Cultural Dynamics

There Will be No 'One Big Union': The Struggle for Interracial Labor Unionism in California Agriculture, 1933–1939

Cultural Dynamics
22(1) 29–48
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DOI: 10.1177/0921374010368307
http://cdy.sagepub.com

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Abstract

In California, between 1933 and 1939, Filipino, Japanese and Mexican farm workers engaged in far-reaching labor strikes. In this article, I argue that the practice of White supremacy prevented interracial farm labor unionism via the creation of a racial hierarchy that aligned Japanese, Mexicans and Filipinos into specific positions. Previous scholarship deemphasizes the roles of race and racism in analysis of farm worker mobilization. I focus upon four key actors, which actively maintained the hierarchy: landowners, the state, organized labor, and the White public.

Keywords

farm labor, Filipinos, Japanese, Mexicans, race

Introduction

In the early 20th century, large swathes of California farmland fell under the control of powerful owners in the state (Garcia, 1980). By 1929, Filipinos and Mexicans formed the core of 'cheap, skilled, mobile and temporary' (McWilliams, 1969: 65) agricultural labor in California. Japanese in California indeed did work as farm laborers, but a considerable number were tenant farmers so that the Japanese occupied a middle ground between that of worker and owner. The power of landowners over Filipino and Mexican workers and Japanese tenant farmers was considerable. So much so, that by 1930, 66 percent of all farm workers were held in the employ of only 7 percent of landowners (Chambers, 1952: 5).

Filipinos and Mexicans were the main source of agricultural labor and often competed with each other for jobs and 'to a lesser extent, with Japanese, South Asians, and Koreans'

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(Ngai, 2004: 106). Mexicans became a prime source of farm labor at the turn of the century and after 1910 constituted the bulk of farm workers in the California agricultural industry (Reisler, 1976). Filipino migrants had entered California in large numbers in the 1920s; many arrived from Hawaii (Coloma, 1974). But the majority had migrated directly from the Philippines (Lasker, 1931; Ngai, 2002).

Between 1920 and 1930, the Filipino, Mexican, and Japanese populations would increase tremendously. In 1930, California's Filipino population numbered 30,470—a significant increase from the 1920 figure of 2,674. The Mexican population in California stood at 368,013 in 1930—a threefold increase from the 1920 figure of 121,000. As for the Japanese population, it stood at 97,456 in 1930, an upsurge from the 1920 count of 71,952 (Bureau of the Census, 1932). Japanese and Mexicans constituted the two largest racial minority populations in 1930s California while Filipinos were the fourth largest minority group behind the Chinese. However, Filipinos seemed to be perceived as a more notorious group as they originated from a US colony. Further, Filipinos were the 'new' Asian group in the state as a result of their conspicuous population increase rate of over 1000 percent between 1920 and 1930.

Decades later in 1966, Filipino and Mexican farm workers would merge their respective labor unions, the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee and the National Farm Workers Association, into one mostly Mexican union led by Cesar Chavez. I contend elsewhere (2009) that the 1960s merger constitutes a moment of interracial solidarity, which was, in part, a movement against White supremacy that was not possible in previous decades. But why was such a movement not possible in the 1930s? This article argues that Filipinos and Mexicans were subjected to an ethos and practice of White supremacy in 1930s California that enacted a hierarchical arrangement of Asian and Mexican origin workers. These workers were indexed and ranked from 'capable' (Japanese) to 'less capable' (Mexicans) and 'detestable' (Filipinos). Therefore, I define White supremacy as a *social force that distributes resources—political, economic, and social—in such a way that the lived experiences and material outcomes are differentiated for each group.* Building on this definition, the article shows that White supremacy's ability to produce a racial hierarchy doomed efforts to create interracial farm labor unionism during the 1930s.

The article proceeds in the following manner. First, I offer a brief critical discussion of sociological and historical studies on farm labor mobilization. I argue that these studies seldom position race as a key investigative point of analysis. Thereafter, I examine historical sociological scholarship on agricultural workers of color. These studies put forward models that enable a rigorous comparative analysis of race and ethnicity. Next I present my empirical case by detailing the social and historical construction of a superior White 'American race' in the United States. The ensuing sections locate and discuss the disabling force of White supremacy in 1930s California agriculture as it emanated from four key sources: landowners, the state, organized labor, and the White public.

Race and the Farm Workers Movement

In studies of California's agricultural labor history, historians and social scientists tend in one of two directions. Either the analysis offers a straightforward interpretation of how

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farm workers are economically exploited by landowners. Or the workers are placed under the microscope of social movement theorists who strive to understand how exactly the farm workers movement of the 1960s was a success. Moreover, much of the scholarship elides how Mexican and Asian origin people were oppressed in different ways.

Carey McWilliams (1942, 1969), the great documenter of the farm working class in California, writes on how landowners throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries exploited farm workers of color. McWilliams (1969: 103) argues that 'the history of farm labor in California has revolved around the cleverly manipulated exploitation, by the large growers, of a number of suppressed racial minority groups which were imported to work in the fields'. Later, McWilliams ponders the 1930s strike waves and wonders why the strikes failed to coalesce into a united labor front. While illuminative, McWilliams's work poses the ensuing waves of Chinese, Japanese, Mexican, and Filipino workers as exploited groups that sequentially replaced each other. He does not offer a comprehensive breakdown of these groups' racial identity and how employers acted upon groups of people that they deemed not only inferior as a class group, but as racial groups as well.

Sociologists J. Craig Jenkins and Marshall Ganz analyze farm worker efforts to unionize. Jenkins notes the 'ethnic cleavages' (1985: 73) that existed between Filipino and Mexican workers. Further, Jenkins (1985: 73) argues that such divisions were historical creations resulting from 'immigration waves, the prominence of self-recruitment, and grower hiring policies'. White racism is not cited as one of the causal factors of intra-worker divisions. However, Jenkins does offer that White workers in the 1930s, many of them Dust Bowl refugees pejoratively tagged as 'Okies' and 'Arkies', were favored over workers of color. However, since workers of color had become entrenched as the main source of farm labor in the 1920s (Ngai, 2004: 106) and, as the analytical section will demonstrate, employers preferred Asian and Mexican labor, I propose that considerable strife surrounded the strike waves of the 1930s because racial and ethnic minority workers engaged in labor agitation.

