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# "I Don't Approve of That Way of Running a Family": Transient Children, Institutions, and Interventions in California Through the Great Depression and Dust Bowl

Jairo Marshall

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**"I DON'T APPROVE OF THAT WAY OF RUNNING A  
FAMILY": TRANSIENT CHILDREN, INSTITUTIONS, AND  
INTERVENTIONS IN CALIFORNIA THROUGH THE GREAT  
DEPRESSION AND THE DUST BOWL**

by

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**B.A., HISTORY, STANFORD UNIVERSITY, 2010**

THESIS

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**ABSTRACT**

This thesis studies the state of California's responses to migratory families and children during the Depression and Dust Bowl. In particular, it emphasizes the growth of several state bureaucracies during this time, including the Department of Public Health, the Department of Education, and the Youth Authority. It also engages with local nonprofit relief agencies as well as county agencies, which functioned as direct aid providers to migrants. The efforts to provide relief to migrant families are explained, as are the surrounding rhetorical frameworks used to discuss the perceived negative attributes of migrant children. These discourses influenced administrators, California residents, and other agents, and they responded by creating new programs, such as school lunches, and by reforming old ones, such as the juvenile detention facilities. This work also sheds light on how Progressive ideas interacted with the New Deal state and anti-migrant sentiment to complicate the treatment of transient youths. This account also challenges the Dust Bowl historiographic turn away from histories of the state, arguing instead that understanding the migrant child's experience requires an in-depth analysis of state programs.

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## 1 – Introduction<sup>1</sup>

*“In spite of a certain very vocal group of people in California who can think of no answer to this problem except to send or drive these people back to the state from which they came, the California delegation realizes that the problem cannot be solved in that way. We do believe that every effort should be made by Federal as well as State agencies to discourage, so far as possible, the further movement of large numbers of people into California... We know, nevertheless, that we probably have in the neighborhood of 150,000 to 250,000 more or less floating families in our State who will remain there from now on. And we know that in spite of anything that can be done, more people will come in the future.”*

– California Congressional delegation<sup>2</sup>

The Depression and Dust Bowl were entwined calamities that forced thousands to leave their homes in search of work and opportunity. Many of these transient families saw California as the 'Golden West', and they flocked to it over the course of the thirties. State directors, local officials, and angry residents produced an impetus for action; transients and their children were liable to damage the social and physical fabric of California unless the state engaged with their needs. However, long-standing migrant populations of Mexican and other non-Anglo families were already working and living in California. The waning light of Progressivism and the new welfare state created by the New Deal coalition intersected in several California programs, chief of which was the State Relief Administration, one among many emergency departments built during the Roosevelt years. This particular work seeks to uncover several loci of state intervention and development, particularly through public health, education, and incarceration

1 The title of this thesis comes from an audio recording. Jose Flores, “Interview About the Mexican Family,” From Library of Congress, *Voices From the Dust Bowl: the Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin Migrant Worker Collection, 1940-1941*. MP3.  
<http://memory.loc.gov/afc/afcts/audio/514/5145a1.mp3>

2 “Interstate Migration and its Effect on California,” 1-2, Call no. F3448:129, State Relief Administration Collection, California State Archives. This was a statement prepared by Jerry Voorhis that was sent to Congress and President Roosevelt in the early part of 1939.

measures directed towards migrant children.

The rich currents of reform and reaction found within such agendas sheds new light on long-standing debates about the purpose, existence, and legacy of relief programs during a tumultuous period in American history. These programs did not, and could not, have existed without tapping into a series of competing rhetorical discourses. Officials sought to reform and provide relief to migrants, as proper New Dealers, yet they often grappled with the control aspects of Progressivism, which had trained them that the poor and maligned needed to break old habits and ideologies before truly becoming citizens. This bureaucratic morass swept up migrant children and families, using their plight to fuel a wave of state growth. What ultimately transpired in many cases was a microcosm of this duality. Children received material or mental assistance through state and local programs, necessary to survive the thirties. Stereotypes and hate also heaped themselves onto transient youth, reinforcing tensions between Mexican migrants, 'Okies,' and resident Californians.

### ***Historiography***

Several historiographies intersect in this work, including the vast Dust Bowl and migrant historiography, the narrative of Progressivism and New Deal ideologies in the making of state programs, and the historiography on disease, nutrition, and scientific discourses. To a lesser extent, scholars of education and the carceral state are also in conversation with the history of new state institutions during this time.

The most prominent of these literatures is on the Depression and Dust Bowl as phenomenons that forced the U.S. government to respond. Some men and women, such as Carey McWilliams, Dorothea Lange, and Paul Taylor, wrote concomitantly with the



tragedies. Taylor was an economic anthropologist who argued across a series of essays that workers' subsistence in the Dust Bowl was precarious. In *On the Ground In the Thirties* (a compilation of 1930s articles collected and printed in 1983), Taylor examined the lives of Latino workers and cotton strikes in California during the early 1930s.<sup>3</sup> Taylor's interest in labor and social conflict during the Depression gave insight to his contemporaries and his analysis of race and class presaged later developments by the New Western historians who engaged with the Dust Bowl. Importantly, Taylor was married to and worked alongside Dorothea Lange, a prominent photographer whose pieces are used later in this work. She gave Americans at large a glimpse into the trials and troubles faced by migrants.

Carey McWilliams was another scholar who reported on the mistreatment and enduring poverty of workers during the Depression and Dust Bowl.<sup>4</sup> Taking his cue from Taylor, he argued that workers suffered greatly because of state policies and local mistreatment by greedy farmers. Along with Taylor, McWilliams also took race seriously, noting the marginalization of Latino pickers in the West. Anglo migrants from Kansas and Oklahoma rounded out his analysis. McWilliams and Taylor both argued that the public needed to change their response to migrants, reflecting the immediate political engagement of this historiography.

Walter J. Stein's work on migrants coming into California was the first book on plains migrants to California.<sup>5</sup> He argues that California welcomed migrants until the late 1930s, when a public panic gripped the state. By relegating the anti-migrant sentiment to

3 Paul Taylor, *On the Ground in the Thirties* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1983). Most of Taylor's articles in this collection come from the 1930s, but the reprint attests to the growing popularity of Dust Bowl scholarship in the early 1980s.

4 Carey McWilliams, *Ill Fares the Land* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1942).

5 Walter J. Stein, *California and the Dust Bowl Migration* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1973).

an aberration, Stein's work furthered the older idea that people were generally good-spirited and brotherly during the Depression. His optimistic take on the migration reflects contemporary notions of the state, especially in regards to the high opinion that California held of its own responses to the crisis.

New Western historians have also engaged in work on the Dust Bowl; possibly the best of these works was produced by Donald Worster. His book, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s*, argues about the pervasively negative economics of agriculture and the naïve optimism of rural communities.<sup>6</sup> Worster's work does not examine California's migration in much depth, however. Nevertheless, he deals with the political and social fault lines exposed by the storms, a topic that this thesis also engages with.

Aside from these traditional works on the Dust Bowl itself, many scholars have focused on federal (and to a lesser extent, state) relief during this time, specifically those who have talked about homelessness, relief programs, and the politicized nature of these topics. Books such as *Olson's New Deal for California*, by Robert E. Burke, are invaluable for explaining state relief politics, if a bit outdated.<sup>7</sup> Burke explains the creation of Governor Culbert L. Olson's Democratic cohort between 1938 and 1942. He also details the continued relief efforts in California, and offers brief glimpses into Olson's view of specific problems, including the reform school tragedies I detail at the

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6 Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979). For more on the Dust Bowl on the Plains, see Paul Bonnifield, *The Dust Bowl: Men, Dirt, Depression*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1979). Also see Geoff Cunfer, *On the Great Plains: Agriculture and Environment*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005).

7 Robert E. Burke, *Olson's New Deal for California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953). For a federal perspective on political battles, projects, and rhetoric during the New Deal, also see Jason Scott Smith, *Building New Deal Liberalism: The Political Economy of Public Works, 1933-1956*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

end of chapter four. This work, however, is simplistic in its analysis of the political machinations at work, preferring to valorize Governor Olson.

Among the most useful works on the politics of relief is the book *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare*, by Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward.<sup>8</sup> This is an early text on the development of relief—more specifically, on the ways in which government assistance maintained the low social status of families on relief. Piven and Cloward wanted to “generalize the functions of relief as an institution,” and in doing so they explained the expansion of relief in the 1930s. Their argument is self-consciously aimed against ideas promoted by the historiographic trend which marks the Progressive era and the New Deal as decidedly liberal institutions. In its place, Piven and Cloward explained how government regulation also affected broader conceptions of the American family. Their work took a highly racialized tone, where the minority family could not enjoy the same recognition as the white family, and was firmly placed into the “marginal labor market.” In essence, relief efforts masked a sort of state-sponsored moralizing. My work utilizes some of their language of social control when describing the various rhetorical strategies employed in California. The programs I study did adhere to racial discourses, particularly when Mexican migrants were concerned.

Some scholars were unafraid of combining Dust Bowl history with the political realities of relief or resistance, creating a rich vein of scholarship. The labor historian Cletus Daniel fully explored the human dimensions of the tragedy. Daniel's work, *Bitter Harvest: A History of California Farmworkers, 1870-1941*, analyzed the dark side of

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<sup>8</sup> Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971).

labor in California through the Depression.<sup>9</sup> His objective was to explain how farmworkers lost power in California. He describes the ways in which refugees from the plains entered into a labor market reeling from cotton strikes, race problems, and other disturbances, yet the reforms of the New Deal failed them and ignored them. Daniel, however, gives little credence to the state's social policies, stating that migrants simply suffered, as they had prior to the storms.

While some historians, such as Daniel, wrote about the lived reality of migrants, others emphasized the top-level administrators. Closely related to Piven and Cloward, there are a few works which offer complementary assessments of Progressive and New Deal political culture and ideology. Daniel T. Rodgers' essay on Progressivism has helped make sense of the multiplicity of directions taken by the state.<sup>10</sup> As Rodgers calls it, for some Progressivism was a set of “ideologically fluid, issued-focused coalitions” which advocated their own visions of reform. Others argued for a movement built around social control and “social efficiency.” In the context of my thesis, bureaucrats and professionals appeared to share visions of the “language of social bonds” by targeting 'antisocial' or otherwise negative traits in children. However, in the Depression their efforts were honed by an acute crisis of need, yet state level efforts were in some cases mediated by local obstinance and other contingencies.

9 Cletus E. Daniel, *Bitter Harvest: A History of California Farmworkers, 1870-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981). For similar themes with a geographer's slant, also see Don Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land: Migrant Workers and the California Landscape* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). In this work, Mitchell specifically thanks the work of McWilliams and Daniel, while providing a glimpse at the modernity of the farm labor system in California.

10 Daniel T. Rodgers, “In Search of Progressivism,” *Reviews in American History* 10, No. 4 (Dec. 1982), 113-32. For an interesting example of the linkages between the New Deal and Progressive thought, see an early work by Rexford Tugwell, a prominent member of the New Deal coalition. Rexford Tugwell, “The New Deal: The Progressive Tradition,” *The Western Political Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (Sept. 1950), 390-427.

Few Dust Bowl scholars have specifically studied children, but by the end of the eighties a handful of scholars pursued this angle. Among those that have are Paul Theobald and Ruben Donato, who analyzed education in California.<sup>11</sup> They focused on the nature of schooling for the children of migrants. They argued that Mexican migrant children (and to a lesser extent, Anglo migrant children) were mistreated in California schools. Theobald and Donato asserted that this mistreatment typified nativism in California. James Gregory also talked about families and community during the migration.<sup>12</sup> His seminal book, *American Exodus*, engaged with families, race, class, and culture. He wanted to complicate one popular account of the survival of these families, where “America looked at the Dust Bowl migrants and saw itself: first finding a symbol of Depression-era failure, later an affirmation of success and deliverance.” Instead, Gregory stated that these children were part of creating an 'Okie' culture from scraps of their regional experiences, which bound them together long after the 1930s. Gregory celebrates the folksy Americanism and ruggedness inherent in their culture. Indeed, Gregory's focus on cultural production ultimately helped move the Dust Bowl historiography away from state and institutional histories.

A few scholars also devoted their time to describing the plight of Mexican migrants during the Depression and Dust Bowl. Francisco Balderrama and Raymond Rodriguez, among others, explained the massive deportation and repatriation efforts California undertook during the decade.<sup>13</sup> Their analysis also elaborates on the

11 Paul Theobald and Ruben Donato, “Children of the Harvest: The Schooling of Dust Bowl and Mexican Migrants During the Depression Era,” *Peabody Journal of Education* 67, no. 4 (Summer 1990), 29-45.

12 James N. Gregory, *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

13 Francisco E. Balderrama and Raymond Rodriguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995).

pathologization of Mexican families, a topic that recurs in all my chapters. As Mexicans felt themselves forced out *en masse*, Dust Bowl refugees and other transient whites picked up farm jobs and shared some of the camps with Mexicans.

These works described how families and policies interacted with state programs, but few early works seriously engaged with questions of gender discrimination. Suzanne Mettler's *Dividing Citizens: Gender and Federalism in New Deal Public Policy* offers some historical gender context for relief.<sup>14</sup> Mettler argued that New Deal policy was gendered; men were “endowed with national citizenship” through “standardized, routinized procedures,” while women and other minorities were “subject to policies...which were administered with discretion and variability,” in effect making them dependents of states. She identified her work with the “new institutionalist” approach, which favored an examination of how policy trickles down, how it is administered, and how it is developed. This theoretical approach, Mettler explained, can provide a richer account of how citizenship is disaggregated and rendered into discrete forms. In her account this is done primarily as part of a gendered society, but this tool was also valuable in describing California's state-sponsored programs for young people, as their citizenship is circumscribed by its latent potential and possibility.

Another important work in this field is James Patterson's *America's Struggle Against Poverty in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, where Patterson traces “the preventive impulse” of reform through the early efforts and into the present day.<sup>15</sup> Among the most important

14 Suzanne Mettler, *Dividing Citizens: Gender and Federalism in New Deal Public Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

15 James T. Patterson, *America's Struggle Against Poverty in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000). Also see Kenneth L. Kusmer, *Down and Out, On the Road: The Homeless in American History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), for a detailed history of homelessness, its relationship with labor, the cultural implications of the 'tramp' or 'bindle-stiff,' and an overview of the Federal Transient Service during the Depression.

parts of this work are the explanations of what Progressive reformers sought to accomplish, which included the destruction of “dependency and social tension,” and the creation of a work ethic in the poor. His chapters on the Depression and early relief are also useful within this project, as Patterson explains the rhetoric surrounding poor families and Federal developments such as the WPA, providing national context.

More recently, scholars such as Margot Canaday continued Mettler's scholarship. Canaday described the use of state relief programs to police sexuality.<sup>16</sup> Her chapter on the Federal Transient Program, the Civilian Conservation Corp, mobility, and homosexuality are valuable for explaining how the state intruded into personal lives, particularly when young men and boys were suspected of being sexually deviant. Other books have also connected the New Deal state programs to alterations of gender norms.

By the 1990s a separate, but thriving, vein of cultural history threatened to overtake other analyses of the Dust Bowl migration, made possible in part by Gregory's opus. Scholars such as Charles Shindo, Peter La Chapelle, and Anne Whiston Spirn, among others, all researched the cultural ephemera of the Depression and the creation of 'Okie' culture.<sup>17</sup> However, this cultural turn has left me dissatisfied. As will be demonstrated in this thesis, institutional histories of the Depression and Dust Bowl are

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16 Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). Canaday's work is a useful work for scholars pursuing gender and sex policy in U.S. social policy, and it also touches on the use of state power to regulate 'normality' and citizenship.

17 Charles J. Shindo, *Dust Bowl Migrants in the American Imagination*, (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1997). See also John R. Wunder, Frances W. Kaye, and Vernon Carstensen, eds., *Americans View Their Dust Bowl Experience* (Niwot, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1999). Caroline Henderson, *Letters From the Dust Bowl*, ed. Alvin O. Turner (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001). Brad D. Lookingbill, *Dust Bowl, USA: Depression America and the Ecological Imagination, 1929-1941* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2001). Peter La Chapelle, *Proud to Be an Okie: Cultural Politics, Country Music, and Migration to Southern California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). Anne Whiston Spirn, *Daring to Look: Dorothea Lange's Photographs and Reports From the Field* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

still needed, as some important programs, particularly those dealing with migrant children, have not been analyzed and integrated into the historiography with sufficient detail.

The historiography of nutrition, public health, and science is another vital component of this project. Though a relatively recent historiography, it is invaluable in explaining the scientific developments behind many public health changes during the Depression and Dust Bowl. Books such as Richard Cumming's early work, *The American and His Food*, have been tremendously important in tracing developments in food programs during the Depression.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, his final four chapters on the Depression and WWII are a useful entry point into the national picture of nutrition and food relief. Harvey A. Levenstein's set of books is perhaps the best example of this trend. Together, they explained concerns over malnutrition, connecting them to early concerns about malnourished workers. His book, *Revolution at the Table*, also offers relevant data on the growth of nutritional science between World War I and the Depression, setting up several of the scientific developments found in chapter two of this thesis.<sup>19</sup> His second work, a follow-up, continues through the Depression, explains the multiple meanings ascribed to the "Newer Nutrition," and studies food shortages in the U.S.<sup>20</sup> Rima Apple is another scholar in this growing field. Her analysis of the growth of the vitamin industry has been

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18 Richard Osborn Cummings, *The American and His Food* (New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1970). This is a reprint of a work first published in the early 1940s, making Cummings a contemporary reporter of many events that I will document.

19 Harvey A. Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table: The Transformation of the American Diet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). In one chapter on malnutrition during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Levenstein analyzed the New Nutritionists and their public health approaches to family nutritional needs. These insights help anchor my study, and developments during this time undoubtedly influenced some of the reformers I will examine.

20 Harvey A. Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).



useful in explaining the growing importance of nutrition science during this time.<sup>21</sup> For those interested in how nutrition science engaged with both public health and private health, Apple's work on the production of scientific knowledge and the rise of pharmaceutical business is fascinating.

Public health is yet another component of this work. For an example of resistance to public health mandates affecting the poor, see chapter four of Howard Markel's *When Germs Travel*.<sup>22</sup> In this piece, Markel recounts the tale of border riots in El Paso, conducted in response to anti-typhus measures put in place by the U.S. Public Health Service. The riots were led by Mexican women who migrated north to work in the U.S. every day. Some information on public health systems during the Depression has also been gleaned from Johanna Schoen's work on the use of sterilization (a topic I briefly examine in chapter 4), and specifics on California's system came from Nayan Shah, who studied Chinatown quarantines during the turn of the century.<sup>23</sup> I largely agree with their explanations of public health developments, and see clear links between this modern work and the work of earlier scholars such as Piven and Cloward or Rodgers.

Another relevant work in food sciences been Susan Levine's recent analysis of school lunch in the United States.<sup>24</sup> Helpfully, Levine also engages with the political nature of relief via school lunch. In particular, her work emphasized the state's use of

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21 Rima D. Apple, *Vitamina: Vitamins in American Culture* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996).

22 Howard Markel, *How Germs Travel: Six Major Epidemics That Have Invaded America and the Fears They Have Unleashed* (New York: Random House, 2004).

23 Johanna Schoen, *Choice & Coercion: Birth Control, Sterilization, and Abortion in Public Health and Welfare* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005). Also see Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

24 Susan Levine, *School Lunch Politics: The Surprising History of America's Favorite Welfare Program* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

food programs as a dual relief effort (for farmers and for schoolchildren). She deftly analyzes this debate and the “institutionalization of school lunch” during World War II, where a successful political coalition, built on the success of such food programs in every state, expanded lunch funding.

There is renewed interest in the sorts of questions that I pose regarding Progressivism, state bureaucracies, and children. For those interested in how the coercive functions of the state intersected with mental hygiene and eugenics, see Miroslava Chavez-Garcia's recent book, *States of Delinquency*.<sup>25</sup> Here, she connects the reform discourses I engage with to eugenics, racial pathology, and the personalities of individuals involved in the juvenile incarceration systems. She also engages with the suicides at Whittier school and expands on the sorts of abuses present within its walls, as well as briefly explains inmate resistance to state power, similar to my work at the end of chapter four. Many of these authors grappled with the growth of public health through the interwar period, and these various threads have been woven into the analysis of public health and health measures within schools or reformatories.

### ***Definitions, Background, and Categories***

Before continuing into the heart of the work, it is important to explain the migrant presence in California, and the state's methods of intervention.<sup>26</sup> What was transpiring on the ground in California from the late 1920s until the early 1940s? Mexicans, the Japanese, and other non-Anglo other immigrant labor groups had been moving up and

25 Miroslava Chavez-Garcia, *States of Delinquency: Race and Science in the Making of California's Juvenile Justice System* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

26 Dorothea Lange, “Drought refugees in California migrant camp,” November 1936. From the Library of Congress, *Prints and Photographs Online Catalog*.  
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000000792/PP/>

down through the agricultural valleys of California since the decline of Chinese labor in the early twentieth century.<sup>27</sup> They did not enter California in significant numbers during the Depression, but they were caught by the crisis just the same. Mexicans in particular were swept up by a tide of deportations, as described earlier. As Balderrama and Rodriguez attest, nearly one-third of the Mexican population of the U.S. was “shipped to Mexico” during the Depression, destroying not only settled communities but also removing many migrant workers from California.<sup>28</sup>

Transient populations had passed through California since the start of the Depression in 1929, but the drought, crop failure, and dust storms of 1934-1936 produced a new, massive migration from the Central Plains states.<sup>29</sup> Citizens of California learned about the migrant 'problem' in a number of ways. Those who lived in agricultural regions such as the Imperial, Salinas, and San Joaquin Valleys knew it firsthand from the rickety vehicles, roadside camps, and migrants looking for work in their communities. People living in urban areas or in other states read about the refugees in newspapers, books, and reports. Local counties and private agencies alternately helped and harassed the migrants, but Californians quickly recognized that the number of migrants would require larger state machinery. These local attitudes prefaced statewide developments in public health, education, and juvenile reform.

27 Cletus E. Daniel, *Bitter Harvest: A History of California Farmworkers*, 62-65. For those interested in the origins of these migrants, Daniel offers a scintillating look at California farmers and their “search for a peasantry” to supplant the Chinese. He also notes that many transient whites were pickers as well, although they would only grow in visibility during the Depression proper.

28 Balderrama and Rodriguez, *Decade of Betrayal*, 222.

29 State Relief Administration Dept. of Special Surveys and Studies, *Transients in California* (Sacramento: CSPO, 1936), 4-5. This reported that California had received “no help from the Federal government in meeting the problem [of transients] before 1933.” On an unrelated note, I use in this thesis the name 'State Relief Administration' or SRA instead of the variable State Emergency Relief Administration, its original name. Some documents refer to the former, some to the latter, but for consistency I stick to SRA.

