of World War I, Los Angeles had become a major confluence of Spanish speaking migrant workers along with an emerging culture industry. The themes of these songs closely mirrored the experience of migrant workers in the American Southwest. While some lyrics followed long-standing themes of love, romance, and tragedy, the most enduring songs reflected the experience of traqueros, field hands, and other casual jobs. Songs like *Los Betabeloros* [The Beet-Field Workers], *El Pensilviano* [The Pennsylvania], and *Corrido de Texas* [Song of Texas] convey a working life marked with contingency and drudgery, told with irony, wit, and bitterness. Narrated in the first-person, *El Lavaplatos*, in particular, tells the story of a worker drawn across the border by the allure of Hollywood, but who quickly finds himself relegated to laying track, thinning beets, and eventually employed as a *lavaplato* [dishwasher]. With his dreams of movie stardom unrealized, the narrator sings, *Adios sueños de mi vida, adios estrellas del cine, vuelvo a mi patria querida mas pobre de lo que vine* [Goodbye dreams of life,

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<sup>11</sup> See Ted Gioia, “Lumberjack,” in *Work Songs* (Raleigh: Duke University Press, 2006) 140. Versions of “Logger’s Alphabet” appear in Williams, *Logger Talk*; Milburn, *Hobos Hornbook*; Amy Cohn, *From Sea to Shining Sea: A Treasury of American Folklore and Folk Songs* (Scholastic Inc., 1993); Carol J. Lind, *Big Timber, Big Men* (Hancock House, 1978); Ivan Walton and Joe Grimm, *Windjammers: Songs of the Great Lakes Sailors* (Wayne State University Press, 2002); *Songs of the Michigan lumberjacks* (Library of Congress); *Shantymen and Shantyboys*; *Songs of the Sailor and Lumberman*, (New York: Macmillan, 1951); *Folk Songs of Old New England* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1939); *Shanties from the Seven Seas: Shipboard Work-Songs and Songs Used as Work-Songs from the Great Days of Sail* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979).

goodbye movie stars, I return to my beloved country poorer than when I came]. [See Figure 4.1]<sup>12</sup>

**Figure 4.1 | El Lavaplatos (The Dishwasher), ca. 1920**

Soñaba en mi juventud  
de ser estrella del cine  
y entre tantos yo me vine  
a conocer Hollywood.

I used to dream in my youth  
of becoming a movie star  
and with the hordes I came up north  
to discover Hollywood.

Un día muy desesperado,  
por tanta revolución.  
me cruce para este lado  
sin pagar la inmigración.

One day while I was so desperate  
because of the revolution  
I crossed over to this side  
without paying the immigration.

Que basilada, ay que patada  
me cruce sin pagar nada.  
Que basilada, ay que patada  
Me cruce sin pagar nada.

How ridiculous, what a kick  
I crossed without paying anything.  
how ridiculous, what a kick  
I crossed without paying anything.

En la carrucha mendada  
se rajaron mas de cuatro  
y yo pues como aguantaba  
mejor me fui a lavar platos.

In the covered cart  
more than four backed out  
and since I could take it  
I became a dishwasher.

Es el trabaja decente  
que lo hacen muchos chicanos  
aunque con la agua caliente  
se inchan un poco las manos.

It's the decent job  
that a lot of Chicanos have  
even though the water is very hot  
and ones' hands get swollen.

Y arrepentido y arrepentido  
estoy de haberme venido.  
Y arrepentido y arrepentido  
estoy de haberme venido.

And I regret, I regret  
having come over here  
and I regret, I regret  
having come over here.

Adios sueños de mi vida,  
adios estrellas del cine  
vuelvo a mi patria querida  
mas pobre de lo que vine.

Goodbye life's dreams  
goodbye movie stars  
I'm returning to my land  
poorer than I arrived.

Nos despedimos, adios paisanos  
porque ahora si ya nos vamos.  
nos despedimos, adios paisanos  
porque ahora si ya nos vamos.

We bid goodbye, goodbye civilians  
because today we're really leaving  
we bid goodbye, goodbye civilians  
because today we're really leaving.

Source: Philip Sonnichsen, *Texas-Mexican Border Music, Vols. 2 & 3: Corridos Parts 1 & 2* (Arhoolie Records, 1975) 9.

<sup>12</sup> On the circulation of borderland corridos, see María Herrera-Sobek, "The Corrido as Hypertext" in *Culture Across Border: Mexican Immigration and Popular Culture* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998) 227-258; María Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound: The Mexican Immigrant Experience in Ballad and Song* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Martha Sanchez, *Corridos in Migrant Memory* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006); Vicente Mendoza, *El Corrido Mexicano* (Mexico, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Economica, 1974); and Nicholas Kanellos, Editor, *Herencia: The Anthology of Hispanic Literature of the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) 260.

## **The Utility of Laborlore**

While it certainly reflected the shape and geography of the contingent capitalism, laborlore was more than just an historical artifact or economic by-product. Workers developed laborlore as a tool for instructing, advising, and helping each other navigate two pressing aspects of their lives, namely the contingency of work and dangerous working conditions.

Prior to his acceptance to the Chicago School of Sociology and rise to scholarly prominence, Nels Anderson struggled to make it as a contingent worker. He rode the rails from Chicago, through Utah, Las Vegas, and eventually to the Pacific Coast. Along the way, Anderson “hit the grit” a number of times, tossed from the train by the railroad police. Prospective employers rebuffed his attempts to locate work. The desperation Anderson felt in obtaining work, along with stories like the ““Millpond” highlight the common defining feature of labor under contingent capitalism – the instability of employment. By definition, these jobs operated with minimal commitment or contract. It was at-will employment, to use the twentieth century labor term. Seasonal shifts and yearly variations in yield, demand, or return – conditions described in the first chapter – dictated much of the need for labor throughout the year. Moreover, many of these lines of employment required minimal experience and skill; jobs were open to anyone. Anderson would later acknowledge he simply lacked survival skills required in the contingent economy. “Like the student who learns the ‘theory of his occupation in school,’” he wrote, “the hobo worker had to learn the ways of the road.” Anderson’s experience necessarily raises the question: how did one obtain that education, in an economic world that was supposedly marked by movement, isolation, and competition?

Rather than rely upon luck or chance to locate jobs, casual laborers developed their own conduits of information and knowledge, which they often shared with one another. Anderson fondly recalled the assistance of Shorty Carroll, who taught him “how the hobo behaves... how he went about from place to place on freight trains, how he evaded train crews and railroad police, and how he found his work.”<sup>13</sup> These relationships of exchange, education, and reciprocity were reinforced by the vocabulary of the casual labor economy. Men like Shorty Carroll, who taught Nels Anderson how to navigate the casual economy, often earned the honorific of being a *lighthouse* for the guidance they offered. Others were known as *jockers*, for their willingness to share wisdom and knowledge with a younger generation of migrant worker. A *blowed in the glass stiff* referred to a dependable or trustworthy source, while *postmen* were particularly useful for their familiarity with long distance travel. For each term that rewarded the contribution to the community, others terms attached negative connotations. Descriptors like *airdale* or *lone wolf* became pejoratives for those that refused to take part in the community or contribute to the body of knowledge about work or working conditions. A *gandy stiff*, *shuffler*, or *buzzard* described individuals that rarely worked, had limited knowledge, or offered little information to the larger collective community. For the thousands of itinerant workers who lacked the traditional sense of neighborhood or an occupational trade, informal networks of conversation and exchange were crucial. As one farm labor report in California noted, “moving around a good deal and coming into frequent contact with one another, the average itinerant worker is conversant with existing conditions,” observed one report on farm labor. “Not only does he know the

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<sup>13</sup> Nels Anderson, *The American Hobo: An Autobiography* (Leiden: Brill Publishing, 1975) 23.

conditions prevailing on a given ranch, as hours, wages, kind of work, type of foreman, and living conditions, but he is keenly alive to any uneasiness concerning a shortage of labor, and awake to the possibilities of an increase in wage,” it concluded.<sup>14</sup>

Friendship, extended kinship, and social ties formed the foundation of this far-flung network of information and exchange. One universal feature of autobiography, oral history, and first-hand observations from the casual labor economy is the importance of the social bonds between workers. For the central protagonist of Carlos Bulosan’s, semi-autobiographical *America is in the Heart*, ties with his fellow Filipino migrants were central to navigating the working world. Len de Caux’s memoir, *Labor Radical*, offers a similar account. De Caux routinely picked up travel partners that “steered me through the yards to light and people.” Asked if he worried about thieves and thugs on the road and in boxcars, he recalled, “Oh, not most the time, no, there were a few always, but most of the guys were my friends.” De Caux’s invocation of the word friends is peculiar. As his account makes clear, these were fleeting relationships, usually lasting no longer than a few days. These were certainly not relationships forged in childhood or during school. Instead, for de Caux and other like him, the notion of friendship was fluid and created easily along the roadside.<sup>15</sup>

Homeguard workers had their own means of gathering information about work or accessing jobs. Unlike itinerant workers, they could rely upon the knowledge of family and friends in their neighborhood, or a network of coworkers to locate jobs. Forming a

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<sup>14</sup> R.L. Adams and T.R. Kelly, “A Study of Farm Labor in California” 193 (March, 1918) University of California Berkeley, Agricultural Experiment Station.

<sup>15</sup> Carlos Bulosan, *America is in the Heart*; Len de Caux, *Labor Radical: From the Wobblies to CIO, a Personal Story* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 74; Interview with Len de Caux, UCLA, Oral History, TAPE NUMBER: I, Side Two (June 20, 1981).

work crew for a construction project or unloading boat cargo was often a matter of personal connection. For Henry Schmidt, these acquaintances proved invaluable in the search for work. At the age of eighteen, he landed his first maritime job aboard a transoceanic cargo vessel bound for Holland. The recommendation from a friend to the employer helped him overcome the complete lack of experience. Several years later, he was placed on the blacklist for labor agitating, but found work through Harry Bridges, an acquaintance of his from other circles in the labor movement. Being connected and knowing people around the industry yielded benefits. Workers may have complained about the disorder of the shape-up and the practice of nepotism, but one person's corruption was another's ticket to steady work.<sup>16</sup>

The structure and landscape of the casual labor economy reinforced the sharing of information. The close quarters of the seaman's fo'c'sle, the logger's bunkhouse, or the hobo's boxcar yielded its own peculiar forms of camaraderie. Investigating the various urban haunts of the casual laborer in Seattle, Towne Nylander noted a profound willingness to share information. "Grease joints" and hobo jungles, he wrote, provided workers with "points of contact where the casual learns of jobs, the character of work, the pay, etc.... If a job is good he soon learns about it." Leisure spaces also functioned as a key location for the dispersal of information. Each billiard hall, lunch counter, and cheap café was another opportunity to share a story or tall tale.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Henry Schmidt, Miriam Stein, and Estolv Ethan Ward, *Secondary Leadership in the ILWU, 1933-1966: An Interview* (Berkeley, Calif.: Regional Oral History Office, the Bancroft Library, University of California, 1983).

<sup>17</sup> Towne Nylander, "The Casual Laborer of California," (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of California, 1922), 73; Interview with Peter Mendelsohn, in Ira Nowinsky, *No Vacancy: Urban Renewal and the Elderly* (San Francisco: Carolyn Bean Associates, 1979) 47.

## **Injury and Didactic Laborlore**

In addition to using the affinities of their fellow workers to negotiate the contingency of their working lives, workers employed laborlore to navigate its dangers. Laborlore carried a host of stories and songs ruminating on the dangers of contingent work. Well known ballads like “John Henry,” “Casey Jones,” or “Down in the Mines,” all related stories of death and injury in casual industries. Among the most widely circulated was the logger ballad “The Jam at Gerry’s Rocks.” Framed by ten stanzas of rhyming couplets sung in minor key. When Alan Lomax made the first audio recording of the tune, he noted, “it may not be too much to say that it is the most popular lumberjack song.” That popularity gave rise to multiple renditions with contradicting details. Most versions feature the brave young foreman leading a crew of less-than-willing young men to their doom untangling a logjam. In others, Monroe is the only casualty. While the precise origins are unclear, it seems to have followed the logging community out of the timber camps in Maine, through the Midwest, and eventually to the Pacific Coast. According to Stewart Holbrook, it was commonly heard along the Pacific Coast among loggers, but also found a wider audience, as well. “The Jam at Gerry’s Rocks,” for example, appears in collections of sailor shanties, cowboy songs, along ballads of railroad and farm work.<sup>18</sup>

This popular logging ballad is a parable of worker safety, warning the inexperienced about dangers on the job. In typical ballad form, the intention is

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<sup>18</sup> This analysis draws upon three different versions of “the Jam at Gerry’s Rocks”: William Doerflinger, *Shantymen and Shantyboys: Songs of the Sailor and Lumberman* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1951) 237, Alan Lomax and Harry Welliver, “Songs of the Michigan Lumberjacks: From the Archive of Folk Song” (Washington: Library of Congress, 1960) 3; and Pete Seeger, “Jam on Jerry’s Rock,” *Smithsonian Folkways* SFW40018-110, 1950. See also, Stewart Holbrook, *Holy Old Mackinaw: a Natural History of the American Lumberjack* (New York: Macmillan, 1956) 194.

announced at the outset – “Come all you jolly river boys, I’ll have you all draw near, and listen to the dangers which you will quickly hear.” It invites the listener’s attention and establishes a link between audience and singer as one of student and teacher. The song describes the scene of a workplace accident with macabre and stark detail. As the log jam breaks, the flood of debris results in a “mangle of bodies,” “cut and mangled,” “crushed and bleeding,” and Young Monroe is swept away to a watery grave. The wreckage unleashed by the Jam is seemingly unpredictable. The jam is released through a minor motion – “he picked the key log out of the drive and off went Young Monroe.” Neither the bravery, nor the warning of the foreman can save him from fatality. The jam at Gerry’s Rocks memorializes the constant present of physical harm.

“The Jam at Gerry’s Rocks” also educates new initiates to the timber industry about overconfidence and offers a subtext of dissent and resistance. Listeners may mourn the tragic death of Monroe, but the consistent invocation of his youth suggests a degree of inexperience. Likewise, the lyrics imply that his commendable bravery contributes to his downfall. Monroe is “a bold shanty boy so manly too and brave,” as the song reminds us again and again, and he selects men “with hearts devoid of fear.” In some versions, this hubris leads Monroe to boast that after he dislodges the key pin, his fellow workers will not be able to match his speed as he surfs the flood “far away.” Monroe believes he has mastery over nature. In addition to misadventure of the foreman, the songs question the necessity of such heroics. For workers at the logging camp, “some of them were willing, while others they hung back. For it’s going to work on Sunday morn, they didn’t think it right.” It invites, even provokes, workers to question the wisdom of men like their young brave foreman Monroe.

“The Jam at Jerry’s Rocks” illuminates two central components of life as a casual laborer: it was difficult and dangerous. The tales of exhaustion and injury line up well with the statistical and ethnographic record. When Carlos Almazán left his home in Michoacán, Mexico in the 1920s for California, he found nothing but long days of exhausting toil. Almazán had experience in many corners of the casual labor economy. He had laid railroad track, worked in a packinghouse, and planted vegetables in a small truck farm. Long, hard work was the defining characteristic of the work history he narrated for an interviewer. The hardest of all these jobs had been in the Simons brickyard located just outside Los Angeles. “They paid me \$4.00 for working eight hours,” said Almazán, “but what eight hours! I was left almost dead, especially the first days.” Almazán’s experience of exasperation and exhaustion is nearly universal among accounts of work in the casual labor economy. According to Almazán, “I don’t believe I will ever return to this country for I have spent the hardest days of my life; it is here where I have worked the hardest and earned the least.”<sup>19</sup>

Not restricted to timberwork, all occupations in the casual labor economy were marked by a high rate of accident and injury. The monthly reports of industrial accidents in California are filled with accounts of injuries and fatalities on the job. In October, 1922, the monthly publication included J.B. Chinn who died of an infected wound from his work as a fruit picker; J.W. Fanell who fell to his death from a scaffold doing iron work; A. Harris who was crushed by a falling log; a falling timber fractured J.O Smith’s head while he worked in a mine; and W.R. Waring was crushed between two cars while adjusting a rail car coupling. In all, the list included forty-seven worker fatalities, the

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Carlos Almazán, Gamio, *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, 90-1.

majority of which had been employed in casual occupations. The month was hardly anomalous. In California, 19,391 workers filed claims for compensation for lost time or disability in 1922. The timber industry easily claimed the largest number of injuries and deaths among workers in the state. Sawmills, logging, and other wood products jobs accounted for more than 10,000 injuries. Civil and residential construction followed with more than 2000 injuries. Mining and trucking jobs also topped the list [See Table 4.1]. Large industrial machinery, unregulated or disorganized workplaces, and fly-by-night operations were dangerous.<sup>20</sup>

**Table 4.1 | California Disability Claims, 1922**

Industry	Claims <sup>1</sup>
Logging Operations	5205
Sawmills	4019
Shingle and Planing Mills	1044
Street and Highway Maintenance	784
General Construction	767
Carpentry or Metal Roof Construction	791
Coal Mines	790
Cabinet Works	678
Machine Shops and Foundries	666
Auto Shops	446
Bake Shops	433
Teaming and Trucking	426

Calculated from *California Safety News* 7:3 (January, 1923)

<sup>1</sup>Combined temporary and permanent disability claims.

Workers battered and bruised their bodies in nearly every type of contingent work. In the agricultural fields, workers labored through hot days, without shade, stooped over to fill their crates. In citrus orchards, workers balanced on high ladders

<sup>20</sup> *California Safety News* 6:10 (October 1922) p1.

while carrying seventy-pound crates. As one worker described, citrus work required “the agility of a monkey” and the “stamina of a horse.” In canneries, workers encountered similarly dismal conditions: Exposed to the cold of Alaska, fish pitchers speared thousands of pounds of fish from scows; graders and slimers were covered in blood and scales as they separated the salmon from viscera; retort men pulled racks of cans from the boiler and dipped the cans in a bath of lye. The work was damp, repetitive, and draining. The waterfront was hardly different. Men like Elmer Mevert, a longshoreman in Los Angeles, loaded heavy sacks with anything from nitrates to sesame seeds or shoveled scrap metal and sulfur into cargo holds. As Mevert, remembered, “[I]t was a continual operation, and your hands would bleed from that rough burlap. Packing bananas, your shoulders would swell up, your arches would break down.”<sup>21</sup>

On the job, employers pushed their employees to work quickly with little regard for safety. Trinidad Vega, who had worked too many jobs to name, claimed the United States could “drive one crazy from working so much.” In his travels from El Paso to Los Angeles, a range of employers in the cotton fields, railroads, had driven him and packing sheds. He continued, “they squeeze one here until one is left useless.” The “squeeze” Vega described often had dangerous consequences. The desire to maintain tenuous margins of profit in the casual labor economy also made employers willing to pass on safety. In the rush to increase to increase productivity and maximize profits, employers became increasingly strident in their ignorance of safe work practices. Turnover was critical to keeping wages low, but contributed to the frequency of accidents. New

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<sup>21</sup> The unnamed orange worker is quoted in John McPhee, *Oranges* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2011) 53-4; Frederick Mills Correspondence, Mills to Lubin, Division of Industrial Relations, Division of Immigration and Housing Records, Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley; Chris Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor: The Pacific Coast Canned Salmon Industry, 1870-1942* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

workers lacked knowledge of proper safety procedures or even the dangers of a particular kind of work. A report from the State of Washington suggested that occupations with a high rate of turnover were four times more likely to suffer accidents. It is was “well-known fact,” stated George Cornwall, a logging operator on the Olympic Peninsula of Washington, “that the constant shifting of men is responsible for innumerable accidents caused by unfamiliarity with the work.” Operators had every incentive to cut corners to maximize the productivity of workers and incur the fewest expenses in the process. With a pool of workers waiting to fill each position, the boss had little incentive to enhance safety measures on the job.<sup>22</sup>

Given the ubiquity of danger in the casual labor economy, workers developed didactic languages and instructive folklore to educate their fellow workers and ward against high rates of fatality and injury. On the job, workers employed a rich vocabulary that described the variety of tasks. Logging had the richest list of words. *Highball*, or *give'r her snooze* was to speed up the operation. *Falling* and *bucking* both instructed the inexperienced how to fell the timbers. To *hit the ball* or work *the candy side* was to find work in the best-equipped logging operations. Workers who found themselves *in the bight* were in a dangerous part of the rigging, while the steel sliver from a rigging wire known as a *jagger* was always a potential hazard. Other terms like *homeguard*, *gyppo*, *to work by the mile*, *inch or bushel* gave workers the idea of their working conditions and the length of the job. In addition to lexicon of work vocabulary, loggers also had to familiarize themselves with an entire list of signals and whistle calls that determined the

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<sup>22</sup>Interview with Elmer Mevert, in Harvey Schwartz, *Solidarity Stories*, 66-67; Interview with Interview with Elias Garza, Gamio, *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, 149; Edward Sheibley, “The New Employee” *California Safety News* 7:12 (December, 1923) 7; “Some Passing Remarks on the Objects and Achievements of the Congress,” *The Timberman* Volume 11 (August, 1910) 64AA; State of Washington, *First Report of the Department of Labor and Industries*, (Olympia: Public Printer, 1922) 64-68.

movement of logs and the directions of steel cables attached to powerful steam engines. The newcomer to any of these industries, “had to learn no little new language,” described Stewart Holbrook.<sup>23</sup>

Contingent workers may have pushed and shoved to get a job, but on the job, the structure of most occupations encouraged workers to collectively develop a safe and productive workplace. Rates of pay were often piecemeal and pay was calculated according to performance. Crews picked fruit and packed vegetables and the bulk or weight determined earnings. In the salmon canneries, contracts often guaranteed a certain base rate, but much of a workers income rested upon the total amount of salmon processed during a contract period. Smooth workflow and camaraderie not only made the job more enjoyable, but also lucrative. For Anton Isaksen, the fortune of he and his fellow workers was intertwined. In the sawmills and fishing vessels where he worked, “it was not competition.” Workers depended upon each other for safety and profitability. “Everyone did every job,” he described, “and for the process to work smoothly, you had to work as a team.” In dangerous environments, workers relied upon the care and awareness of those around them. In timberwork, the *whistle punk* closely monitored the *highwire* that hauled logs up the hill. On the docks, dockworkers manipulating the block and tackle on shore or above deck had to be keenly aware of their partners working in the hold. Coal miners and oil drillers had to be vigilant about their proximity to the crews around them when drilling and blasting.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Holbrook, *Holy Old Mackinaw*, 192.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Anton Isaksen, Rasmussenm *New Land, New Lives*, 209; an account of drilling in Texas and Oklahoma offers an excellent picture of the dangers of oil drilling, Gerald Lynch, *Roughnecks, Drillers, and Tool Pushers: Thirty Years in the Oil Fields* (Austin: University of Texas Press).

Humor reinforced that utility. Folklorist Archie Green recounts a particularly humorous joke common to those in the casual labor economy, which he titled “Wordplay”:

Once upon a time, so legend has it, an injured logger was brought to a hospital, which may have been in New Westminster, or Snohomish, or perhaps it was Tillamook. In any case, the head nurse asked him how the accident had happened.

“Nurse” said he, “It was this way: I was setting chokers on the candy side and was just hooking on to a big blue butt when the rigging slinger says to let her go. The hooker yelled Hi! To the punk, the punk jerked the wire, the puncher opened her wide, and... well, Nurse, here I am.”

This wasn’t too clear to the nurse. “But,” she said, “I don’t understand.” The logger sat up in his cot. “Damned if I do, either,” he replied, “unless that haywire rigging slinger was crazy!”<sup>25</sup>

“Wordplay” was easily adapted for circumstance, audience, and industry. According to Stewart Holbrook, the story began with the logger “*dog*” falsely representing his experience to the superintendent with a cascade of workplace argot. The naïve superintendent is unable to see past the ruse, but the danger posed by the worker’s inexperience becomes evident when he causes an accident. Maritime workers told similar tales of young workers on board ships making silly mistakes by mixing up terminology for parts of the ship and rigging. Miners and Railroad workers had their version of the story. The combination of extensive terminology, humor, and macabre story telling that surround injury and tragedy illustrate the importance of laborlore as not only a form entertainment, but something far more utilitarian.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Green, *Calf’s Head and Other Union Tale*, “Wordplay,” 247-249.

<sup>26</sup> Stewart Holbrook quoted by Walter McCulloch, *Woods Words* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society, 1958) i.

## **Solidarities of Exclusion**

For contingent workers, laborlore was more than just a tool to accommodate contingency and physical danger. Workers employed forms of discourse to foster a sense of community and shared identity. Humor, language, and costume drew lines of inclusion among contingent workers. Of course, cultural demarcations cut both ways. Just as contingent workers sought to create affinities and shared identities with some, they actively excluded others. These solidarities of exclusion were practiced most explicitly by white workers in skilled trades to lay claim to positions of privilege and power. But there were other forms of discourse at work that challenged those exclusions and sought to forge a more inclusive identity. In this way, laborlore exposed the complex fault lines that divided casual workers.

Traveling across broad geographies or constantly shifting between worksites, language and names became important markers of mutual identification. The vocabulary of contingent capitalism featured a large number of terms to identify one's place within this social and economic world. A *bindle stiff*, the physical bedding carried by migrant workers, became a synecdoche for any migrant workers that shifted frequently between locations. A *wallie* or member of the *homeguard* was a casual worker that preferred to remain in the city, within its walls so to speak. The mutual title of *boomer* or *breezer* played upon the modes of transportation. A wide pool of language described the relationship of a worker as part to the whole.

Monikers and nicknames were also part of the ritual of mutual identification. One experienced hobo worker claimed "the code of the road demands that each tramp hide his identity under a road name – a moniker." It is difficult to know how often the "code"

was followed, but traveling through the west from Chicago to the Pacific Coast, Nels Anderson certainly noticed the common ritual of naming. Among those in his work crew, along with Shorty Carroll, were men like Chaw, Dino, Blackie, the Kid, Smokey, Rickety Bill, Lock, and Frenchie. Anderson, himself, garnered the title “Deacon,” a play off his Mormon religion, for which he became “the butt of occasional joshing.” Seemingly, every worker Anderson encountered in his travels had a nickname, which often accorded to some kind of physical description, one’s hometown, or primary vocation. When Sid Roger arrived on San Francisco’s waterfront in the 1930s, nicknames remained an integral feature of the workplace. “Guys don't know each other by names as much as by some aspect of their behavior or the way they look or dress,” recalled Roger. “I always think of the guy who was always chewing on an unlit cigar. He was known as "See-gar.” he recalled in an interview. As he described, longshoremen “may rarely see each other on the job. They might work with a gang for a week, and then not be dispatched to the same ship or pier for months... The nickname became the only form of recognition.”<sup>27</sup>

The ubiquity of nicknames and monikers suggests the significance was more than a mere practicality. Given the isolation of the road and the lack of external social structures, the social practice of naming provided casual laborers a way to announce their place in a seemingly anonymous world. According to Sid Roger, sailors and dockworkers often left their signature or imprint on ships they had worked. Others noted the common practice of carving or scribing names on water towers, boxcars, and other

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<sup>27</sup> A No.1 Hobo Fire Camp Tales, Anderson, *The American Hobo*, 132; Interview with Sidney Roger, “Function of Nicknames on the Waterfront,” <http://www.ilwul9.com/history/nicknames.htm> (accessed 2/1/2014).

common gathering places. “Marking” territory or leaving “traces” during one’s travel was a metaphorical act of self-articulation. Moreover, to receive a nickname or moniker was also a statement of belonging from the larger community. Such titles were bestowed and earned, according to Anderson and Roger, and rarely self-assigned. While a moniker might announce one’s existence in space and time, these titles also emerged in a larger social context. To borrow from anthropologist Levi Strauss, the acquisition of a name was a signal of unity at the heart of diversity. The ritual and social practice of naming drew together the diversity of the casual labor economy into a unified social community.<sup>28</sup>

The affinities derived through naming and language were but one part of a larger semiotics of solidarity. Clothing and costume also became a way for workers outwardly express a bond with those around them. There was a universally recognized uniform of the laboring man along the Pacific Coast. Author Theodore Dreiser wrote about the “appearance” of the “non-descript Western laborer,” which was defined by the hickory shirt, trousers, bandana, and small round Stetson hat. Such clothing pieces reflected practical need. The *hickory* was a heavy, durable cotton work shirt that resisted abrasion and long sleeves protected arms from tough work. The hat shielded the eyes from sun and rain. This unofficial uniform was shared broadly by workers in many occupations, including loggers, cannery hands, and the maritime trades. As such, these items were ubiquitous in clothing stores and second hand shops along the streets of the day labor

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Jack Lewis, Survey of Race Relations Collection, Stanford University, Box 33; Jim Tully, *Beggars of Life* (Oakland: AK Press, 2004) 283; on marking the workplace, see Sid Roger, “Function of Nicknames on the Waterfront” and Nylander, “The Casual Laborer of California” 73-74; Claude Levi Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966) 176. See also, Gabriele vom Bruck and Barbara Bodenhorn, editors, *An Anthropology of Naming and Names* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

district. Places like Joe Harris' emporium for seamen and longshoremen along San Francisco's embarcadero or the Seattle outfitter Filson catered to a mixed clientele of transient workers.<sup>29</sup>

The costume may have been broadly shared, but each occupation developed its own particular form of dress to distinguish one's place in the economy. Timber workers supplemented the hickory with heavily waxed or oiled trousers known as tin pants, and corked shoes, whose spiked soles allowed for traction on the slick logs. In the winter, the stetson might be replaced by a heavy wool watch cap. For cannery workers and fishermen, there were varying individual preferences for the kinds of gloves used to handle vegetables or cold slimy fish. The most segmented clothing divisions existed among workers in the building trades. Each trade was distinguished by contrasting colors of overalls. Painters wore white; carpenters wore blue; and concrete finishers wore rusty-red. Describing the importance of workplace tools, costume, and jargon to the identity of construction workers in the United States, Herbert Applebaum concludes that construction work is more than just a craft, but also "a process of looking, talking, and acting like a construction worker."<sup>30</sup>

Like nicknames, self-fashion and identification through clothing allowed workers to outwardly express their position in the contingent economy. The degree of wear and tear or age of these items added legitimacy and authenticity to one's status in the casual labor economy. Some items of clothing became objects of fetish. Among construction

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<sup>29</sup> Theodore Dreiser, *Free and Other Stories*, (New York: The Modern Library, 1922)184.