In his study, Ganz (2000) contends that the United Farm Workers of America (UFW) was the embodiment of an 'ethnic labor organization'. After doing so, the analysis imparts precious little light on the forces and parameters of racial or ethnic identity within the movement. Further, Ganz explicates the 1960s and does not mention or analyze the predicament of farm workers in the 1930s as a precursor to what would occur three decades later. Considering the short shrift that racial dynamics experience in farm worker scholarship, I turn to historical sociological work to access theoretical tools that allow interpretation of agricultural workers and race in 1930s California.

Racial Hierarchy Models and Agricultural Laborers

In his study on late 19th-century California, Tomás Almaguer (1994) argues that racial groups, many of whom were agricultural workers, were stratified on a racial hierarchy that descended in the following order: Whites, Mexicans, Blacks, Asians, and Native Americans. However, moving into the 20th century, this hierarchy would transform as the Japanese curried greater favor with the White majority.

Writing on 1903 in the California community of Oxnard, Almaguer charts the unionization attempts of Japanese and Mexican beet toppers in the founding of the Japanese

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Mexican Labor Association (JMLA). The workers would garner some concessions, but organized labor, along with widespread racist sentiment, were wary of the nation's first all non-White, interracial labor union (Jamieson, 1945). Almaguer's central claim is that the specter of White supremacist practices and attitudes proved to be causal factors in the creation of a racial hierarchy. The JMLA would procure a membership of what the *Oxnard Courier* described as over 1000 'dusty skinned Japanese and Mexicans … most of them young and belonging to the lower class' (cited in Almaguer, 1994: 194).

The Oxnard beet strike displayed the first genuine example of large-scale interracial farm labor unionism in California. However, Japanese and Mexican workers were perceived differently. The *Los Angeles Times* reported after a violent shooting incident surrounding the labor unrest that Mexicans were responsible 'for most of the firing' and that Japanese workers were 'inclined to be peaceable' (cited in Almaguer, 1994: 194). Japanese and Mexican efforts were stifled and, further, it was clear that though they labored in the same kind of jobs, they occupied different racial positions within California society. Pursuant to their differentiated racial position, the class position of the Japanese would shift subsequent to the Oxnard strikes. Richard Steven Street (1998) reports that many Japanese beet toppers formed the Japanese Cooperative Contracting Company (JCCC) in February 1906—no evidence is provided that Mexican workers did or could have ascended to the position of labor contractor. Street (1998: 198) writes that the JCCC 'did advertise itself as representing long-time Japanese sugar beet workers, but not Mexicans'.

Sociologist Moon-Kie Jung provides additional evidence of parallel and vertically aligned racial and class inequality. He examines racism's effect on the class position of *haoles* (White landowners) and Portuguese, Japanese, and Filipino workers in Hawaii between the First and Second World Wars. Jung (1999) maps a racial hierarchy that produces a corresponding class position for each group of workers with Portuguese workers at the top, Japanese in an intermediary location, and Filipinos at the lowest position. Divided along mutually reinforced lines of race and class, the multiracial set of workers in Hawaii encountered a daunting task in striving to build interracial labor unionism.

We witness a situation in 1930s California that is not altogether different from interwar Hawaii and 19th-century California. As in Hawaii, workers of color were unable to build a successful movement in interwar California. Japanese, Filipino, and Mexican laborers were relegated to similar, but not identical, positions on a race and class hierarchy. As in late 19th-century California, the article exhibits how all three groups were perceived in unique ways and thus subjected to group-specific forms of racism.

Building the Supreme White Race

Thomas F. Gossett postulates that in the early 20th century, an 'American race' (1997: 319), embodying a racial and nationalist ideology, emerged. This conception of the 'American race' would be grounded in Anglo-Saxon identity and domination (Horsman, 1981). By pulling apart this racial and national identity, it is apparent that the ideology of White supremacy rests upon a tautological rationale: Whites are superior in every way—physically, cognitively, culturally—and thus should have more privilege and resources; furthermore, Whites have more privilege and resources because of their innate superiority.

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Certainly, a description of how White supremacy is designed proves to be helpful, but what are the literal effects on people of color?

Historian George M. Frederickson's (1981) study of the US and South Africa lays out several variables that allow for White domination. Via comparative historical analysis, Frederickson (1981: 213) explains that a central goal of White supremacy subsequent to Emancipation 'was control of black labor by white employers' thus subjecting Blacks to both race and class inequality. David Roediger (1999: 20) disseminates how White supremacy has historically perpetuated race and class inequality as 'racial formation and class formation' are directed 'to penetrate each other at every turn'. Roediger proffers a thesis (1999) that Whiteness creates the domain of working class identity for Whites only and ensures that Blacks simultaneously form the 'anchor' (Warren and Twine, 1997) of that identity. Blacks are thus the core and the foil of White workers' race and class identities. Workers of color are an uninvited guest, an intruder, and perceived competition for working class identity and jobs. Most significantly, they represent a perversion of the conflated racial, national, and class identities of White working class Americans. The analyses from Frederickson and Roediger offer path-breaking conceptualizations of White supremacy. However, their focus is binary race relations: interactions between Black and White. This article offers a take on how White supremacy differentiates between groups of color when it contends with more than one non-White group.

Indeed Filipino, Japanese, and Mexican workers in 1930s California encountered the insidious nature of White racial and class domination. This is evidenced in a 1934 *Los Angeles Times* editorial. Bemoaning the candidacy of socialist Upton Sinclair for governor, the editorial speaks of the difficulties confronting this 'supreme' racial group in the Depression era. The article wrote:

> Until now, it might be said that the Americans were a nomadic race—at least in a spiritual sense. They lived in a land of milk and honey with great forests, free lands and untouched resources for the grasping. The pioneer period has come to an end. … This involves a readjustment of physical needs, but not of patriotic ideals. (*Los Angeles Times,* 1934)

In an earlier portion of the piece, the paper speaks disparagingly of striking farm workers in the Imperial Valley, east of San Diego on the US–Mexico border. The editorial speaks to Whites of their own superiority while invoking the lowly Mexican strikers in the cotton fields of the Imperial Valley as potential imposters upon this identity. Yet, Mexicans would not encounter White supremacy in identical fashion to other workers of color. The variant placements of groups of color onto a racial hierarchy would defuse opportunities to foment an interracial response to racist domination.