California experienced massive population shifts during the Depression and Dust Bowl years. In the 1930 Census, California had roughly 5.7 million inhabitants, but by 1940 its population had grown to nearly 7 million, with much of the growth concentrated in the agricultural regions where migrant laborers flocked. In the Central Valley, Kern County grew from 82,000 to nearly 135,000 residents in ten years. Tulare County also increased from 77,000 to 107,000 people. The only major agricultural region to lose population during these years was Imperial County.<sup>30</sup> Some contemporaries attempted to quantify the racial makeup of the migratory laborers they encountered among the orchards and fields. One such survey concluded that, in the San Joaquin Valley, roughly eighty-five percent of the families were whites, with another eleven percent were Mexican, and the other five percent was likely made up of Filipino, Japanese, and African American families.<sup>31</sup> The Dust Bowl migration was also the first of several population shifts over the course of the twentieth century, as historian James Gregory noted. He compiled a table of “Western South natives” living in California. His findings are that by between 1920 and 1930, roughly 243,000 individuals from Texas, Arkansas, Kansas, and Oklahoma had relocated to California. Additionally, during the thirties another 315,000 people moved into the state, most as a result of the Depression and/or Dust Bowl. Thus, they represented about 12.9% of California's total population by 1940.<sup>32</sup> Taken

30 United States Bureau of the Census, “Population of Counties by Decennial Census: 1900 to 1990.” <http://www.census.gov/population/cencounts/ca190090.txt>. In fact, only San Francisco, Colusa, and Imperial Counties lost population between these censuses. All other counties experienced growth. The most rapidly growing region, aside from the southern Central Valley, was San Diego County, which changed from 209,000 to 289,000 people.

31 See Appendix A for the full table. These survey numbers must be taken with a grain of salt, as the sample size of 407 families is quite small, and the percentage of Mexican to white families changes while examining the southern counties. This count also excluded, for the most part, those migrants who were closer to urban areas.

32 Gregory, *American Exodus*, 6. When I state that this migration was larger than just the 1930s, I am relying on Gregory's data set which indicates how these Western South individuals still accounted for more than 8 percent of California's population by 1970. At that point, 1,747,000 people originating in

altogether, the migration into California staggered many contemporary observers with its sheer numbers.

The state of California, as part of the emerging relief bureaucracy, set up a number of special studies to analyze the severity of the migrant problem—these were integral in shaping the state's official responses. Perhaps the most comprehensive of these studies was the one supervised by M. H. Lewis, director of Special Surveys and Studies for the state, and Alma Holzschuh, his contact for the project. Their project, conducted over 1935 and 1936, sought to explain “the extent of the transient problem in California... to determine how the communities were meeting the problem,” and to solve those problems. The state felt an onus during the Dust Bowl because federal help fragmented and weakened in the aftermath of the closing of the Federal Transient Service.<sup>33</sup> This service, referred to throughout the work, operated a number of facilities throughout California for the first half of the thirties, including “Transient Family Bureaus located in thirteen cities, sixteen shelters for men and forty-three camps for men and boys,” and helped run “twenty-six state camps, financed in part by [California].”<sup>34</sup> As that service ended, migrants wound up in informal camps, known as jungles. The state of California and Federal agents re-established camps by the late 1930s, as Dust Bowlers kept coming; these are the camps made infamous by men such as John Steinbeck, and these were also the camps where many administrators sought to control and manage migrant disease, nutrition, and education. The bureaucratic response to these men, women, and children, such as the aforementioned survey, became a key component of the story. The people

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this region lived in California.

33 State Relief Administration, *Transients in California*, foreword. The report was necessitated by the “shutdown of the Federal Transient Service” which had previously kept track of migrants.

34 *Ibid.*, 3-4.

compiling the study did not merely report data; they in fact built the narrative of migration that became influential among lawmakers, bureaucrats, and officials.

Two categorizations are particularly relevant. Lewis provided a definition of the migrant versus the resident. This defined both legal status and the opportunity to receive state relief. Curiously, the report writers noted that “when in need of relief migratory workers and all other transients merge into one class, the non-resident.” Nevertheless, the authors of this survey sought to delineate migrant status, dividing this group of people up into categories such as “state homeless,” “state transients,” and “federal transients.” Such categories determined the type of aid families or individuals could receive through state institutions.<sup>35</sup> This structured approach to aid also reflected resident opinions attached to the different groups—resident homeless families were treated much better than foreign-born transients or than out-of-state migrants. These categories were subject to change as the Depression and Dust Bowl wore on. In general, local or state agencies were early on reluctant to provide large amounts of relief to federal transients, giving most of their funding to in-state transients. Children and families, however, were provided with more robust support than were single men. There was another *de facto* category; if you were a Mexican, African American, or other non-Anglo migrant, you would receive less assistance as a matter of course. Officials in the Social Service Division of the State Relief Administration sent these and other categorizations to local administrators. In their regulations, families and unattached women were supposed to be sent back to their legal place of residence, unless they lacked a residence, in which case they were “accepted for care by local State Relief Administration units.” The state's

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., foreword. Children, as will be shown, often traveled apart from their families. Nevertheless, their residence “follows that of [their] father.”

approach to the migrant problem should be similar to those familiar with other Progressive and New Deal responses to social problems; bureaucrats sought to quantify, categorize, and parse people so that state apparatuses could 'treat' the problem.

Importantly, the state also provided several definitions of who it considered a minor. A few examples point out popular conceptions. The Unemployment Reserves Commission of California noted in its minutes that a “little girl” was picking hops—this girl was 18.<sup>36</sup> The SSD also pointed out their age category when arguing that “boys (16 to 21 years old)” were to be transported back to their legal residence unless they were “habitual transient[s]” or had already been sent home under this regulation.<sup>37</sup> Use of 'girl' or 'boy' as shorthand for teenagers was quite common in the 1930s. The cultural notions which complicate this definition of childhood are varied; in many instances older youths were treated as adults for the purposes of work, and in other cases underage boys and girls lied about their age so they could continue traveling. In the following chapters, the terms 'child' and 'youth' will be used interchangeably, with the term 'teenager' used for those children where ages are provided by the sources. In most sources these distinctions were clear and unproblematic. In cases where the state is aggregating individuals, the term 'children' or 'youths' will suffice for representing what is in reality a broad age range.

There is one other relevant definition to be made for this work. The pre-Depression migrants, most of whom were non-Anglo, had well-established migration patterns, and it was clear to contemporary white Californians that they were not truly

36 Meeting Minutes, Aug. 1937, Call no. F3606:1-10, Unemployment Reserves Commission, Department of Employment, California State Archives. Though not an official statement regarding eligibility, it is clear from the sources that females typically considered adults in the modern day were often treated as minors in this time.

37 State Relief Administration, *Transients in California*, Appendix A, Social Service Division Bulletin No. 59, 2-3. They also noted that unemployable families received aid equivalent to what the local County Welfare Department provided, instead of the same relief that resident families received.

residents who deserved aid (the repatriation to Mexico of even Mexican-Americans functions as proof of this attitude). Prior to the Depression, these families were often considered part of the natural order, as Californian farmers relied on this crop of “migratory workers.” A handful of long-term homeless whites also traveled through California during the twenties, but they rarely had families in tow. Depression and Dust Bowl migrants primarily came from other states into California for the purposes of work or relief, and they brought their children with them. In state literature they were called transients, migrants, migratory laborers, 'Okies,' refugees, non-residents, and a host of other names. For simplicity's sake, this variety had been condensed into the terms migrant and transient, which will be used as synonyms in this work. Both imply a high level of personal mobility as well as the notion that such individuals came from 'somewhere else.' In a few cases, difficult to define, transient youths or families traveled from one part of California to another. These people had easier access to services, but in general their treatment was sufficiently similar that they properly belong to the already-established framework.

### ***Chapter Outline***

Each chapter in this work will elaborate on a state project, the rhetoric surrounding it, and its creations. This thesis will not cover the genesis of such projects if they originated prior to the late 1920s, as the meat of the analysis focuses on the years 1929 to 1941. Nevertheless, if projects continue across that spectrum an effort will be made to include their spread. There is a rough chronology at work, although many of the programs or problems at hand were dispersed widely across California, so thematic relevance is prioritized. Specific dates, if not present in the text, are provided in the



footnotes. In creating such a large project, representative samples have been employed where data would otherwise be unwieldy or impossible. For instance, in explaining the rhetoric used against migrant children, samples have been culled from a variety of sources in order to emphasize the arguments shared across locality or viewpoint.

Chapter two will focus on the health of transient families, particularly those coming as refugees from the Dust Bowl states of Oklahoma, Kansas, Texas, and elsewhere. All migrants presented public health challenges, and locals appealed to the state Department of Public Health for aid. Migrant children were particularly susceptible to malnutrition and could spread a host of contagious diseases to residents. Responding to these issues and sensing an opportunity to grow, state and local public health officials expanded their operations, creating schools for the training of health officers, expanding the County system, printing health information, and utilizing the latest in medical science. Such expansions would greatly alleviate the health problems of migrant families.

Chapter three continues several of the themes present in chapter two, including the growth of state bureaucracies due to the Dust Bowl and the negative rhetoric surrounding migrant children. However, this chapter centers instead on education of transient children. It begins with the brief story of the Migratory Schools, designed to educate Mexican children and maintain a segregated school system. Next, this chapter deals with the Dust Bowl's impact on local districts, and their attempts to accommodate massive numbers of new children. In receiving migrants, locals propagated a backlash to caring for them, and a subsequent propaganda effort tried to convince the nation that California was doing its best to care for transient youths. During this time, the

Department of Education sought to create a robust educative program for transient youth by allying with other local and federal agencies. Echoing chapter one, this chapter also elaborates on California's semi-integration of public health and education within the public school system.

The last part, chapter four, will follow these threads by using the carceral functions of the state as a focus. It starts with those children who traveled alone or without their biological family, who were targeted by state officials for care. As these children were picked up by police, they found themselves in a variety of agencies, including the Detention Homes and nonprofits such as the Salvation Army. Most residents, and especially those Progressive bureaucrats in charge of the reform schools, found many aspects of transient life problematic for children. In order to fix their work ethic, criminal behavior, burgeoning radicalism, and other ills, the state placed the most egregious offenders into the reform schools. Within a discourse of reform, migrant and other children were forcibly rehabilitated. For non-Anglo migrant children, these schools were a harrowing experience, and personal tragedies would ultimately create new departments such as the Youth Authority.

In the conclusion, the various components of state expansion during the Depression and Dust Bowl will be treated as outgrowths of Progressive ideologies and the New Deal state. This section will also explain, in brief, the continuation of some of these programs, and what that might mean for the narratives of state institutions, the Dust Bowl migration, and the imposition of paternalism into the lives of children.<sup>38</sup>

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38 Map of California with Counties and Major Cities. Courtesy of Geology.com, accessed at <http://geology.com/county-map/california.shtml>. This thesis will discuss in detail locations within the state of California. For ease of reference, see this map.



## 2 – Children of Dirt: Hygiene, Nutrition, and Contagion Among Migrant Families

*“Repeatedly people write me to find out whether or not the dust storms which spread over the southwestern portions of the United States in recent years have done immense damage to health. There are said to be two new diseases called dust pneumonia and dust on the intestines. It has been said that the dust interferes with childbirth, that the children when born die young, and that wild animals and birds have disappeared from the so-called dust bowl area.”*

– Dr. Morris Fishbein<sup>1</sup>

When children moved through California during the Depression, clouds of blight followed them. Transients suffered two maladies—they felt the sting of public perception at the same time that illnesses took root in their bodies. In general, state officials and locals considered migrants to be dirty and diseased; their children were no exceptions. These children and families were represented as a plague descending upon residents. Also particular to transient children was the threat of malnutrition, which was also treated through public health systems. The broad variety of attitudes towards migrants was remarkable—some people reacted with compassionate paternalism, others with disgust, and still others helped migrants out of self-preservation. Local groups, county health officers, and the state Department of Public Health all engaged in the creation of a modern public health system in California, which successfully treated the maladies of youth but in the process reinforced negative perceptions of poor migrants. This chapter ultimately situates California's public health responses to Depression-era migrant children within a series of discourses, which included the 'New Nutrition', anti-

1 Morris Fishbein, “Dust Storms Effects on the Health Disclosed in State Report,” *Coshocton (Ohio) Tribune*, 20 Oct. 1938, 12. Dr. Fishbein was also “editor of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, and *Hygeia*, the Health Magazine.” His article pointed out that many people had misconceptions regarding the dust storms and their effect on health. Nevertheless, the Dust Bowl would prove a challenge to public health officials, especially those in California.

migrant sentiments channeled through contagion rhetoric, and the growth of state and scientific oversight of public health.

### ***Nutrition Science and Early Developments***

Public health initiatives in California developed during the Depression and Dust Bowl as a response to the unsanitary and unhealthy conditions in transient camps, the influx of poor people to County Hospitals, and the demands of locals. The state used nutritional science to target malnutrition among poor families. These processes began in the early 1930s with Depression-era homeless people, and would be furthered by the needs of Dust Bowl migrants. Federal funding assisted California during the early years of the Depression, with the state receiving over nine million dollars in Federal grants between 1933 and 1936. However, this amount was rapidly depleted by state agencies, the Federal Transient Service, and dispensations to counties, as they grappled with massive numbers of transient families (see following figure for a monthly breakdown of transients under care).<sup>2</sup> The state had no choice but to efficiently use its resources.

*Figure 2: Mid-Monthly Census of Federal Transients Under Care of FTS or SRA in California<sup>3</sup>*

<b>Month</b>	<b>Unattached (Total Individuals)</b>	<b>Families (Total Individuals)</b>
February 1934	8702	7796
March	9380	9040
April	8376	11135
May	7173	11412
June	7717	11473

2 State Relief Administration, *Transients in California*, 21-31. Much of this money was funneled through the Federal Transient Program or the State Relief Administration; these agencies applied it towards transportation, camp care, allowances, and food.

3 Ibid., 31. These numbers in fact are a prelude to even larger numbers, as 1935 was the early wave of refugees. In addition, these numbers skew higher for families because they are a monthly sample of who was currently in care. The numbers for unattached are much higher as running totals instead of as a current census.

July	8045	11833
August	7874	11570
September	8801	12491
October	10894	13880
November	12537	16000
December	14199	18194
January 1935	14713	20721
February	15506	23309
March	14030	24360
April	12696	24965
May	9951	24438
June	8369	22748
July	9060	21605
August	8785	22138
September	4906	14959
October	2481	10490
November	1891	7102
December	1495	5730
January 1936	1184	6313
February	1041	5577
March	703	4849
April	489	3539
May	489	3185

*Figure 2 [cont.]*

In calculating the needs of the state, the State Relief Administration commissioned reports on the subject and created a set of diet recommendations for public officials. In producing data-driven reports on nutrition, the state was engaging in the development of a new science. 'Newer Nutrition' developed pedagogical and public importance during this time period. As historian Rima Apple noted, laboratories rapidly isolated and cataloged new vitamins during the 1920s and 1930s, and did so in light of the food

problems present during the Great Depression.<sup>4</sup> A handful of nutritionists dedicated themselves to the creation of nutritional bureaucracy. The scientist Dr. Ruth Okey became the primary agent for California's informational assault against malnutrition.

California's Depression-era migrant experience taught bureaucrats that scientific knowledge could counteract malnutrition, so they devised a series of studies, state recommendations, and health practices for social service agencies to follow. Okey was officially the Nutrition Advisor for the SRA when she published her findings for the state in a lengthy 1933 report. Inside this report, Okey and her co-author described the food needs for men, women, and children in every developmental category. Reflecting opinions of their time, Okey and Frances Taylor broke their analysis up by race—Anglos received particular allotments of food, and Mexicans were provided a different allotment. The primary difference between the two was that Mexican families 'needed' no fresh milk, no cereal, and less meat, while instead eating more cornmeal and beans.<sup>5</sup> Aside from these differences, the report neatly spelled out the vitamin needs of families and packaged information so that officials providing meals or bulk food could properly distribute, given their limited resources.

In order to combat malnutrition, the state also attempted to understand why so many children were underfed. The SRA noted in official documents that there were four major causes of malnutrition among children. In many cases, children had too little food to meet caloric or nutritional guidelines. In other cases, the children had digestive troubles. Many other children, the state wryly noted, were too picky and refused to eat

<sup>4</sup> Apple, *Vitamina*, 4-7.

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Ruth Okey and Frances Taylor, "Nutrition and Dietary Data," 1933, Call no. F3448: 25, Social & County Administration, State Relief Administration Collection, California State Archives.

foods they needed. Lastly, families often fed their children “the wrong foods” and thus undermined their growth.<sup>6</sup> One concurrent publication in a California medical journal analyzed these problems among children in Oakland and Berkeley, finding that mothers needed education to adjust the negative behaviors associated with “finicky” or resistant children. The doctor publishing this report also concluded that children who were picky often had other “undesirable behavior[s],” connecting nutritional sciences to mental and social development.<sup>7</sup> In order to fix these problems, the state had a few recommendations compiled and published as a memo. For children who had too little food, they needed to eat more, especially foods with vitamin B, which included “wheat germ, rice polish, whole wheat cereals... and yeast,” along with helpings of tomato and orange juice. This memo also recommended multiple small meals, especially for those children who ate too little during their regular meals. Reduced cooking times for vegetables were also seen as an effective antidote to digestive troubles, unless the child had an intestinal parasite or other ailment, in which case the state recommended medical treatment. The SRA recommended that mothers and fathers deal with “picky children” in a “business like” manner, where the child understood that food placed before them needed to be eaten. This memo essentially modified Okey's Standard Food Budgets already in place, affording to malnourished children the extra foods they required.<sup>8</sup> In addition to this sort

6 “Malnourished and Underfed Children,” 2 July 1934, Call no. F3448:25, State Relief Administration Social & County Administration, State Relief Administration Collection, California State Archives.

7 Herbert R. Stolz, “Resistance to Eating Among Preschool Children,” *Cal West Med* 40, no. 3 (Mar. 1934), 159-163. He also suggested that education level of the mother did not play a significant role in eating habits of the child, but Stolz did see a slight connection between “nervous instability” of the mother and the orneriness of the young children.

8 “Malnourished and Underfed Children.” Such children were, in theory, provided with an extra 10% allowance by the SRA, although it is unclear how often that was followed. Also interesting in retrospect was the claim that children usually enjoyed cod liver oil as a supplement. Modern people may call this particular claim into question.



of information, the state also sent out a notice explaining how to cook vegetables in order to retain their nutrients.

How did migrants receive food through the state? Administrators of the Federal Transient Service developed three methods for feeding migrant families during its brief existence. Typically, camps and shelters conducted “congregate feeding” or provided vouchers for restaurants, but for many families, such those treated by the SRA in California, agencies provided “grocery orders” or otherwise distributed food at their centers of operation.<sup>9</sup> In addition, local agencies (working with the SRA or County Welfare Department) often provided food directly to children in order to counteract their health problems. Sometimes they ate at local hospitals, as one group of twelve-year-olds without families did in Stockton. State agents knew this situation needed stabilization, as aid situation among local agencies was often uneven, with groups like the Young Men's Christian Association and the Martha Washington Club taking care of very few boys or girls, respectively.<sup>10</sup> In any case, social service providers understood that food relief came first for transient children. Californian cities provided food to migrant families or solo children through various agencies. The state then directed migrant families, either at a camp or using their own provisions, in the proper means of food preparation.

Bureaucrats at the SRA wanted to ensure that families on relief, who received many staples in their food budgets, were obtaining the maximum amount of nutrition possible by not obliterating vitamins during cooking. In one lengthy list, the SRA explained that green vegetables should be boiled, with the water saved for soups or

9 Ellery F. Reed, *Federal Transient Program: An Evaluative Survey, May to July 1934* (New York: Committee on Care of Transient and Homeless, 1934), 65-67.

10 State Relief Administration, *Transients in California*, 206-207.

sauces. Yellow vegetables needed to be baked or steamed, red vegetables needed acid to protect their color, and white vegetables were cooked briefly “only until tender.” For starches, a common component of migrant meals, the SRA suggested long cooking times to break up the vegetable. Once again, the state relied on nutritional scientists to authenticate their claims, citing Halliday and Noble of the University of Chicago Press, Lowe's work on “Experimental Cookery,” and Faust's manual from the Agricultural Extension Service at Berkeley.<sup>11</sup> In another proclamation by the Social Service Division, the SRA explained how “using your food wisely” would benefit the family's health. This shorter notice detailed the quantities of canned milk needed per child per day, and offered several recipes for using it in biscuits, puddings, and other foods. Whole grains were also doled out, and the state recommended its use because in white flour “we throw away the vitamin which promotes good appetite, digestion, and helps to avoid nervous disorders.” Citrus fruits and tomatoes were necessary because they offered vitamin C, and carrots or spinach provided vitamin A. Meats, interestingly, were considered “unnecessary from the point of view of food value” when your diet had enough other proteins. The state even enthused that “milk and eggs are better for the children than meat, and serve the same purpose.”<sup>12</sup> Meats were a luxury given sparingly by the SRA's food guidelines, as they cost the state a great deal more than serving only cheese and beans did. Since poor

11 “Cooking Vegetables,” 23 July 1934, 1-2, Call no. F3448:25, State Relief Administration Social & County Administration, State Relief Administration Collection, California State Archives. In general, the report gave very basic advice on handling vegetables properly, which included how to cover vegetables when boiling, how to cut asparagus or beets properly, and how to avoid putting too much water into the pot. This notice could have been used by state or local agencies when feeding those on relief, or by transient families themselves.

12 “Suggestions for Using Your Food Wisely,” 1 June 1934, Call no. F3448:25, State Relief Administration Social & County Administration, State Relief Administration Collection, California State Archives. Clearly, this notice was designed to be handed out to families on relief, as its tone is directed to the family, not to a social worker.

families were not in a position to bargain with the SRA, they were presumed to accept this meatless reality, a tacit reminder of their rock-bottom status. Again, state health officers were quick to conflate bad eating habits with poor health in children and families, and again the state relied on scientific studies to determine the assistance necessary.

In reality, transient families and children did suffer from malnutrition. However, the state's interest lie in the other dangers that malnutrition posed to the creation of healthy workers, families, and citizens. Malnutrition represented a dangerous but preventable malady to the state because it retarded physical growth and simultaneously damaged the future productive capacity of affected children. Its transmission followed family lines, and since transient mothers seemed incapable of creating balanced and nutritive meals for their families, California took up the charge. In doing so, the state also publicized the dangers it was combating. During the Dust Bowl migrations, in a statement read to President Roosevelt and Congress, the SRA argued that diet deficiencies continued to be a pressing issue, especially for children.<sup>13</sup> In order to combat the epidemic of malnutrition they saw, state officials explicitly attacked several vitamin deficiencies that threatened the creation of productive Americans.

Pellagra, a lack of vitamin B, was one of the vitamin deficiencies recognized by nutritionists, particularly among Mexican migrant families. According to one modern scholar, it manifested as “the four d's, dermatitis, diarrhoea, dementia, and death,” and was sometimes mistaken for leprosy due to its rash.<sup>14</sup> Dr. Okey noted in her report that,

13 “Interstate Migration and Its Effect on California,” 1938-39, 3, Call no. F3448:129, State Relief Administration Collection, California State Archives.

14 Walter Gratzer, *Terrors of the Table: The Curious History of Nutrition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 144-150. This disease was not targeted with yeast provisions until the late 1920s, as it was previously thought to be some other sort of illness, accurately demonstrating that Okey and others were on the 'cutting edge' of the Newer Nutrition.

in order to make the food allotment budget tenable, food officials should cut out yeast breads and instead let Mexican families make tortillas. However, Okey explained that this created a risk for pellagra, so “it is, therefore, essential that the full amount of milk, cheese, and beans is used.”<sup>15</sup> Depression-era scientists brought diseases like pellagra to light at the same time that thousands more Americans suffered malnutrition due to the economic downturn. By the time of the Dust Bowl, later surveys of migrant families indicated to the state that Anglos also contracted pellagra in large quantities. One survey reporter noted that a family had migrated to Imperial County because the mother and one child were weakened by pellagra and tuberculosis.<sup>16</sup> Those who ventured into migrant camps or “jungles” often found thin, sickly children that confirmed their suspicions and reified the position of nutritional science.

