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Political Radicalism in the 1920s and 1930s: a Focus on the Southwestern United States of America

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To my family, guide and source of daily support

To my friends, the cornerstone of my life

To Jennifer, my soul mate

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ABSTRACT

Quando venne l'ora di cominciare a strutturare la mia tesi di laurea, era per me veramente importante organizzare lo studio attorno al contesto degli Stati Uniti post - Prima Guerra Mondiale. I 'ruggenti anni Venti' sono da anni per me di grande ispirazione, una passione nata dopo aver visto nel 2013 il film *The Great Gatsby* di Baz Luhrmann, al quale seguì la lettura del capolavoro di Francis Scott Fitzgerald.

Se riguardo *The Great Gatsby* è stato scritto enormemente, così come riguardo il contesto in cui è ambientato, ovvero gli anni Venti Americani, decisi però di partire da un presupposto che proprio il romanzo di Fitzgerald mi ha dato: la disillusione e l'inganno che quegli anni così colorati e affascinanti celavano, come se la magnificenza delle feste di West Egg non fossero altro che un preludio allo sgretolamento delle fondamenta di quella stessa società, così apparentemente invincibile prima del 1929.

Con il crollo di Wall Street, infatti, al consumismo sfrenato prese posto la disoccupazione di massa e la totale incertezza: se dieci anni prima l'America era una nazione uscita intatta dalla Grande Guerra, con l'Europa invece ridotta in macerie, ora la realtà era ben diversa, con le fondamenta economiche americane smantellate e una povertà crescente. Si entrò così nel nuovo decennio con una società caratterizzata da lotte sindacali, grandi flussi migratori, crisi ambientali e radicalismi politici che crescevano in maniera esponenziale. E sarà proprio da queste premesse che si svilupperà il mio studio, entrando poi nel particolare attraverso le figure di Upton Sinclair prima e Carey McWilliams poi, baluardi del radicalismo degli anni Trenta che molto si batterono per le condizioni dei lavoratori californiani e dei milioni di migranti che in quegli anni si riversavano sulla costa ovest degli USA.

Oltre alla gravissima crisi economica che stava paralizzando la nazione, dal 1931 e per quasi tutto il decennio gli stati centrali degli USA esperirono un'aggressiva crisi ambientale: il Dust Bowl. Si trattava di violente tempeste di sabbia che colpirono il Texas, il Kansas e l'Oklahoma, conseguenza delle inappropriate tecniche agricole degli anni Venti, in quanto l'enorme sovrapproduzione agricola tipica di quegli anni spinse lo sfruttamento dei terreni oltre i limiti naturali, arrivando a sfruttare terre inadatte alla

coltivazione che negli anni Trenta erano così aride da generare tempeste di sabbia che misero in ginocchio gli stati circostanti. Mezzo milione di abitanti degli Stati Uniti centrali rimase senza dimora: ne conseguì un esodo di massa verso Ovest, alla disperata ricerca di condizioni di vita decenti.

Questi immigrati furono soprannominati "Okies", in senso dispregiativo per riferirsi agli abitanti dell'Oklahoma, lo stato più duramente colpito dalla crisi, e furono oggetto di disprezzo e razzismo nelle comunità californiane in cui cercavano di introdursi, trovando un ambiente ostile e freddo.

Questo disastroso evento verrà documentato da numerosi servizi fotografici, di cui fanno parte i celebri ritratti di Dorothea Lange, molti dei quali attualmente custoditi al MOMA di New York.

Mentre in California fluivano ondate di migranti provenienti dalle aree colpite dal Dust Bowl, negli stessi anni milioni di messico-americani venivano deportati ed espulsi dalle città Californiane. Sebbene fossero deportazioni spesso organizzate dalle città stesse o da organizzazioni private, la maggior parte dei cittadini decise di tornare in Messico di propria volontà, incoraggiati dal governo messicano che prometteva loro terre gratuite. In California i messico-americani venivano percepiti come usurpatori di lavoro a discapito della popolazione locale, e con l'arrivo dei migranti del Dust Bowl la situazione si fece sempre più ostile.

Il picco delle deportazioni avvenne nel 1934, con situazioni a volte anche violente e ingiuste come incursioni di agenti federali alla ricerca di cittadini di etnia messicana da espatriare con bus, oppure rastrellamenti nei quartieri latini di Los Angeles.

Ma gli anni Trenta vengono ricordati anche e soprattutto per le grandi ondate di sciopero che si susseguirono, su tutti quelli del settore agricolo nel 1933 e quello dei lavoratori portuali di un anno più tardi. Questi lavoratori chiedevano un adeguamento del proprio salario orario, ritenuto fino ad allora estremamente basso per poter sopravvivere, e il riconoscimento delle organizzazioni sindacali, che permettevano di poter essere tutelati.

Durante gli scioperi agricoli si susseguirono una serie di trattative che furono costantemente rifiutate dai lavoratori, e col passare del tempo la situazione finì per diventare violenta, con numerosi scontri nelle campagne californiane.

La stessa situazione si ebbe con le ondate di scioperi di un anno più tardi, con scontri violenti tra lavoratori portuali e la polizia che causarono morti e numerosi feriti. La situazione degenerò a tal punto da sfociare in uno sciopero generale di quattro giorni a San Francisco, sciopero che paralizzò la città e permise ai sindacati di raggiungere la quasi totalità delle condizioni richieste per far tornare a lavoro gli scioperanti.

Oltre alle condizioni dei lavoratori, un'altra questione divenne estremamente popolare durante il decennio: le condizioni economiche e sociali degli anziani. La California era sin dagli inizi del XX secolo una delle mete preferite degli anziani, grazie al suo clima caldo e ai paesaggi estremamente vivibili, e durante i 'ruggenti anni Venti' la popolazione over 65 raddoppiò rispetto al decennio precedente.

Tra le varie soluzioni portate in auge durante quegli anni ci fu quella del dottore Francis Townsend, che prevedeva un sussidio mensile che ciascun pensionato doveva spendere entro quel mese, dando inizio a un vero e proprio movimento che conquistò la California, salvo poi svanire a causa della sua impraticabilità economica. Un'altra idea che prese largo fu la "Ham and Eggs" di Robert Noble, che prevedeva un assegno settimanale a ciascun anziano residente in California. Questa iniziativa avrà un trascorso piuttosto rocambolesco, passando di petizione in petizione, ma venendo in ogni caso sempre sconfitto e mai attuato.

Nonostante i fallimenti di questi due coraggiosi piani pensionistici, la questione delle condizioni degli anziani si aggiunse alle altre di un decennio denso di lotte sociali, su tutte quelle sindacali per i diritti dei lavoratori, ma anche all'ascesa del partito socialista americano che tanto si batteva appunto per migliorare tali condizioni. L'avvento del Dust Bowl inoltre complicò ulteriormente la situazione, già disastrosa dal crollo economico di Wall Street, facendo riversare milioni di Americani sulla costa Ovest statunitense, alla ricerca di un lavoro che già scarseggiava per gli stessi californiani. Ai fasti degli anni Venti seguì così una realtà di povertà e instabilità che travolse la popolazione americana, costretta ora a lottare per la sopravvivenza e per garantirsi un futuro migliore.

Un personaggio cardine per la politica californiana degli anni Trenta che andrò ad analizzare in questa tesi è Upton Sinclair, principalmente conosciuto per essere lo scrittore di *The Jungle*, *The Brass Check*, e moltissimi altri romanzi di vario genere.

Quando pubblicò *The Jungle*, nel 1906, il successo fu enorme e immediato. Si tratta di un romanzo d'inchiesta che narra la storia di Jurgis e di sua moglie, immigrati lituani a Chicago che finiscono a lavorare a Packingtown, il centro dell'industria della carne. Utilizzando il pretesto delle disavventure di Jurgis, l'autore mostra gli orrori delle condizioni di lavoro negli scatolifici americani, così terrificanti da mettere in dubbio pure la qualità della carne che sarebbe poi finita negli scaffali americani. I lavoratori sono costretti a lavorare in condizioni igieniche indecenti, con turni sfiananti per paghe misere, mentre le donne spesso sono costrette a ricorrere alla prostituzione per sopravvivere. Sarà solamente il socialismo a salvare Jurgis, dandogli una ragione di vita e una via d'uscita dalla bolgia infernale di Packingtown.

L'impatto del romanzo alla sua uscita fu clamoroso: iniziarono investigazioni riguardo le condizioni igieniche delle aziende alimentari americane e fu di estrema ispirazione per l'approvazione degli Pure Food, Drug Act and Beef Inspection Act da parte dell'amministrazione Roosevelt, leggi che ponevano delle regole riguardo le condizioni igieniche nei luoghi di lavoro del settore alimentarr e farmaceutico. Seguì anche la fondazione della Food and Drug Administration, l'ente americano incaricato tuttora di regolare l'immissione nel mercato di alimenti e medicinali.

Ritenuto scandaloso ed estremamente scomodo da pubblicare, *The Jungle* innalzò Sinclair nel panorama americano di scrittori di best-sellers, rendendolo sempre più conosciuto e stimato da critici e pubblico.

Dalla pubblicazione del suo romanzo più celebre ne susseguirono altri di vario tipo, ma sarà nel 1919 con la pubblicazione di *The Brass Check* che l'opinione pubblica fu nuovamente sconvolta dalle parole di Sinclair. Il libro è un trattato riguardo la realtà giornalistica dell'epoca e l'operato dell'Associated Press, criticata per il vasto uso di quello che in inglese è chiamato *yellow journalism*, ovvero 'giornalismo giallo', un tipo di giornalismo sensazionalistico e spesso privo di fondamento. Nel corso del libro Sinclair non è timoroso nel fare nome e cognome di coloro che egli riteneva i principali colpevoli

di questa realtà ingannevole, su tutti William Hearst, tra i più importanti imprenditori del settore di quegli anni.

The Brass Check è diviso in tre sezioni, tutte accomunate dalle accuse di Sinclair verso la realtà giornalistica che lo circonda, una realtà in cui per meri interessi economici le testate non si facevano scrupoli a diffondere notizie parzialmente false o volontariamente esagerate, in modo da far presa sul maggior pubblico possibile. La sezione finale del libro racchiude le sue possibili soluzioni per arginare il problema, su tutte la creazione di un codice etico dei giornalisti che impedisca la divulgazione di notizie false o volontariamente esagerate, codice etico poi effettivamente stabilito quattro anni più tardi nel 1923.

Nel corso di questa tesi studierò poi la successiva produzione di romanzi di Sinclair, dai due romanzi di *Sylvia* che Sinclair scrisse congiuntamente con la moglie Mary Craig, a *King Coal*, fortemente ispirato al massacro di Ludlow del 1914, fino alla serie di romanzi con protagonista *Lanny Budd*, ambientati nei principali eventi della prima metà del XX secolo, il terzo dei quali gli garantirà il premio Pulitzer.

Ma una tappa fondamentale della carriera di Sinclair sarà la sua candidatura a governatore della California nel 1934 sotto l'egida del partito democratico. Nel 1933 fondò il partito politico "End Poverty In California" (EPIC), con un programma che comprendeva l'istituzione di un sistema pensionistico e la riqualificazione di fabbriche e terreni dove i disoccupati avrebbero potuto lavorare, creando così ricchezza e diminuendo la disoccupazione. L'elezione fu però fallimentare per Sinclair, che risultò sconfitto dal suo rivale Frank Merriam, a seguito di votazioni che passeranno alla storia per l'accusa di corruzione e falsa informazione ai danni di Sinclair.

Merriam, infatti, fu fortemente appoggiato dai principali produttori di Hollywood, che vedevano l'idea di Sinclair di riqualificare gli studios abbandonati a favore di produzioni indipendenti deleteria per i loro affari, arrivando addirittura a minacciare la delocalizzazione in Florida. Ne conseguirono così film di falsa propaganda ai danni di Sinclair; furono inoltre diffusi articoli sotto ordine di William Hearst a favore di Merriam e grosse somme furono depositate sui conti del rivale politico di Sinclair.

Sinclair venne dipinto come un devoto comunista filo-Sovietico che avrebbe sovvertito la società americana; oltraggiato dai metodi utilizzati in queste elezioni, abbandonò definitivamente la carriera politica per tornare alla scrittura. Il suo ultimo lascito di questa breve esperienza sarà la pubblicazione del pamphlet politico *I, Candidate for Governor: And How I Got Licked* nel 1935, in cui descrisse precisamente i metodi utilizzati per depistarlo durante la campagna elettorale.

Durante gli anni Venti e gli anni Trenta nei circoli letterari che frequentava Sinclair vi era un'altra figura di grande importanza per la California: Carey McWilliams. Originario del Colorado, McWilliams si trasferì in giovane età nel 1922 in California, dove si laureerà in legge e opererà come avvocato nella città di Los Angeles. Con l'avvento della Grande Depressione e dei fascismi in Europa, McWilliams si avvicinò a ideali radicali sempre più vicini al socialismo, collaborando con organizzazioni di sinistra che favorirono fortemente le grandi ondate di scioperi dell'epoca e lavorando come giornalista per testate progressive.

Il suo forte sentimento antifascista venne espresso in uno dei suoi libri più conosciuti, *Factories in the Field* del 1939, dove analizzò l'organizzazione agricola della California dell'epoca. In questo romanzo fece uso del termine "fascismo agricolo" per definire un'organizzazione in cui un'oligarchia comandava le masse di braccianti privandole di ogni diritto e con paghe misere. Suo focus sarà anche il denunciare l'insito razzismo di quel settore, dove nei decenni le varie minoranze furono costantemente soggiogate e sfruttate ai fini produttivi. La sua speranza nel sovvertire le sorti di queste migliaia di lavoratori risiede nel socialismo, unica soluzione per eliminare i soprusi di un tale monopolio.

Fortemente sensibile al tema del razzismo, McWilliams ripropose questa tematica nel 1943 con *Brothers Under the Skin*, uno studio della storia delle varie minoranze californiane, del loro sfruttamento e delle difficoltà che incontrarono nel tentativo di integrarsi negli USA. Grande antirazzista, McWilliams denunciò pesantemente il fatto che un essere umano potesse essere discriminato e leso dei suoi diritti unicamente per il colore della propria pelle, e predicò una società basata sull'uguaglianza di opportunità e la collaborazione tra classi sociali ed etnie differenti.

Alla sua produzione letteraria si aggiunsero negli anni *Prejudice: Japanese-Americans, Symbol of Racial Intolerance*, riguardo le espulsioni di cittadini giapponesi dalla California, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States*, scritto per ridare dignità pubblica alla cultura ispano-americana e *A Mask for Privilege*, riguardante il tema dell'antisemitismo ancora così diffuso negli Stati Uniti.

Sarà però nel 1950 con *The Witch Hunt* che alla produzione letteraria di McWilliams si aggiunse una tematica cardine della sua carriera: la lotta al maccartismo, ovvero la persecuzione di individui di fede socialista o comunista bollati come nemici della nazione – accuse che lui stesso subì sulla sua pelle per i suoi ideali, nonostante non fosse mai nemmeno iscritto al partito comunista. McWilliams considerò tale pratica come un atto sovversivo per una società democratica. Negli anni Quaranta sarà infatti aggiunto alla Lista di Detenzione Custodiale dal direttore del FBI J. Edgar Hoover, venendo così considerato un pericolo e un potenziale detenuto in case di emergenza nazionale.

I grandi conflitti sociali iniziati negli anni Trenta furono percepiti come un pericolo per le classi più potenti della società americana, che di conseguenza iniziarono a bollare i principali sfidanti dello status quo come pericoli e ad ostracizzarli dalla società, in una sorta di caccia alle streghe da cui prenderà spunto McWilliams per il titolo del romanzo. Molti individui che avrebbero con grande probabilità criticato una tale gestione, su tutti i professori universitari, vennero messi a tacere dalla paura di perdere il posto di lavoro o peggio di venire bollati come pericoli per la nazione stessa.

In questo clima di terrore generale McWilliams collaborò con alcuni dei più celebri ostracizzati dal maccartismo, gli "Hollywood Ten", negli anni della 'lista nera' di Hollywood. Questa 'lista nera' consisteva nella pratica di negare il lavoro a qualsiasi individuo dello show business che venisse accusato di avere affiliazioni con i comunisti o verso chiunque si rifiutasse di collaborare nelle investigazioni riguardanti le mosse del partito Comunista. L'industria del cinema divenne sin dagli inizi della Guerra Fredda il focus delle indagini, considerata sin dagli anni Trenta uno dei principali poli culturali delle ideologie marxiste.

Mentre la maggioranza delle persone accusate cooperò con gli investigatori, dieci delle principali personalità di Hollywood dell'epoca si rifiutarono di partecipare a tali

inchieste, definendole una chiara violazione dei loro diritti civili. Passati alla storia come gli "Hollywood Ten", finirono per essere condannati per aver disobbedito al Congresso con sentenze che arrivarono addirittura a un anno di carcere. McWilliams collaborò con due degli Hollywood Ten, lo sceneggiatore John Howard Lanson e il regista Dalton Trumbo, come *amicus curiae*, ovvero come soggetto terzo alle indagini in grado di fornire informazioni volte ad assistere la corte. Attraverso questo ruolo ripropose la sua tesi della caccia alle streghe che si stava facendo tramite queste indagini, in cui il maccartismo era descritto come una pratica irrazionale volte a cercare il male a tutti i costi anche dove effettivamente non si trova.

Con la pubblicazione di *The Witch Hunt* la carriera di McWilliams prese una nuova piega: nel 1951 si trasferì a New York per diventare il nuovo editore della rivista *The Nation*, prendendo così il posto di Freda Kirchwey nel 1955. Sotto la sua egida la rivista continuò con il suo carattere anti fascista e progressista, venendo però spesso additato come eccessivamente filo comunista. I nuovi impegni da editore, che ora gli richiedevano una vista a tutto tondo sulla realtà che lo circondava, gli resero impossibile la ricerca letteraria per un nuovo libro. Per McWilliams, infatti, le responsabilità da editore e autore di libri non potevano coincidere.

Il ventennio in cui svolse il ruolo da editore di *The Nation* lo rese ancora più conosciuto al pubblico, permettendogli di tenere conferenze la cui maggior parte riguardavano le libertà civili e le tematiche razziali, per poi ritirarsi a vita privata raggiunti i sessant'anni, dove cominciò a scrivere la sua biografia e dando sporadicamente lezioni nelle università americane.

Come ho scritto in questa prefazione, nel mio lavoro di tesi cercherò di raccontare l'America della Grande Depressione attraverso queste figure, analizzando i grandi scioperi e i radicalismi che ne emersero. Con il crollo di Wall Street nell'ottobre del 1929 finiva uno dei decenni più leggendari della storia americana, fatto di personalità iconiche, grandi artisti e sviluppo economico. La crisi economica però svelerà la disillusione generale di quegli anni e la debolezza delle fondamenta su cui poggiavano gli Stati Uniti.

Dalle ceneri degli anni Venti andava però costruendosi un nuovo decennio che avrebbe ricostruito da capo le basi della società americana, attraverso una crescente coscienza collettiva e l'instancabile operato dei sindacati. I grigi anni Trenta furono il campo di battaglia per i diritti dei lavoratori e dei più colpiti dalla crisi in generale, i quali lottarono per vedere le loro condizioni e i loro salari adeguati a un livello dignitoso. Personalità conosciute come Upton Sinclair e Carey McWilliams si schierarono con loro in questa battaglia, contribuendo alla diffusione in larga scala delle idee di libertà dei lavoratori americani.

Le figure di Sinclair e di McWilliams sono estremamente significative per raccontare questo periodo della storia americana, il cui operato, circoscritto soprattutto allo stato californiano, influenzerà la nazione intera, dando così un enorme contributo alla ricostruzione della struttura sociale statunitense.