<sup>30</sup> Harry Lundberg describes the importance of Joe Harris' store on the Embarcadero,"Harry Lundberg Stetson," *West Coast Sailors*, March 30, 2001, 3; on the uniform of loggers, see Wilbur Davis, "Logger and Splinter Picker Talk," *Western Folklore* 9:2 (1950) 111-123; on the selection of clothing among fishermen and cannery workers, see Lauren Wilde Casaday, "Labor Unrest and the Labor Movement in the Salmon Industry of the Pacific Coast" (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of California, 1938) 134; Herbert Applebaum, *Construction Workers, U.S.A.*, 22.

workers, tool preferences and bespoke toolboxes became projections of the workers' own identity. Harry Lundberg, the eventual president of the sailors union, could vividly recall the first time he acquired his "lunchbox stetson" and other garments of the seaman's attire. "I'll always cherish the day I was able to walk into Joe Harris's famous clothing emporium on the Embarcadero for the first time I came ashore there." Donning his *de facto* maritime uniform, he was "a transformed person, a member of an exclusive fraternity, identified outwardly as a West Coast man." Fellow sailor and contemporary of Lundberg, A.M. Michelson described the particularities of the uniform: "worn at just the correct angle with the top pulled down over the right ear... it could be hospital white or covered in paint, but it was worn with pride and it made a statement." Statements of this kind suggest how clothing became an outward expression of class identification. Lundberg and others sought to signal an affinity with their fellow workers. For sailors and other contingent workers, clothing became a way to coalesce a discursive community in the face of constant travel and the absence of physical community.<sup>31</sup>

The tilt of a worker's cap or the use of keywords may have been expressions of solidarity, but they also drew lines of exclusion. Lundberg's statement of the pride he felt in joining an "exclusive fraternity" is revealing. The definition of a "West Coast man" was hardly a broadly inclusive category. Among his chosen industry, sailors and deck hands, white men comprised nearly 85 percent of the workforce. Maritime work was not the only line of work that was tightly held. Wenceslao Orozco crossed the border into the United States in the late 1910s, drawn by his friends' accounts of demand for experienced carpenters. He considered himself eminently qualified; he had worked

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<sup>31</sup> "Harry Lundberg Stetson," *West Coast Sailors*, March 30, 2001, 3; A.M. Michelson, *West Coast Sailors*, March 30, 2001, 4.

for several years in Mexico as a carpenter and understood how to read building plans. Upon arriving in San Francisco, however, Orozco found himself locked out of the carpenter's union, which barred Mexican members and other "alien" workers. Orozco's interviewer recorded his frustration: "as he doesn't speak English and is very dark he hasn't been able to get into the union, which is where they guarantee work at ten dollars a day." Instead, exclusion relegated him to menial (and low paying) construction jobs, along with fieldwork and employment in a brickyard. Such exclusions were not reserved solely for immigrants and workers of color. Wobbly organizer and hobo worker Len de Caux put these divisions more bluntly. "Job snobbery," he wrote, prevailed among the American Federation of Labor, skilled craftsmen, and the workers in heavy industry. These workers were "lionized" by labor unions, while the "unorganized millions who dug and wheeled, hewed and carried" were ignored, he said.<sup>32</sup>

For the privileged few skilled and unionized workers, the large pool of itinerant and migrant laborers was a source of constant concern. For decades, Pacific Coast employers fought unionism and worker demands by importing replacement workers to end strikes or built up segregated workplaces to incite competition. Desperate to leave the violence of the American South, black workers were easily recruited to divide organizing efforts in places like the coalmines of Washington State. The upheaval of the Mexican revolution had provided a similar population for employers in the Southwest. In other instances, this floating pool of laborers simply resisted the discipline of unionism. Working around Seattle's warehouse district, and as a logger, there was no love lost between Alfred Moltke and the union teamsters he encountered. Moltke had voluntarily

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with Wenlescao Orozco, in Gamio, *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, 50; de Caux, *Labor Radical*, 74.

served as a replacement worker as a teamster, or scab, during several labor strikes. Alluding to his service during World War I, Moltke said of the situation, “I had come home to find I could not get a job, make an honest living, in an occupation I had come to love.” Moltke got into several altercations during these strikes. While making deliveries near Pioneer Square, three union men tried to pull him from his delivery truck near Pioneer Square. He responded by knocking one out with a pipe he kept for just this occasion. Referring to the crowds loitering about city parks and gathered outside employment agencies, an A.F.L. agent in Los Angeles, suggested it “apparent that these men do not make a good organization material.”<sup>33</sup>

These workers reserved their sharpest vitriol for immigrant workers from Asia and Latin America. For decades, white workers had rallied against the presence of Chinese and Japanese workers along the Pacific Coast, often motivated by political gain rather than actual fear of competition. The rhetoric and violence of race hatred continued uninterrupted after World War I. Labor leaders like Paul Scharrenberg, the California Federation of Labor Secretary, frequently editorialized on the “Immigrant Problem,” “Oriental Menace,” and the unrestricted movement of “Mexican peons” across the border.<sup>34</sup> In Seattle, after a fleeting effort to organize cannery workers, the Central Labor Council made a complete reversal and attacked Filipino workers for what they claimed to be loose morals and taking the jobs of white men and women.<sup>35</sup> The California Building Trades Council signaled alarm at the growing presence of immigrants in the state. In San

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<sup>33</sup> Alfred Moltke, *Memoirs of a Logger* (College Place: College Press, 1955) 199.

<sup>34</sup> Paul Scharrenberg, “The Mexican-American Immigration problem,” *Report of Proceedings of the Annual Convention of the American Federation of Labor* (Cincinnati: American Federation of Labor, 1923) 87

<sup>35</sup> Dana Frank, *Purchasing Power: Consumer Organizing, Gender, and the Seattle Labor Movement, 1919-1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 233-235

Francisco, Filipino workers were reported to be “forcing their way into the building industry, many of them working as engineers, painters, electricians, carpenters, helpers, and laborers.” In the agricultural sector, the newspaper reported that Filipino men were competing with Mexicans, Chinese, Japanese, Hindu and other immigrants, but also whites. As the article concluded, “the exact extent to which Filipinos have displaced white labor can not be readily established” but guaranteed that “further substitution of “Filipino for white and other will take place.”<sup>36</sup> Andrew Furuseh, the powerful president of the International Seamen’s Union in San Francisco, bluntly expressed his criticism. Shipowners’ reliance upon large number of immigrant workers had reduced the maritime trades and high seas into “a cesspool of humanity.”<sup>37 38</sup>

Labor unions endeavored to limit through explicit policies and the very structure of their organizations. The constitutional bylaws for a number of trade unions during this period explicitly refused membership to anyone ineligible for citizenship, a rule that largely applied only to immigrants from Asia. Among them were the Loyal Legion of Loggers and Lumbermen, the International Seaman’s Union, as well most of the building trades unions and railroad brotherhoods. As the Bureau of Labor statistics noted in one study of the membership rules within trade unions, the American Federation of Labor may claim that it disregards the race, creed, color, and sex of workers, but “the most important and powerful organizations affiliated with the federation specify that applicants

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<sup>36</sup> Loyal Legion of Loggers, Constitution and Bylaws, 1921, page 6 in the Survey of Race Relations Papers, Stanford University, Box 7, folder 7;;; California Department of Industrial Relations, *Facts About Filipino Immigration Into California* (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1930) 36;

<sup>37</sup> Andrew Furuseh quoted in Bruce Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990) 20.

<sup>38</sup> Unnamed A.F.L. official quoted in Griewe, “A Study of the Habitués of the Downtown Parks of Los Angeles,” 103; on the struggle of skilled worker to maintain control over the workplace, see David Montgomery, *Worker’s Control in America: Studies in the History of Work, Technology, and Labor Struggles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

shall be white; others exclude orientals; still others admit Negroes but not on an equal footing.” Other rules actively discouraged the membership of transient members in skilled trades. Many locals refused to acknowledge union membership from other regions and discouraged workers from transferring their union cards by levying additional fees. Among building trades workers and other skilled trades, these extra assessments or double-dues came to be known pejoratively as paying *dobies*. Union officials feared that movement would erode the rank and file’s commitment to building local solidarity. Union officers in Seattle were quite explicit about this sentiment. As one leader suggested, migration created “a class of ne’er do wells and disgruntled radicals who wander from city to city appropriating the employment which rightfully belongs to the permanent citizens of the community.”<sup>39</sup>

The expressive culture of contingent capitalism provided a less explicit, but no less powerful means of excluding unwanted workers from the jobsite. Ethnic and racial slurs made the workplaces hostile and unfriendly. When Walter Williams, an African American from Georgia, arrived on the Los Angeles waterfront shortly before World War II, the racial division of work remained powerful. “This union was lily white before you guys came down here,” he was told by the white workers, “and after the war it’s going to be lily white again.”<sup>40</sup> Even the implements of work were slurred by racial epithets and insults. Workers on the dock commonly referred to the round, black winch on a ship as the *niggerhead*. Construction workers used the same slur to describe the caissons for

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<sup>39</sup> Estelle May Stewart, *Handbook of the American Tradeunions: 1936 Edition* (Washington D.C.: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1936) 36-7; Michael Kazin, “The Great Exception Revisited: Organized Labor and Politics in San Francisco and Los Angeles, 1870-1940” *Pacific Historical Review* 55:3 (August, 1986) 375-6; Unnamed labor official quoted in, Andrew Lind, *A Study of Mobility of Population in Seattle* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1925) 50.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Walter Williams, Schwartz, *Solidarity Stories*, 80-82.

pouring concrete. In the salmon canneries, the cutting machine used to process fish was known as the *iron chink*. As noted in the trade journals of the Carpenter's Union, an array of other common terms around construction sites, like *Dago*, *Dutchy*, *Greaser*, *Hunky*, *Kike*, *Mick*, and *Wop*, suggest that the category of whiteness for skilled workers was hardly a monolithic category. This vocabulary of racial and ethnic description underscores the ethnic lines that delineated many of the occupations in contingent economy. Surprisingly, the glossaries and collections of worker language contain few examples of the racially laden language of workers. Yet, these fragments of language and jargon suggest a much larger and hidden world of on the job slurs and epithets that exist beyond the historian's reach.<sup>41</sup>

The precise effect and power of racial and ethnic words can be difficult to assess. On the one hand, ethnic nicknames and monikers might serve as another form of mutual identification, even affection. When Nels Anderson invoked nicknames like Frenchie, "the Rabbi," or "Big Swede," they carried valences of comraderie and levity. Likewise, many of the stories and jokes shared among workers were delivered with particularly thick Swedish, Irish, or Southern accents. The story of the "Corner Saloon," as recounted by Stewart Holbrook, a logger and raconteur, features the inebriated Swede, Halfpint Halverson, who is tossed from a saloon. Each time the intoxicated logger is dismissed from the establishment, he re-enters through another of the saloon's five doors, believing he has come to another bar. As the bouncer throws him out for the fifth time, Halverson proclaims to the bouncer, "yesus, vas yu bouncer en every goddam saloon en

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<sup>41</sup> On the regional specificity in Jam at Gerry's see Eloise Hubbard Linscott, *Folk Songs of Old New England* and Stewart Holbrook, *Holy Old Mackinaw: a Natural History of the American Lumberjack* (New York: Macmillan, 1956) 194; *Carpenter* February, 1919, 44; Victor Clark, "Mexican Labor in the United States" *Bulletin of the Bureau of Labor* (September, 1908) 466-467 comments on the changing racialized language.

Portland!” Jokes like “Corner Saloon” certainly perpetuated stereotypes of Scandinavians as heavy drinkers, loud, or even dim-witted. “Halfpint” itself is presumably an ironic comment on the man’s size. And in Holbrook’s re-telling of the joke, Halfpint Halvorson is booted from the saloon for telling racist jokes. Ethnically-charged humor and language cut both ways.<sup>42</sup>

This discourse of fraternity, exclusivity, and racial privilege did not go unchallenged. In order to blunt the attacks and criticisms of conservative craft unions and other white workers, these excluded workers developed their own discourse to challenge their exclusion from the best jobs. Songs like the popular “*Los Norteños*,” which was first recorded in 1917, offers a caution to Mexican workers traveling north with wide-eyed ambition. Assuming the voice of an omniscient narrator, it describes the difficulty for men who had to leverage all their wealth to acquire a job, only to sacrifice all ties of family and friendship when they are unable to make good on their debts:

Primero empeñan todito, y luego piden prestado ay ya no tienen ni un amigo	First they pawned everything, and later ask to borrow ah they don’t have at least one friend
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As folklorist and writer Américo Paredes points out, the tradition of ballads and corridos not only convey “events of immediate significance, “ but also generate “heightened awareness of mutual values and orientations” among the listening audience. Ballads like “*Los Norteños*” also sharply criticize California’s racial order and the supremacy of whites in the contingent economy through passages like:

Ay yo no me voy de mi patria pa' los Estados Unidos mejor de perro en mi tierra que ser gato de los gringos	Ah, I am not leaving my country for the United States better to be dog in my land than to be the gringos cat
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<sup>42</sup> Green, *Calf’s Head and Union Tale*, 208.

These themes of frustration and lamentation were more than just a description of the ethnic conflict. The lyric sheets of corridos constitute a challenge to ethnic stereotypes and a defense of the rights of migrant workers.<sup>43</sup>

Indeed, corridos point to a much larger discourse of resistance contained within the expressive culture of Spanish-speaking workers. Traveling the labor circuits of the American-Mexican borderland, workers carried tales of outlaws and banditos who stole from the rich and challenged the white authorities. Men like Juan Cortina, Herclio Bernal, Pablo Gonzalez, Joaquin Murrieta, and Gregorio Cortez all became the embodiment of the Mexican freedom fighter willing to resist prejudice, exclusion, and racist intimidations. Long before he was popularized as the swashbuckling Zorro, Cortina in particular became the subject of innumerable poems, songs, and tales. Emerging from the popular Mexican resistance to Tejano oppression in the middle of the nineteenth century, Cortina was a particularly salient figure for Mexican workers for his defense of a fellow worker, standing his ground against an abusive Texas sheriff, evasion of white Texas rangers, and eventual acquittal of any crime.<sup>44</sup>

The most organized and effective challenge to “job snobbery” and the discourse of racial division came from the Industrial Workers of the World. Formed in 1905, the IWW represented a radical departure from the factional trade unionism that predominated organized labor in the early twentieth century. Unlike the more conservative American

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<sup>43</sup> On corridos as a force for resistance and criticism, see John McDowell, “The Mexican Corrido: Formula and Theme in a Ballad Tradition,” *Journal of American Folklore* 85 (1981) 46; Lyrics for “*Los Norteros*,” Hermanos Banuelos, Folklyric Records, 9004, LP Record, 1975. See also the foundational work of Américo Paredes, *With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1958); and Jose Limon, *Mexican Ballads, Chicano Poems: History and Influence in Mexican American Social Poetry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

<sup>44</sup> Americo Paredes, *With His Pistol in His Hand*; Manuel Gamio discusses the language and vernacular of Mexican workers in *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, 262.

Federation of Labor, the IWW's anarcho-syndicalist vision of working class power was predicated on organizing the largest industries of contingent capitalism – agricultural workers, cannery laborers, loggers, dockworkers, and sailors. The IWW's ideology of militancy, the flexibility of a traveling union card, and advocacy for “one big union” appealed to contingent workers. Rather than lock them into a particular skill or industry, IWW membership allowed workers to travel. The Wobbly organizing program also explicitly challenged the racial divisions that marked these industrial sectors. IWW locals from San Francisco to New Orleans broke the color line and formed alliances between black longshoremen, white hop pickers, Mexican oil workers, and Japanese cannery laborers.<sup>45</sup>

The IWW was loud, gregarious, radical, and bent on sharing its vision of the world with others. Storytelling, language, and humor became one of the primary means for the Industrial Workers of the World to circulate their own discourse of unity and common class identity. According to IWW songwriter Richard Brazier, “songs are easily remembered but dull prose is soon forgotten.” “Our aims and principles,” he suggested, “can be recorded in songs as well as in leaflets and pamphlets – in some cases even better.” Polemic wrapped up in song was also more apt to reach the target audience of workers. Many of the most famous wobbly tracts – “Solidarity Forever,” “Long Haired Preacher,” or “Hallelujah, I’m a Bum!” – employ simple language, rhymed couplets, and short verses to maximum effect. Likewise, wobbly songs appropriated well-known tunes

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<sup>45</sup> On the Industrial Workers of the World and interracial organizing, Norman Caulfield, *Mexican Workers and the State: From the Porfiriato to NAFTA* (Texas Christian University Press, 1998); Kornel S. Chang, *Pacific Connections the Making of the Western U.S.-Canadian Borderlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Peter Cole, *Wobblies on the Waterfront: Interracial Unionism in Progressive-Era Philadelphia* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007); Yolanda Alaniz and Megan Cornish, *Viva La Raza: A History of Chicano Identity and Resistance* (Red Letter Press, 2008).

to make them easier to follow along. Ralph Chaplin set his song “Solidarity Forever” to perhaps the most widely known American folk song, “John Brown’s Body.” John Brill’s “Dump the Bosses Off Your Back” mimicked the church hymn “Take it to the Lord in Prayer.” Of course, the adaptation of radical messages in the form of church hymnals had the added effect of irony and humor. As an experienced hobo worker, member of the I.W.W., and wobbly raconteur, Utah Phillips retained a perpetual optimism about the importance of laborlore in creating change: “these songs were to help people define their problems and to suggest what the solutions might be.”<sup>46</sup>

In order to encourage unity, rather than division, among contingent workers, Wobbly lore sought to emphasize the contrasting interests that existed between workers and employers, rather than those between workers. Among the many examples of explicitly oppositional songs, perhaps the most exemplary was the popular wobbly tune, “Hymn of Hate.” First published by Harry McClintock in 1916 in the I.W.W.’s periodical *Solidarity*, the sixty-four lines of rhyming couplets pull no punches. It describes a working class conspiracy of anger and revolution, fueled by the memory of “the bloody shambles at Ludlow” and “the starving men on your roads.” It is a call to action that sets workplace fatalities and union massacres in sharp contrast to the gilded halls inhabited by the wealthy. The voice of the narrator establishes the line of opposition between employer and worker: “your steel mills” and “your railroads” is set in sharp contrast to invocations of a collective identity with the conclusion, “we are the workers of the world and we have not spoken yet.” “Hymn of Hate” highlights the central role of conversation and relationships: “We curse your name in the marketplace as

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<sup>46</sup> Brazier, “The Story of the I.W.W.’s ‘Little Red Songbook’; Joyce Kornbluh, *Rebel Voices*, 26; Interview with Bruce “Utah” Phillips, *Solidarity Forever*, 25.

the workman talks to his mate, and when you dine in your gay café the waiter spits on your plate.” And finally, it portends things to come: “the Day shall come with a red, red dawn; and you in your gilded halls, shall taste the wrath and the vengeance of the men in overalls.” Language like this, in effect, scored a line across the casual labor economy that separated the interests of workers and those who employed them.<sup>47</sup> [See Figure 4.2]

**Figure 4.2 | Hymn of Hate, Harry McClintock, 1912**

For the sailors that drown when your ill found ships go crashing on the shore,  
For the mangled men of your railroads, ten thousand a year or more.  
For the roasted men in your steel mills, and the starving men on your roads,  
For the miners buried by hundreds, when the fire damp explodes,  
For our brothers maimed and slaughtered for your profits every day,  
While your priests chant the chorus “God giveth - and God hath taken away.”  
For a thousand times that you drove back when we struck for a living wage,  
For the dungeons and jails our men have filled because of your devilish rage.  
For Homestead and for Chicago, Coeur D’Alene and Telluride,  
For your bloody shambles at Ludlow, where the women and babies died,  
For our heroes you hanged on the gallows high to fill your slaves with awe,  
While your Judges stood in a sable row and croaked, “Thus saith the law.”  
For all the wrongs we have suffered from you, and for each of the wrongs we hate,  
With a hate that is black as the deepest pit, that is steadfast and sure as fate.  
We hate you with hand, and heart, and head, body, and mind, and brain.  
We hate at the forge, in the mine and mill, in the field of golden grain.  
We curse your name in the market place as the workman talks with his mate,  
And when you dine in your gay cafe the waiter spits on your plate.  
We hate you! Damn you! hate you! we hate your rotten breed.  
We hate your slave religion with submission for its creed.  
We hate your judges. We hate your courts, we hate that living lie,  
That you call “Justice” and we hate with a hate that shall never die.  
We shall keep our hate and cherish our hate and our hate shall ever grow.  
We shall spread our hate and scatter our hate ‘till all of the workers know.  
And The Day shall come with a red, red dawn; and you in your gilded halls,  
Shall taste the wrath and the vengeance of the men in overalls.  
The riches you heaped in your selfish pride we shall snatch with our naked hands,  
And the house ye reared to protect you shall fall like a castle of sand.  
For ours are the hands that govern in factory, mine and mill,  
And we need only to fold our arms and the whole wide world stands still!  
*SO GO YE AND STUDY THE BEEHIVE*, and do not quite forget,  
That we are the *WORKERS* of the world and we have not spoken - yet.

Source: Joyce Kornbluh, *Rebel Voices: an IWW Anthology* (Chicago: Charles Kerr Publishing, 1998) 29.

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<sup>47</sup> Harry McClintock, “Hymn of Hate,” in Kornbluh, *Rebel Voices*, 29.

Among the chief targets of Wobbly discourse was the ethnic and racial segmentation within contingent capitalism. The most exemplary challenge to racialized enmity came in the form of a cartoon character. Mr. Block, the invention of cartoonist Ernest Riebe and later popularized in a song by Joe Hill, first appeared in the pages of the *Industrial Worker* in 1913. The working class cartoon man, identified by his checked work shirt, blinkered smile, and wood block head, was for Riebe “the representative of that host of slaves who think in terms of their masters.” At the center of Mr. Block’s conservatism was his steadfast belief in racial stereotypes and adherence to the difference between nationalities. In “Mr. Block: He Meets Others,” published in the pages of the *Industrial Workers*, the Wobbly strawman is featured in various racialized caricatures (The “American” Mr. Block, Pat the Irishman, Fritz the Dutchman, Toni the Italian, Sam the African American, and an unnamed Japanese and Polish worker). As the bespoke railroad boss approaches them in turn, he encourages each to work faster. He goads Pat: “I hope you will show the lazy gang that the Irish can work”; and tells Sam, “I’m your friend, and as long as you work hard, I’ll stick to you when some of that white trash jumps on you.” Each digs harder and faster, spurred by their sense of interracial rivalry. Like the story of the “Millpond” or the array of language used to label uncooperative coworkers, the image of Mr. Block offers a sharp criticism of the ignorant and competitive worker. Rather than recognize the common experience between them, these characters are duped into serving the interests of capital. Reproduced countless times,

Mr. Block was lampooned for joining conservative union “job snobs,” blindly trusting the government or employer, or being fooled by cops and politicians. [See Figure 4.3]

It can be difficult to evaluate the reach and effect of Wobbly lore. Even at peak of their membership, historians disagree sharply about the influence of anarcho-syndicalism. At the close of World War I, which brought a drive for conformity and an atmosphere of

Figure 4.3 | Mr. Block Cartoon



Source: Ernest Riebe, “Mr. Block Meets Others”, *Mr. Block: Twenty-Four Cartoons* (1913)

conservatism, the power and influence of the IWW was substantially diminished. Many of the veterans of the radical campaigns of the 1910s for free speech in Spokane or maritime unionism in San Francisco had been silenced by a federal prison term. Others were deported from the country for their activities during and after World War I. The Espionage Act of 1917 and Sedition Act of 1918 both rendered the open expression of revolutionary ideals informed by Marxism, anarchism, or some form of syndicalism punishable under federal law. With the federal government taking broad discretion in their fight against radicalism, cities and states followed suit. These kinds of actions had a chilling effect on open expressions of dissent, whether they were informed by revolutionary ideology or not. Circulation of the *Industrial Worker* decreased substantially. Wobbly halls closed their doors and organizers went underground. By the middle of the 1920s, the agitprop machine had largely gone silent.<sup>48</sup>

Despite their flagging activity, the archive of laborlore suggests the Wobbly's discourse of antagonism endured well beyond World War I among the diverse force of contingent workers. Talk of radical ideas continued to pervade descriptions of jungle campfires and shape up lines. Traveling around the Pacific Coast, Porter Chaffee said that ideas about inequality and social class were simply "in the air" and part of the "atmosphere" of conversation. Among his fellow fruit tramps, Chaffee said "they'd always discuss this thing called Communism, but way back in the background," he recalled. Many of the men he encountered in his travels through California were well-versed with unfolding events of the Russian Revolution, the story of labor's martyrs like

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<sup>48</sup> On the suppression of labor radicalism, and the "lean years" of labor activity, see Howard Kimmeldorf, *Battling for American Labor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); and David Montgomery, *The Rise and Fall of the House of Labor: the Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

Nicola Sacco, Bartolomeo Vanzetti, and Frank Little. Washington State labor investigator Cloice Howd observed a similar proclivity for radical ideas. “Here they have the time to think and talk over their grievances and the differences between their social and economic conditions and those of other elements of the population,” he reported, “nearly everything combines to make them radical.” Howd’s notes pertained solely to Pacific Northwest loggers, but we might reasonably extend his analysis to other industries with a circulating workforce, difficult conditions, and a proclivity for talk. At its core, laborlore was a vehicle for the expression of resistance and an outlet for frustration.<sup>49</sup>

In a decade marked by conservatism, humor, sarcasm, and folklore became ways for workers to express opposition. Embedded within the didactic lyrics of “Jam at Gerry’s Rocks,” for example, young loggers are invited to question the authority of the foreman, especially when they are young, enterprising, and fearless. In the case of the “Millpond” story that began this chapter, beneath the sarcastic and humorous veneer, it carries an indictment of a ruthless economy filled with evil coworkers and eviler bosses. Rather than focus on the harsh realities of their lives, workers built a caricature of it. It is also present in the array of pejorative words and derogatory terms they used to reference employers and bosses. For construction workers and longshore workers, the *walking boss* and *bird dog* were pejorative names for the foreman who paced around criticizing the speed and quality of a work crew; a *strawboss* was a fellow worker that aspired to the foreman position; for sailors, the *crimp* or *snakehead* was the usurious exploiter that exchanged bribes for jobs. Loggers and miners labeled labor agents as *laborsharks* for their steep fees, inaccurate advertisements, and other predatory abuses. The *yard bull*,

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with Porter Chaffee, “Porter Chaffee: Labor Organizer,” Regional History Project, University of California, Santa Cruz, 2004, 18; Howd, *Industrial Relations in the West Coast Lumber Industry*, 43.

*cinder dick*, or simply *the heat* represented the police officers that patrolled trains and forcefully dispatched workers from the train. In Spanish, *renganchista*, the term for labor contractors, quite literally referred to one who catches men with a hook.