Another vitamin deficiency that state officials noticed was rickets. As Cummings explained, doctors and nutritionists had been making inroads against vitamin D deficiencies during the interwar period, and had developed methods for testing for it and other nutrition-related diseases.<sup>17</sup> The state of California called on their administrators to be vigilant regarding this deficiency. In a brief notice, the SRA explained the link between rickets and vitamin D deficiencies; in children with insufficient vitamin D, rickets caused bone deformities during periods of rapid growth and left the now-grown adult with permanent difficulties. Again, the notice pinpointed poor children and migrant

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15 Dr. Ruth Okey and Frances Taylor, “Nutrition and Dietary Data.” Pellagra was not considered a problem with the white family food allotment.

16 State Relief Administration, *Transients in California*, 241.

17 Cummings, *The American and His Food*, 177-178, 193. These diseases were often studied in rural populations subsisting heavily on cornmeal, which was sometimes the case among migrants to California. By the 1930s, doctors developed X-ray tests for rickets, along with “photometer tests of the eyes as a measure of vitamin A deficiency” and a “capillary resistance test which may indicate vitamin C deficiency.”

Mexican children as likely sufferers. Poor children had too few foods to supplement their intake of vitamin D, and migrant farmworkers were often in the valleys of California, where intense fog blocked out winter sunlight.<sup>18</sup> In order to fix this problem, which led to weak skeletons, the SRA offered the supplemental intake of fish oils or irradiated milk. This notice made clear the scientific backing of nutrition, as it explained how doctors in Toronto were conducting research into the appropriate amount of irradiated milk necessary to prevent rickets during winter, when sunlight was scarce. It also explained the pitfalls of artificial vitamin D, viosterol, which could cause harm.<sup>19</sup> Explicit connections to cutting-edge science were uncommon in this nutrition literature, but scientific language was par for the course. Also of import to administrators of relief was the permanency of rickets—it could debilitate children for life, but the state could intervene effectively, as prevention was inexpensive.

Lastly, the state also provided nutritional information for mothers with infants, a category of transients at increased risk for malnutrition. In the minds of administrators, poor mothers had neither the knowledge necessary nor the foods required to protect the next generation. In a series of two notices, intended for distribution among social workers and mothers on relief, the state explained in great detail the developmental needs of children. The first notice, published in August of 1934, illustrated the nutritional requirements of breastfeeding women, as well as the need to supplement cow's milk with acidic juices, fish oil, and “cereal water” at particular ages. With a nod towards preventing pellagra, this memo explained that pasteurized yeast or wheat germ were

18 I know about the fog from personal experience—Tule fog is common in the Central Valley, and reduces visibility and available light to very low levels, particularly during the morning until midday.

19 “Vitamin D & Rickets,” 18 Oct. 1934, Call no. F3448:25, State Relief Administration Collection, California State Archives. According to Dr. Tisdall, the Toronto physician, children needed about 1 ½ pints of irradiated milk per day, but could also find that amount through fish oils.

needed at early ages. It also offered precautions against bacteria, which included the pasteurization of milk, boiling formula, and the disinfecting of hands, bottles, and food. These precautions, combined with the supplied feeding schedules and caloric requirements, would ensure a healthy baby. In January of 1935, the state followed up with feeding recommendations and another schedule for children between one to two years old. Ominously, this notice began with the admonition that “what [the baby] eats now will largely influence his health all the rest of his life.”<sup>20</sup> Why did the state provide such lengthy information to mothers? In part, bureaucrats worried about malnutrition among babies in relief families, who were the most vulnerable population within the state. The state also thought these poor mothers were uninformed and would be bad parents unless the state intervened. Later on, the horror stories of the jungles and roadside camps would entrench these ideas among bureaucrats. The embodiment of this state fear was one mother with a blind, disabled infant. She expressed her pitiful condition to an official, stating that “we've never had enough money for doctors. I don't know what's the matter with baby or why she's blind. She certainly is poorly... now the health doctor gave us notice to move not later than today.”<sup>21</sup> Though a sympathetic portrayal, this woman also represented the poorly-informed transient parent whose child desperately needed state intervention. Migrant families such as this one received various sorts of nutritional information over the course of the Depression and Dust Bowl, provided through pamphlets, rations, and advice from social service agencies such as the SRA. The nutritional sciences demonstrated their value to the state during the thirties by

20 Two notices on infant nutrition and feeding, 30 Aug. 1934 & 15 Jan. 1935, Call no. F3448:25, State Relief Administration Collection, California State Archives. The second notice was slightly patronizing in its tone, telling mothers to not feed their babies pie, cheese, anything the adults eat, and to allow the baby to have a monotonous diet.

21 State Relief Administration, *Transients in California*, 242.

protecting at-risk youths and by providing a rational, medical discourse supporting negative opinions of migrant life.

***Public Health, Public Outcry***

Infectious diseases also followed the migrants, causing a great deal of hand-wringing from concerned Californians. The dust storms that swept across Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas during the mid-1930s hastened public health development. To many residents, the Dust Bowl migrants were vectors of infection, especially migrant children, who spread sickness to resident youths, or at the very least were subject to a horrific range of diseases. For instance, state bureaucrats visiting camps or other sites often included statements about sick migrant children. One relevant excerpt from SRA Survey workers indicated a family where “the two little girls wore sweaters but their noses were running, their faces dirty. The mother said they were all recovering from colds.”<sup>22</sup> In many cases, these and other migrant children slept in camps that did not keep out the cold or the rain, creating conditions ripe for contagious disease. State reports confirmed the suspicions regarding migrant disease transmission that circulated among government officials. In a demographic survey, about twelve percent of migrants themselves argued that they left previous residences and came to California for health reasons.<sup>23</sup> Though 'health' was a vague term, some transient families certainly brought along contagious diseases they had hoped to mitigate by traveling to California's agreeable climate.

Other officials in affected regions also voiced their deep displeasure with Dust

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>23</sup> “Agricultural Migratory Laborers in the San Joaquin Valley,” 1937, 12, Call no. F3448:3, State Relief Administration Administrator's Office Files 1933-1938, State Relief Administration Collection, California State Archives. Also see Appendix A for the full tables.

Bowl migrants through state channels. The State Relief Administration's surveys of local communities, for instance, revealed these attitudes. Health officials in particular shared their ire about the migrants. One noted in 1937 that agricultural workers became “excellent subjects for county hospitals and the W.P.A.” Another provided an explicit metaphor of infestation where “The Bowl Weevil arrives, finds enough to eat, makes enough money to get back to Oklahoma, and brings out the family” which California has to support. This officer thought that “the only solution to this problem is sterilization.”<sup>24</sup> The officers of several counties in Southern California pointed out to the state Department of Health the various blights brought in by transient families, which included “trachoma, tuberculosis” and typhoid, which they carried and spread through their lack of sanitary living arrangements.<sup>25</sup> The Dust Bowl's steady stream of transient families galvanized public health fears, already present since the Depression.

The rhetoric of disease offered Californians an easy segue into describing migrants as a dangerous social element. Demonstrating their deep entanglement with the Progressive discourse of social control, many officials reported on non-health issues. One health worker described the supposed radicalism of migrants and the usefulness of Mexican workers over Dust Bowl refugees.<sup>26</sup> Non-medical county officials echoed these sentiments. A bureaucrat from Yuba County thought that migrant conditions would metastasize to local populations, stating that “the county where [transients] will spend the

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24 Ibid., 35.

25 Correspondence between Telfer and Dickie re Riverside County, 8 Aug. 1936, Call no. R384.028, Department of Public Health Director, Department of Public Health Collection, California State Archives.

26 “Agricultural Migratory Laborers in the San Joaquin Valley,” 35-36. As noted by scholars like Don Mitchell, there had been several important agriculture strikes in California during the Depression. These remarks demonstrate the connection of migrants as a danger to the state's economy, a danger to taxpayers, and a danger to political life. I do not have the space to address these themes in detail, but Mitchell and Daniel offer detailed analyzes of these labor forces.



winter will bankrupt itself and send some of the taxpayers from their home to join them on relief.”<sup>27</sup> In essence, these officials were using their position to pronounce opinions on the infective capacities of the migrant. In reprinting these opinions internally, bureaucrats within the State Relief Administration elevated and promoted this discourse, conflating personal and medical opinions.

Proving that these ideas were part of a broader rhetoric, farmers and agricultural officials also utilized this language. They did recognize the health needs of migrants, with several advocating for better camp conditions. One respondent from Kern County explained that “the crying need is for housing for them, sanitary toilets and pure water,” such as that provided at the Arvin camp, set up by the Federal Resettlement Administration with “health, educational and recreational facilities.” He also noted with some derision that it was “better to pay for such camps than for hospital and jail costs.”<sup>28</sup> In this regard, farmers protected their labor supply by advocating for improved camp sanitation, while at the same time worrying that poorly treated migrants would become delinquent. Camp conditions were one of the oft-cited problems facing migrant families, and they were amply documented by newspapers, federal photographers, physicians, and state officials.<sup>29</sup> Nearly all farmers and locals writing to the survey were troubled by the

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27 Ibid., 34-35.

28 Ibid., 36-41. Responses came from farmers in nearly every major agricultural county in central California.

29 Numerous writers have amply documented these conditions. See Stein, *California and the Dust Bowl Migration*, 74-79, for a discussion of news reports during the floods of 1938, which inundated camps. Also see the camp photograph collections of Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, and Arthur Rothstein from the Library of Congress, *Prints and Photographs Online Catalog*. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/fsa/>. For photos of Mexican migrant worker camps in the early Depression, see Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 188-191. Also illustrative are the entries from the “Journal of a Migrant” report contained within the State Relief Administration, *Transients in California*. Pp. 145-147 is particularly interesting; the reporter visited the camps of his neighbors, where he referenced the “mongrel dogs,” “scanty clothing,” the “stank of garbage and human refuse,” and the “crude scaffolding” or “scrap lumber and tin” which comprised the homes.

perceived laziness or poor moral habits of migrants, and many others described economic parasitism as a trademark of these families.

By the late 1930s, these Dust Bowl health problems became increasingly apparent to local and national audiences. Writers warned that the migrants could no longer be sent back to their home states, and that the state would have to bear the relief burden, frightening non-migrants.<sup>30</sup> Some members of the press explicitly used contagion rhetoric to talk about the migrants. One author talked about his experiences in a Bakersfield migrant camp, opening with his shock at seeing migrant children and their condition. He spoke negatively about one young mother, who had “at her feet, playing with an iron bolt,” her baby, “seemingly fat, but yellow with dysentery and covered with flies.” He also blamed the migrants for tuberculosis and typhoid outbreaks, claiming that their Pentecostalism prevented them from self-quarantine or vaccination, making all their children sick.<sup>31</sup> Here is an example of the slippage between different anti-migrant discourses, a recurring topic. Another author in the same magazine, using war rhetoric, called Kern County the “front-line defense against epidemics” coming from out-of-state, and lauded the efforts of their public health director, “Dr. Joe Smith, who believes that an ill person is a menace to others.” The writer also argued that migrants, if not deliberately, acted in ways which infected others—in one instance he explained that a transient family sick with smallpox scattered an entire migrant camp, resulting in a minor epidemic.<sup>32</sup>

These authors represent a small sample of opinions on migrants and disease transmission,

30 Taylor, “What Shall We Do With Them?” *On the Ground in the Thirties*, 205-208. P. Taylor also explained that Californian congressmen were petitioning the federal government at the time he wrote this address in 1938.

31 Carleton Beals, “Migs: America's Shantytown on Wheels,” *Forum and Century*, XCIX no. 1, (Jan. 1938), 10.

32 Frank J. Taylor, “California's Grapes of Wrath,” *Forum and Century*, CII, no. 5, (Nov. 1939), 232.

but state and local officials were also internalizing these and other sentiments when creating public health responses.

### ***Disease and Migrants***

Though Dust Bowl transients would receive much of this ire, many diseases were increasing in prevalence since the start of the Depression, and they continued to tear through communities as the plains refugees came to California. Immediate anti-disease aid came in the form of clothing and medical care. Agencies also offered these necessities to migrant children in an attempt to improve their ability to fight off infection. Exposure to the elements damaged the immune systems of children, especially given the conditions of camp life. To combat this susceptibility to illness and parasites, institutions spent large sums of money to give out new clothing and blankets. As noted by the SRA's monthly reports, aid costs were inflated by the cost of children' clothing, the most expensive “production articles” procured by the agency for county officials to distribute.<sup>33</sup> The Federal Transient Service, before its closure, operated camps that organized around the same principles. Clothing and bedding allotments were two particular areas of federal concern in migrant treatment.<sup>34</sup> When migrant children needed direct medical care, County Hospitals unevenly treated transient diseases, with some turning down people or ignoring the infections. However, in places such as San Bernardino local doctors and the hospital made diligent efforts.<sup>35</sup> Despite these local relief efforts, doctors and those invested in public health knew that the state would have to combat health problems via its

33 Monthly Reports, 1937-1938, Call no. F3448:11, State Relief Administration Administrator's Office, State Relief Administration Collection, California State Archives.

34 Reed, *Federal Transient Program*, 68-69, 130-136. In the appendix here Reed describes the costs to a shelter for bedding and a rash of other necessary articles.

35 State Relief Administration, *Transients in California*, 164. No data was specifically collected in this instance for children, although they stated that “acute communicable diseases of migratory workers, with the exception of gonorrhoea, were treated.”

extensive institutional apparatus.<sup>36</sup> In their minds, they faced a plague of migrant-borne diseases that required clothing and shelter, but also required laws, quarantines, and immunizations.

A few examples of diseases and state responses are illustrative. Tuberculosis,



*Figure 3: Children refugees with TB on roadside, Bakersfield* though not a vitamin deficiency, was exacerbated by the lack of vitamins in the typical migrant family diet. This disease exacted a terrible toll among migrant families, who often contracted it as a unit when traveling. Many people were sick with it before they

<sup>36</sup> “California 'Migrants': 'Workers' and 'Rovers', *Cal West Med* 47, no. 2 (Aug. 1937), 74-75. These doctors stated, matter-of-factly, that the presence of migrant families “necessarily attracts the notice of state and local public welfare and health officials,” noting that caring for them would also require state funding.

even came into California, and the massive flow of people increased the incidences of TB among migrant children. Dorothea Lange's photographs captured several children ravaged by the disease, including a young girl crippled by bone tuberculosis.<sup>37</sup> These migrants bringing tuberculosis into California represented the threat of a contagious outbreak, but the state public health apparatus had already engaged with this issue. The SRA had responded to this problem earlier in the Depression with a published notice, explaining how physicians and public aid providers could give Vitamin B-rich foods to children, breaking it down by age and gender. For instance, while a child between ages three and five needed to eat one-eighth of a pound of liver, a child between nine and thirteen needed to eat half a pound of liver per week. In addition, a girl teen was allowed roughly three-fifths the amount of fats, vegetables, and bread as a boy of comparable age. This notice recapitulated many of the recommendations previously published, including the need for wheat germ or yeast, as well as the use of between-meal liquids to provide additional calories and nutrients.<sup>38</sup> Alongside the Dust Bowl migrants, the state found itself fighting against TB infections in Mexican migrant families. Medical authorities opined that this could be solved by “shutting off the tide” of Mexican migrants, while still commending the state Board of Health for helping such “indigent” clients, especially in Southern California, where deaths from TB were common among Mexicans.<sup>39</sup> Politics intertwined with TB prevention in other ways as well. By 1940, California sought federal help in protecting itself from TB. During a congressional committee, the California

37 Dorothea Lange, “Children of Oklahoma drought refugees on highway near Bakersfield,” June 1935. From the Library of Congress, *Prints and Photographs Online Catalog*. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa1998018914/PP/>.

38 “Diets for Tubercular Children,” 7 July 1934, 1-3, Call no. F3448:25, State Relief Administration Collection, California State Archives. Despite the different food amounts, teens received the same amount of cod liver oil and yeast or wheat germ, necessary for fighting their tuberculosis.

39 “News,” *Cal West Med* 47, no. 4 (Oct. 1937), 268.

Tuberculosis Association argued four points: there needed to be national migrant settlement laws, federal provisions needed to be made for treating migrants with TB, Social Security needed to maintain its funds for public health, and a new program of relief needed to be established.<sup>40</sup> This disease could spread quickly among agricultural labor camps, especially when children were weakened by poor diets. Through sanitation, health measures, and a peculiar disapprobation for immigrants, the state sought to avoid having regional outbreaks of TB.

Another contagious ailment that horrified Californians was meningitis.<sup>41</sup> Due to the influx of refugees who commingled in large camps, a meningitis infection could prove quite dangerous. Furthermore, meningitis was often spread by the dust storms that refugees were fleeing, and was caused in part by *Coccidioidomycosis*, endemic in the Southwest and in California's valleys, otherwise known as 'Valley Fever'.<sup>42</sup> In fact, doctors began studying the presence of this fungus in Kern County's General Hospital during the heyday of the Dust Bowl migration, and results came out by the early 1940s. In one such analysis, Dr. Juliet Thorner found that about sixty percent of children tested positive for the fungus, and that of those children, the majority were girls. Indeed, females were much more susceptible to this infection. Though these tests were for the

40 "News," *Cal West Med* 53, no. 5 (Nov. 1940), 244. This essay will later explain the importance of Social Security funds in the growth of California's Public Health Department. On another note, the California Tuberculosis Association at the same time created a pamphlet that analyzed TB on a county-by-county basis. The author was unable to locate a copy of this report.

41 One interesting medical tidbit regarding meningitis comes from William Howard Hay, "The Usual Meningitis Scare," *Vegetarian and Fruitarian* 29, no. 2 (Feb. 1930), 6. This article from a sanitarium director noted that some people considered that meningitis was not contagious, and that it could be solved only through proper diets. This may not directly support any actions taken in California during the Dust Bowl, but it demonstrates part of the connection between contagious diseases and nutrition science's role in medical practice.

42 Jan V. Hirschmann, "The Early History of *Coccidioidomycosis*: 1892–1945," *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, 44, no. 9, (May 2007), 1202-1207. The studies of the fungus causing 'Valley Fever' explained how the fungus showed meningitis as a symptom.

primary stage of the illness, which was typically benign, Thorner mentioned that more severe cases of Coccidioidomycosis could occur if the body was sufficiently weakened.<sup>43</sup> Locals responded unevenly to reports of such infections, as noted by a Survey worker in the Imperial Valley. This worker explained that a camp, located near an irrigation ditch, used the “ditch water for drinking purposes as well as using the side of the ditch as a toilet. In February a child from one of these families was taken to the County Hospital with spinal meningitis.” The report continued, stating indignantly that “there had been no quarantine and the other members of the family were mixing with their neighbors.”<sup>44</sup> State public health officials, as will be shown, desired stricter quarantine regulations to prevent just such activities.

Diphtheria was yet another infectious agent the state sought to exterminate. Indeed, from the very start of the Depression California's public health officials had been ordering diphtheria immunizations. For instance, Contra Costa County's schools were treated by the County Health Officer, who diligently administered immunizations alongside his regional nurses and the school nurses.<sup>45</sup> These efforts grew as the specter of disease-carrying migrants became apparent. The Health Department of Imperial County also ordered diphtheria vaccinations for all members of the El Centro school district, regardless of migrant or resident status.<sup>46</sup> These sorts of wholesale vaccinations were

43 Juliet E. Thorner, “Relative Values of Coccidioidin and Tuberculin Testing Among Children of the San Joaquin Valley,” *Cal West Med* 54, No. 1 (Jan. 1941), 12-15. In the 1-14 age group, the ratio of male to female exposure was 77:100, and those numbers grew worse as older age groups were analyzed. Dr. Thorner did not offer any suppositions about why women were particularly prone to the fungus.

44 State Relief Administration, *Transients in California*, 242. This report also took the time to mention that children here had particularly bad teeth and pale complexions.

45 Local organization survey: Contra Costa, 29 Mar. 1930, Call no. R384:028, Department of Public Health Director, Department of Public Health Collection, California State Archive. In this instance, the health official and nurses immunized about 300 to 400 children in a day, using the TAT vaccine.

46 State Relief Administration, *Transients in California*, 66.

increasingly common as the state faced more children coming in from elsewhere.

Alongside infectious diseases were a related category of biological contagion, the threat of lice, parasites, and flies. These were popularly assumed by Californians to be a constant hazard in unclean migrant camps. Federal agents had previously understood this problem among through the experiences of visitors to the FTS camps. Here, transients were forced to put their clothing into a “delouser device, usually a fumigating or dry heat room,” which killed any lice or parasites clinging to the fabric. Transients in these cases were also 'treated' to unpleasant odors resulting from the process.<sup>47</sup> Particularly shocking to local officials were the thoughts that children could spread these creatures to residents, or that families could not effectively protect their children. The matron of the Minnie Barton Training Home in Los Angeles described to a state official the plight of a migrant mother who sporadically appeared at the Home with her baby “covered with lice and dirt.”<sup>48</sup> Others offered the same disapprobation. The “Journal of a Transient” reported that one Mexican family lived among “millions of flies and a noticeable sprinkling of dog fleas,” which the young boy happily pulled out from a dog.<sup>49</sup> The FSA photographers also captured such scenes for their projects, with Lange taking a photo of fly-infested dirty laundry at a camp along the American River.<sup>50</sup> Such images connected back to the dirtiness of migrants and their camps. They also served as a vehicle for demonstrating the seeming obliviousness of families and children to their relationship with vermin. This

47 Ellery F. Reed, *Federal Transient Program*, 69. Laundering the clothing was, in this author's experience, outside the reach of many shelters.

48 State Relief Administration, *Transients in California*, 107-108.

49 Ibid., 145. This was reported along the Sacramento River camps. Rivers were a common camping ground for migrants due to the availability of water and the relative protection of the banks, although floods were common and created adverse conditions.

50 Dorothea Lange, “Dirty clothes and flies. American River camp, near Sacramento, California” Nov. 1936. From the Library of Congress, *Prints and Photographs Online Catalog*.  
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa1998021909/PP/>



visceral, visible health crisis struck a particularly terrible chord with Californians.

### ***Growth of the Department of Public Health***

Working in concert with local doctors, Federal assistance, and the SRA, California's Department of Public Health did respond to the Depression and Dust Bowl health crises. The state first created this department in April of 1870, as mandated through Article XX, Section 14 of the California constitution. It was led by the Board of Health, which had seven members, all doctors located in Los Angeles, San Francisco, or Sacramento. These governor-appointed individuals functioned as sentries who would “observe vigilantly sanitary conditions throughout the state, taking all necessary precautions to protect it in its sanitary relations with other states and countries.” It was obvious that migrants from Mexico, the Great Plains, or elsewhere were potential dangers that the Department of Public Health was required to scrutinize.<sup>51</sup> Luckily, Dr. Okey and others had already compiled useful information during the early 1930s. This and other scientific developments deployed on a statewide scale as the Dust Bowl situation grew. By 1936, bureaucrats in the Board of Health were creating a public health plan that would create a “paternalistic medicine” program aimed at sanitation, hospital care, and the protection of resident communities.<sup>52</sup>

In creating such a department, the state tapped into the intelligence and knowledge of the medical profession. The board members were often prominent physicians, and they engaged in the publication of health data. In 1934, J. D. Dunshee,

51 “An Outline of the Laws of California With Regard to Public Health Procedure,” 1934, 1, Call no. R384:029, Department of Public Health Director, Department of Public Health Collection, California State Archives.