The Farm Labor Strikes of 1930s California

The 1930s was a tumultuous decade in California history. In economic turmoil because of the Great Depression, few groups were more deprived than farm workers. In the years from 1933 to 1939, the state's burgeoning agribusiness would witness unprecedented strike waves. Filipino and Mexican workers would comprise a large number of these striking workers (Garcia, 1980; Gregory, 1989). Japanese farmers would be caught in the

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middle as a group who possessed more capital, privilege, and status than Filipinos and Mexicans, but still maintained an unequal position with respect to Whites in the racial hierarchy of the time period. Moreover, there were some Japanese farm workers involved in the mobilization efforts.

In 1933, 30 'major' strikes (Wollenberg, 1972: 163) involving upwards of 50,000 workers took place (Jamieson, 1945; Wollenberg, 1972). By 1939, 180 agricultural strikes transpired (Jamieson, 1945; McWilliams, 1942). The strikes often became physically violent episodes as landowner-controlled law enforcement and angry White mobs reacted to the agitation (DeWitt, 1980; Fisher, 1953; McWilliams, 1942, 1969). One worker, in the northern city of Hollister, recalled that, in response to a 1936 strike, the notorious grower organization, the Associated Farmers, 'tried to run the workers out of the area. But [sic] they refused to leave. Most of this was up in the southside of Hollister … Of course there was [sic] fights. They used ax handles and baseball bats.' Furthermore, the strikes were deemed criminal and frightening activity by landowners as the strike leaders were portrayed as Communists:

> [The Associated Farmers] would claim that those people [CIO organizers] were around here in the area. They would hand out pictures of them to be aware of. Because they said they were probably Reds or Communists ... and they told us a lot of stories how they were bad people and would cause a lot of trouble.[1]

Three years previously, in a 1933 issue, the *Los Angeles Times* quoted Los Angeles Police Department Chief James E. Davis as he heaped praise on his own for keeping the city safe and strike-free. Chief Davis portrays Los Angeles as an urban oasis that escaped the labor uproar which had occurred in the exterior regions of the state, 'The amount of effort and tact extended by this department in the prevention and control of labor strikes and Communistically tended riots cannot be measured in mere words or statistics' (*Los Angeles Times,* 1933).

Further, the police boss had instituted a 'Red Squad' that restricted any activities deemed subversive and operated with the blessing of government and business leaders.[2]

In the face of strike unrest, employers could rely on law enforcement, but still deemed it necessary to organize their interests and did so in amalgamating various landowners into the organization known as the Associated Farmers (Chambers, 1952; Jenkins, 1985). Conversely, but not surprisingly, farm workers were an unstable group that would find it difficult to match the deft manner in which landowners organized. Farm workers moved from work site to work site, were marginalized people, and did not possess the commensurate resources necessary to effectively respond to powerful landowners and growers.

Different Races for Different Jobs

Concomitant with their desire for lower wages, California landowners expressed 'racial preferences' for certain kinds of workers. Indeed landowners constructed farm workers of color as unique groups, which they subjected to 'qualitatively different racisms' (Jung, 2002: 392). Lloyd Fisher (1953: 7) writes:

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> To be sure, the farmer has preferences, but these are racial preferences. The Filipino is preferred because Filipinos are presumed to be skilled agricultural workers. The Mexican is preferred to the White because of a presumption that he is less 'independent.' The Negro is least favorably regarded.

As it were, Filipinos were regarded as appropriate for certain kinds of crops such as lettuce and asparagus (Fisher, 1953; Jenkins, 1985), but posed a threat as labor agitators. As for Mexicans, they were perceived as a malleable group of dimwits who could be exploited with ease and sent over the border to Mexico where they remained an accessible, cheap labor force (Hoffman, 1974).

Moreover, Whites were not excluded from this racial schema. In fact, they formed the justification as to why landowners would desire cheap workers of color. White workers were perceived as a group who would stake their claim to the status of workers who deserved a higher wage. Additionally, White workers did not visualize themselves as mere farm workers; the performance of farm labor by Whites made the occupation a loftier calling. One White worker recalled that previous to 'thinking of agricultural labor as Mexican work. … There were whites in the fields, whites in the packinghouses. Before, it never used to be a disgrace to work in the fields.'[3]

But even in the 1930s and with the influx of Okies and Arkies and thus a seemingly substantial and cheap labor reservoir, the powers that be contended that Whites were physiologically unequipped to carry out farm work anyway. One official in the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, George P. Clements, argued that farm labor was a type of work 'to which the oriental and Mexican due to their crouching and bending habits are fully adopted, while the white is physically unable to adapt himself' (cited in Hoffman, 1974: 10). Further, the historical record indicates that Whites were certainly in the packinghouses and sheds, but not out in the fields in large numbers (Ngai, 2002).

In the comparison of 'oriental' and Mexican labor, landowners preferred Mexican workers. Compared to Filipino and Japanese workers they were not perceived as people with the capacity to strike. Further, Mexican workers were in large supply and easily disposable, but this is far too simple an explanation as to why Mexicans were the most prized type of worker. One California landowner and walnut farmer, Charles Teague (1944: 141), opined that Mexicans were the favorite worker of land barons because they are 'naturally adapted to agricultural work, particularly in the handling of fruits and vegetables'. Again, we observe the racialization of workers of color that constructs them as suited to agricultural work. However, the key point here is that Mexican workers offered two ideal qualities: physically predisposed for agricultural labor while not raising a fuss about their plight as exploited workers.