The celebration of working class heroes provided another way to quietly and surreptitiously ponder alternatives. Many of the central working class figures of American mythology emerge from the context of contingent capitalism – Paul Bunyan, larger than life logger; Casey Jones, heroic train operator; John Henry, indefatigable driver of steel and track liner. These tales were tremendously popular with laborers and commonly retold far beyond their particular industries. The legend of Paul Bunyan, for example, was well known to oil workers migrating between Texas and California. A world of other characters traveled the economic circuits much like the workers, though they never achieved the same kind of widespread fame. These were men like Tightline Johnson, a trickster-like character created by wobbly cartoonist for the pages of Wobbly newspapers, noted for quitting jobs in spectacular fashion, organizing the workers in work camps, and being fired for his wit and willingness to confront his dim-witted foreman. Other publications featured Four Penny Slim, an apple picker and authoritative vagabond, and his traveling companions Dorsey and Horace, who travel through California expropriating food and clothing from the rich and threatening capricious employers with retaliation and sabotage. These triumphant stories of working class tramp heroes, albeit inflated and exaggerated, provided workers with working class heroes. The lore of strikes and tall tales of men like Paul Bunyan provided a glimmer of hope and proffered an alternative world with greater equality and wealth.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> On the significance of working class heroes and their shifting meaning, see Nancy Quam Wickham, “Manhood in the Workplace,” in *Boys and Their Toys: Masculinity, Class, and Technology in America*

No example better illustrates the persistence of a discourse of resistance into the 1920s and beyond than Harry McClintock's "Big Rock Candy Mountain." Unlike his openly confrontational "Hymns of Hate," this song employs more coded forms and humorous expressions resistance. To most listeners, the lyrics paint an innocent western landscape on par with "Don't Fence Me In" or "Home on the Range." Perpetual sunshine and singing birds, lemonade springs and cigarette trees present a picture of utopian fantasy. It conjures humorous and fantastical scenery:

In the Big Rock Candy Mountains

...

There's a lake of stew  
And of whiskey too  
You can paddle all around it  
In a big canoe<sup>51</sup>

For contingent workers, exhausted from a long days work, embittered by an encounter with the police, or lacking steady work, the fantastical features of the "Big Rock Candy Mountain" take on additional significance. The lyrics invite workers to imagine an inverted world of plenty, amidst a world of want. Whiskey streams, hens that lay soft-boiled eggs, and cigarette trees satirize their situation. "Big Rock Candy Mountain" also gave workers an outlet to criticize the indignities and brutalities of life by constructing one of deference and polity, filled with inept or defanged authority:

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(New Yoerk: Routledge, 2001) 91-110; Scott Nelson, *Steel Drivin' Man: the Untold Story of an American Legend* (Oxford University Press, 2008). On the circulation of the Paul Bunyan story, see John Lee Brooks, "Paul Bunyan: Oil Man," *Publications of the Texas Folk-Lore Society* 7 (1928) 46-47; Laura Hapke, *Labor's Text: The Worker in American Fiction* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2001) 190-191.

<sup>51</sup> Lyrics for McClintock's "Big Rock Candy Mountain" appear in Hal Rammel, *Nowhere in America: The Big Rock Candy Mountain and other Comic Utopias* (University of Illinois Press, 1990), chapter seven. A brief discussion appears in Frank Tobias Higbie, *Indispensable Outcast: Hobo Workers and Community in the American Midwest, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003) 189; Otherwise the historiographical treatment of this enduring folk tune is remarkably small.

The brakemen have to tip their hats  
And the railway bulls are blind  
...  
All the cops have wooden legs  
And the bulldogs all have rubber teeth

The concluding lines summarize an attitude that was likely held by many after a long day of labor, with little to show for it:

I'm bound to stay  
Where you sleep all day,  
Where they hung the jerk  
That invented work  
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains.

At its core, McClintock's working class fantasy fits easily with his more incendiary and revolutionary lyrics. But this song was more popular, precisely because it gave contingent workers a way to express their anger, but remain limited in their exposure to blacklists or other forms of suppression. Utopian fantasies of this kind derive their power precisely by acting as an inversion of reality and highlighting the needs and wants of the material world. It also posits a world that all workers can share in and take delight.

## **Conclusion**

Writing his memoir of a long career in maritime work on the Pacific Coast, Bruce Hannon offered a passing comment that gestures towards many of the layers discussed in this chapter. He wrote: "When we worked cargo, moments came when we stretched our minds. We sat on the deck at break time and often talked about world politics." Whether it was idle chat on the wharf, weaving stories around a campfire, or inventing monikers for a new friend, workers cultivated a sense of community that matched their social and

economic reality. The implications of that community formation were complex. At times, it was even contradictory.<sup>52</sup>

Hannon's description challenges the dominant image of casual workers, particularly the interpretations of social investigators. Cloice Howd had witnessed the storytelling and singing that was shared among loggers during his investigations of work camps in Washington State in the 1920s. noted the depth of their workplace vernacular, Yet, the full complexity and significance of these expressions failed to register. When Howd's report was published by the United States Department of Labor, it took note of the elaborate workplace vernacular, common style of clothing, and close living arrangements of the men in timber camps. Yet, the report concluded these men lacked "interest and pride in their work," "cast aside all social ties and obligations," and lived a "mere animal existence." Despite his Ph.D. in sociology and extensive training in ethnographic methods, Howd simply could not recognize or understand the utility or political nature of these working class expressions.<sup>53</sup>

One can imagine Hannon's response to such a characterization. Contingent capitalism certainly forced a number of deprivations upon these workers, but the oral history record suggests a much more intellectual and social life than the one described by labor inspectors and social scientists. Bruce Hannon and his fellow maritime workers would certainly bristle to the suggestion they had been reduced to an "animal existence." The cultural record established by the wealth of laborlore left to us in the form of stories, songs, and humorous jokes indicates a pride in community and identity. Indeed, one can imagine Hannon emphasizing the mental wanderings of his mind as a purposeful rebuff

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<sup>52</sup> Bruce Hannon, "A Window on the Thirties," 12.

<sup>53</sup> Howd, *Industrial Relations in the West Coast Lumber Industry*, 47.

to the comments of Howd and others. Laborlore challenges such reductive, objectifying, and ultimately degrading comments.

Ultimately, the cache of laborlore left to us by contingent and migratory workers constitutes a counter narrative. Whether it was the dark criticism of the “Millpond” or the utopian subterfuge of Haywire Mac’s “Big Rock Candy Mountain,” laborlore imagined a world transformed. That counter narrative may have lacked the volume and structural effect of the apparatus of social investigation. Moreover, it lacked the luster and fervor of free speech fight and epic labor strikes that marked the 1910s. Yet, we must remember, that open confrontation and political activity could easily threaten one’s livelihood. During the conservative period that spanned from the end of World War I to the early days of the Great Depression, laborlore served as a vehicle for the counter-narrative of resistance.



Figure 5.1 | Otto Hagel, “Outstretched Hands,” 1932, 1933, 1934, San Francisco. Hansel Mieth/Otto Hagel Archive, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona

## Chapter 5 | The Great Depression and Contingent Capitalism

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Otto Hagel’s photograph “Outstretched Hands” captures the frenetic scene of the shape-up along San Francisco’s Embarcadero in 1932 or early 1933. The precise location is unknown, but in all likelihood these are longshoremen hoping to pick up a day’s work outside a shipping agent’s office. With experience as a sailor crossing the Atlantic from Germany to the United States, Hagel was fascinated by the process of maritime work. This scene played out each day outside the doors of warehouses, factories, and shipping offices in the area each day between five and seven in the morning. The composition of the image highlights its message. Hidden by their hats, the mob of men is rendered anonymous – simply a crowd gathered and surging together as one organic mass. Each outstretched hand

represents the individual pleading for a day's work. It contrasts their desperation for work, with the solitary power of the hiring foreman, cloistered in the door, handing out job cards. It is a remarkable document of the casual labor economy during the early years of the Great Depression, the subject of this chapter.<sup>1</sup>

The narrative of the Great Depression is generally well known. The roaring economic expansion of the 1920s generated vast wealth, but also inequality, speculation, and eventually the largest economic collapse of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As the nation slid into economic depression, officials struggled to develop a coherent and effective response. Some sat idly by, in the belief the invisible hand would correct the crisis. Others expressed Pollyanna optimism that the economic would steam through. By the time Franklin Delano Roosevelt promised to make a new deal with the American people during the election of 1932, the damage was done. Unemployment topped forty-percent in some parts of the country and economic production had slowed to a halt. Along with tremendous financial losses, the social cost is well documented. Indelible images of unemployment and poverty appear in the photographs and literature of the period.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mieth Hagel quoted in John Loengard, "Overlooked Masters," *American Photo* March/April 2002, 40. See also Anne Loftis, *Witness to Struggle: Imaging the 1930s California Labor Movement* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1998) 28; and "Hansel Mieth and Otto Hagel," Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Accessed August 20, 2013, <http://ccp.uair.arizona.edu/item/32174>. Hagel had a photographic eye, but he also knew the struggle for work. He had arrived in the United States just before the Great Depression set in, working his way across the country in a variety of odd jobs. As his wife would later describe, Hagel was a "young kid gone on Jack London." He exchanged his labor for free passage, known among seamen as a workaway, and crossed the Atlantic. Later, he found a job washing windows in New York City before lighting out for California. On the eve of the Great Depression, he tramped around the Pacific Coast as an agricultural worker. Along with his wife, Hagel became a documentary photographer traveling throughout California during the Great Depression. They captured many notable images of working people – striking cotton pickers in the inland valleys, sardine fishermen, Chinese sweatshop workers, garbage collectors in Sacramento, and dockworkers along the Embarcadero. These photographs illustrate a common thread that ran through the casual labor economy during the early years of the Great Depression – too many workers and not enough work.

<sup>2</sup> On the national experience during the Great Depression, see John Galbraith, *The Great Crash of 1929* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing, 2009); Robert McElvaine, *The Great Depression: America, 1929-1941* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1993); and David Kennedy, *The American People in the Great Depression: Freedom from Fear, Part One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Michael Bernstein, *The Great*

Otto Hagel's "Outstretched Hands" is one of the finest images we have of the shape-up, yet ironically, it also one of the last. The morning shape-up, a defining feature of the casual labor economy for many decades, became the target of a rising tide of working class activism that swept the Pacific Coast in the mid-1930s. After nearly a decade of union busting and diminished working class power, the labor movement's fortunes seemed to have reversed. The adversity of the Great Depression gave way to a period of massive organizing and agitation. The A.F.L. reasserted itself and the newly operative Congress of Industrial Organizations seemingly emerged from nowhere to add four million more union members. An additional one million more workers formed their own independent unions. What could explain this kind of reversal under such onerous circumstances? The answer requires a close examination of the casual labor economy along the Pacific Coast from 1929 to 1933.

This chapter argues that workers adapted new forms of political power in order to respond the changing landscape of the casual labor economy during the Great Depression. Many strands of this chapter will be familiar to historians of this period, but weaving them all together brings something new to our understanding of the Great Depression and the activity of workers. A long list of scholars have greatly enhanced our understanding of the Great Depression and appear in this chapter, including Cletus Daniel, Frances Fox Piven, George Sanchez, William Mullins, Devra Weber, Mark Wild. Moreover, the subject of all this research and writing touches on various aspects of the casual labor economy, including unemployed workers, neighborhoods activists, agricultural workers, or the region as a whole.

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*Depression: Delayed Recovery and Economic Change in America, 1929-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970) 254. On the Pacific Coast and the Great Depression, see William Mullins, *The Depression and the Urban West Coast, 1929-1933* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Jonathan Dembo, "The Pacific Northwest Lumber Industry During the Great Depression" *Journal of the West* 24 (October, 1985): 51-62; Kevin Starr, *Endangered Dreams in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Leonard Leader, *Los Angeles and the Great Depression* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1991).

However, while scholars often acknowledge the connections between these topics, they have never been explored in any systematic fashion. In this respect, this chapter breaks new ground. The following pages emphasize the intersections that came together in the context of the casual labor economy. Set in the larger interpretive frame, the casual labor economy's network of migration, multiracial workforce, urban centers, and hinterland jobs sites offer a way to connect up these distinct but ultimately related narratives.

To do so, this chapter develops in four parts. The first section lays out the arrival of the Great Depression along the Pacific Coast. Although economic storm clouds could have been observed in the late twenties, many remained oblivious or confident in the strength of the region even after the crash of the stock market. The Pacific Coast was isolated from the earliest effects, but once the Great Depression arrived, the casual labor economy suffered the worst. The second section explores the effects of the Depression through the work lives of three casual laborers – Jesus Lopez, Ed Paulsen, and William Bloch. Each biographical sketch opens a window on the experience of casual work during this period – the struggle to locate work, the new demographics that entered, and the effect on workers of color. The third section describes the reorganization of the demographic and economic patterns of this casual labor economy over the course of four years. The final section explores the response of workers. While unions renewed their reactionary and defensive stance, a growing number of casual workers initiated bold and unexpected actions in both urban centers and hinterland worksites.

## The Coming of the Great Depression

When the stock market crashed on October 24, 1929, it registered little for those living on the Pacific Coast. The roaring twenties brought prosperity to the region. In certain industries, including logging and salmon canning, employment reached all-time historic highs during the latter half of the 1920s. And the boom seemed never ending. Each year, the City of Seattle's public employment office received more requests for workers than the last. Productivity and population grew. The Pacific Coast economy steamed along through the late 1920s under a "psychology of prosperity," according to one historian. The day after the stock market crashed, the front page of the *Los Angeles Times* defiantly claimed: "Country Believed Too Rich to Feel After Effects." Under the headline read, "Don't Stampede Like They Used To!" a scrawny cow labeled "Wall St. Speculator" screams panic. Its healthy counterparts – "Industry" and "American Business" – look on placidly, while chewing the fertile grassy fields under their hooves. [See Figure 5.2]<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "Thirty-Fifth Annual Report of the Civil Service Commission of the City of the Seattle, Washington for the Year ending December 31, 1930," Unpublished Report, Civil Service Commission Collection, Seattle Municipal Archives; *Los Angeles Times*, October 25, 1929.

Figure 5.2 | “Don’t Stampede Like They Used To!”



Source: *Los Angeles Times*, October 25, 1929

Despite the Crash, observers along the Pacific Coast remained positive about the long-term employment forecast. Among economists, consensus held that the Pacific Coast would ride out the storm with aplomb. Commentators pointed to evidence from the economic depression that had followed World War I, the most recent example at hand. That economic cycle had also been precipitated by a difficult post-war conversion. It was short lived. In November and December, just weeks after the 1929 stock market crash, the *Los Angeles Times* reported robust building construction and painted a positive employment picture for the coming year. As late as March, 1931, the *Los Angeles Times* offered the headline “Factories Expected to Hum Within Few Months” and quoted one county official

saying: “the citizens of Los Angeles city and county have reason to face the future with earnest optimism.” *The Seattle Times* criticized labor leaders for their lack of confidence and directly addressed a doubting public. “Lucky in Washington!” read the headline of one edition. There were no “alarming” reports to be found in the Pacific Northwest; “proof positive of increasing activity”; and the evidences gathered by the times show conditions to be at least as good as at the outset of any bygone winter, and fail to justify the slightest degree of pessimism.” Whether it was Pollyanna optimism or merely ignorance, business leaders maintained that the region’s prosperity and vibrancy would forestall the gloomy reports from other parts of the country.<sup>4</sup>

For most of the United States, the effect of the stock market crash came suddenly. The national unemployed figure rocketed upward from 429,000 in October to 4,065,000 just three months later in January. Within one year, the number of unemployed doubled to eight million. Some of the most immediate consequences were often localized. In the industrial Midwest, for example, cities like Toledo, Detroit and Cleveland suffered heavily as capital flows dried up and could not keep the engines of finance lubricated. The Ford Motor Company was one casualty of the collapse. In just two years, the automaker’s workforce of 130,000 was reduced to just 37,000 in the summer of 1931. As the anchors of a local economy, when a factory shuttered its operation, the collateral effect was substantial. In Toledo, just three months after the crash, the closure of the Willy-Overland factory caused unemployment in the city to spike to forty percent. The Northeast and South hardly fared

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<sup>4</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, March 16, 1931, pa1; “Lucky in Washington,” *Seattle Times*, December 14, 1930; Mullins, *The Depression and the Urban West Coast, 1929-1933*, 6-8.

better. In January 1932, the New York garment industry employed an estimated ten percent of its normal workforce.<sup>5</sup>

In contrast, the Pacific Coast remained insulated from the economic fall. Coming off a decade of strong growth, low unemployment, and a population boom, the economy fared much better. When the national unemployment rate edged near nine percent in 1930, Washington, Oregon, and California remained two points lower. The lack of industrialization and economic diversity also provided a bulwark. The region did not rely upon the manufacture of luxury goods or retail items. The *Seattle Times* reported a growing number of building permits and construction activity. Likewise, agriculture was safe; people had to eat. Casual industries were particularly resilient during the first year. While sawmill owners, growers, and cannery operators were dependent on credit and capital to stretch through the year, the success of the 1920s had built a positive balance sheet. Moreover, the casual labor economy was tied to a regionally financed economy, rather than capital markets of the Atlantic coast and Europe. Civic leaders, Chambers of Commerce, and workers could point to a number of healthy economic indicators during the first six months of 1930 as proof of the economy's resilience. The population of wage earners had increased; Ford Motor Company had plans to build large factories, and the Bethlehem shipyard announced an expansion; retail sales, bank deposits, and profits were growing.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the outward appearance of resilience, there were storm clouds visible on the horizon for casual workers on the Pacific Coast. Farming was one harbinger of the coming economic collapse. While the value of western agricultural land continued to grow

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<sup>5</sup> Bernstein, *The Great Depression: Delayed Recovery and Economic Change* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 254-7, 317.

<sup>6</sup> Bernstein, *The Great Depression*, 254; "Conditions in State Are Good, Survey Reveals," *Seattle Times*, December 14, 1930.

throughout the late 1920s, crop prices had never fully recovered after the end of World War I. Perhaps more significant for the workers, mechanization and the consolidation of farming, particularly in California, also took their toll. But the great efficiency of the thresher and combine would never render so many workers obsolete as it had in the wheat fields of the Midwest. Hand picking would remain the norm for labor-intensive farming on the Pacific Coast, like cutting lettuce and asparagus or picking berries and stone fruits. But the introduction of mechanized implements like the tractor during the earlier decade had diminished growers' need for labor during much of the year. The demand for large amounts of hand labor became compressed into a shorter period. Mechanization had diminished the demand for labor in other industries as well. Despite substantial increases in productivity during the previous decade, employment had remained stagnant in many industries. Machinery had redefined, or rendered obsolete, many of the tasks in the casual labor economy from logging to salmon canning. As one labor economist described the situation in California just before the Great Depression, the correlation between industrial efficiency and the declining labor demand was a "matter of the gravest concern."<sup>7</sup>

Labor newspapers, unlike the general media, were more attuned to those shifting economic winds. For these sources, the stock market crash was just another portent of growing economic inequality and declining employments figures. The I.W.W.'s *Industrial Worker* jabbed, "this is the Hoover prosperity we hear about." The newspaper's "Job News" offered a counterpoint to the optimism and confidence of mainstream papers with reports from Los Angeles:

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<sup>7</sup> On the consolidation and mechanization of agriculture, see Don Mitchell *Lie of the Land: Migrant Workers and the California Landscape* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) 114); Wesley Mitchell, quoted in *Report and Recommendations of the California State Unemployment Commission* (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1933) 206.

Down along the Slave Market, one who is a veteran of “hard winters” of the Pacific Coast, gasps with astonishment as the Army files hopelessly by. Old and young, native and foreign-born, they are looking, walking, and shuffling along. Some of them are muttering to themselves or to others about the great things they will do, once they get “that job.”

Other reports from San Francisco and Seattle carried news of men crowded into employment agencies and a frenzy of hands to secure a meager two or three day job. By July 1930, even larger union papers predicted tough times. The *Washington State Labor News* carried the headline, “Unemployment Shows No Sign of Abatement” and warned readers that the region could not forestall the effects of the Depression forever.<sup>8</sup>

Casual workers were slow to learn about the economic collapse, and even slower to care. John Galbraith once noted that the devastation of October 1929 was simply “more distant news” to the farmers, industrial workers, and small business owners living beyond the Atlantic seaboard. In the timber fields and canneries of the Pacific Coast, this was most certainly the case. While transient workers were intimately knowledgeable of their localized economy, the health of Wall Street was likely of little concern. In the minds of casual workers, fish runs, timber stands, and a busy port terminal were tantamount to the financial markets in Chicago or New York City. In October, 1929, John McCloskey (who opened the first chapter) was probably living in a rail camp somewhere in Washington’s High Cascades. For itinerant and seasonal workers like McCloskey the most lucrative season was coming to an end after several long months. He would be planning a trip down to Seattle for a little relaxation, perhaps a few odds jobs, then lay plans for the spring to begin his working peregrinations again. The macroeconomic forces of speculation and overproduction that had crashed the New York Stock Exchange must have seemed a world away. Even when they

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<sup>8</sup> *Industrial Worker*, January 25, 1930; *Washington State Labor News*, July 7, 1930, 6.

did hear the news from a coworker or read the headlines in the paper, the events hardly registered on their day-to-day lives. As a young man in search of work and riding the rails towards the Pacific Coast, Ed Paulsen recalls being clueless about the macroeconomic picture. “In small towns out West, we didn’t know there was a Crash. What did the stock market mean to us?” he asked. “Not a dang thing.”<sup>9</sup>

For casual workers like Ed Paulsen, the lack of concern was understandable. Wages in many migratory and contingent occupations continued to hold steady for the first year following the crash. The average laborer in a sawmill on the Pacific Coast earned 41.7 cents per hour in 1929 and 40.9 cents in 1930. In general contracting and construction, wage rates declined by just one half of one cent. Wages for agricultural work and municipal street construction also declined only slightly during this period. When the National Industrial Conference published an exhaustive study of wages from 1914 through 1930, the report confidently concluded that, “[o]n the whole... the current business depression does not appear to have been quite so severe in its effects on wages and employment as was the depression of 1921.” The comparison to the post-war depression was apt. Recent history suggested to economists that the downturn would likely be short-lived, and perhaps even followed by a long period of prosperity. When the labor statistics were published in April, 1931, employment was clearly waning, but wages had not yet collapsed.<sup>10</sup>

Insulated for several months, the Pacific Coast economy eventually went the way of the rest of the country by the spring of 1930. The labor agencies that lined the streets of the

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<sup>9</sup> Galbraith, *The Great Crash*, 124; and interview with Ed Paulsen, in Studs Terkel, *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* (New York: New Press, 2010) 32.

<sup>10</sup> United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Handbook of Labor Statistics*, 746; New York: National Industrial Conference Board, *Wages in the United States in 1931* (Washington D.C.: National Industrial Conference Board) 208.

day labor district were an early barometer of the change. Administrators at Seattle's public employment agency began to note of the decline in the demand for workers at its office. Each spring the number of employer requests filed with the office had outpaced the previous year for a decade. May, 1930, proved break that long-standing trend. Unlike the previous year, in which city clerks received nearly 3,000 work requests, that number declined to just 1,400. Requests continued to decline throughout the year. As employment waned, the number of jobseekers increased. In his annual report to the Mayor's office, Civil Service Commissioner A.H. Grant summed up the situation: "A reduction of more than 40% in the demand for help through the office necessarily increased very largely the number of applicants seeking employment." He predicted "extremely trying conditions" in the coming year. The office scrambled to deal with the flagging demand. Commissioners established new rules for determining work eligibility, including priority consideration for men with families. They assigned men with knowledge and experience to ensure the employers would be satisfied, and in return, bring more requests. New rules could not make up for the shrinking jobs picture.<sup>11</sup>

When the full economic force of the Great Depression finally arrived, it came like the lash of whip – delayed, but eventually swifter and more painful. For more than a year, the region had existed in a bubble of employment, leading most other states with low unemployment figures. In Washington, unemployment spiked from seven percent in 1930 to nearly sixteen percent in 1931. The following year, it climbed further to twenty-five percent. That same year, California's rate of unemployment outpaced the national number by nearly

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<sup>11</sup> "Thirty-Fifth Annual Report of the Civil Service Commission of the City of the Seattle, Washington for the Year ending December 31, 1930," Unpublished Report, Civil Service Commission Collection, Seattle Municipal Archives. The California state offices experienced a similar decline in their requests for workers. Statewide, the agencies had placed 145,000 workers per year in 1929 and 1930. That number fell to slightly more than 95,000 in 1931 and 1932.

five points (28 percent in CA, 23.6 percent nationally). By every indicator – employment, weekly earnings, and economic activity – the Pacific Coast lagged behind the rest of the nation. At the nadir of the employment situation, 700,000 willing workers in California had no stable employment.<sup>12</sup>

The casual labor economy sat at the leading edge of the Depression. Job reports from across the region painted a picture of rapid economic decline. The *Industrial Worker* reported California’s oil industry to be at a near standstill with “thousands of oil workers are on the labor market.” As the reporter lamented, “the outlook for the coming summer is not very promising from the job seeker’s standpoint and unless something extraordinary happens, which is not very likely, the unemployed situation will be just as acute this summer as it has been this winter.” The prediction proved accurate. In 1930, the unemployment rate among casual occupations was twice or three times that of the general population. In California, Oregon, and Washington, across all occupations only eight percent of workers reported some kind of unemployed status, whether they were seeking employment, laid off, or on unpaid leave. Among loggers and fishermen, the rate was fourteen percent; construction laborers claimed the highest rate of unemployment at twenty-three percent. [See Table 5.1] The once insatiable demand for labor power that had been so central to an expanding economy suddenly dried up. By 1932, the Pollyanna optimism that carried the Pacific Coast through the early years of the Great Depression had evaporated.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> California State Unemployment Commission, *Reports and Recommendations*, 40

<sup>13</sup> *Industrial Worker*, “Labor Outlook Not Promising in Los Angeles” April 26, 1930; “Thirty-Fifth Annual Report of the Civil Service Commission of the City of the Seattle, Washington for the Year ending December 31, 1930,” Unpublished Report, Civil Service Commission Collection, Seattle Municipal Archives.

**Table 5.1 | Unemployment Rate Among Select Occupations, Pacific Coast, 1930**

Occupation	Gainful Workers	Seeking Work, Laid Off, or Furloughed	Percentage of Unemployed
All Occupations	3525019	267743	8%
Forestry and Fishing	63497	8942	14%
Carpenters	91770	19265	21%
Construction Laborers	31495	7365	23%
Sailors	14582	1835	13%
Longshore	12371	1887	15%

Calculated from Pacific Division Unemployment Tables for Selected Occupations, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930: Unemployment Volume 2* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1931) 103-110).

The desperation of the Great Depression was summed up in the activities in Los Angeles' Plaza on a summer day in 1932. Before a crowd of more than one hundred onlookers, a group of men and women were "auctioned" to a group of prospective employers. [See Figure 5.3] The auctioneer, Colonel Louis Byrens, a welfare worker and philanthropist, organized his so-called "slave block" to connect the city's large and growing population of unemployed with jobs. As reported by the *New York Times*, Byrens encouraged the crowd; "Here's a big, strong fellow." "Step up and feel those muscles." The object of his description - Henry Marion, a salesman, shipping clerk, truck driver, typist, and common laborer inspired "spirited bidding." Jose Mendoza, a cement worker, was purchased by the owner of a moving company for the price of fifty cents an hour. "Here's a pretty girl," described by the auctioneer as Mrs. Hazel Wall, as self-described divorcee, typist, cook, and house worker "mounted the block." She was "purchased" by a local café owner for the price of thirty-five cents, just enough to legally skirt the state's minimum wage law. Not everyone

was “knocked down” to an employer. Some workers, reported the Associated Press, “were led from the block, futility stamped upon their faces.”<sup>14</sup>

**Figure 5.3 | The Plaza’s Slave Block; “A stenographer offers her services to the highest bidder in an auction”**



Source: *New York Times*, July 9, 1932

The popup slave block connected the historical past to a more troubling contemporary reality. For a half-century at least, the Plaza had been a destination for men seeking work. For Los Angelinos old enough to recall the late 1800s, this had been the “slave market,” where employers, builders, and homeowners had hired indigenous and immigrant workers from this location for decades. But this was something completely different. The crowds, participants, and newspaper coverage made Byrens’ “slave block” part philanthropic act, part

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<sup>14</sup> *New York Times*, “Idle Are Auctioned Off,” July 8, 1932; also *Ottawa Citizen*, July 8, 1932; and *Tax Facts*, “The Auction Block,” July 1932.

spectacle. The event underscored the growing sense of desperation within the casual labor economy in the years after the crash of the stock market.

