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From Self-Help to Public Labor Camps:
Exploring Ways to House California's Agricultural Workers

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Urban Planning

by

Enedina Ruiz

2012

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

From Self-Help to Public Labor Camps:
Exploring Ways to House California's Agricultural Workers

by

Enedina Ruiz

Master of Arts in Urban Planning

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor Jacqueline Leavitt, Chair

Although large growers today are reliant on hired workers more than ever before, the availability of housing for this workforce is far short of the present need. Nevertheless, housing initiatives have been advanced in the face of considerable adversity and this paper highlights two notable models. Born in 1976 out of a prolonged struggle for housing, the emergence of Cabrillo Economic Development Corporation as Ventura County's leading developer of affordable housing presents a compelling story of self-help. In Napa Valley, voters and vintners led the charge for affordable housing by voting to loosen restrictions to strict zoning ordinances and later creating special assessment district. While both housing initiatives should be regarded as models, the housing crisis faced by today's agricultural workers can only be alleviated through greater intervention by the state and the unions that represent the interests of agricultural workers.

The thesis of Enedina Ruiz is approved.

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University of California, Los Angeles

2012

Dedication

This paper is dedicated to the memory of
both my father, Samuel Ruiz, and my sister, Griselda Ruiz.

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I wish to express gratitude to my immediate family members, especially my mother, Martha, and late father, Samuel. For much of their lives, my mother and father worked long hours in orchards and fields in the hope of ensuring a better future for my siblings and I. Also, I wish to thank my grandfather, Vidal, and late grandfather, Efren, who both arrived into this country through the Bracero program. Their personal stories inspired me to study the plight of agricultural workers.

Finally, I would like to thank my siblings, Sam and Martha, and my late sister, Griselda. Without their friendship, unconditional love and constant belief in me, I could never have found the strength and courage to persevere no matter what the challenge. I could not have asked for better siblings.

Introduction

California has rarely enjoyed a period where small family farms dominated the rural, agricultural landscape. The monopolistic patterns of land ownership that was established under Spanish and Mexican rule was carried over and extended after California's admission into the United States (McWilliams 12-13). The concentration of large acreages of land into a relative handful made large-scale farming operations possible in California, but what enabled these "factories in the field" to dominate the agricultural economy was the continuous availability of cheap and abundant labor. Consequently, the initial stage of large-scale farming in California has been defined by the search for a "peasantry" (Daniel 40). Since it entered the union as a "free State," California was denied the employment of slaves in the fields (Fisher 4). Nevertheless, large growers would still employ an agricultural labor force on terms that could easily be compared to both slavery and peasantry (Fisher 4; Daniel 61). Over the century that followed, succeeding waves of Chinese and Japanese provided the majority of the agricultural labor before being replaced by Filipinos, Mexicans, "Dust Bowl" refugees and a "temporary workforce" under the Bracero program. According to Cletus Daniel, the "special benefit" of employing these socially marginalized groups was that farm employers were "given exclusive access" to a labor force whose "common occupational torpor was maintained" without resorting to coercive methods that would have directly conflicted with the country's democratic principles (Daniel 61).

More recently, the special provisions of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act ("IRCA") were designed to ensure a continuous supply of cheap and abundant labor during the 1990s (Palerm 11). However, IRCA also encouraged the influx of illegal immigration into the agricultural labor market during the 1990s, creating a "burgeoning labor surplus" that allowed

employers to push down wages and undermine the power of labor groups (Villarejo 3). The low wages and lack of unionization, in turn, have combined with other forces to worsen the plight of agricultural workers with respect to housing. Based on the 2005 National Agricultural Workers Survey (“NAWS”), the current agricultural labor force is largely Mexican born, low-income, and young (Villarejo 2), with more than half (57 percent) of respondents indicating that they lacked the authorization for employment (Aguirre 10-15). With respect to living quarters, the NAWS found that nearly two-thirds (62 percent) of farmworkers resided in homes intended for single-family, more than one-fourth (29 percent) lived in apartment units, and one-sixteenth (6 percent) in mobile homes (Aguirre 30-31). The California Agricultural Workers Health Survey (“CAWHS”) also found that approximately one-ninth (11 percent) of participants lived in dwellings neither known to the US Postal Service or the county tax assessor, including sheds, shacks, garages and structures not intended for habitation (Aguirre 4). Reliable anecdotal evidence tends to support these findings, since it is not uncommon to hear accounts of farm workers living in dilapidated cottages, caves, chicken coops, barns, hand-dug caves and among raw sewage and polluted water (Perrin et al 5-6; Peck 83-84).

The findings of the NAWS and CAWHS offer insight into the alarming contradiction that exists in agriculture. With the state’s 81,700 ranches and farms receiving a record \$37.5 billion for their output in 2010 (CDFA Website), the agricultural industry in California continues to show remarkable growth. In fact, given the unprecedented scale of farming in the state, large growers are “more reliant on hired workers than at any time in the past century” (Villarejo and Schenker 7). Yet, the availability of housing for this substantial workforce remains far short of the present need. From a historical perspective, the current shortfall in affordable housing for farmworkers can be attributed in part to two key developments: the United Farm Workers

(“UFW”) Union’s inability (or reluctance) to provide services like housing to its own constituents and the state’s consistent failure to sponsor housing initiatives for farmworkers, aside from a rare effort in the 1930s. More specifically, after several decades of inactivity, Filipino and Mexican farmworkers broke ground in the 1960s by joining the picket lines in Delano’s grape vineyards, and later forming an interracial coalition that would help inspire a movement. But while the UFW was generally successful in organizing rural workers, it was the Union’s reluctance to build affordable housing that alienated its older, more impoverished contingency of Filipino workers. As for the state, the rapid influx of “Dust Bowl” migrants into California prompted the Farm Security Administration to plan and manage twelve labor camps between 1936 and 1941 (Hise 246-251). While these labor camps have been regarded as “pathbreaking” developments (Cannon 2), state-sponsored housing is too often the “exception” and has traditionally constituted a small fraction of the state’s housing stock. In fact, there were only about 26 public labor camps across California in 2007, which were exclusively reserved for families with no provision for unaccompanied workers (Villarejo and Schenker 21).

Together with the UFW’s reluctance to build housing for its own constituents during the peak of its influence, the state’s repeated failure to commit resources to rural housing has served to exacerbate the housing shortage for agricultural workers. Although private farm operators have traditionally provided living quarters to their workers, the current trend is towards fewer housing units. In light of these developments, California’s farmworkers and their advocates face many obstacles in finding decent and affordable housing for this indispensable yet often neglected workforce. Nevertheless, various innovative initiatives have been launched in the face of such adversity, and this paper will highlight two notable examples in Ventura County and Napa Valley. Before discussing these models, this paper will first provide an historical account

of labor and housing in California's agricultural industry. More specifically, Chapter 1 discusses the continuous change in the ethnic composition of California's agricultural labor force, with particular focus on why unionization was forestalled until the 1960s and why the formation of the UFW did not necessarily lead to better housing conditions for farmworkers. In Chapter 2, this paper provides a brief look at the state's labor camp history, with specific emphasis on the FSA-sponsored labor camps of the 1930s and the "picker" communities of Southern California from 1910 to 1960. After tracing the origins of the FSA labor camps, this paper examines why this rare experiment was never expanded or extended to serve later generations of farmworkers.

Chapter 3 follows these sections with a description of some current conditions and trends, focusing on who today's farmworkers are, where they live and what the three major groups (growers, government and non-profit groups) are now doing for this neglected workforce. Because self-help has been an instrumental part of both the rise of Cabrillo Village and the work of Cabrillo, the concept of self-help will be considered in Chapter 4, with special focus on the theoretical underpinnings and criticisms of self-help. In Chapters 5 and 6, this paper presents the struggle to build Cabrillo Village and the emergence of the Cabrillo Economic Development Corporation ("Cabrillo"), a non-profit group that would later grow into the "largest private developer of low-income housing" in Ventura County (Alvarez 1995). What distinguishes Cabrillo from other providers of housing is an approach that complements typical "brick-and-mortar" projects with programs to promote community development. While Cabrillo Village presents the story of farmworkers who refused to allow bulldozers to demolish their dreams of decent and affordable homes, Napa Valley shows how vintners in that region have recognized the importance and humanity of their workforce. As discussed in Chapter 7, Napa Valley offers one notable initiative where the region's voters, vintners and policymakers worked together to

expand migrant housing for farmworkers. Faced with a homeless workforce, in 2002 voters passed a measure that loosened the region's strict zoning ordinances. That same year, Napa Valley's landowners established a special assessment district when they voted to tax themselves \$7.66 per acre to support migrant housing in the region. The initiative was unique in that it was supported by a broad coalition of vintners, advocacy groups and policymakers.

Chapter 1. A Brief History of Farm Labor in California

In Search of a "Peasantry"

According to Carey McWilliams, the monopolistic patterns of land ownership that was formerly established under Spanish and Mexican rule was carried over and extended after California's admission into the United States in 1850 (McWilliams 12-13; Schlosser). On the eve of the "American occupation", a number of "connivers" had "rushed through huge grants" that were vague, had "never been surveyed" and known to be fraudulent, but were nevertheless confirmed by the courts (McWilliams 13). Because these land grants were never broken up, one-half or more of California's valuable agricultural land was owned by 1/500 of the population by 1870 (McWilliams 23). Clearly, this monopolistic pattern of land ownership made large-scale farming operations possible in California (McWilliams 49). However, what allowed large-scale, industrialized farming to dominate California's agricultural landscape for the next century was the continuing availability of a cheap and abundant labor supply (Cobey 14; McWilliams 65). In order to flourish, large-scale farming required a labor force that would accept little pay for back-breaking work in the fields, require few accommodations and disappear when the harvest season ended. Because of this, the initial stage of large-scale farming in California has been defined by the search for a "peasantry" (Daniel 40).

Although California was primarily a “grain and cattle country” before the “Gold Rush” and for another twenty years after it, early experiments with intensive crops proved to be promising (Fisher 4). Beginning in the 1860s, California witnessed the rise of great wheat farms as efforts were focused on “[getting] money out of the land as quickly as possible” (McWilliams 49). In the following decade, farmers shifted towards fruit cultivation on a large scale and the “diversification of crop” that generally came with it (McWilliams 64). By the 1870s, an agricultural structure had “crystallized” in California that was notable for its large-scale ownership, crop specialization, and principal use of “hire labor as opposed to self-employment” (Cobey 13). Since it entered the union as a “free state,” California was denied the use of slaves in agriculture and “a peasantry in the world mold” was thought to be inconsistent with democratic values (Fisher 4; Daniel 61). But in the decades that followed, large-scale farmers employed an agricultural labor force on terms that could easily be compared to those of slavery and peasantry (Fisher 4; Daniel 61). Succeeding waves of Chinese and Japanese provided the majority of the agricultural labor before being replaced by Filipinos, Dust Bowl refugees and eventually Mexicans. These groups were given low wages for long hours of arduous work, forced to accept intermittent and irregular jobs with few if any benefits, and endured insecure and nomadic lifestyles with little hope for mobility or improvement (Palerm 10).

The Early Chinese

While neither indentured servitude nor slavery could be introduced into California, its “social equivalent” was found in the utilization of immigrant labor whose language, color and custom rendered them economically immobile (Fisher 21). Farm employers were not so much attached to any particular group as they were drawn to the “characteristics of powerlessness that the Chinese revealed in a greater degree” than any other groups during that time (Daniel 67).

Factors such as the continuing immigration of Chinese into California, coupled with the completion of the transcontinental railroad and the “violent expulsion” of the Chinese from the mines, all combined to produce a large labor force willing to work for subsistence wages (Fisher 4; McWilliams 70). In terms of numbers, some estimates suggest that the Chinese population increased from approximately 49,000 in 1870 to about 75,000 in 1880 (Cobey 14). By 1886, they may have accounted for as much as seven eighths of the agricultural laborers of California (McWilliams 67). As laborers, the Chinese were “uncomplaining” (Fisher 22), “extremely efficient” and especially skilled in the picking and packing of fruit (McWilliams 71). The labor presence of the Chinese has even been credited for the general agricultural “transition from wheat to fruit acreage” (McWilliams 67). Eventually, though, racism and anti-Chinese sentiments would put an end to this “golden” age of labor for California farmers (Fisher 22; Daniel 30).

Despite their significance to California agriculture, the Chinese during this era were nevertheless stigmatized by the mainstream as ‘inassimilable’ and undesirable aliens (Choy et al). In particular, Chinese women were singled out as proof of the supposed “inferiority and immorality” of the early Chinese. In 1848, Marie Seise became the first documented women to arrive in California. Although she made her living as a maid, many who followed her were often kidnapped and forced into prostitution (Choy et al). Additionally, by 1860 the ratio of Chinese men to Chinese women was eighteen to one, as compared to California’s overall ratio of twelve-to-one (Choy et al). The lack of Chinese families and women in California, together with the forced prostitution of many Chinese women, was thought to add to “an already debased stereotype” (Choy et al). Similar to this mainstream belief in the supposed racial and cultural inferiority of the Chinese was a xenophobic fear of a Chinese takeover, or “Yellow Peril” (Choy

et al). In fact, unemployed white workers tended to accuse Chinese workers of causing the nation's demise during times of economic decline (Choy et al). Led by organized labor, periodicals and "agrarians," agitation for Chinese exclusion became a widespread topic in California by the late 1870s (Fisher 22; Daniel 30). Eventually, provisions were adopted that prohibited private and public entities from employing the Chinese, while cities and towns were authorized to "prescribed the limits within which they should live" (McWilliams 73).

