

LABOR, MIGRATION, AND ACTIVISM:  
A HISTORY OF MEXICAN WORKERS ON THE OXNARD PLAIN  
1930-1980

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **LABOR, MIGRATION, AND ACTIVISM: A HISTORY OF MEXICAN WORKERS ON THE OXNARD PLAIN 1930-1980**

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First and foremost, this dissertation focuses on the relationship between labor and migration in the development of the City of Oxnard and La Colonia neighborhood. Labor and migration on the Oxnard Plain have played an important part in shaping and constructing the Mexican working-class community and its relationship to the power structure of the city and the agri-business interests of Ventura County. This migration led to many conflicts between Mexicans and Whites. I focus on those conflicts and activism between 1930 and 1980.

Secondly, this dissertation expands on early research conducted on Mexicans in Ventura County. The Oxnard Plain has been a key location of struggles for equality and justice. In those struggles, Mexican residents of Oxnard, the majority being working-class have played a key role in demanding better work conditions, housing, and wages. This dissertation continues the research of Tomas Almaguer, Frank P. Barajas, and Martha Menchaca, who focused on class, race, work, leisure, and conflict in Ventura County.

Thirdly, this dissertation is connected to a broader history of Mexican workers in California. This dissertation is influenced by important research conducted by Carey McWilliams, Gilbert Gonzalez, Vicki Ruiz, and other historians on the relationship between labor, migration, and activism among the Mexican working-class community in

Southern California. This dissertation's primary goal is to expand the history of Mexican workers in Ventura County, which has been an understudied area within Chicana/o and labor history.

And finally, this dissertation focuses on highlighting the social history of farm workers, families, union organizers, and community organizers who struggled for a better quality of life for the Mexican working-class community of Oxnard, California.

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Dedicated to my parents, Louie and Gloria.  
And in the memory of my grandmother, Margarita.

And to all the oppressed people who have been denied a relevant education!

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I thank my parents, Louie and Gloria for all of their encouragement throughout my life; without their support I would not have finished this dissertation. My brother, José thank you for your feedback and encouragement throughout the years; especially when I struggled to finish this dissertation.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	XI
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	XII
ABBREVIATIONS .....	XIV
INTRODUCTION – WHY OXNARD OR LA COLONIA?	
Introduction.....	1
Constructing A People’s Narrative .....	4
Overview Of Chapters .....	8
Notes On Terminology .....	10
CHAPTER ONE – JOSE & MARIA: SEARCHING FOR A HISTORY ON THE OXNARD PLAIN	
Introduction.....	12
José & María .....	13
Oxnard, California .....	16
La Colonia .....	23
My Mother, Gloria.....	25
Conclusion.....	27
CHAPTER TWO – BY THE SWEAT OF THEIR BROW: MEXICAN MIGRATION AND CONFLICT DURING THE 1930’S	
Introduction.....	29
Mexican Migration And Conflict.....	32
Settling Out, The Development Of A Mexican Community .....	36
Workers, Unions, And Strikes Throughout California.....	44
The Sugar Beet Strike Of 1933 .....	51
Conclusion.....	64

CHAPTER THREE – GROWERS VS. WORKERS: VENTURA COUNTY CITRUS (LEMON) STRIKE OF 1941

Introduction..... 67  
Ventura County Citrus Strike Of 1941 ..... 69  
The Aftermath..... 84  
Conclusion..... 89

CHAPTER FOUR – THE GROWERS STRIKE BACK: THE BRACERO PROGRAM IN VENTURA COUNTY, 1942-1964

Introduction..... 91  
World War II And The Bracero Program ..... 93  
Ventura County Growers Unite ..... 99  
The Bracero Program Continues After WWII ..... 103  
Cesar Chavez And Community Service Organization..... 124  
Union Organizing During The Bracero Program ..... 131  
Conclusion..... 138

CHAPTER FIVE – THE COMMUNITY FIGHTS BACK: THE RISE OF COMMUNITY ACTIVISM

Introduction..... 140  
War On Poverty And La Colonia ..... 142  
The Struggle To End School Segregation..... 162  
Conclusion..... 196

CHAPTER SIX – YA BASTA!: THE STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

Introduction..... 198  
Chicano Power Movement ..... 201  
The Return Of The Farm Worker Movement..... 212  
Conclusion..... 252

CONCLUSION – A FATHER’S HISTORY ON THE OXNARD PLAIN

Introduction..... 254  
Crossing Paths With A Segregated City..... 255  
Conclusion..... 260

BIBLIOGRAPHY..... 262

## LIST OF TABLES

5.1	Oxnard School Ethnic Group Distribution, 1963.....	176
5.2	Oxnard School Ethnic Group Distribution, 1968.....	183

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1.1	Map of Land Grants in Ventura County.....	20
1.2	Mexican Sugar Beet Workers on the Oxnard Plain, nd.....	24
1.3	My mother with her mother, Margarita in the front yard of her Colonia Village's home, 1952.....	26
2.1	Residents of the ABSC adobes, nd.....	39
2.2	Aerial View of Oxnard, CA, 1935.....	41
2.3	American Beet Sugar Company, nd.....	53
3.1	Lemon Pickers on the picket line, 1941. ....	78
3.2	The Growers' Problem, 7 Feb 1941. ....	81
3.3	Lemons being dumped, 1941. ....	83
3.4	Families being evicted from housing, 1941. ....	85
3.5	Teagueville, 1941.....	86
3.6	Group of children posing under sign that reads "U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Security Administration Farm Workers Community," El Rio, CA, 1941.....	87
3.7	Three men and two women seated behind a table with a microphone in front of it.....	88
4.1	Aerial View of Oxnard, CA, 1940s.....	94
4.2	Cesar Chavez and Community Service Organization in Oxnard, CA, Nov 1959.....	125
4.3	Map of Ventura County Bracero Camps.....	131
5.1	Oxnard Newest Low Rental Housing District.....	148
5.2	Inauguration Ceremony for Operation Buenaventura in Colonia.....	156
5.3	First Trip.....	167



5.4	Doubled Up.....	169
5.5	Map Anti-Bond Drive.....	170
5.6	The majority of the students at Ramona School were Mexican and Black, 1963.....	177
5.7	First Bus Ride for Many Pupils, 12 Sep 1971.....	193
6.1	Protest Aired Publicly.....	206
6.2	Flyer of the Oxnard's Chicano Moratorium March, 19 Sep 1970.....	210
6.3	Vietnam War Protested in Mexican-American March in Oxnard, 20 Sep 1970.....	211
6.4	UFW Organizers Arrested By Sheriff's Deputies, 29 May 1974.....	229
6.5	Colonia Park Hears Vow By UFW Leader, 2 Jun 1974.....	234
6.6	Dolores Huerta at a rally in Oxnard, CA, February 2, 1976.....	240
7.1	Garcia's family in Los Angeles, CA, 1936.....	256
7.2	My father's parents in Watts, CA, 1940.....	257
7.3	Reflexion del Chicano, 2008.....	260

## ABBREVIATIONS

ABSC	American Beet Sugar Company
ACLU	American Civil Liberties Union
ACWU	Agricultural and Citrus Workers Union
AFB	American Farm Bureau
AFL	American Federation of Labor
AFSC	American Friends Service Committee
AFVC	Associated Farmers of Ventura County
ALRA	Agricultural Labor Relations Act
ALRB	Agricultural Labor Relations Board
AMAE	Association of Mexican American Educators
AHA	Alianza Hispano Americana
AWA	Agricultural Workers Association
AWIL	Agricultural Workers Industrial Union
AWOC	Agricultural Workers' Organizing Committee
BIGR	Bureau of Inter-Group Relations
CAC	Community Action Commission
CAP	Citizen Against Poverty
CAWIU	Cannery & Agricultural Workers Industrial Union
CCCHE	Chicano Coordinating on Higher Education
CGA	Coastal Growers Association
CIO	Congress of Industrial Organizations

CHM	Comisión Honorífica Mexicana
CORE	Congress of Racial Equality
CSO	Community Service Organization
CUOM	Confederacion de Union es Obreras Mexicanas
CUCOM	Coferderacion de Unions de Campesinos y Obreros Mexicans
CP	Communist Party USA
DOL	Department of Labor
ECAFW	Emergency Committee to Aid the Farm Workers
FALA	Filipino Agricultural Laborers Association
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FBVC	Farm Bureau of Ventura County
FFW	Friends of Farm Workers
FHA	Federal Housing Administration
FPL	Filipino Protective League
FTA	Food, Tobacco, Agricultural, and Allied Workers
FSA	Farm Security Administration
FWA	Farm Worker Association
FWOP	Farm Workers Opportunity Project
IAF	Industrial Areas Foundation
ILD	International Labor Defense
INS	Immigration and Naturalization Service
IVFA	Imperial Valley Farmers Association
JMLA	Japanese-Mexican Labor Association

LAPD	Los Angeles Police Department
LASD	Los Angeles Sheriff Department
LIU 78	United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Workers, Local Industrial Union 78
LULAC	League of United Latin American Citizens
MAPA	Mexican American Political Association
MAUC	Mexican American Unity Council
MAYO	Mexican American Youth Organization
MEChA	Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan
NAIA	Nyeland Acres Improvement Association
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NAWU	National Agricultural Workers' Union
NCDPP	National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners
NCCM	National Chicano Moratorium Committee
NFLU	National Farm Labor Union
NFWA	National Farm Workers Association
NLRA	National Labor Relations Act
NLRB	National Labor Relations Board
NRA	National Recovery Administration
OB	Operation Buenaventura
OBB	Oxnard Brown Berets
OBCC	Oxnard Beach Chamber of Commerce
OCC	Oxnard Chamber of Commerce
OEO	Office of Economic Opportunity

OFWSC	Oxnard Farm Workers Service Center
OHA	Oxnard Housing Authority
OHC	Oxnard Harvesting Company
OHSD	Oxnard High School District
OUHSD	Oxnard Union High School District
OPD	Oxnard Police Department
OPLA	Oxnard Plain Labor Association
OSD	Oxnard School District
PCI	Parental Consent Initiative
PHA	Public Housing Administration
SPFWC	Santa Paula Farm Workers Committee
SCBGA	Southern California Beet Growers Association
TUUL	Trade Union Unity League
UCAPAWA	United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America
UPBMI	Unión Patriótica Benéfica Mexicana Independiente
UFW	United Farm Workers of America
UFWOC	United Farm Workers Organizing Committee
UMAS	United Mexican American Students
UPWA	United Packinghouse Workers of America
USDA	Department of Agriculture
USES	United States Employment Service
VCCGC	Ventura County Citrus Growers Committee
VCLG	Ventura County Lemon Growers

VCEOC	Ventura County Economic Opportunity Commission
VCFLA	Ventura County Farm Labor Association
VCSCO	Ventura County Community Service Organization
VCSD	Ventura County Sheriff Department
WACC	Western Agricultural Contracting Company
WGA	Western Growers Association
WMC	War Manpower Commission
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II

## INTRODUCTION

### WHY OXNARD OR LA COLONIA?

*“History is a political decision. What you put down on paper, just like what you paint, is often a political decision.”*

**- Rodolfo F. Acuña<sup>1</sup>**

Writing history is a political decision. Every word or sentence we write on paper is based on our experience, interaction, and knowledge of the environment around us. Our history as Mexicans within the contexts of United States history has taken on many different interpretations. Some of those interpretations have labeled Mexicans as outsiders, bandits, and savages. On the other side, Chicano/Mexican historians and scholars have contoured those interpretations by highlighting the important part Mexicans have played in the development of the United States.<sup>2</sup>

Our barrios and colonias have shaped our understanding of the world around us, and affect our relationship to labor, migration, and activism. I have always wondered why my family lived on the eastside of the tracks in Oxnard, California. As I asked this question to my parents, my mother would tell me about her grandfather, José De La Luz

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<sup>1</sup> Encuentro: Mexico in Los Angeles, 1991, Rodolfo F. Acuña Collection, Record Group No. 1, Box 155, Folder 15, Urban Archives Center, Oviatt Library, California State University, Northridge (hereafter cited as Acuña Collection).

<sup>2</sup> Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: The Chicano's Struggle Toward Liberation* (San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1972); Antonia Castaneda, “The Political Economy Of Nineteenth Century Stereotypes Of Californianas,” in *Between Borders: Essays On Mexicana/Chicana History*, ed. Adelaida Del Castillo (Encino: Floricanto Press, 1990), 213-236; Dennis Nodín Valdés, *Al Norte: Agricultural Workers In The Great Lakes Region, 1917-1970* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991); Juan Gómez-Quiñones, *Mexican Students Por La Raza: The Chicano Student Movement In Southern California 1967-1977* (Santa Barbara: La Causa, 1978).

who traveled the “corridors of migration” throughout the Southwest and Midwest before settling in La Colonia, the Mexican neighborhood of Oxnard.<sup>3</sup> As my mother told me her stories, it still did not answer my question, why Oxnard or La Colonia?

I wanted to know why Mexicans migrated and settled in the City of Oxnard and why east of the tracks. To answer those questions, I spent many years searching for answers. In conducting this research I came across the writings of Rodolfo Acuña, Dionicio Valdes, Gilbert Gonzalez and other scholars, who have influenced this dissertation on the history of Mexican workers on the Oxnard Plain.<sup>4</sup>

First and foremost, this dissertation focuses on the relationship between labor and migration in the development of the City of Oxnard and La Colonia neighborhood. Labor and migration on the Oxnard Plain have played an important part in shaping and constructing the Mexican working-class community and its relationship to the power structure of the city and the agri-business interests of Ventura County. This migration led to many conflicts between Mexicans and Whites. I focus on those conflicts and activism between 1930 and 1980.

Secondly, this dissertation expands on early research conducted on Mexicans in Ventura County. The Oxnard Plain has been a key location of struggles for equality and justice. In those struggles, Mexican residents of Oxnard, the majority being working-class have played a key role in demanding better work conditions, housing, and wages.

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<sup>3</sup> The term of “corridors of migration” is taken from the writing of Rodolfo Acuña, *Corridors Of Migration: The Odyssey Of Mexican Laborers, 1600-1933* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America*; Valdés, *Al Norte*; Gilbert G. Gonzalez, *Labor And Community: Mexican Citrus Worker Villages In A Southern California County, 1900-1950* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).



This dissertation continues the research of Tomás Almaguer, Frank P. Barajas, and Martha Menchaca, who focused on class, race, work, leisure, and conflict in Ventura County.<sup>5</sup>

Thirdly, this dissertation is connected to a broader history of Mexican workers in California. This dissertation is influenced by important research conducted by Carey McWilliams, Gilbert Gonzalez, Vicki Ruiz, and other historians on the relationship between labor, migration, and activism among the Mexican working-class community in Southern California.<sup>6</sup> This dissertation's primary goal is to expand the history of Mexican workers in Ventura County, which has been understudied area within Chicana/o and labor history.

And finally, this dissertation focuses on highlighting the social history of farm workers, families, union organizers, and community organizers who struggled for a better quality of life for the Mexican working-class community of Oxnard, California.

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<sup>5</sup> Tomás Almaguer, "Class, Race, And Capitalist Development The Social Transformation Of A Southern California County, 1848-1903" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1979); Frank P. Barajas, "Work And Leisure In La Colonia: Class, Generation, And Interethnic Alliances Among Mexicanos In Oxnard, California, 1890-1945" (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate University, 2001); Martha Menchaca, "Chicano-Mexican Conflict And Cohesion In San Pablo, California" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> Carey McWilliams, *Factories In The Field: The Story Of Migratory Farm Labor In California* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1939); Gonzalez, *Labor And Community*; Vicki Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, And The California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987); Matt García, *A World Of Its Own: Race, Labor, And Citrus In The Making Of Greater Los Angeles, 1900-1970* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Jose Alamillo, *Making Lemonade Out Of Lemons: Mexican American Labor And Leisure In A California Town, 1880-1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

## CONSTRUCTING A PEOPLE'S NARRATIVE

In telling the stories of the migration of Mexican workers to Oxnard, California, it is very important to share with you how this narrative was constructed. Theorist Linda Tuhiwai Smith points out in *Decolonizing Methodologies* that:

“imperialism and colonialism brought complete disorder to colonized people, disconnecting them from their histories, their landscapes, their language, their social relations and their own ways of thinking, feeling, and interacting with the world.”<sup>7</sup>

In other words, our histories have been stolen or destroyed and replaced with the oppressor's history. So, it is our goal to challenge the master narrative of our history, lives, and culture. As theorist Frantz Fanon states:

*“who writes for his people ought to use the past with the intention of opening the future, as an invitation to action and a basis for hope.”*<sup>8</sup>

I agree with Fanon and Smith, when constructing (writing) a people's history we must utilize a counter hegemonic approach in re-claiming the voices of our people.

In writing this counter narrative, we need to challenge the culture of the empire, which constructs racial formation to define our (Mexican) history and oppression within the United States. Michael Omi and Howard Winant uses “the term racial formation to refer to the process by which social, economic and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shape by racial meanings.”<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Omi and Winant argue that “we have now reached the point

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<sup>7</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 28.

<sup>8</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 232.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 61.

of fairly general agreement that race is not a biological given but rather a socially constructed way of differentiating human beings.”<sup>10</sup> Politicians, growers, historians, social workers, and others continue to utilize racial formations to construct an “imagined community,” which in reality hides the contradictions of divisions of labor and class. This dissertation focuses on those contradictions by connecting the stories between labor, migration, and activism among Oxnard’s Mexican working-class community.

Therefore, this dissertation utilizes several different research methodologies. First and foremost, it utilizes primary and secondary sources written on labor, migration, and activism, including archival documents. In addition, it relies on interviews (oral history) of key individuals and organizations, as well as audiovisual materials. It is important to note that I am offering only one of many interpretations on labor, migration, and activism among Mexicans in California.

\*\*\*\*\*

In constructing this people’s narrative, I utilize the field of Chicana/o history, with different interpretations offered by its practitioners on social, labor, and political themes. In coming to an understanding of those interpretations, this dissertation focusing of the social history of Mexican workers in the United States. Social history developed from the struggles of real people as the narrative of the “history from below.” It is very clear to point out that Chicana/o history, especially dealing with labor, is connected to social history.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 65.

To understand the Chicana/o experience within the United States, we have to examine our connection to labor production. To do this, I point out that Chicana/o labor history was influenced by the writings of Herbert Gutman, E.P. Thompson, David Montgomery, and other scholars.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, it was also greatly influence by Paul S. Taylor, Manuel Gamio, Carey McWilliams, and Ernesto Galarza, without whose research there would be even greater gaps in labor history literature.<sup>12</sup> Those scholars provided a foundation for Chicana/o labor history by writing about Mexican workers in the migrant stream, strikes, and unions.

The research of Taylor in *Mexican Labor In The United States* (1930-1934) and Gamio in *Mexican Immigration To The United States* (1930) provided Chicana/o historians with the personal interviews of Mexican workers and their stories of hardship in the United States. McWilliams and Galarza exposed Chicana/os to the corruption of agri-business in California and struggles to organize agricultural workers. Inspired by the writings of those scholars, the field of Chicana/o labor history was born. Chicana/o historians including Juan Gómez-Quiñones and Luis Leobardo Arroyo opened the door for the discussion of labor production in the pages of *Aztlán* and the *Western Historical*

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<sup>11</sup> Herbert Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History* (New York: Knopf, 1976); E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964); David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>12</sup> Manuel Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States; A Study of Human Migration and Adjustment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930); Paul Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1930); McWilliams, *Factories In The Field*; Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants Of Labor* (Santa Barbara, CA: McNally & Loftin, 1964).

*Quarterly*.<sup>13</sup> Those discussions led to research on Mexican agriculture and industrial workers in the field of Chicana/o labor history.

As Chicana/o labor history focused primarily on Mexican agriculture and industrial workers, Chicana/o labor historians utilized different interpretations to discuss class, gender, and leisure among Chicana/o workers. In studying the labor history of Mexican communities throughout *Occupied America*, I come to understand that our communities share a common historical foundation. They share a notable phenomenon geographically. Our barrios and colonias are frequently segregated from the rest of town or city. This segregation from the power structure enables the Mexican working-class to develop a culture of resistance. Furthermore, this resistance can be also seen within writings of Chicana/o and non-Chicana/o labor historians.<sup>14</sup>

Chicana/o labor scholarship has expanded labor history by providing a different interpretation of labor production and labor organizing by including Mexican workers as participants in those struggles. Without Galarza providing the foundation for

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<sup>13</sup> Luis Leobardo Arroyo, "Chicano Participation in Organized Labor: The CIO in Los Angeles, 1938-1950," *Aztlán*, Vol. 6, no. 2 (Summer 1975): 277-303; Juan Gómez-Quiñones and Luis Leobardo Arroyo, "On the State of Chicano History: Observations on Its Development, Interpretations, and Theory, 1970-1974," *The Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (April 1976): 155-185; Juan Gómez-Quiñones, "The First Steps: Chicano Labor Conflict and Organizing, 1900-1920." *Aztlán*, Vol. 2, no. 1 (Spring 1972): 13-49.

<sup>14</sup> McWilliams, *Factories In The Field*; Gonzalez, *Labor And Community*; Ruíz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives*; García, *A World Of Its Own*; Alamillo, *Making Lemonade Out Of Lemons*; Richard Steven Street, *Beasts Of The Field: A Narrative History Of California Farmworkers* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004); Cletus Daniel, *Bitter Harvest, A History Of California Farmworkers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981); Camille Guerin-Gonzales, *Mexican Workers And American Dreams: Immigration, Repatriation, And California Farm Labor* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994); Zaragosa Vargas, *Labor Rights Are Civil Rights: Mexican American Workers In Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

understanding the Bracero Program, Kitty Calavita could not have expanded on it by providing a vision of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) from the other side.<sup>15</sup> In their mission to write the history of the common (working) people, Richard Street, Cletus Daniel, Camille Guerin-Gonzales, and Zaragosa Vargas all overlap with each other. Street expands the timeline of agricultural labor in California beyond McWilliams, while Daniel provides an in-depth overview of the three-way struggle to control or organize agriculture workers to the stories of working people. Within the United States, Vargas examines the role of Mexican men and women in their struggles for labor and civil rights within the so-called “American Dream.” On the same note, Guerin-Gonzales guides us through the notion of the “American Dream” as one reason of the mass migration of Mexicans into the United States. Not to undermine each other’s interpretations, they all give a voice to the voiceless.

## OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

**Introduction – Why Oxnard Or *La Colonia*?** focuses on the theoretical framework of this dissertation. It discusses the framework of developing a people’s narrative of the history of Mexican workers on the Oxnard Plain between 1930 and 1980. Likewise, it briefly highlights the writings of numerous historians’ interpretation on labor, migration, and activism of Mexican workers. Finally, it provides a overview of chapters and terminology.

**Chapter One – Jose y Maria: Searching For A History On The Oxnard Plain** recounts the story of Mexican migration and settlement in Oxnard, California through

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<sup>15</sup> Kitty Calavita *Inside The State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, And The INS* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

the narrative of my mother's family history. The chapter focuses on the migration experiences of my great-grandparents into the Oxnard Plain. Furthermore, it provides a brief history of Ventura County and the City of Oxnard.

**Chapter Two – By The Sweat Of Their Brow: Mexican Migration And Conflict** focuses on the migration of Mexicans into the Oxnard Plain during the 1930s, which led to political and social conflict among Whites. The chapter discusses the development of the Mexican community and its connection to agri-business of the Oxnard Plain. As well, it focuses on labor unrest by discussing the Sugar Beet Strike of 1933.

**Chapter Three – Growers vs. Workers: Ventura County Citrus (Lemon) Strike Of 1941** examines the Ventura County Citrus Strike of 1941 and the aftermath. The Oxnard Plain had previously been the site of two major labor strikes in California with the Sugar Beet Strike of 1903 and the Sugar Beet Strike of 1933. But, this conflict would bring a greater labor unrest as agricultural workers took on the powerful lemon industry in Ventura County, which led to a six-month strike.

**Chapter Four – The Growers Strike Back: The Bracero Program In Ventura County** focuses on the marginalization of Mexican workers (Mexican National and US-born) through the Bracero Program between 1942 and 1964. Its purpose is to examine the program and its resistance. Furthermore, the efforts of the Community Service Organization (CSO), the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA) and the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) were particularly important.

**Chapter Five – The Community Fights Back: The Rise of Community Activism** focuses on rise of community activism among the Mexican working-class

community. The chapter examines the struggles to desegregate the local school district and against urban renewal. As a result, through direct action and community organizing the community learned important lessons and gained numerous organizing skills to empower themselves.

**Chapter Six – ¡Ya Basta!: The Struggle For Justice, And Equality** examines the battle for civil and labor rights. The chapter focuses the rise of the Chicano Movement and the United Farm Workers on the Oxnard Plain. Similar, to the previous struggles, direct action and community organizing played key part in this battle.

**Conclusion – My Father’s History On The Oxnard Plain** reflects on the stories of labor, migration, and activism of the Mexican working-class community through the narrative of my father’s family history. Similar, to other chapters, I share my father experience of being criminalize, discriminate, and segregate for just being Mexican.

And a final note, this dissertation offers a people’s narrative of the history through the lens of labor, migration, and activism of Mexican workers on the Oxnard Plain.

## **NOTES ON TERMINOLOGY**

There are many ways in which the US-Mexico Border has been used as a physical space to divide us, as Mexicans. It has led to the construction of us vs. them, specifically Chicanos vs. Mexicans. No matter what side of la frontera we are born on, somos mexicanos, we are Mexicans. Throughout the dissertation, I use the term Mexican to identify people of Mexican birth and descent. At times, I use the term Chicano instead of Mexican but I will make that use clear to the reader. In dealing with other groups, I chose to use Black and Asian instead of African American and Asian



American. In keeping with the pattern I have adopted the term White to identify people of European descent or birth.

## CHAPTER ONE

### JOSÉ & MARÍA: SEARCHING FOR A HISTORY ON THE OXNARD PLAIN

#### INTRODUCTION

As a youth growing up in Oxnard, I have fond memories of traveling with my parents and my brother across the city on birthdays, on Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day to my grandmother's house in La Colonia. During those special occasions, I would interact with my aunts, uncles, and cousins, eat tasty Mexican food and earn some pocket change from my grandmother. It was not until I became older that I realized that my grandmother's house was on the Mexican side of city, which is surrounded by railroad tracks, farm fields, and packing houses. I began to ask my mother questions, such as why do we (my grandmother) live in the Mexican side of the city? How long have we lived in the City of Oxnard?

To answer those questions, I came to the understanding that the lives of Mexicans within the United States is connected not only to migration, labor, and but also to activism. As noted by Gilbert Gonzalez and Raul Fernandez the mass migration of Mexicans into the United States is connected to United States hegemony (i.e. economic domination) over Latin America, especially Mexico.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, Mexican migration provided cheap labor for "big business," which developed into the backbone of wealth & domination for the United States.

As a result, the stories of migration provided a background to examine our resistance to hegemony. Like, Gonzalez and Fernandez, historian Rodolfo Acuña points

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<sup>1</sup> Gilbert Gonzalez and Raul Fernandez, *A Century Of Chicano History: Empire, Nations, And Migration* (New York: Routledge, 2003), xii.

us toward a social history of labor and migration by adopting a Mexican working-class viewpoint, a history from below. In this fashion, the lives of the Mexican working-class are woven into the stories of migration, conflict, and struggles.<sup>2</sup> On the same note, historian Camille Guerin-Gonzales states that “Mexican immigrants came to the United States with hope and dreams shaped by the rhetoric of employment agents in the U.S., Mexican stories and songs glorifying economic opportunities in el norte.”<sup>3</sup> But, in the end foreign-born and U.S. born Mexicans realized that the American Dream was not for them due to their color of skin.

To answer my questions, I have to examine the corridors of migration, formation of Ventura County and the City of Oxnard, and my family’s history. In this chapter, I recount the history of my mother’s grandparents, Cornelio José De La Luz and María Abundis and their migration to Oxnard and La Colonia neighborhood through the lens of migration, labor, and activism.

## **JOSÉ & MARÍA**

Forty-two years after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Cornelio José De La Luz was born on Mexican Independence Day in 1890 in the small town of Floresville, Texas, thirty miles southeast of San Antonio, Texas. His parents were Luciano De La Luz and Emitteria Ramos De La Luz who migrated from Mexico to the

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<sup>2</sup> Rodolfo Acuña, *Corridors of Migration: The Odyssey of Mexican Laborers, 1600—1933* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007), ix-xiii.

<sup>3</sup> Camille Guerin-Gonzales, *Mexican Workers And American Dreams: Immigration, Repatriation, And California Farm Labor* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 2.

United States.<sup>4</sup> In 1890, the United States Census counted 77,000 Mexicans in the United States, with the majority living in California and Texas.<sup>5</sup> In 1898, José's mother died, and her husband, Luciano decided to give José, and his siblings the opportunity to choose to live with him or with their mother's parents. Only José, then decided to live with his father, and he never saw his siblings again.<sup>6</sup> Jose and his father followed many migration streams (corridors of migration) of Mexican workers throughout Texas. By 1919, he traveled the Texas-Michigan corridor all the way to Port Huron, Michigan, as part of the first wave of Mexican workers recruited for the sugar beet industry in Michigan.<sup>7</sup>

María Abundis was born in 1899 in Jalisco, Mexico to Pedro Abundis and Sinobia Delgado. Between 1910 and 1920, the Mexican states of Jalisco, Guanajuato, and Michoacan experienced an economic depression due to the Mexican Revolution, but jobs in mining and agriculture in the United States Southwest were increasing, leading to a mass migration of Mexicans into the United States.<sup>8</sup> María and her family was part of this mass migration estimated at more than 200,000 in the 1910s. In 1920, Maria and her brothers legally entered the United States through the port of entry of Laredo,

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<sup>4</sup> Gloria Moreno, interviewed by author, Oxnard, CA, 1 Nov 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Martha Menchaca, *Recovering History Constructing Race: The Indian, Black, and White Roots of Mexican Americans* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 281.

<sup>6</sup> Gloria Moreno, interview.

<sup>7</sup> For more information on the first wave of Mexican workers in the Midwest, see Dennis Nodín Valdés, *Al Norte: Agricultural Workers In The Great Lakes Region, 1917-1970* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> Carey McWilliams, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States* (New York: Praegar, 1990), 151-173.

Texas, their destination San Antonio, Texas.<sup>9</sup> As Mexican workers entered into migrant streams between Michigan and Texas to work in agriculture, other Mexican workers were actively being recruited to work in the auto industry in Detroit and neighboring cities. From San Antonio, Texas, María and her family entered the Texas-Michigan corridor, and ended up in Detroit.

José met María in Detroit during the 1920's. José was employed in the assembly plants of the Ford Motor Company. In 1925, José and María were married and a year later Gonzalo Abundis De La Luz was born in Detroit.<sup>10</sup> As the economy crashed, turning into a Great Depression during the late 1920s and 1930s, Mexican migration to the Midwest, especially Michigan quickly plummeted. Mexicans became the target of mass layoffs in the industries and were criticized as a "burden on the urban relief coffers."<sup>11</sup> By 1927, the De La Luz family took the Texas-Michigan corridor in the reverse direction, and in 1928, Margarita Abundis De La Luz was born in Fort Worth, Texas.<sup>12</sup> José and María continued their migration entering the Texas-California corridor and by 1930, the De La Luz family was living in Belvedere, east of downtown Los Angeles, California.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ancestry.com. *Border Crossings: From Mexico to U.S., 1903-1957* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: The Generations Network, Inc., 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Gloria Moreno, interview.

<sup>11</sup> Valdes, *Al Norte*, 31.

<sup>12</sup> Gloria Moreno, interview.

<sup>13</sup> Ancestry.com. *1930 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: The Generations Network, Inc., 2002. Original data: United States of America, Bureau of the Census. *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1930. T626, 2,667 rolls.

José and María with their children, Gonzalo and Margarita migrated from Los Angeles to Oxnard, California early in the 1930's. They settled into the American Beet Sugar Company's owned adobes, located next to the factory. José earned his living as an agricultural worker. In 1932, María died from complications during childbirth. José was left to raise his son and daughter.<sup>14</sup> They survived the hardship of living in a segregated town, whose prominent and wealthy residents portrayed Mexicans as dirty, uncivilized, and inferior to Whites. Yet, José was resourceful, and by 1944 was able to buy a lot in La Colonia and build a house for his children.<sup>15</sup>

### **OXNARD, CALIFORNIA**

In 2003, the City of Oxnard celebrated its 100-year anniversary with a yearlong list of activities.<sup>16</sup> Only two of the official events addressed the history of Mexican workers in the development of the City of Oxnard.<sup>17</sup> The literature on the celebration made no mention of the contribution of the Mexican working-class community to the very profitable agri-business, which brings in millions dollars a year to the city and surrounding areas. It is ironic that the city, was 67 percent Mexican and had two Mexican city council members and a Mexican mayor, left out the history of Mexicans during its centennial celebration. Why was the history of Mexicans in Oxnard and Ventura County left out?

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<sup>14</sup> Gloria Moreno, interview.

<sup>15</sup> Gloria Moreno, interview.

<sup>16</sup> "Oxnard at 100," *The Ventura County Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. 47, no. 2 & 3 (2003).

<sup>17</sup> 100 Images of Oxnard's Latino Lifestyle & Culture, Photography by Jess Gutierrez; Sugar Town, Play by Javier Gomez, Teatro Inlakech.

To answer the question, as a young student I began to search for all the information I could find on history of Mexicans in California, particularly Oxnard. The search led me to the classic textbook, *Occupied America*, by historian Rodolfo F. Acuña, which introduced me to Oxnard's Sugar Beet Strike of 1903, which marked the birth of the city.<sup>18</sup> In return, this strike directed me to Tomás Almaguer's important work on race and class in Ventura County.<sup>19</sup> In this chapter, I recount the history of Mexicans in Oxnard from the Chumash period to the incorporation of the City of Oxnard.

What became known as the Oxnard Plain in the early 1900s was once the land of the Coastal Band of the Chumash Nation, inhabitants of the area before the arrival of the Europeans. In 1542, Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo became the first European (Spaniard) to encounter the Chumash. Anthropologist Martha Menchaca pointed out that "Rodriguez Cabrillo recorded the first European accounts of the architectural Indian village designs and cultural lifestyles of these Native American Indians."<sup>20</sup>

The first land-based explorations of the Chumash Nation was led by Gaspar de Portola in 1769 and followed by the establishment of the Franciscan mission of San Buenaventura by Father Junípero Serra in 1782. The Spanish Crown had granted the mission of San Buenaventura, 48,000 acres, whose prize was the Chumash populations. Under the colonization plan, the Franciscan missionaries converted the Chumash into Christianity and intergraded them into the mission system as human

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<sup>18</sup> Rodolfo F. Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1981), 197-199.

<sup>19</sup> Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins Of White Supremacy In California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

<sup>20</sup> Martha Menchaca, *The Mexican Outsiders: A Community History of Marginalization and Discrimination in California* (Austin: University of Texas, 1995), 4.

labor. By 1821, the new nation of Mexico had won independence from Spain and took control of the all institutions of power, especially the mission system.

Following independence from Spain, the government of Mexico issued the secularization decree in 1833, which ended the mission system in Alta California. The secularization decree allowed the Mexican government to re-distribute the land as private property. In Alta California, historian Frank P. Barajas points out that “from 1837 to 1841, Governor Juan Bautista Alvarado allocated over fifty percent of the land grants in the surrounding area...and eight major ranchos existed on the Oxnard Plain by the mid-1830s.”<sup>21</sup>

On May 22, 1837, Governor Alvarado granted 44,883 acres to eight Mexican soldiers which became Rancho El Rio de Santa Clara o La Colonia.<sup>22</sup> This rancho was surrounded by Rancho Santa Paula y Saticoy (17,773 acres), Rancho Santa Clara del Norte (13,989 acres), Rancho Los Posas (26,623 acres), Rancho Callegus (9,998 acres), and Rancho Guadalasa (30,594 acres).<sup>23</sup> (see Figure 1.1) Its main activities were cattle raising and the annual rodeo with the other ranchos. Nine years later, the United States provoked a war with Mexico, articulating the ideology of Manifest Destiny, and by the end Mexico ceding 40% of its territory, including Alta California to the United

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<sup>21</sup> Frank P. Barajas, “Work And Leisure In La Colonia: Class, Generation, And Interethnic Alliances Among Mexicanos In Oxnard, California, 1890-1945” (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate University, 2001), 22.

<sup>22</sup> “Mexican Land Grants – Ventura, Santa Barbara,” in *Historical Atlas of California*, eds. Warren A. Beck and Ynez D. Haase (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974), Map 36; William Tim Dagodag, “A Social Geography of La Colonia: A Mexican-American Settlement in the city of Oxnard, California” (Master’s thesis, San Fernando Valley State College, 1967), 3.

<sup>23</sup> “Mexican Land Grants – Ventura, Santa Barbara”, Map 36.



States. Under the peace treaty, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo stated that Mexican citizens residing in the new territories of the United States were protected under Articles VIII and IX, which guaranteed their property and civil rights.<sup>24</sup>

The United States Federal Census of 1850 recorded that eighty-four individuals residing at Rancho El Rio de Santa Clara o La Colonia, which was overseen by one of the original grantees, Rafael Gonzales. After the United States took control of California, Congress passed the Federal Land Act of 1851, which created a Board of Land Commissions to oversee the validation of Spanish and Mexican grants. The Federal Land Act caused the Mexican community to lose over 40% of their land.<sup>25</sup> By the 1860s, the rancho economy was in ruins following many seasons of drought in Southern California. Many Mexicans had lost their land due to “the strain of a declining cattle economy, debt, and the cost of litigation, the increasing presence of Euro[pean] American squatters.”<sup>26</sup>

By 1864, Thomas A. Scott of the Philadelphia and California Petroleum Company had acquired over 80,000 acres by “ruthless methods of legal intimidation and manipulation.”<sup>27</sup> His goal in acquiring masses of land in what became known as Ventura County in 1873 was because of its oil production potential. Scott had left Thomas R. Bard, later U.S. Senator the power of attorney to manage and sell his properties. Bard had arrived in California in 1864 and by 1871 was appointed as a

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<sup>24</sup> “Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo; February 2, 1848,” *Yale Law School, The Avalon Project*, <http://yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/mexico/quadhida.htm> (accessed on 2 May 2011).

<sup>25</sup> Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines*, 66 and Barajas, “Work And Leisure In La Colonia,” 29.

<sup>26</sup> Barajas, “Work And Leisure In La Colonia,” 35.

<sup>27</sup> Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines*, 86; Barajas, “Work And Leisure In La Colonia,” 37.

commissioner to organize Ventura County.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, as land “opened up” in Ventura County, including Rancho El Rio de Santa Clara o La Colonia, Whites from the East came. They included “French, German, Irish, Italians, Swiss, and Portuguese who were Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Jewish in faith.”<sup>29</sup>

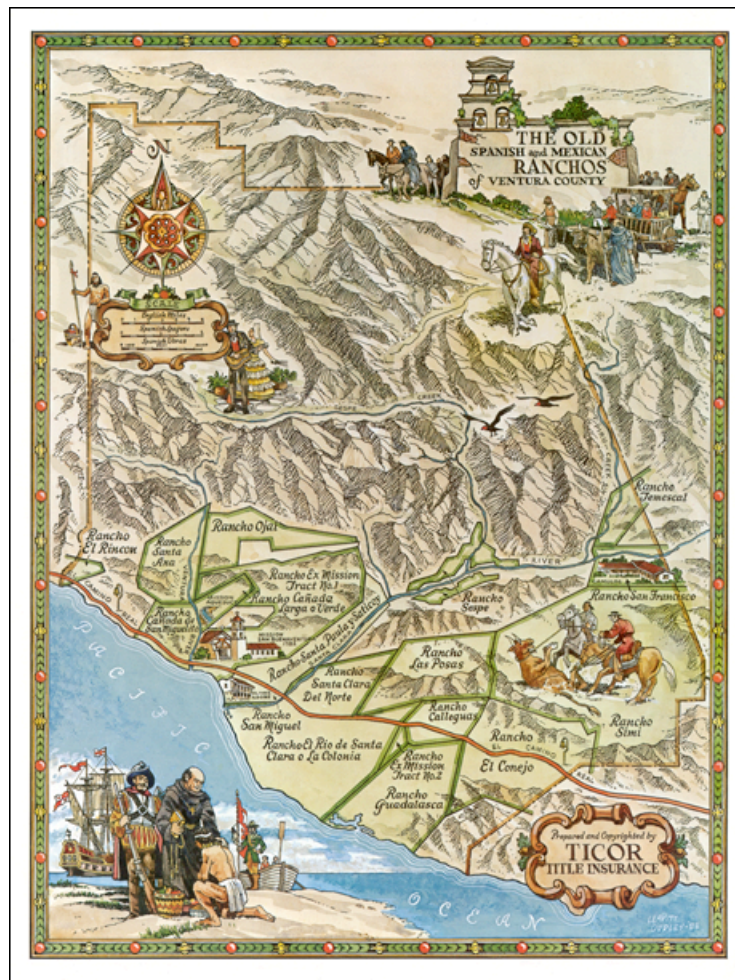


Figure 1.1 Map of Land Grants in Ventura County. Courtesy of the Museum of Ventura County.

For interpretation of the references to color in this and all other figures, the reader is referred to the electronic version of dissertation

<sup>28</sup> “Bard, Thomas Robert, (1841-1915),” *Biographical Directory of United State Congress, 1774-Present*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov> (accessed on 2 May 2011).

<sup>29</sup> Barajas, “Work And Leisure In La Colonia,” 36.

Under the management of Bard, Michael Kaufman became the first person to purchase 160 acres in 1868, followed by John D. Patterson with 5,000 acres. By 1888, Bard had called for a public auction of 16,000 acres to new settlers. It was intended to attract Whites to engage in commercial farming. The land was sold to migrants from the Midwest and East.<sup>30</sup> The first settlers composed of the families of the Maulhardt, Borchard, Saviers, Rice, and McGrath.

Between the 1860s and 1880s, the local farmers planted barley, corn, and wheat in Ventura County. In the 1890s they turned to lima beans, and Albert Maulhardt and other local farmers formed the Lima Bean Association in 1896. But as they began to lose money on the lima beans, they were attracted to a new cash crop, sugar beets. The McKinley Tariff Act of 1890 and the Dingley Tariff Act of 1897 encouraged the sugar beet industry in the United States. The major players in the sugar beet industry locally were Claus Spreckels and Henry T. Oxnard and his brothers.<sup>31</sup>

In 1896, Maulhardt and other farmers had visited Oxnard's Chino Valley Beet Company factory and decided to plant an experimental crop of sugar beets on Thomas Bard's property. The experiment made a profit for Maulhardt and Bard. Maulhardt then met with Henry T. Oxnard and his brothers to discuss a project of building a sugar beet factory in Ventura County. The Oxnard brothers agreed on a contingent with two major conditions, a grant of 100 acres for the factory and a commitment to grow sugar beets on 20,000 acres for a five-year period. In return, they would construct a two million

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas J. Osborne, "Claus Spreckels and the Oxnard Brothers: Pioneer Developers of California's Beet Sugar Industry, 1800-1900," *Southern California Quarterly*, Vol. LIV, no. 2 (Summer 1972): 117-125.

dollar sugar refinery and pay \$3.25 per ton of sugar beets, on 25 cents above the market value in 1897.<sup>32</sup>

Local historian Jeff Maulhardt points out that the Oxnard brothers received their 100 acres (subdivision 31 of Rancho El Rio de Santa Clara o La Colonia) from Thomas Rice for \$25,000 on November 15, 1897.<sup>33</sup> The property was four and one-half miles from town of Hueneme, California and north of the present day Wooley Road and east of Saviers Road. On February 28, 1898, Henry T. Oxnard and his brothers opened the American Beet Sugar Company (ABSC).<sup>34</sup> Within the first six months, the bustling town grew with hotels, restaurants, and merchandise stores.<sup>35</sup> The City of Oxnard was incorporated on June 30, 1903 and became “one of the many ‘boom towns’ in California.”<sup>36</sup>

Class and race divided the residents of the city. Local historian Verna Bloom noted that the west side of the city “was listening to lecture courses, hearing WCTU speakers...putting on minstrel shows,” and the east side “was rip-roaring western

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<sup>32</sup> Jeffrey Wayne Maulhardt, *Beans, Beets & Babies: The Second Generation of Farming Families Of The Oxnard Plain* (Oxnard, CA: MOBOOKS, 2001), 262.

<sup>33</sup> Maulhardt, *Beans, Beets & Babies*, 267.

<sup>34</sup> ABSC has had different names, Pacific Beet Company (1898), ABSC (1899) and the American Crystal Sugar Company (1934); see Maulhardt, *Beans, Beets & Babies*, 279.

<sup>35</sup> Maulhardt, *Beans, Beets & Babies*, 275

<sup>36</sup> Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines*, 187; official date of incorporation is from Herbert F. Richard, “Places Names of Ventura County,” *Ventura County Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. XVII, no. 2 (Winter 1972); “Petition for the Incorporation,” *Oxnard Courier*, 28 Mar 1903.

slums.”<sup>37</sup> The so-called slums were home to working-class Japanese, Chinese, and Mexicans. The non-White community settled in the following neighborhoods, China Alley, ABSC adobes, Meta Street, Eighth & Ninth Streets (between A and B Street), and La Colonia.

## LA COLONIA

National immigration policies, which focused on controlling immigration from Europe, led to the increase of the Mexican population in the United States, especially the Southwest. The United States passed the Immigration Act of 1917 to control the flow of immigrants into the country. The agri-business in the Southwest United States with the support of the Department of Labor was able to have Mexicans exempted from this restriction.<sup>38</sup> The Immigration Act of 1924 introduced the National Origins Act, which placed a 3% quota on the number immigrants from any country, but it did not place any restriction on immigration from Latin America, especially Mexico.

As the sugar beet industry expanded on the Oxnard Plain, the need for cheap labor continued which led to the recruitment of Mexican workers during the early 1900s. (see Figure 1.2) The Mexican working-class community was marginalized and segregated into four enclaves within the City of Oxnard; one of those enclaves became La Colonia. During the 1930s and 1940s, La Colonia became the permanent settlement

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<sup>37</sup> Verna Bloom, "Oxnard was busting out all over in the year it became a city, 1903," *Ventura County Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. 4 (February 1959), 19.

<sup>38</sup> Mark Reisler, *By The Sweat Of Their Brow: Mexican Immigrant Labor In The United States, 1900-1940* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood, Press, 1976); Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens And The Making Of Modern America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004).

for Mexicans and other people of color due to the subdivision of the area into small property lots. As a result, Mexicans began to buy and build their homes and formed a community bond among one another.



**Figure 1.2 Mexican Sugar Beet Workers, nd. Courtesy of the Museum of Ventura County.**

Two historical and physical markers in the La Colonia stand out for my family, the house on Bonita Avenue, and the housing projects, where my mother was born. In 1951, the Oxnard Housing Authority (OHA) started building a 240 units housing project on the outskirts of Oxnard, immediately east of La Colonia neighborhood. The housing project was named Colonia Village; its goal was to provide low-income housing to all the residents of Oxnard. In particular, the housing project provided new housing to La Colonia residents, who were living in substandard and crowded housing. Due to its location, Colonia Village expanded the boundaries of La Colonia.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> “Christmas Greetings,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 22 Dec 1951; “Colonia Village Tenants Named, 104 Units Ready,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 20 Jun 1952.

As a result, the formation of the City of Oxnard and La Colonia would shape my mother's identity and her understanding of migration and community.

### **MY MOTHER, GLORIA**

Throughout the years, I have had many conversations with my mother, Gloria about her life growing up in La Colonia. She has shared stories with me of migration, culture and community. Her understanding of these experiences shaped her identity as a Mexican. In this section, I share my mother's reflection on growing up in La Colonia through her interaction with her family and community.

My mother, Gloria De La Luz Gomez was born in 1952 in a one-story house in the Colonia Village's housing project on Bernarda Court in La Colonia. (see Figure 1.4) Her father Carlos José Gomez was a packinghouse worker and her mother Margarita Abundis De La Luz was a housewife. She was the second child of Margarita and Carlos, whose family included two more children from a previous marriage.<sup>40</sup> In 1956, she moved from the housing project to her grandfather's house on Bonita Street.<sup>41</sup> By 1958, her parents had divorced and her mother, Margarita was left to raise Gloria and her siblings alone.

My mother attended grammar school in La Colonia; Ramona School is only four houses down from her home. Juanita School is only two blocks away. It was not until the mid-1960s, that she attended a school outside her neighborhood. In 1970, she graduated from high school and one-year later she married Louie Garcia Moreno.

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<sup>40</sup> Gloria Moreno, interview; My grandmother had a total of six children.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.



During this time, she had moved out of La Colonia and to a different section of the City of Oxnard. In 1972, she gave birth to Louie Gomez Moreno and five-years later to Joseph Gomez Moreno.<sup>42</sup>



**Figure 1.3 My mother with her mother in the front yard of her Colonia Village’s home, 1952.  
Courtesy of the Author’s Family Collection.**

Her understanding of culture, migration, and community has shaped her identity. Historian Juan Gómez-Quiñones states “culture is learned rather than ‘instinctive,’ or biological.”<sup>43</sup> My mother learned to identify as Mexican from her parents and community. Throughout her life, her Mexican identity has been questioned by American society because she does not “look Mexican” due to her light skin, freckles and reddish

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<sup>42</sup> Gloria Moreno, interview.

<sup>43</sup> Juan Gómez-Quiñones, “On Culture,” *Popular Series No. 1* (UCLA Chicano Studies Center Publications, 1977), 6.



hair. During one conversation with my mother, I asked her the following question: have you been treated differently due to the color of your skin? She responded with the following story; as a child, she recalled going to events in downtown Oxnard with her grandfather, Jose. Individuals at those events would ask her grandfather if he was baby-sitting her. Their remarks frustrated Jose for they did not just come from Whites, but also from Mexicans.<sup>44</sup> Listening to the questions introduced my mother to how people in United States use skin color to define race, ethnicity, and nationality.

Eventually, my mother came to an understanding that many people do not see her as being Mexican. But she explained that the color of her skin did not make her Mexican, instead her history and her community did, and for the most of her life, she has lived in La Colonia. Her neighborhood has influenced her culture and her history, shaped by many generations of migration.<sup>45</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

This discussion of a family history and of migration does not have an ending. Growing up in La Colonia has affected the way my mother sees herself and way she has raised her sons. In her heart and mind, the little house on Bonita Street has always been home and community to her, no matter if she did not live there. Those experiences have defined my mother's life. She sees the world differently now. She sees the need to be a defender of her community, an activist who informs her community about their human and civil rights. In the end, my mother continues to play a role in supporting and

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<sup>44</sup> Gloria Moreno, interview.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

participating in the struggle to end the brutalization, marginalization, and segregation of the Mexican community in Oxnard, California.<sup>46</sup>

I utilized my mother's family history as a starting point, which is connected to the overall Mexican working-class history of Oxnard. This history is linked to the struggles of migration, labor, and activism. Like other Mexican families who settled out the migrant stream, Oxnard became our home. As we built our home, we faced many years or decades of struggles to be treated equality and respected. Therefore, the goal of the following chapters is to introduce a history of struggles and resistance. In other words, to give a voice to the voiceless.

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<sup>46</sup> Gloria Moreno, interview.

## CHAPTER TWO

### BY THE SWEAT OF THEIR BROW: MEXICAN MIGRATION AND CONFLICT DURING THE 1930's

#### INTRODUCTION

*"I have left the best of my life and my strength here sprinkling with the sweat of my brow  
in the fields and factories."*

- **Juan Berzunzolo, 1927**<sup>1</sup>

*"We have no time to speak with these Mexican peons."*

- **South California Beet Growers Association of Oxnard**<sup>2</sup>

In February 1903, the same month, which the city of Oxnard was incorporated, more than nine hundred Mexican and Japanese *betabeleros* under the banner of the Japanese-Mexican Labor Association (JMLA) went on strike against the Western Agricultural Contracting Company (WACC), the key labor contractor for the American Beet Sugar Company (ABSC).<sup>3</sup> Sociologist Tomás Almaguer acknowledged this event as "the first to strike successfully against white capitalist interests in the state."<sup>4</sup> Subsequently, the Oxnard Plain became a key location for labor unrest and migration. Geographer Timothy Dagodag added that the migration of Mexicans to the Oxnard Plain "occurred as a consequence of a shortage of cheap labor and simultaneous

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<sup>1</sup> Manuel Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 147, quoted in Mark Reisler, *By The Sweat Of Their Brow: Mexican Immigrant Labor In The United States, 1900-1940* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood, Press, 1976), ix.

<sup>2</sup> "1200 out at Oxnard," *Western Workers*, 21 Aug 1933.

<sup>3</sup> Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 183-204.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

economic, social, and political upheaval in Mexico.”<sup>5</sup> So, in this context, my community, the Mexican working-class was born out of those struggles and migration.