It was Filipino and Japanese workers who were made out to be labor agitators that threatened the racial and class order. Historian Cletus Daniel (1981) argues that Japanese workers had developed their own niche in the California agricultural industry along with effective strategies to bargain for higher wages. While this certainly was the case, I will add that, subsequent to their ascension to the class level of tenant farmer, many Japanese farm operators—like White landowners—possessed an interest in snuffing out strike actions. Indeed there were Japanese farm workers but it is essential to note Japanese farmers' unique position as an employer group. By 1910, the same year that Mexicans

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came to dominate the agricultural labor force, many Japanese had become either growers or sharecroppers in California (Iwata, 1992) and oversaw more than 170,000 acres of California farmland, which was rented from White landowners (Wollenberg, 1972). Further, legal mandates by the California Alien Land Laws of 1913 and 1920 barred Japanese Californians from becoming property owners and blocked any ascension to the racial and class status of White landowners.

The 'Desirable' Japanese

Thus, the racial hierarchy in 1930s California agriculture constructed and reified a racialized social system in which the Japanese were regarded by Whites more favorably as compared to Filipinos and Mexicans. For example, near the northern cities of Vacaville and Winters, one local resident in 1935 stated that 'The most desirable renter that they [landowners] have is the Japanese. They are not as bad at impoverishing the soil as the Spanish and the Italians.'[4] In contrast, Filipinos built a 'reputation for militancy and radicalism' (Daniel, 1981: 109) which made them the least desirable group of people. This is not to infer that the Japanese were or could ever be White supremacists. However, their racial and economic position had a distinct effect on where their interests lay as farm operators.

However, some Japanese labored as farm workers and took an interest in labor mobilization. One flyer distributed to Japanese residents in San Francisco denounced oppression of racial minorities and called for racial and working class unity:

> The condition of the Japanese, along with Chinese, Filipino and Negro masses is getting worse under the Merriam administration and the 'New Deal.' The Japanese is hired for cheap wages and is discriminated against in daily life. … Workers and poor farmers have no reason to struggle among themselves on national or color lines;—all are exploited by the bankers and landlords.[5]

Indeed, intra-Japanese class variance reveals how the Japanese negotiated a tight intermediary space between Whites above and the Filipino and Mexican workers beneath them on a racial hierarchy. As will be shown, Japanese growers in the Imperial Valley replaced their Mexican workers with Whites; meanwhile, Japanese workers in San Francisco called for interracial cooperation.

As noted earlier, Japanese tenant farmers cannot be assessed as White supremacists but they cooperated with Whites in maintaining the stratified social order of the day. This demonstrates how White supremacy's differentiation of groups of color produces what Moon-Kie Jung (2002) terms 'different racisms'. As Jung demonstrates in 1930s Hawaii, the Japanese are not accepted as Whites but they are deemed as nearer to Whites. I contend that White supremacy functioned in a similar fashion within California agriculture, which opened the door to a modicum of economic cooperation between the two groups located at the hierarchical apex: Whites and Japanese.

For example, in dealing with Mexican strikers in 1935, a message in English and Japanese was sent out to growers/employers in the Imperial Valley: the 'NOTICE' was composed by a committee of three White growers (Jack, Harrigan, and Beleal) and three

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Japanese growers (Uchida, Sasaki, and Matsumoto) in conjunction with General P. D. Glassford, who had been called in by the government to settle unrest in the area. The memorandum dictated that only American workers (read: White) could be employed in shed work. Ngai (2004) indicates that indeed shed work had been the exclusive right of White workers and workers of color were restricted to work in the fields. Significantly, the command ordered 'that the alien Mexican packers be replaced by Americans returning them [Mexicans] to the field work'.[6] Thus, Japanese growers worked in conjunction with their White counterparts to head off strike activity.

In 1933 El Monte, ten miles east of Los Angeles, further exemplifies the outcomes of a racial hierarchy engendered by White supremacy. Japanese growers faced demands for higher wages from Mexican workers, who they employed as berry pickers. As strikes ensued, White institutions in the community, represented most prominently by the El Monte Chamber of Commerce, ensured that Japanese growers made concessions (Wollenberg, 1972). This action on the part of the Chamber of Commerce is not to be mistaken for magnanimity toward Mexicans. Local public aid programs were breaking under the strain of providing support to striking workers. Expressing deep concern for the public coffers and taking into account that Japanese growers could not pay rent to local White landowners if berries were not picked, the pressure to concede was insurmountable.

Further, Wollenberg (1972) describes how Mexican workers believed that racial tensions were at play with their Japanese employers in El Monte—a situation not limited to the southern portion of the state. Filipino workers also maintained that their Japanese overseers looked down on them. Up north in Salinas, one Filipino worker expressed deep animosity for Japanese bosses, 'Most of the farms then [in the 1930s] were run by Japanese. You had to really earn your wages. They were slave drivers. They said if you weren't working fast enough, you were out of work.'[7]

Another worker uprising occurred in Venice in April 1935, beginning with strikes in the celery fields: 4,500 Filipino, Mexican and Japanese workers walked off the job and spurred a series of mini-strike waves throughout the community. No love was apparently lost between the workers and their Japanese employers as 'during the labor troubles, kidnapping [sic], rioting, raids, pitched battles, and the use of airplanes from which to drop rocks on field workers were resorted to'. Nobura Tsuchida (1984) narrates how the dispute was resolved with a labor deal agreed upon between the workers' representatives—the California Farm Laborers Association and the Federation of Farm Workers of America—and the growers' organization—the Southern California Farm Los Angeles County (SCFFLAC), which held within its membership 800 Japanese farmers (*Los Angeles Times,* 1936). Though the SCFFLAC was a Japanese organization, Tsuchida (1984) reports, based on his reading of a Los Angeles Japanese newspaper (*Rafu Shimpo*), that throughout the strikes growers drew the backing of local law enforcement agencies, Japanese civic organizations, the US Immigration Service, and the Japanese Consulate. The workers appealed to the broader public with a meeting at Union Church in Little Tokyo where spokespeople for Filipino and Mexican laborers were provided with an opportunity to plead the workers' case. However, by early June, the strikes terminated when 'Mexican workers unilaterally accepted hourly rates ten cents lower than the strikers request' (Tsuchida, 1984: 459).

