UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

The Color of Development: Racial Capitalism and Land Conflict in Southern California's Imperial County

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Ethnic Studies

by

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The Dissertation of Stevie R. Ruiz is approved and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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DEDICATION

For Candice Rice

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Color of Development: Racial Capitalism and Land Conflict in Southern California's Imperial County

by

Stevie R. Ruiz

Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnic Studies

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Professor Natalia Molina, Chair

Professor Curtis Marez, Co-Chair

"The Color of Development: Racial Capitalism and Land Conflict in Southern California's Imperial County" complicates our understanding of the history of property ownership and capitalist development by analyzing conflicts over land among white pioneers, Asian growers, Mexican immigrants, and Native-Americans in what is now

Imperial County. American westward expansion is typically conceived as a conquest over uncivilized land and peoples, leading to greater political and economic freedom for English-speaking settlers, a process that reached its peak with the U.S.-Mexico war (1846) and ratification of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo (1848), when the U.S. seized the northern territory of Mexico and Native American lands. Claims of land loss have sparked debates among Chicana/o Studies and Native-American Studies scholars. While the former debate rights to ancestral lands, the latter deny any break among settlement, colonialism, and rise of the state. My work focuses on these struggles in a little-studied yet significant geographical region—the rural West—an approach that allows us to understand the full impact of American expansionism. My exploration of rural political economies in Imperial County uncovers the centrality of land subsidy programs to supporting and expanding Manifest Destiny as practiced at the U.S.-Mexico border in the twentieth century. Under racial capitalism, I argue, Japanese and South Asians were successful in renting land and owning property, despite efforts to undermine Asian property ownership with California's Alien Land Laws of 1913 and 1920. I argue that conflicts between whites and Asians persisted because of competing views over what land meant to each community. For white growers, land was associated with property, while Asians viewed land and labor management as part of assimilating into normative standards of U.S. citizenship. I demonstrate that conflicts over commerce and trade between Asians and whites had negative consequences for their 90 percent ethnic Mexican labor force. I argue that the inability to own property within this context made Mexicans and Native-Americans vulnerable to a society that viewed them as cheap labor that could be exploited to transform the Imperial County into a robust center for

agribusiness. With rigorous archival research, I prove that the colonial underpinnings of land confiscation that were apparent in the early twentieth century structured growers' attitudes and were used to discriminate against ethnic Mexicans and Native-Americans.

INTRODUCTION

> The story of our inferiority is an old dodge, as I have said; for wherever men oppress their fellows, wherever they enslave them, they will endeavor to find the needed apology for such enslavement and oppression in the character of the people oppressed and enslaved. When we wanted, a few years ago, a slice of Mexico, it was hinted that the Mexicans were an inferior race, that the old Castilian blood had become so weak that it would scarcely run down hill, and that Mexico needed the long, strong and beneficent arm of the Anglo-Saxon care extended over it. We said that it was necessary to its salvation, and a part of the "manifest destiny" of this Republic, to extend our arm over that dilapidated government. So, too, when Russia wanted to take possession of a part of the Ottoman Empire, the Turks were an "inferior race." So, too, when England wants to set the heel of her power more firmly in the quivering heart of old Ireland, the Celts are an "inferior race." So, too, the Negro, when he is to be robbed of any right, which is justly his, is an "inferior man.
>
> Frederick Douglass, "What the Black Man Wants," 1865[1]

Introduction

In 1865, when U.S. abolitionists declared victory over slavery, leaders involved in the struggle were left second-guessing where anti-racist activism was to go next. Frederick Douglass was an African-American abolitionist and freedman who testified about the horrors of being a former slave. He was best known for his abolition work; however, a less recognized dimension of his activism was his criticism of U.S. westward expansion. Douglass was an outspoken critic of the U.S. declaration of war against

[1] Frederick Douglass, "What the Black Man Wants: Speech of Frederick Douglass at the Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society at Boston," 1865.

Mexico (1846) and subsequent Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo (1848), which confiscated half of Mexico's northern territory.[2] He argued that Manifest Destiny undermined the achievements that were gained from abolition because it relied upon the confiscation of land from Mexicans and Native-Americans.

The power of Douglass' critique was radical for the space and time in which he lived because the majority of white abolitionists viewed race relations through a black and white binary. The dominant understanding of racial equality assumed that the struggle would end after achieving full civil rights for African-Americans. Douglass viewed Manifest Destiny as damaging the successes that were achieved by abolition. He warned that continuing the confiscation of land and bodily captivity demonstrated that slavery's end could not be celebrated yet. At the end of the Civil War, Douglass delivered a speech to a Boston audience where he pointed to the relationship between race, capitalism, and land development.

In this Boston hall in 1865, Douglass delivered a compelling case against racial capitalism. In his speech, "What the Black Man Wants," Douglass argued that the tenets of Manifest Destiny were resoundingly similar to the excuses that were used to purchase African bodies under the institution of slavery. In fact, he insisted that the U.S. federal government was clearly racist for its military action against Mexico. Benevolent imperialism, Douglass delivered, was a poor excuse to steal land from Mexicans in the name of spreading capitalism and transforming Mexico into a more modern society. For Douglass, racial capitalism was the costly burden that racism historically placed upon

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[2] Laura E. Gomez, *Manifest Destinies: The Making of the Mexican American Race* (New York: NYU Press, 2008).

non-white populations in order to generate wealth for whites. These costs took the form of stolen land, forced servitude, and labor discrimination and worked to centralize capital into the hands of white people. Marxist theorist Cedric Robinson would later describe this concept as *racial capitalism,* which combines the profitability that is gained from land dispossession and labor exploitation with the effort to maintain social hierarchies where one racial demographic (whites) benefits at the expense of other racial groups.[3] In his research, Robinson proves that historically non-white populations have been legally disenfranchised from becoming full competitors in a capitalist system because of labor exploitation and U.S. colonialisms.[4] Mid-nineteenth century critiques of westward expansion like Douglass' pointed at the cost and benefit ratio that centralized land ownership into the hands of whites.

Land ownership was a means whereby the law encouraged whites to amass racial capital in the rural American West. The Homestead Act of 1862, for example, established legal precedent for whites to obtain land with government subsidies. After three decades of military conflict with Native-American nations resulting from the Indian Removal Act of 1831, the U.S. Congress passed the Homestead Act of 1862. The Act gave any white male head of household who was a citizen or intended to become one the opportunity to claim ownership of 100 acres of public land. Based upon the Naturalization Act of 1790, citizenship was effectively defined as any free white male.

Thus, in order to access racial capital in the form of land ownership, citizens needed to be included in the category of whiteness. Until the 13th Amendment was passed

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[3] Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (University of North Carolina Press, 1983).
[4] Ibid., 23.

by the U.S. Congress in 1865, citizenship was limited to white property holders. But neither the 13th Amendment nor Reconstruction was enough to give former slaves access to the racial capital. Critical legal studies scholar Sylvia A. Law writes that the homestead laws centralized control over land and property into the hands of white citizens.[5] In her historical study of racial discrimination practiced by the Office of Land Management, Law discovered that all homesteaders were white men.

Even with former slaves granted citizenship, Southern whites resisted giving them access to land: the idea was unnatural to Southern farmers who historically viewed blacks as forms of white property, not as property owners themselves. While the Southern Homestead Act of 1866 was passed in order to give land, despite its poor quality, to former slaves, appellate courts repealed it ten years later. Former slaves' ineligibility to accumulate land made them vulnerable to debt peonage systems such as sharecropping that subverted reconstruction efforts. And Southern white farmers favored systems like this that maintained their position at the top of the racial hierarchy. In 1876, "former slaves paid rent, worked the land and were always in debt to their former masters."[6] The failures of Reconstruction were in part due to poor whites' unwillingness to cooperate with policies that had the potential to reform access to land, and thereby enhance African-Americans' social mobility. An incalculable number of whites feared that black property

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[5] Sylvia A. Law, "White Privilege and Affirmative Action," *Akron Law Review*, 32:3 (1999): 609. Law's historical study analyzes how whiteness materialized into benefits for white people in regard to land, labor, real estate and health care. For more reading about material possessive investments in whiteness see: George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics, Revised and Expanded Edition*, Rev Exp edition (Temple University Press, 2006), 8. Ian Haney Lopez, *White by Law 10th Anniversary Edition: The Legal Construction of Race (Critical America (New York University Paperback))*, 10 Anv edition (NYU Press, 2006).Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (June 1, 1993): 1707–91, doi:10.2307/1341787.

[6] Sylvia A. Law, "White Privilege and Affirmative Action," *Akron Law Review*, 32:3 (1999): 611.

ownership was an inversion of natural race relations. Poor whites led a campaign of terrorism that included lynching and mob violence aimed at curbing black capitalism. If African-Americans accumulated capital and property, Southern white farmers argued, they would be likely to take revenge on their former oppressors. Without whiteness as property, as critical legal studies scholar Cheryl Harris argues, African-Americans were denied the benefits of owning wealth that could pass along from one generation to the next.[7] The legal precedents set by the Homestead Acts of 1862 and 1866 demonstrated that land settlement was contingent upon the taking of property from a racially subordinate population in order to hand over control to the dominant one. In this case, the dominant group was white settlers.

In the rural American West, property ownership came in the form of what historian George Lipsitz calls "possessive investments in whiteness."[8] The legal precedent that was established by the Homestead Act came in several incarnations in the West. Under the Desert Lands Act, for example, proof of irrigation in arid landscapes was necessary in order to apply for land assistance by the General Land Office (GLO) in Washington, D.C. According to historian Marc Reisner, white pioneers submitted fraudulent proof of irrigation, false testimony by witnesses and resubmitted multiple applications under different names in order to expand their private property in desert terrains.[9] The same fraudulent applications occurred under the Timber and Stone Act that centralized control over forestry. Many of these land applications were approved despite

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[7] Harris, "Whiteness as Property."
[8] Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*.
[9] Marc Reisner, *Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water*, Rev. and updated (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 43.

a lack of evidence that the applicants were qualified irrigation farmers who would thrive in desert farming.[10] Such legal precedents upheld whiteness by centralizing control over natural resources such as stone, timber, and water into the hands of white pioneers. Thus in this instance, racial capitalism was supported by the General Land Office's distribution of private property ownership: access to the natural resources needed to generate wealth for industrial agribusiness was put into white people's private property basket.

Racial capitalism assisted whites in acquiring ownership of land at the expense of Native-Americans. The Dawes Act of 1887, for example, was used to survey Native lands and make it available for public auction.[11] It also held that for Native-Americans to be eligible for full citizenship, they must live away from reservations and sell their property. It effectively removed decision-making powers that were historically given to the Indian council when dealing with land disputes. The major purchasers of Indian land titles were white pioneers who wanted to resettle the West. Thus, the Dawes Act assisted in dismantling American Indian control over land decisions that were once protected under the American Indian Appropriations Act of 1851.[12]

Following the work of George Lipsitz, whites flowed into the spaces that were opened up, drawn by financial incentives that came in the form of government subsidies offered to those who conformed to the standards of whiteness. Lipsitz observes that federal government subsidies were given to assist whites in obtaining real estate, welfare and work assistance as part of the New Deal. This assisted in white flight as well as the

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[10] Ibid.
[11] Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*. George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Temple University Press, 2011).
[12] D. S. Otis, *The Dawes Act and the Allotment of Indian Lands*, 1 edition (University of Oklahoma Press, 2014).

financing of segregated neighborhoods after World War II's baby boomer generation.[13] But during the earlier twentieth century, federal subsidies for investors in the rural American West came in the form of land. Thus, the real estate boom that took over many metropolises in the U.S. West in the early twentieth century appears to have its roots in a longer history of subsidizing access to private property via land ownership.

One geographical location where whiteness was upheld in regards to land laws was in Southern California's Imperial County. This dissertation argues that as racial capitalism unfolded in Imperial County, it led to unequal access to land among white pioneers, Asian growers, ethnic Mexican field workers and Native-Americans. I cover the time period between 1902, which saw the biggest land privatization boom in Southern California's Imperial County history, until 1945 when Japanese-Americans were forcibly removed from their private property during World War II. In this dissertation, I demonstrate that over time and space both the legal and cultural realms structured racial hierarchies by determining individuals' access to land and property rights. I argue that white pioneers who relocated to Imperial County were provided subsidies to acquire vast acreages of land that were intended to become huge farms for industrial agribusiness. Non-whites were systematically excluded. Asians were denied the right to own property in Imperial County because they were ineligible to become full citizens. For instance, the Alien Land Laws of 1913 and 1920 excluded South Asian, Filipino, Chinese and Japanese growers from subletting large farms. Unlike Asians, Mexicans legally held the right to own property because they were racially classified as white. However, as Benny Andres and Cheryl Harris have written, the practices of legal discrimination occurred

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[13] Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, 25.

within the banks where lenders refused to provide loans.[14] Native-Americans assisted in the building of the railroad and the maintenance of canals and dams that would ironically one day privatize their own water sources.

At this time, Asians were viewed as ineligible for citizenship rights. Such exclusionary laws directly targeted Chinese, South Asian, Japanese, Korean and Malay immigrants from entering the country due to becoming potential public charges. Such a legal category public charge was a means to classify certain immigrant populations as unfit for U.S. citizenship.[15] The category of public charge included anyone who did not designate normal U.S. sexual practices. Accusations in the Imperial Valley, for example, were waged against Asians, which included concubine marital practices, pedophilia, and homosexuality.[16] Such accusations were noteworthy by popular media as a means to vilify Asians publicly in order to classify them as public charges, potential predators as well as demonstrate the ineligibility to own property. Accusations of moral turpitude were a means to label Asians as potential public charges, or menaces. By making the case against citizenship, public charge as a category was a means to dispossess Asian immigrants from acquiring private property rights, and thereby racial capital.

Welcome to Imperial County

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[14] Harris, "Whiteness as Property." Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*. Benny J. Andrés, *Power and Control in the Imperial Valley: Nature, Agribusiness, and Workers on the California Borderland, 1900-1940* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2014).

[15] Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens?: Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (University of California Press, 2006); Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West*, American Crossroads 31 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (University of California Press, 2001).

[16] Shah, *Stranger Intimacy*.

The history of Imperial County's capitalist development begins with competition between land companies to privatize its natural environment. Under the Federal Reclamation Act of 1902, for example, land companies were invited to seek out land in order to assist in the building of desert colonies: local townships such Brawley, Holtville, Imperial, El Centro, and Calexico. The first land companies were the California Development Company (CDC) established in April of 1896 and the Imperial Land Company (ILC) created in March of 1900. Engineers Charles Rockwood and irrigation specialist George Chaffrey were primary advisers for both companies. The CDC and the ILC entered into agreements to purchase land on behalf of shareholders. Shareholders purchased stock for individual land titles, thereby enabling them to invest while at the same time accruing capital based on land deeds.

The CDC was put in charge of diverting water to the Imperial Valley from the Colorado River while the Imperial Land Company took control over land operations.[17] White homesteaders signed land titles over to the Imperial Land Company in order to allow land corporations to secure public land filings, create townships and build uniform irrigation systems. The trustees went from the hands of public domain to corporate landholders in a short amount of time between 1902 and 1925. Rapid transformation was a cornerstone in regards to the insights white settlers had about the costs and benefits ratio that they weighed when relocating to the Imperial Valley.

White pioneers argued that land was empty space that was unclaimed and therefore wanted to convert it into private property. When the *Imperial Investment Company*, for example, published an investment manual to potential land buyers, it was

[17] Ibid.

candidly expressed that the only purpose that land served was for profit. It stated that because Imperial County's land was irrigable all year round, it would provide higher margins of return based upon each landholder's investment.[18] (see figure 0.1) Marketing campaigns conducted by the Imperial Land Company gave the false impression that the land was already irrigable, vacant, and empty. Its investment augmented and established whiteness as a means to establish industrial agribusiness. Historians Benny Andres and Marc Reisner argue that this level of investment created the means to physically colonize Imperial's landscapes by virtue of the creation of railroads, canals, dams, and townships.[19] This dissertation project expands the debates even further by arguing that the criteria to establish proof of ownership via the possession of deeds, titles, and contracts were *unprecedented* in Imperial County. Such a lexicon of paper documentation established social meanings about land that was based upon private property ownership.[20] Therefore, when we examine the full scope of the U.S. federal government's investment in upholding whiteness by law, we see that the government was more concerned with generating wealth for large corporations. In the early twentieth century, corporate land holdings were the dominant way of accessing whiteness. The significance of this is that it takes place nearly thirty years before Franklin Roosevelt's famed New Deal, which was the first major public assistance program to be established in the United States.

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[18] Allen Kelly, "Imperial Valley: The Nile Valley of America" *Information Bureau for Imperial Valley Lands*. (circa. 1909)

[19] Benny J. Andrés, *Power and Control in the Imperial Valley: Nature, Agribusiness, and Workers on the California Borderland, 1900-1940* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2014), 29.

[20] During Spanish conquest there was economic value assigned to land and by the Mexican nation-state prior to U.S. conquest in 1848. However, there was never an effort to transform the desert by irrigation in order to produce massive agri-business. The transformation of Imperial's built environment was entirely new and thus requires further research about what this new political economic relationship to land by proof documentation with deeds, titles and contracts *meant*.

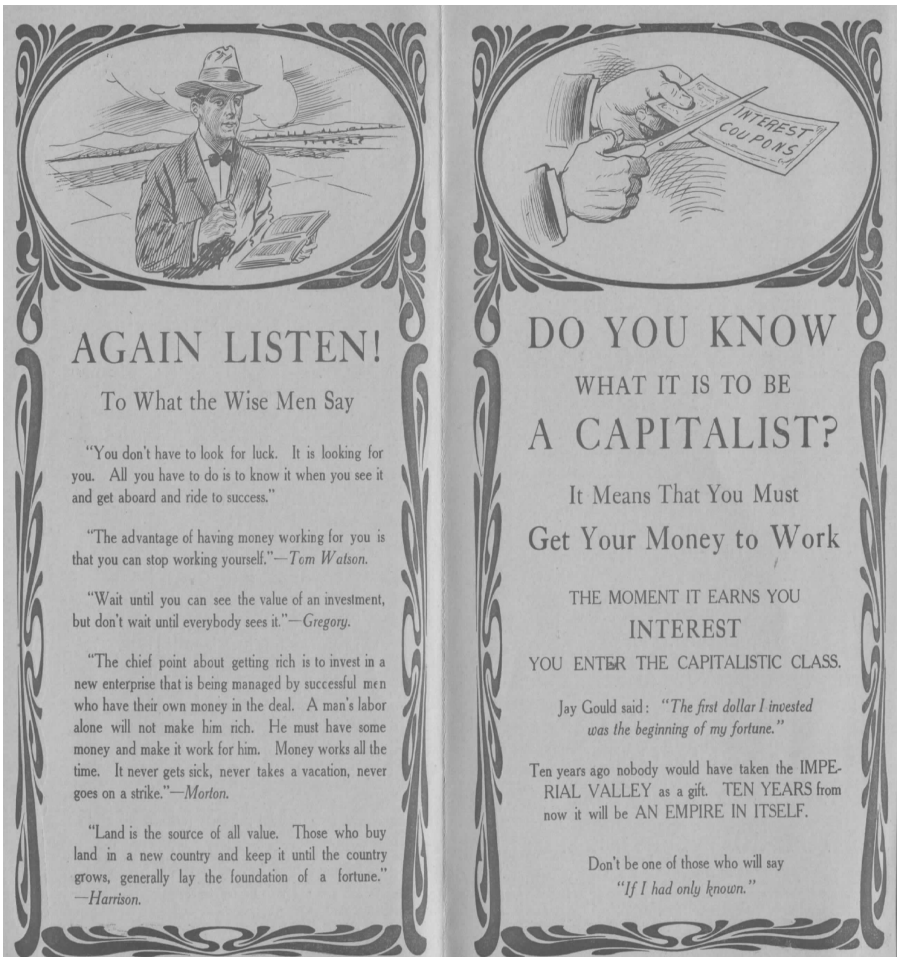

Figure 0.1 Imperial Investment Company advertisement."Listen to what we have to say about the Imperial Valley," *Imperial Investment Company*, circa 1909. (Courtesy of Society of California Pioneers)

Other industries, including railroad companies, capitalized on an expanding land market that provided growing need for regional transportation systems. The Southern Pacific Railroad Company, for example, was the first of its class to provide service along the Sunbelt region of the U.S. Southwest.[21] In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Indigenous, Chinese and ethnic Mexicans assisted in building railroad lines from Los Angeles to Imperial Valley. Under the name "The Exposition Line," the Southern Pacific

[21] "Announcement by the Southern California Land Company: Free Tickets to the Imperial Valley" (circa. 1909)

Railroad became a first class transportation system that carried investors to and from Los Angeles (see Figure 0.1). When it was completed in 1908, the railroad was used to land companies' advantage. In promotional materials, land companies offered free tickets to potential buyers (see Figure 0.2). Discursively, these promotions constructed the land as virgin territory that was *untouched* by previous human interactions with the land. Such a claim was an overt lie because it erased the Indigenous populations who had lived in the region for over five hundred years.[22]

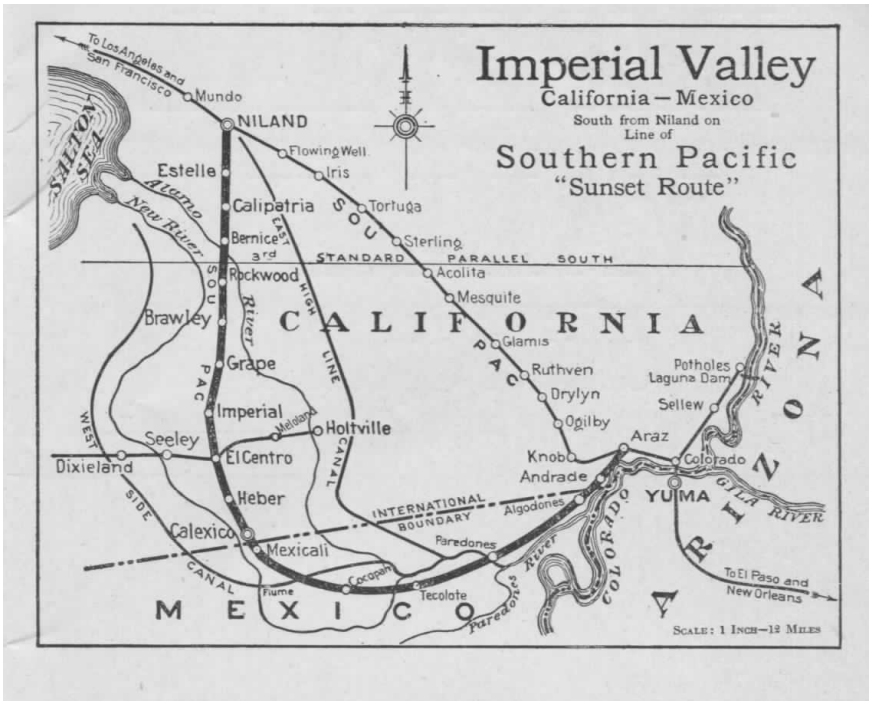

Figure 0.2 Southern Pacific Railroad map. Southern Pacific "Sunset Route," in *Southern Pacific Railroad* brochure, circa 1909. (Courtesy of Society of California Pioneers).

Indigenous populations such as the Cocopa, Chehemuevi, Hopi, and Yuma were, and still remain, the original inhabitants to live at the southern bend of the Colorado

[22] In this dissertation project, I use two terms--Native-American and Indigenous--to describe the complexity of Native identities. Cocopa Indians, for example, are a non-federally recognized tribe in the United States. At the same time, they are an Indigenous population that resides both in the United States and Mexico but are split by the border. Both terms Native-American and Indigenous are used to described the same groups of Native populations that reside along the Colorado River Delta.

River delta. Such tribes historically constituted the Colorado River Tribes that lived both at the Southern and Northern portion of the Colorado River. As far back as 1540, Fernando de Alarcon was ordered by the Spanish viceroy to go up the mouth of the Colorado River in order to gain supplies for General Coronado's expedition. When Alarcon reported back, the biodiversity of crops that the Cocopa Indians cultivated astounded him. Rich fertile soil made it possible to grow crops that included fruits, vegetables, and corn during the harshest of seasons[23] Like many agrarian societies, the Cocopa were subsistence farmers who used land for hunting, food gathering, and sustainable consumption. Sustainability was a priority for Cocopa Indians because the same tracts of land were reused each season. They were aware that if the land were to be exploited it could have reverberating consequences upon the eco-system, thereby their mortality.

Attitudes about land use between white pioneers and Cocopa Indians differed drastically. Cocopa Indians possessed an entirely different worldview about ecological sustainability, growth, and land usage. Cocopa used land for basic sustainable living. Ethnographer William Henderson Kelly observed that when Cocopa Indians were accused of hoarding supplies such as food, shelter, and water —these accusations were met with equitable punishment. Punishment came in the form of public humiliation, exclusion, and confinement away from the tribal community.[24] Tax collection, kings, priests, warlords, and landlords were not a part of Cocopa Indians' civilization. White

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[23] William Henderson Kelly, *Cocopa Ethnography*, First Edition edition (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1977), 4.

[24] *Native Americans and the Environment: Perspectives on the Ecological Indian* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 23.

pioneers, on the other hand, viewed the land as a means to achieve economic advancement. Under racial capitalism, as the stakes for white pioneers were increased, their conflicts and rivalries with other racial groups in the Imperial Valley also went up.

Such competition took the form of a rise in anti-immigrant fervor in the early twentieth century. Anti-Asian immigration bans were established in the late nineteenth century that barred Chinese, Japanese, South Asian, Filipino and Korean immigrants. By legal precedent, legislation such as the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and the 1907 Gentleman's Agreement placed significant restrictions against Chinese and Japanese immigration out of fear that they were becoming a major competitor in the labor market. At the same time, in the Imperial Valley, Japanese and South Asians were making successful gains until 1912. Japanese growers were successful at growing strawberry, cantaloupe and pea crops. South Asians imported their knowledge about working in dry climates to cultivate cotton. As white pioneers across the state lobbied to ban Asian settlement, they capitalized on anti-Asian populist sentiment of the time and were successful in helping to pass the Alien Land Laws of 1913 and 1920. Such laws effectively banned two key Asian competitors in the region from owning property: Japanese and South Asian growers. As these laws targeted the farming practices of Asian immigrants, it also redefined their relationship to land in the Imperial Valley as racialized capitalists who could not effectively be capitalists.

Because of their subordinate position in the racial hierarchy, Japanese and South Asians went to great lengths to circumvent alien land laws. In Arizona, California and New Mexico, South Asian men used common-law marriage with white and ethnic Mexican women as a means to gain access to land deeds. In Washington state, a Japanese

man named Takao Yamashita petitioned the U.S. Supreme Court in 1922 to racially classify himself as white (*Yamashita v. Hinkle*). In the Imperial Valley, South Asian men were convicted of violent crimes involving altercations between whites and other Asian growers. Historians Benny Andres and Karen Leonard have written about alien exclusion laws and how they impacted Asians socialization with whites.[25] Yet, an understudied dimension is the social meaning that Asians produced for themselves by trying to circumvent alien land laws. One dimension that I argue was that Asians' efforts to circumvent alien land laws was one way that they attempted to assimilate into normative standards of U.S. citizenship. In order to access property rights, they had to claim what George Lipsitz calls "a possessive investment in whiteness." I argue in this dissertation that this form of rivalry that resulted in unfair competition between white and Asian growers was the result of racial capitalism that intended to use unfair uneven distribution of property rights along racial lines.

Interestingly, ethnic Mexicans were not legally barred from owning property as Asians were. Yet ethnic Mexicans were the least represented racial demographic among dairymen, growers, and ranchers. Labor historians such as Neil Foley and Benny Andres' have found that ethnic Mexicans were denied loans because of racial biases by loan officers. Some banks had unofficial policies to deny claims made by ethnic Mexicans because they were flight risks, and could potentially flee over the border without paying for the debt. How Mexicans fared in comparison to Asians in the political economy and relations of Imperial Valley is a topic explored in later chapters. Asians, for example,

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[25] Andrés, *Power and Control in the Imperial Valley*, 2014, 4. Karen Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 34.

were portrayed as potential sexual predators against white children and women in popular media. Thus, the legal and cultural apparatuses of the state were used to disposes Asians and ethnic Mexicans of owning land based upon racial stereotypes.

Racial Capitalism in the U.S. West

This dissertation expands upon the work of Cedric Robinson and his concept of racial capitalism to which he traces its origins in feudal European societies. Robinson argues that preindustrial English working classes remained obedient to a feudal lord. Such a stratified society initially cannibalized its capitalist ambitions by using Irish immigrant labor that then transformed into an expansive use of indentured servitude and eventually chattel slavery of Africans. The vision to create a world emancipated from the clutches of slavery and at the same time granting sovereignty to rightful owners of the land draws upon what Robinson articulates as the *black radical tradition*.[26] The contribution that this dissertation makes with regards to racial capitalism framework is that I demonstrate how it unfolds in the American West as the West moves beyond a national frame into an imperial one. Thus, the confiscation of land that I analyze from brochures and pamphlets that were distributed by land companies took on an imperial character to consolidate racial capital in the modern form of private property. Certainly, land seizure was viewed as a natural dimension to capitalism in order to transform it in a robust agribusiness in the Imperial Valley. Land rights in this context afforded racial capital to whites that were denied to others. Land rights as an extension of racial rights in this context afforded the racial capital for whites to deny opportunities to others.

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[26] Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*.