The drive to recruit Mexicans as cheap labor led to the rise of the California’s agri-business. Carey McWilliams labeled the history of California’s agri-business, “one of the ugliest chapters in the history of American industry.”<sup>6</sup> McWilliams concluded that the industrialization of the agri-business had led to “factories in the field.” Likewise, historian Mark Reisler wrote that the “movement of Mexican workers in the United States was inextricably linked to the economic development of the American Southwest.”<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, this migration is seen in the United States Census of 1910, which reported more than 360,000 Mexicans in the United States, which included 48,391 in California, and 1,161 in Ventura County.<sup>8</sup>

In the early years of the sugar beets industry, Mexican workers followed the migration stream into Oxnard, California and began to temporarily settle in the working-class neighborhoods of Meta Street or the Eighth & Ninth Streets. Those neighborhoods were connected to the means of production, which used Mexican workers as disposable labor in sugar beets and vegetable industries. Yet, a sense of community was being

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<sup>5</sup> Timothy Dagodag, “A Social Geography Of La Colonia: A Mexican-American Settlement In The City Of Oxnard, California” (Master’s thesis, California State University, Northridge 1967), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Carey McWilliams, *Factories In The Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1939), 7.

<sup>7</sup> Reisler, *By The Sweat Of Their Brow*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, *Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and by Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, for Large Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States* (Washington, DC: Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau, 2005); Will J. French, *Mexicans in California: Report of Governor C.C. Young’s Mexican Fact Finding Committee* (San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, 1970), 46.

developed, even as Mexican workers continued to follow the harvest seasons throughout California and the Southwest United States.

In 1915, the Roman Catholic Church opened Our Lady of Guadalupe, the first Mexican church on the corner of Meta Street and East Seventh Street to serve the expanding Mexican working-class community.<sup>9</sup> Two years later, the ABSC increased the recruitment of Mexicans into Ventura County by building adobe housing for workers and their families. By the 1920s, Mexicans had become the predominant labor forces in California and especially on the Oxnard Plain. As a result, new neighborhoods were “founded by and continue[d] to develop in response to Mexican immigration.”<sup>10</sup> As the population increased, the Mexican workers came from the Mexican states of Jalisco, Michoacán, and Guanajuato.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, by 1930 the United States Census reported more than 4,000 Mexicans in Ventura County.<sup>12</sup>

This chapter examines Mexican migration and conflict and its connection to agribusiness of the Oxnard Plain during the 1930s. As well, it focuses on the development of the Mexican working-class community and labor unrest.

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<sup>9</sup> Catherine Mervyn, *A Tower in the Valley: The History of Santa Clara Church* (Toppan, NY: Custombook, 1989), 95-99; “Fire destroys historic church,” *The Press-Courier*, 23 Dec 1963.

<sup>10</sup> Dagodag, “A Social Geography Of La Colonia,” 1.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>12</sup> French, *Mexicans in California*, 46.

## MEXICAN MIGRATION AND CONFLICT

Tomas Almaguer noted that “California has experienced a distinct and unique history of race and ethnic relations.”<sup>13</sup> This unique history has played an important part in the conflict between the classes, especially between Whites and Mexicans on the Oxnard Plain. As a result, Almaguer pointed out, “the social division of Oxnard reflected the organization of the community along clearly discernible racial and class lines.”<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the segregation in Oxnard and throughout California “grew out of policy decisions corresponding to the economic interests of the Anglo community.”<sup>15</sup>

The racial and ethnic conflict grew out the notion of White supremacy, which constructed a perspective of Mexicans being inferior to Whites.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, as Mexican population increased, this perspective took shape in the attitudes, ideologies, and politics of Whites toward Mexicans.<sup>17</sup> This White supremacy ideology is seen in the reaction to Mexican migration as a result of economic hardship during the Mexican Revolution between 1910 and 1920.<sup>18</sup> The United States acted on this conflict by passing its first national immigration policy with the Immigration Act of 1917. The goal of the 1917 Act was to control the flow of immigrants into the United States by placing a ban on the “undesirable” and illiterate. Yet, the outbreak of World War I (WWI) worried

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<sup>13</sup> Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines*, 1.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>15</sup> Gilbert Gonzalez, *Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation* (Philadelphia: Balch Institute Press, 1990), 27.

<sup>16</sup> Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines*, 7-9.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> John Ramon Martinez, *Mexican Emigration to the United States, 1910-1930* (San Francisco: R & E Research Associates, 1972), 9.

agri-business interests in the Southwest United States, they were able to get Mexicans exempted from this restriction.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the United States made a unilateral decision to admit Mexicans as temporary workers in agriculture, railroad, and mines until December 31, 1919.<sup>20</sup>

In 1920, the Secretary of Labor appointed a committee to examine the impact of the exemption of Mexicans from the head tax and literacy test passed by the 1917 legislature. The committee focused its investigation on the “claims and counterclaims of individuals and organizations relative to the dearth or surplusage of farm labor and movement of Mexican labor.”<sup>21</sup> It found between 1917 and 1920, more than 50,000 Mexicans were admitted under the exemption, with 22,637 returning to Mexico. It concluded that Mexicans were “not displacing white laborers in any appreciable degree.”<sup>22</sup> This investigation helped set the stage for the Immigration Act of 1924, which introduced the National Origins Act that placed a 3% quota on the number

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<sup>19</sup> Reisler, *By The Sweat Of Their Brow*, 24-48.

<sup>20</sup> United States, *Migratory Labor in American Agriculture: Report of the President's Commission on Migratory Labor* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1951), 37.

<sup>21</sup> “Results of admission of Mexican laborers,” *Monthly Labor Review*, Vol. XI, no. 5 (November 1920): 1095.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 1097.

immigrants from any country.<sup>23</sup> The 1924 Act did not place any limits on immigration countries from Latin America, of which Mexico was the most important.<sup>24</sup>

On the Oxnard Plain, a number of organizations favored unrestricted migration of Mexican workers into the United States. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that the Farm Bureau of Ventura County (FBVC) was “in favor of permitting Mexicans to enter this country...on the grounds that Mexican labor is abolitionary necessary for work in the fields.”<sup>25</sup> On a similar note, the Oxnard Chamber of Commerce (OCC) urged unrestricted migration into California due to the fact that growers “would be crippled without Mexican labor.”<sup>26</sup> However, Ventura County Superintendent of Schools, Blanche Reynolds pushed for restriction on Mexican migration. Reynolds stated, “give us a chance to make proper American citizens out of the Mexicans by not flooding this county with them.”<sup>27</sup>

By 1930, the United States Census reported more than 1,400,000 Mexicans living and working in the United States, including more than 360,000 in California.<sup>28</sup> Agri-business leader like Charles C. Teague, president of the California Fruit Grower Exchange strongly supported continued migration, asserting that:

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<sup>23</sup> *U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service, Legislation from 1901-1940* (accessed 20 September 2011); Philip Martin and Elizabeth Midgley, “Immigration: Shaping And Reshaping America,” *Population Bulletin*, Vol. 61, no. 4 (December 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens And The Making Of Modern America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 50-55.

<sup>25</sup> “Mexican aid sought for field work,” *Los Angeles Times*, 6 Mar 1926.

<sup>26</sup> “Farmers here need big scare to awaken them,” *The Oxnard Daily Courier*, 5 Mar 1926.

<sup>27</sup> “Mexican costs are too high say co. head,” *The Oxnard Daily Courier*, 31 Jan 1928.

<sup>28</sup> Gibson and Jung, *Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race*, 2005.



“Mexican casual labor fills the requirement of the California farm as no other had done in the past. The Mexican withstands the high temperatures...is adapted to the field conditions...does heavy field work –particularly in the so called ‘stoop crops’ and ‘knee crops’ of vegetable and cantaloupe production –which white labor refuses to do and is constitutionally unsuited to perform.”<sup>29</sup>

As Alicia Schmidt Camacho points out that “labor migration reinforced the historical pattern of treating Mexican migrants as ‘always the labor, never the citizen.’”<sup>30</sup> As the Mexican population increased in the United States during this period, the number and size of the barrios and colonias increased, and they became permanent sites of conflict between Whites and Mexicans. Historian Juan Gomez-Quinones highlights that “a contradiction existed between those who sought to maximize profits by bringing in Mexican labor and those who saw Mexicans as a threat to the homogeneity of Anglo society.”<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the conflict was linked to the construction of the so-called “Mexican Problem” in early twentieth century.

As historian Gilbert Gonzalez asserts, according to its adherents, the Mexican problem “summarized the political, economic, and cultural backwardness that prevented Mexico from peerage with the developed nations of the world.”<sup>32</sup> Many individuals who accepted the notion of the “Mexican Problem” attempted to “correct” the cultural

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<sup>29</sup> Charles C. Teague, “A Statement on Mexican Immigration,” *The Saturday Evening Post*, 10 Mar 1928.

<sup>30</sup> Alicia Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 69; see Mark Reisler, “Always the Laborer, Never the Citizen: Anglo Perceptions of Mexican Immigrant during the 1920s,” *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 45, no. 2 (May 1976): 231-254.

<sup>31</sup> Juan Gomez-Quinones, *Mexican American Labor, 1790-1990* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 65.

<sup>32</sup> Gilbert Gonzalez, “The “Mexican Problem”: Empire, Public Policy, and the Education of Mexican Immigrants, 1880-1930,” *Aztlan*, Vol. 26, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 203.

backwardness of Mexicans through Americanization programs. Or in other words, assimilated them into American society. But as the United States entered into the Great Depression, the government made Mexican workers into scapegoat and targeted Mexican communities for repatriation. Reconfiguring the “Mexican Problem” to justify the repatriation movement. They encouraged hundreds of thousands of Mexicans to journey to Mexico. As a result, the Mexican population decreased throughout the United States during the 1930s.

### **SETTLING OUT, THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MEXICAN COMMUNITY**

As agri-business in Ventura County expanded, Mexican workers who followed the corridors of migration through California settled permanently in this area. But, their settlement was not random. It followed a logic of class and race, which divided the residents of the City of Oxnard. On the Oxnard Plain, this division of labor could be seen through the creation of Mexican neighborhoods by employers and developers near the ABSC factory, as well as near the fields where they worked. Mexicans settled in four key neighborhoods of the city: the ABSC adobes, Meta Street, Eighth & Ninth Streets (between A and B Streets), and La Colonia.

In 1898, the ABSC opened its door and four years later the City of Oxnard was incorporated. The leading economic sector of the area, agri-business adopted Taylorism, or scientific management to increase labor productivity. In California, it also involved racialization of agricultural labor, as growers relied on non-White agriculture workers: Chinese, Japanese, East Indian (Sikh), and Mexicans to plant, cultivate, and harvest the crops. By the turn of the twentieth century local growers were turning to

Mexican workers, as Asian immigration was being limited by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and Gentlemen's Agreement of 1907 for Japanese workers.

The ABSC and growers' reliance on Mexican workers was accompanied by increased Mexican settlement. Mercedes Silveria, who migrated to Oxnard in 1905, observed that when he arrived "there were only 50 Mexican families in Oxnard, most of them from the old country."<sup>33</sup> The first Mexican workers settled in the Meta Street neighborhood near the ABSC factory or on Eighth & Ninth Streets (between A and B Streets). In 1917, ABSC Manager Frederick Noble set up a plan to address the housing storage for Mexican employees. Noble had "seen the home system used successfully in Colorado."<sup>34</sup> Noble advocated for free permanent housing for Mexican workers and families to members of the local farm bureau.<sup>35</sup>

After much discussion with the local growers, the ABSC moved to construct more than 200 adobes for Mexican workers to fix the labor and housing storage.<sup>36</sup> In February of 1918, the city approved a permit for the ABSC to construct thirty-seven (37) adobe houses off East Fifth Street, adjacent to the Southern Pacific Depot.<sup>37</sup> ABSC labor supervisor R.G. Beach, hoping to counter stereotypes and fear by local Whites, asserted that "Mexican families that do occupy the houses are of the best type of

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<sup>33</sup> "Mexican-Americans taking even greater role in city," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 24 Sep 1948.

<sup>34</sup> "Adobe Houses for Mexican laborers," *Oxnard Courier*, 14 Dec 1917.

<sup>35</sup> "Homes for workers solve labor need," *Oxnard Courier*, 8 Feb 1918.

<sup>36</sup> "Building 250 adobe houses," *Oxnard Courier*, 11 Jan 1918.

<sup>37</sup> "Building permits," *Oxnard Courier*, 22 Feb 1918; Frank P. Barajas, "Work And Leisure In La Colonia: Class, Generation, And Interethnic Alliances Among Mexicanos In Oxnard, California, 1890-1945" (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate University, 2001), 64.

Mexican laborers in every way.”<sup>38</sup> The *Oxnard Courier* reported that “it is safe to say that there will be no more dearth of field labor when labor is needed most.”<sup>39</sup> The dwellings went up quickly, and by the end of February, more than twenty Mexican workers and families had moved into the adobes. (see Figure 2.1) The settlement was reported positively by most, but is also set the stage for potential conflict. Officer Eloise Thornton of the Oxnard Police Department (OPD) reported, “most of the newcomers are good laboring people but with them has come some undesirables.”<sup>40</sup>

The *Oxnard Courier* was optimistic about the “permanent labor supply [Mexican workers] in this community, not only for taking care of the labor incidental to raising a beet crop but for all other crops.”<sup>41</sup> Another resident, Eligo Jimenez, an employee of ABSC since 1900 confirmed that, “Mexican workers were recruited from Mexico and other areas of California and lived in the ABSC adobes.”<sup>42</sup> Growers embraced the new ABSC plan because it solved their field labor shortage.<sup>43</sup> By 1920, it was reported that more than 700 field workers, the majority being *betabeleros* (Mexican beet workers) were working in the beet fields of Oxnard, and that they were part of “the establishment of a permanent Mexican colony here of higher grade Mexicans.”<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the ABSC and growers continued to import about a thousand migrant laborers into the area,

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<sup>38</sup> “Best Mexican families only to be brought here,” *Oxnard Courier*, 15 Feb 1918.

<sup>39</sup> “A simple solution,” *Oxnard Courier*, 22 Feb 1918.

<sup>40</sup> “Free houses bring Mexican families,” *Oxnard Courier*, 15 Feb 1918.

<sup>41</sup> “Sugar beet outlook is hopeful,” *Oxnard Courier*, 15 Mar 1918.

<sup>42</sup> “Mexican-Americans taking even greater role in city,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 24 Sep 1948.

<sup>43</sup> “Will cost \$2000 or more each; land already bought,” *Oxnard Courier*, 17 May 1918.

<sup>44</sup> “750 people now working beet fields,” *The Oxnard Daily Courier*, 31 Mar 1920.

increasing the demand for permanent housing.<sup>45</sup>



**Figure 2.1 Residents of the ABSC adobes, nd. Courtesy of the Museum of Ventura County.**

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In 1913, Aranetta Hill, the widow of John G. Hill divided her 90 acres property into three 20 acres tracts and one 30 acres tract and sold them to W.H. Lathrop, John Westland, and Alvin Olson.<sup>46</sup> The tract was east of downtown Oxnard. W.H. Lathrop and other developers moved to expand the city boundaries with new housing tracts to accommodate its booming population. (see Figure 2.2) By 1921, Subdivision Realty had purchased 30 acres of the Aranetta Hill tract and subdivided into a half-quarter acre parcels.<sup>47</sup> On July 21, the Subdivision Realty advertised the opening of the Colonia

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<sup>45</sup> Frank P. Barajas, "Work And Leisure In La Colonia," 65.

<sup>46</sup> "3 big deals in nearby real estate", *The Oxnard Daily Courier*, 15 Nov 1913.

<sup>47</sup> "New subdivision to open up in Oxnard," *The Oxnard Daily Courier*, 21 Jul 1921.

Home Gardens tract just east of the downtown, near the ABSC factory and beet fields.<sup>48</sup> Three days later, Subdivision Realty sold 32 plots and by July 29, they had sold all of the 112 plots to 73 people.<sup>49</sup> With the opening of the Colonia Home Gardens, the *Oxnard Daily Courier* reported that the City of Oxnard had reached a population of 5,500.<sup>50</sup>

Aurelio Moreno became the first Mexican resident of Colonia Home Gardens granted a permit to build housing in the new tract.<sup>51</sup> He was joined by Calixtro Segovia, Cecillio Barra, Jose Martinez, and Julian Barajas as the earliest Mexican families to build homes in Colonia Home Gardens, which joined the ABSC adobes, Meta Street, and Eighth & Ninth Streets as a Mexican neighborhood in the city.<sup>52</sup> Colonia Home Gardens stood out from the others as the only one in which Mexicans had the opportunity to buy their own plot of land.<sup>53</sup> In 1926, W.H. Lathrop opened up Ramona Gardens adjacent to Colonia Home Gardens.<sup>54</sup> As a result of the new tract, *The Oxnard Daily Courier* reported that “the Mexican center of population has been shifting from the

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<sup>48</sup> “The Awakening” *The Oxnard Daily Courier*, 21 Jul 1921

<sup>49</sup> “Making many land sales,” *The Oxnard Daily Courier*, 23 Jul 1921; “New subdivision lots are all sold out,” *The Oxnard Daily Courier*, 29 Jul 1921.

<sup>50</sup> “Population of Oxnard over 5,500,” *The Oxnard Daily Courier*, 29 Sep 1921.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> “Mexican-Americans taking even greater role in city,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 24 Sep 1948.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> “To subdivide more land,” *The Oxnard Daily Courier*, 2 Feb 1923; “Lathrop will move old buildings to Mexican colony east of town,” *The Oxnard Daily Courier*, 19 Jun 1926; “Death takes WH Lathrop city leader,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 17 May 1958.

southern and eastern end of Oxnard to the new subdivisions.”<sup>55</sup> As time passed, Ramona Gardens merged into Colonia Home Gardens becoming La Colonia neighborhood. Thereafter, La Colonia became the largest Mexican neighborhood in the city; altogether it was also home to working-class Asians and Blacks.<sup>56</sup>



**Figure 2.2 Aerial View of Oxnard, CA, 1935. Courtesy of the Museum of Ventura County.**

In 1930s, Carey McWilliams representing the Division of Immigration and Housing for the State of California, reported that a crisis of migrant housing was

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<sup>55</sup> “Baptists buy two lots for Mexican Church,” *The Oxnard Daily Courier*, 31 Dec 1926.

<sup>56</sup> “Will Oxnard’s new Chinatown be in the Ramona Gardens,” *The Oxnard Daily Courier*, 4 May 1929.

spreading.<sup>57</sup> He wrote that “the housing that has grown up in these shack-towns is a wildcat, unregulated housing, as most of these communities are outside the incorporated area, and are not subject to any type of building restriction or building code.”<sup>58</sup> This was evident in La Colonia where unregulated housing was widespread. The residents of La Colonia petitioned the city numerous times for sidewalks, curbs and a sewer system.<sup>59</sup> But, it was not until the late 1940s that the city finally paved the streets of La Colonia.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, city officials were able to enforce the division of race and class through unfair housing policies and segregation.

Yet, the residents of La Colonia embraced their neighborhood with a sense of “Mexico Lindo.” As historian Frank Barajas noted that the Mexican community of Oxnard with their differences “by gender, education, generation, and class –reinforced their ethnic and national identity by recognizing itself as “Mexico de Afuera.”<sup>61</sup> Since 1910, numerous Mexican Independence celebration were held on the Oxnard Plain.<sup>62</sup> In 1920, the Mexican Consulate formed the Comisión Honorífica Mexicana (CHM) in

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<sup>57</sup> “Current housing problems in California, n.d.,” Carey McWilliams Papers, Box 34, Folder 1, Department Of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University Of California, Los Angeles (hereafter cited as McWilliams Papers).

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> “Many matters camp up before city trustees,” *The Oxnard Daily Courier*, 21 Nov 1923; “Plan sidewalks, curbs for Colonia Gardens,” *The Oxnard Daily Courier*, 27 Jul 1927; “Colonia Mexican folk want lights and walks,” *The Oxnard Daily Courier*, 3 Feb 1926; “Will vote on sewer issues if deeds secured,” *The Oxnard Daily Courier*, 4 Feb 1928.

<sup>60</sup> Dagodag, “A Social Geography of La Colonia,” 8.

<sup>61</sup> Barajas, “Work And Leisure In La Colonia,” 80.

<sup>62</sup> I found it first reported in the *Oxnard Courier*, see “Mexico’s independence suitably celebrated,” *Oxnard Courier*, 28 Sep 1901.



Oxnard.<sup>63</sup> Thereafter, other organizations followed, like the Unión Patriótica Benéfica Mexicana Independiente (UPBMI) and Alianza Hispano Americana (AHA) to serve and provided activities for the Mexican residents of Oxnard and surrounding areas.<sup>64</sup> By 1923, local mutual aid societies and businessmen took over the task of organizing the annual Mexican Independence celebration in Oxnard.<sup>65</sup>

As the Mexican working-class community took form in La Colonia, a number of services were established. In 1926, businessman Jesus N. Jimenez took over as the managing editor of *La Voz de la Colonia*, the only Spanish language weekly in Ventura County.<sup>66</sup> The weekly was utilized as a vehicle to share information on activities of the local mutual aid societies and business community in Oxnard and throughout Ventura County. By 1928, the Southern California Baptist Convention opened up a Mexican Baptist Church, followed by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese in 1933 with St. John Vianney Chapel, both served the needs of the expanding community.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> "Mexican-Americans taking even greater role in city," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 24 Sep 1948.

<sup>64</sup> "Mexicans from many colonies organize," *The Oxnard Daily Courier*, 12 May 1924.

<sup>65</sup> "Mexican Independence day to be celebrated with big program here," *The Oxnard Daily Courier*, 27 Jul 1923; "County wide celebration Mexican Independence day to be staged here," *The Oxnard Daily Courier*, 1 Aug 1923; "Mexicans making great progress toward their September celebration," *The Oxnard Daily Courier*, 9 Aug 1923; "Mexicans from all part of county to celebrate here soon," *The Oxnard Daily Courier*, 8 Sep 1923; "110<sup>th</sup> Mexican Independence day observed," *The Oxnard Daily Courier*, 15 Sep 1923.

<sup>66</sup> "Jesus N. Jimenez is new newspaper editor," *The Oxnard Daily Courier*, 10 Jul 1926; "Mexican-Americans taking even greater role in city," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 24 Sep 1948.

<sup>67</sup> "Baptists buy two lots for Mexican church," *The Oxnard Daily Courier*, 31 Dec 1926; "Complete plans for Baptists new church," *The Oxnard Daily Courier*, 10 Apr 1928; "Christ the King Church to build new grade school," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 31 Dec 1954.

Meanwhile, as Mexicans began to permanently settle in Oxnard during the 1930s, a number of unions and agricultural workers throughout California battled the agri-business for better wages and work conditions.

### **WORKERS, UNIONS, AND EARLY CONFLICT**

During the 1930s, California became a key location of struggle in the drive to organize agricultural workers. Geographer Don Mitchell stated, “both *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Factories in the Field* were...more than a call to arms, they were rather a culmination of the struggles that marked the 1930s.”<sup>68</sup> In this call to arms, Carey McWilliams, John Steinbeck, and Paul Taylor addressed the plight of agricultural workers and their creative responses to the challenges they encountered. The Communist Party (CP), American Federation of Labor (AFL), and Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) all took on the mission to organize agricultural labor during this decade.

Historian Rodolfo Acuña pointed out that, “Mexicans have always organized, but they have seldom done so formally –in part because non-Mexicans assumed it was not in their nature.”<sup>69</sup> Mexican and Filipino agricultural workers also formed their own unions, like the Confederación de Uniones de Campesinos y Obreros Mexicanos (CUCOM) and Filipino Agricultural Laborers Association (FALA) to demand better housing, work conditions, and wages. As they organized to improve their lives,

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<sup>68</sup> Don Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land: Migrant Workers and the California Landscape* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 196.

<sup>69</sup> Rodolfo Acuña, *Corridors Of Migration: The Odyssey Of Mexican Laborers, 1600-1933* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007), 274.

agricultural workers called strikes throughout California. Sociologists Linda Majka and Theo Majka noted that the organizational efforts led to “the radicalization of the agricultural labor force, which was to turn the California fields into a battleground for most of the 1930s.”<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, historian Cletus Daniel documented that, “large-scale agriculture in California could not survive without Mexican labor, and they resolved to use their political power and influence to ensure that it remained available to them.”<sup>71</sup>

The CP led efforts to organize cannery and agricultural workers through the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL) in 1929. They moved to form the Agricultural Workers Industrial League (AWIL) to organize agricultural workers.<sup>72</sup> By 1931, the AWIL changed its name to the Agricultural Workers Industrial Union (AWIU). Union leaders “sought to advance the union’s fortunes by taking advantage of the spontaneous strike provoked by steadily declining wages and deteriorating working conditions.”<sup>73</sup> They focused their energy in organizing cannery workers in Santa Clara Valley, California. By the end of the labor dispute in Santa Clara Valley, the union changed its name to the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union (CAWIU) but “they did almost nothing to recruit new members or to retain old ones.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Linda C. Majka and Theo J. Majka, *Farm Workers, Agribusiness, and the State* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 68.

<sup>71</sup> Cletus Daniel, *Bitter Harvest: A History of California Farmworkers, 1870-1941* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 67.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 111

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 127

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 128

The CAWIU “sent organizers to strike areas to escalate protests, coordinate the disruption of agricultural production, and gain concessions through mass defiance.”<sup>75</sup> The CAWIU consciously organized cannery and agricultural labor across the ethnic lines, and it was responsible for the strike wave of the early 1930s. It led most of the strikes during this period by entering conflicts that had already begun. The CAWIU participated in 37 strikes with more than 4,000 agricultural workers in 14 different crops ranging from peas, berries, sugar beets, lettuce, and grapes.<sup>76</sup> The majority of the strikes provided few lasting gains for cannery and agricultural workers but they helped CAWIU to develop “organizing techniques and strike strategy that were successfully utilized in the later struggles.”<sup>77</sup>

So by 1932, the CAWIU had very few members. The CAWIU refocused under the leadership of Sam Darcy from the CPUSA, District 13. Darcy “concluded that if farmworkers were to be unionized by the party, the actual work of organizing them had to be done by members who were themselves from the working-class.”<sup>78</sup> The CAWIU “launched an intensive program to recruit and train organizers who, because of their own class background and experience, were able to relate to the state’s farmworkers even if they were not actually from the ranks of the agricultural labor force.”<sup>79</sup> With this new focus, the structure and the orientation of the CAWIU moved to develop a new

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<sup>75</sup> Majka and Majka, *Farm Workers*, 74.

<sup>76</sup> Philip Martin, *Promise Unfulfilled: Unions, Immigration and the Farm Workers* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 62.

<sup>77</sup> Majka and Majka, *Farm Workers*, 75.

<sup>78</sup> Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 133

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

approach to organizing agricultural workers by involving a grass-root level in the union's decision-making processes.<sup>80</sup>

CAWIU "leaders were instructed to build the union through strong mass organization, and not by feeding off spontaneous workers' uprising."<sup>81</sup> A critical test for the CAWIU came in 1933, as it took on the powerful cotton industry in the San Joaquin Valley. Cotton pickers of the union, whom were Mexican, called for a strike, demanding higher wages and the abolition of the labor contractor system. The strike lasted twenty-four days and ended in violence & deaths sparked by the growers.<sup>82</sup> By 1935, CAWIU had been defeated and was dissolved by the TUUL.

In 1936, an informal caucus was formed at the AFL Fifty-Sixth Annual Convention in Tampa, Florida to develop an independent international union, which later became the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA). A conflict arose between the AFL and CIO over the vision of organizing labor. The CIO took on the mission to develop the UCAPAWA, under their vision of recruiting unskilled workers along industrial lines in contrast to the standard craft union approach of the AFL. The UCAPAWA's founders envisioned a "bottom to top" organization, with a broader range of membership and leadership, which included Luisa Moreno and Emma Tenayuca.<sup>83</sup> The union pushed for "worker solidarity across occupational, racial, gender, religious, and political lines."<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Acuña, *Corridors of Migration*, 237-274.

<sup>83</sup> From more information on the activities of Emma Tenayuca and Luisa Moreno, see

By 1937, the UCAPAWA entered the drive to organize agricultural workers in California and inherited the “legacy of experience and consciousness” of past organizing attempts.<sup>85</sup> Historian Vicki Ruiz stated that the, “UCAPAWA provide[d] a model for democratic trade unionism in the United States.”<sup>86</sup> Even with a clear political line, the union still found it “difficult to keep [workers] attached to [the] organization, even if they once join” due to the work force being migratory.<sup>87</sup> Just as, the CAWIU, the union “initiated few strikes but felt compelled to direct numerous unorganized and spontaneous strikes when the strikers appealed to it for support.”<sup>88</sup>

In 1938, the union had been involved with more than 20 strikes involving over 5,000 agricultural workers.<sup>89</sup> By 1940, the UCAPAWA under the leadership of “Donald Henderson decided to focus primarily on cannery and packinghouse workers” not agricultural workers.”<sup>90</sup> This move was “not intended to be permanent” only to “give the

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the following articles, Zaragosa Vargas, “Tejana Radical: Emma Tenayuca and the San Antonio Labor Movement,” *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 66, no. 4 (Nov 1997): 553-580; Vicki Ruiz, “Una Mujer Sin Fronteras: Luisa Moreno And Latina Labor Activism,” *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 73, no. 1 (Feb 2004): 1-20.

<sup>84</sup> Vicki Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), 45

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 51

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 41

<sup>87</sup> Harry Schwartz, “Recent Developments Among Farm Labor Unions,” *Journal of Farm Economics*, Vol. 23, no. 4 (1941): 834.

<sup>88</sup> Majka and Majka, *Farm Workers*, 127

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 128

<sup>90</sup> Dionicio Nodín Valdés, *Organized Agriculture and the Labor Movement Before the UFW: Puerto Rico, Hawai'i, California* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 173.

UCAPAWA more stability.”<sup>91</sup> But, the union would never return to organizing agricultural workers in California.

Daniel noted “by the mid-1920s Mexicans not only had become mainstays of the agricultural labor force, but had displaced the Chinese in the employers’ conception of ideal farmworkers.”<sup>92</sup> In this context, a number of Mexican and Filipino unions were formed to organizing agricultural workers. In 1928, several mutual-aid societies in Southern California met and formed the Confederacion de Uniones Obreras Mexicanas (CUOM) “to promote bread-and-butter unionism among Mexican workers.”<sup>93</sup> The CUOM believed “that the exploited class, the greater part of which is made up of manual labor is right in establishing a class struggle in order to effect an economic and moral betterment of its condition, and at last its complete freedom from capitalist tyranny.”<sup>94</sup> Nevertheless, the Mexican consulate had a active role in the CUOM, which was directed by Mexican President Plutarco Calles.<sup>95</sup> The CUOM agreed with

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<sup>91</sup> Victor Nelson-Cisneros, “UCAPAWA and Chicanos in California: The Farm Worker Period, 1937–1940,” *Aztlan*, Vol. 7, no. 3 (Fall 1976), 471.

<sup>92</sup> Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 67

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 106

<sup>94</sup> Douglas Monroy, “Anarquismo y Comunismo: Mexican Radicalism and the Communist Park in Los Angeles during 1930s,” *Labor History*, Vol. 24, no. 1 (Winter 1983): 39.

<sup>95</sup> Gilbert Gonzalez, *Labor and Community: Mexican Citrus Worker Villages in a Southern California County, 1900-1950* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 138; Gilbert Gonzalez, “The 1933 Los Angeles Farm Workers Strike,” *New Political Science*, Vol. 20, no. 4 (1998): 441.

restricting further Mexican immigration into the United States and assisted in repatriating Mexican workers back to Mexico.<sup>96</sup>

In 1933, the CUOM was involved in strike for better wages against berry growers in El Monte, California. In solidarity, the CAWIU joined the strike and moved to spread the strike into other crops.<sup>97</sup> The Mexican consulate had “waged a powerful offensive against leftist organizations,” which included the CAWIU.<sup>98</sup> Due to the consulate’s influence, the union distanced itself from the CAWIU.<sup>99</sup> By the end of strike, the CUOM had reorganized as the Confederacion de Uniones de Campesinos y Obreros Mexicanos. The CUCOM moved to settle the strike, but conflict between the rank and file and the Mexican consulate would continue.<sup>100</sup> By 1936, the CUCOM voted to cut ties with the consulate due to the “heated controversy during the Orange County citrus pickers strike of 1936.”<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, this would be last time the Mexican consulate was involved with any labor dispute during 1930s.<sup>102</sup>

Likewise, the Filipino Agricultural Laborers Association (FALA) was formed in 1938 in Stockton, California. The union leadership pushed to include and invite Mexican

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<sup>96</sup> Will J. French, *Mexicans in California*, 124.

<sup>97</sup> Mark Reisler, “Mexican Unionization in California Agriculture, 1927-1936,” *Labor History*, Vol. 14, no. 4 (1973): 570.

<sup>98</sup> Gonzalez, “The 1933 Los Angeles Farm Workers Strike,” 441.

<sup>99</sup> Mark Reisler, “Mexican Unionization in California Agriculture, 1927-1936,” *Labor History*, Vol. 14, no. 4 (1973): 570.

<sup>100</sup> Gonzalez, “The 1933 Los Angeles Farm Workers Strike,” 456-457.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 442.

<sup>102</sup> Gonzalez, *Labor and Community*, 159.



agricultural workers into their rank.<sup>103</sup> The FALA was successful in organizing agricultural workers in the asparagus, celery, brussels sprouts, and garlic fields. Yet, the AFL continued to refuse to affiliate a number of Mexican or Filipino unions. The leadership “insisted the union accept all workers into their rank without discrimination.”<sup>104</sup> By 1940 the FALA had more than 30,000 members and was charter member of the AFL.<sup>105</sup>

As a result of the drive to organize agricultural workers during the 1930s, the CAWIU with the Filipino Protective League (FPL) initiated a drive to organize Mexican and Filipino *betabeleros*, who worked thinning, hoeing, and topping of sugar beets on the Oxnard Plain in 1933.

### **THE SUGAR BEET STRIKE OF 1933**

In 1933, the ABSC was able to disburse over two million dollars in payment to local beet growers, “a 17 percent increase from the year before.”<sup>106</sup> (see Figure 2.3) This payout led to a conflict between growers and workers over wages and working conditions. By August 1933, Mexican and Filipino *betabeleros* demanded that the local sugar beet growers eliminate labor contractors, and they warned County Supervisor Joseph McGrath, the largest grower of sugar beets, “that unless their demands were

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<sup>103</sup> changed its name to Federated Agricultural Laborers Association, see Larry Saloman, “Filipinos Build a Movement for Justice in the Asparagus Fields,” *Third Force*, Vol. 2, no. 4 (Oct 31, 1994): 30-31.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>106</sup> Frank P. Barajas, “Resistance, Radicalism, and Repression on the Oxnard Plain: The Social Context of the Betabelero Strike of 1933,” *The Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 35, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 37.

met they would strike.”<sup>107</sup> Led by CAWIU organizers, they set a 10:30am deadline for Sunday, August 6 for local growers to meet workers’ demands.<sup>108</sup> Jack Miller of the Oxnard Chamber of Commerce (OCC) reported that growers could secure more than 700 Mexican workers to counter a possible strike.<sup>109</sup> On August 4, the strike committee representing the CAWIU and FPL met with McGrath and ABSC manager John Rooney to discuss their demands but no resolution was reached.<sup>110</sup>

On August 7, 1,200 Mexicans and Filipinos *betabeleros* went on strike.<sup>111</sup> The CAWIU demanded:

1. *That the present rate for topping beets be raised to 50%. Higher when men do work by tonnage in companies. That the minimum wage for general farm and factory work shall be \$0.35 by the hour.*
2. *That the maximum working hours for General farm and factory work shall be 8hrs. Per-day.*
3. *That the employers agree to pay transportation to and from place of work.*
4. *That no worker shall be thrown out of work for belonging to the cannery and agricultural workers industrial union.*
5. *That there shall be no discrimination of any nationality.*
6. *That the workers’ wages shall be paid every Saturday.*
7. *That employers fully recognize the cannery and agricultural workers industrial union; and hire all workers through these union’s headquarters.*
8. *That the employers agree in eliminating the contractors.*<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> “Field workers frame demands,” *The Ventura County Star*, 3 Aug 1933; “Growers get pay demands,” *Oxnard Courier*, 4 Aug 1933.

<sup>108</sup> “Field workers set 10:30 Sunday as deadline.” *The Ventura County Star*, 3 Aug 1933.

<sup>109</sup> “Plenty of labor should beet men strike in fields in Oxnard district.” *Oxnard Courier*, 5 Aug 1933.

<sup>110</sup> “Mexican and Filipino beet field workers call strike,” *The Ventura County Star*, 7 Aug 1933.

<sup>111</sup> Barajas, “Resistance, Radicalism, and Repression on the Oxnard Plain,” 39; “Sugar beet growers will confer on strike demands,” *The Ventura County Star*, 8 Aug 1933.

<sup>112</sup> “Officers Patrol Oxnard District” *Oxnard Courier*, 7 Aug 1933.

The strike committee met with Mayor Ed Gill, who “urged the committee to call off the strike and return to work this morning on a tentative agreement that the labor contractors be eliminated.”<sup>113</sup> But, strikers rejected Mayor Gill’s proposal.



**Figure 2.3 American Beet Sugar Company, nd. Courtesy of the author’s Oxnard Postcard Collection.**

CAWIU’s organizers and strikers called on Mexicans and Filipinos *betabeleros* not to break the strike. The International Labor Defense (ILD), the legal arm of the Communist Party, joined the strike and through Emma Cutler assisted in organizing

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<sup>113</sup> “Sugar beet growers will confer on strike demands,” *The Ventura County Star*, 8 Aug 1933.

support and picket lines for the strikers.<sup>114</sup> *Betabeleros* and their families appeared on the picket line, and they picketed the ABSC adobes, the factory, and every road exiting Oxnard.<sup>115</sup>

The Southern California Beet Growers Association (SCBGA) representing Oxnard growers offered a return to the 1932 topping wage scale and to eliminate labor contractors. It refused to recognize the CAWIU as the official representative of the *betabeleros*.<sup>116</sup> The SCBGA “went on record as favoring company crews under competent leadership instead of the contractor system and pledged their efforts to work toward that end.”<sup>117</sup> But, the strikers “voted 100 per cent to not accept the terms offered by the growers association unless the [CAWIU] was recogni[zed].”<sup>118</sup>

As the strike continued, the local authorities including the Ventura County Sheriffs’ Department (VCSD), Oxnard Police Department (OPD), and State Highway Patrol increased their pressure, and Barajas viewed their tactics as “agricultural fascism,” a term popularized by Carey McWilliams.<sup>119</sup> On August 8, the OPD arrested

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<sup>114</sup> “Police make first arrest in strike,” *Oxnard Courier*, 10 Aug 1933.

<sup>115</sup> Barajas, “Resistance, Radicalism, and Repression on the Oxnard Plain,” 39; “Strikers still picket ABS adobe houses,” *Oxnard Courier*, 9 Aug 1933.

<sup>116</sup> Barajas, “Work And Leisure In La Colonia,” 166; Barajas, “Resistance, Radicalism, and Repression on the Oxnard Plain,” 39; “Beet Growers make two concessions to strikers,” *The Ventura County Star*, 9 Aug 1933; “Strikers in Oxnard area spurn employers’ office,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 Aug 1933.

<sup>117</sup> “Ranchers offer more pay abolishing contractors,” *Oxnard Courier*, 9 Aug 1933.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> Barajas, “Resistance, Radicalism, and Repression on the Oxnard Plain,” 39.

strikers Joe Moreno and Valente Baskos for disturbing the peace.<sup>120</sup> Two days later, the police arrested strike leader, Esequiel Pantoja for threatening, interfering with police, and disturbing the peace, but was soon released for insufficient evidence.<sup>121</sup>

Numerous attempts to intervene in the strike and reports of harassment toward strikers were made against federal and international agencies. For instance, United States Commissioner of Conciliation, Edward Fitzgerald visited the strike, but “he reported it was impossible to reconcile the two factions at present and that the ranchers and laborers would have to work out their major problems before he could aid in a settlement.”<sup>122</sup> Meanwhile, *The Ventura County Star* reported that the Mexican Consulate of Los Angeles were investigating anti-strike sympathizers’ allegation “that all aliens involved in the strike be rounded up and deported to Mexico.”<sup>123</sup>

Oxnard Police Chief Joe Kerrick continued to accuse the CAWIU and the *betabeleros* of being “agitators” outside of Ventura County. Kerrick found a sympathetic ear in the *Oxnard Courier*, which assisted the police and the sugar beet industry in launching a campaign to spread rumors of the CAWIU and the striking *betabeleros*.<sup>124</sup> Through the *Oxnard Courier*, they blamed the strike and organizing of *betabeleros* on

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<sup>120</sup> “Beet Growers make two concessions to strikers,” *The Ventura County Star*, 9 Aug 1933.

<sup>121</sup> “Spokesman of beet strikers under arrest,” *The Ventura County Star*, 10 Aug 1933; “Topping Schedule factor in change,” *Oxnard Courier*, 11 Aug 1933; “Strike leader is exonerated and released,” *Ventura County Star*, 11 Aug 1933.

<sup>122</sup> “Strike leader is exonerated and released,” *Ventura County Star*, 11 Aug 1933.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> Barajas, “Resistance, Radicalism, and Repression on the Oxnard Plain,” 40.

“outside agitators.”<sup>125</sup> The newspaper claimed that *betabeleros* “would have gone back to work...had it not been for agitators who are influencing them” and the “imported agitators and outside leaders with communistic tendencies [were] losing control over the Mexican populace.”<sup>126</sup> Police Chief Kerrick and Ventura County Sheriff Durley intensified the intimidation through around the clock of surveillance of the CAWIU and supporters.

The CAWIU continued its effort to organize and win the strike by maintaining picket lines and countering propaganda that “outside agitators [were] making valiant efforts to keep the men inline.”<sup>127</sup> Despite claims the CAWIU’s organizers were peaceful encouraging *betabeleros* not to return to work. The OPD continued their harassment of strikers and supporters, the wife of strike leader Esequiel Pantoja complained of harassment by the police, asserting that “this is a free county and she could talk if she wanted to.”<sup>128</sup> On August 13, the CAWIU organized a benefit dance and received truck loads of food from supporters in Los Angeles.

Growers also joined with allies to divide workers and their supporters. The *Oxnard Courier* reported that “Mexicans are considering forming their own group...eliminating the outside agitators.”<sup>129</sup> The ABSC, the police, business elite, and the sugar beet growers created a company union, the Homeworkers Organization, later

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<sup>125</sup> Barajas, “Work And Leisure In La Colonia,” 167.

<sup>126</sup> “Topping Schedule factor in change,” *Oxnard Courier*, 11 Aug 1933; “Outside leaders losing control, *Oxnard Courier*, 12 Aug 1933.

<sup>127</sup> “One third more workers return,” *Oxnard Courier*, 14 Aug 1933.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> “Outside leader losing control,” *Oxnard Courier*, 12 Aug 1933.

called Alianza de Trabajadores Mexicanos. Composed of leaders appointed by growers, it held its inaugural meeting on August 14, attended by 125 *betabeleros*. Alianza representative claimed that “we have watched the present strike situation and realize that outside interests and persons that are not interested in the welfare of the resident workers, are trying to organize us into a union for selfish motives only.”<sup>130</sup> The ABSC and sugar beet growers utilized it to broker negotiations with the striking *betabeleros*, and as SCBGA previously offered workers a return to the 1932 topping wage scale and elimination of labor contractors.<sup>131</sup>

The CAWIU attempted to broaden class unity by organizing ABSC factory workers into a union “that transcended not only race and ethnicity but also a labor system stratified by field and factory workers.”<sup>132</sup> But the CAWIU lured very few factory workers. The CAWIU warned of anti-CAWIU activities of Alianza, especially the drive of Mexican consulate. The Mexican consulate targeted the CAWIU due its links with the Communist Party.<sup>133</sup> Meanwhile, the CAWIU sought a wide range of cross-cultural supporters and allies beyond the Oxnard Plain. It attracted A.L. Wirin of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), who provided legal counsel to the union and strikers.<sup>134</sup> In response to CAWIU efforts to strengthen its base, the police and the Ventura County Sheriff intensified intimidation and repression. Police Chief Kerrick engaged in commie

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<sup>130</sup> “125 more workers in beet fields of district,” *Oxnard Courier*, 15 Aug 1933.

<sup>131</sup> Barajas, “Resistance, Radicalism, and Repression on the Oxnard Plain,” 41; “125 more workers in beet fields of district,” *Oxnard Courier*, 15 Aug 1933.

<sup>132</sup> Barajas, “Resistance, Radicalism, and Repression on the Oxnard Plain,” 41.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 30, 42.

bashing, reporting that he discovered the party organ, *Western Worker* at the UPBMI Hall.<sup>135</sup>

The CAWIU responded by organizing a non-violent cross-cultural parade through the streets of Oxnard, focusing on Mexican neighborhoods.<sup>136</sup> More than 400 betabeleros marched from Colonia Home Gardens to the OPD headquarters and issued a list of demands, including “that the county stop importing armed thugs and scabs into the strike area and that the county police office also observe the law.”<sup>137</sup> To quell such public efforts, the pro-grower city council adopted an anti-marching and anti-parading ordinance, which set harsh penalties.<sup>138</sup>

The final blow between the union and sugar beet growers occurred on August 17 at the ranch of Mayor Ed Gill, a prominent grower. More than seventy strikers and supporters picketed his ranch and in response the heavily armed OPD attacked them with tear gas, thrown by Police Chief Kerrick himself.<sup>139</sup> Police claimed it was a riot and arrested John Madrid, Frank Salas, Mike Flores, and Peter Salcideo for disturbing the peace and destruction of property.<sup>140</sup> That day Mayor Gill addressed a meeting of the

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<sup>135</sup> “Distribute communistic literature in section,” *Oxnard Courier*, 17 Aug 1933; the *Western Worker* is the official western organ of the Community Party, USA.

<sup>136</sup> Barajas, “Resistance, Radicalism, and Repression on the Oxnard Plain,” 43; “50 strikers go back to work in beet fields,” *The Ventura County Star*, 14 Aug 1933; “Filipino misleaders try to prevent united fight,” *Western Worker*, 21 Aug 1933.

<sup>137</sup> “Strike spit is reported,” *The Ventura County Star*, 15 Aug 1933.

<sup>138</sup> “125 more workers in beet fields of district,” *Oxnard Courier*, 15 Aug 1933.

<sup>139</sup> Barajas, “Resistance, Radicalism, and Repression on the Oxnard Plain,” 43; “75 workers go to ranch of Mayor Gill,” *Oxnard Courier*, 18 Aug 1933.

<sup>140</sup> “Five arrested in beet strike held under bail,” *Oxnard Courier*, 20 Aug 1933; “Five arraigned as outcome of strike episode,” *The Ventura County Star*, 19 Aug 1933.



Alianza, the company union, and “complimented the members and their organization and assured them protection while at work.”<sup>141</sup> On August 18, strike supporter Jean Rand was arrested for disturbing the peace and Police Chief Kerrick claimed, “now that the workers are back in the fields, the agitators and outside of Oxnard Mexicans are keeping up the semblance of a strike. Any indication of interference with the work in the field will stopped promptly by the officers.”<sup>142</sup>

The police also increased patrols in the Mexican neighborhoods in the city and on August 19, the OPD raided the CAWIU headquarters in the UPBMI hall and confiscated the CAWIU’s membership cards and books.<sup>143</sup> Police also arrested twelve CAWIU organizers and supporters, including Leon Gonzalez, J.W. Wright, Patrico Sakedo, W.W. Scott, Jack Brittan, Ramon Flores, and Joe Montas, all charged with vagrancy. Several were taken to the Los Angeles County line and warned not return, and Chief Kerrick declared, “all the outside Mexicans have gone.”<sup>144</sup> Mainstream commercial presses, including the *Oxnard Courier*, *The Ventura County Star*, and the *Los Angeles Times*, reported that the police raided the union headquarters due to complaints by the officials of the UPBMI. Yet, the Spanish language newspaper, *La Opinion*, reported that the UPBMI had no issues with the CAWIU or with strikers.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> “50 new Mexican join alliance,” *Oxnard Courier*, 18 Aug 1933.

<sup>142</sup> “Nab Jean Rand on disturbing peace charge,” *Oxnard Courier*, 19 Aug 1933.

<sup>143</sup> “Strike declared officially ended at Saturday evening meeting,” *Oxnard Courier*, 21 Aug 1933; “Oxnard strike is a thing of the past today,” *The Ventura County Star*, 22 Aug 1933.

<sup>144</sup> “12 agitators in beet field strike jailed,” *The Ventura County Star*, 21 Aug 1933.

<sup>145</sup> Barajas, “Resistance, Radicalism, and Repression on the Oxnard Plain,” 44.

Following the raid on August 19, CAWIU leader Leon Gonzalez announced that the strike was over.<sup>146</sup>

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Intimidation by law enforcement during the strike brought increased interest to the Oxnard Plain by legal representation of ACLU, ILD, and National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners (NCDPP). In the aftermath of raid on the CAWIU and strikers, Wirin and Ellis Jones of the ACLU, and Lincoln Steffens of the NCDPP arrived in Oxnard. Their goal was to investigate the “charges that the forces of law conspired with beet growers...to deny striking Mexican and Filipino workers the rights of freedom of speech and assembly.”<sup>147</sup> The ACLU called for a mass meeting in Colonia Home Gardens on August 23 to discuss the strike and harassment by law enforcement. Strikers’ attorney’s Wirin and Jones met with Mayor Gill and Police Chief Kerrick to request permission to stage another mass meeting in downtown Oxnard. Following a heated discussion Police Chief Kerrick refusing permission, stated “we will tolerate no violence. We are going to see that the laws of the city and state are kept.”<sup>148</sup> Yet, the laws were kept in a very selective manner.

The ACLU also sent telegrams to the Department of Labor (DOL), Governor of California, and National Recovery Administration (NRA) to investigate police

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<sup>146</sup> “Strike declared officially ended at Saturday evening meeting,” *Oxnard Courier*, 21 Aug 1933; “Oxnard strike is a thing of the past today,” *The Ventura County Star*, 22 Aug 1933.

<sup>147</sup> “Charge Oxnard police in conspiracy with growers,” *The Ventura County Star*, 23 Aug 1933.

<sup>148</sup> “About 100 Mexicans attend Colonia Gardens meet.” *Oxnard Courier*, 24 Aug 1933.

repression.<sup>149</sup> The telegram read: “can you intervene immediately, investigate brutal mistreatment striking Mexican, Filipino workers Oxnard, California. Provisions NRA being violated. Police being used as strike breaking agency.”<sup>150</sup> The DOL responded, “by firing telegrams to Oxnard officials protesting the prosecution of the defendants.”<sup>151</sup> The ACLU, also announced it was filling a \$50,000 damage suit against Mayor Gill and Chief Kerrick for “asserted illegal intervention in meeting of the strikers and for alleged brutal treatment of strike prisoners.”<sup>152</sup>

On August 25, Wirin filled a suit in Ventura County Superior Court against Police Chief Kerrick for \$25,000.<sup>153</sup> The union held another mass meeting in Colonia Home Gardens on August 25, the union leaders claimed, “they say we’re communists, I guess they expect to see us all wearing horns or something. It makes no difference if you are a communist, a democrat, or a republican. We don’t ask what political party you belong to when you join our union.”<sup>154</sup> Union leaders also informed the crowd about a recall campaign to remove Supervisor McGrath.

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<sup>149</sup> “Charge Oxnard police in conspiracy with growers,” *The Ventura County Star*, 23 Aug 1933; “Organizations investigate beet labor strike conditions in Oxnard district,” *Oxnard Courier*, 23 Aug 1933.

<sup>150</sup> “Organizations investigate beet labor strike conditions in Oxnard district,” *Oxnard Courier*, 23 Aug 1933.

<sup>151</sup> Barajas, “Resistance, Radicalism, and Repression on the Oxnard Plain,” 45.

<sup>152</sup> “Oxnard charges referred to Rogers,” *The Ventura County Star*, 24 Aug 1933.

<sup>153</sup> “Chief and brother deny charges of arrested workers,” *Oxnard Courier*, 26 Aug 1933.

<sup>154</sup> “Charges fly as Mexicans meet again in Oxnard,” *The Ventura County Star*, 26 Aug 1933.