Queste due figure sono infatti l'emblema del radicalismo che esplose negli anni Trenta in California, i quali innalzarono il socialismo a soluzione per le varie problematiche della nazione, venendo così spesso bollati come filo-sovietici, ma portando sempre avanti i loro ideali per il bene della comunità, dedicando le loro intere carriere a un'utilità sociale che li renderà due dei più importanti cittadini Californiani d'adozione.

INTRODUCTION

When I started to organize my dissertation, I made the snap decision that the topic should be set in the framework of the Roaring Twenties, my great personal interest and a time in history that has been a huge source of inspiration for me. These were the years of the “Lost generation”, those writers who came of age during the First World War and were given this label by Gertrude Stein in a correspondence to Ernest Hemingway that specifically mentioned so his contemporaries. Some of the most significant artists of the 20th century were represented in this group, including Ernest Hemingway, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Francis Scott Fitzgerald.

Due to the massive economic growth of the United States and the fact that the war’s horrors had destroyed the European economy, consumerism and general prosperity were able to flourish. Excessive behavior increased, parties got increasingly extravagant, jazz emerged from the black community to become a mainstream phenomenon, with Louis Armstrong elevated to celebrity status, and women enjoyed increasing social and sexual freedoms.

However, *The Great Gatsby* of 1925 foresaw that all of that reality was a fleeting bubble set to burst and that it was all hypocrisy. As though the American dream, which in those years seemed so real, had as its inevitable conclusion the worst of falls, Jay Gatsby’s goal to conquer Daisy ends in the worst of failures. In fact, from the great feasts of the 1920s, the Great Depression began, with millions of Americans unemployed as early as 1930.

What first appeared to be a strong and ideal society, a blend of truth and a wonderful illusion, turned out to be a broken, erroneous structure that needed to be reconstructed. These core ideas have guided the development of my study, which has drawn on the authoritative voices of Upton Sinclair and Carey Williams. I intend to describe the various phases of the post-illusion of the 1920s, including the union conflicts, the massive migration waves that flooded into California, political radicalism, and the significant accomplishments made possible by the efforts of these two individuals.

Great advocates for California, Sinclair and Williams are the epitome of the political radicalism that characterized their times in the American southwest: the first's muckraking novels and the second's investigations into the living circumstances on Californian estates broadened readers' perspectives on society and made it possible to alter a system that the 1929 financial crisis had only served to reveal. The total exploitation of American workers and their appalling working conditions necessitated significant reforms, as did the out-of-control nature of the Dust Bowl situation and its need for organization, as well as the opaque nature of the racial issue and the use of the media. In fact, newspapers were thriving and greatly benefited from "yellow journalism", as there was no journalistic code of ethics before Sinclair.

These two individuals played a crucial role in creating the future of America because they dedicated their lives to reversing the course of events in California, a state that had been driven to its knees by the Black Tuesday but actually had already weak foundations that needed to be restored. They provided socialism of legitimacy and importance on American soil and fought for its ideals, despite the specter of Sovietization that resulted from the mere use of the word "socialism", which helped the American trade union movement achieve great things.

If the 1920s were years of great illusion, the 1930s showed the real reality, and great men like Sinclair and McWilliams fought to rebuild America from the foundations, from picketing on the streets to publications of great public interest, leaving a legacy that still inspires today's society.

1930s CALIFORNIA: THE RADICAL STATE

The period across 1920s and 1930s was one of the greatest up-and-down times in American history. The state experienced a decade of unmatched prosperity after World War I, which was followed by the worst economic crisis in its history.

California experienced one of the greatest economic development during the 1920s. New industries were founded, and older ones grew. Due to World War I's extensive destruction of huge portions of the European continent, the economy increased by roughly 40% in the decade, with the United States producing about half of the world's output on average.¹ Public spending on new construction nearly doubled from \$6 billion in 1920 to \$12 billion six years later. The unemployment rate throughout the 1920s, for the most part, never went above the natural rate of about 4%, with the exception of the economic depression of the first two years of the decade.² One main argumentation for the boom of the Roaring Twenties was because of financial innovations, with stockbrokers who began allowing customers to buy stocks "on margin". Brokers would lend stockholders at least 80% of the remaining price after they had only put down roughly 15% of the stock's price. With the support of taking loans, investors were able to purchase more stock than they could previously afford, which allowed them to profit more if the stock price increased.³ This kind of exact procedure became a fragility when stock prices dramatically fell during the 1929 stock market crash.⁴

As the production of consumer products expanded, American affluence increased. As more Californians acquired refrigerators and washing machines, they became common home items. The majority of Californian houses had radios by the middle of the 1930s, and by 1924, there were 70 radio stations broadcasting everything from music to news

¹ Nasser A., *Override Economy: American Capitalism and the Crisis of Democracy*, Pluto Press, 2018, pp. 56-60.

² U.S. Census Bureau, *Bicentennial Edition: Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*, p. 126.

³ U.S. Census Bureau, *Bicentennial Edition: Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*, p. 302.

⁴ Nasser A., *Override Economy: American Capitalism and the Crisis of Democracy*, pp. 60-67.

to weather reports.⁵ Additionally, the airline sector physically rose to prominence. When the Kelly Act and the Air Commerce Act were passed in 1925 and 1926, respectively, the Post Office was given permission to outsource the delivery of airmail, and by 1929, there were 170,000 more persons flying, completely altering the way that people traveled.⁶ Henry Ford's invention of the assembly line, along with his flagship product, the Ford Model T, which only cost between \$260 and \$800, and the fact that more families could now purchase on credit, led to a significant expansion of the car industry.⁷ More than 20 million cars had been registered by the end of the decade, and for the first time, women had the decision to drive.⁸ The expansion of the auto industry created an economic benefit for all, with governments that spent billions of dollars to build new roads and bridges. Gas stations, motels, and restaurants appeared to service drivers who now could cover longer distances. The insurance industry also started adding expensive protection for the vehicles and their owners, with banks which also profited by lending to new car owners.

Those years were also characterized by the Volstead Act of January 16, 1920, which prohibited the sale and manufacture of any alcoholic beverages.⁹ The outcomes of the experiment show unequivocally that it was a horrible failure on every level. It was intended to decrease criminal activities, alleviate social issues, lessen the fiscal burden caused by jails, enhance health and good conduct in America, and solve social problems. Although alcohol consumption decreased in the early years of Prohibition, it then rose sharply, which had a cascade of negative effects: alcohol consumption became increasingly dangerous; crime rose and became "organized"; the court and prison systems were overburdened; and public officials were frequently corrupted. No measurable improvements were made in productivity or reduced absenteeism.

⁵ Scott C., "The History of the Radio Industry in the United States to 1940", *Economic History Association*, last retrieved December 13, 2022, <https://eh.net/encyclopedia/the-history-of-the-radio-industry-in-the-united-states-to-1940/>.

⁶ Various Authors, "The Pioneering Years: Commercial Aviation 1920-1930", *U.S. Centennial of Flight Commission*, last retrieved December 12, 2022, https://www.centennialofflight.net/essay/Commercial_Aviation/1920s/Tran1.htm.

⁷ Various Authors, "The Model T", *FORD*, last retrieved December 13, 2022, <https://corporate.ford.com/articles/history/the-model-t.html>.

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, *Bicentennial Edition: Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*, p. 716.

⁹ Hobart G., "The Volstead Act", *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 109, 1923, pp. 85-101, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1014996>.

Prohibition removed a significant source of tax revenue and instead increased government spending. It also led many drinkers to switch to opium, marijuana, cocaine, and other dangerous drugs that they would have been unlikely to encounter without the Prohibition years.¹⁰

The wealth of the 1920s, however, was unfairly allocated, with too much income concentrated in profits and too little in salaries. Many employees had such low incomes that they could not afford to purchase the goods they made. In other words, there was an excess of production compared to demand. The economy was in trouble due to the large amount of unsold commodities, and the 1929 stock market crash was immediately followed by the worst depression in both Californian and American history. When companies and banks all around the state closed during the Great Depression, numerous small investors and depositors lost everything they had invested. By 1932, California's farm income had decreased to nearly half of what it had been in 1929. The unemployment rate in the Golden State reached an incredible 28 percent in 1932, and one-fifth of all Californians need public assistance two years later.¹¹

For California and the whole nation, the 1930s was a period of particularly hard times. The US stock market crash of 1929 set off the most severe economic depression in the Western world. In the American Midwest, this was compounded by a severe drought that destroyed crops and farms: of the 2.5 million Dust Bowl immigrants who left the Plains states, about 200,000 moved to California, joining a population that was already facing massive unemployment and low wages. During the Great Depression, labor issues were commonplace and strikes occurred frequently, marking a major wave of political radicalization, with the major strike represented with the 1934 San Francisco General Strike.

¹⁰ Thornton M., "Alcohol Prohibition Was a Failure", *Cato Institute*, Policy Analysis n. 157, July 17, 1991, last retrieved December 12, 2022, <https://www.cato.org/policy-analysis/alcohol-prohibition-was-failure>.

¹¹ Graves S., "The Great Depression: California in the Thirties", California State University Press, 2009, p. 2.

The Dust Bowl

Impact of the Crisis

A significant man-made environmental catastrophe in American history was the Dust Bowl. When World War I broke out, the government encouraged farmers to plant wheat in low-cost areas. Farmers plowed millions of acres of untouched land, destroying the native grasses that kept the soil stable.¹² Then suddenly the rains stopped and crops perished and died. Winds carried the topsoil away, resulting in huge dust storms that choked the life out of livestock and humans alike. Journalists called the area a “Dust Bowl”.¹³

Over 250,000 of those who left their homes in Missouri, Texas, Arkansas, and Oklahoma for California did so because they saw the Pacific state as a land of opportunity, driven by the depression, drought, and Dust Bowl.¹⁴ The Dust Bowl migrants came to California to stay, and they changed the culture and politics of the state.¹⁵ Agriculture was a leading sector in California in the 1930s, with more than half of the country’s fruits and vegetables that came from the fields of California’s valleys.

California’s agricultural environment was dominated by massive farmlands that focused on one or two crops, dependent on a work force that would emerge during harvest and vanish once the crops were harvested. Mexican agricultural labourers provided for this rigorous way of life.¹⁶ They labored during the harvest period, traveled back to their country of origin during the cold seasons, and then came back to work in the spring. Depression’s challenging periods altered this process. New immigration laws forcibly deported thousands of Mexican workers, and their absence created a need for farm

¹² Various Authors, “The Dust Bowl, California, and the Politics of Hard Times”, *State of California Capitol Museum*, last retrieved December 22, 2022, <https://capitolmuseum.ca.gov/exhibits/the-dust-bowl-california-and-the-politics-of-hard-times/>.

¹³ McLeman R., Dupre J., Berrang Ford L., Ford J., Gajewski K., Marchildon G., “What We Learned from the Dust Bowl: Lessons in Science, Policy, and Adaptation”, *Population and Environment*, Vol. 35, n. 4, pp. 218-232, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11111-013-0190-z#citeas>.

¹⁴ “The Dust Bowl, California, and the Politics of Hard Times”, *State of California Capitol Museum*.

¹⁵ Worster D., *Dust Bowl - The Southern Plains in the 1930s*, Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 50.

¹⁶ Graves S., “The Great Depression: California in the Thirties”, p. 4.

workers, attracting the Dust Bowl migrants to settle in California's farm valleys.¹⁷ In a short amount of time, however, there were too many workers and not enough jobs. Dust Bowl migrants had little food, shelter, or comfort. Some growers allowed workers to stay rent-free in labor camps and others provided small cabins. The majority of the immigrants found refuge wherever they could, with hundreds staying beside irrigation ditches or in vacant fields close to the ranch lands. Still, some merely gave a patch of muddy ground to set up a tent. The homes were typically arranged in groups known as Squatter Camps or Shanty Towns, and they were frequently situated close to the irrigation canals that ran around the edges of these fields. Because their warehouses were normally located around the irrigation canals, some waste would inevitably drain into the water that served as supplies to the immigrant families.¹⁸ Due to this lack of sanitation in these camps, the disease was rampant among migrant workers and their families. Also contributing to the disease was the fact that these Shanty Townhomes where migrant workers lived did not have running water and, due to their minimum wage, medical care was unavailable.¹⁹

The years 1936 and 1937 represented the peak of this migration process. Malaria, tuberculosis, and smallpox were widespread all across the country. Residents died from health problems and starvation.²⁰ In the 1930s, more people moved to California than to any other state in the union. With the steady influx of low-income migrants that overwhelmed the valley's tiny agricultural towns' schools and amenities, the population of the majority of valley towns rose by 50% by 1938. These newcomers competed with natives for employment throughout the valley, offering much lesser pay. The worst-hit county was Kern, where the population grew by 60% in a short period of time. The capacity of the police, medical, housing, and social agencies was at capacity. No matter what nation they were from, locals referred to Dust Bowl refugees as "Okies". They saw

¹⁷ Balderrama F., "America's Forgotten History Of Mexican-American Repatriation", *National Public Radio*, September 10, 2015, last retrieved December 13, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2015/09/10/439114563/americas-forgotten-history-of-mexican-american-repatriation>.

¹⁸ Tugwell R., "Roosevelt and the Bonus Marchers of 1932", *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 87, n. 3, 1972, pp. 372-76, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2149206>.

¹⁹ DeAngelis G., *Baked Out and Broke: The Okie Migration*, Cobblestone, 2003, p. 24.

²⁰ Blackwell G., "Medicine and Disease in History: The 1930s Plague Pandemic", *Miami University History Department*, Spring 2019, last retrieved December 13, 2022, <https://sites.miamioh.edu/hst-journeys/2019/05/medicine-and-disease-in-history-the-1930s-plague-pandemic/>.

Okies as being stupid, uneducated, dishonest, and bizarre. Some people wanted to support the Okies by giving them food and clothing, while others wanted them to leave California and return to their own country.²¹

The family embarked on a three-day or longer journey through the legendary Route 66 in search of a presumably better life in the Californian countryside.²² When the migrants got to Barstow, California, one of the very first towns they encountered, they had to decide whether to follow the highway towards Los Angeles or turn north toward the state's central agricultural valleys. 40 percent of the southwestern migrants chose Los Angeles. The municipal police set up a "bum roadblock" at the border in 1936 in reaction to this large exodus to keep out anyone they deemed unwelcome. Whatever the case, in the 1930s, "Okies" effectively integrated and joined the city's predominately Anglo populace.²³

In an effort to address the "Okie" migration, the California Citizens Association was successful in increasing the waiting period for relief to three years. The Farm Security Administration (FSA) constructed 10 federal camps in 1937 that offered adequate housing in migrant labor camps, but they were only intended to serve as models for state and private organizations that were not likely to construct any kind of residences, and they could not satisfy the immediate requirement for migrant housing.²⁴ The Associated Farmers feared the "Okies" might collect under unions and start demanding better conditions. The United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA) was founded by the Committee for Industrial Organization, which played a part in a series of strikes in the fields, but the migrants lacked a strong sense of class consciousness. Many people were discouraged, and the majority identified more as farm owners than as workers.

²¹ Mullins W., "Okie Migrations", *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, last retrieved December 12, 2022, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=OK008#:~:text=From%201935%20to%201940%20California,northwestern%20Oklahoma%20and%20the%20Panhandle.>

²² Mullins W., "Okie Migrations", *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*.

²³ Mullins W., "Okie Migrations", *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*.

²⁴ Todd C., "The Okies' Search for a Lost Frontier", *The New York Times*, August 27, 1939, p. 10.

Dust Bowl migrants can probably claim their major accomplishments in the area of culture. John Steinbeck's 1939 novel *The Grapes of Wrath* depicted a distressed family moving from Oklahoma to California, suffering scorn and economic depression looking for honest employment.²⁵ This rough portrayal offended some Oklahomans, while many others read the book. Dorothea Lange's photographs, produced for the FSA, stirred concern for the displaced, with her iconic picture *Migrant Mother* of March 1936, as did the musical productions of Woody Guthrie, while the editor of *The Nation* and historian Carey McWilliams focused his indignation on the migrants in his work *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California of 1939*.²⁶

Politically, the "Okies" transmitted "plain-folk Americanism", combining a concern for humankind mixing individualism and patriotism.²⁷ They provided an emotional and evangelical conception of Protestantism to culture, particularly the Pentecostal religious movements. Moreover, they popularized country music.²⁸ Even as the "Okies" across years dispersed to defense industry jobs during World War II, climbed up the socio-economic ladder to own a plot of land in the valley, or went back to their homelands, they left their mark on a society that had treated them with disdain.

Mexican Repatriation

During the Great Depression the deportation of Mexican citizens from the United States to Mexico was known as the Mexican repatriation. Amounts repatriated are estimated to be between 200,000 and one million of people.²⁹

The deportations were mostly planned by city governments, frequently with assistance from nearby private organizations, albeit having federal approval. Federal officials were hardly ever involved, and voluntary return was considerably more prevalent than formal

²⁵ Steinbeck J., *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chelsea House Publishers, 2006.

²⁶ Mullins W., "Okie Migrations", *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*.

²⁷ Mullins W., "Okie Migrations", *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*.

²⁸ Royston Battat E., *Ain't Got No Home: America's Great Migrations and the Making of an Interracial Left*, University of North Carolina Press, 2014, pp. 41-69.

²⁹ Gratton B., Merchant E., "Immigration, Repatriation, and Deportation: The Mexican-Origin Population in the United States, 1920-1950", *The International Migration Review*, Vol. 47, n. 4, 2013, pp. 944-975, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24542812>.

expulsion. Some of the returning citizens intended to avoid the Dust Bowl-related migration waves from central states and the Great Depression's economic crises. Indeed, the Mexican population, for the most part, labor force in agricultural fields, now found themselves with enormous competition in their sector. The government formally deported at least 82,000 people, the vast majority between 1930 and 1933, with the Mexican government instead encouraging repatriation with the promise of free land.³⁰

Several different categories of farmers, revisionists, and racists had urged for curbs on Mexican immigration even before the Wall Street disaster. Their main points of contention were the cost of public aid for the needy and the competitiveness for jobs.³¹ The Great Depression just strengthened these arguments: the coordinator Visel, a representative of the Los Angeles Citizens Committee for Coordination of Unemployment Relief (LACCCU), wrote to the federal government in Los Angeles that deportation was required because "We need their jobs for the citizens in need".³²

The massive alien population is the primary reason for unemployment, according to Congressman Martin Dies' article in the *Chicago Herald-Examiner*.³³ Private groups like the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and The National Club of America for Americans also believed that removing Mexicans from the country would create jobs for US citizens, and the latter organization urged Americans to exert pressure on the government to start the expulsion process.

The National Catholic Welfare Conference projected that the expulsion of non-citizen parental figures would have cost more than the roundup because the remaining children and wives who were previously unsuitable for expulsion would now qualify for public welfare. Recent studies, in fact, supported this analysis, as a study in El Paso, Texas.³⁴

³⁰ Gutiérrez L., "Trains of Misery: Repatriate Voices and Responses in Northern Mexico during the Great Depression", *Journal of American Ethnic History*, Vol. 39, n. 4, 2022 pp. 13-26, <https://scholarlypublishingcollective.org/uip/jaeh/article-abstract/39/4/13/228896/Trains-of-Misery-Repatriate-Voices-and-Responses?redirectedFrom=fulltext>.

³¹ Hoffman A., *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929-1939*, University of Arizona Press, 1974, p. 26.

³² Balderrama F., Rodríguez R., *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s*, University of New Mexico Press, 2006, p. 67.

³³ Betten N., Mohl R., "From Discrimination to Repatriation: Mexican Life in Gary, Indiana, during the Great Depression", *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 42, n. 3, 1973, pp. 370-388, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3637683>.

³⁴ Balderrama F., Rodríguez R., *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s*, p. 77.