### **Three Workers, Three industries, Three Experiences**

Casual workers did not need the economic forecasts or tables from a special census to understand the effects of the Great Depression. The signs of economic stress surrounded them. While casual laborers during the early years of the Great Depression had no universal experience, there were discernible patterns. The work history of three individuals—Ed Paulsen, William Bloch, and Jesus Lopez—illustrates the common struggle to find work, but also the role of age, race, and skill in shaping their opportunities. Each biographical sketch offers a window on wider trends in the casual labor economy during this period.

#### **Ed Paulsen**

At the age of nineteen, Ed Paulsen left his family farm in South Dakota in 1930, caught a train, and headed west in search of greater opportunity. Paulsen graduated from high school in South Dakota, and in his words, unwittingly “walked out into this thing” – the Great Depression. He knocked around from job to job, worked the harvest in Montana and other parts of the upper Midwest. He jumped across the Rockies to Washington for apple picking season. To some extent, his travels could be described as wanderlust, but clearly, the search for decent, good-paying work motivated his migration. Eventually, he made his way to California. Describing the allure of Pacific Coast, he said, “I was never satisfied to stay there [the Midwest]. I was always taking a pop at L.A. or San Francisco.” There, he “hustled sheets” in Los Angeles, worked on road crews shoveling gravel, and tried his luck

on the docks in San Francisco. Paulsen came of age in the relative prosperity of the roaring twenties, and therefore, seemed incredulous at the shape-up he joined every morning in San Francisco's warehouse district. "We didn't know how to make out in the city.... Job hunting, looking for a chance to earn a little money," he laughingly described himself as kid who had "middle-class ideas without middle-class incomes."<sup>15</sup>

Paulsen was hardly alone. Thousands of other young men just like him were cut loose upon the world with little support or preparation for life on the road in the early 1930s. Falling crop prices and land consolidation had offered little reason to stay home. Young men felt they were a drain on the family economy – one more mouth to feed. As the demand for relief grew and states were taxed beyond their ability, support for impoverished families was certainly on the decline. By 1932, there were so many young men like Paulsen looking for work, the media dubbed them, "An Army of Boys on Loose." Demographic data confirmed this characterization. According to the Los Angeles County registry of transient men, the largest proportion of those visiting relief agencies, shelters, and employment agencies were young men between the ages of twenty and twenty-nine. Nearly ten percent of the 39,000 total registrants were even younger. According to county officials, even more were believed to be floating outside the system, beyond the purview of the government. Officials took note of the reports from Ohio to Arizona that decried the sheer number of young transients on the road "bumming their way west." A. Wayne McMillen, a University of Chicago professor, speculated about the "great moral hazards" of life on the road for this demographic. The most devastating consequence, argued McMillen, was the danger of these young men encountering "the infectious attitude of the seasoned hobo." "The philosophy of 'no work' is

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Ed Paulsen, in Terkel, *Hard Times*, 26-32.

attractive to youngsters most of whom are not equipped by education and experience to accept any but the most unskilled, ill-paid jobs.” “What happens to the boys who have taken to the road,” McMillen asked rhetorically.<sup>16</sup>

For Paulsen, the constant struggle to find work surpassed these moral concerns. As a young man, husky, and athletic (his description), Paulsen believed himself well suited for stevedoring or warehouse work. But his physical stature was little help in the shape-up along San Francisco’s warehouse district, which recounted later in life:

I’d get up at 5 o’clock in the morning and the streetcar fare was only a nickel in those days. I’d head down to the waterfront looking for work. And I’d head down to 3<sup>rd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>, Spreckels Sugar and American Can. You know outside a gate, there’d be a thousand men and you know dang well when you go there there’s only three or four jobs. A guy will come out with two little Pinkerton cops or their equivalent in uniforms to the gate and he’ll say, “I need two guys for the bull gang and two guys to go in the hold, or what have you.... A great surge would run through, uh you know, only four of us are going to get thorough. And I’m too young a punk... I’m still nineteen goin’ on twenty. There just weren’t any jobs.

Like the scene from Hagel’s “Outstretched Hands,” Paulsen competed with the crowd for a single days work. He said, “more and more men were after fewer and fewer jobs.”<sup>17</sup>

Unknowingly, Paulsen was searching for work in one of the hardest hit economic sectors. Up and down the Pacific Coast, the maritime trades, along with warehousing and shipping had seen major declines. As the economy ground to a halt, national and international shipping lines slowed. By 1931, he recalled, “things were getting really tough.” The year before the Great Depression, Seattle longshore workers had loaded and unloaded nine million tons of freight. That amount had

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<sup>16</sup> A. Wayne, McMillen, “An Army of Boys on the Loose,” *The Survey* (September, 1932) 389-90. See also Thomas Minehan, *Boy and Girl Tramps of America* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1934).

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Ed Paulsen, *Hard Times*, 26-32.

declined to just 5.5 million tons by 1932. Indeed, over this three-year period, the freight tonnage at all three of the largest port complexes – Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles – had been cut in half. Declining freight meant losses in the demand for labor. In 1929, the state of Washington reported more than 503,000 days worked in longshoring and other wharf operations, but only 472,000 the next year – a loss of 31,000 days of workdays. The following year was even worse. The total number of working days on the docks declined to just 397,000, a reduction of 75,000 work days. Three years after the beginning of the Great Depression, the port had lost the equivalent of nearly one thousand full time jobs.<sup>18</sup>

**Table 5.2 | Number of Days Worked in Selected Industries, Washington State**

	1929	1930	1931	1932
Coal Mining	762,070	653,545	520,989	466,958
Fish Canneries	367,225	317,399	314,727	215,685
Logging	6,936,688	5,051,888	2,897,144	1,786,877
Longshoring	503,112	472,053	397,718	327,000

Calculated from State of Washington, *Fourth Report of the Department of Labor and Industries* (Olympia: Jay Thomas Public Printer, 1932) 30-1; and State of Washington, *Fifth Report of the Department of Labor and Industries* (Olympia: State Printing Plant, 1937) 18-9.

As the cargo disappeared, so did jobs in other parts of the economy. Outside the city, many of the largest industries, including logging, salmon canning, and mining reported substantial losses. The number of workdays in the State’s logging operations was barely

<sup>18</sup> On the decline of shipping cargo, see Ronald Magden, *A History of Seattle Waterfront Workers, 1884-1934* (Seattle: International Longshormen’s and Warehousemen’s Union 19 and the Washington Commission for Humanities, 1991) 189.

more than one quarter of its original size after just three years of declining employment [See Table 5.2]. State and local government made some effort to continue public works programs to maintain employment, but it was a losing battle. Road construction and other public projects were designed merely as stopgap solutions, rather than living wage jobs. Work was distributed so thinly, it was questionable if the measure actually benefitted anyone.

### **William Bloch**

If the experience of Ed Paulsen typifies that of the young man attempting to gain a foothold in a shrinking economy, William Bloch, at the other end of the age spectrum, clung to what little remained. Bloch had spent much of his youth working in the casual labor economy as a rancher, miner, and railroad section hand. But later in life, he had successfully vaulted himself out of contingent work into more skilled professions. When the stock market crashed in 1929, he was employed in Los Angeles' burgeoning automobile industry. His position as special mechanic at a tire factory seemed far removed from the casual labor economy; namely, the job required skill, paid well, and most importantly, the work was steady. In April 1930, Bloch was laid off by his employer as economic demand waned. He was an older worker and the factory had many options. For a while, he remained optimistic that he would be rehired. Testifying about his work history before a public hearing on unemployment in California, Bloch described his situation: "for six months, I kept going back to the tire factory for a job, but I am now "out of practice,' 'out of skill,' and 'out of joint.'" He had registered with every employment office and resorted to knocking on doors

for odd jobs. “What’s the state going to do with us,” he asked? “I have been thrown on the rubbish pile like a bundle of rags.... Nobody wants me anymore.”<sup>19</sup>

As unemployment grew, workers were dislocated from their steady jobs and flooded into the casual labor economy in search of employment. The largely male, unattached, and young transient worker like Paulsen was joined by a new demographic: families, young children, older men, and some women. Some were individuals like William Bloch, knocked back down to his previous condition by hard times. Others had no experience in this sector of the economy. The California State Unemployment Commission termed these individuals the “*New Poor*.” “At the beginning of the depression,” reported the commission, “many citizens and leaders believed that ‘those who are idle have something wrong with them; they are misfits and ne’er-do-wells.’ But as their own friends and relatives were left by the wayside, their opinion rapidly changed.” It concluded, “the economic depression has made few discriminations.”<sup>20</sup>

Behind the counter at the Seattle public employment office, the clerks observed a similar demographic shift in the market for casual work. Unlike the army of tramp and hobo workers, migrant Filipinos, or seasoned Mexican *traqueros*, many of these new applicants for common labor positions carried the resume of a skilled worker – commercial sales, factory work, and machinist. With some surprise, the office’s annual report noted that these men (and some women) were “drawn from a variety of regular occupations.” The civil servants seemed unprepared as the Great Depression broke down longstanding historical economic division between casual and regular employment. As one experienced tramp worker said of

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<sup>19</sup> Testimony from William Bloch is excerpted in California State Unemployment Commission, *Report and Recommendations*, 93.

<sup>20</sup> Webb, *The Transient Unemployed*, 107, 112-3; California State Unemployment Commission, *Report and Recommendations*, 89.

the new faces he encountered in his travels around the region for work: “It was a very different sort of traveling companion,” he recalled. In contrast to the young men leaving farms for work or veterans from the war to which he was accustomed, the rail cars he traveled in were filled with “fellas that had made it all the way through college and back.” “Lawyers, carpenters, bakers, ‘the very best’ were on the bum at that time.” he said somewhat tongue in cheek.<sup>21</sup>

The statistical record from relief agencies in Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles bore out the anecdotal observations made by employment agency clerks and experienced tramps. In the first four years of the Great Depression, William Bloch joined a wave of other individuals that came to federal and state relief agencies seeking assistance with employment and basic needs. Among the thousands that recorded their work history in these offices, subsequently compiled by the Works Progress Administration, the majority had no prior experience with casual work. Nearly seventeen percent of the registrants claimed their “usual occupation” was that of a skilled worker – machinist, mechanic, foreman or inspector, structural ironworker. Another eleven percent listed their occupation as some form of office work, such as clerical staff, salesperson, or small business owner. In all, 59.3 of the 15,681 of those interviewed claimed their work was “non-casual.” Exodusters fleeing the dustbowl would later compound the population of jobseekers in sectors of the casual labor economy. Paul Taylor placed all these migrations into historical perspective: “they trek into California,

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<sup>21</sup> “Thirty-sixth Annual Report of the Civil Service Commission of the City of the Seattle, Washington for the Year ending December 31, 1931,” Unpublished Report, Civil Service Commission Collection, Seattle Municipal Archives, 5. Interview with Charles Craig, Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, Fullerton.

these American whites, at the end of a long immigrant line of Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, negroes, Hindustanis, Mexicans, and Filipinos, to serve the crops and farmers of the state.”<sup>22</sup>

### **Jesus Lopez**

For those already employed in the casual labor economy, particularly workers of color like Jesus Lopez, the arrival of men like Ed Paulsen and William Bloch spelled disaster. Lopez was an experienced casual laborer. He had arrived in the United States as a young man in 1916, crossing the border from Mexico with his family. During World War I, Lopez found lucrative and steady employment as a traquero with several midwestern railroad corporations. He supplemented that with work in cotton and beet fields. For fifteen years, he tacked back and forth between track work and these other lines of employment. According to his work history, collected by a federal relief agent in 1932, the previous decade had been relatively stable and prosperous. He recorded his largest annual earnings in 1922 – a sum of \$500. For more than a decade, railroads, farmers, and salmon canneries relied upon workers from Mexico and the Philippines during a period of rapid expansion. Each year, contractors combed through Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle to locate workers for these rural jobs. Some extended their reach abroad to places like Michoacán and Binalonan. With the promise of good jobs, employers funneled men like Lopez to the Pacific Coast for work.<sup>23</sup>

As the Depression deepened, employers squeezed out workers like Lopez to make room for the influx of native-born white workers. In 1931, Lopez lost his job when his employer told him he was too old to return to his seasonal work as a railroad section hand in

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<sup>22</sup> Webb, *Transient Unemployed*, 43-55; and Paul Taylor, “Again the Covered Wagon,” *Survey Graphic* (July, 1935) 349.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Jesus Lopez, in Webb, *The Migratory Casual Worker*, 60, 93-6.

Nebraska. At the age of forty-seven, his age may have been a factor. More likely was the color of his skin. Unemployment among workers of color spiked much earlier than their white coworkers. In the words of labor economist Paul Taylor, “the Mexicans were obviously the last hired and first fired.” One Mexican American worker in Los Angeles described the process of discrimination for a reporter with *La Opinión*:

During the last three months, I have been getting up very early; I dress up and go downtown or uptown to the construction sites where the supervisors know me and always have given me a job. Soon the supervisors come out and tell the people that are waiting to get a job to line up on one side, all the white people, and on the other side the ones that are not. Because I am of dark complexion, 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.

Out of work, Lopez relocated to Seattle and found occasional work thinning beets and picking apples. These jobs only yielded an income of \$75 per year, far less than his typical annual earnings before the depression. With few jobs available in Seattle, which he described as his “headquarters,” Lopez had to rely upon “hunting firewood” and reselling collected junk for income.<sup>24</sup>

The discrimination in hiring was not limited to construction sites or employer’s offices. Intent on protecting jobs for native-born whites, local governments restricted public employment programs to citizens. Among the most impactful of the racial exclusions for workers of color were new laws that restricted public work jobs for those with American citizenship. In 1931, the State of California formalized the growing sentiment that alien workers be excluded from the benefit of public funds. The Alien Labor Act of 1931 targeted

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<sup>24</sup> *La Opinión*, February 8, 1931; Paul Taylor, “Some Aspects of Mexican Immigration,” *Journal of Political Economy* 38:5 (October, 1930) 613. The experience of Mexican workers during the Great Depression is well-documented in Guerin-Gonzales, *Mexican Workers and the American Dream*; Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*; Natalia Molina, *Fit to be Citizens: Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); and Douglas Monroy, *Rebirth: Mexican Los Angeles from the Great Migration to the Great Depression* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); and Devra Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold*.

labor contractors and employment agencies that continued to employ immigrant workers. It ordered that “no person, firm, partnership, association or corporation, or agent thereof, doing any work as a contractor or subcontractor upon any public work being done for or under the authority of the state... shall knowingly employ or cause or allow to be employed thereon any alien.” The law also required labor contractors and agencies to keep a “record showing the names and citizenship of all workers employed by him,” making it one of the first laws to make this kind of requirement of employers in the nation. Given that federal law prohibited most non-European immigrants from naturalizing, legislation of this kind defined the privilege of whiteness. In passing the Alien Labor Act, the state of California codified and enshrined the heretofore de facto racist hiring practices experienced by men like Jesus Lopez and the unnamed Mexican veteran into law.<sup>25</sup>

The overall effect of workplace discrimination and other restrictions made the unemployment situation far more acute for workers of color. Public works projects such as road building, irrigation projects, and constructing the electric grid had been an important mainstay for immigrant workers who could not access to the exclusive union building trades jobs. Other employers began to explicitly replace Filipino and Mexican workers with native-born whites. The Spanish language newspaper *La Opinión* reported hundreds of Mexican workers in Los Angeles “flatly denied work in factories and construction sites, including those born in the California, despite their American citizenship.” The paper reported on one Los Angeles companies that remained very busy, but chose to lay off six hundred Mexican

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<sup>25</sup> The text of the Alien Labor Act appears in Francisco Balderama, *The Decade of Betrayal* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006); on the effect of the Alien Labor Act, see Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*; Eric Meeks, *Border Citizens: The Making of Indians, Mexicans, and Anglos in Arizona* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010) 95-98; Zaragosa Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights: Mexican-American Workers in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Princeton University Press, 1996) 46; and Camille Guerin Gonzales, *Mexican Workers and American Dreams: Immigration, Repatriation, and California Farm Labor, 1900-1939* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

workers in order to substitute them with needy *norteamericanos*. The *Industrial Worker* reported a similar situation in the truck farms south of Seattle. In July 1932, two hundred Filipino workers for the lettuce harvest were fired from the job when local residents of Kent, Washington asserted their “right” to picking jobs. Such layoffs, according to *La Opinión* had, brought the most frightful misery to the Spanish-speaking community.”<sup>26</sup>

### **Changing Landscape**

As the biographies of Paulsen, Bloch, and Lopez illustrate, the Great Depression brought new pressures to bear upon the casual labor economy, and intensified others. The landscape of the casual labor economy, which had functioned largely the same as it had for the past half century, was changing. In a short period of just four years, the Great Depression transformed three longstanding structures of the Great Depression – the pool of available workers, the agreements between employers and employees, and finally, the urban infrastructure.

### **The Pool of Labor Overflows**

As other parts of the nation bore the initial brunt of high unemployment rates, many sought out greater prosperity along the Pacific Coast. The endurance of the region’s economy during the first year of the Depression was present in the mind of these migrants. Scholars estimated the nation-wide transient population dislocated by the Great Depression in 1933 to be near one and one half million, many of them heading west. For Ed Paulsen, in South Dakota, California was synonymous with prosperity. As he recalled, “Los Angeles was the Mecca for us guys... transients.” He was not alone. “Out on the road and far into

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<sup>26</sup> *La Opinión*, February 8, 1932; *Industrial Worker*, “Natives Replacing Filipinos,” July 12, 1930.

the hinterlands,” wrote one *Los Angeles Times* columnist traveling with casual migratory workers, “the city has the reputation of being the place where men without means can eat well and sleep well without much exertion on their own part.” A well-established pattern of chain migration out of the American South and Midwest further reinforced these opinions. For more than a decade, anecdotal stories of high wages and economic opportunity floated across the United States. Good weather and the allure of Hollywood certainly contributed. Studies of internal migration suggest that at least half of the migrants bound for California after the Great Depression had a pre-existing family connection to the state. Whether the stories were fact or fiction mattered little; Pacific Coast cities were magnets for seeking some form of employment.<sup>27</sup>

Newspapers sounded the first alarm about the arrival of masses of unemployed in the region. “The Incoming Hobo Army,” “Jobless Wanderers,” and “Ten Thousand Homeless Waifs,” read the headlines. To one *Los Angeles Times* editor: the city “has become the human sponge of the nation, compelled, whether it wishes it or not, to absorb this devastating influx.” The *Seattle Times* described a similar scene of city streets overrun by beggars and panhandlers unable to find work. Such descriptions routinely tread into hyperbole, but preyed upon a long tradition of Pacific Coast residents wary of their situation spoiled by overcrowding.<sup>28</sup>

Large numbers of working class migrants arriving in the Pacific Coast was nothing new. For decades, the region had outpaced the rest of nation in receiving flows of both

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<sup>27</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, “Efficiency Features Handling of Jobless Transients in Los Angeles,” February 4, 1932, A3; Nels Anderson testimony before United States Congress, *Relief for Unemployed Transients. Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Manufactures* (1933) 65; on chain migration to Southern California, see James Gregory, *American Exodus*, 226-35.

<sup>28</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, November 1, 1931, K3; *Los Angeles Times*, February 7, 1932; *Seattle Times*, April 9, 1933.

internal and international migrants. The overwhelming majority of residents in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle had been born elsewhere. Indeed, relative to the previous two decades of the twentieth century, internal migration to the American West declined precipitously during the Great Depression. Immigration from the Philippines and Mexico similarly went decreased. While Pacific states did receive nearly 1.4 million interstate migrants from 1930 to 1940, again, this represented a comparative decrease in migration to the region in the 1920s.

While the relative number of newcomers may have decreased, so had the region's capacity to absorb them. In prosperous years, economic growth had added new jobs in all sectors just as quickly as people could fill them. The decline in employment had dramatically changed the situation. The case of agriculture is illustrative. In the years before the Great Depression, the labor supply in the agricultural industries had been relatively stable. Between 1926 and 1930, when the California Farm Bureau tallied the relative supply and demand for farm labor, it found that for every one hundred jobs, there were slightly more than one hundred jobseekers. While the farm bureau recognized that localities might struggle with their own particular labor situation at some point during the year, and despite the protestations of growers, the state's labor supply was found to be in rough equilibrium. When the economy declined, and men like Bloch and Lopez found it difficult to find work in old places, many turned to farm labor. The mechanization of agriculture and the consolidation of land ownership also conspired to create an oversupply of workers. In short order, the demand for work outstripped the number of jobs. By 1931, the farm bureau estimated 155 workers for every one hundred jobs. By 1933, the ratio had risen to 186 for every one hundred [See Table 5.3]. That disparity was often even more pronounced. Some

farm districts along the Pacific Coast reported five workers for every two available jobs during the 1933 harvest.<sup>29</sup>

**Table 5.3 | Supply and Demand for Agricultural Labor in California, 1926-1935**

Year	Per Cent of Normal		Workers for Every 100 Jobs Offered
	Supply	Demand	
1926	99	96	103
1927	101	94	107
1928	102	92	111
1929	100	88	114
1930	105	86	122
1931	118	76	155
1932	125	69	181
1933	126	68	186
1934	109	77	142
1935	101	84	128

Source: *Migratory Labor in California*, 48

For day laborers already struggling to find work, the arrival of more migrants meant greater competition for job. Each day in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle, crowds reenacted the scene from Otto Hagel’s “Outstretched hands,” as they gathered outside employment offices and along the docks. Newspaper headlines told of “fistic battles,” “Fights in the rush for Jobs” and “Sharp Clashes Outside Employment Offices” all across the region. In one instance, a crowd of two hundred jobseekers melted into a riotous brawl outside an agency advertising just twenty openings for truck drivers. “A chalk mark on an employment board is the signal for a stampede,” reported the *Industrial Worker*. Outside another agency on Howard Street was “like the scene on a sinking ship where men fight for a life preserver as the ship settles and goes down.”<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, *Yearbook in agriculture* (Washington D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, 1935) 189.

<sup>30</sup> *Industrial Worker*, “Battle for Jobs and Garbage,” March 14, 1931; and *Industrial Worker*, March 1, 1930.

As the pool of unemployed workers swelled, the casual labor economy could not absorb them all. Pushed out of their normal occupations, jobseekers turned to work in the shape-up or employment agency, which often privileged physical ability over experience or skill. As one clerk in Seattle's municipal employment office, described the situation, seasonal work in sawmills and agricultural fields "was eagerly sought by all classes of job seekers." This was "a last resort" for many of the applicants. But regardless of their previous occupation or skill level, the economic situation "brought them in competition with the number of regular workers engaged" in contingent and temporary forms of work. As one labor economist put it, the Great Depression marked a low point for unskilled workers. Not only did they lose their wage, but also many lost their ability to work entirely.<sup>31</sup>

In the face of such overwhelming numbers and growing cutthroat competition, workers like Ed Paulsen were left with a feeling of despair. Standing at the shape-up in the morning, he recalled, "a thousand men would fight like a pack of Alaskan dogs." "Only four of us would get through. I was too young a punk." The difficulty of the period, as he told an interviewer, led him to steal, cheat, and "work all the angles." In his estimation, anyone scrambling for work turned to criminality at some point. One casualty of his desperation was the camaraderie Paulsen had felt among his fellow workers. He said, "it created a coyote mentality... you had to be a predator."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> "Thirty-sixth Annual Report of the Civil Service Commission of the City of the Seattle, Washington for the Year ending December 31, 1931," Unpublished Report, Civil Service Commission Collection, Seattle Municipal Archives, 5; Ahearn, 153.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Ed Paulsen, in Terkel *Hard Times*, 26-32.

## Rewriting the Terms of Employment

With a surplus of workers and declining demand, the Great Depression also became an opportunity for employers to rewrite many of the terms that governed the casual labor economy. Wages became one focal point for conflict. Rates of pay for most casual work had reached a plateau since their high point during the labor shortages during World War I. Without question, declining prices and flagging consumer demand put new pressure on employers to reduce their expenses. With little control over fixed costs like machinery, taxes, or buildings, farmers turned to their most fungible cost – labor. In every industry and across the entire region, the spring of 1930 brought sudden wage reductions. When the mills opened in the timber towns of Washington State, employers had restructured the pay rates for workers that included hourly wage cuts of ten to twenty percent. In places like Aberdeen and Gray’s Harbor, the cuts were compounded when operations were scaled back to four days per week, slicing even further into workers’ income. Mills in Northern Washington and parts of California soon followed.<sup>33</sup>

Mill workers were not the only ones to receive substantial cuts. From 1929 to 1933, wages in all sectors of the day labor economy fell by one third to one half. The wages for agricultural laborers declined from the high of \$51.22 per week in 1929 to a low of \$25.67 in 1933. Weekly wages for coal miners declined from \$114.52 in 1926 to \$57.88 in 1933. For sailors, the average wage, which included room and board, was just \$47 per month in 1933, a substantial decline from its recent high point of \$61 in 1924. When the economic boom in construction came to a halt, workers in the building trades lost big. A sixty percent decline in

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<sup>33</sup> *Washington State Labor News*, April 17, 1931; and *Washington State Labor News*, April 117, 1931. On timber work during the Great Depression, see William Robbins, *Hard Times in Paradise: Coos Bay, Oregon, 1850-1986* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988); Andrew Prouty, *More Deadly Than War!: Pacific Coast Logging, 1827-1981* (New York: Garland, 1985).

building permits in Los Angeles meant that at least half of the workforce was out of a job. For those lucky enough to still have a job, wages declined by fifteen percent in just two years. The city's once powerful Building Trades Council, according to one historian's account, had been reduced to "hardly more than a shadow organization." For most casual laborers, wages would not return to their previous levels for another decade.<sup>34</sup>

Despite the economic pressure on employers, the justification for substantial wage reductions was sometimes thin. The decline of wage rates from 1929 and 1933 quickly outpaced the losses on employers' revenue and profit sheets. Even when prices for crops like cotton, peaches, and lettuce recovered a bit in 1932, employers continued to suppress wages in the face of worker demands. As historian Cletus Daniel suggests, "employers seemed determined to derive the fullest possible personal benefit from the higher prices their crops were commanding."<sup>35</sup>

Wages were not the only casualty of the Great Depression. Since the end of the strike wave during World War I, workers and employers had reached a *détente* over a number of less tangible workplace issues like hours, conditions, safety measures, and other benefits. As the memories lingered of I.W.W agitation in places like Wheatland, California, and the fields of the Palouse, Washington, employers had learned that appeasement was an important tool for maintaining a stable workforce. Rather than raise wages, employers had ceded ground on

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<sup>34</sup> The weekly wage statistics are drawn from United States Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, 1789-1945* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1949) 70; Sailors wages are from Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*, 72; The statistical record for wages lacks uniformity. On agricultural wages on the complexity of calculating and comparing wages, see Daniel Ahearn, *The Wages of Farm and Factory Workers, 1914-1944* (New York: AMS Press, 1968) 153. On the decline building trades employment, see Louis Perry and Richard Perry, *A History of the Los Angeles Labor Movement, 1911-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963) 230-1.

<sup>35</sup> Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 179; see also Raymond Berry, Editor, "Migratory Labor in the California Pea Crop," Unpublished Monograph, Federal Writer's Project, Oakland, California Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California; Raymond Berry, Editor, "Wage Chart by Crops, State of California, 1865-1938," Unpublished Monograph, Federal Writer's Project, Oakland, California Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California.

a number of other subjects. Minimum guarantees for work hours, transportation to and from the jobsite, and improvements in housing and labor camps had managed to contain worker protests. As recently as 1928, employers had made similar concessions to appease longshore workers in Seattle and end a strike among cantaloupe pickers in the Imperial Valley. Such inducements were unwritten, and not contractual, but they had been grower's method for quelling job actions.<sup>36</sup>

Employers sought to erode these less quantifiable aspects as the Depression took hold. Many growers rescinded the daily guarantee of a minimum five hours paid work in 1930. A year later, even workers' access to clean drinking water and free transportation to work sites became subjects of debate. On the waterfront, sailors and dockworkers faced similar changes to their work routine. In April 1931, leaders of the Sailors Union of the Pacific, the largest representative of seaman in the region, received a proposal to reduce wages by fifteen percent, but also overhaul the hiring process and work routines. Employers actively sought to rewrite the "three-watch" system, which had governed sailor's employment for more than a decade. Shipping owners no longer could guarantee an eight-hour workday or the closed shop, which disallowed employers from hiring outside the dues-paying membership. In longshoring, union workers had tried and failed to maintain their own closed shop throughout the 1920s. The high rate of unemployment and declining cargo seemed to make that system even more unlikely. As Germain Bulcke, a longshorman in San Francisco, described the situation:

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<sup>36</sup> Raymond Berry, Editor, "Migratory Labor in California," Unpublished Monograph, Federal Writer's Project, Oakland, California Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California 62; the dangerous balance between confrontation and appeasement in the political economy of California's agriculture sector is also discussed in Mitchell, *Lie of the Land*, 112; in the case of the longshore workers, see Magden, *History of Seattle Waterfront Workers*, chapter X.