In another meeting Wirin, representing the CAWIU, met with Ventura County District Attorney James C. Hollingsworth, demanding that OPD be charged with police brutality against the strikers but Hollingsworth refused.<sup>155</sup> On August 28, *The Ventura County Star* issued a call to settle strike issues.<sup>156</sup> It suggested a four-point solution:

1. *That the Oxnard officials, the sheriff, the district attorney agree to guarantee these discontented workers the exercise of their full American rights;*
2. *That the representatives of the various civil rights organizations agree to drop all court proceeding, pending, and threatened;*
3. *That the growers and employees meet together in frank fashion to iron out whatever differences may exist between them;*
4. *The we try to get long together in this county and unitedly push ahead the National Recovery program.*<sup>157</sup>

*The Ventura County Star* turned to DA Hollingsworth, as the voice of reason, claiming he was “ready at any time to hear any and all complaints that anyone may have to make concerning the violation of any constitutional rights in the County of Ventura.”<sup>158</sup>

The aftermath of the strike moved into the courtroom as the fate of Rand, Madrid, Salas, and Flores all charged with disturbing the peace, and the last three with destruction of property would be decided.<sup>159</sup> Defendant Rand declared, “I don’t want to

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<sup>155</sup> Barajas, “Resistance, Radicalism, and Repression on the Oxnard Plain,” 45; “Hollingsworth holds hearing at Ventura,” *Oxnard Courier*, 27 Aug 1933; “Oxnard Police officers will not be prosecuted,” *The Ventura County Star*, 28 Aug 1933; “Prosecution of Oxnard Police Chief refused,” *Los Angeles Times*, 29 Aug 1933.

<sup>156</sup> “Why not settle this trouble,” *The Ventura County Star*, 28 Aug 1933; “Agree to attempt settlement as Star urges,” *The Ventura County Star*, 30 Aug 1933; “Here’s letter on mediation,” *The Ventura County Star*, 30 Aug 1933.

<sup>157</sup> “Here’s letter on mediation,” *The Ventura County Star*, 30 Aug 1933.

<sup>158</sup> “Hollingsworth has not ended beating probe,” *The Ventura County Star*, 31 Aug 1933.

<sup>159</sup> “Earlier trials for 4 strikers are sought now,” *The Ventura County Star*, 1 Sep 1933; “Move trials for rioters forward to Sept 4,” *Oxnard Courier*, 2 Sep 1933; “4 strikers trails are set today for Sept 8,” *The Ventura County Star*, 2 Sep 1933; “Four suspects in

go to jail. But I will gladly go there if necessary. By putting me in jail, you are not accomplishing anything. This is a class struggle.”<sup>160</sup> In the same fashion, Wirin stated that “these workers are entitled to a trial by workers, by persons who earn their livings by the sweat of their brows and the work of their hands.”<sup>161</sup> Throughout the trials of accused, the working-class community was not intimidated by law and came out to demand justice for the accused.

In the background of the trial, numerous meetings between officials and strikers’ attorneys were held to discuss an out of court solution to the situation. On September 12, Wirin filled a habeas corpus to secure a release of Gonzales, Wright, Scott, Britton, and Flores waiting trial on charges of vagrancy and a writ of probation on the current trial of Rand, Madrid, Salas, and Flores.<sup>162</sup> A closed-door meeting between Hollingsworth, Wirin, and third-party mediator Ray Pinkerton was held to finalize a settlement.<sup>163</sup> *The Ventura County Star* reported “much of the discussion revolved around a suggestion that all the pending lawsuit and charges before the state and federal bodies be dropped.”<sup>164</sup> Moreover, after several meetings, officials and strikers’

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Oxnard riot on trial today,” *The Ventura County Star*, 8 Sep 1933; “Consume much time fro jury on strikers’ trial.” *Oxnard Courier*, 8 Sep 1933.

<sup>160</sup> “May settle strike case out of court,” *Oxnard Courier*, 12 Sep 1933.

<sup>161</sup> “No jury picked yet to hear trial of four speech,” *The Ventura County Star*, 9 Sep 1933.

<sup>162</sup> “Wirin asks habeas corpus writ for 5 prisoners,” *The Ventura County Star*, 12 Sep 1933.

<sup>163</sup> “May settle strike case out of court,” *Oxnard Courier*, 12 Sep 1933.

<sup>164</sup> “Strike case may come to amicable end,” *The Ventura County Star*, 12 Sep 1933.

attorneys finally agreed to drop all litigation and court proceeding involving the strikers.<sup>165</sup>

On September 13, Judge Dominick dismissed the charges against Rand, Gonzales, Scott, Wright, Britton, Flores, Reyes, Vasquez & Montas and Madrid, Salas, and Flores were found guilty with time served.<sup>166</sup> On September 18, Commissioner Fitzgerald met with Police Chief Kerrick and union leader Gonzeles, it was decided that the OPD had violated no constitutional rights of the *betabeleros*.<sup>167</sup> Therefore, to avoid labor organizing and strikes, the citrus and walnut growers moved to increase wages for the Mexican workers on the Oxnard Plain.<sup>168</sup>

## CONCLUSION

While the strike ended, labor organizing on the Oxnard Plain did not end. Into the mid-1930s, the CAWIU continued its educational campaign in the Mexican working-class community on the importance of union recognition.<sup>169</sup> Growers through the *Oxnard Courier* spread the fear of communism throughout the Oxnard Plain. The newspaper reported “if Los Angeles can deport these agitators Ventura County should

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<sup>165</sup> “Wrangles growing out of strike soon will be over,” *The Ventura County Star*, 13 Sep 1933.

<sup>166</sup> “Trial speeds up as jurors are dropped,” *The Ventura County Star*, 13 Sep 1933; “Three workers tried before Judge Dominick,” *Oxnard Courier*, 13 Sep 1933; “Present strike trouble ends prisoners freed,” *Oxnard Courier*, 14 Sep 1933; “Last of strike cases is ended men are freed,” *The Ventura County Star*, 14 Sep 1933; “All jailed Oxnard beet strikers are freed.” *Western Worker*, 25 Sep 1933.

<sup>167</sup> “Government investigated strike matter,” *Oxnard Courier*, 20 Sep 1933.

<sup>168</sup> Barajas, “Resistance, Radicalism, and Repression on the Oxnard Plain,” 46.

<sup>169</sup> “Urge Mexicans, Whites attend hall session,” *Oxnard Courier*, 4 Jan 1934.

do the same, and do so without the least possible delay. Deport the Reds right now. Delay is dangerous.”<sup>170</sup> Furthermore, this fear led to tactics of red-bating Mexican workers on the Oxnard Plain.<sup>171</sup>

Local growers called on the Associated Farmers of Ventura County (AFVC) to join the campaign to smash labor organized. Historian Rodolfo Acuña noted, “the Associated Farmers controlled local police, influenced the state legislature to pass laws that barred picketing and, finally, secured the arrest, and later the conviction of labor leaders.”<sup>172</sup> In January 1934, the AFVC hosted a meeting to propose an anti-picketing ordinance that “make it unlawful for any person to loiter or stand or sit in or upon any public highway, alley, sidewalk or crosswalk so as to in any way hinder or obstruct the free passage therein or thereon of persons or vehicles.”<sup>173</sup> The proposal was presented to the Board of Supervisors and passed on March 1.<sup>174</sup>

In the end, the intimidation of the police, the growers association, and beet growers left social and physical markers on the Mexican working-class community. Barajas notes that the labor conflicts of the 1930s were highlighted by Mexican resistance as they “challenged the popular perception of them as a pliable and passive

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<sup>170</sup> “Deport the Reds right now,” *Oxnard Courier*, 10 Jan 1934.

<sup>171</sup> “Communism scared in Strand theater rally,” *Oxnard Courier*, 9 Feb 1934; “Communism must thwarted Gill says at Red Men meeting,” *Oxnard Courier*, 24 Feb 1934.

<sup>172</sup> Acuña, *Corridors of Migration*, 281.

<sup>173</sup> “Protection for radical elements sought in county,” *Oxnard Courier*, 19 Jan 1934.

<sup>174</sup> “Table anti-picketing ordinance for county,” *Oxnard Courier*, 20 Jan 1934; “Supervisors adopt new anti-picketing measure,” *Oxnard Courier*, 2 Mar 1934.

population serving the needs of industry.”<sup>175</sup> The conflict between Mexicans and Whites on the Oxnard Plain continued into the 1940s as agri-business demands for cheap labor increased.

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<sup>175</sup> Barajas, “Resistance, Radicalism, and Repression on the Oxnard Plain,” 50.



## CHAPTER THREE

### GROWERS VS. WORKERS: VENTURA COUNTY CITRUS (LEMON) STRIKE OF 1941

#### INTRODUCTION

*“We do not know who is on strike or for what reason. We only know that a picket line is across our main gate.”*

**- Clint Hutchins, President of Seaboard Lemon Association<sup>1</sup>**

*“Workers have been intimidated and coerced into joining and striking.”*

**- Charles C. Teague, President of Limoneria Ranch<sup>2</sup>**

In the thirty-eight years since its founding, Oxnard had experienced a great deal of conflict and division. Conflict between agricultural workers and citrus growers continued as the citrus industry developed in Ventura County. By the 1930s, Southern California became a key producer of citrus due to the mild seasons and the mixture of excellent soils, which created a citrus belt from San Diego to Ventura County.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the University of California’s Agricultural Extension Service stated that the “soils in Ventura County are some of the finest and most fertile that you will find anywhere in the world.”<sup>4</sup>

In 1912, lemons were introduced on the Oxnard Plain, which had established a agriculture industry in 1903 with sugar beets, lima beans, and vegetables. By 1918,

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<sup>1</sup> “Farmers Face Loss Of Crop In Lemon Strike,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 30 Jan 1941.

<sup>2</sup> “Mr. Teague Talk...,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 22 Feb 1941.

<sup>3</sup> Gilbert Gonzalez, *Labor and Community: Mexican Citrus Worker Villages in a Southern California County, 1900-1950* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 5-6.

<sup>4</sup> *25 Years of Agriculture in Ventura County California, Crops Years 1939-1964*, University of California, Agricultural Extension Service, 2-3.

citrus growers agreed to establish the Oxnard Citrus Association, which was affiliated with the California Fruit Growers Exchange in Hueneme, California.<sup>5</sup> The Seaboard Lemon Association appeared in 1936, and established a packinghouse in La Colonia. Citrus growers and packinghouse associations led the drive to establish lemons as the number one crop on the Oxnard Plain.

By 1939, it was reported that Ventura County agri-business had grossed over \$22 million from its soil.<sup>6</sup> Ventura County led the state in producing 30% of all lemons grown in California.<sup>7</sup> And to maximize profit, citrus growers in Southern California utilized Mexicans as cheap labor, “number[ing] some 10,000 pickers in 1926 and by 1940 constituted nearly 100 percent of the picking forces, about 22,000.”<sup>8</sup> Historian Frank Barajas notes, “whether in the fields or in the packinghouses, agricultural interests formulated a work culture that followed the regimented and systematized production precepts of Frederick W. Taylor.”<sup>9</sup>

Major conflicts between agricultural workers and citrus growers began to form, as the demand for better wages and work conditions advanced. In 1941, American Federation of Labor (AFL) secretary-treasurer, George Meany stated that, “Ventura County is a place where many millions of lemons are grown annually. Twenty-two thousand acres of Ventura County are devoted to the production of lemons,” but “lemon

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<sup>5</sup> Frank P. Barajas, “Work And Leisure In La Colonia: Class, Generation, And Interethnic Alliances Among Mexicanos In Oxnard, California, 1890-1945” (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate University, 2001), 77.

<sup>6</sup> *25 Years of Agriculture in Ventura County*, 2-3.

<sup>7</sup> Williamson, “Labor In The California Citrus Industry”, 14.

<sup>8</sup> Gonzalez, *Labor and Community*, 7.

<sup>9</sup> Barajas, “Work And Leisure In La Colonia,” 77.

pickers, although their employers do not legally own their bodies, lead lives that have been likened to those under slavery.”<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, citrus growers attempted to control the means of production by fear, “if the Mexicans challenged the Anglo American written rules, the citrus growers could retaliate by evicting them from company housing and terminating their employment.”<sup>11</sup>

Historically, the Oxnard Plain had been the site of two major labor strikes in California with the Sugar Beet Strike of 1903 and the Sugar Beet Strike of 1933. But, 1941 would bring a greater labor unrest as agricultural workers took on the powerful lemon industry in Ventura County, which led to a six-month strike. This chapter examines the Ventura County Citrus Strike of 1941 and conflict between citrus growers and agricultural workers and its aftermath.

### **VENTURA COUNTY CITRUS STRIKE OF 1941**

By the 1940s, the majority of the Mexican working-class community was living in La Colonia surrounded by lemon orchards and the Seaboard Lemon Association packinghouse to the north, the lima bean packinghouse to the west, sugar beets and the ABSC factory to the south, and different types of agricultural fields to the east. This working-class community was connected to the expanding citrus industry. So, in this context, local agricultural workers attempted to organize themselves for better wages and working conditions.

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<sup>10</sup> George Meany, “Peonage in California,” *American Federationist* (May 1941): 4.

<sup>11</sup> Martha Menchaca, *The Mexican Outsiders: A Community History of Marginalization and Discrimination in California* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 78.

The AFL and CIO had very little success in representing agricultural workers in the citrus industry due to the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (NLRA). The NLRA only gave industrial workers the right to organize under a union, engage in collective bargaining, and call for a strike, but excluded agricultural workers from this right.<sup>12</sup> By 1940, AFL West Coast Representative Meyer Lewis announced that the union would launch an organizing drive in Southern California, in various crops and industries, especially citrus.<sup>13</sup>

On the Oxnard Plain, the AFL formed the Agricultural and Citrus Workers Union, Local No. 22342 (ACWU) to represent lemon packers and pickers. On December 19, 1940, the union was able to win the right to represent lemon packers at Seaboard Lemon Association, with an 84 to 7 vote.<sup>14</sup> By the end of the year, the ACWU was also representing lemon packers at Oxnard Citrus Association.<sup>15</sup> On January 29, 1941, the ACWU held a mass meeting at the Odd Fellows Hall in Oxnard with more than four hundred Mexican lemon packers and pickers to discuss the labor situation. Under the leadership of Lee Renfro, Dallas Cisco, Besie McKnight, and Ed Achstetter, lemon

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<sup>12</sup> Linda C. Majka and Theo J. Majka, *Farm Workers, Agribusiness, and the State* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 108.

<sup>13</sup> Stuart Jamieson, *Labor Unionism in American Agriculture* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 189.

<sup>14</sup> National Labor Relation Board, *In the matter of Seaboard Lemon Association and Agricultural and Citrus Workers Union, Local No. 22342*, Case no. R-2124-decided, 30 Nov 1940.

<sup>15</sup> "Farmers Face Loss Of Crop In Lemon Strike," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 30 Jan 1941; A.H. Petersen to William Green, 6 Feb 1941, American Federation Of Labor Records, Part I, Strikes And Agreements, 1898-1953, State Historical Society Of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin (hereafter cited as AFL Part I).

pickers decided to strike.<sup>16</sup> Lemon packers were divided over joining the strike due to the “fear of losing their jobs.”<sup>17</sup>

On the morning of January 30, more than 600 Mexican lemon pickers joined the picket line at Seaboard Lemon Association and Oxnard Citrus Association packinghouses. The *Oxnard Press-Courier* called it “a mysterious citrus workers strike,” and stated “it has been widely known that outside agitators have been fomenting the citrus workers for the past month.”<sup>18</sup> Clint Hutchins, president of Seaboard Lemon Association stated, “we do not know who is on strike or for what reason. We only know that a picket line is across our main gate.”<sup>19</sup> He continued the “AFL union [ACWU] were certified by the National Labor Relations Board for [citrus] packing house employees only.”<sup>20</sup> As the citrus industry denied that the strike was underway, AFL organizer Ed Achstetter stated that the lemon pickers were striking for union recognition.<sup>21</sup> He added, “we have continually tried to keep this thing peaceful and have frequently notified packinghouse associations of our desire to negotiate for union recognition but they have

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<sup>16</sup> “The Pickers,” *Santa Paula Chronicle*, 6 Feb 1941; Emil Watchel to Omer Mills, 28 Feb 1941, Record Group 96, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Correspondence Concerning Migratory Labor Camp, Box 8, Folder 1941 Lemon Pickers Strike, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Maryland (hereafter cited as RG 96).

<sup>17</sup> Barajas, “Work And Leisure In La Colonia,” 189.

<sup>18</sup> “Farmers Face Loss Of Crop In Lemon Strike,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 30 Jan 1941.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> “Strike Halts Lemon Work,” *Los Angeles Times*, 31 Jan 1941; “Union Demands Recognition; Farmers Acting,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 31 Jan 1941.

merely shrugged it off.”<sup>22</sup> They were demanded a wage increase of 10 cents per hour and “stand by time” payment.<sup>23</sup>

On January 31, the strike spread to Saticoy Lemon Association in Saticoy, California. The ACWU claimed that more than 1,500 citrus workers were involved in the strike and filled charges with the NLRB against several packinghouse associations for violating the Wagner Act.<sup>24</sup> Packinghouse association representatives continued to refuse to meet with the ACWU or recognize the union as the representative of the Mexican lemon pickers. A.H. Peterson arrived on the Oxnard Plain on the behalf of the AFL and sought assistance from Dan Emmett of the *Oxnard Press-Courier* in mediating the strike.<sup>25</sup>

Until that time, the only way each group had been communicating was through the newspapers. The ACWU took some issues with the *Oxnard Press-Courier* over its unfair coverage of the strike. The newspaper responded by attacking lemon pickers, AFL and its organizers in their editorial page. Under the editorial “We Receive A Threat,” the *Oxnard Press-Courier* stated that:

*“We mention this because to us it clearly illustrates the frame on mind created by these outside agitators —a class hatred psychology instilled in the hearts and*

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<sup>22</sup> “Union leaders tell view,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 31 Jan 1941; the packinghouse associations were notified on the following dates, Seaboard Lemon (Dec 19, 1940), Oxnard Citrus (Jan 14, 1941), and Saticoy Lemon (Jan 14, 1941).

<sup>23</sup> Jamieson, *Labor Unionism In American Agriculture*, 188-192; Menchaca, *The Mexican Outsiders*, 78-95; Barajas, “Work And Leisure In La Colonia,” 188-203; “The Oxnard new week,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 1 Feb 1941.

<sup>24</sup> “Saticoy house picketed,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 31 Jan 1941; “Lemon strike spreads to Saticoy,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 31 Jan 1941.

<sup>25</sup> “AFL fights CIO organizing work in Santa Paula,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 1 Feb 1941; “Union leader asks for peace session,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 1 Feb 1941.

*minds of otherwise orderly citizens, closing the door to calm, deliberated, sensible negotiations.”*

*“Achstetter said they were striking for wages and working conditions.”*

*“Now we learn the truth. Mr. Achstetter admits that the strike was called not for wages, not for working conditions, but for UNION RECOGNITION.”*

*“The lemon pickers and packers are being made tools of Mr. Achstetter and his union in an effort to gain more control, regardless of the industry’s returns, regardless of the worker’s wages.”<sup>26</sup>*

The Associated Farmers of Ventura County (AFVC) commented on the citrus strike, as C.F. Burson stated that “this work stoppage bears out the contention that agriculture cannot afford to enter into closed shop contracts with organizations which conduct themselves in such an unreasonable and irresponsible manner,” and furthermore “the farmers cannot sit idly by during the existing desirable weather conditions and watch his fruit further deteriorate. The fruit must be picked and packed.”<sup>27</sup> The AFVC refused to recognize the ACWU as the representative of the lemon pickers. Max Hendrickson of AFVC stated, we “will be happy to meet with their pickers individually, through a committee selected by and of them.”<sup>28</sup> ACWU continued to maintain picket lines at Seaboard Lemon, Saticoy Lemon, and Oxnard Citrus packinghouses. Hendrickson stated, “let them put up their picket lines” and “we’ll pick the fruit, if each farmer has to do it alone. And we’ll take it to the packinghouses in our own trucks, and pack it with our own crews.”<sup>29</sup>

The Department of Labor (DOL) became involved with the strike and dispatched Conciliator Edward Fitzgerald to the Oxnard Plain. Fitzgerald arrived in Oxnard on

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<sup>26</sup> “We Receive A Threat,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 31 Jan 1941.

<sup>27</sup> “Lemon Strike spreads to Saticoy,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 31 Jan 1941.

<sup>28</sup> “AFL fights CIO organizing work in Santa Paula,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 1 Feb 1941.

<sup>29</sup> “Labor summons more help in lemon strike,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 3 Feb 1941.

February 2 and stated, “the government is anxious to settle this strike quickly and peacefully.”<sup>30</sup> He planned to talk with Hendrickson and other growers in a effort to end the strike; having already talked with lemon pickers and packers. Fitzgerald stated he “intend[ed] to do all possible to bring the farmers and union together for negotiations.”<sup>31</sup> The DOL proposed an agreement, which called for “all lemon pickers in Ventura County return to work immediately without discrimination” and “an arbitration board consisting of three member be set up immediately.”<sup>32</sup> The board would be appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture, Secretary of Labor, and Governor of the State of California. Fitzgerald’s proposal aimed at ending the strike but he failed to convince both parties to meet at the negotiate table.<sup>33</sup>

The ACWU through Petersen and Achstetter were meeting with the Teamsters and the Los Angeles Central Labor Council to seek support for the strike. Lemon pickers in Oxnard held mass meeting to discuss the strike. In Oxnard, strikers passed two resolutions, first to appoint a strike committee to represent the union and second to extend the hand of reconciliation to all pickers or packers who have crossed the picket lines and join the union without fines.<sup>34</sup> In Santa Paula, California, the CIO called a mass meeting with lemon pickers to begin the process of organizing the citrus industry in the eastern part of Ventura County. Strikers attended the meeting and won over the

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<sup>30</sup> “Government act in strike,” *Los Angeles Times*, 3 Feb 1941.

<sup>31</sup> “Labor summons more help in lemon strike,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 3 Feb 1941.

<sup>32</sup> DOL Proposed Agreement, 25 Feb 1941, RG 96, Box 8; Edward H. Fitzgerald to William Green, 25 Feb 1941, AFL Part I.

<sup>33</sup> Barajas, “Work And Leisure In La Colonia,” 191; A.H. Petersen to William Green, 6 Feb 1941, AFL Part I; Emil Watchel to Omer Mills, 28 Feb 1941, RG 96, Box 8.

<sup>34</sup> “Labor summons more help in lemon strike,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 3 Feb 1941.



lemon workers to join the AFL not the CIO.<sup>35</sup> In the following days, CIO organizer, Alfonso Ortiz announced that the CIO conceded its campaign to organize Santa Paula lemon pickers to the ACWU. He exposed that “the CIO is not interested in jurisdictional flights, and is only interested in the betterment of the workers in regards to wages, hours, and working conditions.”<sup>36</sup> More than 300 lemon pickers in Santa Paula agreed to join the ACWU.<sup>37</sup>

By early February, the strike had spread to the self-proclaimed “lemon capital of the world,” Santa Paula. The ACWU served officials at Briggs Lemon Association, Limoneria Ranch, Santa Paula Citrus Association, Culbertson Lemon Association, and Teague-McKevett with demands to negotiate with their employees.<sup>38</sup> Petersen reported that the Brotherhood of Teamsters was willing to cooperate with the ACWU at any juncture. This support led to Oxnard Citrus, Seaboard, and Saticoy Citrus to be placed on a “hot cargo” list.<sup>39</sup> Achstetter pointed out, “unless these associations agree to negotiate, we’ll be forced to take economic actions, which probably would be striking.”<sup>40</sup> Two more packinghouses, Ventura Coastal Lemon Association and Mutual Orange

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<sup>35</sup> “Union leader asks for peace session,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 1 Feb 1941; “AFL fights CIO organizing work in Santa Paula,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 1 Feb 1941; “AFL lemon union storms CIO rally,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 Feb 1941.

<sup>36</sup> “CIO quits efforts in Santa Paula,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 4 Feb 1941.

<sup>37</sup> “Federal referee on job,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 3 Feb 1941.

<sup>38</sup> “Strike leaders in notice,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 4 Feb 1941.

<sup>39</sup> “Economic Action...” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 4 Feb 1941.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

Distributors were notified by the ACWU. Growers still refused to meet with the ACWU. Petersen stated, “the fundamental points of difference is union recognition.”<sup>41</sup>

The *Oxnard Press-Courier* and the ACWU continued their battle of words. The newspaper attacked the ACWU and Petersen by stating “we do not question the role of labor, nor the rights of men and women to join labor unions. We only challenge the sagacity of the present demands upon citrus growers here.”<sup>42</sup> Petersen responded, “I’ll defend your rights to editorialize as you see fit, so long as you print the facts.”<sup>43</sup> As the ACWU reported more than 3,000 lemon pickers are striking, the growers stated the number is lower.<sup>44</sup> Burson of AFVC charged the ACWU with terrorism in obtaining union members. He stated lemon pickers “were told that they had to join the union or lose their jobs, and that scared them with a threat to their livelihood.”<sup>45</sup>

The ACWU announced the formation of a strike committee composed of Andres Peralez (Limoneria), Arthur Uriven, (Briggs Lemon), Frank Viramontes (Teague-McKevett), Enrique Garcia (Santa Paula Citrus), Teodora Mora (Culbertson), and Julian Rocha (Ventura Coastal).<sup>46</sup> At Ventura Coastal Lemon, workers formed Independent Citrus Employees Organization instead of joining the ACWU.<sup>47</sup> They stated “we are

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<sup>41</sup> “Two more houses notified to act or face strike,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 5 Feb 1941.

<sup>42</sup> “A letter to Mr. Petersen,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 4 Feb 1941.

<sup>43</sup> “Petersen lauds labor stories; answer P-C letter,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 5 Feb 1941.

<sup>44</sup> “5 plants picketed, 1500 out,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 5 Feb 1941.

<sup>45</sup> “Burson charges strike terrorism.” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 6 Feb 1941.

<sup>46</sup> “Rain suspends picking; house still operating,” *Santa Paula Chronicle*, 6 Feb 1941.

<sup>47</sup> “Lemon house workers form organization,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 6 Feb 1941; “Montalvo plant now has pickets,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 6 Feb 1941.

satisfied with our present conditions and if we want to do any collective bargaining with our employers we'll do it through our own organization.”<sup>48</sup>

The *Oxnard Press-Courier* continued its attacks on the ACWU:

*“you promise better wages for the pickers, you foment class hatred. You point to the cars owned by farmers, the big houses, you refer to the dwelling places of workers as hovels. You stir up hatred for the farmer.”*<sup>49</sup>

Petersen pointed out that “lemon pickers have asked us to be their bargaining representative” and “however, the lemon associations refused even to meet with us to discuss the strike.”<sup>50</sup>

On February 6, Fitzgerald left Oxnard unable to settle the strike between the ACWU and growers. The following day, Milton Teague of Limoneria attempted to meet with strikers, not the ACWU by inviting Peralez and other strikers to a meeting.<sup>51</sup> At Mutual Orange, employees accused the ACWU of threats, according to the *Oxnard Press-Courier* “they’re telling the workers that if they don’t join the union, they won’t be able to work anymore in California.”<sup>52</sup> In the midst of verbal attacks against the ACWU, growers attempted to recruit assistance from local junior college students by offering them lemon-picking jobs.<sup>53</sup> By February 8, more than five thousands lemon pickers were on strike with picket lines at Seaboard Lemon, Oxnard Citrus, Saticoy Citrus Briggs Lemon, Limoneria, Santa Paula Citrus, Culbertson Lemon, Teague-McKevett,

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<sup>48</sup> “Montalvo plant now has pickets,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 6 Feb 1941.

<sup>49</sup> “2 strikers on growers,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 6 Feb 1941.

<sup>50</sup> “Union gives strike cause,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 6 Feb 1941.

<sup>51</sup> “Conciliator quits strike,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 7 Feb 1941.

<sup>52</sup> “Packers threatened by union,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 7 Feb 1941.

<sup>53</sup> “Broadcast of JC calls for help.” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 7 Feb 1941.

Ventura Coastal, and Mutual Orange Distributors.<sup>54</sup> (see Figure 3.1) In addition, the Brotherhood of Teamsters declared all Ventura County lemons as “hot cargo.”<sup>55</sup> Harold Watterburg of the Teamsters stated we are “pledging the full support of our membership of over 30,000 in Southern California in this fight.”<sup>56</sup>



Figure 3.1 Lemon pickers on the picket line, 1941. Source: *American Federationist*, May 1941.

The powerful lemon growers launched a mass public campaign in three local newspapers under the banner of the Ventura County Lemon Growers (VCLG) claiming a unfavorable position and operating at a loss for years.<sup>57</sup> (see Figure 3:2) In one of their ads, growers attacked the strikers by stating:

*“Agriculture pays the major part of the tax bill in Ventura County from which our Mexican workers receive many benefits. They are the chief beneficiaries of our county hospital system which coast \$415,256.00 last year: Their children were*

<sup>54</sup> Barajas, “Work And Leisure In La Colonia”, 189-190; “Lemon growers claim big losses,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 8 Feb 1941.

<sup>55</sup> “Teamsters back citrus union strike,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 8 Feb 1941.

<sup>56</sup> “Lemon growers claim big losses,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 8 Feb 1941.

<sup>57</sup> Williamson, “Labor In The California Citrus Industry,” 138; “Lemon growers claim big losses,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 8 Feb 1941; “4 arrested in lemon pickers,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 8 Feb 1941.

*educated in our school system which cost Ventura County \$2,242,000.00 in 1940. They were aided by our health department, welfare department and many other governmental agencies whose operation by tax monies was an added cost to the growers.”*<sup>58</sup>

Charles C. Teague, spokesperson of the VCLG “sent a personal letter to all striking Mexicans on [his] property explaining the ranch management position” of the strike.<sup>59</sup>

The overall purpose of the letter was to threaten Mexican lemon pickers to return to work or give up their company housing.<sup>60</sup> The ACWU pointed out that the growers

continued to use a “feudalistic pattern of employer-employee relationship” with strikers.<sup>61</sup> The strikers held two mass meetings, with more than 2,000 gathering Santa

Paula and 1,200 in Oxnard pledging a commitment to their key demands. The ACWU stated this strike “appears to be a show-down fight, not with the growers of lemons in

Ventura County, but with the California Fruit Exchange. If the Exchange wishes to make this a battleground for a general fight, the union will be willing to accommodate them.”<sup>62</sup>

The strike moved countywide as the Fillmore Lemon Association and Rancho Sespe were added to the list.

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<sup>58</sup> “Our contribution,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 10 Feb 1941.

<sup>59</sup> “Teague Blames Union Heads For Blocking Strike Peace,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 14 Feb 1941; Teague was the president of the California Fruit Growers Exchange (now known as Sunkist).

<sup>60</sup> “Lemon Men Strike Back,” *Los Angeles Times*, 15 Feb 1941;

<sup>61</sup> “Citrus union tells story,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 8 Feb 1941.

<sup>62</sup> “Union tells of meetings,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 10 Feb 1941.

The VCLG moved to break away from hiring the packinghouse associations to pick their lemons and decided to hire their own picking crews.<sup>63</sup> The VCLG “felt that, at all costs they had to retain their workers in a subordinate, to ensue high profits and low operating expenses.”<sup>64</sup> Due to this position of the VCLG, they found themselves with a limited crew of agricultural workers to pick the lemon fields. In order not to lose any profit on the lemon crop the VCLG recruited strikebreakers from outside the county. The ACWU charged the growers were flooding the county with cheap labor and potential relief clients.<sup>65</sup> In addition, the ACWU requested a hearing before the state labor commission to air charges of importing lemon pickers from other counties without being notified about the strike.<sup>66</sup> Even by securing strikebreakers to pick the lemons, the VCLG continued to lose profit due to the heaviest rain season affecting the county and inexperience of the strikebreakers.<sup>67</sup> (see Figure 3.3)

On February 14, growers started to hand eviction notices to strikers, ordering them out of their housing to make room for pickers “willing to work.”<sup>68</sup> The growers “declared they could not continue furnishing housing facilities for Mexicans who would not work when farmers must continue their operations.”<sup>69</sup> Teague announced that the Limoneira Company “could not pay higher wages and intended to keep operating

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<sup>63</sup> “Farmers block union picket line attempts,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 11 Feb 1941; “Lemon work to resume,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 12 Feb 1941.

<sup>64</sup> Menchaca, *The Mexican Outsiders*, 87.

<sup>65</sup> “Battle lines form in citrus strike,” *Ventura County Union Labor News*, 12 Feb 1941.

<sup>66</sup> “Charges to be aired in strike here,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 13 Feb 1941.

<sup>67</sup> Williamson, “Labor In The California Citrus Industry,” 143.

<sup>68</sup> “Families warned to leave,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 14 Feb 1941.

<sup>69</sup> “Strikers given notices to vacate farm homes,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 14 Feb 1941.

whether the striking Mexicans returned to work or not.”<sup>70</sup> Fitzgerald returned to Oxnard with Lyman Sisley to attempt to mediate the strike again. The *Ventura County Star-Free Press* reported that Sisley “will work directly among Mexican laborers in an attempt to give them a true picture of the strike.”<sup>71</sup>

## THE GROWERS' PROBLEM

**DEMANDS** have been made on the lemon growers of Ventura County by union organizers for a wage increase which would raise the labor costs of the harvest approximately 30 per cent. This is only one of several demands made. However, this presentation will deal solely with the problem created by this one demand.

**STRIKES** to unionize the lemon industry were the methods utilized by the organizers to enforce these demands upon the growers.

**PROBLEMS** are not new to farmers. The last few years have seen these becoming more and more acute. Actual figures show that for the past two years the lemon growers have been operating at a loss. Production and consumption figures show an alarming picture. Continuing production increases are far outstripping consumption. This means unmarketable surpluses.

**FACTS** cannot be denied. Here are the figures.

<b>AVERAGE PRICE GROWER RECEIVES PER FIELD BOX FOR HIS LEMONS AFTER CHARGES DEDUCTED</b>	<b>68 CENTS</b>
<small>(Deductions are for picking costs at the present wage level, packing, shipping and selling costs. This figure arrived at by average of returns to growers taken from 1940 annual reports which have been verified by public accountants for every lemon association in Ventura County)</small>	
<b>AVERAGE PRODUCTION PER ACRE IN VENTURA COUNTY</b>	<b>434 FIELD BOXES</b>
<small>(Figures taken from statistics compiled by disinterested standard authority for entire industry, the California Citrus League)</small>	
<b>RETURN TO GROWER PER ACRE</b>	<b>\$301.24</b>
<b>AVERAGE GROWING COST PER ACRE IN VENTURA COUNTY</b>	<b>315.54</b>
<small>(This includes costs for fertilizer, fungicide and spraying, cultivating, fighting frost, water, pruning, repairs, general ranch labor, and taxes. These figures taken from same source, statistics of California Citrus League)</small>	
<b>LOSS PER ACRE</b>	<b>\$ 14.30</b>
<small>(This much loss is being taken from just cash outlay without figuring in any interest on investment or restoration of capital. In fact it means a capital outlay of \$14.30 per acre to maintain the present wage level)</small>	

Latest figures available on national production of lemons show a total production of 11,322,000 boxes. The same year lemon sales totaled 7,978,000 boxes. This left a surplus in the United States and Canada of 3,344,000 boxes, 29.5 per cent of the total production. This year production has increased to the extent that the estimated production for 1941 is 12,422,000 boxes. This will mean a surplus of 40.6 per cent over the largest sales year in the history of the industry.

Meanwhile consumption in the past five years has increased from 4.03 pounds per capita to 4.14 pounds. A gain of 3 per cent in consumer demand. Growers cannot hope for increased dollar returns until increased consumer demand wipes out that 40.6 per cent surplus.

These facts and figures are presented to our friends, the citizens of Ventura County, to show that the farmers who have played such a vital part in building and maintaining the communities and institutions in the county, are now threatened with serious injury. In the tradition of American fair play we ask your consideration of our problem.

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### Ventura County Lemon Growers

CULBERTSON LEMON ASSOCIATION	VENTURA COASTAL LEMON ASSOCIATION
FILLMORE LEMON ASSOCIATION	SEABOARD LEMON ASSOCIATION
MUTUAL ORANGE DISTRIBUTORS	VENTURA CITRUS ASSOCIATION
OXNARD CITRUS ASSOCIATION	SATICUM LEMON ASSOCIATION
BRIDGE LEMON ASSOCIATION	TEAGUE-MARVEY COMPANY
LIMONERA COMPANY	GEORGE C. POWER
SANTA PAULA CITRUS FRUIT ASSOCIATION	

Figure 3.2. The Growers' Problem. Source: *Oxnard-Press Courier*, 7 Feb 1941.

<sup>70</sup> “Teague blames union heads for blocking strike peace,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 14 Feb 1941.

<sup>71</sup> “Families warned to leave,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 14 Feb 1941.

Another round of threats continued between the growers and the strikers. The ACWU stated, "if the California Fruit Growers Exchange elects to make this a racial dispute, the entire citrus industry in Southern California will become involved."<sup>72</sup> Bob Wright, president of the Farm Bureau of Ventura County (FBVC) responded "many willing and needy workers are being kept from work by picketing, coercion and intimidation resulting in needless loss of work and developing a bitterness between the workers."<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, the *Oxnard Press-Courier* under the leadership of Dan Emmett stated, "we have confidence in the Mexican population of Ventura County and we believe that it will weigh the evidence, ignore the threats of union leaders, and with courage choose the course of conduct that will best serve the lemon pickers of Ventura County."<sup>74</sup> On February 17, those threats lead to a fight in the outskirts of Oxnard between strikers and non-strikers. Organizer Achstetter was charged with battery and disturbing the peace; he pleaded not guilty and was release pending trial.<sup>75</sup> The *Oxnard Press-Courier* reported, "we don't know who is right nor who is wrong in this fight, but we do know that his squabble and resultant violence is not THE AMERICAN WAY."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> "Union hints more strike," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 14 Feb 1941.

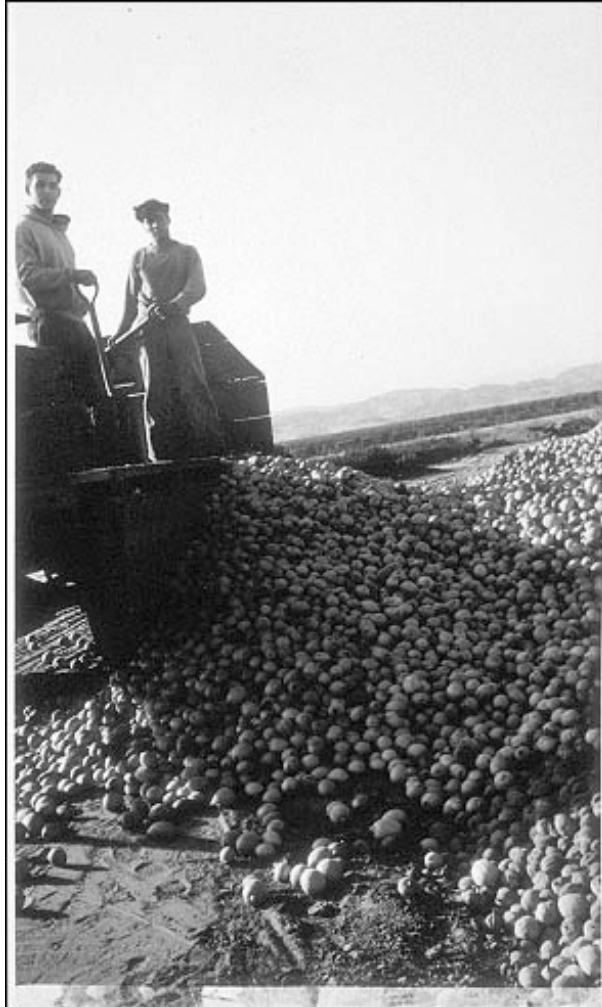
<sup>73</sup> "Farm bureau hits strike," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 14 Feb 1941.

<sup>74</sup> "To Ventura County lemon pickers," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 17 Feb 1941.

<sup>75</sup> "Citrus strike chief jailed," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 February 1941; "Ranchers active picking lemons as skies clear," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 18 Feb 1941.

<sup>76</sup> "Is this Americanism." *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 17 Feb 1941.





**Figure 3.3 Lemons being dumped, 1941. Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration, Pacific Region, San Bruno, California.**

Finally, lemon growers called for a mass meeting in Santa Paula to discuss a response to the strike. On February 21, more than one thousand lemon growers attended the meeting and decided to “fight to the finish” against the ACWU.<sup>77</sup> The lemon growers under the leadership of Teague, stated that the:

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<sup>77</sup> “Citrus Growers Vote ‘Fight to the Finish,’” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 22 Feb 1941; Michael R. Belknap, “The Era Of The Lemon: A History Of Santa Paula, California,” *California Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. XLVII, no. 2 (June 1968): 135-153; Richard G. Lillard, “Agricultural Statesman: Charles C. Teague Of Santa Paula,” *California Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. LXV, no. 1 (March 1986): 12-13; Douglas Cazaux

*“workers have been intimidated and coerced into joining and striking...if they did not join the union they would not be permitted to work in the citrus industry and if they did work they would they would have to pay a heavy fine.”*<sup>78</sup>

With this position, lemon growers saw no need to talk with the ACWU because they believed that the Mexican lemon pickers were incapable of calling for a strike on their own, that the ACWU was pulling the strings of the lemon pickers.<sup>79</sup> The *Oxnard Press-Courier* stated, “it’s high time that Ventura County’s reign of terror should come to an end. The great preponderance of the Ventura County citizens demand it.”<sup>80</sup> By March 1, the strike was at a stalemate between strikers and growers.

## THE AFTERMATH

The growers refused to negotiate with the union and instead it served more than six hundred eviction notices to Mexican lemon pickers (around 2,500 persons) and families living on company housing owned by Saticoy Citrus, Limoneria, Santa Paula Citrus, and Rancho Sespe.<sup>81</sup> The ACWU’s lawyers took on the VCLG in court over the eviction notices.<sup>82</sup> In response the ACWU secured relief from California’s State Relief

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Sackman, *Orange Empire: California And The Fruits Of Eden* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 289-290; Williamson, “Labor In The California Citrus Industry,” 140.

<sup>78</sup> “Mr. Teague Talk...,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 22 Feb 1941.

<sup>79</sup> Menchaca, *The Mexican Outsiders*, 86; “Mr. Teague Talk...,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 22 Feb 1941.

<sup>80</sup> “Reign of terror,” *The Oxnard Press-Courier*, 19 Feb 1941.

<sup>81</sup> “Sheriff Seeks Federal Aid in Housing Evicted Strikers,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 May 1941.

<sup>82</sup> Barajas, “Work And Leisure In La Colonia,” 196.

Administration (SRA) for food and utilities.<sup>83</sup> The growers protested against the relief and demanded an investigation in the practices of the SRA.<sup>84</sup> But, the union could not prevent the eviction from the company housing. (see Figure 3.4) Nevertheless, the strikers were “determined to make [a] sacrifice rather than give up the strike, hundreds swarmed to court to sign the [eviction] papers” on April 21.<sup>85</sup>



**Figure 3.4 Family being evicted from housing, 1941. Source: *American Labor Citizen*.**

On May 5, on the orders of the lemon growers “the deputies packed up the [Mexican lemon] workers’ belongings and left them by the roadside.”<sup>86</sup> The strikers set

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<sup>83</sup> Omar Mills to Dr. Gregory Silvermaster, 4 Mar 1941, RG 96, Box 8.

<sup>84</sup> Williamson, “Labor In The California Citrus Industry,” 142-143.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>86</sup> “Bitter Strike leaves legacy of farm-workers camps.” *Ventura Star-Free Press*, 17 Jul 1988; Menchaca, *The Mexican Outsiders*, 87.

up two tent camps; Teagueville (Steckel Park) in Santa Paula and Kimballville (Seaside Park) in Ventura.<sup>87</sup> (see Figure 3.5)



**Figure 3.5 Teagueville, 1941. Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration, Pacific Region, San Bruno, California.**

The ACWU pled with the United States' Farm Security Administration (FSA) for assistance for the evicted Mexican lemon pickers and their families and the FSA took over the other two camps.<sup>88</sup> It moved workers and families to a new mobile campsite on the outskirts of Oxnard, off Vineyard Avenue in El Rio. (see Figure 3.6) But, "Oxnard's leaders did not welcome the establishment of a FSA campsite in their backyard."<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.; Teagueville was named after Charles C. Teague and Kimballville was named after E.C. Kimball, Farm Bureau official.

<sup>88</sup> Omar Mills to Dr. Gregory Silvermaster, 4 Mar 1941, RG 96, Box 8.

<sup>89</sup> Barajas, "Work And Leisure In La Colonia," 198;



**Figure 3.6 Group of children posing under sign that reads "U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Security Administration Farm Workers Community," El Rio, CA, 1941. Courtesy of the Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin Migrant Worker Collection, Library of Congress.**

El Rio Workers' Community Mobile Unit # 5, opened on May 28, 1941.<sup>90</sup> More than ninety families moved onto the site. By June 11, a community council was formed, which focused on providing educational, recreational, and civic activities to the residents.<sup>91</sup> (see Figure 3:7) The union assisted the residents of the camp by distributing food and clothing to them.<sup>92</sup> By the following month, at least 40% of the

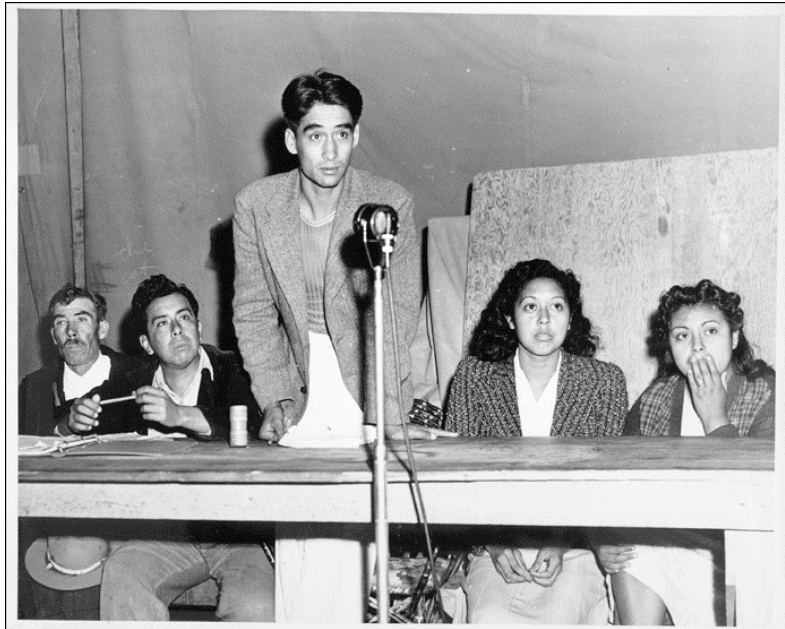
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<sup>90</sup> John Fischer to Albert Deutsch, 20 Jul 1941, RG 96, Box 11.

<sup>91</sup> Donovan Bess to Harvey Coverly, 30 Jun 1941, RG 96, Box 11; Jose Flores, interview, *Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin Migrant Worker Collection*, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington DC, 1941.

<sup>92</sup> Jose Flores, interview.

residents of the camp had moved or migrated to San Jose for the annual apricot harvesting.<sup>93</sup>



**Figure 3.7 Three men and two women seated behind a table with a microphone in front of it. Courtesy of the Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin Migrant Worker Collection, Library of Congress.**

On July 7, the NLRB finally intervened on the lemon strike, which was still a stalemate between the lemon growers and ACWU. The NLRB ruled that the Mexican lemon pickers needed to return to work due to not being protected under the NLRA.<sup>94</sup> The ACWU agreed with the recommendation and on July 14 the lemon strike officially ended. The ACWU pointed to two reasons why the strike ended: Mexican lemon pickers found agriculture jobs elsewhere in the state and SRA could not continue to support the

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Menchaca, *The Mexican Outsiders*, 88-89.

lemon pickers with aid.<sup>95</sup> By late August, El Rio Workers' Community Mobile Unit # 5 closed.<sup>96</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The Ventura County Citrus Strike of 1941 left political and social markers on the landscape of Ventura County, especially Oxnard. For the lemon growers it certified how powerful they were in defending themselves against their workers, overwhelmingly Mexicans. This power enabled growers to gain even greater control of agricultural labor in Ventura County for the next twenty-two years through supporting the federal guest worker (Bracero) program with Mexico.<sup>97</sup> On the other side, the lemon strike gave the Mexican working-class community hope for a better world. The Mexican community demonstrated its ability to organize against the White power structure of Ventura County. They were not intimidated into striking by the AFL, as Charles C. Teague claimed.<sup>98</sup> Instead, the Mexican working-class community considered the lemon strike as a opportunity to improve their position within American society.

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<sup>95</sup> "Union 'Call Off' Long Lemon Pickers' Strike," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 Jul 1941.

<sup>96</sup> "Mobile Camp to be moved," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 Aug 1941.

<sup>97</sup> Menchaca, *The Mexican Outsiders*, 89-95.

<sup>98</sup> Charles C. Teague, *Fifty Years A Rancher: The Recollection Of Half A Century Devoted To The Citrus And Walnut Industries Of California And To Furthering The Cooperative Movement In Agriculture* (Los Angeles: California Fruit Growers Exchange, 1944).

By the end of WWII, the Mexican population of Oxnard reached more than 8,000 residents.<sup>99</sup> The residents of La Colonia formed new organizations, including the Los Guardianes de la Colonia and the Latin American Veterans Club in order to improve the living conditions of *La Colonia*, such as paved streets.<sup>100</sup> As a result of voter registration drives led by local Mexican civic and business leaders, Mexican registered voters increased from 300 to 900 by 1948.<sup>101</sup> That same year, Reginald Vela ran for city council, and won a seat; he carried the majority of voters from La Colonia.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> “Mexican-Americans taking even greater role in city,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 24 Sep 1948.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, the streets were not paved until 1946.

<sup>101</sup> “Mexican-Americans taking even greater role in city,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 24 Sep 1948; “Vela’s election outgrowth of Colonia registration,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 15 Apr 1948.

<sup>102</sup> “Mexican-Americans taking even greater role in city,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 24 Sep 1948.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE GROWERS STRIKE BACK: THE BRACERO PROGRAM IN VENTURA COUNTY, 1942-1964

#### INTRODUCTION

*“Conquest is never civilized. Its business while it lasts, is to destroy men and their culture.”*

- Ernesto Galarza<sup>1</sup>

*“The jobs belonged to the local workers. The braceros were brought only for exploitation. They were just instruments for the growers.”*

- Cesar Chavez<sup>2</sup>

Since the establishment of the American Sugar Beet Company (ASBC) in 1898, the Oxnard Plain has been connected to what Ernesto Galarza called the California “Agri-Businessland.”<sup>3</sup> Following the Ventura County Citrus Strike of 1941, the local lemon growers had demonstrated how powerful they were in controlling their workers, the majority being Mexicans. Within a year, the Ventura County lemon growers with open arms supported the Bracero Program with Mexico.<sup>4</sup>

The United States Government officially claimed that program was developed to minimize the agricultural labor shortage due to World War II (WWII). But historian Dionicio Valdes points us to two other interpretations behind the Bracero Program: first

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<sup>1</sup> Ernesto Galarza, *Farm Workers and Agri-Business in California, 1947-1960* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques E. Levy, *Cesar Chavez: Autobiography of La Causa* (New York: Norton, 1975), 129.

<sup>3</sup> Galarza, *Farm Workers*, 19-16.

<sup>4</sup> Martha Menchaca, *The Mexican Outsiders A Community History of Marginalization and Discrimination in California* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1995), 89-95.

to Cary McWilliams, who argued that it was “planned chaos” to keep the workforces disorganized and second to Ernesto Galarza, who stated it was created to cause division among workers from organizing themselves.<sup>5</sup> Along the same lines as McWilliams and Galarza, I will examine the Bracero Program in Ventura County and demonstrated how lemon growers supported it, in expectation that it would prevent union organizing and resistance from Mexican workers.

This chapter contributes to our understanding of Mexican workers under the Bracero Program in Ventura County between 1942 and 1964 by focusing on the conflict between Mexican workers and the growers and the way Ventura County growers pitted Mexican workers (US-born vs. Mexican Nationals) against each other.<sup>6</sup> It also demonstrates how the program reconfigured the struggle and how Mexicans adopted new ways of challenging the white power structure.

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<sup>5</sup> Dennis Nodín Valdés, *Al Norte: Agricultural Workers in the Great Lakes Region, 1917-1970* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 89-90; Carey McWilliams, “California and the Wetback,” *Common Ground* 9 (Summer 1949): 15-20; Ernesto Galarza, “Program for Action,” *Common Ground* 9 (Summer 1949): 27-38.

<sup>6</sup> Valdés, *Al Norte*, 89-117; Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 121-166; Menchaca, *The Mexican Outsider*, 78-95, 122-144; Barbara A. Driscoll, *The Tracks North: The Railroad Bracero Program of World War II* (Austin: CMAS 1998); Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the INS* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Erasmo Gamboa, *Mexican Labor & World War II: Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1947* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000); Juan Ramon Garcia, *Operation Wetback: The Mass Deportation of Mexican Undocumented Workers in 1954* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 18-69; Richard B. Craig, *The Bracero Program: Interest Groups and Foreign Policy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971); Peter N. Kirstein, *Anglo Over Bracero: A History of the Mexican Worker in the United States from Roosevelt to Nixon* (San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, 1977).

