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The Depression Decade

The Great Depression was a terrifying worldwide economic collapse that shook the faith of millions of Americans in their government. In 1932 the nation reacted by turning to new political leadership, electing Democrat Franklin Delano Roosevelt as president. Faced with the example of authoritarian states emerging elsewhere in the world, Roosevelt proposed instead a program aimed at preservation of the American system. In an astonishing record of legislation enacted in the first 100 days of his administration, Roosevelt's New Deal changed the role of the federal government in American society. It restructured federal-state relationships, bringing the federal government into the lives of citizens through relief, social security, and federal tax programs. It pumped huge quantities of money into the economy through public works projects, adopted legislation strengthening organized labor, and enacted a program of federal oversight and business regulation designed to prevent another such collapse. The New Deal had such a profound effect on the nation and California that, 75 years later, when an economic collapse rivaling the Depression (and called the "Great Recession") struck, many looked to the New Deal for solutions. The political framework had changed, however, and supermajority vote requirements allowed Republican minorities to prevent Democratic majorities in both Congress and the state legislature from enacting a New Deal-like response to the Great Recession.

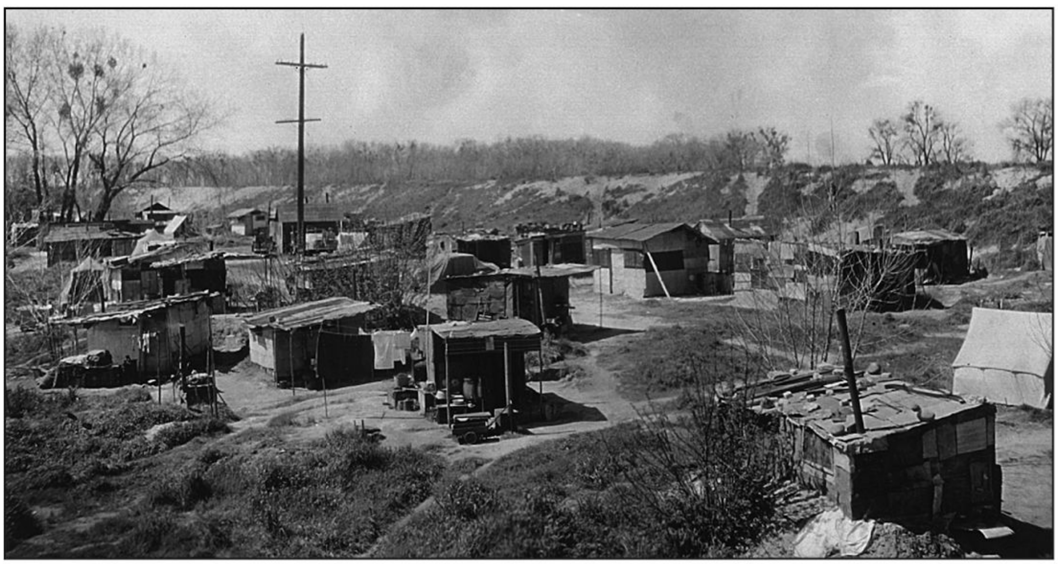
Impacts of the Depression

The good times of the 1920s came to an end with the great stock market crash of October 1929. That blinding flash of disaster started a long, grinding decline of the American economy, the worst business contraction and deflation the world had known. By 1932 national income had declined by 50 percent; per capita production of goods and commodities fell to the rate of 1889; housing construction barely reached 15 percent of the 1929 rate; and nearly 15 million workers, almost a third of the nation's work force, were unemployed. Millions of Americans roamed the country, frightened and perplexed by the calamity.

One of the myths of the Great Depression pictured California as a balmy paradise of orange groves and Hollywood fantasy somehow shielded from the disaster. In reality, modern business and agriculture, the automobile, radio, and hundreds of other connections had so closely tied the state to the rest of the nation that there could be no escape. Moreover, some of California's chief products—specialty crops, tourism, and movies—made the state particularly vulnerable to shrinking incomes.

California therefore felt the full impact of the depression. Its agricultural revenues, $750 million in 1929, fell to $327 million in 1932. Its rural areas were suddenly poverty-stricken. The oil industry produced more oil than it could sell, leading to thousands of layoffs. Developers and real estate firms, construction companies, and savings and loan associations—the high flyers of the 1920s—crumbled, revealing a sad picture of fraud, embezzlement, and other forms of financial chicanery that spelled ruin for thousands. Even the movies, propped up temporarily by the introduction of the "talkies," eventually went down with the other industries, losing millions.

Southern California—with an unusually high percentage of the work force in service occupations, a large number of lower-middle-class white-collar workers, and the highest proportion of elderly people in the nation—was devastated. Southern and Midwestern migrants living on savings and investments were wiped out by the financial crash. Older persons were the first to be unemployed as the region's new manufacturing industries laid off workers. With one-fifth of its population on relief (at $16.20 per month per family) Los Angeles County's public welfare costs increased tenfold. No



Sacramento "Hooverville"

Unemployed workers who had lost their homes lived in shantytowns made of salvaged boxes, boards, tin, and tar paper. Usually called "Hoovervilles" to mock President Hoover's failure to ease the depression, they appeared on the outskirts of most sizable towns. *Courtesy of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.*

wonder city officials welcomed the aid of Aimee Semple McPherson's commissary and her Foursquare Brothers and Sisters. In San Francisco, home of the state's largest corporations, the unemployment rate approached 25 percent in 1932 and remained there for several years. State and local leaders faced huge increases in delinquent taxes and drastic reductions in revenues.

The human toll of the depression was incalculable. Thousands of formerly secure people were reduced to selling apples or pencils on street corners. Some rushed out at street intersections to clean auto windshields, hoping for a tip from the driver. Others just sat in whatever shelter they could find, lived off pitiful relief payments of a few cents a day, and waited, giving a strange kind of stillness to their communities. Those with jobs often worked only two or three days each week at reduced wages, yet frequently supported relatives who had lost jobs and homes. For African Americans, Latina/os, and Asian Americans, massive unemployment meant increased discrimination. Activists like Frances Albrier used local organizations to fight discrimination in hiring, often in alliance with white women's groups. Unions, however, seldom admitted blacks or other minorities. Others, particularly Mexican American women, built self-help organizations to meet the crisis in their own communities.

Under a barrage of front-page newspaper stories covering the nation's economic collapse and the shady dealings of prominent Californians, the people's faith in the business community, Herbert Hoover's business-oriented presidency, and, for some, the whole economic system, was shattered. In the process, a large segment of the voting public was radicalized, ready to consider the most unorthodox proposals for their betterment.

The New Deal in California

The New Deal as it evolved consisted of a mind-boggling array of federal agencies designed to provide relief of the unemployed, recovery of the American economy, and reform of the system that had failed so miserably. Relief was the most urgent problem of the early 1930s. Until the end of his presidency, Herbert Hoover clung to the Republican's belief that the federal government had no responsibility to help individual citizens; the burden of relief, he felt, belonged to state and local agencies. At the local level, California had long provided some forms of aid to the poor. In times of economic crisis the unemployed received aid or were employed by the state in public works projects. As always, private charities and church groups like Sister Aimee's provided relief to the poor.

The depression, however, simply overwhelmed this system, and the number of homeless and unemployed skyrocketed. The state diverted funds to counties and municipalities for relief and to a greatly expanded public works program. In 1931 the state Unemployment Commission was established to coordinate unemployment relief.

Transient and homeless men and women were a major problem in California, far more serious, a 1931 Census Bureau report noted, than in eastern states. Wandering families and unattached men, women, boys, and girls entered the state at a rate approaching 1,000 a day. To aid them, the Unemployment Commission recommended state labor camps, and in 1931–1932 28 forestry camps and two highway camps were established to house and feed transient and homeless men while they cleared firebreaks and built campground facilities and roads in state parks and national forests. But state expenditures for relief and public works soon exhausted the $30 million surplus Governor James Rolph Jr. had inherited. By 1933 he was faced with a $9.5 million deficit. With the nation's financial system foundering and almost all banks shuttered, Californians, like most Americans, looked to their new president for help when he took office in March 1933.