When the state finds it convenient, however, it uses liberal multiculturalism as a means to appear inclusive when dispossessing Native-American populations' from their rights to land. Jodi Melamed, for example, in her critique of racial capitalism argues that after the succession of the Civil Rights Movement, liberal multiculturalism became a means to include legal protections of civil rights afforded to some racial minorities at the exclusion of others. When Melamed writes about Native-American tribes who used courts as a means to sustain sovereignty from the U.S. federal government, she argues that this normalized racial capitalist relations to land.[27] In so doing, it foreclosed competing visions within the diversity of Native-America that land *means* something much more than capital. In fact, as I argue in my dissertation land for Native-Americans was a means to maintain a connection to community, history and culture. Thus, expanding upon Melamed's argumentation, the state's benevolence comes at a cost of supporting a uniform vision as the capitalist production that requires land in order to expand wealth. Access to land for white pioneers worked similarly in Imperial County. To expand upon Melamed's formulation of racial capital, I argue that although land was a means of achieving full citizenship for Asians, ethnic Mexicans and African-Americans, it was also a way to assist in the building of autonomous spaces. It was also a means to claim space in order to afford human dignity outside of the violence of capitalism that insisted land was a means to achieve private property ownership alone.

In the U.S. West, land was a highly contested commodity that created competition and rivalry over landownership. David Chang has written about rivalry over land in

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[27] Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2011), 196.

Oklahoma. For Chang, racial hierarchies that were established between whites, black and Creeks determined access to land ownership in rural Oklahoma. This drove a system of blood quantum where racial capitalism was structured upon the rivalry between mixed race Creeks, who both identified as African-American and Native-American. The messiness over labeling oneself into a distinct racial category sometimes made people ineligible for owning property.[28] I expand upon Chang's analysis of racial capitalism by arguing that land tenure worked differently depending upon the investment of the state. While homesteading was popular means to obtain property, it wasn't driven by huge waves of migration and the complexity of immigrants' status to citizenship. Thus, when analyzing the experiences of ethnic Mexicans and Asians relationship to land, citizenship becomes a means to obtain wealth, property and security over basic civil rights.

Ruth Wilson Gilmore's critique of the prison industrial complex as a means to generate wealth for whites while incarcerating predominantly African-American and Latinos in California argues that racial capitalism implicates everyone. Thus the prison industrial complex has been a key avenue to understand how deeply wedded race, space and land are intertwined in the state's insistence on maintain wealth for whites.[29] In my dissertation, I expand upon Gilmore's critique of racial capitalism by arguing that white landowners used the criminal justice system as a way to punish workers who voiced opposition to fascist practices in the fields. I demonstrate that landowners possessed prosecutorial power and used such power in order to police ethnic Mexican communities. When framing the criminal justice system from the 1930s, it demonstrates the prehistory

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[28] David A. Chang, *Color of the Land*, First Edition edition (The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).
[29] Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California (American Crossroads)*, 1 edition (University of California Press, 2007).

to the carceral regimes that were used as a way to resolve social ills. In the early twentieth century, it was a way to public humiliate, target and squash union organizing.

Regional Racial Formation

This dissertation expands the literature in the field of comparative race and ethnicity by analyzes the development of interracial formation changes over space and time. Michael Omi and Howard Winant remind us that racial formation is defined "as the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed."[30] In Imperial County, for example, racial categories were invented and consolidated based upon access to land and private property. Thus, because whites possessed wealth that was used to purchase land, they benefitted from laws that excluded other racial populations from owning property, and monopolized natural resources, Historically situating the rise of Imperial County thus requires a regional understanding of U.S. racial formation. Racial classification is generally shaped by national shifts in racial attitudes; however, in Southern California's Imperial County these classifications were structured by the political economy of that time and place. For the purposes of the early twentieth century, industrial agribusiness dominated the cultural and legal realms that informed the social construction of race relations.

This dissertation places the experiences of Native-Americans, African-Americans, Mexican-Americans, whites and Asians-Americans in conversation withuniv one another by virtue of their competing relationships to land at the institutional level. Natalia Molina and Nayan Shah, for example, analyze competing cultural politics that ensued between

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[30] Michael Omi, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (Psychology Press, 1994).

whites, Asian and Mexican immigrants in two urban centers: Los Angeles and San Francisco.[31] In each of their case studies, Molina and Shah found that non-white immigrants faced greater forms of discrimination from the Department of Public Health whereas whites were not a point of interest for hygiene. I expand upon their analyses by arguing that because whites were privileged by virtue of their relationship to state institutions they were not impacted by racial discrimination in the ways that ethnic Mexicans, Asians and African-Americans were. Indeed, when it came to land and private property rights, it was extremely difficult for non-white populations to access land because of the centralized lock-down whites held. Such institutional forms of racial bias were not evenly applied and thus created a racial hierarchy that persisted for years.

This dissertation also expands upon the work Tomas Almaguer and analyzes the ways in which racial hierarchies were exercised in relationship to land rights.[32] In his research, Almaguer writes that over time, racial, gender, and class hierarchies shifted as the economic and political terrain was used to support white supremacy. Almaguer traces such a phenomena by comparing the experiences of Asian immigrants, ethnic Mexicans, white settlers, African-Americans, Native-Americans and European immigrants as they unfolded in California. He finds that until the late nineteenth century, certain racialized groups were preferred over others in order to support white supremacy, thus creating competition among non-white groups. I broaden the conversation even further by

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[31] Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens?*; Shah, *Contagious Divides*.

[32] Tomas Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California*, With a New Preface edition (Berkeley, Calif.; London: University of California Press, 2008). For other works that situate racial hierarchies see: Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture*, American Crossroads 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987).

examining the development of racial hierarchies as they unfolded between ethnic populations in a rural agricultural community in the early twentieth century until 1945. In this time period, racial hierarchies shifted depending on the political climate surrounding property ownership. That meant that if an increase in anti-Asian sentiment resulted in laws banning Asians from owning property, this also allowed whites to preserve their position at the top of the racial hierarchy in the Imperial Valley. These racial hierarchies were informed by whether or not someone could access land rights by law, but also if they possessed the racial capital in order to purchase property in the first place. In the case of ethnic Mexicans, for example, even though they were classified as white by law, they were the demographic least likely to be represented as landowners in Imperial County. Unlike Asians, however, Mexicans were never legally disenfranchised from owning property in California. Thus, the significance of this dissertation project demonstrates that even though Asians appeared to have fewer rights than ethnic Mexicans, they paradoxically possessed greater racial capital by virtue of their higher rates of land ownership.

Methodology

This dissertation is an interdisciplinary study of the Imperial Valley from a historical perspective. Methodologically, I bridge cultural studies, legal studies and ethnic studies together by weaving an analysis of the visual, textual and discursive. Data collected for this dissertation was taken from the years 1902-1945, including court transcripts from the Imperial County courthouse, immigration files collected from INS record group 85 located at the National Archives in Washington, D.C., cultural ephemera such as photographs and land company brochures collected from the Department of the

Interior at the National Archives, Society of California Pioneers and Huntington Library and newspaper articles from *Los Angeles Times*, *San Diego Union/Tribune*, *Imperial Valley Press*, and *Holtville Tribune.* Such broad data collection is necessary to parse out the societal effects of racial crimes against minorities, which were chronically under-investigated or under-reported.

Out of hundreds of brochures and pamphlets that were published by land companies, I analyze ten major publications. With the use of these publications, I conduct a visual and textual analysis of early twentieth century representations of land in the Imperial Valley. I argue that the land was represented as vacant as a means to support the colonization of the desert. Visually, it socially engineered the place as a site that could be transformed in a more modern robust site for agribusiness. Such ingenuity on the part of the land companies was a means to socially construct the place as a place where whites could obtain land in the form of racial capital.

Out of the thirty murder and rape trials documented for instance at the Imperial County Courthouse and San Diego Historical Society, I examine six involving Punjabi, Black, Mexican, and White migrants during the years 1902-1945. I then critique how press coverage from the *Los Angeles Times*, *San Diego Union*, *and Imperial Valley Press* produced racial hysteria concerning perverse migrant men along the U.S.-Mexico border. I take my cue from cultural studies critic Stuart Hall who suggests popular culture works in tandem with the state to produce meaning about racial groups as pathological/criminal.[33] Trial transcripts and newspapers are the public artifacts that not

[33] Stuart Hall, "Popular Culture and the State" In *the Anthropology of the State: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 364.

only represent historical "events," but also as queer theorist Emma Pérez writes, *were ways of knowing* non-normative sexualities and racial bodies.[34] In this section, I explain where I located primary sources, limitations of sources and analytics I will use to read my findings.

Trial transcripts used in this dissertation were found in legal archives located at the Imperial Valley Courthouse and San Diego Historical Society. During my visit to both sites, I located twenty homicide trials and ten rape/sodomy trials involving Black, Punjabi and Mexican migrants occurring between the years 1902 and 1945. I use these trials to examine 1) how knowledge about racial groups was being classified and 2) how the state framed its role as benevolent protector of victims' rights, while at the same time creating the idea that migrant domesticities are dysfunctional. These trials will allow me to answer my main research question about the limitations of liberal governance and specifically to examine what discourses trial lawyers, witnesses, and judges used to mobilize ideas about race, gender and sexuality in the space of the courtroom. That said, I read trials *against the grain* of popular thinking to disrupt the social meanings produced by early twentieth century courts that worked to criminalize Punjabis, ethnic Mexicans, and Blacks. I argue that such classifications were used as a tool to support the exclusion of non-white groups from owning property, thus citizenship rights.

The limitation of these transcripts is twofold: defendants and witnesses held little power over how their testimony was transcribed, and the accused (or members of their family) faced imprisonment or imminent death at the hands of the state if they did not

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[34] Emma Pérez, "Queering the Borderlands: The Challenges of Excavating the Invisible and Unheard," *Frontiers* 2&3 (2003), 122-130.

cooperate. As I analyze these court cases, I will be attentive to reading against the grain so I can "listen for gaps/silences" where migrants express discomfort or publicly withdraw from certain questioning. Tracing moments of silence in court testimonies allows me to examine the complexity of migrant testimony in the space of the courtroom. Rather than exhaustively examining what is stated in public testimony, I'm interested in finding what's left unheard, unintelligible, and untraceable. As I work within and against these legal archives, I use this as a site to consider what meaningful kinships and intimacies ethnic studies scholars could mine from legal archives. The paradox, for ethnic studies scholars interested in histories of intimacy between Punjabis, Mexicans, blacks and whites, is that there are few other sources; many of these men and women were illiterate, making it difficult to search for written records in their own words, such as diaries and letters. The courtroom was one of the few public spaces where migrants publicly testified about their everyday kinships and affinities.

As cultural geographer Steve Macek suggests newspapers create racial anxieties about the possibility that certain racial groups are more prone to commit rape and murder.[35] I argue the *Los Angeles Times*, *San Diego Union*, *Holtville Tribune* and *Imperial Valley Press* characterized migrants' sexuality as an impending sexual danger to white society. The limitation, however, of using mainstream newspapers is the lack of counter-representation from communities of color, such as the black press, Spanish-speaking newspapers, and social activists fighting against racial injustice. I have not found many narratives countering mainstream representations of criminality in my

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[35] Steve Macek, *Urban Nightmares: The Media, The Right and The Moral Panic Over the City*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 25.

research. Nevertheless, the mainstream coverage of the "crimes" give evidence to the hegemonic thoughts and practices of the time.

Newspaper articles were found using secondary literature, online databases, and immigration files in record group 85 located at the National Archives. Newspapers were selected based on sexually perverse representations of African-Americans, Mexican and Punjabi immigrants in Imperial Valley and San Diego. The newspapers were useful because they demonstrated how press coverage created racial anxieties about non-normative migrants and African-Americans living along the U.S.-Mexico border. In addition to articles, I located advertisements covering issues related to sexual hysteria and violent crimes in the Imperial Valley.

Beyond the textual descriptors that were created by newspapers, I also weave together the photography of Dorothea Lange with the correspondences and field notes of early reformers who worked on behalf of the Study of Race Relations in the U.S. Such a rich archival resource has been useful in understanding the power and salience that Lange's photography had in the early twentieth century with regard to her depictions of ethnic Mexican school children. I put Lange's photographs in conversation with school teacher Nora Kreps's field notes where she noted the everyday poverty and racism that ethnic Mexican children faced. The significance of such visual and textual documents is that it provides a window into the agency that children possessed in the Valley in order to contest the overshadowing burden of living a racially driven capitalist society. I also use Lange's photographs in order to understand a more comprehensive view of children's incarceration during Japanese internment. I use such photographs as a means to illustrate the state of race relations that over 90 percent of Imperial's Japanese American residents

faced as they were expelled to the Colorado River Indian Reservation. With the use of photography, I argue that Lange and other photojournalists demonstrated that state violence could not diminish the human spirit to maintain human dignity.

Labor reports were also used in this dissertation in order to illustrate the internal debates that the state was having over ethnic Mexican immigrant rights in the Imperial Valley. I argue that in the fight for public space, labor board commissioners in Los Angeles viewed 1930s Imperial Valley to be a racially hostile place because of the inequality that was created by the landowners. I argue that despite efforts to prosecute ethnic Mexicans and criminalize their unionizing efforts in public space, they were determined to carve out counter publics in order to publicly protest.

Chapter Overview

This dissertation project emphasizes that rivalry and competition over land use has been structured by racial capitalism in Imperial County. Such conflict over land has been profitable for whites at the expense of non-white subjects. Each chapter outlines the significance of land in expanding the extent to which racial capitalism impacts development. Chapter one analyzes the discursive and visual production of Imperial Valley's landscapes as an uncivilized space that required modernization in order to support industrialized agribusiness. In this chapter, I turn to cultural and ephemeral materials that were used to support white pioneership. Chapter two demonstrates that racial capitalism generated rivalries, conflict, and tensions between white pioneers and Asian growers over the same plots of land. In this chapter, I draw upon the cultural and legal arenas in which Asians, ethnic Mexicans and African-Americans were racialized in regards to land and land ownership. More specifically, I analyze how criminalization of

such groups became a means to disqualify them from becoming eligible recipients of land ownership. Chapter three analyzes how poverty manifested in the built environment across the color line. Specifically, I analyze how poverty impacted the segregation of ethnic Mexican field workers, thus creating a two-tiered society that was produced and enforced through residential and class segregation as well as environmental racism . Chapter four analyzes field workers and private landowners' struggle over public space in the fight over fair compensation and wage salary. In this chapter, I argue that property owners exercised their white privilege by using law and punishment in order to dissuade ethnic Mexicans from striking in public space. Chapter five analyzes the overlaps in land removal that occurred during World War II when 90 percent of Japanese-Americans living in the Imperial Valley were relocated to the Colorado River Relocation Camp located on an Indian Reservation in Poston, Arizona. By way of photography, personal journals, and school assignments, I analyze both Native-American and Japanese-American responses to the social alienation that was created by internment. In doing so, I demonstrate that the dispossession of land had significant consequences because both groups lacked racial capital. Each chapter has advanced my argument that because whites possessed racial capital they were given the authority by law to discriminate, exclude, and criminalize other racial populations for profit. In their summation, the chapters provide a closer picture of the specific methods by which racial capitalism developed in its modern form within the changing political and social landscapes of a racially segregated America

Chapter One

The Political Economy of Land

In January 2010, as I was taking a break from conducting research at the Imperial County courthouse, I overheard two gentlemen speaking in Spanish about a recent drowning in the All-American Canal. The person who drowned was an unidentified migrant crossing from Mexico into the United States. Because of the 1994 border enforcement policy, commonly referred to as Operation Gatekeeper, I knew that migrants had shifted their routes of entry from mountains to canals. By the year 2010, an estimated 500 men, women, and children perished in the canal's water.[36] Intruding upon their conversation, I asked how was it possible that countless deaths went unchecked over such a lengthy period of time. The two men replied that the Imperial Irrigation District (IID) refused to install buoys. In the 100 years of its management of the All-American Canal, they explained, the IID's position was that it didn't support illegal entry and thus would not rescue undocumented migrants. This conversation left an indelible mark upon me as I continued to grapple with a system that allowed over 500 preventable drownings. Upon conducting my research, I was shocked to find that drowning experts identified the All-American Canal as the most dangerous body of water in North America. Though not a

[36] Thank you to my colleagues Michael Aguirre and Alina Mendez for sharing their experiences as young people in the Imperial Valley. I am particularly grateful for their insight regarding the IID's efforts at damage control for hundreds of immigrant deaths. One example is the IID's children's public awareness program called "Dippy Duck," which warns Imperial's children about the dangers of going into the canal for recreational purposes. No mention of immigrant crossings is talked about in the Dippy Duck public awareness program. For more information about the origins of Imperial Valley's moat see Eric Boime, "National Moat, Regional Lifeline: The Campaign for the All-American Canal, 1917–1944," *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 26, no. 2 (August 1, 2011): 161.

secret (the drownings earned the attention of national news outlets such as *60 Minutes*), the death of Mexican immigrants by drowning has been a less dominant part of immigrant rights discourse.[37]

Upon my return to the Imperial Valley in March 2010, I attended a meeting concerning preventative measures the IID needed to take in order to curb drowning. Elders, children, and community members filled the hallway of its dilapidated building. Board members argued that the IID didn't have a responsibility to resolve illegal immigration by installing buoys. Allegations of racial bias circulated within the room that evening, even with a board composed of Mexican immigrants and second generation Mexican-Americans. Stella Mendoza, for example, a board member of Mexican descent, was most adamant about defending the IID. In her closing statements she argued that the IID was not accountable for "trespassers" using the canal for recreational purposes. According to Mendoza, the IID's primary responsibility was to protect the canal from trespassers. A self-identified "old timer" said the canal was built to serve the needs of the community rather than act as a destructive weapon. Interestingly, this man was a white elder of the community whose father was one of the first pioneers to relocate to Imperial County. That evening I left troubled by how fractured this community was over the historical memory of one canal.

The IID historically has had a deep and troubling relationship with the Mexican community, which I trace in this chapter. In the literature concerning border crossing, studies of deaths and injury due to border militarization have been primarily conducted

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[37] 60 minutes interview, "All American Canal," CBS, 2010. Though not a secret, the coverage involving the 500 plus victims has never become a dominant part of human rights discourse concerning migrant crossings. At the same time, it can be better placed into dialogue into the history of the border's development as militarized hostile space against ethnic Mexican immigrants beginning 100 years prior.

after the Operation Gatekeeper policy enacted during the Clinton administration.[38] However, when taking into consideration the history of land management, the scope of control and management of land access/restrictions has much earlier roots, beginning in 1915 with land privatization and the IID's management of the All American Canal. At that time, the IID established itself as the official liaison between entities tasked with water management, distribution, and service in the Imperial Valley. The architectural design of the border sits at the canal's banks separating the United States from Mexico. Border crossers who have opted for the canal over crossing the desert and facing deadly heat to avoid border patrol agents have had to face high mortality rates. Historically, the IID has remained uninterested in resolving the problem of illegal entry into the United States. Its position is that it is a water authority management company, and so it has remained silent on whether to assist immigrants despite the fact that this community has been affected by the building of this monumental structure. The prehistory of the building of the canal, however, demonstrates that this conflict is not ahistorical and in fact has underpinnings that began with the early pioneers who settled in the Imperial Valley. Such pioneers were predominantly investors who held great economic power that came in the form of land companies. Land companies assisted in the building of such canals in order to provide water for settlement. A hundred years later these very canals continue to impact land use, crossing, and immigration policy at the U.S.-Mexico border.

To better contextualize the origins of what I viewed to be a conflict over race, citizenship, and land rights, in this chapter I examine the history of water control and

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[38] Benny J. Andrés, *Power and Control in the Imperial Valley: Nature, Agribusiness, and Workers on the California Borderland, 1900-1940* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2014). Boime, "National Moat, Regional Lifeline: The Campaign for the All-American Canal, 1917–1944."

desert colonization in Southern California's Imperial County. Based upon land development programs dating back 100 years, there is substantial evidence to prove that there were racial biases shared by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the California Development Company (CDC), and the Imperial Irrigation District (IID). For example, in 1900 desert colonists intentionally selected the name Imperial as an expression of their desire to transform the valley's arid topography into an industrial agribusiness.[39] Each of these land companies intentionally promoted their land programs for whites only. They intentionally erased the history of Native-American presence in the region, claiming that the land was vacant. Such claims were used to support imperial ambitions to subjugate the Colorado River and tame the wild desert landscape, thereby allowing for the creation of industrial agribusiness. U.S. imperialism conventionally has been understood to occur through military occupation in international contexts such as Hawaii, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico.[40] However this dissertation argues that U.S. imperialism took on a variety of forms through the construction of counties such as Imperial within the continental United States.

Such a transformation of Imperial's built environment included the colonization of its desert landscapes. Canals and dams were viewed as the best remedy for flooding that was caused by the unpredictability of the Colorado River. Because canals were

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[39] Boime, "National Moat, Regional Lifeline: The Campaign for the All-American Canal, 1917–1944."
[40] Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives across Cultures, Communities, and Countries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Yen Le Espiritu, *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refugees* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); Adria L. Imada, *Aloha America: Hula Circuits through the U.S. Empire* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2012); Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 1994). "Imperial Valley, California: Where Water Works Miracles," *Southern Pacific Railroad Company* brochure, circa. 1925. California Society of Pioneers, Folder 2, Box 001102 Advertisements.

considered monumental design projects they required the support of the U.S. federal government. Underscored in the construction of such public works projects was the U.S. government's commitment to modernizing the U.S. Southwest. In order to meet the demands of colonialists who at this time were predominantly investors, the U.S. federal government financially backed construction projects that enhanced design projects of canals, dams and railroads.

The Federal Reclamation Act of 1902 made Western settlement possible. It allocated funding for white homesteaders to act as desert colonizers. It created the Bureau of Reclamation, housed in the Department of the Interior, that acted as the official liaison between the federal government and private companies.[41] A formal private-public partnership between the Bureau of Reclamation, the CDC, and the IID was established. Under the Swing-Johnson Act of 1928, monetary relief was set aside for irrigation projects such as the building of Boulder Dam in 1928 and the All-American Canal that was completed in 1942. Because these federal projects exponentially enhanced not only the value but also the business potential of these lands that only whites had access to, such partnerships exposed the political economic investment that the nation state held in possessing property for white citizens.

By contrast, the political and economic apparatus of the state secured benefits for whites at the expense of non-whites. Without the benefits of whiteness, as historian Natalia Molina argues, citizenship was hollow.[42] Under California's Alien Land Laws of

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[41] Andrés, *Power and Control in the Imperial Valley*.

[42] Natalia Molina, *How Race Is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts*, 2013, 47. Molina, Natalia, "The Long Arc of Dispossession: Racial Capitalism and Contested Notions of Citizenship in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands in the Early Twentieth Century," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (December 2014): 431–47.

1913 and 1920, for example, Japanese, South Asian, Filipino, and Chinese immigrants were banned from owning property.[43] Such laws were also adopted in the states of Washington, Arizona, and New Mexico. By law, the political and economic apparatus of the state secured the benefits for whites at the expense of non-citizens. In this instantiation of U.S. laws, they were used to prohibit access to owning property in the form of land.

An understudied dimension about the environmental history of Imperial County is the intersection between whiteness, desert colonization, and the political economy of land. Historian Benny Andres, for example, has written about the impact that desert colonization, canals, and dams had on Imperial's built environment. Water dependency, flood control, and anti-Asian racism against Japanese colonization in Mexicali fueled the ever-growing need to build the All American Canal. The canal offered independence from relying upon Mexico for water, the ability to remain sovereign, and the added benefit of physically acting as a border between the United States and Mexico. Such an analysis has been generative in demonstrating that the CDC and the IID were motivated by racial discrimination. Yet there has been little to no discussion about the relationship between whiteness and private property subsidies prior to Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal programs of the 1930s. A central claim in this chapter is that land subsidies were used in order to centralize property rights into the hands of whites. Under the management of the Bureau of the Interior, the Department of Reclamation invested in the racial capital of

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[43] Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West*, American Crossroads 31 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

whites. In the context of the Imperial County, racial capitalism was used in order to accumulate private property in the form of land ownership.

This chapter is about how the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, CDC, IID, and desert colonization advocates transformed the racial meanings that were ascribed to land. It is organized into two main sections. The first is about how the Bureau of Reclamation, CDC, and IID transformed the socio-economic meaning that was associated with land. Historian Benny Andres has written about the material impact that land and water companies had on Imperial's ecology and built environments. The California Development Company and the Imperial Land Company, for example, sold tracts of acres to desert colonists in the late nineteenth century. The Imperial Irrigation District managed the privatization of the Colorado River when the All-American Canal was completed in 1942. Land ownership by white homesteaders was promoted as the precondition for the civilization of the region. Indeed, the Bureau of Reclamation and the California Development Company also constructed the space as uncivilized. Such descriptions about the land and its inhabitants were solicited as primary reasons for white pioneers to purchase land in Southern California's Imperial County.

In this chapter, I conduct a visual and textual analysis of promotional materials that were distributed by the Bureau of Reclamation, CDC, and IID. I analyze how calls for the "modernization" of regional spatial relations endorsed a racialized version of capitalism. In terms of space, the Imperial Valley was constructed in what was best described as empty lands. My primary analytical focus demonstrates how land was constructed as a form of property for white homesteaders. The discourse of empty lands was indicative of a burgeoning capitalist economy that viewed itself as unprecedented.

For this reason, I argue that property ownership was a form of racial capitalism. Capitalism, conventionally, assumes that everyone is free to exchange labor and thereby this exchange is determined by how much time is expandable by labor power. The key assumption of this form of neo-colonial economics is that labor power is equitable among all workers. However racism, nationalist formation, and colonial history have the residual effects that distribute different kinds of labor to different groups and make property relations unequal for non-white people. In the process of the devaluation of these subjects, I argue that property ownership is what gave allowed white growers to assume a position of economic power.

Land Companies

To better elucidate tensions over race and capitalism, this chapter begins with the history of Imperial Valley's land development. The first companies to invest in the Imperial Valley were the California Development Company (CDC) and its sister corporation called the Imperial Land Company (ILC) established in 1900. Fortune tycoon Charles Rockwood owned the CDC and recruited irrigation specialist George Chaffrey. Chaffrey was a distinguished engineer who earned numerous accolades for his irrigation projects in California and Australia.[44] Chaffrey joined the company in order to assist in one of the largest water projects in U.S. history: the effort to divert water from the Colorado River into the Imperial Valley. In the late nineteenth century, the Colorado River was a navigable river that poured into the Gulf of California at the southern part of the U.S.-Mexico border. In the Imperial Valley, the only reliable source of water was the

[44] Andrés, *Power and Control in the Imperial Valley*. Andres' book is one of two case studies that traces a lengthy and rigorous historical arc to transformations of race and power relations. Although not explicit in his analysis, Andres is adamant about providing an economic and environmental history to the Imperial Valley, one that has been difficult to document because of the dearth of research in the region.

nearby Alamo Canal located in Mexicali Valley, Mexico (see Figure 1.1). Upon establishing themselves in the Imperial Valley, the two companies invested in the

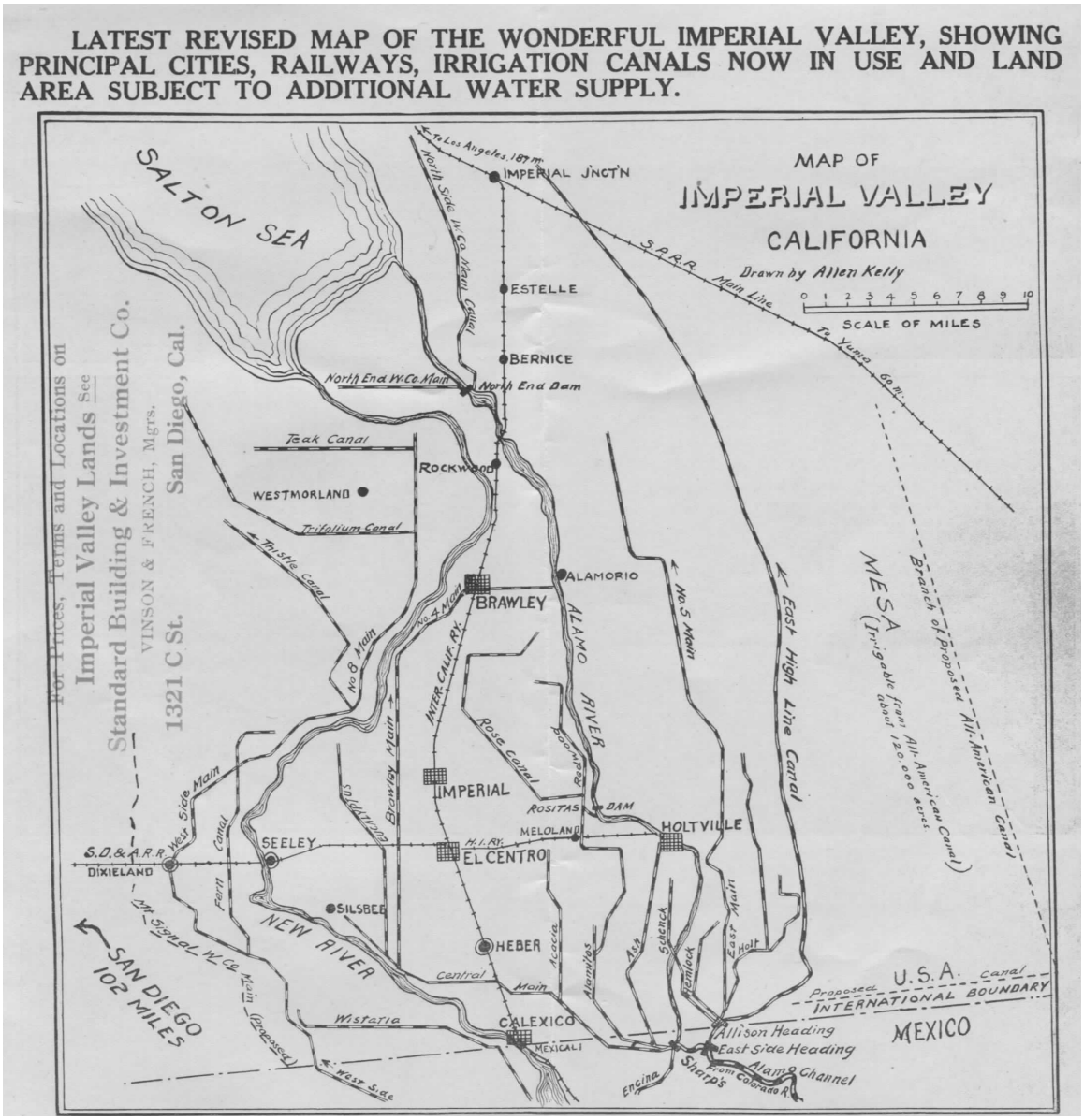

Figure 1.1 Map of Imperial Valley. Map taken from the Information Bureau for Imperial Valley Lands. This map was created for potential land investors who lived in San Diego, California. Folders 1 & 2 Imperial County, Advertisements Folder (Courtesy of Society of California Pioneers)

construction of an independent water district that could be autonomous from the Alamo Canal. As part of a publicity campaign, both the CDC and the ILC wanted to give the

impression that the Imperial Valley would be free from foreign influence with regard to water.