These anti-Chinese sentiments ultimately led to the passage of the Exclusion Act of 1882, which ended Chinese immigration and ushered in the "rapid decline" of the importance of the Chinese in agriculture (Fisher 23-24). Although "agrarians" saw Chinese exclusion as an important first step towards the "dismantling of California's large-scale agricultural industry" (Daniel 31), the void left by the Chinese would continue to be filled by succeeding waves of cheap and exploitable labor. While the Chinese "held their own in rural California for a while," they tended to drift back into towns and cities in the 1890s (Starr 172). Initially, as the Chinese left the rural countryside in search of better prospects and opportunities, California's large scale ranchers and farmers "gave serious consideration to importing" Southern Blacks to replace the Chinese (Starr 172). By the 1890s, however, large-scale farmers and ranchers in California were relying not on black workers to fill the void left by the Chinese, but primarily on Italians, Portuguese and especially Japanese – who alone, by 1909, comprised approximately forty-five percent of California's total agricultural labor force (Starr 172).

The Japanese

From 1892 to 1900, the fruit industry in California suffered many setbacks that included reckless overexpansion, labor disturbances, and a bad drought that occurred in 1893 (McWilliams 81). Searching for a new intensive crop that could produce quick profits and

supplement the existing crops, many farmers turned to sugar beets (McWilliams 82). To fill the sharp demand for cheap and seasonal labor that was created by this shift in production, the Japanese were recruited in large numbers to take the place of the recently excluded Chinese (Fisher 24). Initially, the Japanese were enthusiastically welcomed into the industry and encountered little to no prejudice (McWilliams 108). However, as the Japanese eliminated other groups as competitors and began to monopolize the labor market, exclusion again became a major topic in California politics (Gonzalez 294). Widely regarded as one of the more successful groups to climb the agricultural ladder, the early Japanese “rose above the status of wage labor” (Cobey 15) to move into the ownership category, especially in Southern California (McWilliams 116). By 1905, the Japanese owned 16,449 acres and leased about 137,233 acres (McWilliams 113). In addition to this, those who did not own land increasingly turned to Japanese landowners for employment rather than White owners (Fisher 30).

As a consequence of these developments, a series of federal and state measures were enacted to “diminish the importance of the Japanese” in agriculture (Fisher 31; Gonzalez 294). The “Gentleman’s Agreement” in 1906 began to shut off the supply of Japanese laborers (Cobey 14). This was followed by state-alien laws passed in 1913, 1920, 1930 (Fisher 31) and the Federal Immigration Act of 1924, which prevented “the replenishment” of the first wave of Japanese to arrive in California (McWilliams 116). Through these initiatives, Mexican and Filipino labor began to overshadow the once predominant Japanese by the 1920s (Gonzalez 294; McWilliams 116). While the Japanese are generally thought to have “underbid their competition” in order to “gain a foothold” (Starr 172), there have been some instances of cooperation between the early Japanese and other ethnic groups. For example, in 1903 Japanese and Mexican sugar beet workers formed the Mexican-Japanese Labor Association (“MJLA”) to

strike beet growers for higher wages in Ventura County (Spreckles). But as Adrian Cruz nevertheless points out, the successful formation of an interracial farm worker union was forestalled by “White supremacy” in the 1930s, as emanating from four primary sources, including the state, organized labor, landowners and the White public (Cruz 25).

More specifically, “White racism” was thought to obstruct interracial farm worker unionization by “creating a ladder of racial preferences that hierarchically ordered Japanese, Mexicans and Filipinos” (Cruz 22). Under this hierarchical system, Mexicans were generally viewed as “hardy, subservient” laborers while Filipinos were cast as “wily, labor agitators” (Cruz 52). Because they constituted both a worker group and employer, the Japanese occupied a “middle ground position” (Cruz 52) and also became the target of strikes, since Japanese tenant farmers also employed Mexican and Filipino laborers in large numbers. Therefore, while the MJLA would garner some concessions from growers in Ventura County, Filipino, Mexican and Japanese farm workers faced a number of obstacles during the 1930s, including “White supremacy” (Cruz 53), that made it impossible for these groups to mobilize collectively during that decade (Cruz 51).

Mexicans and Filipinos

As Japanese and Chinese exclusion laws began to limit the supply of these workers, California’s growers were again forced to look elsewhere for a source of cheap and abundant labor. Rather than improve conditions and wages in the fields, the policy of the U.S. agricultural industry has generally been to recruit workers from abroad where there are fewer jobs, more laborers and much lower wages (NC Farmworker Institute). During World War I, many barriers to immigration were loosened so that Mexican laborers could arrive in greater numbers. For instance, the policy of the United States during this period was to allow Mexican immigrants to

enter the country “at will” (Fisher 31). Furthermore, the passage of the Immigration Law of 1924, which placed strict restrictions on immigration from Europe, was thought to give “an added impetus” to immigration from Mexico (McWilliams 124). From 1900 to 1910, the population of Mexicans in California jumped from 8,086 to 45,391, which represented a six-fold increase (Gonzalez Jr., 15). By 1930, the number of Mexicans in California was estimated to be as low as 250,000 (McWilliams 124) and as high as 368,000 (Cobey 15), making them the primary source of agriculture labor in California during this period.

According to Carey McWilliams, the “farm industrialists” were “enchanted” with Mexican laborers since they were good workers, unorganized and tended to “hibernate” at the end of the harvest season (McWilliams 125). However, the Great Depression brought major changes to California’s agricultural labor force. The Mexican population, which numbered 368,000 in 1930 (Cruz 42), served as convenient scapegoats during this time of economic upheaval. At the same time that White government officials claimed that Mexican immigrants made up the majority of California’s unemployed, White trade unions asserted that Mexican immigrants took away jobs from white men (Oakland Museum). In response to pressure from White farm owners, California state and local officials implemented “repatriation” plans to transport Mexican and Mexican-Americans back in “busloads and boxcars” (Oakland Museum). According to some estimates, some 500,000 Mexicans were deported from the United States from 1930 to 1937 (Cruz 48), purportedly to “get them off the relief rolls” (McWilliams 129). Although many of those deported were children with US citizenship, their claim to citizenship would be “meaningless” in the face of “White supremacy” (Cruz 53).

In addition to Mexicans, the labor force during the 1920s and 1930s was also made up of Filipino immigrants. There was an estimated 31,000 Filipinos that entered California between

1920 and 1930, many of whom found employment in agriculture (Fisher 38). Although Filipinos were initially regarded as “model workers,” they generally lost this favorable reputation among growers when they began to form unions, organized strikes and demand higher wages (Fisher 40-41; McWilliams 131-133). Additionally, while Mexicans were seen as “reliable, necessary labor,” Filipinos were generally cast as a “hygienically unfit group” who were “predisposed” to partake in “labor agitation” and relationships with White women (Cruz 42-43). Furthermore, while the Filipino population (which numbered about 30,500 in 1930) was not subject to the 1924 Immigration Act, Congress and President Roosevelt took some steps towards the institution of a Filipino repatriation program in the 1930s (Cruz 42). Under one provision of House Resolution 6464, which Roosevelt signed into law in July 10, 1935, Filipinos were offered free passage back to the Philippines but were not allowed re-entry into the country (Cruz 42). Although few (2,036) Filipino people actually took this offer, the goal of these efforts was to send a clear message to Filipinos that they were “undesirables” (Cruz 42; Ngai 1999).

Dust-Bowl Migrants

Mexican and Filipino agricultural workers were rapidly replaced with dust-bowl migrants by the beginning of the Great Depression (Gonzalez Jr., 16). From 1930 to 1940, an estimated 1,250,000 people entered California from other parts of the United States, approximately 11.5 percent of which migrated as agricultural laborers (Fisher 5). According to Juan Gonzalez Jr., Mexican laborers were commonly fired from their agricultural and industrial jobs in order to provide jobs for the “unemployed Anglos” from Arkansas, Texas and Oklahoma (Gonzalez Jr., 16). Often traveling with their families, these migrants came without expense to the growers and were so impoverished that they were willing to work for “whatever wages were paid” (McWilliams 306). Like their Chinese, Japanese, Mexican and Filipino counterparts, these

migrants worked long hours for low wages and were forced to accept substandard housing accommodations. But unlike the groups before them, their “white skins and Anglo-Saxon names could” gain the sympathy and attention that was previously denied to their Asian and Mexican counterparts who “normally struggled in the valleys of California” (Gregory 2004).

Thus, between 1936 and 1941, the Farm Security Administration (“FSA”) planned and managed twelve labor camps throughout California, including at Arvin, Marysville, Coachella, and Woodville (Hise 246-251). Because of the large number of white families that worked as laborers, the FSA attempted to incorporate social planning in the farm labor camps that they managed (Hise 247). Typically featuring centralized communal facilities, the FSA labor camps were designed as “self-contained” communities that would also have the facilities and infrastructure in place to allow for future expansion (Hise 251). As noted by Carey McWilliams, the “labor camps and improvised shantytowns” that awaited these dust-bowl migrants gave renewed hope that a “new type of agricultural economy” would emerge from these latest recruits and “their struggle for a decent life” (McWilliams 325). But instead of change, large-scale agriculture in California continued to flourish and expand by intensifying their recruitment of Mexican immigrants into the agricultural labor market.

Japanese Internment and the Bracero Program

In the 1940s, California’s farmers were threatened with a critical labor shortage as men enlisted in the armed forces, workers left the farm for better paying jobs in the war industries, and the supply of farm laborers from other states dwindled (Cobey 71). Moreover, because “Californians did expect bombing and a Japanese invasion” following the events at Pearl Harbor, Lieutenant General John L. DeWitt “claimed authority over the ‘Japanese problem’” in January of 1942 (Masumoto 42). Facing an uncertain future and given little time for preparations, many

Japanese farmers “lost the leases for rented farmlands and were forced to dispose of homes and business” (Masumoto 89). Of the 111,170 Japanese imprisoned across various camps in the United States in 1942, Adrian Cruz finds that about 20.4% of adult internees worked in the agricultural industry – a testament to the “central role that Japanese farmers and laborers occupied in the California agriculture industry” (Cruz 65-66). Meanwhile, some white growers may have been “pleased” as these developments served to “block out the Japanese threat to White control” over the agricultural industry of California (Cruz 66).

Nevertheless, the removal of the Japanese exacerbated a labor shortage that required a swift response. Potentially faced with a crisis, farming interests in California forced the government to guarantee a continuous supply of cheap Mexican labor under a program that came to be called the “Bracero” program (Gonzalez Jr., 16). Under this program, which went into effect in 1942, the United States entered into a formal agreement with Mexico that allowed for the importation of temporary contract workers into California during the “wartime emergency” (Gonzalez Jr., 16). Just in the first and second years of the program’s operation, about 52,000 and 62,000 laborers respectively, were permitted to work in the Southwest, with the majority being assigned to California growers (Gonzalez Jr., 17). To the farm interests, the Bracero program was so convenient and beneficial that it was extended well past the wartime emergency through intense lobbying and the passage of Public Law 78 (Gonzalez Jr., 17; Palerm10). But for most Chicano agricultural workers, the Bracero program took away their farm jobs, stalled their unionization, and practically ensured that wages remained at subsistence levels (Gonzalez Jr., 17). Through the Bracero program, California’s growers may have been able to ward off the unionization of agricultural laborers until the mid 1960’s (Gonzalez Jr., 17), when Cesar Chavez and Larry Itliong formed the UFW.

Cesar Chavez, Larry Itliong and the UFW

The Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (“AWOC”), which was funded by the AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations), was formed in 1959 and consisted of a large Filipino contingency that “was crucial to farm worker mobilization in the 1960s” (Cruz 90). In fact, the AWOC produced a labor leader in Larry Itliong, who played a critical role in forming the UFW and later became one of the Union’s vice presidents. During the 1930s, “White supremacy” was thought to prevent the formation of an interracial coalition of minority groups, since “farm workers of color were positioned on specific points on a racial heirarcy” (Cruz 90) and encountered different levels of discrimination. But in the 1960s, Larry Itliong’s AWOC and Cesar Chavez’s Mexican-dominated National Farm Workers Association (“NFWA”) recognized that they “required each other’s help to mobilize” (Cruz 124) and after a “disremembering process” (Cruz 114), together formed a group that would inspire farmworkers for a time and sow the seeds of social unrest throughout the entire state.

Nevertheless, the early success and momentum of the UFW could not be sustained over the ensuing course of the Union’s history. As Adrian Cruz points out, the decline of the UFW was attributable to several factors, including the loss of loyal backers, the depletion of funds, increased competition from the Teamsters Union, and repressive measures from the Ronald Reagan Administration (Cruz 127). Even the interracial coalition that formed the Union’s core membership was beginning to break down, as the Filipino contingent increasingly became dissatisfied with Chavez and the increasingly “Mexican-centric” focus of the UFW (Cruz 151). In particular, Filipino activists such as Larry Itliong and Phillip Vera Cruz were thought to differ from Cesar Chavez in that they “desired a broad, all-encompassing movement that would deliver the little services that a deprived group required and operated from a socialist base” which would

attempt to alter the prevailing social system so that necessary resources could be distributed to farm workers (Cruz 153).

In the early 1970s, the UFW dabbled in housing services by founding a retirement home for aged “manongs” known as Paulo Agbayani Village (Cruz 147). Nevertheless, the provision of housing or services generally would not be the primary goal of the UFW by 1976, since Chavez himself once indicated that the Union was “too concerned with servicing people...we need to cut down on them or close them if they aren’t helping to organize workers” (Cruz 150; Marshall Ganz Papers 1976). In March of 1972, Itliong wrote to AFL-CIO Director of Organizing William Kircher, warning that it “is well and good to go all over the place and build Unions for the farmworkers but if you do not take care of what you build then it will tumble down on you” (Cruz 158; Larry Itliong Papers 1972). Following Itliong’s words of caution, the UFW proved unable to renew contracts that had reached points of termination and lost influence and ground to the Teamsters (Cruz 157). As discussed in Chapter 5 and 6, the influence of Chavez and the UFW proved critical in the acquisition and renovation of Cabrillo Village and other housing projects in the region, including Rancho Sespe. Still, one of the more disappointing legacies of the UFW was the void that the Union left with respect to affordable housing for farmworkers – a void that would continue to widen over the following decades and force farmworkers, in the face of homelessness, to build their own housing.