Additionally, current economic research suggests that deportations had a negative economic impact on the American national treasury.³⁵

Local governments started repatriation initiatives from the beginning of the 1930s, frequently working with private organizations or social welfare offices. Los Angeles, the American city outside of Mexico with the highest concentration of Mexicans, developed a typical expulsion strategy, including a plan for commercial releases announcing “the deportation campaign, some arrests would be made”, with the maximum amount of publicity and images, and “and both the police and the deputy sheriffs would have attended”.³⁶ Both the Mexican embassy and the regional Spanish-language newspaper, *La Opinión*, have voiced grievances and critiques as a result of this.³⁷ Tremendous raids were conducted with the assistance of federal agents, deputy county sheriffs, and police departments. After the raids, the deportees were herded aboard trains and buses. Jose David Orozco, commenting those events, spoke of “women crying in the streets upon not finding their husbands” on his local radio station.³⁸

Several forays into Los Angeles included roundups of hundreds of Mexicans, with immigration officers and agents blocking all exits from the Mexican neighborhood in East Los Angeles.³⁹

The repatriation movement had peaked by 1934, but Los Angeles still threatened to deport thousands of families. The threat was not eventually carried out, even though the Mexican government made an effort to prepare for such a fresh influx.⁴⁰

Mexican governments had suddenly taken the position that it was “right” to help repatriate Mexicans living in the annexed parts of the southwestern United States.⁴¹

³⁵ Jongkwan L., Peri G., Yassenov V., “The Employment Effects of Mexican Repatriations: Evidence from the 1930s”, *National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper n. 23885*, 2017, <https://www.nber.org/papers/w23885>.

³⁶ Balderrama F., Rodriguez R., *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s*, p. 2.

³⁷ Hoffman A., *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929-1939*, pp. 59-62.

³⁸ Balderrama F., Rodriguez R., *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s*, p. 70.

³⁹ Hoffman A., *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929-1939*, p 64.

⁴⁰ Alanís Enciso S. F., *They Should Stay There: The Story of Mexican Migration and Repatriation During the Great Depression*, Chapel Hill, 2017, pp. 52-55.

⁴¹ Alanís Enciso S. F., *They Should Stay There: The Story of Mexican Migration and Repatriation During the Great Depression*, p. 17.

However, it generally did not act according to this stated policy, mainly due to a lack of adequate resources. In any case, the early 1930s saw a huge number of repatriations, which compelled the government to respond and provide a range of services, such as paying the costs of all those thousands of citizens' repatriations.⁴² The government made some attempts to establish new settlements, known as *colonias*, where returnees may dwell, although the great majority returned to those areas where they had family and friends.

After the peak of repatriation was passed, the post-1934 government led by Lázaro Cárdenas continued to talk about encouraging repatriation, but on a practical level did little to implement it.⁴³

A decade of social upheaval

In the 1930s United States, the red color was most commonly identified with the alien threat of the Communist Party, which was seen as moving toward the destruction of every form of government and democracy. Realistically talking, the U.S. Communist Party members were much more concerned with the establishment of better working conditions within the American capitalist system. After the United States' economy saw great expansion in the 1920s and then crashed into the global Great Depression in 1929, employees there either lost their jobs or were forced to work in unfavorable conditions for little pay.⁴⁴ In this situation, major and medium-sized businesses utilized the millions of unemployed people who were willing to work for any pay and under any circumstances as a threat to convince their current employees to put up with appalling working conditions.⁴⁵

⁴² Alanís Enciso S. F., *They Should Stay There: The Story of Mexican Migration and Repatriation During the Great Depression*, p. 24.

⁴³ Alanís Enciso S. F., *They Should Stay There: The Story of Mexican Migration and Repatriation During the Great Depression*, pp. 185-186.

⁴⁴ Various Authors, "Depression Era: 1930s: "Bloody Thursday" & Other Labor Strikes", *Picture this: California Perspective on American History*, last retrieved December 12, 2022, <http://picturethis.museumca.org/timeline/depression-era-1930s/political-protest/info>.

⁴⁵ "Depression Era: 1930s: "Bloody Thursday" & Other Labor Strikes", *Picture this: California Perspective on American History*.

California agricultural strikes of 1933

In 1933 a series of agricultural strikes began in California, mostly involving Mexican and Filipino laborers from the San Joaquin Valley. About 50,000 workers were involved in the wave which included about thirty strikes from 1931 to 1940. Twenty-four of these strikes, involving 38,000 union members, were led by the Industrial Union of Conservatives and Agricultural Workers (CAWIU). The strikes, which broke out in August among beet, grape, and peach workers, culminated in a series of upheavals by cotton farmers in the San Joaquin Valley in October. These October strikes, concerning conditions in the cotton fields, involved the largest number of strikers in this wave.⁴⁶

Cotton farmers in the San Joaquin Valley used to use labor costs far below a decent threshold to become the country's leading producer, producing more cotton per acre than in the Old South. Despite this premise, Californian cotton farmers paid slightly better than cotton farmers in other states, even if wages for cotton pickers in California had dropped significantly from \$1.50 per hundred pounds in 1928 to just 40 cents per hundred pounds in 1932, wages set by the Agricultural Labor Bureau, the American organization of employers. In 1929, with the Great Depression, there was a dramatic reduction in demand for cotton, and many landowners lost their assets to the Bank of America and others who held the cash. The US government, in a ploy to preserve the economic stability of farmers, offered them a range of economic subsidies. The harvesters, therefore, hoped that the farmers would support them as a result of this government financial maneuver, but this did not happen, causing the conditions for the series of strikes.⁴⁷

The Cannery and Agricultural Workers' Industrial Union (CAWIU), a communist workers' organization, had been organizing for some time on the question of workers in the cotton fields and by 1933 had come to represent the political and social leader of the cotton pickers, most of whom were Mexican. In the event that its demands were not met, the CAWIU threatened a general strike across the valley. These demands included

⁴⁶ Rosales A., *Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*, Arte Público Press, 2017, p. 119.

⁴⁷ Acuña R., *Corridors of Migration: The Odyssey of Mexican Laborers 1600-1933*, University of Arizona Press, 2007, p. 237-238.

the elimination of contract labor, paying at least \$1 per 100 pounds of cotton collected, and recognizing the CAWIU as the employees' collective bargaining executive. As previously mentioned in the section titled "The Dust Bowl", contract labor refers to the hiring of a sizable group of workers for occasional or seasonal work. These demands were perpetuated in virtually every cotton strike that followed in 1933. On a September morning a group of 80 men and women launched the cotton strikes after discovering that it took an average picker 10 hours to gather 300 pounds of cotton. The money that the planters were offering per quintal, 40 cents, was not even enough to cover the necessary minimum purchases of food and the other basic needs. The workers remained stuck in the demand for a dollar per quintal. The planters reluctantly raised the money, raising the offer at 60 cents, following the pressure of public opinion and the firm position of the striking workers, but this was not enough, starting the most aggressive and massive phase of the strikes.⁴⁸

Picket lines, a method of protest used by workers at the work site, signaled the start of the cotton strikes on October 4, 1933. The moment the growers learned about the strike, they firmly launched an all-out offensive on them. The pickers and their family had five minutes from eighty Kings County planters to put everything into the trucks and then discharge it on the highway without any type of safety or security. In support of them, the CAWIU rented fields near the cotton harvesting centers, the most important of which was in Corcoran, California, where they could have a stable and secure base. Local citizens barely tolerated the Mexican workers taking over the area and access to basic needs such as health care was difficult if not impossible. Three days after the protests began, cotton farmers began to worry that their cotton crop would not be harvested at its maximum value, and that angry landowners would then start violent persecution of the strikers. Two days later, the strike turned violent: in Tulare County, gunmen hired by farmers clashed with the strikers and union organizers of the CAWIU, while their staff were forcibly expelled from the county. The tension peaked on October 10 in Pixley, when about 30 ranchers held a meeting of strikers. The situation escalated into a violent firefight, which ended in the death of three collectors and the wounding of many others. On the same day, in response to this event a group of striking harvesters

⁴⁸ Acuña R., *Corridors of Migration: The Odyssey of Mexican Laborers 1600-1933*, pp. 239-240.

confronted a group of armed farmers on a ranch near Arvin, California, about 60 miles south of the Pixley shooting. After several hours of confrontation on the border of the mainland, the two sides began to attack each other (the workers armed with wooden poles, the men of the landowners instead with the butts of rifles), again leading to the injury of many workers.⁴⁹

At the end of October, the cotton strikes came to a close. Following the violence in Pixley, the farmers' acts were widely criticized, and the California Highway Patrol swarmed the region to reestablish calm. Public works officials and mediators from the federal and state governments arrived to try to put an end to the strikes and find a resolution to the economic issues that were fueling all this unrest.⁵⁰ George Creel, president of the Regional Labor Board of the National Labor Board (a federal agency for labor relations), began to participate more regularly in mediating strikes. Both sides were struck by Creel's air of authority despite the fact that he had no legal authority. He told landlords that the Roosevelt administration would stop all federal agricultural funding to California if the violence continued in an attempt to influence farmers. He also suggested a three-member committee of inquiry to address the strike issue. On October 23, the panel declared that growers should provide a 75 cents-per-pound payment, and two days later, they were formally persuaded by Creel's influence. Creel said that all assistance would be completely cut off if workers refused to accept this final commission rate. The CAWIU had earlier wanted at least 80 cents and the Union's recognition. The leaders of the CAWIU accepted the commission's recommendation and asked that all forms of the cotton strike that was then going on in California come to an end, despite the fact that the strikers were still keen on continuing with the strike series.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Cletus D., *Bitter Harvest: A History of California Farmworkers 1870-1941*, University of California Press, 1982, p. 196.

⁵⁰ Cletus D., *Bitter Harvest: A History of California Farmworkers 1870-1941*, p. 201.

⁵¹ Various Authors, "California Forces End of the Cotton Strike", *The New York Times*, October 26, 1933, p. 35.

1934 West Coast waterfront strike

Dockworkers in every US West Coast harbor refused to report for work on May 9, 1934, the first day of the eighty-three-day West Coast Waterfront Strike of 1934. A strike resolution was eventually reached when the conflict reached its pinnacle with the murders of two workers on “Bloody Thursday” so San Francisco general strike began, which stopped all operations in California’s largest port cities for four days.⁵²

West Coast longshoremen had been either unorganized or represented by corporate unions since the end of World War I, when shipping companies and stowage firms imposed the open shop, so a place of employment at which the individual is not required to join a union (closed shop) as a condition of hiring, after a series of failed strikes. The “blue book” system, managed by a corporate union, was used to hire dockworkers in San Francisco, the biggest port on the coast at the time.

Through its organization of maritime workers, the Industrial Workers of the World attempted to mobilize longshoremen, sailors, and fisherman in the 1920s. They even organized a strike in the port of San Pedro in 1923, but it quickly failed due to a wave of widespread arrests. With the failure of this strike, the IWW lost its authority, but union thinking remained alive and burning on the Californian docks.⁵³ In the effort to establish revolutionary trade unions, the Communist Party also became active in the region in the late 1920s, attempting to unite all classes of seafaring workers under the umbrella of the Marine Workers Industrial Union (MWIU). On the West Coast, the MWIU never made much progress, but it did draw a number of former IWW members who shared its objectives. A newspaper was also established, *The Waterfront Worker*, which focused on the most pressing demands of longshoremen: more men per gang, lighter loads and an independent union. As a result of this collective thinking, thousands of workers in the port sector united under the wing of the International Longshoremen’s Association. The union wanted a closed shop, a contract for the entire coast, and a room for union recruitment as the main demands of the strike. However, the employers asked that the

⁵² Preis A., *Labor's giant step: twenty years of the CIO*, Pathfinder Press, 1974, pp. 31–33.

⁵³ Nelson B., *Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s*, University of Illinois Press, 1990, pp. 61-62.

union accept an open shop as an official condition of any arbitration resolution before agreeing to arbitrate the conflict. The strike was started when the longshoremen rejected the arbitration plan.⁵⁴

On May 9, 1934, the longshoremen of every port on the West Coast began to go on strike, which was soon followed by the sailors a few days later. In reaction to the strike, employers hired strikebreakers to make up for the shortage of workers, housing them on docked ships or in fortified complexes, and escorting them to their jobs while being guarded by police. On May 15, strikebreakers of the fence in San Pedro were attacked by union members; as a result, there were firefights between police and protesters, which resulted in one fatality and numerous injuries. The Roosevelt administration made an effort to mediate an agreement to put an end to the strike, but the members twice turned down the offers their leadership had offered them, causing the walkout to continue. Even some truck drivers joined the strikes by refusing to transport “hot loads” - goods that the strikebreakers had unloaded - although the truckers’ leadership was less in favor of such conduct. When the maritime strike ended in May, Seattle Teamsters President Dave Beck and San Francisco Teamsters President Mike Casey encouraged strikers to accept conditions provided by employers and threatened to use the Teamsters as strikebreakers if the ILA were not restored to full function.⁵⁵

After an unproblematic 4th of July, the employers’ organization, the Industrial Association, tried to reopen the Port of San Francisco on Thursday July 5th. As onlookers watched from Rincon Hill, police fired tear gas into the crowd, which was followed by a charge by mounted police. The strikers responded by throwing stones at the police, who charged again, sending them retreating. When fighting broke out outside the ILA strike’s kitchen that afternoon, the situation became violent. According to reports, after a number of strikers originally surrounded a police vehicle and attempted to flip it over, the police reportedly opened fire with their firearms into the air and towards the crowd. Other eyewitnesses allege that police officers fired shots at the demonstrators on their own initiative, hitting three men, two of whom later died from their wounds.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Quin M., *The Big Strike*, International Publishers Co., 1979, pp. 41-42.

⁵⁵ Quin M., *The Big Strike*, p. 80.

⁵⁶ Quin M., *The Big Strike*, p. 113.

On the orders of California Governor Frank Merriam, the California National Guard moved that evening to patrol the boardwalk. Likewise, US Army federal soldiers stationed at the Presidio have been placed on alert of the situation. The strikers withdrew, unwilling to face armed soldiers in an unequal fight, and trucks and trains began to move freely. Along with the Alameda County Central Labor Council in Oakland, which was considering the same plan, the ILA requested that the San Francisco Labor Council convene on July 7th to sanction a general strike. The following day truckers in San Francisco and Oakland chose to strike against opposition from union leaders. The memorial march for the two fatalities that followed had a profound effect on the people of San Francisco, who started organizing a general strike. The San Francisco Labor Council voted on July 14 to officially call for this general strike after several of Bay Area unions supported it in the days that followed. When the city's mayor, Angelo Rossi, declared a state of emergency, a statewide strike involving more than 100,000 workers began on September 16. General Hugh Johnson, head of the National Recovery Administration, spoke at Berkeley University the same day to denounce the general strike as "a threat to the government" and more than 300 perceived communists were apprehended as a result of the police's retaliatory destruction of the strike-related organizations' equipment.⁵⁷

The strike finally lasted four days: non-union truckers joined from day one, cinemas and night clubs closed to customers. While food deliveries continued with the strike committee's permission, many small businesses closed down, posting signs in support of the strikers.

While some of San Francisco's most influential citizens viewed the strike ending as a victory for employers, many longshoremen and sailors believed otherwise. Spontaneous strikes over grievances and working conditions erupted throughout the city as the strikers returned to work, with longshoremen and carters supporting their demands. The longshoremen themselves also started setting other conditions, fining members who worked more than the 120-hour limit per month, requiring employers to fire strikebreakers hired during protests. In response, employers gave workers even more

⁵⁷ Johnson V., *How Many Machine Guns Does It Take to Cook One Meal?: The Seattle and San Francisco General Strikes*, University of Washington Press, 2008, pp. 69-86.

confidence in requests to lighten unbearably heavy loads. The arbitration decision of October 12, 1934, strengthened the ILA's position of authority by granting the union the right to choose the client while assigning the management of the organization to a committee of trade union and employer representatives. The ILA swiftly took control of hiring at the port because longshoremen were prepared to quit if a company did not hire a suggested worker, giving them the authority to push strikebreakers out of the sector. Workers complained that businesses exploited them for cheap labor and forced them to work in hazardous conditions, while employers charged that the union sought to "Sovietize" the shoreline. The union quickly employed the "rapid strike" strategy to pressure employers into making a number of concessions, including safer working conditions and higher compensation.⁵⁸ Longshoremen also refused to move "hot cargo" destined for non-union warehouses. The arbitration award also granted longshoremen an increase of ninety-five cents (corresponding to \$18 in 2019) per hour for full-time work, just under the dollar per hour required at the dawn of the riots.⁵⁹

The organization born at the end of these protests, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), the spiritual evolution of the ILA, continues to recognize the "Bloody Thursday" as a national celebration by closing all ports on the West Coast every 5th July and honoring Nick Bordoise, Howard Sperry and all the other workers killed by the police during the riots of '34.

Political Radicalism

With the advent of fascisms in Europe and the catastrophic consequences of the economic crisis in the United States, a need for change arose in many segments of the population, which led to a radicalization of general political thought.

Communist Party activists have struggled to build inclusive industrial unions since the party's inception. As I explained in the previous paragraph, a series of workers' strikes

⁵⁸ Kimeldorf H., *Reds or Rackets?: The Making of Radical and Conservative Unions on the Waterfront*, University of California Press, 1988, p. 112.

⁵⁹ Glass F., *From Mission to Microchip: A History of the California Labor Movement*, University of California Press, 2016, p. 245.

occurred in 1934 influenced by the hopes raised by the New Deal government that engulfed California.

The most important of these strikes, the general strike in San Francisco, saw socialism as the road to freedom and dignity for workers. While in the other cities of the United States the strikes that broke out led to few memorable milestones, in California a large percentage of the population was beginning to support those ideals, fighting hard through these strikes.⁶⁰

While business leaders in various US states urged President Roosevelt to use military force to put an end to strikes, the administration reacted to these labor conflicts by passing the National Labor Relations Act (also referred to as the Wagner Act), giving employees a democratic way to form trade unions with collective bargaining agreements that business owners must now uphold.⁶¹

Along with the Social Security Act, which was passed in 1935, it also established the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which created jobs, and Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), an unemployment insurance program that was heavily designed by Communist-led Unemployed Councils.⁶²

The programs that the Communists had fought for in local demonstrations in city halls and state legislatures across the country had produced great achievements for the workers. Even though conservatives in Congress and California itself have been able to limit their advantages, as I will explain in the subsequent paragraph regarding the California government elections, the major business media have dubbed the programs an effort to impose a Communist “dictatorship” under Roosevelt’s aegis, those initiatives represented the greatest successes for workers since the Civil War ended slavery.⁶³

⁶⁰ Glass F., *From Mission to Microchip: A History of the California Labor Movement*, pp. 211-218.

⁶¹ Nelson J., *The Colonized Eye: Rethinking the Grierson Legend*, Between the Lines, 1988, p. 25.

⁶² Ikenberry J., Skocpol T., “Expanding social benefits: The role of social security”, *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 102, n. 3, 1987, pp. 389-416, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2151400>.

⁶³ Glass F., *From Mission to Microchip: A History of the California Labor Movement*, pp. 220-227.

By the middle of the 1930s, the Communists were battling to solidify these victories, attempting to unionize more workers, and anticipating a new conflict: the fight against fascism.

1934 California gubernatorial election

The California government elections of 1934 were held on November 6, 1934 and are considered to be among the most controversial in the state's political history, featuring the political duel between conservative Republican Frank Merriam and former Socialist Party member Upton Sinclair, who became Democrat since that year, best known as the author of *The Jungle*, a 1906 novel that tells the terrible conditions to which immigrants were subjected in industrialized cities like Chicago.

Upton Sinclair was born in Maryland in 1878 and approached socialist ideals from a young age, only briefly detaching himself from the party on the occasion of the First World War in 1917, as a fervent believer in the importance of American intervention to end conflicts in Europe.