Without water from the Colorado River, Southern California would cease to exist. The Colorado's water supply flows southwesterly in the direction of the Gulf of California.[45] The Imperial Valley links seven states that extend south from lower Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, New Mexico, Arizona, and California into a single draining system. In each of these states, the Colorado River passes through some of the United States' toughest terrains, mainly arid desert climate. Environmental historian Kevin Starr writes that Chaffrey doubted whether white people possessed the biological capacity to survive such conditions.[46] Chaffrey had a change of heart, however, when he joined a team of engineers constructing a canal in Australia. In the Australian outback he witnessed British settlers thriving in sustainable agricultural communities in the mid-nineteenth century. The Australian project opened him up to other possibilities that involved the creation of sustainable water sources for newly created colonies. Chaffrey determined that if one imperial project worked in the context of the Australian Outback, it certainly could work in the context of Southern California's Imperial County.

In the years between the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo of 1848 and the passing of the Federal Reclamation Act of 1902, the U.S. federal government tested a number of homestead programs in the rural American West. In the Treaty, Mexico lost nearly half of its northern territory to the United States. The Homestead Act of 1862 and its amended law the Southern Homestead Act of 1866 gave Civil War veterans (who were

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[45] Kevin Starr and Kevin Starr, *Inventing the Dream: California through the Progressive Era*, Americans and the California Dream (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 20.
[46] Ibid, 21.

predominantly white men) tracts of land in order to assist their transition back into civilian life. Most tracts of land were given in the rural American West. In 1877, the U.S. congress passed the Desert Land Act that effectively granted homesteaders 640 acres per capita. It also gave them the option of purchasing land for $1.25 an acre.[47] This initially seemed like a good ploy to increase settlement by providing subsidies for homesteaders. In 1887, the United States federal government passed the Dawes Act, which officially suspended American Indian land sovereignty. The law allowed homesteaders to parcel tracts of land and sell them to private owners. Demographically, homesteaders were nearly all white people. Each of these laws worked turn homesteaders into investors. As a consequence of land reform, there was an emphasis on purchasing property. In so doing, homesteaders were at the forefront of the reclamation movement in the rural American West.

The CDC and ILC experienced a number of setbacks in their initial plans to conquer the Colorado River. The passage of the Federal Reclamation Act of 1902 put an end to unregulated homesteading. Until 1902, Imperial Valley homesteaders outsourced the messy job of water management and allowed the CDC to create townships by transferring land titles into the company's name.[48] Around the same time, the Southern Pacific railroad company expanded into the Imperial Valley, increasing demand for property titles. Reclamation, the federal government argued, provided homesteaders with the ability to reclaim and populate desert landscapes.[49] For the CDC, the Reclamation Act

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[47] Ibid, 28.
[48] Ibid, 34.
[49] Marc Reisner, *Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water*, Rev. and updated (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 123.

had profound consequences, because the increased red tape left the CDC vulnerable to scrutiny by the federal government.

Under the law of 1902, the Bureau of Reclamation that was housed in the Department of Interior regulated the daily management of land titles. In its review of the CDC in 1904, the Reclamation Service accused the land company of fraud. It claimed that the CDC embellished its property lines, violated homestead laws, and illegally diverted water from navigable rivers. Additionally, the CDC was accused of exploiting the Desert Land Act by violating land agreements. The most serious accusation was that the CDC signed international trade agreements without the permission of the federal government, specifically a fiduciary agreement between the CDC and Mexican consul general and landholder Guillermo Andrade. Working through a subsidiary, *La Sociedad de Terrenos y Irrigacion de la Baja California*, CDC owner Charles Rockwood entered into an agreement with Andrade. Rockwood rented land because of Mexican laws that prohibited Americans from owning property on the southern side of the border. In return, Andrade delivered a consistent flow of water and leased the land as an absentee owner.

Ecological Conquest

Under the terms that Chaffrey and Rockwood established for economic development, land companies relied upon two forms of engineering in the early twentieth century. The first was the physical transformation of Imperial Valley's built environment through the construction of canals, railroads, and irrigation systems that included dams. The second was social engineering as it pertained to the recruitment of homesteaders. As of 1902, land companies published leaflets that included photographs and written descriptions about the abundance of free property. Solicitation was their primary goal.

Without property holders in place, the CDC and ILC recruitment efforts were to increase profit and revenue. In the process of their recruitment, they constructed the land to be an arid open space. At the same time, they constructed the space of the Imperial Valley as a wilderness that required containment. The insidious aspect of development was that it naturalized colonization of Imperial Valley's land and water systems.

Indeed, ecological conquest was central to the early propaganda with respect to reclamation. In his index about the history of the Colorado River, U.S. reclamation propagandist Don J. Kinsey wrote a short manuscript entitled, "The River of Destiny: The Story of the Colorado River." In 1928, his writings were published in a book length manuscript for the Department of Water and Power in the City of Los Angeles as part of its propaganda to support the Hoover Dam. In the same year, the U.S. Congress debated a bill that was authored by Representative Phil Swing and Senator Hiram Johnson. Both members argued in support of the construction of Southern California's All-American Canal and Hoover Dam. The Swing-Johnson Act passed in both houses within months of its introduction. While Swing and Johnson operated at the national level, Kinsey attempted to persuade locals living in the Southwest region to support the building of the All-American canal. In his writing, Kinsey included provocative accounts about the ecological conquest that was brought upon by Spanish colonialism in the sixteenth century. Kinsey's texts provided a window into the colonial discourses that were at the heart of the 1928 reclamation movement.

Colonial discourses normalized the building of dams and canals in the early twentieth century as part of a continuation of European settlement that began in sixteenth century Alta California. In the first chapter of *The River of Destiny*, Kinsey described the

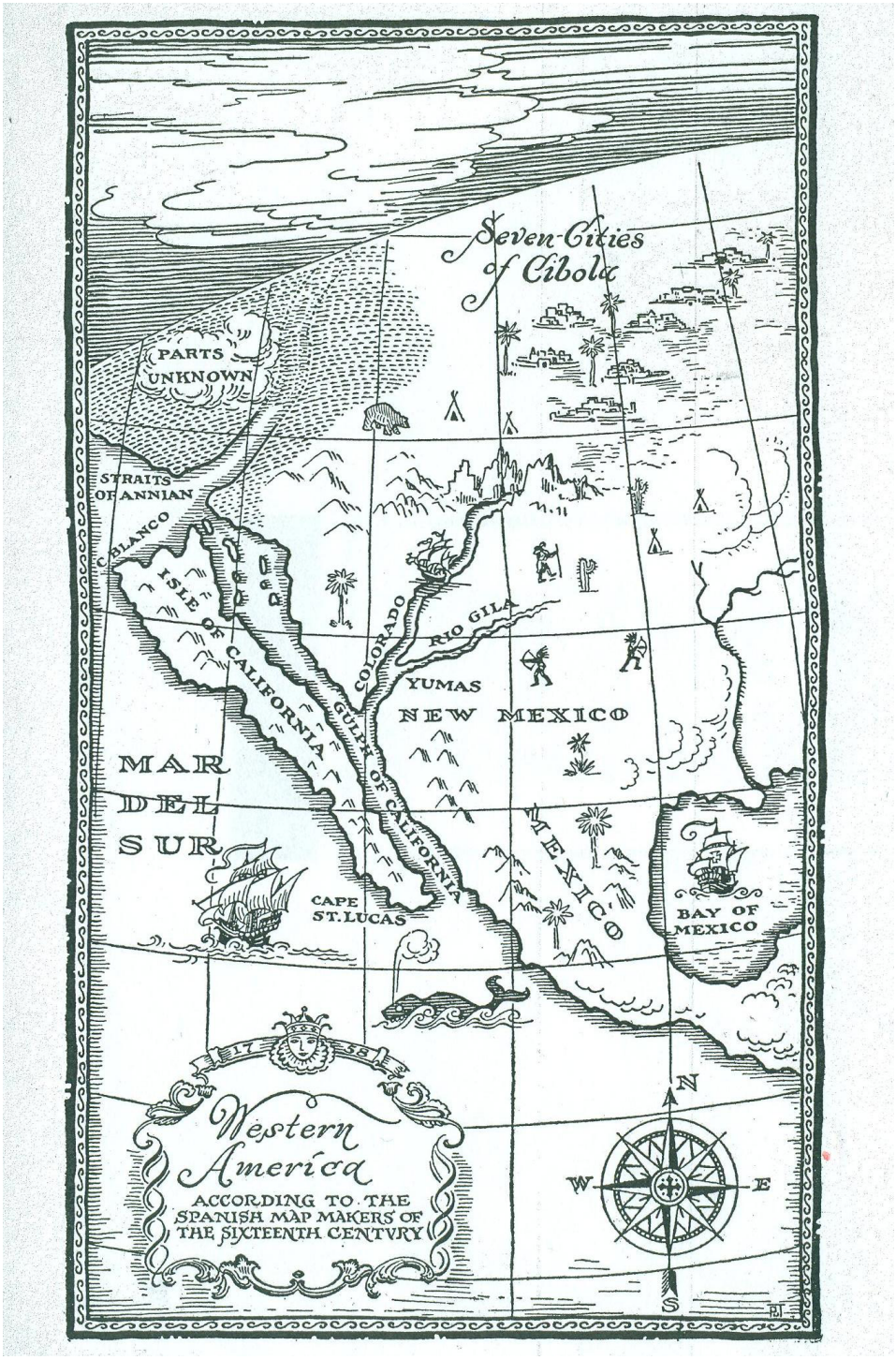

Figure 1.2 Colonial map taken from "The River of Destiny." In it, he envisioned that the construction of canals being done at the Colorado River was a continuation of Spanish imperialism. Such a map demonstrates that he not only understood natural resources to be used for the purposes of Euro-Centrism but that the work of the IID was a continuation of its Manifest Destiny. Kinsey, Don J., "The River of Destiny: The Story of The Colorado River" (Department of Water and Power City of Los Angeles, 1928), 10, Otis R. "Dock" Marston Papers, Huntington Library.

dramatic journey that Spanish *conquistadores* took in 1540 that led them to the mouth of the Gulf of California. Upon discovering this entryway, legend stated that Cortez, conqueror of Mexico, heard that to the north there stood the Seven Cities where houses were built of solid gold and streets were paved with jewels. The northern tip of where the Colorado River departed inland was the Imperial Valley (see figure 1.2).[50] For Kinsey, there existed an economic connection between Spanish ecological conquests during the colonial period and his lobbying efforts to conquer the Colorado River. His views mirrored the capitalist incentives that were used by Spanish colonizers. Certainly, his bias was racial because he saw an alliance between European colonialism and the efforts to control the Colorado River. Based upon the common parlance of his time, Kinsey conveyed a correlation between Manifest Destiny and conquest of the Colorado River.

Promotions of the reclamation effort show that the conquest of the Colorado River represented the inauguration of western civilization into the rural West. The social meanings that circulated promoted the colonization of land as a means of establishing an American sense of personhood, place, and societal formation. For example, Kinsey wrote about how the Colorado possessed a providential geography that was incomparable to other rivers. His belief stemmed from Euro-centric views about the economic viability that the Colorado represented. For example, he wrote that Cortez's apprentice, Fernando de Alarcon, discovered the Colorado and named it the "River of Good Guidance" because he believed it would lead to riches and power.[51] River Indians held reverence for the Colorado because of its volatile nature and the protection it offered from mosquitos.

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[50] Kinsey, Don J., "The River of Destiny: The Story of The Colorado River" (Department of Water and Power City of Los Angeles, 1928), 10, Otis R. "Dock" Marston Papers, Huntington Library.
[51] Ibid.

Catholic missionaries called it the "River of Martyrs". For reclamation advocates, the Colorado was an ecological resource that was the life source for the effort to colonize Imperial's landscapes. Spanish *conquistadores'* ecological conquest over desert terrains, mountains, and rivers was the closest parallel to what reclamation aspired to achieve in the twentieth century. The actual conquest of the Colorado by controlling its river navigation via canals, dams, and water banks was only a few steps further. Colonialism in this regard was viewed as a positive move for the region rather than a negative one, because of the belief in Manifest Destiny.

Land companies built their investment upon the logic that they were taming a wild desert land in an unprecedented window at U.S. imperialism. In the brochure released by the Bureau of Land Management, for example, "Homes and Investments in Imperial," a subsection entitled "Claims of the Imperial Valley," one promoter argued:

> It is on these four requisites of productivity and profitable existence that the Imperial Valley bases its claims to indisputable preeminence. It is the presence of a unique combination of physical forces and facilities which has drawn to it increasing thousands of high class settlers, awakened visions, quickened zeal, created new capitalists, and built up a civilization of rarest sort. Only recently the Imperial Valley was all uninhabitable bareness of desert waste. It is yet partly desert. The period of its transformation is better measured in months than years. Its problems and perplexities are not all solved. They are rather, such challenges to combat between mind and matter as stir the blood of American citizenship, for they provide the occasion to develop and exhibit the indomitable determination and unconquerable will as over spurs man on the mastership.[52]

[52] Southern California Land Company, "Homes and Investments in Imperial County," Southern California Pioneer Society (1915) Folder No. 1.

To expand upon historian Frederick Jackson Turner's representation of the wilderness at the edges of the frontier, civilization was made possible through conquest.[53] For land companies, high-class settlers (who were all white) possessed a mastery over the desert terrain that allowed for U.S. imperial expansion. The uniqueness about this form of white man's burden to civilize "other frontiers" was that it took the form of a mastery over the landscape. When U.S. imperialism has been historicized in the context of Hawaii, Puerto Rico and Guam, it has taken the form of educational, assimilation, and military occupation in order to civilize indigenous populations.[54] In the case of the Imperial Valley, the civilizing mission takes the form of conquest over the landscape in order to transform it for economic prosperity. Therefore, the context of the Imperial Valley's burden to civilize its desert terrain was made apparent in land company pamphlets that it was to serve the interest of the white settler population.

In these discourses of physical transformation of the natural and built environment, there were racial underpinnings that were not always overt. As Marxist theorist Cedric J. Robinson put it, the ability for white people to ascend the economic and social ladder was contingent upon the exploitation of labor, land, and property in the twentieth century. For Robinson, the hidden treasure troves that white people have

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[53] Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (Martino Fine Books, 2014).

[54] Noenoe K. Silva, *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2004). Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*. Walter L. Hixson, *American Settler Colonialism: A History* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).Gretchen Murphy, *Shadowing the White Man's Burden*, n.d.It is important to note that the U.S. military occupation in the Filipines, Hawaii and Puerto Rico is beginning to take hold at the same time of desert colonization. The distinction in the Imperial Valley is that it takes the form of economic development which means that it was candid about its economic ambitions rather than imperial ambitions to civilize indigenous populations abroad.

accumulated over time through inheritance, colonialism, and the benefits of being white are the specter of capitalism. No place was this more evident that in the Imperial Valley.

A key dimension of settler identity constructed by promotional literature was that white people's superiority ensured dominance over uncontrollable arid landscapes. This civilizing mission arguably demonstrated that land was envisioned through the promise of what whiteness could offer it. Historian Natalia Molina traces the workings of racial formation as low-level officials and circular courts debated how to make Mexicans ineligible for citizenship. Citizenship, Molina argues, was hollow without the benefits of whiteness.[55] And, certainly debates over who fits within the category of whiteness came with proprietary benefits in the early 1910s and 1920s when white settlers moved west in order to acquire land. This is evident in the Alien Land Laws of 1913 and 1920 instituted in California, Arizona and later New Mexico that prohibited Asian transients and migrants from owning property. Such limitations on land ownership arguably demonstrate that the state and low-level circular courts protected land use.

By supporting such laws and pushing for their enactment, white settlers thwarted the competing economic threat of Japanese, Chinese, and Asian Indian land accumulation. At both federal and state levels, bureaucratic institutions went out of their way to categorize Mexicans as non-white, thereby eradicating not only their citizenship benefits, but also the possibility of keeping their land in spaces such as the Imperial County. Critical legal studies scholar Cheryl Harris, for example, traces the unfolding histories of land confiscation since the establishment of the United States as a settler

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[55] Natalia Molina, "In a Race All Their Own: The Quest to Make Mexicans Ineligible for Citizenship," *Pacific Historical Review,* 79(2010): 173.

colony. I call the United States as a settler colony based on the work of Native-American scholars such as David Chang because it is evident in the historical record that as the United States is attempted to modernize sparsely inhabited lands, the settler nation state continued to use settlement practices that dated as far back as sixteenth century colonial North America. Harris explains, one of the contingencies of "whiteness as property was the assumption of American law as it related to Native Americans that conquest did give rise to sovereignty. Indians experienced property laws of the colonizers and the emergent American nation as acts of violence perpetuated by the exercise of power and ratified through the rule of law."[56] Harris' scathing indictment of the history of property accumulation by homesteaders proves that land acquisition historically has been tied to confiscation of land from Indigenous populations. In the case of Imperial County, Indigenous populations were demographically comprised of the Cocopa Indians and Mexicans residing in Imperial, Holtville, Yuma, and Brawley. Precisely for this reason, as Harris concludes, Indigenous populations found themselves at odds with forced land accumulation because they were incorporated as citizens forcibly. This reasoning allows us to describe ethnic Mexican populations living in Imperial County not simply as international immigrants, but also, as a racialized community living in the American Southwest that has legitimate land grievances with the United States federal government.

Empty Land

The transformation of so-called "empty lands" was a means to generate wealth for white men. For example, in a pamphlet published in 1903 by the Hovley-Cady Brown Land and Investment Company entitled, "From Desert to Garden: From Worthlessness to

[56] Cheryl Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review*, 106 (1993) 1726.

Wealth," the company represented land under the terms of private property (see figure 1.3).[57] In detailed accounts, the magazine provided a chronology of successful agribusinesses including cotton, cantaloupes, and lettuce. Successful stories of previous

[57] L.M. Holt, *From Desert to Garden: From Worthlessness* to *Wealth*, Times Mirror Printing and Binding House, Los Angeles (1903), 1.

Figure 1.3 Water promotional materials. Illustration of white woman holding wand in *From Desert to Garden: From Worthlessness to Wealth*, Times Mirror Printing and Binding House, Los Angeles (1903), 1.

white pioneers attempted to seduce the reader in a "get quick rich scheme". These descriptions mirrored colonial spatial imaginaries of what cultural historian Anne McClintock argues was virgin land.[58] Economic production became the driving motivation for colonizing and permanently occupying arid landscapes.

Reclamation of arid lands reflected preceding histories of Manifest Destiny. In the Hovley-Cady Brown pamphlet, the cover illustration features a white woman holding a wand overlooking the Imperial Valley. As a cultural product, land companies represented Imperial County that included the vision of white capitalism. Providence by design saturated many publications, alleging that the land was intended for capital monetary investment. This version of storytelling relied upon an expansionist understanding of taking over space in order to civilize the region.

The accumulation of property ownership discursively represented the Imperial Valley as an empty land. Early Spanish settlers, for example, who came to California in the eighteenth century employed the legal term *terra nullius*, empty lands.[59] Political geographer Sharene Razack writes about the uses of law in order to legally confiscate land in Canadian contexts. Razack's study found that an incalculable acreage of land was stolen from First Nation peoples living in Canada under the legal category of *terra nullius*. Distribution of land centered on Euro-centric understanding of Native people's land as lacking economic viability, national borders, and coherent citizenship.

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[58] Anne Mcclintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, 1st edition (New York: Routledge, 1995), 30.
[59] Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Houndmills, Basingstoke ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

In each of the accounts identified in pamphlets, it was clearly noted that there was historical break and that industrialization would bring about a more modern time period in the Imperial Valley.

Racial superiority reinforced the trope of virgin lands upon conquest, which was a racial and gendered dispossession. In the 1920 pamphlet released by the "Information Bureau for Imperial Valley Lands," one publication released a timeline celebrating the promise of irrigation. "In 1901: Not a living White man on the desert; a tree nor a blade of grass, in 1902, the White population was at about 2000; in January 1913: irrigation canals, foliage, and growing crops everywhere."[60] Upon dispossession of land, as Anne McClintock argues, "within colonial narratives, the eroticizing of 'virgin' space also effects a territorial appropriation, for the land is virgin, colonized peoples cannot claim aboriginal territorial rights, and white male patrimony is violently assured...."[61] For land companies such as the Imperial Valley Lands, Inc., the space of the Imperial Valley was constructed as virgin territory. Untouched landscapes that lacked the presence of white male authority reassured white settlers moving in that potential property disputes would not be a problem. Such reassurance of white male prowess, as McClintock argues, erased Native-American populations from the space itself.

At the same time, in order to reassure that the space could potentially become white, land companies emphasized the index of white populations was outgrowing any other racial demography. Arguably, the celebration of white population growth eased the fears of white absentee landowners and settlers who were interested in coming to

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[60] "Information Bureau for Imperial Valley Lands," this pamphlet was created for potential land investors who lived in San Diego, California. Folders 1 & 2 Imperial County, Advertisements Folder (Courtesy of Society of California Pioneers)

[61] Mcclintock, *Imperial Leather*, 30.

Imperial. Not a single word, however, is mentioned of Mexican populations who either resided there prior to white settlement or moved there during the building of irrigation canals or at the time of the publication. By 1926, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans comprised one third of the population. Yet, there is a clear break between how land companies envisioned a successful modern society and the reality of a society with a sizeable non-white population.

The early twentieth century ushered in one of the most ambitious architectural projects to ever assist in the irrigation of desert landscapes. Engineers, architects, geographers and policy makers in Washington, D.C. argued that the future of the American Southwest was dependent on water. Modern irrigation systems such as the buildings of canals and dams would ensure the viability of new white populations as they created townships in California, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, and Colorado. With water, conquest would occur in the form of a permanent settler society that could control the allegedly untamable landscape. For example, in a 1901 newspaper article published in the *Imperial Valley Press*, Mr. H. P. Wood, secretary of the Imperial Valley Chamber of Commerce, comments on the necessity of building a dam in Imperial:

> [A person] viewing this for the first time is greatly impressed by the greatness of the artist who transferred this marvel as scene to canvas; but, believing that in the economy of nature nothing is done without purpose, one can but ask why it is that the restless energy of moving water has chiseled out this great gorge, constantly tearing away and grinding up boulders, and earth, in its onward course through countless ages past; it surely was not that man might wonder and exclaim at the beauty of the scene. No, it was for a grander and nobler purpose. That all-wise Being, whose works we reverence, was but slowly developing a plan to provide homes for a favored race.[62]

[62] Mr. H.P. Wood, *Imperial Press*, April 1901, Vol. 1, No. 1

The alleged correlation between race and natural ecology created a perplexing dilemma for local and federal officials. On the one hand, social critics, including men like Wood, argued that the American Southwest was made for a grander and nobler purpose: that settlement was natural and divinely ordained. At the same time, Wood had a keen insight into the racial thinking that was common-sensical to mainstream white society. Over time, the space of the Imperial Valley would unfold into a more developed set of lands with the assistance of white people. Even the possibility of creating the Imperial Valley relied upon racial thinking that land was up for grabs. The description and uses of land, and its complex relationship in shaping people's relationships with one another, conflicted with competing demands over agribusiness and irrigation at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Although the nineteenth century concept of Manifest Destiny provided the language to justify acquiring a third of Mexico's northern territory, local and state officials continued to use the language of racial superiority to acquire land. Wood's claims that a greater authority provided land to confiscate demonstrates the racial dimensions imbedded in reclamation laws instituted in the twentieth century. Racially, claims like Wood's meant that land and reclamation were geographically centered in the superiority of whiteness. Whiteness, then, was embedded in an understanding that land should be confiscated for the purposes of settlement. Such acquisition of land would never have been possible without the justification provided by Manifest Destiny. To reclaim the desert meant to civilize the region of its uncontrollability. And, such sustainable discourses of land, race and power were embedded in the physical landscape.

This is not to argue that race was linked to land acquisition by coincidence: rather, race was critical in the formation of such land acquisition laws.

The race to reclaim arid lands in the American Southwest offered a profoundly different vision of proper uses of water, ecology and land rights. The building of canals, roads, irrigation systems, and railroads would physically transform the landscape in order to support white America's settlement of land in Arizona, Colorado, and Southern California. An unexpected twist of the United States' federal government's commitment to settle the American Southwest with white populations was that it created new possibilities for labor, commerce, and land conflict between other racialized populations. Amid growing debates over whether to exclude Chinese and Japanese migrants from entry into the United States, the American Southwest had some of the largest populations of farmers of Asian descent owning land. For Native populations, such as the Cocopa, a band of the Yuma Tribe, the Federal Reclamation Act of 1902 outlined the legal parameters that made land confiscation permissible by the United States federal government. Fifty-four years after the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848, the Department of the Interior initiated the creation of the All-American Canal. Located at the U.S.-Mexico border, Imperial County unfolded into one of the most conflicted places over land, water access and reclamation.

The program was so successful that nearly 5,000 white families moved to Calexico, Holtville, Brawley and El Centro. Whereas previous scholarship within the field of Chicano Studies has emphasized land loss and conquest because of Manifest Destiny in the nineteenth century, I argue modern irrigation systems that reshaped built environments at the U.S.-Mexico border were a continuation of such colonial settler

practices in the twentieth century. The architect of the Federal Reclamation Act of 1902, George Maxwell, argued the building of canals and dams was part of the federal government's commitment to support white settlement to the region.[63] Maxwell was among many leading social critics of his time who argued the dependence on water sources from nations such as Mexico at the Colorado River Delta compromised the sovereignty of the United States, especially for white settlers moving to the West.

One of Maxwell's fundamental priorities was demonstrating white racial superiority as the key mechanism of modernization for the region. The research of environmental historian Eric Boime, for example, has outlined racial hysteria and anti-Asian panics relating to possible contamination of shared potable water at the U.S.-Mexico border. Investment in architectural infrastructure to bring about modern uniform standards of clean water was dependent upon the panic sparked by racial difference. Architecturally, modernization meant the separation of ecology, water, and the built environment that would ensure the separation of national borders and races.

Vanishing Indians

Upon reclamation, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, land companies, and promotional advertisements went to great lengths to deny Native-Americans of rightful ownership to land. Such dispossession came in the form of erasing Cocopa Indians (original inhabitants) from the discourse of Imperial County's development or representations that deemed them unworthy of land ownership. When George Chaffrey first came to the Imperial Valley in the late 19th century, he was assisted with a Cocopa

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[63] George Maxwell, "Golden Rivers: The Colorado-The Nile of America," unpublished manuscript in the Eugene Clyde La Rue Papers, Box 4, Folder 1. Located at the Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

Indian guide. Such assistance between Cocopa Indians and land surveyors was not uncommon. When photographed, Cocopa Indians in the late nineteenth were featured alongside desert pioneers (Figure 1.4). In this photograph that was taken by a land surveying company, the white pioneer stands in front holding his arms steadfast at the camera. In contrast, the Cocopa lined the banks of the Colorado River with some apprehension as to what the camera represented in facilitating a communication between themselves and the larger U.S. public. In retrospect, the Cocopa were assisting in the privatization of water from the Colorado that inevitably blocked their own free public use of the Colorado River upon the completion of the All American Canal in 1942.

Figure 1.4. Cocopa Indians in the Colorado River basin. Photograph taken on Oct 9, 1887 (Courtesy of Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley)

The power to photograph in the early twentieth century was not just for commemoration, in fact was used as avenue to assert power over Native-Americans. In the photograph taken at the Colorado River basin, in terms of the power that the white pioneer holds in comparison to the Native-American subjects was compelling. According to cultural geographer Gillian Rose, the power to center one individual in photographs taken during this time was indicative of power relations in the society in which the subjects being photographed lived.[64] In the context of white pioneers moving into the Imperial Valley, the spectatorship that went into these photographs demonstrates that there was an exoticism to photographs that wanted to document Native-Americans who were stuck in a separate time and space outside of modernity.

If modernity was constructed as the space and time where whites inhabited, then, photographs taken of the Cocopa were used to demonstrate their isolation from "modern" technology. In a photograph taken of a group of Cocopa workers on the side of the road, one photographer commented in his field notes that Cocopa Indians refused to take photographs and in fact turned their backs on the cameraman (see Figure 1.5). In his field notes, the photographer commented at length that the Cocopa were superstitious and refused to take photographs. Such refusal was not considered an invasion of privacy but rather an indicator of the backwardness of the Cocopa to keep up with modern technology of the early twentieth century. To expand upon Native-American historian Philip Deloria's argument, Native-Americans historically have been viewed as outside

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[64] Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*, Third Edition edition (London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2011).

the bounds of modern time and space.[65] Thus, when refusing to take photographs, it was an indicator to this white cameraman that Cocopa Indians were incompatible with modernity. Such portrayals of Cocopa Indian's inability to assimilate with modernity contributed to their vanishing from the landscape itself.

