

The Footloose Labor System: Work and Migration in the Pacific Northwest, 1850–1940

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Between the 1850s and World War II, millions of workers participated in a system of continuous labor migration that drove the development of the Pacific Northwest. Western industries relied on short-term workers because of their seasonal and economic cycles. These industries were often located far from urban centers and thus relied on a highly mobile pool of North American, European, and Asian workers to turn the Northwest's abundant natural resources into wealth, an arrangement I call the footloose labor system. In order to manage workers' movement within and across United States borders, employers turned to immigrant labor contractors and employment agencies to bring order to this chaotic labor market. But those agencies did little to settle the high labor turnover, and instead, exerted increasing control over migrant workers. By the mid-twentieth century, white workers had largely risen out of the system, leaving migrant labor to Asian, and increasingly, Latinx workers who have come to represent "migrant workers" in today's America.

This dissertation argues that the presence of both hobos and Asian workers in the footloose labor system dynamically shaped the conditions of the labor market, and together, cemented a racialized migrant labor system in the Pacific Northwest that would come to be dominated by Latinx workers in the second half of the twentieth century. Placing labor migration—and the labor brokers who engineered the footloose labor system—at the center of the story shifts our perspective to see that hobos and Asian immigrant workers existed in the

same labor market dominated by employers who relied on footloose workers. From the point of Northwestern employers and labor brokers, migrant workers, whether they were born in Kansas, Greece, China, or the Philippines, proved useful only if they made a business profitable.

Employers continued to hire both white and Asian workers through labor brokers into the 1920s. But white migrant workers increasingly sought jobs outside of the footloose labor system as new technology in agriculture reduced the number of available jobs and post-World War I politics put a greater emphasis on homeownership and conformity. White workers' departure left the most precarious and exploitative jobs to Japanese, Filipinx and eventually Latinx workers. The footloose labor system always depended upon a highly mobile pool of workers who were kept on the fringes of society to do the difficult, cheapened, and necessary work of turning natural resources into wealth.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1925, seventeen-year-old Roy Martin climbed atop a mail train in Ray, North Dakota with \$350 in his pocket, and rode the train more than 800 miles west to Spokane, Washington. Martin, who was born and raised in Idaho, had just finished working the wheat harvest in North Dakota that summer and was determined to make it back to the Pacific Northwest to find work as a lumberjack. When he reached Spokane, Martin went to an “old lumberjack restaurant” where he met up with a waitress friend. She let him use the washroom to scrub off the coal soot from his journey. Martin waited about a week for the arrival of his friends who also worked in the wheat fields that summer. Once reunited, the young men spent a few days in the city to rest, reconnect, and find work. Many workers patronized the numerous employment agencies, or “employment sharks” as Martin called them, to pay for information leading to a job. Shortly after arriving in town, the young men were gone again, off to the logging camps nestled in Idaho’s panhandle.¹

Three years later, Ben Rinonos stepped foot in Seattle after sailing for more than a month on the *Empress of Canada* from the Philippines in 1928. Like Martin, Rinonos came to the city in search of work. Within a week, he found employment on a railroad. But less than a month later, Rinonos was back in Seattle and this time, he went to a labor broker to secure work and passage to the Alaskan salmon canneries. After a few months working in a cannery, Rinonos had once again sailed to Seattle, where he learned of work in Yakima, Washington picking hops, and

¹ Roy Martin, “Interview Two,” interviewed by Sam Schrager, July 30, 1976, Latah County, Idaho Oral History Collection, MG 415, Special Collections and Archives, University of Idaho Library, Moscow, Idaho, <https://www.lib.uidaho.edu/digital/lcoh/index.html>.

he was off again. In subsequent years, Rinonos spent his summers working in canneries, and the rest of the year on farms on Bainbridge Island, Washington or further south in California.²

This dissertation tells the story of the system of labor migration that facilitated the movement of millions of men like Martin and Rinonos. Although Martin and Rinonos came from different countries and ethnicities, they shared important similarities in the labor market. Both men migrated across hundreds of miles for jobs in different industries and their movement was not simply dictated by their own whims. Employment agents and labor brokers—the middlemen who located and managed workers for the region’s numerous extractive industries—were the central nodes in the network of their labor migrations.³ By World War II, however, white workers like Martin had largely left the system of migrant work behind. By tracing the development of the system of migrant labor in the Pacific Northwest, this project explains how a multiracial, though fragmented, migrant workforce gave way to one that was overwhelmingly Asian and eventually Latinx by the mid-twentieth century.

Between the 1850s and World War II, hundreds of millions of workers participated in this system of continuous labor migration that drove the development of the Pacific Northwest. Seasonal and economic boom-bust cycles made western industries—predominantly logging, milling, agriculture, canning, and construction—rely on short-term workers. These industries were often located far from urban centers and relied on a highly mobile pool of North American,

² Ben Rinonos, “Filipino Immigrant and Historical Facts about the Pinoy Pioneers on the West Coast,” interview by Theresa Cronin, March 27, 1975, Washington State Oral/Aural History Program interviews, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Libraries Archives & Special Collections, Western Washington University, Bellingham WA 98225-9123.

³ I use both terms, “labor broker” and “employment agency” to refer to the middlemen-businesses that contracted jobs between employers and workers. However, I use “labor broker” to refer to the immigrant brokers who worked primarily with co-ethnic immigrants, and “employment agency” for the businesses who worked primarily with English-speaking white workers (without regard for immigration status). It is very difficult to know the immigration status of those who patronized employment agencies, unless in rare cases the agent made explicit mention of the worker’s background. I differentiate these two terms only because people at the time did so.

European, and Asian workers to turn the Northwest's abundant natural resources into wealth.⁴ Each winter, thousands of unemployed workers left remote work camps and flocked to Northwestern cities. Seattle in particular served as the hub for unemployed footloose workers. Many men chose to wait out the slow season in the city until the following spring when managers of farms, mills, logging outfits, construction projects, and canneries began to look for workers. These footloose workers left Seattle each spring to complete their annual labor circuits. Some, like Rinonos, sailed north of the city to canneries in Washington or Alaska to pack salmon throughout the summer. They returned to Seattle where they contracted with a broker to pick hops in Yakima in September. Others, like Martin, worked the wheat fields of the Great Plains each summer, and returned to the Northwest where they could find employment as lumberjacks or mill workers.