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Japanese tenant farmers and White landowners had clearly defined goals: to maintain a status quo of low wages and a tight grip on their labor force. In carrying out this agenda, landowners and farm operators had several factors operating in their favor. As for workers, they had little to rely upon except for their own ability to walk off the job and eventually the Communist Party. Communist ideals represented an ideological construct that operated to draw Filipinos, Japanese, and Mexicans together under the banner of exploited workers. Throughout the early portion of the 1930s, the Communist Party-supported Trade Union Unity League (TUUL) was a key player in most of the labor agitation. Most prominently, the TUUL was the driving force behind the formation of the Cannery and Agricultural Industrial Workers' Union (CAIWU), which had organized Mexican berry pickers in El Monte.

Daniel (1981) contends that Mexican participation in TUUL sanctioned activity should not be equated to acquiescence with Communist philosophy. Yet Jamieson (1945) points out that prominent labor organizers, which he specifically names—Japanese, Filipino, and Mexican—indeed subscribed to Communist ideals. However, for Mexicans in El Monte, Communist ideals were not adequate to address their conflict with Japanese employers as it required them to assert themselves *purely* as workers—the struggle could only be understood as class struggle. As previously stated, Mexican strikers felt that there was racial as well as class tension between themselves and their Japanese employers. Mexican workers disagreed with the way in which the CAIWU attempted to deracialize the labor strife (Wollenberg, 1972).

Further, historian Eiichiro Azuma (1998: 164) demonstrates that indeed tense race relations were at play between Japanese farm operators and their workers. Azuma reports on a tendency for Japanese tenant farmers to identify Mexicans 'as more "docile" and "better" than Filipinos, who had already struck against farmers elsewhere in California'. However, this racialized differentiation of workers, in which Mexicans were considered more favorable, occurred when Japanese employers could exclude Filipinos. Azuma (1998: n. 90) asserts, based on his readings of Japanese newspapers, that when Mexicans did carry out strike activity, such as in El Monte, 'Filipinos often became a "good" race—that is, a friend of the Issei farming class—while Mexicans were considered the main menace.' Thus, the ordering of the racial hierarchy was open to the manipulation of those groups who sat atop of it.

The State and Interracial Labor Unionism

With few resources available and few advocates to defend them, working with known Communists was perhaps the only alternative for Filipino, Japanese, and Mexican workers but it was a perilous relationship upon which to embark. In 1919, the California legislature had enacted the State Syndicalism Law. Thereafter, state law deemed a criminal anyone who subscribed to 'any doctrine or precept' which advocated or employed actions that would serve to create 'a change in industrial ownership or control, effecting any political change' (text of the statute cited from Solow, 1935: 14). Subsequently, it was the presence of Communist-led activity and convenient anti-Communist legislation that would provide landowners in California with good reason to coalesce into their own anti-labor organization: the Associated Farmers.

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The Associated Farmers as a name for the landowners' organization was a misnomer. The group was a complex of powerful land barons, big industry—such as businesses, which shipped and processed agricultural products—and the banking sector—in particular, the Bank of America. The organization would utilize the State Criminal Syndicalism Law to deal, in effect, a deathblow to CAIWU-led strikes, bringing them to an end by 1934, and thereby dissolving the only organization which advocated for interracial labor unionism. In a 1934 report by the Associated Farmers, which can be characterized as big capital's white paper on the strike waves of the period, the organization stated that the program of the CAIWU and 'the Communist Party … embodies the overthrow of the American form of government by force, suppression of religion, and the establishment of a central control, or dictatorship, by the workers themselves'. Furthermore, though the report spoke most specifically about southern California, it identified Communist-led agricultural strikes as a statewide/industry-wide problem: 'It is a program [labor strikes] primarily directed toward the perishable crops of California agriculture. It is a situation which must be met by agriculture as a whole.'[8]

In 1935, 'agriculture as a whole', along with the aid of the state apparatus, would finish off the CAIWU in a Sacramento courthouse where union leaders were convicted of violating the Syndicalism statute. However, the trial in 1935 constituted far more than a crackdown on Communist activity. I contend that the legal verdict was a state-sanctioned renouncement of interracial labor unionism. The prosecuting lawyer in the case, Sacramento district attorney Neil McAllister, informed the jury that 'the defendants do not believe in religion or the superiority of the white to the negro and yellow races' (Solow, 1935: 20). Moreover, McAllister argued that convicting the defendants would be tantamount to carrying out the tenets of patriotic duty (Solow, 1935: 20). Indeed, the strike leaders had engaged in not only Communist action, but had done so with the other. Consequently, farm workers of color in 1930s California faced not only a battle for higher wages, but more significantly, they encountered the devastating force of White supremacist ideology which worked to disassemble any effort to create interracial working class consciousness. These workers constituted an inferior group of people in which race and class were 'mutually constitutive' (Jung, 2006) and acted to relegate workers of color to the lowest levels of the labor market. But White supremacy would also exert itself in excluding Filipinos and Mexicans from the actual nation-state space of the US. Both groups would be subjected to repatriation programs, legal and illegal, that would seek to have them removed from the country.

Still, Filipino and Mexican farm labor activism did not fade into decline subsequent to the Sacramento decision. Stuart Jamieson (1945: 129) reports that 'farm labor unions grew rapidly among Filipinos, as among Mexicans' subsequent to the CAIWU's state-engineered demise. However, growers reasoned that Filipinos were the party responsible for priming the labor movement pump. A newspaper account from Brawley in the Imperial Valley offered that Filipinos (Jamieson, 1945: 131, citing from the *Brawley News*) 'brought labor disturbances in the valley' and that 'growers are not pleased'. Though growers may have focused upon Filipinos as the central labor agitation threat, Jamieson (1945: 132) reasons that Filipinos 'won their greatest gains when they had cooperated closely with organized Mexicans and whites'.

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Undesirables: Filipinos and Mexicans in the National Space

Though Filipinos and Mexicans underwent the threat of repatriation, both groups were filtered out differently in the national imagination. They were colonized subjects who were neither American citizen nor outright foreigner (Ngai, 1999, 2002, 2004). Coming from a colonial outpost, workers from the Philippines were not subject to the 1924 Immigration Act. Though the Filipino population in California in 1930 of 30,500 did not compare with that of the Mexican population of 368,000, H. Brett Melendy (1967) asserts that Filipinos were significant to the White majority as they represented the dreaded 'third Oriental wave' to invade California (subsequent to the Chinese and Japanese). This 'Oriental wave' was not merely a physically different colonial subject. They were racialized as a hygienically unfit group who were predisposed to engage in labor agitation and sexual relationships with White women.