The work had slowed so much because the [D]epression set in....Conditions on the waterfront had gotten very bad, [with] speed ups, employers cutting wages....Many times they did not have an many men as they should have for a job, which made it very difficult for fellows.

Those working on the docks also suffered substantial layoffs, declining wages, and a speed-up of working conditions. In 1931, waterfront employers ended “Penalty Pay,” which had provided extra pay for unloading dangerous cargo like creosote products, logs, or bone tankage. Union members staged a protest, but went back to work the next day in a cloud of futility.<sup>37</sup>

Employers were not alone in shifting their relationship with laborers. Struggling to limit their own financial losses, labor contractors and employment agents attempted to capitalize on casual workers’ position of weakness. Reports of corruption and graft perpetrated by unscrupulous labor contractors rose substantially during these years. Among the list of abuses included contractors that absconded with workers’ wages by fleeing the worksite before the end of the season. Others described various forms of chiseling workers’ wages by operating gambling and prostitution rings in work camps, inflated interest rates on loans, and exorbitant fees for locating work or provide transportation to the worksite. At the end of each season, the offices of California’s Division of Immigration and Housing and State Agriculture Secretary were overwhelmed by complaints of corruption. Investigators reported on elaborate schemes devised by contractors to generate more fees for room and board by overpopulating work camps and arranging for short three-day workweeks. With

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<sup>37</sup> Raymond Berry, Editor, “Migratory Labor in California,” Unpublished Monograph, Federal Writer’s Project, Oakland, California Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California 62; Magden, *History of Seattle Waterfront Workers*, 191; Stephen Schwartz, *Brotherhood of the Sea: A History of the Sailor’s Union of the Pacific, 1885-1933* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1986) Chapter 4.interview with Germain Bulcke, “Longshore Leader and ILWU-Pacific Maritime Association Arbitrator,” an oral history conducted by Estolv Ethan Ward, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1984, 117.

“his office in his hat,” as one study of contractors put it, these individuals were nearly impossible to locate or prosecute.<sup>38</sup>

### **Collapsing Infrastructure**

The final significant change brought on by the Great Depression was on physical landscape of the day labor district itself. As the tide of migrants flooded west into the region’s cities, the casual labor economy’s urban infrastructure—low-income housing, government programs, and charitable organizations—buckled under the increased demand. The influx also pushed the boundaries of the district itself, as migrants set up makeshift camps that stretched the laborer’s geography.

Major metropolitan centers had long been the focal point for casual laborers in between work and searching for new jobs. The early 1930s was no exception. Social service agencies were suddenly overwhelmed by the rising demand for assistance. In Seattle, groups like the Salvation Army faced a substantial rise in the demand for housing. While the organization operated two shelters in Seattle for homeless men, they could simply not meet the need. In 1932, they converted an unused federal immigration building at the corner of second and Main in the heart of the day labor district to add more space. The new facility held nearly seven hundred beds in dormitories with triple stacked bunks. It was regularly filled to capacity. The same was true in Los Angeles’ Midnight Mission. In May 1930, the Mission provided beds for 8,678 transient men; the following year the number quadrupled to

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<sup>38</sup> United States Congress House Committee on Labor, *Labor Disputes Act: Hearings Before the Committee on Labor, Seventy-Fourth Congress, First Session on H.R. 6288* (Government Printing Office, 1935) 42 and 50. Emily Huntington, *Doors to jobs: A Study of the Organization of the Labor Market in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1942) 331-335. California’s Division of Immigration and Housing maintained a list of complaints filed with the office. See California Division of Immigration and Housing, “Housing Reports” Unpublished Manuscript Collection, University of California, Bancroft Library, Carton 41:23.

25,469. Unable to find space, lodgers spilled onto any available hallway and floor space. San Francisco erected military style barracks to house the overflow of transients. In Los Angeles, social service officials estimated a one hundred percent increase in the population of transient homeless men between 1930 and 1931. At one point, the number of new jobseekers entering the city was estimated to be nearly ten thousand per month. A Los Angeles county judge assessed the rising burden on the urban infrastructure: “We have always lured individuals to new sections by booms or the failings of local industries. But never have we had those plus this depression-migration to nowhere. The situation is unparalleled.”<sup>39</sup>

Inundated by jobseekers, Pacific Coast cities and states responded to the crisis of migration with a mixture of compassion, diversion and exclusion. Seattle attempted to put the new arrivals to work. At the corner of Railroad Avenue and King Street, in the center of the day labor district, Seattle’s municipal woodlot exchanged free room and board for eight hours of arduous wood splitting per week. Los Angeles hired unemployed workers onto a variety of municipal public works projects. Cities also did their best to funnel unemployed transient men out of the metropolitan areas by opening a series of work camps organized in the High Sierras. Laboring on water projects, railroad maintenance, or fighting fires, again, workers were not paid a wage, but rather traded their labor for a place to sleep and meals. Public officials reasoned that funds could be distributed further and the basic needs provided

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<sup>39</sup> On housing in San Francisco and Seattle, see Mullins, *The Depression and the Urban West Coast*, 75; details about the Salvation Army lodging house capacity is gleaned from photograph captions in the “Society and Culture Collection,” ph608.4, University of Washington, Special Collections, Digital Collections; for Los Angeles, see Chester Hanson, *Los Angeles Times*, February 4, 1932, A3.

if they did not pay wages to workers. Besides, a paying job, they reasoned, would only provide further incentive to migrants contemplating a trip to the Pacific Coast.<sup>40</sup>

Figure 5.4 | Wood Yard Employment Site, ca. 1933



Source: University of Washington Digital Collections, Helping the Homeless Man Collection, K0184, Item no. 12-13.

As the economy worsened, city officials and business leaders called once again for tough enforcement of vagrancy laws and other measures. Able-bodied workers should be discouraged from collecting aid, said the president of the Chamber of Commerce. “Unless some definite steps are taken immediately this section [of California] will be deluged by these undesirable transients,” he said. The City of Los Angeles, working with the Chamber of Commerce developed “work tests” to force the idle and unemployed to seek work or leave

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<sup>40</sup> On state and municipal relief programs, see *Los Angeles Times*, December 18, 1932; Mullins, *The Depression and the West Coast*; and Kevin Starr, *Endangered Dreams*.

urban areas. Chamber of Commerce leaders met with the City Council in February 1932 to draft an ordinance that would require all charitable organizations to screen relief applicants. Even without City mandated standards, charitable organizations implemented their own work tests to determine applicants were deserving of food and lodging. The soup kitchen operating in Los Angeles's Plaza went so far as to bring a doctor to examine men in line to determine individuals' fitness for work and ferret out "moochers."<sup>41</sup>

As the influx of migrants stretched the limits of housing within the day labor districts, an explosion of improvised housing sprung up. With overcrowding and high costs of lodging houses in the day labor district, many sought more ephemeral living arrangements. Zacarias Manangan, a Filipino casual laborer, recalled sleeping in vacant houses and lots, unable to find space in a Seattle bunkhouse. Others scavenged for scrap lumber and drift wood to build their own small houses and huts. Shantytowns emerged along the shores of the Los Angeles River and tidal zones around San Francisco Bay and Puget Sound. These "jungle" encampments had been an omnipresent feature on the margins of the day labor district for several decades, but the need for housing vastly expanded these ephemeral locations. They also took on new meaning in the years of economic crisis as out of work residents renamed their dwellings "Hooverilles," poking fun at President Herbert Hoover's inaction.<sup>42</sup>

Built on the remains of the old Skinner and Eddy shipyard, Seattle's Hooverville was both a continuation of the city's longstanding laborer's geography, but in an extreme and mutated form. The shipyard had once been a bustling site of employment, and the flashpoint

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<sup>41</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, "Transient Law Wanted," February 18, 1932; *Los Angeles Times*, "Moocher Plan Drafted," February 13, 1932, A1; *Los Angeles Times*, "Plaza Kitchen to End As "Army" Dodges Jobs," March 17, 1932, 3.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Zacarias Manangan, Washington State Oral/Aural History Program, Washington State Archives, Olympia, Washington, 18; see also Christiana Gold, *Hooverilles: Homelessness and Squatting in California During the Great Depression* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

for the city's general strike in 1919. By 1931, the Hooverville was home to more than six hundred residents. Surrounded by warehouses, railroad switching yards, and the "beckoning lure" of skid road, as one observer commented, Seattle's Hooverville became an ad-hoc extension of the day labor district. The Los Angeles Hooverville emerged on a five-acre parcel of land just south of the city along Alameda Avenue. Residents forged structures from cardboard, tar-paper, and gathered wood, old trucks and buses, or tents. By the time health officials razed it in 1932, the site housed nearly seven hundred residents. But the Hooverville was only one of many spots around the city for such encampments like Marysville, Hooverville, Hovertown, Churchill, Angel City, and Tipperary. Even further on the urban margins, auto camps housed more migrants to the Pacific Coast. The geography of day labor had always been somewhat fluid and fragile, but the size and scope of Seattle's Hooverville suggests the changes brought on by the Great Depression. Ephemeral housing was a permanent fixture of the casual labor economy, but the Great Depression projected it into a new dimension.<sup>43</sup>

### **Competition and Cooperation**

Confronted by a flood of new jobseekers, failing urban infrastructure, and resurgent employers, casual workers faced a difficult choice between competition and cooperation. Economic uncertainty provided few allies. Organized labor continued to view casual laborers as a reserve pool of replacement workers, or scabs. In the face of exclusion and isolation, at least some chose a path of solidarity and mutualism, and in the process, touched off a new wave of labor activism within the casual labor economy.

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<sup>43</sup> Matthew Klinge, *Emerald City: An Environmental History of Seattle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) 197-200; Donald Francis Roy, "Hooverville: A Study of a Community of Homeless Men in Seattle," (M.A. Thesis, University of Washington, 1935), chapter 3; Steve Harvey, "Hooverville – Refuge for L.A.'s Homeless in Depression Years" *Los Angeles Times*, June 15, 1987, c1.

Unemployed workers like Ed Paulsen, Jesus Lopez, and William Bloch found it difficult to locate allies during the Great Depression, especially from the few remaining sectors of the casual labor economy that remained unionized. Concerned with their own flagging influence, workers in the building trades, along with teamsters, and sailors, viewed casual workers with suspicion and hostility. After a decade of anti-radical purges and pro-business conservatism, the first year of the Great Depression was the nadir of the labor movement. Throughout that period, discussed in chapter four, the American Federation of Labor offered very little support. As the jobless crowded outside of labor offices and joined the shape-up, union workers felt more and more vulnerable. As one sailor put it, “those of us who are fortunate enough to be on the job are slave to fear of the specter of the unorganized mob which is begging to jump into our places regardless of wages and conditions.” Indeed, the wharves and employment offices were filled with crowds of increasingly desperate workers. Describing the labor movement on the eve of the Great Depression, historian Dana Frank suggests that at each turning point the AFL, “redefined solidarity to include fewer and fewer members of the working class... and vitiated the movement’s ability to counter employer’s assaults.” The years from 1929 to 1933 were no exception.<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, the interests of organized labor clashed with those of casual workers and the unemployed on a number of fronts. Public relief programs were one arena. Union federations actively opposed many of the earliest programs for work relief along the Pacific Coast. In 1931, when the California’s State Unemployment Commission proposed a number of new jobs programs to alleviate poverty, it drew immediate fire from the unions that represented the building trades and other construction workers. Among the proposals, the

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<sup>44</sup> “Marine Workers Face a Crisis,” *Industrial Worker*, October 17, 1931; Dana Frank, *Purchasing Power*, 15.

Commission suggested drawing back the length of the working day to six hours for all public workers and encouraged private employers to do the same in order to spread work to the needy. Others put forward money for labor camps and initiated public works projects for the unemployed. Union members challenged the proposals as yet another attempt to undercut wages and erode their membership roles. Testifying before California's Unemployment Commission, Paul Scharrenberg, secretary of the state's American Federal of Labor, contended that lower hours and lower wages would only perpetuate the economic crisis by undercutting worker's buying power. Another representative argued that cuts to the workday without equivalent raises "would mean pauperizing the entire working class." At the very least, appropriations for these programs would divert precious public funds through relief agencies, away from the established channels for union hiring. Instead, groups like the AFL and the Washington State Labor Council encouraged state agencies to couple any reduction in work hours with raises in wages in order to restore purchasing power.<sup>45</sup>

The fear that relief programs would cut into union power may have been well founded. When California opened its relief work camps in 1931, there was no provision for union membership or bargaining rights. In lieu of wages, the unemployed exchanged the construction of roads, campgrounds, and stringing telephone lines for lodging, food, and tobacco. The price of board and lodging were hardly the prevailing union wage rate. County governments followed suit. In 1931, Los Angeles County formed the County Employment Stabilization Bureau to locate work for the unemployed and assign them to county and city projects. Promising a flat rate of \$3.20 per day, the agency registered 200,000 workers

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<sup>45</sup> Carl Patterson, testimony appears in California State Unemployment Commission, *Abstract of Hearings on Unemployment Before the California State Unemployment Commission* (San Francisco: State Unemployment Commission, 1932) 98; Paul Scharrenberg, in California State Unemployment Commission, *Report and Recommendations*, 243; the subject of wage cuts and hours was routine topic in the pages of the *Washington State Labor News*, as in the case of February, 20, 1931.

within the first few months. Echoing the position of their counterparts in Washington State, the Los Angeles Central Labor Council vocally opposed the program. The low wage rate, they contended, would undercut wages and for union men to accept the rate, debasing their skilled knowledge. Moreover, the expansion of public works' programs cut into union employment. Suddenly, unions found their gains that had been established through years of negotiations and struggle were put into jeopardy.<sup>46</sup>

Unions further distanced themselves from casual laborers by seeking alliances with growers and business owners, rather than the unorganized. Throughout the postwar period, under the leadership of Samuel Gompers and his predecessor, William Green, the A.F.L. had pursued a policy of cooperation rather than confrontation. Just a year after the fall of the stock market, the A.F.L.'s chief proponent of labor-management accord, Geoffrey Brown, editorialized in the *Washington State Labor News* that "trade unions must cooperate actively with management to promote high productivity, elimination of waste, and low cost of production in organized establishments." In hopes of developing a political bloc with farmers and small businesses, the Federation had promised to discourage strike activity and keep a lid on antagonistic rhetoric. Local leaders obliged with the policy avoided stirring up trouble in any sectors of the economy that did not already have representation. Implicitly, that meant turning a deaf ear to the struggle of unskilled and unemployed workers.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> The County Employment Stabilization Bureau and the Central Labor Council's opposition is noted in Perry and Perry, *A History of the Los Angeles Labor Movement, 1911-1941*, 238-9. The A.F.L. position on these issues speaks to a larger policy choice of the national body to shun government involvement in the affairs of waged workers. The A.F.L. opposed measures designed to promote job security, like unemployment insurance between 1923 and 1932 in preference of direct dealing with employers. See David Montgomery, "Thinking about American Workers in the 1920s" *International Labor and Working Class History* 32 (Fall, 1987), 21.

<sup>47</sup> Geoffrey Brown, *Washington State Labor News*, August 30, 1930; Dana Frank suggests the union's conservative position was, in part, designed to generate support for the union label movement in Frank, *Buy American*, 102-110; on the A.F.L.'s policy of cooperation and appeasement, see Irving Bernstein, *The Lean Years: A History of the American Worker*, 34-36.

Guided by their belief in white supremacy of whiteness and concerned that immigration might contribute to the decline in organizing power, unions pushed measures to limit the employment of foreign workers for even temporary or seasonal labor positions. Local labor councils strenuously argued that American jobs be reserved for “American” workers, a code word for white. The *Washington State Labor News* informed its union readers that “unscrupulous employers in their selfish desire for cheap labor are replacing our workers with the ever available Filipinos and are thus further adding to the unemployed and subsequent destitution of our workers.” In August of 1932, the Seattle Labor Council debated a resolution to protest “the employment of Orientals in place of White people, who are walking the streets hungry.” The Council endorsed a number of other legislative initiatives, including “Filipino expulsion” and any measures designed “to cope with the influx of cheap Mexican labor.” Labor groups in California pursued their own anti-immigrant agenda. They threw their support behind the Alien Labor Act of 1931 in the hopes that the measure would limit immigrants’ access to jobs.<sup>48</sup>

A broader population of white casual laborers shared the vitriol that organized labor directed towards Filipinos and Mexicans. Many whites viewed immigrant workers as a foreign threat to the livelihood of native-born workers, whom they believed were more deserving. Coming on the heels of previous waves of Chinese, then Japanese immigration, Filipinos in the Pacific Coast labor market appeared like a third Asiatic invasion. Mexican immigrants presented similar concern. Laborers in Los Angeles eagerly adopted a threatening catchphrase that began among the ranks of organized labor: “Employ no Mexican while a white man is unemployed. Get the Mexican back into Mexico regardless by what

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<sup>48</sup> *Washington State Labor News*, October 17, 1930; Minutes, May 18, 1932, Box 8, King County Central Labor Council Records, University of Washington Special Collections; *Los Angeles Times*, “Illegal Alien Bar Sought,” January 13; *Los Angeles Times* Aug 24, 1931, A1; Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, 46.

means.” In a failing economy, white workers felt that jobs should be reserved primarily for citizens, rather than immigrants. A young farm worker in California expressed the sentiment of many white workers dislocated by the Great Depression: “You can’t get nothing to do unless you are a Filipino or native son” in California, he told an interviewer at a relief agency in Washington. Among this demographic, there was a presumptive link between race, citizenship, and jobs.<sup>49</sup>

These increasingly common sentiments of white supremacy gave way to instances of racialized violence. Confrontations, expulsions, and physical intimidation were hardly new to this economic sector. An unbroken chain of raids, expulsions, and revanchism stretched back to the nineteenth century along the Pacific Coast. The omnipresence of violence had kept workers of color from penetrating the most desirable occupational lines. As the labor market tightened, however, even the lowest paying jobs became sources of conflict. On the day of the stock market crash, a white mob in Exeter, California burned a work camp to the ground and beat fifty Filipino workers following an altercation in the city center. Just a few months later, violence broke out in the nearby city of Watsonville. Outraged by a sexually charged story that appeared on the front page of the local newspaper alleging sexual misdeeds of a white/Filipino couple, mobs attempted to shut down the local dance halls, squared off against crowds of Mexican and Filipino workers, and destroyed the sleeping quarters of immigrant workers. Fermin Tobera, a young migrant worker employed as a laborer at a local ranch died when vigilantes indiscriminately fired upon a laborer’s bunkhouse. The riots in Watsonville set off a rampage against Filipino workers throughout central California and beyond that lasted for months. White mobs acted against Filipino

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<sup>49</sup> Unnamed farm workers quoted in Webb, *Migratory Casual Laborer*, 95; Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, 46.

communities in Santa Cruz, Gilroy, San Jose, Fremont, and Oakland and San Francisco's day labor district, white men assaulted groups of Filipinos on the streets in three separate instances of January 1930.<sup>50</sup>

Many observers focused on the social, rather than economic, origins of racialized violence, but the competition between whites and Filipinos for work undoubtedly supplied the overarching context. Although the work was temporary and low paid, white transient laborers resented the presence of foreign workers in a time of growing economic pressure. In small towns, resentment was doubled, because white families with small farms relied upon seasonal work for other larger farms in their community. Competition for orchard work became particularly contentious. Stories in the *Exeter Sun* and *Stockton Record* pointed to the degradation of white labor in the face of "stoop labor," a lowered living standard, and competition with "Latin, Oriental, or African laborer(s)." In the face of such provocations, these accounts seemed to suggest, how else was white labor to respond? The majority of the labor press further rationalized the frustration of white casual workers. As the *Washington State Labor News* explained, the outbreak of violence in Exeter was due "primarily to the racial feeling of antagonism developed among the white laborers against the Filipino labors

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<sup>50</sup> On the systemic persecution of workers of color, see Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), Roger Daniels, *The Politics of Prejudice: The Anti-Japanese Movement in California and the Struggle for Japanese Exclusion* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999); Jean Pfaelzer, *Driven Out: The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans* (New York: Random House, 2007); Rick Baldoz, *The Third Asiatic Invasion: Migration and Empire in Filipino America, 1898-1946* (New York: NYU Press, 2011); California Department of Industrial Relations, *Facts About Filipino Immigration Into California* (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1930) 9. Anti-Filipino violence is well-documented in Cecilia Tsu, *Garden of the World: Asian Immigrants and the making of agriculture in California's Santa Clara Valley* (New York: Oxford, 2013) and Rick Baldoz, *The Third Asiatic Invasion: Migration and Empire in Filipino America, 1898-1946* (New York: New York University Press, 2011); Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) 137-141.

who were displacing them.” For many readers of these papers, the violence directed by white towards immigrants had to be understood in the face of competition and despair.<sup>51</sup>

The focal points for white violence offer further evidence for the economic context. Revanchists targeted the institutions that catered to Filipino migrant workers - dance halls and social clubs, bunkhouses, and places of employment. In one incident in Stockton, white revanchists threw a bomb through the window of the Filipino Federation of America, a local organization that provided a boarding house for Filipino itinerants, operated a dance hall, and was the frequent site of worker meetings. Farmers, ranch owners, and businesses that hired workers of color also became another focal point. In Watsonville, vigilantes posted a warning to local farmers to “GET RID OF ALL FILIPINOS OR WE’LL BURN THIS TOWN DOWN” and “WORK NO FILIPINOS OR WE’LL DESTROY YOUR CROP AND YOU TOO.”<sup>52</sup>

Pervasive, yet unorganized instances of revanchist violence gave way to more concerted and organized state-sponsored campaigns of exclusion. In California, state relief agencies began to target alien residents, particularly Mexican and Filipino immigrants, for exclusion. These groups were barred from receiving charitable support or assistance. The City of Los Angeles and the State of California both subsidized the train fares for any Mexican families that might want to return to their native country. These coercive policies were backed by the physical patrolling of the spanish-speaking colonias that surrounded the city center. Municipal authorities – health and sanitation inspectors as well as police officers

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<sup>51</sup> Bruno Lasker describes the response of local families in small towns to Filipino work force in, *Filipino Immigration to Continental United States and to Hawaii* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931); *Salinas Index-Journal*, 25 October 1929; *Washington State Labor News*, July 30, 1931.

<sup>52</sup> Baldoz, *Asiatic Invasion*, Chapter 4.

– patrolled these neighborhoods with extra vigilance, hoping to “encourage” Los Angeles’ Mexican residents to “voluntarily” deport themselves. Police officers also took a more active approach. On February 27, 1931, Los Angeles police officers descended upon the Plaza in the center of the city, blocked all the entrances, forced all the inhabitants to remain seated, and interrogated individuals about their legal residency in the United States. Unsatisfied by many of the individuals’ responses, and suspicious of their sympathies with Communist orators at the Plaza, many were detained. The raid on the Plaza was only one instance. By 1933, the repatriation efforts by local government had reached a high point. Thousands of Mexican and Mexican American residents were forced to leave Los Angeles or face rising levels of persecution.<sup>53</sup>

### **Cooperation Among Casual Labor**

Competition, reaction, and animus were endemic to the casual labor economy, but not ubiquitous. For some casual laborers, the Great Depression proved to be galvanizing moment. Between 1929 and 1933, workers in both the metropole and hinterland confronted the challenge of the Great Depression. A growing movement of unemployed casual workers asserted their power in the cities. Concomitant to this surge in the city, the agricultural workers mobilized their own action. While these forms of self-activity came as a surprise to many, they conformed to the changing landscape of the casual labor economy, particularly its growing inequity.

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<sup>53</sup> On repatriation, see in Abraham Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929-1939* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974); Francisco Balderama, *The Decade of Betrayal* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006); George Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).; and Camille Guerin Gonzales, *Mexican Workers and American Dreams: Immigration, Repatriation, and California Farm Labor, 1900-1939* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

## The Urban Unemployed Workers' Movement

In the city, casual workers found one outlet for their interests in the form of a rapidly growing unemployed workers' movement. In the spring of 1930, thousands of unemployed workers throughout the country staged rallies to protest rising unemployment and the lack of effective relief programs. Many of these protests coalesced around International Unemployment Day, an event organized by Communist Party activists in Chicago. Alongside Cleveland, Philadelphia, and New York City, the idea of a political movement of the unemployed found a particularly receptive audience in Pacific Coast cities. In San Francisco, two thousand marched through the streets to protest rising unemployment and the lack of a coordinated response from public officials. In Los Angeles, neighborhoods surrounding the day labor district became the proving ground for new forms of radical activism organized by the Communist Party. In Seattle, the radical Unemployed Councils were joined by the relatively conservative Unemployed Citizen's League (UCL), which claimed 12,000 members in their first year and 50,000 members by 1933.<sup>54</sup>

For young casual workers like Ed Paulsen, the wave of unemployed protest that engulfed the Pacific Coast was a powerful demonstration of working class power. Each morning, Paulsen recalled, he would leave the shape-up, filled with despair about the lack of work, but found inspiration in the emerging worker protests. "You'd drift up to Skid Row. There'd be thousands of men there. Guys on baskets, making weird speeches, phony theories on economics. About eleven-thirty, the real leaders would take over." The "real leaders,"

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<sup>54</sup>Mullins, *The Depression and the Urban West Coast*, 78. The Unemployed Workers' movement is discussed in Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) chapter 2. See also, Arthur Hillman, *The Unemployed Citizens' League of Seattle* (Seattle, Wash: University of Washington Press, 1934); Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Marc Horan-Spatz, "The Unemployed Councils of the Communist Party in Washington State, 1930-1935," accessed July 1, 2014, [http://depts.washington.edu/depress/unemployed\\_councils.shtml](http://depts.washington.edu/depress/unemployed_councils.shtml).

Paulsen referred to were the Communist leaders of the Unemployed Council who mobilized the workers along San Francisco's Market street in the call for more funding for jobs, better housing, and the end to the police department's persecution of homeless transient men. "This parade would be four blocks long, curb to curb. Nobody had a dime. There were guys on the corner trying to sell apples to this money-less wonder," he laughed. For Paulsen, the power and strength of the city's unemployed left an impression. "I remember as a kid how courageous this seemed to me, the demands, because you knew that society wasn't going to give it you."<sup>55</sup>

On the surface, the unemployed workers' movement appeared to be comprised of jobless professionals and previously stable regular worker. These are "citizens who work hard, raise families, buy homes and pay taxes... caught in the wreckage of a disordered system," described Hulet Wells, one of the founders of the UCL in Seattle. In Seattle, the Unemployed Citizens' League articulated their demands for an end to evictions and food for school children. The UCL also established a network of self-help groups throughout the city to harvest and distribute food. Los Angeles' hunger marches and "empty pot and pan" protests reflected the interest of the significant contingent of housewives and homemakers. In Los Angeles, the Unemployed Councils organizing strategy centered on organizing block-by-block.<sup>56</sup>

Despite their organizing strategy structure or the description of their leaders, however, the unemployed workers' movement drew substantial support from casual laborers. Faced with greater competition and less work, both migratory and homeguard workers turned

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<sup>55</sup> Interview with Ed Paulsen, in Terkel, *Hard Times*, 33.

<sup>56</sup> Hulet Wells is quoted in Hillman, "Unemployed Citizens' League of Seattle," 193; the organizing strategy of the Los Angeles Unemployed Council is described in Wild, *Street Meeting*, chapter 7.

to these political movements. In a sample taken in 1932 of 354 participants in Seattle's UCL, the majority described their primary occupations as that of carpenter, logger, fisherman, or some kind of common laborer in building construction. California's Unemployed Council revealed a similar composition. Testifying before the California State Unemployment Commission in 1932 on the subject of public relief, half of the representatives from the Unemployed Councils were self-described casual workers, including Martin Wilson, an unemployed harvest hand, Louis Freck, carpenter, Hazel Hayes, farm worker, and William Bloch, rancher, railroad hand, and "tramp." For these individuals, the purpose of the Unemployed Councils was closely linked to their work history. William Bloch came to the hearing to testify on behalf of the younger generation of tramp workers who, he feared, would be unable to find refuge by homesteading land or bailed out by the rise of new factories. "Do something so that the young men do not have to drown themselves for lack of food and clothing," Bloch implored. Louis Freck, an unemployed carpenter, came before the commission to convey the position of thousands of out of work building laborers. Young and unmarried, men like Freck had been barred from most forms of public relief, because they did not have to provide for children or wives. Why should he be left to starve, while the state and federal government devised assistance for the most stable and employed workers? Freck encouraged the panel to consider a state-wide tax on every employed person, in order to provide a minimum base income for those out of work or floating between jobs.<sup>57</sup>

The concerns of men like Bloch and Freck about the shrinking opportunities for an entire generation of casual laborers were amplified by the formal demands of the

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<sup>57</sup> Hillman, "Unemployed Citizens' League of Seattle," 268; California State Unemployment Commission, 155-171. The California State Unemployment Commission heard the testimony of nine individuals in total. see, California State Unemployment Commission, *Abstract of Hearings on Unemployment Before the California State Unemployment Commission*, 154-179.

unemployed workers' movement, which reflected many of the specific concerns of casual laborers. The UCL's call for a base minimum wage of \$4.50 and substantial investments in public works programs would have had broad appeal, but the most immediate beneficiaries of such funds would be construction laborers and those in the building trades. Some issues spoke to the concerns of casual laborers more specifically. In particular, the UCL's list of demands included an end to the city's use of contractors for city projects and the fair and equal distribution of work.<sup>58</sup>

For the Unemployed Councils in California, the construction of an economic safety net to protect the jobless became a central demand. The concept of an employer-funded pool of funds that could be tapped by workers pushed out of employment was certainly not new to the Great Depression. The idea had floated around since Progressive era, but had never found much traction. For casual workers, the benefits of unemployment insurance were obvious. A modest income between jobs would be a tremendous boon for those that struggled to connect employment consistently throughout the year. Equally, such a system would encourage employers to smooth out their hiring practices throughout the year. The concern about labor turnover was a particularly salient issue for workers, who not only fought against seasonal swings in employment, but employers also other forms of corruption. A tax on employers would encourage employers to maintain more regularity in their workforce and end the capricious practice of using the threat of hiring and firing to stifle dissent and enforce discipline on the job.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> The demands are detailed in Hillman, "Unemployed Citizens' League of Seattle," 36.