Figure 1.5 Cocopas Indians in Calexico. Description of photograph written by photographer: The Cocopa did not like to have their pictures taken as in their ignorance they thought that pointing the camera toward them worked some evil influnce [sic] over them. So one turned his back and I snapped the other as he turned." (Courtesy of Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley)

Refusal of being photographed was a means to retain personal dignity. To expand upon photographic historian Lucy Lippard's work, other native tribes officially protested being photographed. In 1902, for example, the Hopi restricted photographers to a

[65] Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence, Kan: Univ Pr of Kansas, 2004).

specific area of the ceremonies to avoid photographs.[66] Such measures to spatially isolate cameraman was to limit the spectatorship that was involved in colonial practices of "the gaze". In reference to the photographs that were taken to the Cocopa, cameraman violated many privacy codes that Native-Americans held necessary for personal space. Such confrontational behavior between cameraman demonstrated that there was a clear privilege between the white cameraman and his access to taking photographs of whom ever he deemed necessary.

Conclusion

This chapter has analyzed the visual and discursive conquest of Imperial County via cultural products such as promotional materials, photographs and maps. In it, I argued that such ephemeral materials were powerful in producing knowledge about the Imperial Valley as an empty space that was worthy of colonization. Such discourses were used to erase valid claims to land on the part of Native-American populations who resided there and at the same time booster settlement among whites. Land companies, the Bureau of Reclamation and water reclamation enthusiasts went to great length to construct unyielding power over racial capital into the hands of whites. Such racial capital came at the expense of Native-Americans in order to centralize land ownership into the hands of white pioneers. In my concluding section, I argued that Native-American representations that were made by photographers contributed to the vanishing of the Native-American population from fitting into the future modernization of the Imperial Valley.

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[66] Lucy R. Lippard, ed., *Partial Recall: With Essays on Photographs of Native North Americans* (New York: New Press, The, 1993).

Chapter Two

The Construction of Unworthy Citizens

Introduction

If race and sexuality in the 1910s were organized within a constellation of predatory violence, criminality, and vigilante justice, the play *The Clansmen* exhibited white America's fears of African-American male sexual violence in public space, and thus the potential instability interracial sex created for white domestic life. When *The Clansmen* visited Southern California in 1911, the play packed theatre houses in small towns along the coast. Reviews of the play by the *Los Angeles Times* and the *San Diego Tribune* celebrated the traveling melodrama as a major contribution to the performing arts for its "realistic" portrayal of white Southern life. Set in the U.S. South after Reconstruction, *The Clansmen* was a cultural site that reinforced normative ideas that black and white relations and interracial sex were dangerous.

On stage, white male actors in blackface make up performed rape scenes staged in public grass fields with white female co-stars. The fear that white women, and thereby white families, were vulnerable to physical attacks by black predators in public space was a common theme in popular films and was featured in *The Clansmen*'s crossover silent hit *Birth of a Nation*. In places such as San Diego where *The Clansmen* visited, however, taxonomies of racial pathology looked quite different for South Asian (Punjabi), Mexican, and Chinese immigrants. Less noticeable from *The Clansmen* was how cultural sites such as plays, newspapers, and legal trials provided a vocabulary used in the

American West to sexualize racial groups outside the black/ white binary, a process that limited these groups' access to private property and land rights.

I begin with this play as an example of how racial capitalism *came to be* situated in relation to representations of migrant masculinities. In this chapter, I analyze how press coverage of *The Clansmen* created questions about the potential sexual threats from "outsiders" in Southern California, including Asian, ethnic Mexicans, and African-Americans. Even though the play was never staged in the Imperial Valley, the media scandal surrounding it created an opportunity for whites to express their suspicion of transient migrants living nearby. For white residents, the play served as a public venue to voice anxieties about white women's security, interracial sex, and the potential dangers non-white men and women posed to the political economy of the region. I then analyze how the media portrayed sexual assault, pedophilia, and violent altercations during criminal court trials from the years 1910-1925. I argue that such salacious news stories were used to classify South Asian men as potential predators and thus threatening to the political and economic fabric of white pioneer life. I focus on (1) how Orientalist discourses were mobilized to create panic in the Imperial Valley and (2) how such racial classification had profound implications concerning the right to own property among non-white populations.

Anti-Asiatic Movements

Anti-Asiatic movements of the early twentieth century were responsible for the racialization of Asians as public charges or dependents of the state. In August 1910, for example, the magazine *The White Man* argued that Japanese and South Asian immigrants

were public charges of the United States (see Figure 2.1).[67] In it, Asian exclusionists built a case to support Asiatic exclusion. In political cartoons, for example, South Asians were represented as potential public charges because of the moral, economic and social baggage that was imported with them. It was argued in such cartoons that South Asians posed economic baggage to the U.S. nation-state, thereby shifting the burden onto the "white race." According to historian Natalia Molina, such a legal category was used to deport immigrants in the early twentieth century. Laws such as the Chinese Exclusion Act and the Gentleman's Agreement were used to ban Japanese, Chinese, Malay, and South Asians from entering the nation. At the same time, these laws were also used to police migrants internally by ensuring that that the legal system maintained racial hierarchies.[68] Labeling migrants as public charges of the United States was used in order to justify deportation, deny civil rights, and publicly scrutinize immigrants for potential public health and economic security risks that they supposedly posed to the nation. The significance of this category was that it demonstrated that immigrants didn't fit into the economic system that was established for whites. At the same time, it denied Asian immigrants the legal protection they needed to secure racial capital.

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[67] A.E. Fowler, ed. *The White Man*, August 1910, Vol. 1, No. 2. Located at the San Francisco State University Archives, California Labor School Library.

[68] Natalia Molina, *How Race Is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts*, 2013.Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (University of California Press, 2001).

Figure 2.1. Cartoon published in *The White Man*. Published on August 1910, Vol. 1, No. 2. Located at the San Francisco State University Archives, California Labor School Library.

Asians were excluded because they were racialized as being potential threats to white society. Under such a model of racial antagonism, California social critics like A.E. Fowler, editor of *The White Man,* argued that Asians were a moral and economic liability for the nation. Furthermore, he argued, "the economic, moral and social life of the white race in California and elsewhere must be protected. The surrender of our lands and opportunities to Asiatics is a mark of national decay. The association of white women with Mongolians, Hindus and negroes is racial pollution."[69] Thus, social critics such as Fowler viewed interracial mixing (both sexual and non-sexual) as potentially threatening to the white race. Certainly, Fowler believed in the biological understanding of race at this time but he also believed that race mixing had profoundly negative economic

[69] A.E. Fowler, ed. "The White Man," August 1910, Vol. 1, No. 2. Located at the San Francisco State University Archives, California Labor School Library.

implications for white citizens. For Fowler, racial capitalism needed to be protected by means of Asian exclusionary laws.

Such exclusionary laws were specifically geared towards certain industries and excluded Asians from owning property. In the borderland states of California and Arizona, for example, the Alien Land Law of 1913 and 1920 made Asians ineligible to own property. Such Asiatic exclusionary laws were popular among white farmers who viewed Japanese and South Asian men to be key competitors in cotton, cantaloupe and dairy farming. Local newspapers, for example, such as the "Douglass Daily Dispatch" published white farmers demonstrating in protest against Japanese and South Asian farmers in Phoenix, Arizona (see Figure 2.2).[70] As Karen Leonard has shown, the Alien Land Law was used as a weapon to prohibit competition between white and Japanese growers.[71] The Alien Land Law demonstrated that there were profound collusions behind the conclusion that Asians posed an economic threat. As Fowler pointed out, Asiatic exclusion was motivated in part by the fact that if Asians owned property, this could invert race relations, which was potentially risky. Thus, at this time, racialized understanding of morality and exclusion were used in order to uphold whiteness at the expense of non-white populations. The result was profound economic consequences that negatively impacted non-white groups, as well as a flurry of modern racialized scientific classifications about race, gender, sexuality, and class. All these together supported the basic idea that racial capitalism should be upheld in the form of land rights no matter what.

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[70] "Arizonans Resent Foreign Influx," from the "Douglas Daily Dispatch," September 4, 1934.
[71] Karen Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

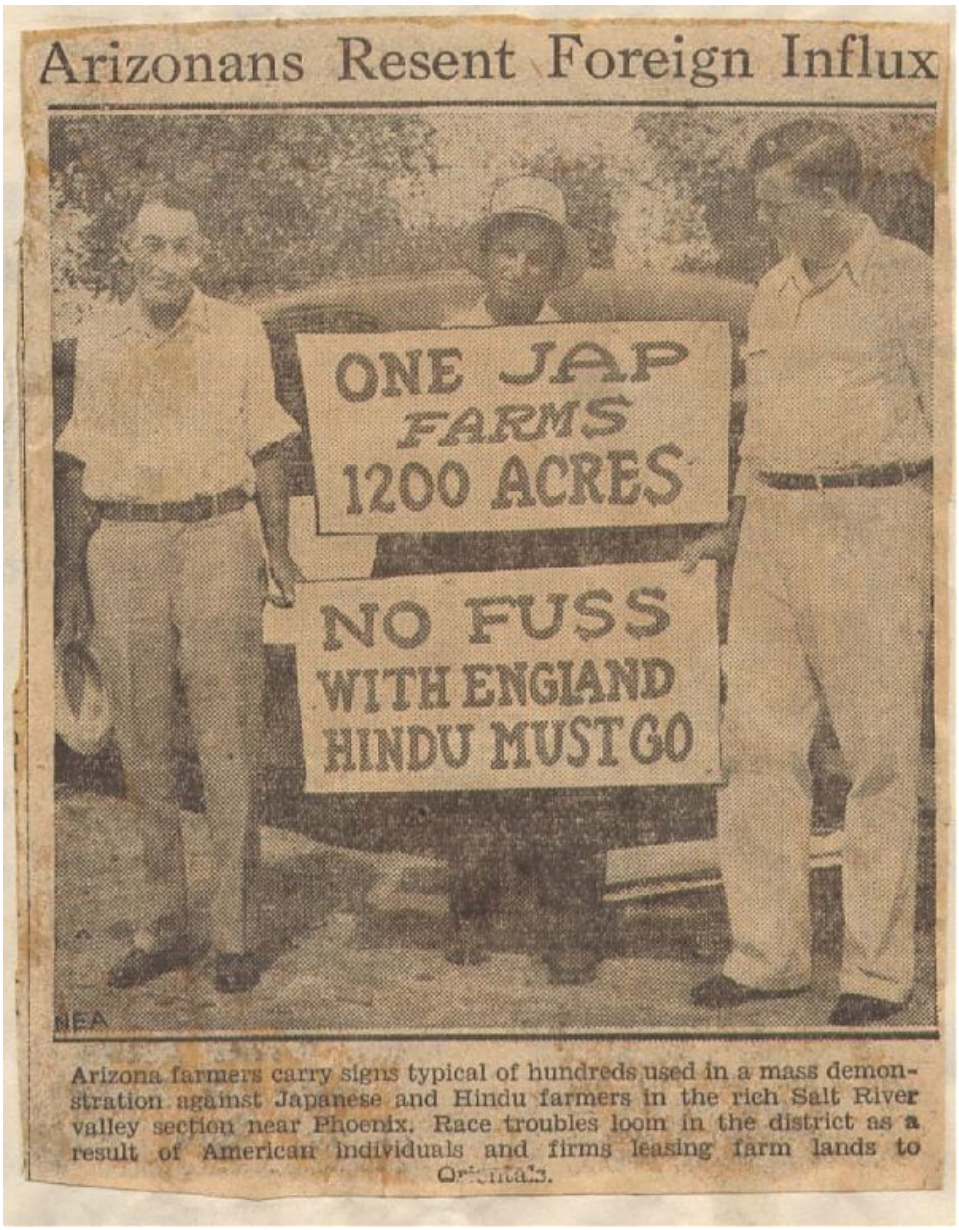

Figure 2.2 Photograph from the "Douglas Daily Dispatch". "Arizonans Resent Foreign Influx," from the "Douglas Daily Dispatch," September 4, 1934.

Racialized Predation

In the Imperial Valley, predatory masculinity was presented not as black but as South Asian as a means to deny capital. This shift is best modeled by earlier scholarship concerning relational racialization. Michael Omi and Howard Winant suggest race is a set

of ideologies constructed in relationship to previous racial struggles over political autonomy and freedom from oppression, such categories are made salient in particular socio-historical contexts.[72] Transient men living in the Imperial Valley had little power over how they were categorized publicly by the press or by civil society in the context of the play. The foundational work of postcolonial scholar Edward Said on Orientalism examining how the West pathologized the East as decadent and effeminate seems almost contradictory to the hyper-masculine representations of African-American men. In the Imperial Valley, in order to apply racial anxieties about sexual violence to South Asians, however, Orientalist discourses had to pathologize South Asians as hyper-violent, a strategy that was already useful in denigrating and racializing African-American men.[73] Without erasing blackness as an essential category to describe criminality, there is evidence from public discourse that the concerns circulated in *The Clansmen* were applied to other groups such as South Asians in relationship to extant newspaper representations of black masculinities.

Local newspapers such as the *Los Angeles Times*, the *San Francisco Call*, the *Holtville Tribune* and the *Imperial Valley Press* were instrumental in creating social meaning about murder and categorizing racial groups as sexual threats. Moral panic, as Stuart Hall suggests in his reading of policing and crisis argues that newspapers work in tandem with the state to produce panics.[74]. In addition, these discourses produce ideas about how to categorize racial groups in relationship to other racial subjectivities. While

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[72] Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s Tothe 1980s*, Critical Social Thought (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 57. For historical understandings of relational racialization based upon racial scripts please see: Molina, *How Race Is Made in America*.
[73] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 23.
[74] Stuart M. Hall, ed., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*, Critical Social Studies (London: Macmillan, 1978), 7.

the primary focus of this chapter is to examine how discourses related to moral panic and Black maleness work in tandem with Punjabi male representations, I'm specifically interested in how newspapers and courtrooms present their case to classify these alternatives forms of masculinity as racially inferior.

Race, as I argue, was discursively organized in trial proceedings and newspapers in sexual terms. In this way, trials served as *sites of knowledge production* where discourses about queer sexual encounters, interracial intimacies, and sexual violence in migrant ranch houses were criminalized. What I see at stake whether immigrants' sexual freedom existed outside the bounds of Western morality. My analysis in this chapter offers a critique of liberal discourse, that is, the regime of power that discursively organizes state intervention as benevolent and necessary.[75] The paradox, as I suggest, is that although courts mobilized categories around the discourse of "protecting the victims," trials did the "work" of criminalizing male Punjabi and African-American migrants by policing their privacies and creating suspicion of their sexuality.

Interracial sex playing out on stage in melodramas like *The Clansmen* gave whites in California a vocabulary for defining race relations in the West. Immigration from Europe, Mexico, China, and India created a flurry of concern over how to make sense of the variety of men and boys staying in California. By 1910, nearly twenty percent of the working male population was Chinese, with a growing number of South Asian men working in California industries such as laundry, agriculture and railroads. Many of these migrant men spent their leisure time in places like boarding houses, bars, and alleyways;

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[75] Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality*, Public Planet Books (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 89.

police officials in Sacramento, Marysville, and the Imperial Valley categorized these as spaces of suspicion.

In his notable research on early twentieth century sodomy trials involving South Asian men accused of soliciting sex with teenage white boys, historian Nayan Shah argues that the sexual spaces migrant males created with one another in automobiles, brothels, ranch houses, and saloons were essentially public, lacking the privacy afforded to heterosexual couples.[76] For Shah, "in the early twentieth century it was impossible for migrant men to pursue 'privacy' or to enjoy freedom from state surveillance of those spaces removed from public view, such as automobiles, boardinghouses, bars, and gambling houses. These counter sites and landscapes of queer contact and communities were shaped by both the activities of migrant men and policing."[77] The places where these queer contacts occurred, as Shah suggests, were not easily classified as public, semi-public, or private. Instead, the murkiness of privacy for migrants living in transient societies, engaging in supposed lewd sex with one another, placed their every acts of intimacy open to policing.[78] Shah's conceptual move to examine queer semi-publics and semi-privacies is useful as I situate my research in conversation with histories of migration, domesticity, race, and interracial intimacy. Like Shah, I examine how these domesticities, or semi-publics, were spaces open for public scrutiny. Where I depart from Shah's analysis, however, is in the trials I examine, which involve a calamity of violent events between husbands, wives, and family rivals in the Imperial Valley. I suggest the

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[76] Nayan Shah, "Policing Privacy, Migrants, and the Limits of Freedom," *Social Text* 23, no. 3–4 84–85 (September 21, 2005): 277.
[77] Ibid, 281.
[78] Nayan Shah, "Between 'Oriental Depravity' and 'Natural Degenerates': Spatial Borderlands and the Making of Ordinary Americans," *American Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2005): 714.

discourses used in the press to pathologize Sikh immigrants as violent drew on popular representations of black male predatory violence. In order to categorize Sikhs, then, Orientalist discourses required a readjustment to make them newsworthy enough to compete with popular violent representations of violent black masculinities.

Interracial marriages between Punjabi men and Mexican women during the 1910s were not uncommon. As Karen Leonard describes in her groundbreaking study on Punjabi-Mexican families, although state laws prohibited miscegenation or "blood mixing" between Asians and Mexicans, rural towns such as the Imperial Valley distributed marriage licenses, allowing Punjabi men the possibility of land ownership.[79] Because Mexican women were categorized as White according California's racial classification at the time, hundreds of Punjabi men secured land rights through marriages to Mexican women. Leonard's discussion of Punjabi-Mexican conjugal intimacies demonstrates how common these marriages were in the Imperial Valley, but this does not mean they were normalized, as can be seen in the lewdness of interracial domesticities presented in the court cases and trials I explore. Although these marriages were monogamous, they were called into question in ways that White heterosexual families living in the Imperial Valley were not. For example, newspapers and courts argued that caste rivalries between Punjabi families dating back generations in India created disputes leading to property conflicts and fatalities. In this chapter, I examine how these fatal property disputes between Punjabi-Mexican families translated as evidence South Asians' failure to create healthy meaningful intimacies and associations outside the

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[79] Karen Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans*, Asian American History and Culture (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 57.

constraints of "primitive" caste systems. These incidents of domestic violence over private property converged with those the public violence exhibited by portrayals of men of color.

Geographies of White Women's Security

After the emancipation of African-Americans, the American South witnessed a flurry of concern over interracial dating between blacks and whites. Scholars who have written about Black face minstrelsy, Eric Lott for example, have argued that traveling melodramas like *The Clansman* were used to stir up fears about interracial sex and dating by suggesting that black men were sexual predators.[80] Indeed, these conflicts were also motivated by monopolies over labor and human rights—and also over how land in places such as South Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana would be divided. The conflicts and debates over mixed-race dating in plays in San Diego and Los Angeles helped shape racial categories across geographies in the West, the Imperial Valley included.

The number of African-American migrants in Imperial County soared from 100 in 1907 to 2,000 in 1920. The Imperial Valley's cotton and railroad industries relied heavily on African-American migrant labor from the American South. These migrants successfully contested existing hierarchies of power by, for example, creating California's first all black high school (named Douglass High School) in 1925. This school was a response to racial terror and spatial segregation in Northern El Centro. The Ku Klux Klan propagated such terrorism in order to spatially isolate blacks and relegate them to the edges of the city to a less desirable section with less access to water and

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[80] Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, Race and American Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 34.

transportation to the city center. Indeed, race-based spatial politics in the Imperial Valley in the 1920s was motivated by an anti-racist politics, one that came out of unevenness in labor power African-American migrants worked for predominantly white and South Asian landowners.

Conflicts over space and land played out significantly different for Mexicans because they were legally classified as white though they were still placed on par with blacks in the Valley. Mexicans were known to live in predominantly black neighborhoods in Northern El Centro, and Mexican-Americans were the first non-black adolescents to enroll in Douglass High School in 1928. Mexicans were still racialized and classified as intellectually and morally inferior to white settlers in the region. This meant Mexicans were spatially and politically placed between the metaphorical borderlands of black vs. white in Imperial County. Such hierarchies were reinforced in trials concerning conflict between South Asians and white landowners.

If social panics were constructed via the image of black male predation during the early decades of the twentieth century, then press coverage concerning *The Clansmen* was a space that celebrated efforts to prevent interracial dating, sex, and land accumulation. The play arrived in San Diego one year after the anniversary of the Mann Act, a federal law allegedly to stop middle-aged men from having lewd sex with underage girls. The problem, however, was that black men were disproportionately prosecuted for engaging in lewd sex with white women. Famed boxer Jack Johnson, for example, was placed into custody when he and his white girlfriend crossed state lines in

1912.[81] Under the auspices of protecting white women, the Mann Act effectively categorized black men as potential predators of young white girls. Certainly, the play was a cultural site that created panics in San Diego, where residents submitted editorials after watching the play about the dangers of miscegenation, particularly fears that black men and white women could create families. The *San Diego Tribune*'s coverage of *The Clansmen* presented black masculinity as a sexual subject to be feared, even as the articles primarily focused on the celebratory attributes of the play, particularly its contributions to the performing arts, and its message about white male protection of white women from black predators.[82] Beneath all the celebratory angst, predatory criminal masculinity could be distinctly categorized as black. Because San Diego had a small black population at this time (estimates place the number in the hundreds up until to WWII,) there was relatively little imminent concern about black men courting white women.

From the editorials submitted to newspapers, there is no evidence Imperial Valley residents actually saw the play, yet circulation of news concerning *The Clansman* was enough to generate conversations among Brawley and El Centro residents. After the release of the play, editorials were submitted to the *Imperial Valley Press* concerning the dangers of transients spending their leisure time in close proximity to white families. In one of these, William Langley from Holtville argued that transient men were lurking in spaces where his daughters walked alone. According to Langley, "any father, who loves his children wants to ensure their safety. My daughters have lived here all their lives, still

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[81] David J. Langum, *Crossing over the Line: Legislating Morality and the Mann Act*, The Chicago Series on Sexuality, History, and Society (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 6.
[82] "Traveling Vaudeville Visits San Diego," *San Diego Tribune*, July 19, 1911.

I don't trust these Hindus and Chinese who come here, and can leave at any moment when committing a crime."[83] The irony is although *The Clansmen* exhibited interracial sex as a lewd activity between blacks and whites, there was little need to be concerned over black men in the Imperial Valley. In the 1910s, Imperial Valley's Black population was estimated in the dozens, and there was little evidence that black men engaged in rape of white women. The problem, however, was that plays such as *The Clansmen* were useful for white men to argue the need to securitize and police gender/race relations in public spaces. In the 1920s, for example, young impressionable white women living in urban areas such as New York City, Los Angeles, and San Diego were classified as vulnerable to sexual slavery, lacking the wit to know when they were being manipulated by African-American and Asian men.[84]

A group of concerned mothers responding to *The Clansmen* submitted articles to local newspapers such as the *Holtville Tribune* arguing, "given our concerns in the past regarding the safety of our daughters when riding our bicycles and walking to town, we see these Hindu men as vagrants, not knowing what their intentions are with being here. They frequent saloons and others areas of town unimpressionable and unsafe for our children."[85] So although white men were advocating for the policing of public space where transient men spent their leisure time, including alleys, boarding houses, and saloons, white civic societies run by women publicly voiced their panic over transient migrant men living and working in more private spaces that were considered too close.

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[83] Editorial column, *Imperial Valley Press*, November 14, 1912.
[84] Mary Ting Yi Lui, *The Chinatown Trunk Mystery: Murder, Miscegenation, and Other Dangerous Encounters in Turn-of-the-Century New YorkCity* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2005), 25.
[85] Editorial column, *Holtville Tribune,* February 2, 1912.

The paradox is although young women at this time were being categorized by the state as a separate class of adolescents to help prevent statutory rape in the home, white mothers advocated for greater spatial constraints to limit their daughters' public mobility.[86] This meant, white supremacist organizing on behalf of gender and women's rights were motivated by the gendered enforcement of spatial boundaries.

As white women advocated for enhanced gender security to police the semi-publics where transient Punjabi men and other Asian men lived, it reveals two major translations that occurred during this time regarding white women's relationship to immigrant men. First, black men were not overwhelmingly represented demographically in the Imperial Valley. Still, black sexuality represented to be lascivious, if not outright lewd. In the Imperial Valley the taxonomy of racial and sexual difference was situated within the discussion of transient men loitering in public spaces. What is left unknown by the newspaper articles and editorials submitted to the *Imperial Valley Press* and the *Holtville Tribune* is what impression these women had of transient Hindu men prior to watching or hearing about the play. In addition, the dangers presented in *The Clansmen*, while situated in an entirely separate geo-political context outside the Imperial Valley, and involving populations that were not an imminent threat to whites there (as they were believed to be in San Diego, Los Angeles and San Francisco) nonetheless stirred panic. In other words, panic over black masculinities *worked* to create widespread panic among whites about white women's relationship to pubic space and vulnerability to the moral corruption of South Asians considered to be foreigners.

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[86] Shah, "Between 'Oriental Depravity' and 'Natural Degenerates,'" 720.

What is less obvious, however, is how questions of black masculinity were translated into concerns about other transient men living in bunkhouses and in ranches near white families. The desire to protect women from suspected sexual assailants was not so much about producing a consensus concerning blackness. Instead, in the space of the Imperial Valley, it stoked a much wider concern over how to deal with growing numbers of Punjabi, Mexican, and Chinese men spending their leisure time in brothels, saloons, and boarding houses. Cultural representations involving salacious crimes between blacks and whites thus casted South Asians into the position of being be similarly menacing, if not more so.

By this time, California was a hotbed of social debate concerning the large numbers of Hindu, Mexican, Chinese, and Japanese immigrants working in the Golden State. Fears over interracial sex were circulated using a variety of media, including films, newspapers, and advertisements. That same year, the weekly *San Francisco Call* published an article, "Hindus Force Autoists to Witness Orgies," claiming that Hindus publicly engaged is unnatural "sex acts" in Northern California. Stories abound of sexual perversity vilified foreigners, including Mexican men, as un- assimilable to the moral standards of the "fair state of California."[87] In San Diego, newspapers like the *San Diego Union* published outrageous pieces including, "The Coming of the Hindu," in which Hindus were accused of abnormal sexual practices, such as polygamy, sodomy, and group sex.[88] In his critique of Orientalism, Edward Said suggests that the West historically has used cultural products to fetishize "the East" as decadent, feminine, and

[87] "Hindus Force Autoists to Witness Orgies," *San Francisco Call*, March 8, 1910.
[88] "The Coming of the Hindu," *San Diego Union Tribune*, September 22, 1910.

sexually exotic.[89] Newspapers, as Melani McAlister writes, are the cultural products that create social meaning for racial groups to "encounter" each other across different spatialities, borders, and continents without ever meeting one another.[90] For California newspapers, sensational press coverage concerning abnormal sexual practices of migrant workers in rural and urban spaces produced sexual anxieties about lingering threats of non-white men potentially engaging in sexual acts with white women and (even more disturbing) in same-sex relationships with white men.

From 1916-1923, a few stories of random sexual violence were published in the *Los Angeles Times* describing black men as sexual predators. One of the more infamous cases of sexual assault in the Imperial Valley was in 1916 when an African-American male field worker from El Centro was accused of attacking a four-year-old white girl. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that "the unidentified 'black fiend' offered the little girl candy and took her to the lower level floor of a movie house on Main Street and proceeded to assault her."[91] When the assailant saw a janitor approaching, he allegedly pushed the girl to the side and ran with his pants down to the street corner. Nearly a decade later, a similar story ignited a lynch mob to hunt down a black man accused of fondling himself in front of two white girls in 1923 outside a saloon. Lewd sex crimes mapped a geography of fear onto the bodies of black men. The sexual assault of a white child resonated with ideas that predatory violence was imminent, even in the most leisurely spaces, such as movie houses. The spatialities of these dangerous sexual liaisons

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[89] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 7. Said, *Orientalism*, 7.
[90] Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945*, Updated ed., with a post-9/11 chapter, American Crossroads 6 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 6.
[91] "Negro Attacks Four-Year-Old Child," *Los Angeles Times*, October 24, 1916.

in movie houses, saloons, and bars turned them into sexual public spaces where transients could prey on children and wives. The sexual geography associated with these spaces, where men lurked in dark corners hoping to prey on innocent youth, were similarly ascribed to South Asians during this same time period. Nayan Shah argues that the suspicion of South Asian, European, Mexican, and Chinese men spending leisure time in boardinghouses and bars meant that their access to privacy was not easily defined and these places became seen as more public and in need of scrutiny. Instead, the semi-public spaces where many of these men spent their leisure time were categorized by the press and news coverage as sexually immoral.