Help came quickly. Roosevelt had none of Hoover's reservations about the role of the federal government in relief; within 100 days of Roosevelt's inauguration, Congress had adopted a wide range of legislation attacking the problems of relief for the unemployed and economic recovery and reform. The Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) provided matching funds to the states for relief, administered in California by a quickly established State Emergency Relief Administration. Opposed to simple handouts, New Dealers instituted a program of work relief through the Civil Works Administration (CWA), which in 1933–1934 employed more than 150,000 Californians building airports, bridges, roads, schools, and other public structures. At the same time, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) took thousands of unmarried, unemployed young men between the ages of 18 and 25 out of cities and put them to work in forest and soil conservation programs, not unlike the state's 1931 forestry camps. By 1935 federal expenditures for relief in California amounted to $285 million.

A new phase of federal relief activity in California began in 1935, when Congress established the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to supersede the FERA and CWA and to concentrate relief in public works projects. For the rest of the decade, hardly a school, post office, city hall, bridge, or road was built without

WPA funds. Through the Federal Writers Project, the WPA engaged unemployed writers and historians in research projects such as producing county histories. The Farm Security Administration put photographers such as Dorothea Lange to work recording the impact of the depression on farm families, creating a priceless heritage of documentary photographs. Working through the Federal Theatre Project, unemployed actors and musicians presented plays and musicals throughout the country, paying special attention to rural communities unused to such fare. And more than 200 Federal Arts Project muralists covered California public buildings with art, a unique style of painting heavily influenced by the Mexican muralist Diego Rivera. Ironically, California's New Deal art expressed a kind of cultural nationalism stressing the strengths of American society and the middle-class values promoted by Roosevelt's New Deal. It was, as one analyst observed, an art form that "affirmed traditional American values in the visual style of a Mexican Marxist."

Large-Scale Public Works

New Dealers saw public works not only as a way to provide unemployment relief but also as a means to promote economic recovery through stimulation of the construction industry. Accordingly, they allocated vast sums of money to large-scale construction projects, often contracted to private industry through a variety of federal agencies. Many important municipal improvement projects, such as Orange County's development of Newport Harbor, were financed by the Public Works Administration (PWA), set up to manage major undertakings. Meanwhile, the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) provided loans for construction of such large projects as the Oakland-San Francisco Bay Bridge. Even these ventures were surpassed by the Bureau of Reclamation's Colorado River and Central Valley projects.

The works comprising the Colorado River Project made it a stupendous enterprise: the world's largest and highest dam at Black Canyon; the world's largest

Dorothea Lange and Florence Thompson

The Photographer and the Migrant Mother

On a rainy March day in 1936, in a farmworkers' camp near Nipomo, Dorothea Lange focused her camera on a woman and several children in their canvas shelter. The images that she produced were among the scores taken for the California Rural Rehabilitation Administration and the hundreds still to come under the federal Farm Security Administration (FSA) program that documented rural America in the 1930s. An established San Francisco photographer recently married to University of California economist and political activist Paul S. Taylor, Lange joined the FSA and, with her husband, toured California taking photographs and writing descriptions, especially of Dust Bowl migrants from the drought-ravaged South and Midwest. At Nipomo, Lange's subject was Florence Thompson, a 32-year-old widow and mother of six, who had just sold her automobile tires in order to feed her children. Frost had destroyed the local pea crop and there was no work for her or hundreds of other pickers.

Dorothea Lange: The Photographer

Dorothea Lange atop automobile in 1936 California. *Farm Security Administration photo by Rondale Partridge. Library of Congress.*

To the public, Thompson became known as the "Migrant Mother," a symbol of the trials of the Great Depression. The title of Lange's photograph could not have been more fitting. For most of the 1930s, Thompson worked as an itinerant farm laborer in California, picking whatever was in season. Years later, she described putting her babies in bags during cotton harvests and carrying them along with her as she picked her way down the rows. She recalled averaging "around 450, 500 [pounds of cotton a day]" and earning 50 cents for every 100 pounds she picked.

After the women's brief encounter, the photographer's reputation soared. Lange earned a Guggenheim fellowship and exhibitions of her work were featured at the New York Museum of Modern Art and elsewhere. But the Migrant Mother herself remained obscure and anonymous, even to Lange. Thompson followed the crops until the 1940s, when she settled in Modesto and gave birth to four more children. To keep her family afloat, Thompson often worked 16 hours a day, seven days a week. "I worked in the hospitals, I tended bar, I worked in the field," she told reporters in 1979, "I done a little bit of everything to make a living for my kids." For a time, the proud woman objected to appearances of the photograph depicting her early poverty, but during the 1970s, widowed again and in poor health, she publicly associated herself with the famous image. She hoped that she might receive some compensation for its repeated use, but as property of the federal government, the photograph was in the public domain and she received no royalties for its use. In 1983, after Thompson had a stroke, her children capitalized on her identity as the iconic Migrant Mother and raised $15,000 to defray her medical bills. Thompson died soon thereafter.

Despite vast differences in their lives, both women made contributions to California. Lange's is tangible: a photographic record, housed in the Library of Congress and the Oakland Museum, documented and influenced a crucial period in state and national history. Thompson's contributions are less immediately apparent: it was her toil, and that of thousands like her, that allowed California agriculture to flourish even in the depths of the Great Depression. (CMT, WAB)

and longest aqueduct, carrying Colorado River water to the Los Angeles basin; and the All-American Canal to the Imperial Valley. The RFC bought more than $200 million worth of Metropolitan Water District (MWD) bonds to finance the aqueduct, and the Bureau of Reclamation financed the rest. The most spectacular of these spectacular works proved to be the great dam on the Colorado. Begun during the presidency of Herbert Hoover, it was initially called Boulder Dam then renamed Hoover Dam in 1947.

Approval of a 1930 contract to sell electricity generated by the dam led Congress to appropriate initial construction funds. In April 1931 the contract for construction was awarded to a syndicate of firms incorporated as the Six Companies, with Henry J. Kaiser as chairman of the board. Frank Crowe, as superintendent of construction, was the driving force of dam construction. The job required enormous facilities: a complete air-conditioned community (Boulder City, Nevada) built near the site to house workers, and four by-pass tunnels, each a mile long and 50 feet in diameter, carved into the canyon walls before the riverbed could be cleared. The dam itself, 660 feet thick at the bottom and 45 feet thick at the top, stood 1,282 feet high. When completed, it created Lake Mead, holding 32 million acre-feet of water. With profits of more than $10 million from building Hoover Dam, the Six Companies moved on to sink the towers for the Golden Gate Bridge, build the Oakland-San Francisco Bay Bridge, and complete the Grand Coulee and Bonneville dams on the Columbia River, before taking on major defense contracts in World War II.

The building of the Golden Gate Bridge was another of the magnificent technological achievements in this age of public works. Financed by Marin and San Francisco county bond issues, the bridge was begun in 1933 and completed in 1937. It was an engineering challenge, given the difficulties of construction in the narrow opening to the Bay, with its swift currents and tides. It was, for a time, the longest suspension bridge in the world. Construction of the Oakland-San Francisco Bay Bridge, built at the same time within the calm confines of the inner Bay, proceeded more quickly and was finished in 1936. San Francisco civic leaders hoped that the two great bridges would revive the city's position as the business and population center of the Bay Area, but ironically they accelerated population dispersal and contributed to San Francisco's relative decline in following years.