Consequently, between 1933 and 1935, the Congress would consider a series of bills that would move legislative efforts toward the institution of a Filipino repatriation program. On 10 July 1935, President Roosevelt signed House Resolution 6464 into law. Two provisions in the law stand out. First, the law's text is clear that Filipinos would not be forcefully deported from the country. However, another provision mandated that any Filipino person who took the offer of free passage back to the Philippines would not be allowed re-entry into the country. As a result, there were few takers of the 'offer'; only 2,036 individuals would end up choosing to return the Philippines by the termination of the program in July 1940 (Ngai, 2002). Further, Ngai (1999) argues that, though only a few accepted the offer of free passage (most from the middle-class), the goal of repatriation efforts are more nuanced than being simple removal programs. They are a message to the targeted group—regardless of whether they vacate or not—that they are undesirables.

In contrast, Mexicans were not current colonial subjects in the 1930s, but had been the objects of conquest by the US subsequent to the Mexican American War of 1848 (Acuña, 1988; Barrera, 1979; Montejano, 1987). Throughout the 1930s, Mexicans would be repatriated by an illegal program that would force Mexican-descent people, some of them US citizens, 'back' to Mexico. Mexicans, not unlike Filipinos, served well as an economic scapegoat in tight economic times (Balderrama and Rodriguez, 1995; Hoffman, 1974). Consequently, from the years 1930 to 1937, over 500,000 Mexicans would be deported from the United States. Many of these people would be children who held US citizenship (Hoffman, 1974).

The repatriation of Mexicans from the US was a forcible removal of people from many parts of the country. Efforts were carried out in Chicago, Detroit, and Gary, Indiana. However, the main stage for the repatriation program of Mexicans was in California, particularly Los Angeles (Gutiérrez, 1995; Hoffman, 1974). McWilliams (1969) argues that the impetus for directing repatriation efforts toward California's Mexican population was, in part, at the directive of landowners. The propertied elite was deeply concerned, as already illustrated by the formation of the Associated Farmers, in regards to any labor organization farm workers would endeavor to create. Removing Mexicans from California would, hopefully for powerful landowners, extract some portion of the labor agitation threat.

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The number of repatriated Mexicans far outnumbered Filipinos who returned to the Philippines. Yet, Filipinos appeared to be the group which drew considerable ire as compared to Mexicans, as was seen in the previous section. Mexicans were assessed as reliable, necessary labor. Balderrama and Rodríguez (2006: 101) write that, in the 1930s, the powers that be 'were repeatedly implored to desist from repatriating indigent Mexicans until after the crops had been harvested'. Further, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce official, George P. Clements, contrasted Mexicans as more desirable than Filipinos who were deemed (Balderrama and Rodríguez, 2006: 101) 'the most worthless, unscrupulous, shiftless, semi-barbarian that has ever come to our shores'.

A possible reason that Mexican labor remained more desirable—even in the midst of deportations—is that Mexicans often worked as a family unit (Balderrama and Rodríguez, 2006: 45–8). Conversely, Filipino men were single and lacked a sizeable number of potential Filipina marriage partners. The lack of family meant that Filipinos were solo workers, bringing no additional laborers in the form of immediate relatives, and were conceived as a threat to Whites and, in particular, White women. A White resident of Salinas, in 1930, expressed abhorrence of Filipinos since 'they will not leave our white girls alone and frequently intermarry' (cited in Melendy, 1967: 67). A San Joaquin County labor official remarked that a Filipino contractor 'brings women (white women) into the camp as well as booze' (Melendy, 1967: 67).

'One Big Union'?: White Organized Labor Says 'No'

Organized labor was not receptive of Filipino and Mexican organization efforts either. Specifically, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) was unwilling to be racially inclusive of all agricultural laborers. In the development of an official policy toward both Filipinos and Mexicans, the California Federation of Labor (CFL) would officially support the exclusion of Filipinos, in slight favor of Mexicans, from the agricultural labor force (Pivar, 1967). This policy was reiterated from 1927 to 1931 at annual CFL conventions (Fuller, 1991: 53). Though on a small scale, this racism-laden, nativist sentiment was reflected at a more macro and state-level when the US Congress instituted anti-Filipino legislation in the 1930s (Baldoz, 2004).

Moreover, agricultural workers, no matter what their racial and ethnic identity, had been disallowed the right to collective bargaining when they were excluded from the provisions of the Wagner Act of 1935 (more formally known as the National Labor Relations Act) (Mariano, 1940). This distinction of being an industrial worker was necessary to engage in the labor negotiation process. Both landowners and organized labor subscribed to this view of workers as inhabiting categories of either industrial or non-industrial worker. But the designation moved beyond job classification and disproportionately harmed workers of color, especially those in California's agricultural industry. Workers of color could not be categorized as industrial workers since they did not labor in the sheds and packinghouses. In defining only industrial workers as labor union-eligible (in the sheds and packinghouses), the implication for farm workers of color was that to be defined as an industrial worker meant being White.

In February 1937, 97 delegates representing more than 100,000 farm workers met in San Francisco in an AFL sponsored gathering. The workers called to dissolve this class,

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racial, and labor line drawn between industrial and non-industrial workers. Representatives envisioned 'one big union' which would unite both 'cannery and field workers' (Chambers, 1952: 35). However, the AFL was in favor of no such action. Oddly, the organization leadership desired to organize farm workers, such as Filipino lettuce workers in Salinas, but was unwilling to grant these workers actual membership in the labor union (DeWitt, 1980).

In response to this noncommittal commitment, delegates founded the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA), which was affiliated with the recently formed CIO (Committee for Industrial Organization—later to be known as the Congress for Industrial Organizations). Within the AFL and the newly minted CIO, workers were supposed to be industrial workingmen. Citing this shortcoming, UCAPWA focused on unionizing workers within the agricultural industry who worked in the processing plants *and* in the fields (Chambers, 1952). Therefore, a key UCAPAWA initiative was to blur the line between the industrial and agricultural worker in order to assemble workers across these lines. Thus by implication, this was a movement toward interracial unionism.