The Legal Construction of Pedophilic Desire

In this section, I examine the trial of Bagga Singh, a middle-aged Punjabi migrant worker accused of offering alcohol to two underage white boys. The Pioneer Boarding House in El Centro, where Singh and other Sikhs lived during the peak harvest season, was a place of refuge for migrant men to console one another. Racial hostility targeting Sikhs led to a variety of social exclusions including segregated housing and saloons where migrants congregate to socialize in the town center. Public homosocial spaces, such as ranch houses, board rooms, and alleyways where Punjabi, ethnic Mexican, and Chinese men congregated became sites of suspicion whenever impressionable young men would gravitate towards these areas. Historian Nayan Shah, in his examination of sodomy trials involving Punjabi men and white adolescents in Northern California, argues what

constituted "suspicion" was widely based on arbitrary police enforcement. [92] Moral panic concerning poor white boys soliciting themselves for prostitution was a common fear in spaces where predominantly adult migrant males lived. While Shah's analysis focuses on the spaces that get mapped as suspicious based on what constituted a non-normative relationship, I resituate this trial involving the delinquency of two white male sixteen-year-olds. I argue Singh's trial is useful not only to tell us which spaces and bodies during this time were considered criminal, but also to examine the dissident behaviors that migrant workers, including white male adolescents, used in the space of the courtroom to protect themselves from further adjudication. Thinking of Singh's trial as an artifact of migrants' everyday kinship suggests court transcripts might tell us more than just the legal processes of criminalization. In fact, trials such as Singh's, which involve intimate relations between young adolescents and migrant workers, makes to consider the usefulness of criminal trial records as a rich resource to help articulate what migrant workers' everyday lives looked like.

Two weeks prior to Christmas in 1919, Bagga Singh was taken into custody by Officer J.C. Lane for contributing to the delinquency of two white male minors, Ulysses Hudson and Edgar Ellis. The two transient white boys were followed into the Pioneer Boarding House, where Lane and two other white men from the local bar approached the

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[92] Shah, "Between 'Oriental Depravity' and 'Natural Degenerates,'" 715. Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West*, American Crossroads 31 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

door. Placing his ear to the door, Lane heard a series of conversations taking place between Singh, Hudson, and Ellis. During his testimony, officer Lane stated:

> I was informed by some one on the street that there was a Hindu down at this place that was trying to get boys to go in the room and drink, and I went and looked up Mr. Parrish and this officer, and told him we had better go down and investigate…I came along behind listening and I heard a noise in one room and I stopped, and the door was partly open, it seemed to be latched in some way on the inside, but was so sprung in a way I could see in the room, and I looked in, and I seen this man standing with his back against the wall like this, Bagga Singh, and he was reaching his arm out like that for something and I could not quite see his hand, but at the time this young man here stepped over to a little table and come right in view. Ellis and Hudson held a bottle of whiskey in their laps and Singh smoked a cigarette at the other end of a smoky dim room. [93]

The suspicion of a Punjabi man attempting to lure two white youths into his room to possibly be seduced placed inter-generational relationships between young men and foreign migrant workers like Singh outside the realm of what was considered natural. This took place within a larger registry that constructed these boarding houses as places of vice, where gambling and illegal drinking were taking place. The alcohol on Singh's breath and lips was evidence enough for the jury to convict him for attempting to induce intoxication and teach two white boys delinquent behavior. The problem for the prosecution, however, was arranging a strong enough case that Singh had ulterior sexual motives for getting the two boys drunk, or at least imply that there was some larger plan to get the boys in his room alone for sexual favors. Blamed for initiating inappropriate behavior by calling the two white boys in his room suggested there was something morally corrupted about Singh.

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[93] *People v. Bagga Singh*, Case No. 786, 8 (1919), Records from Imperial Valley Court.

Early in the court testimony, the two boys were called for questioning. Although Singh was never officially accused of sexual misconduct with the young boys, the interrogation that proceeded within the trial primarily focused on how the young men met Bagga Singh, why they would even consider joining him for a drink in his room, and whether their relationship was an indication of something that might have not been disclosed in the initial report, but could be revealed in front of a jury. When Ulysses Hudson was called to the stand, the questions were specifically geared towards how physically close Singh was to the, the arrangement of furniture, and (in a rather awkward moment for the teenager) whether Singh had his clothes on or off, whether he was lying on the bed, and whether they shared the same bottle.[94] Little is known about Hudson or the extent of his relationship with Singh. However, in the trial testimony, Hudson went to great lengths to refute any suggestion of sex in the hotel. Possibly startled by the insinuation that he engaged in sex with a foreigner, or any male, Hudson was adamant that nothing happened besides just three guys, in his words, "looking to have a good time."

Nowhere in Singh's trial do the sheriff or the prosecution explicitly accuse him of enacting fellatio (oral sex) or sodomy on either of the two boys. Unlike the early twentieth century sodomy trials that Shah explores, where Punjabi and Chinese men were accused of "crimes against nature," this trial is a bit different because there are moments where sex acts are implied, but never confirmed.[95] The problem for the prosecution in Bagga Singh's trial is they might not have had the proper language, discourse, or even

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[94] *People v. Bagga Singh*, Case No. 786, 8 (1919), Records from Imperial Valley Court.
[95] Shah, "Between 'Oriental Depravity' and 'Natural Degenerates,'" 705.

ways to represent what constituted sexual misconduct, how it went about, and what "it" might have even looked like. Regina Kunzel suggests, quite deftly, in her analysis of same-sex cultures in prisons, that the ways in which the state has categorized homosexuality or even same-sex relations have been anything but uniform. What gets constituted as the intimate, as Kunzel suggests, is part of a larger ensemble of how gender and race get played out at certain moments, combined with the scientific knowledge at the time that defines the very language available to describe certain sexual behaviors in modern American history.[96]

As Kunzel writes, even state officials by the end of the nineteenth century had a difficult time articulating what homosexual sex *was* in official prison records. Being unable to articulate what something is places these intimacies outside a category of what is knowable, though they were made to be obscene. Obscenity, then, becomes not only what is silenced in historical records, but also what is made illegible. If historians of sexuality are primarily concerned with how categories of difference come to be produced, they must also be concerned with how language, adaptability, and social norms about talking about sex publicly are all part of a push to think about sex uniformly: all these things shape the way in which we've come to define constitutes normative sexual behavior.

Hudson and Ellis' entry into Singh's room willingly might have been just what Hudson stated as, "a few guys having a good time." But it is a mistake to translate such strangers' intimacy as somehow universally moving towards so-called meaningful

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[96] Regina G. Kunzel, *Criminal Intimacy: Prison and the Uneven History of Modern American Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 15.

relationships. Rather, if we over-romanticize these relationships and how people to come associate with one another under such difficult constraints during a time of racial hostility, then we undermine the potential gravity that sharing a bottle of whiskey might have held for men like Singh, and the two white youths. Punjabis, already placed outside the category of what was normal by living in one-room boarding houses with other Asian men, sometimes had limited options about who they could befriend and associate with. Calling over the two white boys to his boarding house room might not have been so much about sex, but more about sharing the bottle of whiskey and having mutual camaraderie with these two transient boys, who knew what it felt like to be poor, alienated, and without family. The familial ties migrant men created in boarding houses with one another during this time creates an avenue by which we begin to think about what public intimacies in the Imperial Valley might have felt like.

The court never confirmed the prosecution's suspicion about whether something sexual took place between Singh and the two white boys in the Pioneer Rooming House that afternoon. Still, Singh's character was called into question by the fact he invited two white adolescents into his room for a drink. The charges against Singh were for intoxicating and contributing to the delinquency of a minor. Even though the prosecution merely implied Singh took advantage of the two boys when he got them drunk, there was clear evidence he had offered them drinks. The minors were also taken into custody and after Singh's trial they were sent to Juvenile Courts, where they were fined for drinking and later released. Singh, however, was found guilty by the Imperial Valley court, where he faced a sentence of two years in jail and a fine of $700. The gravity of Singh's punishment appears to confirm that the prosecution and the jury were preoccupied by the

suggestion that a sexual tryst could have occurred when two white adolescents decided to visit the boarding house of a complete stranger.

Violent Altercations in Courts

Efforts to police migrant sociability in early twentieth century courtrooms were punctuated by stories of violence involving Sikhs killing other Punjabi men, as well as their Mexican wives. In this section, I examine press coverage surrounding three assault trials involving fatal altercations between Punjabi men and members of their extended families, friends, and Mexican wives. What I find useful about these trials is they allow historians of sexuality and race to consider how discourses circulating in courtrooms worked relationally to present Punjabis as incapable of functioning without violence. I focus explicitly on (1) how predatory masculinity was used to describe defendants, (2) how fatal disputes between Punjabi males were represented as the failures of assimilability into white normative masculinity and (3) how the management of privacy was inter-connected with the policing of Punjabis. This section works to imagine how categories of blackness worked in relationship to the production of fatal violence between Punjabis families.

Male predation also came in the form of the threat of imminent violence which was a means to label immigrant men as degenates. For example, on June 13, 1913 when a group of Punjabi men named Partap Singh, Meta Singh, Budh Singh, Kehr Singh, Bahn Singh, and Kandar Singh allegedly robbed and assaulted Natha Singh and Jai Singh in Calexico during a dispute over money, prosecutors suggested that the physical altercation was caused by caste rivalries. Caste rivalries, as Karen Leonard describes in her research on Punjabi resettlement to the Imperial Valley, were considered by police officials to be

the main source of domestic disputes among South Asians. Because the altercation occurred at night, the prosecution had to make the case that the defendants were undoubtedly the people who robbed the two men. The problem, however, was the witnesses called to testify were not certain of the attackers' identities; and it turned out the prosecutors were not either. The prosecutor H.L. Welch had placed these men under suspicion because one of the them, Bahn Singh, was suspected of having a caste rivalry with the victims--even though the defendants had been working across town at the time of the attack. Judge Brown eventually dismissed all charges on the grounds of lack of evidence.

The intriguing part of prosecutor H.L. Welch's case was the insistence this altercation was part of a larger cultural dysfunctionalism tied to primitive masculinity and social caste systems in India. During cross-examination, the prosecution accused the victims Natha Singh and Jai Singh of hating the defendants because of their lower caste status. According to the prosecutor, "You don't like them very well do you, because they are not from your village? In your country, some people are from one village, and some from another, is that right? And when they are from a different village, they are not friends, are they?"[97] Even though Natha Singh and Jai Singh denied caste rivalries as the source of tension between the group of men and themselves, the line of questioning represented the alleged victims' failure to socialize like normative white men without the so-called burden of caste disputes. The promise of liberal societies like the United States was to allow normative men the free range of sociability, as an extension to the right to

[97] *People v. Partap Singh, Meta Singh, Budh Singh, Kehr Singh, Bahn Singh, and Kandar Singh*, Case No. 222, 3 (1913), Records of the Imperial County Court.

happiness and property, despite the racial background of citizens. By failing to engage in this kind of normative association, Sikh males were represented as failing to assimilate into Western liberal societies. Holding up caste rivalries as a reasonable explanation for physical disputes between Punjabi men situated the conflicts between migrant men as normal behavior expected from primitive peoples. The court's acceptance of these caste rivalries as inherently violent underscored their effort to categorize South Asian masculinities as brutal and felonious, and thus antithetical to the principles of free association and free capitalist relations. In this context, racial capital was viewed as a means to embark upon freedom of association in order pursue economic prosperity. South Asian men were viewed as potential risks to white capitalism because of their importation of feudal caste systems.

In another example, on February 26, 1919, the *Los Angeles Times* reported a fatal altercation between Punjabi immigrant nicknamed "Albert Joe" and his father-in-law Rullia Singh in Holtville, ten miles north of the U.S.-Mexico border.[98] After receiving death threats for nearly three months, Albert Joe was killed at the footsteps of his milk house while operating a cream separator during a heat wave. The *Los Angeles Times* article entitled, "Slayer of Albert Joe Found Guilty," explained that Singh was angry with Albert Joe because he had prevented Singh's wife Valentina Alvarez from rejoining her husband after she had deserted him (allegedly because of sexual abuse).[99] Press coverage of the trial went to great lengths to solve the events of what occurred that night. A series of articles in the *Imperial Valley Press* were published chronicling the exact timeline of

[98] "Slayer of Albert Joe Found Guilty," *Los Angeles Times*, February 26, 1919.
[99] Ibid.

the crime, where Singh was suspected to be at each moment, and detailed descriptions of the crime scene. A fatal dispute between father-in-law and his son-in-law turned into a salacious murder mystery about sexual abuse. Graphic details of Albert Joe's blood mixing with milk were part of the newspapers' efforts to classify Singh as psychotic. Little is known about the extent to which editorial contributors went to place Singh at the scene of the crime, however, chronicling the horrific events of Albert Joe's murder meant there was suspicion, at best a public curiosity, about the inter-personal lives and disputes between Punjabis in El Centro.

The graphic details concerning Albert Joe's killing were only part of the unusual interest in Rullia Singh's murder case. When testifying during her husband's trial in the El Centro courthouse, Singh's wife Valentina Alvarez (referred to by the press as his "Mexican wife") testified about her long history of sexual abuse and her husband's bad temper. During questioning, Alvarez stated, "he would hit me, torture me and then expect me to be with him sexually. I was expected to service him sexually at any time of the day."[100] Alvarez's painful sincerity came across in her husband's trial and drew commentary by newspapers throughout the Valley. The problem, however, was the court testimony made by Valentina Alvarez did not make it into the published reports in newspapers and instead was altered and misconstrued to become a public indictment of Hindu males. Not once in her testimony did Alvarez refer to Singh's race to explain why he committed such sexual violence. The press, however, distorted Alvarez's testimony to make it evidence of unusual sexual practices committed by Hindu men in domestic

[100] *People v. Rullia Singh*, Case No. 773, 18 (1919), Records of the Imperial County Court.

quarters.[101] Singh's alleged perverse sexual demands were situated within a larger ideology of what it meant to be a "normal" man who could rationalize restraint, and to exclude Singh and other Hindus from this category. Unable to control his sexual urges, like the black male subjects featured in *The Clansmen*, Singh was racialized and cast as a sexual degenerate. Susan Lee Johnson argues that popular cultural products at this time, including newspapers and dime novels, associated normative white masculinity with restraint, sexual temperance, and self-controlling rational manliness.[102] The press coverage, working at this time to categorize migrants outside the realm of white normative masculinity, described Singh's degeneracy as a product of his Hindu race. This degeneracy formed the basis for the denial of property rights to such men as an extension of the denial of legitimate marriage rights to Mexican women. For this reason, California passed a number of laws at the time to prohibite Punjabi men from land ownership due their failure to practice normative sexual and familial behavior.

The court testimony records dozens of additional witnesses who were called to the stand to testify against Rullia Singh, including the defendant's step-daughter Alejandrina Cardenas who was a witness to the entire incident. Witness accounts and production of the pistol used to kill Albert Joe solidified a guilty verdict by the jury. Singh later petitioned appellate courts for a reversal of the decision, arguing Albert Joe died of influenza. Despite his appeals, the courts never granted a reversal of the verdict and he was eventually placed under a life sentence.

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[101] "Hindu Trial for Murder," *Holtville Tribune*, November 29, 1919.

[102] Susan Lee Johnson, "A Memory Sweet to Soldiers': The Significance of Gender in the History of the 'American West," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (November 1, 1993): 506.

The suspicion stirred up by Rullia Singh's case crossed over into other trials related to domestic abuse in nearby towns. On April 16, 1921, Margarita Montoya was killed by her husband in the town of Brawley, sending shockwaves across the Valley. Described by her mother as a good-hearted woman who fell in love with Punjabi immigrant Gaudet Singh, the family's sweet image of the victim was contrasted with tales of her being forced to participate in sexual orgies by her husband. Montoya's mother Rosa Estrada testified that Singh, in a drunken fit, attempted to prostitute his wife to Japanese and Hindu migrant workers at a nearby ranch where primarily Japanese, Mexican, and Hindu males lived. According to Montoya's mother, "[Gaudet Singh] would say give me ten dollars, give me five dollars, give me two dollars. I will leave my wife here with you for one night or two nights, it did not make any difference."[103] Estrada later clarified that despite numerous attempts to get her daughter to engage in sex with male workers, Montoya ran away each time prior to each "incident." The details of Singh's perverse sexual demands of his Mexican wife, described in newspapers like the *Los Angeles Times,* associated the Hindu's lust for sharing his wife with concubine marital systems in India.[104] Caricatured by the press and medical physicians as insane, Singh was represented as a killer with an outrageous sexual appetite. His thirst for alcohol and pimping his Mexican wife to other males created racial and social anxieties about the sexual demands of Hindu men wanting to force their wives to have sex with transient men in ranch houses.

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[103] *People v. Gaudet Singh*, Case No. 1031, 39 (1921), Records of the Imperial County Court.
[104] "Hindu Murderer Believed Insane: Prisoner Sentenced to Hang Will Probably be Sent to Asylum," *Los Angeles Times*, January 5,1922.

The sexual encounters in labor camps described in Gaudet Singh's murder trial offer a different type of panic than prior concerns over interracial intimacies in boarding houses. Earlier research on taxonomies of perversity in Northern California suggests boarding houses were places of sexual suspicion primarily for encounters between men and boys. Singh's attempts to pimp his Mexican wife to transient men suggested there were other concerns besides homosexual sex in one-room boarding houses. Instead, people suspected that when migrant men and boys were alone a variety of sexual encounters was taking place, including same-sex, opposite-sex, and group sex . Singh's solicitation of group sex, then, was useful for newspapers and trial lawyers wishing to argue that migrant male domesticities were spaces for lewd and lascivious behavior. Sexual trysts between men were described as situational sex, the consequence of female absence. Singh's trial shows, however, there were other classifications at work where hypersexual representations were used to racialize immigrant households.

When the prosecution summoned neighbors, doctors, and family friends who lived in Brawley, it solidified the case against Gaudet Singh. Many of the witnesses who arrived at the crime scene testified to watching Montoya suffer at the end of her life. She was shot in the head and abdomen a few times when she died. After an El Centro court found Gaudet Singh guilty and sentenced him to death, he was transferred to San Quentin where he was placed under psychiatric observation. On September 2, 1921, according to police records, he was executed and "hung by the neck until he died."[105]

Four years later in 1925, yet another murder trial took place in the dead heat of the summer in an El Centro courtroom. Exculpatory testimony given by Mexican laborers

[105] *People v. Gaudet Singh*, Case No. 1031, 1 (1921), Records of the Imperial County Court.

was not convincing to an all-white jury intent on convicting Pakhar Singh for the murders of John Hagar and Victor Sterling. A local paper of the Ku Klux Klan had already made bids on the life of Pakhar Singh, a South Asian man accused of killing two white business partners in Calapatria on April 1, 1925. During this altercation on the Calapatria lettuce farm, Singh was said to have picked up a revolver and shot Hagar and Sterling in front of his Mexican workers. I've chosen to incorporate this trial because it spells out the unevenness of land rights and the complexities of where South Asians and Mexicans fit within the racial hierarchy. According to testimony given by Mexican workers, Singh was involved in a yearlong dispute with Hagar and Sterling, who were threatening to take Singh's land away. Jurors in this trial—some of whom were friends of the dead men—were already agitated by the fact that a dark skinned man killed two white men. This trial was revenge for many White landowners who were agitated by competition from South Asian businessmen.

This trial meant more to whites in Imperial County than merely redressing Sterling and Hagar's injury. Instead, winning a conviction against Pakhar Singh was retribution for land lost by white landowners to the South Asian business class. When Mexican laborers working on Pakhar's lettuce farm testified about what transpired between Singh and the two men, many stated that Sterling and Hagar instigated the conflict (see Figure 2.3). Candelario Iguerra, a farm worker on Singh's ranch, testified, "two White men came more than once and kept it up. They kept coming, making him angry and then would leave. There was a fight over who was the landowner, but I worked

for Pakhar. Pakhar's lettuce, the lettuce belonged to Pakhar."[106] A dozen Mexican workers expressed similar sentiments that same afternoon in the courtroom. Indeed, such trials are small window into the socio-political worlds Mexican men inhabited with South Asian businessmen. –and overlapping unevenness that exist in power relations in legal trials-

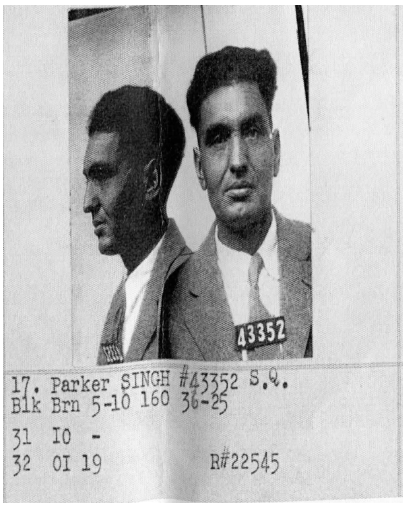

Figure 2.3 Criminal photograph of Pakhar Singh. California State Archives, Department of Justice, File: "Hindus"

The Mexican workers' testimony in this trial suggests that they were aware of the unevenness in law's applicability, and also of the extent to which they could dissent against the prosecution's narrative that Singh was completely at fault for the two murders.

Social critics who followed this case were fixated on the credibility of the Mexican witnesses in this trial. One critic in the *Holtville Tribune* argued testimony made by Mexican workers should be inadmissible because of their continued affiliation with Singh as laborers on his ranch, which he saw as a conflict of interest. While some lawyers

[106] *People v. Pakhar Singh*, Case No. 14575, 14 (1925), Records from Imperial County Court and Riverside County Court.

argued that these conflicts of interest plagued the trial with bias, the same standard was never applied to white witnesses. Allegedly this trial was impartial, –unless Mexicans expressed disloyalty to the interests of white settlement in Imperial County. Mexicans as a peon class of workers were a surplus of labor, excessive to the region. This excess meant that their loyalties were assumed to be in alliance with an anti-white politics. This critique surfaced in the trial: –South Asians were taking over the land, the argument ran, and Mexicans were facilitating this land grab through their labor power. Such intimacies between South Asian businessmen and Mexican workers meant that white social critics placed these relationships under suspicion. At the same time these alleged solidarities – seen in the Mexican workers' testimony – gave rise to political possibilities that Mexicans imagined for themselves by invoking the language of race and racism. This verbalization of inequality by Mexican workers concerning South Asians – albeit limited – shows sensitivity to the unevenness of race within the courtroom and the everyday social worlds they inhabited in the Valley.

Racial capitalism in this context was a vehicle to deny non-white groups the right to own property. For Pakhar Singh, he faced greater risks of losing his property and labor management because he lacked racial capital under the protection of law. For Sterling and Hager, they possessed racial capital because it was legally given to them because of white privilege. Singh lacked the racial capital to take Hager and Sterling to court in order to sue them because he was not allowed to legally possess ownership of property. Under the protection of law, racial capitalism ensured that Sterling and Hager held more rights of their equity, value, and labor force than did Singh.

Conclusion

The focus on immigrant male predation comes out of my general interests to understand how taxonomies of racial difference get circulated from one racial group to another in order to uphold racial capitalism. Such representations were used to support the exclusion of immigrants in the early twentieth century by law and cultural custom. The translation of racial difference, as I see it, allows for different possibilities when reading historical documents, including trials, newspapers, plays, and dime novels. Race, in the context of the Clansman shows, criminal trials and newspapers, was talked about in sexual terms. While I'm not suggesting these documents require this type of analysis, I am invested in the project of interrogating how categories of racial and sexual difference intersect to create knowledge about criminal subjects and unworthy citizens. For the purposes of this chapter, I examined how discourses concerning black masculinities in plays and national newspaper representations of African-American men as predators worked relationally to help racialize Punjabi immigrants. Within my analysis, I examined what the limits of immigrants' privacy was in their everyday lives, as their families were placed under intense social scrutiny. From this discussion, I offered a critique regarding the illogical white fears about the safety of white women. From questions related to semi-privacies and semi-publics, I argued that suspicious sexual encounters, and the spaces where they took place, were considered to be abnormal because of their inability to assimilate to normative ideas about monogamy, masculinity, and restraint. Because race relations are critical to the construction of moral panics, even today, this project hopes to drive a deeper understanding about how discourses are used to represent the supposed failures of immigrants to "fit" the nation-state.

Chapter Three

Youth Cultural Politics in Imperial County

Introduction

In March of 1937, photojournalist Dorothea Lange, along with writer Paul Taylor, embarked on a journey into Southern California's Imperial Valley. Here in California's agricultural communities, Taylor and Lange spent over a decade documenting the experiences of migrant field workers. Commissioned by the Farm Security Administration, Lange's documentary project was part of the U.S. federal government's effort to address poverty in rural agricultural sectors. She found herself travelling to places such as the Inland Empire, the Imperial Valley, and the San Joaquin Valley. Each summer she dedicated a significant amount of time to cotton fields located in Texas, Alabama, and Georgia. With camera in hand, Lange revealed a window into the economic turmoil that southern migrants to the West experienced in squatter settlements. Due to the instability of the market, bank loans were increasingly difficult to obtain after the 1929 stock market crash. Commonly referred to as "dust bowl refugees," rural whites entered California's agriculture sectors at unprecedented rates, thus elevating the poverty index. Many of these refugees struggled to obtain steady employment, sustainable food sources, potable water, and adequate housing.

Lange's fame was propelled based upon her representations of white women and children's vulnerability during the dust bowl. In fact, the iconic image that propelled Lange's career was a photograph she titled "Migrant Mother" depicting a poor

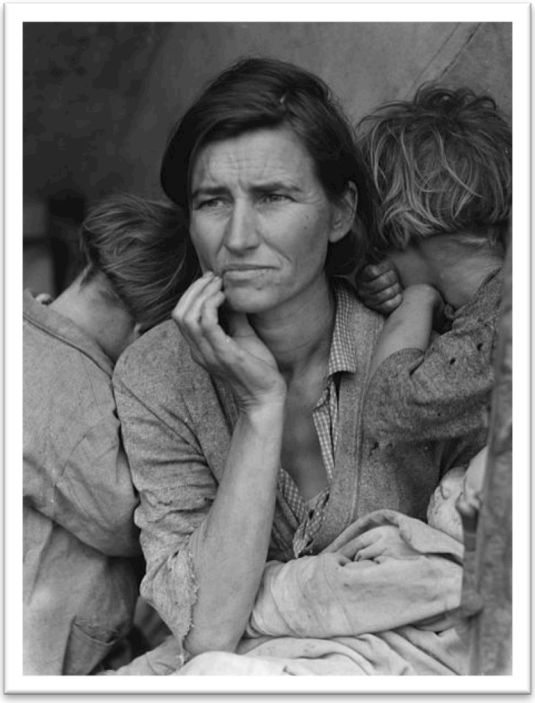

Figure 3.1 Photograph of "Migrant Mother". LC-USF34- 009058-C, "Destitute pea pickers in California, mother of seven children. Age thirty-two. Nipomo, California," February 1936, Photographer: Dorothea Lange (Courtesy of Library of Congress)

white woman surrounded by her children glancing away from the camera as she cradled her baby in an encampment near a pea field in Nipomo, California (see figure 3.1).[107] The woman was later identified as 32 year-old Florence Thompson, a widowed mother of seven. This image was celebrated nationally because it was a powerful symbol of the strength of mothers to protect their children. A closer examination of Lange's migrant mother shows that the power of this photograph is generated by its centering of Florence Thompson as the primary subject. Yet Thompson's personhood as a mother was

[107] James Noble Gregory, *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California* (Oxford University Press, 1991). Robert Cohen, ed., *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt: Letters from Children of the Great Depression*, 1 edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002). Linda Gordon, *Dorothea Lange: A Life Beyond Limits* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2010).

generated by virtue of her relationship to her children. As photograph historian Russell Freedman points, in the context of the Great Depression, photographic documentation of poverty told through the lens of white children and their mothers stood as a powerful image of the conditions that sought to expose the harsh conditions that refugees faced.[108] When she photographed diver migrant populations, she found that poverty was not only structured by the state of economic affairs nationally. Rather, in the context of the Imperia Valley, poverty was used as a means to geographically isolate ethnic Mexican children, families, and workers, driving them to congregate in less desirable sectors of the county, including East Brawley, Holtville, and East El Centro.

Lange documented a multiracial yet stratified society that was segregated along what African-American historian W.E.B. DuBois famously called the problem of twentieth century: "the color line." In her exploration of daily life along the "color line," Lange photographed what poverty looked liked from the perspective of diverse migrant workers. In it, she captured ethnic Mexican field workers, African-American migrants, white refugees, as well as Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino farmers.[109] When she visited the Imperial Valley, for example, she photographed ethnic Mexican children of carrot pullers in the fields (see figure 3.2). In it, a girl poses by smiling while she gestures towards the camera as her brother looks suspiciously away. Such photographs documented young migrants' embodied realities, struggle with poverty, racism, and their relationship to the built environments where they worked, played, and in which they were educated in. When told from the perspective of ethnic Mexican youth, we can view how such young

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[108] Russell Freedman, *Children of the Great Depression*, Reprint edition (Boston: HMH Books for Young Readers, 2010).

[109] Gordon, *Dorothea Lange*.

people enacted agency, created their own form of anti-racist politics, and defied a socially stratified society that was built upon keeping races separated from one another, which is a key dimension to this chapter.

Figure 3.2 Children of Mexican migratory carrot pullers. Imperial Valley, California. Call Number LC-USF34- 016222-E. Photographer: Dorothea Lange, March 1937.

In this chapter, I examine representations of race, childhood, and poverty as they intersected in visual culture and written reports that were generated by reformers, social scientists, photojournalists, and Americanization teachers. Childhood for ethnic Mexicans during the Great Depression—whose racialized experiences with poverty has been shaped differently from that of white youth—were the subject of investigation as early reformers attempted to understand how, and sometimes if, ethnic Mexicans could be

Americanized. Such an analysis concerning the racial politics of non-white childhood poverty has been widely understudied by historians of the Great Depression.[110] Douglas Monroy, for example, has written about Mexican immigration and its impact upon youth in Los Angeles during the Depression. However, Monroy and Sanchez have focused primarily on acculturation as a means to transform social identities based upon the first generation experiences during the Great Depression.[111] In this chapter, I expand upon their work by demonstrating that within the context of the Imperial Valley landowners and growers perpetuated ethnic Mexican school children's racialization in order to ensure the next generation of field workers retained its subordinate status via environmental racism and discrimination in the school systems. Such an analyses will demonstrate that built environments both were impacted and shaped by ethnic Mexican youths in Imperial County. Whereas in previous chapters, I have analyzed discriminatory practices that took shape in the form of gender and racial stereotypes in the legal system, this chapter forefronts age and race as an indicator of how social hierarchies were perpetuated in social ecologies where young people lived. I argue that such discrimination manifested in the form of school segregation, environmental racism, and second-class citizenship for ethnic Mexican youth. In the context of Southern California's Imperial County, racial capital was a means to socially isolate, discriminate, and target with the ambition of

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[110] George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (Oxford University Press, 1995); Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens?: Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (University of California Press, 2006); Vicki L. Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987); Albert Camarillo and John Chávez, *Chicanos in a Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa Barbara and Southern California, 1848-1930* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 2005).