Golden Gate Bridge

The Golden Gate Bridge was one of the engineering marvels of the 1930s. Construction of the span claimed the lives of ten workers, despite elaborate safety nets strung beneath. In 1939–40, completion of the Golden Gate Bridge and the San Francisco–Oakland Bay Bridge was celebrated with the Golden Gate International Exposition on Treasure Island. *Courtesy of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.*

The Central Valley Project

New Deal financing finally broke down opposition to another gigantic California undertaking, the Central Valley Project (CVP). As temporary Californian Mark Twain once quipped, "whiskey is for drinking—water is for fighting over." That certainly was true of the San Joaquin/Sacramento River Delta. The region faced serious environmental problems almost immediately, the result of converting tens of thousands of acres of tule marshes into farms, greatly reducing the Delta's capacity to store fresh water and to withstand saltwater intrusion from the San Francisco Bay. Salt water is a greater hazard to the Delta than to other regions. Lying below water level and lacking natural drainage, its soils cannot be easily drained or leached of accumulated salts that stunt or destroy crops.

By the early twentieth century, irrigation, cities, and sugar and petroleum refineries taxed the Delta's freshwater supply. Even more significant were declining flows from upstream. As the San Joaquin and Sacramento valleys boomed, irrigation projects and cities sucked up ever more water, leaving less to find its way to the Delta. San Francisco and Oakland dammed major tributaries of the San Joaquin River and imported their water directly by aqueduct, bypassing the river and the Delta altogether. By 1920, the volume and velocity of Delta rivers declined dramatically, especially during dry summer months, and the mean saltwater line moved steadily eastward. At first it polluted the industrial and municipal supplies of the western Delta, then it threatened Delta irrigation works. Wells began to draw salt water into underground basins. When droughts struck in the 1920s, freshwater slowed to a trickle, and the Delta teetered on the brink of ecological disaster.

Delta water users struck back to defend their water supply in 1915. They joined the city of Antioch in suing to prevent upstream irrigation districts, private land and water companies, and individual irrigators from diverting Sacramento River water further, but upstream interests ignored them. The state supreme court ruled in 1922 that upstream interests had vested rights to river water, that Delta users had no right to the preservation of water quality, and that there was no legal requirement that valuable water be "wasted" to flush the Delta.

During the 1920s, recurrent drought, the likelihood of future water shortages, and Delta water wars finally forced California to adopt comprehensive water planning, but different interests disagreed over solutions. Different regions and economic groups usually pursued narrow interests with little regard for the overall welfare of the environment. To escape litigation and regulation of their water use, Sacramento Valley diverters campaigned for a barrier or dam across the western Delta to keep saltwater out. Some western Delta industries and Bay Area cities supported this plan because it might assure their own water supply, but inner Delta interests strenuously objected that such a barrier would raise water levels and flood their farms and towns. Some scientists predicted that the entire Delta region would become hopelessly polluted if the barrier were built. Delta agricultural interests demanded that California confirm their legal right to enough freshwater flow to hold back saltwater intrusion, and were vigorously opposed by upstream users. Inland shipping and coastal fishing interests joined to fight the saltwater barrier, as it would impede ships and spawning fish bound for the interior. State and federal water experts favored large upstream dams in the northern Sacramento Valley. These dams could store excess winter water, channel it into canals to irrigate the interior, and release it in summer to flush salt from the Delta. This plan was supported most forcefully by the San Joaquin Valley, already facing water shortages and hoping to import water from northern streams and the Delta. Southern California strongly opposed all these schemes. Geographically isolated and developing its own water supply from the Owens Valley and Colorado River, southerners objected to spending state general funds to benefit those living north of the Tehachapis. From the 1920s on, decisions about water provoked bitter controversy.

Years of intensive arguing and study finally led to a water transfer plan in 1931, compiled by state engineer Edward Hyatt. The plan proposed: (1) to build Shasta Dam on the northern Sacramento River to store water for irrigation, flood control, navigation, and Delta flushing; (2) to modify natural channels to carry purer and more abundant Sacramento River water into the San Joaquin portion of the Delta; (3) to install giant pumps to raise water from the southern Delta into gravity canals down the west side of the San Joaquin Valley; and (4) to construct the Contra Costa Conduit to supply the salt-plagued western Delta with fresh water. To placate the inner Delta and Southern California and to improve chances for passage, the costly saltwater barrier was dropped.

The Delta

In this Delta cabbage field, salt encrusts the surface and stunts the plants. *California Department of Water Resources.*

After acrimonious debate, the legislature passed the Central Valley Project bill in 1933. Enemies, particularly Southern California and private power companies that objected to the inexpensive public electricity the project would generate, forced the bill into a referendum later that year. It narrowly passed by a margin of only 35,000 votes. San Franciscans endorsed the measure two to one, while Angelenos rejected it by about the same proportion. By then, however, the deepening depression made state financing unlikely. Luckily for CVP advocates, the most pressing political issue in 1933 was taxation. Lobbyists for the major corporate taxpayers—particularly oil, railroad, and utility interests—were so involved in the taxation issue that they paid scant attention to the Central Valley Project bill, ably promoted by state senator John B. McColl of Redding. Much to their surprise, McColl's bill was adopted that year and signed by the governor. The act authorized a $170 million revenue bond issue to finance the CVP and included provision for public distribution of publicly generated power—an obvious bid to draw New Deal money. To state leaders' relief, in 1935 President Roosevelt and Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes decided to make the CVP a Bureau of Reclamation project. Federal funds were allocated to the Bureau to start work, and two years later Congress assigned the CVP to the Bureau of Reclamation. Construction began in February 1937 and continued into the 1950s. As it stands today, the CVP is one of the most complex and massive water transfer systems ever built.

The chief components of the initial system were Shasta and Keswick dams on the Sacramento River, Friant Dam on the San Joaquin River, and the Delta-Mendota, Friant-Kern, and Madera canals. Shasta Dam at the time of construction was second only to Hoover Dam in size. It impounds the waters of the Sacramento, Pit, and McCloud rivers just north of Redding, creating the four and one-half million acre-foot Lake Shasta. Water from the lake flows south to the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and then is lifted to the huge Delta-Mendota Canal, which carries it 117 miles south into the San Joaquin Valley. Friant Dam impounds the waters of the San Joaquin River east of Fresno for distribution south to the Bakersfield area via the Friant-Kern Canal, and north by the Madera Canal. Well over 700,000 acres of San Joaquin Valley land came under irrigation with construction of this project. Since completion of the initial plan, the waters of other rivers were integrated into the system, bringing many thousands of additional acres into production. For example, the Trinity River, which normally flows to the coast, is impounded by Trinity and Lewiston dams, and most of its waters diverted through tunnels to the Sacramento Valley via the Whiskeytown Dam and Reservoir. Construction of Folsom and Nimbus dams added the American River to the system; construction of the New Melones Dam added the Stanislaus River. Completion of the two and one-half million acre-foot San Luis Reservoir west of Los Banos, which stores winter runoff for release to the west side of the San Joaquin Valley, increased the capacity of the CVP even further.

Although the original state plan had listed saltwater control as a responsibility of the CVP, federal authorization laws failed to mention it. When appealing for support in the late 1930s and early '40s, the federal Bureau of Reclamation promised to release water from Shasta Dam to maintain the Delta's water purity. Once the project was operating, however, the Bureau insisted it had no legal obligation to use Shasta water to maintain Delta water quality beyond what was needed to assure the quality of water exported south. Increasingly, federal and state experts viewed releasing fresh water to flush the Delta and Bay as a waste of valuable resources that could be used to stimulate development elsewhere. The Bureau of Reclamation's position—that as a federal agency it was not bound by state laws, including water standards—was generally upheld by federal courts. In drought years, the CVP refused to cooperate with California to maintain Delta water quality. By the 1950s Delta water rights had eroded still further.

Other controversies accompanied the burst of large-scale New Deal public works. Especially acrimonious was conflict over the distribution of electric power produced by the CVP, and over Bureau of Reclamation policies limiting to 160 acres the amount of land that could be irrigated with federally subsidized water. Nevertheless, the state and federal governments spent hundreds of millions of dollars creating thousands of jobs, relieving the impact of the depression and endearing the New Deal to many Californians.