In addition to seasonal cycles, dirty and dangerous working conditions contributed to high rates of labor turnover. Since many of the jobs available were already short-term, workers were more likely to leave than try to reform or organize their workplaces for better conditions. Together, these factors created high rates of unemployment, and a concomitant pool of migrant labor. To bring order to this chaotic labor market, employers turned to employment agents and labor brokers who promised to find, filter, and supply employers with workers. But agents and brokers did little to settle workers' movement, and instead, exerted growing control over migrant workers. The three-way relationship between employers, middlemen brokers, and workers began

⁴ Following historian Carlos Schwantes, I define the Pacific Northwest as Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. There are good arguments for the inclusion of British Columbia and even western Montana, but for the purpose of this study, I accept Schwantes' reasoning that this boundary "conforms reasonably well to the logic of geography, economics and history that together constitute common ground for places as different as metropolitan Seattle and the sparsely populated rangelands of eastern Oregon and central Idaho." Carlos Arnaldo Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest: An Interpretive History*, Revised edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 2.

as soon as white settlers came to the Pacific Northwest, and evolved into an arrangement I call the footloose labor system.⁵

Employers continued to hire white and Asian workers through employment agents and labor brokers into the 1930s. But white footloose workers increasingly took jobs outside of this mobile labor system as new technologies in agriculture reduced the number of available jobs and post-World War I politics put a greater emphasis on white homeownership and conformity. Filipino workers, because of their unique immigration status in the 1920s, took over as the go-to ethnic group for employers of migrant labor. White workers remained in the industries that no longer required migrant labor, while those that still relied on footloose workers—especially agriculture—became increasingly non-white. Thus, white workers departed the footloose labor system in the interwar period, leaving the most precarious and exploitative jobs to Filipino and eventually Latinx workers. The footloose labor system always depended upon a highly mobile pool of workers who were kept on the fringes of society to do the difficult, cheapened, and necessary work of turning natural resources into wealth, and it continued to do so after white workers left.

This dissertation examines how the footloose labor system developed, and in the process, how white workers eventually were able to leave migrant work behind. Despite the wealth of literature on labor and immigration in the American West, there has not been a study examining the larger labor system that spanned multiple industries and employed a diverse workforce in the Pacific Northwest. Labor and western historians have examined the history of hobos, tramps, and bums in the American West to illuminate the colorful counterculture that hobos called “hobohemia.” These stories add depth to our understanding of the boxcar-riding, bundle-carrying

⁵ I take the term “footloose labor” from Jan Breman’s 1996 work on migrant labor in twentieth-century India (Jan Breman, *Footloose Labour: Working in India’s Informal Economy* (Cambridge University Press, 1996)).

tramp who often comes to mind when one thinks of hobos in the late-nineteenth-century American West. Western historians have studied single industries—especially logging, canning, and agriculture—but have not fully captured the connections between them, or the system of labor contracting that emerged to shuffle workers between these different workspaces. Gunther Peck’s 2000 book, *Reinventing Free Labor*, provides an important correction to single-industry or single-ethnic group studies. Peck critiques labor and social histories for focusing on individual ethnic groups and industries, and instead looks across both to reveal the system of immigrant labor contracting in the West. My project builds on the work of Peck by showing that native-born and Asian-immigrant workers also participated in this labor system, and explains why white workers were able to leave it behind.

Labor historians have also detailed hobos’ contributions to western labor radicalism through the creation of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and their opposition to the abusive employment sharks who charged fees for job information. These scholars conclude that the end of footloose labor in the West occurred with the introduction of gas-powered tractors and affordable automobiles in the 1920s. This is only true if one ignores the history of Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino footloose workers in the West.⁶ My study takes a longer view of this process, demonstrating that a multi-racial system of labor brokering in the Pacific Northwest first began in the 1850s when Americans colonized the region. It continued until World War II.

⁶ Todd Depastino, *Citizen Hobo: How A Century of Homelessness Shaped America* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2003), <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/C/bo3631480.html>; Greg Hall, *Harvest Wobblies: The Industrial Workers of the World and Agricultural Laborers in the American West, 1905-1930*, (Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University Press, 2001); Frank Tobias Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts: Hobo Workers and Community in the American Midwest, 1880-1930*, First Edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Evelyne Stitt Pickett, “Hoboes across the Border: A Comparison of Itinerant Cross-Border Laborers between Montana and Western Canada,” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 49, no. 1 (1999): 18–31; Robert E. Walls and Dora Zimpel, “Lady Loggers and Gyppo Wives: Women and Northwest Logging,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 103, no. 3 (2002): 362–82;

Immigration historians have similarly examined the lives of immigrant workers in the American West, and convincingly demonstrated that during the same period, Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino workers took on the dangerous, undesirable seasonally contracted jobs that white workers refused to do. Asian immigrants often found employment through co-ethnic labor brokers, and experienced violence and racism from both white workers and an increasingly restrictive and punitive immigration regime.⁷ However, immigration historians focus on those migrants who crossed international boundaries. Understandably, they seldom incorporate the history of native-born migrant laborers who found work in the same footloose labor system as Asian and European immigrant workers. Although native-born workers did not cross international boundaries, they participated in internal migrations that rendered them outsiders (yet not foreign) in many of the communities in which they worked. Kornel Chang's work provides one exception to this trend. In his 2012 book, *Pacific Connections*, Chang explored how white IWW members and South Asian radicals attempted to make common cause in the early twentieth-century Pacific Northwest. Chang's work provides an important gender analysis of a rare case of interracial solidarity in the Pacific Northwest, but there is more to be revealed by examining the coexistence of white and Asian workers in the same footloose labor system.