## WORLD WAR II AND BRACERO PROGRAM

On September 10, 1940, Congress passed the Selective Training and Service Act signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, which required all men between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-five to register with local draft boards. It required all male citizens of Oxnard to register for a lottery system, and if drafted to serve a one year of duty. On the evening of December 7, 1941, the *Oxnard Press-Courier* informed the residents of Oxnard about the Japan military strike against United States forces at Pearl Harbor, with the headline “**JAPS ATTACK HAWAII; PHILIPPINES; U.S. GRIDS FOR WAR WITH TOKYO.**”<sup>7</sup> This attack provided the United States with justification for declaring war against Japan.

The decision to enter WWII caused rapid changes on the Oxnard Plain. In 1942, the Navy had established a military base at Port Hueneme to serve as a staging area and training center for the Seabees.<sup>8</sup> The new base led to the “hiring of more than 10,000 civilian workers and 21,000 military personal.”<sup>9</sup> The population of Oxnard in 1940 reached “8,519, a thirty-seven percent increase from 1930” but by “1943 the city’s population climbed to 15,000 –a fifty-seven percent growth.”<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, thousands of local men and women volunteered for service during WWII. (see Figure 4.1)

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<sup>7</sup> “Japs Attack Hawaii; Philippines; U.S. Grids for War with Tokyo,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 7 Dec 1941.

<sup>8</sup> Judith P. Triem, *Ventura County: Land of Good* (Northridge, CA: Windsor Publications, 1985), 132-136.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 134

<sup>10</sup> Frank P. Barajas, “Working and Leisure in La Colonia: Class, Generation, and Interethnic Alliances among Mexicans in Oxnard, California, 1890-1945” (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate University, 2001), 213; “Population of Oxnard Grows 37 Percent,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 30 Aug 1941.

Meanwhile, local agriculture controlled by a small minority of growers who experienced sharp growth sustained by cheap labor even during wartime.<sup>11</sup> Growers maintained a racialized notion of the agricultural labor order. They relied on non-Whites (Japanese, Filipino and Mexican) agricultural workers to plant, cultivate, and harvest the crops. Furthermore, White workers who had briefly worked in agriculture moved into non-agriculture jobs or wartime labor in the defense industries.



**Figure 4.1 Aerial View of Oxnard, CA, 1940s. Courtesy of the Museum of Ventura County.**

In 1940, California's growers petitioned the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) for permission to import Mexican Nationals into the United States but their request was denied on the grounds that there was "sufficient domestic labor to meet the

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<sup>11</sup> Garcia, *Operation Wetback*, 19.

demand.”<sup>12</sup> As numerous growers reported serious agricultural labor shortage, Max Hendrickson of the Associated Farmers of Ventura County (AFVC) reported that “Ventura County has more farm laborers here than it needs.”<sup>13</sup> Other Southwestern growers had warned of labor shortages before entering WWII, even when they were recruiting Mexican Nationals from across the US-Mexico border without government assistance. In 1941, the United States Employment Service (USES) “took the position of analyzing separately each individual request for Mexican labor.”<sup>14</sup>

The USES’s goal was to verify if a domestic labor shortage existed and report the information back to the INS. The majority of growers were denied request for Mexican Nationals by USES in 1941. Historian Juan Garcia noted that a key reason for denying this request was due to several governmental agencies who “believed that the importation of Mexican contract laborers would hamper efforts to increase wages for domestic migrant farm workers.”<sup>15</sup> Yet, by December 1941, the USES changed its position and recommended to the INS the need to recruit Mexican Nationals for the labor shortages in the agricultural industry.<sup>16</sup>

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With pressure from California growers, a joint committee composed of officials from the Departments of Justice, Labor, State, and Agriculture, the Office of the

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<sup>12</sup> Craig, *The Bracero Program*, 38.

<sup>13</sup> “Labor need on Farm Told Here,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 31 Jul 1941.

<sup>14</sup> Kirstein, *Anglo Over Bracero*, 13.

<sup>15</sup> Garcia, *Operation Wetback*, 18.

<sup>16</sup> Kirstein, *Anglo Over Bracero*, 13.

Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, and the War Manpower Commission formed the “Special Committee on Importation of Mexican Labor” in April of 1942 to discuss the wartime labor shortages.<sup>17</sup> The discussion led to the establishment of the Emergency Farm Labor Supply Program (hereafter Bracero Program) whose primary goal was to supply labor to agri-business in the Southwest, Pacific Northwest, and Midwest United States.<sup>18</sup>

During the negotiation of the program, Mexican officials pushed for stricter guarantees for Mexican workers and enforcement of the agreement. The key issue was the treatment of Mexican Nationals.<sup>19</sup> A formal agreement was finally reached on June 23, 1942, as Secretary of Agriculture Claude Wickard guaranteed enforcement of the agreement.<sup>20</sup> On August 4, the United States signed a bilateral agreement with Mexico to use Mexican Nationals as wartime relief labor.<sup>21</sup>

The international agreement served as a collective bargaining tool between the government of United States and Mexico; the Farm Security Administration (FSA) was the representative of agricultural employers and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was the

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<sup>17</sup> Calavita, *Inside the State*, 19; Kirstein, *Anglo Over Bracero*, 13.

<sup>18</sup> Necessity of and plan for importation of Mexican labor, 20 May 1942, Record Group 211, Records of the Records of the War Manpower Commission, Office Files of the Representative in Mexico, Box 4, Folder Mexican Aliens, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Maryland (hereafter cited as RG 211).

<sup>19</sup> Garcia, *Operation Wetback*, 21.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>21</sup> International agreement concerning importation of Mexican Nationals into the United States, nd, RG 211, Box 4, Folder Mexican Aliens.

representative of Mexican Nationals.<sup>22</sup> Within the agreement, the Mexican Nationals were guaranteed the following: they cannot engage in any United States military services, were not to be subjected to discriminatory acts of any kind, were guaranteed transportation, living expenses, repatriation back to Mexico, and were not to be employed either to displace domestic workers or reduce their wages.<sup>23</sup> Under the agreement, Mexican Nationals had individual contracts with their employer (FSA) and the Mexican government supervised it.

The program was structured with two primary agencies; the FSA in the United States and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the Departments of Interior and Labor in Mexico. On the United States side, USES would certify and estimate the number of Mexican Nationals needed for the job.<sup>24</sup> In Mexico, recruitment centers were established in the interior, where Mexican and United States screened potential workers. From the recruitment centers, the Mexican Nationals were transported to the US-Mexico border then placed with growers associations throughout the country.<sup>25</sup>

The Bracero Program began operational immediately after it became effective immediately and over four thousand Mexican Nationals entered in the following

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<sup>22</sup> USDA sets forth FSA's part in the importation of Mexican workers, 27 Aug 1942, Record Group 96, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Correspondence Concerning Migratory Labor Camp, Box 6, Folder Labor General, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Maryland (hereafter cited as RG 96).

<sup>23</sup> Craig, *The Bracero Program*, 43.

<sup>24</sup> Garcia, *Operation Wetback*, 23.

<sup>25</sup> Garcia, *Operation Wetback*, 42-43; Statement of labor standards for the recruitment and employment of Mexican workers in the United States, 4 Jun 1942, RG 211, Box 4, Folder Mexican Aliens.

months.<sup>26</sup> Initially, the two main industries to seek Mexican Nationals were citrus growers in Southern California and sugar beet growers in the Southwest and Midwest.<sup>27</sup> In addition, Mexican Nationals were recruited into the United States railroad industry as unskilled labor.<sup>28</sup> Even as employers benefited with the supply of Mexican Nationals into the labor force, some growers voiced their immediate opposition to the agreement.

In November of 1942, the American Farm Bureau (AFB) and other farm organizations issued a joint statement supporting the program in principal but called for relaxed rules and regulations.<sup>29</sup> On the other side, a number of labor and minority advocacy organizations, like the American Federation of Labor (AFL), Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) opposed the importation of Mexican Nationals in the United States. Those organizations disagreed with the growers' argument that domestic workers were unavailable or refused to do that type of work and "believed if wages and working conditions were improved there would be sufficient domestic labor."<sup>30</sup> During the early years of the program, the

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<sup>26</sup> Craig, *The Bracero Program*, 45; Garcia, *Operation Wetback*, 23; Philip Martin, *Promise Unfulfilled: Unions, Immigration and the Farm Workers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 47.

<sup>27</sup> Summary of weekly agricultural reports, 8 Jul 1942; War Manpower Commission to John Corson, 23 Sep 1942; War Manpower Commission to John Corson, 20 Aug 1942, RG 211, Box 4, Folder Mexican Aliens; "Our good neighbor farm labor" *New Agriculture*, Vol. 25, no. 2 (November 1942), RG 211, Box 4, Folder Foreign Labor.

<sup>28</sup> Driscoll, *The Tracks North*, 67-74.

<sup>29</sup> Garcia, *Operation Wetback*, 26-27.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.



Mexican government was satisfied with the outcome, as President Avila Camacho “viewed it as a boon to improving relations between the two nations.”<sup>31</sup> A number of Mexican Labor Secretary officials visited the United States and found some grievances but were over all satisfied with treatment of workers.

In 1943, the Committee on Appropriations held hearings on the Bracero Program, during which Major Walker reported that “the Mexicans, probably the first 3,000 that were moved into California” and “went into the sugar-beet industry. The first ones went to the vicinity of Stockton and Sacramento. Then there were others who went to other parts of the sugar-beet areas in that general section of California.”<sup>32</sup> Mr. Townsend testified that “we hope to get about 50,000 Mexicans. The Mexican Government believes that is the maximum they can spare.”<sup>33</sup> By the end of WWII, more than two hundred thousand Mexican Nationals entered the United States under the program, sixty-three percent employed in California.<sup>34</sup>

### **VENTURA COUNTY GROWERS UNITE**

After the Ventura County Citrus Strike of 1941, local growers organized the “Committee of Twenty-Two” to control the labor market and prevent the organizing of agricultural workers. In 1942, local growers pushed for a study that would confirm a

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>32</sup> United States, Committee on Appropriations, *Farm Labor Program*, 78th Congress, 1st Session (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1943), 13.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.; 36.

<sup>34</sup> James F. Creagan, “Public Law 78: A Tangle of Domestic and International Relations,” *Journal of Inter-American Studies*, Vol. 7, no. 4 (October 1965): 542; United States, *Migratory Labor in American Agriculture: Report of the President's Commission on Migratory Labor* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1951), 39.

shortage of agriculture labor on the Oxnard Plain stemming from the outbreak of WWII. The study addressed potential sources of labor, like students, women, or imported Mexican Nationals.<sup>35</sup> Bob Beardsley, president of Farm Bureau of Ventura County (FBVC) and C.F. Burson, president of the Associated Farmers of Ventura County (AFVC) sought assistance of the Oxnard High School District (OHSD) in recruiting students as agricultural workers. In a response, the OHSD pledged all out support from the growers.<sup>36</sup> At the state level, Governor Culbert Olson called for the immediate importation of Mexican Nationals to meet statewide labor shortage of agricultural workers.<sup>37</sup> Ray Wiser, president of the California Farm Bureau agreed with the Governor concerns by stating that “the situation was already serious and getting worse” and “we were short 15,000 workers.”<sup>38</sup>

In Ventura County, Burson of AFVC stated the county “farm labor shortage is becoming more acute daily” and “cautioned farmers against bidding against each other for labor.”<sup>39</sup> On December 27, 1942, one hundred Mexican Nationals arrived on the Oxnard Plain to be assigned to local packinghouses by the FSA and local citrus associations.<sup>40</sup> By April 1943, FSA district supervisor M.E. Huffaker reported that more

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<sup>35</sup> “Farmers ask labor study,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 16 Jan 1942; “Farmers study labor needs, elect field crop leaders,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 31 Jan 1942.

<sup>36</sup> “Farmers ask labor help here,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 11 Feb 1942; “School pledge aid in farm labor need,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 12 Feb 1942.

<sup>37</sup> “Import farm labor urged,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 15 Jun 1942.

<sup>38</sup> “State reports acute shortage face farmers,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 24 Jun 1942.

<sup>39</sup> “Farm vexed by labor need,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 13 Aug 1942.

<sup>40</sup> “Mexican citrus workers to arrive here at 3:30pm,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 27 Dec 1942.

than 850 Mexican Nationals were working in Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties.<sup>41</sup> Local growers were “planning to make use of the imported labor in the citrus orchard and were building dormitories and eating establishment for their convenience” but due to political issues in Mexico led to delays.<sup>42</sup> Beardsley complained “Ventura County farmers are further handicapped now.”<sup>43</sup> The Farm Bureau claimed a shortfall of 2,000 agricultural workers at the peak of the harvest season, and a shortage of 300 on the Oxnard Plain.

Growers’ complaints about the FSA direction of the Bracero Program intensified. Charles C. Teague, representing the powerful citrus industry “told a Senate committee that the Secretary of Agriculture had appointed the wrong agency to administer the program” and “accused the FSA of deliberately creating unsettled conditions which made it difficult for employers to get along with their braceros.”<sup>44</sup> In June 1943, growers’ pressure led to the decision to pass the Bracero Program from the FSA to the War Manpower Commission (WMC).<sup>45</sup> By 1944, Farm advisor Roy Southwick reported to local growers that 3,000 Mexican Nationals were imported into the county in 1943.<sup>46</sup> FBVC called on United States officials to help with the lemon harvest by speeding the process importing of Mexican Nationals into Ventura County. W.J. Williams, manager of

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<sup>41</sup> “850 imported Mexicans at work on farms in area,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 6 Apr 1943.

<sup>42</sup> “Farm labor needs acute,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 4 Mar 1943.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Galarza, *Merchants of Labor*, 51.

<sup>45</sup> Craig, *The Bracero Program*, 47.

<sup>46</sup> “Farm bureau in plea for help in lemon harvest,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 24 Jan 1944.

Ventura County Farm Placement Service stated, “the continuing and increasing numbers of farm workers entering the armed forces and the drain of agricultural workers into industry present a most serious problems to the farmers of California and most particularity to Ventura County farmers.”<sup>47</sup> Complaints continued over the direction of the program, by May of 1944 Ventura County growers were upset that the quota of Mexican Nationals set by the WMC was far below the needs of California’s growers.<sup>48</sup>

By 1947, the “Committee of Twenty-Two” grew into the Ventura County Citrus Growers Committee (VCCGC) headed by William Tolbert.<sup>49</sup> The VCCGC became the main contractor and lobbying group to bring Mexican Nationals into Ventura County. Each Mexican National had an individual contact with the VCCGC and in return, “the VCCGC received the braceros, assigned them to packing houses, and had the right to relocate them at other packaging houses without paying a re-contracting fee.”<sup>50</sup> The VCCGC relied on the packinghouses to oversee the housing, food, and transportation of Mexican Nationals. The use of grower committees shifted responsibility away from immediate employers and complicated the relationship between workers and braceros. By 1948, more than five thousand Mexican Nationals resided in labor camps in Los

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<sup>47</sup> “Ventura County needs 3500 crops workers,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 24 Apr 1944.

<sup>48</sup> “Report farm labor supply discouraging,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 25 May 1944.

<sup>49</sup> Richard Mines and Ricardo Anzaldúa Montoya, *New Migrants vs. Old Migrants: Alternative Labor Market Structures in the California Citrus Industry*. Monographs in U.S.-Mexican Studies, 9 (La Jolla, Calif.: Program in US-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1982), 31.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

Angeles, Orange, and especially Ventura Counties.<sup>51</sup> Ventura County growers earned more than sixty-four million dollars for agricultural produce, with the majority coming from the citrus industry: thanks in large part to braceros in 1948, the following years, VCCGC, which controlled over 60% of the Southern California's citrus industry, earned more than twenty-five millions dollars in profit.<sup>52</sup>

### THE BRACERO PROGRAM CONTINUES AFTER WWII

In 1947, the Committee on Agriculture held hearings on developing the Bracero Program into a permanent program. H.L. Mitchell, president of National Farm Labor Union (NFLU) stated to the committee, "we are opposed to the continuation of the program of importing foreign labor. We believe when there are 2,000,000 American citizens without work that there is no need for the foreign workers to be brought in to work on the farm."<sup>53</sup> The union's position did not stop the import of Mexican Nationals. Through numerous public laws between 1947 and 1951, the agri-business representatives were allowed to directly negotiate with the Mexican government for contact labor.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> "Mexican Labor Vital Factor in Southland Agriculture," *Los Angeles Times*, 27 Sep 1948.

<sup>52</sup> "Agricultural wealth pours through City," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 28 Jun 1949; "Seaboard, Somis, Santa Clara Houses Handle Crop of Ranches Around Oxnard," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 28 Jun 1948; "Lemon King Crop in Ventura County," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 28 Aug 1950.

<sup>53</sup> United States, Committee on Agriculture, *Permanent Farm Labor Supply Program*, 80th Congress, 1st Session (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1947) 81.

<sup>54</sup> Public Law 45, 40, and 893.

On June 3, 1950, President Harry S. Truman established the President's Commission on Migratory Labor to investigate the treatment of migrant agricultural workers within the United States.<sup>55</sup> The Commission held hearings throughout the country and collected data on the plight and needs of migrant agricultural workers. California's growers were more interested in braceros, and testified to the Commission that "of all the groups tried, excepting the locals, the Mexican National is by all standards the best suited to this work...he seems especially adapted to farm employment."<sup>56</sup> In its final report, the Commission concluded that "migratory farm laborers move restlessly over the face of the land, but they neither belong to the land nor does the land belong to them."<sup>57</sup> Because the faceless and landless foreign workers were even more than migrant citizens, the Commission continued, "cheap foreign labor is advantageous to the owners of the large-scale farms which employ 'stoop' labor in great quantities."<sup>58</sup>

In the background of the debate over the plight of migrant agricultural workers whether citizen or foreign born, the NFLU, under the leadership of H.L. Mitchell, Henry Hasiwar and Ernesto Galarza, moved to organize agricultural workers. By 1950, they had turned to Mexican Nationals in Imperial Valley. Galarza played a key role for the NFLU, "charged with educating unionists about ethnic Mexicans to discourage such 'race prejudice,' on the one hand, and with encouraging Mexicans and Mexican

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<sup>55</sup> "Executive Order 10129," President Harry S. Truman, 3 Jun 1950; "Union Splits with Farmer on Mexicans," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 Aug 1950; *Migratory Labor in American Agriculture*, 1.

<sup>56</sup> *Migratory Labor in American Agriculture*, 20.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

American to join the union, on the other.”<sup>59</sup> He wrote that the Bracero Program “was passed through under the pressure from finance farmers in this county who find it to their advantage to import foreign labor rather than to use available domestic workers.”<sup>60</sup>

The NFLU chartered three locals and recruited members from the area surrounding Calexico, El Centro, and Brawley. On April 26, 1951, the NFLU informed the Imperial Valley Farmers Association (IVFA) “that the union represented farm workers in Calexico, El Centro, and Brawley...[and] wished to discuss wages and working conditions.”<sup>61</sup> The growers association did not respond to the request. So, the union called a strike on May 24, 1951 against the IVFA. More than four hundred agricultural workers picketed the growers association, local packinghouses and labor camps, and UPWA packinghouse workers refused to cross the picket line. Through the Imperial Valley Central Labor Council, the local Teamsters supported the strike. In the following days, the Teamsters changed their position and declared, “the strike was a wildcatter, that it was unauthorized, and...[they did] support it.”<sup>62</sup> The UPWA soon followed suit and its members returned to work. But strike involved 8,000 agricultural workers, including 5,000 Mexican Nationals.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Stephen Pitti, “Ernesto Galarza, Mexican Immigration, and Farm Labor Organizing in Postwar California,” in *The Countryside in the Age of the Modern State: Political Histories of Rural America*, ed. Catherine McNicol Stock and Robert Johnston (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 169.

<sup>60</sup> “Summer brings the Mexicans,” *The Commonwealth*, Vol. XLVIII, no. 12 (2 Jul 1948): 275.

<sup>61</sup> Ernesto Galarza, *Farm Workers*, 159.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>63</sup> “Strike Threatens Imperial Valley,” *Los Angeles Times*, 23 May 1951; “Farm Workers Call Imperial Valley Strike,” *Los Angeles Times*, 24 May 1951.

NFLU organizers focused on leafleting Mexican Nationals and undocumented immigrants about the strike. Some Mexican Nationals began to seek out the union to assist with grievances against the IVFA and many joined the union.<sup>64</sup> NFLU efforts prevented a contingent of two hundred undocumented migrants from Ventura County from reaching Imperial Valley.<sup>65</sup> The union called the strike off on June 25. The strike demonstrated how the DOL, local growers, and USES worked hand to hand to prevent agricultural workers from organizing, using Mexican Nationals and undocumented migrants as a safeguard against labor unrest by citizens. Galarza was disgusted, that “Mexico and the United States had betrayed farmworkers’ interests in their administration of the Bracero Program.”<sup>66</sup>

In its final report, the Commission suggested eleven recommendations to President Truman, which included the establishment of a Federal Committee on Migratory Farm Labor to “have the authority and responsibility ...to assist, coordinate and stimulate...policies relating to migratory farm labor.”<sup>67</sup> But recommendations had little impact on United States immigration policies and July 13, 1951, President Truman signed Public Law 78 extending the Bracero Program, with a requirement to evaluate the program every two-years.<sup>68</sup> The final conflicting positions of the Commission and the signing of the Public Law 78 would spark debate among politicians, growers, and union organizers for the next several years.

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<sup>64</sup> Galarza, *Farm Workers*, 164.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>66</sup> Pitti, “Ernesto Galarza,” 165.

<sup>67</sup> *Migratory Labor in American Agriculture*, 177.

<sup>68</sup> Garcia, *Operation Wetback*, 73; Martin, *Promise Unfulfilled*, 48.



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Meanwhile on the Oxnard Plain, growers prepared for braceros. Local grower John Maulhardt and his business partner, Ventura County Supervisor Edwin Carty of C and M Properties requested permission from Oxnard's city council and Planning Commission to build a labor camp in a heavy manufacturing area on the outskirts of the city on May 6, 1952. Maulhardt stated the labor camp would meet "the great demand for housing for male industrial workers."<sup>69</sup> Maulhardt continued and called on the city council to change the ordinance in prohibit the building of housing in this area. The city council forwarded the requested to the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission on May 16 called for a public hearing before approving the request of building of a labor camp in a heavy manufacturing area.<sup>70</sup> Supporters of the labor camp pushed for the need of housing from Mexican Nationals under contract with the local lemon industry.

On May 16, the city council set a minimum of one hundred workers for any proposed labor camp and stated that no other city zones could be used for labor camps. C and M Properties planned to build a labor camp in the corner of Mountain View and Pacific Avenues to house between 200 and 300 Mexican Nationals. The discussion of building a new labor housing sparked interested by Ernest Fuller, manager of the Santa Clara Lemon Association. Frank Hovley, new manager of the future C and M Properties

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<sup>69</sup> "Factory Area Labor Camp Asked," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 7 May 1952.

<sup>70</sup> "Planners Move To Allow Labor Camp In City," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 17 May 1952.

labor camp, informed the city council that there was “need for agricultural employees vegetable business is growing by leaps and bound here.”<sup>71</sup>

At the city council meeting on May 27, opposition to the building of a new labor camp came from Don Ruggles, Milton Diedrich, Allis-Chalmers Manufacturing Company, and Southern California Edison Company. They stated that “the proposal would lower M-2 property values and would keep manufacturers from the city.”<sup>72</sup> Diedrich stated to the city council, “I don’t want that camp near my house. I don’t see where it would be beneficial to my property...it is a nuisance, who’s going to stop it once its started.” Ruggles stated, “we have no objection to labor camps as such but only the misuse of land zoned as M-2.”<sup>73</sup>

On the other hand, Maulhardt and Fuller argued that housing was “desperately needed to attract laborers here for the coming harvests.”<sup>74</sup> Camp supporter Robert Livingston pointed out, “the ordinance would serve as a restriction on labor camps, rather than have them scattered all over Oxnard.”<sup>75</sup> Another supporter Fidel Villasenor pointed out to the city council would earn “about \$2,000 per year on just the one percent sales tax that would be charged to the laborers for meals.”<sup>76</sup> A ruling by City Attorney William Reppy delayed the passing of the new ordinance due to the necessary

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<sup>71</sup> “Oxnard Firms Tell Need For Farm Laborers,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 21 May 1952; Frank Hovely was formerly employed by the State Farm Placement Office.

<sup>72</sup> “Opposition Changes Camp Would Be Detrimental To City; Procedure Was Wrong,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 28 May 1952.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

procedure in adopting an emergency ordinance. It was pointed out that to pass a new ordinance, the planning commission must conducted two public meetings and the city council another.

On June 4, the Planning Commission held its first meeting dealing the new labor camp ordinance. They heard a number of statements in support and opposed to the labor camps. William Tolbert of the VCCGC stated during the peak period “as many as 2,500 laborers [Mexican Nationals] are in the Oxnard Plain and that housing is needed for them.”<sup>77</sup> Jesse Stillen, manager of Somis Lemon Association spoke in favor of the new ordinance. The second meeting was held on June 7, where the Planning Commission continued to hear opponents and supporters of the proposed labor camp. Cecil Watt of the Ventura Coastal Lemon Company “warned of the hardships facing growers because of the shortages of local labor.”<sup>78</sup> In addition, grower Robert Friedrich stated the labor camps would bring “advantages to merchants and benefits to the community.”<sup>79</sup>

The debate over the ordinance led to two proposed sites for the new camp. Don Huggles suggested the area between Pacific and Rose Avenues. Ventura Farms Frozen Foods and Southern California Edison Company endorsed the site. Another alternative site was suggested by Diedrich was located on the outskirts of Third Street. C and M Properties had no issue with the alternative sites, only if it “could be obtained at a

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<sup>77</sup> “Labor Camp Housing Stirs Arguments Pro And Con,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 5 Jun 1952.

<sup>78</sup> “35 Argue Labor Camp Proposal,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 7 Jun 1952.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

reasonable price.”<sup>80</sup> On June 16, Maulhardt informed the city council, that C and M Properties had “taken an option on three acres of land east of Pacific Avenue facing Fifth Street as an alternative site for the labor camp.”<sup>81</sup> Opposition to the labor camp agreed on the compromise location. The property is adjacent to the Oxnard Citrus Association’s Pacific Labor Camp. Before moving on with the compromise, the city council would meet with the Planning Commission to discuss location and zone regulations for labor camps with the City of Oxnard.

After months of debate between growers and other residents, on June 19 the Planning Commission agreed on a special “M-3 zoning” for labor camps in the City of Oxnard. C and M Properties was granted a permit to build a new labor camp in the new zone with the goal of housing Mexican Nationals by late summer harvests.<sup>82</sup> On June 25, local farmers formed the Ventura County Farm Labor Association (VCFLA) under the leadership of Frank Vojovich, Robert Fredrich, and Hovely.<sup>83</sup> On the following day, C and M Properties broke ground on a new labor camp to be operated by Hovely and food services operated by Villasenor.<sup>84</sup> VCFLA moved to have the camp operating by

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<sup>80</sup> “Alternate Labor Camp Sites Proposed,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 9 Jun 1952.

<sup>81</sup> “Compromise Site For Labor Camp Taken On Option, *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 17 Jun 1952.

<sup>82</sup> “Labor Camps To Get 20 Acres On Fifth Street,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 20 Jun 1952.

<sup>83</sup> “Works Began On Labor Camp; Farm Users Pick Officers,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 26 Jun 1952.

<sup>84</sup> Susan Zamudio-Gurrola, “Housing Farm Workers: Assessing The Significance Of The Bracero Labor Camps In Ventura County,” (Master’s Thesis, University of Southern California, 2009), 123; in May 1956, Villasenor would enter into a agreement with VCFLA to operated the camp and kitchen under Buena Vista Operating Camp Company, see Albert Mister to Glenn Brokway, 20 Feb 1958, Record Group 174, Records of the Department of Labor, Office of the Solicitor Region 9, Records Relating

August 10 to provide housing for Mexican Nationals harvesting lima beans on the Oxnard Plain.<sup>85</sup>

In August of 1952, the city gave the green light to Triple-S Labor Association composed of Somis Lemon Association, Seaboard Lemon Association, and Santa Clara Lemon Association to build a labor camp between the VCFLA's new Buena Vista Labor Camp and Pacific Labor Camps.<sup>86</sup> The labor camp would provide 500 Mexican Nationals working for the lemon industry.<sup>87</sup> By September 19, the city council moved to adopt a new labor camp ordinance and fees for water, sewer, police, fire, and other services provided by the city. The majority of the owners and management of the labor camps complained of the fees being high.<sup>88</sup> The Oxnard Chamber of Commerce (OCC) intervened to recommended that all labor camps pay a tax of 1  $\frac{3}{4}$  cents per day for each laborer housed, plus an industrial business fee of \$1 dollar per year for each farm laborer.<sup>89</sup> The city council and labor camp representatives failed to agree on a fee to be paid to the city for the operation of the camps on September 26.<sup>90</sup> Fuller pointed out that "there was no such tax on a labor camps in Santa Paula, nor did he know of them

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to the Mexican Labor (Bracero) Program, Box 3, Folder General Correspondence, National Archives and Records Administration, Pacific Region, San Bruno, California (hereafter cited as RG 174).

<sup>85</sup> "Works Began On Labor Camp; Farm Users Pick Officers," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 26 Jun 1952.

<sup>86</sup> Zamudio-Gurrola, "Housing Farm Workers," 101.

<sup>87</sup> "\$164,000 Labor Camp Planned on East Fifth," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 26 Aug 1952.

<sup>88</sup> "Labor Camp Fee Debated," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 19 Sep 1952; "

<sup>89</sup> "Chamber Agrees on Labor Camp Yearly Fee Tax," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 26 Sep 1952.

<sup>90</sup> Agreement Fail on Special Tax For Labor Camp," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 27 Sep 1952.

anywhere else in the state.”<sup>91</sup> Grower Clint Hutchins stated, “for years the Chamber of Commerce has been trying to get industry to come into the city. Now here we come along, and just because we do things a little different...we get special taxes placed on us.”<sup>92</sup> After much debate, on October 7, the city council adopted a new labor camp ordinance with the compromise on taxes and fees proposed by the OCC.<sup>93</sup>

Opposition to building labor camps within or near the city continued throughout the 1950’s. In 1955, Edward Fontes and Robert Peña sought a special permit to construct a labor camp in Nyeland Acres, an unincorporated neighborhood on the outskirts of Oxnard. They were met with protest from Nyeland Acres Improvement Association (NAIA), which opposed the construction of a labor camp for Mexican Nationals near their Nyeland Acres neighborhood. Residents feared that Mexican Nationals “would be roaming around the area at night because there would be no recreation to keep them occupied.”<sup>94</sup> John Cargill of the NAIA called on residents to protest the Ventura County’s Planning Commission meeting being held on the labor camp.

More than seventy residents attended the Ventura County’s Planning Commission meeting on November 17, with the majority opposing the labor camp. Attorney Donald Benton of the NAIA presented to the commission a petition signed by 443 residents opposing the labor camp. The opposition stated the labor camp would “create a police hazard, would devaluate property in the area and would be a hazard to

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> “First Reading Given Labor Camp Ordinance,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 8 Oct 1952.

<sup>94</sup> “Nyeland Acres group objects to labor camp.” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 8 Oct 1955.

women and children in the area.”<sup>95</sup> Peña defended his proposed labor camp by stating that Mexican Nationals “are highly religious people, quiet, 90 percent family men” and “hardly involved with anyone outside of the camp.”<sup>96</sup> On November 28, the commission denied a special permit for a labor camp in Nyeland Acres due to protests from residents of the neighborhood.<sup>97</sup>

In October of 1956, the Oxnard Plains Labor Association (OPLA) under Public Law 414 began to import Japanese Nationals into the Oxnard Plain.<sup>98</sup> OPLA hired Hovley, formerly with the VCFLA to oversee the Japanese Nationals, whom were being employed by Tanaka Brothers Ranch on the outskirts of Oxnard.<sup>99</sup> By the end of 1956, the OPLA filed for a special permit with the Ventura County’s Planning Commission to build a labor camp near Patterson Road.<sup>100</sup> The new labor camp would house more than 200 Japanese Nationals during a period of three years.

On January 3, 1957, the Oxnard’s Planning Commission forwarded its objections of the labor camp due to sanitation issues and creating a neglected image within the beach area to the Ventura County’s Planning Commission.<sup>101</sup> Ben Faulkner of the

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<sup>95</sup> “Nyeland Acres delegation opposes nearby labor camp.” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 18 Nov 1955.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> “Planners reject labor camp at Nyeland Acres,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 28 Nov 1955.

<sup>98</sup> Since 1956, Japanese Nationals were brought in through PL 414; see *California’s Farm Labor Problems, Part 1: Report of the Senate Fact Finding Committee on Labor and Welfare* (Sacramento: Senate of the State of California, 1961), 127.

<sup>99</sup> “91 Japanese hired to work on local farm,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 27 Oct 1956.

<sup>100</sup> “Hearings started on labor camp, Oxnard drilling,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 28 Dec 1956.

<sup>101</sup> “Planners object to labor camp west of city,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 4 Jan 1957.

Oxnard Beach Chamber of Commerce (OBCC) complained that “the camp would be an eyesore.”<sup>102</sup> Even with opposition from the city and the OBCC, the commission approved the special permit with a number of conditions on January 14. The special permit still needed to be approved by the Board of Supervisors. The Oxnard’s Planning Commission renewed its protest over the labor camp by calling on the Ventura County Planning Commission to revoke the special permit due to being a traffic hazard and security risk for the Naval base.<sup>103</sup>

The Board of Supervisors referred the issues of the special permit for the labor camp back to the Ventura County Planning Commission.<sup>104</sup> The labor camp continued to be opposed by City of Oxnard, OBCC, and residents of the beach area. On January 28, the OPLA withdrew their request from the Planning Commission for a special permit to build a labor camp in the outskirts of Oxnard.<sup>105</sup> The following day, the OPLA filed for a special permit to build a new labor camp near the existing Triple-S Camp and Buena Vista Labor Camp with the Oxnard’s Planning Commission.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> “Labor camp west of Oxnard approved despite protests,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 15 Jan 1957.

<sup>103</sup> “Labor camp protest renewed,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 18 Jan 1957.

<sup>104</sup> “Protest delay labor camp, ok,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 22 Jan 1957.

<sup>105</sup> “Labor camp plans canceled in wake of many protests,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 29 Jan 1957.

<sup>106</sup> “Canceled labor camp may be built in East Oxnard,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 31 Jan 1957.



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In 1951, the President's Commission on Migratory Labor recommended for control of undocumented migration into the United States and strengthening of the INS.<sup>107</sup> It also pushed for "employer sanctions –fines on employers who knowingly hired illegal workers –and a halt to the practice of legalizing illegal workers after they found United States jobs."<sup>108</sup> It was not until 1953, that those recommendations were seen as a priority as reports of mass undocumented migration into California portrayed immigration as a serious threat. As a result, the Department of Justice moved to adopt a plan to enforce immigration laws.<sup>109</sup> In August of 1953, Attorney General Herbert Brownell toured Southern California, and spoke to more than one hundred individuals affected by undocumented migration on the US-Mexico Border. After his tour, Brownell proclaimed the influx of undocumented migrants into the United States "a serious and thoroughly unsatisfactory situation" which he found "shocking and one that was causing universal dissatisfaction."<sup>110</sup>

Attorney General Brownell moved to curb undocumented migration, which he addressed was one of the "nation's greatest law enforcement problems" with a three-way approach of dealing with it at diplomatic, federal, and state levels.<sup>111</sup> In addition,

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<sup>107</sup> I chose to use the term "undocumented" instead of "wetback," which was use throughout the literature during this period; *Migratory Labor in American Agriculture*, 178.

<sup>108</sup> Martin, *Promise Unfulfilled*, 48.

<sup>109</sup> "Brownell speeds study of 'wetback' problems," *New York Times*, 1 Aug 1953.

<sup>110</sup> "Brownell tours 'wetback' borders," *New York Times*, 16 Aug 1953.

<sup>111</sup> "Wetback called a major problems," *New York Times*, 17 Aug 1953; "Eisenhower backs wetback drive," *New York Times*, 18 Aug 1953.

Attorney General Brownell moved to increase the budget of the Border Patrol to control undocumented migration. He appointed retired Army Lieutenant General Joseph Swing as Commissioner of the INS, his main focus was to re-organize and militarize the Border Patrol.<sup>112</sup> Commissioner Swing and Attorney General Brownell developed a strategy to roundup and deport undocumented migrants. On June 9, 1954, Brownell announced Operation Wetback, which began on June 17 in California and Arizona, later it moved to Texas, and to the Midwest. Its main focus was apprehending and deporting undocumented migrants and publicizing its efforts.<sup>113</sup>

Commissioner Swing utilized state and federal agencies, including the military, to capture undocumented Mexicans. There is no clear estimation how “successful” Operation Wetback was but Commissioner Swing declared victory by stating, “the so-called wetback problem no longer exists....The border has been secured.”<sup>114</sup> Operation Wetback was only a short-term solution to the influx of undocumented migration, which was encouraged by the agri-business in its drive for cheap labor.

While Operation Wetback was taking place, the Committee on Agriculture held hearings on the Bracero Program. Congressmen James B. Utt of California, a Ventura County grower informed the committee that, he “depend almost completely on Mexican labor for the harvest of [his] crops.”<sup>115</sup> He continued by stating he has “not been able to get these so-called domestic laborers who are out of a job” to work on his ranch

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<sup>112</sup> Garcia, *Operation Wetback*, 158-159 and 172-173.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 225; the INS estimated the total to be 1,300,000.

<sup>115</sup> United States, Committee on Agriculture, *Mexican Farm Labor*, 83th Congress, 2nd Session (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1954), 146.

because they earned more from unemployment compensation.<sup>116</sup> Ernesto Galarza of the National Agricultural Workers' Union (NAWU), the NFLU's successor, also testified, rhetorically asking, "is there a critical manpower shortage in agriculture today?"<sup>117</sup> The NAWU believed there was not. The NAWU cited the case of Ventura County, where lemon growers sought to import five hundred Mexican Nationals into the area during the month of January 1954. Lemon growers argued if they did not receive assistance, they could lose \$60 million dollar. Galarza visited Ventura County several time that month and "we found some 300 farmworkers residing in the county who would have offered themselves for employment if at least the same conditions of employment had been offered to them as were granted to alien workers."<sup>118</sup>

The NAWU singled out the Bracero Program as its main target. Between 1942 and 1954, seventy-five percent of Mexican Nationals were from the states of Durango, Zacatecas, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacan, and Aguascalientes, with ninety-four percent employed in California, Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and Arkansas.<sup>119</sup> Historian Stephen Pitti pointed out that NAWU's organizer Galarza "struggled hard both to expose the backroom machinations of government officials and to develop a grassroot union movement to counteract their crimes."<sup>120</sup> Galarza "had become discouraged by the symbiotic relationship between agribusiness, government

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Garcia, *Operation Wetback*, 39-40.

<sup>120</sup> Pitti, "Ernesto Galarza," 161.

bureaucrats, and organized labor.”<sup>121</sup> Galarza refocused his energy and drive to expose the Bracero Program, which he believed was undermining labor-organizing efforts.<sup>122</sup>

In 1955, the Subcommittee on Equipment Supplies and Manpower held hearing on the Bracero Program. Tolbert representing the VCCGC stated to the committee that “we started using Mexican nationals in Ventura County in 1943, the wage rate has increased 189 percent. We have had to make two 10-cent-an-hour raises in the last 24 months, and we are using a large percentage of Mexican nationals. I do not think that indicates that the Mexican nationals are pushing wages down in that area.”<sup>123</sup> Tolbert claimed “we in Ventura County have done everything we possibly could do to replace foreign labor. We are actually the largest importer of displaced persons of any organization in the United States. We brought in over 2,500 of them.”<sup>124</sup> Galarza stated that “we do want to make it clear that we are not opposed to the employment of workers from Mexico, if and when there is an actual shortage of labor and all of our own farmworkers are employed at wages and under conditions that will provide them with an American standard of living.”<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Richard Chabran, “Activism and Intellectual Struggle in the Life of Ernesto Galarza (1905-1984),” *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 7, no. 2 (1985): 139.

<sup>122</sup> Garcia, *Operation Wetback*, 58; Alicia Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 83-94.

<sup>123</sup> United States, Subcommittee on Equipment Supplies and Manpower, *Mexican Farm Labor Program*, 84<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1st Session (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1955), 115.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

In July of 1956, Galarza was able through the Joint United States-Mexican Trade Union Committee to publish *Strangers in Our Fields*. The pamphlet exposed the exploitation of the Mexican Nationals to the public. California growers attacked it and “charged that the pamphlet was full of inaccuracies and misrepresentations.”<sup>126</sup> Galarza continued to expose the corruption of the Bracero Program to politicians in the United States but also stated ‘there should be no restriction on the right of collective bargaining by Mexican Nationals. They have this right in Mexico and no international agreement should abrogate it.’<sup>127</sup>

Like the NAWU, the CIO’s United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Workers, Local Industrial Union 78 (LIU 78), which was once part of the Food, Tobacco, Agricultural and Allied Workers (FTA) focused on organizing agricultural workers in Southern California. The union launched a campaign to organize packinghouse workers in Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties.<sup>128</sup> By November 13, 1953, the LIU 78 was certified as the bargaining representative of all packinghouse workers in the Somis

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<sup>126</sup> Ernesto Galarza, *Strangers in Our Fields* (Washington, DC: U.S. Section, Joint United States-Mexico Trade Union Committee, 1957), iv; Garcia, *Operation Wetback*, 58; A Report on Strangers in Our Fields by Region X, 10 Aug 1956, RG 174, Box 13 Folder Ernesto Galarza v. DiGiorgio Fruit Corp.

<sup>127</sup> Pitti, “Ernesto Galarza,” 177.

<sup>128</sup> In 1950, CIO expelled the FTA due to its Communist ties; see Don Watson, “Mixed Melody: Anticommunism and the United Packinghouse Workers in California Agricultural, 1954-61,” in *American Labor and the Cold War: Grassroots Politics and Postwar Political Culture*, ed. Robert W. Cherny, William Issel, and Kieran Walsh Taylor (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 58.

Lemon Association, Oxnard Citrus Association, Seaboard Lemon Association, and Santa Clara Lemon Association but was unable to negotiate a contract.<sup>129</sup>

The United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA) entered California to organize packinghouse workers, but also included agricultural workers in their organizing campaigns.<sup>130</sup> The UPWA took over the LIU 78, which was composed of packinghouse workers in California and Arizona. In 1954, the packinghouse workers in the San Joaquin Valley, Oxnard, Imperial Valley, and Arizona voted to join the UPWA.<sup>131</sup> The UPWA moved to organize fruit and vegetable workers, the majority of whom were migratory workers. By July, the LIU 78 became UPWA Local 78 under the leadership of UPWA's vice president A.T. Stephens. The ultimate goal of UPWA Local 78 was to link "thousands of West Coast field and packing shed workers into a powerful and militant combination under the UPWA banner."<sup>132</sup> In its drive to organize agricultural and packinghouse workers, the UPWA pointed out that "the presence of many thousands of these contract Nationals has undermined wage rates and working conditions for resident agricultural workers –both in the packing sheds and in the

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<sup>129</sup> Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 126; Oxnard Citrus Association and United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Workers, Local Industrial Union 78, *National Labor Relation Board*, Case No. 21-CA-1909, 13 Apr 1955; Seaboard Lemon Association and United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Workers, Local Industrial Union 78, *National Labor Relation Board*, Case No. 21-CA-1948, 13 Apr 1955; Santa Clara Lemon Association and United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Workers, Local Industrial Union 78, *National Labor Relation Board*, Case No. 21-CA-1908, Case No. 21-CA-1907, Case No. 21-CA-18 51, 13 Apr 1955; the packinghouses were build in the following order, Oxnard Citrus Association (1918), Seaboard Lemon Association (1936), Somis Lemon Association (1946), and Santa Clara Lemon Association (1948).

<sup>130</sup> Galarza, *Farm Workers*, 300-301.

<sup>131</sup> Watson, "Mixed Melody," 59.

<sup>132</sup> "Big coast local in solid UPWA vote," *The Packinghouse Worker*, Jun 1954.

produce fields.”<sup>133</sup> Similarly, UPWA’s president Ralph Helstein declared the Bracero Program “a bare-faced device for beating down wages in California’s vast fruit and vegetable industry.”<sup>134</sup> Furthermore, the UPWA telegraphed California’s Governor Goodwin Knight “to instruct the state’s employment service to halt the practice of refusing to send resident applicants to field jobs while issuing ‘certifications of need’ to imported labor contractors.”<sup>135</sup>

In Ventura County, the UPWA Local 78 filled charges against Somis Lemon Association, Oxnard Citrus Association, Seaboard Lemon Association, and Santa Clara Lemon Association for unfair labor practices through the NLRB. The UPWA Local 78 had won the right to represent packinghouse workers but the five packinghouse associations refused to deal with the union. By November of 1954, the NLRB found the local packinghouse associations affiliated with Sunkist guilty of unfair labor practices and ordered them to begin collective bargaining with the UPWA Local 78.<sup>136</sup> The NLRB recommended that the packinghouse associations stop “discriminating against workers because of union membership.”<sup>137</sup>

It was not until 1957 that the packinghouses’ associations and UPWA Local 78 sat down to negotiate a contract. The UPWA Local 78 was seeking a minimum wage of

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<sup>133</sup> “Fight for jobs in California fields,” *The Packinghouse Worker*, Jun 1954.

<sup>134</sup> “UPWA puts floodlight on huge West Coast labor import scandal,” *The Packinghouse Worker*, Feb 1954.

<sup>135</sup> “California shed workers voting for UPWA bond,” *The Packinghouse Worker*, May 1954.

<sup>136</sup> “Sunkist lemon, ordered to bargain with UPWA,” *The Packinghouse Worker*, May 1955.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

\$1.25 per hour, with a maximum of \$1.50, which included seven paid holidays, medical insurance, and overtime pay for Sunday.<sup>138</sup> The negotiation committee was composed of local workers, union representation and packinghouse associations members; Charles Fischer (UPWA), Robert Lopez (Oxnard Citrus), Robert Mesa and Beatrice Vance (Santa Clara Lemon), Frank Barajas (Seaboard Lemon), Pauline Silvio (Somis Lemon), Ashby Vickers, Richard Danielson, and John Phillips.<sup>139</sup> Through a series of meetings, Vickers stated, “we’ve been able to reach some tentative agreement.” On October 11, 1957, the packinghouse associations presented their proposal to the UPWA Local 78. The UPWA Local 78 rejected it due to Sunkist attempt to put “actual language of rights-to-work...into [the] union contract.”<sup>140</sup>

The negotiation continued as UPWA’s vice president Stephens urged that “consumers not buy lemons processed by these Sunkist growers.”<sup>141</sup> Gilbert Simonson of the UPWA Local 78 charged that Sunkist had “repeatedly stalled and delayed negotiation.”<sup>142</sup> Sunkist called the charges “unfounded” and “untrue.” The packinghouse associations had refused to bargain with UPWA Local 78 since January 1954 to February 1957 defying a NLRB decision. The packinghouse associations attempted to be exempted from the Fair Labor Standards Act (overtime provisions)

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<sup>138</sup> “Santa Clara Lemon, union meet Tuesday,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 23 Sep 1957.

<sup>139</sup> “Packing house officials, union open bargaining,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 24 Sep 1957.

<sup>140</sup> “Sunkist Growers try right-to-work squeeze,” *The Packinghouse Worker*, Oct 1957.

<sup>141</sup> “California state council aids UPWA lemon drive,” *The Packinghouse Worker*, Nov 1957.

<sup>142</sup> “Packinghouse workers union asks boycott of five houses,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 31 Oct 1957.



because of being a seasonal production. UPWA Local 78 member, Panfilo Navarro of Somis Lemon stated, “ I have heard so-called farmers in the lemon industry tell how hard they work, and these same men don’t know if lemons are grown on trees or what.”<sup>143</sup>

The AFL-CIO voted to support the “Don’t Buy Campaign,” against Somis Lemon, Oxnard Citrus, Seaboard Lemon, and Santa Clara Lemon, including Carpinteria Lemon Association.<sup>144</sup> The “Don’t Buy Campaign” aimed to boycott lemons from the local Sunkist affiliated packinghouse associations who have refused to bargain in good faith with the UPWA Local 78. Sunkist complained that it was an innocent bystander caught in the crossfire of a dispute with the UPWA Local 78 and their affiliates on the Oxnard Plain.<sup>145</sup> The local packinghouse associations continued their anti-union campaign by petitioning the NLRB to decertify UPWA Local 78 from representing packinghouse workers at Santa Clara Lemon Association.<sup>146</sup>

The NLRB refused to recognize the decertification petition and moved to bring contempt charges against Sunkist affiliated packinghouse associations for refusing to

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<sup>143</sup> “Sheds don’t need exemptions,” *The Packinghouse Worker*, Nov 1957.

<sup>144</sup> “Lemon Don’t Buy drive advances by giant step,” *The Packinghouse Worker*, Dec 1957; “Boycott Spreading On Lemon Sales By Five Packinghouses,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 21 Nov 1957.

<sup>145</sup> “Sunkist hold the key sector on California’s anti-labor battlefield,” *The Packinghouse Worker*, Feb 1958; “Sparks fly as lemon campaign roll on,” *The Packinghouse Worker*, Feb 1958.

<sup>146</sup> “Move to decertify packinghouse union halts negotiations,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 25 Mar 1958; “Try decertification trick at Santa Clara Lemon,” *The Packinghouse Worker*, Feb 1958.

bargain with the UPWA Local 78.<sup>147</sup> A contempt conviction may bring major fines and a possible jail sentences.<sup>148</sup> John Ollman, UPWA's District 4 director stated after years refusing to negotiation with the UPWA Local 78, "the growers pressured some workers into signing petitions to get rid of the union...[and] use this as an excuse for breaking off the contract talks."<sup>149</sup>

The UPWA Local 78 called the Bracero Program a national scandal due to its "lack of enforcement of the legal regulations supposedly protecting domestic workers."<sup>150</sup> In Ventura County there were over ten thousand acres devoted to lemons, with four packinghouses on the Oxnard Plain.<sup>151</sup> In 1957, California peaked with 51,300 Mexican Nationals working in the agri-business.<sup>152</sup>

### **CESAR CHAVEZ AND COMMUNITY SERVICE ORGANIZATION**

In the midst of the Bracero Program, Mexicans began to challenge it. In the summer of 1958, Cesar Chavez and Fred Ross met with Saul Alinsky and Ralph Helstein, president of the UPWA to discuss a proposal to develop a joint project with the

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<sup>147</sup> "Election To Pick Bargaining Agent At Santa Clara Lemon Assn Denied," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 8 Apr 1958; "NLRB to press lemon house contempt charges," *The Packinghouse Worker*, Nov 1958.

<sup>148</sup> "Lemon Packinghouse Take NRLB Contempt Proceeding," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 23 Oct 1958.

<sup>149</sup> "NLRB to press lemon house contempt charges," *The Packinghouse Worker*, Nov 1958.

<sup>150</sup> "Stephens ask public to pass up lemons from five growers groups," *The Packinghouse Worker*, Nov 1957.

<sup>151</sup> "Citrus in Ventura County," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 21 Jun 1957.

<sup>152</sup> California Assembly Committee on Agriculture, *The Bracero Program And Its Aftermath: An Historical Summary*, 1 Apr 1965, 5.

Community Service Organization (CSO), which focused on agricultural workers in Oxnard.<sup>153</sup> The UPWA Local 78 had built a base among packinghouse workers since the early 1950s. Chavez was a key organizer for the CSO, which was funded by Saul Alinsky's Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF).<sup>154</sup> Chavez worked closely with Eddie Perez and Rachel Guajardo, local organizers with the UPWA Local 78. Chavez returned to Oxnard, where he had spent time as a youth when his parents worked there in the fields.<sup>155</sup> Chavez focused learning the bread and butter issues of the Mexican residents of Oxnard, especially those in La Colonia neighborhood.<sup>156</sup>



**Figure 4.2 Cesar Chavez and Community Service Organization in Oxnard, CA, November 1959.**  
Courtesy of the Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs.

<sup>153</sup> Fred Ross, *Conquering Goliath: Cesar Chavez at the Beginning* (Keene, CA: United Farm Workers, 1989), 1-5; Susan Ferriss, Ricardo Sandoval, and Diana Hembree, *The Fight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers Movement* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1997), 52-53.

<sup>154</sup> Ferriss, Sandoval, and Hembree, *The Fight in the Fields*, 37-63.

<sup>155</sup> Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 35-39 and 55-63.