Mechanization and the “Settling Out” of Migrant Workers

Due to the country’s abundant land and scarce labor endowments, mechanization has historically played a large role in the development of U.S. Agriculture (Napasintuwong 15). During the first American agricultural revolution (1862 to 1875), several mechanical devices were utilized “from the usage of horsepower in place of hand power” (Napasintuwong 15).

Several decades later, the second American agricultural revolution (1945-1970) would be characterized by a transition from horsepower to “tractors and the adoption of a group of technological practices,” such as the mechanical tomato harvester used in California (Napasintuwong 16). During the 1960’s and 1970’s, the looming threat of mechanization or automation throughout California was expected to bring “hard times” for the state’s farmworkers (Agrarian Action Project 7). In fact, the 29 research projects then underway in 1977 at the University of California campuses of Davis and Riverside were thought to “threaten 176,000 harvest time jobs in the state” (Agrarian Action Project 2). Beginning in August of 1974, the UFW called a strike against tomato cannery growers in Yolo County shortly after 32,000 tomato pickers were displaced by 1500 mechanical harvesters (Agrarian Action Project 7). In March 25, 1978, Chavez expressed his concerns about the mechanization and potential displacement in an article published in *The Nation*. According to Chavez, the farmworkers viewed these machines as “los monstruos” (or “the monsters”) that threatened more than 120,000 jobs and was capable of “bringing hardship and suffering to countless thousands” (Chavez 1978).

Despite Chavez’s concerns, Juan Vicente Palerm found that the state’s agricultural industry “[was] being transformed because manual labor –mostly Mexican—[was] needed instead of being replaced by mechanization” (Palerm 42). Fueled by increasing domestic and international demand for high-value specialty crops, California farmers intensified the production of fruit and vegetable crops in the hope of meeting the market challenge (Palerm 48). This trend towards intensification was facilitated by the state’s ideal climate (Palerm 48) and then recent expansion of irrigated land (Giannini 2004). As California farmers undertook specialization and intensification, they were also forced to rely heavily on manual laborers to delicately handle the high-value, specialty crop – a feature that made these crops “resistant to

mechanization” (Palerm 42). Also during this period, diversification of crops and farm enterprises created extended seasons and even year-round employment for farmworkers in various parts of California (Johnston et al. 10), including the Imperial Valley and Central Valley. With the rise of intensification and diversification, it became increasingly possible for workers to “settle out” of the migrant stream in order to seek year-round employment and establish permanent roots. As farmworkers established permanent roots in the places where they worked, farm owners were relieved of their duty to provide on-farm housing. Still, since migratory labor is required for the harvest of fruit crops, there are major streams that travel north to the states of Michigan, Washington, and Upper State New York. The vast majority of these migrant workers reside in one or two residences all year-round, and typically search for employment on the surrounding farms.

When the UFW came to prominence in the 1960’s, the Union was focused primarily on advancing the rights of “migrant workers.” Eventually, the natural trend for many migrant workers to “settle out” encouraged the UFW to work with agricultural workers who did not officially qualify as “migrant workers” and therefore were not eligible for benefits reserved for migrant workers. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (“USDA”), the official definition of a “migrant agricultural worker” is a person employed in agriculture work of a seasonal or other temporary nature who is required to be absent overnight from his or her permanent place of residence” (USDA Website). For example, one benefit that is reserved for children of migrant workers but not agricultural workers is that children from the former category can have their school records travel with them as their parents follow the harvest. Nevertheless, the UFW’s attempt to accommodate the needs of agricultural workers came far too

late. Accordingly, the UFW model was flawed to the extent that the Union relied on contracts for migrant workers rather than agricultural workers.

Chapter 2. Labor Camps in California

From Male Bunkhouses to Family Settlements

California farm operators have traditionally provided living quarters to their agricultural workers, although the current trend is towards fewer housing units. Before World War II, many farmers housed their agricultural workers because racism and high prices often prevented these workers from finding housing on their own in town (Gordon 6). The “bunkhouse community” was common during the time that the Japanese dominated the agricultural labor force. But when Mexican labor succeeded the Japanese at the turn of the century, the living quarters provided by employers increasingly assumed a different character. From 1900 to 1910 alone, the population of Mexicans in California jumped from 8,086 to 45,391, a six-fold increase (Gonzalez Jr., 15). By 1930, the number of Mexicans in California was estimated to be as high as about 368,000 (Cobey 15), making them the main source of agriculture labor in California during this period. Unlike the groups before them, Mexicans migrated with their families rather than just as single men (Gonzalez 294). Growers adjusted to this social condition by adopting a labor policy that included the “construction of housing and social programs for Mexican families” (Gonzalez 294). Between 1905 and 1920, the Japanese male bunkhouse community gradually declined as communities for Mexican families began to dominate the agricultural landscape (Gonzalez 294). One representative example of these emerging communities was the “picker” living quarters that dotted the “citrus belt” of Southern California’s from 1910 to 1960.

Picker Communities of Southern California

As Mexican workers increasingly dominated the agricultural labor force in California during the early 1900s, the “male bunkhouse” gradually gave way to the rise of family-occupied settlements like the “picker” communities of Southern California between 1910 and the 1960s. According to Gilbert Gonzalez, approximately twenty-one independent companies and associations sponsored some form of picker housing (Gonzalez 295). Some, like the La Habra Citrus Association, built and rented housing while associations like Rancho Sespe provided land so that workers could build their own homes (Gonzalez 295). Segregation was widely practiced during this era, and Mexicans were therefore housed in “inferior accommodations, in the less desirable, and often dangerous, sections of the association property” (Gonzalez 296). Although some associations required no rent (only that a laborer be available for work during the year), others deducted rent from the picker’s wages (Gonzalez 295-296). In addition, classes in so-called “Americanization,” including sanitation, hygiene and English were offered to the pickers as one way of cultivating a work force that was “loyal, contented, and therefore more cost-efficient” (Gonzalez 298).

But while the growers intervened to structure life and culture in the Mexican community, Gilbert Gonzalez notes that these picker community still acted “independently, creating culture and community” on the margins of society (Gonzalez 298). Music was abundant in these picker communities, while both culture and patriotism was persevered through the celebration of functions like *Las Posadas*, *Las Pastores* and *El 16 de Septiembre* (Gonzalez 302-304). Women played a particularly special role in these communities, because they often specialized in storytelling, health care, childbirth, and supernatural causes and cures for sickness (Gonzalez 308). Although families were usually linked to a single citrus grower, there was still

considerable movement within and between the picker communities of Southern California. There is even evidence to suggest the existence of regional ties among the various camps, since workers often traveled to other counties at the end of harvest in order to find additional work or otherwise build ties with other laborers (Gonzalez 302). Compared to the migrant settlements that existed earlier, these picker communities were not just unique but were also culturally dynamic in the sense that they became “centers of creativity” (Gonzalez 291) in the face of pervasive social and economic oppression.

The “Dust-Bowl” Migration

During the mid-1930s, the migration of between 150,000 and 200,000 people from the “Dust-Bowl” states to the non-metropolitan regions of California changed the composition of the state’s agricultural labor and drastically affected how governments viewed and approached the problem of housing for farmworkers. Up until this dramatic migration, farm operators were almost exclusively responsible for sheltering agricultural workers who were then seen more as “peasants” or “expendable cogs” (Daniel 69) than human beings. Employer-provided housing therefore consisted of “inferior accommodations” confined to undesirable locations (Gonzalez 296) with little to no government intervention in regards to health or safety. However, the arrival of the “Arkies” and “Okies” into California created widespread sympathy, especially since many of these newcomers were native born and White. Regularly subject to a “last hired, first fired” policy, many Mexican laborers were “fired from their agricultural and industrial jobs in order to provide jobs for unemployed” Anglos arriving from the Dust-Bowl states (Gonzalez, Jr., 16). Brian Q. Cannon also suggests that humanitarian concerns for this newly arrived workforce caused state and county officials to “search for ways to provide better accommodations for agricultural workers” (Cannon 5). Therefore, between 1936 and 1941, the FSA planned and

managed twelve labor camps exclusively reserved for California farmworkers, then viewed as the “lowest strata in a highly mechanized and productive system of industrial agriculture” (Hise 243-44). While some have interpreted these camps “as failures” (Hise 243), Greg Hise states that these FSA settlements offer a visible “representation of low-cost satellite community-building,” particularly during an era where “squalid, unhealthful roadside camps” were commonplace (Hise 254).

The FSA Labor Camps

The FSA Labor Camps can trace their origins to 1935, when Paul Taylor along with other officials from the California Rural Rehabilitation Division (of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration) toured California to interview, observe and photograph the conditions of migrant workers (Cannon 5). The “squalid” and “unhealthful” conditions that they found motivated the state of California, later that year, to begin the construction of migrant labor camps in Marysville and Arvin – with the latter serving as the basis of John Steinbeck’s fictitious and “idyllic” portrayal of life at a federal labor camp in his 1939 novel, The Grapes of Wrath (Cannon 1). In 1937, the two labor camps in Marysville and Arvin were passed on to the FSA and the Region IX Staff, which went on to manage a total of eighteen labor camps in California by 1940, including camps in Shafter, Coachella, Winters and Brawley (Cannon 2; Hise 247). Viewed as the rural counterpart to the Progressives’ response to the industrial city (Hise 243), these FSA labor camps afforded access to health care, organized activities and sanitary facilities (Cannon 18). Despite these amenities, life in these labor camps was not easy, particularly in Arvin where residents had very little privacy, received low pay for difficult, sporadic work and lived in tin shelters that offered “scant protection from the elements” (Cannon 18-19).

In terms of design, an “overarching formal typology” was devised by the Region IX Staff, which consisted of a “permanent institutional core surrounded by impermanent dwellings” (Hise 245). By experimenting with standardization, scale economies and construction efficiency, the Region IX staff was able to replace tents with tin shelters and eventually retrofitted “garden homes” (Hise 249). Social planning was highly emphasized by the FSA. In fact, the labor camps featured centralized communal facilities that tended to “stabilize camp life, to organize the floating pool of workers for potential employment or state relief, and to introduce migrants” to health and hygiene standards (Hise 247). Greg Hise notes that this emphasis on social planning was greatly influenced by the rising percentage of White families, who were thought to have “every intention of staying beyond the planting and harvest seasons” (Hise 247). By the time that Woodville was built, the FSA viewed the labor camps not as “way stations,” but as “self-contained” communities that had the facilities and infrastructure in place to allow for the development of entire new towns (Hise 251). Unfortunately, this “evolution” in low-cost satellite, community building would be cut short by the demands of World War II (Hise 254). Still, the FSA labor camps were widely regarded as a “pathbreaking development in federal rural policy” for their time (Cannon 2), particularly since the federal government had rarely before assumed the responsibility for assisting the rural poor.

Post-World War II Changes

World War II brought rapid change to the FSA labor camps and the picker communities of Southern California. The wartime pressures pulled young men from the picker communities into the armed services and attracted older men into the wartime industries (Gonzalez 309). Mexican laborers brought into the United States through the Bracero program would later fill the jobs left behind by former pickers. According to Gilbert Gonzalez, as much as 80 percent of the

picking crews during this period was comprised of Bracero labor (Gonzalez 310). As Bracero labor came to dominate California's agricultural labor force, a major shift occurred: the era of the "Mexican family attached to a picker had ended" while the era of single Mexican male was beginning (Gonzalez 310). As a result of this, agricultural employers established "barracks-style housing with centralized eating facilities" (Gordon 6) to accommodate a workforce that was overwhelmingly unaccompanied and male. In the early 1960s, an estimated 4,000 of the state's 8,140 labor camps of record were used to shelter Bracero labor (Cobey 42). These housing facilities were usually owned by associations of employers and operated by professional managers (Gordon 6). After the Bracero program ended in 1964, these barracks-style housing accommodations declined in use due to high operating costs and because undocumented workers "did not want to be housed in centralized facilities" where they feared detection by immigration officials (Gordon 6).

Since the end of the Bracero program, California's agricultural labor market has seen a "precipitous decline in the number of employer-owned camps" (Villarejo 1). For example, in 1955, growers registered over 9,000 facilities to house seasonal and migrant workers (Gordon 6). When the Bracero program ended in 1964, there was an estimated 5,000 labor camps in the state (Villarejo 2). In 1982, approximately 1,424 employer-owned camps were registered for just over 39,700 employees (Gordon 6). By the early 1990's, approximately 1,000 labor camps remained (Villarejo 2) and in 1994, there were only 900 labor camps for 21,310 farmworkers (Gordon 6). Today, only a relative handful of farmworkers can secure housing in labor camps. According to the 2003-2004 NAWS survey, only three percent of respondents indicated that they lived "on-farm" (Villarejo 4). Similarly, the CAWHS survey found that six percent of the 970 farmworkers that were surveyed lived in a farm labor camp (Villarejo 4). In 2007, there were

about 26 public labor camps found in 16 counties that were exclusively reserved for families with no units for unaccompanied workers (Villarejo and Schenker 21). This general trend towards fewer housing units has been blamed on a number of factors. Growers often complain that providing housing to their workers is expensive due to “liability issues, and regulatory and safety concerns” (Gordon 18; Villarejo 2). Also, the IRCA is now understood to have created a “burgeoning labor surplus” (Villarejo 3) such that current farm operators have little to no economic incentive to invest in costly housing projects.