In the 1920s, the Sinclairs moved from the East Coast to Monrovia in California, where Sinclair founded the state branch of the American Civil Liberties Union. He unsuccessfully campaigned for the United States Senate in 1922 and the House of Representatives in 1920 under the Socialist Party's banner in an effort to commit himself totally to politics. In 1926 and 1930, he ran as the party's candidate for governor of California, winning in both years by close to 50,000 votes. In these years, Sinclair grew more involved with the radical movements that were emerging in Los Angeles. For example, in 1923, to support the Industrial Workers of the World's contested right to free speech, Sinclair spoke in front of the public at a protest during the San Pedro maritime strike, beginning to read the Bill of Rights while also being detained by the LAPD. The real turning point in Sinclair's political career came in 1934 when, this time under the aegis of the Democratic Party, he ran for the state government elections. With his movement, called the End Poverty in California movement (EPIC), he won the support of Democrats and eventually won 879,000 votes, an immense achievement and

the largest of his political career.⁶⁴ Sinclair described his vision of the party in his 1933 book *I, Governor of California, and How I End Poverty: A True Story of the Future*. Sticking to the text, his political plan included the state seizure of dormant factories and farmland where the owner had not paid property taxes, then retraining them into facilities where the unemployed could be hired to work there. Many farms would thus become self-sufficient cooperatives run by workers. EPIC also included the implementation of California's first state income tax, which was to be progressive, with the richest taxed at 30%. The plan would also raise inheritance taxes and institute a 4% tax on share transfers. The movement also included government-provided pensions for the elderly, disabled and widowed, and involved the creation of three new government agencies: the California Authority for Land (CAL), in charge of managing unused farmland, the California Authority for Production (CAP), for the management of the dormant factories and finally the California Authority for Money (CAM), which was to act as a pivot for the other two agencies, financing them in order to be able to issue wire transfers and bonds for the purchase of land and machinery.⁶⁵

His opponent Frank Merriam, however, defeated him by getting 1,140,000 votes against 879,500, through significant support from Hollywood bosses who, wanting firmly to oppose a possible election of Sinclair, pushed their employees to support the campaign of Merriam, and produced false propaganda films aimed to attack Sinclair, thus allowing him no opportunity to fight back. Leaders at major Hollywood film studios have been staunchly opposed to EPIC, largely due to Sinclair's proposal to hand over idle film studio batches to unemployed film workers to make their own films without the aegis of any film company.⁶⁶ Studio bosses reacted by threatening to relocate film operations to Florida and deducting money from employee salaries to fund Merriam's Republican campaign. Two of California's most influential figures in the press, William Randolph Hearst and Harry Chandler, also used their documents to support Merriam's campaign and attack Sinclair. The conservatives in fact considered his political program an attempt

⁶⁴ Vanden Heuvel K., *The Nation 1865–1990*, Thunder's Mouth Press, 1990, p. 80.

⁶⁵ Sinclair U., *I, Governor of California, and How I Ended Poverty: A True Story of the Future*, Farrar & Rinehart, 1933.

⁶⁶ Cohen H., "The Struggle to Fashion the NRA Code: The Triumph of Studio Power in 1933 Hollywood", *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 50, n. 4, 2015, pp. 1039-1066, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44162812>.

to take over their state communist and quickly opposed, precisely using incorrect propaganda to portray Sinclair as a devout Communist.⁶⁷

Sinclair was a Socialist Party member from 1902 until 1934, when he switched to the Democratic Party, even though he had always thought of himself as a socialist. When he moved to the democratic side, along with the Socialists who backed its campaign in California, he was expelled from the Socialist Party as a result of the Party's refusal to let its members participate in any other party.⁶⁸

After Merriam defeated him, Sinclair gave up EPIC and politics in general and went back to writing, which was his area of expertise. He highlighted the strategies used by Merriam's supporters, notably the then-popular Aimee Semple McPherson, who fiercely opposed socialism and what he viewed as Sinclair's modernism, in his 1935 book *I, Candidate for Governor: And How I Got Licked*.⁶⁹

Extremely significant of those times is Sinclair remark of 1951:

The American People will take Socialism, but they won't take the label. I certainly proved it in the case of EPIC. Running on the Socialist ticket I got 60,000 votes, and running on the slogan to "End Poverty in California" I got 879,000. I think we simply have to recognize the fact that our enemies have succeeded in spreading the Big Lie. There is no use attacking it by a front attack, it is much better to out-flank them.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Gregory J., "Upton Sinclair's End Poverty in California Campaign", *Civil Rights and Labor History Consortium*, University of Washington Press, January 2021, last retrieved December 12, 2022. <https://depts.washington.edu/epic34/campaign.shtml>.

⁶⁸ Gregory James, "Upton Sinclair's 1934 EPIC Campaign: Anatomy of a Political Movement", *LABOR: Studies in Working-Class History*, December 2015, last retrieved December 12, 2022, <https://depts.washington.edu/epic34/anatomy.shtml>.

⁶⁹ Rossiter C., *The Turkey and the Eagle: The Struggle for America's Global Role*, Algora Publisher, 2010, p. 207.

⁷⁰ Sinclair U., *Socialist Party of America: Letter to Norman Thomas of 1951*, Spartacus Educational, June 2010, last retrieved December 12, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20061231173012/http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAsocialismP.htm>.

The Townsend Movement and the Ham and Eggs Movement

The beginnings of California's old age policy can be identified with the great wave of elderly migration in Southern California since the early 20th century.

When the concept of "retirement" became socially acceptable, many older Americans moved to Southern California for its pleasant climate, in the same mechanism that worked for Florida on the Atlantic side of the United States. Between 1920 and 1930, the number of people aged 65 and over in Southern California increased by 100%.⁷¹ Most of the elderly lived on a fixed income resulting from savings, investments and pension funds. But when the Great Depression struck, thousands of these individuals became destitute and as the situation worsened, the conditions of the elderly became a major concern of Californian society.

The first of the plans to find a solution was the conception of Francis Townsend, doctor of Long Beach, a locality that counted as a good third of its residents as elderly. On September 30, 1933 Townsend sent a letter to the *Long Beach Press Telegram* explaining his idea of a solution to the crisis, according to him not only for the pension issue, but to solve the Great Depression in general. The plan was based on a simple formula: counting 15 to 20 million people in the United States over the age of sixty, if each of these individuals were granted \$150 per month generated by a national sales tax and each had to spend them all within the same month, between \$2 and \$3 billion would be pumped steadily into the US economy. The greater and constant circulation of money on the market would somehow have increased the purchasing power of the masses, eventually ending the Depression. Townsend's proposal gave birth to what quickly became known as the Townsend Movement which, while for economists it was considered an absurd and irrational plan, the idea conquered a large number of Californian elderly, who had seen their life savings diminish if not disappear and they felt as though they owed a refund. The Townsend movement became the pivot of a political ideology that encompassed this branch of the population so humiliated by the

⁷¹ Starr K., *Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California*, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 133-34.

crisis. In just three years, 2.2 million Americans joined the “Townsend Club” and millions of people considered Townsend a messiah.

The Townsend movement vanished mainly due to its economic impracticability. But it still served to bring a new constituency into the American mainstream politics: the elderly. In fact, in 1938 there were about eighty different old-age welfare schemes competing for political support in California, the most important of which was “Ham and Eggs”, an idea invented by the radio personality Robert Noble. Inspired by a 1931 idea from Yale professor Irving Fisher, Robert Noble began pushing for such a structured retirement pension plan: the plan was to give \$25 in warrants every Monday morning to each Californian unemployed over the age of fifty. From this idea he followed up a full-blown statewide campaign to introduce a constitutional amendment, the “California Pension Plan”, to the ballot of 1938. After giving birth to the idea, the leadership of the movement was removed from Noble and acquired by two brothers, the radio promoters Lawrence and Willis Allen. The two of them formed the Retirement Life Payments Association (RLPA), by submitting a petition to the California Secretary of State signed by 789,000 voters to put a new act - the “California Life Payments Act” - which now consists of \$30 every Thursday morning for each unemployed Californian over 50.⁷²

Critics have called the Ham and Eggs Act as a mocking attempt to evoke the negative image of two elderly Californians eating ham and eggs for breakfast every Thursday morning once the warrants from the taxpayers arrived, but on the contrary, it became the slogan of its supporters. While the hugely popular Ham and Eggs seemed destined to win big in the weeks leading up to the elections, the movement was dealt a devastating blow just before election day. On January 14, 1938, a police officer named Earl Kynette was arrested for planting a bomb in the car of a private investigator who was probing the city administration. While in prison, Kynette asked to be reimbursed by the Allen’s for a sum of money he had loaned them prior to his arrest, money that had been used to help the Allens gain control of Robert Noble’s California Pension Plan organization. The media picked up the story and got married in spreading it. In the subsequent elections, the Allen proposal was defeated with a relatively narrow margin

⁷² Starr K., *Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California*, p. 206.

- 1,143,670 to 1,398,999. Although Ham and Eggs was failed, it had played an important role in reviving the Democratic Party in California.⁷³

Despite the electoral defeat, the movement refused to surrender. The Ham and Eggs leadership initiated a petition to be presented to the governor-elect Olson to hold a special election on the matter. The governor found himself practically forced to ask for this election when the Allens showed up to him with over a million petition signatures. However, the governor did not immediately set an election date, despite the Allen brothers having shown preference for the date of August 15, when the support would presumably be at its peak and before which opponents would be left without enough time to launch an effective counterattack. On July 1, much to the dismay of the Ham and Eggers, Olson announced that the elections would take place on November 7, giving Ham and Eggs' opponents plenty of time to build up strength and acclaim. That same month, the opponents had built a successful campaign aimed at exposing the economic impossibility of the plan, portraying the movement's leaders as corrupt and incapable criminals. On election day, the movement lost nearly by a million votes - 1,933,557 to 993,204. Despite this second, more severe defeat, Ham and Eggs still survived. After losing on November 7, the leadership of Ham and Eggs again mobilized to recall Governor Olson and to initiate a third campaign in favor of the movement, which this time offered \$20 a week in warrants to every Californian over fifty. Ham and Eggs' refusal to die after two completely failed election attempts outraged many citizens. In the presidential election of 1940, a list of the Ham and Eggers was again crushingly defeated by a pro-Roosevelt list led by Governor Olson, a victory which represented the actual epilogue of the movement. Since that time, in fact, the revenues of the movement have fallen dramatically and the number of the rallies declined.⁷⁴

Despite repeated defeats, clearly the Ham and Eggs movement proved to be of fundamental importance for the political climate of the Californian 1930s. In the first election Ham and Eggs lost by a few votes, explaining how in a climate of trade union revolts, out-of-control migratory waves and heterogeneous political ideologies, the question of the elderly, who also wanted to fight for their conditions, was added.

⁷³ Starr K., *Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California*, p. 211.

⁷⁴ Putnam J., *Old Age Politics in California*, Stanford University Press, 1970, p. 112.

UPTON SINCLAIR: THE SOCIALIST ICON

Upton Beall Sinclair was born in Baltimore on September 20, 1878, and died in Bound Brook, New Jersey, on November 25, 1968.

Growing up in a cultured and refined environment but centered on constant economic hardship, he was pushed towards socialist ideals from his youth.⁷⁵

Passionate about reading from a very young age, he began writing when he entered the City College of New York at age 14, where he wrote dime novels and articles in young adults' newspapers to support his studies.⁷⁶ Using his passion to pay for his tuition was a practice that continued at the law faculty at Columbia, where he continued to write adventures for children and where he even sold ideas to cartoonists.⁷⁷ Much more passionate about a career as a writer than as a lawyer, he left Columbia University without obtaining a degree, and devoted himself to writing four novels in four years (*King Midas* in 1901, *Prince Hagen* in 1902, *The Journal of Arthur Stirling* in 1903 and, a year later, *Manassas*) which were not very successful, but were a literal exercise that prepared him for his great success, *The Jungle*.⁷⁸

In 1906, the novel *The Jungle*, about the scandalous plight of workers at the Chicago cattle markets, was such a great success that it was praised by Jack London, reviewed by Winston Churchill, and Bernard Shaw had words of great admiration for it.⁷⁹ *The Jungle* is also remembered for helping to implement the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906, a law on the purity of foods and medicines.⁸⁰

In 1919 he published *The Brass Check*, an open denunciation of American journalism that publicized the issue of yellow journalism and the limits of the "free press" in the

⁷⁵ Harris L., *Upton Sinclair, American Rebel*, Cromwell, 1975, pp. 25-28.

⁷⁶ Pine J., "Note in *The Jungle*", *The Jungle*, Dover Thrift, 2001, pp. 7-8.

⁷⁷ Sinclair U., "What Life Means to Me", *The Cosmopolitan*, October 31, 1906, p. 591.

⁷⁸ Coodley L., *Upton Sinclair: California Socialist, Celebrity Intellectual*, University of Nebraska Press, 2013, p. 30.

⁷⁹ Dawson H., "Winston Churchill and Upton Sinclair: An Early Review of *The Jungle*", *American Literary Realism, 1870-1910*, Vol. 24, n. 1, 1991, pp. 72-78, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27746475>.

⁸⁰ Johnson K., "Nationalizing Regulation: The Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906", *Governing the American State: Congress and the New Federalism, 1877-1929*, Princeton University Press, 2007, pp. 85-115.

United States. This publication was of enormous influence in the creation, four years later, of a code of ethics in the journalistic order.⁸¹

His works fall under the category of historical fiction since they portray the progressive age in America from the perspectives of both workers and industrialists, always maintaining his socialist beliefs even in fiction. Indeed novels such as 1917 *King Coal*, concerning the trust of John D. Rockefeller Jr. and his role in the Ludlow massacre in the Colorado coal fields; 1927 *The Coal War* and *Oil!* and ten years later *The Flivver King*, about Henry Ford's rise to power and subsequent decline into anti-Semitism, are set in the working world of the coal, oil, and auto industries.

He was also actively involved as a politician, running for the United States Congress under the aegis of the Socialist Party, without actually being elected, but his major political commitment was with the Democratic Party when he set up the End Poverty campaign in California for the governorship of California after the Great Depression but being defeated in 1934 in an ambiguous and corrupt climate.

Through this chapter, I intend to analyze Sinclair's main literary production, from *The Jungle* to *The Brass Check* to the other novels and then move on to its importance in the Californian political context of the 1930s.

The Jungle

The Jungle, written by Upton Sinclair and published in 1906, is a highly accurate novel that explores the living conditions of workers, migrations, the organization of work, the building of Chicago, and the industrial production of food. It does not only serve as an example of journalism and literature of denunciation but it is still of current relevance today for its cultural importance in shaping the American food safety legislation.

Jurgis Rudkus and Ona Lukoszaite, two young immigrants from Lithuania to Chicago, are the primary protagonists. They are determined to hold their wedding celebration in a

⁸¹ Fenger S., "Holding the news media accountable: A study of media reporters and media critics in the United States", *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 80, n. 4, 2003, 818-32, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/107769900308000405>.

pub in the city's Packingtown neighborhood. The couple and several family members moved to Chicago in search of a better life, but Packingtown, the hub of Lithuanian immigration and Chicago's meatpacking industry, is an unforgiving, dangerous, and filthy place where it is difficult to find work and where they are subjected to constant abuse.

Young Jurgis, determined to find employment, quickly finds work, as do Marija Berczynskas, Ona's cousin, and Jonas, Ona's stepmother's brother, Teta Elzbieta. The family signs an agreement to purchase a house, which however turns out to be a scam: the agreement is full of hidden quibbles and the house is shoddy and dilapidated. As the family's living expenses increase, the other members are also forced to look for work. But jobs in Packingtown are precarious and unsafe, with little respect for the rights of individual workers. Furthermore, the immigrant community is rife with crime and corruption. For example, Jurgis's father, Dede Antanas, can only get a job after agreeing to pay another man a third of his salary for helping him get that job – a job that reveals to be extremely hard and not at all suitable for the physical conditions of the elderly.

In Packingtown, winter is the most hazardous time of year, and even Jurgis, who is compelled to work in an unheated slaughterhouse where it is even impossible to see due to the toxins, puts his life in peril every day just by showing up for work, while Marija's factory closes and she loses her job. Jurgis, who is troubled by the miserable circumstances in which his family is living, decides to join a union as he gradually learns more about the political corruption that permeates Packingtown.

Ona is now pregnant and her job has become more and more difficult for her, while her supervisor, Miss Henderson, runs a prostitution racket where most of the other girls in the factory are made to be prostitutes. Also Marjia, unable to find other employment, is forced into prostitution in a local brothel.

The novel ends on a hopeful note: Jurgis, by chance attending a political rally to seek relief from the cold, comes into contact with members of the socialist party, who convince him to devote himself to this cause. The protagonist will eventually find work

in a hotel run by a prominent member of the socialist party, thus fully embracing these values.⁸²

Ivaziavimas

One of the most important and meaningful chapters is the one narrating the wedding party, or *ivaziavimas*, of the two young protagonists, an exemplary example of how the capitalist system erases every tradition and every cultural heritage.

For the newcomers, the wedding dance is a cornerstone of their being, without which their own family lives would be meaningless. The enormous cost of the party, especially concerning the meager economic finances of the family, would then be weighed by the voluntary contributions of the guests, according to the custom that the more generous the offer, the more one feels tied to one's tradition.⁸³

However, a very different reality from what they had hoped for is presented to Jurgis and his family, because long-term Lithuanians in the United States and second-generation Lithuanians present themselves culturally very distant from the newly arrived, refusing traditional clothes and far from recognizing themselves in duties of welcome and the hierarchies of respect. Even though the organizers of the *ivaziavimas* were also Lithuanians, they turned out to be cheaters and swindlers, inflating the total cost of the party on any possible occasion, willing to reduce Jurgis full of debts, denying their cultural roots for the mere need to get rich. The young people are described as being corrupted by the environment in which they find themselves, tasting every delicacy present at the banquet and then disappearing into thin air, taunting and making fun of the family for having organized an event so linked to the Lithuanian tradition.

Using the pretext of the banquet, it is clear how Sinclair wants to present the capitalist reality as a force capable of corrupting the habits and customs of an entire people, relegating the human being to a mere cog in a complex and degrading system, in which

⁸² Sinclair U., *The Jungle*, Aegypan, 2006.

⁸³ Klimas A., "Lithuanian Wedding Traditions in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*", *Lithuanian Quarterly Journal of Arts and Sciences*, Vol. 33, n. 1, p. 320, 1987, https://www.lituanus.org/1987/87_1_01.htm.

human values give way to abuse and exploitation in the name of the constant search for enrichment.⁸⁴ Hence the recurring theme of *The Jungle*, where the unwritten laws that regulate the capitalist industrial apparatus are more similar to those of the jungle, where only the strongest survives and the one who has no scruples towards others. But through *The Jungle* Sinclair is not apt to attack the very foundations of the American dream, rather he wants to use the disintegration of the traditional family to illustrate his belief, stating that capitalism itself is an attack on the values that underpin the American dream, which from time has been hollowed out by the immoral value of greed, elevating socialism to the only means to once again honor the much-vaunted American dream.⁸⁵

The symbolism of Packingtown

The most important symbol of the novel, however, are the fences and slaughterhouses of Packingtown, a simple and direct metaphor for the plight of the working class.⁸⁶ Just like the animals in Packingtown who are herded into pens, killed with impunity, and made to suffer with no choice over their fate, so too are the thousands of poor immigrant workers forced into the dynamics of capitalism which slaughters and kills them without giving them any choice. Waves of animals roll through Packingtown in a constant stream of death and devastation, while thousands of them are slaughtered every day and replaced by new ones, just as generations of immigrants are ruined by the ruthless toil and oppression of capitalism and eventually replaced by new generations of immigrants. In *The Jungle*, the fate of the pigs is the same as that of men, women, and children: the animals' disassembly corresponds to the communities, of the bonds, of humanity itself shredded together with the beasts in the infernal system of slaughterhouses.