<sup>59</sup> Support for unemployment insurance among casual workers in California is evident in California State Unemployment Commission, *Reports and Recommendations*. On the history of unemployment insurance, see Michael Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1996); Daniel Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

The unemployed workers use of public space as a site for protest also reflected a long running concern of casual laborers. Soapboxing and public speaking had been a central tactic for the IWW and Socialist Party throughout the 1910s and 1920s. It had been anger over employment agency fees that had touched off the Wobbly free speech fights in the 1910s. Protests organized by the Unemployed Councils drew large crowds to city hall, private charities, and notably, public employment offices. In Los Angeles and the Bay Area, demonstrations turned violent, as Communist organizers openly confronted police officers who sought to impose order with clubs and tear gas. Even for Seattle's UCL, which favored an agenda of reform and electoral politics over confrontational street fighting, saw the value of large gatherings in public spaces. As the Great Depression worsened, Seattle-ites increasingly turned out to protest the city government's refusal to sponsor comprehensive relief. One rally outside of City Hall in February, 1931 attracted hundreds to hear the demands for enlarged public works, food for children, and the end to labor agents' profiteering. Subsequent protests included the occupation of the County and City offices. The presence of thousands of angry workers, crowded onto the steps and sidewalk in front of City Hall must have been reminiscent of the city's General Strike in 1919.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Wild, *Street Meeting*, 189-190; "Jobless Will Visit Martin to Ask New County Aid Group," *The Seattle Times*, February 15, 1933, 5.

**Figure 5.5 | Labor Rally of Unemployed Persons at the City Hall Park, Seattle, Washington, February 10, 1931.**



Source: James P. Lee Photograph Collection, PH Coll 294, University of Washington Special Collections.

One of the most remarkable features of the unemployed workers' movement was its embrace of multiracial organizing. Unlike the more conservative mainstream of the labor movement, political organizations associated with the American Left showed a strong commitment to explicitly anti-racist organizing principles. It can be difficult to tease out the relationship between Communist Party rhetoric and the actual experience on the ground. In the case of the unemployed workers' movement, multiple pieces of evidence suggest a *bona-fide* commitment to racial equality in each of the three cities. In Seattle, the movement's unofficial publication, *The Vanguard*, featured stories about the harassment of Filipino workers at the hands of local whites in rural towns around the Puget Sound along with encouragement for their political activities. Filipinos, it wrote, are encouraged "to demand fair wages and conditions of employment and to defend themselves and secure redress from brutal attacks of white thugs." At a rally for the Unemployed Citizens' League outside Seattle's City Hall in a 1931, placards and posters called for an end to evictions and food for children, but also "Equal Rights For Negroes" [sic] and "Equal Rights For All Workers." [See

Figure 5.5] The unemployed movement in San Francisco made their own commitment to multiracial organizing. A handbill announcing a Hunger March down Market Street in San Francisco organized by the Unemployed Councils demanded that “Negroes, Mexican, Filipino, Foreign born, Transient, Youth, and Single workers” should receive equal access to public relief and called for an end to housing discrimination. Ed Paulsen recalls the multiracial character of protest rallies in San Francisco at this time. Los Angeles showed the strongest commitment to anti-racist organizing, no doubt a reflection of the diverse membership of unemployed activists in the city’s urban core.<sup>61</sup>

### **Wildcat Strikes in the Hinterland**

In the summer of 1930, several spontaneous and short-lived labor strikes broke out on farms in the Green River Valley, just a few miles south of Seattle. They did not make the newspaper and few historical accounts exist of these incidents. Brief in length, lacking the support of any larger organization, and non-specific in their demands these job actions were doomed to failure. Like the tip of an iceberg, however, the full size and significance of a labor strike is always partially hidden from view. For the largely Filipino workforce in the agricultural truck farms of this area, their sights were set on greater organizing pastures. Ponce Torres, one of the chief instigators, explained the purpose of the Green River walkouts as “the most effective way of gaining members to the secret organization that we were planning.” Strikes in the Green River valley were designed to lay the groundwork for the coming struggle in the Alaskan canneries later that season. From their apartment in Seattle’s

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<sup>61</sup> “Hunger March: all out semptember 12, 1932” (San Francisco: Hunger March Conference: Workers Ex-Servicement’s League, 1932); Interview with Paulsen, in Terkel, *Hard Times*; and Mark Wild, *Street Meeting*.

day labor district, Torres and his friends began to utilize the network that existed within the casual labor economy to agitate for better wages, working conditions, and dignity.<sup>62</sup>

The context for all this planning and strategy was undoubtedly the Great Depression. Ponce Torres came to the United States via Seattle in 1925. Like many casual laborers, he traveled the well-etched labor circuit from Alaska to Los Angeles for five years. His stories of casual work are typical. He had worked difficult jobs for little pay and at the end of his contract found his wages absconded by labor agents. Ponce Torres and his friends had objected to conditions in the fields and canneries before, only to find “it was a difficult for us to get a job again... the following year because they don’t like people complaining.” When he recalled his work history to an oral history interviewer more than forty years later, Torres remembered that it did not seem bad at first, saying simply, “we did not know the difference.” While the casual labor economy had never been particularly stable or remunerative, the collapse of the American economy in 1929 put those conditions into sharp relief. Faced with declining wages and surrounded by growing unemployment, he and his compatriots came to question those conditions. “We found out that it could be better,” he concluded. Workers themselves attributed their organizing to the particular effects of the Great Depression. As Torres recalled, “the organization of the union came faster when we were hit by Depression. There was no job, we were not doing much, except we got all the time to meet together and plan something to improve ourselves.” Torres was not the only casual migratory laborer to express this kind of sentiment.

Mindful of their precarious and contingent situation, organizing among casual workers was often conducted quietly and clandestinely. For Ponce Torres and his fellow

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<sup>62</sup> Interview with Ponce Torres, Washington State Archives, Bicentennial Oral History Project, 9-11. The short-lived organization came to be known as the Filipino Laborers Association. See Mejia and King 13-15; and Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor*, 135-7.

conspirators in the fields south of Seattle, the union agenda was always “sub rosa.” Filipino workers were well aware of the kinds of repressive tactics employed by labor contractors and employers. Blacklists and physical intimidation were common features of work in the canneries and fields. They formed small caucuses, resembling affinity groups, and comprised only a dozen or so members. “People who joined it [the union] were very discreet,” he recalled,” so the company was caught completely by surprise.”

The secrecy of Filipino cannery and agricultural workers mirrors the organizing tactics in other industries. Maritime workers had their own experience with employer reprisals. While a small cadre of devoted activists associated with the Marine Workers Industrial Union were more vocal, on the wharfs, longshore workers were more cautious. Brother Hackett, a longshoreman in San Francisco, recalled the balance of tension and secrecy that governed the docks in the early thirties. “I had a feeling there was something going on,” he said, “with a few whispers here, a little group there. Hackett approached his coworkers and inquired about the cabal: “I got ‘em to confess: There was a union in the offing. You think I wasn’t going to jump for it? I said, “Sign me up!”<sup>63</sup>

While the spontaneous strikes that occurred in the Green River Valley were among the earliest iterations, the deepening of the Great Depression brought more job actions. In January 1930, roughly five thousand workers walked away from the lettuce fields in California’s Imperial Valley to protest allegations that labor contractors had stolen their wages. Later than year, sawmill workers in Oregon and Washington staged a number of wildcat strikes over wage cuts and restricted hours. Fishermen joined in protests that stretched from Seattle to Alaska. Employing rhetoric that now appears remarkably prescient,

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<sup>63</sup> Interview with Brother Hackett, in Harvey Schwartz, *Solidarity Stories: An Oral History of the ILWU* (Seattle: University of Washington, 183.

one observer described the sawmill strikes thusly: “The whole audience appeared fired with a determination to sweep out present-day unemployment with a new deal.” By 1931, the number of longshore workers willing to openly express their support for the union had reached critical mass. The pages of the *Washington State Labor News* reported on the upsurge in organizing. Workers on the docks were “conducting an aggressive organizing campaign” and union local 3812, which had struggled through the Depression “had tripled their membership in a two month period.” The bulk of their organizing, noted the article, “had remained in the background for a considerable time.”<sup>64</sup>

Job actions of this kind were hardly contained to the Pacific Coast. The whole nation was wracked by labor strikes. Textile workers in Pennsylvania, Cigar workers in Tampa, and coal miners Ohio walked off the job. When hosiery workers struck out in North Carolina, Governor Max Gardner expressed the surprise and disbelief of many as workers staged unexpected job actions through the textile mills of the South:

This outburst at Highpoint and Thomasville was almost spontaneous and spread like the plague.... This thing burst forth from the nervous tension of the people who have lost and lot and many of whom are now engaged in the battle for the bare necessities of life.

The wave of wildcat strikes during the first three years of the Great Depression were notably ineffective in accomplishing their short term goals. Worker demands were often met with rejection and repression. In the case of the Ohio coal miners, the confrontation was among the bloodiest in American history. But after a decade of inaction, at least some portion of the labor movement seemed to have its legs again.

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<sup>64</sup> These early wildcats strikes are poorly documented and rarely appear in the historiography. The *Washington State Labor News* and *Industrial Worker* both offer some discussion of the conflict between Filipino workers and native white workers. Sawmill strikes appear in Robert Eicken, *Forested Land* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987) 189; *Washington State Labor News*, February 6, 1931

Several new conditions motivated and enabled this wave of labor strikes. The re-emergence of an activist labor Left, in the form of the Communist Party (CP), was one catalyst. In the repressive atmosphere of the 1920s, many radicals had quietly retreated from public life. Others continued their activism, quietly “boring from within” among the ranks of the mainstream labor movement. For many more, revolutionary ideology lost its currency during a decade of relative prosperity. But the collapse of the economy drew many radicals out of hiding and energized many new participants in the party. One former machinist described his process of radicalization and involvement in the labor movement before the California State Unemployment Commission:

Have you ever been idle when you had no desire to do so? It’s nothing short of a plague. Let me tell you, I had little patience with people who seemed radical, revolutionary; but those thoughts force themselves upon you when you sit at home, income cut off and demands for food, clothing, and shelter remain the same....<sup>65</sup>

CP organizers had quietly entered California’s agricultural fields as early as 1928, but waited until 1929 to formally announce their presence with the formation of the Agricultural Workers league (AWIL). The Communist Party cultivated the support of their working class base through a number of brief labor strikes in the following years. Eventually, the AWIL emerged into the much larger Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union in 1931. In both organizations, CP members proved themselves to be adept organizers willing to engage in confrontation. Unlike the ill-fated efforts of the A.F.L., the CP seemed to better understand the lay of the land and the needs of the workers they represented.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> California State Unemployment Commission, *Report and Recommendations*, 109.

<sup>66</sup> On the influence of the Communist Party in organizing agricultural workers, see Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*; Mitchell, *Lie of the Land*; Benny J Andrés, *Power and Control in the Imperial Valley: Nature, Agribusiness, and Workers on the California Borderland 1900-1940* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2015).

The CP had a talent for organizing, but their effort was certainly aided by a widespread proclivity for activism among the rank and file. Even during the largest strikes, CP members comprised only a very small number in the fields, when compared to the thousands of laborers. Mexican workers, the largest contingent of striking workers in California, had ample previous experience with fiery rhetoric and rallying cries. Many had lived through the Mexican Revolution and were versed in the history of radical transborder activism of the 1910s. As Paul Taylor described the strikes that gripped the Imperial Valley in 1933, and the participation of Mexican workers in particular, the message of the strike “appealed to a class of workers with adequate experience to vivify the charges hurled by Communist leaders, and rendered exposition of the theories of Karl Marx superfluous.”<sup>67</sup>

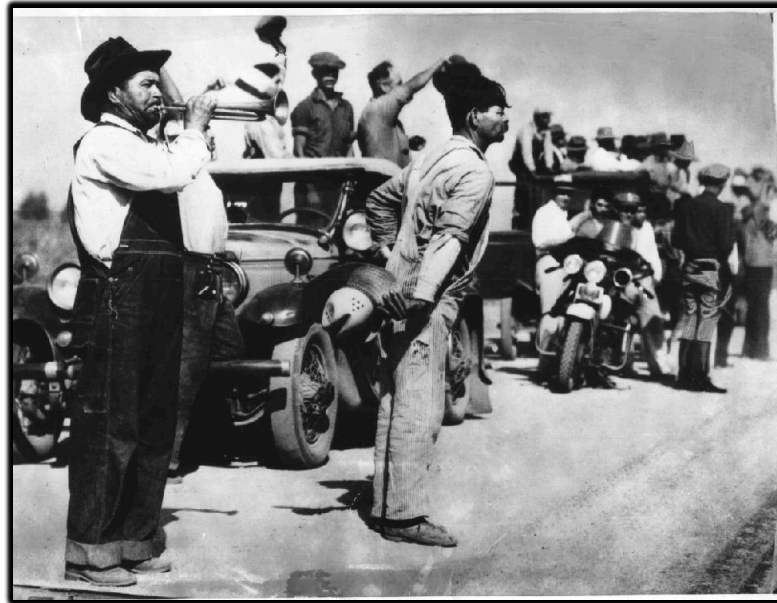
New forms of mobility also gave striking workers independence from growers, ranchers, and the labor contractor. By the late 1920s, automobiles and trucks had replaced the riding the rails as the preferred method of transportation for migrant workers following the jobs from California to Washington. Most of the region’s agricultural fields had become accessible by the state highways constructed shortly after World War I. While some old guard Wobblies lamented the passing of rail travel, which had been one of their standard organizing strategies, car travel had its own distinct advantages. For one, laborers no longer depended upon labor contractors for transportation to various worksites. Rather than wait on a street corner or isolate themselves at a rural worksite, they could locate their own employers and deal with them directly. In places like California’s San Joaquin Valley, car travel allowed workers to come and go with relative ease, unlike their counterparts who arrived by rail, foot, or horse-drawn wagon who traveled for weeks to arrive at their

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<sup>67</sup> On the role of Communist Party organizers in agricultural strikes during the 1930s, see Devra Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold*. Paul Taylor, “Documentary History of the Strike of the Cotton Pickers in California 1933,” in *On the Ground in the Thirties* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1983) 17.

destination. The enhanced mobility of the worker only fueled the existing complaints of growers, who viewed this population as rootless and unreliable. Union organizers also discovered the usefulness of cars during the early agricultural strikes in California. The sprawling acreage of an agricultural field was much harder to contain with a picket line. Trucks and cars allowed striking pea and cotton pickers to patrol the perimeter of a farm and badger replacement workers from all sides. Known as “flying squads” or “flying caravans,” this form of moving picket line became an effective staple of agricultural strikes throughout the 1930s. [See Figure 5.6] The automobile became such a permanent fixture of life for agricultural workers on strike in the 1930s, labor groups began laying out strike camps with makeshift streets.<sup>68</sup>

**Figure 5.6 | Pickets on the highway calling workers from the fields, 1933 cotton strike.**



Source: University of California, Berkeley, Bancroft Library, International News Photo Collection

<sup>68</sup> Tim Creswell notes the lamentation of wobbly organizers about the decline of rail travel, in Creswell, *The Tramp in America*. (London:Reaktion Books, 2004) 196; the rise of automobile use among transient workers is also described in Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold*, 42-3; Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 183.

Workers' early Depression-era strikes were notable not only for their spontaneity, but also their independence. Few of these confrontations could be predicted by a period of politicking or bargaining. Just like striking textile workers in North Carolina, the spark of labor activity seemed to "burst forth" without warning or notice. Part of their spontaneity was due to their informal structure. Contingent and migrant workers found little support from a diminished and defensive labor movement and took it upon themselves to force the hand of employers. Indeed, the upsurge of protest was the product of workers own self-activity. In the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, organized labor strikes were the territory of formal labor unions. During these decades, the vast majority (between 90 and 98 percent) of all labor strikes in the United States were associated with a labor unions, namely local affiliates of the A.F.L. Beginning in 1927, a growing percentage of labor strikes had no affiliation to a labor union at all. By 1933, more than one-fifth of all labor strikes in the nation were independent. [See Table 5.4]

In all likelihood, the number of independent strikes was even greater than the statistics reveal. Wildcat strikes were almost impossible for the federal government to track reliably, particularly if they only lasted for one or two days, or a few hours. Striking agricultural workers in the Green River Valley, for example, did not register anywhere in the formal accounting of labor strikes published by the Department of Labor. Moreover, unions often moved to incorporate unaffiliated groups of workers in the middle of a strike, thus rendering it "union involved," according to the definition established by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Nonetheless, the trend line suggests a growing energy among the working class, and that this restlessness took place outside the sectors traditionally represented by labor

unions. That was certainly true in California’s agricultural sector, as well as the Alaskan canneries.<sup>69</sup>

**Table 5.4 | Labor Strikes in the United States**

Year	Total Number of Work Stoppages	Percentage of Strikes without Union Involvement
1927	707	9.7
1928	604	10.2
1929	921	15.7
1930	637	14.3
1931	810	17.5
1932	841	15.3
1933	1695	20.9
1934	1856	6.5
1935	2014	8

Source: Adapted from Edwards, *Strikes in the United States, 1881-1974* 140 and Historical Statistics, “Work Stoppages,” 71.

Two years of agitation and quiet organizing in the casual labor economy erupted in 1933. That spring, California was seized by the largest agricultural strike wave in its history. The number of work stoppages tripled. In other parts of the country, the energy of autoworkers, meatpackers, and steelworkers suggests the national prevalence of unionism during this period. But on the Pacific Coast, it was the casual laborers who led the way. In El Monte, 50,000 workers went on strike in nearly every agricultural industry from peas to berries. Later that summer, apple pickers in Yakima threatened the year’s harvest when they walked off the job. Just south of Seattle, the independent Farm Laborers Union oversaw a strike of seven hundred Filipinos, their largest concerted action to date. Between 1933 and 1935, every industrial sector of the casual labor economy was hit by a strike, among the most

<sup>69</sup> Florence Peterson, *Strikes in the United States, 1880-1936*, 651 (US Government Printing Office, 1938).

notable were longshoring, timber, cannery work, and shipbuilding. Set in national context, these strikes constitute part of a much larger rise in union activity during the interwar period, which saw the rise of the Congress of Industrial Organizations and the reassertion of the American Federation of Labor. But the labor activity along the Pacific Coast during the first three years of the Great Depression stand out as some of the earliest and the most radical instances of that strike wave.<sup>70</sup>

### **Conclusion**

By the fall of 1933, the landscape of the casual labor economy on the Pacific Coast had changed dramatically. The labor supply had stretched to include a large number of native-born white workers dislocated by the Great Depression, in the process pushing out many workers of color. The urban machinery that supported this mobile and contingent workforce had collapsed under the load. And employers attempted to redraw the rules about wages and working conditions, to their advantage and profit. In a matter of three years, the Great Depression transformed some of the casual labor economy's most enduring features.

In response to these changes, workers in the casual labor economy asserted themselves in powerful and unexpected ways. Attempting to capture the size and scope of the 1933 Cotton Strike in California's San Joaquin Valley, ethnographer and economist Paul Taylor employed the metaphor of an earthquake: "[a]s the faulting of the earth exposes its strata and reveals its structure, so a social disturbance throws into bold relief the structure of society, the attitudes, reactions, and interests of its groups." Taylor's description could be generalized within the casual labor economy more broadly. In the years that followed the

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<sup>70</sup> The 1933 strike wave in California agriculture is well-documented. Daniel's *Bitter Harvest* remains authoritative. See also Ronald Lopez, "The El Monte Berry Strike of 1933," *Aztlan* 1 (1970): 101-115.

crash of the stock market, casual laborers in both urban and rural contexts sought to develop a new set of political tools. The nascent unemployed workers' movement pressured public officials to respond more actively to the needs of the working class, and casual laborers specifically. Agricultural workers rediscovered the power of the strike. By one estimate, the strike wave of 1933 in California involved nearly 50,000 workers, and threatened sixty-five percent of the state's agricultural industry.

Each labor strike during the early years of the Great Depression had its own narrative, but a common thread wound through many of the labor actions along the Pacific Coast during these years. Like all labor strikes, they targeted the issue of wages and working conditions. But alongside the bread and butter issues of labor organizing, a large number of these actions targeted the hiring process itself. When the San Joaquin Valley cotton workers delivered their demands to the growers, the list included higher wages and union recognition, but also an end to the system of labor contracting. That "ask" would be reiterated again and again, as each industry of the casual labor economy went on strike. For maritime workers, that meant the dissolution of company employment offices, the so-called fink halls, and the installment of union operated hiring halls. For cotton and lettuce workers, it meant replacing the labor contractor with an equitable state labor exchange. Salmon Cannery workers demanded an end to the serpentine network of subcontractors operating out of Seattle and San Francisco.

Activism on the farms and in the neighborhoods of the casual labor economy were a bellwether of things to come. The strike and protest wave of 1933 served as the prologue for an even larger series of actions the following year. Every sector of the casual labor economy began mobilizing in 1934. Since the 1880s, the tension between casual laborer and employer

had often boiled over into conflict. But the early 1930s marked a shift. For the first time, casual workers in a variety of industries challenged the supremacy of the employer in a coordinated, or at least simultaneous manner.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Paul Taylor, "Documentary History of the Strike of the Cotton Pickers in California 1933," in *On the Ground in the Thirties*, 17.

## Epilogue: Laboring for the Day

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At the nadir of the Great Depression, two labor strikes epitomized the trajectory of the Pacific Coast's casual labor economy during the decade after World War I. In October, 1933, ten thousand cotton pickers walked off the job in California's San Joaquin Valley demanding, among other things, recognition for their union and higher wages. The income of cotton pickers had been hard hit by the Great Depression. Since the stock market crash, they had seen their wages fall by seventy-three percent, from \$1.50 per hundred pounds in 1928 to just \$.40 in 1932. As the unemployed flooded into the agricultural sector, work became scarce. Informal negotiations between growers and the organization representing the workers, the Cannery and Agricultural Workers' International Union, had yielded little progress. After several months of organizing and growing confrontation, signs appeared on field gates around the San Joaquin Valley stating, "This Ranch is Under Strike." Striking workers staffed twenty-four hour picket lines at the entrances of the largest farms in the valley, threatening the viability of the cotton harvest. Rather than negotiate, growers lashed out. In the small town of Pixley, armed vigilantes fired upon unarmed picketers, killing two. Several days later, another picketer was shot and several more wounded. In all, more than 18,000 workers participated in the cotton strike that year, capping a long season of strikes in nearly every farm district of the state.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Details about the beginning of the strike, falling wages, and vigilante violence are noted in Raymond Berry, "The California Cotton Pickers Strike, 1933" Federal Writers' Project Source Material on Migratory Labor, District no. 8, BANC MSS C-R 2, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. On the Cotton Strike, see also Devra Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold: California Farm Workers, Cotton, and the New Deal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Paul Taylor, "Documentary History of the Strike of the Cotton Pickers in California 1933," in *On the Ground in the Thirties* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith

The following spring, Pacific Coast maritime workers paralyzed the shipping industry from Los Angeles to Seattle in a strike that lasted for nearly three months. Since the end of World War I, sailors and stevedores had worked either without any union representation or within employers' unions. As was the case for the cotton pickers, work conditions for those in the maritime industry had declined. Hours had become unpredictable and wages had declined significantly. The pace of work had increased to such a speed that many stevedores collapsed under exhaustion; some had heart attacks and died. Rising from a small cadre of radical agitators, the call for the reinstatement of the union gained momentum. By the fall of 1933, under a charter from the International Longshore Association, stevedores began to advocate for sweeping change on the docks. But as in cotton, shipping employers dug in their heels rather than negotiate. After several months of stalled discussion, stevedores and their allies in numerous other maritime trades set up pickets in May, effectively preventing the movement of cargo. When private security guards backed by local police officers attempted to forcibly open port facilities in July, 1934, violence erupted. Two workers were shot and killed in San Francisco, precipitating a general strike in the city for five days. In Seattle, police set up machine guns posts and made liberal use of tear gas on crowds of protestors, but were still unable to prevent workers from interrupting the function of the Port.<sup>2</sup>

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Books, 1983); and Don Mitchell *Lie of the Land: Migrant Workers and the California Landscape* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Accounts of the declining conditions on the waterfront appear in the interview with Brother Hackett, in Harvey Schwartz, *Solidarity Stories: An Oral History of the ILWU* (Seattle: University of Washington, 183). On the 1934 maritime strike, see "Waterfront Workers History Project," [http://depts.washington.edu/dock/34strike\\_intro.shtml](http://depts.washington.edu/dock/34strike_intro.shtml) (accessed March, 2015); Bruce Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990); and Howard Kimmeldorf, *Reds or Rackets?: the Making of Radical and Conservative Unions on the Waterfront* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

These two strikes reflect the lines of inquiry pursued in this dissertation. The years between World War I and the Great Depression marked a period of (re)definition and change for the political economy of the Pacific Coast. Seeking to rapidly develop the region's material wealth, employers built a labor force defined by contingency and flexibility. These arrangements dominated hiring in not just stevedoring or cotton picking, but constituted an entire political economy of labor along the Pacific Coast during this period. Tens of thousands of workers filled out the ranks of the contingent labor force, comprising nearly one-third of all those employed. Many of them came from Europe during the immigration boom of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Others arrived from Latin America and the Philippines, dislocated by an expanding American empire, and desperate to find remunerative work. Whether they obtained their jobs through a labor contract, word of mouth, or in the morning shape-up, it was always precarious and subject to the whim of the employer.

Although they both emerged out of a shifting political economy, the ultimate outcome of these two strikes stood in stark contrast: striking maritime workers won significant gains and built some of the most enduring labor unions in the nation, while agricultural workers forced few concessions and, to date, remain the most marginalized sector of the American working class. This dissertation opened with vignettes of two individuals who labored in these industries - Trinidad Vega in cotton and Harry Lundeberg in the maritime trades. The fortunes of these two men diverged sharply in the middle of the 1930s. One exited the Great Depression as an icon of American labor. The other has largely been lost to the back pages of history. The origin of that divergence was located not in the specificity of agricultural and maritime work, nor the economic

collapse of the Great Depression, but in the significant shift in political economy during the earlier decade. In the decade after World War I, the casual labor economy developed as a distinct form of racialized capitalism, reliant upon contingent forms of labor and the steady flow of workers to the region. That reliance upon a distinct working class demography served as a lightning rod for concerns about race and radicalism in the region and created the conditions for widespread protest and federal action in the early 1930s, as embodied by these two labor strikes.