Chapter 3. Current Conditions

A “Burgeoning Labor Surplus”

From 1964 to 1977, the actual number of farm workers that were employed in California farms “remained unchanged” despite the adoption of labor saving methods and introduction of agricultural machinery (Palerm 10). Scholars believed that the “monumental acreage expansion” in labor-intensive fruit and vegetable crops were creating new jobs at a rate that equaled or even exceeded “the displacement of workers from other crops subjected to mechanization” (Palerm 11; Martin et al., 4-6). Despite the advantages of mechanization, California’s growers have continued to rely on cheap and abundant labor. The most recent example of this can be seen in the special provisions of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (“IRCA”), which included the H-2A Program, the Special Agricultural Worker Program (“SAW”), and the Replenishment Agricultural Worker Program (“RAW”) (Palerm 11). Together, these provisions ensured a continuing supply of immigrant laborers in the case of farm labor shortages in the early 1990s (Palerm 11). Before the November 30, 1989 deadline, approximately 617,000 individuals registered for the RAW program (Palerm 11; Ag Alert 1990). In addition, approximately 1.2

million people applied for SAW visas and about 1.1 million were approved, which was “more than twice as many as had been estimated to have been eligible” (Villarejo 3). Furthermore, this post-IRCA growth of the agricultural labor force is understood to have exceeded the demand, therefore allowing employers to keep wages low while also undermining the influence of labor groups (Villarejo 3). Today, the agricultural labor force is overwhelmingly Mexican born, low-income, and young (Villarejo 2), with as many as 57 percent indicating that they lacked the proper authorization for employment (Aguirre 10-15).

Like the Bracero Program, the special provisions of the 1986 IRCA were designed to guarantee an abundant supply of cheap labor during the 1990s (Palerm 11). But as Phillip Martin suggests, many SAW applicants were not actually eligible since they did not perform the qualifying farm work so the fact that they nevertheless became lawful immigrants “taught rural Mexicans that being an unauthorized workers in the United States can bring immigration benefits” (Martin 7). With these incentives in place, illegal immigration from Mexico flooded the agricultural labor market during the 1990s, just as thousands of “wetbacks” (Cobey 72-73) illegally entered the state during the height of the Bracero program. Like the Bracero program, the IRCA created a “burgeoning labor surplus” that allowed employers to bid down wages and undermine the power of labor groups (Villarejo 3). Therefore, the immigration surge that followed the IRCA has not only given shape to the agricultural labor force seen today, but will continue to help determine the wages and living conditions that this labor force endures.

Current Demographics

The 1986 IRCA caused an increase in illegal immigration from Mexico that created a vast reserve of farm laborers that largely exceeded the demand (Martin 5; Villarejo 3). The clearest demographic profile of California’s agricultural labor force is provided by the NAWS,

which relied on 2,344 surveys with California farmworkers during the 2003-2004 fiscal years (Aguirre 2). Consistent with the post-IRCA surge in immigration, more than nine-tenths (95 percent) of California's farm laborers are foreign-born and of these, the vast majority (96 percent) was born in Mexico (Aguirre 10). The NAWS also found that more than half (57 percent) of farmworkers lacked work authorization, which is a nine percent increase from the 1989-1990 NAWS and a likely result of the IRCA (Aguirre 15). With the median age found to be 32, farmworkers in California were relatively young and most were married (64 percent), although more than a quarter (28 percent) did not have their spouse living in their household (Aguirre viii). Additionally, only about one-third (33 percent) of farmworkers migrated to find their farm jobs, which represented a twenty percent drop from 1989-1990 levels (Aguirre 16-17). In terms of income, the NAWS shows that over two-fifths (43 percent) of farmworkers earned less than \$10,000 per year, with nearly one-quarter (22 percent) falling below the federal poverty line, which was \$9,573 for an individual in 2003 (Aguirre 27).

With respect to living quarters, nearly two-thirds (62 percent) of farmworkers lived in homes intended for single-family, more than one-fourth (29 percent) lived in apartment units, and only one-sixteenth (6 percent) resided in mobile homes (Aguirre 30-31). The NAWS also found that only three percent of farmworkers lived in housing provided by employers, a figure that represented an eleven percent drop from 1989-1990 levels (Aguirre 30-31). Another useful source for information related to farmworker housing is the California Agricultural Workers Health Survey ("CAWHS"), which was a 1999 cross-sectional survey of 970 hired farm workers in seven representative communities (Villarejo 4). In that survey, two thirds (69 percent) of participants stated that they were renters, one-fourth (23 percent) indicated that they or a family owned the dwelling in which they lived and one-sixteenth (6 percent) lived in a farm labor camp

(Aguirre 4). Notably, approximately one-ninth (11 percent) of CAWHS participants indicated that they lived in dwellings not known to the US Postal Service or the county tax assessor, including sheds, shacks, garages and other structures not usually intended for human habitation (Aguirre 4).

Federal Programs

At the federal government level, the HOME Investment (“HOME”) and the Community Development Block Grant (“CDBG”) program provide block grant funds for local community and housing development projects that serve the needs of low to moderate income households (HAC 1997, 1). Also, the United States Department of Agriculture (“USDA”) runs several programs that serve the interests of farmworkers particularly with regard to housing. For example, USDA Section 514 and 516 are administered by the Rural Development Housing Services (“RHS”) and are exclusively used to fund housing for farm laborers. More specifically, Section 514 loans and Section 514 grants can be used to purchase, build, and repair or improve housing for farm laborers and those involved in processing agricultural products (HAC 1998, 1). With reference to “self-help” housing, two programs have traditionally “[offered] a financial package that has been at the center of rural self-help housing efforts” (Carey 159). Under USDA Section 502, borrowers can secure loans for the repair or purchase of new or existing single-family homes in rural areas (Sherman 147). This loan is ideal because it is a convertible loan that closes prior to construction, therefore allowing borrowers to purchase a lot, pay for materials and hire subcontractors during the construction process (Carey 159). Under USDA Section 523, nonprofit organizations can acquire loans for the purchase and development of land “that is to be subdivided into building sites for houses to be built by the mutual self-help method” (Sherman 151). Over the past several decades, nonprofit groups like Self-Help Enterprises and People’s

Self-Help have relied on Section 523 funding to make self-help housing a reality. However, the USDA discontinued funding for Section 523 in the 2012 fiscal year (USDA 53).

Public and Private Labor Camps

The availability of affordable housing for agricultural workers is far short of the present need. As the NAWS and CAWHS suggest, the farm labor housing market has seen a sharp drop in the number of employer-owned labor camps (Villarejo 1). During the mid-1950s, growers registered approximately 9,000 facilities to house their seasonal and migrant workers (Gordon 6). By 1994, only about 900 labor camps remained (Gordon 6), leading some scholars to conclude that on-farm housing provided by employers for their laborers “has reached a nadir” (Villarejo 2). In addition, the FSA labor camps that originated during the Depression have since “passed into the hands of local housing authorities” and growers (Peck 3). In 2007, Villarejo and Schenker found that there were about 26 public labor camps located in 16 counties, exclusively reserved for families with “no provision whatsoever for unaccompanied workers” (Villarejo and Schenker 21). Usually run by local housing authorities, these camps require proof of eligibility, are only open for six months of the peak agricultural season and sheltered approximately 2,107 families in 2007 (Villarejo and Schenker 21). Although the general trend is towards fewer employer-owned units, Chapter 7 describes one noteworthy initiative where agricultural landowners in Napa Valley voted to tax themselves in order to help expand farmworker housing in the region.

Private, Non-Profit Organizations

Perhaps the “largest source of newly developed farm labor housing” over the last decades has been provided by private, non-profit organizations that are devoted to providing affordable housing to rural areas (Villarejo 8). Typically, these non-profit groups rely on public sector grants and loans to finance their housing projects. For example, an estimated 3,500 units have

been constructed with funds provided through the California Department of Human Development (“HCD”) since 1977 (Villarejo 8). Other groups, like People’s Self-Help and Self-Help Enterprises, tap into government programs like USDA Sections 502 and 523 in order to provide assistance to “self-help” housing projects. Although exact numbers are elusive, estimates suggest that over 28,000 self-help homes have been built since 1971 (Annie E. Casey 2). In California alone, mutual self-help groups built approximately 10,000 homes during the three decades preceding the year 2000 (Minnehan and Brown 1). What tends to distinguish these non-profit groups from other providers of housing is an approach that complements typical “brick-and-mortar” projects with programs designed to promote community development – an approach that strives to incorporate opportunities for homeownership and asset-building (Pacheco 11). In fact, non-profit groups like Cabrillo have designed farmworker housing projects that include a number of amenities, such as community centers, childhood education and health care services. Central to the rise of Cabrillo Village and the work of non-profit groups like Cabrillo is the concept of self-help, which is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4. Self-Help Housing

The Solution of Self-Help

The concept of self-help in housing is not a particularly new concept (Ward 7). Some scholars have described it as one of primitive man’s earliest activities (Abrams 168). In America, the concept is perhaps as old as the country itself. In fact, the early pioneers often used self-help methods to construct their barns, homes, churches and to build communities (Carey 158). Self-help strategies were once again adopted during the Great Depression, when the coal industry suffered major setbacks, but it was not until the 1960’s that the approach received serious

funding from the federal government. Through the efforts of individuals and organizations committed to the fight for social justice for farm workers in California, Congress eventually created legislation that provided the necessary financing for self-help projects. Today, self-help housing projects receive funding through USDA Sections 502 and 523. Specifically, the Section 523 “Mutual Self-Help Housing” program allows farm workers to come together and, under the direction of a nonprofit entity, construct their own homes. When coupled together, the two programs “offer a financing package that has been at the core of rural self-help housing efforts” (Carey 159).

Although the numbers vary, some estimates suggest that over 28,000 self-help homes have been constructed since 1971 (Annie E. Casey 2). In the late 1990s, rural self-help programs existed in more than 30 states and provided housing to thousands of rural residents (Carey 158). Much of this progress is attributed to the introduction of the Section 523 program in the early 1970’s, which led to the growth of self-help organizations across the country (McGahee 10). Some of the more visible organizations include the Coachella Valley Housing Coalition (“CVHC”), People’s Self-Help, and Self-Help Enterprises (“SHE”) – the latter helped move approximately 5,500 families into decent and affordable housing since beginning its mutual self-help program in 1965 (Self-Help Enterprises 2). Non-profits like these organizations “can oversee construction of 10,000 self-help homes per year -- if there was federal money.” (Greenhouse 7)

The self-help process, besides constructing adequate dwellings, has also been shown to build families and communities. Through their involvement in the construction process, farm workers gain “valuable skills and learn about the power of collective action” (Rasanen 2). The hands-on training that these farm workers learn can be transferred to stable jobs in construction

or in the future maintenance and expansion of their own homes (Rodriguez 18). The nature of construction is thought to “[develop] a sense of community and friendship as future neighbors build homes side by side” (Rasanen 2). Furthermore, by participating in financial counseling early on, farm workers can learn about their mortgage, consumer credit, insurance, budgeting and other issues relating to personal finance (Rasanen 2). Finally, organizations like People’s Self-Help have had tremendous results in the test scores of children living in self-help units (Orozco 1). These positive outcomes have recently been supported by a 2005 study conducted by the Housing Assistance Council, which associated self-help housing with increased homeownership, asset-building, and stable communities where children can thrive academically (Annie E. Casey 5-6).

A Brief History

Peter N. Carey describes self-help as an “American tradition” that traces back to the “pioneers who set up housekeeping in a new land” (Carey 158). Despite their limited resources, these determined newcomers worked effectively together to construct the barns, schools and churches “that became the fabric of America’s rural communities” (Carey 158). The first significant mutual self-help housing effort by a social or public agency took place during the 1930’s (Carey 159). The demand for coal was said to plummet during the Great Depression, depriving coal miners of their livelihood and forcing many into desperate circumstances (Carey 159). In response to this, the County Relief Board of Westmoreland County of Pennsylvania organized in 1933, and oversaw the construction of 250 homes by the coal miners themselves, who were paid for one-quarter of their labor (Spohn 22). A similar effort was initiated in 1937. This time, the American Friends Service Committee (“AFSC”) planned and provided financing for a project that eventually produced fifty homes (Spohn 22). In the decades that followed,

AFSC sponsored similar self-help projects in Philadelphia, Indianapolis, and Puerto Rico (Carey 159).

The beginning of organized mutual self-help as a national program can be traced to Goshen, a poor community in the heart of the San Joaquin Valley. Even though the San Joaquin Valley was one of the richest agricultural regions in the nation, the farmworkers in Goshen experienced severe poverty and lived in miserable conditions as revealed in Edward R. Morrow's 1960 film, "Harvest of Shame" (Carey 160). Following this film, AFSC established an office in the region to launch its fight for social justice – a fight that they took all the way to Washington D.C. (Carey 160). In 1961, AFSC worked to support legislation that allowed rural residents to apply for housing loans, since only farms could apply for Section 502 loans during that time (Carey 160). Following the change of this law, the Rural Housing Services ("RHS") agreed to link the Section 502 program with the concept of self-help, therefore enabling families to earn "sweat equity" by utilizing their own labor to construct their home (Carey 160). Under Section 502, borrowers could obtain loans for the repair or purchase of new or existing single-family homes in rural areas (Sherman 147). Under Section 523, nonprofit organizations can obtain loans for the purchase and development of land "that is to be subdivided into building sites for houses to be built by the mutual self-help method" (Sherman 151).

Turner's Concept of Self-Help

Some of the strongest arguments for self-help housing have come from the work of John F. C. Turner. Drawing from fieldwork in Peru, Turner argues for increased autonomy for who he calls the "owner-builder" (Turner 1972, 243). In the context of poverty, he argues that autonomy allows the owner-builder to maximize his or her scarce resources, therefore increasing the quantity of housing but in any context, autonomy is said to "[increase] meaning" (Turner 1972,

243). Furthermore, when the owner-builder is free to make his or her contributions to the planning, design, construction or management of their housing, benefits accrue to both the individual and to society (Turner 1982, 105). Turner therefore views housing as an “activity” in which the users are the principal actors who have the ultimate authority over the housing decisions (Turner 1972, 154). In contrast to this, an “undesirable dependency” occurs when the entity that supplies the shelter also decide “how much shelter there should be, where it should be, and how it should function” in the lives of “passive users” (Turner 1982, 246). Furthermore, Turner identifies several consequences of this “unhealthy dependency,” including a surplus of luxury housing, a corresponding housing deficit for the poor, and even if affordable housing is provided, a mismatch between the essential needs of the poor and the shelter constructed (Turner 1972, 245).