[111] Douglas Monroy, *Rebirth: Mexican Los Angeles from the Great Migration to the Great Depression* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). For more on Americanization programs see also: Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*; Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives*.

harming the first generation of ethnic Mexican youth and limiting their chances at achieving at higher social status than their parents. In this sense, the color of development denotes not only the racial aspects of land development, but those of human "development" –something that is most evident in the ways children were raised and the life paths offered to them to become fully happy empowered adults.

Based upon studies that were conducted by Americanization teachers, reformers, social scientists and photojournalists, I argue that landowners went to great lengths to isolate ethnic Mexican field workers in order to entrap them into a cycle of harsh rigid menial labor. Growers and landowners had insurmountable influence upon the outcomes of children's lives in spaces that included schools, parks, and homes. I analyze the depictions of young people's relationship to the production of their built environments in written reports that were generated by the "Committee on Farm and Cannery Migrants, Council of Women and Home Mission" and field notes taken from an Americanization teacher named Nora Kreps who started her work in the Imperial Valley in the 1920s. I compliment these studies by using photographs that were taken by journalists such as Dorothea Lange and Rusell Lee, both of whom worked on behalf of the Farm Security Administration during the Great Depression. I argue that both Lange and Lee contested conventional representations of dust bowl victimhood as mainly impacting landless white people. Instead, they documented the lived experiences of diverse immigrant populations that included impromptu photograph sessions in fields, homes, and in town.

This rural agricultural community dominates Lange's collection, accounting for nearly a third of her pictures. In photographs, Lange documented what housing segregation looked like for ethnic Mexicans in her depictions of squatter life on the

outskirts of east Brawley, Holtville, and El Centro. Furthermore, they provide an account of the hardship ethnic Mexicans faced in the midst of racial hostility aimed against them. Under what can best be described as a system of racial apartheid, landowners went to restricted ethnic Mexicans to designated living spaces. In this highly segmented society, white growers committed themselves to sustaining separation of racial groups, dividing whites from yellow, black, and brown. In this chapter I interrogate the relationship between those who owned property and the negative environmental impact that these unequal relationships had on immigrant communities that resided there, particularly through the perspectives and experiences of ethnic Mexican children.

Photography was a powerful source of knowledge production to learn about the local perspectives of the people. As photographers embedded in the mundane activities of everyday people, Lange captured the sublime moments of young people's lives as they tended to survive such rigid social structures. When highlighting the perspective of adolescents and how they faced racism. Lange's work allows for deeper, sometimes more meaningful conversations about the lessons that were learned by the Great Depression. In this chapter, I demonstrate that 1) ethnic Mexican children experienced environmental racism during the Great Depression because of *where* they were residentially segregated in camps, 2) land owners used racial capital as a means to limit ethnic Mexican children from obtaining descent education, thereby limiting their access to social mobility, and 3) despite efforts to spatially segregate ethnic Mexican youth, they crossed racial and class boundaries in order to enact their own forms of autonomy.

Environmental Racism

When Kathryn Cramp who was the lead investigator of the report entitled, "Study of the Mexican Population in the Imperial Valley," on behalf of the Committee on Farm and Cannery Migrants, Council of Women for Home Missions, she wrote about the dire circumstances that ethnic Mexican families were living under in labor camps. Her attention was primarily placed on the environmental hazards that youth and families faced as a result of environmental racism. In her report co-published with Louise F. Shields and Charles Tomson, she wrote of the conditions at the Alamo Camp, which was located southeast of El Centro:

> A group of children were having a great time tumbling around in the manure as though it were a hay stack…There were flies, everwhere, guaranteed by the large number of manure piles near shelters….In front of each human shelter was the inevitable laundry tub, and many of the women as usual were busy with their washing…[112]

Environmental justice scholar Laura Pulido defines environmental racism as the disproportionate exposure of toxins and hazards by people of color due to racial discrimination.[113] In the context of the Imperial Valley, this was true for ethnic Mexican immigrants. Children were exposed to sewage waste, animal feces and human waste footsteps from their door. Incidentally, when Pulido theorizes her definition of environmental racism she basis it upon the experiences of the field workers movements during the grape boycotts of the 1960s. In the context of the Imperial Valley, however, investigators recorded such living conditions as early as the 1920s. Exposure to human

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[112] Mrs. Kathryn Cramp, Miss Louise F. Shields, and Charles A. Thomson, "Study of the Mexican Population in Imperial Valley." Made for the Committee on Farm and Cannery Migrants, Council of Women for Home Missions (1926), 7.

[113] Laura Pulido, *Environmentalism and Economic Justice: Two Chicano Struggles in the Southwest*, Society, Environment, and Place (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996).

and animal fecal matter was quite common in the Imperial Valley. For ethnic Mexican children, such waste was something they confronted in their everyday built environments where they worked, played, and leisured in spaces near their homes. A number of public health problems were connected to human exposure to environmental waste. In this context because human beings were isolated to spaces where animals lived, it demonstrated the lack of concern growers had for their workers and families. The lack of investment growers had in their workers was expressed in the human capital that manifested in housing. Environmental racism was a means to express social inequality in the landscape, pivoting around the question of who was permitted to have access to water, hygiene, and public health.

When examining environmental racism in camps, the fight for natural resources was one dimension that played a significant role in shaping the lives of ethnic Mexican children. For example, when Cramp and her investigators visited the Alamo Camp, they commented extensively on the lack of natural resources that were made available to field workers and their families. In it, Cramps and her fellow investigators wrote about such harsh living conditions but in terms of the lack of water.

> We found one woman carrying water in large milk pails fro the irrigation ditch. The water was brown with mud, but we were assured that after it had been allowed to settle, that it would be clear and pure. This is evidently all the water which they have in the camp.[114]

In her analysis of the fight to pursue environmental justice, Laura Pulido points that the mainstream environmentalists in the United States have dismissed claims to natural

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[114] Mrs. Kathryn Cramp, Miss Louise F. Shields, and Charles A. Thomson, "Study of the Mexican Population in Imperial Valley." Made for the Committee on Farm and Cannery Migrants, Council of Women for Home Missions (1926), 7.

resources as being something that primarily affects third world movements.[115] Yet in the context of the Imperial Valley, basic natural resources such as clean water were not accessible for ethnic Mexican field workers and their children. As Cramp found, upon reviewing the impact that this had on young people's lives, it entrapped them into substandard living that was endemic in the built environment. Thus, from an economic perspective good housing conditions for workers were not of value for most landowners. Structurally, the lack of natural resources that were made available to ethnic Mexicans demonstrates that there was a continued fight for basic necessities, such as water, in order to survive and maintain sanitation.

Dorothea Lange was astounded by the abuses heaped upon Mexican field workers and their living conditions. Most notable was the vast structural weaponry that growers used to influence where Mexicans lived. Growers were instrumental in determining who owned, controlled, and rented land. This was best exhibited in who held decision-making power over access to clean water, where field workers could live, and their proximity to white families. The neighborhoods where ethnic Mexicans lived, in the outskirts of East Brawley, El Centro, and Holtville, were places that lacked economic investment, access to potable drinking water, and had the worst dilapidated housing in the valley. For all their disadvantages, the spaces where Mexican field workers lived were communities that thrived in a racially hostile climate. Mixed neighborhoods did exist. African-Americans, Japanese, and South Asians lived in predominantly Mexican neighborhoods, as they were the largest labor sector in the Valley. The primary aim of racial segregation was to separate Mexicans from the white majority.

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[115] Pulido, *Environmentalism and Economic Justice*.

When Lange visited migrant camps, there was visibly a crisis over access to clean water for immigrant children. During her visit to an El Centro labor camp, she conducted extensive landscape photography where she captured the design and lack of infrastructure that was made available to immigrant children. Children were witnessed collecting excess water from the banks near their homes (see Figure 3.3). This photograph was emblematic of the living conditions caused by the Great Depression.[116] In the photograph with a Mexican girl leaning down towards the water embankment she stood upon a visible board that led to the edge. In terms of the built environment that immigrants designed for themselves in camps, they invented infrastructure that allowed them the

Figure 3.3. Drinking water for field worker's family. Imperial Valley, California, near El Centro. Call Number: LC-USF34-001619-C, March 1935, Photographer: Dorothea Lange. Library of Congress.

possibility to survive the lack of water. Under such living conditions, children were responsible for collecting water, cooking, and conducting daily chores in their homes.

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[116] Gordon, *Dorothea Lange*; Dorothea Lange and Oakland Museum, *An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion in the Thirties*, Rev. and extended ed. (New Haven: Published for the Oakland Museum [by] Yale University Press, 1969).

Lange's fascination with the most inordinate behaviors demonstrated she had a keen fascination with how young ethnic Mexican grew up differentially than their white peers. As written in her biography by historian Linda Gordon, Lange invested in whatever cultural capital she could in order to protest against inequality.[117] In the 1930s, the ability to take a photograph of populations made "invisible" to the mainstream public was a labor unto itself. For Lange, such documentarian work was necessary in order to expose the vulnerability of children who were segregated based race. Such segregation had profound consequences because it led to the exposure of pesticides, toxins, and sewage waste that was cause for public health crises.

Interestingly, Cramp and Lange held competing ideas about the role landowners possessed in shaping built environments of ethnic Mexican youth. In 1926, Cramp reported that "the economic value of good housing is being increasingly recognized by employers: they are realizing that a man must have a decent place if he is give good work."[118] Yet Lange nearly a decade later in June of 1935 intentionally photographed shacks where there was still only one water source available for entire community in Brawley, California (see figure 3.4). The conditions that Cramp argued could be repaired in 1926 were not made by 1935. When considering Cramp's claim the landowners eventually would come around to provide adequate housing conditions, it is hard to believe that after nearly a decade after not an ounce of water had been invested

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[117] Gordon, *Dorothea Lange*. Phillip H. Round, *The Impossible Land: Story and Place in California's Imperial Valley* (UNM Press, 2008).

[118] Mrs. Kathryn Cramp, Miss Louise F. Shields, and Charles A. Thomson, "Study of the Mexican Population in Imperial Valley." Made for the Committee on Farm and Cannery Migrants, Council of Women for Home Missions (1926), 7.

into the living conditions, thus demonstrating that the racial capital of having healthy ethnic Mexicans was not truly valued.

Figure 3.4 Home of Mexican field workers showing water supply. Brawley, Imperial Valley, California. June 1935, Photographer: Dorothea Lange. LC-USF34- 002280-E

Lange's assertion that discrimination was an institutional practice of environmental racism mobilized against ethnic Mexicans exposed the limits that racial capitalism. If as Cramps claimed, higher investment led to greater production among workers, the value of workers should have allegedly gone up in 1926. However, one dimension that Cramps denied in her report was that race was a major indicator of the social institutions that drove much of the inequality in Imperial County. Lange was more decisive in labeling her photographs based upon the exact findings: that ethnic Mexican neighborhoods were denied access to clean potable water because of institutional racism that was propagated by landowners. Because landowners controlled camps, it was

important for Lange to demonstrate that the lack of investment was connected to the question of who possessed control over the landscape. In this context, possession over power and commerce were held in the hands of white private property investors.

Educational Discrimination

The education system in the Imperial Valley was notoriously hostile toward ethnic Mexican youth and African-American children. For example, according to Katherine Cramps' report about the education impact upon immigrant youth:

> At one school in the county (Magnolia), the trustees are planning to place all the negro and Mexican children in one room, put in a door on that side of the building so that those children can enter and leave separately from the American children.[119]

The architectural design proposed by the school district intended to spatially isolate young people from engaging in contact with one another. As historian Benny Andres writes, young ethnic Mexicans of the 1920s were viewed as potential risks to white children's educational attainment.[120] Such risks manifested in separate divisions and unequal spaces of education. In order to sustain rigid racial hierarchies that prioritized white school children, it demonstrated that ethnic Mexican youth (and African-Americans) were viewed as potential liabilities for whites. In this proposed geography of racial segregation it demonstrated that even in the most "innocent of places," race was a primary indicator as to how people were perceived within their communities at a very young age. Thus, educational attainment was made even harder for young people of color to strive for better circumstances.

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[119] Mrs. Kathryn Cramp, Miss Louise F. Shields, and Charles A. Thomson, "Study of the Mexican Population in Imperial Valley." Made for the Committee on Farm and Cannery Migrants, Council of Women for Home Missions (1926), 16.

[120] Henry Yu, *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

The problems persisted past elementary school and well into the high school with young adults. When asked about his perspective about the importance of education for Mexican youth, Mr. C.R. Princo, Principal of the High School, stated the following to Cramps for her report:

> We find that a large proportion of all the Mexicans who come to us for the first time, regardless of their age, are unable to speak the English language with any fluency. For that reason we place these children in rooms which for convenience we designate as receiving room, grade 1-C and grade 1-B.

For Princo, the purpose of removal of Mexicans from "normal" classrooms was to assist them in catching up with the English language. Even though this was common practice among California educators until the 1980s (and in some cases today), there lies a key foundation about the insistence that speaking a language other than Spanish is an indicator of a setback in educational progress. As ethnic studies scholar Ana Celia Zentella has noted, bilingual children possess a great deal of knowledge about how to negotiate two worlds for their parents and quite frequently possess a great deal of agency.[121] For those who spoke Spanish in school, it was viewed as setting back the progress of the individual student. Such assimilationist tropes were used at this time in order to encourage uniform standards of language acquisition and turn English into the primary mode of communication between immigrant populations. Separation was a method to control how these children were to communicate with others.

Such separation extended to other racial groups including African-Americans. According to assimilationist Katherine Cramps:

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[121] Ana Celia Zentella, *Building on Strength: Language and Literacy in Latino Families and Communities* (New York : Covina, Calif: Teachers College Press, 2005).

> In El Centro, a negro high-school is maintained, to which the Mexican children are also supposed to go. But this is the only case brought to our attention where segregation extends beyond the elementary grades. It should also be mentioned that the term "segregation" is not used by school officials; "separation" is the more popular expression.[122]

Because segregation was built upon keeping different races separated, it achieved such goals by limiting children's access to a public education that was supposed to be open and democratic. At the expense of ethnic Mexican and African-American youth, white youth were provided better resources, facilities, and educators. Whereas, in the case of El Centro high school students, any person who did not fit the category of white was automatically ostracized. Thus, as historian George Sanchez found, despite efforts to assimilate and "Americanize" Mexican youth, institutionally they were treated as second-class citizens. Legal efforts to end segregation took flight in California with a series of successful desegregation cases in Southern California well before *Brown v. Board* (1954) with the first national desegregation case with the Lemon Grove Incident (1930) in San Diego County and *Mendez vs. Westminster* (1946) in Orange County.[123] In both cases, ethnic Mexican school children were denied entry into all white schools on the basis of not fitting into the standards of whiteness. It demonstrated that despite the fact that ethnic Mexicans were born in the United States, their racialization perceived them to be "birds

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[122] Mrs. Kathryn Cramp, Miss Louise F. Shields, and Charles A. Thomson, "Study of the Mexican Population in Imperial Valley." Made for the Committee on Farm and Cannery Migrants, Council of Women for Home Missions (1926), 16.

[123] Robert R. Alvarez, "The Lemon Grove Incident: The Nation's First Successful Desegregation Court Case," Journal of San Diego History, Spring 1986, 32(2), 1. Philippa Strum, *Mendez v. Westminster: School Desegregation and Mexican-American Rights*, Landmark Law Cases & American Society (Lawrence, Kan: University Press of Kansas, 2010).

of passage" that potentially would return to Mexico with their parents.[124] Such a stereotype was being used the reason for the lack of public investment in the lives of such children.

The lack of investment was most revealed when teachers in the Imperial Valley released their annual grades that were distributed in April of 1926. Separated by two different schools in Calapatria and Imperial where African-American and Mexican youth were segregated, school officials argued that 46% of white school attendees were retarded while 74% of Mexican and African-American attendees were classified as retarded.[125] Such findings demonstrated that schoolteachers held little reservation in failing such a huge number of minority students simply classified as intellectually deficient. At the same time, it demonstrated that the racial problem of school education was a reflection of negative racial attitudes in the larger community against ethnic Mexicans and African-American youth. With such overwhelming biases that these young people faced, it was remarkable that many still achieved the impossible by graduating from high school. As historian Benny Andres and other Chicano scholars prior to him have proven, when talking about educational discrimination of Mexican youth, proof of retardation became a means to route young children into economic sectors that best "suited" them.[126] For this reason, because agribusiness was the dominant sector of the region, such young people were made vulnerable to being tracked into vocational

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[124] Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens?*; Natalia Molina, *How Race Is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts*, 2013; Martha Menchaca, *Naturalizing Mexican Immigrants: A Texas History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011).Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*.

[125] Mrs. Kathryn Cramp, Miss Louise F. Shields, and Charles A. Thomson, "Study of the Mexican Population in Imperial Valley." Made for the Committee on Farm and Cannery Migrants, Council of Women for Home Missions (1926), 16.

[126] Andrés, *Power and Control in the Imperial Valley*.

fields and sent to conduct field/manual labor. Such a method was used to track individuals into lower sectors, force them to drop out entirely and made to feel unworthy of obtaining social mobility.

Reformers of the Time

In the year 1924, a great deal of popular and governmental interest was expressed in the state of race relations in the United States. That year, the Johnson-Reed Act standardized immigration quotas by restricting Mexican immigration (and those from Asia), and allocated funds for the creation of a border patrol at the U.S.-Mexico border. The act also restricted carte blanche the entry of persons suspected of being "retards" and potential "public charges" under a blunt legal apparatus that made race and class synonymous with disability. Under the direction of University of Chicago sociologist Robert Park, a consortium of social scientists visited the Imperial Valley to conduct research about the impact that land ownership, tenant farming, and immigration had on race relations in rural agricultural communities.[127] J. M. Davis, one of Park's protégés, visited the Imperial Valley on October 7, 1924. Upon his visit he met an ambitious Americanization teacher named Nora Kreps. According to Davis, Kreps stood out as a prime candidate to assist Park's study on the Imperial Valley about the state of race relations. When commenting in his field notes, he wrote about Kreps, "Miss Kreps is, however, tremendously interested in the whole racial problem of the valley and is probably one of the most intelligent and experienced persons in the community in this

[127] Henry Yu, *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

field."[128] To his delight, Kreps agreed to work with Professor Park with the contingency that she delivered her diary to him directly. Such an arrangement made her a vehicle to access the personal histories of young ethnic Mexicans and school children that worked with her in El Centro.

Americanization teacher Nora Kreps possessed a great deal of enthusiasm in her outreach work with her ethnic Mexican students outside of the classroom. In her self-entitled submission to Robert Park, "Diary of a Schoolteacher in the Imperial Valley," she spent extensive time with you adult women and men outside of the classroom. Certainly, she was young enough only at the age of 30 to identify with many of the ambitions, goals, and achievements that her students wanted to pursue. Her close ties to her students was reflected in her writing when she reflected on a recent experience she had with a group of teenagers. According to Kreps in her April 25, 1924 diary entry:

> For some reason or other my Mexican girls got on the subject of interracial marriages this afternoon. They told me that in Mexicali many of the Mexican girls were married to the wealthy Chinese merchants and restaurant owners. Yes, the Chinese made very good husbands – but the Mexicans always feel badly when their people marry into the darker races…Curious statement for a peon Mexican![129]

In terms of racial hierarchies, ethnic Mexican women perceived Chinese men to be more adept for marriage. It demonstrated that cross racial kinship was perhaps encourage among young people because it was a means to achieve social mobility. At the same

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[128] "Report of Visit of J.M. Davis to Imperial County", October 7 to 9, 1924. Located in Survey of Race Relations collection, Box 18, File 5. Reports from Southern California, Imperial County located at Hoover Institute at Stanford University.

[129] Nora Kreps, "Diary of a Schoolteacher in the Imperial Valley, 1924. Located in the Survey of Race Relations collection, Box 25, File 57. Reports from Southern California, Imperial County located at Hoover Institute at Stanford University. See also: Benny J. Andrés Jr., "'I Am Almost More at Home with Brown Faces than with White': An Americanization Teacher in Imperial Valley, California, 1923-1924," *Southern California Quarterly* 93, no. 1 (April 1, 2011): 69–107.

time, Chinese may have been perceived as successful because of their entrepreneurship, which made them standout from other peers.

Krep's enthusiasm for teaching could have been built on the fact that she was excited by connecting with her students to the extent that they felt comfortable revealing private information with "an outsider" about internal racial attitudes among ethnic Mexicans. At the same time, it also demonstrated that she was someone who didn't see a conflict of interest with revealing her young pupils' deepest intimate details about their feelings and relationships with someone they thought was a friend. Whereas in previous representations of poverty that I have analyzed with regard to environmental racism, ethnic Mexican adolescents have predominantly been portrayed as receptors of racism. In the context of Kreps' diary entries, she revealed that young women understood the stratified landscape of race, power and capital. In order to ascend such racial hierarchies, as they understood, marriage was a primary goal to seek upward mobility. To echo the work of historian Vicki Ruiz, Mexican women possessed more power than submitting to patriarchal standards such as heterosexual marriage as a means to defeat racism.[130] It was noteworthy, however, that Kreps' felt compelled to write down such a perspective about Mexican women's racial and sexual capital in her notes that were submitted to Park. The messiness of conversations about matrimony, sex, and desire were tangled in these young women's lives who held deep possession over how to articulate their own futures on their own terms. For this reason, when taking possession of such a conversation, the fact that young women were envisioning a future beyond field labor and poverty, demonstrated

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[130] Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives*. For more on Chicana feminist perspectives see: Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

that they held great ambition, hopes, and dreams. The significance of such relationships between white adults and young minority children was that they were rare, especially in educational settings.

Ambition was a key tool that connected early reformers such as Kreps to her students, demonstrating Kre's own racial capital in advancing her career and public status. When reflecting upon her interactions with her male students, she wrote, "Today Alejandro Campos came to me who is seventeen years old. He told me that when he was a little boy my ambition was to be a carpenter and to be a blacksmith or to be a hunter."[131] Interestingly, as historian Benny Andres has argued Kreps' favored her relationships with her male students because of her perception of their maturation.[132] Each week she commented on how much she learned from ethnic Mexican youth and was impressed by the maturity of her male students. Her views with women contrasted greatly as she viewed young women to be innocent (naïve at times). While these descriptions of teacher-student relations may have been portrayals of her own innocence (or naiveté), she was able to connect with young people at the human level. Thus, when ethnic Mexican youth confided in her about their most personal ambitions, they revealed a lot about the alternative worlds that they wished would materialize. For this young man named Campos, such a schoolteacher might have been instrumental in the development of his confidence, knowing that he knew how to speak professionally to another white person and thus develop his cultural capital to become a successful person in U.S.

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[131] Nora Kreps, "Diary of a Schoolteacher in the Imperial Valley, 1924. Located in the Survey of Race Relations collection, Box 25, File 57. Reports from Southern California, Imperial County located at Hoover Institute at Stanford University.

[132] Jr., "'I Am Almost More at Home with Brown Faces than with White': An Americanization Teacher in Imperial Valley, California, 1923-1924."

society. Despite her determination to see these young people to assimilate into U.S. culture, Kreps made compelling strides in learning how to deal with individuals who faced a lot of difficulties in their everyday lives. Thus, when we view the diary of a schoolteacher, we must view the totality of who Kreps was as a person and what she offered to these young people was a form of racial capital that other white people had denied them in the Imperial Valley. At the same time, Kreps' work demonstrates the racial capital and privilege she possessed as a white teacher able to exercise influence over students and gain easy access to their personal lives by virtue of her whiteness.

Young people of color exhibited a great deal of agency as illustrated in photographs taken by Russell Lee. Lee was most famous for his Imperial County Fair photographs that were taken in March of 1942. Since Lee worked under the same contract as Lange, he was able to visit many entertainment and leisure sites throughout the county documenting young people's interactions with one another. When he visited the annual Imperial County Fair, he documented a scene involving African-American boys with young Mexican American boys at a carnival attraction (see Figure 3.5). Lee documented the tense and tender moments that youth of color shared with one another. According to Lee, he captured each of his shot without the permission of the individuals in which he took photographs because he preferred impromptu natural shots. In the context of the boys playing with one another it demonstrated that there was a great deal of hope about interethnic comingling that occurred without interracial hostility. One dimension of Kreps' diary entries that appears out of place was her mention of interracial

rivalries between African-Americans and ethnic Mexicans.[133] Certainly, there may have been tensions between individuals, but it was not representative of the entirety of the population in the Imperial, as was demonstrated through Russell Lee's photography.

Figure 3.5 Boys at Carnival Attraction. Located at Imperial County Fair, March 1942. Library of Congress.

The work that social reformers performed in the early 1920s into the 1940s allowed for different political possibilities for youth of color to cope with the racist society in which they lived. Kreps' intimate relationship with her students demonstrated that some adults used their position in order to enact social change. Lee's photography reminds us that within an image can stand a powerful message about friendship, entertainment and leisure when faced with an increasingly hostile society that doubts young people's ability to persevere. His body of work also demonstrates the power with

[133] Nora Kreps, "Diary of a Schoolteacher in the Imperial Valley, 1924. Located in the Survey of Race Relations collection, Box 25, File 57. Reports from Southern California, Imperial County located at Hoover Institute at Stanford University.

which whites had in documenting the "natural" experiences of young minorities in social settings carved out by racial segregation. In the face of such racial hostility, these young people needed someone who believed in the power of them to express their ambitions, hopes, and desires.

Conclusion

Race was a key indicator of young people's social outcomes in the early twentieth century and led to the segregation by law of school age children, exposure to environmentally racist toxins, and led to the development of an internal battle for natural resources such as water. Young people's lives are shaped by the adults that they live with, next to, or sometimes who have no immediate contact with them but have decision making power over their lives. Despite such overwhelming odds, young people still held a great deal of ambition to think and move beyond the state of race relations in the time that they lived. Such hope demonstrated that they possessed cultural capital that could not be denied despite the overwhelming oppression that was generated by landowners, educators, and growers to restrict life chances and opportunities.

Chapter Four

The Struggle for Public Space

Introduction

Before his arrival in the Imperial Valley in January 1924, Los Angeles Regional Labor Board Secretary Campbell MacCulloch didn't know what to make of the social unrest that prompted his visit. He was aware of a cohort of ethnic Mexican and Filipino field workers staging public protests against pea growers between September and December of 1933. Certainly, labor disputes were not unusual for a regional labor secretary such as MacCulloch to encounter. In field notes made while en route from San Diego to El Centro, he expressed a sincere disinterest in petty disputes between growers, contractors and landowners, but the problems in El Centro appeared much larger. His field operator had urged him to investigate allegations of unfair wage discrimination, unlawful arrest and detention, as well as the expansion of prosecutorial power that was being used to discourage the right of public assembly. Without the right to protest in public space, MacCulloch argued after his visit to the Imperial Valley, civil liberties were suspended under a state of legal jeopardy.

Ethnic Mexican field workers were subjected to punishment because of their unionization efforts that occurred in public. Based upon archival evidence of the 1933 strikes, I argue that growers used their power as landowners in order to dissuade public protests. In 1933, under the leadership of the Cannery and Agricultural Workers' Industrial Union (C.A.W.I.U.), field workers organized weekly meetings. Such strategies

Figure 4.1 Pickets on the highway calling workers from the fields. 1933 cotton strike [San Joaquin Valley]" (Courtesy of UC Berkeley, Bancroft Library)

were borrowed from successful cotton strikes that had taken place earlier that year in San Joaquin Valley (see figure 4.1). The following, the Associated Farmers was established: a cooperative of growers that pledged to assist one another and law enforcement in the event of what journalist Carey McWilliams described as "disorderly conduct that arose out of picketing and sabotage."[134] McWilliams, who documented abuse of workers during the 1930s strikes, wrote that the situation between landowners and field workers was in such disrepair that Imperial County's agribusiness reached its nadir. In his writing, McWilliams described such adversarial ties between growers and workers as oppressive,

[134] Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1939), 231.

and he accused farmers of "farm fascism" and using overt force and terrorism to intimidate field workers. Like many leftists of his time, he argued that such fear-mongering practices constituted prototypical American fascist brutality.[135]

Law enforcement often supported growers and landowners in early twentieth century Imperial Valley. Police prioritized the rights to secure property over the right of public assembly. For example, police arrested ethnic Mexican field workers under vagrancy statutes if they held public meetings in protest of their labor conditions. Field workers were detained even when they protested in zones legally classified as public space such as bridges, public buildings, and sheds. Beyond being used to discourage civil disobedience, vagrancy laws were used to secure property values by growers who made political rivals disappear from the physical space of nearby ranches.