As it were, the CIO was a newly formed umbrella organization made up of a few unions who held some contempt for the AFL. That is to say that the UCAPAWA had allies, but they would not be powerful enough to overcome the AFL and its resistance to farm workers of color. Nevertheless, by the time of UCAPAWA's first national meeting in Denver in July 1937, many Filipino, Mexican, and Japanese labor unions would become incorporated into the structure of UCAPAWA (Jamieson, 1945). However, historian Howard DeWitt (1980) asserts that, even within the confines of the UCAPAWA, Filipino demands were not being met.

While Filipinos and Mexicans had cooperated with Japanese and even White workers in agricultural strikes, especially in CAIWU-led activity in 1933, many remained within group specific labor organizations. Mexican workers had organized unions such as El Confederacion de Uniones de Campesinos y Obreros Mexicanos del Estado de California (CUCOM), the Mexican Agricultural Workers Union, and the American Mexican Union. Filipino workers pieced together their own unions, among them were the Filipino Labor Association, the Filipino Labor Supply Association, and the Filipino Labor Union Incorporated of Guadalupe (Jamieson, 1945). Though they maintained their own labor organizations, there are examples of cooperation between Filipino and Mexican workers much to the chagrin of landowners and Japanese tenant farmers. This is evidenced by the previously noted Venice strikes in 1935.

Stuart Jamieson (1945) asserts that when there was cooperation between Filipinos, Mexicans, and Whites, there were significant labor victories. However, there were splits within Filipino organizations as to how much cross-racial cooperation should actually take place. Individuals, such as the secretary of the Filipino Labor Union Incorporated (FLU), C. D. Mensalves, 'favored a policy of racial exclusiveness and opposed affiliation with other labor organizations' (Jamieson, 1945: 132). This may be attributable to the ways landowners and the labor union power structure (as embodied by the AFL) racialized workers of color and viewed industrial, White workers as superior and labor union eligible. But Filipino and Mexican workers may not have interpreted their own interests as identical. However, a group such as the Associated Farmers, repatriation

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efforts, and resistance from labor unions are evidence of the racial oppression from White institutions in society.

Filipinos underwent a differentiated experience with racism as compared to Mexicans. Labor unions did not want them. As deportable subjects, they were characterized as 'semi-barbarian'. Filipino workers' position at the bottom of a racial hierarchy within California agriculture is further evidenced by the racist violence to which they were subjected. These racist feelings would be expressed in the form of bigoted riots directed toward Filipino farm workers

The White Public and Racist Terrorism

Historian Eric T. L. Love (2004: 164) writes that US colonization of the Philippines constitutes the 'culminating event … on race and American imperialism in the late nineteenth century'. Love shows that US imperialists, ever cognizant of connections between race and colonization and hoping to obfuscate those links, operated to '*remove* race from the debates' (2004: 164; Love's emphasis) over a potential takeover of the archipelago. Advocates for empire building aimed to defuse concerns in regards to how the US state could govern a racially mixed empire. One such concern articulated by a former government official warned the reading public that governing the Philippines would mean 'running the risk incident to the admission of distant and alien peoples to full citizenship' (cited from *North American Review* in Love, 2004: 181). *The Nation* voiced concern that annexation of the Philippines opened the door for 'incorporation into our system of an immense group of islands' and 'eight millions of people of various races, that are for the most part either savage or but half-civilized' (Love, 2004: 181).

Indeed the effects of racism rooted within imperial endeavors persisted into 20th century as Filipinos were subjected to White terrorism in 1930s California. While anti-Filipino terrorism that occurred in the year 1930 obviously predates the strike waves between 1933 and 1939, I assert that anti-Filipino riots in that year provide a reliable measurement of the social atmosphere which Filipinos experienced throughout the decade.

Beginning in Watsonville, racist anger toward Filipinos would crystallize in violent scenes. On 19 January upwards of 500 'blue collar' Whites marched through the town proclaiming that Filipinos posed a threat to society as a 'social and sexual problem' (DeWitt, 1976: 46–7). The fear that Filipino men would engage in sexual relationships with White women caused a great stir in the local community. Filipinos would respond to the onslaught of White gangs by fighting back, but would be unable to gain an upper hand in how the local media would depict them. Historian Howard DeWitt cites one newspaper whose coverage of the riots was summed up in a headline, 'FILIPINOS RIOT ON WATSONVILLE STREETS' (cited from the *Santa Cruz News* in DeWitt, 1980: 47). The newspaper thus posed Filipinos as the rioters though much evidence points to the fact that 'Filipino riots' were a justified reaction to the White mobs.

Moreover, the state of California issued a post-riot report on Filipino migration into the state that did not allow a favorable depiction of the group among the White public. The bulletin (State of California, 1930: 72) pronounced that 'Filipinos are taking the places of white workers in many of the occupations in which they find employment upon arrival into California.' Taking into consideration several instances of rioting against

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Filipinos in Watsonville, Exeter, Tulare county, and Monterey county, the state concluded (p. 76) that Whites were understandably upset since 'the appearances and customs of the Islanders … aroused the acrimony and hostility of the white residents'.

One Filipino farm worker in a community nearby Watsonville described the trying daily life of the 1930s:

> Even if you had the money we weren't allowed in hotels or in some restaurants they refused to serve you. Right in Salinas, that was so. If you walked the street even with friends of another race, the people would say 'hey gugu, monkey.' That's the way people treated us.[9]

Paul A. Kramer (2006: 127) offers that the racist epithet, 'gugu', was part and parcel of a 'distinctive Philippine American colonial vocabulary that focused hatreds around a novel enemy'. Though the racial slur originated in the Philippines from US military personnel, as Kramer argues, in California it was only a portion of derogatory practices and language that the White public would use to oppress Filipino workers.