The quality of the food produced by the Chicago slaughterhouses caused the most uproar at the release of Sinclair's book. What was happening in those factories is a real

⁸⁴ Bakthawar P., "Capitalism in American Society as Represented in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*", *Lantern*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2013, pp. 284-294.

⁸⁵ Øverland O., "The Jungle: From Lithuanian Peasant to American Socialist", *American Literary Realism*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 2004, pp. 15-23.

⁸⁶ Bakthawar P., "Capitalism in American Society as Represented in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*", pp. 284-294.

production of very poor quality food: any part of the pig, even if rotten and in bad condition, was cleaned and finally canned. At the end of this linear assembly line, based on the packaging chosen, the products are shipped and sold at different prices, sometimes even quite high, even though they are always of the same poor quality, in marketing operations in which the product, based on the chosen name, it is presented as a delicacy of great value.⁸⁷

Sinclair describes the bosses as constantly looking for tireless young people like Jurgis, extremely dedicated to work, and never standing still, thus guaranteeing a high production quantity. Young people of this type are essential for an infernal environment like that of Packingtown, whose mechanisms disassemble the animals in the same way they disassemble the workers, creating an army of automatons who hate their jobs, their colleagues, to the point of hating their own life, now considered meaningless and emptied by the degradation that surrounds them.

Another obstacle to cohesion among workers described in *The Jungle* is the linguistic barrier present in the industry: the constant introduction of new ethnic identities into the circuit of slaughterhouses, because they are more malleable and unaware of the conditions that await them, creating a modern tower of Babel in which languages are confused with each other, and the impossibility of communicating is an inevitable consequence.⁸⁸

If the first immigrants to start the sector were specialized butchers from Germany, as mechanization increased and work lost its specialization these were replaced by immigrants from Ireland, who then at the time of the great strikes of the 1880s were replaced by the Bohemians and the Poles. Then arrived the turn of the Lithuanians who, as soon as they went on strike, were in turn replaced by former slaves arriving from the southern United States used as strikebreakers.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Various Authors, "Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*: Muckraking the Meat-Packing Industry", *Constitutional Rights Foundation: Bill of Rights in Action*, Vol. 24, n. 1, pp. 30-42, Fall 2008.

⁸⁸ Various Authors, "*The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair", *Mother Earth*, Vol. 1 n. 4, June 1906, pp. 25-46, last retrieved November 11, 2022, <https://www.zestletteraturasostenibile.com/la-giungla-1905-upton-sinclair-recensione-apparsa-su-mother-earth-1906/>.

⁸⁹ Øverland O., "*The Jungle*: From Lithuanian Peasant to American Socialist", pp. 1-23.

So the impact of the novel on consumers was striking: investigative inquiries multiplied and, after six months, having ascertained the inhumanity of US industrial slaughterhouses, the Pure Food, and Drug Act and the Beef Inspection Act were hurriedly approved by the Roosevelt administration to try to put order and levee to the US food industry.⁹⁰ The immediate consequence was the establishment of the Food and Drug Administration, the American body that still deals with the regulation of food and pharmaceutical products. Sinclair's statement on the establishment of the 1906 law would prove very significant: "I aimed at the public's heart and by accident, I hit it in the stomach".⁹¹

Five publishers refused to publish the work as it was considered too shocking and scandalous.⁹² Sinclair was thus persuading himself to self-publish an abridged version of the novel when Doubleday set himself up as a publishing house.⁹³ On February 28, 1906, the Doubleday Edition was released, selling 25,000 copies in its first six weeks alone, with Sinclair dedicating the book "To the Workingmen of America".⁹⁴

Other literary productions

Between 1913 and 1914 he published under his name, but with the contribution of his wife Mary, the two novels of *Sylvia*, about the experiences of a young southern girl. In 1919 he published *The Brass Check*, considered by himself the most dangerous book he had ever written.⁹⁵ Then followed the important pamphlet *I, Governor of California, and*

⁹⁰ Greenberg D., "How Teddy Roosevelt Invented Spin", *The Atlantic*, January 24, 2016, last retrieved November 29, 2022, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/01/how-teddy-roosevelt-invented-spin/426699/?google_editors_picks=true.

⁹¹ Kantor A., *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 66, n. 12, December 1976, National Library of Medicine, last retrieved December 13, 2022, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1653522/>.

⁹² Gottesman R., "Introduction", *The Jungle*, Penguin Classics, 2006.

⁹³ Various Authors, "The Jungle and the Progressive Era", *The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History*, August 28, 2012, last retrieved November 29, 2022, <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/essays/jungle-and-progressive-era>.

⁹⁴ Bloom H., *Upton Sinclair's The Jungle*, Infohouse, 2002, pp. 50-51.

⁹⁵ Various Authors, "Upton Sinclair & The Jungle", *Socialist Standard, World Socialism n. 1227*, November 2006, last retrieved November 29, 2022, <https://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/socialist-standard/2000s/2006/no-1227-november-2006/upton-sinclair-and-jungle/>.

How I Ended Poverty of 1934, a prelude to his imminent candidacy for the California governorship, and the *Lanny Budd series*, 11 novels published between 1940 and 1953.

In his long career, he has published many other books and novels ranging from the most disparate topics, but in the course of this paragraph, I intend to dwell on those mentioned in this introduction.

The Brass Check

The Brass Check is a courageous treatment of American journalism by Upton Sinclair published in 1919. It focuses mainly on the journalistic reality of its time and the service operated by the Associated Press. In those years, some criticism had already appeared in the press, but Sinclair achieved the greatest result thanks to his enormous fame achieved mostly thanks to the bestseller *The Jungle*.⁹⁶ Among the main targets of the book is William Randolph Hearst, a journalist and politician of the time who made excessive use of yellow journalism in his widespread newspaper and magazine business.⁹⁷

The term “yellow journalism” refers to exaggerated or biased media reporting that does not strictly adhere to the truth. Born out of intense competition between rival newspapers in the late 1800s, it involves taking a factual story and presenting it either sensationally or distorted. It can be used to invoke fear, disgust, uncertainty, or even sympathy in readers by trying to convince them of something, though often the real goal is an attempt to grow sales or audiences and gain more market share.⁹⁸

The Brass Check is divided into three broad sections:

- One covering cases of newspaper refusals to publicize socialist causes and Sinclair’s investigations into corporate corruption;

⁹⁶ Sumpter R., “*The Brass Check: A Study of American Journalism*”, *Journalism History*, vol. 29, n. 2, 2003, p. 95.

⁹⁷ Whyte K., *The Uncrowned King: The Sensational Rise of William Randolph Hearst*, Counterpoint, 2009, p. 314.

⁹⁸ Biagi S., “*Media/Impact: An Introduction to Mass Media*”, *Cengage Learning.*, 2011, p. 56.

- The cases in which he was not personally involved;
- His proposed remedies.

Sinclair criticizes newspapers in the book for being either extremely conservative and supporters of powerful, unassailable political and economic forces or sensational tabloids who practice “yellow journalism”, with William Randolph Hearst’s company being singled out as the greatest offender. In both instances, the value of accurate and impartial information is subordinated to a narrow commercial interest, with the sole actual goal being to further the financial interests of the newspaper’s owners and the numerous advertisers.⁹⁹ This is done in several ways that are covered in the book, the most prevalent of which is the editorial decision of what can and cannot be printed; through the fabrication of stories that are in no way plausible; or through the exaggeration of stories that are insignificant but often have the power to ruin the reputation of a target considered inconvenient.¹⁰⁰

Regarding potential remedies, Sinclair determined that to stop the phenomena of yellow journalism, more sophisticated approaches were required than straightforward demonstrations. His main recommendations include the enactment of legislation mandating that any media outlet that publishes an assertion later proven to be false give equal prominence to the subsequent correction, at the risk of a fine if it is incorrect; challenging the Associated Press’ monopoly by other broadcast services; and enacting legislation prohibiting any newspaper from fabricating news along with a regulated journalistic code of ethics that brought journalists together.¹⁰¹

The Brass Check was originally published without registering the copyright of the text to increase the circulation and, subsequently the reach of the book to the general public, so that the proposed solutions could be made a reality. Only four years later, the first code of ethics for journalists was established in 1923.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Nalbach A., “Poisoned at the Source”? Telegraphic News Services and Big Business in the Nineteenth Century”, *Business History Review*, Vol. 77, n. 4, 2003, 577-611, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30041230>.

¹⁰⁰ Sinclair U., *The Brass Check*, Teleread, 1919, Chapters L-LVII, <http://www.teleread.com/brasscheck.htm>.

¹⁰¹ Sinclair U. *The Brass Check*, Chapter LXII-LXVI, <http://www.teleread.com/brasscheck.htm>.

¹⁰² Fengler S., “Holding the news media accountable: A study of media reporters and media critics in the United States”, pp. 818-832, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/107769900308000405>.

However, on its publication, “most newspapers refused to review the book, and those very few that did were almost always unsympathetic. Many newspapers, like the *New York Times*, even refused to run paid advertisements for the book”.¹⁰³

No one will ever sue Sinclair for libel since he showed extraordinary transparency with anyone who accused him of being inaccurate, inviting them to study his published facts and to do so if they found that the facts had been presented falsely. But due to these accusations, the book gained a reputation for inaccuracy that will cause it to almost totally go into obscurity throughout the 1950s, since Sinclair was refused access to the resources necessary to defend himself and his creations, and his accusers assumed the illusion of truth.¹⁰⁴

I, Governor of California, and How I Ended Poverty

With the end of the First World War, Sinclair’s writing style already had well-defined and peculiar characteristics. Completely detaching himself from the general disillusionment of the ‘Roaring Twenties’, Sinclair continued his research and consequent denunciation of scandalous facts, which began with *The Jungle* and continued with *The Brass Check*.¹⁰⁵ While not occupying a prominent political position, his work was of primary importance in showing the capitalist hegemony of American society. His work was a precise and difficult-to-attack study of the injustices that revolved from east to west of the United States, through a systematic and sometimes scientific approach.¹⁰⁶ Looking for a common thread in his research, the basis of his beliefs was that “Wall Street ruled the money market and the money market ruled American society”¹⁰⁷, consequently Wall Street ruled the American society. Hence his attacks on American institutions were branded as entities moved solely by capitalist interests.

¹⁰³ McChesney R. and Scott B., “Upton Sinclair and the contradictions of capitalist journalism”, *Monthly Review*, Vol. 54, n. 1, May 2002, last retrieved December 12, 2022, pp. 1-14, <https://monthlyreview.org/2002/05/01/upton-sinclair-and-the-contradictions-of-capitalist-journalism>.

¹⁰⁴ McChesney R. and Scott B., “Upton Sinclair and the contradictions of capitalist journalism”, pp. 1-14.

¹⁰⁵ Fretz L., “Upton Sinclair and the Jazz Age”, *ANZASA Bulletin*, Vol. 1, No. 6, May 1974, p. 18.

¹⁰⁶ Fretz L., “Upton Sinclair and the Jazz Age”, p. 18.

¹⁰⁷ Fretz L., “Upton Sinclair and the Jazz Age”, p. 19.

Sinclair particularly opposed the revolution since it would fail due to the conservative sentiment at the time. Because of his concern that any alternative strategy would always result in devastation, poverty, and the loss of human life, he was more in favor of a policy of balancing powers than aggressiveness. His true aim was to achieve a nonviolent socialist revolution, which was in stark contrast to the usual socialist mindset of the 1920s.¹⁰⁸

While placing the senselessness of violence as a basis of thought, in some cases even for Sinclair it could be justified, for example when the capitalist superiors make use of violence to annihilate the labor movement, very active during those years; if the disastrous economic conditions and the absence of institutional support lead the less well-off classes to degradation and despair; or if the relations between the world powers are fraying to the point of hypothesizing the possibility of a new world conflict.¹⁰⁹

Through this premise, the causes of Sinclair's internal political conflict are put forth: while he envisioned a radical transformation of American society, he was in no way in agreement with the strategies favored by the majority of socialists of the time, preferring instead to envision a smooth and unifying change.

But while Sinclair was unsure of how a socialist society should be established in the United States, he was certain of how its operating system would function.

Sinclair advocated for the nationalization of the transportation, communications, and business sectors, including railways, telegraph firms, oil fields, sizable factories, and all of the state's key logistical hubs, including warehouses, retail outlets, and office buildings.¹¹⁰

The capitalist classes, whose knowledge would enable a fair new partnership for the management of such a society, would assist in achieving and testing this sort of transition, which would not be the sole duty of socialist forces.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Davidson G., *Upton Sinclair: Socialist Prophet Without Honour*, Canterbury University Press, 1985, p. 136.

¹⁰⁹ Fretz L., "Upton Sinclair and the Jazz Age", p. 24.

¹¹⁰ Fretz L., "Upton Sinclair and the Jazz Age", p. 25.

¹¹¹ Bakthawar P., "Capitalism in American Society as Represented in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*", pp. 284-294.

This is demonstrated in his choice of characters in most of his novels published during the 1920s and early 1930s, such as the son of the oil tycoon Bunny Ross in *Oil!* (1927), the dreamer who was born poor but became rich Jedd Rusher in *Mountain City* (1930), and Luke Faber in *Roman Holidays* (1931).¹¹²

Sinclair had a history of making highly contrasting claims about himself and the issues he covered in his books. However, the intellectual and political atmosphere of the 1920s would highlight these inconsistencies, greatly enhancing his political alienation and isolation, which would ultimately cause him to leave the socialist ranks for those of the democratic party in the 1930s.¹¹³

The socialist party was becoming more and more divisive with the introduction of the New Deal and the significant events occurring in Europe. Many union leaders had argued that “what Roosevelt was doing was stabilizing capitalism with very few concessions to workers”.¹¹⁴ The major focus was on the different issues that defined the society of the early 1930s, such as the various large waves of strikes, despite the understanding that the concessions of the Roosevelt presidency fell well short of what was necessary. Sinclair’s End Poverty In California (EPIC) and other new movements emerged in this unsatisfactory and uncertain environment, each with its answers.¹¹⁵

A *New York Times* story about Upton Sinclair’s socialist plan to turn around California’s economic woes was published on August 5, 1933. The qualities of this daring new idea were constantly being described in the several articles that followed this one, which by that time had already gained a sizable following among the less fortunate parts of society.¹¹⁶

His political and economic program was precisely described in 1933 in the political pamphlet *I, Governor of California, and How I Ended Poverty: A True Story of the Future*.¹¹⁷ One of the significant changes to Californian society that EPIC would bring

¹¹² Davidson G., *Upton Sinclair: Socialist Prophet Without Honour*, p. 136.

¹¹³ Davidson G., *Upton Sinclair: Socialist Prophet Without Honour*, p. 138.

¹¹⁴ Drew D., *Socialism and American Life*, Princeton University Press, 1952, p. 372.

¹¹⁵ Davidson G., *Upton Sinclair: Socialist Prophet Without Honour*, p. 148.

¹¹⁶ Davidson G., *Upton Sinclair: Socialist Prophet Without Honour*, p. 148.

¹¹⁷ Sinclair U., *I, Governor of California, and How I Ended Poverty: A True Story of the Future*, Farrar & Rinehart, 1933.

about was the establishment of a \$50 monthly pension paid to all residents over 60, as was already discussed in the first chapter. The money acquired from tax payments and the savings from the jobs that EPIC would generate to reduce the unemployment rate as much as feasible would be used to pay for all the strategies developed.¹¹⁸ In this way Sinclair decided to pursue a political career more and more actively, putting his novel writing on hold to run for governor in the 1934 elections as a result of the EPIC's enormous popularity among the public in less than a year.

Despite the compelling arguments, Frank Merriam will be chosen as governor instead of Sinclair. Big businessmen and movie makers actively backed Merriam's program with negative campaigning against Sinclair out of fear of the potential taxes and industrial reorganization Sinclair's campaign supported, making it one of the most dishonest and corrupt elections in American history.¹¹⁹

Sinclair ended his political career after this setback, but not before publishing *I, Candidate for Governor: And How I Got Licked* in 1935, in which he meticulously detailed the coercive tactics employed by Merriam's followers to elect him to the position of 28th governor of California, including the yellow journalism of William Randolph Hearst already criticized in the previous *The Brass Check*.¹²⁰

The Novels

Around eighty books were written by Upton Sinclair throughout his long career as a writer, which was interwoven with his brief two-year political stint.¹²¹ Many of his works were acclaimed novels that the public and reviewers both adored.

¹¹⁸ Sinclair U., *I, Governor of California, and How I Ended Poverty: A True Story of the Future*.

¹¹⁹ Davidson G., *Upton Sinclair: Socialist Prophet Without Honour*, p. 152.

¹²⁰ Sinclair U., *I, Candidate for Governor: And How I Got Licked*, University of California Press, 1935, <https://books.google.co.zw/books?id=XAmvngEACAAJ&printsec=copyright#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

¹²¹ Sinclair U., *The Autobiography of Upton Sinclair*, Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962, p. 180, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015005125375&view=1up&seq=45>.

I will discuss some of the best-known novels and most popular series in this paragraph, such as the two *Sylvia* novels and *the Lanny Budd* series, the third of which will win Sinclair the Pulitzer Prize.

Sylvia novels

A girl from the American South is the protagonist of the 1913 book *Sylvia*, which details her experiences. It was co-written by Upton Sinclair and his wife Mary Craig, who was born and reared in Mississippi and drew heavily on her own life experiences when creating the storylines revolving around Sylvia, the book's protagonist. It was published under Sinclair's name. The experiences of Sylvia are utilized as an excellent allegory for the general condition of women who lack a voice in their society and who instead observe the consolidation of their limits.¹²²

Published in 1913, the novel was defined by the *New York Times* as “the best novel Mr. Sinclair has yet written — So much the best that it stands in a class by itself”.¹²³

Sylvia's popularity was so tremendous that the follow-up book, *Sylvia's Marriage*, was released a year later. In this book, the protagonist, who has agreed to marry Douglas de Tuvier because it is what a respectable Southern woman would do, struggles with her marriage.¹²⁴

King Coal

The Ludlow Massacre, which occurred on April 20, 1914, was a significant national event that swayed public opinion and had a significant impact on Sinclair's writing. Under the watchful eye of the National Guard, who did nothing to stop the slaughter, the anti-

¹²² Prenshaw P., “Sinclair, Mary Craig Kimbrough” - *Lives of Mississippi Authors, 1817–1967*, 1981, pp. 409-410.

¹²³ Various Authors, “Sylvia, Mr. Upton Sinclair's Novel on a Much-Discussed Theme Sylvia”, *The New York Times*, May 25, 1913, last retrieved December 4, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/1913/05/25/archives/sylvia-mr-upton-sinclairs-novel-on-a-muchdiscussed-theme-sylvia-by.html>.

¹²⁴ Sinclair U., *Sylvia's Marriage*, Aegypan, 2007.

striker militia committed mass murder on that day in the same-named Colorado city's coal mines. Twenty-one miners, including family members, died.¹²⁵

Sinclair stayed at Carnegie Hall that evening, April 27, 1914, to hear firsthand tales of the bloodshed and murders that had taken place in the Colorado mines. Sinclair was so horrified by the abuses and brutality that the employees reported that he wanted to launch a protest movement out of concern that the incidents would gain media attention befitting of such savagery.¹²⁶

He sought to raise awareness of the circumstances mine workers endure through this campaign, highlighting the policies of the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, which owns the mine where the massacre occurred.

Sinclair chooses to set up a picket line in front of the Standard Oil Company's offices after being denied the chance to have a private discussion with John D. Rockefeller Jr. in New York. This was the start of what the media dubbed the "Rockefeller War", which grew as protesters attacked anything bearing the Rockefeller surname.¹²⁷ Sinclair has a new investigative novel in the vein of *The Jungle* planned in addition to all these protest actions.