Besides the idea of autonomy, another major component of Turner’s work is the concept of “use-value.” According to Turner, the value of any physical object cannot be measured in terms of its physical characteristics, but in the “use-value” – in other words, the relationship between the object and the user (Turner 1976, 60-61). When applied to housing, this idea suggests that the value of a home is not found in the material qualities of the physical products, but in what it does in the lives of its users (Turner 1972, 159). In other words, the real value in housing lies in the ability of dwellers to “create and maintain environments which serve both their material and their psychological needs – not in buildings as such” (Turner 1972, vii). It therefore follows that when dwellers lose this control, shelter becomes a commodity of reduced value to the individual and an inordinate expense to society (Turner 1972, vii). To be distinguished from “use-value” is a commodity’s “market-value,” which only measures “the material standard of the goods and services it embodies” (Turner 1976, 61). Since the true value

of a home lies in what it does for people rather than what it is, and because market-value can only focus on the latter component, it follows that market-value can provide only a partial view of a home's value to the user (Burgess 1982, 50).

From the above points, Turner concludes that the basic necessity of housing can be provided more effectively by a large number of small local groups than by a smaller number of large, centralized enterprises (Turner 1982, 107). From his experience in Peru, Turner argues that the economy achieved by self-helpers is often “based on the capacity and freedom of individuals and small groups to make their own decisions” more than on a capacity to perform manual labor (Turner 1982, 102). In an “open service system” approach to housing, the owner-builder is free to use any combination of discrete services in order to arrive at the same end, which is the construction of a home (Turner 1972, 154-155). On the other hand, centrally administered housing systems are more rigid and standardized with respect to the procedures that they follow, and the housing services that they provide (Turner 1982, 104). Turner is critical of minimum specification standards since, in his view, government is often unwilling to close the gap between the degree of investment that they require and the “effective demand” (Turner 1972, 150). He also feared that as the dweller continues to lose control over the process of housing construction, she becomes more dependent on housing decisions made for her “by increasingly centralized authorities according to criteria which have little relevance to her personal life” (Turner 1972, 251).

Turner and Mutual Self-Help

In Turner's view, the basic principle of mutual self-help is the contribution of free labor by participating families, who earn “sweat equity” in the construction process (Turner 1972, 130). The idea is that, by forming groups, it becomes possible to divide, train, achieve specialized

labor and maintain continuous work under skilled supervision (Turner 1972, 130). To organizers and supervisors, the challenges associated with mutual self-help can include the technical design, cost of supervision, time accounting, and the resolution of personal and intra-group conflicts that inevitably arise during construction (Turner 1972, 130). Opponents of mutual self-help typically argue that the administrative costs are very expensive and cite the difficulty of recruiting and training the professionals needed to expand programs of this type (Turner 1972, 132). On the other hand, advocates claim that the social and psychological byproducts of mutual self-help justify their continued investment (Turner 1972, 132). Quoting Nehru, Turner writes that mutual self-help “[builds] families as well as homes” (Turner 1972, 132). As noted earlier, when a home is reduced simply to a commodity supplied by paternalistic agencies, the dwellers are deprived of the opportunity to enjoy the process itself (Turner 1972, 133). However, when people occupy the role of builders, genuine relationships often form as people begin to draw a common pride and satisfaction from the work itself (Turner 1972, 145).

Criticisms

Hans Harms, who was one of Turner’s earliest critics, argued that self-help housing has been regularly proposed as a policy solution in capitalist societies, particularly when there is a crisis in capitalism (Harms 17). To support this argument, Harms points to the early examples of state sponsored self-help in Pennsylvania in the 1930’s – a housing initiative that was proposed in the midst of high unemployment and growing social unrest (Harms 26). In short, the state often acts as a political mediator during crisis situations and (in an attempt to maintain social order and keep capitalism intact) can either introduce some reforms or increase repressive measures (Harms 20). According to Harms, one such reform measure is state-sponsored self-help (Harm 20). When conceptualized in this way, self-help becomes little more than a tool from

above that “attempts to increase integration into the existing order and to perpetuate capitalist accumulation and domination” (Harms 20). Moreover, Harms argues that self-help policies shift costs accounting from the state to the individual families, forcing those with the least amount of choices in the market to construct their own homes (Harms 20). From the state’s perspective, therefore, self-help becomes an inexpensive policy for housing that requires almost no changes to resource allocation or to societal structure (Harms 23).

Rod Burgess was another influential critic of Turner’s work. Reminiscent of Hans Harms, Burgess has criticized Turner’s ideas as “nothing less than the now traditional attempts of capitalist interest to palliate the housing shortage in ways that do not interfere with the effective operation of these interests” (Burgess 1982, 86). In addition, Burgess sees various drawbacks to state sponsored self-help. These projects, which are more centralized and bureaucratic, often search for uniformity, ease of administration and adherence to building codes, bylaws and minimum standards – considerations that tend to restrict variations between individual programs such that self-help becomes “highly inflexible” (Burgess 1985, 282). Even more troubling, the owner-builder is stripped of the opportunity to participate in the design and planning process under state sponsored self-help (Burgess 1985, 295). This, combined with the greater input of paid labor, contributes to the wider separation between the owner-builder and the production process despite the self-help component (Burgess 1985, 287). There is also the fear that self-help housing programs are integrated into, and may reinforce, a system of social segregation (Burgess 1985, 299).

Empirical Support

Recent fieldwork in the Caribbean has tended to confirm many of Turner’s ideas (Potter and Conway 253). More specifically, Potter and Conway have found that “communal-territorial

responsibilities are best manifest in people’s empowerment and participation in the decisions that affect their daily lives and those of their families and loved ones”, which includes the provision of housing (Potter and Conway 253). In 1981, Leland S. Burns and Donald Shoup examined resident satisfaction and housing investment behavior by comparing a squatter upgrading project with two self-help housing projects (Burns and Shoup 106-107). Based on surveys, Burns and Shoup found that the self-help group had a more favorable outlook towards their neighborhood, and that the greater enthusiasm was attributable to their “more active involvement in decisions governing the planning of the new neighborhoods and the construction and maintenance of their dwelling” (Burns and Shoup 108). In 1987, Naomi Carmon and Tamar Gavrieli compared two major processes of improving housing conditions for low to moderate-income households in Israel, the institutional solution and the self-help method (Carmon and Gavrieli 324). Through interviews and questionnaires, the researchers found that self-helpers tended to be more satisfied with their housing, produced better housing conditions, and tended to improve relationships between neighbors (Carmon and Gavrieli 326-328). Moreover, and as compared with institutional housing, self-help housing produced a positive overall impact in preventing neighborhood decay and even encouraged urban renewal (Carmon and Gavrieli 324).

Chapter 5. Cabrillo Village

Early Beginnings

Prior to the arrival of the Spanish, the region now known as Ventura County was mainly settled by a group of hunter-gatherers known as the Chumash people (Ag Future Alliance 11). With the founding of the San Buenaventura Mission in 1782, the Franciscan fathers placed “the Chumash to work cultivating and harvesting mission crops” like wheat, corn and beans, while also housing them in primitive dwellings located on the mission property (Ag future Alliance 11).

Over the following century, particularly after California's admission into the United States, agriculture in the region underwent an intense transformation in both scale and variety, as crops were expanded to include vegetables, wine grapes, lima beans and sugar beets (Ag Future Alliance 11). The agricultural labor during this period was supplied by immigrants from Italy, Germany, Chile and China – groups that, in one way or another, helped shape agriculture in Ventura County (Ag Future Alliance 11). Although some of these workers were sheltered where they worked, many were forced to procure housing wherever and however they could (Ag Future Alliance 11).

As each of the above groups made their way out of the fields, the federal government began looking south of the border to fill the growing shortage of agricultural labor in the country. Therefore, in a pattern that would repeat itself later, large numbers of Mexican laborers were recruited to help feed the troops, provide castor oil to support the war effort, and otherwise keep farming intact, as the United States mobilized for World War I (Ag Future Alliance 11). Although many of these workers were forced to return home during the 1930's through repatriation, the United States would again encounter labor shortages both during and after World War II. To deal with these needs, the federal government recruited thousands of Mexican laborers into the United States as temporary workers through the Bracero program, which lasted from about 1942 to 1964 (Gonzalez Jr., 16). In Ventura County, the Bracero program helped supply more than 3,000 Braceros who, after a long day of harvesting citrus fruits and toiling in the fields, often retired to labor camps that were built and maintained by the grower-owned cooperatives that employed these workers (Ag Future Alliance 12).

Located near the farming community of Saticoy, the twenty-five acres of land known as the Cabrillo Village started out as an early labor camp, originally built by the Saticoy Lemon

Growers Association in 1936 to shelter single male workers who followed the harvest in search of work (Pierce and Guskind 143; Sommer 1995). Initially, there was somewhere between 90 to 100 dormitories on this site, all were constructed with un-insulated walls (that produced frigid temperatures inside of the units during cold days) and most occupied less than 500 square feet of living space (Pierce and Guskind 143). Each of these dwellings were serviced by unpaved roads, marked by plumbing that was limited to a toilet and a kitchen sink, and connected to a rudimentary sanitation system that emptied into two nearby open ponds, often exposing residents to offensive odors given the proper wind conditions (Pierce and Guskind 143). Ultimately, as the laborers married, raised children and took up permanent residence at the labor camp, living conditions at Cabrillo Village became overcrowded and deteriorated still further. But unlike the growers who owned and scarcely maintained the labor camp, the farm workers refused to tolerate these poor conditions.

Fighting the Bulldozers

The original Cabrillo Village was initially built in the 1930s for single migrant laborers. By the 1970's, Cabrillo Village had developed into a dilapidated settlement where farm workers and their families were forced to crowd together in cramped and unsanitary dwellings, and work long hours to make a living. But during this time, the impoverished living and working conditions of farm workers were beginning to receive more of the nation's attention. In 1960, the airing of "Harvest of Shame" brought the harsh living conditions of farm workers to most people's living rooms. In the mid-1960s, Cesar E. Chavez and the UFW were beginning to sow the seeds of a labor unrest that would spread throughout the entire state. At Cabrillo Village, the substandard living conditions and subsistence wages of the farmworkers left them with little other choice but to act. Therefore, by October 1974, farmworkers at Cabrillo Village took the

important step of “walking out” on the growers, hoping to achieve better working conditions and greater pay (Zamudio-Gurrola 47). The strike remained at a standoff for ten days, with the growers refusing to meet the strike leaders and the “workers alleging that the [growers] had hired undocumented workers to break the strike” (Zamudio-Gurrola 47). Victory was within reach when the growers and the farmworkers agreed to a settlement agreement one month later. The growers, however, continued to ignore the terms of the settlement agreement (Zamudio-Gurolla 47), forcing the farmworkers to take to the picket lines once again.

In launching their second organizing drive against the lemon growers, the farm workers at Cabrillo Village hoped to capitalize on the influence and guidance of the UFW (Zamudio-Gurolla 47). But just a few weeks before the election, the growers fired 190 farm laborers and issued eviction notices to every resident of Cabrillo Village – a move that workers saw as an attempt to crush their union activities (Pierce and Guskind 145-146; Zamudio-Gurolla 47-48). But rather than preventing them, the tactics utilized by the growers served to energize the farm workers, as Cesar Chavez counseled these laborers to ignore the eviction notices and fight back (Pierce and Guskind 146). Inspired by Chavez and backed by activists throughout the state, the Cabrillo Village residents leveraged their political resources to successfully pursue several stays of eviction (Pierce and Guskind 146). Building on this momentum, the villagers then went on to organize marches, conduct protests, hold all-night vigils at the homes of local growers, and eventually dissuade a private buyer from purchasing the Cabrillo Village for \$80,000 (Pierce and Guskind 147). According to the private buyer, Enriqueta Villasenor, local nuns joined with the farmworkers and labor organizers in their protest against the growers (Zamudio-Gurolla 48). Impatient with the laborers and their struggle, the growers hired bulldozers to flatten the shelters

already vacated by those who previously took the growers' relocation offer (about \$500) and left the labor camp (Pierce and Guskind 147; Zamudio-Gurolla 49).

The bulldozers were no match for the collective strength of the empowered residents of Cabrillo Village. One of these residents was Luis Magdaleno, who was himself inspired by the life lessons and leadership of Cesar Chavez (CEDC Report 11). Threatened with the demolition of their homes, Magdaleno and others from Cabrillo Village "joined hands and created a human chain between" the bulldozer and the houses (CEDC Report 11). As Pierce and Guskind have noted, blocking the bulldozers proved to be the pivotal moment in the struggle and one that "turned the tide irrevocably" in the favor of the farmworkers (Pierce and Guskind 147). Over the next several months, Magdaleno and the other residents formed the Cabrillo Improvement Association (later to become the CEDC), elected a board of directors, and began meeting with the Saticoy Growers Association to discuss purchasing the labor camp (CEDC Report 11; Pierce and Guskind 148). The Cabrillo Improvement Association ("Association") encountered resistance from twenty other families who favored a for-profit group and submitted a competing bid. Nevertheless, the growers ultimately accepted the Association's offer and sold Cabrillo Village for \$80,000 (Pierce and Guskind 148). When the Association took ownership of the labor camp on May 5, 1976, the moment signaled a landmark victory in a contentious struggle that lasted nearly two years, produced powerful moments, threatened the resolve and unity of Cabrillo's residents, but ultimately equipped them with the leadership skills and confidence to confront the numerous challenges that lay ahead.