North of San Francisco in Vacaville, about 90 miles from Salinas, the local police chief cited Filipinos as the primary threat to the wellbeing of the local community. The chief, in 1935, attested that 'the Filipinos are the least desirable additions to any community' and showed an interviewer a 'large exhibit of arms [guns and various weapons]' that had allegedly had been taken from local Filipinos. Further, the chief contrasted Filipinos and other groups such as the Chinese with a positive assessment of Japanese people who took 'care of each other and do not cause any trouble in the community'.[10] A local judge in San Francisco, in 1936, deemed Filipinos as 'scarcely more than savages' (cited in Kramer, 2006: 407).

As for the riots in Watsonville, they would subside within a few days, but culminated in the death of one Filipino farm worker who was gunned down in his living quarters on the ranch where he worked. In the Philippines, the *Manila Times* termed the riots an interracial conflict and called the chaos in Watsonville 'racial warfare' (Kramer, 2006: 411). One White worker confirms that anti-Filipino violence was not a one-off affair and pointed out that such incidents were commonplace: 'They [Filipinos in the 1930s] took a pretty bad beating themselves. The shipper would burn them out of their camps or go out at nights and shoot into their houses.'[11] Congressmen Arthur M. Free, who represented Watsonville (seemingly only the White portion of the population), argued that the White gangs had been all but baited into the violence because Filipino men were 'luring young white girls into degradation' (cited from the *Manila Times* in Kramer, 2006: 412). The tension spread to nearby San Jose where local Filipino leaders advised Filipinos to 'stay off the streets' for their own safety (DeWitt, 1976). The threat of racist riots notwithstanding, landowners wanted to maintain access to cheap labor. Eventually, law enforcement would see to the protection of Filipino farm workers, but the voice of the White public, in the form of violent racism—like landowners, the government, and labor unions—had been heard.

Conclusion

Filipino, Mexican, and Japanese farm workers sought social and economic transformation in 1930s California. However, the number of obstacles they encountered made

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successful collective mobilization impossible during the decade. Specifically, White supremacy prevented successful interracial collective action among farm workers. The farm workers movement would navigate the twists and turns of the ensuing two plus decades to the 1960s in which Filipino and Mexican farm workers successfully moved against White supremacy and formed an interracial labor union that could adequately represent them. In the 1930s, workers of color were stationed at specific points on a racial hierarchy, which descended in the following order: White, Japanese, Mexican, and Filipino.

The Japanese were able to operate as tenant farmers and thus employed workers of color. I do not argue in this article that the Japanese subscribed to White supremacy, nor is there ample evidence to do so. However, pursuant to a higher race and class position on the hierarchy vis-à-vis other groups of color, Japanese farmers cooperated with Whites in suppressing and curtailing strike actions. As for Filipinos and Mexicans, they formed the main source of farm labor in the fields. Employment in sheds and packinghouses was the labor reserve of White workers. Filipinos and Mexicans shared not only their position as field laborers but also as targets for deportation. So why were Filipinos at the bottom of the hierarchy?

First, ever so slightly, White labor organizations favored inclusion of Mexicans over Filipinos. Such exclusion of Filipinos is also revealed in the treatment they received in daily life. Further and most significantly, Filipino rootedness in a US colony categorized them as uncivilized barbarians who were apt to engage in sexual relations with White women. Consequently, Filipinos were subjected to outright White terrorism.

Though the article's take is historical, I assert that the socially disempowering force of racism, even when understood by studying the past, is clearly shown to be an ideological practice that treats groups of color in group-specific ways. Additionally, as we evaluate later decades of the farm workers movement in California we can see how racism evolves and changes over time; it is not a static force but a mutative one as Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (1997) has argued. Encouragingly, farm laborers were able to act successfully against the race and class discrimination they encountered in the 1960s.

As for the 1930s, moving into the next decade the state of race and labor relations in California agribusiness would undergo sudden change. The inception of the Bracero Program would add a substantial number of workers—by contracting workers from Mexico during the Second World War for agricultural jobs—and the internment of Japanese origin people would extract Japanese tenant farmers from the industry. The very fact that Japanese tenant farmers held a higher position on a racial hierarchy of the 1930s does not produce a conclusion that the Japanese avoided subjection to racism; the opposite was true. In accordance with their position nearer to Whites in 1930s California and thus as a 'superior' racial group versus other groups of color, the Japanese in the US West were deemed a greater threat. As the Second World War commenced, all talk or perceptions of the Japanese being 'good' or 'reliable' were swept away by a distinct form of anti-Japanese racism. Japanese tenant farmers in California of the 1930s would be imprisoned in the 1940s. Finally, a key goal in this article has been to demonstrate that race coextends with class throughout California history in the subjugation of farm workers of color. Yet race and racism have not received due attention in analysis of the farm workers movement. This offering is a step in that direction.

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Notes

1. Labor Collection Papers, J. Paul Leonard Library, San Francisco State University. Charlie Blacklock, Interview with Joan L. Zoloth, 1976.
2. The LAPD openly admits this on their website: www.lapdonline.org/history (1926–50).
3. Labor Collection Papers, Leonard Library, Holman Day, interview with Joan L. Zoloth, 1976.
4. Paul S. Taylor Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley. Term Paper Interview by Ruth Merrick with unnamed respondent, April 1935 (Box 43, Folder 12).
5. Charles E. Young Library, University of California at Los Angeles, Yoneda Papers. 'Why the Japanese Should Vote Communist', Aug. 1934 (Box 152, Folder 2).
6. Paul S. Taylor Papers, Bancroft Library, Flyer (Box 46, Folder 11).
7. Labor Collection Papers, Leonard Library, Manuel Luz, interview with Joan L. Zoloth, 1976.
8. Paul S. Taylor Papers, Bancroft Library, Report by the Associated Farmers: 'The Imperial Valley Farm Labor Situation', 16 April 1934 (Box 46, Folder 11).
9. Labor Collection Papers, Leonard Library, Manuel Luz, interview with Joan L. Zoloth, 1976.
10. Paul S. Taylor Papers, Bancroft Library, letter to Paul S. Taylor from Ruth Merrick, 30 April 1935 (Box 43, Folder 12).
11. Labor Collection Papers, Leonard Library, Holman Day, interview with Joan L. Zoloth, 1976.

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