In typical Sinclair fashion, he determined that one of the best ways to bring this issue to light was to create a novel, for which he immediately went to Colorado to get the data. The knowledge acquired via this research served as the inspiration for *King Coal* of 1917. It is his first real work after *The Jungle* to "indicate his full power as a novelist of the social scene".¹²⁸

The novel is about the rich young man Hal Warner who walks away from home and assumes the identity "Joe Smith" to learn the truth for himself about the circumstances in the mines. Hal obtains employment in a different coal mine run by the General Fuel

¹²⁵ Simmons L., Simmons T., Haecker C., Siebert E., "National Historic Landmark Nomination: Ludlow Tent Colony", *National Park Service*, OMB N. 1024-0018, 2008, pp. 41, 45, https://www.nps.gov/archeology/months/NP_NHL_Nomination_Ludlow.pdf.

¹²⁶ Davidson G., *Upton Sinclair: Socialist Prophet Without Honour*, p. 69.

¹²⁷ Newton-Matza M., *Disasters and Tragic Events: An Encyclopedia of Catastrophes in American History*, ABC-CLIO, 2014, p. 223.

¹²⁸ Granville H., "The Survival of Upton Sinclair", *College English*, Vol. 4, n. 4, 1943, p. 214, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/370787>.

Company, or GFC, after being rejected by one coal mine because of suspicions that he was a union activist. He makes friends with a lot of the miners there and learns about their suffering and exploitation at the hands of the masters.¹²⁹

In *King Coal*, Sinclair focuses on the concept of a “rich kid” who progressively embraces socialism after becoming aware of a harsh and repressive reality and ready to utilize his resources and position to help people in need.

The book failed to become a success despite its verified content and the distinction of having a preface written by George Bernard Shaw and George Brandes. The novel was attacked for overusing socialist jargon, and the topic was already fading into obscurity since, by 1917, the strike had already been over for two years and the influence of the protests against the slaughter of Ludlow had lost much of its popular support.¹³⁰

The *Coal War*, the follow-up to *King Coal*, was rejected by another Macmillan executive, Edward Marsh, in late 1917. It was not published until 1976, many years after Sinclair’s passing.¹³¹

Oil!

In any case, since *The Brass Check*’s 1919 debut, Sinclair’s literary career would be highly successful during the ‘Roaring Twenties’, with roughly fifteen works released. Honorable mention among them belongs to *Oil!* from 1927, a book concerning the social effects of the early twentieth-century American oil industry. Bunny Ross, the son of businessman James Alfred Ross, who got wealthy via the purchase of oil fields in California, tells the story of his inner turmoil in *Oil!*.

Bunny’s experiences, particularly his friendship with the young Paul Watkins, of a low socioeconomic class who is compelled to go to war where he observes the atrocities committed by American soldiers in Siberia, lead him towards socialism and respect for workers’ rights, as well as his understanding of his father’s corruption. Through the internal conflict of the young Bunny, the story, therefore, serves as a warning against

¹²⁹ Sinclair U., *King Coal*, Serapis Classics, 2017.

¹³⁰ Davidson G., *Upton Sinclair: Socialist Prophet Without Honour*, p. 83.

¹³¹ Davidson G., *Upton Sinclair: Socialist Prophet Without Honour*, p. 83.

the corruption of capitalism in favor of the principles of equality propagated by socialism.¹³²

The source of inspiration for the setting of *Oil!* was the Teapot Dome scandal of 1923, when Albert Fall, the Secretary of the Interior for the Harding administration, gave some oil firms, which had paid him a bribe, the permission to extract in Wyoming and California. The incident, which resulted in Fall's imprisonment, had a very significant reach, equivalent to what occurred in 1972 under the Nixon administration with the Watergate scandal.¹³³

The Lanny Budd Series

However, Upton Sinclair produced also an epic series of 11 novels between 1940 and 1953, the third of which would also win him the Pulitzer Prize.¹³⁴

The series' protagonist, the swashbuckling Lanny Budd, is thrust into the middle of some of the most dramatic and iconic events in the history of the first half of the 20th century, allowing readers to hear Sinclair's opinion about these events, including the two world wars and the ascent of some of the era's infamously most iconic leaders (Lanny Budd will meet, for example, Adolf Hitler in the Pulitzer Prize winning novel *Dragon's Teeth*), under the guise of the protagonist's adventures.

While Upton Sinclair and his wife Mary Craig were listening to the radio report of Nazi Germany's invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1938, the concept for such a narrative first came to the author. His wife reacted to this news by saying, "Well, our world is at an end. I don't see how anyone can fail to realize that". Six weeks later, Sinclair recalled having a vision of a saga to be entitled *Worlds End*: "Walking in my garden one night, something happened; a spring was touched, a button pressed... there was no resisting it, and I didn't try".¹³⁵ The story that followed was technically named *Worlds End*, but because of the protagonist's name, fans frequently refer to it as the *Lanny Budd series*.

¹³² Sinclair U., *Oil!*, Penguin, 2008.

¹³³ Various Authors, *Watergate & the Teapot Dome Scandal: The History and Legacy of America's Most Notorious Government Scandals*, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016, p. 15.

¹³⁴ Brennan E., Clarage E., *Who's Who of Pulitzer Prize Winners*, Oryx Press, 1999, p. 493.

¹³⁵ Salamon J., "Revisit to Old Hero Finds He's Still Lively", *The New York Times*, July 22, 2005, last retrieved January 19, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/22/books/revisit-to-old-hero-finds-hes-still-lively.html>.

The *Lanny Budd* series by Sinclair, which biographer Dieter Herms describes as “anti-fascist propaganda amusingly packaged in the wrappers of popular literature”, had a significant impact on the general attitude of the American people to take up weapons.¹³⁶

The 11 volumes of this series were readily accessible in paperback in the different railway and port terminals, and millions of people eagerly embraced them. The fact that banners promoted the novels in other languages such as Swedish, Norwegian, and Japanese shows how widely read this tale was, enabling readers during the war to share the same anti-fascist principles.¹³⁷

Final Remarks

Upton Sinclair published more than 80 novels, dozens of newspaper pieces, and maintained correspondence with some of the major figures of the 20th century during the course of his 90 years. Sinclair ranks among the very top positions in terms of significance and influence within the American radical experience. He made contributions on many different levels, from purely political with his 1934 presidential run to the cultural, as he was one of the most well-known and respected novelists of the time. He created the standards for the proletariat novel, and boldly advanced socialist principles by publicly opposing the well-established institutions of American capitalism, only to be shunned by the American Socialist Party while seeking the Democratic nomination for governor of California.

His work as a writer and as a socialist was always intertwined, using his writings as a means to spread the socialist ideal and expose American hypocrisy. Dedicating his career to fighting injustice and abuse, he was constantly at the forefront of union struggles, organizing picketing and ending up in jail for his protests. He proved to be an extremely awkward character in the American panorama, as the consequences of the publication of some of his novels, *The Jungle* above all, unmasked some of the worst conditions with

¹³⁶ Salamon J., “Revisit to Old Hero Finds He’s Still Lively”, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/22/books/revisit-to-old-hero-finds-hes-still-lively.html>.

¹³⁷ Brennan E., Clarage E., *Who’s Who of Pulitzer Prize Winners*, p. 493.

which the capitalist mechanism fed itself: the abuses of workers, the lack of respect and a total disregard of the basic conditions necessary for a healthy society, such as hygienic conditions or the minimum wage. As in all of his other muckraking works, capitalism fails to provide prosperity to all social groups in *The Jungle*, but instead only serves to further the wealth of the already wealthy managerial classes at the expense of the proletariat. Therefore, regardless of how hard a worker may work, the working class finds itself living a terrible life filled with suffering and insecure situations. Thus, the human being is invalidated and diminished to a menial cog in a vile machine. And Upton Sinclair spent his entire life fighting against the injustices and brutality directed at American workers to defeat this system.

Correspondence with Joseph Stalin, Albert Einstein, Vladimir Lenin, Henry Ford, and Gandhi can be found in the Indiana University Lilly Library, which houses all of Sinclair's thousands of letters, writings, and speeches. This is evidence that Sinclair was a significant and major figure both nationally and internationally, at many levels of society.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Sinclair U., *Sinclair mss., 1814-1968*, Archives Online at Indiana University, https://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/findingaids/view?doc.view=entire_text&docId=InU-Li-VAA1292.

CAREY McWILLIAMS: A CULTURAL REBEL

Biography and Literary Production

Carey McWilliams was born in Steamboat Springs in Colorado on December 13, 1905. He first moved to California in 1922, after a sudden decrease in demand from the livestock market, his family's economic foundation, which had ruined his father's health and his family's finances.¹³⁹

In California, McWilliams attended the University of Southern California, where he earned a law degree in 1927.¹⁴⁰ From that year until 1938, McWilliams practiced as a lawyer in the city of Los Angeles at the Black, Hammock & Black Law Firm. Some of his cases during this period, including his defense of striking Mexican citrus growers, set the stage for the subjects of his literary career.

During the 1920s and early 1930s, McWilliams joined a mostly Southern Californian writing circle that included Robinson Jeffers, John Fante, Louis Adamic, and Upton Sinclair, the future candidate for the California governorate. His relationships with Mary Austin and H.L. Mencken also profoundly influenced his literary career. The latter provided a great influence at the beginning of McWilliams' journalistic career, throwing him the idea for his first book, a 1929 biography of the famous Californian writer Ambrose Bierce.

The Great Depression and the rise of fascism in Europe in the 1930s radicalized McWilliams. Engaged in the wave of California strikes, he began working with leftist political and legal organizations, including the American Civil Liberties Union and the National Lawyers Guild. During his career he also worked for the *Pacific Weekly*, *Controversy*, *The Nation* (of which he would be editor in the twenty years between 1955 and 1975), and other progressive magazines. Simultaneously with his literary activity, he continued to represent workers across the area of Los Angeles, organizing unions and corporations and working as an examiner for the new National Labor Relations Board,

¹³⁹ Gannon F., *Biographical Dictionary of the Left*, Western Islands Publishers, 1969, p. 450.

¹⁴⁰ Gannon F., *Biographical Dictionary of the Left*, pp. 452-454.

an independent agency of the federal government of the United States established in 1935 with responsibilities for enforcing U.S. labor law on collective bargaining and unfair labor practices.

His novel *Factories in the Field* was published in 1939, just months before the publication of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, and examined the lives of migrant farm workers in California condemning the politics and consequences of the agricultural land monopoly of California and large-scale agribusiness. Shortly before its publication, McWilliams accepted an offer from incoming Governor Culbert Olson to head the California Division of Immigration and Housing. During his four-year tenure, between 1938 and 1942, McWilliams was focused on improving working conditions and wages in the agricultural sector, but his hopes for a major and substantial reform weakened with the advent of World War II.

McWilliams left his government role in 1942 when incoming Governor Earl Warren promised the campaign audience that one of his first official acts would be to fire him.¹⁴¹ McWilliams was at the beginning a harsh critic of Warren, only to become a great admirer when Warren became part of the Supreme Court of the United States in the 1950s. On the other hand, a relationship that has always remained cold was the one with another prominent figure in first Californian and then national politics, Richard Nixon, always seen by McWilliams with skepticism and distrust, described by himself in 1950 as a mean person.¹⁴²

After leaving the state government, McWilliams focused on literary production. Turning his attention to racial and ethnic equality issues, he wrote a series of books (*Brothers Under the Skin*, *Prejudice*, *North from Mexico*, *A Mask for Privilege*) outlining the treatment of immigrants and minority groups in California. He also produced two regional portraits, *Southern California Country: An Island on the Land* (1946) and *California: The Great Exception* (1949), which many historians still consider to be among the best interpretive stories of the Pacific-backed state.¹⁴³ Decades after its release,

¹⁴¹ Long E., "Earl Warren and the Politics of Anti-Communism", *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 51, n. 1, 1982, pp. 51-70, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3639820>.

¹⁴² Richardson P., *American Prophet: The Life and Work of Carey McWilliams*, University of Michigan Press, 2005, pp. 250-270.

¹⁴³ Richardson P., *American Prophet: The Life and Work of Carey McWilliams*, p. 140.

Southern California Country will be of great inspiration for Robert Towne's original Oscar-winning script *Chinatown* of 1974.¹⁴⁴

McWilliams died in New York City on June 27, 1980, aged 74. Since his death, his critical fortunes increased exponentially: the American Political Science Association annually awards the Carey McWilliams Award "to honor an important journalistic contribution to our understanding of politics." In 2002 *Embattled Dreams*, California historian Kevin Starr calls McWilliams "the finest California nonfiction ever", while the biographer Peter Richardson argues that McWilliams may be the most versatile American public intellectual of the twentieth century.¹⁴⁵

Through this chapter I intend to analyze the work of Carey McWilliams, focusing on his anti-fascism, his commitment against racial discrimination, how his position was considered extremely uncomfortable during the second Red Scare, and finally his work as an editor for *The Nation* in New York since 1955.

McWilliams and Antifascism

In 1935, the Californian magazine *Pacific Weekly* published the article "Jewish Fascism", written by Los Angeles attorney Carey McWilliams, where he defined Jewish leaders who linked their opposition to the Nazis to a fascist defense of capitalism. To associate such a combination might have seemed strange even to the readers of that left-wing magazine, yet for McWilliams fascism was a concept that could be applied in a much broader way than it was defined in those years.¹⁴⁶

Under the framework of fascism, McWilliams described the various American movements in the twenty years from 1920 to 1940 such as the breakup of the trade unions, anti-Semitism, nativism, militarism, capitalist exploitation, and xenophobic lynching. Although McWilliams's use of the fascist concept lacked theoretical rigor, it allowed him to put together in an organized agenda the varied range of political

¹⁴⁴ Richardson P., *American Prophet: The Life and Work of Carey McWilliams*, pp. 144.

¹⁴⁵ Richardson P., *American Prophet: The Life and Work of Carey McWilliams*, pp. 297.

¹⁴⁶ McWilliams C., "Jewish Fascism", *Pacific Weekly*, Vol. 90, n. 3, August 19, 1935, pp. 76-78.

activities that he actively pursued in his career as a lawyer, journalist, activist, and government official. Antifascism, as a political attitude that required radical reforms toward economic reconciliation, education and racial equality in a democratic constitutional order, was a fundamental condition of political instinct for McWilliams. In general, historians believed that anti-fascist rhetoric was closely intertwined with the policy of the Communist Party to be useful for carrying out a rigid left policy genuinely rooted in the American political situation, but McWilliams's studies in the 1930s reveal that a wide range of liberals and leftists have applied the metaphor of fascism to American society itself.¹⁴⁷

McWilliams's anti-fascist thinking was rooted in the Californian political environment, which enjoyed a strong history of repression of dissident political expression: for example in 1919, with the Criminal Syndicalism Act, it was allowed to pursue any ideals deemed subversive. As argued by historian Kevin Starr, as many of the leading political figures violently opposed the union pressures of the 1930s, the fascist scenario actively presented itself in the political and social plan of California of that decade, where even the most basic affirmation of labor rights underwent swift legal repression.¹⁴⁸ The farm worker organization in the state, in which McWilliams was closely involved, encountered, for example, one of the most violent suppressions of the 1930s, with struggles to assert the most basic and primary rights of workers, such as the minimum and decent wage. Furthermore, a large section of the Californian press, such as that controlled by William Randolph Hearst, gave strong support to the various repressive and anti-union measures. Thus, California's left-wing political forces were more inclined than their Atlantic coast sections to see parallels between the rise of fascism in Europe and their domestic situation, thus working in favor of their constructive program against the specter of fascism.¹⁴⁹

McWilliams unified his specific concern about the threat of fascism in California by sparking a national political conversation through his publications in magazines such as

¹⁴⁷ Geary D., "Carey McWilliams and Antifascism, 1934-1943", *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 90, n. 3, 2003, p. 912, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3660881>.

¹⁴⁸ Starr K., *Endangered Dreams: California in the 1930s*, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 370-390.

¹⁴⁹ Nelson B., *Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s*, University of Illinois Press, 1988, pp. 220-230.

the *American Mercury*, *New Republic*, *The Nation*, and *Common Ground*; his influential national books such as *Factories in the Field* of 1939 and 1943 *Brothers under the skin*; and its active members in national organizations such as the *League of American Writers*, the *National Lawyers Guild* and the *American Committee for the Protection of Foreign Born*. But fear of a fascist escalation was not limited to just the California state: Sinclair Lewis's 1935 novel *It Can Happen Here* which envisions a fascist takeover in America, received wide attention from the left across the nation, and in the two years from 1934 to 1935 alone, the *Nation* published 8 articles on the threat of domestic fascism: three concerned the situation on the West Coast, the others reflected on a possible fascist threat in Michigan, Pennsylvania, New Mexico, and an influence in the House of Representatives.¹⁵⁰ McWilliams's involvement in a nationwide speech indicates that he should be understood not just as a prominent commentator of the Californian reality, as he is generally seen today, but as a representative of the broader trends of leftist thinking during the 1930s and World War II.

With Adolf Hitler's takeover of power in Germany in 1933, a debate sparked on the American left among communist-affiliated intellectuals, who argued that fascism was a natural consequence of capitalism, and those who followed the theory of Alfred Bingham, a radical intellectual of the 20th century, arguing that fascism was a misdirected revolt against capitalism by the disillusioned sections of the middle class.¹⁵¹ McWilliams never provided a precise analysis of the social origins of fascism, although he drew on elements of both theories in vogue at the time. In his fight against American fascism, however, McWilliams proposed an anti-fascist agenda focused on civil liberties, racial equality, and economic reconstruction. Although they did not present a coherent theory of fascism, McWilliams's 1930s writings on the internal fascist threat allowed him to speak to a broad and heterogeneous Left that was made up of civil liberties lawyers, agricultural workers, trade unions, Democrats, writers, Hollywood liberals, Communists, and New Dealers.

¹⁵⁰ McWilliams C., *It Can Happen Here: Active Anti-Semitism in Los Angeles*, California State University Northridge, 1935, p. 3.

¹⁵¹ Bingham A., *Insurgent America: Revolt of the Middle-Classes*, Harper and Brothers, 1935, p. 193.

Acting on the Antifascist Agenda against Racism

In the article “Fascism in American Law”, published in *American Mercury* in 1934, McWilliams described a lynching in San José, supported by the governor of California, as proof of the constant growth in popular discontent with the judicial system.¹⁵² McWilliams feared that such general discontent, fueled by anger as a consequence of the worsening of post-1929 economic conditions, would lead to the erosion of civil liberties which would then be used by the élites as a tool for the suppression of subversive minorities as what was happening in Nazi Germany at the time.

Racial democracy was another significant part of McWilliams’s agenda in the 1930s. Although he was not primarily known as a writer on issues of race and ethnicity until the publication of *Brothers Under the Skin* in 1943, McWilliams was part of a large national movement for a more ethnically diverse democracy that spread among the liberal intellectuals during those years. Relying firstly on cultural pluralism, using the anthropological refutations of the concept of race, and then on the urgency created by the events that were unfolding in Fascist Europe, the movement resulted in a greater acceptance for Southern and Eastern European immigrants in American social life and attracted general attention to the issue of racism experienced by African American inhabitants.¹⁵³

McWilliams, however, brought a Californian perspective to the discussion. Instead of focusing on those immigrants that came from the Southern and Eastern parts of Europe, McWilliams focused on the treatment of people from Mexico and Asia, where most of the immigrants to California came from. Already in 1933 McWilliams denounced in the *American Mercury* that, while the middle-class Californians previously had exalted the figure of Mexicans as a source of cheap labor by referring positively to possible Americanization programs, then they tried to deport Mexicans when they became perceived as a burden on the nation’s economy.¹⁵⁴ A huge influence in shaping Carey McWilliams’s ideas about racism was Louis Adamic, a Slovenian writer who immigrated

¹⁵² Geary D., *Carey McWilliams and Antifascism*, p.925.

¹⁵³ Geary D., *Carey McWilliams and Antifascism*, p. 920.