Individually, these fields of history offer important insights into the experiences of particular groups of workers. They also share many common themes, including labor migrations,

⁷ Beth Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go: Violence, Exclusion, and the Making of the Alien in America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018); Kornel S. Chang, *Pacific Connections: The Making of the Western U.S.-Canadian Borderlands*, American Crossroads (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Mae M. Ngai, "Chinese Gold Miners and the 'Chinese Question' in Nineteenth-Century California and Victoria," *Journal of American History* 101, no. 4 (March 1, 2015): 1082–1105, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jahist/jav112>; Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton University Press, 2014); Gunther Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Dorothy B. Fujita-Rony, *American Workers, Colonial Power: Philippine Seattle and the Transpacific West, 1919-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

economic exploitation, and a complex network of labor brokering. But kept separate, they reveal only fragmented pictures of the Northwestern labor market. The histories of hobos and Asian footloose workers did not simply develop on parallel tracks over time. Instead, this dissertation argues that the presence of both white and Asian workers in the footloose labor system dynamically shaped the conditions of the labor market, and together, cemented a racialized migrant labor system in the Pacific Northwest that would come to be dominated by Latinx workers in the second half of the twentieth century. Placing labor migration—and the employment agents and labor brokers who engineered the footloose labor system—at the center of the story offers a new lens through which to understand the larger system of labor migration that dominated the lives of both native-born and immigrant workers. I do not argue that these workers shared a monolithic experience, nor do I ignore the importance racism and violence played in shaping the lives of Asian workers. Acknowledging these important differences, this project demonstrates that footloose workers shared a similar function in the economy. From the point of view of Northwestern employers and labor brokers, migrant workers, whether they were born in the United States, Greece, China, or the Philippines, proved useful only if they made a business profitable.

Carlos Schwantes's framework of "The Wagerworkers' Frontier," which he outlined in his 1987 article, "The Concept of the Wagerworkers' Frontier," underpins this project. Schwantes called on scholars to study the class of migrant wagherworkers that circulated throughout the American West in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. He noted that historians had "long accorded unskilled and semiskilled laborers a significant role in the early industrial development of the American West," but that they had focused on specific industries, regions, or ethnicities. Schwantes's approach is an important breakthrough, and offers a way forward for

more insights. He suggested that historians employ a systematic approach to understanding the “class of western labor as a distinct group” who had a “range of experiences that cut across occupational and national boundaries” and contributed to the West’s industrial development, but does not include transpacific migrants into his framework.⁸ This study builds on Schwantes’s work in two ways. First, it includes Asian immigrants in its analysis of the footloose labor system and recognizes that their labor migration shared important similarities to the native-born and European immigrant wage workers whom Schwantes highlighted. Second, this project places employment agencies and labor brokers as the center of the narrative to demonstrate how the footloose system operated. More than describing the experiences of footloose workers in the Pacific Northwest, this dissertation explores the creation of the economic and social structures that footloose workers found themselves within.

While this study is about footloose laborers in the Pacific Northwest, it is also about the system that developed to manage and control that labor. Accordingly, I rely on a number of business records to uncover the workings of the footloose labor system. Chief among these are the papers of Edwin G. Ames, the mill manager of one of the Northwest’s oldest sawmills, the Puget Mill Company. Ames’s tenure at the Puget Mill Company spanned the height of the footloose labor system, and offers an inside look at how one of the region’s most important employers dealt with the problem of managing footloose labor. Employment agents and labor brokers left behind few written documents, but preserved in the Ames papers are dozens of letters and advertisements from employment agents that bring the footloose labor system to life. In addition to business records, government reports like those created by state Bureaus of Labor and the 1916 United States Commission on Industrial Relations revealed how state actors

⁸ Carlos A. Schwantes, “The Concept of the Wageworkers’ Frontier: A Framework for Future Research,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (1987): 39, <https://doi.org/10.2307/968927>.

conceptualized the problem of labor turnover and attempted to wrest control of the footloose labor system from private employment agents and immigrant labor brokers. Finally, newspapers such as the *Seattle Times* and the *Industrial Worker* provide insights into how average citizens and workers communicated about the footloose labor system.

This project is organized chronologically, tracing the rise and fall of the footloose labor system from the 1850s until World War II. Each chapter moves between industries and groups of workers to examine the different periods in the development of the footloose labor system. Creating a coherent story about a system that encompassed many industries and groups of people proved difficult, so the story of the Puget Mill Company weaves through each chapter to provide this study with its narrative thread.

Chapter One examines American settlement of the Pacific Northwest. When American settlers arrived in the Pacific Northwest, they did so to build an extractive economy. They were amazed by the region's millions of acres of forest, abundant salmon runs, and its temperate climate. But owners of the early lumber mills, farms, and canneries demanded workers, and at first turned to the Indigenous peoples of the Northwest. Indigenous peoples already established seasonal labor migrations, combined with the seasonal nature of the Northwest's new industries, created an economy reliant on seasonal workers. Additionally, the Northwest's economic dependence on external markets—located in San Francisco, Asia, and eventually the eastern United States—meant that it could not as easily cushion the fluctuations of the nineteenth-century capitalist economy. After some initial experimentation with labor recruitment strategies, employers turned to a number of Chinese labor brokers to quell the chronic labor shortages.

Chapter Two begins by detailing the violent backlash those new Chinese immigrants experienced at the hands of white workers in the Northwest. Unable to see Chinese contract

workers as victims of the same footloose labor system in which they worked, white workers used violence and political pressure to expel Chinese workers from the country. They were not completely successful, however, and Chinese workers remained in the Northwest, although in reduced numbers. As the economy expanded in the Northwest, and with fewer Chinese workers to take on seasonal work, the number of private employment agencies grew to keep up with employers' demand for more workers. Rather than taming the increasingly unstable labor market, however, both private employment agencies and labor brokers exerted increasing control over the footloose labor system. Employment agents and labor brokers exacted expensive fees, misled workers about job opportunities, and even trapped workers in debt to keep them coming back each season. The chapter demonstrates the diversity of workers and industries in the footloose labor system, and the growing influence of employment agents and labor brokers in controlling that system. As businesses continued to grow, they turned to new groups of immigrants to work in the mills, fields, and canneries. By the early nineteenth century, employment agents and labor brokers had firmly cemented their place in the footloose labor system.

Chapter Three reveals the growing backlash against employment agencies and labor brokers. Individual workers, unions, and city-run public offices all attempted to wrest control away from private agents and brokers. Workers used violence, the IWW protested employment agents and offered their own job information service, and cities throughout the Northwest began opening up public, fee-free employment offices. Residents of Washington state temporarily banned all employment agencies from charging job fees to workers, but a 1917 Supreme Court decision overturned the ban. With mixed success, people in the Northwest began to regulate the footloose labor system.

Chapter Four argues that through a carrot-and-stick approach, state and federal governments created a more settled society in the Pacific Northwest. Strikes in the timber industry during World War I led the federal government to clean up the filthy logging camps that had plagued footloose workers for a half-century. These improvements helped to reduce labor turnover in the logging industry. Wartime manufacturing in the shipbuilding industry also created more stable employment through constant, rather than seasonal, production. Local governments, motivated by fears of labor radicalism, created homeownership programs that directly targeted the region's white footloose workers. When footloose workers struck for higher wages and better working conditions, vigilantes used violence and deportation to rid the Northwest of those they deemed subversive. Through both improvements in the lives of some workers and violence and deportation against others, local and federal governments used the wartime as an opportunity to begin ridding the Northwest of footloose workers.