52 “Indigent Camps in California: A New and Pressing Problem,” *Cal West Med* 46, no. 1 (Jan. 1937), 2-3. These were the words of doctors knowledgeable about the plan. Their rhetoric was focused on the dirty camps, the need to segregate infected transients, and the lack of care on offer at County Hospitals, which were only open for residents.

the Director, published an article in *Cal West Med* explaining the steady increase in polio infections since the late 1920s, with the 1930 and (then-current) 1934 epidemics slated to be the worst of the series. This was undoubtedly due to Depression-related health problems, as noted during the 1930 epidemic, which largely attacked five-to-nine-year-olds.<sup>53</sup> In general, the Board of Health and the Department of Public Health, due to its proximity with medical research and development, both promoted and shaped medical opinions in California during the 1930s.

The state's health bureaucracy grew rapidly during the Depression, in large part due to Dr. Walter M. Dickie, who was the Director of the State Department of Public Health both before and after Dunshee's tenure.<sup>54</sup> Dickie helped standardize, promote, and coordinate county health efforts. He published one such promotion in a medical journal, describing in brief the steps taken by California to protect itself against the migrant tides. He noted that “extensive migration” from Mexico and “other states” required the development of “special activities to control communicable disease among such laborers and to provide protection for residents of California.” Among these new practices were camp sanitation procedures, smallpox and diphtheria immunizations in schools,” instruction in child hygiene, maternal welfare, nutrition and” anti-TB efforts, including a van that traveled up and down the Central Valley (the primary agricultural region consisting of the interior counties, such as Kern, Fresno, Tulare, San Joaquin, and Sacramento) conducting x-rays. Dickie continued, explaining that rural hygiene improved with the hiring of more nurses in rural counties, the hiring of more female

53 J. D. Dunshee, “The Present Status of Epidemic Poliomyelitis,” *Cal West Med* 40, no. 6 (June 1934), 410-11.

54 To wit, Dickie was director in 1930 and was director again by 1936.

doctors for the Bureau of Child Hygiene to send into agricultural areas, and the production of mobile dental clinics for transient children.<sup>55</sup> His right-hand man in this regard was Dr. Gavin Telfer, the State District Health Officer from Los Angeles. Telfer's duties included regular visits with county officials, "epidemiological investigations," and acting as liaison between the state and counties. For instance, while visiting Fresno County in March of 1936, he advised the local official, Dr. Stein, on how to properly administer public health and on how to ameliorate sanitation issues (probably in the migrant camps).<sup>56</sup>

The state envisioned its public health project as a unified front against illness, but on the ground realities occasionally made life difficult for Dickie and Telfer. As part of his expansion of the Department of Public Health, Dickie wanted to increase the number of full-time County Health Units. He was successful in this regard, as twenty counties had those units by 1937.<sup>57</sup> However, sometimes state and county ran into local obstacles. Indeed, Telfer engaged in a protracted battle over control of local public health with Westmoreland, Imperial County. This municipality had a city health officer instead of a county officer. Dr. Fox, the official in charge of Imperial County, was supposed to take over the health duties in Westmoreland, but the city failed to properly file their petition, and in either case it wanted to retain the city officer, only giving "permission to Dr. Fox

55 Walter M. Dickie, "Highlights in California's Public Health Work in 1937," *Cal West Med* 48, no. 2 (Feb. 1938), 147-48. This was a time of incredible expansion for the state's other public health services as well. California re-opened its Bureau of Venereal Diseases for the first time since 1920 and was studying carbon monoxide poisoning in the workplace.

56 Set of correspondence between Dr. Telfer and state office, 1930-1937, Call no. R384:028, Department of Public Health Director, Department of Public Health Collection, California State Archives. These scattered records offer a glimpse into Telfer's schedule, and include 'abstracts' of disease investigations into Fresno County, Imperial County, and letters sent to Dr. Dickie about Contra Costa and Imperial County, all counties with substantial agricultural production at the time.

57 Walter M. Dickie, "Highlights in California's Public Health Work in 1937," 148.

to come in to the city, and do certain things; to enforce the State law when requested to do so.” According to Telfer, “rural cities of the state” sometimes resisted county control because “they know that a good full-time county health officer” would quarantine or order destroyed places of prostitution, which the town would illegally protect. Telfer's opinion was that state and county control of public health was vital as “a protection to the general public.” In Westmoreland, Fox denied a request for immunizations at the school district because he lacked legal jurisdiction without the proper contract. He had previously conducted these sorts of immunizations in Brawley (also part of Imperial County) without incident, although Brawley also had a city health officer. In order to resolve the Westmoreland debacle, Telfer met with the mayor, who reiterated the desire to keep the city officer. Telfer explained that “it was the attitude of the State Department of Public Health ultimately to unify the health services” within the county, and that such progress was backed by the U.S. Public Health Service as well. He also posited the financial benefit the city would receive if it agreed. Despite his wrangling, the district attorney would not allow Fox to practice in Westmoreland, but in an effort to maintain immunizations for children, Telfer recommended that that Fox contract with the school district on his own.<sup>58</sup> Men like Telfer, Dickie, and Fox personified the state's efforts to systematically protect Californian children through immunization, sanitation, and other health measures. In the face of local resistance, the state nevertheless found success, as other counties had their own health officers, and most municipalities in Imperial County were enthused about the growth of a state public health apparatus.

Other counties took proactive measures in improving their public health systems

<sup>58</sup> Set of correspondence between Dr. Telfer and state office, 1930-1937. Telfer had pointed out that the mayor of Westmoreland lived close to the red light district.

during the Depression and Dust Bowl. Los Angeles County, a hub where many Dust Bowl families settled, created a legal apparatus for discriminating against migrant families, under the guise of a health code. In late 1938, the Public Health Committee of the Chamber of Commerce organized meetings to discuss a Health Code for Los Angeles County. The code's regulations were in line with much of the state's efforts, and include provisions for a Health Officer, infectious disease investigations, and sanitation guidelines. However, the codes contained covert anti-migrant measures. Section 103, for instance, ordered the Health Official to care for “indigents with communicable disease” through discretionary quarantining and the provision of necessities to those families. Section 105 expanded these quarantine powers, stating that “he may enforce such quarantine measures as may be necessary in the interests of the general health of the community.” The code also required innkeepers and lodgers to provide information on infected residents, which obliquely targeted those who kept transients or their families. All state institutions in the county were regulated in the same manner by Section 108. As a counter to the migrants who flaunted quarantine, Sections 115 and 116 made it “unlawful to remove [the health officer-mandated] placard” or to “break quarantine.” Lastly, Section 117 indicated that districts should exclude “school children affected” by communicable diseases.<sup>59</sup> None of these proposed provisions directly targeted migrants and their families, but they were clearly a response to problems made apparent by the Dust Bowl influx. As noted previously, some migrant families chose to, or had to, ignore quarantines, especially in jungles or camps. Migrant children were seen as a threat to

<sup>59</sup> Letter regarding Public Health Committee meeting attached to proposed Health Code, 19 Oct. 1938, Call no. R384:028, Department of Public Health Director, Department of Public Health Collection, California State Archives. It is unclear, given the set of papers available, whether the Health Code became law, although it seemed in concordance with the state's public health efforts at this time.

school health, so this code made it easier for the Health Officer to quarantine and control them and their families. Los Angeles County craftily targeted these families, which traveled frequently and lodged in many different places, with a set of laws that seemed non-discriminatory. Nevertheless, these provisions allowed health officials to better track and analyze such disease carrying migrants.

Riverside County became another proponent of public health during the thirties. It asked Dickie and the Department of Public Health for assistance in funding a new health official. In 1936 the first major waves of migration from the Dust Bowl were hitting Riverside and its surroundings. Jack McGregor, the Chairman of the Riverside Board of Supervisors, had a lengthy chat with Dr. Telfer about supporting the Public Health efforts of the county. Telfer agreed, arguing that the other southern counties, San Bernardino and Imperial County, “have practically the same problems as Riverside County. All of these counties have a marked influx of poor whites from the Texas Oklahoma area. These people are bringing their infections into California.” He went on, listing the various illnesses brought into California by these migrants. McGregor was adamant about receiving Social Security funds to bolster Riverside's local health efforts. Riverside County wanted to use this money to hire an assistant health officer and more nurses. Telfer advocated for the county to Dickie, explaining that “it would be a good idea for the State to take the attitude to accept conditions as they are, and build up the organization by the addition of trained people.” California, in Telfer's eyes, could not afford to “lose out in any of these county organizations that we have taken ten years or more to develop,” because that would damage both the awareness of public health and the state's bureaucratic projects. McGregor and the Riverside Board would later petition

the Department superintendent directly.<sup>60</sup> County officials were aware of the aid available for public health purposes, and feeling overwhelmed, they appealed directly to the state. Such outcries were desirable to Dickie, Telfer, and other state bureaucrats, as they demonstrated the need felt by locals for a comprehensive, well-educated public health apparatus. Counties such as Los Angeles and Riverside sought to protect themselves from transient-borne illnesses by tapping into the money and expertise of the state and federal government.

### *The Nation and the State*

California's bureaucratic response to migrant children and their health problems fit into the national standardization of public health. In fact, California helped create a regional facility for training “sanitary inspectors and health officials,” thanks in part to Social Security funds. Their training program attracted recruits from “all of the western states” who would go back and improve their own departments. The California Department of Public Health and the University of California were both instrumental in all this, offering training in the administration of public health as well as qualifying candidates for the program.<sup>61</sup> At the same time, Dickie also created a Division of Public Health Nursing to assist nurses working in rural counties ravaged by migrant disease. Doctors cheered these developments, declaring that in the pursuit of eradication of infectious disease, the state's Department of Public Health had become an eminent supplier of the “highest grade of technical service” to local public health providers. This was only possible because local health services grew rapidly during the Depression,

<sup>60</sup> Department of Public Health Director, correspondence between Telfer and Dickie re Riverside County, 8 Aug. 1936. The county was ready to pay out of their own pocket for an assistant Health Officer, but preferred to spend federal monies.

<sup>61</sup> Walter M. Dickie, “Highlights in California's Public Health Work in 1937,” 148.

turning the state department into a core of highly-trained, rigorously scientific specialists.<sup>62</sup> As previously noted by Telfer, the state took pride in this effort, providing the most capable and learned physicians, or training new recruits when the need arose.<sup>63</sup> Dickie, as head of the department, also engaged with national public health measures. As one example, he attended a 1939 joint conference between the Federal Children's Bureau and the Surgeon General. This conference addressed the “extension of medical and health services,” with an emphasis on malnutrition and Social Security funding.<sup>64</sup> These state and county developments were driven by individuals and new scientific methods, but they found common cause in the harrowing images of dirty children with leaky noses.

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62 “News,” *Cal West Med*, 268. California first hired public health nurses in 1917 as part of Progressive reforms. However, the Depression caused the state to cut the supervisory positions in 1932. Dickie's aggressive expansion of the public health apparatus is on full display here.

63 Correspondence between Telfer and Dickie re Riverside County, 8 Aug. 1936. In this, Telfer referred to the hiring of an assistant health officer, who would probably be a “graduate of public health,” presaging the state's development of a training program with the University of California.

64 “Press Clippings,” *Cal West Med* 50, no. 4 (Apr. 1939), 306.





*Figure 4: Nurse treating child in health clinic, Shafter*

Federal agents also intervened in the health of Dust Bowl migrants; by the late 1930s they continued where the Federal Transient Service left off. In particular, they had jurisdiction within the federal migrant camps. These camps began to offer health clinics staffed by WPA-funded nurses. Promotional photos showed both the cleanliness of the clinics (as opposed to the filth of the camp itself) as well as the involvement of the whole family, prominently including fathers. These photographs also demonstrated the inspection and checkup routines performed on migrant children, which included lice inspection and shots.<sup>65</sup> In places where a permanent clinic was not established, such as

<sup>65</sup> Arthur Rothstein, "Nurse treating child in health clinic, Shafter migrant camp" March 1940. From the Library of Congress, *Prints and Photographs Online Catalog*. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000005980/PP/>. Also see Arthur Rothstein, "Child being treated in health clinic, Shafter migrant camp," March 1940. From the Library of Congress, *Prints and*

among some of the Mexican migrant camps, there were still vestiges of public health, as Mexican families continued to pose a threat to California residents. Lange detailed one “well-baby clinic” performed by a traveling doctor during harvest season in the Imperial Valley.<sup>66</sup> These photos illustrated the massive public health mobilization put on cooperatively by California and federal relief agencies. Early-intervention care took root in California under the guise of creating “physically and morally 'fit'” young citizens, as described by Nayan Shah and other historians.<sup>67</sup> In order to succeed, officials of all stripes emphasized care for children through these clinics, free care, the aforementioned nutritional memos, quarantines, and other procedures.

Taken altogether, California's response to contagious disease during the Depression and Dust Bowl was in line with the growth of public health outreach elsewhere in the country. In places such as Ohio, the WPA's art program created posters that warned of farm family diseases contaminating milk supplies.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, in cities like Chicago local departments of health sensationalized the dangers of diphtheria to “unprotected children.”<sup>69</sup> These two posters were examples of the broad public health

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*Photographs Online Catalog.* <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000005974/PP/>.

66 Dorothea Lange, “Calipatria, Imperial Valley. Visiting public health doctor conducts well-baby clinic in local school building adjacent to pea harvest,” February 1939. From the Library of Congress, *Prints and Photographs Online Catalog.* <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000002599/PP/>.

67 Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 214-215. Here Shah pointed to the urging of female reformers in urban areas during the 1920s, a precursor to the public health apparatus at work in this particular instance. Also note how physical and psychic health were conflated by reformers in their quest to 'fix' social problems.

68 Works Progress Administration Art Program, Ohio, “Milk truckers do not!” July 1940. From the Library of Congress, *Prints and Photographs Online Catalog.* <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/98517167/>. The poster listed diphtheria, infantile paralysis, scarlet fever, typhoid, spinal meningitis, and smallpox as diseases to avoid for milk truckers, who stopped at farms to pick up their milk supplies. Disease that potentially contaminated milk would disproportionately hurt children, who (as seen with nutritional guidelines) were supposed to drink significant amounts of milk.

69 Works Progress Administration Art Project, Chicago, “Diphtheria strikes unprotected children,” 1936-1941, From the Library of Congress, *Prints and Photographs Online Catalog.* <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/98508392/>

system made possible by New Deal poverty abatement programs, such as the Works Progress Administration. California's response was intensified and stimulated by the numbers and kinds of migrants, creating a unique discourse about the health needs of migrants, who actually brought disease into the state, and were thus attacked in ways unlike the poor children of other states. Differences aside, California followed similar methods, producing public or internal notices warning of disease and malnutrition, offering information through social workers or medical professionals, quarantining camps, feeding and clothing families, and building a pro-public health administration.

### ***Rhetoric, Reality, and Response***

What is often lost among rhetoric is the actual disease environment of California. Unfortunately, state records are clearly biased, blaming many health problems on migrants. Some historians have agreed with the Department of Public Health's analysis. For example, Walter Stein lauded the public health countermeasures, stating that they “managed to prevent epidemics” of “typhoid, malaria, or tuberculosis.”<sup>70</sup> Here, Stein repeated the opinions shared by individuals who bragged about the efficacy of California's response in the press, whether they felt migrants were deserving of aid or not. One polemicist argued that “no migrant family hungers in California unless it is too proud to accept relief... There is no red tape about getting free food,” and then later explained how migrants spread by bringing their families and friends out West with tales of relief money.<sup>71</sup> This opinion, widespread during the time, also holds some truth value.<sup>72</sup> Future studies could uncover information on the actual incidences of disease due

<sup>70</sup> Stein, *California and the Dust Bowl Migration*, 158.

<sup>71</sup> Taylor, “California's Grapes of Wrath,” 232.

<sup>72</sup> See Appendix A for some data regarding migrant entry and stays in California. Also consider the amount of funding and aid that California provided—locals might have disdained migrants but state

to migrants, but that history offers a different argument. Here, public health programs were relevant because they represented the growth of relief during the New Deal, the advancement of a contagion rhetoric surrounding migrant families, and the deployment of science to combat perceived problems.

There is no single coherent stereotype that encapsulates the image of the migrant child in the Californian imagination. As demonstrated throughout this work, rhetorical confluences happened, which variously described their poor health, immorality, potential for radical politics, criminality, bad upbringing, lack of labor habits, and a few other negative attributes. The metaphor of contagion neatly packaged these problems into a single nugget of wisdom for Californians—the migrant child absolutely needed intervention if the state wanted to avoid damaging its own citizens. In their massive report's concluding statement, M. H. Lewis and Alma Holzschuh explained that “it must be remembered also that while public aloofness from the problem of the transient may be excused on the grounds of lack of responsibility for his welfare or his future, such excuse is not available when public self-interest enters into the picture. As will be noted by careful reading of this report, continued neglect of the transient and his problems cannot help but redound to the active detriment of the health, morals and welfare of the State. We do not live or die in a vacuum--nor does the transient.”<sup>73</sup>

There were a multitude of responses to the public health problems presented by migrants. Counties, residents, and the state all engaged with the undeniable facts of migrant life through a variety of actions. Public and private agencies distributed food, offered health screenings, classified migrants, sheltered families, posted notices, and

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officials recognized that aid, whatever their reasons for providing it, was necessary.  
73 State Relief Administration, *Transients in California*, 290.

deployed science, but did so in haphazard ways. What resulted from these efforts was a tremendous growth in the Department of Public Health, as it utilized the New Nutrition, created specialists, expanded its county programs, and generally promoted the cause of public health by attacking poor and migrant families. This initiative was not undertaken solely out of sympathy—instead, many in California continued to berate or patronize migrant families for what seemed to be self-inflicted health problems. Nevertheless, this admixture of necessity, frustration, and pity provoked a massive amount of infrastructure which surrounded poor families and children, not just migrants. The state and its officials were attempting to rid California of its Dust Bowl contagion. However, as bureaucrats recognized the concerns of transient children, their attentions also turned to other methods for 'treating' the child.

### 3 – Wandering Pupils: Schooling the Migrant Child in California

*“In Central Valley, a large community hall was finally rented and temporary partitions erected to form three classrooms. By the time school was ready to open, the school population had increased from an expected three teacher situation to one requiring five teachers and with the opening of school, following the Christmas holidays, a sixth teacher has been added to the staff. At Project City a former dance hall has been converted to school use, and three teachers provided. In the Bass District, which was originally a one-teacher school, there are at present approximately forty-five children and two teachers”*

– Robert J. Meade, Supervising Principal, Shasta Dam Area<sup>1</sup>

Much as public health expanded during the Depression and Dust Bowl, so too would the Department of Education. Its officials were similarly reform-minded, although they emphasized the need for education as a requirement for children to reach their capacities as citizens and workers. They were also acutely aware of how locals responded negatively to migrant children. In response to competing obligations, bureaucrats trod carefully, creating segregated schools for both Mexicans and Anglo transients as the needs arose. Californians never fully empathized with transient children, although they convinced themselves of their forward thinking and tender affinity for the needs of migrant children. Amidst a sea of rhetoric and structural pressure, the Department of Education ultimately connected its programs with other agencies, including the Department of Public Health, in order to better express its paternal power in a time of crisis.

#### ***Mexicans and Education***

The State of California began educating transient and migrant children prior to the Depression, although their initial program was short-lived. In 1927 the legislature passed

<sup>1</sup> Robert J. Meade, “Shasta Dam Emergency Schools,” *Western Journal of Education*, (Feb. 1940), 13.

a bill which created the Migratory School system, which was designed to help children of migrant laborers. By 1929 the legislature set aside funding that counties could request in order to set up their own Migratory Schools; this funding was treated “as if the apportionment were made from the state school fund to the elementary schools.”<sup>2</sup> This program represented an early acknowledgment of the educational hazards of an itinerant lifestyle. A number of school districts petitioned to create Migrant Schools within their communities, and these petitions tended to occur whenever “the Mexican population grew large enough” that officials felt the need to segregate.<sup>3</sup> In Los Angeles County alone, the Pico, Mt. View, East Whittier, West Covina, Bassett, and Mill districts created such schools, all for the children of families engaged in walnut picking. These schools were in operation by the fall walnut harvest of 1927, and employed an average of 2 teachers for the duration.<sup>4</sup> Other districts were also engaged in the creation of Migratory Schools. The teachers in these schools had to keep detailed annual reports and districts filed these with the state Department of Education. These asked, among other things, for the total attendance, the number of children per grade level, and any other special classes taught.<sup>5</sup> Through the Depression, it seemed as though these schools were successful at teaching migrant children, especially minority children (as prior to the Dust Bowl most

2 State of California, *The School Code of the State of California and Acts of the Eight-Eighth Regular Session of the Legislature*, (Sacramento: CSPO, 1929), 157. HeinOnline Legal Database.

3 Gilbert G. Gonzalez, *Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 1990), 131. Presumably, these petitions were meant to protect white children from having large numbers of Mexican children as their peers.

4 “Notification and Application for Reimbursement of Moneys Expended for Conduct of Classes for Children of Migratory Laborers,” set of 7 identical notices, Call no. F3601:1, Los Angeles County Superintendent of Public Instruction, Dept. of Education, California State Archives. School districts in other counties also applied for the state funds, although it appears that only Los Angeles County sent correspondence about the organization of such schools.

5 “Migratory School: Elementary School Teacher's Annual Reports, 1927-1934,” 2 ffs of various teachers' reports, Call no. F3601:2, Dept. of Education, California State Archives. These were identical forms filled out by any teacher engaged in Migratory School work. It would be too laborious to list all teachers or districts involved, but a sample, given on the next page, is illustrative.

migratory laborers were Mexican, Filipino, Japanese, or African American). Certainly, these Migratory Schools pleased Californian bureaucrats.

By 1933 the Migratory Schools underwent some changes. The legislature, arguing that a fiscal crisis was imminent, altered the way that schools received state funding, by repealing the original fund and replacing it with a new method of financing the schools.<sup>6</sup> Migrants continued to receive education through school districts, although by the Dust Bowl such schools appeared to have fallen out of favor. To wit, the Migratory Schools were not included in the Department of Education's *California Schools* publication after 1935. In this volume, the state charted the decline of the Migratory School, indicating that since the 1930-31 school year, roughly ten percent of school districts had discontinued “classes for children of migratory laborers” and another ten percent had reduced those services.<sup>7</sup> Dust Bowl children did not receive an education through this system, for a variety of reasons.

6 James H. Deering, *Supplement of 1933 to Deering's Codes and General Laws of 1931 and to Treadwell's Constitution*, (San Francisco: Bancroft-Whitney Co., 1934), 2222-2228.

7 Department of Education, *California Schools: Vol V, 1934-1935* (Sacramento: CSPO, 1935), 6-7. This is the last issue to mention the Migratory Schools.