¹⁵⁴ Weiss R., “Ethnicity and Reform: Minorities and the Ambience of the Depression Years”, *Journal of American History*, Vol. 66, n. 3, 1979, pp. 66-79, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1890296>.

to New York in 1913 when he was fifteen. The two became great friends in the 1920s when Adamic moved to Southern California and remained in close contact even after 1929, when the Slovenian writer returned to New York. The reports that Adamic sent to California in 1932 during his trip to Italy, where he described a society subjected to the military and fascist customs, were of fundamental importance in the formation of the strong sense of fascist threat living in McWilliams.¹⁵⁵ Like Adamic and other advocates of ethnic-racial democracy in the 1930s, McWilliams has often described racism as an irrational phenomenon deeply interconnected with economic roots. For McWilliams, fascism was a means of channeling the economic discontent of the masses into hatred for certain specific racial minorities. Therefore, McWilliams was particularly alarmed by the growing manifestations of anti-Semitism in South California. Between September 29 and 30 1935, thousands of anti-Semitic leaflets were distributed throughout Los Angeles, many of them inside even some copies of the *Los Angeles Times*. In the wake of this incident, McWilliams wrote a thirty-page pamphlet: *It Can Happen Here: Active Anti-Semitism in Los Angeles*, published by the *American League Against War and Fascism* and the *Jewish Anti-Nazi League of Southern California*. The booklet precisely described Ingram Hughes's activities, the head of the American Nationalist Party, and other major members of the pro-Nazi groups in the region. McWilliams feared that anti-Semitism could explode amid Los Angeles's economic discontent.

But McWilliams had guessed that economic reasons were often the basis of xenophobic sentiments. As an example of this, as a ploy to limit the arrival and presence of Filipino immigrants in the United States, there were harsh reactions to the growing militancy of Filipino workers' unions. McWilliams strongly opposed the arbitrary expulsion of resident aliens and immigration policies that practices race-based discrimination, arguing that anti-Japanese sentiment ultimately stemmed from their isolation in homogeneous colonies. He was a fervent supporter of full American citizenship for Filipino citizens, explaining how the antimiscegenation laws had negative effects exclusively on a part of the Filipino population, almost exclusively immigrants.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Adamic L., "Letter of Adamic to McWilliams", *McWilliams Papers*, box 1, Young Library, May 11, 1932.

¹⁵⁶ McWilliams C., "Once Again the 'Yellow Peril'", *The Nation*, June 26, 1935, pp. 735-36; McWilliams C., "Exit the Filipino", *The Nation*, September 4, 1935, p. 265.

In any case, a concern for economic justice was at the heart of McWilliams's anti-fascist thought in the 1930s. If the fascist threat to civil liberties and ethnoracial democracy feeds on misdirected anger at economic discontent, then only a broad and organized program to rebuild a discredited capitalist economy could indeed promise a future free from fascism. McWilliams saw organized labor as the main tool for achieving the economic reconstruction necessary after the 1929 crisis. The promise of the labor movement was the hope of rebuilding the American economy on a more democratic basis and uniting workers of different races and ethnic groups with no more divisions or racism. McWilliams, as his friend and colleague Adamic, saw trade unions as a means of achieving racial equality.¹⁵⁷

Fascists in the Field

The different points of McWilliams's anti-fascism culminated in *Factories in the Field* of 1939, his most influential writing on agricultural work. McWilliams has identified the roots of the suppression of civil liberties in California in the racial exploitation of farm workers when, for example in 1934, he wrote of a "fascist suppression" of the civil rights of agricultural workers for the *American Mercury*.¹⁵⁸ In 1935, McWilliams began a fruitful collaboration with the journalist Herbert Klein, also fearful of a fascist turn in Californian society: at the end of May of that year, the two men crossed California trying to discover and document the true conditions of agricultural work in the state. Between 1930 and 1934 Klein worked in Berlin as a correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune*, having firsthand experience of Hitler's party's rise to power. In those years Klein had also studied German agriculture closely, and he was therefore well aware of the reactionary influence that a landed elite such as the German Junkers or the Californian farmers could exert on society.¹⁵⁹ The 1935 expedition led to the publication of an article in *The Nation*, "Cold

¹⁵⁷ Adamic L., *My America: 1928-1938*, 1938, Reprint Services Corp, p. 427; McWilliams C., "Why a Labor Movement?", address delivered at the University Club, June 1937, McWilliams Papers, box 1, Young Library.

¹⁵⁸ Critser G., "The Political Rebellion of Carey McWilliams", *UCLA Historical Journal*, 1983, pp. 34-65, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0m91m243>.

¹⁵⁹ Klein H., "Going through the Rye: Germany's Food Tariffs", *The Nation*, April 8, 1931, pp. 377-79.

Terror in California”, and a six-part series for *Pacific Weekly*, “Factory in the Field”.¹⁶⁰ In these latest articles, Klein and McWilliams traced the origin of “agricultural fascism” to the “financial-farm oligarchy” that owned most of California’s farmland.¹⁶¹

In *Factories in the Field*, McWilliams traced the origins of the financial-farm oligarchy to the corrupt “floating” Mexican land concessions of the state’s early days, detailing how a small group of men monopolized the agricultural lands and first instituted the system of exploitation of migratory labor. Incorporating his previous journalistic work, McWilliams explained how farmers used “agricultural fascism”, a massive crackdown on the civil rights of workers, to maintain control over the workforce. McWilliams’ choice to treat the subject from a historical point of view also allowed him to focus on the centrality of race in the history of agricultural labor.¹⁶²

One of *Factories in the Field*’s main arguments is that how the history of agricultural labor in California has revolved around the exploitation of several skillfully manipulated minority groups, imported to work in the fields by large farmers. For a centralized land tenure system to survive, McWilliams has argued that farmers needed to exploit a large, cheap, mobile, and temporary workforce. He then described the later use of Chinese, Japanese, Mexican, and Filipino labor, noting how the persistence of racism has allowed the exploitation of farmers to avoid public scrutiny. Furthermore, the exploitation of minorities in the agricultural sector was precluding their greater integration into American society, inhibiting any possibility of greater ethnocratic democracy.

Factories in the Field ends with a strong but vague appeal to agricultural socialism: while McWilliams was confident that the “substitution of collective agriculture for the current system of monopoly ownership and control would require at most one mere change of ownership”, he did not specify a system of socialized agriculture would work.¹⁶³ In this case, McWilliams’ anti-fascist perspective led him to focus on what he opposed at the expense of detailing the alternative society he dreamed and hoped for. Although McWilliams was vague and imprecise about his goal, he was explicit about the means to

¹⁶⁰ Klein H., McWilliams C., “Gold Terror in California”, *The Nation*, July 24, 1935, pp. 97-98.

¹⁶¹ Critser G., “The Political Rebellion of Carey McWilliams”, pp. 34-65.

¹⁶² McWilliams C., *Factories in the Field*, University of California Press, 1939, pp. 104,139.

¹⁶³ McWilliams C., *Factories in the Field*, p. 315.

achieve it: “The solution to the problem of agricultural work can only be achieved through the agricultural worker’s organization”.¹⁶⁴ Although McWilliams had already noticed positive signs in the federal government’s intervention in the creation of fields for migrant workers, *Factories in the Field* was above all a call for militant trade union solidarity, an attempt by a powerful labor movement to reshape the factories in the field by promising to carry out its anti-fascist agenda by fighting not only the exploitation of labor but also racism and the violations of civil liberties intrinsically linked to it.¹⁶⁵

The racial revolution

The research conducted by McWilliams with Herbert Klein in 1935 had taken him far and wide across agricultural America and, in doing so, he greatly expanded his perspective on American race relations. On a more academic level, the pioneering work of anthropologists such as Franz Boas and Margaret Mead helped liberate the discourse on race from the rigid grip of biological determinism.

Brothers Under the Skin

Brothers Under the Skin, the first of McWilliams’ books on a “racial revolution”, appeared in 1943 and quickly became a bestseller.¹⁶⁶

The novel encompasses and unifies studies on numerous ethnic groups, organizing the writing into eight sketches that present their history, the origins of their exploitation, and the difficulties encountered, together with their attempts to integrate into the American social structure. By studying the origins of Indians, Mexicans, Blacks, and Puerto Ricans, *Brothers Under the Skin* exposes the thesis of how there was a population of about 14 million people in the United States destined for living standards and working

¹⁶⁴ McWilliams C., *Factories in the Field*, p. 320.

¹⁶⁵ McWilliams C., *Factories in the Field*, pp. 303, 334, 335.

¹⁶⁶ Forrest R., “Remembering Carey McWilliams”, *Western American Literature*, vol. 34, n. 4, University of Nebraska Press, 2000, pp. 420-443.

conditions decidedly lower than the general average due to their different skin pigmentation.¹⁶⁷

In contrast to such an injustice, McWilliams heavily denounces racial discrimination as his idea of social justice collides with the fact that a human being can be humiliated and penalized by an entire society considered democratic solely for the color of his skin. He further argues that no kind of decent society can be built or strengthened as long as such general racist sentiment prevails. Published in 1943, amid World War II, in the book McWilliams argues how the Allied forces can definitively win the conflict only when racial and discriminatory issues are progressively resolved.

McWilliams' ideals are based on integrity and respect for different cultures, whose cohesion is a plus for society when in its contemporaneity the colored groups have seen their cultural models humiliated by the economic barriers raised by the American lifestyle. In *Brothers Under the Skin*, it is explained how these groups see their customs not only rejected but not tolerated, making it impossible for them to even progressively introduce themselves into the strata of US society.¹⁶⁸ This is well demonstrated in the ghetto experience of immigrant groups, such as the various Chinatowns scattered throughout American cities until America's aggressive capitalist system evicts them regardless of any consequences; Or, in the alienation experienced by second-generation groups who, due to the low levels of education with which they are trained, are unable to excel and socially emancipate themselves.

Minorities thus see their cultural roots destroyed without even being able to find any replacement, while the majority shows no slightest interest in trying to absorb the best elements of all these various cultures, avoiding any possibility of union. McWilliams in this book emphasizes the economic effects of such discrimination, trying to analyze the question in the most objective way possible, even going so far as to state that initially, such discrimination could not logically be in the interests of American capitalist society, see immigrant farmers from Japan that has not been a hindrance to US agricultural production.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ McWilliams C., *Brothers Under the Skin - Racial Problems in the USA*, Little Brown & Co, 1943, p. 325.

¹⁶⁸ McWilliams C., *Brothers Under the Skin - Racial Problems in the USA*, pp. 345-347.

¹⁶⁹ McWilliams C., *Brothers Under the Skin - Racial Problems in the USA*, pp. 345-347.

In any case, it is clear how American capitalism expanded benefiting from such racism, using minorities as a cheap and easy-to-use workforce for the various degrading tasks that the American population was no longer willing to do. The various minorities were also the scapegoat with which the Americans vented their frustration over the economic hardships of the time, maintaining an attitude of superiority and contempt.¹⁷⁰ “The racial prejudice”, claims McWilliams, “is not a product of racial or cultural differences as such; rather it derives from conflict or rivalry and is essentially a social phenomenon”.¹⁷¹

In the book, his approach broadens to the history of America as a continent, seeing American racism as a result of the global colonial question, where minorities are seen as a threat to the well-being and fulfillment of the dominant group.

McWilliams admits that “there is no doubt a real social value in competition”, but insists that such a value can only be achieved when the whole of society is committed to equality of opportunity, promoting cooperation by depriving the privileged classes of the social force with which they subjugate minorities.¹⁷²

Other productions on the racial revolution

The analysis presented in *Brothers under the Skin* allowed the consequent development and publication of a series of books on the subject of the racial revolution that was going on in the west of the United States. *Prejudice: Japanese-Americans, Symbol of Racial Intolerance* was the first study concerning the expulsion of Japanese citizens, as McWilliams noted in his autobiography, published in 1944, before either the internment program or the war itself was over.¹⁷³

During the writing of *Prejudice*, McWilliams was active in support of the affected Japanese Americans, drafting reports and writing articles, lobbying a Congressional committee in California to hold public hearings, and traveling as an informed and understanding witness to various internment facilities throughout the state. The book

¹⁷⁰ McWilliams C., *Brothers Under the Skin - Racial Problems in the USA*, p. 347.

¹⁷¹ McWilliams C., *The Education of Carey McWilliams*, Simon and Schuster, 1979, p. 65.

¹⁷² McWilliams C., *The Education of Carey McWilliams*, p. 346.

¹⁷³ McWilliams C., *The Education of Carey McWilliams*, p. 101.

begins with a lengthy chapter of first-hand accounts from people who experienced internment camps. It then looks at the history of discrimination against Asian citizens beginning in the Gold Rush Era and includes a thorough analysis of the anti-Japanese agitation that has developed since Hawaii was annexed by Japan.¹⁷⁴ According to McWilliams's research, racial animosity has social and economic roots, but it has been amplified in large part by politicians and the media, who have been interested in stoking prejudice in California from the start. The book's conclusion included several reform suggestions from the author, all of which depended on the engagement of the federal government.¹⁷⁵

The 1948 book *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States*, written to increase public awareness of racial issues, emphasizes the dignity and continuity of Mexican American culture, particularly because it has endured for many generations outside of its original borders. The author emphasizes that white Anglo-Saxons, and not Mexicans, are the most recent immigrants to the American continent. To understand the structure of Hispanic-American cultural relations in the South West, it is important to place them in the context of a local mentality left behind in 1846, the year of the US-Mexican war, still bearing the aftermath of a centuries-old cultural conflict.¹⁷⁶ The legacy of years of violence and intimidation that explain why Mexican Americans were subordinated in the local social structure during those years is recounted by McWilliams as he continues his narrative. The culmination of his historical research in the book is a thorough account of the infamous Zoot Riots of 1943, a vicious assault on young Mexicans supported by the LA press. The riots, according to McWilliams, "weren't an unforeseen breakdown in Anglo-Hispanic relations, but the inevitable and consequent outcome of a century of desertion and prejudice".¹⁷⁷

Finally, McWilliams focused on discrimination towards Jews with the release of *A Mask for Privilege* in 1948. The plot of this book is similar to that of the others in that it is developed against the backdrop of current events, in this case, the resurgence of anti-

¹⁷⁴ McWilliams C., *The Education of Carey McWilliams*, p. 107.

¹⁷⁵ McWilliams C., *Prejudice: Japanese-Americans, Symbol of Racial Intolerance*, Little Brown & Co, 1944, pp. 280-320.

¹⁷⁶ McWilliams C., *The Education of Carey McWilliams*, p. 98.

¹⁷⁷ McWilliams C., *The Education of Carey McWilliams*, p. 257.

Semitism in post-World War II America and its potentially dangerous ramifications for the fledgling state of Israel, established in 1948.¹⁷⁸

McWilliams bases his novel on the ongoing history of a century of American prejudice against Jews, taking as its main objective that of exposing the process by which “privileged groups fabricate a system of structures to mask their attempts to the monopoly of social, economic and political power”.¹⁷⁹ *A Mask for Privilege* was built as a textbook for the study of American anti-Semitism, tracing its path from the mid-nineteenth century to the time of publication, becoming the perfect spot for the analysis of the overall centuries of racism that perpetuated in the USA.

The works written by McWilliams are a great example of a production that frequently resulted from events that occurred around him and that were generally heading in the direction of reform. *The Prejudice* was the outcome of years of intensive participation in Japanese evacuation programs, excursions, and intellectual participation in radio debates. Amid the Sleepy Lagoon case, in which several young Americans of Mexican heritage were found guilty of murder, *Brothers Under the Skin* was published. McWilliams will lead their defense group and raise funds to put together a successful appeal. He also played a significant role in the initiative to control the disturbances known as the “zoot suit riots” that erupted in Los Angeles in June 1943.¹⁸⁰ This commitment will form the basis for the composition of *North from Mexico*. Also, in these years of fruitful publications, McWilliams crossed the country several times a year during the war, talking about racial issues to the most diverse groups from university organizations to Knife and Fork Clubs evenings.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ McWilliams C., *The Education of Carey McWilliams*, p. 215.

¹⁷⁹ McWilliams C., *The Education of Carey McWilliams*, p. 229.

¹⁸⁰ Griswold R., “The Los Angeles ‘Zoot Suit Riots’ Revisited: Mexican and Latin American Perspectives”, *Mexican Studies*, Vol. 16, n. 2, 2000, pp. 367-370, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1052202>.

¹⁸¹ McWilliams C., *The Education of Carey McWilliams*, p. 115.

The Red Scare

A state or political force's broad fear of the possible growth of communism, anarchism, or other leftist ideologies is referred to in the US as the "Red Scare" and is frequently used as the basis for political propaganda. The term relates to the red flag, which is a well-known communist emblem.¹⁸²

The term is used to refer to two periods in US history: the first Red Scare occurred after World War I, around a perceived threat from the American labor movement, the anarchist revolution, and the political radicalism of the early 1920s; the second Red Scare, to which the work of Carey McWilliams was also subjected, occurred at the end of the Second World War, and was characterized by the perception that international communist forces were infiltrating or wanting to subvert American society and the federal government.¹⁸³

McCarthyism

Making erroneous or unsubstantiated charges of treason and subversion, particularly about anarchism, communism, and socialism, and especially when done in a visible and attention-grabbing way, is known as "McCarthyism".

The expression first appeared in the United States during the Second Red Scare, which lasted from the late 1940s through the early 1950s, and was first associated with the divisive acts and ideologies of U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy. Its distinguishing traits included political repression, persecution of left-leaning individuals, a drive to instill mistrust of perceived communist and socialist influence on American institutions, and Soviet undercover operations.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Foster S., "Chapter I: The Red Scare: Origins and Impact", *Counterpoints*, Vol. 87, 2000, pp. 1-10, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i40115645>.

¹⁸³ Foster S., "Chapter I: The Red Scare: Origins and Impact", pp. 1-10, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i40115645>.

¹⁸⁴ Schrecker E., "McCarthyism: Political Repression and the Fear of Communism", *Social Research*, Vol. 71, n. 4, 2004, pp. 1041–1045, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40971992>.

After the mid-1950s, McCarthyism began to fade, largely as a result of Joseph McCarthy's gradual loss of popularity and credibility after several of his accusations were found to be untrue, as well as persistent opposition from the U.S. Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice Earl Warren, based on human rights. Thanks to a series of rulings by the Warren Court on civil and political rights that rendered numerous important pieces of legislation and governmental regulations illegal, the Second Red Scare came to an end.¹⁸⁵

The major targets of persecution included members of the government, famous figures in the entertainment industry, professors, left-wing politicians, and union organizers. The amount of risk presented by someone's supposed or actual associations with and beliefs in the left was regularly exaggerated, and ambiguous and questionable evidence was frequently used to bolster accusations.¹⁸⁶ The reprisals against those who were considered communists had a terrible impact: many lost their jobs, saw their careers permanently compromised, up to the worst of the consequences, the imprisonment. Even though many lives had already been lost, the majority of these retaliations were sparked by extrajudicial practices like informal blacklists kept by employers and public institutions, trial verdicts that were later overturned, laws that were later ruled unconstitutional,¹⁸⁷ dismissals for reasons that were later deemed unlawful or actionable. One of the most notable examples of McCarthyism is the *House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC)* hearings and Senator McCarthy's investigations into alleged communists.¹⁸⁸

The McCarthy period, as it became known in history, began long before Joseph McCarthy's active involvement in it. The "First Red Scare", which was sparked by the emergence force of communism and the widespread social unrest brought on by union organizing in the United States, was one of the factors that contributed to McCarthyism's rise.¹⁸⁹ The Communist Party of the United States grew throughout the 1930s, reaching a peak of about 70,000 members in the years 1940-1941, in part due to

¹⁸⁵ Lichtman R., *The Supreme Court and McCarthy-Era Repression: One Hundred Decisions*, UI Press, 2019.