Chapter Five concludes the study by demonstrating how the number of footloose workers declined after the first World War. New and affordable technology and the professionalization of employment managers transformed the footloose labor system. Gas-powered tractors drastically reduced the number of jobs in wheat farming while automobiles revolutionized how workers found employment. No longer dependent on agents and brokers to locate work, men, increasingly accompanied by their wives and children, simply drove to different job sites in search of work. In the 1930s, cannery workers unionized and successfully eliminated labor brokers in that industry. With tighter immigration restrictions after the 1924 Immigration and Naturalization Act, the number of labor brokers declined throughout the Pacific Northwest. During the interwar period, employment agents professionalized with new manuals and classes.

Employers created in-house employment departments and moved away from hiring workers through third-party agencies.

By the time the United States entered World War II, the footloose labor system in the Pacific Northwest had largely faded away. New wartime industries like ship and airplane manufacturing shifted the labor market from being dependent upon seasonal employment in extractive industries to instead fueling the military industrial complex. Although the footloose labor system no longer drove the Northwestern economy, it had left its mark. The creation of wealth in the Pacific Northwest would not have been possible without the millions of native-born and immigrant footloose workers who felled trees, milled lumber, picked hops and fruit, harvested wheat, canned fish, and built railroads.

CHAPTER ONE

The Beginning of the Footloose Labor System

In September 1851, a party of four Americans left the small settlement of Olympia, Oregon Territory, and sailed sixty miles north on the Puget Sound to a place that would become known as Elliot Bay. David Denny and his two fellow passengers had migrated west along the Oregon Trail that summer, and sought sites on which to settle. The men left behind their families, who had fallen ill, in Portland, Oregon Territory. The boat's captain, a former whaler from Vermont named Robert C. Fay, used the voyage as a chance to scout for his own business opportunity—salmon exports to rapidly growing American settlements in California. With the California Gold Rush in full swing, more settlers arrived on the Pacific Coast every day.⁹

The party landed on a spit of land known to the Indigenous inhabitants, the Duwamish, as Prairie Point. Once landed, dozens of Indigenous people and their leader, Chief Seeathl (also known as Seattle or Sealth), met the party. Seeathl and Fay had already established a business relationship prior to the party's landing, and the chief brought workers that he had promised for Fay's new business. These Indigenous fishing crews caught and preserved between fifteen and twenty barrels-worth of salmon that Fay sent to San Francisco that year.¹⁰ This exchange between businessman (Fay), broker (Seeathl), and workers (fishing crew) likely did not draw any unusual attention, as Indigenous people throughout the Puget Sound region had traded with Europeans and Americans for decades. But this kind of three-way relationship soon would become central to the colonization and economic development of the Pacific Northwest.

⁹Coll Thrush, *Native Seattle: Histories From the Crossing-Over Place*, Weyerhaeuser Environmental Book (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 2007), 28.

¹⁰ Thrush, 28; Frank Carlson, *Chief Sealth*, Bulletin of the University of Washington. Series 3, History Series No. 2 (Seattle: University of Washington, 1903), 26, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100324871>; Thomas Prosch, *A Chronological History of Seattle*, 1901, 24, 249, <https://cdm16118.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15015coll2/id/5209>; B. J. Cummings, *The River That Made Seattle: A Human and Natural History of the Duwamish* (University of Washington Press, 2020), 34.

Two months after David Denny's small party landed at Prairie Point, which they soon renamed Alki Point, his brother Arthur Denny and his family joined David. The Denny Party—as they came to be known—relocated across Elliot Bay and established a settlement which they called Seattle, after the Duwamish-Suquamish chief who helped Captain Fay find workers. Within a few decades, this site would grow into the Northwest's largest city and the place where one of the earliest examples of capitalist labor brokering in the Pacific Northwest can be found.

When American settlers arrived in the Pacific Northwest in the 1840s and 1850s, they quickly established an extractive economy that consisted of logging, milling, agriculture, fishing, and canning. Nascent businesses exported most of their products outside of the Northwest to California, Hawaii, Australia, South America, and Great Britain. In addition to finding external markets, businessmen also needed to locate enough workers who could turn local resources into capital—this would become an ongoing problem for Northwestern extractive industries until World War II. To remedy the lack of workers, businesses hired Indigenous men and women. But there were never enough. Some business owners tried labor recruitment schemes that enticed workers to leave their homes in the Northeast and Midwest regions of the United States, promising pay advances if they agreed to work for a year. Northwestern employers also turned to Chinese immigrants who had begun to migrate to North America during the 1849 California Gold Rush. To organize this unstable labor market, businesses began to contract with Chinese labor brokers who took on the work of locating and hiring workers for the region's employers. By the end of the 1870s, employers, labor brokers, and workers established a new world of labor, migration, and capital: the footloose labor system.

Vast Natural Resources

Newcomers to the Northwest marveled at the region's vast natural resources. Spanish, British, and American trappers and traders began to visit the Pacific Northwest in the late eighteenth century in search of valuable beaver and seal pelts. Fur trappers from the United States and Great Britain continued to trade in the Pacific Northwest in the first half of the nineteenth century before the two countries agreed upon territorial borders. The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), under charter from Great Britain to conduct trade in North America, established its northwestern outpost at Fort Vancouver on the northern bank of the Columbia River. During the first half of the nineteenth century, Fort Vancouver served as the region's main economic center and attracted a wide range of traders from the eastern United States and Canada, as well as from around the Pacific world, who traded in the region's natural resources, including skins, shells, and lumber. This early settlement, so reliant on the extraction of those natural resources and trade with foreign ports, presaged the economic relationship that the Northwest would develop over the next century. In addition to traders, Christian missionaries also began to push west into Oregon Country during the 1830s and 40s. In 1846, Great Britain and the United States signed the Oregon Treaty, by which the U.S. secured all territory in the Oregon Country up to the 49th parallel, except for Vancouver Island.¹¹

With its tallest peak, Mt. Rainier, standing at 14,411 feet, the Cascade Range serves as the natural barrier between the rainy and temperate western Northwest and the arid and more extreme eastern part of the region. The range runs south to north through northern California, Oregon, Washington, and into British Columbia. On the western side of the mountains is the Puget Sound—what the Duwamish called Big Water—a deep water inland sea that a receding