The intense labor conflict that emerged during the early years of the Great Depression forced the federal government to grapple once again with the labor question – who would do the work and at what cost? For New Deal legislators struggling to respond to the economic crisis, employers' insistence upon flexible, migratory, and contingent forms of labor was simply untenable. For a decade or more, concern had been rising about the growing number of casual laborers. Among scholars and public officials, this category of worker was believed to be the source of labor militancy and instability. Both the urban zones they inhabited and their labor peregrinations constituted a threat to social order and racial homogeneity. The growing number of Filipino and Mexican immigrants, they believed, were proving difficult to incorporate into the body politic. White workers had expressed their own anger at laboring side-by-side with Filipino and Mexican workers and had gone to great measures to exclude them from their union. By the early 1930s, the Pacific Coast had become a wellspring of radical labor agitation, particularly in industries defined by precarity and contingency. For politicians, the growing number of strikes throughout the country not only jeopardized any plan for economic recovery, but threatened social order. What measures could be taken to bring stability to these labor

markets? How should New Deal policy address the growing radicalism among casual migratory workers along the Pacific Coast? Would policymakers protect all workers equally? These concerns would drive federal labor policy in the years of the New Deal.<sup>3</sup>

In the face of labor militancy, architects of the New Deal sought to restructure the labor markets of the Pacific Coast, with the goal of regularizing employment and substantially reducing the contingency of labor. That approach had three prongs. The first mobilized massive economic stimulus to save American workers from the worst contingencies of unemployment and stabilize wages and prices. Notable among these early programs were the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and Federal Transient Program, both enacted during Roosevelt's active First One Hundred Days. Over the course of its nine-year existence, the CCC employed 2.5 million young men throughout the United States on public projects like road construction, reforestation, flood control, and fire suppression, drawing them out of cities and relieving the stress on urban day labor districts. The CCC's counterpart, the Federal Transient Program, built a national network of shelters and work camps to provide immediate relief for the unemployed. These programs met criticism. Organized labor criticized the low wages paid by federal jobs programs; workers complained about poor administration; and the transient program, in particular, became a lightning rod for concerns that federal programs would encourage dependency upon federal hand outs and promote social behaviors deemed to be undesirable, like same-sex relationships. Nonetheless, these programs along with the

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<sup>3</sup> On New Deal labor policy, see Steve Fraser, "The 'Labor Question,'" in Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) 55-84; Ruth O'Brien, *Workers Paradox: The Republican Origins of New Deal Labor Policy, 1886-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013) 227-275; and Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

many other iterations that followed, reduced the unemployment rolls and proved immensely popular with the public-at-large. But these initiatives were merely bandage approaches to more systemic problems of economic inequality and the lack of stable employment.<sup>4</sup>

The second prong sought to smooth seasonal hiring and reduce labor precarity through regulation and the creation of new governmental bodies. The Reemployment Agreement of 1933 encouraged employers to guarantee full working hours to their employees, rather than rely upon a large number of part-time employees and established the first federal minimum wage. That same year, the National Recovery Administration set price controls in many of the industries that relied upon seasonal and contingent work to support higher wages and abolished some of the most abusive employer practices, like payment in scrip wages. The following year, Congress strengthened the regulation of construction contracts governing public works projects to ensure that laborers received the region's prevailing wage, a significant gesture towards the building trades. Later policies, part of the FDR's Second New Deal, continued to encourage the regularization of employment. The most notable of these was the establishment of the Social Security Administration 1935, which provided not only a safety net for the aged and poor, but also established the foundation for the federal unemployment insurance system. For workers, unemployment insurance offered a bridge between layoffs, but the system also discouraged employers from using layoffs and rehires as a workforce strategy. Funded by taxes on the employer, and adjusted according to an employer's rate of turnover, the program penalized those who routinely hired and fired workers. This had been a central

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<sup>4</sup> On New Deal Jobs programs, see Kevin Starr, *Endangered Dreams in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

demand of the Unemployed Councils that had emerged in 1930, particularly among its constituency of casual laborers.<sup>5</sup>

The third prong of New Deal labor policy aimed to stabilize and regularize contingent labor through support for unionization and labor organizing. In June of 1933, Congress passed the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA). Buried within pages of new legislation concerning working hours and conditions, prices, and loans for employment programs, Section 7a of the Act endorsed workers' "right to organize and bargain collectively." It guaranteed that union organizers would be "free from the interference, restraint, or coercion" and barred employers from using company unions to thwart independent organizations. The promise of collective bargaining without intimidation struck directly at employers' most powerful tool of control. Complaints about safety, talk of a union, or merely slow work could result in a spot on the blacklist. For decades, employers had maintained artificially high rates of turnover to trim their costs, push high rates of productivity, and manage dissent. In 1935, the federal government strengthened and codified its support for collective bargaining rights with the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (NLRA). Among its many effects, the NLRA gave teeth to earlier expressions of support for unions by establishing procedures for union voting, building a framework for collective bargaining, and outlining the sanctions that would be imposed upon employers who intimidated organizers. This broad expansion of

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<sup>5</sup> On the New Deal's many new regulations and administrative agencies, see Robert McElvaine, *The Great Depression: America, 1929-1941* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1993). On the Pacific Coast and the Great Depression, see William Mullins, *The Depression and the Urban West Coast, 1929-1933* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

labor law remains the most extensive endorsement of worker's rights in American history.<sup>6</sup>

The protections and benefits bestowed by the New Deal upon workers, however, did not extend throughout the entire casual labor economy. While drafts of the NLRA did not discriminate between sectors of the economy, the final version featured a narrow exemption for “any individual employed as an agricultural laborer” or “in the domestic service of any family or person at his home.” The chief sponsor, Robert Wagner feared that without these exceptions, the Act would lose the support of Southern Democrats, an important constituency of the New Deal coalition. On the Pacific Coast, that exception applied to nearly a half million workers, and fell disproportionately upon workers of color, specifically Mexican and Filipino laborers working in the agricultural fields of California. Exclusion from the NLRA was only the first of many instances in which agricultural workers would be denied access to New Deal benefits. The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, which established the first minimum wage and required employers to pay overtime, included the same exceptions for farm labor. The Agricultural Adjustment Act, Farm Labor Security Act, and the Social Security would all contain similar provisions.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The many intersections between the New Deal and casual labor economy remains unexplored in any systematic way, though its effects on the labor movement more broadly is explored in Irving Bernstein, *The Turbulent Years: A History of the American Worker, 1933-1941* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2010); David Brody, *Workers in Industrial America: Essays on the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Struggle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); and Lichtenstein, *State of the Union*.

<sup>7</sup> Text of the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 is available through the National Labor Relations Board: <http://www.nlr.gov/resources/national-labor-relations-act> (accessed: July 30, 2014). Railroad workers were also exempted from the Act, but they were already protected under an earlier piece of legislation. The NLRA's exemption, both its origin and effect, has been extensively discussed. See, Lee Alston, *Southern Paternalism and the American Welfare State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Robert Lieberman, *Shifting the Color Line: Race and the American Welfare State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); and Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold*; and Juan Perea, “Echoes of Slavery: Recognizing the

In addition to the exclusion from federal regulations and benefits, Mexican and Filipino workers found themselves targeted by a number of other government policies. Municipal and state governments established prerequisites for public assistance, such as residency and citizenship requirements, to make it difficult for immigrants to collect charitable help. The City of Los Angeles selectively enforced health and sanitation laws and razed homeless camps in the Mexican neighborhoods that lined the Los Angeles River. Encouraging Filipinos to leave the Pacific Coast, Congress and the California Emergency Relief Agency offered one-way passage back to the Philippines under the Filipino Repatriation Act of 1935. Very few signed up for the program, because the federal government has instituted a quota limit that would bar them from ever returning. Collectively known as repatriation campaigns, these efforts were designed to drive immigrant workers back to their countries of origin. By one estimate, 50,000 Mexican immigrants and their children (many of them American citizens) left the city of Los Angeles during a five-month period in 1931. That amounted to nearly one third of the city's Mexican population. By the end of the decade, more than 400,000 Mexicans and Mexican Americans had left the inhospitable environment either voluntarily or through some form of physical coercion.<sup>8</sup>

What was the result of these mixed policy changes? Investment in public works projects, facilitation of union organizing, and exclusion of agricultural workers

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Racist Origins of the Agricultural and Domestic Worker Exclusion from the National Labor Relations Act,” *Ohio State Law Journal* 95 (2011) 100-133.

<sup>8</sup> On repatriation, see in Abraham Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929-1939* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974); Francisco Balderama, *The Decade of Betrayal* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006); George Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).; and Camille Guerin Gonzales, *Mexican Workers and American Dreams: Immigration, Repatriation, and California Farm Labor, 1900-1939* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

restructured the casual labor economy from top to bottom. The support of the federal government immediately lent confidence to the organizing workers like the nascent Filipino farmworker's union in Seattle. Emboldened by FDR's announcement, Ponce Torres described, "we started to campaign in the open and more workers begin to follow us." He and his friends "were not afraid to come to the open." For Henry Schmidt, news of the NIRA reached San Francisco's waterfront at an opportune time. He had been blacklisted by the shipping companies for instigating a wildcat strike on the Embarcadero just a few months earlier and eagerly sought the protections that a renewed International Longshoreman's Association might bring. As he recalled, "we didn't have to be pushed to get into that union. We knocked down the god darned doors."<sup>9</sup>

Men like Torres and Schmidt were at the leading edge of the largest union organizing drive in American history, which culminated in the formation of the Committee for Industrial Organization in the fall of 1935. By mid-1930s, reinvigorated maritime unions brought an end to the practice of the shape-up and seized control of the hiring process and timber workers mobilized their own industry-wide strike involving 30,000. Three years later, fishermen and salmon cannery workers each formed their own unions and signed contracts that secured substantial increases in wages and improvements to working conditions. Change was not reserved for semi-skilled or laborer positions. The federal government's actions reversed a downward trend in union representation in the trades and re-animated regional Labor Councils. In Los Angeles, despite the lack of any formal organizing campaign, workers spontaneously converged at the Labor Temple seeking to sign up for labor unions. In the month following the

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Ponce Torres, Washington State Oral History Program, August 25, 1975, 3; Interview with Henry Schmidt, by Estolv Ethan Ward, Secondary Leadership in the ILWU, 1933-1966 (Berkeley: Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, 1983) 36.

announcement of the NIRA, the Central Labor Council counted 6,000 new members, most of them in the building trades. A month and a half later, another 15,000 workers had joined. New Deal policies ensured that government agencies would recognize prevailing wage rates, made new commitments to shorter work hours, and eliminated the open-shop requirement of some public works programs. The number of workers represented by a labor union and protected by a contract rocketed up from fewer than three million in 1932 to nearly nine million in 1939. Much of that increase along the Pacific Coast came in industries once defined by contingent working arrangements.<sup>10</sup>

Yet, the exclusion of some portions of the contingent workforce from federal protection guaranteed that some sectors would remain unchanged. In the absence of federal protection, agricultural employers dug in their heels and refused to negotiate. The hard fought gains made by workers between 1929 and 1933 in berries, peas, and cherries proved to be ephemeral and illusory. The denial of collective bargaining rights permanently cemented farm work as the lowest tier of the economic ladder and the domain of workers of color. As Cletus Daniel has suggested, “whether they intended to do so or not, they [New Deal Policymakers] also legitimized a notion of agricultural exceptionalism that would serve for decades thereafter as an ideological rationale for denying farmworkers the rights afforded other workers.” This notion that agricultural labor somehow warrants separate, distinct, and ultimately unequal treatment in federal law has often been challenged but remains the law of the land to the present day.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> On the effect of the NIRA on unions in Los Angeles, see Louis B. Perry and Richard S. Perry, *A History of the Los Angeles Labor Movement, 1911-1941*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963) 247. The surge of union membership, see Bernstein, *The Turbulent Years*.

<sup>11</sup> See Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 262.

How shall we resolve these contrasting faces of New Labor policy - the promotion of labor rights for some and the exclusion of others? Many historians suggest that New Deal labor policy marks a bright moment in American labor history. They cite the rise of real wages, the formation of the middle class, and a long stretch of relative wage equality - what has come to be known as the “Great Compression.” CIO leader John Lewis likened the NIRA’s protections for labor organizing to both the Magna Carta and the Emancipation Proclamation. Perhaps unlike any other period in American history, they argue, the New Deal valorized work and enacted policies that reflected the interests of working class people. Taken in the context of this vast expansion of liberal rights, this collection of regulatory exclusions, repatriation campaigns, and the containment of radicalism were unfortunate footnotes to a period of liberal triumph. Ultimately, the treatment of farmworkers was an unfortunate exception or “unfulfilled promise” in the long arc towards justice and the American dream.<sup>12</sup>

In recent years, scholars have tempered and revised the predominant narrative of the New Deal as a moment of fundamental change. Indeed, New Deal reforms like the Social Security Act did substantially decrease poverty among the aged and the upsurge of unionism swelled the middle class. But as scholars like Ira Katznelson, Linda Gordon, Alice Kessler-Harris, Joe Trotter, and Camille Guerin-Gonzales have demonstrated, they hardly represented an economic and social transformation. Subsidies for home buying entrenched the economic advantage of the white middle class through redlining; social security and unemployment insurance fixed the male breadwinner as the conduit for social welfare; the notion of a fair and equitable social wage remained inextricably linked

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<sup>12</sup> This narrative of the New Deal as liberal promise is evident in Lichtenstein, *State of the Union*; and Philip Martin, *Promise Unfulfilled: Unions, Immigration, and the Farm Workers: Unions, Immigration, and the Farmworkers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Starr, *Endangered Dreams*.

to citizenship and paid work outside the home. As Katznelson convincingly argues, the New Deal amounted to one large policy of affirmative action for middle-class families, homeowners, and white male workers, in particular. Reforms aimed at stabilizing labor markets seem to fit that description quite well.<sup>13</sup>

The winners and losers of the New Deal reforms were determined by the (re)definition of work that occurred during the decade after World War I. Congressional action reified rather than challenged the perceived racial differences between workers like Harry Lundeberg and Trinidad Vega. The decision to exclude agricultural work from the NLRA was also backed by an apparatus of social investigation. For a decade or more, social scientist and public officials had developed a discourse that viewed immigrant workers as a separate and distinct population of contingent workers, in need of a separate and distinct solution. The working class identity, as built by many white laborers in the city also cemented those divisions. The A.F.L. and CIO made a short-lived effort to organizing packing shed workers, who were paradoxically covered by the NLRA, but abandoned their effort to assist field hands. The agricultural sector would perpetually find it difficult attract the support of large labor unions.<sup>14</sup>

The consequences of that divergence are written across the landscape of the Pacific Coast. Throughout the post-war period, western agriculture continued on its path

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<sup>13</sup> See, Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action was White: An Untold Story of Racial Inequality in the Twentieth-Century* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005); Linda Gordon, *Pitied but not entitled: Single mothers and the history of welfare, 1890–1935* (New York: Free Press, 1994); Joe Trotter, *From a Raw Deal to a New Deal: African Americans, 1929-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); and Guerin-Gonzales, *Mexican Workers and American Dreams*; and Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>14</sup> On organized labor's abandonment of agricultural work, see, Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) 137-141; Devra Weber offers a similar argument in *Dark Sweat, White Gold*, 126. On the A.F.L. and C.I.O. abandonment of the fields, see Zaragosa Vargas *Labor Rights are Civil Rights: Mexican American Workers in Twentieth Century America* (Princeton University Press, 2007) 151.

towards specialization, which all but guaranteed that it would be the domain of an immigrant, contingent, migrant labor force, particularly Latinos and Filipinos. In 1930, foreign-born workers comprised only slightly more than half of all farm laborers; today they make up more than three-quarters of the workforce. But there were additional impacts. As many industries become more stable and employment less precarious, workers did not need to link together multiple industries to earn a living. Once-thriving day labor districts that shaped the urban core in Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles began to decay as the need for labor agents, transportation hubs, and short-term housing declined. Also, the intellectual and working class discourse that had shaped the image of casual labor in the years before the Great Depression began to fade and transform. The iconic tramp worker was eclipsed, first by the beleaguered exoduster from the Great Depression, and later the image of urban homelessness. The post-war period wiped away the memory of the casual labor economy.

The twenty-first century has witnessed a renewal of precarious and contingent work arrangements. While the New Deal era aimed to create stability for much of America's working class, a good deal of that effort has now been undone by deregulation and the employers' never-ending search for cheaper forms of labor. The return to labor precarity is not limited to low skill jobs. In an attempt to shed their fixed costs in the name of global competitiveness, many of the nation's largest corporations, including Microsoft and Ford Motor Company, have shifted away from a full employment model to one based upon more "flexitime," subcontracting, and on-call work. Last year, three million Americans found their job through a temporary help service. Desperate for work, many of these contingent workers have been subjected to a variety of predatory practices,

including false advertisements about the types of work available or placement fees that garnish up to seventy-five percent of a worker's wages during their first month of employment.<sup>15</sup>

The divergence of the economy into two separate tiers – one stable, the other casual – has been a primary factor in widening the gap between rich and poor in this country. In the early twentieth century, the line that divided casual and stable work was largely defined by pay, working conditions, and stability. Those divisions certainly persist, but the expansion of federal and state protective legislation has only furthered the inequity between classes. One factor has been that the majority of labor legislation since the New Deal is designed around the paradigm of stable work. That leaves those in contingent employment situations outside the bounds of important legislation, such as the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), Employee Retirement and Income Security Act (ERISA), alongside a variety of state programs, including unemployment insurance. The situation for temp workers is made even more acute, given the widespread practice of subcontracting. In these instances, the threat of a union can cause both business owners and subcontractors to mutually terminate an agreement, rather than negotiate or address the concerns of workers. Effectively, it may be the same as firing workers for engaging in a protected union activity, because the business never technically assumes the role of employer, there is never a violation of federal labor law. Place these factors alongside the declining enforcement of wage and hour laws, workplace safety, and employment discrimination, and it becomes easy to understand the correlation between renewed

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<sup>15</sup> Erin Hatton, "The Rise of the Permanent Temp Economy," *New York Times*, January 26, 2013; see also Arne Kalleberg, *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs: The Rise of Polarized and Precarious Employment Systems in the United States, 1970s-2000s* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2011); and Catherine Connelly and Daniel Gallagher, "Emerging Trends in Contingent Work Research," *Journal of Management* 30:6 (July, 2004) 959-983.

contingency in the workplace and the divergent fortunes of the rich and poor in the United States.<sup>16</sup>

Like the early 1930s, a nascent but growing working class movement has emerged to challenge an economic order based upon precarity and dislocation. In fall 2011, Occupy Wall Street's message and tactics often appeared to be a postmodern manifestation of the Unemployed Council movement in Los Angeles. The tent city's that emerged in front of City Halls in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Oakland, and Seattle were reminiscent of the 1930s Hooverville and spokes councils mimicked some of organizing strategy. The list of demands was also similar – regulation of financial markets, a full employment economy, and the expansion of the social safety net. There was certainly a parallel in the willingness to embrace ideas from the ideology of the American Left. Just as the Unemployed Councils benefitted from the energy and talents of Communist Party members, so to did the Occupy protests, with a significant involvement from anarchist activists. Much like the stock market crash had in 1929, the mounting pressure and desperation among workers after the financial crisis of 2008 had become the catalyst for agitation, protest, and labor organizing.

Several months into my research on the history of independent farm strikes near Seattle during the Great Depression, another labor related headline in the local paper caught my attention. In the spring of 2013, several hundred farmworkers on a berry farm just north of Seattle staged a series of wildcat strikes in the Skagit River Valley and organized a boycott of Nestle and Häagen-Dazs products that included their produce. Still on strike, their demands include higher wages, an end to intimidation, and cessation

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<sup>16</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Unfair Advantage: Workers' Freedom of Association in the United States Under International Human Rights Standards* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2000) 135-170.

of a federal guest worker program that threatens to undercut the wages of domestic workers. I could not help but make the connection between the courage of workers like Ponce Torres and those picketing Sakuma Brothers Farm in Burlington, Washington. Their economic and political marginalization was not just reminiscent of the past, but rather the direct result of labor policy adopted during and after the New Deal. Excluded from protection under the National Labor Relations Act, their employer was not required to recognize the union and engage in collective bargaining. Only time will tell if these two instances of labor agitation will have any endurance or influence. Until then, they will remain laboring for the day.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ansel Herz, "Sakuma Brothers Berry Boycott: Workers at a Farm Outside Seattle Demand Better Conditions and Wages," *The Stranger*, October, 2, 2013.

## Appendices | Selected Lodger Lists

**Table A1 | Lodger List, Tourist Hotel, January, 1920**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Birthplace</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
John Berglund	50	Sweden	Blacksmith Shop Keeper
William Jones	29	Missouri	Boilermaker
Thomas H Henwood	35	England	Boot Black
Walter Salstrom	33	Sweden	Building Trades Laborer
Samuel Hughes	70	Wales	Building Trades Mason
Otto Jensen	53	Denmark	Butcher
Misae Uechira	26	Japan	Chamber Maid
J A Leedon	55	Virginia	Civil Engineer Surveyor
Andrew Neilson	44	Pennsylvania	Coal Miner
Samuel C Craig	28	Missouri	Farm - Labor Working Out
Edward Jacobs	42	Norway	Farm Manager
Albert Bertold	33	Switzerland	Farm Milker
Stanley C Nash	29	West Virginia	Hotel Café Laborer
Tomeyo Ogawa	28	Japan	Hotel Housekeeper
Tsubusa Ogawa	40	Japan	Hotel Porter
Joseph F Evans	43	New York	House Carpenter
Erick Wickstrand	40	Sweden	House Carpenter
Carl A Carlson	36	Sweden	House Carpenter
Patrick McCarron	47	New York	House Repairing
Charles Newton	37	England	Kitchen Work
Fred Wittkop	38	Germany	Laborer - Any Kind of Work
C Nelson	37	Norway	Laborer - Any Kind of Work
Stauznine Pepito	27	Philippines	Laborer - Any Kind of Work
Norman Smith	37	Canada	Laborer Any - Kind of Work
Kumichi Nakatami	27	Japan	Lodging House Keeper
James Terry	46	Massachusetts	Logger - Working Out
Timothy McMullin	60	Ireland	Logger - Working Out
Mike Mc Kiride	26	Serbia	Logger - Working Out
Ben A Sundholm	26	Sweden	Logging Camp Laborer
James Littlefield	38	England	Lumber Camp Blacksmith
Robert Jacobson	49	Norway	Mountain Prospector
Naragiku Nakatami	30	Japan	None

David Loyd	45	Pennsylvania	Plant Glass Blower
Thomas Kempsey	53	California	Quartz Miner
Henry Peterson	35	Illinois	Ship Fireman
Chester F McCready	40	Washington	Shipyard Boilermaker
Rasmus Johnson	51	Norway	Shipyard Bolter
Peter Sharo	27	Austria	Shipyard Laborer
Judson Gorman	34	Ireland	Shipyard Laborer
Mike Henry	52	Minnesota	Shipyard Laborer
William Corbett	38	New York	Shipyard Laborer
Samuel Thompson	34	Norway	Shipyard Laborer
Alimbago Pablo	21	Philippines	Shipyard Laborer
Homer Smith	20	United States	Shipyard Laborer
George Williams	53	New York	Stationary Engine Engineer

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**Table A.2 | Lodger List, Volunteers of America Boarding House, April, 1930**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Birthplace</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
James Hartey	17	Arizona	Agricultural Laborer
Joe Hendricks	43	California	Agricultural Laborer
Carl Schwartz	58	Germany	Agricultural Laborer
William G Akers	51	Indiana	Agricultural Laborer
Theodore Anderson	29	Minnesota	Agricultural Laborer
Alfred Green	46	Minnesota	Agricultural Laborer
Robert Tate	27	Missouri	Agricultural Laborer
Jack Wall	32	New York	Agricultural Laborer
Nels Johnson	42	Norway	Agricultural Laborer
Thomas Macon	31	Oklahoma	Agricultural Laborer
Charles E Pitman	37	Washington	Agricultural Laborer
Frank Bailey	49	West Virginia	Agricultural Laborer
William Stokes	23	Chicago	Automobile Machinist
Larry Whittier	23	Michigan	Automobile Machinist
John Tobak	49	Austria	Baker
Charles Ward	38	Vermont	Baker
James E Winfrey	56	Georgia	Barber
Jerry Donahue	36	Massachusetts	Bricklayer
James Murphy	39	Massachusetts	Bricklayer
Simon Smith	21	Scotland	Bricklayer
William Flynn	39	Minnesota	Building Carpenter
Joseph Beam	59	Minnesota	Building Lather
Carl B Worsten	36	Sweden	Cabinet Maker
Otto H Holsted	67	Illinois	Carpenter
Frederick Walters	62	Indiana	Carpenter
John David	55	Iowa	Carpenter
Nels Jackson	56	Michigan	Carpenter
Martin Engen	40	Minnesota	Carpenter
Edward Greenlund	63	Minnesota	Carpenter
Joseph Fister	47	Missouri	Carpenter
Isaac A Winslow	70	New York	Carpenter
Frederick Simpson	88	New York	Carpenter
Frank Jenkins	28	Kansas	Cleaning Laborer

Eli Stewart	29	Illinois	Clothing Tailor
Abraham Kiddi	65	Finland	Coal Miner
Harry Thompson	43	Germany	Coal Miner
John Smith	30	Illinois	Coal miner
Thomas Thompson	76	Norway	Coal Miner
Rice Norden	40	Sweden	Coal Miner
Arthur B Stedman	76	New York	Commercial Telegrapher
Nicholas Hanson	70	Denmark	Construction
William Kurki	35	Finland	Construction
George W Haines	59	Oklahoma	Construction
Neil Doherty	50	New York	Construction Horseshoer
Henry A Johnson	50	Sweden	Construction Laborer
Alfred W Jones	40	Missouri	Construction Millwright
George Brown	72	Massachusetts	Construction Stone Cutter
James O'Neil	48	Missouri	Construction Tractor Operator
Harry Shidel	33	Canada	Cook
Herman Gulvas	62	Germany	Cook
William M Maria	32	Missouri	Copper Miner
Kay Sheley	30	Illinois	Electrician
Harland Lefler	32	Illinois	Electrician
Fred Farr	38	Illinois	Electrician
Frank Saltis	30	Minnesota	Factory Laborer
Earl Rowan	18	New York	Farm Dairy Hand
Patrick Murphy	29	Irish Free State	Fishing Laborer
Joseph Hogan	61	Illinois	Foreman
Matthew U Fritze	39	Austria	Furniture Upholsterer
Ulysses Cooper	34	Oklahoma	Gas Engineer
Micheal Locks	65	Hungary	General Baker
John Barghie	49	Armenia	General Laborer
Alexander Leitch	58	Canada	General Laborer
John F McLaughlin	62	Canada	General Laborer
John H Campbell	68	Canada	General Laborer
William Woods	45	Greece	General Laborer
Frank J Sutton	39	Illinois	General Laborer
Elmer H Mason	40	Illinois	General Laborer
Lester McCord	30	Iowa	General Laborer

Leonard Larson	41	Iowa	General Laborer
George Brown	48	Ireland	General Laborer
William J Barrett	51	Ireland	General Laborer
John McGinley	65	Ireland	General Laborer
William J Oneil	47	Irish Free State	General Laborer
Willmon Whiten	51	Kentucky	General Laborer
Walter McDonald	54	Massachusetts	General Laborer
David Brun	63	Massachusetts	General Laborer
Frank Costillo	19	Mexico	General Laborer
Joseph Acosta	40	Mexico	General Laborer
Theodore M Hanson	40	Minnesota	General Laborer
Harry Hamilton	41	Minnesota	General Laborer
Charles G Hallin	51	Missouri	General Laborer
Arthur Williams	38	Montana	General Laborer
William Powell	69	Ohio	General Laborer
John H Stevens	71	Ohio	General Laborer
Stanley A Bartosrich	41	Russia	General Laborer
George Patterson	42	Scotland	General Laborer
Thomas Turnbull	51	Scotland	General Laborer
Doc Deas	35	South Carolina	General Laborer
Harry F Johnson	22	Sweden	General Laborer
Robert Johnson	52	Sweden	General Laborer
M Olson	76	Sweden	General Laborer
Richard P Moore	46	Texas	General Laborer
Albert Rud	41	Wicomico	General Laborer
Frank Newlun	56	Wisconsin	General Laborer
Van Perkins	84	Missouri	General Laborer
John Kline	38	Minnesota	General Laborer Electrician
Valentine Barker	81	Ohio	General machinist
Robert Hecker	39	Illinois	Hotel Cook
John A Ogle	58	Iowa	Hotel Cook
Walter L Dowers	30	Ohio	Hotel Cook
Howard Velziam	49	Oregon	Hotel Cook
Daniel J Turaski	29	Poland	Hotel Cook
John Hamilton	72	Wisconsin	Hotel Cook
John Jackson	69	Norway	Hotel Kitchen Helper