¹⁸⁶ Fried A., *McCarthyism, The Great American Red Scare: A Documentary History*, Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 205, 207.

¹⁸⁷ For example: California's "Levering Oath" law, declared unconstitutional in 1967.

¹⁸⁸ Schrecker E., *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*, Little, Brown & Company, 1998, p. 65.

¹⁸⁹ Lichtman R., *The Supreme Court and McCarthy-Era Repression: One Hundred Decisions*, May 12, 2019.

its success in forming labor unions, its early opposition to fascism, and its ability to provide a viable alternative to capitalism's problems during the Great Depression.¹⁹⁰

The following key events that occurred in 1949 and 1950 dramatically increased the American opinion on the communist threat: In 1949, the Soviet Union performed an atomic bomb test earlier than many observers had predicted, raising the stakes of the Cold War.¹⁹¹ Mainland China was also taken over by Mao Zedong's communist army in the same year, despite substantial financial backing from the United States for the Kuomintang's opposition. The Korean War, which pitted American, United Nations, and South Korean forces against communists from North Korea and China, started in 1950.¹⁹²

The emergence of McCarthyism was also aided by major internal factors. Conservative American politicians have long attacked progressive initiatives like women's suffrage and child labor regulations as "communist" or "Red conspiracies" to stoke opposition. When criticizing President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal initiatives during the 1930s and the Great Depression, Conservatives referred to them with similar words.¹⁹³ Many conservatives associated the New Deal with socialism or communism and believed the programs were proof of excessive communist influence by Roosevelt administration decision-makers. Anti-communist politicians' rhetoric generally focused more on the hazily defined threat of "Communist influence" than it did on espionage or any other particular conduct.¹⁹⁴

McWilliams and McCarthyism

The Witch Hunt of 1950 was an early attempt to combat McCarthyism, which McWilliams viewed as a severe threat to civil liberties and a just democratic order. Despite not being a member of the Communist Party, he constantly came under anti-

¹⁹⁰ Weir R., *Class in America: An Encyclopedia*, Greenwood Press, 2007, pp. 148-149.

¹⁹¹ Peffley M., "Intolerance of Communists during the McCarthy Era: A General Model", *The Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 43, n. 1, 1990, pp. 93-95, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/448507>.

¹⁹² Stueck W., *Rethinking the Korean War: A New Diplomatic and Strategic History*, Princeton University Press, 2002, p. 71.

¹⁹³ Fried R., *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective*, Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 41.

¹⁹⁴ Storrs L., *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left*, Princeton University Press, 2012, p. 210.

communist attacks. Even though McWilliams was employed by the state government when he appeared before the California Committee on Un-American Activities in the 1940s, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover added him to the Custodial Detention List, making him a potential detainee in the event of a national emergency.¹⁹⁵

The US economy, which at that time was perceived as increasingly monopolistic and authoritarian, was making people feel very uncomfortable and terrified, as McWilliams demonstrates in his book *Witch Hunt*. The resulting societal conflicts posed a danger to the powerful, affluent, and dominant classes in society who, in response, whether consciously or subconsciously, wanted total political and economic uniformity.¹⁹⁶ The most obvious status quo challengers were stigmatized and punished using loyalty investigations. Fear of losing their job or their social status compelled larger groups of citizens who might otherwise be motivated to criticize, especially college professors, to acquiesce and even participate in the witch hunt.

The author is aware that while international tension influences this concentration, it is not the storm's genuine source because communist aggression has already harmed nations in Eastern Europe and continues to loom over Central Europe, Greece, and Korea. The actual problem at its root is economic maladjustment, which threatens societal instability in the US.¹⁹⁷

In this climate of terror for an imminent red advance of the American Communist Party, among the most affected with whom the lawyer McWilliams collaborated was the "Hollywood Ten", during the years of the Hollywood blacklist.

The Hollywood blacklist was a blockade for the entertainment industry that included many areas of the media that were spread across the United States in the middle of the 20th century at the start of the Cold War. The blacklist involved the practice of refusing employment to individuals in the entertainment business who were allegedly Communists or their sympathizers in the past or present.¹⁹⁸ The studios forbade the employment of Americans in the entertainment sector, including actors, screenwriters,

¹⁹⁵ Richardson P., *American Prophet - The Life and Work of Carey McWilliams*, p. 130.

¹⁹⁶ Horn R., "Review of *Witch Hunt: The Revival of Heresy* by Carey McWilliams", *University of Chicago Law Review*, Vol. 18, Art. 21, 1951, pp. 145-151.

¹⁹⁷ Horn R., "Review of *Witch Hunt*", pp. 145-151.

¹⁹⁸ Pollard T., *Sex and Violence: The Hollywood Censorship Wars*, Routledge, 2015, p. 95.

directors, musicians, etc. This was usually done in light of their alleged affiliation with, sympathy with, or activity in the Communist Party USA as well as their refusal to participate in Congressional investigations into the party's operations. The blacklist was rarely made public or simple to verify, even when it was strictly enforced, from the late 1940s to the late 1950s. This was because it was the outcome of multiple studio choices and not a result of formal legal action. However, it swiftly and directly hurt or ended the careers and income of numerous people employed in the film industry.¹⁹⁹

During the early Cold War, the House Un-American Activities Committee was tasked with looking into claims of communist influence and subversion in the U.S. The Hollywood film industry was rapidly the focus of the committee's attention since it was thought to be a hub for communist activity. This reputation extends back to the 1930s when Marxist groups became increasingly enticing to struggling actors and studio workers as a result of the Great Depression's economic struggles.²⁰⁰ Anti-communist politicians started to be concerned that the film industry might be exploited as a vehicle for subversive propaganda as the Cold War got underway. Even if famous Hollywood films from the 1930s and 1940s did not offer much evidence of a mostly Socialist intent, the investigation continued. On suspicion of having communist sympathies or engaging in subversive operations, HUAC subpoenaed more than 40 individuals with ties to the film business in October 1947.²⁰¹

The majority of the witnesses either requested forbearance by cooperating with investigators or invoked their Fifth Amendment privilege against self-incrimination because they were aware that their answers could harm their reputations and livelihoods during the inquiry sessions when members of HUAC questioned the witnesses about their past and present affiliations with the Communist Party. On the other hand, a group of 10 Hollywood screenwriters and directors took a different approach and explicitly contested the validity of the committee's findings.²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ Pollard T., *Sex and Violence*, p. 97.

²⁰⁰ Schwartz R., "How the Film and Television Blacklists Worked", *Film & History Annual*, Florida International University Press, 1999, last retrieved November 21, 2022, <https://comptalk.fiu.edu/blacklist.htm>.

²⁰¹ Bernard G., *Hollywood Exile, or How I Learned to Love the Blacklist*, University of Texas Press, 1999, p. 9.

²⁰² Ceplair L., *Anti-Communism in Twentieth Century America: A Critical History*, Praeger, 2011, p. 77.

Alvah Bessie, Herbert Biberman, Ring Lardner Jr, Lester Cole, Edward Dmytryk., John Howard Lawson, Albert Maltz, Samuel Ornitz, Dalton Trumbo, and Robert Adrian Scott were among the ten people who refused to submit to HUAC investigations.²⁰³ These men - later known as the “Hollywood Ten” - refused to help with the inquiry and blasted the HUAC anti-communist proceedings as a clear violation of their civil rights because the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution gave them the right to associate with any political party they chose, coming to compare such treatment with that of the oppressive investigations of Nazi Germany.²⁰⁴

The Hollywood Ten suffered severe consequences for their conduct during the hearings. Each defendant who was prosecuted on this accusation in April 1948 and found responsible for disobeying Congress in November 1947 was sentenced to one year in jail and a fine. They attempted to have the verdicts overturned without any success, and their sentences started in 1950. Edward Dmytryk, one of the members, made the decision to cooperate with the law enforcement when he was detained.²⁰⁵ He testified in 1951 and provided a list of more than 20 business associates he believed to be communists. Writing an amicus brief²⁰⁶ for the Supreme Court on behalf of John Howard Lawson and Dalton Trumbo, Carey McWilliams became engaged in this case by asserting that there was a witch-hunt mentality permeating American culture at the time, substantiating the argument made in his self-titled book. The Court ultimately decided not to consider their appeal.²⁰⁷

The Nation

With the publication of *Witch Hunt* in 1950, Carey McWilliams’s literary production comes to a halt. In fact, in 1951, McWilliams moved to New York where he began

²⁰³ Lewis J., “‘We Do Not Ask You to Condone This’: How the Blacklist Saved Hollywood”, *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 39, n. 2, 2000, pp. 3–30, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1225550>.

²⁰⁴ Kahn G., *Hollywood on Trial: The Story of the 10 Who Were Indicted*, Boni & Gaer, 1948, pp. 69-71.

²⁰⁵ “The case of Edward Dmytryk”, *Los Angeles Times*, April 27, 1951.

²⁰⁶ A person or group that is not a party to a lawsuit but is allowed to assist a court by providing knowledge, insight, or information that is relevant to the case’s concerns is known as an *amicus curiae*.

²⁰⁷ Lewis J., “‘We Do Not Ask You to Condone This’: How the Blacklist Saved Hollywood”, pp. 3-30, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1225550>.

working for *The Nation*, under the guidance of Freda Kirchwey, then taking on the role from 1955 to 1975.²⁰⁸

The liberal American newspaper *The Nation* publishes news, commentary, and analysis on politics and society twice a week. *The Liberator*, a newspaper that opposed slavery, stopped publishing in 1865 when the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution (abolishing slavery) was enacted, being replaced on July 6, 1865, by *The Nation*. The journal then moved on to a bigger subject with Wendell Phillips Garrison, son of William Lloyd and new literary editor of the magazine, who made significant contributions.²⁰⁹

Freda Kirchwey, editor of *The Nation* from 1933 to 1955, the year in which she passed the baton to McWilliams, began a total renewal of the newspaper in favor of anti-fascist, pro-Soviet, and anti-anti-communist liberal causes.²¹⁰ As an editor, Kirchwey was a fervent advocate of Roosevelt's New Deal; she eventually broke with Villard, the previous editor of the journal, to back Roosevelt's involvement in World War II. She supported the creation of a Jewish state on its own and was a steadfast friend of the anti-Franco faction throughout the Spanish Civil War.²¹¹ Her hostility to fascism in general and Nazism, in particular, led to a strong belief in the importance of close connections to the Soviet Union. In any case, the Soviet invasion of Finland was still denounced by Kirchwey, who said: "The atrocities that fascism wreaked in Spain are being reproduced, in the guise of peace and socialism, in Finland".²¹² On the home front, she was a harsh critic of the House Un-American Activities Committee and the rise of McCarthyism in America, branding Martin Dies Jr., the committee's chairman from 1938 to 1944, as a "one-man Gestapo from Texas".²¹³

After McWilliams took over in 1955, Kirchwey's editorial stance was maintained, but it was not without difficulties: in the 1950s, *The Nation* was criticized for being "pro-

²⁰⁸ Svoboda S., *Women's Rights in the United States: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia of Issues, Events, and People*, ABC-CLIO, 2014, p. 140.

²⁰⁹ Vaughn S., *Encyclopedia of American Journalism*, Routledge, 2007, p. 200.

²¹⁰ Vaughn S., *Encyclopedia of American Journalism*, pp. 317-318.

²¹¹ Svoboda S., *Women's Rights in the United States*, pp. 133-134.

²¹² Guttenplan D., *American Radical: The Life and Times of I. F. Stone*, Northwestern University Press, 2012, p. 154.

²¹³ Vaughn S., *Encyclopedia of American Journalism*, pp. 317-318.

communist” since it advocated detente with the Soviet Union, urged the US and URSS to cooperate in international affairs, and denounced McCarthyism.²¹⁴ Louis Fischer, one of the magazine’s writers, left subsequently, complaining that *The Nation’s* international coverage was excessively pro-Soviet, moving to the anti-communist liberal magazine *The Progressive*. Diana Trilling stated that, despite this, the rules of the newspaper did let anti-Soviet writers, like herself, submit articles critical of Russia to the magazine’s arts section.²¹⁵ McWilliams inherited also a newspaper that was prohibited from various school libraries in New York City and Newark during McCarthyism, and Ruth Brown, a librarian in Bartlesville in Oklahoma, lost her job after a citizens’ committee claimed she had given *The Nation* shelf space.²¹⁶

McWilliams abandoned the field of authoring and transitioned into print journalism when he traveled across the continent to take on “temporary” responsibilities in the financially precarious *The Nation*. Although the requirements and obligations were unfamiliar to him, the challenges were interesting.²¹⁷ Even though he had been sporadically submitting articles to *The Nation* for years, he had been residing on the West Coast, away from the circle of regular authors to the magazine. Now McWilliams expanded his interests to embrace the major topics the journal covered as a result of his daily interactions with this group of intellectuals and his need to keep *The Nation* on the course. During those years, McWilliams’s writing also changed: instead of researching to satisfy his curiosity, he now produced essays that satiated the requirements of the country.²¹⁸ He selected articles for every topic as an editor and regularly opted to release special issues that were entirely devoted to a certain theme. When his background fit the standards of the journal, he also proceeded to publish articles on his own.

McWilliams, on the other hand, was preoccupied with the various obligations that came with running a weekly newspaper. In fact, in his twenty years as an editor, he never had the opportunity to do the exhaustive research required to write even one book.

²¹⁴ Alpern S., *Freda Kirchwey, a Woman of the Nation*, Harvard University Press, 1987, p. 162.

²¹⁵ Amis M., *The Moronic Inferno and Other Visits to America*, Jonathan Cape, 1986. pp. 63-64.

²¹⁶ Cate D., *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*, Secker and Warburg Publishers, 1978, p. 454.

²¹⁷ Culhane J., *Carey McWilliams: A Man of Ideas and Words*, University of New Mexico Press, 2001, p. 275.

²¹⁸ Culhane J., *Carey McWilliams: A Man of Ideas and Words*, p. 275.

McWilliams believed that the responsibilities of the author and editor were irreconcilable.²¹⁹

McWilliams achieved a degree of renown as editor of *The Nation* which allowed him to begin lecturing. His prior studies for his books provided him with concepts that broadened his selection of conversational subjects and enhanced his talks. Although he regularly discussed political subjects as well, the majority of his lectures were devoted to concerns like civil liberties, racial and ethnic prejudice, and discrimination. McWilliams was comfortable playing the rebel and radical, and he never hesitated to speak his mind even when he knew that the audience would not agree with him.²²⁰

When McWilliams reached his sixties, he put a stop to his editorial career. Following his departure from *The Nation*, he began organizing his papers, penning his memoirs, and occasionally teaching college students. By the late 1970s, he was battling cancer. He passed away in New York on June 27, 1980, but McWilliams, who was a very discrete person, kept this final chapter of his life a secret.²²¹

Final Remarks

Through this chapter I intended to delineate the work of Carey McWilliams, passing through the rebellious years of the 1920s, which associated him with legendary figures such as Francis Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway. For McWilliams, the Roaring Twenties were a very formative period, which shaped the basis of his radical thinking. Between 1930 and 1950 then there was his intense literary production, strongly dedicated to his beloved California and to the denunciation of the social and racial disparities that occurred during that era.

With the publication of his latest book, *Witch Hunt*, in 1950, McWilliams made a big change in his life: from the West he pushed to the East, crossing the Rubicon and moving to New York, where he worked for *The Nation* newspaper. He made a significant literary

²¹⁹ McWilliams C., *The Education of Carey McWilliams*, p. 230.

²²⁰ Culhane J., *Carey McWilliams: A Man of Ideas and Words*, p. 5.

²²¹ Culhane J., *Carey McWilliams: A Man of Ideas and Words*, p. 5.

change at this point because he could not write exclusively about subjects and themes that suited him personally. Instead, he had to focus on a newspaper that was going through a crisis, with all of its columns, news, and dynamics that covered a wide range of subjects and themes.

In the contemporary period of American history, Carey McWilliams had a significant role. He lived through eighty years of the 20th century, a period in which the USA gained a major role in the international scenario, being a witness of the events that defined the century. Those events were not, however, observed in quiet by McWilliams: he spoke about them all and did not hold back from expressing his disapproval when appropriate.²²² And with time, many of his ideas—which were considered radical when he first articulated them—have become more widely accepted. Because the issues to which he devoted the majority of his time—the civil rights of minorities, individual freedoms for all, and social justice on a local, national, and worldwide scale—remain essential today, his views are still relevant, making Carey McWilliams an American forefather of the struggle for social justice.

²²² McWilliams C., *The Education of Carey McWilliams*, p. 320.

CONCLUSION

After the First World War, the United States went through a relatively prosperous time that culminated in the 1920s, often known as the “Roaring 20s”. The American economy was booming and society was alive and energetic, but the US was completely unaware of the storm that was about to develop. In fact, the crisis of 1929 caused the nation’s profile to shift unavoidably. Fears and uncertainties spread; there were significant migration flows of individuals looking for better living conditions, strikes, and violent labor disputes.

With this study, I intended to analyze the socio-political climate of the 1920s and 1930s by concentrating on the American southwest, studying the radicalisms that emerged after the 1929 financial crisis. I did that by focusing one chapter on the figure of Upton Sinclair and another on Carey McWilliams. They both served as striking examples of the political militancy that was occurring in California in those years, although different methods and objectives. The first was in fact a respected bestsellers writer; the second established himself as a lawyer and journalistic publisher, but both of them were united by the socialist ideals.

With a focus on the major events that occurred in those 20 years, from the great innovations of the 1920s to the Dust Bowl to the great waves of strikes and the very first brave efforts to establish a national pension plan, in the first chapter I attempted to establish the background necessary to further the two study figures in the following ones. Thus, this section served as an introduction and general part that describes the economic, social, and political landscape of the United States following World War I.

Then came my research into the life of Upton Sinclair, a famous author from Baltimore best known for his novel *The Jungle*, in which he exposed the appalling working and health conditions in American slaughterhouses. This set off a chain of events that resulted in the passing of the Pure Food and Drug Act, a set of laws meant to protect the quality of American food. Known for *The Jungle* in particular, he produced more than 80 volumes over his lifetime, including novels, essays, and political pamphlets. Although he spent practically his entire life writing, he found his calling in politics for two years. He

ran for governor of California in 1934 but lost in a murky and corrupt election, an event that I went into detail in the second chapter of the thesis.

The third and last chapter centered on Carey McWilliams, an American author, publisher, and lawyer who is best known for his writings on Californian politics and culture, including the treatment of migrant agricultural workers and the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. From 1955 to 1975, McWilliams also served as editor of *The Nation* magazine. The Great Depression and the emergence of fascism in Europe in the 1930s radicalized McWilliams, who started collaborating with left-leaning political and legal groups like the National Lawyers Guild and the American Civil Liberties Union.

McCarthyism, the practice of accusing people of subversion and treason, especially when it came to communism and socialism, was something that McWilliams saw as a serious threat to civil liberties and a bad policy. He made his first attempt to combat it with one of his major productions, *Witch Hunt* of 1950. Although he was never a member of the Communist Party, he was frequently a victim of anti-Communist attacks, and through this thesis, I detailed and evaluated the various ways that his involvement took shape.

Considering works as *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Labor in California* of 1939 and *California: The Great Exception* of ten years later, McWilliams wrote novels that continue to be extremely relevant and important for understanding the context in which he worked and the California that was created as a result of these struggles. These novels detailed the semi-hidden world of migrant agricultural workers in California's large estates, a subculture permeated with low wages and massive exploitation.

My objective was to analyze in-depth the causes and effects of these radicalized movements in this specific geographical area, from the 1920s to the 1940s, while presenting a general socio-political framework of this diverse society through the study of Sinclair's novels and McWilliams's operate.

The result is a picture of Californian history full of events and great personalities that forever changed the face of the state, whose echo of events reverberated throughout the United States, forever changing its social profile.

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