*Figure 5: Mexican children of migratory workers*

Several scholars noted the racially segregated nature of the Migratory School; it did not assist white transients because it was designed to control Mexican families. Gilbert Gonzalez, for instance, maintains that these institutions were designed to educate migrant Mexican children away from the general school population, alongside the state's Mexican Schools. Mexican-only schools were a fixture in California prior to the Depression, and were looked at by educators as “institute[s] of service devoted to the

welfare of the immigrant people.” In such schools, Mexican children received a disproportionate amount of labor training, euphemistically called “special subjects which have for their purpose the developing of habits of thrift and industry and manual skill,” which these children were supposed to “excel in these special subjects.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed, it was common to hear educators speak about the Mexican child's “craftsman's hands.”<sup>9</sup> Lange demonstrated the accuracy of the reports emphasizing the labor of Mexican children in several of her photos, including one of a family where the oldest child (perhaps ten) tied carrots alongside her family.<sup>10</sup> In his work, Gonzalez argues that the Migratory Schools were also founded on Americanization and maintaining an economic system. The schools were bolstered through particular lessons and “special schedules,” which included a shortened five-hour school day in violation of official state statutes.<sup>11</sup> In many cases Mexican migrant youths received even less schooling. The records on days spent in the classroom corroborate Gonzalez's claim; for instance, in the Milpitas Migratory School the total days of attendance was 1144, but dividing that by the number of pupils, each child was only in attendance for roughly eight school days.<sup>12</sup> Mexican migrant and transient children represented a laboring class to the state of California, and the Department of Education was complicit in this project. As Piven and Cloward argued,

8 C. R. Holbrook, “Schools for Mexicans,” *Western Journal of Education* (Nov. 1926), 5. These specific quotes come from Holbrook, the Superintendent of San Bernardino's city schools. He was 'assisting' the Mexican community in his city by creating a second Mexican School. Indeed, he extolled the virtues of segregation and labor as a way to 'properly educate' these children. Such opinions were the norm prior to the Depression, and in some ways they continued through the 1930s.

9 “Education of Foreign Language Groups,” *Western Journal of Education* (Dec. 1936), 12. In fairness, this author also praised Japanese and Russian children in similarly patronizing ways.

10 Dorothea Lange, “Children of migratory Mexican field workers. The older one helps tie carrots in the field,” February 1937. From the Library of Congress, *Prints and Photographs Online Catalog*. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000001036/PP/>

11 Gonzalez, *Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation*, 131-133.

12 “Migratory School: Elementary School Teacher's Annual Reports, 1927-1934.” This teacher in particular appeared to have some difficulty with the form, as many things have been crossed out or written over.

the state was “regulating the poor” by providing a small carrot in the form of the segregated schools. Nevertheless, the Migratory School was a new development in educational practices, and the education of migrant workers and their families would mushroom into an important component of California's school system in the postwar years. In sum, despite the apparent success of Migratory Schools, they would not be used to educate the masses of white migrant children. However, by the end of the thirties segregated practices appeared which focused on protecting local children from transient children.

### ***Districts in Crisis***

Those families fleeing the Dust Bowl forced educators in California to reckon with their sheer numbers. Repeatedly, the state attempted to count the migrants. The Department of Education began gathering educational data on the influx of Dust Bowl families in the mid-1930s, as counties began to complain about the volatility of the situation. Around seventy-one thousand new migrants came into California from June 1935 to the same month in 1936.<sup>13</sup> Many of these migrant families had school-age children, but being migrants, they moved within the state as well. This caused further upheaval among local districts. Due to transient motion, school attendance numbers fluctuated rapidly—in Bakersfield “from fifteen to twenty new families were being reported to the school department each week” and in one school the number of pupils jumped over twelve percent within months, before falling and rising the next year. This created instability and uncertainty for school officials, who were scrambling to find

13 Helen Hefferman, “Education of Children of Seasonal Workers,” *Western Journal of Education* (Jan. 1939), 10-11. This article was a shortened version of a lengthy report created in December of 1938 by the State Department of Education in conjunction with several educational administration organizations.

enough teachers, desks, and books to meet demand.<sup>14</sup> Other schools reported similar increases and decreases in population in accordance with the agricultural cycle. El Centro received an influx of Dust Bowl migrants alongside the Mexican and African-American farmworker families typically at work in the region's cotton and lettuce fields. The bureaucrats of that district “expected by April [1936] to have to provide for as many as 400 extra children” in their “five small grade schools,” a dramatic increase for the region.<sup>15</sup> This sort of fact-finding continued throughout the decade, with publications by the Department of Education offering such information to local teachers and administrators. For example, Helen Hefferman, the Chief of the Division of Elementary Education and Rural Schools, used numbers gleaned from an April 1938 report, with a “conservative estimate [of] 30,000... children of school age.”<sup>16</sup> In 1939 the department issued a brief taken from a SRA study, explaining to officials that education was one of the state's top priorities in dealing with the Dust Bowl migrants. This brief culled education-related statistics from the SRA's larger report, repeating the fact that roughly forty percent of the people on relief were primary school-aged children.<sup>17</sup> In sum, the state continually attempted to stay abreast of the increase in pupils, as it was tied to funding, teacher hiring, and a host of other administrative functions.

Locals and the Department of Education also had to deal with the practical concerns of finding space to house these children and give them some semblance of an

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14 State Relief Administration, *Transients in California*, 55. In Hawthorne School, the pupil numbers were as follows: in Sept. 1934, 362, in Mar. 1935, 408, in June 1935, 367, in Sept. 1935, 381, in Jan. 1936, 424.

15 Ibid., 63-64. For comparison, El Centro's population from the 1930 census was 8,434, and thousands of migrant workers came through during the harvest every year.

16 Hefferman, “Education of Children of Seasonal Workers,” 10. These numbers originally came from the Simon J. Lubin Society's study, which counted over 250,000 migrants (children and adults).

17 Department of Education, *California Schools: Vol X, 1936-39* (Sacramento: CSPO, 1939), 137-139.

education. Schools in the Central Valley were especially keen on upgrading their school infrastructure once migrant children began appearing in droves. For the most part, they sent these children to the local elementary or high schools, which received hasty upgrades such as new classrooms, or were built specifically in response to the crisis. These upgrades did not come cheaply to the affected counties. Tulare County and two of its cities are relevant examples. In Tulare County's districts, attendance skyrocketed by forty-six percent between 1935 and 1940, and school taxes accelerated even faster, reaching 270 percent of the 1935 amount.<sup>18</sup> In an attempt to stem these financial leaks, the City of Tulare voted to create bonds worth \$120,000 for the construction of a new building that would hold seventh and eighth graders. They had no feasible alternative, as roughly five hundred new students inundated their district from the Dust Bowl region.<sup>19</sup> Porterville faced even worse circumstances. It condemned one school building and had another one burn down in 1938, just as school numbers increased yet again. Porterville gained roughly two hundred students in two years, and so it (along with other districts) had to convert the library into an emergency classroom, while also building two new structures.<sup>20</sup> Districts both spent large sums of money and improvised with their existing structures in order to meet the Dust Bowl demand for schooling.

As migrants continued fleeing into California, some local school districts broke under the combined weight of new enrollments and social unrest. Camp schools re-created the segregation inherent in the Migratory Schools or Mexican Schools, but primarily educated Dust Bowl Anglo children. The Department of Education issued

18 "Migrants Add to California School Costs," *The Lima (OH) News*, 25 Apr. 1940,

19 "Western School News," *Western Journal of Education* (Dec. 1937), 14.

20 Morris Wagner, ed., "Western School News," *Western Journal of Education* (Jan. 1939), 5-6. The superintendent, naturally, occupied a spacious office in one of these new buildings. Development was often as good for the bureaucrat as it was for the child.

regulations for Emergency Schools by late 1938, well after local districts had found ways to increase their capacity. Still, these schools would be employed in many rural districts. Ideally, these Emergency Schools provided a healthy environment, transportation, and the same education available through a regular public school.<sup>21</sup> School districts in rural counties created such schools near migrant camps and other areas where transient children were concentrated. Fresno's approach is indicative of such efforts; by 1939 it had seventeen of these temporary migrant schools, twenty-five teachers dedicated to instructing migrant youth, and an attendance of nearly one thousand children at the start of harvest season. Farmers in particular appreciated these schools, as they tended to keep families close to their crops, and drew in a "more desirable class" of transient workers.<sup>22</sup> Sometimes temporary school programs were initiated at the local level. The migrant school near the Arvin federal migrant camp was an illustrative example of this alternate approach. Kern County Superintendent Leo Hart created the Arvin Federal Emergency School in 1940, and it remained in operation for five years. It was intended to provide a safe space for migrant education, away from the harsh treatment on display at schools for residents of the county.<sup>23</sup> These buffer schools, designed to siphon migrant children from public schools, were not a complete solution—many Dust Bowl migrants continued to attend local schools.

### ***Residents Strike Back***

While local districts and the Department of Education expanded the physical

21 Hefferman, "Education of Children of Seasonal Workers," 11. These recommendations came from Hefferman's conference report. Interestingly, "Crop holidays" were abolished in these schools where they had previously existed. This was an attempt to ensure that migrant children actually received an education.

22 "Migrants Add to California School Costs," *The Lima (OH) News*, 21. This article came from a national news outlet that studied the problem in Fresno County.

23 Jerry Stanley, "Children of the Grapes of Wrath," *American West* (May/Apr 1986), 22-24.

spaces for education, angry county residents hotly contested the social spaces. Some parents were convinced that migrant children brought in contagious diseases. Indeed, schools were often the site of transmission between migrant children and resident children, a fact that angered many Californians and led them to react against migrants through public backlash and through public health measures. One author wrote on Kern County's struggle and explained how Bakersfield parents revolted when “the migrants' children came over the line to school and epidemics of flu, skin diseases, chicken pox, and other ailments depleted the classrooms.”<sup>24</sup> In fact, it was the Bakersfield Parent Teacher's Association which made the link between migrants and children; it noted that “migratory children were responsible for the frequent epidemics breaking out in the schools.”<sup>25</sup> As already noted in chapter two, transient families and children were thought to transmit other diseases as well, including tuberculosis. Bureaucrats could not ignore such local outcries; the Department of Education had resigned itself to this reality, and knew that local superintendents do “not always find the needed support... there is frequently discrimination against migratory children.” State officials continued, also explaining how these youths were “not wanted in the regular schools because of considerations of cleanliness, health, or social status.”<sup>26</sup> Though New Deal California was powerful, it had to respond adequately to the needs of its citizens before the needs of migrant 'interlopers.'

In the face of these parental and local backlashes, the state orchestrated a national and internal propaganda effort that sought to downplay the harsh treatment of transient

24 Taylor, “California's Grapes of Wrath,” 232.

25 State Relief Administration, *Transients in California*, 56. F. Taylor and this government report presumably received their information on these outbreaks from the same newspaper sources, but the reprinting of such facts bears mentioning.

26 Hefferman, “Education of Children of Seasonal Workers,” 11.

children within the school system. The state balanced multiple sorts of rhetoric carefully; it clearly helped shape the contagion discourse around migrant youths, but Progressive and New Deal rhetoric regarding control and relief also influenced bureaucrats. Most importantly, California designed its propaganda campaign to counter public critics, negative stereotypes that hurt the state's image, and to suit its national political needs. In one statement read to Congress, the state delegation noted that “we admit there is prejudice against those children in many California districts,” then pointed out that demographic pressures are to blame for the animosity. In their words, “the school enrollment in many such districts has literally doubled in the past two or three years, due to the influx of people from other states.” Whatever the real numbers, it was clear that locals felt as if the schools were out of their control, and the state returned to methods first realized by the Migratory Schools. To wit, the California congressional delegation explained that the state legislature was considering a school funding bill, and asked for Federal assistance “in financing schools in connection with the Federal Migrant Camps.”<sup>27</sup> Governor Olson also acted as a national promoter for California's New Deal state. He was well-aware of California's negative portrayal in popular media, particularly from authors such as John Steinbeck. In response to Steinbeck, Governor Olson stated his new plan to deal with migrant families in a magazine article aimed towards a national audience. In part, Olson explained how his reforms were undermined by minimum wage loopholes and the long history of “migratory labor problems” in California.<sup>28</sup> These pleas

27 “Interstate Migration and its Effect on California,” 4-5. Also in this proposal was a recommendation for federal funding to prioritize states “in proportion to the number of children of non-residents being educated” therein by “local taxpayers.”

28 “Olson Offers 'Self-Help' Plan as Steinbeck Reply,” *Bakersfield Californian*, 15 Aug. 1939, 8. This brief article demonstrates the extent to which California's state government felt compelled to reply to *Grapes of Wrath*. In reference to the labor problems, this and other chapters describe the number of attitudes/stereotypes Californians held. Olson is probably referring to the strikes of the early 1930s.



from state officials reached national ears, obfuscating certain realities and shifting blame onto demographic change, the lack of adequate funding, or on agitation.

State agencies shielded themselves from criticism by explaining the sheer amount of work they had to accomplish. The Department of Education called for a sustained educational effort to confront the vast numbers of Dust Bowl children, as schools faced the challenge of undoing the underlying mental, labor, and familial problems which plagued transient children. In one brief, it stated that families needed to be taken off relief, put to work, and “be made physically sound once more.”<sup>29</sup> The grim specter of children raised without a work ethic was only going to be contained by the Department of Education's efforts. Officials and public figures felt obligated to create such propaganda in response to negative press they had received.

Locals also sought to defend themselves from negative publicity. In response to Steinbeck and others, the Bakersfield Californian ran an opinion piece that dismissed the structural educational prejudice against migrants, stating that although “the nation is told of the lack of educational facilities for the migrant children,” the actual “records disclose that the farmers in the agricultural areas are carrying a steadily mounting tax burden in the effort to provide additional school facilities for the progeny of the newcomers.” They also wrote that many charitable organizations and volunteers aided those “underprivileged enrolled in the schools” even before the government engaged in such aid. What did Bakersfield reap for their hard work? According to this author, the only “reward for their humanitarianism” was the “dissemination of untruths which profit only the publicists.”<sup>30</sup> This public defense was emblematic of the opinion of Kern County

<sup>29</sup> Department of Education, *California Schools: Vol X, 1936-39*, 138.

<sup>30</sup> “Lip Service and Service,” *Bakersfield Californian*, 12 Aug. 1939, editorial.

locals, many of whom also chimed in with similar retorts in the newspaper. One local from Oildale argued that Californians were smeared by *Grapes of Wrath*, despite the decent, humane treatment offered by the county.<sup>31</sup> Still other newspaper writers sent these opinions around the country. *The Lima (OH) News*, for instance, ran a lengthy article on migrant education in Fresno County, arguing in its conclusion that “there is no evidence of discrimination against the children of migrant parents,” and tacitly blaming transient families for their own education problems. These children lost out on their education because they moved so rapidly, with truancy officers remarking that their movements made steady education impossible because the state could not effectively track such youths.<sup>32</sup> As Dust Bowl migration increased, interest groups directly vented their frustrations with the state. The California League of Women Voters, for instance, used newspapers as a podium. As noted by their Education Chairman, Mrs. Brown, the League was analyzing the Emergency School Fund proposed by some California legislators. League members worried about the cost of educating migrant children, which was projected to increase if transients could work on WPA projects. This would have given Dust Bowl families a reason to stay in California, placing their children into local schools on a semi-permanent basis. These women sought out more information by writing to County superintendents and by conducting research in their own communities.<sup>33</sup> The League, alongside other Californians, shifted the argument away from the plight of children and onto the danger faced by California taxpayers via the

31 C. H. M., “Migrants,” *Bakersfield Californian*, 11 Aug. 1939, editorial. This response was written in light of the series of articles by Saunders on migrants in Kern County, which are referenced elsewhere in this document.

32 “Migrants Add to California School Costs,” *The Lima (OH) News*.

33 “Migratory Workers Education Problem is Cause of Alarm,” *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, 11 Aug. 1938, 6. Brown described the proposal by the California legislature as one that would direct state funds to districts directly impacted by migration.

migrant families. Locals in affected counties laid blame on the migrants themselves, absolving residents of any obligations. Others were concerned about the mounting costs of transient education. Still more individuals defended their communities, claiming that they humanely dealt with migrant children.

Later scholars of the period have also engaged, in a limited way, with a valorization of local educational efforts. Jerry Stanley wrote a brief piece on the construction and maintenance of a school for transients near Weedpatch Camp (also known as Arvin Camp, the same one lambasted by Steinbeck in the *Grapes of Wrath*). Stanley, in interviewing Leo Hart, the superintendent of Kern County schools, lauded Hart's efforts to protect children from being "forced to sit on the floor" and also cited his inclusion of migrant parents into the school's operation. Stanley also noted that Hart was reacting to the negative opinions of some bureaucrats, including one who opined that "[Dust Bowl migrant children] are going to grow up just like their fathers and mothers. They're a shiftless lot. They've got no brains." For all this, Hart set an example for other agencies. In one case, several Youth Authority officials toured the camp school, then remarked that it was "the finest crime prevention program in the state."<sup>34</sup> It was clear that Hart cared for the migrant children, but in relying primarily on interview material Stanley unwittingly advanced rhetoric already familiar to local officials. The Youth Authority agents revealed this in their assumption that migrant children would, if left to their own devices, become criminal deviants. In addition, Hart appeared powerless to prevent the ostracization of migrant youth in the Kern County school systems he led, opting instead to segregate migrants at their own school, much as the Migratory and Mexican Schools

<sup>34</sup> Stanley, "Children of the Grapes of Wrath," 22-28. Interestingly, Stanley would later turn this essay into a children's book on migrant children and the Arvin school.

had done for those populations. This meant that Kern County residents scored a small victory, produced through their hate for Dust Bowl refugees.

### ***Education Bureaucracy in the Dust Bowl***

The California Department of Education, under Vierling Kersey, was strained by the new problems it faced in dealing with migrant children and the strain of the Depression on rural areas. The department thus enlarged itself through emergency alliances with national and state agencies who shared its cause. Hefferman admitted this new stance in her 1939 report, arguing that “education must increasingly become the concern of the federal government in order that children in all parts of the country may be afforded equal educational opportunity.” Education, traditionally the domain of the state, required national intervention because California lacked resources. Hefferman and other administrators hoped that the federal government, already intervening through the transient camps and other measures, would augment the department's activities.<sup>35</sup> For instance, educators sought to make ties with federal agencies that helped transient children learn work habits. These links were germinating as the Dust Bowl began, and would increase as more migrants came into California. Among Kersey's early correspondence with such agencies was a series of letters between him and the National Youth Administration, which helped fund a series of projects in California, starting in late 1935. As the California Youth Administration's “Project Series Bulletin” noted, the NYA collaborated with sponsors in California to organize and direct four distinct projects. The first was the “project for youth community development and recreational leadership,” which primarily created jobs for “young men and women from relief families” doing

<sup>35</sup> Hefferman, “Education of Children of Seasonal Workers,” 11.

recreational guidance, arts and crafts, facility improvement, and other unskilled labor. Migrant teens benefited more from the second project, which employed rural youths for repair, agricultural work, and school or library work in their country communities.<sup>36</sup> Locals also interfaced with non-educational agencies in their counties. Teachers in particular deployed their expertise with children for these ends. In one instance, schoolteachers in Bakersfield “volunteered as recreational directors” during the summer, “[feeling] the need of preventive work so that the children of migratory workers should not become delinquent.”<sup>37</sup> The interest of Kersey, his department, and local educators in youth programs pointed to the entwined nature of education, labor, relief, and moral programs during the Depression.

As noted earlier, Californians and others who worried about the education of transient children were also troubled by the perceived lack of work ethics among those youth. Federal agencies like the National Youth Administration or the Civilian Conservation Corps attempted to inculcate successful labor habits as a protective measure against the ever-present threat of radicalism, indolence, deviancy, and other un-American attributes.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, the Department of Education engaged with federal and state institutions to help care for the health of schoolchildren.

Public health programs fit neatly with administrative visions of the school. Educators found that “the education of children cannot progress unless their basic

36 “CYA Project Series Bulletin No. 1: NYA Sponsored Projects,” 24 Dec. 1935, Call no. F3752:523, 1-2, Department of Education Collection, California State Archives.

37 State Relief Administration, *Transients in California*, 56.

38 For a description of the CCC and the rhetoric about preventing “anti-social” behavior among male youths, as coterminous with homosexuality in the camps, see Canaday, *The Straight State*, 117-26. These themes will be revisited in chapter four when discussing, briefly, sex perversion fears among unattached transient children.

physical needs” were cared for.<sup>39</sup> What were some of the ways that the state and their federal allies promoted their version of health to children? WPA nurseries and public schools both attempted to teach proper habits to children in their care. Rothstein photographed this occurring in the Shafter migrant camp, where a young boy, presumably directed by his teacher, appeared to either be wiping his hands or blowing his nose into a handkerchief, away from the other children.<sup>40</sup> Though comparatively minor, such examples of health education represented a cost-effective and straightforward way of protecting local and migrant youths from taking unnecessary health risks.

Not all inter-agency relationships were as cordial. The Department of Public Health and the Department of Education had a tenuous relationship, although they shared the goal of having healthy schoolchildren. The efforts by Dr. Telfer and others to immunize against migrant-borne illness were described earlier, but several other combined efforts were also notable. In particular, Superintendent Dickie and the Department of Public Health implored school officials to promptly report daily attendance to Kersey, so that, in accordance with School Code Section 4.750, local officials could authorize countermeasures against “epidemics of unusual duration and prevalence” in schools. In the same notice, Dickie stated that his health officers would investigate such incidences and certify the epidemics for further aid, if needed. Later the same year, Dickie repeated his frustration with the slow bureaucracy of the Department of Education. Pointing out that many lists of “epidemic absences” were merely regular absences, he revealed the gap that sometimes existed between local and state authorities.

<sup>39</sup> Hefferman, “Education of Children of Seasonal Workers,” 11.

<sup>40</sup> Arthur Rothstein, “Children in nursery are taught health habits, Shafter migrant camp, California,” March 1940. From the Library of Congress, *Prints and Photographs Online Catalog*.  
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000005985/PP/>

These health requests were disseminated in the *California Schools* publication in 1936, just as Dust Bowl children were entering the California school system.<sup>41</sup> It appeared as if teachers and administrators kept poor records even in the face of migrant illness. This was surprising, given the monetary reasons to diligently report such diseases. The School Code and legislature tied funding to attendance, but schools facing epidemics could request “emergency attendance” to inflate their numbers.<sup>42</sup> By 1938, the Department of Education created more specific guidelines for such health measures. They re-emphasized the 1936 advice to teachers and administrators, while also offering a comprehensive list of communicable diseases. These came in three categories: regular, which included Valley Fever, reportable only, and quarantinable, which included the dreaded TB and polio.<sup>43</sup> The well-being of resident youths required collusion between health administrators and educators, but their distinct obligations caused friction. Still, these two groups shared the opinion of migrant children as disease vectors, and attempted to seamlessly transition care between the school and the health department as necessary.