The Revival of Labor

The Depression and New Deal ushered in a whole new era for organized labor in California, one characterized by a new militancy and radical leadership that eventually overturned the open-shop policies of the 1920s. In 1932 one of four workers in San Francisco and one of three in Los Angeles was out of work. In some fields, such as the building trades, unemployment ran as high as 50 percent. Workers scavenged at restaurants and produce markets, assisted charitable organizations in return for food, or sought public relief. Employers, in contrast, saw layoffs, reduced wages, longer hours, and the "speed-up" as ways to maintain profits and stay in business.

On the waterfront, particularly in San Francisco, these conditions were most troublesome. There employer-controlled "blue-book" unions operated their own closed shops. Hiring was accomplished by the degrading "shape-up," whereby longshoremen assembled each morning on the dock and company-controlled foremen selected men for a day's work, generally picking those who would kick back part of their wages or who were compliant participants in the speed-up. Others might get "casual" work for a day or two per week, in a system that fostered inequality in work distribution and discrimination against pro-union workers.

The adoption of the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) as the New Deal's program for business recovery inspired organized labor to challenge this system. Section 7(a) of the NIRA for the first time guaranteed by law workers' right to organize and to bargain collectively with employers. An unprecedented era of union formation and strikes followed. When the U.S. Supreme Court declared the NIRA unconstitutional in 1935, Congress quickly passed the Wagner Act, which maintained labor's guarantees and established the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to oversee their implementation. Employers, however, refused to comply until court decisions upheld it; they sometimes encouraged defiance of the law even then.

Confrontation in the maritime industry came in 1934. That spring, membership in the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) rose dramatically all along the Pacific Coast from Seattle to San Diego, and its members, in a test of strength, successfully challenged the "blue-book" union on Matson Company docks in San Francisco. Then, joining forces with other maritime unions, the longshoremen demanded shorter hours, higher pay, and an end to the shape-up. They also called for a union-controlled hiring hall and coastwide bargaining. Led by San Francisco's Industrial Association, the shipping companies refused to deal with the union, which they said was in communist hands. Nor would they consider coastwide bargaining or what they called the "un-American" closed shop.

On May 9, 1934, the longshoremen went out on strike. They were joined by unions representing stewards, sailors, masters and mates, marine engineers and firemen. A total of 3,500 men quit work, paralyzing the entire Pacific Coast. In June the Industrial Association negotiated an agreement ending the strike with conservative eastern leaders of the ILA, only to have it voted down by the union rank and file. The strikers then established a Joint Maritime Strike Committee and elected Harry Bridges, the longshoreman who had emerged as the militants' leader, as chairman.

Waterfront employers in San Francisco, determined to reopen the port, forced the issue on July 3, by sending a fleet of trucks from Pier 38 under police escort. A two-day battle ensued, ending on July 5, a day that became known as "Bloody Thursday," with scores injured and two longshoremen dead. That night Governor Frank Merriam sent the National Guard to patrol San Francisco's docks.

Bloody Thursday evoked massive sympathy for the strikers. San Francisco unions voted overwhelmingly for a general strike to protest that day's violence. On July 16 tens of thousands of workers left their jobs, and the city fell silent in a display of labor solidarity that shocked and frightened the rest of California. Four days later the general strike ended when strikers and employers agreed to arbitration of the longshoremen's dispute, and

Harry Bridges

The longshoremen's and general strike of 1934 produced, in Harry Bridges (*leaning forward, center of photo*), one of California's most imaginative and innovative labor leaders. Born in Australia, Bridges migrated to California as a seafarer and became a key figure in the strikes of 1934, expanding the union inland, developing an areawide contract, eliminating racism in union membership, and adapting, in later years, to containerization. Accused of being a Communist Party member, he was harassed for 20 years with efforts to deport him. *Courtesy of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.*

employers agreed to recognize and bargain with maritime unions. On July 31 the maritime strike ended, and on October 12 the National Longshoremen's Board's arbitration decision was handed down.

The decision was a substantial victory for Harry Bridges's longshoremen. It provided for recognition of the ILA as bargaining agent for the workers, and called for coastwide bargaining, jointly operated hiring halls with union-selected dispatchers to guarantee fair work distribution, a six-hour work day, and a substantial wage increase. It did away with the hated shape-up and established the basic structure of a longshoremen hiring system that is still used. By early 1935 the other maritime unions had negotiated their own settlements with employers.

The success of the young militants under Harry Bridges next led them to protect their flanks by organizing the poorly paid, local warehousemen. In what has been called "the march inland" that led to a major strike in 1936–37, Bridges's group brought almost all Bay Area warehousemen into a union affiliated with the ILA. In 1937, they were brought together in the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU) when the ILA broke away from the American Federation of Labor (AFL).

The great maritime and general strikes of 1934 were symbolic of labor's rush to organize. They were also an inspiration to others. Older unions were rejuvenated and new unions sprang up among a host of previously unorganized workers. Union membership in California tripled between 1933 and 1938. But labor on the march was not always invincible and the open shop gave way slowly. In San Francisco the Employers Council, formed in 1938, ultimately replaced the Industrial Association and reasserted the right of employers to bargain collectively. In 1938 the Council negotiated a landmark contract with the ILWU, in which Bridges accepted a multiemployer agreement covering an expanded geographical area. Other unions and employers adopted this concept, and within a short time most Bay Area workers were covered by such contracts. The regional, multiemployer union contract is standard in California today.

The Open Shop in Los Angeles

As might be expected, Los Angeles put up an even stiffer defense of the open shop. When workers flocked to join unions after passage of the NIRA, the Merchants and Manufacturers Association (M&M) and the Los Angeles *Times* swung into action, pressuring employers to resist both unionization and Section 7(a). The M&M mounted a vast propaganda campaign, pouring hundreds of thousands of dollars contributed by local businesses into the effort. It organized Southern Californians, Inc., as a steering committee and formed numerous front organizations such as The Neutral Thousands (note the acronym) and Women of the Pacific as strikebreakers. Its tactics—use of spies, blacklists, tear gas, and toughs—earned it the condemnation of the La Follette Committee, a subcommittee of the U.S. Senate Committee on Education and Labor, for its violations of basic civil rights. The M&M's campaign effectively slowed labor's drive to organize the unorganized, but could not stop it. From 1934 to 1939 unions increased their economic power and successfully eroded the open shop in Southern California until they claimed more than half the Los Angeles work force. In that period the auto, tire, movie, oil refining, and airplane industries were organized, and union membership shot from 33,000 to over 200,000. In July 1939 Los Angeles mayor Fletcher Bowron noted that "even the most conservative manufacturers have come to realize that . . . the effort to maintain the open shop is a lost cause."

Several factors explain the stubbornness of the open shop in Los Angeles. Only one-fifth of the city's total employment was in manufacturing in the 1930s. Also, nearly 68 percent of its work force was in service occupations or unorganized trade industries. Furthermore, Los Angeles was a regional market, with few industries dominated by any one employer. Plus the nature of the state and city economy—dependent on extractive industries such as oil and agriculture and on the businesses associated with them—made organization of those workers especially difficult. Only the stimulus of the New Deal, the development of branch plants in Los Angeles by national corporations accustomed to dealing with unions, and the industrialization of the area when World War II began, finally broke down the city's barriers to unionism.

Conflict within the union movement produced some of the 1930s' agitation and violence. Militant labor leaders such as Harry Bridges fervently believed in organization along industrial lines, while older AFL leaders clung to organization by craft or job task. In 1935 the AFL reluctantly set up the Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO) under the aggressive John L. Lewis, head of the United Mine Workers, to undertake industrial organization. Lewis successfully organized the auto, steel, and rubber industries in bitter campaigns, attracting others to the principle of industry-wide organization. In 1937 the ILWU and several maritime unions affiliated with the CIO. But AFL leaders became increasingly unhappy with CIO political activities and with radical influences in the CIO, several of whose unions had been infiltrated by communists. Attempts to discipline CIO unions finally led to their expulsion and the establishment of an independent Congress of Industrial Organizations in 1938. Consequently, work stoppages in the later 1930s often stemmed from disputes between rival AFL and CIO unions. Nevertheless, as the period closed, employer-employee relations in California had been irrevocably transformed.