Zigmund Kremiski	20	Poland	Hotel Kitchen Helper
John Hanson	38	Michigan	Hotel Laborer
Ray Humphries	18	Michigan	House Apprentice
Neal Johnson	75	Sweden	Iron Milder
Newell M Ketchum	45	Illinois	Iron Molder
Archibald Mac Neish	67	Rhode Island	Janitor
Fox D Sanders	44	Alabama	Laborer
Lawrence Oconnell	50	England	Laborer
John Edwards	55	England	Laborer
Thomas McGrath	41	Finland	Laborer
Hans A Munshahn	39	Germany	Laborer
John Perry	69	Maine	Laborer
James Boothby	26	Massachusetts	Laborer
John Ware	36	Minnesota	Laborer
Victor H Prince	35	Pennsylvania	Laborer
John Fredin	71	Sweden	Laborer
Barry Royal	21	Washington	Laborer
Albert Williamson	67	Iowa	Laundering Steam Engineer
Millan Wildbahn	35	Missouri	Lodging House Clerk
William Wilson	46	Australia	Logger
John Peterson	54	Austria	Logger
Frank Hill	50	Finland	Logger
Herman Banks	59	New York	Logger
Edward Hart	46	North Carolina	Logger
Carl Frederickson	67	Norway	Logger
John Lindgren	48	Sweden	Logger
Henry Sunvall	50	Sweden	Logger
Frederick Brooks	70	Canada	Lumber
John Johnson	44	Finland	Lumber
Frank McDonald	67	Massachusetts	Lumber
Arthur Derosier	32	Minnesota	Lumber
Lemuel Dreasback	64	Ohio	Lumber
Joseph Stanley	40	Russia	Lumber
Philip Streb	49	Russia	Lumber
Albert Nordstrom	47	Norway	Lumber Blacksmith
Saro Olson	41	Norway	Lumber Inspector

George Rumas	40	California	Lumber Laborer
Andrew Johnson	50	Illinois	Lumber Laborer
James Morand	53	Kentucky	Lumber Laborer
William S Havins	69	Michigan	Lumber Laborer
Edward Carroll	51	Missouri	Lumber Laborer
William Dennig	43	New York	Lumber Laborer
Patrick Walsh	67	New York	Lumber Laborer
Emil Johnson	60	Norway	Lumber Laborer
Thomas Taylor	53	Virginia	Lumber laborer
Christian Thor	65	Denmark	Lumber Logger
Arvo A Lindros	40	Finland	Lumber Logger
Axel Clarkson	52	Finland	Lumber Logger
Martin J Johnson	36	Oregon	Lumber logger
Ollie Anderson	70	Sweden	Lumber Logger
Harry Masson	32	Washington	Lumber Logger
John Gilford	66	Wisconsin	Lumber Logger
John Martin	42	Chile	Lumber mill Laborer
Karl Baker	26	Alabama	Machinist
John E Peterson	65	Illinois	Marine Engineer
Floyd Williams	23	New Jersey	Marine Engineer
George Blanchetti	65	New York	Marine Engineer
John Williams	47	California	Marine Fireman
Anthony Farris	22	California	Marine Seaman
Frank Hill	61	New York	Marine Seaman
Ollie Hanson	63	Norway	Marine Seaman
Theodore Rauch	21	Washington	Marine Seaman
Lin Kelly	42	Washington	Marine Seaman
James Castleman	33	New York	Mercantile Clerk
Frank Buckingham	75	New York	Mercantile Linoleum Layer
Jack B Strickland	33	Oklahoma	Mercantile Salesman
Ernst Anderson	34	Sweden	Merchant Marine Sailor
John Wallace	37	Ohio	Mill Laborer
Alex Peterson	45	Sweden	Mill Laborer
Albert Benton	25	California	Miner
Walter D Saul	27	England	Miner
William S Skinner	61	Isle of Man	Miner

Bert Sloan	33	Kentucky	Miner
James Gilliland	66	Ohio	Miner
James Little	36	Scotland	Miner
William Martin	47	England	Mines Laborer
Frank Miller	76	Germany	Mining
Chester Walton	40	Michigan	Mining Laborer
Jean Nielson	48	New York	Mining Laborer
Mike Nelson	55	Norway	Mining Laborer
Wendell Pratt	18	Oklahoma	Mining Laborer
Thomas Cook	47	Washington	Mining Laborer
William C Patching	87	England	None
Charles Sloan	73	Illinois	None
John Taylor	72	India	None
Alexander Rivera	71	Massachusetts	None
Gustave Gurnke	61	Minnesota	None
Frederick Swiggard	32	Nebraska	None
Thomas Gleason	70	New York	None
Emil Olsen	70	Norway	None
James Leonard	74	Ohio	None
William McGuff	50	Scotland	None
Dan Cummins	83	Virginia	None
Alexander Spencer	42	Ohio	Nurse
William S Lee	55	Indiana	Odd Jobs Laborer
Walter S Behrens	25	Iowa	Odd Jobs Laborer
Oscar Anderson	26	Virginia	Odd Jobs Laborer
Ander Olsen	29	Denmark	Odd Jobs Painter
George Willett	46	Canada	Orchestra Musician
Otto Kresser	34	Budapest - Hungary	Painter
Edward F Albert	67	Canada	Painter
Harry Bristol	49	Missouri	Painter
Edward Snyder	58	Missouri	Painter
William Marran	39	Nebraska	Painter
Albert Peterson	40	Sweden	Painter
Albert Ives	60	England	Photographer
Steven Ignatz	50	Austria	Railroad Laborer
Thomas Muller	43	California	Railroad Laborer

Frank Miller	56	California	Railroad Laborer
Peter Recob	50	Canada	Railroad Laborer
Edward Burno	65	Delaware	Railroad Laborer
John Johnson	44	Finland	Railroad Laborer
Charles Stenholm	55	Finland	Railroad Laborer
Nels Olson	55	Finland	Railroad Laborer
John Seko	62	Finland	Railroad Laborer
Edward Ryan	54	Illinois	Railroad Laborer
Harvey West	33	Indiana	Railroad Laborer
Michael Mantle	65	Indiana	Railroad Laborer
John D Hiland	67	Indiana	Railroad Laborer
John Timmerman	31	Iowa	Railroad Laborer
James Power	69	Ireland	Railroad Laborer
Harry Morgan	71	Kentucky	Railroad Laborer
Carlos Roegas	27	Mexico	Railroad Laborer
Henry L Wood	34	Michigan	Railroad Laborer
Solomon Fobert	58	Michigan	Railroad Laborer
John Dunn	58	Michigan	Railroad Laborer
Kenneth Graybill	46	New York	Railroad Laborer
Thomas J Gallagher	51	New York	Railroad Laborer
Edward Forbis	54	New York	Railroad Laborer
Thomas Price	43	Ohio	Railroad Laborer
Robert Smith	66	Ohio	Railroad Laborer
John Ryan	27	Oregon	Railroad Laborer
John Wilson	60	Pennsylvania	Railroad Laborer
Harry Weir	62	Pennsylvania	Railroad Laborer
Alfred Kewin	67	Pennsylvania	Railroad Laborer
Simon Erickson	42	Russia	Railroad Laborer
Hans Asplin	50	Russia	Railroad Laborer
Charles Smith	50	Russia	Railroad Laborer
Subordey Ober	60	Siberia	Railroad Laborer
John Swanson	48	Sweden	Railroad Laborer
Olaf Larson	64	Sweden	Railroad Laborer
Nels Munson	69	Sweden	Railroad Laborer
Tom Davis	70	West Virginia	Railroad Laborer
Thomas Burns	61	Wisconsin	Railroad Laborer

Tom Nash	41	Ohio	Railroad Machinist
Allen Neil	32	Scotland	Railroad Telegraph Operator
Alberto Wallin	42	Alaska	Restaurant Dish Washer
Adophus Risher	38	Texas	Restaurant Kitchen Help
Charles Mathews	28	Oregon	River Plant Engineer
William Christian	52	England	Shingle Weaver
John J Valent	21	Pennsylvania	Shipyards Boilermaker
Henry Roldan	76	Pennsylvania	Shipyards Boilermaker
Charles Sanglin	60	Maine	Shoemaker
Sam Anderson	51	Norway	Shoemaker
Charles E Hawkins	38	Oregon	Shoemaker
Frank Welsh	68	Minnesota	Stationary Fireman
Isaac Wilms	29	Minnesota	Steam Engineer
Robert J Oneil	35	Illinois	Steel Mill Laborer
John Macon	41	Pennsylvania	Steel Mill Laborer
William Schale	33	California	Truck Driver
John Lord	31	Connecticut	Truck Driver
William L Halpin	30	Pennsylvania	Truck Driver
Marshall Rutherford	28	Texas	Truck Driver
William D Wilson	41	Wisconsin	Truck Driver
George Sheppard	18	Florida	Waiter

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**Table A.3 | Lodger List, 356 Third Street, San Francisco, April 1930**

Name	Age	Place of Birth	Year of	Language	Occupation
John L Scott	55	Kentucky	-		Hotel Manager
Emetio Oulet	53	Spain	1899	Spanish	Butcher
Frank F Shallins	29	West			Truck Driver
Leonardo Martinez	39	Mexico	1918	Spanish	Shipyard
Emitan Spiaya	24	Philippines		Spanish	
Ajis A Boat	36	Turkey	1920	Indian	General Laborer
Lester C Hillers	25	California			Laborer (Printing)
Clement Maffee	55	France	1893	French	General Laborer
Vanlios Parrimanos	43	Greece	1913	Greek	Coal Car Fireman
Michael Zaphispoub	72	Greece	1892	Greek	Dishwasher
John Mardor	65	Turkey	1898	Greek	None
Cosmanuel Siman	26	Mexico	1920	Spanish	Shipyard Laborer
Ascarn Y Fucks	32	Wisconsin			Lithographer
Diego Morenos	43	Mexico	1907	Spanish	General Laborer
Diego Guitwicz	35	Mexico	1917	Spanish	Seaman
Arthur Montoya	30	New Mexico			Seaman
Santos Canales	29	Honduras	1914	Spanish	Seaman
Gus Garlouis	41	Greece	1910	Greek	Laborer (Iron Foundry)
August Murioz	34	Spain	1920	Spanish	General Laborer
Carlos G Prielta	40	Nicaragua	1923	Spanish	General Laborer
Dionisio Matus	26	Nicaragua	1921	Spanish	Dishwasher
Nick Zacklesis	30	Greece	1905	Greek	Cook
Alex Glaros	31	Greece	1916	Greek	Office Janitor

**Table A.4 | Lodger List, 1209 Broadway, San Francisco, April 1930**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Birthplace</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
Frank Mangioni	31	Italy	Hotel Manager
Zira Mangioni	36	Argentina	Hotel Clerk
Pietao Piastri	21	Italy	Hotel Maid
John Gaffney	61	Italy	Street Laborer
Jean Beadoulay	37	California	Paper Factory Laborer
Rodolfo Corso	57	France	Laundry Laborer
Camora Numa	52	Italy	Shipyards Laborer
Spasvje Bukvich	41	France	Kitchen Helper
Wing Chan	58	Yugoslavia	Ship Laborer
Jose Uresti	49	California	Café Waiter
Alice Rhodes	40	Mexico	Farm Laborer
William F Rhodes	40	North Dakota	Hospital Nurse
Giannetti Domenick	41	Texas	Tailor
Robert Silva	22	Italy	Sewing Machine Sales
Jose Inclan	47	California	Waiter
Joseph Esquer	40	Arizona	Produce Market Laborer
Mike Gutorny	30	France	Laundry Proprietor

**Table A.5 | Lodger List, 644 Pacific, San Francisco, April 1930**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Birthplace</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
Torakichi Tamura	48	Japan	Rooming House Owner
Riki Tamura	40	Japan	None
Masako Tamura	16	California	None
Yoshiko Tamura	12	California	None
George Tamura	10	California	None
Kimiko Tamura	6	California	None
Leong Lee	40	China	Family Cook
Valentin Galloza	38	Philippines	Shipyards Painter
Lorenzo Gomez	36	Puerto Rico	Shipyards Scaler
Francisco Guiles	30	Philippines	Shipyards Carpenter
Gregorio Lopez	43	Cape Verde Island	Building Laborer
Charles Jackson	63	Georgia	Building Laborer
Mary Ortega	35	California	Restaurant Waitress

**Table A.6 | Lodger List for 935 Kearny, San Francisco, April 1930**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Birthplace</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
Nick Legler	57	Chile	Hotel Clerk
E. Legler	60	Switzerland	None
Charles Hermann	29	Switzerland	Garage Machinist
Pedro Miralles	33	Philippines	Ship Seaman
William Mates	24	Hawaii	Ship Seaman
James Purdy	24	Hawaii	Orchestra Musician
M Goddard	48	British West Indies	Cook
Frank Montero	29	Cuba	Ship Sailor
Lyle Bryce	23	Minnesota	Bus Boy
Charles Pukui	24	Hawaii	Ship Seaman
Paolo Boyona	46	Philippines	Hotel Laborer
Frank Dias	45	Philippines	Hotel Laborer
Peter Delana	31	Philippines	Newsman
James Ortiguerra	20	Philippines	Ship Seaman
Sam Berilla	20	Philippines	Ship Seaman
Joe Moreno	25	Texas	Iron Works Laborer
Joes Santos	20	Philippines	Iron Works Laborer
Robert Bautista	21	Philippines	Ship Seaman
Jean Domecq	39	France	Insurance Broker
William Isaco	42	France	Hotel Clerk
Louis C Schmitz	27	France	Bakery Driver
Paul Montagne	46	France	Baker
George Gayanich	50	Austria	None
Fred Willuflores	46	Philippines	Candy Store Laborer
Frank Carius	34	Philippines	Candy Store Laborer
Alex Corona	49	Arizona	Ranch Laborer
Frank Spicher	32	Switzerland	Bus Factory Laborer
Marie Gonzales	25	Philippines	Bus Factory Laborer
Dante Rodriquez	34	Peru	Mechanic
James C Kana	21	Hawaii	Ship Seaman
Robert Hernandez	20	Philippines	Ship Seaman
George Kalashian	45	Armenia	Tailor
Paul Alago	23	Philippines	Ship Seaman

Carlos Vidal	28	Philippines	Factory Laborer
Tom Kawahua	28	Hawaii	Ship Seaman
Mack Kanui	29	Hawaii	Ship Seaman
Jose Gilbueng	39	Philippines	Dentist
Jesus Gilbueng	16	Philippines	None
Maximo Achebuche	52	Philippines	Ship Seaman
Primo Carranza	23	Philippines	Hotel Bed maker
Charles Barberis	52	Italy	Hotel Clerk
Fearonis Barberis	51	France	None
Frank Barberis	11	California	None
Sam Moore	33	Hawaii	Seaman
Theodore Pina	30	Philippines	Barber
Lucy Pina	35	Philippines	None
Jose Julian	22	Philippines	Ship Seaman
Felumino Aradozo	26	Philippines	Ship Seaman
M J Pilar	33	Philippines	Ship Seaman
Charles Abundano	53	Philippines	Ship Seaman
Wm Raymond	29	Hawaii	Hotel Pantry man
Charles Gonzales	23	Puerto Rico	Ship Oiler
Richard Hennan	30	Hawaii	Ship Seaman
Robert Essex	37	Kentucky	Construction Laborer
Fotz Guido	31	United States	None
George Cawai	30	Hawaii	Ship Seaman
Archie Achuck	30	Hawaii	Grocery Clerk
Louis Pau	28	Hawaii	Ship Seaman

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**Table A.7 | Lodger List, 1039 Grant, San Francisco, April, 1930**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Birthplace</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
Low Get	31	China	Tailor
Yee Sen	17	China	none
Yick Lum	45	Hawaii	Café Dishwasher
Yein Lum	22	China	None
Gum Lo	39	California	Tailor
Yow	72	China	Tailor
Lowe	72	China	Tailor
Ching Jeang	50	China	Garage Machinist
Hing Ow	55	California	Grocery Clerk
Kay Chan	60	China	Family Cook
Joa Yow	50	China	Meat Clerk
Hing Woo	52	China	Interpreter
Gee Woo	55	California	None
Sing Lee	65	California	Café Cook
Shek Fong	40	California	Café Cook
Cheung Fong	37	California	None
Chung Fong	33	California	Grocery Clerk
Kien Fong	33	China	Meat Butcher
Him Young	39	China	Farm Laborer
Bark Look	39	China	Café Waiter
Shee Jue	39	China	Café Dishwasher
Ying Jue	21	China	Café Porter
Toy Jue	17	California	Garment Seamstress
Moy Jue	9	China	Garment Seamstress
Shee Jue	51	California	None
Tim Jann	50	California	None
Won Tom	22	California	None
Shew Wong	38	China	None
Hew Chan	41	China	None
Shee Fung	63	China	None
Hook Lock	34	California	None
George Lock	15	California	None
Rosie Lock	13	California	None

Stanley Lock	7	China	None
James Lock	4	China	None
Lee Lim	38	China	Club Cook
Saw Lim	35	California	None
May Lim	6	California	None
Yin Lim	5	California	None
Hin Lim	2	California	None
Shew Chin	56	China	Laundry Clerk
Han Chin	20	China	Café Cook
Shew Yip	37	China	None
Wong Yip	37	California	None
Oi Yip	7	California	None
Fay Yip	5	California	None
Sim Yip	3	California	None
Yoke Yip	1	China	Farm Laborer
Bing Lew	41	China	Laundry Laborer
Seck Yee	19	China	Laundry Laborer
Ock Yee	17	China	Factory Seamstress
Haw Sum	60	California	Ranch Laborer
Bun Leang	42	California	Ranch Laborer
Beau Lean	48	China	Fish Cannery Laborer
Shew Moy	32	China	Restaurant Laborer
Wing Kow	37	China	Butcher Shop Laborer
Tong Chan	52	California	Tailor
Jack Hue	27	China	Farm Laborer
Quong Chan	51	China	Farm Laborer
Jam Shin	42	California	Fruit Store Clerk
Shew Jue	47	California	Auto Mechanic
Carl Jue	23	China	Meat Market Clerk

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**Table A.8 | Lodger List, 1116 Stockton, April, 1930**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Birthplace</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
Tomi Minami	56	Japan	Hotel Proprietor
Tami Minami	51	Japan	Clerk
Joe Chinbo	22	California	None
William Gregory	50	Virginia	Boot Black
Charles Brown	34	Georgia	Janitor
William Brown	50	New York	Janitor
Benjamin Davis	36	California	Shipyards Laborer
Robert Lee	44	Tennessee	Barber
Hollis Frazier	46	Kentucky	Print Shop Laborer
Elizabeth Frazier	46	Texas	None
John Edwards	38	California	Steam Ship Cook
Lola Alexander	49	Louisiana	Family Maid
Archie Drew	51	Louisiana	Shipyards Laborer
Henry Morgan	41	North Carolina	Longshoreman
John Field	47	Missouri	Janitor
Joe Wallace	31	Texas	Train Waiter
Arthur Brown	29	Georgia	Boot Black
Rutus Horton	31	North Carolina	Porter

**Table A.9 | Lodger List, Hotel Du Midi, 1362 Powell, San Francisco, 1930**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Birthplace</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
Florencino Hague	48	Spain	Hotel Manager
Juanita Hague	35	Spain	None
Jeanne Salducchere	24	France	Hotel Cook
Nicolas Larranete	32	Spain	Bakery
Martin Gonzalez	43	Spain	Express Man
Ramon Hernandez	56	Spain	Pantry Man
Victorinno Mirse	36	Spain	Laundry Man
Marianno Perez	44	Spain	Laundry Man
Antonio Lopez	34	Spain	Laundry Man
Louis Geffrey	59	Spain	Ship Sailor
Pablo Blanco	38	Spain	Hotel Waiter

**Table A.10 | Lodger List, Towne Hotel, 609 East 5<sup>th</sup> Street, Los Angeles, 1930**

Name	Age	Birthplace	Occupation
James C Conrad	56	Missouri	Hotel Manager
Christopher M Mcgough	64	Tennessee	Newspaper Salesman
Frank J Smith	55	Wisconsin	Road Construction
Peter Spilman	51	Minnesota	Hotel Clerk
Oliver H Heiser	65	Indiana	None
John B Rubenstein	55	Russia	Dry Goods Store
William H Davis	56	Indiana	None
Frank S Delabar	63	Illinois	Butcher - Meat Market
Albert A Barrett	45	New York	Actor - Moving Picture
Charles H Perkins	46	Maine	Restaurant Cook
James C Kennedy	44	New York	Clerk Florist
Gus Guilleanne	50	Germany	Restaurant Manager
Victor North	49	Finland	Bridge Construction Carpenter
August Schaupp	69	Iowa	None
William Dooley	43	Ireland	None
Joseph Cook	69	Russia	None
Anna A Haron	53	French	Hotel Maid
Carl Mamlo	56	Poland	Walnut Merchant
George H Mastersen	62	Massachusetts	Furniture Upholsterer
Frederick M Allen	39	Nebraska	Railroad Service Cook
John R Works	38	Yugoslavia	Hotel Steward
John E Summerville	46	California	Building Carpenter
Charles Williams	62	Illinois	Odd Jobs Laborer
Edward W Mead	62	Kentucky	Fruit Sales
Henry Dixon	48	England	Water Company Machinist
Kurt H Weinerts	37	Germany	Building Laborer
James Darcy	40	Ireland	Oil Pipeline Layer
Harry Brecker	56	Pennsylvania	Building Laborer
Elmer S Saymour	36	Washington	Restaurant Waiter
Ella Bellamy	32	Texas	Dry Goods Clerk

Grover C Henry	37	Pennsylvania	Mining Laborer
Eugene L Fergener	54	Massachusetts	Lumberyard Purchasing
Albert Cardo	37	Kansas	Lumber Yard Laborer
John O Toole	70	Missouri	Barber
Willie Dielschmeider	54	Oregon	Plumber
Albert A Barrett	45	New York	Moving Picture Actor
Emil Meisber	45	Germany	Baker
Edward J Hoy	58	Michigan	Transfer Snaker
Charles E Adams	57	Missouri	Building Carpenter
Nathaniel B Horton	58	Illinois	None
Charles Howe	73	Kentucky	None
Robert S Smith	18	California	Radio Service Mechanic
John Newhouse	40	Holland	Odd Jobs Laborer
Percie E Smith	65	Minnesota	None
William C Murray	71	Wisconsin	Building Brickmason
John A Kennedy	51	Pennsylvania	Dishwasher
Jack O O'Keefe	48	Oregon	Building Laborer
Thomas D Bowles	61	Missouri	Building Laborer
Arvid Anderson	47	Sweden	None
Urbelles Mc Niel	58	USA	None
William J Craik	56	Michigan	Mining Laborer
Michael P Masterson	64	Massachusetts	None
Milan Krmpotich	31	Croatia	Trinket Salesman
De Alvin Fox	37	Ohio	None
Abner Mc Faren	37	Arkansas	Restaurant Cook
Harry D Queen	60	Maryland	Hotel Clerk
Robert E Meadows	45	Ohio	Electrician
Thomas Lewis	48	Colorado	Deputy Registrar
Thomas T Turk	40	Arkansas	Baker
Frank C Halas	47	Moravia	Baker
Henry C Dickson	44	Kansas	Lumber Teamster
Daniel Ryan	69	Pensylvania	Office Janitor

Harvey Werntz	48	California	None
James Keating	39	Connecticut	Odd Jobs

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- Wu, Judy Tzu-Chun. *Doctor Mom Chung of the Fair-Haired Bastards* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

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- Zeidel, Robert F. *Immigrants, Progressives, and Exclusion Politics: The Dillingham Commission, 1900-1927*. Northern Illinois University Press, 2004.

## ALEXANDER MORROW

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### Education

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#### University of Washington | Seattle, Washington

Ph.D. in History | Emphasis on 19th and 20th United States History; American West; and Modern Latin America

Dissertation: "Laboring for the Day: Casual and Migrant Workers, Urban Politics, and the Shaping of the Pacific Coast in the Mid-Twentieth Century." (Advisor: James Gregory)

#### University of Oregon | Eugene, Oregon

Masters of Arts in History, 2004

Bachelor of Arts in History, 2002

### Faculty and Research Appointments

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**University of Washington Tacoma** | Lecturer | Winter 2015-Present | Teaching courses for the Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences Program in History, Global Studies, and Ethnicity, Gender, and Labor

**Cornish College of the Arts** | Integrated Studies Faculty, Humanities and Sciences | Fall 2008-Present  
Teach humanities classes. Current course offerings include *Zeitgeist*, *America in the World*, *History of Work*

**Museum of History and Industry, Center for Innovation** | Research Consultant | January 2011-Present

**Seattle Central College** | Adjunct Instructor | 2011-2014 | United States History Survey

**Green River Community College** | Adjunct Instructor | 2012 | United States History Survey

**Jackson School of International Studies, University of Washington** | Instructor | Fall 2103-4 | Teach courses in immigration history and American foreign policy. Work with international exchange students through the Program for Continuing Education and Thematic Study Abroad program.

**University of Washington** | History | Instructor, Teaching Assistant, and Researcher | 2004-2011 | Teach courses in Labor Studies, Pacific Northwest History, and Comparative Ethnic Studies. Responsible for all aspects of the class, including content, syllabus, lecture, and grading. Assisted in a variety of large courses on U.S. history, Northwest history, and Latin American history.

**University of Oregon** | University Archives and Collections | Archivist and Manager | 1999-Fall 2003

### Other Professional Experience and Community Involvement

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**Cornish Federation of Teachers** | Faculty Union Vice President | 2011-2014

**Museum of History and Industry** | Research Consultant, Center for Innovation, 2012-2014

**Pacific Northwest Historians Guild Annual Conference** | Chair and Coordinator | March, 2011

**Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project** | Associate Editor | 2005- 2010 |  
[www.civilrights.washington.edu](http://www.civilrights.washington.edu)

**Labor and Working Class History Association** | Executive and Program Committee | 2005-2009

## Teaching Experience

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### American History Since 1877

*Survey of recent American history at Seattle Central College, Green River Community College, and University of Washington, Tacoma.*

*Website and Syllabus: <http://americanhistoryin12weeks.blogspot.com>*

### Transnational America

*Examination of immigration to U.S. in a global context, developed for the Global Citizenship Program at the Jackson School of International Studies, University of Washington and the University of Washington, Tacoma.*

### Writing Seattle's Urban History

*Capstone research project for undergraduate history majors at the University of Washington.*

### American History to 1877

*Survey of early American history at Seattle Central College.*

### Zeitgeist

*Survey of the intellectual and cultural arc of Modernism from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, developed for the Integrated Studies Program in Humanities Cornish College of the Arts.*

### America in the World

*Interdisciplinary course on American foreign policy and the culture of American empire from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present, developed for Cornish College of the Arts. Website and Syllabus: <http://whereintheworldistheusa.blogspot.com>*

### The Past, Present, and Future of Work

*Comparative study of labor that blends humanities and political economy for the University of Washington Center for Labor Studies and Cornish College of the Arts. Website and syllabus: <http://unwork.blogspot.com>*

### History of American Film

*Survey of aesthetics and politics of film in American history from the silent-era to the present day for the University of Washington.*

## Publications and Conference Papers

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“Filming and Writing: Engaging Student Writing Through Experiential Learning” | TYCA-PNW Pacific Northwest Writing Center Association Annual Conference | October 25, 2013

“A Laborer’s Geography: Day Labor Districts of Pacific Coast” | Labor and Working Class History Association | June, 2009

“Studying the ‘Problem’ of Transient Labor: Social Investigators, Casual Workers, and the State, 1920-1929” | Workers, the Nation-State, and Beyond: The Newberry Conference on Labor History Across the Americas | September 2008

“Organizing in the Interstices: The Difficult Politics of Ethnicity, Mobility, and Radicalism Along the Pacific Coast, 1919-1941.” | North American Labor History Conference | October 2007

Panel Chair and Participant | “Backlash Against Labor History? Working Class History, the Job Market, and the State of the Field.” | Labor and Working History Association / Southern Labor Studies | May 2007

“The ‘Problem’ of Migrant Labor: Transient Workers, Social Science, and the Great Depression” | Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association | August 2005

## **Selected Fellowships and Awards**

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**Distinguished Teaching Award** | Nominee | Cornish College of the Arts | 2012

**Hefflinger Fellowship** | University of Washington Department of History | 2010

**JC Smith Memorial Fellowship** | University of Washington Department of History | 2008

**Graduate School Dissertation Fellowship** | University of Washington Graduate School | Fall 2007

**West Coast Poverty Center Dissertation Fellow** | Evans School of Public Affairs | University of Washington | Summer 2007

**Harry Bridges Labor Studies Fellow** | University of Washington Department of History and the Center for Labor Studies | Academic Year of 2004-5

**Simpson Center for the Humanities Recruitment Award** | University of Washington | Fall 2004

## **Professional Service**

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Bargaining Committee | Cornish Federation of Teachers | 2011-2 Contract Negotiations

Program Committee and Graduate Student Chair | Labor and Working Class History Association | 2005-2009

Academic Search Committee | Pre-Meiji Japan | University of Washington, Department of History | Fall 2007

Co-organizer | Graduate Student Reading Group in Critical Theory at the University of Washington | 2005-07

Committee Member | Pacific Northwest Labor History Conference | Plenary Committee | 2003-04

Executive Officer | University of Oregon History Guild | Graduate Student Association | 2003-04

Contributing Member | Cascadia Media Collective | 2002-04

Executive Council and Departmental Steward | Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation | American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO Local 3544 | 2002-04