### ***School Lunches***

Later on, California developed of a school lunch program to combat malnutrition and childhood illnesses. Educators knew that migrant children were often malnourished, probably through the efforts of the Department of Public Health, so administrators wanted to assist these youths. By 1938, Hefferman recommended that properly education transients would require “providing for a noonday meal of nourishing meat, fruits, vegetables, and milk.”<sup>44</sup> A year later, the Federal Surplus Commodities Commission

41 Department of Education, *California Schools: Vol VII, 1936-39* (Sacramento: CSPO, 1935), 9-10, 360.

42 Ibid., 82-85.

43 Department of Education, *California Schools: Vol IX, 1936-39* (Sacramento: CSPO, 1935), 105.

44 Hefferman, “Education of Children of Seasonal Workers,” 11. This was necessary to Hefferman

realized these hopes by providing a nationwide school lunch program. These food surpluses began to enter California schools by 1939—a late start compared to other states, but nevertheless a proactive measure. According to the SRA's reports on unemployment relief for 1939, this school lunch program had an instant effect. In their words, it reduced colds and illness among schoolchildren and eased their “mental attitudes” in the face of adverse conditions. Importantly, this meal program sought to be inclusive; children who received a free lunch were not segregated from other children in the cafeteria.<sup>45</sup> Early scholars of relief echoed these sentiments, with one arguing that “teachers in schools where lunches were served observed that children gained in weight, lost inferiority which they had felt among classmates, and became more alert and interested in school work.”<sup>46</sup> In treating nearly 266,000 schoolchildren across California, school lunches certainly helped migrant children, and demonstrated an attempt at integrating transient children into local districts as equals.

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because migrant children lacked basic amenities. To fix that, she hesitantly recommended offering food, facilities for bathing, and places to rest, things “totally lacking in the labor camps.”

45 “Unemployment Relief in California,” pp. 29-30, July-Dec. 1939, Call no. F3448: 112, State Relief Administration Collection, California State Archives. However, it remains possible that children faced ridicule or other bullying for being on the lunch program.

46 Richard Osborn Cummings, *The American and His Food*, 216.





*Figure 6: Children eating lunch at nursery, Tulare*

Federal officials in the California branch of the WPA, working alongside the state, also attempted to offer nutrition in the form of school lunches to very young children, in the hopes that this would combat rampant infections in the camps. One form of care was through the nursery schools prevalent in the better-managed, official migrant camps. Kern County's Shafter Camp in particular offered a lunch program in its nursery school. Dorothea Lange photographed and detailed this program during her visit to the camp, explaining that the WPA trained nursery school teachers and sent them to the camps as a form of work relief.<sup>47</sup> Nursery schools with lunch programs appeared in other camps as

<sup>47</sup> Dorothea Lange, "Lunchtime for young migrants at Shafter Camp, California," February 1939. From the Library of Congress, *Prints and Photographs Online Catalog*.  
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000002344/PP/>. In some respects this program was unusual, in

well, including Farmersville, Visalia, and Woodville Camps in Tulare County. Here, Rothstein provided an image of toddlers happily eating their lunch.<sup>48</sup> These served a dual purpose; in fixing migrant health problems the WPA also offered employment to women as teachers or aides. In fact, the nutritional needs of transient children were often bound up in other relief programs, unrelated to the primary objective of feeding youths at school.

These school lunches were part of a larger relief effort, despite official denials. Publicly, the federal officials involved in the program claimed that “this is a health program and not a relief program,” demonstrating their deep belief in nutritional countermeasures against disease.<sup>49</sup> It is also noteworthy that the purpose of public health programs easily slipped between meanings. Another scholar, Susan Levine, explored the origins of school lunch programs in the U.S. She stated that “physicians and home economists alike had long documented the debilitating effects of hunger...children who came to school without proper meals, nutritionists warned, would be unable to take advantage of their education, nor would they fully develop into strong and responsible citizens.” Nevertheless, Levine also argued that politicians creating the school lunch program oriented it to benefit farmers by paying for surplus crops, which “effectively transformed free commodity distribution into agricultural price support rather than food aid.”<sup>50</sup> The state's attempts to help children, though somewhat effective in feeding

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that the vast majority of WPA projects were designed to provide men with jobs. However, nursery aide and teacher were traditionally female professions, so this did not substantially 'cut into' the jobs available for men.

48 Arthur Rothstein, “Children eating lunch in nursery, Tulare migrant camp, Visalia, California,” March 1939. From the Library of Congress, *Prints and Photographs Online Catalog*.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000005917/PP/>

49 “Unemployment Relief in California,” 30.

50 Levine, *School Lunch Politics*, 41-46. She also explains that this became a problem because the fruits and vegetables available followed erratic cycles, not nutritional requirements.

children a nutritive meal, also placed economic provisions ahead of children's welfare through the bureaucracy of school lunch programs.

### ***Schooling Endures***

Schools in California during the Depression and Dust Bowl became flashpoints in the social stratification of the state. Historically, Mexicans and other non-Anglos received education in segregated institutions that turned them into a pliable class of laborers. Schools for migrants during the early 1930s remained segregated institutions for nonwhite children. This changed through the migration. Dust Bowl families were also laborers, yet their children largely entered into the local public schools. Here, these children were maligned and stereotyped by locals for their supposed bad attitudes, diseased bodies, and for the simple fact that they were strangers to the communities in which they lived. Locals and officials deployed potent rhetorical countermeasures to criticism, which expressed their faith in the school system as it strained under the weight of incoming schoolchildren. Nevertheless, the Department of Education knew it had to enact new measures in order to maintain its educational goals. It allocated funds, created guidelines for Emergency Schools, and teamed up with a variety of agencies, including the WPA and Department of Public Health, in order to survive the Dust Bowl. Schools also became a battlefield for the well-being of migrant and local children, as the Department of Public Health, school lunches, and local reactions attested. Once more, health and nutrition programs expanded during the New Deal but did not do so under the banner of 'relief,' thus they were spared the postwar axe, where governments cut the funding to many other relief-oriented programs. Education programs at-large also increased through WWII and into the late twentieth century, surviving the end of the New

Deal and the last vestiges of Progressivism. To wit, children continue to receive school lunches, migrant laborers in California still require special educational facilities, and the Department of Education has only grown in prominence over the last century.

#### 4 – Holding the Child: Travel, Incarceration, and Resistance in Aid and Reform

*“The Juvenile Detention Home, located on the same grounds as the County Hospital, is a two-story brick building, with accommodation for twenty children. Each child, according to the matron, was given a physical examination at entrance, or if this could not be arranged immediately, was placed in isolation. The matron stated that the migratory boys were so destructive that no furnishings could be left in their rooms. When she locked them into the basement they broke open the cupboards, stole food and blankets, and escaped. When the place was visited March 14 there were only two girls in the house.”*

– Bakersfield County Report<sup>1</sup>

Californians noticed many problems among migrant children; among the most pressing were their transient ways, their lack of parental guidance, and their vulnerability to a host of unseemly dangers. Children wandered along desolate highways, conversed with older homeless people in jungles, lacked proper clothing, committed minor crimes, rode the rails, and generally lacked the social aptitude that the state required of its citizens. In their migrant lives, children attempted to avoid the state and its imposition of order onto their young lives. Despite these attempts, youths in California were subject to an intrusive relationship with state and local bureaucracies, one where institutions controlled or abrogated childrens' motivations, desires, and goals. Due to the connections between migrants in California and a variety of social or moral ills, the state of California undertook particular reform measures. In fixing this myriad of problems, California resorted to its dual role as peacekeeper and parent, turning many migrant children into wards of the state.

1 State Relief Administration, *Transients in California*, 59. This large bound volume of reports from the California Department of Special Surveys and Studies will be referred to often throughout this essay, as it is a demographic compendium of the formative years of state, local, and private responses to the migrant problem. Further, this large set of data became a 'bible' for officials who managed or oversaw migrant aid through the state.

### ***Rambling Children***

Most transient children experienced this power in the local County Welfare Department or Detention Home, where they received clothing, shelter, and meals. In more extreme examples, migrant children incurred the full brunt of the state's carceral apparatus via the reform schools. This chapter describes the viewpoints and actions of state employees who oversaw these and other coercive systems during the Depression. It also offers a look into the complicated relationship between the needs of the children and the demands of the state. Some children rebelled against the state's imposition of control, creating narrow avenues of escape. In this, the fullest expression of *in loco parentis*, transient youth found themselves at the mercy of a state which saw itself as protecting future citizens and maintaining social roles through aid, removal, inspection, categorization, and incarceration.

There was no unifying explanation for why children traveled alone through California during the Depression and Dust Bowl. Many left their families out of need. These youths, especially those boys old enough to pass for eighteen or older, often looked for menial labor, or relief handouts, alongside older transient men.<sup>2</sup> They often came out to California prior to their families, or had no family to speak of and were trying to eke out a living on the road.<sup>3</sup> For some, it was an opportunity for adventure or an escape from terrible family circumstances. In a number of instances, girls and young women also left their families and sought opportunities, with many of them dressing as boys to avoid suspicion and danger.<sup>4</sup> Regardless of their reasons, these solo transient children

2 M. H. Lewis, "Progress Report # 3, 4, 5." One undercover informant noted the vast number of boys and men commingling around "jungle fires" or hitchhiking together on the roads in the Central Valley.

3 State Relief Administration, *Transients in California*, 122. One boy, for instance, had been traveling since 1932 because his parents had died.

4 M. H. Lewis, "Progress Report # 3, 4, 5," 10. Cross-dressing was not always successful, as this report

found both sympathy and antipathy among locals and officials. Many children understood that they needed relief, but were reticent to ask for substantial assistance, preferring instead to get meals from local agencies or find a bunk along with the older transients. Despite these surreptitious efforts, the search for relief led many children into direct contact with state institutions that wanted to mitigate the perceived negative effects of their sojourning.

How many children traveled through California unattended? The state attempted to answer this question in 1936 by analyzing data recorded by aid agencies. Over a month-and-a-half period between December of 1935 and January of 1936, they estimated that a little over one percent of the male transient population and over five percent of the female transient population was under 16 (excluding those children traveling with their families). Roughly nine percent of the male transients were between 16 and 20, as were thirty percent of the female transients.<sup>5</sup> These numbers were incomplete because age data was only secured in thirty-five percent of all relief transactions, but they are still telling. It is clear from this information that few young children were traveling alone. However, a large number of teenagers and young adults took to the rails and roads during the Depression.

### ***City and County Treatment***

Transient and migrant children were served in cities and counties by a hodgepodge of agencies which expanded their services to help these young travelers.

indicated. One worker from the Fresno City Shelter stated that “several times, gals have come in here in men's clothes and raised hell with the place before morning.”

5 State Relief Administration, *Transients in California*, 13. The total number of male transients (without family) was 22,787, total number of female transients was 578. Among males, 265 children under 16 and 2,175 youths between 16 and 20. Among females, 33 children under 16 and 162 youths between 16 and 20. Among those migrants traveling with families, there were 1,808 children under 16, out of a total of 4,614 transients.

After the Federal Transient Service, a national aid agency created to relieve Depression migrants, closed in 1934, an increased burden fell down to the local level.<sup>6</sup> Police departments, local nonprofits, the Welfare Department, and the Detention Homes all provided basic necessities while also monitoring these children. Importantly, location mattered—there was no uniformity to treatment across California, despite the state bureaucracy and its studies of the problem. In benign instances, the police and local agencies took transient children in to give them food and shelter. State bureaucrats recognized the local character of such aid, remarking that “the police in some cities were friendly and sympathetic towards the transients, in others extremely indifferent, and in some places... transients and non-residents were treated like criminals.” If the police or another agency deemed it necessary, county officials would employ the Detention Homes to provide aid to “runaway or abandoned children” on a temporary basis. If they could not find somewhere to send the child afterward, such as a local nonprofit or a relative, the children “were simply turned loose.”<sup>7</sup> Again, treatment was heavily dependent on the county in question, as the following accounts attest.

Sacramento County typified a mild, but highly localized, sort of treatment. Especially in the early years of the Dust Bowl migration and during much of the Depression, transients found aid through a number of agencies which built ad-hoc or unreliable links with the State Relief Administration, local Welfare Departments, and regional shelters. During 1935 and 1936 in this county, transient children were typically cared for by nonprofits such as the YMCA, the YWCA, Salvation Army, or the Traveler's Aid Society. Younger children and those discovered by police were sent instead to the

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., foreword.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 42. The prime example of releasing children, according to this author, was Alameda County.



Sacramento County Detention Home. While these three nonprofits did coordinate their relief efforts, they also created a system which could create more transient youths. No single organization offered shelters “where a stranded family” could stay together; instead the fathers were sent to the City Shelter while the mother stayed with the YWCA. According to one state bureaucrat, these temporary separations sometimes became permanent. Bureaucratic hurdles also weakened the effectiveness of relief, with state agencies such as the SRA unable to “reimburse for emergency aid given to transients.”<sup>8</sup> As was the case with nonprofit assistance, groups such as the YMCA did not adhere to these standards across the state—in fact, Sacramento may be an anomaly. One employee of the YMCA in a nearby county succinctly noted that the agency disliked engaging in “welfare work” and was instead designed to build character.<sup>9</sup> Apparently, migrant boys and men were not potential character-building projects for the YMCA. Sacramento County is an excellent example of the aid deployed by nonprofits, which certainly helped transient youths while also revealing some structural weaknesses to the reliance on nonprofit aid.

San Francisco provided another example. After picking up transient children, the SFPD faced a shortage of space, so they made due with temporary housing in the facilities available. For instance, the County Welfare Department provided care at the Detention Home for young children. However, teenage boys were shipped off to the San Francisco Jail. The police would also bring into the jail any teens they picked up. These sorts of boys were noted in the “Journal of a Transient,” which remarked that “at 9:45, the

8 Ibid., 160-162.

9 Ibid., 45, 206. It is unclear whether these two references to the YMCA are from the same person. In either case, the bureaucrat compiling this report was convinced that the YMCA did not function effectively as a relief agency, as the total number of boys offered shelter was quite small during their study.

sergeant brought in four boys, ranging in age from 15 to 16... none of them had been to [the State Relief offices] and none seemed interested.” These boys were presumably annoyed or frightened by their experience with the police, and were seeking to avoid potential problems with the local SRA. The Welfare Department's reason for using such suboptimal housing stemmed from a broader lack of funding; after paying for meals and beds, the “Juvenile Court had no funds to pay transportation” unless such monies were wrangled out of the State Relief Administration. Agencies did receive more funding over time, but the numbers of migrant adults and children were still overwhelming, especially for local agencies. It was also a problem created by local social service providers, who preferred to send children (and young single women) back to their residences.<sup>10</sup> This county acted unevenly because of the lack of resources and a lack of cooperation among groups, choosing to send people away despite their desire to fix the social ills of migrant children.

The city of El Centro and Imperial County, the southernmost agricultural region in California, held a significant amount of nonwhite migrant families, which fed into its parsimonious approach to aid. Mexicans, African Americans, and Filipinos worked the fields of this county, and when considered alongside the county's history of labor agitation and its vigilante group, state workers unsurprisingly found few avenues of assistance.<sup>11</sup> SRA workers explained that the vast majority of applicants for aid were

10 Ibid., 178-79. The usage of a jail for teens may sound dangerous, but in many cases it was merely counterproductive to the state's goals. The state often housed adult transients in the jails as well, meaning that the raids which took the child out of the jungle resulted in placing them alongside other adult homeless in the local jail.

11 Ibid., 63-64. For more insights into the strikes or vigilantism, see Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 111-116. Here, Daniel describes the strikes which took place in Brawley in 1930, which started with Filipinos and Mexicans, were aided by Communists, and which helped spur deportation rhetoric against Mexicans. The Sheriff was also instrumental in using violence against these strikers, leaving a legacy that Imperial County maintained throughout much of the thirties.

non-resident migrant whites. Here, the SRA had to provide more assistance to transients, as the County Indigent Commissioner disdained the non-resident poor, and as such refused to supply funding. The expectation here, for youths and adults alike, was that they would “use their first relief check to get out of town.” Even then, the SRA primarily extended this aid to Anglo refugees from the Dust Bowl, not to nonwhite transients. Further, although treated about eighty percent of incoming families and all women or girls, the SRA referred nearly all men and boys to the Salvation Army instead. There were also four means of relief in this county specifically designed for children. A Coordinating Council helped distribute nonprofit donations of “lunches, milk and books for school children from migratory families.” The Red Cross and the Children's Clothes Closet also distributed clothing at a shack on the outskirts of El Centro. Locals did recognize the basic needs of children, but stiff treatment also abounded. A few children lived under county care at the Detention Home, which held roughly thirty-five youths and sought SRA funds to send them back home. Imperial County also used the jails to house these children, especially those “boys over 14, or girls 'too tough to be with other children.”<sup>12</sup> Demonstrating the complicated social status of the migrant child, nonprofits offered essentials and sympathy to these children. At the same time, this county represented a widespread backlash and resident contempt for transients, endemic in the state. In part, this is about the racial politics of labor. Imperial County already held a large number of nonwhite agricultural laborers, so the Dust Bowl migrants served no economic purpose, necessitating their quick exit out of the county. At the same time, what the little aid available was reserved for white transients and children.

<sup>12</sup> State Relief Administration, *Transients in California*, 63-68.

Other locations utilized more severe treatment and demonstrated a willingness to utilize carceral institutions to punish the migrant child. In Shasta County, youths suspected of being delinquent were punished by being “sent to a state prison, instead of the Preston School of Industry.” The writer also noted that such treatment from the Juvenile Court was not given to local troublemakers, but only to transient boys who were arrested. For those children who were not classified as delinquents, Shasta County offered little else but some clothing or the 'chance' to “work on a farm” at the behest of the County Welfare Department. Those officials in the Welfare Department could not rely on sending youths to a Detention Home, as Redding, the county seat, lacked one. However, in Redding a small number of children received board in private homes at the behest of social service providers.<sup>13</sup> Sparse, rural counties such as Shasta, which more than doubled in size during the 1930s, were perhaps more likely to use harsh measures in response to migrants.<sup>14</sup>

Kern County was another place where migrant children were treated poorly. Bakersfield tried to keep transients, young and old, out of its city limits. On the order of the Probation Department, the Bakersfield Police would round up “all boys under sixteen and girls under twenty-one who were alone,” then request funding to send them back to their families. Here, Bakersfield was performing the same removal of transients that San Francisco and other cities engaged in, where girls, boys, and young adult women were all treated the same.<sup>15</sup> For children where this proved impossible, Kern County kept them

13 Ibid., 142. In terms of families needing assistance, this county had very few total applications for aid, but the State Relief Administration attended to nearly all of them.

14 “Population of Counties by Decennial Census: 1900 to 1990.” Shasta County grew from 13,000 residents to over 28,000 in the thirties.

15 Note that this treatment functionally applied only to single young women, as the state officials saw them as being vulnerable. Migrant men were typically only removed to the next county or the edge of town, an interesting wrinkle in the gendered treatment of transients.

housed at the County Detention Home. In at least one instance, according to the matron, transient children destroyed the place, stole victuals, and abandoned it after their rampage. However, their havoc seemed justifiable, as employees had locked them into the basement without any furniture.<sup>16</sup> Kern County officials protected migrant youths by sending them home or locking them up, showing a concerted effort to control the migrant population. Counties such as Kern and Shasta, which received large numbers of migrant children and faced greater demographic pressures, took an interventionist approach to treating transient youth.

Oakland's treatment of migrants demonstrated local desires for social control through coercive measures. Transient children who committed crimes were particularly vulnerable to state-sanctioned intrusions into their lives. The police in urban areas would sometimes comb through jungles to pick up children for referral to other institutions. Oakland's police department furnished a telling example of this activity to the state. They picked up an African American teenager for "associating in an unwholesome way" with the other transients, then sent him to the local Detention Home. He had been traveling with older homeless for several years prior to this encounter. Most likely, these other individuals were his friends or surrogate family, but in the eyes of the state they represented a negative influence on his development. In another case, they had captured a fourteen-year-old boy who escaped the jail's interrogation by throwing himself out the window. The police did not pursue him, with one officer stating that "he must have been hurt pretty bad though because there was blood all over the place where he landed. We never did find out what became of him."<sup>17</sup> This sort of resistance seemed uncommon, but

<sup>16</sup> State Relief Administration, *Transients in California*, 59.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 122-123.

certainly transient youth knew how to protect themselves in a limited way.

### ***Immorality, Radicalism, and other Specters***

These local forms of aid influenced and reflected the discourses on migrant families and children. The whole of California engaged in this rhetorical debate, from local agencies such as the YMCA, to polemical journalists, to state administrators, and this dialogue infused the treatment of children. A number of common themes, by no means unique to Depression or Dust Bowl migrants, developed over the course of the thirties. In general, state agencies and citizens alike saw the children as a threatened and threatening class of future citizens. One pressing problem was their lack of a proper family, one which had a home, had a mother and father, and taught normal behavior. Instead of these traditional families, many migrant youths associated with older transients, a camaraderie distasteful to the state and many locals. Migratory adults were slandered with a host of negative stereotypes. These 'bums' or 'tramps' were loathsome to many locals, and their close proximity to transient children became a source of ideological transmission that the state wanted to discourage. Some people believed that migrants would give rise to radical politics and moral corruption. For instance, one author argued that totalitarianism was targeting the United States, and the “focus of the infection” was on California and migrant-supported politicians.<sup>18</sup> Those closer to the refugees offered their own opinions as well. The undercover informant who wrote the “Journal of a Transient” piece thought that relief issues would create conditions for “the impulses behind the most extreme radicalism.”<sup>19</sup> Locals also reflected this fear of

18 Walter C. Frame, “California Faces Totalitarianism,” *The Living Age*, Jan. 1940, 357.

19 M. H. Lewis, “Progress Report # 3, 4, 5,” 11. Specifically, he was referring to an incident where a family was denied aid at the Salvation Army, whereby his traveling companions, a group of men and boys, “cursed the Salvation Army” and stated that “they 'were not going to stand that bull much

communism, especially among transient men, who could transmit these ideas to children in their midst. A reformed transient near Corona, in Riverside County, stated to the local paper that Communism and criminality had been spreading, but state and federal interventions through migrant camps had curtailed this dangerous dispersal.<sup>20</sup> One state official was particularly virulent. He blended criticisms of migrant children with those of communism, explaining how migrant children, “the 250,000 child tramps of America under nineteen years of age, with one in every nineteen a girl,” were ripe to become communists and destroy the U.S. government. In this way, locals perceived migrant children to be a threat to the social order, where boys would commit criminal acts and girls would teach the next generation to disobey the government. To him, this was not idle hyperbole—the official in fact stated that unless preventive actions were taken, “we can write 'finis' to our present form of government.”<sup>21</sup> Such broad statements reflected both uncertainty regarding the condition of migrant children as well as the massive demographic upheaval of the Dust Bowl migration.

Political threats were problematic, but writers also made explicitly moral appeals. Tellingly, the author of the *Journal of a Transient* explained his encounter with a teen nicknamed 'Red'. Red had left his family to work on a ranch in Watsonville, where he left after committing some theft of blankets and clothing. He also spent some time in Los Angeles, where he survived on the money he earned “off'n the queers.”<sup>22</sup> Another piece

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longer.” This was certainly not an isolated incident, and these sorts of reports went directly to the State Relief Administration's bureaucrats.

20 “'Forgotten Man' Gives His Idea of Transient Camps,” *Corona Daily Independent*, 8 Feb. 1935. This man also expressed thanks for the steady work offered to men through the camps. It is unknown to what extent boys benefited from the labor program in this particular case.