Agricultural Labor

No such transformation took place in agriculture, due to the nature of California farming, the composition of its labor force, and successful organization of growers to resist unionization. The NIRA explicitly denied agricultural workers the right to organize and bargain collectively. To appease powerful Southern Democrats who balked at the prospect of unionized tenant farmers, sharecroppers, and maids, New Dealers deliberately excluded farmworkers and domestic workers from the protections of Section 7(a). The fact that California's agricultural workforce in the Depression era was approximately three-fourths Mexican and one-fourth Filipino generated far less public support for farm labor unionization, in contrast to the sympathy Californians showed white industrial workers.

In the 1930s, fear and anxiety about foreigners allegedly taking jobs and welfare benefits from native-born white Americans drove the deportation of over one million Mexican nationals and American citizens of Mexican descent. In California, the program of so-called "voluntary" repatriation saw federal and local officials rounding up Mexican immigrants and their families at parks, hospitals, markets, and other public places, and herding them into vans and trains bound for Mexico. An estimated 400,000 Californians of Mexican ancestry were deported in these raids. During the Depression, the annual rate of Mexican immigration to the United States fell from more than 50,000 to under 8,000.

Forced repatriation of Mexican Americans in the 1930s was supported by agricultural interests due to Mexican participation in efforts to organize farm worker unions and to a number of spontaneous strikes for higher wages. Such activities attracted the attention of the Communist Party, which formed the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL) and entered the agricultural field with the TUUL-affiliated Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union (CAWIU). In 1933–34 CAWIU-led strikes in California accounted for more than half the farm strikes in the nation, and three-fourths of them won wage increases for farm workers. Nearly 15,000 workers were involved in the 1933 San Joaquin Valley cotton strike, making it the largest in the history of American agriculture. Two years later John Steinbeck used the strike as the basis for a short but powerful novel entitled *In Dubious Battle*. Communist leadership provided a convenient excuse for growers to use intimidation and violence in dealing with farm workers, and grower political pressure eventually resulted in the arrest and conviction of CAWIU leaders under the state's criminal syndicalism law. This, along with a shift in Communist Party strategy away from organizing their own unions to infiltrating mainstream unions, destroyed the CAWIU.

Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants dominated most of the successors to CAWIU, sometimes under female leadership. In Southern California, the *Confederación de Uniones de Campesinos y Obreros Mexicanos* (CUCOM) led several successful mid-1930s strikes for higher wages and better working conditions. By 1938 attempts to organize agricultural labor centered on the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA) of the reorganized Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). Initially successful in California, the Dust Bowl migration, grower resistance, and harassment of alleged Communist organizers weakened it after World War II. UCAPAWA, however, was exceptional in successfully organizing both urban and rural Mexican workers, and in its reliance on women leaders, including the dynamic Luisa Moreno, one of its chief organizers. With Josephine Fierro de Bright and others, Moreno cofounded *El Congreso de Pueblos de Habla Española* (Congress of Spanish-Speaking Peoples), a civil rights organization that grew out of the labor movement. Fierro de Bright, another charismatic Latina, brought significant financial support to the Congress through her husband, screenwriter John Bright.

The most important grower organization developed to respond to the strikes of 1933–34 was the Associated Farmers of California (AF). Ostensibly representing growers and processors, but actually a front for a cross-section of California business interests, the AF was financed by contributions from San Francisco's Industrial Association, Southern Californians, Inc., PG&E, Southern Pacific, Holly Sugar Corporation, and the Spreckels Investment Company, among others. From its inception, the AF played a dominant role in suppressing farm labor organization. It formed what amounted to a private vigilante army of men (often deputized by local sheriffs) who protected strikebreakers, disrupted workers' meetings, and attacked pickets. The AF successfully pushed for anti-picketing ordinances in agricultural areas and generally made a deliberate policy of violent resistance to unionization. It was responsible, said the La Follette Committee, for "the most flagrant and

John Steinbeck

Bard of the Long Valley

Signs in Salinas, in the surrounding 100-mile Long Valley, and around Monterey proclaim that "This Is John Steinbeck Country," but it was not always so. Indeed, the author once observed that residents of Salinas, where he was born in 1902, "want no part of me except in a pine box." Time, recognition, and awards—including the 1962 Nobel Prize—altered public opinion before Steinbeck died in 1968.

His youth in the Long Valley profoundly affected Steinbeck's life and career. Work in its fields, packing sheds, and processing plants provided the settings, characters, and sympathies that appeared in some of his finest novels. His parents introduced him to literature and music and, on his ninth birthday, gave him Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. The book engendered a lifelong fascination with the ideas of knighthood, chivalry, and the heroic quest and perhaps confirmed his decision to write. Steinbeck pursued that ambition during his high school and Stanford University years, but without success. He supported himself with odd jobs while he embarked on his own quest, completion of his first book, *Cup of Gold* (1928). Not until the 1935 publication of *Tortilla Flat*, a novel based on *paisano* (country) life on the Monterey Peninsula, did Steinbeck achieve recognition: the annual Commonwealth Club Award for the best book on a California subject. A year later, *In Dubious Battle* captured the same prize.

John Steinbeck

Courtesy of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Despite its social commentary and overtones of the Arthurian legend, *Tortilla Flat* could be read as humor; *In Dubious Battle* could not. It related the bitter, violent, and tragic Depression-era conflict between growers and communist-led farm workers, with little sympathy for growers or their tactics. In the Salinas Valley, it branded Steinbeck as subversive, an opinion apparently confirmed by the Pulitzer Prize-winning narrative of dust-bowl migrants, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). Steinbeck's neighbors condemned his work as "trash" full of "lust, sex, and vile words!" and saw it as a political, moral, and economic threat. Local libraries would not stock his books; his mother could not even give them away.

Passing years and fame apparently heal even the deepest wounds. In 1968 the author's ashes were welcomed back and interred—not in a pine box—in his beloved Long Valley. In the Salinas Victorian home where he spent his boyhood, tourists buy gourmet delicacies, books, and souvenirs, and profits from sales are distributed among local charities serving farmworkers and their families. The Galahad in John Steinbeck would have certainly understood and probably enjoyed the irony. (WAB and PJB) violent infringement of civil liberties." Others labeled AF actions "farm fascism."

Whatever their methods, California growers effectively thwarted organization of farm labor. Even in the late 1930s, when UCAPAWA organizers entered the fields with the support of Governor Culbert Olson, they could not overcome the antiunion climate engendered by the AF and its allies. In this atmosphere, the AFL abandoned efforts to organize California farmworkers.

Depression Politics

The liberal deficit-spending policies of the New Deal were offset by the tight-fisted conservatism of California's Republican governors. While Gov. James Rolph supported the expenditure for relief payments of the $30 million surplus he inherited from Gov. Young, and approved forestry and highway work-relief camps recommended by the State Unemployment Commission, his 1933–35 budget of $258 million was $24 million less than the 1931–33 budget, which did little to relieve depression suffering. Having cultivated a glad-handing "smile with Sunny Jim" political image, Rolph found it difficult to deal seriously with the depression. He offended even his friends by condoning violence against striking farmworkers and, remarkably, by publicly approving the 1933 lynching of two kidnap-murder suspects in San José.

Gov. Rolph died suddenly in June 1934, after embarking on a strenuous reelection campaign against the advice of his doctors. His successor, Lieutenant Governor Frank E. Merriam, seemed to be cut from the same conservative cloth. Merriam would very likely have been replaced by a Democrat that year, had Upton Sinclair not appeared on the political scene.