¹¹ Carlos Arnaldo Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest: An Interpretive History*, Revised edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 68, 72.

glacier carved out around 15,000 years ago.¹² In its wake, the glacier also left many bays, inlets, channels, islands, and peninsulas that make up more than 2,500 miles of shoreline in Washington state alone.¹³ Bounded to the west by the Pacific Ocean and to the east by the Cascade range were millions of acres of old-growth forests containing fir, cedar, hemlock, spruce, and maple trees that ranged all the way south to northern California. The landscape just east of the Cascade Range contrasts the temperate and dense forests of western Washington and Oregon—it is arid, flat, and dotted with sage brush. Once irrigation projects began in the late nineteenth century, central Washington became prime real estate for commercial farming. The Columbia River, which serves as a partial border between Oregon and Washington, experienced annual salmon runs between April and July that were so plentiful that one settler proclaimed: “There is probably no better quality of fish on the continent.”¹⁴ South of the Columbia River and west of the Cascade Range sits Oregon’s fertile Willamette Valley—the much sought-after land for the Oregon Trail migrants.

The mountains that separate the east from the west portions of the Northwest made travel between the two difficult until the rail lines pushed through the mountains in the late nineteenth century. Prior to the railroad, however, the wagon was the primary means of overland transportation—one that was made particularly difficult by the rugged terrain and dense, primeval forests west of the Cascades. Due to the difficulty of moving across the terrain, most towns and settlements west of the Cascades—both Indigenous and settler—dotted the shores of

¹² “Puget Sound and Coastal Geology | WA - DNR,” accessed December 30, 2022, <https://www.dnr.wa.gov/programs-and-services/geology/explore-popular-geology/puget-sound-and-coastal-geology#puget-sound-geology>.

¹³ “Puget Sound Nearshore,” Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife, accessed December 30, 2022, <https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/habitat-recovery/puget-sound/nearshore-program>.

¹⁴ Ezra Meeker, *Washington Territory West of the Cascade Mountains: Containing a Description of Puget Sound, and Rivers Emptying into It, the Lower Columbia, Shoalwater Bay, Gray’s Harbor; Timber, Lands, Climate, Fisheries, Ship Building, Coal Mines, Market Reports, Trade, Labor, Population, Wealth and Resources* (Olympia: Washington State Transcript Office, 1870), 21.

the Puget Sound and rivers. Canoes and ships were essential modes of transportation before the advent of the railroad and automobile. This remoteness led to the reliance on isolated work camps located far from cities and towns well into the twentieth century. Ezra Meeker, an early settler and promoter of the region wrote to an eastern audience in 1870 of the Northwest's economic potential. Attempting to allay any fears that the densely forested western region precluded development, he explained,

While the general surface, covered as it is mainly with dense forests of fir and cedar, seem uninviting to those just from a strictly agricultural region, with its broad prairies, yet the impartial eye cannot fail to detect the wealth that lies dormant in our soil, situated as it always will be, in the midst of a manufacturing and commercial people, taxing it to its utmost capacity for sustenance, and calling upon other and remote localities to supply the deficiency, anyways ensuring a highly remunerative market.¹⁵

This philosophy—that the settlers should reap as much wealth from the land as possible—underpinned the attitudes of the settlers who came in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The Northwest remained a trading outpost for Europeans and Americans until two major events in the mid-nineteenth century created the conditions for American colonization of the Pacific Northwest. The first was the transcontinental migration of American settlers to Oregon Country in the 1840s along the Oregon Trail. These settlers traveled west for a variety of reasons, but many undertook the difficult trek in order to acquire fertile farmland in Oregon's Willamette Valley. More than 50,000 migrants made this journey between 1840 and 1860, establishing the Oregon Trail as one important highway for westward travel in the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁶

James W. Marshall's discovery of gold along the American River on January 24, 1848 ushered in the California Gold Rush and marked the second major event that transformed the

¹⁵ Meeker, 10–11.

¹⁶ Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest*, 108, 100.

Pacific Northwest. News of his discovery spread across the globe, and by 1849, California experienced one of the greatest voluntary migrations in the history of the United States.¹⁷ Mostly men, these miners came from places throughout the Pacific world including Hawaii, China, Mexico, and Chile. Migrants also came from across the United States to try their luck at gold panning. While most migrants came for the economic opportunities presented by Marshall's discovery, not all turned to gold mining to strike it rich. Mining outfitters, lumber merchants, and shipping agents all emerged to take advantage of the influx of people to San Francisco who needed transportation, housing, and mining gear. When mining did not work out for those who hoped a gold strike would make them financially independent, they turned instead to wage labor or other business opportunities. The California Gold Rush brought employers and laborers to the Pacific coast. Both quickly turned their sights to the Pacific Northwest for their next opportunity.

Meanwhile, in Oregon Territory, American settlers pressured the federal government to pass legislation that would give them legal title to the land upon which they had already settled. In 1850, amidst the turmoil surrounding the addition of free and slave states to the Union, the United States Congress passed the Donation Land Claim Act. The act created a legal mechanism that transferred Oregon Country land into private hands, and served as the model for the Homestead Act, which Congress passed the following decade. The Donation Land Claim Act's provisions allowed white men over the age of 18 to claim 320 acres of land if they settled on it for four years. If a settler was married, his wife could claim an additional 320 acres in her name. By explicitly naming white Americans, white immigrants who had declared their intention to become citizens, and "American half-breed Indians" as the beneficiaries of its provisions, the

¹⁷ Christopher Herbert, *Gold Rush Manliness: Race and Gender on the Pacific Slope* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018), 4; Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *Days of Gold: The California Gold Rush and the American Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1.

law prohibited African Americans and Hawaiians—many of whom came to work for the Hudson’s Bay Company—from filing land claims, ensuring that white settlers secured control of the territory.¹⁸

Although the United States and Great Britain had settled the question of which nation would colonize Oregon Territory in 1846, the United States had still not yet signed treaties with the dozens of Indigenous tribes throughout the region.¹⁹ Thousands of migrants arrived in the Northwest in the middle of the nineteenth century, but like the settlers in other regions of North America in earlier periods, they did not come to an unpeopled land. Thousands of Indigenous people and hundreds of tribes called the vast region of the Pacific Northwest home. Early settlers soon built their economy on Indigenous people’s land and labor.