<sup>156</sup> Ross, *Conquering Goliath*, 7-17; Activity Reports, September 19-30, 1958, Fred Ross Sr. Papers, Box 2, Folder 43, Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan (hereafter cited as Ross Papers).

One of the major concerns was the lack of agricultural jobs, which the local growers controlled.<sup>157</sup> In 1958, growers used the labor associations to bring in 6,140 Mexican Nationals and contracted 3,745 to work in citrus industry in Ventura County.<sup>158</sup> Chavez organized using the house meeting model, and met with key Mexican civic leaders. He hired local resident John Soria as an organizer, who assisted Chavez with the house meetings, and in setting up three committees focusing on voter registration, citizenship classes, and farm worker employment.<sup>159</sup> In focusing on the needs of the Mexican working-class community, Chavez set up the CSO office in the heart of the La Colonia, one of the oldest Mexican neighborhoods in Oxnard.<sup>160</sup>

On November 2, 1958, Chavez and Soria launched a mass voter registration drive in the precincts of La Colonia, which was strictly non-partisan.<sup>161</sup> (see Figure 4.2) The registration drive led to more than 1,000 residents voting in the November election comparing to 442 from the year before.<sup>162</sup> On November 6, Chavez and staff organized the first general meeting of the Ventura County Community Service Organization

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<sup>157</sup> “Mexican Labor,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 3 Sep 1958

<sup>158</sup> *California's Farm Labor Problems, Part 1*, 111.

<sup>159</sup> Activity Reports, October 1-15, 1958, Box 2 Folder 44, Ross Papers; “CSO Open Drive To Get Out Vote,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 1 Nov 1958; “Campaign For Citizenship Class Enrollment,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 15 Nov 1958.

<sup>160</sup> The Oxnard’s CSO Office was located at the following address in *La Colonia*; 435 N Hayes Ave (Latin-American Veterans Club), 170 N Juanita Ave (Colonia Park), and 428 N Grant Ave.

<sup>161</sup> Activity Reports, October 16-31, 1958, Box 2 Folder 45, Ross Papers; “CSO Open Drive To Get Out Vote,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 1 Nov 1958; Ferriss, Sandoval, and Hembree, *The Fight in the Fields*, 55.

<sup>162</sup> “Del Buono Head Service Group,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 8 Nov 1958.

(VCCSO) at Juanita School in La Colonia, which brought out more than three hundred residents.<sup>163</sup> The VCCSO elected Tony Del Buono as their temporary president.<sup>164</sup> The VCCSO launched a door-to-door campaign in La Colonia to enroll residents into citizenship classes by November 25 more than 200 residents signed up.<sup>165</sup> On February 7, 1959, the VCCSO installed their first officers, Del Buono (president), Ernie Villanueva (first vice-president), Pablo Marin (second vice-president), Gloria Garcia (corresponding secretary), Tom Oliva (treasurer), Jesus Lagunes (sergeant-at-arms), Sara Meza (historian), Josephine Flores (interpreter), and Genevieve Valdes (parliamentarian).<sup>166</sup> In the same month, the VCCSO had more than 800 members and was granted a free office space in Colonia Park by the city council.<sup>167</sup>

The VCCSO, also took on the mission of exposing corruption among local and state officials, who oversaw the placement of domestic workers in agri-business. The *Oxnard Press-Courier* reported that local labor camps housed thousands of Mexican Nationals & Japanese Nationals and brought millions of dollars into the local economy

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<sup>163</sup> CSO Reporter, n.d., United Farm Workers, Office of the President Part I, Archives Of Labor And Urban Affairs, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan (hereafter cited as UFW Part I); "Community Service Organization May Be Formed Locally," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 7 Oct 1958; Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 125-144.

<sup>164</sup> "Del Buono Head Service Group," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 8 Nov 1958; "Service Group Meets Tonight, Juanita School," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 20 Nov 1958; "Community Service Group Okay By-Laws, Constitution," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 22 Nov 1958.

<sup>165</sup> "Campaign For Citizenship Class Enrollment," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 15 Nov 1958; "226 Sign Up In Colonia Area For Classes In Citizen," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 25 Nov 1958; "New Citizen In Colonia," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 28 Nov 1958; "Citizenship Classes Jump For 2 To 8 In Few Weeks," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 16 Dec 1958.

<sup>166</sup> "CSO to install officers tonight," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 7 Feb 1959.

<sup>167</sup> "Mexican-American," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 3 Feb 1959.

of the city.<sup>168</sup> (see Figure 4:3) Also, Buena Vista Labor Camp had become the largest bracero camp in the nation, with more than five thousand Mexican Nationals.<sup>169</sup> The growers used the Mexican Nationals to displace the local domestic workers, clearly a violation of the Bracero Program.

Under the Bracero Program, domestic workers had access to the agricultural jobs before Mexican Nationals. In order for local domestic workers to get an agriculture job, they had to go the Farm Placement Service Office in Ventura to pick up a referral card then return to the VCFLA or any other labor associations. A majority of the time, domestic workers were told they arrived late and had been replaced by Mexican Nationals in the fields. Chavez called on the state employment officials and DOL to investigate the corruption within the local Farm Placement Service Office. The VCCSO and UPWA Local 78 collected more than 100 referral cards and complaints as proof of fraud. Chavez organized pickets at the labor camps and the fields calling on the growers to hire local domestic workers.

On April 14, the VCCSO with the assistance of the UPWA Local 78 organized a “sit-down” at the Jones Ranch due to the hiring Mexican Nationals over local domestic workers and wages.<sup>170</sup> State employment officials intervened on the dispute of wages between the grower, VCCSO, and VCFLA, leading to local domestic workers returning to work. The wage dispute continued at Jones Ranch, as the VCCSO and UPWA Local

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<sup>168</sup> “Mexican National Spend \$3 Million-Plus in Oxnard,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 14 May 1958.

<sup>169</sup> “Largest Labor Camp in the nation in Oxnard,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 6 Mar 1958; Zamudio-Gurrola, “Housing Farm Workers”, 124.

<sup>170</sup> “Tomato Harvest Delayed Until Wage Dispute Settled,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 15 Apr 1959.

78 led a march down Vineyard Avenue on April 21.<sup>171</sup> On May 21, Secretary of Labor James Mitchell was greeted by protest by the VCCSO and the UPWA Local 78. He was a guest speaker for the Republican Federated Women's Club of Southern California in Ventura, focusing his speech on labor matter as they effected the Ventura County's economy.<sup>172</sup> The VCCSO attempted to meet with Secretary Mitchell, Del Buono stated "we want him to hear from the field workers, how they are being discriminated."<sup>173</sup> The UPWA Local 78 and VCCSO leveled charges against VCFLA, OPLA, Somis Labor Association, and Summerland Plant Growers with widespread discrimination against domestic workers through a scheme between Farm Placement Service Office and growers. The investigation of corruption came to a end, as the State Director of Employment, John Carr charged his own department (Farm Placement Service) staff of giving agriculture jobs to Mexican Nationals over local domestic workers.<sup>174</sup> The state employment officials intervened and a number of Farm Placement Service officials were fired or resigned, which included Assistant Placement Chief William Cunningham for keeping false records and taking gifts from growers.<sup>175</sup> Helstein commended UPWA Local 78 organizers "for outstanding achievement against overwhelming odds" and

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<sup>171</sup> "Labor Assn Attacks Handbill, As Farm Workers March," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 22 Apr 1959.

<sup>172</sup> "Secretary of labor greeted by officials, union protests," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 21 Apr 1959.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> "California placement head roll; UPWA farm job drive gains," *The Packinghouse Worker*, Aug 1959; *California's Farm Labor Problems, Part 1*, 145-149.

<sup>175</sup> "California placement head roll; UPWA farm job drive gains," *The Packinghouse Worker*, Aug 1959.

Ollman pointed out that “collusion between state officials and employers provided the biggest roadblock to unionization of agricultural workers.”<sup>176</sup>

Chavez and VCCSO were in position to control the hiring of agricultural workers on the Oxnard Plain. Chavez was able to build a strong base for the VCCSO and UPWA Local 78 to continue organizing agricultural workers. In his annual report to the IAF covering 1958-1959, Chavez highlighted efforts organizing the residents of La Colonia; with semi-monthly meetings with 400 members; 900 member paying monthly dues, 650 members in semi-weekly citizenship classes, register more than 300 new votes, and organized to have the state investigate growers hiring practices.<sup>177</sup> The Oxnard experience convinced Chavez that the National CSO could build a union for agricultural workers, but the CSO Board refused. By the end of 1959, Chavez was moved to Los Angeles to take the position of national director of the CSO.<sup>178</sup> On the Oxnard Plain, the growers returned to hiring Mexican Nationals over local domestic workers due to the factional fighting between members of the VCCSO and UPWA Local 78.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Sydney Smith, *Grapes of Conflict* (Pasadena, CA: Hope Publication House, 1987), 78.

<sup>178</sup> Dick Meister and Anne Loftis, *A Long Time Coming: The Struggle to Unionize America's Farm Workers* (New York: Macmillan, 1977); Eugene Nelson, *Huelga: the First Hundred Days of the Great Delano Grape Strike* (Delano, CA: Farm Worker Press, 1966); Fred Ross, “Mexican-Americans on the March,” *Catholic Charities Review* (Jun 1960), Industrial Area Foundation, Box 2, Folder 16, Richard J. Daley Library Special Collections, University Of Illinois At Chicago, Chicago, Illinois (thereafter cited as IAF).

<sup>179</sup> Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 143; Ferriss, Sandoval, and Hembree, *The Fight in the Fields*, 60.





Figure 4.3 Map of Ventura County Bracero Camps. Courtesy of the Bracero Oral History Project, California State University Channel Islands.

### UNION ORGANIZING DURING THE BRACERO PROGRAM

After Chavez departed, the drive to organize agricultural workers in California and to eliminate the Bracero Program continued. The NAWU had long used its direct drive to organize in the “factories in the fields,” and placed its efforts on the need to eliminate the program. But several other individuals began to re-examine the strategies of organizing agricultural workers, including Father Thomas McCullough of the Catholic

Church and Dolores Huerta of the CSO.<sup>180</sup> Huerta and Father McCullough attempted to pressure the AFL-CIO to refocus on organizing agricultural workers but failed.<sup>181</sup>

Then in 1958, Huerta and McCullough formed the independent Agricultural Workers Association (AWA).<sup>182</sup> Meanwhile, the AFL-CIO Executive Council voted to refocus its energy on organizing agriculture workers in the United States, especially California. A year later, they launched the Agricultural Workers' Organizing Committee (AWOC) under the direction of Norman Smith. AWOC's original goal was to unionize agricultural workers, but it also directed much of its energy to eliminate the Bracero Program. Meanwhile, it was not until 1960, that the general public was exposed to the Bracero Program and plight of migrant agricultural workers in CBS documentary "Harvest of Shame."

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AWOC entered Ventura County with the support of the UPWA Local 78. The Local 78 had been on the ground in Ventura County since the mid-1950's organizing packinghouse workers in the citrus industry. The union had funded Cesar Chavez between 1958 and 1959 to organize a CSO chapter with the goal of organizing the Mexican working-class community, the majority being agricultural workers. After years of organizing, the Local 78 finally won a battle with the citrus industry. On January 22,

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<sup>180</sup> Chavez and Huerta both member of CSO and were influenced by Fred Ross and Saul Alinsky of the IAF.

<sup>181</sup> Ferriss, Sandoval, and Hembree, *The Fight in the Fields*, 70-71.

<sup>182</sup> Ferriss, Sandoval, and Hembree, *The Fight in the Fields*, 70-71; *Wind in the Fields, A Report on Farm Labor, 1965*, Farmworker Movement Documentation Project (accessed 1 Jul 2011).

1960, the United States Court of Appeals for the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit found Oxnard's Sunkist affiliated packinghouse associations in contempt of court because they refused to bargain in good faith with the union.<sup>183</sup>

The court informed the packinghouse associations in order to remove themselves from contempt charges: they had to post notices in all of the packinghouses that the Sunkist affiliated packinghouse associations had been declared in contempt of court, immediately resume negotiations, cover the cost of the years long court case, and report within 90 days to the court the progress of the negotiations.<sup>184</sup> Ollman stated "the decision represents a tremendous victory for the 500 lemon shed workers who have been denied the right to collective bargaining all through the seven long years since they voted for the union."<sup>185</sup> Finally, in April of 1960, the Sunkist affiliated packinghouse associations signed a contract with the UPWA Local 78 ending a seven-year battle with local growers. The contract was the first in the fifty-year history of Sunkist's lemon

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<sup>183</sup> "Court orders Sunkist sheds bargain fairly with UPWA," *The Packinghouse Worker*, Feb 1960; *Carpinteria Lemon Association vs. National Labor Relation Board*, United States Court of Appeals for the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit, 274 F.2d, 22 Jan 1960.

<sup>184</sup> *Carpinteria Lemon Association vs. National Labor Relation Board*, United States Court of Appeals for the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit, 274 F.2d, 22 Jan 1960; Sunkist growers' anti-labor role in California agriculture, 3 Feb 1960, AWOC Collection, Box 8, Folder UPWA, 1959-1960, Archives Of Labor And Urban Affairs, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan (hereafter cited as AWOC); A wage increase now!, 23 Feb 1960, AWOC, Box 8, Folder UPWA, 1959-1960.

<sup>185</sup> "Court orders Sunkist sheds bargain fairly with UPWA," *The Packinghouse Worker*, Feb 1960.

industry.<sup>186</sup> UPWA's International representative, Clive Knowles, called the agreement "a major breakthrough in an industry which employs over 12,000 shed workers."<sup>187</sup>

By April 4, 1960, the UPWA Local 78 and AWOC launched a sit-down strike against Katsuda Ranch on the outskirts of Oxnard.<sup>188</sup> Knowles stated "this sit-down is for recognition of the union and for right to negotiate a contract for higher wages."<sup>189</sup> The union called on the State Employment Office to investigate the hiring of Mexican and Japanese Nationals, which were used to replace the local domestic labor force.<sup>190</sup> Both unions maintained picket lines at Katsuda Ranch. The ranch attempted to recruit local agricultural workers, but they refused to cross the picket line. OPLA Manager Hovely, who provided the braceros to Katsuda Ranch stated, "we can't get local people to cross the picket line."<sup>191</sup> By April 18, thirteen members of the UPWA Local 78, including John Soria, were arrested for trespassing and destroying property.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> "Sunkist lemon bosses end 7yr fight," *The Packinghouse Worker*, Apr 1960.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> "Farm Workers Picket Field Using Japanese," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 6 April 1960; "Sit Down On In Oxnard Celery Field," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 Apr 1960.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> "Lettuce Field Strike Still On," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 7 Apr 1960.

<sup>191</sup> "Field workers pickets force removal of foreign labor," *The Packinghouse Worker*, May 1960.

<sup>192</sup> "Lettuce Farmer Arrests Pickets Says Crop Dumped," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 18 Apr 1960; "13 Arrested In Farm Strike Due In Court," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 19 Apr 1960; "Farm Strikers Picket Gov't Offices," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 20 Apr 1960; Soria was working as business agent for the UPWA Local 78.

Moreover, the UPWA Local 78 was able to get INS ordered the removal of Japanese Nationals from Katsuda Ranch because they were used as strikebreakers.<sup>193</sup>

The strike caused the owner of Katsuda Ranch to lose fifteen acres of celery.<sup>194</sup> Knowles stated “rather than sign a contract with the union covering local workers and providing them with conditions as favorable as those offered the foreign worker, the employer [Katsuda Ranch] allowed his celery crop to rot in the field.”<sup>195</sup> The union requested that the State Labor Conciliation Service intervene and set up a meeting between Katsuda Ranch and union.<sup>196</sup> But the owner of Katsuda Ranch refused to meet with the UPWA Local 78.

In direct response to the strike, Katsuda Ranch sold its celery harvest to the Oxnard Harvesting Company (OHC). The OHC brought in agricultural workers from Texas to harvest the celery.<sup>197</sup> On April 28, the union formed a picket line to block the imported agricultural workers from harvesting the celery. The OHC responded by getting an injunction to prohibit the UPWA Local 78 from interfering with the harvest. The OHC stated that this strike had nothing to do with them, it is with Katsuda Ranch.<sup>198</sup> As a result, the sit-down strike exposed how the growers used the strategy of

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<sup>193</sup> “U.S. Orders Japanese Workers Off of Farm,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 21 Apr 1960; “Labor Secretary Intervened Here,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 22 Apr 1960.

<sup>194</sup> “Celery Crop Lost In Strike,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 23 Apr 1960.

<sup>195</sup> “Field workers pickets force removal of foreign labor,” *The Packinghouse Worker*, May 1960.

<sup>196</sup> “State Asked To Get Farmer Union Together,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 25 Apr 1960.

<sup>197</sup> “Celery Farm Quiet Again After 200 Crates Packed,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 27 Apr 1960.

<sup>198</sup> “Violence Averted In Celery Strike,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 28 Apr 1960.

selling the crops to other growers or associations, where no one takes responsibility for the labor situation.

Under the leadership of Tolbert and Jesse Frye, the manager of the VCFLA, Ventura County's agri-business focused predominantly on employing Mexican Nationals as its labor force. Mexican Nationals harvested ninety percent of the lemon industry.<sup>199</sup> At the Subcommittee on Equipment Supplies and Manpower hearings in 1960, Tolbert told the committee, "in citrus in California we use a peak of between of between 8,000 and 9,000 braceros. A lot of people say that we are a dominated crop, that we are using Mexican nationals entirely, but in my own county [Ventura] I could say that we peak about 4,000 Mexican nationals...we have about 11,000 domestic workers."<sup>200</sup> Tolbert continued, "the Mexican nationals that worked in Ventura County in 1958 took home an average of \$1,275 per Mexican national. And there were some 5,538 men."<sup>201</sup> Tolbert informed Congressman Charles M. Teague of California, "Mexican Nationals only do harvest work. The rest of it is all done by domestic workers."<sup>202</sup> Local Congressman and grower Teague supported the Bracero Program as a boom to small farmers and as an anti-undocumented migrants measure.<sup>203</sup> But, by 1961, the California Senate Fact Finding Committee on Labor and Welfare found that the "Bracero Program had been

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<sup>199</sup> American Friends Service Committee, *Final Report of the Farm Workers Opportunity Project* (Oxnard, CA: Farm Workers Opportunity Project, 1967), 9-10.

<sup>200</sup> United States, Subcommittee on Equipment Supplies and Manpower, *Extension of Mexican Farm Labor Program*, 87<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2nd Session (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1960). 64.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>203</sup> "Teague gets answer on braceros." *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 29 May 1961.

used by farmers in some areas of the state to freeze wages at low levels, that domestic labor was being discriminated against in favor of the braceros.”<sup>204</sup>

In its twenty-two year history, the Bracero Program enabled employers to bring five million Mexican Nationals into the United States.<sup>205</sup> Galarza pointed out that “from the beginning braceros have been, not a separate or peculiar type of agricultural labor, but a part of the broader class of migratory farm labor supply.”<sup>206</sup> In 1961, President John Kennedy moved to end the Bracero Program but agreed to a two-year extension. But in 1963, growers called on Congress to extend the program again by arguing, “without braceros, fruit and vegetable production would shrink and food pieces would rise.”<sup>207</sup> In hearings conducted by the Committee on Agriculture on the Bracero Program, Simonson of the UPWA Local 78 questioned the contradictions of elected politicians. He pointed out the case of Congressman Teague of California, who owned a ranch that used braceros, “if this is correct, this certainly creates a conflict of interest and any Congressman using braceros under Public Law 78 should disqualify himself from voting for legislation which would be for his personal and financial interest.”<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> *The Bracero Program And Its Aftermath*, 7

<sup>205</sup> Martin, *Promise Unfulfilled*, 47.

<sup>206</sup> Galarza Ernesto, *Tragedy at Chualar: El Crucero De Las Treinta Y Dos Cruces* (Santa Barbara, CA: McNally & Loftin, West, 1977), 54.

<sup>207</sup> Martin, *Promise Unfulfilled*, 50.

<sup>208</sup> “Simonson blasts bracero law; testifies before House committee,” *The Packinghouse Worker*, Apr 1963

By 1964, the growers of Ventura County employed 7,250 agricultural workers, which included 3,270 Mexican Nationals.<sup>209</sup> The VCCGC developed a legal buffer between the packinghouses and union organizers by creating harvesting associations. The associations took control of the operation of the harvest and agricultural workers, which once were controlled by the packinghouses. The packinghouses “no longer directly employed citrus pickers and as a consequence were not subject to union or DOL action against them.”<sup>210</sup> By the end of the Bracero Program, the VCCGC assisted in forming Coastal Growers Association (CGA) and other associations to recruit agriculture workers.

## CONCLUSION

After years of debate over the need and the conditions of the Bracero Program between politicians, growers, and union organizers it was not renewed and finally ended on December 31, 1964.<sup>211</sup> One-year later on September 8, 1965, Filipino grape workers with AWOC went on strike in Delano, Ca.<sup>212</sup> AWOC sought support from the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) under the leadership of Cesar Chavez, Philip Vera Cruz, and Dolores Huerta, which had been organizing in Central Valley since 1962. On August 22, 1966, AWOC merged with the NFWA to form the United

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>210</sup> Mines and Montoya, *New Migrants vs. Old Migrants*, 36.

<sup>211</sup> *The Bracero Program And Its Aftermath*, 2.

<sup>212</sup> Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 182-186.



Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC).<sup>213</sup> On the Oxnard Plain, the campaign drives of the VCCSO between 1958 and 1959 of voter registration, citizenship classes, and the organizing of agricultural workers led to the rise of civic activism among the Mexican community.

After the Bracero Program, Ventura County continued to be the center of the citrus industry, with over thirteen packinghouse associations and seventeen packinghouses.<sup>214</sup> The Bracero Program “turned out to be the largest foreign workers program in U.S. History, five million ‘braceros’ were contracted to growers and ranchers in twenty-four states.”<sup>215</sup> The Bracero Program was not a collective decision made by everyone, but “born and raised on administrative powers” of only a few individuals.<sup>216</sup> In the words of Manuel Garcia y Griego, the Bracero Program “left an important legacy for economics, migration patterns, and politics of the United States and Mexico” and those legacies would be seen on the Oxnard Plain.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Cesar Chavez, “The Organizer’s Tale,” *Ramparts*, Vol. V, no. 2 (Jul 1966): 43-50.

<sup>214</sup> Mines and Montoya, *New Migrants vs. Old Migrants*, 30.

<sup>215</sup> Calavita, *Inside the State*, 1.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Manuel Garcia y Griego, “The Importation of Mexican Contract Laborers to the United States, 1942-1964: Antecedents, Operation, and Legacy,” in *The Border that Joins: Mexican Migrants and U.S. Responsibility*, ed. Peter Brown and Henry Shue (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1983), 45.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE COMMUNITY FIGHTS BACK: THE RISE OF COMMUNITY ACTIVISM

#### INTRODUCTION

*“Education yes, Segregation no.”*

**- Al Contreras, Second-Vice President of Ventura County Community Service Organization<sup>1</sup>**

*“We live and work with the poor. We are the poor. We don’t have to prove anything.”*

**- Citizens Against Poverty<sup>2</sup>**

The legacy of resistance and the termination of the Bracero Program in 1964 left physical markers among the Mexican working-class communities of the Oxnard Plain. Years after being a stronghold of the *Bracero Program*, Ventura County still ranked tenth among farm counties in California, fifteenth nationwide, and earned \$147 million in value of farm products in 1966.<sup>3</sup> Agriculture continued to be big business in the coastal landscape of the Ventura County. It was connected to every aspect of life through culture, history, and politics. The growers controlled the power structure by influencing civic and educational policies of the residents of Oxnard Plain, especially the Mexican working-class community.

The rise of community activism on the Oxnard Plain called on the sons and daughters of Mexican workers to re-examine their connection to the capitalist power structure that controlled every aspect of society. Their reaction can be seen in the rise

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<sup>1</sup> “Weekend anti-bond drive,” *The Press-Courier*, 19 Jan 1963.

<sup>2</sup> “CAP tells about itself,” *The Press-Courier*, 4 Oct 1965.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

of civic engagement within city politics. The voter registration drives of the Ventura County Community Service Organization (VCCSO) between 1958 and 1959 led in a series of political campaign in the 1960s. In 1960 and 1962, John Soria ran for a Oxnard City Council's seat.<sup>4</sup> The political landscape of Oxnard changed on April 12, 1966, with the support of the local Mexican American Political Association (MAPA), Salvatore Sanchez was elected to the city council with 2,400 votes and winning all the precincts of La Colonia.<sup>5</sup>

By 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson took on the challenge to eliminate poverty and racial injustice in the United States with the *Great Society* initiative. The *Great Society's* programs addressed education, medical care, urban problems, and transportation among the working-class communities. Within the City of Oxnard, city officials and community members utilized the Urban Renewal and War on Poverty programs to target the Mexican work-class community. On the other side, the Mexican community responded by organizing against urban renewal and utilizing the War on Poverty funding to empower and organize overall working-class community.

This chapter examines the Mexican working-class community response to urban renewal, the War on Poverty, and school segregation.

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<sup>4</sup> "3 Women, 9 Men In Oxnard Race," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 11 Apr 1960; "Ten Candidates In Race For 3 Oxnard Council Seat," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 5 Apr 1962; "Council Vote Running High," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 12 Apr 1960; "Chart Shows Voting Precincts in Oxnard Election," 13 Apr 1960; "Incumbent Nason beaten; record 52 percent vote," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 11 Apr 1962; he received 413 votes in 1960 and 636 in 1962.

<sup>5</sup> "Nielsen Fourth In Tight Race," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 13 Apr 1966.

## WAR ON POVERTY AND LA COLONIA

Since the 1940s, city officials utilized numerous federal housing policies and acts, like National Housing Act of 1934, Housing Act of 1949, and Housing Act of 1954 to segregate Mexicans on the Oxnard Plain. City officials and realtors used those acts in redlining neighborhoods and developing restrictive covenants in preventing Mexicans from moving into certain areas in Oxnard. In 1945, the Oxnard Housing Authority (OHA) was formed to deal with the substandard housing and the demands for temporary housing for the nearby naval bases.<sup>6</sup> By November 1945, the housing authority applied for a 600-unit slum clearance project from the federal government, its key target area was La Colonia.<sup>7</sup>

Two years later, the Planning Commission requested a housing survey of La Colonia. The housing authority conducted the survey and found at least 408 units lacked private baths, 304 units no private toilets and 95 units with no running water.<sup>8</sup> OHA Director George Wallace reported that they received “excellent cooperation” from the Mexican community and the “Colonia residents are not being criticized, but facts are merely being presented.”<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the housing authority pushed to expand the

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<sup>6</sup> Oxnard Housing Authority, *An Golden Anniversary, 50 Years, 1985*, Subject Files, Oxnard Public Library Local History Collection, Oxnard, California (hereafter cited as Oxnard Local History).

<sup>7</sup> “Housing group proposes survey of Oxnard area,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 17 Jan 1947.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

survey area to the entire city, with the goal of using the information to apply for a federal housing project.

By 1949, Wallace indicated in his annual report to the city council that 31 percent of the city housing was in substandard conditions. The Oxnard Chamber of Commerce criticized the findings as being false and demanded a correction. Wallace responded, “we have to face facts” and “the only people who would object to facing facts are slum landlords.”<sup>10</sup> On September 20, Wallace and OHA Chairman Robert Beardsby called on the city to apply to the federal Public Housing Administration (PHA) for \$210,000 dollars to fund a citywide survey on the housing crisis. In addition, they called for the development of 800 low-rent permanent housing units.<sup>11</sup> The housing authority’s goal was “not only low-rent housing but obliteration of blight in Oxnard.”<sup>12</sup> The 800 units “would replace existing substandard housing, and would be for low income families.”<sup>13</sup> The funds would develop a survey “to justify’ the need for low income housing in Oxnard.”<sup>14</sup>

The city council suggested a public meeting to discuss the housing authority plan and the housing crisis. Mayor Carty stated, “we must be sure the people understand the need and what we are doing, and are behind us.”<sup>15</sup> The Housing Authority, City Council, and Planning Commission met to discuss a plan to replace slum and blighted

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<sup>10</sup> “False! Cries C of C of housing photo,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 15 Sep 1949.

<sup>11</sup> “Low-rent housing urged,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 21 Sep 1949.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> “Low-rent housing plan pushed,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 22 Oct 1949.

areas of the city with new low-income housing. Wallace called for the hiring of an outside expert to conduct a survey of the blighted areas. The survey would be used to seek funding from the PHA. Wallace stated, “let’s not think of tearing down houses so much as building up families.”<sup>16</sup>

By November, the city council still took no action on the low-income housing plan after hearing public debate on the issue. Mayor Carty mentioned throughout the debate that no matter the outcome the city still needed to condemn more than 200 units “regardless of whether they are replaced by low-rent housing.”<sup>17</sup> The council understood the importance of developing new housing but the main issue was over the signing of the contract to receiving PHA funding. The contract would tie the city to a “certain agreement to last until the last housing bond is paid off.”<sup>18</sup> There was also opposition to the low-income housing from the Oxnard Harbor District Real Estate Board. Moreover, OHA board member Jesus N. Jimmez stated that, “this [is] a human problem and it must be done [i.e. building new housing & removing slum housing] because we are also human. If you figure in the expense of crime, juvenile delinquency, tuberculosis, it is a saving proposition for the city.”<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Director Wallace added, “the authority for several years has been studying this problem and now is our golden opportunity [i.e. PHA funding]...we urge you to take action now.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> “Council plans public debate on housing,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 2 Nov 1949.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

On November 30, city council announced they were moving forward with a modified PHA agreement to bring low-income housing to the city.<sup>21</sup> A few weeks later, the PHA authorized 260 low-rent housing unit to city, only if the city council agrees to it.<sup>22</sup> Again, they took no action and called for another public meeting on the issue. The city officials wanted to know if the citizens of Oxnard wanted public financed low-rent housing. In addition, the city moved to establish a “slum clearance program” to demolition Oxnard’s worst housing.<sup>23</sup> The city building inspector Hugh Clark with Joseph Maier of the county health department were assisted to focus on identifying key target areas. After several weeks, Clark and Maier identified La Colonia and downtown as key areas.<sup>24</sup> By January 6, 1950, the city launched a “slum clearance program” with a yearly goal of demolishing forty substandard housing within the city.<sup>25</sup>

By January 10, another public meeting was held on the matter of public financed low-rent housing attended by more than hundred residents. Mayor Carty oversaw the meeting with two speakers presenting both sides of the issue over new public housing. Like before, local real estate agents opposed public housing due to the “unnecessary burden on taxpayers and is not in accord with good city planning.”<sup>26</sup> Eugene Conser of the California Real Estate Association stated that “public housing is like crackerjack, the

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<sup>21</sup> “City open war on slums,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 30 Nov 1949.

<sup>22</sup> “260 low-rent units are offered to Oxnard,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 21 Dec 1949.

<sup>23</sup> “City open war on slums,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 30 Nov 1949.

<sup>24</sup> “City starts slum clearance,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 6 Jan 1950.

<sup>25</sup> “City program dooms 40 substandard home yearly,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 18 Jan 1950.

<sup>26</sup> “Housing debate tonight,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 10 Jan 1950.

more you eat, the more you want.”<sup>27</sup> He pushed that the proposed for low-rent housing should be put to a vote. On the other side, Harold Wise of Planning and Housing Research Associates argued that public housing was needed for low-income residents. In the end, Mayor Carty stated that the city council would take action on this issue soon.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, on January 17, the city council passed a resolution 3 to 1 authorizing the OHA to develop public housing in Oxnard. Director Wallace stated “we will proceed immediately after the papers are signed to select an architect, carefully pick the right sites, and move as fast as possible on construction.”<sup>29</sup> Also, the city council agreed to demolish more than two hundred substandard houses within five years of the construction of the new housing project. Furthermore, the resolution gave the housing authority an \$80,000 PHA loan for a preliminary plan of prospective sites and census data.<sup>30</sup>

By June 16, it was announced that the first 160 of the 260 low-rent housing would be built in La Colonia.<sup>31</sup> But, by October the OHA decided to build all of the low-rent housing on a thirty-nine acres site east of the new Juanita School and Colonia Memorial Park in La Colonia.<sup>32</sup> The housing authority established it would cost more

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> “100 at public housing forum,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 11 Jan 1950.

<sup>29</sup> “City council authorized housing deal,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 18 Jan 1950.

<sup>30</sup> “City council authorized housing deal,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 18 Jan 1950; “Truman ok’s Oxnard loan,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 20 Apr 1950.

<sup>31</sup> “Colonia to get 160 low rentals,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 16 Jun 1950.

<sup>32</sup> “Low rent housing in single tract,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 25 Oct 1950.



than two million dollars for the low-rent housing project. Also, they set up the starting date as July 1, 1951, with a timeline to have the first units done in eight months followed with the entire project done in an additional ten months.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the housing would be open to veterans first then to all residents of Oxnard.<sup>34</sup>

In 1951, the OHA started building a new housing project on the outskirts of Oxnard. Housing officials named the project Colonia Village. By January 2, 1952, the housing authority began to accept applications for the new housing.<sup>35</sup> In the following months, they received more than five hundred applications, but two hundred were found ineligible.<sup>36</sup> The housing project provided new housing to La Colonia residents, who were target for living in unstable housing. Furthermore, due to its location the housing project expanded the boundaries of La Colonia.

In March, the housing authority announced that the first ninety-two units would open in May and the other one hundred and four units by June.<sup>37</sup> The *Oxnard Press-Courier* reported that seventy-nine of ninety-two new tenants of Colonia Village came from substandard housing throughout the city.<sup>38</sup> On May 16, Florencio Bocanegra, a

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<sup>33</sup> "Low-income housing to cost \$1,934,000," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 23 Jun 1951.

<sup>34</sup> "Rental scales being set for low-income housing," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 9 Aug 1951.

<sup>35</sup> "Christmas Greetings," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 22 Dec 1951; "Colonia housing project takes applications," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 5 Jan 1952.

<sup>36</sup> "Low-income home ready in mid-march," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 27 Feb 1952; "Slum housing to be torn down," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 11 Apr 1952.

<sup>37</sup> "Slum housing to be torn down," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 11 Apr 1952.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

resident of Oxnard since 1923, became the first official tenant of Colonia Village.<sup>39</sup> The housing authority dedicated Colonia Village on August 30 to city dignitaries, housing officials, and the public.<sup>40</sup> (see Figure 5:1) Furthermore, housing officials praised the opening of Colonia Village as a key “to clean up slum conditions and provide decent low-cost housing” in Oxnard.<sup>41</sup>

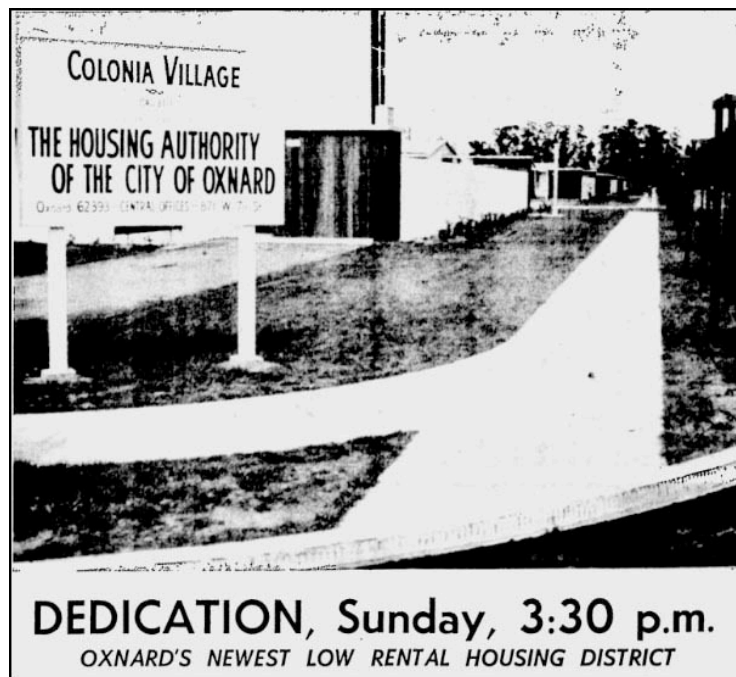


Figure 5.1 Oxnard Newest Low Rental Housing District. Source: *The Oxnard Press-Courier*, 30 Aug 1952.

Continuing down the same path into the 1960s, OHA expanded the boundaries of La Colonia by adding more living units to Colonia Village.<sup>42</sup> City officials utilized the

<sup>39</sup> “First Colonia Village door opened with golden key,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 17 May 1952.

<sup>40</sup> “Low-rental housing to be dedicated,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 29 Aug 1952.

<sup>41</sup> “Colonia Village dedicated,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 29 Aug 1952.

<sup>42</sup> “70 low rent units planned in east Oxnard,” *The Press-Courier*, 24 Oct 1961; “Housing agency asks approved to add 150 units,” *The Press-Courier*, 26 Sep 1961.

OHA as tool to redeveloped La Colonia, which they labeled the “slums” of Oxnard. In constructing the negative images of La Colonia and the Mexican working-class community, again city officials targeted La Colonia as a key area to seek federal urban renewal funds for mass redevelopment. The City of Oxnard held a number of meetings to discuss urban renewal, which led the Mexican working-class community to take a stand against redevelopment.

A community meeting sponsored by VCCSO was held on November 30, 1961 at Juanita School to discuss community redevelopment. Over three hundred residents of La Colonia attended and “voted unanimously to oppose any mass redevelopment.”<sup>43</sup> On December 19, at a city council meeting VCCSO presented their position against using any federal funding to improve La Colonia. Any type of federal funding would lead to an urban renewal program, which can cause widespread displacement in La Colonia. VCCSO pushed for local efforts to be used to improve the area. Councilman Harold Nason attacked their position but Mayor C.E. Davidson praised VCCSO efforts.<sup>44</sup>

At Oxnard’s Urban Development Committee meeting on December 21, committee members rejected any proposed federal funding for a La Colonia area study. The committee accepted the recommendation of VCCSO. CSO National Director, Cesar Chavez and VCCSO vice president José Rivera outlined a plan to redevelop *La Colonia*. The plan called on individual initiative and strict code enforcement without federal funds.<sup>45</sup> It was pointed out that “Colonia residents feared a federal program

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<sup>43</sup> “Colonia rebuilding fight vowed,” *The Press-Courier*, 1 Dec 1961.

<sup>44</sup> “Nason defends redevelopment,” *The Press-Courier*, 20 Dec 1961.

<sup>45</sup> “Urban development unit rejects Colonia study,” *The Press-Courier*, 22 Dec 1961.

would displace them from their homes and force them to become renters.”<sup>46</sup> VCCSO continued its fight against redevelopment in La Colonia by focusing its energy on organizing the Mexican working-class community.

By 1963, the City of Oxnard continued their mission to redevelop La Colonia by announcing they were seeking a federally funded study of the area. Mayor Robert Howell stated that the “city is in need of a survey that would show what needs to be done in hardcore areas.”<sup>47</sup> In response to the announcement, the VCCSO restated its previous statement that they were against any type of federally funded projects or studies due to it leading to displacement of the residents of *La Colonia*.<sup>48</sup>

At the Urban Redevelopment Agency meeting held on March 5, 1963, city officials agreed to seek federal funds for a study of La Colonia but not to make any improvement of the area.<sup>49</sup> VCCSO called for a protest against the city plans for redevelopment of La Colonia at the next city council meeting. In a handout distributed to the Mexican working-class community, the VCCSO stated that “urban renewal will force you to move...you will not be asked if you want this program! It will be forced upon you.”<sup>50</sup> On March 12, over one hundred people attended the city council meeting in

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<sup>46</sup> “US funds for urban improvement rejected,” *Los Angeles Times*, 24 Dec 1961.

<sup>47</sup> “Federal study eyed for Colonia renewal,” *The Press-Courier*, 7 Feb 1963.

<sup>48</sup> “CSO wary of the US urban study,” *The Press-Courier*, 20 Feb 1963.

<sup>49</sup> “Oxnard bans US funds for Colonia improvement,” *The Press-Courier*, 6 Mar 1963.

<sup>50</sup> “City faces battle on Colonia study,” *The Press-Courier*, 11 Mar 1963.

protest against urban renewal. Leo Alvarez of VCCSO informed the city council that the “study could be used as a wedge for a future federal project.”<sup>51</sup>

As the debate over the urban renewal continued the city officials moved forward in submitting an application for a federal funded study of La Colonia. In addition, the city was studying a Federal Housing Administration (FHA) loan program that could make available long-term, low-interest homes loans for families in *La Colonia*.<sup>52</sup> Harvey Pollock, Urban Development Agency coordinator reported to the city officials that an application for federal funds is not possible if the city rejected a federal redevelopment project.<sup>53</sup> On April 2, the Urban Redevelopment Agency reversed its decision on submitting an application for a federal funded study and called for the study to be conducted by city planning and building officials.<sup>54</sup> The city labeled La Colonia a rehabilitation area and would seek FHA loan program to redevelop the area.<sup>55</sup>

Under the direction of Pollock, the city officials took on the task of focusing on the two hundred acres of La Colonia. It was reported that 670 of 1,006 dwellings in the rehabilitation area did not meet city building standards and codes.<sup>56</sup> Due to understaffing, the city would utilize firemen as building inspectors and will hire a number of individuals to conduct the door to door economic survey.<sup>57</sup> On May 16, the

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<sup>51</sup> “Overflow crowd protest US renewal in Colonia,” *The Press-Courier*, 13 Mar 1963.

<sup>52</sup> “New FHA loan program eyed for Colonia us,” *The Press-Courier*, 25 Mar 1963.

<sup>53</sup> “Pollock seeks Colonia policy change,” *The Press-Courier*, 1 Apr 1963.

<sup>54</sup> “City rejects US study on redeveloping Colonia,” *The Press-Courier*, 2 Apr 1963.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> “City firemen may inspect Colonia homes,” *The Press-Courier*, 8 May 1963.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

city kicked off its informational campaign in La Colonia with the goal of conducting a evaluation of available relocation housing and a study of economic factors of the community.<sup>58</sup>

Through the Urban Redevelopment Agency, city officials decided to study the possibility of a new redevelopment program for La Colonia.<sup>59</sup> The economic survey of La Colonia reported that the majority of residents would not qualify for FHA loans. The survey found that 45 percent of property owners earned below \$160 per month.<sup>60</sup> The city decided to seek a redevelopment plan that focused on an enforcement approach to make owners improve their properties.<sup>61</sup>

In the background of developing an urban renewal plan for La Colonia, city officials hired an outside firm to conduct a city land uses study. Through the study, the city was informed it should focus on redeveloping its downtown business area and delay any redeveloping in *La Colonia*. The downtown property was three times as valuable as in La Colonia.<sup>62</sup> In 1962, the city officials announced a \$5 million project for downtown Oxnard with a modern shopping mall.<sup>63</sup> Two years later, the city officials unveiled a twenty-year plan to redevelop the downtown area. A six-month study was conducted by

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<sup>58</sup> "City opens information campaign in Colonia area," *The Press-Courier*, 17 May 1963.

<sup>59</sup> "Council shifts policy seek Colonia study," *The Press-Courier*, 3 Jul 1963.

<sup>60</sup> "Colonia plan won't work," *The Press-Courier*, 16 Jul 1963.

<sup>61</sup> "Colonia redevelopment plan the hard way," *The Press-Courier*, 17 Jul 1963.

<sup>62</sup> "Oxnard advised to upgrade downtown," *Los Angeles Times*, 11 Dec 1961.

<sup>63</sup> "\$5 million project set for downtown Oxnard," *Los Angeles Times*, 21 Jan 1962; "Modern shopping mall planned at Oxnard," *Los Angeles Times*, 5 Aug 1962; "Auditorium, hotels facing Plaza urged in downtown Oxnard plan," *The Press-Courier*, 20 Nov 1963.

an outside firm to seek urban renewal funds from the Federal Housing and Home Finance Agency for a multi-million dollars redevelopment program in a twenty-seven block area of downtown.<sup>64</sup>

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Through numerous War on Poverty programs, the Mexican working-class community of Oxnard were able to empower themselves to demand social and political changes. The community connection to VCCSO, United Packinghouse Workers of America (UFWA) Local 78, and Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) led a number of individuals and organizations to seek War on Poverty funding for a number of programs dealing with agriculture workers and the Mexican working-class community. As city officials targeted La Colonia for urban renewal, two key projects attempted to provide leadership and advocate for the betterment of the Mexican working-class community: Operation Buenaventura (OB) and Farm Workers Opportunity Project (FWOP).

In 1961, the Emergency Committee to Aid the Farm Workers (ECAFW) was founded with the goal of publicizing the struggle of the underemployed and unemployed Mexican domestic workers due to the Bracero Program. As a key critic of the Bracero Program, it helped to create programs that gave Mexican domestic workers training and skills to seek other types of employment. In 1962, the committee supported the Oxnard

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<sup>64</sup> “Urban renewal plan unveiled for Oxnard,” *Los Angeles Times*, 21 Jan 1964; “Urban renewal funds approved for Oxnard,” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 Feb 1964; “Oxnard will revitalize downtown,” *Los Angeles Times*, 12 Apr 1964.

Farm Workers Service Center (OFWSC), funded by Katherine Peake.<sup>65</sup> The service center was staffed by John Soria and José Rivera and offered social service program similar to the Ventura County CSO.<sup>66</sup> The service center's membership was "consisting of farm workers united to protect ourselves collectively in our employment relations with employers in agriculture."<sup>67</sup> The goal of the service center was to assist "workers to organize in their own behalf: to demand equal rights and to challenge the tightly-organized Ventura County growers and their associations."<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, the OFWSC attempted to meet its goals by educating and developing a sense of community among Mexican workers.

By August 20, 1964, President Johnson signed the Economic Opportunity Act, which allowed the local communities to create Community Action Agencies to apply for federal funding from the newly established Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO).<sup>69</sup> Through OEO funding, the ECAFW was able to develop Operation Buenaventura in

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<sup>65</sup> Katherine Peake was a key member of the ECAFW and wealthy cattle rancher, see "Prominent Ranch women works in fields to expose pay violations," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 Jan 1965.

<sup>66</sup> Cesar Chavez to Fred Ross, 2 May 1962, Fred Ross Sr. Papers, Box 3, Folder 6, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI (hereafter Ross Papers); John Walsh to Millard Cass, 23 Jul 1962, Papers of the President's Committee on Migratory Labor, Part 1, Correspondence with States, 1955-1963, Reel 9, 0065 (hereafter PCML); Constitution of Oxnard Farm Workers Service Center, PCML, Reel 9, 0065; Marshall Ganz, *Why David Sometimes Wins: Leadership, Organization, and Strategy in the California Farm Worker Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 97-98.

<sup>67</sup> Constitution of Oxnard Farm Workers Service Center, PCML, Reel 9, 0065.

<sup>68</sup> John Soria, "The Oxnard Farm Workers Service Center." *Farm Labor*, Vol.1, no. 6 (May 1964): 21.

<sup>69</sup> Robert Bauman, *Race and the War on Poverty: From Watts to East LA* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 4.



Oxnard. On February 8, 1965, the project submitted a proposal for funding to the OEO under Title III B, as a migrant program. The project was granted funding on March 19 and it was designated as a Demonstration and Training Program under Title III, section 207 of the Economic Opportunity Act.<sup>70</sup>

The project opened its office in the heart of La Colonia under the direction of Katherine Peake. (see Figure 5:2) Its overall mission was to “seek out men and women among the community of migrants and seasonal farm worker in Ventura County who have potential leadership qualities and through intensive training, develop these qualities.”<sup>71</sup> The program’s goal was to educate and train twelve farm workers as community aides.<sup>72</sup> Peake stated “it’s the only project of its kind in the nation” and “call[ing] it an inculcation against poverty.”<sup>73</sup>

The project moved to create a Citizen’s Advisory Committee, composed of half farm workers and the other half by community members. By the end of the grant, the ECAFW moved to relinquish the overall administration of the project to the Citizen’s Advisory Committee. With the goal of any direction or management of the project should

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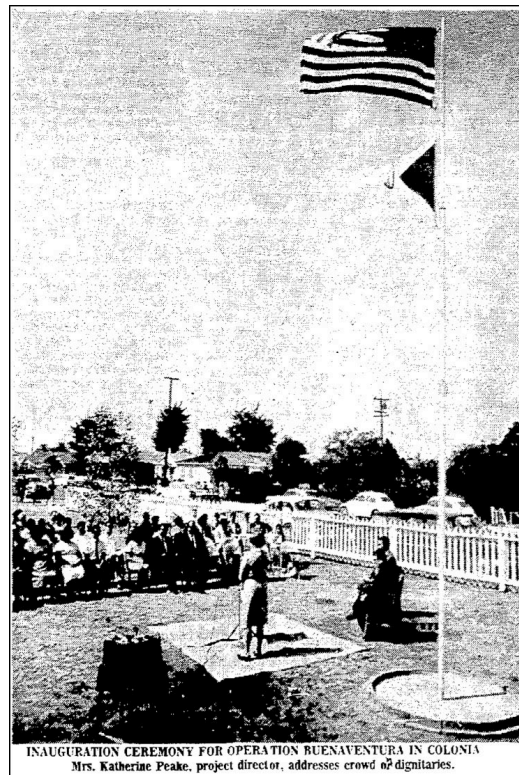
<sup>70</sup> Katherine Peake, A review of some aspects of Operation Buenaventura, Prepared for the Ventura County Community Action Commission, 17 May 1966, Max Mont Collection, Box 9, Folder 9-16, Urban Archives Center, Oviatt Library, California State University, Northridge (hereafter Mont Collection).

<sup>71</sup> Katherine Peake, A Report on Operation Buenaventura, Prepared for the Board of Directors of the Emergency Committee to Aid the Farm Workers, 7 Jun 1965, Mont Collection, Box 9, Folder 9-16.

<sup>72</sup> “Farm workers to be trained for leadership” *Los Angeles Times*, 1 Jul 1965; “Flag hoisted in program to aid farm workers,” *The Press-Courier*, 17 Aug 1965.

<sup>73</sup> “\$106,00 Colonia plan attracts eyes of nation,” *The Press-Courier*, 29 Jun 1965.

“be locally based and controlled by residents of the area to be served.”<sup>74</sup> OB received a site visit from actor Steve Allen, board member of the ECAFW, who praised the project but was critical of the conditions agricultural workers lived in the labor camps of Ventura County.<sup>75</sup> In addition to praise, the community aides played an important part in tackling a number of issues that the Mexican working-class community faced every day.<sup>76</sup>



**Figure 5.2 Inauguration Ceremony for Operation Buenaventura in Colonia. Source: *The Press-Courier*, 17 Aug 1965.**

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<sup>74</sup> Katherine Peake, A review of some aspects of Operation Buenaventura, Mont Collection, Box 9, Folder 9-16.

<sup>75</sup> “Steve Allen to inspect Operation Buenaventura,” *The Press-Courier*, 8 Jul 1965; “Allen critical of labor camps,” *The Press-Courier*, 10 Jul 1965; “Growers say Allen taken for ride,” *The Press-Courier*, 14 Jul 1965.

<sup>76</sup> “Operation Buenaventura,” *PC Magazine*, 4 Dec 1965; “Poverty unit aids two in tax battle,” *The Press-Courier*, 23 Feb 1966.

Another project sponsored by ECAFW was the Farm Workers Opportunity Project. The FWOP was developed during 1964 and early 1965 with discussion from several different agencies in Ventura County. Like Operation Buenaventura, FWOP focused on improving the lives of farm workers through education and job placement. Under the direction of Peter Lauwery, a proposal for federal funding was submitted to Manpower Development and Training Act (MDTA) Project of the Department of Labor. The FWOP was granted federal funding by MDTA on March 16, 1965 becoming the first project in the nation to focus on training agriculture workers.<sup>77</sup>

In the past Oxnard Union High School District (OUHSD) had refused to accept federal aid to improve the education of their students of color. It was not until the OUHSD was “forced by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the War on Poverty, and the Farm Workers Opportunity Project to come to a showdown with the issue of federal support.”<sup>78</sup> The high school district finally agreed to sponsor the FWOP after months of debate over the issue on August 25, 1965.<sup>79</sup> The final sponsor of the FWOP was the Oxnard Farm Labor Office part of the California Department of Employment, which would assist in seeking employment for agricultural workers.<sup>80</sup> The tasks of FWOP was divided between among the following agencies; recruitment and counseling by the ECAFW, job placement by Farm Labor Office, and basic education

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<sup>77</sup> “Farm Labor Training Plan Okd,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 Mar 1965.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>79</sup> American Friends Service Committee, *Final Report of the Farm Workers Opportunity Project* (Oxnard, CA: Farm Workers Opportunity Project, 1967), 39: “School for poor? Let'em Starve,” *The Press-Courier*, 5 Aug 1965.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-32.

program by OUHSD.<sup>81</sup> The twenty-four week basic education program of the FWOP started on November 15, 1965 with a six-hour and five days a week schedule covering basic reading, writing skills, and English language.<sup>82</sup>

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Operation Buenaventura had taken a key role in the struggle to expand the membership of Ventura County Economic Opportunity Commission (VCEOC) to include real community representation not hand picked leaders with no connection to the working-class community.<sup>83</sup> Tony Garcia, chairman of VCEOC with member Tony Del Buono pushed to have the commission expanded.<sup>84</sup> The Ventura County Farm Bureau and Tax Payers' Association led the resistance not to expand the commission. Operation Buenaventura believes "that the wellbeing of farm workers is considered by agriculture to be diametrically opposed to its own."<sup>85</sup>

In May 1965, Edward Abrams, member of VCEOC, called for a meeting of all the organizations doing work to end poverty in Ventura County to be held at the Elks Club in Oxnard. The newly formed Citizens Against Poverty (CAP) called for the picketing of the poverty meeting due to the history of the Elks Club denying membership to people of color. Abrams stated that they "decided to bring the race issue into this...[but] poverty is

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 41-42.