The Democrats had every reason to expect a return to power in 1934. The Depression had discredited Republican policies; Democratic voter registration had rebounded from a three-to-one disadvantage to equality with Republican voters; and the party itself had come into the hands of leaders with close ties to the immensely popular Roosevelt administration. Instrumental in the Democratic revival was William Gibbs McAdoo, a major figure in national Democratic affairs, who relocated to Southern California in 1922. In 1932, he won the party's nomination for the U.S. Senate and helped switch the California Congressional delegation's allegiance to Roosevelt, assuring the latter's nomination. In the ensuing election Roosevelt won the presidency and McAdoo was elected to the U.S. Senate. Thus the time seemed ripe for the Democrats to win the governorship in 1934.

The party, however, was split north-south. Northerners backed Justus Wardell, a San Francisco magazine publisher, while southerners backed McAdoo's old friend George Creel, a federal relief administrator in California. Both were moderate to conservative Democrats; in supporting them, party leaders ignored the depression's radicalizing of hundreds of thousands of normally moderate middle-class voters. Failure to reckon with this churning, dissident force proved disastrous when Upton Sinclair took up the cause of the desperate with his End Poverty in California (EPIC) program.

Sinclair was a progressive-era muckraker who wrote *The Jungle* and dozens of other controversial books; he was the Socialist party candidate for governor in 1926 and 1930. Far more attuned to the misery caused by the depression than Democratic Party leaders, Sinclair published a pamphlet in 1933 outlining a program of action to end poverty in California, from which the EPIC movement sprang. That fall he changed his registration to Democrat and announced his candidacy for the party's nomination for governor by publishing a book entitled *I, Governor of California and How I Ended Poverty: A True Story of the Future*, in which he set forth his ideas in detail.

Desperate victims of the Depression eagerly embraced EPIC. More than 2,000 California EPIC clubs were formed, and Sinclair's supporters registered over 330,000 new Democrats, among them one former Republican, Edmund G. (Pat) Brown of San Francisco. An almost fanatical fervor imbued their campaign—not surprisingly, since Sinclair's proposals were a radical departure from Democrats' past platforms.

The EPIC program contained many attractive features, including repeal of the sales tax, shifting the burden of taxation to the wealthy and corporations, and a monthly pension of $50 for aged, blind, and needy people aged 60 and over. The most controversial, however, was Sinclair's plan for unemployment relief through a program he called "production-for-use." This scheme called for California to acquire idle factories and agricultural land where the unemployed would be employed in a system of cooperative self-help, with the exchange of goods facilitated by state-issued scrip. A $300 million bond issue would enable California to purchase the necessary properties. The production-for-use proposal appealed to a huge middle class experiencing real poverty for the first time. Their support turned Sinclair's campaign into a crusade that won him the Democratic gubernatorial nomination with more than 52 percent of the vote in a large field of candidates. EPIC-backed Sheridan Downey, a Sacramento lawyer and a spellbinding orator, won the nomination for lieutenant governor, becoming the other half of a team that newspapers dubbed "Uppie and Downey."

Party leaders deserted Sinclair in the general election campaign, influencing President Roosevelt's decision not to endorse Sinclair—a fatal blow to his chances. The campaign itself has been called the most bizarre in California history, its central issue becoming Sinclair himself. For 30 years Sinclair had attacked established social institutions in his writings and, as a socialist, he had consistently denounced the capitalist system. Fearing potential socialist control over California's economy, state business leaders poured millions of dollars into a vicious anti-Sinclair campaign. Political consultants and advertising executives took excerpts from Sinclair's writings out of context to depict him as an atheist, an advocate of free love, and a communist. Cartoonists pictured him as a wild-eyed fanatic. EPIC was renamed "Easy Pickings in California." The movie industry ground out fake "newsreels" showing thousands of the unemployed migrating to California, accusing Sinclair of deliberately attracting hoboes and relief chiselers to the state. Newspaper stories, often fabricated, and editorial cartoons ridiculed the new society envisioned by EPIC. The campaign against Sinclair has been called the first modern "media" campaign, a precursor of politics in the age of television.

In contrast to Sinclair, Gov. Merriam, who had easily won the Republican nomination, projected an image of reason and moderation. Although he had called out the National Guard to deal with the 1934 waterfront strike, he now came out in favor of collective bargaining and a shorter work week; he also let it be known that he would cooperate with Roosevelt's New Deal programs. Leaving the vituperative personal attacks on Sinclair to others, Merriam presented himself as a moderate, pragmatic reformer. These tactics were effective and former Lieutenant Governor Merriam easily won election in his own name. Sinclair retired from politics to write the story of the EPIC campaign in a book titled *I, Candidate for Governor and How I Got Licked*. The EPIC organization disintegrated rapidly, and the Democratic Party began another long struggle to rebuild cohesion and unity.

In retrospect, popular support for Upton Sinclair was a measure of the seriousness of the depression and the structural weakness of the state's post-progressive political system. Merriam's election denied Democrats the state house at a time when Democrats were winning offices nationwide. When California Democrats finally regained power in 1938, the reform impulse had passed.

Merriam's "Pragmatic Conservatism"

Gov. Merriam has long been regarded by historians as a do-nothing conservative who held his state still as the New Deal marched by. But Merriam's conservative rhetoric must be contrasted with his moderate-to-liberal actions. Merriam led California as far into the New Deal as his party would let him, using political skills he had developed in 16 years as assemblyman, assembly speaker, state senator, lieutenant governor, and as chairman of the Republican state central committee.

Calling for "social justice without socialism," Merriam promoted establishment of the State Emergency Relief Administration (which qualified the state for federal relief funds), approved federal takeover of the Central Valley Project, and backed a pension law that brought the state additional federal funds under the Social Security Act of 1935. To finance other social legislation, Merriam unabashedly secured a state income tax, higher taxes on inheritance, banks, and corporations, and a liberalized sales tax that exempted groceries, fuel, and prescription drugs. But opening the state to the grant-in-aid programs of the New Deal was as far as he could go, and after 1937 he generally resisted liberal social legislation.

While Merriam was governor, Democrats sought to recover from the debacle of 1934. Party regulars were in disarray but the "radical" wing coalesced around Culbert Olson, who had been elected as Los Angeles County's state senator in 1934 with EPIC backing and had emerged as the leading proponent of Democratic reform proposals in the legislature. Olson announced his candidacy for governor in September 1937, running on a liberal platform that included a modified production-for-use program, increased welfare and pension payments, progressive taxation, slum clearance, low-cost housing, public ownership of public utilities, and support for organized labor. In a deal of questionable legality, Olson secured the support of labor leaders with a commitment to pardon Tom Mooney as his first act in office. Mooney had spent nearly 22 years in prison, convicted on perjured testimony for San Francisco's 1916 Preparedness Day parade bombing. Labor's support proved decisive and Olson won the Democratic nomination in the 1938 primaries.

Democratic prospects for the general election were excellent. The New Deal was still popular and President Roosevelt endorsed Olson. Democrats were at last united and Olson's "New Deal for California" slogan attracted wide support in both parties. Gov. Merriam, on the other hand, was in deep trouble. His cooperation with the Roosevelt administration had offended

Republican conservatives, and his 1935 proposal to impose liquor, oil, and mineral severance taxes had offended the powerful state business interests whose wholehearted support he required. As expected, Californians elected Olson in November 1938, bringing the twentieth century its first Democratic administration. It was not a Democratic sweep, however, as Republicans regained control of the rural-dominated state senate and reduced the Democratic majority in the assembly.

Utopian Schemes and the Pension Movement

Hard times produced a wide variety of self-help organizations that received financial aid from New Deal agencies. In addition, radical and sometimes utopian schemes to provide for the elderly and unemployed proliferated in Depression-era California. One popular movement was Technocracy, which proposed to replace the existing monetary system with an energy system whose basic units were called "ergs." It attracted wide support in 1932, but collapsed within months. Similarly, the Utopian Society, which offered a vague "new economic order," found favor in 1933 and by 1934 claimed a membership of 500,000. The society's heavy emphasis on social activities led one observer to call it a "colossal Lonesome Club."