Setting a New Foundation

To raise the money necessary to purchase Cabrillo Village, the Association relied in part on a \$1000 contribution from Madaleno and 79 other families (CEDC 11; Sommer 1995). The

shortfall was covered by loans from both the UFW and the Housing Assistance Council (Pierce and Guskind 148). In 2003, the *Los Angeles Times* noted that this was the first time in history that Mexican-American farm laborers “rallied to collectively buy their homes from a grower” (Alvarez 2003). But while fighting for (and acquiring) the land tract was a challenging task for the people of Cabrillo Village, transforming the labor camp into a livable yet affordable community proved to be another difficult challenge. To begin with, Cabrillo’s residents were faced with the choice of either subdividing the development on a for-profit basis or forming a limited equity cooperative – which generally strives to keep a housing project affordable for future residents by limiting the resale price of the cooperative shares (Gordon 13). Ultimately, the residents agreed on rebuilding Cabrillo Village as a limited equity cooperative. After conducting a feasibility study and connecting this newly formed cooperative to local sewerage and water systems, the residents began rehabilitating the older cottages of Cabrillo Village. To pay for these operations, the residents relied on private funding and a variety of government sources – including, a federal job training program that enabled residents to acquire knowledge and skills that proved useful in the renovation of Cabrillo Village and beyond (Pierce and Guskind 150). When renovation work was completed in 1986, the long-neglected cottages were given new kitchens, bathrooms, more living space, new plumbing, wiring and foundation.

While the old cottages underwent renovation, new housing projects were built in other parts of Cabrillo Village. Under the guidance of John Mutlow and Frank Villalobos, the two architects hired by the cooperative in 1977, a thirty-five unit complex of town houses was completed by 1981, while another complex of thirty-nine homes was started in 1983 – with active hot water heating and passive solar space heating built into the home’s design to save nearly 70 percent on utilities (Pierce and Guskind 151-153; CEDC Report 11). While the

architecture of the new housing won countless praise and awards, it was the architects' participatory, grass-roots style of building low-income housing that made the developments truly unique (Pierce and Gusking 151). Breaking from the highly-centralized style that had come to characterize public housing, Mutlow and Villalobos utilized questionnaires and participated in weekly meetings in order to gauge the desires and aspirations of the residents, later applying this knowledge to the design and features of Cabrillo Village's newer additions (Pierce and Guskind 153; Zamudio-Gurolla 49). More recently, the residents have taken further steps to adapt Cabrillo Village to their own unique needs, having installed carports with their own money and raising \$40,000 to not only expand their community center, but equip it with a kitchen, laundry and meeting room large enough to seat every resident from the village (Pierce and Guskind 154). Ten years after being threatened with bulldozers, the farmworkers of Cabrillo Village had successfully transformed a decaying labor camp into a "national model for farm worker self-help community development" (CEDC Strategic Plan 5).

Cabrillo Village Today

Cabrillo Village spent much of its early existence under the control of Ventura County (Lima 1995). In the spring of 1994, the city of Ventura annexed the community of 150 dwellings, which enabled police and fire authorities to patrol the streets of Cabrillo Village (Sommer 1995). In 2004, Dewey Bandy found that Cabrillo Village was one of eleven farmworker housing cooperatives operating in California (Bandy 7). Under a cooperative system, individual members hold shares that grants them the right to occupy a specific housing unit, and these "shareholders" operate the cooperative by means of an elected board of directors that oversee the fiscal integrity, management and maintenance of the housing cooperative (Bandy 7). In particular, Cabrillo Village provides an orientation to new members of the cooperative, and

allows these members to attend the three to four board training sessions held each year (Bandy 14-15). Over the years, Cabrillo Village's board of directors has invested their resources in the development and education of their youngest members. In 1995, a recreational center was opened to provide recreational space to members 14 years of age and younger (Lima 1995). In 2002, Cabrillo Village's board of directors invested \$50,000 to set up the Adelante Academic Center, a resource center that provides mentoring, tutoring and other after-school services to "steer youngsters away from gangs, violence and other influences" that often derail the children of underprivileged neighborhoods (Alvarez 2003). Also funded by a \$50,000 grant from the California Consumer Protection Foundation, the Adelante Academic Center offers access to over twenty computers and assists as many as two dozens kids a day (Alvarez 2003). This emphasis on education and development has led to many success stories, as a great number of residents of Cabrillo Village have gone on to earn college degrees and pursue professional careers (Alvarez 2001).

Chapter 6. Cabrillo Economic Development Corporation

Becoming a Model Developer

In 1976, when the farm workers of Cabrillo Village formed the Cabrillo Improvement Association, few could have envisioned the impact that this organization would have on the people of Cabrillo Village, and eventually on the lives of needy families throughout Ventura County. Through the Association, the people of Cabrillo Village were initially able to engage the Saticoy Growers Association, negotiate a purchase price of \$80,000, and eventually take ownership of the labor camp on May of 1976 (CEDC Report; Pierce and Guskind 148). In the pivotal years that followed, the Association successfully weaved together the funding needed to

turn Cabrillo Village into a “national model for farm worker self-help community development” (CEDC Strategic Plan 5). The executive director of the Association during this period was Rodney Fernandez who, in 1981, made the important decision to form the Saticoy-based Cabrillo Economic Development Corporation (“Cabrillo”).

Created to “replace, broaden the base, and expand the activities” of the group that preceded it (CEDC History), Cabrillo was faced with a number of difficult challenges very early on. The “virtual demise” of the United Farm Workers and the vanishing influence of iconic figures like Cesar Chavez, together with the rapid influx of immigrants willing to work for no benefits and low pay, threatened to drive down wages and worsen conditions for the farm workers of Ventura County, who numbered somewhere between 18,000 and 22,000 during that period (Pierce and Guskind 155). These factors, coupled with increasing gentrification and the passage of city and county growth control laws that restricted housing developed for the poor, turned Ventura County and its surrounding areas into “one of the toughest places in America to be poor” (Pierce and Gusking 155). But despite the overwhelming odds against it, Cabrillo would pursue effective collaborations with state and private entities, navigate skillfully through the pervasive “NIMBY” sentiments in the county, and help translate the dreams of struggling families into a tangible reality.

Ten Years of Success (1981-1992)

When Cabrillo commemorated their ten-year anniversary on August of 1992, there were many accomplishments to celebrate and many reasons to be hopeful. By that time, Cabrillo had completed 650 units of quality housing across six cities in Ventura County, on the way to becoming the “leading producer of low-income housing in” the county (LaPolla 1992). These housing developments included the 100-unit Rancho Sespe project located in Fillmore, a 27-unit

project in Ventura called Los Cabos Lane and a recently completed 150-unit project in Santa Paula built primarily for seniors, with 21- and 22-unit projects under way in Ojai and Simi Valley, respectively (LaPolla 1992). But aside from just rental units, Cabrillo also built the Colonia Santa Paula by 1983, a complex of 128 single family homes located in the city of Santa Paula (CEDC website). To finance these projects, and the many others being planned in Oxnard, Camarillo and Santa Paula by August of 1992, Cabrillo tapped into a diverse range of funding sources, including private donations to grants from local, state and federal governments (LaPolla 1992). The non-profit's access to these funding opportunities was likely facilitated by Cabrillo's growing credibility in the community and their reputation as a "tenacious" nonprofit, unafraid to "[ruffle] a few feathers on occasion" (LaPolla 1992).

The Rancho Sespe development, for example, was planned and built by Cabrillo despite the loud protests coming from local farmers and public officials, many of who feared that the "eyesore" project would turn into a "ghetto isolated from" the nearby towns of Fillmore and Piru (Pascual 1990). Others initially challenged Cabrillo's county construction permit, arguing that the 100-unit complex was improperly built on twenty acres of land that was more suitable for citrus groves than for "urbanization" (Catania 1994). Despite this strong opposition, Cabrillo went on to build the \$8.5 million project by weaving together funds from the state Department of Housing and Community Development ("DHCD") and the federal Farmers Home Administration ("FHA") (Pascual 1990). When the Rancho Sespe project opened in March of 1990, the moment was the latest victory in a prolonged battle that initially began in January of 1979, when a company called Rivcom bought the original 4,300-acre Rancho Sespe ranch, and "fired 200 workers who had just voted to join the [UFW]" (Pascual 1990). Refusing to accept eviction, the original residents quickly filed a lawsuit that "dragged on four eight years,"

eventually ending when the California Supreme Court ruled that the “village would continue to stand and that the workers could stay” until suitable replacement housing was located (Pierce and Guskind 158). Originally planned by Cabrillo as a “self-contained community” (Pascual 1990), the Rancho Sespe project still stands as a 100-unit housing complex for farm workers, complete with a community center, garden, recreational field, and day-care center run by the preschool Head Start Program (Catania 1993).

Besides Rancho Sespe, two other projects that Cabrillo completed early on included the Villa Campesina project and the Santa Paulan, complexes found in the cities of Moorpark and Santa Paula, respectively. Located on 10-acres of land in Moorpark, the Villa Campesina development is a self-help project that was built when Cabrillo successfully secured financing through the federal FHA (Lozano 1990). After purchasing the 10-acre property for \$500,000 from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, Cabrillo selected 62 families (from more than 200 applicants) and set them promptly to work under the close supervision of the People’s Self-Help Housing Corp., based in San Luis Obispo (Lozano 1990). With the exception of the electrical and plumbing work that was contracted out, the participating families were each asked to contribute 40 hours a week towards the completion of their homes, doing everything from “pouring foundations to framing and roofing” (Lozano 1990). Work continued in this way until all 62 families moved into their self-built homes by March of 1991, with each house costing less than \$70,000 (Lozano 1990). When originally completed, the project served as a source of pride and inspiration to both residents and local politicians alike, with Councilman Bernardo Perez being quoted as saying that the Villa Campesina was “a blessing to all the families involved and a jewel for the city of Moorpark” (Lozano 1990).

Another early success for Cabrillo was the Santa Paulan, a 150-unit apartment complex for low-income seniors that also “[marked] the first time in Ventura County that a private developer and a non-profit housing corporation [teamed] up as partners” (Potter 1997). According to Jesse Ornelas, Prairie Pacific Investment (who had worked on the project for 3 years) had first approached Cabrillo “to market the idea and to acquire subsidies” for the 3.6-acre development (Fulford 1992). Built by Prairie but owned and managed by Cabrillo, financing for the \$6.7 million project was made possible by a “complex web of 11 institutions” (Potter 1997), including mortgage financing by First Nationwide Bank, a construction loan by Wells Fargo Bank, and a combination of subsidies from the city of Santa Paula, County of Ventura, Federal Home Loan Bank of San Francisco and Southern California Edison (Fulford 1992). When the project opened in April of 1992, senior citizens began moving into a Spanish-style, 150-unit complex consisting of three separate structures, with each structure containing its own elevator, laundry room, kitchen, pool, spa, exercise room and library (Fulford 1992). Guaranteed to remain affordable for 55 years since the project’s completion date, the Santa Paulan project still lies adjacent to a professional medical building, and is a short walking distance away from recreational facilities, bus transportation and Santa Paula’s downtown business district (SPDC 1991).

Building Momentum (1994-1999)

In March of 1994, Cabrillo had won approval to build the Villa Solimar project, a 32-unit apartment complex planned in the city of Oxnard (Galperin 1994). Since being founded in 1981, the non-profit had blossomed into the “largest private developer of low-income housing” in Ventura County (Alvarez 1995), with many awards already earned and even more on the way. Despite the organization’s productivity in the region, Cabrillo still struggled with the pervasive

NIMBY attitudes in Ventura County, since their requests for city or county subsidies were often met with resistance. For example, in August of 1994 Cabrillo submitted a proposal to the affordable housing committee of Simi Valley, hoping to receive a \$500,000 loan to help build 40 affordable apartments for the low-income residents in the area (Catania 1994). Although CEDC had already completed affordable housing in Ojai, Moorpark, Santa Paula, Ventura, Oxnard and Camarillo by that time, city officials pressed the non-profit for more proof that the proposed project “would truly be affordable for the city’s poor residents” (Catania 1994). Earlier that year, Cabrillo presented other Ventura city officials with a proposal to build 80 apartments and 66 single-family homes on a 23-acre lot at the end of Citrus Drive, an area just north of the Santa Paula Freeway (Lee 1994). Although, at the time, Ventura was “lagging behind in the number of low-income housing units it [was] mandated by the state to build,” city officials were still “not sure” about granting Cabrillo’s request for \$1.4 million since they preferred to use that money to “[revitalize] Ventura’s downtown” (Lee 1994). To make the situation worse, by September of 1994, the Cabrillo project had become the target of an angry petition signed by 700 local residents, many of whom fearing that “the influx of low-income residents [would] bring traffic and crime” (Lee 1994) and otherwise turn their neighborhood into “ghettos” (Sommer 1994).

Still, there were other projects in various stages of development and plenty of reasons for Cabrillo to be hopeful. While their tireless efforts to expand affordable housing continued, the non-profit also began receiving more national attention for their innovative work in Ventura County (Alvarez 1995). One notable distinction came in 1995, when Cabrillo became one of 68 groups chosen to participate in an “unprecedented campaign to aid long-neglected rural communities” (Alvarez 1995). Led by the Local Initiatives Support Corp (“LISC”), the national campaign was designed to “pump \$302 million in public and private funds into rural

communities” in 39 states over four years, and was the “first time” that the federal government joined forces with banks and private foundations to “attack poverty in rural America” (Alvarez 1995). “[In] line to receive” potentially millions from a pool of grants and loans to build dwellings for the rural poor, a “humbled” Rodney Fernandez expressed a desire to focus efforts on Fillmore, Piru and Santa Paula, largely rural communities with many low-income residents but “not enough affordable housing” (Alvarez 1995). Boosted by the LISC recognition, Cabrillo continued to add to their extensive portfolio of affordable housing projects as the century drew to a close. The Villa Solimar project, which was initially approved for development in 1995 (Galperin 1994), was finally completed by 1996 at a total cost of \$5 million (Warchol 1996). Financed by a “string of federal grants, loans low-income equity credits,” the 32-unit apartment complex represented the “first time the nonprofit organization built in Oxnard” and, with features like a gated playground and outdoor walkways on the second floor, was a “big hit” among the residents (Warchol 1996). Another development completed in 1996 was the Apricot Ranch, a project consisting of 22 multi-family homes built for the low-income residents of Simi Valley (CEDC website).