Important Industries and the Early Labor Market

Logging, lumber milling, hop-farming, fishing, and salmon canning became the Northwest’s principal industries in the mid-nineteenth century. For nearly three generations after American settlement, economic activities in the Northwest primarily relied on these extractive industries. These lucrative businesses depended upon outside capital and external markets. But such dependence on foreign markets and financing created a highly combustible economy. Businesses shipped the lumber, hops, and canned salmon that workers cut, picked, and packed in the Northwest to San Francisco, and to countries throughout the Pacific world, including Hawaii, China, Australia, Chile, and Great Britain. Both external markets and seasonal harvesting created a labor market that was prone to dramatic fluctuations, sometimes requiring a large number of

¹⁸ Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest*, 121.; "Chapter 76, 31 Congress, Session 1, An Act: To create the office of surveyor-general of the public lands in Oregon, and to provide for the survey, and to make donations to settlers of the said public lands.," U.S. Statutes at Large 9, no. Main Section (1850): 496-500.

¹⁹ Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest*, 121.

workers, and other times letting workers go after the season peaked or market conditions slumped. Hop-farming and salmon canning were seasonal industries that relied on short, intense bursts of harvesting activity, followed by periods of low-maintenance labor. Although dozens of new mills, farms, and canneries began to expand in the mid-nineteenth century, many employers had trouble securing enough workers to keep up with demand, and turned to Indigenous people to work in the forests, hop fields, and canneries. Coinciding with their already-established seasonal work patterns, Indigenous workers adapted to and shaped the settlers' rapidly growing extractive economy. In this way, settlers adopted seasonal Indigenous work patterns, not the other way around. Other workers from the United States, Hawaii, and China joined Indigenous workers as employers scrambled to find enough labor to make their businesses profitable.

Logging and Milling

Logging and milling quickly became the region's economic lifeblood. Sparked by the gold rush in California, more than two dozen mills had sprouted up in Oregon to ship lumber to the rapidly growing settlement at San Francisco, and one decade later, the same number of mills had been built north along the shores of the Puget Sound.²⁰ Although the mills along the Columbia River were closer to the San Francisco market, the deep waters of Puget Sound offered brigs, barks, and schooners superior routes in which to navigate. With its difficult-to-navigate sandbar, the Columbia River that separated Oregon from Washington Territory was notorious for being the "graveyard of ships." Mills, and their connected towns, sprang up throughout the Puget Sound region, at places settlers called Port Townsend, Discovery Bay, Teekalet (later Port

²⁰ Thomas R. Cox, *Mills and Markets: A History of the Pacific Coast Lumber Industry to 1900*, Emil and Kathleen Sick Lecture-Book Series in Western History and Biography (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974), 47, 56, 63; Richard C. Berner, "The Port Blakely Mill Company, 1876-89," *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (1966): 158; Robert E. Ficken, *The Forested Land: A History of Lumbering in Western Washington* (University of Washington Press, 1987), 20, 28.

Gamble), Port Madison, Port Blakely, Port Ludlow, Seabeck, Seattle, and Tacoma, among others.²¹

Of the dozens of mills that settlers erected in the decade following the California Gold Rush, the Puget Mill Company exemplifies the lumber market connection between San Francisco and the Pacific Northwest. In December 1849, Andrew Jackson Pope and Frederic Talbot of East Machias, Maine joined the thousands of migrants who arrived in San Francisco following the discovery of gold in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. But rather than seeking their fortune through gold mining, the two quickly realized that they could make more money selling lumber in the growing settlement of San Francisco. In December of 1849, the city's population had reached 20,000—more than triple its population that previous summer. Miners returning from the gold fields sought out lodgings, but San Francisco was in short supply of lumber to build dwellings. That winter, San Francisco was a mud-soaked shantytown, and many of the city's inhabitants spent the winter camped out in tents.²²

With experience in the lumber industry back home in Maine, Pope used his family connections to ship lumber from New England. While some lumber mills had been established in California at the time, there were not nearly enough lumber producers to meet the growing city's demand.²³ In March of 1850, several months after Andrew Pope and Frederic Talbot arrived in San Francisco, Frederic's brother, Captain William Talbot, arrived in the city with a cargo of lumber from Maine. During 1850, Pope and the Talbot brothers operated a lumber yard from

²¹ Cox, *Mills and Markets*, 56–62.

²² Edwin T. Coman Jr. and Helen M. Gibbs, *Time, Tide and Timber: A Century of Pope & Talbot* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1949), 23, 6.

²³ Cox, *Mills and Markets*, 47.

which they bought and sold lumber, and also ran a lighterage business, which transported goods from the larger sailing ships to the docks at San Francisco.²⁴

By December 1850, William Talbot replaced Frederic as Pope's business partner in their firm, Pope & Talbot. After two years of buying, selling, and shipping lumber from the Atlantic around Cape Horn to San Francisco, Pope and William Talbot decided to build their own mill closer to California. The two men partnered with Josiah P. Keller and Charles Foster, both of East Machias. However, the new mill was not to be located in California, but instead hundreds of miles north in the Pacific Northwest along the deeply forested shores of the Puget Sound. The four businessmen signed papers chartering their business in December 1852, and called it the Puget Mill Company.²⁵

Although the men knew that they wanted to establish a mill on the Puget Sound, they had yet to locate a specific site. Captain Talbot set sail from Maine aboard the *Julius Pringle* in 1853 to scout for a location. The ship carried materials to build the facility and Talbot was joined onboard by what would become the mill's first crew. Following Talbot, Josiah Keller left Boston in April 1853 aboard the *L.P. Foster* with the mill's machinery, not yet knowing where Talbot would establish the mill. After cruising the shores along the Puget Sound, Talbot decided on a site for the Puget Mill Company at the mouth of Gamble Bay, a place the Indigenous inhabitants, the S'Klallam, called Teekalet. Talbot deposited the mill crew and materials that summer to begin work on the mill site, and left for San Francisco, where he and Pope would continue to operate their lumberyard and the business side of the mill's operations. Only hours after he left

²⁴ Edwin T. Coman Jr. and Helen M. Gibbs, *Time, Tide and Timber: A Century of Pope & Talbot*, 27.

²⁵ Edwin T. Coman Jr. and Helen M. Gibbs, 47.