In many respects, the social movements of the 1930s substituted economic cults for the religious cults popular in the 1920s; indeed, Upton Sinclair had successfully directed those energies into his political movement. The old-age pension phenomenon was quite different. Of all the movements of the decade, pension plans attracted the widest support and caused the biggest headaches for politicians. By the mid-1930s, observed Jackson Putnam, "it was virtually raining pension plans." While California's 1929 Old Age Security Act was the nation's first mandatory state pension plan, the depth of the depression made it sadly inadequate. Pension requirements (essentially one had to be a propertyless indigent with no support from relatives) seemed degrading, yet a growing number of older people were faced with the prospect of permanent unemployment. Sinclair was one of the first to appeal to this group when he proposed a monthly pension of $50 and a ten-year reduction in the age of eligibility. His primary victory in 1934 was partly the result of older Californians' support, but he probably lost much of that support in the fall election by rejecting the Townsend plan, which by then had become surprisingly popular.

Borrowed from various sources, the Townsend plan was the product of an unsuccessful Long Beach physician and sometime real estate promoter, Francis E. Townsend. In 1934 Townsend, with a realtor named R. Earl Clements, launched the Old Age Revolving Pensions plan. The proposal called for Congress to adopt a national sales tax in order to provide all persons over 60 years of age with a monthly annuity of $200, on the condition that it be spent within the following month. The organization's newspaper, *The Townsend Weekly*, soon had a circulation of more than 100,000. Older Americans flocked to join Townsend clubs across the state and nation, and the Townsend Plan became a factor in national politics from 1934 on. However, when the Townsend Party was formed in 1936 and became involved in right-wing opposition to Roosevelt, the organization went into decline. At the same time, Congressional adoption of the 1935 Social Security Act blunted the plan's appeal.

The most sensational of the pension plans came to be called "Ham and Eggs" when someone at a rally shouted, "We want our ham and eggs!" It began in 1936 as the brainchild of an unscrupulous radio personality and promoter, Robert Noble, who was ousted and replaced in 1937 by the even shadier Allen brothers, Willis and Lawrence. The plan called for the state to issue 30 $1 pieces of scrip every Thursday to all unemployed persons over age 50; the scrip would then circulate like money. Every Thursday a holder of scrip was to put a 2-cent stamp on the back of the scrip dollar. At the end of fifty-two weeks, the state would redeem the scrip for a dollar, thus collecting four cents per scrip dollar to cover the program's administrative expenses. Picking up where Sinclair and Townsend had left off, the Allens by 1938 had gathered more than a million supporters. That year, "Thirty Dollars Every Thursday" qualified as a ballot initiative, becoming an important issue in the general election. Merriam endorsed the plan; Olson equivocated. Narrowly defeated in 1938, a new ballot measure qualified again in 1939. Now Gov. Olson came out against it and helped organize opposition to the measure as economically unsound, causing the measure to lose decisively. The Allens faded from public view, but not before hiring George McLain, an organizational genius who would dominate old-age pension politics for years thereafter.

The Townsend and "Ham and Eggs" movements had much in common: attractive plans, leaders who were skilled propagandists, and autocratic organizations that nevertheless offered supporters important psychological and emotional returns. They played an important role in forging California's elderly into a potent, highly vocal political interest group that put the state in the forefront in programs for senior citizens.

Olson's "New Deal for California"

Democratic expectations were unduly high when Olson took office in January 1939, and his administration proved to be a study in frustration. He failed to achieve passage of almost all of his principal reform proposals and so offended the legislature that it stripped the lieutenant governor of his committee-appointing powers, replaced a pro-Olson assembly speaker with a conservative Democrat, and forced Olson to seek relief funds in driblets from special sessions.

Nevertheless, Gov. Olson had his successes. His pardon of Tom Mooney momentarily made him the most famous governor in the United States. He achieved significant humanitarian reforms in the state's mental-health and parole systems. He vigorously protected civil liberties and minority groups, raised the standards of living conditions for migrant labor, and took satisfaction in the appointment of liberals to numerous judgeships. Ironically, the outbreak of World War II made Olson's reform program essentially irrelevant, and American entry into the war led him to cooperate, against his better judgment, in one of the most tragic events of the period—the 1942 removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans.

The "Okies"

A dramatic change in makeup of California's harvest labor force further undermined efforts to organize farm labor in the 1930s. Between 1935 and 1939 nearly 300,000 Southerners and Midwesterners migrated to California. Most came from the lower Plains states, notably Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri, and Texas, but they were generally dubbed "Okies." A variety of factors accounted for this migration. Years of drought had made their small farms unprofitable, especially when the depression hit. The New Deal Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) that paid farmers not to plant grain or cotton allowed landowners to evict tenant farmers. Mechanization made larger holdings more efficient, eliminating other tenant farmers. The great dust storms of the mid-1930s ruined large areas for farming. Poverty-stricken, "blowed out," and "tractored out," the Okies moved their families west.

California was a logical destination, given the image of the state created by years of boosterism. Moreover, favorable reports from friends and relatives of good wages picking cotton and fruit encouraged the move west and transportation was easy by automobile on Route 66. Like migrants of the 1920s, nearly half settled in metropolitan areas, primarily Los Angeles. The rest, however, turned north to the San Joaquin Valley where they sought work in California's complex, industrialized agricultural system. Ineligible for relief for one year because they were new to the state, they accepted the low wages that Mexican workers would not. In a short time Okies almost completely displaced Mexicans in California fields. When the Okies became eligible for unemployment relief, the state relief administration under Gov. Merriam cut off relief payments if farm work was available, forcing Okies into the relief-harvest labor-relief cycle that had historically subsidized California growers' low wages.

Important distinctions divided the Okies and traditional harvest laborers. As white Anglo-Saxon Protestants who settled in Central Valley towns, sent their children to local schools, and—importantly—registered to vote, their poverty could not be ignored. Living in shocking conditions in tent camps along irrigation ditches, they exposed the exploitation of farm labor in California's peculiar agricultural system and became a highly visible burden in local communities, particularly in the San Joaquin Valley. In 1939 their plight entered the national consciousness with the publication of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and Carey McWilliams's *Factories in the Field*. Unfortunately, the focus on white Dust Bowl migrants rendered invisible the Mexican and Filipino farm laborers who had endured those conditions for years and continued to struggle for survival.

Grower satisfaction with the Okies was short-lived. The flood of migrants in 1937 created an embarrassing oversupply of labor, and the squalor of their camps reflected poorly on the industry. In 1938 it became apparent that the Okies were politically embarrassing as well. They were Democrats, supported Culbert Olson, and displayed firm loyalty to the New Deal. They also disrupted the strong Republican hold on rural communities, a fact that led to the formation of the California Citizen's Association (CCA), which, like the Associated Farmers, fronted for banking, oil, railroad, real estate, and insurance interests allied with agribusiness. The CCA, determined to attack the New Deal and Olson through the migrants, launched a publicity campaign that, as Walter Stein observed, went a long way toward creating a popular view of the Okie in California as a "degenerate, degraded loser in the American struggle for survival." By 1939 the CCA campaign had engendered widespread antagonism toward the migrants and their sympathizers, justifying harassment and discrimination against them. Olson's appointment of Carey McWilliams to head the Division of Immigration and Housing indicated his concern for farmworkers, but it also angered the conservative bloc in the legislature, which began a running battle with the blunt McWilliams. Nonetheless, McWilliams effectively used his position to publicize the shameful conditions of California's migrant farmworkers.

Organized labor might well have expected to capitalize on Okies' disappointment and anger at their treatment. But Okies brought with them such a strong individualism and antiradical patriotism that proletarian rhetoric about collectivism and class struggle was lost on them. When the CIO established UCAPAWA in 1937, it got nowhere with the newcomers. Ironically, the ideologies of the Okies led them to sympathize with farm owners, and they frequently served as strikebreakers. Their arrival impeded the unionization of farmworkers and lowered further an already insufferable standard of living.