Entering a New Century (2000-2007)

In the early years of the twenty first century, the struggles of farm workers in California appeared to be receiving more attention from state and local officials. At one level, the state’s farm worker housing fund (which was receiving \$1 million to \$2 million up through 1999) was given a \$40 million allocation for the fiscal year 2000-2001 (Alvarez 2002). This unprecedented funding, together with the opening of major housing projects in Escondido, Santa Barbara and Coachella by 2002, led state officials to believe that there was “more activity than ever on the farm-worker housing front” (Alvarez 2002). In Ventura County, where increasing housing

prices and soaring rents were forcing farm workers to “live out of cars and garages,” county planners in 2002 began examining the results of a “comprehensive survey” to assess the housing needs of farm workers, all in an effort to put together the support and money needed to build the first major “block of farm-worker housing... in nearly a decade” (Alvarez 2002). Later released in August of 2002 by the county’s planning division, the survey suggested that “overcrowding” was “the biggest” housing problem faced by the 1,516 farmworkers that responded, while 30 percent cited “affordability” (Hernandez 2004). Furthermore, 14 percent of respondents suggested that their dwellings lacked “at least one bathroom amenity” like a shower, toilet, or bathroom sink, while the same number “said they did not have a kitchen sink or stove” (Hernandez 2004). Shortly after the release of the 2002 survey, officials in Ventura County amended zoning ordinances to “allow more housing on existing farms” and began looking at other solutions, all in the hopes of “[addressing] the overcrowding problem with the goal of providing more affordable housing for farmworkers” (Hernandez 2004).

Building on this momentum, Cabrillo finalized their plans for several additional projects by May of 2002, including proposals for 24-unit developments in both Santa Paula and Oxnard. By 2003, Cabrillo would complete the Sycamore Homes project in Ojai (25 single family homes), and Phase I of the Mountain View Homes development, which included 26 market rate and affordable single family homes in the city of Moorpark (CEDC website). Working closely with the city of Ojai to build the Sycamore Homes complex, Cabrillo used “smart growth” and “traditional neighborhood design practices” to help make the single family homes affordable (CEDC website). Meanwhile, Phase II of the Mountain View Homes project was eventually completed in 2005, with 33 more affordable and market-rate homes added to the Moorpark complex by that time (CEDC website). From 2004 to 2007, Cabrillo completed four new

housing projects in Ventura County, including three developments in Oxnard, alone. The first of these projects, known as the Meta Street Apartments, was the first of several planned developments that not only offered quality living space, but also provided residents with education, social services and healthcare (Hernandez 2004). Opened in March of 2004, the 24-unit project was developed through a partnership between Cabrillo, a non-profit organization known as the Rural Community Assistance Corporation (“RCAC”) and the city of Oxnard (Hernandez 2004). Built for \$5.5 million, the Meta Street Apartments was considered the county’s first farmworker housing project to offer social resources and free healthcare services like screenings and preventative checkups through a mobile clinic (Hernandez 2004). With regards to education, residents are offered English classes, citizen courses and leadership training, while their children are “monitored after school” and can complete their homework in the safety of a community room (Hernandez 2004). Shortly after completing the Meta Street project, Cabrillo built the Keuner Homes in 2006, a complex that included 26 single family homes in Simi Valley (CEDC website). Additionally, by 2007, Cabrillo completed the Hacienda Guadalupe and the Villa Cesar Chavez (with the help of Habitat for Humanity), Oxnard projects that offered 26 multi-family homes and 6 single-family homes, respectively (CEDC website).

Cabrillo Today (2006-Present)

When Cabrillo first started in the 1980s, most of their affordable housing work was concentrated in a handful of cities in Ventura County, including Piru, Ventura, Santa Paula and Moorpark (2006 Plan). During the 1990’s, Cabrillo diversified their operations to include other parts of the county, with projects opening in Oxnard, Ojai and Simi Valley (2006 Plan). By March of 2006, Cabrillo had expanded their service area to include Santa Barbara County, and actively managed their day-to-day operations through four divisions, including community

building and neighborhood revitalization, real estate development and property and asset management (2006 Plan). The fourth division, known as the NeighborWorks Home Ownership Center and the Ventura County Community Development Corporation (“HOC and VCCDC”), has allowed Cabrillo to assist families with mortgage education, counseling and various financial services (2006 Plan). In addition, by 2006, Cabrillo was actively managing 389 affordable rental units, and had completed 983 for-sale and rental homes, with 721 more units in the development “pipeline” (2006 Plan). Moreover, with net assets in excess of \$6.9 million, an operating budget of \$7 million and a staff of 62 people, Cabrillo was preparing to move into “a larger facility to support its growth” (2006 Plan). Since that time, Cabrillo has continued to expand their extensive portfolio of housing developments in Ventura County. For example, in 2009 Cabrillo completed the Paseo Del Rio and Paseo Santa Clara, two affordable rental developments that offered 54 and 86 rental homes to Oxnard’s “extremely low income residents and very low income residents” (Press Release [“PR”] 5/26/09). Featuring a “New Urbanist” look, these apartments were designed “as stacked flats and townhome-style apartments over tandem garages” and offer amenities such as two community rooms, three play areas, and a “sweeping” community courtyard, all with the intention of creating “walkable communities” that are also close to schools, public transportation and shopping centers (PR 5/26/09). A year later, Cabrillo completed the Central Station in Fillmore, a complex that features a combination of 21 affordable rental and 8 ownership homes, a community center, five courtyards, and a paved bike path that “runs alongside the community” (PR 2/25/10).

Currently, Cabrillo has several affordable housing developments in various phases of development, with each project hoping to incorporate “green and sustainable features” while also offering extensive on-site amenities and social services to help make a “sense of community”

more attainable (PR 04/19/11). Valle Naranjal, which broke ground in 2010, is a six-acre development in Piru that offers efficient, energy-star appliances in all 66 rental apartments, and features substantial site amenities (soccer field, community center, community garden, and open space) and a variety of service amenities such as youth activities, financial literacy, training in leadership and health services through Clinicas del Camino Real (PR 02/18/11). Its name meaning “valley of the orange grove,” Valle Naranjal was financed through local, state and federal resources (including federal HOME dollars) and is situated on land that used to house a labor camp built by the Fillmore- Piru Citrus Association in the 1950’s (PR 02/18/11). When Valle Naranjal opens in April of 2012, the project will have a special on-site exhibit that is expected to showcase the former labor camp and document the area’s agricultural legacy (PR 02/18/11). Three other developments that Cabrillo hopes to complete by 2012 include Camino Gonzalez, Paseo de Luz, and Azahar Place, projects all located in Ventura County. Breaking ground in March of 2011, Azahar Place provides 30 homes for farmworkers earning between \$26,000 and \$52,000, and represents the “first in-fill development since the adoption of the Saticoy Wells Community Plan and Code” in 2009 (PR 03/18/11). Equipped with amenities like a 2,059 square-foot community center, a kitchen, classroom, and recreational areas, the project features energy-star appliances in all units to help “reduce utility bills for residents” (PR 03/18/11). Both breaking ground in April of 2011, Camino Gonzalez provides 18-units of “farmworker restricted affordable rental townhomes” while Paseo de Luz will include 25 rental homes for low-income “special needs residents” in the city of Oxnard (PR 04/18/11). Each project will have a large community room, offer various outdoor amenities (like courtyards, basketball courts, BBQ area) and each home will be designed with green and sustainable features to meet the “Built It Green” certification program (PR 04/18/11). Finally, in December of 2011,

Cabrillo opened Paseo Santa Barbara, a 6.5 acre development that include 90 rental homes for people earning 30 to 60 percent of the area median income (“AMI”) and various on-site amenities like two community gardens, community center and a childcare center (CEDC website).

A Balancing Act

Born in 1976 out of a struggle for basic housing, the rapid emergence of Cabrillo as Ventura County’s leading developer of affordable housing offers an inspirational example of self-help and self-determination. Undoubtedly, the non-profit benefited from strong and visionary leadership, especially during the early years of the non-profit’s existence. Despite facing an uncertain future with the decline of the UFW, Cabrillo bravely resisted the pervasive NIMBY attitudes in the region, pursued diverse coalitions and skillfully weaved together funding from diverse sources. While Cabrillo has largely stayed true to its original mission, scholars like Keith Getter and Leonardo Vasquez acknowledge the “balancing act” performed out of necessity by community development leaders like Cabrillo’s Rodney Fernandez (Getter and Vasquez 2007). In contrast to the 1960’s and 1970’s (where there were fewer organizations), today’s non-profit organizations “ are among many actors competing for the same funding, employees, and even customers and clients”(Getter and Vasquez 2007). Now forced to work towards their mission and their “financial bottom lines” (Getter and Vasquez 2007), today’s community development leaders are increasingly forced to pursue projects that, while bringing in more money, offer little benefits to the target population. Even Rodney Fernandez once acknowledged, “I think in order for us to remain a not-for-profit, we have to make a profit” (Getter and Vasquez 2007). With less room for failure, groups like Cabrillo also seek out educated professionals, which often meant hiring people from different classes, ethnicities, and cultures, than their

constituency (Getter and Vasquez 2007). Clearly, these decisions threatened to push groups like Cabrillo further away from their original mission statement. This is one drawback to the Cabrillo model. As non-profit groups base more of their decisions on financial considerations, they run the risk of deviating from their mission statement while also promoting what Turner would term an “undesirable dependency” with their constituents (Turner 1982, 246).

Chapter 7. Napa Valley

A Homeless Workforce

Napa Valley is usually known more for the expensive wine rather than for farmworker housing. An estimated four percent of California’s wine is produced in Napa County’s 40,000 acres of vineyards, and the cabernet grapes produced in the region can bring up to \$4,456 a ton at the wineries – a figure several times higher than the state average of \$545 per ton (*Rural Migration News*). The world-class wine has also turned Napa Valley into a popular location for agri-tourism, as several millions each year flock to a region that one writer described as “Disneyland for grown-ups” (Glen Martin 2004). But while vintners and tourists enjoy the privileges of good wine and rustic living, “things aren’t quite as rosy” (Glen Martin 2004) for Napa Valley’s rarely seen but indispensable workforce. During the late 1990s, Phillip Martin found that total farm sales in Napa Valley reached \$237 million in 1997 (Martin 2000). He also found that Napa County only had between 200 to 300 beds for the estimated 6,600 farmworkers who migrated to the region during the harvest months (Martin 2000). This housing shortage along with the impoverished circumstance of most farmworkers has produced an unfortunate but predictable result. Farmworkers and their families doubled and even tripled up just to pay the monthly rent (Saillant 2002). Still, there were many farmworkers who were even less fortunate:

many were found living in cars, cardboard boxes, along the Napa River, under bridges and at the front steps of local churches (Strasburgof 2000). In one case, a local priest opened the door at the rectory on his way to pick up a newspaper and nearly tripped over a “man sleeping on the doorstep with the welcome mat pulled over his shoulders for warmth” (Ybarra 2001).

“The Right Thing to Do”

These widespread scenes of homelessness prompted a swift response from local officials and farmer groups. In 2001, the County of Napa purchased twelve collapsible yurts to provide farmworkers with meals and living quarters for \$10 a day (Sanchez 2001; May 2001). Round domelike dwellings whose origins go back to Mongolia’s nomads, the yurts were set up on a hillside near Yountville and provided shelter for about 40 farmworkers (Sanchez 2003). Local farm groups and vintners supplement these yurts with their own initiatives. In 2000, the Napa Valley Wine Auction raised \$453,000 for housing programs and, through a voluntary assessment, vintners and growers collected \$135,000 for the maintenance of the then-existing, farmworker housing stock (Ybarra 2001). Joseph Phelps, the owner of several vineyards in Napa Valley, also donated eight acres of land near the Napa River for the construction of what later became the River Ranch Farmworker Housing Center (Sanchez 2003). But before this development could be built, voters needed to approve modifications to Napa County’s Agricultural Land Preservation Initiative, put in place to preserve the region’s agricultural identity. Enacted in 1968, the Initiative mandated that at least 40 acres of land was required before anyone could build a dwelling in Napa Valley’s agricultural preserve (Ybarra 2001). Nevertheless, in 2002 voters had the opportunity to loosen these restrictions through Measure L which, if passed, enabled large agricultural landowners to section off 2 acres or more of land for the purpose of building farmworker housing (Podger 2002).

Measure L received support from a broad coalition of local politicians, housing advocates, farm interests and vintners. Each of these groups appreciated the importance of farmworkers to the region's economic success and many understood that housing for this workforce was guided both by an economic and moral imperative. Also, Yountville Mayor Mary Lu Holt, stated that the region's farmworkers were "a very important part of [the] economic and social fabric" of Napa Valley (Podger 2002). Leading up to the March election, both the mayor and Joseph Phelps each agreed that expanding housing for this workforce was "the right thing to do" (Podger 2002; Sanchez 2003). Measure L was also supported by a "yes" campaign launched by a large array of supporters, including the Sierra Club, the Hispanic Network, the Napa Chamber of Commerce, St. Helena Catholic Church, and Joseph Phelps Vineyards (Podger 2002). The NIMBY attitudes in the region may have been addressed by this "yes" campaign, which sponsored community outreach efforts and "public forums" (Furhman 2001) to allow local residents to voice their concerns over the proposed housing projects. In a vote taking place on March 5, 2002, Measure L passed by an overwhelming majority of 71 percent (Glionna 2002). To some advocates, the passage of Measure L "culminated about nine years of effort to provide better housing for farmworkers" (Podger 2002). Later that same year, Napa Valley's agricultural landowners established a special assessment district when they voted by a majority of 85% to tax themselves \$7.66 (now \$10.00) per acre to pay for farmworker housing in the region (Firstenfeld 2002).