In this chapter I argue that landowners possessed legal authority to punish labor protesters that organized in public space. Historians Benny Andres and Cletus Daniel have written about law enforcement's abuse of power, which took the form of police brutality, invasion of privacy, and assaults on union members. In the historiography about labor disputes in this region, however, an understudied dimension is the excessive rights that private property owners possessed in being able to influence social behaviors in public space. This chapter demonstrates that because of the way Imperial County's public spaces were socially constructed they were susceptible to being controlled by landowners

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[135] Ibid., 233. Don Mitchell notes that although McWilliams was left-leaning in his politics, his descriptions of farm fascism were not an exaggeration. Both in the U.S. and internationally [?] fascists went to great lengths to conduct espionage, intimidate workers and keep unions under surveillance in order to discourage workers from joining the Communist Party. [Is a footnote about the holocaust relevant here?] For more information about farm fascism see: Don Mitchell, *Lie Of The Land: Migrant Workers and the California Landscape*, 1 edition (Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 1996). Don Mitchell, *They Saved the Crops: Labor, Landscape, and the Struggle over Industrial Farming in Bracero-Era California* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012).

who held power over the region's commerce and trade. For white growers, the right to secure property values gave them the authority to protect their land from outside agitators, including ethnic Mexican field workers. Yet field workers viewed that same land as public space: a place to organize, meet, and bargain with growers. Such competing attitudes over land use were tethered to the fact that private and public spheres were not clearly distinguishable. In these murky spaces between private and public, union members blurred such boundaries by uncovering what the growers considered "private" concerns such as unfair labor practices and turning them into public demands.

I argue that white growers benefited from legal discrimination against field workers, under what Cedric Robinson terms racial capitalism.[136] While many scholars have used this term in speaking to the problems of whites exploiting non-white bodies and labor for gain, I flesh out the concept in terms of the ways public space and property relations were regulated in early twentieth century U.S. society. Racial capitalism, as I argue throughout this dissertation project, can best be defined as the combination of profits gained from land dispossession and labor exploitation and the effort to maintain social hierarchies where one racial demographic (whites) benefits at the expense of another. The racial hierarchies that existed between white landowners and ethnic Mexican field workers were exposed because of union organizers' commitment to fair and equitable working conditions.

The Associated Farmers

In 1934, Imperial County Supervisor Hugh Osbourne went to local growers to pitch the idea of establishing a local chapter of the Associated Farmers of California.

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[136] Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*.

Osbourne was a stoic investor who was intent on destroying the Communist Party. Because of his personal investment in securing his title as an absentee landowner, investor, and bank lender, he led one of the largest campaigns against unions in the history of California labor.[137] The Associated Farmers was a network of shippers, insurance companies, bankers, large landowners, and investors that worked tirelessly to halt labor unions. By 1939, its membership had reached 40,000 growers, with each member contributing one dollar in annual dues. The organization's numbers grew exponentially through the 1930s as social unrest erupted across the state in agricultural communities that included the Imperial Valley, the Inland Empire, and the San Joaquin Valley. Because of Osbourne's keen insistence on protecting the rights of private landowners, the Associated Farmers became one of the most powerful agribusiness cooperatives to exist.

The Associated Farmers was a powerful lobbying group due to its size and geographical location. It drew on the power of California's massive industrial agribusiness, made possible by cheap labor. As a cooperative, growers not only had a heavy hand in influencing local politics in their communities but also became a powerful lobbying voice across the state of California. One of the Associated Farmers' most powerful weapons was the wealth that growers generated from private property ownership. That wealth sustained growers by giving them reliable sources of revenue and thus became a powerful tool in bidding wars and lobbying efforts.

Ironically, the Associated Farmers didn't view its own organizing efforts as an admission that unionization could potentially work in their favor. From the outside, the

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[137] Andres, "Power and Control in Imperial Valley, California," 92.

organization had many of the same qualities that any union possessed, including annual fees and a strong lobbying arm to advocate for the rights of its members. Nevertheless, the Associated Farmers vehemently denied that it was a union. Instead, it viewed unions as a Communist ploy to cheat growers out of their independent wealth and rights as private property owners. One dimension of these rights that Associated Farmers thought was most necessary was the right to protect private property by any means necessary.

Membership in the Associated Farmers generated its own forms of racial capital by enhancing the social status of white growers. Growers used membership into the Associated Farmers as leverage to earn the trust of El Centro's sheriff's department and city council members. When social unrest erupted in the Imperial Valley in 1935, for example, 1200 white men were assigned as deputies to halt union strikes.[138] All of them were members of the Associated Farmers. A clear division was drawn between those who possessed the power to enforce the law and those beholden to obey the law, an arrangement that gave white property holders an unfair advantage. State power effectively was placed into the hands of white growers. The tactics of surveillance used against field workers meant that they not only had the watchful eyes of their bosses upon them, but they also had the eyes of the state and privileged white growers peeking into their union activities.

The growers' wealth alone was not enough to guarantee them security: they needed the privileges of whiteness as well. When questioned by Los Angeles Regional Labor Board secretary MacCulloch about the social unrest caused by the labor situation, Captain Frank Oswalt became visibly agitated. He grimaced, looked downward then

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[138] McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 233.

straight into MacCulloch's eyes. "You men get out of here," he said. He went on to say, "You are hurting *our work*. We don't want conciliation. We know how to handle these people, and where we find trouble makers we'll drive them out, if we have to 'sap' them."[139] For MacCulloch, Captain Oswalt's personal investment in the growers' wellbeing cautioned him. If Oswalt was truly concerned about public unrest, what was the *work* he referred to? As a white man, Oswalt relied upon his alibi of white privilege as a means to slander ethnic Mexican field workers as communist agitators. Beyond defamation, he publicly announced that he would use his power as an officer of the state to "drive them out." Indeed, as whiteness scholar George Lipsitz has so eloquently written, "whiteness is a means to accumulate property for whites while keeping it from others."[140] When Oswalt allowed growers to deny fair and equitable labor rights he secured the accumulation of property, and thus wealth, into the hands of white growers. The *work* that Oswalt spoke of—work that he saw as not only permissible but also necessary—was precisely the measures that were needed to secure white property investment, thus creating a racial capitalist system translated into the form of law and punishment.

Indeed, MacCulloch's suspicions about Oswalt's personal investment in protecting white growers were confirmed. According to the regional labor board's chief field investigator, Oswalt himself owned and cultivated 100 acres of land in the vicinity of El Centro; his younger brother, Sterling Oswalt, El Centro Chief of Police, also was

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[139] MacCulloch, Campbell, "Labor Conditions in Imperial Valley" (Regional Labor Board, January 19, 1934), 5, Record Group 25, Records of the National Labor Relations Board, District 15 (Los Angeles code inquiries and complaints, 1933-1935) Box No. 2, File Name: " Labor conditions in the Imperial Valley," National Archives at Perris, CA.

[140] Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, viii.

reported to own acreage. The report went on to mention that Chief Lon Cromer of Brawley, Sherriff George Campbell of Imperial County, Undersheriff Rodney Clark, and E.H. Harrigan, Agricultural Commissioner stationed at El Centro, all possessed considerable acreages and cultivated crops for agricultural distribution. Clearly this was a conflict of interest, and it explained Oswalt's odd behavior. The explosive investigation disclosed that law enforcement were indeed landowners who were securing their own property values using security measures including arrest and detention of field workers who petitioned against their authority. The boundaries between upholding the law for the purposes of public safety and for private interest were murky. In such a stronghold of social unrest, when workers petitioned for their rights, the question of who could resolve such disputes became even more difficult.

Interestingly, some of the harshest criticisms of labor unions came from white female landowners. H.B. Griffin, for example, was Police Judge, Justice of the Peace sitting in civil cases, clerk of the Police Court, and clerk of the Justice. As a major grower and landowner in Imperial, she was famously quoted as stating "$1 a day is enough for a Mexican field worker." Interestingly, Griffin's gender was not mentioned, even though her position as a white woman who held possession of land was uncommon. Griffin was one of only a handful of white women to possess such a political position. It didn't mitigate her oppressive attitudes towards ethnic Mexicans, nor her classist views about what humane forms of compensation looked like. As labor historian Neil Foley has written, white women during this time increasingly crossed the boundaries that usually

barred them from labor, property ownership and management of farms .[141] Such constraints on the boundaries of femininity meant that Griffin's position, as a judge and landowner, did not always match her status as a woman in the Imperial Valley. Indeed, her social position as a white person outweighed the fact of her gender and allowed her to taken on roles that were traditionally assigned to white men.

Divisions over capital and labor took a surprising twist in the Imperial Valley. The Associated Farmers centralized its power, and in so doing blocked the distribution of wealth for their workers. While field workers demanded basic living wages to sustain themselves, white growers prioritized the demands of land and property value and viewed their workers as an expenditure cost. Given their rigid view of what commerce and trade were intended to do, they had little room for bargaining with such individuals. The possessive investment in whiteness outweighed their desire to provide fair and dignified salaries for their ethnic Mexican field workers.[142] In fact, organizations like Associated Farmers went to great lengths to use the power of law in order to punish individuals who dissented against such a form of racial capitalism.

Red Menace in the Public Sphere

The police conducted undercover investigations against field workers, and used this information to create an effective espionage system in order to keep track of "dangerous radicals." When Carey McWilliams was asked to visit the Associated Farmers' San Francisco office in 1935, he found espionage records that reported alleged Communist radicals. Each record included photographs, addresses, arrest history, strike

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[141] Foley, *The White Scourge*, 142.

[142] David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, Rev. ed, Haymarket Series (London: Verso, 2007).

activities, and affiliations.[143] According to McWilliams' observation, each list of suspects was sent to police officers throughout California and to members of the association. Thus, the labor situation in the Imperial Valley was not an isolated instance but a part of a statewide effort to halt labor unions. McWilliams was astounded by the violation of privacy, and by the association's complete disregard for the law as it tapped into people's affiliations and distributed their information publicly. The revelation also highlighted how conjoined law and labor politics were in the efforts to dismantle unions during this time.

The invasion of field workers' privacy exposed how murky a legal category the right to privacy was for immigrants in the early twentieth century. Social historian Nayan Shah, for example, has written about how police entrapment of transient male workers in Sacramento sex sting operations was used to circumvent privacy laws. As he notes, "the geographical spaces between the business district, transportation hubs, and respectable residential districts generated locations of unconventional meeting, communication, and relationships."[144] Because immigrants were classified as a potential risk to the nation-state (whether this was because of public health concerns, immigrants supposed moral turpitude, or the threat of unionization), they were subject to higher rates of police surveillance.[145] Such relationships that were generated between strangers in public space (sometimes sexual) were open for police investigation because of the lack of legal

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[143] McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 233.

[144] Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West*, American Crossroads 31 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 86.

[145] Natalia Molina, *How Race Is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts*, 2013. Shah, *Contagious Divides*. Benny J. Andrés, *Power and Control in the Imperial Valley: Nature, Agribusiness, and Workers on the California Borderland, 1900-1940* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2014).

protection to secure immigrants' right to privacy. For the Associated Farmers in the Imperial Valley, the flexibility of moving between private and public was more pronounced. In the nexus of information that was made available to farmers about potential allies, adversaries, rivals, and competitors, the use of law and punishment outweighed immigrants' rights to privacy and protection of personal information. The durability of this information would then lead to arrest and charges made against union organizers.

Communism was viewed as a potentially divisive tool that could subvert control over class relations in Southern California. Labor historian Vicki Ruiz, for example, writes that any union attempt to gain control over wage earning power was viewed as potentially subversive.[146] Ruiz writes about the early cannery strikes that took place from the 1930s into the 1940s in Southern California. Because ethnic Mexicans were the dominant work force, and as a result the demographic most likely to be engaged in politically charged labor issues, they were viewed as potential Communists. This led to an even greater crackdown on Communists in the state of California who viewed labor relations as potentially threatening to the rights and security of protecting landowners.

Anti-communist officials publicly declared that socialism was a form of class warfare, militarism, and redistribution of wealth; growers viewed its philosophy as antithetical to industrial agribusiness (see Figure 4.2). When Supervisor Hugh Osbourne was asked to give a speech at the Anti-Communism meeting held in Los Angeles on March 26, 1934, he said," we [Imperial growers] are not going to deal with Red whose

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[146] Vicki L. Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), 47.Gilbert G. González, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing: Imperial Politics in the American Southwest (Center for Mexican American Studies)* (University of Texas Press, n.d.).

only interest is tearing down the government and interfering with orderly harvesting of our crops."[147] Interestingly, Osbourne viewed the security of private property ownership as in jeopardy because of labor organizers.

Anti-Communist Ranks Strengthened in Imperial Area

Radicals Given Battle

During a mass meeting at the Imperial County Fairgrounds more than 1000 joined in the fight against agitators who plan to prevent marketing of cantaloupes by causing a strike. In the center is Rex B. Goodcell, former collector of internal revenue, who addressed the meeting, congratulating Charles Nice, commander-in-chief of the Anti-Communist Association, while Roy Stilgenbour looks on.

Figure 4.2 Imperial Coup Beats Radicals newspaper article. Photograph courtesy of *Los Angeles Times,* "Imperial Coup Beats Radicals," *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 1934

He went on to argue that field workers potentially could invert the "natural" order of seasonal labor. Osbourne viewed field labor in racial terms because he wanted to maintain his white privilege and sense of private property entitlement. Such Red-baiting tactics were used in order to scare growers that without support, field workers could one

[147] "IMPERIAL COUP BEATS RADICALS: Anti-Communists Pack Hall Before Meeting Opens Cannery Workers' Heads Refuse to Talk Representatives of Growers' Body Address Throng," *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, March 26, 1934.

day invert white-Mexican relations. Such threats about an inversion of race and class hierarchies were potentially threatening for those who enforced the law. Accordingly, in between the years 1933 and 1934, union organizers were targeted as potential threats to public safety because of their organizing in public space.

Following the pea strikes of 1933, union organizers were frequently put on trial, often on suspicion of being Communist sympathizers. Two women strikers, Emma Cutler and C.A. Hoffman, were found guilty on vagrancy charges in 1934 and sentenced to six months in Imperial County jail. A third defendant named Clarence Lynch was freed. During their arrest pamphlets were found in their possession that had been published by the International Labor Defense, which the prosecution believed was an agent of the Communist Party. The media went to great lengths to suggest that the Communist Party, and by extension protesting field workers, were engaged in a battle to create political unrest (see Figure 4.3). One *Los Angeles Times* article alleged that the communist menace threatened violence to civilians and possible murder of elected politicians.

Figure 4.3 Red menace newspaper article. Photograph taken from *Los Angeles Times* article, "Is there a Red Menace in Los Angeles?" *Los Angeles Times*, April 15, 1934.

In December of 1933, three white brothers returned to Southern California's Imperial County; Imperial landowners identified the "three boys" as the Hancock brothers.. Before the three entered El Centro, police identified the eldest, Stanley Hancock, as a union organizer affiliated with the Communist Party. It was suspected that the brothers were labor organizers assisting Mexican field workers in San Diego, Imperial County, and the San Joaquin Valley. Once word spread, growers alerted the Imperial County sheriff that the Hancocks were en route to assist in yet another strike. The landowners saw the Hancocks as agitators who wanted to use unions as a ploy to recruit members into the Communist Party. For Mexican field workers, the Hancocks

were white leftists who were in a position to assist them because of their networks with outside labor unions.

In March of 1934, Stanley Hancock and fellow communist Dorothy Ray were arrested in Brawley and put in detention in "the hole."[148] Their joint trial was sensationalized in the *Brawley Press*. White landowners were terrified that that communism was being imported into Imperial County. They spread rumors that communism would lead to an inversion of labor relations, restructure U.S. agribusiness, and (worst of all) strip landowners of their property rights. The Hancock-Ray trial proved that communists were present in the Imperial Valley and even worse that growers' primary (and only) labor force was a population under suspicion for communist activities. Such activities were used to justify racial capitalists' efforts to manage public space in the same way that they managed and regulated private property.

The Struggle for Public Space

In 1934, the El Centro police department adopted repressive measures that demonstrate their racialized nationalist views of ethnic Mexicans as oppositional to, if not subversive of, white public safety. To expand upon the work of critical race scholar Ian Haney Lopez, police officers in Southern California held mainstream discriminatory attitudes against ethnic Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, and self-identified Chicana/os as oppositional to law and order. In fact, it was the police brutality, terrorism, and fascist practices by the Los Angeles Police Department that drove ethnic Mexicans from

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[148] "Federal Writers' Project," 1934, BANC MSS C-R 2, Carton 32, Folder 10, Bancroft Library at University of California, Berkeley.

claiming a white racial identity in the 1930s to adopting an oppositional brown identity by the 1960s.

The expansion of prosecutorial power was best exemplified in the outlawing of public protests. In writing about the conflict, Labor Board Secretary Campbell McCulloch said, "it is stated by many persons in both El Centro and Brawley that there is virtually martial law." He went on to elaborate: "No mass meetings are allowed; not more than two of the workers are allowed to stand together on the streets in one group."[149] The management of public space demonstrated that the places where field workers lived, worked, and relaxed were held under suspicion. When questioned about the legitimacy of what amounted to martial law, authorities said, "these measures are necessary if peace is to be preserved."[150] As human geographer Don Mitchell argues in his analysis of California field worker movements, Mexicans were not afforded the space to protest. In fact, gathering in public space was criminalized.[151] The criminalization of public space also annihilated the right of public assembly. By so doing, police officers deliberately circumvented universal statutes regarding civil liberties in the name of security. To quote Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, "the state of exception" allows the suspension of human and civil rights in the name of preserving local, state, and national security. For El Centro police, preserving security meant preserving the interests

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[149] MacCulloch, Campbell, "Labor Conditions in Imperial Valley" (Regional Labor Board, January 19, 1934), Record Group 25, Records of the National Labor Relations Board, District 15 (Los Angeles code inquiries and complaints, 1933-1935) Box No. 2, File Name: " Labor conditions in the Imperial Valley," National Archives at Perris, CA, pp 4.

[150] Ibid.

[151] *Lie Of The Land: Migrant Workers and the California Landscape*, 1 edition (Univ Of Minnesota Press, 1996).

of growers by essentially declaring martial law. Intimidation tactics were used to regulate public space in ways that destroyed both tradition of privacy and publicness.

Campaigns of harassment resulted in the incarceration of field workers. According to MacCulloch's report about police involvement in breaking strikes, dozens of field workers were detained, questioned, and imprisoned in correctional facilities in El Centro and Brawley. MacCulloch wrote, "the police and deputy sheriffs within a few days of January 15-17 arrested 75 persons whom they classed as agitators."[152] Under this form of fascism, police used prosecutorial power to punish those who dissented. To be classified as Mexican agitators and possible allies of communists made protesters vulnerable to city and county-wide prosecution (see Figure 4.4). The use of law and punishment to tamp down dissent accounts for the powerful influence the growers had in the region.

[152] MacCulloch, Campbell, "Labor Conditions in Imperial Valley," pp. 4.

Figure 4.4 Street meeting at night in Mexican town outside of Shafter, California. Organizer for United Cannery Agricultural Packing and Allied Workers of America (Congress of Industrial Organizations-CIO) talks to mixed crowd. The strike failed. Photographed by Dorothea Lange, November 1938. (Courtesy of Library of Congress).

The most repulsive of police actions was when white officers tear gassed a local gymnasium in which Mexican men, women, and children were congregated for a meeting. In his investigative report on labor abuses, Robert Wagner of the National Labor Board in Washington, D.C. wrote that "2,000 persons in Brawley were dispersed by the police 'who hurled tear-gas bombs into the group and wielded hardwood clubs to break up the meeting."[153] Officers claimed that this forced entry into a semi-public space was necessary in order to apprehend a handful of alleged agitators. In terms of law

[153] "Labor Conditions in the Imperial Valley" (National Labor Board, February 11, 1934), Record Group 25, Records of the National Labor Relations Board, District 15 (Los Angeles code inquiries and complaints, 1933-1935) Box No. 2, File Name: " Labor conditions in the Imperial Valley," National Archives at Riverside, CA., p. 22.

enforcement, the apparatus of law enforcement publicly moved from viewing Mexicans as agitators to becoming openly hostile to their very existence. The type of terrorism that El Centro police engaged in all too familiar to those living in the Imperial Valley and the rest of Southern California. Incidents like this one raise the question of what incentive police had to dedicate so much force against the protesters.

Local organizations were major contributors to local police departments in Southern California's Inland Empire and Imperial Valleys, to such an extent that labor commissions had major concerns about the impartiality of local courts. Labor Secretary Wagner, for example, was deeply concerned with the inability of Imperial County Courts to try protesters before an impartial jury. Wagner noted in February of 1934 that the escalating racial tensions between police and Mexican residents should be addressed with the utmost immediacy by the Department of Justice. Police officers, judges, and prosecutors in the 1920s and 1930s in Southern California's Inland Empire and Imperial Valley were 'strange bedfellows' with the Ku Klux Klan.[154] As Matt Garcia found in his historical study of 1930s protests in the Inland Empire, judges, lawyers, and police officers were often members of the Klan or other white supremacist groups. With terrorist organizations backing up the racial fascism enacted by police officers, it appeared that race relations in the Imperial Valley had reached their low point.

The expansion of prosecutorial power has historically proven to be racist. The case study outlined in this chapter is an example of many experiences that transnational immigrants have had with the criminal justice system. The power to criminalize, hold

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[154] "LAST RITES FOR KU KLUX SLATED: 'Invisible Empire' Passes in Imperial Valley; Best Element of Citizens to Quit Klan; Prominent Men Held High Offices in Order," *Los Angeles Times (1886-1922)*, June 2, 1922.

suspect, and harass may appear to be a misuse of the law. But in fact, the abusive political economy of agricultural communities was mainstream and widespread. The El Centro police department extorted and punished field workers who did not conform to their control and demands. Under racial fascism and racial capitalism, punitive measures were waged against children, men and women without regard for their lives as public beings or private persons.

Mutual Aid Committees

In February of 1935, the Mexican Social Welfare Committee released a report outlining labor and human rights abuses in the Imperial Valley. The report also reflects on the history of labor demands that were required by industrialization. The majority of this labor came from South of the Mexican border. Despite the numbers of whites, Asians, and American Indians, Mexicans outnumbered all these demographic in each decade of the 20th century. The report noted that no less than one-third of the population in the Imperial Valley was Mexican, with the largest population in Brawley, with 11,000 Mexican residents.[155]

Brawley was divided into two parts, Eastside and Westside, separated by the Southern Pacific railroad. The city had the first Mexican Chamber of Commerce in the United States, years prior to the establishment of a Mexican Chamber of Commerce in Los Angeles. At the heart of the question concerning Mexican labor was whether Mexicans as a community posed a threat to property ownership. Such a threat did not have to come from fights over land titles: instead Mexicans' power came from their

[155] Bancroft Library, Mexican Social Welfare Committee, February 1935. Paul Taylor Papers, Container 14, File 38.

ability to organize. By organizing, they could potentially subvert the political economy of the region, thereby plummeting property values. In the minds of whites, Japanese, and South Asians, it appears that there was an internal concern about what the Mexican population intended to do with the strikes. What after all was the purpose?

The reasoning behind this demonstrates that there were larger concerns about whether Mexicans' goal was in fact higher wages, as they alleged in their campaigns. Pervasive white anxiety about how secure their property was is apparent in correspondences with the Federal Board. In fact, in the Mexican Social Welfare Committee's report about the history of their organization, they characterize the decade-long organization from 1921-1928 as a period of prosperity. According to the committee's history of Mexican labor, Mexicans were peaceful during this time and only advocated for labor rights and tensions did not intensify until 1928. In April of that year, the Benito Juarez Mutual Benefit Society—a mutual aid society established by the Mexican community in Brawley— presented the possibility of establishing a formal union called the Union of United Workers of Imperial Valley, Inc. Even though the Benito Juarez Mutual Benefit Society wasn't formally a union, all of its members belonged to the only union representing Mexicans in the area.

In an effort to distance themselves and the proposed union from the Mexican Union, the mutual benefit society wanted to establish a clear break between themselves (the Mexican community) and field worker unions. The reason is because fieldwork was essentially racialized as Mexican by 1928, and the mutual aid society wanted to establish that there was not a uniform position about union organizing among Brawley's Mexican community. Until this time, Brawley was predominantly represented by mutual aid

societies who advocated for human and labor rights improvement. In an effort to appear non-biased, the mutual aid society wanted to appear acting in the best interest of the community. In so doing, they didn't want the board to mistrust their intentions.

Conclusion

This chapter has relied upon legal and cultural evidence to support the argument that growers and landowners used their racial capital in order to subvert public protest. During the 1930s protests, evidence supported by labor councils, committees, and public newspapers demonstrates that there was an anti-Mexican sentiment that was used to support anti-Communist rhetoric. Therefore, by labeling ethnic Mexican field workers as communists, it elided worker's rights protest for better working conditions, fair wages and salary. Because field workers did not posses the same racial capital as white growers, they were viewed as subversive to the nation-state, as well as to white growers sustaining their power over the distribution of wealth. Such a case study demonstrates that white growers' insistence that racial capital should be centralized into the hands of white growers was implemented and enforced by police force.

Chapter Five

Shifting Terrains of Race Relations During Wartime

Introduction

In the wake of Executive Order 9066, citizens of Japanese descent were forcibly evacuated in desert communities throughout the nation including their removal to Native-Americans reservations. En masse, citizens were transported to war relocation centers in states that included California, Oregon, Arkansas, Arizona and Washington. Located in Poston, Arizona, the Colorado River Indian Reservation was to become one of the two largest internment camps during World War II. Its sister camp was located on the Gila River Indian Reservation in southern Arizona was to become the second. 90 percent of Japanese-Americans who were evacuated from the Imperial Valley were sent to the Colorado River and Gila River relocation centers. In terms of its built environment, each was made up of large barracks that were newly constructed by Native-American contractors. The camps' construction, however, did not go uncontested.

The Colorado River Relocation Center was significant because the Indian Council—which consisted of tribes belonging to the Mohave, Chemehuevi, Hopi and Navajo--denied the U.S. Department of the Interior's initial request to use American Indian lands in 1942.[156] Internment was justified by accusations that Japanese-Americans were spies who intended to subvert U.S. security on behalf of the Japanese Empire. On the basis that internment was racially discriminatory, elders viewed Japanese-American

[156] Ruth Y. Okimoto, *Sharing a Desert Home: Life on the Colorado River Indian Reservation, Poston, Arizona, 1942-1945* (Heyday Books, 2001).

war relocation as a similar practice to American Indian land removal. Despite tribal disapproval, in 1943 the U.S. War Relocation Authority transferred 17,000 internees from Southern California to the camp at Poston. At the Colorado River Relocation Center, Japanese-Americans of variant ages, backgrounds, and national status converged upon the desert lands that belonged to Native-American nations.

In this chapter, I analyze how the construction of the Colorado River Relocation Center created the vocabulary for Japanese-Americans and Native-Americans to identify their complex historical relationship to the U.S. nation-state as an imperial power. An understudied dimension of internment has focused on the impact evacuation had upon race relations from a comparative race and ethnicity angle. Matt Briones and John Howard, for example, analyze the impact internment had upon race relations between African-Americans and Japanese-Americans that resulted in complicating the color line under Jim Crow during World War II.[157] I expand upon Briones and Howard's analyses by examining the impact internment on race consciousness when juxtaposing the experiences Japanese-Americans with those of Native-Americans. When drawing upon each groups' racialization from a comparative angle in one geography such as the Colorado River Relocation Center, it demonstrates the multitude of power relations that were generated by this one site.

A key dimension of this dissertation project thus far has been to elucidate on the tensions and conflicts that arose out of uneven power relations. Such power relations were structured by access to racial capital, particularly within the context of the Imperial

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[157] Matthew M. Briones, *Jim and Jap Crow: A Cultural History of 1940s Interracial America*, Reprint edition (Princeton University Press, 2013); John Howard, *Concentration Camps on the Home Front: Japanese Americans in the House of Jim Crow*, 1 edition (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2008).

Valley. With field notes taken by photojournalists hired by the War Relocation Authority and school notebooks written by Japanese-American adolescents that were detained, I demonstrate that war relocation provoked questions concerning land sovereignty, racial capitalism, and the limits of liberal democratic citizenship. By virtue of their experiences in camps, Japanese-American youth who came from the Imperial Valley began to question their own privilege prior to the war. For the first time, they began to place into conversation their racialization in camps with the racial formation of Chicana/o, African-Americans, and other ethnic minorities. Native-Americans were inconvenienced by the war because of the costly burden it placed upon its land, built environment, and ecological resources.

Without consent, both Japanese-Americans and Native-Americans identified were denied citizenship rights on the basis of security of the U.S. nation-state in 1942. When Japanese-American internees arrived en mass onto Native-American lands under such hostile circumstances, Native-Americans relived the historical trauma of watching yet another racialized population terrorized by forced removal, a saga that was all too familiar for Native-Americans. For Japanese-Americans, the Colorado River Relocation Center represented loss, pain, resentment, deception, and aggravation. Such varying attitudes about the relocation of human beings and their loss of assets, wealth, freedom, and self-determination shows that internment was not an issue that impacted one racial demographic evenly. Instead, internment generated a host of issues that makes the Colorado River Indian Reservation such a compelling and unique story to tell about the denial of citizenship rights, racial capital, and land sovereignty.

American Indian Land Sovereignty

Land sovereignty has held several competing definitions among Native-American scholars. Native Hawaiian scholar J. Kehaulani Kauanui, for example, has argued for a more expansive view of self-determination that contests discourses of authenticity and blood quantum.[158] To expand upon her definition, sovereignty is the power to self-determine the political economy and political authority over land belonging to native populations. In the context of the Colorado River Relocation Center, the Indian Council's power was overrun by the decisions made by the War Relocation Authority to relocate Japanese-Americans onto Native lands.[159] Under federal law, American Indian reservations were protectorates of the United States, and therefore during wartime could be used for the war effort.