In the long run, the inhospitality of Californians contributed to the creation of an "Okie subculture," defined by notions of personal toughness, economic justice, nativism, and Americanism—a group identity reinforced through the lyrics of country music. It was a subculture with considerable political and cultural impact on California, including a militant racism. When World War II nearly quadrupled California's African American population, blacks met resistance everywhere, but it was Okies who found the newest migrants most difficult to accept, leading to tension and violence. Moreover, while nominal Democrats, Okies moved away from California's more liberal Democratic Party, developing the kind of populist conservatism expressed by George Wallace 30 years later.

World War II dramatically ended the poverty of the Depression and altered the Okie experience in California. After 1939 the migrants, joined by 600,000 more Southerners and Midwesterners, drifted rapidly into war industries in urban areas, while an army of Mexicans, the *braceros*, replaced Okies in the fields. Those who remained were better paid and experienced greater acceptance. While the war ended the Depression era in California, the influence of the Okie subculture remained, as the continued popularity of religious radio stations and country music attest.

The Cultural Scene between the Wars

The good times and expanding economy of the 1920s brought increased support for the arts, while the automobile age promoted an orientation toward the outdoors that was reflected in architecture and leisure activities. San Francisco maintained its role as the state's cultural leader in this period. Construction of the de Young Museum in Golden Gate Park and the Palace of the Legion of Honor provided the city with two outstanding art galleries by the mid-1920s. At the same time, plans proceeded for construction of the War Memorial Opera House, completed in 1932 as the nation's first municipal opera house. City taxes supported not only opera but also the excellent San Francisco Symphony, established in 1911. Attracting outstanding conductors such as Alfred Hertz and Pierre Monteux, the symphony earned a reputation as one of the nation's best.

Los Angeles, meanwhile, developed its cultural institutions, despite the fact that many migrants of the 1920s preferred Aimee Semple McPherson to the opera. In 1919 William Andrews Clark Jr. endowed the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, which in 1921 began its famous series of summer "Concerts Under the Stars" in the Hollywood Bowl. The Huntington Library and Art Gallery rapidly became a world-renowned institution, especially with its acquisition of Thomas Gainsborough's painting *Blue Boy*. Establishment of the Otis Art Institute in the home of Harrison Gray Otis and the Chouinard Art Institute gave Los Angeles an important place in the visual arts.

Also significant was the arrival in the 1930s of thousands of European intellectuals fleeing the spread of Hitler's Nazi regime. Bringing "high culture" primarily to Southern California, where many worked in the movie industry, their homes became cultural "salons" for lively discussion. The famous novelist Thomas Mann, playwright Bertold Brecht, composer Arnold Schoenberg, conductors Otto Klemperer and Bruno Walter, as well as numerous well-known artists and actors, were a part of this migration which continued through the war years and contributed immensely to the subsequent "cultural explosion" of that region.

Architecture between the wars reflected and encouraged a trend toward outdoor living, notably in Southern California, where Richard Neutra—like Frank Lloyd Wright a student of Chicago's Louis Sullivan—introduced "functionalism." An Austrian immigrant, Neutra pioneered the "art moderne" style that opened houses to light. Wright and Neutra both subscribed to the concept that "form follows function," and their homes, with extensive use of glass, rock, and split-level design, contributed significantly to the evolution of the modern California ranch-style house.

In northern California "form follows function" was also the creed of Irving F. Morrow, consulting architect on San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge in the mid-1930s. A modernist, considered by many to be radically ahead of his day, Morrow combined beauty with simplicity. For the bridge, he designed functionally graceful arching lamps over the roadway, insisted on a rail with open balusters so motorists and pedestrians could see through to the magnificent view, emphasized the height of the portals by having them diminish in width as they rose upward, and designed a vertical facet motif that he used subtly on piers and braces. Most daring of his innovations was painting the bridge "international orange." Noting that fog made San Francisco gray and colorless much of the year, Morrow criticized local architecture for adding more gray and no color. By choosing a full polychrome beginning with red-orange and culminating in a pure metallic gold on the monumental towers, he created a true "Golden Gate."

Another bright addition to the 1930s was the exuberantly cheerful musical style known as "swing," which Californians helped to launch. When Benny Goodman brought his first "big band" to Los Angeles at the end of an unsuccessful 1935 cross-country tour, Southern California youth gave him such an enthusiastic reception at the Palomar Ballroom that, as one observer noted, "the swing era was born." Goodman became known as the "King of Swing" and in 1936 organized the first integrated big band when he hired black pianist Teddy Wilson and vibraphone player Lionel Hampton. For the next two decades, California hotels and ballrooms were especially popular bookings for the swing bands of Goodman, Glenn Miller, the Dorsey Brothers, Duke Ellington, and others.

Musicians, artists, writers, historians, and actors and actresses were frequently found on the rolls of varied New Deal programs. WPA artists covered the walls of public buildings with murals that are only now attracting the attention they deserve. Dorothea Lange did some of her most powerful work as a photographer for the Farm Security Administration; her photographic documentations of the depression's effect on farm workers became classic works in the world of photography. Popular fiction often reflected the anxieties of the depression years, producing a number of bleak novels such as James M. Cain's *Double Indemnity* and Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*.

Compassion for California's agricultural workers produced equally powerful literature, such as John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, which was quickly made into a successful movie starring Henry Fonda. Carey McWilliams joined Steinbeck in exposing the plight of migrant farmworkers with publication of *Factories in the Field* (1939), a well-researched study of California agriculture. The Colorado-born McWilliams migrated to California and worked for the Los Angeles *Times* in the 1920s, attended law school in his spare hours, and joined a prestigious law firm. But he devoted much of his time to researching and writing on California themes, and most of his works on these topics were published in the 1940s. *North from Mexico* (1949) was a sympathetic account of the difficulties endured by Mexican migrants. *California: The Great Exception* (1946) developed the theme of the uniqueness of the state, while his *Southern California Country* (1949), republished as *Southern California: An Island on the Land* (1973) remains one of the best surveys of that region. McWilliams left the state in 1953 to become editor of *The Nation*. Another side to California's agriculture, ranching and the huge cattle-feeding business, is delightfully captured in Robert Easton's *The Happy Man*, published during the war and reissued in 1993.

Other fine writers made California and the West their themes. University of California professor George R. Stewart published *Ordeal by Hunger* (1936), a gripping account of the Donner party disaster, while at San Francisco State, Walter Van Tilburg Clark was writing *The Ox-Bow Incident*, published in 1940. The San Joaquin Valley was the locale for much of the writing of William Saroyan, whose heartwarming accounts of his boyhood in Fresno's Armenian community appeared in *My Name Is Aram* (1940). Two of Saroyan's best works, *The Time of Your Life* (1939) and *The Human Comedy* (1943), were made into movies. Saroyan's work, especially *The Time of Your Life*, which deals with the foibles of some down-and-out San Francisco waterfront characters, revealed a refreshingly positive view of human nature. In contrast to Saroyan, the era also produced Robinson Jeffers, who took a gloomy view of his fellow man.

Thus the "Roaring '20s" and the Great Depression, two strikingly different decades, produced some of the most moving and contradictory literature in California history. The essential innocence and optimism of Saroyan's view of life generally pervaded the era despite the hardships of the Depression, while the somber view of

Jeffers played a disturbing subdominant theme, warning of the dark destructive side of human nature.

San Francisco's Golden Gate International Exposition of 1939–1940, held on a large man-made island attached to Yerba Buena Island, embodied the optimistic view. Commemorating completion of the Golden Gate and Bay bridges, the "Treasure Island" world's fair dazzled visitors with exhibits of the latest technological developments, including television, and entertained guests with everything from "swing" to opera. Ironically the fair opened under the darkening shadow of war. Upon its closing, Treasure Island became a major facility of the U.S. Navy during World War II.