Greater Outreach

Passing Measure L allowed the Napa Valley Housing Authority ("NVHA") to begin construction of River Ranch on the eight acres of land previously donated by vintner, Joseph Phelps. By passing a special assessment district in 2002, Napa Valley's landowners ensured that

River Ranch and future developments would receive steady funding for operating costs. Located near the Napa River, the River Ranch Farmworker Housing Center opened in March of 2003 and was financed through an \$800,000 no interest loan from the Napa County Housing Trust Fund, a \$1.6 million state grant and \$650,000 from the Napa County Vintners Association (Firstenfeld 2002). Made up of four buildings around a central courtyard, River Ranch features a soccer field, barbecue area, laundry facilities and a multipurpose building for television and recreation (Sanchez 2003). Rooms are shared by two unaccompanied males, and three meals are provided each day, including sack lunches – all at a cost of \$11.50 a day in 2007 (Strochlic et al., 4-5). River Ranch was the fourth permanent farmworker housing camp administered by the NVHA when it opened and the first migrant housing facility built in Napa Valley for more than twenty years (Sanchez 2003). The NVHA obtained the Mondavi Farm Worker Center and Calistoga Farm Worker Center from local wineries in 1993 and expanded the number of beds found in these centers through extensive renovation (Glen Martin 2004). Like the Mondavi and Calistoga Farmworker Housing Centers, River Ranch is publicly run and provides 60 beds for unaccompanied males according to the Napa County Farmworker Housing Needs Assessment (“Napa County Study”), a 2007 study that relied on 200 farmworker surveys, 19 employer surveys, and focus groups with farmworkers in Napa County (Strochlic et al., 4).

Like River Ranch, the Napa County Study found that Mondavi and Calistoga each charged \$11.50 per night even though the cost of the camps was actually \$27 per bed. The rest was covered by Measure L funds, which assesses growers up to \$10.00 per acre (Strochlic et al., 4). Besides these public labor camps (180 beds total), Napa County had four mobile units (16 beds), the yurt camp previously mentioned (40 beds), and thirty privately owned labor camps (159 beds) in 2007 (Strochlic et al., 4). While private housing was generally perceived to be

more affordable, farmworkers cited several advantages to staying at the public labor camps, including less dependence on others to pay rent, management flexibility with respect to the timing to pay rent and less crowding (Strochlic et al., 4-5). The Napa County Study noted that the public labor camps had experienced vacancies in recent years that could possibly be addressed through “greater outreach” (Strochlic et al., v). In response to the Napa County Study, the Napa County Housing Authority was formed by the county Board of Supervisors to “support affordable housing initiatives” in the region (Villarejo 9). In 2010, all three of the public labor camps were operating at full capacity (Johnson 2010). That same year, the Napa Valley Farmworker Committee organized the Twelfth Annual Cinco De Mayo Golf Classic, with proceedings going to improve the education, housing and health care of local farmworkers (Times-Herald 2010). The money raised by these charitable events, together with financing and donations from county and municipal government, businesses, churches and local citizens (James 2011) have enabled River Ranch and the other public labor camps in Napa County to continue providing farmworkers with quality housing and three meals for just \$12.00 a day.

Conclusion and Recommendations

There has been little progress in farmworker housing since Carey Williams wrote optimistically about the “new type of agricultural economy” that could issue from the arrival of the Dust Bowl refugees and “their struggle for a decent life” in California (McWilliams 325). The “squalid” and “unhealthful” conditions observed in rural California during the 1930’s prompted a promising effort from state and federal policymakers, who experimented with “social planning” by founding twelve public labor camps that featured sanitary units and centralized community facilities (Hise 254). Although World War II was thought to cut short this “evolution” in low-cost community building (Hise 254), public support for farmworker housing

may have also decreased because Dust Bowl migrants (whose Anglo-Saxon names initially won sympathy from politicians) largely left the fields in search of better opportunities. Since the construction of the FSA labor camps, policymakers have done little to improve the housing conditions for a labor force that is widely regarded as indispensable.

This troubling reality is partly attributable to the historic tendency, among policymakers, to equate rural policy simply with farm policy, with little if any attention therefore being paid to “rural communities, their institutions and people” (Bonnen 191). For more than a century, this country has committed major public resources to improving the welfare and productivity of the farming sector, all in an attempt to prevent market forces from pushing “independent American farmers back into a rural peasant class” (Bonnen 191). But as James T. Bonnen notes, these agrarian policies have had the effect of concentrating power in the hands of the rural elite, reducing the number of farmers needed to supply food, and taking attention and resources away from the “low-income, retired, working poor and welfare populations scattered” throughout the rural countryside and concentrated in isolated communities (Bonnen 199). Given this skewed distribution of resources, it is not surprising that California’s agricultural industry continues to reap record profits (\$37.5 billion in 2010) while farm worker’s struggle to find even the most basic living quarters.

Largely ignored by policymakers and frequently viewed as outsiders, today’s farm laborers face many barriers to finding safe and affordable housing. For their advocates, even the best-intentioned housing efforts could be halted or delayed by so-called NIMBY views. If housing for this workforce is to succeed, farmworkers must be accepted into their communities as human beings rather than “expendable cogs” (Daniel 69) and the folk definition of “rural” must, in turn, be updated to reflect present-day circumstances and realities. Like the Dust Bowl

migrants of the 1930s, today's farmworkers also encounter "squalid" and "unhealthful" conditions but a governmental response (similar to the FSA Labor Camps) has not been forthcoming. As Napa Valley shows, housing for farmworkers can and should be addressed collectively by a broad coalition consisting of policymakers, farmers and non-profit groups – all accepting that housing for this indispensable workforce must be guided by both an economic and moral imperative. If the current housing shortfall for California's agricultural workforce is to be addressed, there must be a coherent rural policy that, at the very minimum, incorporate the following recommendations:

1. Removing the barriers to farmworker housing created by laws and ordinances.

Today's policymakers must re-write laws and ordinances that inhibit the planning and development of new housing for farmworkers. In the early 2000s, the Napa Valley Wine Auction raised \$453,000 for housing programs while local vintners were committed to help maintain and expand affordable housing in the region through a voluntary assessment. Nevertheless, one major obstacle stood in the way of better housing for farmworkers: Napa County's Agricultural Land Preservation Initiative, enacted in 1968, which mandated that a minimum of 40 acres of land was required before anyone could build a dwelling in the region's agricultural preserve. The 1968 Napa Valley Initiative is but one of countless laws and ordinances in the state that not only prevent the construction of new housing, but also inhibit low-income residents from utilizing "traditional strategies to provide cheap makeshift housing" for themselves (Fitchen 137). Mobile homes are the frequent target of such laws. For example, some municipal laws and ordinances attempt to control the mobile home's appearance on the day it is set up, which scholars feel ignore the "kind of incremental user-built changes" that occur more often in trailer parks (Wallis 43). Still other laws ignore the limited means of poor

inhabitants by preventing these residents from first moving into partially completed homes and then making improvements to their home as more resources become available. If the housing needs of farmworkers are to be met, state and local governments must thoroughly evaluate and address laws and ordinances that work to impede the construction of new housing units. Unclear, complex regulations should also be rewritten so as to streamline the development, construction and permitting of farmworker housing. As Napa Valley shows, the first step towards better housing for farmworkers often means removing the barriers created by laws and ordinances.

2. Promote vernacular or unconventional forms of housing.

To help alleviate the present housing crisis, policymakers must take steps to preserve the current vernacular housing stock, while encouraging the creation of new vernacular house forms. In rural areas more particularly, vernacular design has been featured in a broad range of house forms during the past century, ranging from the FSA Labor Camps of the 1930s to mobile homes and the “half-house” seen today in Appalachia. To outside observers, these structures frequently appear makeshift, dilapidated or substandard. But as Amos Rappaport has pointed out, these “house forms” are nevertheless the physical embodiment of the “desires, dreams and passion of a people” (Rappaport 1). This can be seen with the mobile home or house trailer, which are thought to be a “move up” in some communities and can afford a “simpler way of life closer to nature and voluntary social interaction” (Fitchen 126; Wallis 29). Recently, the use of shipping containers has emerged as a “green,” trendy and practical way of providing decent shelter. Most shipping containers are typically priced at between \$2,800 and \$4,800 depending on availability, and are sturdy enough to withstand the elements without any paint (Newcomb 2011). With the money saved on building materials, funds can be used to make improvements to these shipping containers, such as by installing solar panels on the flat-topped containers, using high-quality

insulation and adopting passive cooling strategies such as open-air ventilation (Newcomb).

Already, shipping containers have been used to provide housing to seasonal farmworkers. In the late 1990s, the Housing Authority of Grant County outfitted 26 forty-foot long stainless steel shipping containers with heating, cooling equipment and plumbing, transforming these shipping containers into 40 units (240 beds) of permanent housing in Matawa, Washington (Common Ground website). To solve such a widespread problem as inadequate housing for farmworkers, policymakers and advocates must not automatically disregard unconventional forms of housing. As seen with the shipping container, unconventional or vernacular housing can offer a green, practical and cost-effective way of providing sturdy housing for farmworkers, so long as safety remains a top priority. Inevitably, one of the challenges associated with unconventional or vernacular housing is finding the right balance between safety and convenience. While minimum guidelines must be established to ensure basic safety, advocates of alternative forms of housing should benefit from a process that is less bureaucratic and more streamlined. An important task for researchers might be to identify a means of ensuring that vernacular house forms are safe, while still preserving convenience and accessibility.

3. Revisiting self-help as a solution.

If policymakers cannot meet the immediate shelter needs of farmworkers, they should not automatically restrict the building autonomy of whom John Turner would call the “owner-builder” (Turner 1972, 243). Just as vernacular or unconventional forms of housing should be explored as solutions to the farmworker housing problem, policymakers should also take steps to preserve the owner-builder’s freedom to build. Inevitably this means supporting the non-profits that oversee the self-help construction process. According to some estimates, non-profit groups like People’s Self-Help, Self-Help Enterprises and CEDC can oversee the construction of 10,000

self-help homes per year if federal money was available (Greenhouse 7). If this potential is to be reached, the federal government must renew funding for programs like USDA Section 523, which is often used in conjunction with USDA Section 502. Ideally, a national fund for self-help housing would be set up, ensuring a steady and reliable source of funding to local non-profits actively involved in self-help efforts. On the ground, local self-help group could collaborate with local housing authorities and other non-profits to pursue multiple objectives, such as countering NIMBY views, recruiting volunteers and identifying suitable sites like vacant land or settlements in need of rehabilitation. In particular, local resistance to proposed self-help projects could be alleviated if local workers or companies were contracted to perform the plumbing and electrical work. Given the countless achievements of groups like Cabrillo, one proven method of expanding high-quality, affordable housing for farmworkers is to support the work of regional non-profit groups that specialize in rural housing, especially self-help.

4. Creating self-contained communities that can blossom into new towns.

A look at Napa Valley and the FSA Labor Camps of the 1930s reveals useful solutions to the problem of farmworker housing, particularly in rural regions encountering a mobile and fluctuating population of workers. In the face of widespread homelessness among the region's farmworker population, the County of Napa purchased twelve collapsible yurts in 2001. The yurts proved useful in meeting the immediate shelter needs of some farmworkers, while plans were underway to build more permanent facilities. In regions characterized by a mobile and fluctuating workforce, impermanent dwellings like yurts or unconventional house forms such as shipping containers can be purchased and assembled by the region's public housing authority, with the labor supplied by volunteer groups, non-profits or the farmworkers themselves. Like the FSA Labor Camps, these dwellings can be built around a "permanent institutional core" that

could serve to “stabilize camp life, to organize the floating pool of workers for potential employment or state relief” (Hise 247) and provide workers with services like healthcare and education. Non-profits in the region can be engaged to provide the latter services. Whenever feasible, important infrastructure and services should also be put in place to facilitate the future expansion and development of the settlement. Funding for these projects should not only come from the state and federal government, but also from private growers by way of an assessment. The money collected from growers could be used to purchase and maintain the settlement, hire staff, and finance future expansion and development. By requiring growers to help cover the cost of housing, the private market for impermanent or unconventional dwellings would be strengthened, which could lead to more competition, greater innovation and better housing for farmworkers. Like the FSA Labor Camps, these settlements should not be conceived as “way stations” but as “self-contained” communities that would have the infrastructure in place to facilitate the development of entire new towns (Hise 251).

5. Pursuing Larry Itliong’s vision of the UFW.

The housing initiatives in Napa Valley and Cabrillo Village, together with the ongoing work of the CEDC, should be regarded as models of farmworker housing. Nevertheless, if housing conditions for today’s agricultural workers are to improve, there must be changes to the current social system. Historically, this system has largely equated rural policy with farm policy, therefore creating a rural elite at the expense of the rural poor, especially farmworkers. Perhaps the greatest hope for change came during the 1960’s and 70s, with the rise of an interracial union led by Chavez and Itliong. Although the influence of the UFW has since faded, Itliong’s original vision of the Union is still relevant to today’s farmworkers. Together with Phillip Vera Cruz, Itliong envisioned the UFW as part of a “broad, all-encompassing movement” that delivered

services to constituents while operating from a “socialist base” that would attempt to alter the prevailing social system so that necessary resources could flow to farmworkers (Cruz 153). The UFW under Chavez did not prioritize important services like housing. But since the early 1990’s the UFW has dedicated more attention to providing services and programs for farmworkers, including affordable housing. Through the National Farmworker Service Center, which is run by Paul Chavez, the UFW has preserved, developed and rehabilitated more than 2,200 units of affordable rental housing across several states (Cesar Chavez Foundation Website).

In light of the current shortfall in farmworker housing, the issue of affordable housing must be a top priority for the unions that claim to represent the interests of farmworkers. Unions must build housing for farmworkers and can follow the model provided by CEDC. Ideally, unions would work in collaboration with regional housing groups like CEDC as part of a “broad, all-encompassing movement” that would attempt to alter the current rural system so that today’s farmworkers receive their long overdue services and resources. It should be noted that the Public Housing Act of 1937 could not have been passed without the support of unions during that era. Now, unions are again needed to lead the fight for better housing conditions for farmworkers.

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