When taking into consideration the history of land dispossession, Native-Americans have been denied self-determination due to their lack of racial capital. Under the Indian Removal Act of 1831, for example, Native-Americans were forcibly removed from the Great Plains region with families and children. The Indian Appropriations Act of 1851 effectively created the reservation system with the contingency that Native-American tribes devote loyalty to the United States federal government. Under the Dawes Act of 1887, Native-American decision-making power was further decentralized

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[158] J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, *Hawaiian Blood: Colonialism and the Politics of Sovereignty and Indigeneity*, Narrating Native Histories (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). See also: Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Houndmills, Basingstoke ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). Noenoe K. Silva, *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2004); Adria L. Imada, *Aloha America: Hula Circuits through the U.S. Empire* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2012). David A. Chang, *Color of the Land*, First Edition edition (The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

[159] Okimoto, *Sharing a Desert Home*. Phillip H. Round, *The Impossible Land: Story and Place in California's Imperial Valley* (UNM Press, 2008).

when their property was auctioned off to white settlers moving to the rural American West.[160] Such laws were used to generate dependency and loyalty among Native-Americans particularly when land rights were involved. In the context of the Colorado River Relocation Center, Native-American held no means to possess property rights, and thus they were not afford racial capital in the ways white settlers were.

When a Chemehuevi Indian (Native-American) woman named Mrs. Ruby Snyder was approached in April 1942 concerning the relocation of Japanese-American evacuees to Poston, Arizona she welcomed photographer Clem Albers onto her land. Albers was a photographer working on behalf of the Office of War Relocation contracted under the Department of the Interior. He visited Native-American families who lived on the Colorado River Indian Reservation. As he approached her ranch in Parker, Arizona, Snyder was busy pumping water from an underground water unit. She was a middle-aged woman who was reluctant to have her photograph taken but still engaged with Albers (see Figure 5.1). In fact, in photographs taken of her she stares off into the distance turning away from Albers as if suspicious of his intentions with her image. According to cultural geographer Gillian Rose, to take a photograph of a person during this time standing up right in the center of the photograph allotted for the image, it stands as a powerful representation of that person.[161] In terms of the power of this image, Snyder stands as a dominant character where she looks at the landscape and topography around her under her own terms. Such a powerful image contradicted the state of relations

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[160] Chang, *Color of the Land*; D. S. Otis, *The Dawes Act and the Allotment of Indian Lands*, 1 edition (University of Oklahoma Press, 2014).

[161] Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*, Third Edition edition (London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2011).

between the U.S.-nation state and the concurrent disagreement the Indian Council had with the government concerning the creation of the relocation camp.

When asked about incoming internees, Snyder said she knew little information except that the Japanese were outstanding farmers. As she pumped water into her bucket, Snyder mentioned, "I hear the Japanese are wonderful farmers. I would like to go down

Figure 5.1 Photograph of Mrs. Ruby Snyder. She is a Chemehuevi Indian of the Colorado River Indian Reservation using water pump, April 10, 1942, photograph by Clem Albers. War Relocation Authority Collection, National Archives, NWDNS-210-G-A332.

to see how they grow things."[162] Interestingly, she viewed evacuees as potential instructors that could better assist in the cultivation of land that she was native to. In the past decade, the Colorado River Indian Reservation endured a number of droughts that made cultivation difficult. Such an ecological crisis may have peaked Snyder's interest

[162] Caption from photograph with Ruby Snyder, April 1942, War Relocation Authority Collection, National Archives, RG 210, NWDNS-210-G-A332.

in desert-based agriculture. Snyder's remarks demonstrated that there were concerns about the shortage of water in the region and potential loss for desert farmers. Beyond her knowledge about Japanese cultivation practices, Snyder knew nothing about the humiliation that internment caused for many Japanese-Americans, including their loss of property, land, and citizenship rights.

Ironically, the construction of the Colorado War Relocation Center was built with the assistance of Native-American contractors who were in dire straights for financial relief. Many Native-American including the Hopi and Apache were living in poverty stricken circumstances and the construction of barracks for war relocation provided temporary job growth. In a study conducted in 1942 that was based upon generating Native-American support of the United States during wartime, political scientists John Collier surveyed the participation of Native-American tribes in assisting the wartime effort. Because war relocation was viewed as a dimension of the wartime security machine, he classified this as support for the war, even though it was a means to produce capital in order to curb long-term poverty on reservations. When writing about Native-American participation he wrote, "Almost over night the twelve hundred Indians found hundreds of trucks pouring over their roads to unload building material; barracks began to rise on the unoccupied land adjacent to their homes…"[163] Collier was dismissive of the fact that Native-Americans required a resolution to recurrent desert droughts and poverty that was instrumental to malnutrition among their youth. Based upon Collier's description, he assumed that Native-Americans held the capital to deny certain forms of

[163] John Collier, "The Indian in a Wartime Nation," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 223 (September 1, 1942): 31.

labor based on their ethical position. Whereas in prior circumstances racial capitalism has come in the form of land ownership, in this case, Native-Americans couldn't afford to decline labor.

Apache and the Hopi were primary sources of labor to assist in the building of barracks for Japanese-Americans. When the Office of War Relocation sent Fred Clark to photograph the Apache unloading steel rods for bedding materials, he took several photographs of young boys assisting their fathers with delivering such materials (see Figure 5.2). Based upon the photographs, the Apache were determined workers who wanted to obtain as much short-term work as possible under contracts that were signed by the Office of War Relocation. Although political scientists such as Collier viewed Apache participation as a sign of goodwill for the war effort, there may have been more economic incentives that gained Native-American participation.

Figure 5.2 Apache Indians assist in unloading beds for Japanese evacuees, Poston, Arizona, April 29, 1942, photograph by Fred Clark. Office of War Relocation Collection, National Archives, NWDNS -210-G-A161

When the relocation center closed in September of 1945, Hiraku Iwasaki was preparing to leave the Colorado River Indian Reservation. Upon his exit he came across a group of Hopi women and children waiting outside vacant barracks. After speaking with a white elderly white woman who accompanied the Hopi, he learned that the barracks were to stay in place. In fact, Mrs. A.D. Franchville, who was the Superintended of Home

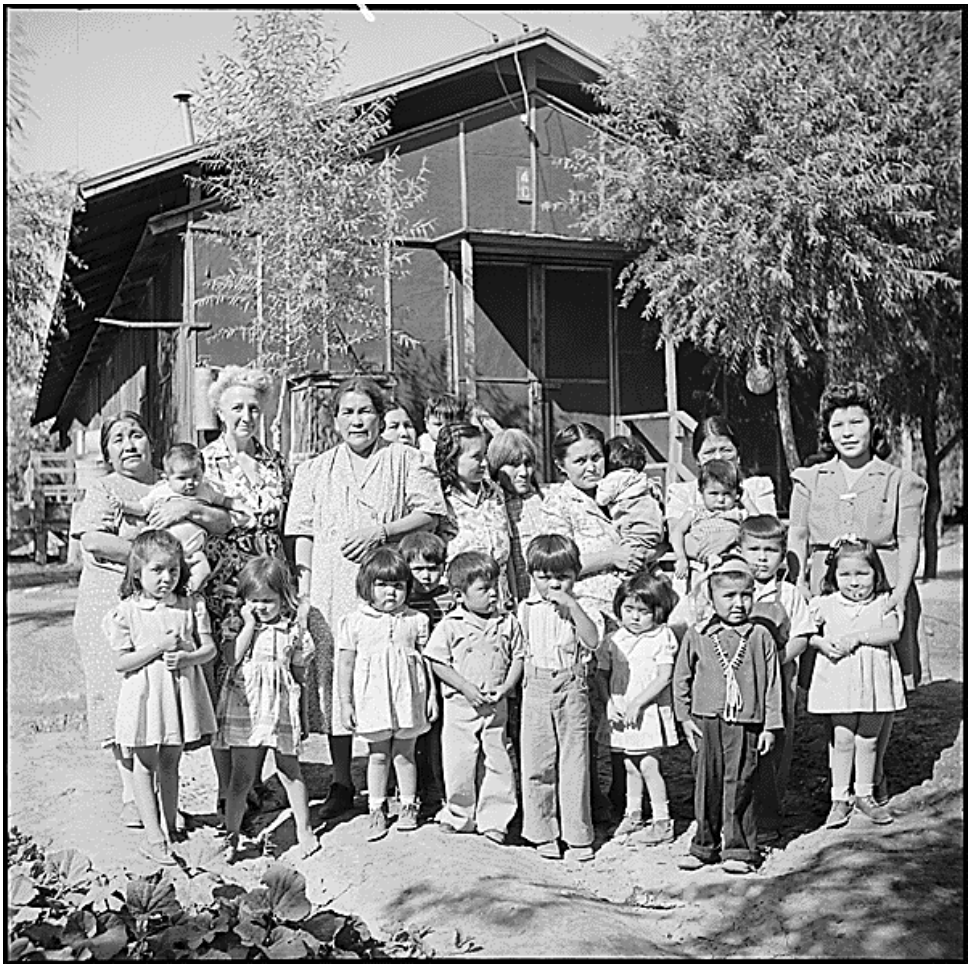

Figure 5.3 White woman takes a photograph with the Hopi. Mrs. A.D. Franchville, Superintendent of Home Economics poses with a group of Hopi Indians near their new barrack homes in Poston, Arizona, September 1945, photograph by Hiraku Iwasaki. War Relocation Authority Collection, National Archives, NWDNS 210-G-K369.

Economics at Poston, said these barracks would make nice quarters for the Hopi. To Iwasaki's astonishment, the physical places that haunted his internment were to become someone else's home. As a keepsake, he took a photograph of the group of women and their children, as they stood next to Mrs. Franchville (see figure 5.3). Before exiting he wrote in his notes about the irony that the barracks that confined his family for so many years could potentially provide relief to others.

Certainly, the photograph taken of the Hopi demonstrated that there was messiness to how generous the U.S. War Authority thought it was being. Although it imposed itself upon the Colorado River Indian Reservation, it attempted to prove its benevolence by offering its scrap material to the Hopi. Even though the Hopi could use these buildings for living quarters, this didn't mitigate the violence that resulted from removing Japanese-Americans in order to ensure homeland security. It also proved that capitalism could not only be useful for ensuring that whites benefit at the expense of non-white people, but that non-white individuals were forced to consume the expenditures of war, racism, and imperialism. Certainly, racial capitalism created the means to remove Japanese-Americans, while at the same time in an earlier epoch of U.S. history forcibly removed the Hopi from their ancestral lands.

Shifting Terrains of Race Relations under Japanese Internment

In the Imperial Valley, Japanese-Americans were preferred racially over other racial demographics on the hierarchy. Some of the most successful dairy farmers and growers of strawberry, cantaloupe, and lettuce crops were Japanese-Americans. As growers, they were unionized separately than whites but were considered key market competitors despite laws banning their ownership of land. By the 1920s, for example,

Japanese-American school children were placed in predominantly white schools. Even though there were anti-Asiatic laws on the books in California, in terms of racial preference, they were given a higher status than Malay, South Asians, Koreans, and Chinese, as well as ethnic Mexicans and African-Americans.[164] As Tomas Almaguer argues, racial hierarchies were created in according to racial preference and class status.[165] Thus, the success of Japanese-American farmers allowed for their close proximity to whiteness on the racial hierarchy.

In comparison to ethnic Mexicans, South Asians, Chinese, Malay, Filipinos, and African-Americans, Japanese-Americans were classified as a more desirable race in the Imperial Valley. In fact, despite efforts to exclude them from owning property, Japanese farmers were successful in moving up the ranks to lead foreman. According to school reports that were generated by the Americanization teachers missionary groups led by Katherine Cramps, Japanese school children were more likely to be enrolled in all white classrooms than any other race. According to one Japanese-American youth named Sophie Yamanaka, she was the editor of her school newspaper and was encouraged as a teenager to attend college. In her interview, Yamanaka stated, "Several of my teachers have suggested I go to Occidental College. I want to go to a small college, but I may

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[164] Mrs. Kathryn Cramp, Miss Louise F. Shields, and Charles A. Thomson, "Study of the Mexican Population in Imperial Valley." Made for the Committee on Farm and Cannery Migrants, Council of Women for Home Missions (1926), 17. The "The White Man" magazine, Japanese were given a higher racial status than South Asians were because of hygiene, capitalist motives, and skill sets. See here: A.E. Fowler, ed. *The White Man*, August 1910, Vol. 1, No. 2. Located at the San Francisco State University Archives, California Labor School Library.

[165] Tomas Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California*, With a New Preface edition (Berkeley, Calif.; London: University of California Press, 2008).

decide to stay at home and attend the local junior college."[166] Compared with the racialized education of ethnic Mexican school children as I have examined earlier in this dissertation, Japanese-Americans in the 1920s were classified as possessing intelligence on par with white counterparts. Over time, the racial classification of Japanese-American youth changes over time as the Japanese Empire becomes increasingly involved in the wartime effort, culminating in an attack on a U.S. naval based called Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1942.

When the attacks on Pearl Harbor occurred, however, anxieties about Japanese loyalty to the United States, their status on the racial hierarchy moved down the scale. They became the new internal domestic threat that was to be contained out of fear. In the Imperial Valley, for example, rumors spread that the Japanese were an inscrutable race that held deep secrets of deception.[167] As Edward Said suggests in his writing about Orientalism, he argues that orientalist attitudes assumed that Asiatic people were clannish and therefore secretive in their pursuits to destroy the West. The Orientalist discourse that was used to describe Japanese-Americans was a persuasive argument. In terms of the time and space, the transformation of racial hierarchies shifted because of national fears that moved to the more local level. In the Imperial Valley, farmers were rounded up and sent to camps in order to assist in the production of dairy farming and sustainable agribusiness.

S. Ishimoto, for example, was a successful dairy farmer in the Imperial Valley who was hired as lead foreman in the camps. When his family was relocated to Poston,

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[166] William C. Smith, "Life History of Sophie Yamanaka, El Centro, California" June 1, 1924," Survey of Race Relations, Hoover Library, Box 28, File 234.
[167] Round, *The Impossible Land*, 106.

Arizona, he was asked to be in charge of the local dairy farm (see figure 5.4). Many internees were assigned to work in their specialized trades for the benefit of agribusiness enterprises that were transplanted to the Colorado River Relocation Center. Due to his incarceration, Ishimoto and many other farmers like him were not eligible to receive the wages and compensation that they normally would have commanded. In other instances, racial discrimination resulted in the exclusion of owning property. In this case, racial capitalism was a means to utilize the skilled labor of Japanese-Americans to serve in the maintenance of camp life. Japanese-Americans were also expected to build barracks, garden, and reroute irrigation canals from the Colorado River. Such labor was only recognized as an asset within the confines of the prison as Japanese-Americans were hired to conduct highly skilled employment. When they were on the outside of prison, however, their racial capital was not good enough to compete with whites.

Figure 5.4 Photograph of dairy farmer. Japanese internee S. Ishimoto, former resident of El Centro, California, is shown at the dairy farm on an internment camp, April 1943, photograph by Stewart Rivers. War Relocation Authority Collection, National Archives, NWDNS-210-G-B479.

One public figure that spoke against relocation was documentarian photographer Dorothea Lange. Hired by the U.S. War Relocation Authority in 1942, Lange was assigned to take photographs in order to ease fears that Japanese-Americans' civil rights were being violated. Instead, she did the opposite. She photographed Japanese-American school children weeks prior to internment.[168] One set of photographs involved her visit to the Raphael Weill School in San Francisco, California (see figure 5.5). In this racially

[168] Dorothea Lange, Linda Gordon, and Gary Y. Okihiro, *Impounded: Dorothea Lange and the Censored Images of Japanese American Internment* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006); Linda Gordon, *Dorothea Lange: A Life Beyond Limits* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2010).

mixed school comprised of African-American, white, Latino (majority of whom were Mexican-American), Filipino, and Japanese-American children she intentionally exposed the dark underside of internment, namely the innocent victims who were negatively impacted by war.

Figure 5.5 Lunch hour at the Raphael Weill Public School. A child whose ethnic identity is unknown poses with a Japanese-American boy during Lange's photograph session at lunch hour at the Raphael Weill Public School, Gear and Buchanan Street in San Francisco, California, February 1942, photograph by Dorothea Lange. War Relocation Authority Collection, National Archives, NWDNS-210-G-A72.

Interestingly, Lange capitalized on the social construction of childhood as a critique against relocation. How was it possible that such innocent young people were collaborators with the Japanese Empire? In her portraitures of innocence, she took photographs of young boys playing in schoolyards knowing that within weeks they were

to be carted off to camps. Such "cute politics" were dangerous to the war effort's anxieties about Japanese-Americans being military threats to U.S. citizens. Was Lange alone in her critique of Japanese-American internment? Such an intimate photography session between these schoolchildren and Lange certainly suggests that Lange was invited by the principal, teachers, and/or parents in their community, perhaps in an effort to resist or undermine the U.S. War Relocation Authority. In this state of emergency, many people felt helpless when they spoke against the U.S. War Authority or feared being potentially classified as subversive. Lange's photographs potentially shifted the discourse from the triumph of U.S. success to the more mundane aspects of camp life.

The U.S. federal government went to great lengths to maintain its control over information that was disseminated about camp life, especially at Colorado River Indian Reservation. It invited contracted photographers and news reporters who were inclined to highlight the more positive aspects of camp life (see figure 5.6).[169] When Chet Huntley from CBS News interviewed Florence Mori, he asked about civic life and codes of conduct in the camps and praised Japanese-Americans for their loyalty to the United States. The loyalty that Huntley spoke about [and the positive picture of camp life] overshadowed the hidden web of silence that was propagated by the United States Office of War Relocation. In fact, the media was complicit in ensuring that such lies–including the humiliation that many Japanese-Americans were forced to internalize because of such detention—would be removed from public discourse. Dissident behaviors against internment were rarely addressed in public. However, there were photographers

[169] Lange, Gordon, and Okihiro, *Impounded*.

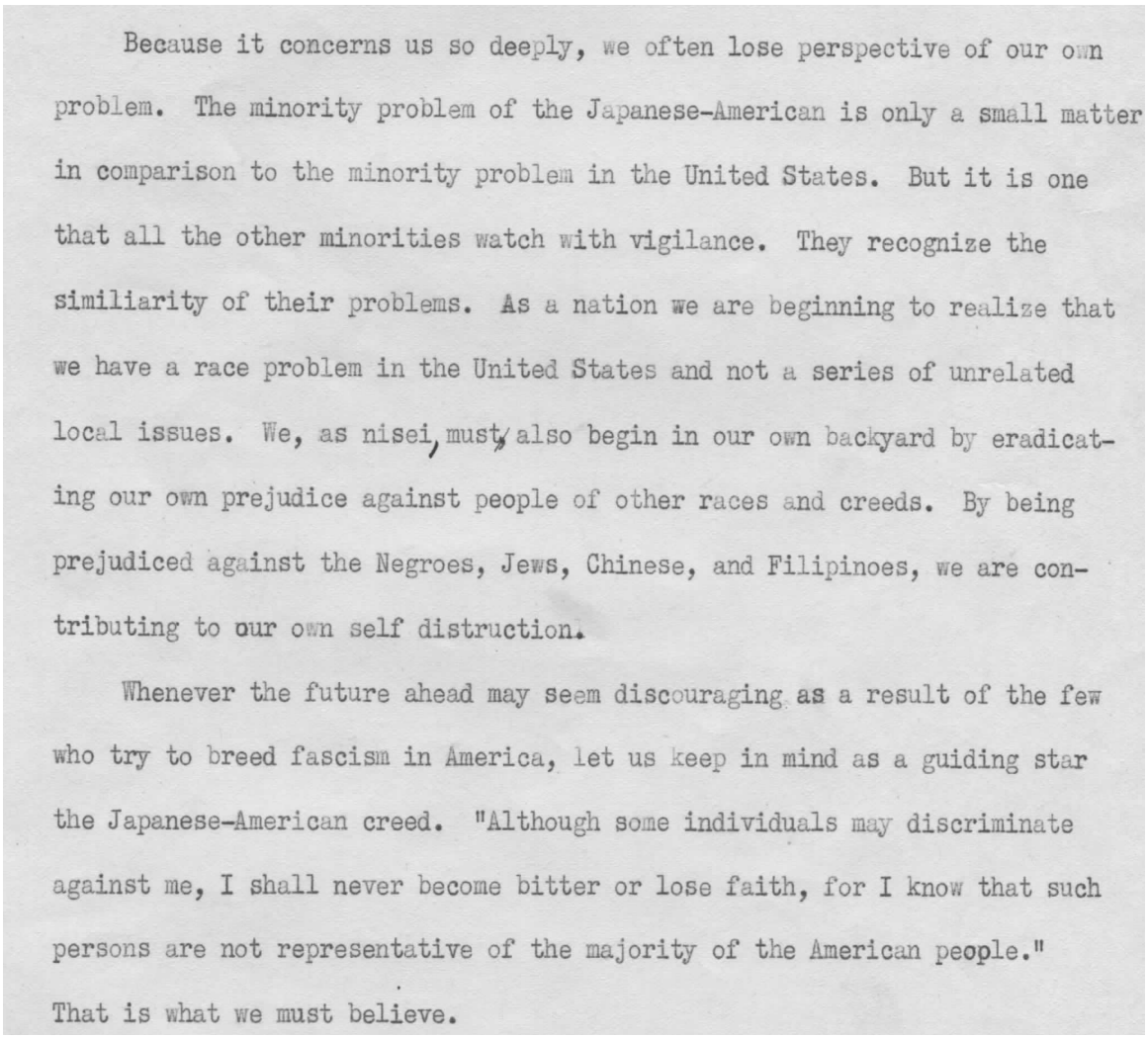
Figure 5.6 Japanese woman participates in CBS broadcast. Florence Mori, evacuee of Japanese ancestry at this War Relocation Authority center, taking part in this CBS broadcast with Chet Huntley in Poston, Arizona, May 26, 1942, photograph by Fred Clark. War Relocation Authority Collection, National Archives, NWDNS-210-G-A113.

documenting such behaviors who were classified as potential risks to national security during World War II. Any discourse about racial discrimination was erased from the public media. Instead, representations of good camp life were distributed to the U.S. public in an effort to preserve wartime morale. The greatest critiques from within the camps came from young Japanese-Americans who witnessed the transformation of their own consciousness to U.S.-race relations that was motivated by witnessing the incarceration of their families.

Japanese-American youth in camps illustrated the shifting discourse about race consciousness best. One such young man was Sadao Domon who was interned at Colorado River. In a school assignment that he entitled, “A Nisei Faces the Future,” he

wrote about racial discrimination in the United States (see Figure 5.7). In his manifesto, he explicitly talked about the need for Japanese-Americans to begin to place themselves in greater dialogue with the plight of African-Americans, Chinese, Filipinos, and other ethnic minorities including Jewish people. Domon's manifesto against racism stood as a window into the sentiment that young people felt as they were publicly alienated from U.S. society. Such alienation in camps provided the time and space for reflection. Domon's school assignment revealed an internal struggle within the Japanese-American community to come to terms with its own prejudices against ethnic and racial minorities. Indeed, his manifesto illustrated a shift from understanding racism as individual acts of discrimination to understanding it as institutional racism that was established by policy, the law, and class politics. Domon's curiosity about contemporary race relations may have been generated by his own transformation from a young person to an inmate who witnessed a transformation in social hierarchies.

Domon witnessed the transformation of the social status of Japanese-Americans from once model minority to being criticized for potential espionage. Domon grew up in Brawley, California where he was at the top of his class, an honor roll student, and identified himself as an all American boy. Thus his manifesto stood as a powerful bookmark into his relationship to other racialized groups because he witness how quickly Japanese-Americans went from being model citizens to enemies of the state. Such hierarchies that Domon and many of the school children in Poston, Arizona lived with assisted in their development of a race consciousness that was rapidly changing because of the time and space that they lived in. As Laura Pulido argues, racial hierarchies are



Because it concerns us so deeply, we often lose perspective of our own problem. The minority problem of the Japanese-American is only a small matter in comparison to the minority problem in the United States. But it is one that all the other minorities watch with vigilance. They recognize the similiarity of their problems. As a nation we are beginning to realize that we have a race problem in the United States and not a series of unrelated local issues. We, as nisei, must also begin in our own backyard by eradicating our own prejudice against people of other races and creeds. By being prejudiced against the Negroes, Jews, Chinese, and Filipinoes, we are contributing to our own self distruction.

Whenever the future ahead may seem discouraging as a result of the few who try to breed fascism in America, let us keep in mind as a guiding star the Japanese-American creed. "Although some individuals may discriminate against me, I shall never become bitter or lose faith, for I know that such persons are not representative of the majority of the American people." That is what we must believe.

Figure 5.7 Excerpt from "A Nisei Faces the Future". This was written by Sadao Domon. Department of the Interior, National Archives, Record Group 210, Entry 48, Box 105.

not permanently fixed and shift depending on national contexts.[170] Therefore, Japanese-American racial formation in the 1940s in the context of the Imperial Valley changed significantly because the national discourses concerning the racialization of what it meant to be Japanese changed dramatically during World War II.

When asked to write about working class politics in the United States, Colorado River internee Yoshio Kamiya from the Imperial Valley wrote an essay about "The

[170] Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

Future of Clothes" that focused on the Thunderbolt or Zoot Suit. Kamiya was fascinated by recent fashion trends, which he viewed as outlets for young people to embody self-expression freely. Despite the War Production Board (WPB) ban on wearing the Zoot Suit he indulged his curiosity by analyzing the content that comprised the design of what was then famously referred to as the thunderbolt. In his description, he included details about a collage of ornaments that included chains, suspenders, extra long lapels, colorful jackets, and high-waisted pants (see figure 5.8). Interestingly, Kamiya demonstrated that he didn't view the Zoot Suit as "belonging" to Mexican-Americans or African-Americans. Instead, he noted that young people in Brooklyn and Los Angeles were using it as a mode of expressing their complex personhood. The "I am what I wear" attitude that Kamiya described demonstrated a modern vision of how young Japanese-Americans identified their complex personhood in camps, in potential solidarity with other non-white youth who lived outside internment.[171] Kamiya's vision of the successful man he thought he would become demonstrates that young people held a great deal of hope that surpassed their internment.

Kamiya's illustration and writing about the power of zoot to become a transformative weapon against nationalism was provocative for someone of his age to petition against the wartime authority. Kamiya potentially risked being an obedient classified as a troublemaker in the camps. As John Howard argue, the Japanese-American Citizens League attempted to silence any dissident behavior against the U.S. government

[171] Luis Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance during World War II* (University of California Press, 2008).

by asking of Japanese-Americans to remain obedient to the war authority.[172] For Kamiya, the zoot was a metaphor for the radical futurity that could one day exist for young people of color to disidentify from a nation that betrayed their trust by incarcerating without due process.

Figure 5.8 Yoshio Kamiya's illustration of the "Future of Clothes". It depicts a young Mexican-American man wearing a Zoot Suit. Department of the Interior, National Archives, Record Group 210, Entry 48, Box 105.

Conclusion

This chapter has analyzed the shifting terrains of race relations during World War II as experienced by Native-Americans and Japanese-American internees. It predominantly relied upon photographs taken by wartime photographers who were

[172] Howard, *Concentration Camps on the Home Front*.

embedded in internment camps. The significance of the Colorado River Relocation Camp was that it was located on an American Indian Reservation without the consent of the Indian Tribal Council. In the first part of this chapter, I analyzed how the U.S. federal government historically annulled the rights of Native-Americans in order to secure its own national interests. In doing so, I analyze the impact Japanese-American internment had upon the racial formation of Native-Americans during World War II. I argue that such racialization attempted to represent Native-Americans as being loyal to the U.S. war efforts when in fact they performed labor to help alleviate with dire poverty. In the second half o the chapter, I analyze the transformation of racial hierarchies in the Imperial Valley that once privileged Japanese-Americans but due to the war they were classified as a menacing race. In my analyses, I argue that photographic journalists and young people went to great lengths to bring about greater race consciousness to the U.S. public and within the Japanese-American community.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has analyzed competing politics over access to land use in Southern California's Imperial County. Methodologically, this dissertation project has relied upon resources that bridge together the fields of legal studies, cultural studies, U.S.-Mexico borderland history, and cultural geography. In chapter one, I analyzed cultural ephemera that were used to promote racial capitalism in the form of land investment for white property holders. I argued that white property investment was viewed as a key advancement towards the production of the modern West as a site for industrial agri-business. In chapter two, I analyzed how non-white populations were excluded from landownership via the cultural and legal realm. I argued that court trials, sensational press coverage, and melodramas were used to socially classify immigrants as ineligible for citizenship rights that came in the form of property ownership. In chapter three, I analyzed the cultural politics of childhood with regard to poverty, ethnic Mexican children, and the built environment as portrayed by Americanization teachers and reformers of the 1920s. I argue that photography became a means for social transformation that enabled photo documentary to redress social inequality made against ethnic Mexican farm workers. In chapter four, I analyzed the struggle for public space in the fight to redress impunity against landowners, growers, and police brutality. I argued that in petitioning against the state, ethnic Mexicans carved out spaces for political possibility that ensured a viable field workers movement as early as the 1930s. In chapter five, I analyzed how Japanese-American evacuation during World War II created a means for Japanese-Americans and Native-Americans to voice their dissidence against

U.S. racial hierarchies. I argue that despite representations of Native-Americans as loyal to the United States during the time of war by assisting with the construction of the Colorado River Relocation Center, it needed to be situated within its historical context. Native-Americans used their contractual agreements as a means to survive dire circumstances on reservations including poverty and hunger. At the same time, Japanese-Americans were represented as disloyal to the United States. I argue that both forms of racialization were attributed to shifts in racial hierarchies at the time where Japanese-Americans were placed at the bottom of the hierarchy, while Native-Americans were praised for their assistance.

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