Teekalet, Talbot spotted Keller's ship, the *L.P. Foster*, and told Keller where he would find the new mill site and the crew.²⁶

The Puget Mill Company was immediately successful. The ten-man crew that arrived in Teekalet built a cookhouse, lodging house, and a store with the lumber they brought from Maine. They also constructed a forty-five foot by seventy-foot building to house the original mill. The first mill at Teekalet had the ability to cut between 7 thousand and 15 thousand board feet per day. Within its first year, the mill cut 3 million board feet, which the company shipped to its San Francisco lumberyard aboard the *L.P. Foster*.²⁷ When Pope and Talbot found it difficult to sell their lumber in San Francisco as the market slumped in the mid-1850s, they shipped over one-third of their supply to Hawaii to make up a portion of their sales. Other mills around the Puget Sound used the same tactic to stave off the effects of an oversaturated market in San Francisco, and shipped their lumber to China, Australia, and South America, rather than close down shop.²⁸ Captain Nathaniel Crosby sailed from the Columbia River to Chinese treaty ports in 1854 to sell lumber. Transpacific lumber sales took off after Great Britain's victory in the Opium Wars in China resulted in the opening of treaty ports for American and European trade by 1860.²⁹

In 1858, Puget Mill Company built an additional mill that had the ability to produce 60 thousand board feet per day, and in 1870, it replaced the original mill with a larger-capacity mill that could to produce 116 thousand board feet per day.³⁰ By comparison, Henry Yesler's Seattle mill, which was the first steam-powered mill on the Puget Sound and had opened just six months

²⁶ Edwin T. Coman Jr. and Helen M. Gibbs, 51, 58.

²⁷ "History of Port Gamble, Washington," by E.G. Ames, August 1, 1884, Accession No. 1744-001, Vertical File 715, Pope & Talbot Lumber Co. records, 1849-1955, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, Washington.

²⁸ Cox, *Mills and Markets*, 75, 78.

²⁹ Cox, 84.

³⁰ "History of Port Gamble, Washington," by E.G. Ames, August 1, 1884, Accession No. 1744-001, Vertical File 715, Pope & Talbot Lumber Co. records, 1849-1955, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, Washington.

before Puget Mill Company, had the capacity to produce only 15 thousand board feet per day in 1864.³¹ By 1860, Puget Mill Company employed an average of 175 workers and was worth \$350,000 (about \$12.5 million dollars in 2022).³² In seven short years, the Puget Mill Company was worth nearly twelve times its initial investment of \$30,000.³³ Although much of their success came from the business acumen of the four men who owned the mill, the company would not have been successful without access to vast, old-growth forests and Indigenous labor.

When the Mainers arrived at Teekalet, they did not find empty land. Teekalet was one home of the S’Klallam people, who lived in villages all along the northern Puget Sound and along the Strait of Juan De Fuca to the northwest for thousands of years. Company-sponsored histories of the Puget Mill Co. claimed that Teekalet meant “brightness of the noonday sun,” but earlier records suggest that Teekalet, or *texexq e’ultx*, actually means “skunk cabbage” in the Suquamish language.³⁴ The newcomers asked the S’Klallams to relocate less than a thousand feet across Gamble Bay on a small spit called Point Julia “with the promise that they would always give them work and they would always see that they had lumber to build new homes.”³⁵ The S’Klallams agreed, and built homes with newly sawed lumber on the flood-prone spit. Within a decade of the establishment of the mill, the Mainers changed the name of their settlement from Teekalet to Port Gamble for the bay upon which it was located.³⁶

³¹ Cox, *Mills and Markets*, 103.

³² “\$350,000 in 1860 → 2022 | Inflation Calculator.” Official Inflation Data, Alioth Finance, 21 Dec. 2022, <https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1860?amount=350000>.

³³ Edwin T. Coman Jr. and Helen M. Gibbs, *Time, Tide and Timber*, 73.

³⁴ Olympic Peninsula Intertribal Cultural Advisory Committee, *Native Peoples of the Olympic Peninsula: Who We Are*, Second edition (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), 52; Port Gamble Indian Community of the Port Gamble Reservation, Washington., *The Strong People: A History of the Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe* (Port Gamble, Washington: Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe, 2012), 5.

³⁵ Port Gamble Indian Community of the Port Gamble Reservation, Washington., *The Strong People: A History of the Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe*, 76.

³⁶ While some settlers continued to use the name Teekalet for about a decade after the establishment of the mill, I’ll use the name Port Gamble going forward for clarity.

Although the settlers made an informal agreement with the S’Klallams to settle at Port Gamble in September 1853, Puget Mill Company began its operation a year-and-a-half before the Territorial government officially signed the treaty that granted Americans legal right to claim the land. On January 25 and 26, 1855, Puget Mill Company’s manager, Josiah Keller, joined Washington Territory Governor, Isaac Stevens, and more than a dozen other settlers four miles north of Port Gamble at the northern tip of the Kitsap Peninsula, at a place Indigenous people called Hahd-skus, and the settlers called Point No Point (for its spit of land that disappeared during high tide). More than 1,200 S’Klallams, Chimacum, and Skokomish tribal members gathered to hear the terms of a new treaty proposed by Stevens. The treaty promised Indigenous people hunting and fishing rights and a small reservation fifty miles south on the banks of the Hood Canal at Skokomish, in exchange for their sale of their homeland. Many tribal members in attendance, however, did not speak English or the trade language Chinook Jargon, well enough to fully understand the treaty’s terms. After some reluctance, fifty-six tribal chiefs, sub-chiefs and members, signed onto the treaty.³⁷

Between December 1854 and January 1856, the United States government signed seven treaties with more than fifty tribes in Washington Territory, bringing millions of acres of land under control of the U.S. government, and eventually into private hands. Although members of many tribes signed the governor’s treaties, they did not necessarily agree to the terms because they had not understood what the settlers traded for. After all, they did not speak English, the language of the treaties. In exchange for their lands, Native tribes were expected to settle on

³⁷ Charles M. Gates, “The Indian Treaty of Point No Point,” *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (1955): 54.

small reservations sometimes far away from their traditional homelands, although they retained the right to fish, hunt, and gather in their traditional locations.³⁸

Three months after the Treaty of Point-No-Point and over a year after the Puget Mill Company began its operations, Keller and his wife, Emma, submitted their claim under Donation Land Act to the territorial government to acquire 305 acres of land at Port Gamble.³⁹ Settlers such as Keller were able to gain ownership of large amounts of land due to the territorial government's rapid treaty negotiations. Through Keller's claim, the Puget Mill Company took ownership of the parcel and became one of the most profitable enterprises in the territory by the end of the century. This was not the purpose of the Donation Land Claim Act. Lawmakers intended the Act to be used to parcel out land to individual settlers—not businesses.⁴⁰