21 “Agricultural Migratory Laborers in the San Joaquin Valley.”

22 M. H. Lewis, “Progress Report # 3, 4, 5,” 11. Red stated that he was 19, although he looked 16 to the writer, and it is probable that he was hiding his real age to avoid trouble from police or the state, who, Red supposed, would send him back home to Missouri.

of evidence collected by the state was the story of a twenty-two year old who shot and killed an agent of the Southern Pacific. He “had been riding freights since he was thirteen years old. He had been involved in a robbery.” The writer then laconically noted that the police caught up to this boy, as “he was apprehended, convicted of murder and executed.” These were the same train agents that remarked on the “moral as well as physical dangers” faced by girls and boys who rode the rails or slept in the transient camps.<sup>23</sup> Crime and homosexuality were spoken of sparingly, though they presented a dark picture to the state of transient life for children. As one contemporary scholar noted, in reference to camp dangers in Southern California, “the boy does not need to remain long in hobo society to learn homosexual practices,” a “perversion” which would “spread” unless boys were physically separated from older transients.<sup>24</sup> Some church youth groups also took notice of migrant children's moral failings. One article in the *Christian Endeavor World* asked children readers about helping migrant children; the suggestions were to look for hymns that related to migrant children and to read story books on missionizing or schooling children.<sup>25</sup> Migrants seemed to require political and spiritual guidance, lest they become infected with these ills. Picking up children and caring for them at Detention Homes alleviated some of this issue, as did sending the children back to their families.

23 State Relief Administration, *Transients in California*, 223. As to the physical concerns, train agents reported a family caught inside a boxcar for several days, and explained how certain tunnels could suffocate children riding on the outside of the train (or burn them to death, depending on their location).

24 George E. Outland, “The Federal Transient Program for Boys in Southern California,” *Social Forces* 14, No. 3 (Mar. 1936), 428. Outland was also referencing scholarship done by Nels Anderson in his work, *The Hobo*. In this context, he was describing the segregation enforced by the Federal Transient Service in California, a subject covered by other scholars in greater detail. Outland was the Supervisor of Boys' Welfare for Southern California, a post he held until 1935. He was also a sociologist at Yale.

25 “Junior Society Topic: Helping Homeless People: What about Children of Migrants?” *The Christian Endeavor World*, Oct. 1 1940, 10.



Locals were also concerned that particular bad habits were spreadable by migrant girls. The Young Women's Christian Association, typically known for offering lodging, denied transient women and girls entry in Fresno, claiming that they “lodged young college and high school girls whom the members of the staff felt should be protected from transients who were 'likely to be of questionable character.’”<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, in counting hitchhikers and train riders survey workers noted, with some concern, a number of girls wearing boy's clothing and traveling away from their families.<sup>27</sup> As explained by historian Kenneth Kusmer, these girls were likely in far more danger as transients than they were likely to perpetrate misdeeds. He explained how they faced “the constant threat of sexual harassment” and rape. In addition, female travelers were more likely to be young when compared with male migrants in similar situations.<sup>28</sup> In part due to the sexual dangers faced by such youths, and also due to their challenging of gender norms, the YWCA and other organizations found migrant women lacking in morals. Fewer sources explicitly mentioned migrant girls, and they were largely considered less 'dangerous' than migrant boys. Nevertheless, as will be shown, the state's coercive apparatus did directly target female morality.

If labor issues did not turn these children into socialists, and if they avoided becoming morally defective, they were still learning laziness and sloth through the relief

26 State Relief Administration, *Transients in California*, 45, 74-76. It is likely that this was due to a concern over unmarried women and girls living away from their families, which many other agencies attempted to mitigate by returning such women to their residences or families. The Salvation Army in Fresno, for instance, had kept track of unmarried women with children looking for aid. The YWCA was also worried about girls without money, as it normally “[offered] protection to young girls who are stranded in a city,” but Dust Bowl youths were thought to be especially “undesirable.”

27 Ibid., 219-220. Why wear boy's clothing? It was harder to get caught by police, and made it easier to climb on or off of a train car.

28 Kusmer, *Down and Out, On the Road*, 206-07. To be specific, female migrants were twice as likely to be under 20 years old than their male counterparts. Kusmer also repeats the evidence that girls cut their hair short and wore boy clothing to avoid suspicion.

given to others. One government worker from Contra Costa County believed that relief was “absolutely necessary” to fight the “forces of unrest and discontent,” but also articulated the notion that those on relief needed a new state program to “lift the non-producing consumer class... and transform them into community assets.”<sup>29</sup> This need to inculcate positive labor habits into migrant children would fit particularly well with the state's juvenile reform program.

### ***Reformatories and Progressivism***

California had three reform schools for troublemaker children; reformers in the late nineteenth century developed these at the height of their influence. These Progressive impulses continued through the Depression and Dust Bowl. In the words of Governor Culbert L. Olson, young offenders used to be sent to adult prisons, but “about 50 or 60 years ago in most of the states,” reformatories developed, which still shared many attributes with the common prison. Olson claimed that California helped pioneer the development of the school of industry, a new technology of rehabilitation. As part of the reform of juvenile justice, California had “totally prohibited” any physical punishments and many of the physical restraints associated with the earlier schools.<sup>30</sup> These schools espoused a Progressive telos, offering 'wayward' boys (and girls) moral and physical training. The Whittier School for Boys and the Preston School of Industry were the two institutions for young males, and Ventura was the School for Girls. As Olson stated in a letter to the superintendent of Whittier, “the boys who are committed to our correctional schools represent, by selection, the most difficult behavior problems,

29 State Relief Administration, “Agricultural Migratory Laborers in the San Joaquin Valley,” 38.

30 Governor Olson's investigation report, 21 Aug. 1939, Call no. F3738:93, Whittier State School Superintendent's Records, Dept. of Youth Authority Collection, California State Archives.

having proved intractable.” He further argued that “their rehabilitation” was the key tenet of such reformatories.<sup>31</sup> In theory, both local employees and state bureaucrats were engaging cooperatively in re-education.

Transient children came under the control of the reform schools for a few reasons. They were primarily locked up for criminal behaviors, which administrators often conflated with mental deficiencies, a residue of Progressive social control policies, which considered delinquent behavior hand-in-hand with mental problems. Some of the boys at these detention facilities were migrants, picked up for crimes such as petty theft or illegal riding of train cars. They may have been referred to these schools by local police departments or Welfare Departments. Officials from local programs also referred children they suspected of having mental deficiencies. One report published by the Department of Public Health explained this stance, saying that a “definite proportion of delinquent children” were simply unable to “conform to basic community requirements.” Many 'defective' children were not cared for by the Mental Hygiene Division of Public Health, but were instead drawn into the Juvenile Court's (and later, Youth Authority's) orbit. Indeed, only about one-fifth of children with defects were cared for by Mental Hygiene.<sup>32</sup> It is likely that transient youths, already looked down upon by locals and bureaucrats, were transferred into juvenile reform schools instead of into the hands of appropriate caregivers. This would have especially grave consequences for mentally ill or developmentally disabled children locked away in Preston, Whittier, or Ventura.

31 “Letter from Governor Culbert L. Olson,” Aug. 21 1939, 9, Call no. F3738:93, Whittier Superintendent's Records & Correspondence, Dept. of Youth Authority Collection, California State Archives.

32 J. C. Geiger and Olga Bridgman, “Mental Hygiene as a Department of Public Health Activity,” *Cal West Med* 51, no. 6 (Dec. 1939), 378-381. These scholars advocated helping such children in schools. The Juvenile Courts did send a number of children through the Mental Hygiene Division in the Dust Bowl years (1,397 in a year, probably 1938).

Once brought in, the state had to categorize and analyze the sources of deviancy in each child. To this end, officials conducted research to determine the supposed causes of each boy's delinquent behavior; as with many migrant children, the problem was often that the child made poor choices because of their race, low class status, and/or negligent parents.<sup>33</sup> All migrants faced these judgments, but those within the bowels of state parentage were treated to a prying investigation, not unlike those done by public health officers during disease outbreaks.<sup>34</sup> In general, the processing of an inmate would involve a physical examination, an assessment of their family background, as well as observations on their particular problems, all collected and cataloged for the benefit of the staff. While the state sought to quantify the origins of youth crime, it also organized rehabilitation processes. This intake system helped inject racial bias into the reform schools, as Mexican migrant children received harsher analysis. Employees and doctors at the schools, as will be shown, used race as a tool of control and categorization which tacitly and explicitly legitimized severe treatment.

33 Inmate Case File #14406, admitted 9/18/1934, Call no. F3738:23, Preston School of Industry, Dept. of Youth Authority Collection, California State Archives.

34 Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 34-37. Here Shah described a particularly stirring account of investigations into Chinatown that occurred during the 1880s. I am offering an analogy to these investigations and the YA investigations because in many cases the investigator had already made up their mind that the subject of their study was 'bad' or 'damaged', using racial ideologies to make such suppositions.

Intake was only the first step in the state's reform program. Administrators at the schools then had to change the inmates. The state created robust regimens centered



*Figure 7: Inmate tending to vegetable garden, Whittier School*  
around building up the economic, moral, and social standing of the youth in their care.

To crib language from the Mental Hygiene Division, children with mental defects, such

as these miscreants, needed to be “adequately trained and controlled.”<sup>35</sup> As Gov. Olson noted, the Whittier School created “for each boy a program of academic instruction; agricultural and industrial training; physical sports, music, and other diversions.”<sup>36</sup> Chief among such methods was the use of work to instill the values of honest labor into children. One type of employment training emphasized for migrant children was the agriculture program. These state schools had ample space for vegetable gardens, flower beds, fields, and orchards, and they put children to work amidst the produce. According to proponents of such programs, agricultural training would provide skills and inculcate labor habits into the inmates. Both Preston and Whittier had agricultural training areas on their campuses.<sup>37</sup> At Whittier the state showcased its work program by publicizing it through photographs and tours for officials.<sup>38</sup> This sort of work became part of the promotion of these schools, as demonstrated in one image of a youth gingerly weeding raised vegetable beds. This orderly work, performed among immaculate boxes of shoots, was proof of the successful reforms at Whittier.<sup>39</sup> Other photos echoed this theme, with delinquent boys shown with their plants.<sup>40</sup> Transient children, especially nonwhite youth, were often singled out to receive agricultural training. This was probably done both because migrant children already knew more about farming than urban youth, but was also a method of assigning these children the kind of labor they were expected to do their

35 Geiger and Bridgman, “Mental Hygiene as a Department of Public Health Activity,” 381. This sort of training was required, not for the child's own benefit, but for “humanity.”

36 Governor Olson's investigation report, 21 Aug. 1939.

37 Inmate Case File #14406. At Preston it was a vegetable garden and farm.

38 Touring state programs was a two-way street, as demonstrated by the Youth Authority workers who visited the emergency school in the last chapter.

39 “Boy at vegetable garden,” 1934, Call no. F3738:271, folder 1, Whittier State School Miscellaneous Records Photographs, Dept. of Youth Authority Collection, California State Archives. See image on previous page.

40 Agricultural Education (6 prints), 1934, Call no. F3738:271 folder 1, Whittier State School Miscellaneous Records Photographs, Dept. of Youth Authority Collection, California State Archives.

whole lives. As noted by one employee during an official visit by a Mr. Chandler, one resident doctor noted that “when a boy was of too low an I.Q. for a trade,” he was sent to do farm labor. Dr. Toner also noted, approvingly, that one Mexican farm youth at Whittier's farm “could have gone to work in any citrus grove” and done irrigation work, based on his own expertise. All this farm labor was salubrious, according to Whittier's employees, as it taught respect to children who lacked it.<sup>41</sup> Administrators of these schools were training the children to enter the lowest rung of the labor force, presumably because they considered that as the best these children could accomplish.

At the Ventura School for Girls, which reformed deviant and delinquent girls, the training regimen was modified to inculcate gendered norms. There, the state emphasized domestic training and recreation, creating a distinct atmosphere from that which pervaded Preston or Whittier. For instance, Ventura organized dance lessons, music training, and choir classes for their inmates. Some of these events were quite elaborate, as represented by a 1935 festival and the 1936 May Day dance, where the girls had costumes and choreography. Home-oriented handicrafts were also part of the rehabilitation process. In these classes, the inmates learned how to type, cook, and do decorative woodworking, skills that would prepare them for marriage. Ventura did not completely ignore the rural realities of Californian life, as it too had space for a vegetable garden and an apiary. At these places, officials remarked that girls were “working with vegetables they will later use in the kitchen.”<sup>42</sup> Presumably, Mexican migrant girls were disproportionately

41 Report on inspection, Call no. F3738:93, Whittier State School Superintendent's Records, Dept. of Youth Authority Collection, California State Archives.

42 Photo set of inmate activities, 1925-1936, Call no. F3738:549 file folder 1, Ventura School for Girls, Dept. of Youth Authority Collection, California State Archives. The apiary was established prior to the Depression, in 1925. The vegetable garden was also an early development, and it was in use through at least 1932.

represented among the farmhands, although the state's treatment of girls was softer than its response to transient boys. Nevertheless, in both the boy's and girl's schools the state's objective was to create good citizens who valued labor, gender roles, and their social position.

As part of the reform project, the state also dabbled in health measures. In order to keep the inmates orderly and mentally healthy, it was necessary to feed their bodies appropriately. As already demonstrated, nutritional science was deeply ingrained into other state agencies. By the late 1920s, the state Bureau of Food and Drugs was analyzing foods used in such institutions “in order to determine if they comply with” the state's Food Law and its other specifications. Virtually all food products underwent this screening, from butter to flour to spices.<sup>43</sup> These schools in California also took an active interest in the nutrition of their inmates. Ventura School for Girls, for instance, communicated with the California Milling Corporation's sales manager, Weston Lake, about its enriched “Ace Hi Family Flour,” presumably so that Ventura could begin purchasing it if it met dietary specifications. California Milling Co. responded to the inquiry by providing brochures on “the complete Vitamin B complex” and explained how “every pound of this flour contain more than 1.66 mg. Vitamin B-1 (thiamin); 6.15 mg. Nicotinic Acid; 6.15 mg. Iron.”<sup>44</sup> Even in juvenile detention facilities the national Public Health apparatus demonstrated its immense reach. The U.S. government urged flour producers to enrich their products during this time, using the Pure Food Bureau

43 W. M. Dickie, “Department of Public Health,” *Cal West Med* 31, no. 6 (Dec. 1929), 447. Again, Dickie's tenure resulted in many changes in health procedure.

44 Correspondence with California Milling Corporation, 4 June 1941, Call no. F3738:275, Ventura School for Girls, Dept. of Youth Authority Collection, California State Archives. In a shrewd business move, Lake noted that if Ventura wanted the wheat germ included, they would have to purchase the whole wheat flour instead.



guidelines. Furthermore, agricultural scientists from places such as the Wheat Flour Institute in Chicago were developing new ways to supplement flour's nutritional content.<sup>45</sup> Reform schools and Public Health officials shared many of the same objectives; they cared about the health of children, and they teamed up to create nutrition guidelines.<sup>46</sup> Now, the reform schools had children growing their own vegetables and fruits, their doctors were equipped with knowledge of New Nutrition, and state or federal laws assisted their purchasing decisions. With scientific categorization, work regimens, structured training, and healthy food, reformers saw a future full of possibilities for their inmates.

### ***Mexican Children in the System***

Or at least, white children held promise. Nonwhite children, but especially transient Latino youth, were treated roughly at all levels of the reform project. It is their treatment, not the treatment of white migrant children, that truly exposed the ugly underbelly of reform and created internal reforms.<sup>47</sup> Migrant girls were objects of a peculiar mix of disapprobation and sympathy, even prior to the Dust Bowl. In large part, female delinquents were not considered criminals, but were instead wards of the state who needed treatment before becoming women citizens. One telling example is the story of Marisol.<sup>48</sup> She was the daughter of Mexican immigrants to San Luis Obispo county,

45 Correspondence with California Milling Corporation. This institute had apparently been working on synthetic vitamin enrichment with whole wheat flour as well.

46 Interestingly, the meals at these reform schools were probably more successfully nutritive than those provided through the school lunch program in chapter 3. It does not appear that any farmers received benefits from the reform schools.

47 For a detailed analysis of the history of reformers, racial thinking, and juvenile detention, see Chavez-Garcia, *States of Delinquency*. She also treats the tragedies I detail later using a different analytical lens.

48 This name, as well as the name of Felipe later on in this essay, has been changed as per the California State Archive's request. The names for Benny Moreno and Edward Leiva, the stories that end this chapter, have not been changed.

and was brought to Ventura in the Fall of 1930. Though originally in one of the aforementioned Detention Homes, Marisol was transferred to Ventura on order of the matron. A detention home employee wrote that “[Marisol] was first of all disobedient to the extreme. Would openly defy all rules. Second, she is immoral in thought and actions, was placed in a room with her two small sisters (three and four years of age) and would wake them in the night to have them nurse her breasts. Would steal and is untruthful.” The writer, Hattie Ranney, concluded by stating that “her father is of the lowest type Mexican.”<sup>49</sup> Marisol presented a problem for the detention home because of her recalcitrant behavior, her poor ethnic and class status, as well as what her supposed immorality. Marisol was eleven at the time of her transfer to Ventura.

Despite the ire of the Detention Home, Ventura's Superintendent, Dr. Olive P. Walton, felt that a lighter touch was required. After having Marisol at Ventura for about 7 months, Walton sought to make alternate arrangements in light of Marisol's age. She corresponded with Mabel Weed, the assistant director of the Department of Public Welfare, contending that “[Marisol] is untruthful, disobedient at times, and gets into mischief,” but that she needed help in “an institution for dependent children” instead of staying in Ventura. Walton worried that Marisol's moral habits would be further endangered by a prolonged stay in Ventura, because a young impressionable girl like her would learn other deviancy from the older inmates.<sup>50</sup> Walton was also frustrated because Marisol's own letters to Ranney, her brother, and an older female friend had gotten

49 Correspondence between Dr. Walton and Ms. Weed, 20 Aug. 1930, Call no. F3738:275, Ventura School for Girls, Dept. of Youth Authority Collection, California State Archives.

50 Ibid. It is deliberately vague as to what other negative behaviors she could learn, with it only explaining how Marisol could learn to “get along without knowing.” This is perhaps a veiled reference to homosexuality, a reference that would make some sense given what the employees already knew about her.

nowhere, leaving her at Ventura indefinitely. Further, Walton pointed out that Marisol “has not heard from her father since her arrival.” Walton inquired about alternative places for Marisol to receive treatment, suggesting that perhaps the local St. Vincent's could take care of her.<sup>51</sup>

In response, the Department of Public Welfare recommended a new approach. Acting on behalf of Weed, the writer organized a meeting between Mr. Plover, one of the department's agents, and Ranney, of the detention home in San Luis Obispo. Once that was done, Plover would call Ventura and sort the new arrangements out. Lacking further correspondence, it is unclear what happened to Marisol, but it is likely that these state agencies sent her either back to the detention home or to an institution for dependent children, as they were in agreement “that other types of homes should be used for so young children before their commitment to a State school.”<sup>52</sup> If Marisol was ultimately sent to a home for dependents, she may have experienced another peculiar aspect of the state's health apparatus. Her combination of sexuality, young age, and mental defects made her a prime candidate for sterilization, a tool in use at these Progressive state carceral institutions. Doctors at the Norwalk State Hospital, for instance, advocated sterilization for women in order to prevent the spread of issues such as “sex pervers[ion].”<sup>53</sup> This brief story of Marisol's incarceration within institutions is a special

51 Ibid. Walton's argument that Marisol ought to be institutionalized demonstrate the distinction made between schools which 'fix' moral, criminal, or social corruption, and those which help the mentally disabled. Ventura was clearly marked as a place where the first class of youth went.

52 Correspondence between Ms. Orcutt and Dr. Walton, 2 Sept. 1930, Call no. F3738:275, Ventura School for Girls, Dept. of Youth Authority Collection, California State Archives. Plover was apparently excellent at dealing with these sorts of inter-agency disputes over children, as the writer noted that “he has such a kindly understanding of this kind of problem.”

53 M. J. Rowe, “Who Should Be Sterilized?” *Cal West Med* 40, no. 6 (Jun. 1934), 429-30. Again, it is not known to me whether Marisol underwent such treatment, but case files in the Youth Authority collection (not related to migrant children, thus they do not appear in this piece) seem to corroborate the usage of sterilization, even on boys at Preston or Whittier.

case, but it reveals the tight weave of state agencies in California as well as the languages of delinquency. Age also affected the type of care a child received. Although younger children like Marisol were still compartmentalized according to their type of 'defect,' the state treated her as a dependent, not as a proto-criminal, as was the case with most of the boys under state care.

It is difficult to offer a single representation of male delinquency, although the case of Felipe is illustrative of the Mexican transient boy's status within this carceral system.<sup>54</sup> Felipe was admitted to the Preston School of Industry in September of 1934 for unspecified reasons. He was from a Mexican family that traveled between Los Angeles and Fresno as fruit pickers (they had been doing this prior to the Depression, making them a semi-permanent migrant family). According to the home investigators, his family was the problem, and thus removal became the state's solution. The bureaucrats concluded that the “underlying cause of boy's delinquency-poor Mexican family. Parents separated boy had had poor home training.” As was their proclivity, the school's supervisors set Felipe to work at Preston's vegetable garden and farm. He was apparently successful while at Preston, because he was recommended for an off-site road camp three years after his imprisonment.<sup>55</sup> Many migrant Latino children found themselves in these reform schools. In most cases, they were treated harshly but such rigor was in accordance with the state's goals. There were also a handful of exceptional instances which revealed the failures of the state within these gated, barred institutions.

54 I regret not having more information on white transient youths, but it is a quirk of the archives. Mexican migrants received worse treatment, which resulted in more letters and materials in the Superintendent's records. Individual inmate records from this time period are, for the most part, restricted and inaccessible.

55 Inmate Case File #14406. Road camps offered more freedom to the boys, as they worked on improving infrastructure away from the rigor of the YA school itself.