<sup>82</sup> "Workers school to open Nov 15," *The Press-Courier*, 28 Oct 1965.

<sup>83</sup> Katherine Peake, A Report on Operation Buenaventura, Mont Collection, Box 9, Folder 9-16

<sup>84</sup> "County poverty group sanctioned," *The Press-Courier*, 21 May 1965.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

the issue and race has nothing to do with it.”<sup>86</sup> The CAP responded to Abrams by calling him out as “not a true spokesman” of the community.<sup>87</sup> An agreement was worked out between both parties, the meeting was held on June 1, 1965 at the Trinity Baptist Church in La Colonia.<sup>88</sup> In the end, over one hundred individuals attended the meeting and agreed “that the community places a higher premium on a united attack against social problems than on the airing of fractural differences.”<sup>89</sup>

The Ventura County Economic Opportunity Commission became the official Community Action Commission (CAC) of Ventura County to oversee the federal funding of the War on Poverty program under the direction of Russell Tershly.<sup>90</sup> The Board of Supervisors pushed to have all anti-poverty programs under the control of the commission, with goal of having a central agency in control of all the federal funding received from the OEO.<sup>91</sup> A key target to bring under the direction of the commission was Operation Buenaventura.<sup>92</sup> As the CAC became the key agency to oversee all War on Poverty programs and funding, the Mexican and Black community joined forces to

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<sup>86</sup> “Poverty meeting may be picketed,” *The Press-Courier*, 27 May 1965.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> “Poverty board bows to picket threat,” *The Press-Courier*, 28 May 1965.

<sup>89</sup> “Poverty meeting harmonious,” *The Press-Courier*, 2 Jun 1965.

<sup>90</sup> “Russell Tershly approved as county poverty director,” *The Press-Courier*, 9 Jun 1965.

<sup>91</sup> “Single control favored in anti-poverty work,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 Feb 1965.

<sup>92</sup> Peake, A review of some aspects of Operation Buenaventura, Mont Collection.

“present a united front get to War on Poverty funds” for a number of neighborhood projects.<sup>93</sup>

It was not until the OEO requested the commission to be expanded in order to receive federal funding that the commission agreed to take action.<sup>94</sup> The debate over how to expand the CAC sparked division among the members of the commission. The CAP continued to demand representation on the CAC.<sup>95</sup> In the mist of debate, Richard Johnson resigned from the commission, which opened up a seat that could be replaced by a member of the CAP.<sup>96</sup> In the final outcome, the commission added new members, which included Manuel Avla of CAP.<sup>97</sup>

*The Press-Courier* had always been a key supporter of the growers since the founding of the city in 1903. With this bias, *The Press-Courier* attacked Operation Buenaventura by stating “the real purpose of the program is to organize farm workers into a union.”<sup>98</sup> In a response to the attack, Assistant Director of Operation Buenaventura, Manuel Banda stated that if we understand the law we “cannot as an agency whose funds are derived from the federal government indulge in unionization

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<sup>93</sup> “Colonia factions combine in criticizing poverty board,” *The Press-Courier*, 2 Dec 1965.

<sup>94</sup> County poverty group sanctioned,” *The Press-Courier*, 21 May 1965.

<sup>95</sup> “Colonia bloc jars poverty board,” *The Press-Courier*, 17 Sep 1965; “Del Bunon loses move to muzzle public in poverty war meeting,” *The Press-Courier*, 17 Sep 1965.

<sup>96</sup> “MacDonald center of poverty furor,” *The Press-Courier*, 17 Sep 1965; “The poverty delegates,” *The Press-Courier*, 17 Sep 1965.

<sup>97</sup> “Catholic priest named to poverty board post,” *The Press-Courier*, 27 Oct 1965.

<sup>98</sup> “Operation Buenaventura,” *The Press-Courier*, 18 Aug 1965; “Union education farm workers?” *The News*, 16 Jan 1966; “GOP hits poverty unionists,” *The Press-Courier*, 19 Jan 1966.

activities.”<sup>99</sup> More attacks continued, in a report by Beverly Moeller of CAC, she accused the Operation Buenaventura of waging a campaign to undermine the efforts of the commission through the CAP.<sup>100</sup> Peake responded to “Moeller Report” by stating it “shows a lack of communication with the poor and community at large and a fundamental lack of understanding of the intent and purpose of the Economic Opportunity Act.”<sup>101</sup>

As for the CAP, Peake stated it was “here working with the poor long before we were.”<sup>102</sup> The commission continued to focus its energy in bring Operation Buenaventura under their supervision. In doing that, the commission called on the project to submit a review of the project for further funding.<sup>103</sup> Again, *The Press-Courier* attacked the Operation Buenaventura by the questioning role of project and what they have done with their funds has been a mystery.<sup>104</sup> Even with the criticisms from the growers, politicians, and the newspaper, the Operation Buenaventura stated it will

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<sup>99</sup> “A closer look,” *The Press-Courier*, 3 Sep 1965.

<sup>100</sup> “Operation Buenaventura accused of undermining county poverty group,” *The Press-Courier*, 27 Sep 1965.

<sup>101</sup> “Poverty aide answers critic,” *The Press-Courier*, 30 Sep 1965; “The lady speak up,” *The Press-Courier*, 30 Sep 1965.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> “Poverty project review due,” *The Press-Courier*, 17 Feb 1966; “MacDonald asks for review of Operation Buenaventura,” *The Press-Courier*, 19 Mar 1966; “Poverty heads rap control,” *The Press-Courier*, 28 Mar 1966.

<sup>104</sup> “Operation Buenaventura,” *The Press-Courier*, 24 Feb 1966; “Operation Buenaventura,” *The Press-Courier*, 19 Mar 1966.

continue to empower the Mexican working-class community, especially agriculture workers.<sup>105</sup>

In January 1966, the FWOP defended the Mexican working-class community in Ventura County by assisting in the organizing efforts stop the eviction of a local farm worker, Mario Soto. Soto was part of the first education class of the FWOP under the direction of the OUHSD, where he learned to read and write. Soto, a resident of Rancho Sespe was notified the he and his family violated their rent agreement due to not being employed by the ranch.<sup>106</sup> FWOP counselor, Ernest Jenkins and others led a demonstration over the eviction.<sup>107</sup> Through the FWOP, Soto was able to defend his family and seek assistance over the eviction issue.<sup>108</sup>

Nevertheless, the battles during the struggle against urban renewal and lessons learned during the War on Poverty would help in the struggle to end school segregation in the Oxnard School District.

## THE STRUGGLE TO END SCHOOL SEGREGATION

In 1963, seventeen years after the *Mendez v. Westminster School District* and nine years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decisions on the education of people of color, the Oxnard-Ventura County National Association for the Advancement of

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<sup>105</sup> “Operation Buenaventura determined to continue,” *The Press-Courier*, 26 Mar 1966;

<sup>106</sup> Drew Pearson and Jack Anderson, *The Case Against Congress* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 152-156.

<sup>107</sup> “Farm workers group raps Fillmore eviction,” *The Press-Courier*, 14 Jan 1966.

<sup>108</sup> “Rancho Sespe stands firm on plan to evict family,” *The Press-Courier*, 15 Jan 1966; “Soto family quits Sespe Ranch home,” *The Press-Courier*, 19 Jan 1966; “An eviction,” *The Press-Courier*, 20 Jan 1966; “Rancho Sespe eviction cited in OEO talks,” *The Press-Courier*, 26 Jan 1966.



Colored People (NACCP), VCCSO and other organizations came together to advocate for the desegregation of the Oxnard School District (OSD). The struggle led to mass protests on the issues of racial discrimination and de facto segregation within the City of Oxnard from the 1963 School Bond to the 1970 Soria Case.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the OSD had laid down the foundation of this crisis during the 1920s, when they utilized de facto policies to segregate Mexican children from White children.<sup>109</sup> Historian Gilbert Gonzalez noted that numerous school districts used “Americanization [as] the prime objective of the education of Mexican children.”<sup>110</sup> These programs “tended to preserve the political and economic subordination of the Mexican community.”<sup>111</sup> On the same note, educational historian Ruben Donato states that, “one of the tasks of public schools was to assimilate immigrant children into full-fledged Americans.”<sup>112</sup>

As the Mexican population increased in Oxnard during the 1930s and 1940s, the local school district moved to build neighborhood schools (aka Mexican schools) within La Colonia. By developing a de facto situation, the education of Mexicans became inferior to Whites. Gonzalez pointed out that, “Mexicans [were] integrated into the economy and as their numbers increased, school boards established a de jure

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<sup>109</sup> “School board minutes play big role in Oxnard desegregation,” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 Jan 1975; “Of Children and Chicken Coops,” *Los Angeles Times*, 26 Jan 1975.

<sup>110</sup> Gilbert Gonzalez, *Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation* (Philadelphia: Balch Institute Press, 1990), 30.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Rubén Donato, *The Other Struggle for Equal Schools: Mexican Americans During the Civil Rights Era* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), 11.

segregationist policy.”<sup>113</sup> Or as noted by Donato, “the schools of Mexican Americans during the first half of the twentieth century in the Southwest functioned as a means of social control, an attempt to socialize them into loyal and disciplined workers.”<sup>114</sup> So, as the OSD moved to develop the “neighborhood schools” concept, it would produce de facto segregation within the school district. This segregation would create Ramona and Juanita Schools within blocks from each other in La Colonia.

In 1939, the school district purchased more than six acres on the eastside of Colonia Home Gardens (La Colonia) to build a new school.<sup>115</sup> By September 1939, the school district approved the plans to a build a new school, which would serve more than three hundred children from Colonia Home Gardens.<sup>116</sup> They placed a school bond of \$75,000 on the ballot for the December 15 election.<sup>117</sup> The school bond passed by 358 to 30 votes. Following the victory, the OSD announced the new school would be ready for the 1940-1941 school year.<sup>118</sup>

By June 1940, the school district called on the residents of Oxnard to participate in the naming of the new school.<sup>119</sup> The OSD finally agreed to name it, Ramona School, opening in August 1940. The school district moved to set the school enrollment

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<sup>113</sup> Gonzalez, *Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation*, 21.

<sup>114</sup> Donato, *The Other Struggle for Equal Schools*, 13.

<sup>115</sup> “Grammar school board purchases 6 acres for east side school,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 12 Sep 1939.

<sup>116</sup> School Board Minutes, 27 Jun 1939, Oxnard School District Archives (hereafter OSD Archives).

<sup>117</sup> “Civic leaders of Oxnard back plan for new Colonia school,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 11 Dec 1939.

<sup>118</sup> “School bonds voted,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 16 Dec 1939.

<sup>119</sup> “Names for new school suggested,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 25 Jun 1940.

boundaries as the following “all children living east of Oxnard Boulevard and north of Fifth Street will attend the Ramona School.”<sup>120</sup> By doing this, the school district automatically created a “Mexican School” due to the boundaries composed of all of La Colonia neighborhood. By July 1941, the school district added more rooms to the school. Furthermore, they moved to include a baby clinic “for the benefit of young Mexican mothers and their children in the district.”<sup>121</sup>

Nine years later, Ramona School became overcrowded with more than six hundred students, the majority being Mexicans.<sup>122</sup> The OSD moved to build another school in La Colonia.<sup>123</sup> Again, voters were called on to vote for a new school bond of \$304,000 to build a new school, but also to make improvement at other schools within the school district.<sup>124</sup> On April 19, 1949, voters approved the school bond with a 904 to 44 vote.<sup>125</sup> The school district moved forward on their five-point plan, which included expanding Ramona School from 20 to 28 classrooms and purchasing land for a new school in La Colonia.<sup>126</sup>

By November 1949, the school district and the city council met with landowner Dean C. Daily to discuss purchasing some of his property near Ramona School for a

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<sup>120</sup> “Elementary schools to open Sept 10,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 22 Aug 1940.

<sup>121</sup> “Add rooms at Ramon School,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 18 Jul 1941.

<sup>122</sup> “Today’s total enrollment reaches 3,916,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 12 Sep 1949.

<sup>123</sup> Oxnard Elementary School Board to Oxnard Union High School, nd., OSD Archives.

<sup>124</sup> “Grade school bond vote Tuesday,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 18 Apr 1949.

<sup>125</sup> “Voters will go to four schools in bond election,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 19 Apr 1949; “School bonds pass 904 to 44,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 20 Apr 1949.

<sup>126</sup> School Board Minutes, 26 Apr 1949, OSD Archives.

new school and community park.<sup>127</sup> On September 6, 1949, the school board agreed to buy seven acres for a new school in La Colonia, which was only a block away from Ramona School.<sup>128</sup> Under their plan, the school district would build the new school first, which would be named Juanita School then expand Ramona School with new classrooms.<sup>129</sup> Superintendent Richard Clowes pointed out that “the new school...will relieve the need for double sessions in Ramona School next years.”<sup>130</sup> Finally, in December 1951, Juanita School opened to relieve overcrowded conditions in the district.<sup>131</sup>

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Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, the school district continued to expand Ramona and Juanita Schools due to the increasing Mexican population. By January of 1963, the school district began a campaign for a new 3.2 million dollar school bond for the upcoming January 22 elections. It was the OSD’s third attempt to pass a school bond for improvement; the previous two (1961 and 1962) lost by a small margin.<sup>132</sup> The school district pushed for the school bond to reduce overcrowding and the construction

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<sup>127</sup> “City, school men to meet land owner,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 28 Nov 1949.

<sup>128</sup> “Junior high need said 5 years a way,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 7 Sep 1949; School Board Minutes, 6 Sep 1949, OSD Archives.

<sup>129</sup> School Board Minutes, 21 Feb 1950; 4 April 1950, 3 May 1950; 21 Feb 1950; 18 Jul 1950; 26 Jul 1950; 5 Dec 1950, OSD Archives.

<sup>130</sup> “Work begins on \$260,000 Juanita School,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 1 Mar 1951.

<sup>131</sup> “Juanita School to open in December,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 12 Nov 1951; School Board Minutes, 22 Dec 1951, OSD Archives.

<sup>132</sup> “Third try for Oxnard school bonds,” *The Press-Courier*, 21 Jan 1963.

of a new junior high school in La Colonia. The OSD argued it would save \$5000 a year on the transportation of over 300 children from La Colonia to another junior high school in the district.<sup>133</sup> (see Figure 5:3 and 5:4) In response to the school bond, a support committee was formed composed of community individuals and organizations, which endorsed the bond.<sup>134</sup> The VCCSO gave the school bond a partial endorsement but pushed for a different site for the new junior high school.<sup>135</sup>



Figure 5.3 First Trip. Source: *The Press-Courier*, 18 Jan 1963.

On January 17, OSD officials met with VCCSO to sway them into pro-bond position. VCCSO opposed the bond on the grounds that it would create a segregated junior high school in La Colonia. VCCSO President, Cloromiro Camacho noted, “this is complete discrimination” and “if a school is built here, it would be 39 percent Mexican or

<sup>133</sup> “It costs \$5000 for 305 pupils to ride to school,” *The Press-Courier*, 8 Jan 1963.

<sup>134</sup> School Board Minutes, 8 Jan 1963, OSD Archives.

<sup>135</sup> “50 join committee backing school bonds.” *The Press-Courier*, 9 Jan 1963.

Negro. Therefore, this is a segregated school.”<sup>136</sup> VCCSO was not against the construction of a new junior high school but just not in La Colonia. The OSD officials informed VCCSO that Superintendent Harold DePue “has vowed that he wanted to spend more money here [La Colonia] because the children need it more.”<sup>137</sup>

On the same day, the local NAACP met and took an anti-bond position. The local NAACP stated, “we support quality education for all children of Oxnard, however we cannot endorse segregation in any form.”<sup>138</sup> Superintendent DePue stated his disappointment by the opposition of the school bond but “we must remember that the action taken by these groups is the right of any individual or group and it must be respected as such.”<sup>139</sup> In a response to the anti-school bond position of the VCCSO and local NAACP, the editor of *The Press-Courier* took the position that there was no racial discrimination in the OSD and that “opposition cares less for the welfare of the families of Oxnard and children.”<sup>140</sup>

On January 20, the VCCSO kicked off their campaign against the school bond with the goal of getting a one hundred percent no vote in La Colonia. The VCCSO organized a house-to-house drive in La Colonia with pamphlets encouraging the

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<sup>136</sup> “Principals fail to sway CSO opposition to school bonds,” *The Press-Courier*, 18 Jan 1963.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> “NAACP joins foes of bonds,” *The Press-Courier*, 18 Jan 1963; “NAACP, CSO, to meet to air bond issue stand,” 16 Jan 1963.

<sup>139</sup> “DePue disappointed by school bond opposition,” *The Press-Courier*, 18 Jan 1963.

<sup>140</sup> “A sorry mistake,” *The Press-Courier*, 19 Jan 1963.

residents to vote no on the school bond.<sup>141</sup> (see Figure 5:5) Former VCCSO president, Tony Del Buono appealed to the executive board of the VCCSO to “approve the bonds but oppose the site because of de facto segregation.”<sup>142</sup> A similar comment made by former city councilman, Harold Nason called on the VCCSO to “support the bond issue for the all children and then oppose the construction site if they want to.”<sup>143</sup> The school bond caused tensions among the membership of the VCCSO. In the past, the VCCSO had supported the previous school bonds. Camacho defended the position of the VCCSO and “as for many members of our group that will not join us in opposition, we respect them and their democratic right of vote and freedom.”<sup>144</sup>



Figure 5.4 Doubled Up. Source: *The Press-Courier*, 10 Jan 1963.

<sup>141</sup> “Weekend anti-bond drive,” *The Press-Courier*, 19 Jan 1963.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> “Third try for Oxnard school bonds,” *The Press-Courier*, 21 Jan 1963.

<sup>144</sup> “Voting brisk on elementary school bonds,” *The Press-Courier*, 22 Jan 1963.

On January 22, Oxnard's voters went to the ballot to vote on the school bond, which included a new junior high school in La Colonia. Voters approved the school bond with a yes vote of 71.9 percent.<sup>145</sup> The school bond won 9 of 14 precincts but lost in the three La Colonia precincts, where VCCSO and local NAACP organized against the school bond.<sup>146</sup> The editor of *The Press-Courier* continued its attack against the local NAACP and VCCSO by stating that the residents of La Colonia "were torn by misguided efforts on the part of two small groups to defend the bond."<sup>147</sup> The residents of La Colonia were divided over the location of the new junior high school.



Figure 5.5 Map Anti-Bond Drive. Source: *The Press-Courier*, 10 Jan 1963.

<sup>145</sup> "Bonds win heavily; new schools rushed," *The Press-Courier*, 23 Jan 1963; School Board Minutes, 29 Jan 1963, OSD Archives.

<sup>146</sup> School Board Minutes, 29 Jan 1963, OSD Archives.

<sup>147</sup> "A Heartening Victory," *The Press-Courier*, 25 Jan 1963.



Before and after the passing of school bond, racial tension among the residents of Oxnard existed but peaked over the issue of the location of the new junior high school in La Colonia. The school district was in the cross fire over the issue. Since 1960, the school district was in the hot seat over the tracking of children of La Colonia to Fremont Junior High, which led to a number of residents and police complaints of vandalism.<sup>148</sup> On January 27, vandalism occurred at one of the district's schools, which school officials and the police linked to racial tension and fights at Oxnard High School over the controversy of the school bond.<sup>149</sup> High school officials confirmed racial tensions between two student groups, the Playboys (Mexican students) and Surfers (White students) over the public discussion of segregation.<sup>150</sup> High School officials stated "all children bring their problems and their out-of-school experiences to the campus," which sometimes causes issues among students.<sup>151</sup>

With the school bond in place, the OSD moved to make improvements throughout the district, especially the planning of the construction of the new junior high school. Due to the opposition, OSD requested information from the California Department of Education over the matter; school officials wanted to know if there were any legal issues.<sup>152</sup> The school board requested an external study on the question of de facto segregation. The local NAACP and VCCSO continued to believe that new

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<sup>148</sup> "Teenage gang fight, vandalism rise," *The Press-Courier*, 29 Jan 1963.

<sup>149</sup> "Vandals wreck school," *The Press-Courier*, 28 Jan 1963.

<sup>150</sup> "Teenage Gangs look for trouble," *The Press-Courier*, 30 Jan 1963; "High school tensions under control," *The Press-Courier*, 31 Jan 1963.

<sup>151</sup> "High school tensions under control," *The Press-Courier*, 31 Jan 1963.

<sup>152</sup> "Colonia area school may violate law," *The Press-Courier*, 30 Jan 1963; School Board Minutes, 29 Jan 1963, OSD Archives.

junior high school in La Colonia would create de facto segregation. The local NAACP called on the trustees of the OSD to organize a special meeting on the school issue.<sup>153</sup> Superintendent DePue informed the VCCSO and local NAACP that they needed to submit a written request for a discussion of the school bond issue before the next school board meeting.<sup>154</sup>

By February 5, the OSD informed the residents of Oxnard that they had been advised by Thomas Braden, president of the California State Board of Education to get a legal opinion before moving forward with the new junior high school in La Colonia. Braden stated, “it seems that the proposal would in effect create de facto segregation where it has not previously existed.”<sup>155</sup> The school district agreed to seek a legal opinion from the District Attorney. Again, the local NAACP and VCCSO urged the OSD to reconsider their plan for the new junior high school before they seek legal action on this matter.<sup>156</sup> School board president, Mary Davis informed the PTA Council that, “we had felt that neighborhood schools were feasible and sound but we hadn’t considered all the facets” and “the proposed school could bring de facto segregation.”<sup>157</sup>

*The Press-Courier* reported that the OSD was composed of 51.4 percent of minority students, which broken down to 9.8 percent Black, 38.8 percent Mexican, and

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<sup>153</sup> “NAACP wants meeting on school issue,” *The Press-Courier*, 28 Jan 1963.

<sup>154</sup> “Colonia area school may violate law,” *The Press-Courier*, 30 Jan 1963.

<sup>155</sup> “Colonia school might break rule, state says,” *The Press-Courier*, 6 Feb 1963.

<sup>156</sup> “School plans hinge on segregation issue.” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 Feb 1963; School Board Minutes, 5 Feb 1963, OSD Archives.

<sup>157</sup> “Oxnard school board chief says NAACP has point,” *The Press-Courier*, 7 Feb 1963.

2.8 percent Asian.<sup>158</sup> The data showed the majority of Mexican and Black students attended school in La Colonia compared with other schools outside of La Colonia area. (see Table 5:1) At Ramona School the breakdown was 71.9 percent Mexican and 23.2 percent Black and at Juanita School it was 75.6 percent Mexican and 19.4 percent Black.<sup>159</sup> (see Figure 5:6) Furthermore, the data was used to call for desegregation of the school district.

On March 5, the local NACCP submitted numerous “anti-segregation” proposals to the school district for consideration.<sup>160</sup> The proposals called for the desegregation of all schools in the district with new boundaries and pairing of schools. Althea Simmons, field secretary of the National NAACP stated that the abandonment of La Colonia site “would be the best solution to the de facto segregation problem.”<sup>161</sup> The local NAACP called on the school district to adopt a “desegregation” plan. Simmons stated it was “necessary not only to eliminate racial segregation of minority group but also to eliminate alleged segregation of predominately white schools.”<sup>162</sup>

Even with public criticism, the local NAACP continued to advocate that Mexican and Black children had been subjected to a segregated school environment and called on the school district to accept one of the desegregation proposals submitted to

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<sup>158</sup> “Minority races in majority among Oxnard district elementary students,” *The Press-Courier*, 13 Mar 1963.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> School Board Minutes, 5 Mar 1963, OSD Archives.

<sup>161</sup> “Juggling school urged to mix races,” *The Press-Courier*, 6 Mar 1963.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

them.<sup>163</sup> On April 2, Ventura County District Attorney Woodruff Deem submitted a legal opinion on La Colonia school site to the school district. Deem stated “it would be valid if the trustees went ahead after making an ‘exhaustive effort’ to study all facets of the racial problem in La Colonia area” but “urged trustees to consult freely with organization and community groups in seeking assistance to explore alternative.”<sup>164</sup> School board president Davis stated, “we’re right where we started,” with no solution on the issue.<sup>165</sup> In a response to the legal opinion, trustee Robert Pfeiler suggested to form a community committee to address issue of de facto segregation. Pfeiler stated, “let the parents get together and talk it over and bring it all into the open.”<sup>166</sup>

By April 16, the OSD trustees announced an open community meeting set for April 30 at Juanita School to discuss the concerns of the overall community on *La Colonia* school site.<sup>167</sup> More than seventy residents, which included members of the VCCSO and local NAACP attended the special meeting and it was very clear that the community was spilt on issue of La Colonia school site.<sup>168</sup> It was reported by the Juanita-Ramona School PTA that at least 80 out of 100 residents in La Colonia surveyed supported the new junior high school.<sup>169</sup> On the other side, VCCSO vice president, Leo Alvarez pointed out that the issues of de facto segregation among the

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<sup>163</sup> “On the school problem,” *The Press-Courier*, 18 Mar 1963.

<sup>164</sup> “DA ruling backs plan Colonia area school,” *The Press-Courier*, 3 Apr 1963.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> “School board candidates answer question,” *The Press-Courier*, 4 Apr 1963.

<sup>167</sup> School Board Minutes, 16 Apr 1963, OSD Archives.

<sup>168</sup> School Board Minutes, 30 Apr 1963, OSD Archives.

<sup>169</sup> “Citizens split over Colonia School,” *The Press-Courier*, 1 May 1963.

OSD is related to the racial discrimination within the housing policies of the city.<sup>170</sup> The OSD trustees reminded the residents that they would listen to their opinions but the final decision is on the school board. On May 7, OSD school board stated they came to a compromise on La Colonia school site and will announce the decision in two weeks. Trustee Pfeiler stated that the OSD and residents of La Colonia, “can come to very sensible agreement” on this matter.<sup>171</sup>

On May 21, the OSD school board announced it would not use La Colonia site for a new junior school. Davis stated that OSD had to face up to the truth of the issue but “they were unaware of the idea of de facto segregation as deeply rooted problems until these organizations outlined their objectives at numerous meetings.”<sup>172</sup> The OSD would work on solving the issue of de facto segregation by moving “minority students” to other schools with space available and expand the size of the Fremont Junior High School.<sup>173</sup> Fred Brown, local NAACP president stated that the decision not to build the new junior high school in La Colonia was “a great step toward in eliminating segregation problems in local schools.”<sup>174</sup> Deep debate continued about the new junior high school in La Colonia. On June 18, local residents accused the school board of breaking their promise to build a new junior high school.<sup>175</sup> Some board members and residents

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> “Decision near on Colonia school issue,” *The Press-Courier*, 8 May 1963.

<sup>172</sup> “Board kills Colonia School plan,” *The Press-Courier*, 22 May 1963.

<sup>173</sup> “Oxnard may be on way to de facto segregation solution,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 22 May 1963.

<sup>174</sup> “NAACP meeting here sees prejudice on wane,” *The Press-Courier*, 25 May 1963.

<sup>175</sup> “Build in Colonia trustees urged,” *The Press-Courier*, 19 Jun 1963.

accused each other of segregation or being bias. In a crowded school board meeting on June 24, the OSD school board took the position that they would not build a new junior high school in La Colonia.<sup>176</sup> Trustee Dr. Thomas Millham stated, “I never realized the magnitude of the de facto segregation problem.”<sup>177</sup> In not building a new junior high school, the OSD still had issues of enrollment. To solve issue, the OSD pushed to build a new elementary school and maybe in the same area in La Colonia.

**Table 5.1: Oxnard School Ethnic Group Distribution, 1963. Source: *The Press Courier*, 13 Mar 1963.**

Schools	Anglo		Mexican		Negro		Oriental		Total Enrollment
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Brittall	196	75.0	48	18.0	0	.0	18	7.0	264
Curren	397	89.0	14	3.0	2	.4	34	7.6	447
Driffill	266	35.0	382	50.1	81	10.6	33	4.3	767
Elm	275	71.4	95	24.7	6	1.6	9	2.3	385
Fremont	192	31.6	318	32.4	80	13.2	17	2.8	607
Harrington	323	78.0	76	18.0	5	1.0	11	3.0	415
Haydock	380	36.0	239	35.0	49	7.0	11	2.0	679
<b>Juanita</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>475</b>	<b>75.6</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>19.4</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>628</b>
Kamala	444	68.5	179	27.6	15	2.4	10	1.5	648
Mckinna	570	67.8	156	18.5	104	12.3	11	1.4	341
<b>Ramona</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>485</b>	<b>71.9</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>23.2</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>675</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>3065</b>	<b>48.6</b>	<b>2467</b>	<b>38.8</b>	<b>621</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>6351</b>

At the August 27 school board meeting, the local NAACP called for the integration of the Ramona and Juanita Schools in La Colonia. Fredrick Jones, vice president of the local NAACP stated that “segregation pattern do exist in those schools, and if the board would take a mature approach, the problem could be solved.”<sup>178</sup> By

<sup>176</sup> “Mass meeting told no new junior high,” *The Press-Courier*, 25 Jun 1963; School Board Minutes, 24 Jun 1963, OSD Archives.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> “Negros pressing local school aims,” *The Press-Courier*, 28 Aug 1963.

September 3, school board responded to the local NAACP proposal from integration of all the schools in the district but especially La Colonia's schools. The OSD suggested on calling for the opinion of parents of on this issue.<sup>179</sup> In addition, the OSD called on the State Commission on Equal Educational Opportunities to investigate claims of de facto segregation made by the local NAACP. The OSD claimed "they never have gerrymandered any boundary line" within the district.<sup>180</sup>



**Figure 5.6** The majority of the students at Ramona School were Mexican and Black, 1963. Courtesy of the author's Family Collection.

On October 8, the school board rejected the local NAACP's May 5 proposal to integrate the neighborhood school system.<sup>181</sup> In addition, the OSD would not build a

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<sup>179</sup> "School race issue may to the parents," *The Press-Courier*, 4 Sep 1963.

<sup>180</sup> "Segregation Probe Asked at Oxnard," *Los Angeles Times*, 19 Sep 1963.

<sup>181</sup> "Proposal to mix student rejected," *The Press-Courier*, 9 Oct 1963; "Oxnard Rejects NAACP Bid," *Los Angeles Times*, 16 Oct 1963.

new elementary school on La Colonia site. On November 19, the local chapter of Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) called on the school board to consider its recommendations to end de facto segregation within the district.<sup>182</sup> The school district claimed that some of the recommendations were similar to NAACP request and others had been already put into effect within the district.<sup>183</sup> CORE expressed that action on the recommendations needed to be done immediately, if not they would call for a mass demonstration at the next school board meeting in December.<sup>184</sup> The OSD addressed CORE's recommendations in a letter, stating the "plans for the future include doing whatever appears appropriate and with the our power to combat...de facto segregation."<sup>185</sup>

In its drive to end de facto segregation, the local NAACP hosted a presentation by chief counsel Robert Carter on the history of de facto segregation in the United States.<sup>186</sup> By December 11, the OSD announced that they were "in support of integrating Oxnard schools wherever it is possible and feasible and moved toward doing so."<sup>187</sup> Furthermore, the school district would consider a request by Superintendent De

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<sup>182</sup> "Negro Group Demands Oxnard Integration," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 2 Nov 1963; "Oxnard School evades face to face race talk," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 6 Nov 1963; "Racial Leader to protest at next Oxnard School meet," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 7 Nov 1963.

<sup>183</sup> "CORE Cancels Study-In," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 9 Dec 1963.

<sup>184</sup> "School study plea has lie-in threat," *The Press-Courier*, 20 Nov 1963; "Study-In threatened in Oxnard," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 20 Nov 1963.

<sup>185</sup> "CORE Gets a official school reply," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 29 Nov 1963.

<sup>186</sup> "NAACP Counsel to give talk." *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 22 Nov 1963.

<sup>187</sup> "Trustees Move to end de facto segregation," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 11 Dec 1963.



Pue and Richard Zanders of CORE to develop a plan to redraw school attendance boundaries to eliminate de facto segregation and a program to educate teachers & administrators about minority students.<sup>188</sup>

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On January 1, 1965, *The Press-Courier* published article titled, "Big boost to students like Jose," which highlighted the OSD's compensatory education program for Mexican and Black students. The program cost more than \$50,000 per year with half of the funding coming from a State of California grant. The program's philosophy was "prevention is better than rehabilitation."<sup>189</sup> Oddly, the school district held that there was no segregation or racism toward Mexican and Black students. Within the article, the OSD argued that the educational success of Mexican and Black students was connected to their economical status and language barrier.<sup>190</sup> Furthermore, this argument would shape the decisions of the school district and board for the next several years.

In the midst of the debate over integration, the OSD approved a plan to save \$2,533 per year on busing students to other schools throughout the district. With the new policy, the school district would only bus students if they lived two or more miles from the school. In a response to the new policy, the CAP mobilized a petition drive in La Colonia and Rose Park neighborhoods to protest against the decision to stop the

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> "Big boost to students like Jose," *The Press-Courier*, 1 Jan 1965.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

busing of more than one hundred and fifty La Colonia children next school year.<sup>191</sup> In a joint organized drive, the local NAACP and CAP called for a boycott of the school district over the busing issue.<sup>192</sup> The boycott could keep more than one thousand students from La Colonia out of school following school year. Encarnacion Flores, secretary of the CAP stated that parents in La Colonia “had agreed to keep their children out of school if bus service is not resumed.”<sup>193</sup>

By July 20, the school board refused to accept a recommendation by Acting Superintendent Seawright Stewarts to reduce the two miles to one and half miles in order for La Colonia’s children to qualify for transportation.<sup>194</sup> The local NAACP and CAP submitted over 900 signatures to save La Colonia bus service.<sup>195</sup> Both organizations questioned the school board decision and connected it to the issue of de facto segregation within the school district. School trustees denied charges of discrimination toward the Mexican and Black community. CAP with the support of the local NAACP pushed to continue the boycott of the OSD. CAP stated that the bus dispute “may become a civil rights issue.”<sup>196</sup> Fred Jones, president of the local NAACP supported that statement by stating “it very definitely is a civil rights issue.”<sup>197</sup> Jones

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<sup>191</sup> “Colonia to protest bus service cut,” *The Press-Courier*, 4 Jun 1965.

<sup>192</sup> “Boycott threat in bus dispute,” *The Daily Review*, 1 Sep 1965.

<sup>193</sup> “Bus service cut brings school boycott threat,” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 Jun 1965.

<sup>194</sup> “School boycott threat fails to sway decision to cut Colonia bus service,” *The Press-Courier*, 21 Jul 1965.

<sup>195</sup> “Board sticks by decision to cut Colonia bus service,” *The Press-Courier*, 23 Jul 1965.

<sup>196</sup> “Rights issue seen in bus dispute,” *The Press-Courier*, 30 Jul 1965.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

pointed out the school board decision to continue the bus service in another part of Oxnard (majority of white students) and not La Colonia was making it into a civil rights issue. Flores called the school board decision “a direct insult to the people who signed the petition requesting the service to continue.”<sup>198</sup>

The CAP and local NAACP continued the call for a boycott and intensify their efforts to organize the community around the issue. By September 1, the school district held a special meeting to re-discuss La Colonia’s bus dispute. Acting Superintendent Stewarts presented more evidence provided by the City of Oxnard’s Traffic and Safety Committee to the school board on the safety issues facing the OSD if bus service is cut off from *La Colonia*.<sup>199</sup> Again, CAP and the local NAACP called on the school board to resume the bus service or they would continue the boycott and march against the OSD. Trustee Pfeiler stated that “this board have never made a decision based on threats or intimidation from any group...we only made decisions based on facts.”<sup>200</sup> Jones of the local NAACP pointed out the some of the trustees; especially Pfeiler “has little compassion for the students in this school district and the people of Colonia.”<sup>201</sup> The school board decided unanimously to reverse its early decision to end the bus service in *La Colonia* due to “safety reasons.”<sup>202</sup> Nevertheless, the school board changed its mind due to pressure from community members and the Mexican community.

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> “School board may change bus ruling,” *The Press-Courier*, 1 Sep 1965

<sup>200</sup> “Colonia students put back on buses.” *The Press-Courier*, 2 Sep 1965.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> “Oxnard Board reverses itself on bus plan,” *Los Angeles Times*, 3 Sep 1965; “Colonia students put back on buses.” *The Press-Courier*, 2 Sep 1965.

As a result of the 1963 school bond issue and the bus dispute, the school district had been in conflict with the Mexican working-class community. To improve this relationship the OSD created the Inter-School Study Trip and Teacher Exchange to promote a “better community relations and understanding between Colonia children and other children in the community.”<sup>203</sup> The program focused on the “sister schools concept” of pairing up La Colonia schools with other schools within the district. One of the first school paired up was Ramona School with Elm School. Norman Brekke, principal of Elm School stated that program “gives teachers a chance to work with other teachers to study different concepts and methods of teaching...but most of all it’s an attempts to break the ignorance barriers.”<sup>204</sup> On the other side, local Mexican teachers formed a local chapter of the Association of Mexican-American Educators (AMAE) to organize to improve the conditions of Mexican students face within the United States educational system. A key focus of AMAE was to “promote a three-way interaction and interplay of the home, school, and community as a means to secure the fulfillment of the educational potential of Mexican American children.”<sup>205</sup>

For several years, the school district continued to debate the issue of the implementing an integration plan. By March 14, 1969, the school district revealed that students may be relocated to different schools in the fall semester. The integration plan attempted to end de facto segregation within the district. Also, to meet the new State Board of Education amended sections “to prevent and eliminate racial and ethnic

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<sup>203</sup> “Hands Across the Boulevard,” *PC Magazine*, 13 Nov 1965.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>205</sup> “Educators groups to attack the Mexican American problem,” *The Press-Courier*, 22 Dec 1965.

imbalance in pupil enrollment.”<sup>206</sup> The OSD pointed out that eight schools were racially and ethnically imbalanced, especially Juanita, Ramona, and Rose Ave Schools in La Colonia. (see Table 5:2) Furthermore, the school district had more than eight thousand students with an ethnic breakdown of 43 percent White, 42 percent Mexican, 13 percent Black, and 2 percent Asian.<sup>207</sup>

**Table 5.2: Oxnard School Ethnic Group Distribution, 1968. Source: Oxnard School District, Preliminary Report on Integration, October 1968.**

Schools	Anglo Pupils		Minority Pupils		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	
Brittell	248	60.1	165	39.9	413
Curren	465	82.0	102	18.0	567
Driffill	235	31.9	503	68.1	738
Elm	212	51.4	201	48.6	413
Harrington	396	81.2	92	18.8	488
<b>Juanita</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>511</b>	<b>98.4</b>	<b>519</b>
Kamala	449	61.4	283	38.6	732
Marina West	486	66.6	244	33.4	730
McKinna	196	33.3	393	66.7	589
<b>Ramona</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>.7</b>	<b>566</b>	<b>99.3</b>	<b>570</b>
<b>Rose Avenue</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>771</b>	<b>91.0</b>	<b>847</b>
Sierra Linda	566	89.2	68	10.8	634
Fremont	406	40.0	609	60.0	1015
Haydock	393	49.2	405	50.8	798
<b>Total</b>	<b>4038</b>	<b>44.6</b>	<b>5015</b>	<b>55.4</b>	<b>9053</b>

The OSD worked closely with the Bureau of Inter-Group Relations (BIGR) of the State Department of Education, who were conducted a survey of the district. Superintendent Stewart stated “that his administrators have work daily studying ways to eliminate the problem.”<sup>208</sup> In addition, Assistant Superintendent Dr. Gregory Betts

<sup>206</sup> “Pupil shifting studied in 12 Oxnard schools,” *The Press-Courier*, 15 Mar 1969.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

stated that “integration provides a productive citizen by shedding prejudices and giving the respect for their indifferences.”<sup>209</sup> It is very clear that any integration plan would effect the schools in the North Oxnard and La Colonia. The BGR would submit their report to the OSD and the public by April 15.

The announcement of the school district conducting a study or survey on the ethnic imbalance of the district led to debate among supporters or non-supporters of integration, especially the busing of students among the “letter to editor” pages of *The Press-Courier*. A key non-supporter stated that the OSD intended the “destruction of the neighborhood school system and to cause a ‘salt and pepper’ look in our schools without the regard to the disastrous effects this would have on the education of our children.”<sup>210</sup> A supporter of integration stated, “I can only conclude that my child’s future must be for different from my present. His world will involve...social activities with people from all ethnic groups and I find it only to his advantage.”<sup>211</sup> Henry Muller, school board president of OSD responded to the non-supporters by questioning their sources of information and stating this is only “a staff survey and evaluation on the results of paring schools and grades. This is but one of many alternatives for board consideration.”<sup>212</sup> Another non-supporter called on parents to “get busy and do what we can to discourage this pupil shifting while we still have a chance to do something.”<sup>213</sup> Supporters from Rose Ave School, commended “the Oxnard Elementary School board

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> “Plan for ‘show’ only,” *The Press-Courier*, 20 Mar 1969.

<sup>211</sup> “School board backed,” *The Press-Courier*, 20 Mar 1969.

<sup>212</sup> “Board president speaks,” *The Press-Courier*, 22 Mar 1969.

<sup>213</sup> “Pupil shift opposed,” *The Press-Courier*, 21 Mar 1969.

for the forward step they have taken...to assure ethnic balance in the schools of Oxnard.”<sup>214</sup>

Again, non-supporters accused the school district of double standards on providing information on the plans of integration to the public. PTA member, Marilyn Canon responded that “in fact we were given this information so we could discuss it intelligently with friends or groups in which we were involved should the subject arise.”<sup>215</sup> This debate of integration in the pages of *The Press-Courier* sparked concerns and actions among the residents of Oxnard into the next month. The debate over integration crossover into the campaigns for school board trustees, which eight out of fourteen candidates avoided taking a position on the issue of busing.<sup>216</sup>

By April 17, the local American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) held a public forum at Driffill School with the OSD to discuss the plans for integration. During a Q & A, Acting Superintendent Stewarts stated “to ignore the needs of 50 percent of the pupils is a hazard we can’t risk.”<sup>217</sup> In a response to the busing issue, Director of Special Projects Norman Brekke pointed out that “some busing will be involved in solving the racial imbalance in the district.”<sup>218</sup> Finally, on April 21, the BGR submitted its final report to the school district. The report gave four alternative plans to improve the racial and ethnic balance of the district, which involved some type of busing. The BGR had

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<sup>214</sup> “Assistance pledge,” *The Press-Courier*, 26 Mar 1969.

<sup>215</sup> “No silencer,” *The Press-Courier*, 3 Apr 1969.

<sup>216</sup> “Segregation issue dominates forum,” *The Press-Courier*, 28 Mar 1969.

<sup>217</sup> “Racial balance in schools debated at Oxnard forum,” *The Press-Courier*, 19 Apr 1969.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*

two main recommendations for the OSD: adopt a plan as soon as possible to correct the ethnic imbalance with a timetable to implement the plan and in-service training program on intergroup relation for all employees of the district.<sup>219</sup>

The OSD held a public forum on April 29 to discuss the report with two representatives from the BIGH. More than three hundred supporters and non-supporters attended the forum, with their major concern being the integration plans, especially the busing issue.<sup>220</sup> The school district and trustees were overwhelmed by concerns and more than eight different integration plans to review and discuss. So, by June 3, the OSD shelved any plans for integration until next school year. Moreover, the school district was also at odds with the residents of Oxnard over busing.<sup>221</sup>

Within California, a drive led by Assemblyman Floyd Wakefield to collect more than 300,000 signatures to place the Parental Consent Initiative (PCI) on the November 1970 general election ballot. The PCI called for adding a new section to 1010 of the State Code. It would read, “no governing board of a school district shall bus any students from the purpose of integration without the written permission of the parent or guardian.”<sup>222</sup> Within the City of Oxnard, Kenneth Mytinger led the drive to collect signatures for the PCI. Critics of the PCI, like Assemblyman J.K. MacDonald opposed it on the grounds its violate the equal protection clause of the United States

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<sup>219</sup> “City schools get state ethnic study,” *The Press-Courier*, 22 Apr 1969.

<sup>220</sup> “350 attend hearing on ethnic study,” *The Press-Courier*, 29 Apr 1969.

<sup>221</sup> “School busing study shelved until fall,” *The Press-Courier*, 4 Jun 1969.

<sup>222</sup> “325,173 signatures sought to battle integration by bus,” *The Press-Courier*, 18 Oct 1969; Daniel HoSang, *Racial Propositions: Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 91-129.



Constitution.<sup>223</sup> Due to the issues over busing more than two thousand residents of Oxnard signed the petition to add the PCI to the November 1970 ballot.<sup>224</sup>

The school board meetings became a key space to discuss and debate the various integration plans. On October 23, trustee Thomas Kane called on his fellow trustees to support one of the plans submitted by the BGR.<sup>225</sup> Other trustees opposed the mandatory busing of students but suggested it be on a voluntary basis. Trustee Kenneth Tinklepaugh called in question how the data was collected on the Spanish surnames. The debate over integration continued, the school board called on Acting Superintendent Stewarts to complete a cost estimate on several of the integration plans by the next board meeting.<sup>226</sup> In November of 1969, the OSD informed the trustees that “Plan I” submitted by the BGR would not decrease ethnic imbalance but increase it in a number of schools.<sup>227</sup>

*The Press-Courier* continued to highlight the concerns of the residents of Oxnard. A supporter of integration stated “it is my belief that true democratic values can only be established in an integrated setting where all people regardless of creed or color will bring about a genuine equality for all.”<sup>228</sup> Finally on December 16, the school board unanimously approved a thirteen-point master plan submitted by trustee Kane to

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<sup>223</sup> “Busing plea splits legislators,” *The Press-Courier*, 21 Oct 1969.

<sup>224</sup> “Petitioners oppose compulsory busing,” *The Press-Courier*, 2 Dec 1969;

<sup>225</sup> “De facto segregation to be aired,” *The Press-Courier*, 23 Oct 1969; “Trustees take 2 view of school integration,” *The Press-Courier*, 27 Oct 1969.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> “Imbalanced schools by de facto plan,” *The Press-Courier*, 19 Nov 1969.

<sup>228</sup> “Integrated setting urged,” *The Press-Courier*, 7 Nov 1969.

eliminate de facto segregation. The plan would decrease ethnic imbalance from eight schools to three schools only. On February 3, 1970, the school board voted four to one in favor of a district integration plan to bus students from La Colonia to other schools within the school district. Even with a master plan, the trustees and community were still at odds over the busing of students.<sup>229</sup> Trustee Kane stated, “a separate education is not an equal one and that the weight of the law is on the side of integration.”<sup>230</sup>

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After many years of false promises from the OSD over the issue of de facto segregation, the Mexican working-class community finally took a major stand. On February 26, 1970, a class action lawsuit on the behalf of students at Rose Ave, Juanita, and Ramona Schools was filed against the OSD and trustees seeking a prompted desegregation and restoration of racial imbalance.<sup>231</sup> Trustee Kane responded to the lawsuit by stating “it’s a disappointment that they (plaintiffs) don’t agree with us that our effort is a substantial one.”<sup>232</sup>

A class action lawsuit was filled in the United States District Court, the Central District of California on the behalf of Debbie & Doreen Soria and other students of color. The lawsuit alleged that the OSD’s Board of Trustees “had consistently maintained and

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<sup>229</sup> “School desegregation plan approved,” *The Press-Courier*, 17 Dec 1969.

<sup>230</sup> “Classrooms to be relocated,” *The Press-Courier*, 4 Feb 1969.

<sup>231</sup> The children of Roberto Soria, Patrick Joe Barrios, Catalina Godina, Margaret Frazier, Lana Avery, and Josephine Trevino; “Parents sue Oxnard school, ask desegregation,” *The Press-Courier*, 2 Mar 1970; “Suit demands Oxnard Schools integration plan,” *Los Angeles Times*, 3 Mar 1970.

<sup>232</sup> “Trustees disappointed over segregation suit,” *The Press-Courier*, 3 Mar 1970.

perpetrated a systematic scheme of racial segregation by capitalizing on a clear pattern of de facto racial segregation in Oxnard.”<sup>233</sup> The plaintiffs accused the OSD of violating their Fourteenth Amendment rights.<sup>234</sup> Thomas Malley of Legal Service of Ventura County, Stephen Kalish, and Peter Ross of Western Center on Law and Poverty represented the plaintiffs. On the other side, Ventura County Assistant Consul William Waters represented the OSD. The plaintiffs submitted evidence that the OSD was divided by race; up to 96 percent of students of color attended school in the eastside compared to the 90 percent of white students attended school in the North Oxnard.<sup>235</sup>

Against the background of the lawsuit, the OSD continued to push to bus over three hundred students from La Colonia schools to other schools in the district. Critics of the integration plan, like Cloromino Camacho, VCCSO president stated “the best integration for Colonia would be two-way busing or not at all.”<sup>236</sup> John Soria of MAPA agreed and stated “our first concern is not with integration but with the proper education for our children.”<sup>237</sup> In March of 1970, the school district again asked the voters of Oxnard to approve a \$3.99 million dollar school bond to improve the overcrowding of classrooms and funding of the master plan to integrate the district, but voters rejected

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<sup>233</sup> Debbie and Doreen Soria, et al. v. Oxnard School District Board of Trustees, United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, 27 Nov 1973, 488 F. 2nd 579 (hereafter 488 F. 2nd 579).

<sup>234</sup> Richard R. Valencia, *Chicano Students and the Courts: The Mexican American Legal Struggle for Educational Equality* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 68.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>236</sup> “Colonia group hit school integration plan,” *The Press-Courier*, 17 Jun 1970.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*

it.<sup>238</sup> On January 5, 1971, a supporter of integration and key ally to the Mexican working-class community, Rachel Wong was elected to the school board.<sup>239</sup> A hearing on the lawsuit was held on May 10, which the court granted the plaintiffs' motion for summary judgment. Judge Harry Pregerson found that the school district failed or refused to adopt a desegregation plan. He called on the OSD "to submit to this court within twenty (20) days a plan that promised realistically to work now so the racial imbalance existing in the Oxnard Elementary Schools is eliminated root and branch."<sup>240</sup> On May 25, the school board voted to seek a stay of motion on court order integration plan to the Ninth Circuit Court.<sup>241</sup>

By July 21, the district court approved OSD's desegregation plan and ordered immediately implement of the plan. The desegregation plan composed of pairing schools and two-way busing of students.<sup>242</sup> In August of 1971, Attorney Edward Lasher on the behalf of the OSD filed a plea for a motion of stay on the court order integration

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<sup>238</sup> "\$3.99 million school bond go before voters Tuesday," *The Press-Courier*, 9 Mar 1970; "Voters defeat \$3.99 million school bond," *The Press-Courier*, 11 Mar 1970.

<sup>239</sup> "Oxnard district voters pick trustee Tuesday," *The Press-Courier*, 3 Jan 1971; "Rachel Wong wins Oxnard school vote," *Venture Star-Free Press*, 6 Jan 1971; "Rachel Wong winner in school race," *The Press-Courier*, 6 Jan 1971.

<sup>240</sup> Debbie and Doreen Soria, et al. v. Oxnard School District Board of Trustees, United States District Court for the Central District of California, 12 May 1971, 328 F. Supp. 155; "Judge Ok'd Oxnard School integration plan," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 Jul 1971; "School suit ruling due," *The Press-Courier*, 11 May 1971; "Oxnard school must integrate," *The Press-Courier*, 13 May 1971; "Parent awaiting action on school busing directive," *The Press-Courier*, 14 May 1971.

<sup>241</sup> "Plaintiff oppose Oxnard busing stay," *The Press-Courier*, 3 Sep 1971.