### *Violence and Escape*

Indeed, the actions of young men at the Whittier State School testified to the prison-like conditions found therein. Violence, though not overtly condoned, was a fact of life in the boy's schools. On the night of August 10<sup>th</sup>, 1939 Benny Moreno, an inmate housed in the 'Lost Privilege Cottage,' committed suicide by hanging himself. He had been temporarily housed in the Lost Privilege Cottage, a method of “segregation for more secure custody” which housed up to 32 children in three large rooms, and had 5 solitary confinement cells. This building was isolated from the rest of the facility and youths inside here were subject to closer supervision.<sup>56</sup>

Quickly, Governor Olson's office issued a brief report by Dr. Aaron Rosanoff, the Director of Institutions, which disabused the media's argument by explaining that “disciplinary methods and practices, that are in use in correctional facilities, could not properly be discussed solely with reference to the hazard of suicide... The references must be, largely... to their humaneness, and... to their effectiveness in correcting antisocial behavior, preventing its recurrence, and protecting other persons in the institution.” His report, which read more akin to a defense of Whittier and its Superintendent, Judge Milne, emphasized the security needs of school personnel. He appended a photograph of “a partial collection of knives, daggers, files, “saps”, bayonet-like weapons... imitation pistols, and the like,” which were collected from inmates by the staff. The rest of his report's section on discipline was a excursus on the history of discipline for children, with the intended message being that the state had progressed beyond such measures, and that corporal or other harsh punishments were nonexistent (and therefore could not have

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<sup>56</sup> Governor Olson's investigation report, 21 Aug. 1939.

caused Benny's suicide).<sup>57</sup>

Despite Rosanoff's spirited rebuttal, Olson acquiesced to a plea from "the Mexican-American group which met with [Olson] and presented... their doubts, suspicions and even accusations" that Benny was brutalized before his death. This committee was comprised of several individuals from the Spanish-Speaking People's Congress, an advocacy organization in Southern California. Milne and Rosanoff also agreed to ask the Mexican Consulate and members of Spanish-language media if they wanted to attend, presumably to stave off the negative press already surrounding the incident.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, Milne was no friend of this investigation. He secretly loathed the People's Congress, calling them "The Communistic Spanish People's Congress" and also stating that the committee would "pretty definitely be red" based on the participants, who included several Latinos.<sup>59</sup> The ensuing investigation revealed a complicated social relationship between the inmate children and the supervisors. The investigators appointed by Governor Olson interviewed children and employees at Whittier, conducted an autopsy, and held hearings. As requested, reporters for *El Eco de Mexico* and members of the Spanish-Speaking People's Congress involved themselves in the process. In addition, the Mexican Consulate sent the Vice Consul and a request regarding the autopsy.<sup>60</sup> The interest of these groups revealed racial and social tensions. Benny's death

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57 Ibid.

58 Correspondence between Olson, Rosanoff, Milne, and investigators, Call no. F3738:93, Whittier State School Superintendent's Records, Dept. of Youth Authority Collection, California State Archives.

59 Correspondence between Milne and son David, 14 Sept. 1939 & 16 Sept. 1939, Call no. F3738:93, Whittier State School Superintendent's Records, Dept. of Youth Authority Collection, California State Archives. Milne apparently kept his ire private, as he did not appear to insist on any changes to the committee. In at least one instance he obstructed an interview between committee members and an inmate, booting them out of Whittier after they had claimed to stop conducting interviews for the day.

60 H. E. Lambert, "Report of Committee Appointed by Governor Culbert L. Olson," 1-2, Call no. F3738:93, Whittier State School Superintendent's Records, Dept. of Youth Authority Collection, California State Archives.

had brought out deep suspicions among the Mexican and migrant communities that he had been mistreated by a state institution that ostensibly sought to 'reform' him, not end his life.

The investigators retraced the steps leading up to Benny's suicide. On the morning of August 10<sup>th</sup>, Benny attempted to escape from Whittier with another boy. He was captured quickly and transferred to the Lost Privilege Cottage under the guard of Supervisor H. McMillian, who stripped Benny and ordered him into one of the solitary confinement rooms. He was visited by Milne and Napper, another Supervisor, during his lunch and dinner. The employee patrolling at night noticed no disturbances in Benny's room, but they discovered his body hanging from a belt that morning. The school notified Benny's father, who came to Whittier but was not allowed to see the body at first. The coroner's immediate inquest called no witnesses, and family members noticed several irregularities in the body prior to burial, including what appeared to be broken ribs and blood behind Benny's head. When the committee heard testimony from children who had been around Benny prior to his suicide, they were fearful of speaking on the subject to anyone other than the investigators. Though neither boy spoke about Benny being beaten, the investigators knew that "these boys were subject to some fear" inflicted by the employees of Whittier. Several other boys also gave testimony, with one attesting that Supervisor Cavitt, another of the guards, had stated "Just wait until I get a-hold of [Benny]." Yet another boy who knew Benny explained privately that he heard Cavitt beating Benny.<sup>61</sup> Judge Milne was particularly annoyed with the committee's private interviews with the boys, arguing that their presence "has upset the general morale to an

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 4-8. A handful of boys indicated that they had not seen Benny ever wear the belt he was found hanging in, although it is likely that this was given to him when McMillian took his regular clothes.

unusual degree.”<sup>62</sup> The words spoken by the inmates are fascinating precisely because of the gap between what was stated publicly and what was said privately. This strongly indicates that a culture of fear (if not outright violence) was cultivated at Whittier. Despite this evidence, the report concluded that these wounds were inflicted during the autopsy, and that no misconduct took place.

Whittier did not rest quietly after the second investigation. On July 23, 1940 another Latino migrant inmate committed suicide in the Lost Privilege Cottage. As stated in the ensuing report, “Edward, of part-Mexican descent, was born in Bakersfield, Calif., Sept. 24, 1923.” He had previously been committed by Kern County officials when he was twelve, then was returned to his father, before again being sent to Whittier in April 1940 for violating his parole. After an escape attempt, he was sent to solitary confinement in the Cottage, where he hung himself.<sup>63</sup>

The resulting report by Dr. Rosanoff disclosed some new information regarding science, violence, and the operations of Whittier. Rosanoff fit Edward's story into a neat psychological package. In explaining the family life of Edward, the doctor called it “perfectly typical as a background of defective and psychopathic delinquents.” Thereafter he described in detail Edward's broken home; his parents divorced when he was young, he lacked a mother, his brother was also a troublemaker, his other family members could not help him, and he was subject to abuse from his father. The report argued that Edward “had, indeed, feared corporal punishment” as it had been inflicted on him “unmercifully” by his father when at home. Rosanoff also pointed out Edward's

62 E. J. Milne, monthly report to Board of Managers and Trustee, 13 Oct. 1939, 1-2, Call no. F3738:94, Whittier State School Superintendent's Monthly Reports, Dept. of Youth Authority Collection, California State Archives.

63 Aaron J. Rosanoff, report on suicide at Whittier, 9 Aug. 1940, 1, Call no. F3738:93, Whittier State School Superintendent's Records, Dept. of Youth Authority Collection, California State Archives.



mental state, claiming that his suicide was actually a failed escape attempt, and that his poor planning had been his downfall. Edward's I.Q. was tested several times, with the report matter-of-factly indicating that his I.Q. had “steadily deteriorat[ed],” as he grew older.<sup>64</sup> This part of the report exculpated Whittier and its staff by using the new scientific categories prevalent among reform-minded bureaucrats and supervisors of the Youth Authority.

Regardless of the reality of Rosanoff's scientific analysis, it is nevertheless intriguing that Edward, a child of supposedly limited mental capacity, was not offered different treatment, as had been the case with Marisol. Age and gender dictated that Edward was kept locked up at the school for delinquents, while Marisol was transferred to a different type of institution. Edward's case was merely a tragic accident, self-inflicted by a 'defective' Mexican youth without much family, intelligence, or hope.

The report's most interesting element laid within the implicit admission that harsh treatments did happen at Whittier. In fact, Rosanoff declared that “slighter cases [of corporal punishment] must be not so rare,” and if these occurred, they would have been with the “more difficult boys and to the 'lost-privilege' cottage.” Furthermore, Rosanoff also explained that he knew of employees who would “chastise the boys in 'fatherly' fashion” and stated that he was of the opinion that corporal punishments were conducted at the Cottage towards the boys residing there.<sup>65</sup> Rosanoff was certainly also aware of the

64 Ibid., 3-4. The results of his I.Q. tests were: at the Bureau of Juvenile Research in 1932 an 89, at Whittier in 1935 an 83, and at Inglewood High School in 1939 a 75. Rosanoff correlated this evidence with Edward's weak scholastic achievement, which was around a fifth-grade level. These sorts of numbers are problematic because many scholars have pointed out the historical problems with I.Q. tests and educational discrimination.

65 Ibid., 8-9. Note the careful language used by Rosanoff. He called the corporal punishment a 'fatherly' style chastisement, and also explained how these punishments were amenable to the boys themselves. I rather doubt that the boys were asked for their opinion on the subject in question.

previous year's suicide and investigation, which found several children who stated that Supervisor Cavitt had used corporal punishment against Benny. In this new investigation, Rosanoff took further interviews, and concluded that, among the punishments used in the Lost Privilege Cottage, the boys reported “kicking... hitting with the fist in the mouth or body, whipping with a belt or strap, 'rabbit-punch'... or even a general beating-up,” conducted by supervisors.<sup>66</sup> The state's recalcitrance in the face of accumulated evidence is astounding. For all this, Rosanoff did not conclude that violence played any part in either suicide, and he repeatedly couched his admissions with disclaimers about the 'mild' nature of any beatings endured by the children. Furthermore, his explanation of Edward's abuse at the hands of his father connected to the admonitions from 'fatherly' staff members. This provides some interesting subtext regarding the state as parent. If a child's own father used violence inappropriately, then it follows that the state had to demonstrate proper parenting to the child through their institutions. In spite of this, Whittier was more akin to a prison than a home, and for all the high-minded ideals pursued by reformer, the reality was that two children committed suicide because they could not take another moment inside the walls of Whittier.

### ***Fallout***

Despite their efforts, Rosanoff, Milne, and the supervisors were ultimately unable to protect themselves. The fallout from these reports required immediate action from Governor Olson. His last effort, the Lindsey committee, “found corporal punishment prevalent and condemned the lack of counseling and vocational training, as well as the lack of responsibility and general apathy in the administration of the institution.” Olson,

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

facing immense pressure from the press, installed a new superintendent and deposed Milne. As one scholar described it, this “sorry mess” resulted in the creation of the California Youth Authority as an oversight body, made official in the summer of 1941. Its body of administrators would take over the job previously held by Juvenile Court judges, and would help administer institutions such as Preston, Ventura, and Whittier (which was renamed to Nelles).<sup>67</sup> In some instances, New Deal reforms required public tragedy before they were put into effect.

The human capacity for sympathy and cruelty in equal measure never ceases to amaze. Californians felt compelled, for one reason or another, to provide succor to traveling children. Here, the SRA, Salvation Army, YMCA, and a host of other dedicated social service agencies attempted to alleviate the trials of life on the road. Counties were too poor to fully care for transient youths, which drew in other elements of the relief bureaucracy. The state of California's carceral and coercive engagements with transient youth were yet another element of state paternalism in Depression and Dust Bowl. Indeed, these programs represented the other half of the aid coin, and bureaucrats were willing to use all tools in their quest to transform migrant children. The institutions involved, which included Detention Homes, were not direct products of the New Deal state. In fact, they were relics of Progressivism's coordinated effort to reform delinquent children. In spite of high-minded reformers, violence remained a viable tactic for treating children, especially those whose low class or racial status marked them as targets. As already explained, police departments as well as local officials targeted migrants for a number of reasons, including the maladjusted association with older transients, petty

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<sup>67</sup> Burke, *Olson's New Deal for California*, 178-80.

crime, radicalism, immorality, and their lack of 'proper' labor habits. Male as well as female transients were feared, and the sexuality of girls was especially problematic to Californians. In some cases, these children were let go after receiving light treatment, which may have included a bed and meal. Many others resisted the state's imposition and fled their captors. For incorrigibles, the Youth Authority reformatories were the final destination.

At these schools, there is little evidence to suggest that Anglo Dust Bowl migrants received particularly bad treatment; it is, however, probable that they were seen as especially backwards, lazy, or delinquent by their fellow inmates and the guards. Local hatred for Dust Bowl refugees, and particularly the disapprobation directed towards the homeless, tinged the lives of transient youths, much as it had within public health or education discourses. Still, the cruelty of the juvenile reform system would fall primarily upon the helpless backs of Mexican migrant children. The children described in detail here all came from Mexican or Mexican American families, and their parents, mostly agricultural laborers, were considered even lower than the 'Okies'. Those who ran these schools categorized these children, finding them adept at physical farm labor, lacking in moral training, mentally inferior, intractable, in need of sterilization, and of low social status. What sorts of resistance could a child put up in the face of the scientific and educational discourses surrounding them? Add to that volatile mixture the abuses of guards and enforced isolation, and is it any wonder that two of these youths saw no other way out? These tragedies are not merely isolated deaths; they offer a stark view into the state's deep engagement with migrant children. Indeed, the juvenile reform school is the apotheosis of public health and state education. In such a place, the inmate youth is

isolated, their maladjustments are analyzed then scrubbed away, and through discipline they learn acceptable behaviors and attitudes.

## 5 – Conclusion

*“I came out here from Texas  
To the state of the Golden West  
My pop gets on the WPA  
'Cuz he thought that was the best*

*They started talking Ham and Eggs  
And that just suited me  
I said goodbye to the cotton patch  
There's no more spuds to see*

*We were all so happy  
And thought we're riding high  
But they took away our Ham and Eggs  
If I stay out here I'll die.”*

– Lloyd Stalcup, *The Cotton Picker's Song*<sup>1</sup>

By the early 1940s, the Department of Public Health, the Department of Education, and the Youth Authority, in conjunction with local residents, county employees, scientific developments, and a reform spirit, had created new programs in response to a vast array of problems. Migrant children, in their status as young, malleable individuals, faced a host of hazards—some real, some imagined by Californians. Often the subject of sympathy and antipathy, their lives were beholden in many ways to state officials. Transient children were impacted by serious illnesses such as meningitis, while also blamed for transmitting these diseases to 'healthy' local children. They suffered from malnutrition while residents bemoaned the high cost of providing such succor. Youths were uneducated because of their movement, then were attacked for

1 Lloyd Stalcup, “The Cotton Picker's Song,” 8 August 1940. From Library of Congress, *Voices From the Dust Bowl: the Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin Migrant Worker Collection, 1940-1941*. MP3. <http://memory.loc.gov/afc/afcts/audio/410/4104a2.mp3>. Stalcup, a 14-year-old from Texas, wrote this song himself. On a related note, the capitalization of Ham and Eggs is no error. That was the popular name given for a pension plan developed in 1938, which would have given California residents scrip that could be cashed in at a later date. See the brief description of the plan found in Robert E. Burke, *Olson's New Deal for California*, 15-17.

'invading' school districts. They were ignored by locals and others who could help them, then found themselves under suspicion because they were alone. As they sought camaraderie with potentially dangerous older transients, the state sent police to drag them before the Juvenile Court. Being poor and Mexican, they were deemed naturally low-class because of their race. When they committed suicide, officials found it unfortunate that they were stupid enough to kill themselves. Relief and aid, which suffused migrant life during the Depression and Dust Bowl, did not come freely. Migrant families shouldered their burden of being poor, pathologized, and intruded upon.

That being said, this is not a complete indictment of the state of California's New Deal activities. Children found caring, dedicated individuals in all these departments. Health officials taught proper nutrition, provided immunizations, and set up free clinics. Educators created new classrooms from scratch, teamed up with other agencies to provide work or recreation, and fed them. Police and the reform schools sheltered children, taught them job skills, and reformed delinquent habits. Throughout all this, government employees and officials believed that they were doing what had to be done, for the sake of the transients and residents.

Much of this story is about a confluence of discourses. As already shown, locals in California resented the imposition that transient children represented. Despite this, officials and locals helped children. For some it was a measure of necessary compassion, but for many others the alternatives seemed more dire. Thus, migrant children received vaccinations alongside resident schoolchildren in order to forestall an epidemic, and Mexicans had schools built for them because they could not be allowed to integrate into the public school. Californians, even those who openly vilified migrants, recognized that

thousands of white individuals could not simply be sent elsewhere, despite several attempts at refugee deportation, and despite California's success at removing Mexican families from the state. Thus the language of self-preservation became a common currency among residents of California. State bureaucrats shared that opinion, but indeed they were also beholden to the lasting languages of reform. Not quite pure Progressivism, as that time had passed, and not quite the relief politics of the New Deal state, the discourses circulating around officials emphasized growth, expansion, and the use of science to fix problems within the social order. Men such as Telfer and Dickie repeated the mantra of state oversight and growth, while women such as Okey and Hefferman created foundations for the building of later developments. Even Governor Olson was clearly interested in reform, as he crafted the Youth Authority out of the bones of the old reform schools. These administrators, dedicated as they were, set the stage for continued state paternalism during the second half of the twentieth century.

Historians of the Dust Bowl would do well to reconsider these and other institutional histories in light of their over-emphasis on media production and culture during the Dust Bowl. Children as a class are particularly under-analyzed, and these transient children made up a significant proportion of those needing (and receiving) assistance during the 1930s and early 1940s. Though it is difficult to recover the voices of individual children, research into the paternal state's developing apparatuses of care and coercion enrich the historiography on the migrant family. Nevertheless, state reports, photographs, and journalism did reveal brief sketches of individual children, whether sick with diphtheria, locked away in a Lost Privilege Cottage, or singing songs in a migrant camp. In this regard, perhaps cultural histories of the Depression and Dust Bowl



reconcile themselves with institutional works—research remains to be done with regard to the social lives of migrant children within these state-created agencies. Children, as noted previously, are potential citizens, thus even strangers find themselves concerned with the 'proper' upbringing of such youth. Children are also the focus for some of the most invasive elements of the state, as even seemingly innocuous state programs such as the school lunch, a vaccination drive, or the pickup of delinquents are bound up in statewide concerns about the growth of the child into a citizen that will fulfill particular social functions.

In addition, historians of social welfare and institutions ought to more carefully examine the life of programs born during the New Deal. The reforms in this thesis, created by idealistic officials, were built to last. Many other New Deal relief programs collapsed as the political coalition weakened. Public health programs did lose free clinics and some sanitation measures, in large part because federal migrant camps also disappeared, but other advances remained in California's administration. Migrant workers and their families are still watched closely by health officials, and are sometimes still blamed for outbreaks of disease. Attempts at providing proper nutrition continue to occur at shelters, food banks, and other agencies. Avenues for providing health information to poor families, pregnant mothers, non-English speakers, and the like have expanded tremendously, as residents gradually recognized the need for poor people to receive health care. Indeed, the average citizen is probably unaware of the vast number of public health activities which take place in state bureaucracies; this is a testament to the successes of medicine, nutrition, and scientific rhetoric, all of which were honed in part by the shock of the Depression and Dust Bowl. At the same time, some members of

the public maintain and promulgate rhetorical forms of disapproval earlier felt by migrant families, especially non-whites. The negative discourses on disease, dirtiness, and poverty also increased by the end of the twentieth century, as rhetoric regarding welfare families, cultures of poverty, and ignorance of the existence of migratory workers developed.

Alongside these advances, the Department of Education also expanded in the postwar period. Educational facilities for migrant workers have become mainstays in California, and such education has expanded to offer adult classes as well. School overcrowding and issues with funding are also commonplace in districts, demonstrating the continued political battles over education resources. Taking a page from the Progressives, schools have expanded to offer summer school and recreational opportunities, which ideally prevent delinquency. Epidemics in schools now mostly consist of chicken pox, influenza, and other mostly minor diseases. Enforced vaccinations, in fact, have become systematized in U.S. school districts, although some parents rebel against these shots. School lunches are a fully accepted part of the public school experience, although they may be feeding children too much, and their nutritional standards are questionable. Even the lowly lunch bears the stamp of the New Deal relief; feeding children cheaply competes with feeding them well, even today. Most importantly, the inclusion of Dust Bowl migrants into public schools, despite all the negative rhetoric surrounding them, made a difference. By the end of WWII, most Anglo children had tremendous educational opportunities, and levels of education rose steadily during the 1900s. Even in an age of school budget cuts, most citizens recognize the centrality of education to the lives of children.

Even among juvenile detention facilities there has been continuity of a more dangerous sort. The California Youth Authority was directly a product of the incarceration of poor Mexican children. Despite repeated attempts at improving conditions, YA schools are often hazardous to the inmate. At the same time, they still advocate for the mental reform of the child, with education, therapy, and other programs replacing the use of agricultural labor or sterilization. Delinquency among children in California also continues. Nationally, some people have shed new light on the problems of homeless youths, yet they remain an underserved population. Sadly, police involvement with youths has also increased; the carceral state needs no testament to its tremendous growth in the postwar period.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the YA bears the most mixed racial legacy of all these programs; Progressive reformers thought they could mold youths into proper citizens, but juvenile detention facilities have largely failed their Mexican, African American, and other non-white populations, leaving young children vulnerable to gangs, failing to provide them a usable education, and maintaining the traditional rhetoric about their criminality. This happens in spite of competing discourses of reform, which came from the Spanish-Speaking People's Congress, and continues via MALDEF and other concerned organizations. In general, programs oriented towards children survived the culling of programs that followed WWII and the end of the New Deal, and some of them have expanded through the postwar period. Thus, perhaps in order to understand the state legacy of Progressivism or the New Deal, it behooves historians to seriously consider those bureaucracies that expanded as a response to migrant needs and local problems.

2 Nevertheless, historians have provided such evidence. See Heather Ann Thompson, "Why Mass Incarceration Matters: Rethinking Crisis, Decline, and Transformation in Postwar American History," *The Journal of American History* (Dec. 2010), 703-734.

## Appendices

### *Appendix A: State Relief Administration Survey in the San Joaquin Valley*

#### State of Origin

State or Country of Origin	Number of Families	Percent of Total
Arizona	41	10
Arkansas	37	9
Missouri	31	7
Oklahoma	150	37
Texas	48	12
Other States	40	10
Native Californians	32	8
Mexico	22	5
Miscellaneous	6	2
Totals	407	100

#### Occupation at Time of Leaving State of Origin

Occupation	Number of Family Heads
<u>Agricultural</u>	
Owner Operators	32
Tenant Operators	125
Laborers	130
<u>Non-Agricultural</u>	
Proprietors and Managers	20
Laborers	72
Domestics and Service Employees	9
Other Occupations	19
Total	407

#### Reason for Leaving Home State and for Coming to California

Reasons for Leaving State	Number of Families	Percent of Total
Drought, Crop Failure, Dust	102	27
No Work or Wages Too Low	127	34

Health	46	12
Vacation or Visit	16	4
To Find Better Place to Live	33	9
Miscellaneous	51	14
Subtotal	375	100
California Natives	32	
Total	407	

#### Reasons for Coming to California Rather than to Any Other State

Reasons for Coming to CA	Number of Families	Percent of Total
Work – Better Wages	206	55
Relatives in California	63	17
Health	46	12
To See California	16	4
Desire to Settle in California	17	5
Miscellaneous	27	7
Total	375	100

#### Date of First Entry Into California

Year of First Entry	Number of Families	Percent of Total
1937 (to August)	127	34.3
1936	104	28.1
1935	32	8.7
1934	23	6.2
1933	12	3.2
1932	8	2.2
Prior to 1932	64	17.3
Total	370	100

#### Plans at Time of Interview

Intentions	Number of Families	Percent of Total
Specific Place to Settle In Mind	110	27
Follow Crops Continuously	102	25
Follow Crops Temporarily	18	4

Plans Uncertain	92	23
<u>Total, Prefer to Remain in CA</u>	322	79
Intend to Return to State of Origin	67	16
Continue as Interstate Migrants	3	1
Not Specified	15	4
Total	407	100

#### Racial Distribution

<b>Race</b>	<b>Number of Families</b>
White	343
Mexican	44
Other Races	20
Total	407

#### Education Statistics for Children 6 to 15 Years of Age

<b>Status</b>	<b>White Migrants</b>	<b>Mexican Migrants</b>	<b>All California (1930)</b>
Advanced	8.0%	1.5%	5.2%
Normal	22.5	12.3	45.0
Retarded	69.5	86.2	49.8

#### Extent of Retardation

<b>Years Retarded</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Mexican</b>
One year or more	66.4	85.3
Two years or more	38.5	57.4
Three years or more	19.1	23.5
Four years or more	9.7	8.8
Total Retarded	69.6	86.2

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