<sup>242</sup> The following schools were paired, Harrington (grades 1-3) with Elm (grades 4-6), Ramona (grades 1-3) with Sierra Linda (grades 4-6), Juanita (grades 1-3) with Curren (grades 4-6), Brittell (grades 1-3) with Drififil (grades 4-6), Kamala (grades 1-3) with McKinna (grades 4-6), and Marina West (grades 4-6) with Rose Ave (grades 4-6), see "School start due as planned unless..." *The Press-Courier*, 5 Sep 1971.

plan in the Ninth Circuit Court. Supporters of the integration plan accused the OSD of creating “an emergency in an attempt to bypass Judge Pregerson[‘s]” decision.<sup>243</sup> Critics of the court ordered integration plan formed the Citizens Opposed to Busing (COB), which focused on fighting the busing issue through legal channels.<sup>244</sup>

In the count down to implement the integration plan in September of 1971, the OSD continued to wait for a decision on motion of stay.<sup>245</sup> Some non-supporters of the order integration pulled their children out of the OSD. Dr. Keith Mason, president of the school board, publicly stated that he would remove his children from the OSD if the motion of stay is not approved to stop the busing plan.<sup>246</sup> Nancy McGrath of COB stated that “some parents have sold their homes and moved from Oxnard. Some who have stayed say they will educate the children themselves.”<sup>247</sup> Two days before the opening of 1971-1972 school year, there was still no decision made on the motion of stay by Ninth Circuit Court.<sup>248</sup> Superintendent Doren Tregarthen announced, “we’ll go

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<sup>243</sup> “Plaintiff oppose Oxnard busing stay,” *The Press-Courier*, 3 Sep 1971.

<sup>244</sup> “School busing starts smoothly in Oxnard,” *The Press-Courier*, 13 Sep 1971.

<sup>245</sup> “School get no word on busing stay,” *The Press-Courier*, 11 Sep 1971; “Oxnard still waits stay on busing,” *Ventura County Star-Free Pres*, 8 Sep 1971.

<sup>246</sup> “Trustee may take children out school,” *The Press-Courier*, 8 Sep 1971.

<sup>247</sup> “County’s first integration buses to roll tomorrow,” *Ventura County Star-Free Pres*, 12 Sep 1971.

<sup>248</sup> “School get no word on busing stay,” *The Press-Courier*, 11 Sep 1971.

ahead and open school on schedule”<sup>249</sup> and “the classrooms are ready, the teachers are ready, the buses are ready.”<sup>250</sup>

On September 13, the OSD opened the new 1971-1972 school year with a court-order integration plan that bused more than three thousand students to schools throughout the district. *The Press-Courier* reported that the first day of busing started “without the protests and violence that [are] ripping other cities.”<sup>251</sup> (see Figure 5:7) Superintendent Tregarthen stated the first day went smoothly and “underst[ood] the anxiety of the parents.”<sup>252</sup> By September 14, the Ninth Circuit Court turned down the motion of stay to stop busing of students. The court stated that OSD “should have in the first instance presented it’s application for a stay in the district court” not the Ninth Circuit Court.<sup>253</sup> Superintendent Tregarthen commented “that’s dumb, it’s a real copout” on the decision of the Ninth Circuit Court.<sup>254</sup> Trustee Dr. Mason stated he believed the OSD was “betrayed by the courts and will pursue the stay until we get some decent

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<sup>249</sup> “Oxnard Schools open Monday under bus plan.” *The Press-Courier*, 12 Sep 1971.

<sup>250</sup> “County’s first integration buses to roll tomorrow,” *Ventura County Star-Free Pres*, 12 Sep 1971.

<sup>251</sup> “School busing starts smoothly in Oxnard,” *The Press-Courier*, 13 Sep 1971; “Oxnard busing accomplished without incidents,” *Ventura County Star-Free Pres*, 13 Sep 1971.

<sup>252</sup> “Bugs plaque busing in opening day run,” *The Press-Courier*, 14 Sep 1971.

<sup>253</sup> “Plea denied for stay in busing,” *The Press-Courier*, 15 Sep 1971; “Appeals court reject Oxnard busing delay,” *Ventura County Star-Free Pres*, 15 Sep 1971.

<sup>254</sup> “Appeals court reject Oxnard busing delay,” *Ventura County Star-Free Pres*, 15 Sep 1971.

answers.”<sup>255</sup> Even with the decision, the school district still had another appeal on the court ordered integration in Ninth Circuit Court.



**Figure 5.7 First Bus Ride For Many Pupils. Source: *The Press-Courier*, 12 Sep 1971.**

The OSD gained some support in their drive to end the court order busing with the proposal of anti-busing legislation by President Nixon in the summer of 1972.<sup>256</sup> The Nixon administration pushed for a moratorium on any type of busing of students. With this news, the school board was still split in re-appealing the court ordered integration.<sup>257</sup> The Justice Department asked the Ninth Circuit Court to halt the integration of the OSD until the appeals in the case are complete.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> “Oxnard district to press court for busing,” *The Press-Courier*, 22 Sep 1971.

<sup>256</sup> “Bill may permit SF and Oxnard to halt busing,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 Jun 1972.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>258</sup> “US tests busing ban in Oxnard school case,” *Los Angeles Times*, 8 Aug 1972; “Use of antibusing law to halt integration in Oxnard sought,” *Los Angeles Times*, 11 Aug 1972.

On August 21, 1972, the Ninth Circuit Court again denied a stay on the court-ordered integration.<sup>259</sup> The school board voted four to one to appeal the courts decision to the Supreme Court.<sup>260</sup> The new anti-busing legislation led to debates over the ability to postpone or roll back early desegregation court cases. US Chief Justice Warren E. Burger and William Douglas refused to grant a stay on the OSD case.<sup>261</sup> By late October of 1972, the Supreme Court unanimously denied the request for a stay on the court-ordered integration plan.<sup>262</sup> On August 27, 1973, the Ninth Circuit Court ruled on the court-ordered integration. The OSD argued that ethnic imbalance was created by population patterns of the city not the school board.<sup>263</sup> The Ninth Circuit Court found the district court's decision as "inconclusive and vague on the question of the school board's segregative intent."<sup>264</sup> The ruling remanded the case back to district court, which the plaintiffs needed to provide the evidence in determining if the OSD had

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<sup>259</sup> "Court denies Oxnard School petition to suspend busing," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 Aug 1972; "US District Court refuses to all schools in Oxnard to halt busing," *Los Angeles Times*, 23 Aug 1972; Debbie and Doreen Soria, et al. v. Oxnard School District Board of Trustees, United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, 21 Aug 1972, 467 F. 2d 59 (hereafter 467 F. 2d 59).

<sup>260</sup> "Oxnard to take busing decision to high court," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 Aug 1972.

<sup>261</sup> "Stay denied on Oxnard busing case," *Los Angeles Times*, 21 Sep 1972.

<sup>262</sup> "US Supreme Court reject appeal for Oxnard busing stay," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 Sep 1972; "Supreme Court denies appeal to halt Oxnard school busing," *Los Angeles Times*, 25 Sep 1972.

<sup>263</sup> Between 1964 and 1966, the OSD build three new schools, Marina West (1964) composed of 72% Anglo, Rose Ave (1965) composed of 19% Anglo, and Sierra Linda (1966) composed of 75% Anglo; Valencia, *Chicano Students and the Courts*, 68.

<sup>264</sup> Debbie and Doreen Soria, et al. v. Oxnard School District Board of Trustees, United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, 27 Aug 1973, 488 F.2d 586 (hereafter 488 F.2d 586); Valencia, *Chicano Students and the Courts*, 68.



committed a constitutional violation. The ruling did not affect the court-ordered desegregation plan.<sup>265</sup>

On December 10, 1974, the district court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs again. The plaintiffs' lawyers were able to provide new evidence and a historical link of segregation by revealing the school board minutes from August 1934 through June 1939, which discussed the segregation of Mexican students from White students.<sup>266</sup> In the previous, Ninth Circuit Court decision, it stated that the OSD had never maintained a "dual school system" but the new evidence showed the school district had intent to racially segregate the district beginning in the 1930's through 1970's. The school district had developed segregation within the district by building two Mexican schools (Ramona School in 1940's and Juanita School in 1950's) in La Colonia to limit the interaction of White and Mexican students.<sup>267</sup> Previous Superintendent Richard Clowes (1949-1961) and Superintendent Harold De Pue (1961-1965) in court pointed out that the school board took no action on the segregation issues and had a "do nothing" policy.<sup>268</sup> In the final summary, the district court stated that the OSD and school board failed to act to end segregation and the "remedial plan shall continue in full force and effect."<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Debbie and Doreen Soria, et al. v. Oxnard School District Board of Trustees, United States District Court for the Central District of California, 10 Dec 1974, 386 F. Supp. 539 (hereafter 386 F. Supp. 539); Valencia, *Chicano Students and the Courts*, 69; "School board minutes play big role in Oxnard desegregation," *Los Angeles Times*, 19 Jan 1975; "Of Children and Chicken Coops," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 Jan 1975.

<sup>267</sup> 386 F. Supp. 539; Valencia, *Chicano Students and the Courts*, 70.

<sup>268</sup> 386 F. Supp. 539.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

## CONCLUSION

Operation Buenaventura and Farm Worker Opportunity Project played an important part in organizing farm workers, but also giving a voice to the overall Mexican working-class community in La Colonia and surrounding areas. Both projects, made a positive effects on the education and empowerment of the Mexican working-class community.<sup>270</sup> Clearly, the growers wanted to maintain the system as it was by calling both projects a waste of government funds and in the words of one grower “if the two federally funded organizations are giving people the opportunity to become dependent on the government, then I think that is bad.”<sup>271</sup>

In spite of criticism, the projects sparked the creation of a new civic organization, Citizen Against Poverty (CAP). CAP grew out of the “ashes of Committee of the Poor” in April 1965; they “consider themselves veterans in the war against poverty because they are poor.”<sup>272</sup> CAP had been criticized for its actions in the defending the working-class community, and in their response to the critics, they stated, “we live and work with the poor. We are the poor. We don’t have to prove anything” to anyone.<sup>273</sup>

To conclude, the court decision on school segregation would leave many different markers on the Mexican working-class community, the OSD, and City of

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<sup>270</sup> “Farm worker program –success and waste?,” *The Press-Courier*, 12 May 1966; “Follow-up study of the farm workers graduates,” *The Press-Courier*, 13 May 1966; “Imported trio heads county’s farm labor efforts,” *The Press-Courier*, 13 May 1966; “Not all comments are critical,” *The Press-Courier*, 15 May 1966.

<sup>271</sup> “County farmers critical of two federal projects,” *The Press-Courier*, 16 May 1966.

<sup>272</sup> Founder member were Albert Rojas, Manuel Alva, Encranacion Flores, and Jesus Gonzales (Flores and Gonzales were original members of the Committee of the Poor), see “CAP tells about itself,” *The Press-Courier*, 4 Oct 1965.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*

Oxnard. The struggle for desegregation gave the Mexican working-class community the opportunity to speak up and defend the education of their children. Furthermore, for the school district and the city it exposed the evidence that city founders, growers, and city officials created a segregated city divided by race and class.

## CHAPTER SIX

### YA BASTA! THE STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

#### INTRODUCTION

*“The giants have been defeated in other places and they can be defeated here.”*

- Cesar Chavez<sup>1</sup>

*“We are marching in protest so that our youth’s lives will not be used as pawns in a political game.”*

- Roberto Flores<sup>2</sup>

The political and social movements within the United States and throughout the world would play an important part in raising the consciousness of the masses of Chicanos living within the United States, especially on the Oxnard Plain.<sup>3</sup> This

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<sup>1</sup> “Chavez predicts growers’ defeat,” *The Press-Courier*, 23 Oct 1970.

<sup>2</sup> “Peace march leaders issue conduct code for paraders,” *The Press-Courier*, 17 Sep 1970.

<sup>3</sup> Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide* (New York: Writers And Readers, 1973); Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle SNCC And The Black Awakening Of The 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); Bobby Seale, *Seize The Time: The Story Of The Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1970); Kwame Ture and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics Of Liberation* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967); Rodolfo Acuña, *A Community Under Siege: A Chronicle Of Chicanos East Of The Los Angeles River 1945-1975* (Los Angeles: Chicano Studies Research Center Publications, University of California, Los Angeles, 1984); Carlos Muñoz, *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement* (New York: Verso 1989); Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales and Antonio Esquibel, eds., *Message To Aztlán: Selected Writing Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzalez* (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 2001); Ernesto Vigil, *The Crusade For Justice: Chicano Militancy And The Government’s War On Dissent* (Madison: University Of Wisconsin Press, 1999); Ernesto Chavez, *My People First! Mi Raza Primero: Nationalism, Identity, and Insurgency In The Chicano Movement in Los Angeles 1966-1978* (Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 2002).

awareness led Chicanos to demand political and social changes through protests that included sit-ins, walkouts, and demonstrations.<sup>4</sup> In March of 1968, Chicano students demanded changes in the educational system by calling for a mass walkout in East Los Angeles, California. This call led to more than ten thousand Chicano students to walk out of their high schools demanding educational changes.<sup>5</sup> With the support of Sal Castro, a teacher and outspoken critic of the school system and United Mexican American Students (UMAS), the walkout called attention to the unequal educational system Chicano students faced everyday.<sup>6</sup>

A month earlier, Cesar Chavez started a fast in Delano, California to reaffirm the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee's Grapes Strike and Boycott commitment to non-violence.<sup>7</sup> Throughout the fast, Chavez and UFWOC received support from numerous congressmen, senators, union and religious leaders, such as Martin Luther King, Jr and Robert Kennedy. The fast lasted twenty-five days and ended on March 11, 1968 with a mass attended by more than four thousand farm workers. A letter written by Chavez was read, expressing his further commitment to non-violence. He stated "I am convinced that the trust act of courage, the strongest act of manliness is to sacrifice

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<sup>4</sup> Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition* (New York: Longmen, 2004), 298-337.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 319-320.

<sup>6</sup> United Mexican American Students founded at University of California, Los Angeles in 1967, see Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos, 5<sup>th</sup> ed.*, 317.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Griswold del Castillo and Richard A. Garcia, *César Chávez: A Triumph of Spirit* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 84-88.

ourselves for others in a totally non-violent struggle for justice.”<sup>8</sup> The fast brought national attention to farm worker movement and to Chavez.

By March 1969, the Crusade for Justice organized the National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference in Denver, Colorado.<sup>9</sup> The weeklong conference produced “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán,” a document calling for the liberation of all Chicanos.<sup>10</sup> With the concept of self-determination, Chicanos left the conference with the mission to educate and unite their communities. Furthermore, El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán called on Chicanos to take a revolutionary role in the Chicano Power Movement by create new identity, developing national unity with all social classes of Chicana/os, and struggling for political and economic control of the community.<sup>11</sup>

Following the National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference, Chicano students, activists, and professors met at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) to participate in a conference organized by the Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education (CCHE).<sup>12</sup> The participants focused on developing a link between the community and university. This relationship with the university would provide the space

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 87-88.

<sup>9</sup> Founded in Denver, Colorado in 1966 by *Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales*, see Gonzales and Esquibel, eds., *Message To Aztlán; Vigil, The Crusade For Justice*.

<sup>10</sup> El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán, <http://www.panam.edu/orgs/mecha/aztlan.html> (accessed 29 Nov 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Muñoz, *Youth, Identity, Power*, 75-78.

<sup>12</sup> According to Juan Gomez-Quinones, the main organizers of the conference were Rene Nunez, Armando Valdez, Jesus Chavarria, Fernando de Niecocheam and himself, see Juan Gomez-Quinones, “To Leave to Hope or Change: Propositions on Chicano Studies, 1974,” in *Parameter of Institutional Change: Chicano Experiences in Education* (Hayward: Southwest Network, 1974), 154; for information on CCHE, see Muñoz, *Youth, Identity, Power*, 134-141.

for Chicanos to organize & develop strategies to empower the community. Furthermore, the university would provide the labor (people power) and the economic resources to empower the Chicano community and the base to develop the power of knowledge, which would produce the political, economic, and social change in the Chicano community.

Those events would influence Chicano youth on the Oxnard Plain during the late 1960s and 1970s. Within Oxnard, Chicanos took to the streets to demand an end to police brutality and the Viet Nam War. In the midst of a political struggle, the battlefield moved from the streets to agricultural fields of Ventura County, as Chicanos joined the farm worker movement. The struggles for justice and equality on the Oxnard Plain would leave many social and political memories on the Mexican working-class community.

This chapter examines the rise of the Chicano Power Movement and the return of Farm Worker Movement on the Oxnard Plain.

### **CHICANO POWER MOVEMENT**

In the summer of 1968, local Chicanos formed the independent chapter of the Oxnard Brown Berets (OBB). The OBB was under the leadership of Roberto Flores, Fermin Herrera, Andrea Herrera, Armando Lopez, and Jose Ontiveras, which individually took on the issue of police brutality in Oxnard, especially La Colonia.<sup>13</sup> Majority of the members were born on the Oxnard Plain and raised in La Colonia.<sup>14</sup> By

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<sup>13</sup> "Who are the guys in Brown Berets," *The Press-Courier*, 21 Aug 1968.

<sup>14</sup> Armando Lopez had ran for city council this past April 1968.

August 13, 1968, the Brown Berets challenged the Oxnard's city council on the issue of police brutality by requesting an investigation on the matter. Spokesperson Fermin Herrera stated, they had sworn documents of several cases of police brutality and a petition from the Mexican working-class community for an investigation.<sup>15</sup> In a response to the request, the city council voted unanimously to forward a request to investigate the alleged acts of police brutality against the residents of La Colonia to the California Attorney General's Office.

Following the first appearance of the Brown Berets at the city council, the editors of *The Press-Courier* took on the task of raising the following question, "Who are the Brown Berets?" In their editorial, they stated that "the Brown Berets are nothing but a few young college men out to brew a tempest in a teapot before skipping off to campus."<sup>16</sup> In a sharp criticism, the newspaper stated "the real problems of Colonia of which there are many will not be solved by impossible demands and exaggerated and shrill appeals for mass protest."<sup>17</sup>

The Brown Berets pointed out that their key purpose was "to see better living conditions, better education, and better working conditions for the Mexican-Americans."<sup>18</sup> With this purpose, the Brown Berets moved to circulating a petition for a community police review board from their shared office with the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) on Cooper Road in La Colonia. A controversy occurred as a

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<sup>15</sup> "Plea for Police Probe Granted," *The Press-Courier*, 14 Aug 1968.

<sup>16</sup> "Who are the Brown Berets?," *The Press-Courier*, 20 Aug 1968.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> "Brown Berets aggressive in spirit, energetic," *The Press-Courier*, 29 Aug 1968.



campaign flyer labeling the OPD as “white racist cops” and “white helmeted dogs.”<sup>19</sup> Within the Mexican working-class community, they had supporters and non-supporters. One non-supporter stated, “they do not represent the greater Mexican feeling.”<sup>20</sup> A supporter of the Brown Berets stated, “I favor a police review board as a forward step in this community and not just for the Colonia but for all of us” and “I think a civilian advisory review board is needed to increase respect for law and improve the quality of justice.”<sup>21</sup> The Brown Berets continued their organizing against police brutality, as they waited for a final report.<sup>22</sup>

On December 28, the Brown Berets organized a one-day community conference in La Colonia, which brought out more than fifty individuals from among the Circulo Social Mexicano, Los Amigos, Mexican American Political Association (MAPA), and Association of Mexican American Educators (AMAE) to discuss solutions for community problems.<sup>23</sup> Out of the conference, a new group was formed, the Mexican-American Unity Council (MAUC). Raul Maynez of Circulo Social Mexicano was elected chairperson; he stated that the goal of the new group is “a united Mexican-American community, preservation of the Mexican culture, a better understanding between the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> “Plenty to do,” *The Press-Courier*, 2 Sep 1968.

<sup>21</sup> “Backers for review board,” *The Press-Courier*, 10 Sep 1968; “Review board would help,” *The Press-Courier*, 14 Sep 1968.

<sup>22</sup> “Brutality report delayed,” *The Press-Courier*, 14 Sep 1968.

<sup>23</sup> “Brown Berets plan meeting in Oxnard,” *The Press-Courier*, 25 Dec 1968; “Unity Group planned for Oxnard,” *The Press-Courier*, 29 Dec 1968.

Spanish speaking and English speaking communities.”<sup>24</sup> Also, the Brown Berets announced new leadership; Armando Lopez (Prime Minister), Jose Ontiveras (Minister of Discipline), Tomas Sanchez (Minister of Records), Alberto Ordonez (Minister of Public Relations), and Jose Aguilera (Minister-at-large).<sup>25</sup>

In the struggle against police brutality and discrimination, the local Brown Berets participated or organized numerous protests to expose those issues. On January 23, 1969, thirty Brown Berets and supporters picketed in the rain the hearing of fifteen-year-old Robert Estrada at the county’s courthouse. The Brown Berets and others charged racial discrimination in the handling of Estrada’s case.<sup>26</sup> Spokesperson, Andrea Herrera stated, “this is just another example of the way Mexican brown people and black people are treated. We don’t get justice.”<sup>27</sup> The following day, forty Brown Berets and supporters picketed in front of the OPD headquarters protesting the shooting of Lorenzo Hernandez Torres. Herrera stated, “the shooting was coldblooded, claiming the officers did not fire any warning shots.”<sup>28</sup> Torres survived the shooting and was charged with burglary.

A battle of words continued between the Brown Berets and OPD over the shooting at the city council meeting, where they criticized the OPD and Chief Al Jewell of continuing the harassment of La Colonia residents. Chief Jewell responded by calling

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<sup>24</sup> “Brown Berets plan meeting in Oxnard,” *The Press-Courier*, 25 Dec 1968.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> “Mexican pickets protest hearing,” *The Press-Courier*, 24 Jan 1969; “Brown Berets picket youth’s court hearing,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 24 Jan 1969.

<sup>27</sup> “Mexican pickets protest hearing,” *The Press-Courier*, 24 Jan 1969.

<sup>28</sup> “Brown Berets picket youth’s court hearing,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 24 Jan 1969.

the OBB's accusations "completely ridiculous."<sup>29</sup> On January 28, more than two hundred OBB and supporters flooded the city council meeting to demand the firing of Chief Jewell, the suspension of three police officers involved with the shooting of Torres, and the development of police review board. The city council agreed to form a committee composed of Mayor William Soo Hoo, Councilman Sal Sanchez, and City Manager Paul Wolven to investigate the shooting of Torres but refused to suspend any of police officers involved with the shooting. Alberto Ordonez of the Brown Berets accused Chief Jewell of "formatting a policy of shooting to kill suspects."<sup>30</sup> (see Figure 6:1) Chief Jewell responded to the OBB, "I've done everything possible for the Mexican-Americans and will continue to do it but not for your group...because you're militants."<sup>31</sup>

The Brown Berets continued to organize and defend the rights of Chicanos on the Oxnard Plain. Due to their position on police brutality, they were criticized throughout the pages of *The Press-Courier*. One non-supporter stated, if the Brown Berets "are genuinely interested in helping the community as they profess to do so, their past actions have belied their sincerity by being only concerned and associated with the welfare of the criminals of society."<sup>32</sup> The editors of *The Press-Courier* stated, "it is possible to say that the [OBB] case against the police consists ineffective and

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<sup>29</sup> "Pickets Protest at police," *The Press-Courier*, 25 Jan 1969.

<sup>30</sup> "Brown Berets demand firing of Oxnard Chief," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 29 Jan 1969.

<sup>31</sup> "Soo Hoo, Sanchez to probe burglary suspect shooting," *The Press-Courier*, 29 Jan 1969.

<sup>32</sup> "Berets Booed," *The Press-Courier*, 29 Jan 1969.

unsupported claims.”<sup>33</sup>

On January 31, Councilman Sanchez announced he did “not feel a review board would be bad for the city.”<sup>34</sup> Sanchez was criticized for this position; he responded to his critics by stating “whether the Oxnard Police are guilty today of discrimination or the abuse of power or applying a double standard, I do not know, but I do know that a large percentage of Americans of Mexican descent believe that it exists today”<sup>35</sup> On February 11, the city council found no wrongdoing in the shooting of Torres but called for the creation of a community relations representation linked to the Community Relations Commission “to act as liaison between administrative officials, department heads, the police, and the people.”<sup>36</sup>



Figure 6.1 Protest Aired Publicly. Source: *The Press-Courier*, 29 Jan 1969.

<sup>33</sup> “Oxnard council misses cue,” *The Press-Courier*, 30 Jan 1969.

<sup>34</sup> “Review board urged to help in probe of police,” *The Press-Courier*, 31 Jan 1969.

<sup>35</sup> “Councilman Speaks,” *The Press-Courier*, 1 Feb 1969.

<sup>36</sup> “City to name expert as tie with public,” *The Press-Courier*, 12 Feb 1969.

The Brown Berets disagreed with the decision and continued to organize and empower the Chicano community through their tutoring and education programs.<sup>37</sup> By November of 1972, numerous Brown Berets chapters disbanded and others continued.<sup>38</sup> As for the members of the OBB, a majority moved into other struggles on the Oxnard Plain and throughout California.

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As the local Brown Berets organized against police brutality, other organizations in Oxnard and elsewhere focused on exposing the unjust war in Viet Nam. In 1967, Ralph Guzman published his article "Mexican American Casualties in Vietnam," exposing Chicanos to the high number of people of color dying in the unjust war in Viet Nam.<sup>39</sup> In this groundbreaking article, Guzman compared the Chicano population of the United States Southwest with the number of Chicano dead in Viet Nam. The results stated that Chicano only made up 13.8 percent of population in the Southwest but were 19.4% of dead in the unjust war in Viet Nam. This article raised the political consciousness of Chicanos to the need to organize and join the struggle against the Viet Nam War.

With the military draft in place, Chicanos began to be recruited into the war. The Chicano community was divided over the issue with some entering the draft and others

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<sup>37</sup> "Beret give service," *The Press-Courier*, 3 Feb 1969.

<sup>38</sup> Ernesto Chavez, *My People First!*.

<sup>39</sup> Ralph Guzman, "Mexican American Casualties in Vietnam," *La Raza Magazine* 1, no. 1, 1969.

becoming draft resisters. In 1969, Rosalio Munoz, Ramses Noriego and other individuals founded the National Chicano Moratorium Committee (NCCM) in Los Angeles. The purpose of the NCCM was to expose the Chicano community to unjust war in Viet Nam and to raise the issues (i.e. irrelevant education, police brutality) Chicana/os faced everyday.<sup>40</sup> The NCCM called for a series of demonstrations against the Viet Nam War leading up to a mass demonstration in East Los Angeles during the summer of 1970.

On February 28, 1970, more than three thousands Chicanos marched in the rain against the Viet Nam War in East Los Angeles.<sup>41</sup> Following this march, other small demonstrations took place in San Francisco, San Diego, Santa Barbara, and other cities in the Southwest.<sup>42</sup> On August 29, more than twenty thousands Chicanos gathered at Belvedere Park to march down Atlantic and Whittier Blvd in the heart of East Los Angeles ending at Laguna Park. At Laguna Park, the peaceful crowd listened to music and speakers.<sup>43</sup>

Outside the park, a so-called dispute happened at a nearby liquor store, which the Los Angeles Sheriff Department (LASD) was called. The outcome of the dispute at the liquor store led the LASD to call for the end of the rally at Laguna Park. The LASD turned the peaceful rally into a violent attack against the Chicanos in the park. The LASD entered the park with riot gear and shot tear gas into the crowd. In a response to

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<sup>40</sup> Lorena Oropeza, *Raza Si! Guerra No!: Chicano Protest and Patriotism During the Viet Nam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Chavez, *My People First*, 61-79.

<sup>41</sup> See the film, *Chicano Moratorium: March In The Rain* by Victor Millan.

<sup>42</sup> Chavez, *My People First*, 66.

<sup>43</sup> Oropeza, *Raza Si! Guerra No!*; Chavez, *My People First*, 61-79.

the attack, the crowd defended themselves by throwing the tear gas back at the LASD and moved into the surrounding community to find safety. The rally ended with the death of Angel Diaz, Lyn Ward, and Los Angeles Times Reporter Ruben Salazar.<sup>44</sup>

The NCMC challenged the mainstream newspaper reports on the death of Ruben Salazar and outcome of the August 29 event. Through *La Raza Magazine*, Raul Ruiz published the photos of the attack on the peaceful march and rally in a special edition of the magazine.<sup>45</sup> The photos showed the LAPD aggressively attacking the marchers at the park and eyewitness reports showed them forcing people back into the Silver Dollar Café before shooting into it.<sup>46</sup> The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) harassed individual members of the NCMC for those photos. In the end, a grand jury investigation was held on the death of Ruben Salazar, ultimately ruling the death an accident with no charges filed against the LASD's officer.

On the Oxnard Plain, the Chicano community responded to the Viet Nam War and NCMC by organizing their own moratorium event, La Raza Moratorium Peace March. (see Figure 6.2) To avoid violence the OPD met with march organizers, MAPA and MEChA. John Soria of MAPA stated, "we don't want any difficulties, only an effective and peaceful march."<sup>47</sup> As part of the march activities, Roberto Flores, one of

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.; see the film, *Requiem 29*.

<sup>45</sup> *La Raza Magazine*, no. 3 Special Issue.

<sup>46</sup> *La Raza Magazine*, no. 3 Special Issue; *Requiem 29*; Edward Escobar, "The Dialectics Of Repression: The Los Angeles Police Department and the Chicano Movement, 1968-1971." *The Journal Of American History* 79, no. 4 (March 1993): 1483-1541.

<sup>47</sup> "Mexican-American slate peace march," *The Press-Courier*, 10 Sep 1970.

the march organizers reported that fifteen members of the Oxnard's Chicano Moratorium Committee would begin a fast on September 16, 1970 at Lady of Guadalupe Church in La Colonia to highlight the eight thousand Chicanos killed in the Viet Nam War, which included thirty from Ventura County. One of the key points of the march, Flores stated, "we are marching in protest so that our youth's lives will not be used as pawns in a political game."<sup>48</sup>



Figure 6.2 Flyer of the Oxnard's La Raza Moratorium Peace March, 19 Sep 1970. Courtesy of the Author's Family Collection.

More than one thousand Chicanos marched from Colonia Park to Oxnard Community Center on September 19, in protest over the Viet Nam War. (see Figure 6.3) The crowd heard speeches from a number of local and national speakers. Ricardo Carmona of the Oxnard's Chicano Moratorium Committee told the crowd, "we must ban

<sup>48</sup> "Peace march leaders issue conduct code for paraders," *The Press-Courier*, 17 Sep 1970.



together and change our course by fighting for all of our rights.” Another local speaker, Roberto Alias stated, “we just want to be liberated” and “we have been raped of our land and heritage.”



**Figure 6.3 Vietnam War Protested in Mexican-American March in Oxnard. Source: *The Press-Courier*, 20 Sep 1970.**

Joey Garcia, member of Teatro de la Esperanza read a powerful poem on police brutality to the crowd: “with a gun on your side / you walk so tall. / But I know you’re afraid / ‘cause you can’t kill us all. / So just go away, until another day, / When we shall meet face to face / once again, / at the moratorium.”<sup>49</sup> Rosalio Muñoz of the NCMC reminded the crowd, “we are nation of people rising on our home front to fight for justice and we must organize to pressure the issues of police brutality and working conditions.”

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<sup>49</sup> George Mariscal, *Aztlán and Viet Nam: Chicano and Chicana Experiences of the War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 201.

And finally, Reverend Blasé Bonpane pointed out that Chicanos “were the largest single race sent [to Viet Nam], but they receive the least from society and face hunger, injustices, and racism.”<sup>50</sup> The march ended with no violence and left a historical marker within the Chicano community on the Oxnard Plain, which called on organizing for social and political justice.

### **THE RETURN OF THE FARM WORKER MOVEMENT**

As the Bracero Program ended in December 31, 1964, Ventura County’s growers faced a decrease in the labor forces. The growers attempted to recruit displaced domestic workers back into the agricultural labor forces in Ventura County. This moved led to a mass turnover in the citrus industry; in one year more than twenty thousand agricultural workers were hired in an industry that only needed two thousand workers yearly.<sup>51</sup> The growers moved to recruit former braceros through newspaper ads and radio announcements in Mexico. Also, growers made recruitment trips to Mexico to encourage former braceros to return with their families back to Ventura County.<sup>52</sup> As former braceros and new Mexican workers migrated into Ventura County, there immigration status was in question. The majority of Mexican workers had entered the United States without documentation. The growers secured green cards for their new

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<sup>50</sup> “Chicanos urged to unite,” *The Press-Courier*, 20 Sep 1970.

<sup>51</sup> Richard Mines and Ricardo Anzaldúa Montoya, *New Migrants vs. Old Migrants: Alternative Labor Market Structures in the California Citrus Industry*, *Monographs in United States-Mexican Studies* 9 (La Jolla, Calif.: Program in United States-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1982), 37.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

workers. During this period, the only thing needed to secure a green card was a letter from the employer asserting that new worker had a job within the United States.<sup>53</sup>

By 1965, growers, through their packinghouses had formed or joined cooperative harvesting associations “to serve as employers-of record that could absorb much of the pressure from both the DOL and union organizers.”<sup>54</sup> The key cooperative harvesting associations in Ventura County were Coastal Growers Association, SP Growers, and F & P Growers.<sup>55</sup> In 1966, Ventura County led the nation in lemon production, ranked 10<sup>th</sup> among farm counties in California and 15<sup>th</sup> nationwide.<sup>56</sup> In that same year, the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) and Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) merged into the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC).

The UFWOC focused to organize agricultural workers in other parts of California.<sup>57</sup> Growers launched a smear campaign against the union. The California Farm Bureau Federation under the direction of Allan Grant stated, “Chavez and his union are using communist tactics to gain control of agriculture in America.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Mines and Montoya, *New Migrants vs. Old Migrants*, 38; Richard Mines and Philip Martin, “Immigrant Workers and the California Citrus Industry,” *Industrial Relations*, Vol. 23, no. 1 (Winter 1984): 142; Miriam Wells, *Strawberry Fields: Politics, Class, and Work in California Agriculture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 63-69.

<sup>54</sup> Mines and Martin, “Immigrant Workers and the California Citrus Industry,” 142.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> American Friends Service Committee, *Final Report of the Farm Workers Opportunity Project* (Oxnard, CA: Farm Workers Opportunity Project, 1967), 9.

<sup>57</sup> History of UFWOC: A Chronology, May 1956-June 1970, United Farm Workers: Information and Research Department, Box 16, Folder 44, Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan (hereafter cited as UFW Research).

<sup>58</sup> “Chavez revolt catching fire across state,” *Los Angeles Times*, 14 Jun 1970.

Continuing down the same line, Charles Woods of Imperial Valley Farm Bureau stated, “Chavez and people of this type seeking power by the intimidation of workers through a revolutionary movement.”<sup>59</sup>

By 1967, the UFWOC entered Ventura County and by 1970 set up shop in the heart of the La Colonia, a key Mexican neighborhood on the Oxnard Plain.<sup>60</sup> On October 22, 1970, the Ventura County Community Service Organization (VCCSO) organized an event in La Colonia with Cesar Chavez and the UFWOC to discuss the organizing of agricultural workers in Ventura County.<sup>61</sup> In his speech to the crowd, Chavez stated “the giants have been defeated in other places and they can be defeated here.”<sup>62</sup> Those words would motivate a decade of struggles against the growers ending with some victories and defeats.

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On July 14, 1970, more than two hundred citrus workers of F & P Growers Association walked out of their jobs due to a dispute over wages in nearby Fillmore,

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ignacio Garcia was listed as Oxnard’s UFWOC representative in the issues of *El Malcriado*, No. 51, 2 Dec 1966; Report #1, 9 Oct 1971, United Farm Workers: Office of the President Collection, Part II, Box 36, Folder 1, Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan (hereafter cited as UFW President Part II).

<sup>61</sup> “Chavez to speak in Oxnard.” *The Press-Courier*, 22 Oct 1970; “Chavez predicts growers’ defeat.” *The Press-Courier*, 23 Oct 1970.

<sup>62</sup> “Chavez predicts growers’ defeat.” *The Press-Courier*, 23 Oct 1970.

California.<sup>63</sup> On the behalf of the citrus strikers, Pablo Izquierdo of Santa Paula Farm Workers Committee (SPFWC) presented the citrus strikers' demands to the growers.<sup>64</sup> The demands were the following; minimum hourly guaranteed wage, improved sanitary conditions, vacation benefits, improve communication between workers and the management, and union recognition of the UFWOC.<sup>65</sup> It was reported in the *Ventura County Star-Free Press* that "the dispute over piece rates does not involve the amount paid, but the fact the workers do not know the rate to be paid until the day's work is over."<sup>66</sup> The strikers picked Ben Aparicio as their key spokesperson and negotiator with the growers.

A number of rallies of support were held within the Mexican community of Fillmore with speakers from the UFWOC. On July 17, three hundred citrus workers at other labor associations staged a sympathy walkout in support of the strikers.<sup>67</sup> On the same day, Chavez spoke to the strikers and crowd of supporters. Chavez informed the crowd that "he has been quietly organizing Ventura County farm workers for three years

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<sup>63</sup> Fillmore is 24 miles from Oxnard; "Citrus Pickers Boycott Job, As Talks Snag," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 17 Jul 1970; "500 citrus pickers quit jobs in dispute," *The Press-Courier*, 17 Jul 1970.

<sup>64</sup> Fillmore Citrus Association Workers to Fillmore Citrus Association, 15 Jul 1970, United Farm Workers: Office of the President Collection, Part I, Box 32, Folder 16, Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan (hereafter cited as UFW President Part I).

<sup>65</sup> Mines and Montoya, *New Migrants vs. Old Migrants*, 43-44.

<sup>66</sup> "Citrus Pickers Boycott Job, As Talks Snag," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 17 Jul 1970.

<sup>67</sup> Mines and Montoya, *New Migrants vs. Old Migrants*, 43-44; "Citrus walkout grows in county," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 19 Jul 1970; "Citrus picking dwindles as walkout spreads," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 20 Jul 1970.

[since 1967]" and "if the growers want a strike, we'll give them a strike."<sup>68</sup> Also, William Kircher of AFL-CIO stated, "we also know that the only language the growers understand is the voice of organized power."<sup>69</sup> Talks between growers and strikers were going nowhere. Aparicio stated that "the growers should grant me a least the dignity of something on paper to take back to the workers" and "right now I have nothing but a vague promise to consider our demands. We have no proof of their good intentions."<sup>70</sup> On the other side, Warren Wegis, manager of the VCCGC stated, "the pickers had broken off discussions with growers...deciding not to accept the [latest] offers on a new method of determining piece rates."<sup>71</sup>

On July 18, one hundred and eighty out of two hundred citrus pickers voted to continue the strike. Under Chavez, the UFWOC pledged full support for the strike.<sup>72</sup> Aparicio pointed out, "if the growers have no pickers, the citrus will just remain on the tree and rot."<sup>73</sup> A few days later, the strike increased to five hundred citrus strikers.<sup>74</sup> Within five days, the citrus strikers were successful in closing down one of the packinghouses served by F & P Growers Association.<sup>75</sup> As talks went nowhere, the

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<sup>68</sup> "Talk or face strike Chavez warns growers," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 18 Jul 1970.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> "No citrus walkout talks set," *The Press-Courier*, 18 Jul 1970.

<sup>72</sup> Cesar Chavez to F & P Growers Association, 18 July 1970, UFW President Part I, Box 32 Folder 16.

<sup>73</sup> "Citrus pickers strike; Chavez back move," *The Press-Courier*, 19 Jul 1970.

<sup>74</sup> "Over 500 pickers reported on strike," *The Press-Courier*, 20 Jul 1970.

<sup>75</sup> Mines and Montoya, *New Migrants vs. Old Migrants*, 43-44.

citrus strikers attempted to recruit more citrus pickers into the strike by focusing on organizing other citrus pickers at the F & P Growers Association's labor camp in Piru, California to join. On July 22, Chavez and UFWOC organizers joined the citrus strikers on the picket line.<sup>76</sup> The UFWOC called for an election among citrus pickers to decide if they wanted union recognition but Ivan McDaniel, the growers' attorney, pointed out that NLRB could not call for a election due to no authority over agricultural workers.<sup>77</sup> UFW attorney, Charles Farnsworth and citrus strikers accused F & P Growers Association of using undocumented workers as strikebreakers.<sup>78</sup> Russell Hardison, president of Fillmore Citrus Association denied allegations of hiring undocumented workers, he stated, "we have hired no outsiders what so ever."<sup>79</sup>

Aparicio continued to deny growers rumors that the UFWOC started the strike not the citrus workers. The *Ventura County Star-Free Press* reported "some county growers feel UFWOC's support is also physical, since they claim much of the picketing is being done by outsiders, not county workers."<sup>80</sup> Wegis and Fred Bryce, manager of F & P Growers Association continued to report that the strike would end soon. Wegis states, he is "hopeful that we'll have them all back by this time next week," with Bryce

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<sup>76</sup> "Citrus strike end seen," *The Press-Courier*, 23 Jul 1970.

<sup>77</sup> "Pickers reject growers' offer, call for election," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 23 Jul 1970; "Union vote impossible," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 24 Jul 1970.

<sup>78</sup> "Union charges growers using illegal aliens to fight walkout," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 21 Jul 1970; "Citrus union leader say growers exploiting aliens," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 26 Jul 1970.

<sup>79</sup> "Chavez talks charge of county citrus strike," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 22 Jul 1970.

<sup>80</sup> "The harvest from the citrus strike," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 22 Jul 1970.

seeing “drastic changes by the end of the week.”<sup>81</sup> The growers moved to offer the citrus pickers immunity if they would return to work, plus with the key demand of piece rates before the beginning of the workday. Aparicio stated if this strike is going to end, “we’re waiting for a written statement” due to the “failure of the growers in the past to honor their promises.”<sup>82</sup>

After eight days, some citrus strikers began to break ranks and returned to work.<sup>83</sup> On July 28, the strike ended with a final agreement between F & P Growers Association and citrus strikers on the majority of the demands but not the union recognition of the UFWOC.<sup>84</sup> One day after the ending of the Fillmore’s Strike, Delano’s table grape growers signed a pact with Chavez and the UFWOC, which led to 75 percent of the state’s table grape growers under union contacts.<sup>85</sup> In Ventura County, growers would continue their drive to combat unionization in the citrus industry but it would not decrease the agitation of citrus workers to improve their wages, benefits, and working conditions.

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> “Pickers ask pact in writing,” *The Press-Courier*, 22 Jul 1970.

<sup>83</sup> “40 more workers return to county groves,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 28 Jul 1970.

<sup>84</sup> “12-Day Citrus strike ends; Pact reached,” *The Press-Courier*, 29 Jul 1970; “County citrus strike ends,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 29 Jul 1970; “Both side gain in communication,” *The Press-Courier*, 30 Jul 1970.

<sup>85</sup> “Delano growers sign grape pact,” *The Press-Courier*, 30 Jul 1970.



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As the UFWOC was on the verge of winning the Delano Grape Strike, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (Teamsters) took on the drive to organizing agricultural workers in Salinas, California. Since the 1960s, the Teamsters had attempted to undermine the organizing of the UFWOC by signing direct contracts (sweetheart deals) with the growers. On July 17, 1970, six thousand drivers and packing workers represented by the Teamsters went on strike. Six days later, the Salinas Valley vegetable growers signed two hundred contracts with the Teamsters giving them access to organize farm workers not the UFWOC. The UFWOC was able to negotiate an agreement over the jurisdiction of organizing agricultural workers with the Teamsters but it collapsed by August 12, 1970.

On August 24, 1970, seven thousand Salinas and Santa Maria Valley vegetable workers went on strike under the leadership of the UFWOC. The Salinas Lettuce Strike became the largest farm workers strike in United States labor history. The Teamsters continued its jurisdiction dispute with the UFWOC, which led to mass picketing, arrests and extensive violence. The Teamsters violently attacked UFWOC supporters in Coachella and San Joaquin Valleys. By September 27, 1973, a tentative agreement with the Teamsters to leave the agricultural workers organizing to the UFW, but like previous agreements the Teamsters disregarded it.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> The UFWOC changed its name to the United Farm Workers of America (UFW) in 1972.

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Three and half years after the F & P Growers Association's strike, more than one hundred and fifty citrus workers of SP Growers Association walked out of their job on January 25, 1974 over a dispute over wages in nearby Santa Paula, California.<sup>87</sup> The strike would become the longest labor dispute in Ventura County's citrus industry. The citrus strikers main protest was over the change from a per-box to per-bin system payment.<sup>88</sup> Lee Chancy, manager of the VCCGC "claimed that [citrus] workers were incorrect" over the new system.<sup>89</sup> Local neighbor of the SP Growers Association's labor camp, George Castaneda, was picked by the citrus strikers to speak on their behalf to the growers.<sup>90</sup> Robin Cartwright, manager of SP Growers Association offered to talk to citrus pickers separately in the field but citrus strikers feared that Cartwright was attempting to divide and conquer the citrus pickers.<sup>91</sup> On January 28, Cartwright visited the labor camp to plead with the citrus strikers to return work.<sup>92</sup> Castaneda attempted to communicate the citrus strikers demands to Cartwright but he refused to talk to him.

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<sup>87</sup> Santa Paula is 16 miles from Oxnard; "Walkout staged by citrus crew," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 26 Jan 1974; "200 citrus pickers stay off jobs in pay dispute," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 27 Jan 1974.

<sup>88</sup> Mines and Montoya, *New Migrants vs. Old Migrants*, 45-46.

<sup>89</sup> "Walkout staged by citrus crew," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 26 Jan 1974.

<sup>90</sup> Mines and Montoya, *New Migrants vs. Old Migrants*, 45-46.

<sup>91</sup> "Citrus pickers idle despite offer to talk," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 28 Jan 1974.

<sup>92</sup> "Santa Paula citrus pickers stay home again," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 29 Jan 1974.

The SP Growers' board of directors was split over allowing Castaneda to speak on the behalf of the citrus strikers.<sup>93</sup>

Due to the tension between citrus strikers and Cartwright, the citrus strike committee submitted their thirteen-point demands to VCCGC not to SP Growers, which led the board of directors to dismiss Cartwright from his position.<sup>94</sup> SP Growers offered a rebuttal to the demands, which included that citrus pickers would be informed within three hours after the start of work. The citrus strikers rejected five points of thirteen point offered by SP Growers and increased its pressure for a grievance committee.<sup>95</sup> The citrus strikers were informed by a UFW spokesperson, that Chavez "is ready to come down if you seek him to."<sup>96</sup> On February 2, citrus strikers voted to seek help from the UFW.<sup>97</sup>

The negotiations went back and forth between SP Growers and citrus strikers.<sup>98</sup> James Sharp, president of SP Growers stated that the citrus strikers' demands were becoming "unreasonable and unacceptable."<sup>99</sup> Finally, on February 7, both sides came

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<sup>93</sup> Mines and Montoya, *New Migrants vs. Old Migrants*, 47-48.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> "Citrus growers agree to set picking rates," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 30 Jan 1974; "Pickers reject pay offer, ask grievance panel," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 1 Feb 1974.

<sup>96</sup> "Idled pickers told of Chavez offer to help," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 30 Jan 1974.

<sup>97</sup> "SP workers vote for Chavez help," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 3 Feb 1974.

<sup>98</sup> "Agreement near in citrus strike?," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 5 Feb 1974; "Striking pickers, grows to meet," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 6 Feb 1974; "Growers won't accept SP pickers proposal," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 7 Feb 1974.

<sup>99</sup> "SP Growers break off wage talks," *The Press-Courier*, 7 Feb 1974.

to an agreement ending the strike. The agreement addressed the majority of citrus strikers' demands, which included a guaranteed a minimum piece rate of 8.33 cent per bin and the established a workers grievance committee.<sup>100</sup>

Six months later, on August 20, more than one hundred and twenty citrus workers walked out of their job. José Rodriguez, the citrus strikers' spokesperson, stated they are demanding a 25 percent rate increase for picking.<sup>101</sup> The key labor disputes were over the different wages between picking lemons and oranges and the picking crew issues with foreman DeWayne Basolo. As reported by Legal Aid Association of Ventura County (LAAVC) attorney Steve Harvey, citrus workers have been working in "unrest" conditions since ending the strike in February.

The following day, Chancy of VCCGC reported "at least they haven't been joined by other crews" and he was willing to meet the citrus strikers.<sup>102</sup> Like the strike before talks went back and forth, as Rodriguez stated the "growers have not lived up to many of the points in the February agreement."<sup>103</sup> On the other side of the table, Chancy stated to the citrus strikers, "we do not intend to negotiate a new contract."<sup>104</sup> Again, the citrus strikers sought out the UFW for assistance in this struggle with the

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<sup>100</sup> Mines and Montoya, *New Migrants vs. Old Migrants*, 47-48; "Citrus walkout ends, pickers approve pact," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 8 Feb 1974.

<sup>101</sup> "Citrus pickers walk off jobs in Santa Paula," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 21 Aug 1974; Mines and Montoya, *New Migrants vs. Old Migrants*, 47-48.

<sup>102</sup> "SP Growers, citrus pickers in pay impasse," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 22 Aug 1974.

<sup>103</sup> "SP citrus pickers remain idled by strike," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 23 Aug 1974.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

growers.<sup>105</sup> The citrus strikers utilized the *Ventura County Star-Free Press* to highlight how the growers violate the February pact.<sup>106</sup> Rodriguez reported that the growers continued to say “go back to work and then we will work things out,” and we all know “this is just another promise that the company will break.”<sup>107</sup> The two weeks of negotiations between the growers and citrus strikers made little progress in resolving the labor dispute as it increased to one hundred and eighty citrus strikers.<sup>108</sup>

On September 4, Chavez visited the citrus strikers and families; he encouraged them to “hold the line” against the growers.<sup>109</sup> The following day, SP Growers hired Ralph de Leon as their new manager; he was the former assistant manager from the Coastal Growers Association (CGA) in Oxnard.<sup>110</sup> By September 10, de Leon was able to negotiate an agreement between the growers and citrus strikers, with an immediate wage increase and a promise of an across the board increase of 8% by the middle of November.<sup>111</sup> This strike had some major impacts on the SP Growers Association as

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<sup>105</sup> “Striking SP pickers to ask student help,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 24 Aug 1974.

<sup>106</sup> “Pickers: Growers violated February pact in 5 areas,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 27 Aug 1974.

<sup>107</sup> “Citrus strike grows, talks again breakoff,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 30 Aug 1974.

Mines and Montoya, *New Migrants vs. Old Migrants*, 47-48; “Citrus talks to clear air begin in SP,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 27 Aug 1974; “Citrus strike grows, talks again breakoff,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 30 Aug 1974.

<sup>109</sup> “Chavez tell striking pickers to hold the line,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 5 Sep 1974.

<sup>110</sup> “SP Citrus camp hires new manger,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 6 Sep 1974.

<sup>111</sup> “Farm workers to meet with new manger,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 8 Sep 1974; “Accord reached in citrus strike; pickers to vote,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 11 Sep 1974.

some packinghouse associations pulled out. On the other side, citrus pickers moved closer to the ranks of the UFW and it increased its militancy in the fields.

By February 25, 1975, citrus pickers went on strike again in dispute over piece rates. Within days, manager de Leon replaced the citrus strikers with other workers. The citrus strikers charged that de Leon replaced them with undocumented workers.<sup>112</sup> On March 4, the Border Patrol raided the SP labor camp arresting twenty-five individuals including citrus strikebreakers and strikers. The citrus strikers accused SP Growers of calling the Border Patrol. Manager de Leon publicly disputed the citrus strikers' claims of two hundred citrus pickers on strike but they were able to provide evidence, which showed that de Leon had fired them after the beginning of the strike.<sup>113</sup>

On March 12, attorneys on the behalf of the citrus strikers filed a class action against SP Growers, Briggs Lemon Association, and the VCCGC for \$550,000 dollars in damages for violating the Farm Labor Contractor Registration Act. Following the filing, SP Growers issued eviction notices to all citrus strikers living in the labor camp.<sup>114</sup> The citrus strikers' attorneys attempted to block the evictions but as the legal struggle dragged on citrus strikers began to move out of the labor camp.<sup>115</sup> As the battle between growers and citrus pickers continued, again SP Growers began to lose

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<sup>112</sup> "Striking pickers demand removal of illegal aliens," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 2 Mar 1975.

<sup>113</sup> Mines and Montoya, *New Migrants vs. Old Migrants*, 49.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-51.

<sup>115</sup> "Strikers families receive notices to leave camp," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 29 Apr 1974.

members and by 1975 they dissolved.<sup>116</sup> It was not until 1977 that the Supreme Court of California ruled that eviction was illegal and by 1980 the citrus strikers won their class action suit.

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In 1973, the *Ventura County Star-Free Press* reported that agriculture was the number one industry in Ventura County with \$220 million dollars earned by local growers.<sup>117</sup> Strawberries were the third top-ranking crop with \$19 million dollars earned.<sup>118</sup> The UFW had targeted the strawberry industry in Salinas Valley to organize strawberry pickers.<sup>119</sup> One of the key growers in Salinas was Dave Walsh, who also grew strawberries on the Oxnard Plain.

On May 24, 1974, two hundred strawberry pickers walked off their job in a sympathy strike in support of Salinas's strawberry pickers strike against grower Dave Walsh.<sup>120</sup> The strawberry strikers called on the local UFW to negotiate better wages with the growers. A key issue was the differences in wages being paid in Salinas and on the Oxnard Plain.<sup>121</sup> The walkout led to a mass picketing at Dave Walsh's property the day after, which turned violent. The Ventura County Sheriff Department (VCSD)

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<sup>116</sup> Mines and Montoya, *New Migrants vs. Old Migrants*, 50-51.

<sup>117</sup> "Agriculture –our no. 1 industry." *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 11 Jan 1974.

<sup>118</sup> "4 pickets arrested at berry field," *The Press-Courier*, 26 May 1974.

<sup>119</sup> Miriam Wells, *Strawberry Fields: Politics, Class, and Work in California Agriculture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 74-96.

<sup>120</sup> "Strawberry strike erupts in Oxnard," *El Malcriado*, 24 Jun 1974.

<sup>121</sup> "Berry harvesting halted by violence," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 25 May 1974.

responded to a called by Cecil Martinez, who reported that the UFW organizers and supporters were intimidating strawberry pickers and destroying farm equipment. The VCSD arrested four individuals on charges of arson, trespassing, and malicious mischief.<sup>122</sup> Roberto Flores, a local activist stated he “deplored the violence by some pickets but maintained the union had been invited to the fields by dissatisfied workers.”<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, Flores charged the VCSD of attempting to intimidate the UFW with “arbitrary arrests.”

The strawberry strike was over low wages, poor working conditions, and general dissatisfaction with growers as Flores stated, “the strawberry pickers are the lowest paid in California.”<sup>124</sup> The walkout turned into a majority strike of two thousand strawberry pickers against the local strawberry growers of Dave Walsh, Driscoll, Oxnard Berry Farms, and American Food Company.<sup>125</sup> The local growers under the direction of the Western Growers Association (WGA) refused to raise wages and negotiate with strawberry pickers or the UFW.<sup>126</sup> The strawberry strikers continued to encourage other strawberry pickers to join the strike by utilizing the tactic of going from field to field. Again, the growers called the VSCD, which warned the strawberry strikers to leave the fields or be arrested for trespassing. As reported by UFW spokesperson Lorenzo

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<sup>122</sup> “4 pickets arrested at berry field,” *The Press-Courier*, 26 May 1974.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> “Growers sues UFW over berry picketing,” *The Press-Courier*, 28 May 1974.

<sup>125</sup> “Strawberry strike erupts in Oxnard,” *El Malcriado*, 24 Jun 1974.

<sup>126</sup> On page 88 of *Strawberry Fields*, Wells pointed out that, “Berry growers regarded the WGA as their most powerful political representative on union issues.”



Moreno, the strawberry strike was “spontaneous and not directed by the union,” the strawberry pickers sought the support of the UFW after they walked out.<sup>127</sup>

As the strawberry strikers were seeking support from the UFW, the growers were seeking legal action. On May 27, Cecil Martinez filed a legal action in Oxnard Superior Court seeking a preliminary injunction and restraining order against the UFW and strawberry strikers to keep them off his field, with a claim of \$1 million dollars in damages.<sup>128</sup> On May 28, more than four hundred strawberry strikers and supporters demonstrated at the Ventura County Jail calling for the release of the arrested strikers and the end of arbitrary arrests & harassment by the VSCD.<sup>129</sup> In the evening, Chavez spoke to a crowd of more than two thousand strikers and supporters in Oxnard, stating, “the union will protect workers. We will fight the unfair injunctions.”<sup>130</sup> Chavez continued by stating that “striking is the most important and effective weapon in showing ranchers of the needs of the campesino.”<sup>131</sup> Local UFW supporter, Jesus Madrigal agreed with the UFW as “Chavez says we ought to unite ourselves to fight the boss for what is just...and I think that is right, that why I support Chavez’s union.”<sup>132</sup>

The following day, Oxnard Superior Court Judge Donald Pollock issued a temporary injunction limiting the picking of the UFW. The strawberry strikers and

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<sup>127</sup> “Cesar Chavez to aid Oxnard berry strike,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 28 May 1974.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> “Strawberry strike erupts in Oxnard,” *El Malcriado*, 24 Jun 1974.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> “Violence erupts in berry dispute,” *The Press-Courier*, 29 May 1974.

<sup>132</sup> “Strawberry strike erupts in Oxnard,” *El Malcriado*, 24 Jun 1974.

supporters were limited to five individuals per field and two individuals at each entrance. Debra Peyton, UFW attorney stated “the court order was one of most oppressive ever issued and one which is illegal and unconstitutional.”<sup>133</sup> Furthermore, Peyton points out that the temporary restraining order “denies the basic rights of the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment and prevents the farm workers from effectively expressing his grievances with other workers.”<sup>134</sup>

Violence erupted between strawberry strikers and supporters, the Oxnard Police Department (OPD), and VCSD as they attempted to serve the injunction papers. The VCSD escalated the situation by adding helicopters to disperse the strawberry strikers and supporters on the picket line.<sup>135</sup> An exchange between the OPD and Roberto Flores led to six individuals including himself being arrested over a rock-throwing confrontation.<sup>136</sup> (see Figure 6:4) Before being arrested, Flores accused the VCSD of harassment as they labeled the picket line an unlawful assembly of strawberry strikers and supporters.<sup>137</sup> The VCSD and OPD continued the arrests of non-violent strawberry strikers and supporters, which increased the number of individuals on the picket line.

The strawberry strikers received support from State Assemblyman Richard Alattore of Los Angeles, as he stated, “I support the right of the UFW here in Oxnard to

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<sup>133</sup> “Violence erupt in berry dispute,” *The Press-Courier*, 29 May 1974.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> “Strawberry strike erupts in Oxnard,” *El Malcriado*, 24 Jun 1974.

<sup>136</sup> “Violence erupts in berry dispute,” *The Press-Courier*, 29 May 1974; “Picketers, deputies clash in berry strike,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 29 May 1974.

<sup>137</sup> “Picketers, deputies clash in berry strike,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 29 May 1974; “Chavez to resist strike-breaking,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 29 May 1974.

obtain the same contract as they have in Salinas.”<sup>138</sup> The local growers continued with legal action by suing the UFW for damages per day for the lost of strawberries, which included four million dollars in punitive damages.<sup>139</sup> As local growers took legal action, Leo Hubbard of WGA was bragging that growers could beat this strike, even as the strike was costing the growers hundreds of thousands of dollars a day.



**Figure 6.4 UFW Organizer Arrested By Sheriff's Deputies. Source: *The Press-Courier*, 29 May 1974.**

On May 30, Superior Court Judge Richard Heaton issued a new temporary restraining order that covered several more local growers. Attorneys of the UFW and the growers were able to reach an agreement on a new restraining order, which

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<sup>138</sup> “Assemblyman backs UFW in move for equal contract,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 29 May 1974.

<sup>139</sup> “Strawberry strike erupts in Oxnard,” *El Malcriado*, 24 Jun 1974; “30 more arrested in labor dispute,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 31 May 1974.

permitted no more than fifty picketers, each fifty feet apart on the picket line, and prohibited picketers from entering the field.<sup>140</sup> The UFW increased its organizing leadership with the arrival of Manuel Chavez on the Oxnard Plain to strengthen the organizing drive of local strawberry pickers.<sup>141</sup> Both sides were claiming gains in the strike. Hubbard stated “90 percent of the pickers are back in the fields” and the “UFW does not as it has claimed, represent local workers.”<sup>142</sup> UFW organizer, Chavez responded by stating that the strike was “85 percent successful” and the “strike is working and the ranchers are scared.”<sup>143</sup>

The growers continued to use the VCSD, OPD, Ventura County Tactical Squad, and armed security guard to harass the strawberry strikers and supporters on the picket line.<sup>144</sup> The harassment moved from the picket line to the community, as UFW organizer Roberto Garcia was arrested when leaving the UFW office in La Colonia on charges of preventing the transporting of the strawberry pickers to the fields.<sup>145</sup> By May 31, the VCSD and OPD continued their harassment by arresting thirty strawberry strikers and supporters for violating the temporary restraining order.

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<sup>140</sup> “Berry pickets hit by new court order,” *The Press-Courier*, 30 May 1974; “County growers seek legal block,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 30 May 1974.

<sup>141</sup> Manuel Chavez is the cousin of Cesar Chavez; “County growers seek legal block,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 30 May 1974.

<sup>142</sup> “Both side in berry dispute, claim gains,” *The Press-Courier*, 31 May 1974; “UFW vows \$500,00 to win strike,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 31 May 1974.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> “Strawberry strike erupts in Oxnard,” *El Malcriado*, 24 Jun 1974; “Both side in berry dispute, claim gains,” *The Press-Courier*, 31 May 1974.

<sup>145</sup> “County growers seek legal block,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 30 May 1974.

UFW organizer, Garcia pointed out that the “growers know how effective our strike is, and they’re using the sheriffs and police department the same way they used the judge to break our strike.”<sup>146</sup> The VCSD and OPD continued their harassment of Roberto Flores, as he was arrested again for the third time. Flores stated “they’re arresting me for anything they can think of.”<sup>147</sup> UFW attorney Peyton charged that the VCSD had gone crazy and arresting strawberry strikers and supporters on trumped up charges.<sup>148</sup> It was reported that Daryl Arnold, executive vice president of WGA was on the picket line harassing strawberry strikers and supporters. It was very clear that the WGA’s mission was “to disorganize, demoralize, and terrorize the striking workers back into the field.”<sup>149</sup>

In the midst of the bitter struggle between strawberry strikers and growers, the Teamsters announced they were ready to start organizing agricultural workers in Ventura County.<sup>150</sup> To expose the overall Mexican working-class community to the strawberry strike, the UFW planned a march and rally in Oxnard. UFW representative, Sister Pearl McGivney stated the “purpose of the march is to bring the people together and protest the injustices and attitudes of the Ventura County Sheriff’s Department and Oxnard Police Department in their handling of the berry strike.”<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> “30 more arrested in labor dispute,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 31 May 1974.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> “Chavez returning for rally tonight,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 1 Jun 1974.

<sup>149</sup> “Strawberry strike erupts in Oxnard,” *El Malcriado*, 24 Jun 1974.

<sup>150</sup> “Chavez returning for rally tonight,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 1 Jun 1974.

<sup>151</sup> “Candlelight march scheduled by UFW,” *The Press-Courier*, 1 Jun 1974.

On June 1, more than two thousand supporters from the local community, throughout Ventura County & California joined Chavez and strawberry strikers in a march through the streets of La Colonia in protest over extreme law enforcement harassment. (see Figure 6.5) Chavez told the crowd that “Sheriff Hill has taken it upon himself to be the judge, prosecutor, and sheriff...we’re going to picket because of our god given rights and no one...can take those rights away from us.”<sup>152</sup> Chavez continued, “we are going to submit to arrest non-violently” and “we are going to go to jail by the thousands to demonstrate that we are not going to be kicked around.”<sup>153</sup> In the end, the crowd shouted, “Huelga, Huelga,” and “Chavez sí, Teamsters no.”<sup>154</sup> Local UFW organizer, Jesus Villegas pointed out “the support of our brothers and sisters here in the community is a sign of the justice of our cause.”<sup>155</sup> Garcia reported that there are more than two thousand individuals available for picketing duty.<sup>156</sup>

Hubbard continued to preach that the “growers would break the UFW activities, claiming the UFW does not represent local workers.”<sup>157</sup> Teamster Jim Hanson reported that organizers are on the ground in the Oxnard Plain assessing the situation with growers and strawberry pickers. As the strike continued, the strawberry strikers and

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<sup>152</sup> “Strawberry strike erupts in Oxnard,” *El Malcriado*, 24 Jun 1974; “Chavez urges mass arrests in county,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 2 Jun 1974; “UFW’s Chavez pledges to put strikers in jail,” *The Press-Courier*, 2 Jun 1974.

<sup>153</sup> “Chavez urges mass arrests in county,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 2 Jun 1974.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> “Strawberry strike erupts in Oxnard,” *El Malcriado*, 24 Jun 1974.

<sup>156</sup> “UFW’s Chavez pledges to put strikers in jail,” *The Press-Courier*, 2 Jun 1974.

<sup>157</sup> “Candlelight march scheduled by UFW,” *The Press-Courier*, 1 Jun 1974.

UFW received support from the ACLU, Oxnard Federation of Teachers, and American Federation of Teachers.<sup>158</sup> Violence erupted again, on June 2, as a farm labor bus, which transported strawberry pickers to Oxnard from Santa Paula was set on fire.<sup>159</sup>

On June 3, the Ventura County Board of Supervisors (VCBS) announced they would form a committee composed of Supervisors John Flynn and Frank Jewett to investigate UFW charges of harassment by the VCSD.<sup>160</sup> Isedillia Quirez of the UFW informed the Board of Supervisors about her harassment by the VCSD, she stated “the wind created by the helicopters was so strong I...was knocked down...the helicopter over me I thought it was going to kill me.”<sup>161</sup> Sheriff Hill responded to allegations of harassment in a written statement by “acknowledging the rights of UFW and supporters to voice their concerns through orderly picketing and free of speech but also it’s their job to enforce the injunction.”<sup>162</sup>

On June 5, one hundred strawberry pickers and supporters attended the Oxnard’s city council meeting to protest OPD’s tactics and harassment on the picket line. UFW attorney Ellen Lake called on the city council to “pull the Oxnard Police off the

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<sup>158</sup> “Supervisors to probe UFW harassment,” *The Press-Courier*, 4 Jun 1974.

<sup>159</sup> “Strawberry pickers vehicle set on fire,” *The Press-Courier*, 3 Jun 1974.

<sup>160</sup> “Supervisors to probe UFW harassment,” *The Press-Courier*, 4 Jun 1974.

<sup>161</sup> “Flynn, Jewett to confer with strikers, sheriff,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 5 Jun 1974; “Hill responds to allegation of ACLU head,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 6 Jun 1974.

<sup>162</sup> “Flynn, Jewett to confer with strikers, sheriff,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 5 Jun 1974.

strike lines outside of the city limits.”<sup>163</sup> The following day, growers and their supporters jammed packed another city council meeting to oppose any move to decrease the police efforts to enforce the court injunctions. OPD chief Robert Owens reported that “the police are not antifarm workers...we had frequent relatively peaceful encounters even though incidents went somewhat beyond permissive bounds.”<sup>164</sup> The UFW attempted to put more pressure on the City of Oxnard as they filed a two hundred and fifty thousand dollar claim in court for the injuries that occurred when the police were arresting UFW strawberry strikers and supporters.<sup>165</sup>



Figure 6.5 Colonia Park Crowd Hears Vow By United Farm Workers Leader. Source: *The Press-Courier*, 2 Jun 1974.

<sup>163</sup> “Strikers protests tactics of Oxnard’s police force,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 6 Jun 1974.

<sup>164</sup> “Police role changes in UFW dispute,” *The Press-Courier*, 7 Jun 1974.

<sup>165</sup> “Berry growers oppose restraining police,” *The Press-Courier*, 6 Jun 1974.



Both sides continued to their battle of words, as Ventura County Agricultural Association (VCAA) maintained that the strawberry strike was over and the UFW hinted about a call for a nation-wide strawberry boycott.<sup>166</sup> Violence continued as the result of the labor dispute between growers and UFW with reports of arson on strawberry pickers' homes and growers' properties.<sup>167</sup> On June 14, Superior Court Judge Heaton issued a preliminary injunction limiting the picketing by UFW at eighteen strawberry fields. The preliminary injunction changed the previous temporary injunction to no more than two picketers every fifty feet.<sup>168</sup> UFW attorney, Peyton called the injunction, "an incredible infringement on the first amendment rights."<sup>169</sup> Growers' attorney William Hair stated, "this is exactly what I've asked for. Now we have an order so we can keep the peace."<sup>170</sup> The injunction put a end to the strawberry strike and picketing of the UFW on the Oxnard Plain. UFW organizer Villegas connected all the dots in how powerful the local growers are by stating it is "my opinion...the courts work hand to hand with the growers by approving such an injunction."<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> "UFW may ask nationwide berry boycott," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 6 Jun 1974; "UFW feels capable of lengthy holdout," *The Press-Courier*, 9 Jun 1974

<sup>167</sup> "5 pickers ok as house set on fire," *The Press-Courier*, 5 Jun 1974; "Arson blamed for fires," *The Press-Courier*, 7 Jun 1974; "Fire bomb thrown into home of pickers but fail to explode," *The Press-Courier*, 10 Jun 1974; "Fire bomb hurled into Oxnard home," *The Press-Courier*, 11 Jun 1974; "Non-violent tactics," *The Press-Courier*, 8 Jun 1974.

<sup>168</sup> "Injunction issued on UFW pickets," *The Press-Courier*, 14 Jun 1974.

<sup>169</sup> "Picket injunction condemned by UFW, praised by growers." *The Press-Courier*, 15 Jun 1974.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

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Cesar Chavez and the UFW had rejected legislative solutions in the past but due to the ongoing battle with the Teamsters had changed their minds. A supporter of the UFW, Jerry Brown was elected the Governor of California in 1974. The UFW pushed Governor Brown and the California State Legislative to act on the plight of agricultural workers. Governor Brown pushed for labor laws reforms, especially for farm workers. On April 10, 1975, an agricultural labor bill was introduced in both chambers of the State Legislative. After decades of struggles, the Agricultural Labor Relations Act (ALRA) was signed into law in California on June 4, 1975.

The ALRA established collective bargaining for agricultural workers, which contoured the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (NRLA) that excluded farm workers rights. Also, the ALRA created a five-members Agricultural Labor Relations Board (ALRB) to oversee and certify elections and investigate unfair practices within the agriculture industry. With the ALRA to take effect on August 28, 1975, the Teamsters had replaced the UFW as the major union representing farm workers throughout California due to sweetheart contracts with the growers.<sup>172</sup> The UFW would continue their battle with the Teamsters and growers over the new agricultural labor laws.

In Ventura County, more than twenty thousand agricultural workers were being recruited by the UFW and the Teamsters to become their authorized bargaining agents. Chavez saw Ventura County as a key area to win the battle against the Teamsters. So, Chavez appointed Eliseo Medina, a key organizer of the Grape Boycott to direct the organizing. Medina's mission to organize farm workers would be simple, "we are

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<sup>172</sup> Philip Martin, *Promises to Keep: Collective Bargaining in California Agriculture* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1996) 89.

promising honest representation” and “we are making no promises on wages that is a product of negotiations.”<sup>173</sup> On the ground in Ventura County, the UFW had filed five petitions for union representation elections at West Food, Hiji Brothers, KK Ito Farms, Watanabe Ranch, and Brokaw Nursery on September 2, 1975.<sup>174</sup> One day later, United States District Court Judge M.D. Croker issued a temporary restraining order barring the ALRB from enforcing its rule allowing union organizers limited access to growers’ fields. Medina called the ruling “outrageous” and “an anti-UFW injunction.”<sup>175</sup>

On September 6, agricultural workers at Brokaw Nursery voted the UFW as their union representative in the first ALRB election in Ventura County and Southern California.<sup>176</sup> On the same day, Chavez spoke to more than one thousand agricultural workers and supporters at a celebration rally in Oxnard; he “charged that the growers and Teamsters are doing everything they can to sabotage free elections.”<sup>177</sup> At West Food, the UFW charged that the Teamsters and West Food were using the Border Patrol as tactic to undercut the ARLB election.<sup>178</sup> On September 8, the first direct ballot confrontation between the UFW and the Teamsters occurred. In the end, farm workers voted 136 to 39 in favor of the UFW. Medina stated, “we’ve maintained all along when the workers were given the right to vote, they will vote for the UFW.”<sup>179</sup> On the other

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<sup>173</sup> “Battle of unions waged in farm fields,” *The Press-Courier*, 24 Aug 1975.

<sup>174</sup> “UFW filed for county labor votes,” *The Press-Courier*, 2 Sep 1975.

<sup>175</sup> “UFW’s Egg City access retained,” *The Press-Courier*, 4 Sep 1975.

<sup>176</sup> “First farm labor law vote due,” *The Press-Courier*, 6 Sep 1975.

<sup>177</sup> “Chavez hail victory,” *The Press-Courier*, 7 Sep 1975.

<sup>178</sup> “UFW files complaint on raid,” *The Press-Courier*, 5 Sep 1975.

<sup>179</sup> “UFW top rival in county vote,” *The Press-Courier*, 9 Sep 1975.

side, Teamster Art Chavarria stated, “winning the election is not hard, it’s negotiating that is hard.”<sup>180</sup>

Within Ventura County, the UFW proved to have more support among farm workers than the Teamsters. It was also reported that the local UFW were more successful in winning the battle against the Teamsters than in the overall UFW statewide efforts.<sup>181</sup> On September 15, Chavez accused ALRB’s General Counsel Walter Kintz of “making illegal deal with the growers.”<sup>182</sup> Chavez pointed to the poor administration of the new farm election law as permitting “a growers-Teamsters conspiracy...to prevail.”<sup>183</sup> Locally, Medina charged that the growers were submitting phony employment lists in an attempt to prevent elections. Three days later, the California Supreme Court suspended the restraining order against access to agricultural workers on private property.

Local growers responded to the UFW’s organizing of farm workers at a meeting with the local clergy in Oxnard. Grower Bob Gill stated, “I feel that most of the problems are coming from the UFW.”<sup>184</sup> Grower Donald Dufau complained about access to farm workers during work hours, “organizers at every lunch hour are pestering my people.”<sup>185</sup> Art Piduck continued “if unions are so great why can’t they hold a public

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> “UFW winning battle for county workers,” *The Press-Courier*, 13 Sep 1975.

<sup>182</sup> “UFW rap growers, Teamsters,” *The Press-Courier*, 16 Sep 1975.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> “Farm vote issue of Oxnard,” *The Press-Courier*, 7 Oct 1975.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

meeting during the off hours of the workers.”<sup>186</sup> And finally, Bob Grounds, manager of VCAA stated, he “don’t think the growers are opposed to unions as long as it is done fair and square.”<sup>187</sup>

Under the direction of Medina, the local UFW was able to win twelve elections becoming the largest agricultural worker union in Ventura County with more than one thousand members. By October of 1975, Larry Tramutola took over as UFW’s Ventura County director and Medina was moved to battle the Teamsters in Coachella Valley.<sup>188</sup> *The Press-Courier* reported that within the last two months, the UFW had “the support of the majority of the farm workers even though the Teamsters have held the majority of the contracts.”<sup>189</sup> At the state level, the UFW won one hundred and thirty-five ALRB elections compared to the ninety-one wins by the Teamsters, within Ventura County it was thirteen to five wins in favor of the UFW.<sup>190</sup>

The battle between the growers and ALRB continued into 1976, as grower-friendly legislators moved to cut the funding of the new farm labor law. By February 6, 1976, the Ventura County ALRB’s office was closed due the state legislation failing to approve emergency funding of 1.25 million dollars sought by Governor Brown. Before closing its doors, the Ventura County ALRB’s office had conducted twenty-four

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> “Teamsters win vote in Oxnard,” *The Press-Courier*, 15 Oct 1975.

<sup>189</sup> “Farm dispute revival feared,” *The Press-Courier*, 26 Oct 1975.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

elections.<sup>191</sup> The UFW mobilized a campaign to gather signatures for a statewide proposition, which would restore the funding of the ALRB and prevent continue attacks of the new labor law. (see Figure 6.6) Proposition 14 was added to the November 1976 election ballot but was unable to pass. The funding issues of the ALRB moved back to the California's legislature, where they came to agreement to fund the new farm labor law in 1977. By March of 1977, the UFW final reached a successful agreement with the Teamsters, which would leave the organizing of farm workers to the UFW.



**Figure 6.6 Dolores Huerta At A Rally In Oxnard, CA, February 2, 1976. Courtesy of the Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor And Urban Affairs.**

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Since 1970, the UFW and the Teamsters had been in an intense battle over organizing agricultural workers throughout California. In Ventura County, the Western

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<sup>191</sup> "ALRB closes area office," *The Press-Courier*, 6 Feb 1976; "Farm votes set as ALRB to close," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 13 Apr 1975.

Conference of Teamsters' organizers linked to the Local No. 186 were on the ground during Oxnard's Strawberry Strike of 1974. By March 25, 1975, the Teamsters signed its first farm labor contact with the United Celery Growers.<sup>192</sup> The local UFW found themselves in a uphill battle against the Teamsters' sweetheart contacts with local growers.

On April 10, 1975, between two and three hundred workers at Julius Goldman's Egg City in Moorpark, California walked out of their jobs in protest over the firing of Miguel Ceja.<sup>193</sup> Leopoldo Urias, director of the Friends of Farm Workers (FFW) pointed out that "Ceja was actually discharged because of his anti-Teamsters feelings."<sup>194</sup> Furthermore, Urias reported "that workers had agreed not return to their jobs and had agreed among themselves not to renew their Teamsters [Local No. 186] contract in June."<sup>195</sup> On April 14, Superior Court Judge Richard Heaton signed a temporary restraining order requesting that Teamsters' members (strikers) cease picketing and demonstrating in front of Egg City.<sup>196</sup> Urias called the restraining order "an unjust injunction and we're going to stay day and night until we break it."<sup>197</sup> The strikers would

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<sup>192</sup> "Teamsters seen defeating Chavez," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 13 Apr 1975.

<sup>193</sup> Moorpark is 22 miles from Oxnard; "Egg City picketed strike is confirmed," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 11 Apr 1975.

<sup>194</sup> "Egg strike in third day," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 12 Apr 1975.

<sup>195</sup> "Egg City picketed strike is confirmed," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 11 Apr 1975.

<sup>196</sup> "Court demand end to strike at Egg City," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 15 Apr 1975; "Court orders Egg City employees back to work," *The Press-Courier*, 16 Apr 1975.

<sup>197</sup> "Strikers scorn court order at Egg City," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 16 Apr 1975.

ignore the court order and continue the picketing of Egg City. The strikers pointed out that their key labor dispute is with the Teamsters not the Egg City's management and that is why the strikers are seeking to be represented by UFW not the Teamsters.

The strikers issued a set of demands to the Teamsters and Egg City's management. The demands called for the following; the recognition of the "Central Committee of the Workers" of Egg City as the official representation of the workers instead of the Teamsters, the rehiring of Ceja, the rehiring of all workers involved with the strike, and firing of all workers who kept working during the strike.<sup>198</sup> Egg City's management responded by refusing to negotiate with the strikers' committee due to being in violation of the Teamster's contract. John Sawyer, the vice president of Egg City stated, the "workers are in violation of their contract" by being on strike.<sup>199</sup>

As the strikers stood their ground against the Teamsters and Egg City's management, the county's Community Action Committee (CAC) promised some type of assistance to the strikers' families. Judy Kessen of the CAC stated, "that's what we're here for to help people who are out of work and have no money."<sup>200</sup> The CAC faced much criticism for assisting the strikers and their families but defended their decision.<sup>201</sup> The strikers accused Egg City of using undocumented workers as strikebreakers, which

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<sup>198</sup> "Strikers issue set of demands at Egg City," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 16 Apr 1975.

<sup>199</sup> "Egg City locked in labor impasse," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 19 Apr 1975.

<sup>200</sup> "Hungry Egg City strikers promised help by CAC," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 18 Apr 1975.

<sup>201</sup> "CAC role in strike defended," *The Press-Courier*, 25 Apr 1975; "Supervisor question CAC role at Egg City," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 23 Apr 1975; "CAC officials defended help at Egg City," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 25 Apr 1975.



led to a protest at the Oxnard's Border Patrol office calling for a investigation.<sup>202</sup> The Border Patrol responded by detaining thirteen undocumented workers at Egg City.<sup>203</sup> UFW organizer, Jesus Villegas reported that UFW would help the strikers when the present Teamsters' contract expires.<sup>204</sup>

On May 2, a preliminary injunction was issued against the strikers from engaging in further picketing or work stoppages at Egg City. The strikers responded by stating "the walkout is a protest against the Teamsters union, which...is not representing them."<sup>205</sup> The picketing continued as a series of violence erupted between strikers and Egg City's security. Some strikers were arrested on charges of assault with a deadly weapon.<sup>206</sup> By June 5, the battle between strikers and Egg City's security reached a peak, as the fifteen strikers including their families were placed under citizen's arrest on charges of disturbing the peace by Egg City's security. In return, the strikers placed Egg City's security under citizen's arrest on charges of misdemeanor assault. The VCSD intervened and arrested all of them.<sup>207</sup> A battle of words erupted in the streets in front of Egg City on June 15, as more than one hundred UFW and Teamsters supporters

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<sup>202</sup> "Strikers say aliens working at Egg City," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 24 Apr 1975.

<sup>203</sup> "Border patrol deports 37 illegal aliens," *The Press-Courier*, 22 Apr 1975; "37 arrested in county illegal alien crackdown," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 22 Apr 1975.

<sup>204</sup> "Strikers say aliens working at Egg City," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 24 Apr 1975.

<sup>205</sup> "Court order picket halt," *The Press-Courier*, 3 May 1975.

<sup>206</sup> "5 arrested on assault charges," *The Press-Courier*, 10 May 1975; "4 plead innocent to rock throwing," *The Press-Courier*, 15 May 1975; "Man, guns seized near Egg City," *The Press-Courier*, 19 May 1975.

<sup>207</sup> "Egg City fracas scrambled affair," *The Press-Courier*, 6 Jun 1975.

confronted each other in the struggle to represent the workers at Egg City. The VCSD moved in to prevent any type violence between the UFW and Teamsters.<sup>208</sup>

By the end of June, the UFW called for a union representation election at Egg City to determine who should represent the workers. UFW Ventura County director, Eliseo Medina requested the election to be held under the ALRA but the new agricultural labor law did not go into effect until August 28, 1975.<sup>209</sup> The urgent call for an election was due to the Teamsters' contract ending on June 30. Ceja who was fired two months earlier pointed out that the "workers did not receive any representation from the Teamsters."<sup>210</sup> Sawyer responded to the call for an election by stating, "the company was in a quandary on whatever to call for a union representation election under the new farm labor law."<sup>211</sup> Egg City's management was still in negotiation with the Teamsters, but "was concern[ed] if an election were held now, if might not be legal and binding."<sup>212</sup>

The UFW launched a campaign to inform agricultural workers throughout California, including in Ventura County about the ALRA. Medina stated, "we are engaged in an intensive campaign to reach every farm worker in Ventura County with news of the farm labor election bill so that all workers will know that they are free to

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<sup>208</sup> "2 nabbed at Egg City incident," *The Press-Courier*, 16 Jun 1975.

<sup>209</sup> "UFW ask union vote at Egg City," *The Press-Courier*, 1 Jul 1975.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> "Egg City union vote uncertain," *The Press-Courier*, 3 Jul 1975.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

choose the union they want to represent them.”<sup>213</sup> It was also reported by the UFW, that Chavez would speak at Fiesta Campesina in La Colonia to explain the new law and promote self-organizing among agricultural workers. On July 13, Chavez addressed more than three hundred strikers and supporters at a rally across the street from Egg City. The Teamsters attempted to drown out Chavez when he spoke to the crowd and held up signs “urging Chavez to go home.”<sup>214</sup> Later in the day, Chavez spoke to more than one thousand UFW supporters at Colonia Park, where he charged that the growers and the Teamsters were attempting to sabotage the new agricultural labor law. Chavez stated, “why are the growers signing contracts a full month and half before there can be elections under the law” and “their only purpose is to deprive workers of their rights to vote freely and to subvert the law.”<sup>215</sup>

On July 28, Medina and three other UFW organizers were arrested and charged with trespassing when attempting to enter Egg City during lunch hour to talk with Egg City’s workers about joining the UFW.<sup>216</sup> UFW attorneys raised the issue of discrimination by Egg City’s management, which allowed the Teamsters to have full access to the plant. The management responded that if they allowed the UFW full access it would violate the contract with the Teamsters. It was reported that the Teamsters were assisting Egg City’s management in the hiring of new workers to replacing the strikers. On the same day, the Teamsters signed a new three-year contract with Egg City.

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<sup>213</sup> “Chavez due in Oxnard,” *The Press-Courier*, 10 Jul 1975.

<sup>214</sup> “Chavez due in Oxnard,” *The Press-Courier*, 13 Jul 1975.

<sup>215</sup> “Chavez claims sabotage of new farm labor law,” *The Press-Courier*, 14 Jul 1975.

<sup>216</sup> “4 UFWA aides arrested trying to enter egg farm,” *Los Angeles Times*, 29 Jul 1975.

Egg City's owner, Julius Goldman reported that since April 30, they lost around one million dollars in profit. Also, Goldman shared his opinion about the strike, stating, "I don't believe they have any grudges against the plant. It is just caught in the middle of the two unions fighting for union representation."<sup>217</sup> It was reported by the UFW that Egg City was hiring Vietnamese refugees as strikebreakers. Reverend Wayne Hartmire, Director of National Farm Worker Ministry and three other clergy members attempted to investigate allegations of hiring Vietnamese refugees to break the strike but they were locked out of Egg City.<sup>218</sup> Reverend Hartmire stated that "Goldman is afraid to let the UFW organizers talk to the workers" and the conditions at the plant look like a "concentration camp" and "it is a just a tragedy."<sup>219</sup> The fourteen Vietnamese refugees working at Egg City were asked by their sponsoring agency to quit their jobs. Sawyer stated "I believe the UFW and its leaders Cesar Chavez are discriminating against the refugees."<sup>220</sup>

On August 1, four UFW organizers were arrested on charges of trespassing when attempting to enter Egg City to talk with workers, which added up to twelve individuals arrested since July 28.<sup>221</sup> It was announced by District Attorney C. Statley Trom, he would not prosecute any farm workers organizers who attempted to communicate with workers at Egg City, but that the VCSD will continue to arrest any

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<sup>217</sup> "Teamsters ok Egg City pact," *The Press-Courier*, 29 Jul 1975.

<sup>218</sup> "Egg City hiring of refugees hit," *The Press-Courier*, 31 Jul 1975; "Egg City gate locked to clergy," *The Press-Courier*, 1 Aug 1975.

<sup>219</sup> "Egg City gate locked to clergy," *The Press-Courier*, 1 Aug 1975.

<sup>220</sup> "Viets to quits at Egg City," *The Press-Courier*, 5 Aug 1975.

<sup>221</sup> "4 arrested at Egg City," *The Press-Courier*, 2 Aug 1975.

organizers on trespassing.<sup>222</sup> The UFW continued its mission to enter Egg City. Medina stated “the gate isn’t locked for them. It’s only locked for the UFW” and “it is a plain case of favoritism and collusion.”<sup>223</sup> On the other side, Teamster Martin Fry accused the UFW of harassing workers and forcing them to sign election cards.

On August 18, Superior Court Judge Robert Shaw presided over the hearing of a injunction seek by Egg City to restrict the picketing of the UFW. Sawyer testified that owner, Julius Goldman believed the Teamsters would call a strike if the he would allowed the UFW onto his plant. Local Teamsters reported “if the UFW did come on the ranch, all hell would break loose.”<sup>224</sup> Two days later, Judge Shaw ruled that two UFW organizers can enter Egg City to talk with workers about the new agricultural labor law. Judge Shaw cited the following case, *UFW vs. Santa Clara County* that found that union access was a first amendment right.<sup>225</sup> It was also exposed that Egg City’s management arranged that new employees would not be hired unless they joined the Teamsters. Medina stated, “their sweetheart arrangement has suffered a serious setback.”<sup>226</sup> The UFW was able to modify the court order, in which Judge Shaw increased the number of organizers who could access Egg City.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> “UFW faces new Egg City arrests,” *The Press-Courier*, 8 Aug 1975.

<sup>223</sup> “UFW trio barred by Egg City gates,” *The Press-Courier*, 9 Aug 1975.

<sup>224</sup> “Strike fear said shutout reason,” *The Press-Courier*, 20 Aug 1975.

<sup>225</sup> “Court grants UFW access to Egg City,” *The Press-Courier*, 21 Aug 1975.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> “UFW Egg City access restricted by location,” *The Press-Courier*, 23 Aug 1975; “UFW to step up effort at Egg City,” *The Press-Courier*, 3 Sep 1975.

On September 1, the Teamsters filed a petition for a union representation election at Egg City with the ALRB. The following day, fifteen UFW organizers entered Egg City to convince workers that UFW should be on the ballot with the Teamsters. The UFW needed to sign up at least 20 percent of the four hundred workers at the Egg City to be included on the ballot.<sup>228</sup> A pre-election conference was held at Egg City between the local ALRB, the Teamsters, the UFW, and Egg City's management to discuss the election. Kenneth Keith, local ALRB official reported that "the strikers will be allowed to vote, subject to challenge."<sup>229</sup>

Egg City's workers finally voted to see who would represent them, the UFW or Teamsters on September 9, 1975.<sup>230</sup> The outcome of the election was 189 to 144 in favor of the Teamsters, which did not include the one hundred sixty-seven strikers' votes. The Teamsters were challenging those votes. The Teamsters claimed victory, with local Teamster Chavarria proclaiming "the rooster ate the eagle at Egg City."<sup>231</sup> Keith stated, "it will up to the state ALRB to decide whether these strike votes should be counted."<sup>232</sup> Medina responded to the challenged votes by stating that they "should be counted because they are economic and unfair labor strikers."<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> "UFW to step up effort," *The Press-Courier*, 3 Sep 1975.

<sup>229</sup> "Farm labor ballots cast," *The Press-Courier*, 10 Sep 1975.

<sup>230</sup> "UFW face big test at Egg City," *The Press-Courier*, 11 Sep 1975.

<sup>231</sup> "Vote challenges cloud 2 farm elections," *The Press-Courier*, 12 Sep 1975

<sup>232</sup> Egg City vote still in doubt," *The Press-Courier*, 12 Sep 1975.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*

Due to lack of funding, staffing, and attacks by agri-business, it took two years for the ALRB to rule on the challenged votes.<sup>234</sup> During this period, the UFW filed charges against Egg City on August 31, 1977 for refusing to reinstate strikers; it was not until a year later that an informal settlement agreement on the hiring of the strikers was reached. Finally, on September 27, 1977, the ALRB ruled the employees were economic strikers and under the ALRA they were permitted to vote in the election.<sup>235</sup> On October 13, 1977, Joan Anderson of the local ALRB informed the UFW and Teamsters at meeting to discuss the Egg City's election that the challenged ballots were stolen or disappeared from the Oxnard's ALRB office. Anderson stated, "one hour ago we discovered the ballot box was not in our possession."<sup>236</sup> The OPD would investigate the possible theft of the ballot box. Oxnard's UFW director, Roberto de la Cruz charged that the ballot box was stolen. ALRB's Southern California Regional director, Marc Robert stated, "we don't have any clear opinion on how the box and its contents disappeared."<sup>237</sup> Chavez stated the "loss of the ballot box is the result of gross negligence of duty and is a grievous blow to the farm workers' faith in the administration of ALRB."<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> "Year-old Egg City election undecided," *The Press-Courier*, 19 Sep 1976.

<sup>235</sup> "UFW wins ruling in Egg City ok," *The Press-Courier*, 7 Oct 1977; State Of California, Agricultural Labor Relations Board, No. 75-RC-21-M, 3 ALRB No. 76.

<sup>236</sup> "Oxnard Police probe loss of Egg City votes," *The Press-Courier*, 14 Oct 1977.

<sup>237</sup> "UFW official claims theft," *The Press-Courier*, 15 Oct 1977.

<sup>238</sup> "Ballot box stolen in farm union election," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 Oct 1977.

The ALRB moved to hold a new election for the challenged employees.<sup>239</sup> On July 7, 1978, the UFW was certified as the collective bargaining representation for Egg City's employees. Nine months later, on April 23, 1979, the UFW and Egg City signed a collective bargaining agreement. Issues between workers, the UFW, and Egg City's management would continue into the 1980s.

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In 1965, local packinghouses formed different types of cooperative harvesting associations to provide a labor force in the Ventura County's citrus industry. In the same year, one of key cooperative harvesting associations Coastal Growers Association (CGA) was formed under the management of Jack Lloyd. By 1966, CGA expanded its services from three to seven packinghouses, followed by issuing picking equipment to citrus pickers in 1969, and finally the transportation of citrus pickers and the direct supervision of the foremen and crew leaders by 1970.<sup>240</sup>

On March 27, 1978, a labor dispute between a CGA citrus picking crew and a foreman led to a mass protest on the Oxnard Plain. The following day, thirty citrus pickers blocked the gates of the staging area of CGA preventing one hundred citrus pickers from being deployed into the fields. In a response to the labor dispute, Lloyd decided to suspend operations until the matter could be settled with an election; he

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<sup>239</sup> "State panel asks aid on Egg City election, *The Press-Courier*, 4 Nov 1977; "New Egg City election ordered," *VC Ad-visor*, 12 Dec 1977.

<sup>240</sup> Mines and Montoya, *New Migrants vs. Old Migrants*, 38.



believed the citrus pickers would reject union recognition.<sup>241</sup> Oxnard's UFW director, Roberto De La Cruz reported that more than one thousand citrus pickers will vote to see if they want UFW representation at CGA.<sup>242</sup> The election would be one of the largest turnout to vote on union representation since the ALRB went into effect in the 1975.<sup>243</sup>

On March 31, citrus pickers at CGA voted 897 to 42 in favor of UFW representation. Lloyd stated, "our employees have now spoken. We accept their decision and will abide by it and cooperate with its implementation."<sup>244</sup> CGA moved to negotiate with the UFW not to contest the election. The local ALRB moved forward in the certification of the election.<sup>245</sup> By April 6, 95% of the citrus pickers returned to work after an eight-day walkout. The CGA called off the harvest, when the UFW filed charges that CGA was stalling the bargaining sessions.<sup>246</sup>

CGA and UFW continued talks, as citrus pickers received no paycheck for past work. On May 5, citrus pickers attempted to collect unemployment compensation, which led to a sit-in demonstration at the local Employment Development Department (EDD). The EDD ruled that about third of the nearly one thousand applicants were eligible for unemployment.<sup>247</sup> The following day, the UFW and CGA management were able to

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>242</sup> "Election due for pickers out on strike," *The Press-Courier*, 30 Mar 1978.

<sup>243</sup> "Union election ballots cast," *The Press-Courier*, 31 Mar 1978.

<sup>244</sup> "Pickers ask UFW negotiations help," *The Press-Courier*, 1 Apr 1978.

<sup>245</sup> "Strike may hurt harvest," *The Press-Courier*, 4 Apr 1978.

<sup>246</sup> "Temporary strike end considered," *The Press-Courier*, 5 Apr 1978; "Pickers' strike settled," *The Press-Courier*, 6 Apr 1978.

<sup>247</sup> Mines and Montoya, *New Migrants vs. Old Migrants*, 62; "UFW members wait for check," *The Press-Courier*, 5 May 1978.

agree to three-year contract, which was ratified by 872 to 18 vote.<sup>248</sup> De La Cruz stated, “it is a good contract that the company and the union can live with.”<sup>249</sup> Other cooperative harvesting associations, like S & F Growers and Limoneria followed suit and signed contract with the UFW. By the end of 1978, the UFW represented more than 90% of the Ventura County citrus industry.<sup>250</sup> In a response, the growers withdrew from the CGA and moved to hire labor contractors as tactic against the UFW.

## CONCLUSION

The Chicano Power Movement and Farm Worker Movement shaped the drive for equality on the Oxnard Plain. Those movements sparked the establishment of the local Brown Berets and UFW. Both groups played an important part in the political education of generations of local activists. Those organizations would take a stand against police brutality, discrimination and demand worker rights and better work conditions for the Mexican working-class community.

As the Chicano Power Movement activities decreased in the mid-1970s, local activists continued their mission to empower the working-class community and advocate for farm worker rights. For instance, by 1975, local activists formed the El Concilio del Condado de Ventura, as an umbrella organization to provide information on the areas of education, farm labor, and health.<sup>251</sup> After years of struggling and organizing, the UFW

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<sup>248</sup> “Farm pact eyed,” *The Press-Courier*, 6 May 1978.

<sup>249</sup> “Worker ratify pact ending citrus clash,” *The Press-Courier*, 7 May 1978.

<sup>250</sup> Mines and Montoya, *New Migrants vs. Old Migrants*, 63.

<sup>251</sup> “Bylaws draft meeting slated,” *The Press-Courier*, 4 Oct 1975; “Chicano group meet tonight,” *The Press-Courier*, 9 Jan 1976.

in Ventura County would enter the 1980's on high note. Yet, after years of battles with the growers and city officials, the Mexican working-class community on the Oxnard Plain would face more battles in the 1980's and beyond.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **MY FATHER'S HISTORY ON THE OXNARD PLAIN**

## **INTRODUCTION**

In reconnecting or reconstructing the important unknown or forgotten history of the Mexican working-class communities on the Oxnard Plain from 1930 through 1980, especially the residents of La Colonia: I returned to my original question, why Oxnard or La Colonia? Throughout the previous chapters, I have addressed this question. It is very clear, that Ventura County and especially the Oxnard Plain has been a key agricultural empire in California and the United States.

In this context, the growers and politicians have done everything in their power to control the social and political lives of every resident, especially the Mexican working-class. To gain this control, laws and public policies were utilized to construct barriers between workers and owners. In other words, social, political, and physical barriers developed into segregation between Mexicans and Whites. Those markers can be seen clearly in the areas of education, housing, and employment. The previous chapters have shown that the Mexican working-class community has resisted the power structure through strikes, protests, campaigns, and lawsuits.

In Chapter One, I shared the story of my mother's family migration to the Oxnard Plain. So, in the conclusion of this dissertation, I return to my family history by sharing my father's history, which is connected to labor, migration, and activism on the Oxnard Plain.

## CROSSING PATHS WITH A SEGREGATED CITY

My father's history starts like other Mexican families who left their homeland to *el norte*. Since 1848, El Paso, Texas has been a key port of entry for Mexicans migrating into the United States. For my father, El Paso is a key part of this story. Thirteen years before the Mexican Revolution of 1910, my father's maternal grandfather Clarence Garcia was born in 1897 in El Paso County, Texas. His parents were Felipe Garcia, who was also born in El Paso County and Antonia Martinez Garcia, who migrated from Chihuahua, Mexico to El Paso. Four years after Clarence was born, my father's paternal grandmother, Josefina Ochoa was born in 1901 to Francisco and Conception Ochoa in Sonora, Mexico.<sup>1</sup>

A young Clarence and his family entered the "corridors of migration," which took them from El Paso, Texas, to Santa Barbara, California, during the turn of the century. During the same period, Josefina and her parents left Sonora to work in the fields or canneries of San Diego, California. When living in San Diego, California, Clarence met Josefina and they were married in 1920. Two years later, my father's mother Pearl Evelyn Garcia, was born in 1922. Clarence had a federal job and Josefina was a housewife raising Pearl and her siblings. By then, Clarence had settled his family in the working-class neighborhood of Watts in the 1930s. (see Figure 7:1)

In the 1940s, Los Angeles was a booming metropolis with ties to military, entertainment and tourism, while in the background, race and class divided the city. Pearl met Louis Moreno and they married in 1941. (see Figure 7:2) Louis was born in El Paso, Texas in 1918 to Tiburcio and Pasuala Moreno both from Mexico. In the same

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<sup>1</sup> Louie Moreno, interviewed by author, Oxnard, CA, 1 Nov 2010.

year, his grandfather Clarence migrated to Oxnard, California, where he opened Los Oasis, a restaurant and motel on the outskirts of city the serving the local military base and the surrounding community.<sup>2</sup>



**Figure 7.1 Garcia's family in Los Angeles, 1936. Courtesy of the Author's Family Collection.**

The Oxnard Plain was booming due to the outbreak of WWII. In the Mexican neighborhood, tension and conflict continued between the police, growers, and Mexicans. This tension could be seen in the way the Oxnard Police Department (OPD) interacted with the overall Mexican working-class community. The OPD was utilized as the enforcer of Oxnard's power structure to keep Mexicans in their place or neighborhoods. A clear example of enforcement occurred on January 31, 1942 in the Meta Street neighborhood, as the police threw tear gas into a crowd of working-class

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<sup>2</sup> Louie Moreno, interview.

Mexicans, who were watching people dancing in the street. The police labeled it a riot and arrested a number of Mexicans for disturbing the peace.<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 7.2 My father's parents in Watts, CA, 1940. Courtesy of the Author's Family Collection.**

In 1943, my father Louie Moreno was born in the Florence District of South Los Angeles but was raised in Watts before entering his own “corridor of migration.” In 1949, my father joined his grandparents in Oxnard, who were living on 6<sup>th</sup> Street in the heart of Meta Street neighborhood. His grandfather, Clarence had become a business owner with many different property holdings throughout the city. In 1951, my father's family

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<sup>3</sup> “Police use tear gas against local crowd,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 2 Feb 1942.

migrated to Santa Barbara, when his grandfather opened up some new businesses in the surrounding area. For the next eight years, my father migrated between Santa Barbara and Oxnard, as his grandfather managed his businesses.<sup>4</sup>

The Oxnard Plain experienced a boom in housing with new tracts spreading across the boundaries of the City of Oxnard during the 1940s and 1950s. Realtors used redlining, blockbusting, and racial steering to exclude the majority of the Mexican working-class community from moving into those new neighborhoods. By 1953, his grandfather moved into the new McMillan Manor housing tract on the outskirts of the city becoming the first Mexican family to buy there.<sup>5</sup> Oddly enough, the McMillan Manor tract had a restrictive covenant, which stated, “that no person of any race, other than the White or Caucasian race shall use or occupy any building or any lot.”<sup>6</sup> Being the only Mexican family living within the McMillan Manor tract, they faced years of discrimination.

Conflicts between the police and Mexicans continued into the 1950s with a number of so-called riots. In 1955, the police responded to a fight off Cooper Road in La Colonia, which sparked a clash between the police and residents. The tension led to a number of residents throwing bottles and spitting & cursing at the police.<sup>7</sup> The police responded by throwing a teargas bomb into the crowd of two hundred residents. In the end, one police car was damaged.

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<sup>4</sup> Louie Moreno, interview.

<sup>5</sup> “McMillan Manor growing fast,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 31 May 1949; Louie Moreno, interview.

<sup>6</sup> McMillan Manor’s Covenants Conditions and Restrictions, 9 May 1949.

<sup>7</sup> “Police quell Colonia riot,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 23 Aug 1955.



The following years, another police riot rocked La Colonia. On August 26, 1956, more than one thousand residents were attending a church bazaar sponsored by the Christ the King Church on Cooper Road. The riot was touched off by the arrest of Richard Madrid, a few blocks away from the bazaar. Again, like the previous riot, tension between the police and residents led to the police being bombarded with rocks, beer cans, and bottles from the crowd. The police responded by launching more than 50 tear gas bombs into the crowd. In its aftermath, several officers and residents were injured and ten individuals were arrested, with five being juveniles. They were charged with disturbing the peace and failure to disperse. Police Chief Carl Hartmeyer stated, “we had to break the riot up and since the mob wouldn’t disperse, we had to use drastic measures. I’ll say this: tear gas is a lot better than shotguns.”<sup>8</sup>

By 1959, my father permanently returned to Oxnard. Like, many other Mexican youth of his generation, my father experienced the criminalization, discrimination, and segregation for just being a Mexican by spending time in and out of *la pinta*.<sup>9</sup> My father was exposed to *el movimiento* in 1966 by providing political artwork for Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO). Two years later, my father joined the Oxnard Brown Berets (OBB). Through the local Brown Berets, he participated in campaigns in efforts to stop police brutality and provide social and educational services within

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<sup>8</sup> “5 men, 5 teenagers arrested in rioting, several injured,” *Oxnard Press-Courier*, 27 Aug 1956.

<sup>9</sup> Louie Moreno, interview.

Oxnard, especially La Colonia. Like other *movimiento* activists, he moved on with life and 1971, he had married Gloria De La Luz Gomez.<sup>10</sup>

## CONCLUSION

As an *ex-pinto*, he earned his living in construction and Gloria was a housewife raising their two sons. Both shared the responsibility of teaching and exposing their sons to a different world, but not to be ashamed of their working-class background. As a self-taught artist, he continued working on his art throughout the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>11</sup> In 1995, my brother and I co-founded a local grassroots organizing committee in the heart of La Colonia. My father joined the committee and again became an active participant *el movimiento* by utilizing his art as his voice against oppression (see Figure 7.3).



Figure 7.3 Reflexion del Chicano, 2008. Courtesy of the Author's Artwork Collection.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Louie Moreno, interview.

In previous chapters, I highlighted the lives of the Mexican working-class community of Oxnard, which includes my own family. As the community confronted the issues of criminalization, discrimination, and segregation, they gained the courage to resist by demanding better wages or calling for an end to police brutality. In closing, I have shared with you an unofficial alternative history of the Oxnard Plain, but it is just a brief introduction to the historical memory of the Mexican working-class community; there are many more stories to be told.

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