In the 1850s and 60s, mills in the Puget Sound used various methods to secure timber. Initially, companies logged their immediate surroundings, and nearby settlers who had recently logged their homesteads sold timber to the mills. In other cases, smaller mills sold any of the big timber that they had harvested to larger mills, like the Puget Mill Company, whose bigger equipment could handle the larger trunks. For example, Enoch Willey and his son, Ben, operated such a mill at Oakland Bay, on the far-southern end of the Puget Sound, and sold their larger logs to Puget Mill Company in the 1860s. The Port Blakely Mill Company, located on the southern end of Bainbridge Island in the Puget Sound, contracted with loggers to supply its newly established mill with logs in the 1870s. Logging camps lined the bay around Port Blakely, but the company did not own them outright until after 1885. Prior to that time, Port Blakely Mill

³⁸ Lissa K. Wadewitz, *The Nature of Borders: Salmon, Boundaries, and Bandits on the Salish Sea* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 2012), 57, 59.

³⁹ "History of Port Gamble, Washington," by E.G. Ames, August 1, 1884, Accession No. 1744-001, Vertical File 715, Pope & Talbot Lumber Co. records, 1849-1955, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, Washington.

⁴⁰ Ficken, *The Forested Land*, 32.

Company owned little timberland and instead contracted with independent loggers and logging companies to purchase timber.⁴¹

But Puget Mill Company and others also used illegal means to acquire timber. As the United States signed treaties throughout the region, the federal government took under its control millions of acres of timberlands. Poaching timber from public lands was common in the 1850s and 60s before private companies like the Puget Mill Company, and others, purchased thousands of acres of timberland from the federal government for future harvesting. Such theft was possible because the Northwest was still a distant hinterland with little oversight from federal regulators over public lands. In 1861, Josiah Keller of the Puget Mill Company and several other lumbermen were indicted by a federal prosecutor for theft of timber from federal lands. The men plead guilty and were let off with a modest fine and “one day” in jail, which consisted of the defendants joining the judge and the sheriff in a jail cell for the length of time it took to smoke a cigar.⁴²

Mill companies were able to turn profits by poaching timber from federal lands that less than one decade before had been controlled by Indigenous tribes. By the 1870s, however, government regulators and legislators pushed for more formal mechanisms to transfer ownership of federal lands to private mill companies. Most noteworthy was the 1878 Timber and Stone Act which allowed individuals to purchase 160 acres of forested and mountainous lands from the federal government for the purpose of logging or mining. It took only six months to prove up on the land before title to the land was transferred to an individual. While the Timber and Stone Act, like the Homestead and the Donation Land Claim Acts before it, was meant for individuals—not businesses—to purchase the land, companies found ways around this requirement. Third-party

⁴¹ Berner, “The Port Blakely Mill Company, 1876-89,” 159.

⁴² Ficken, *The Forested Land*, 43.

purchasers, known as “entrymen,” secured their claims often through the prompting of mill managers, waited the required six months, and then sold the land to larger companies. The Port Blakely Mill Company paid entrymen between \$100 and \$150 per claim and had an agent in Olympia who facilitated filing the claims. By 1884, Port Blakely Mill Company’s owner, William Renton, determined that timber along the shores of the Puget Sound was almost all gone, and moved to purchase more timberland further from the water. Two years later, the company’s timberlands were worth approximately \$3 million.⁴³ The Puget Mill Company also benefited from this scheme and by 1892, had purchased 186 thousand acres of timberlands in Washington state.⁴⁴ Mill companies in the Puget Sound region benefited from the federal government’s land management policies. The national government’s treaty-making authority transferred ownership from Indigenous tribes to the United States. The federal government’s lax oversight of poaching on its lands allowed mills to access thousands of acres of timber without having to purchase it. Once congress put in place legislation to combat poaching through the Timber and Stone Act, it was easily corrupted, and companies continued to cut timber from land that was not supposed to be theirs. Without the federal government’s help, both through its treaty making, its neglect, and its cheap sale of public land, mill companies would not have experienced the same early successes.

Access to public timberlands was not the only reason mills succeeded in the mid-nineteenth century. Indigenous labor also played a vital role in companies’ ability to operate in the early years. When Pope and Talbot established their sawmill at Port Gamble, they asked the S’Klallam people to resettle across the bay in exchange for lumber and employment. This was a profitable deal for the Puget Mill Company, as the company had access to abundant amounts of

⁴³ Berner, “The Port Blakely Mill Company, 1876-89,” 160–61.

⁴⁴ Ficken, *The Forested Land*, 51.

timber, but were short on labor. Josiah Keller often complained about labor shortages faced by the company and remarked in August 1855 that “We now just about make the mill go with what native help we get.”⁴⁵ Many S’Klallam men worked in the mill from its founding and used their wages to purchase goods from the company store—thus further supporting the company. S’Klallam workers did not live in Port Gamble with the other mill workers, but instead commuted to work by paddling traditional canoes across Gamble Bay.⁴⁶ One Indian Agent remarked that the S’Klallam “helped keep the mill running during the late 1850s and 1860s as white men joined the gold rush on the Fraser River.”⁴⁷ Without S’Klallam millworkers, Puget Mill Company would have struggled to keep the mill running in its early days.

Contrary to the many accounts that state that mills hired Indigenous workers solely as so-called unskilled laborers, they performed skilled labor. One example from the Puget Mill Company helps to paint a more complicated picture. In 1865, a gold rush on the Fraser River in British Columbia caused many workers in the Puget Sound region to leave their jobs behind in hopes of striking it rich in Canada. Puget Mill Company’s foreman, Mike Drew, found it difficult to keep enough white workers on the job, and hired Indigenous workers to fill the gap. One white engineer took advantage of the labor shortage to ask for better wages, but Drew refused, and instead replaced the engineer with an Indigenous worker at one dollar per day. With a mixture of Chinook Jargon and English, Drew explained to the new engineer how to operate the machine, “Well, it will be good if you always make a very strong fire and always watch the pump and always closely watch the glass. It will be very good if the water stays half way in the glass. If the

⁴⁵ Port Gamble Indian Community of the Port Gamble Reservation, Washington., *The Strong People: A History of the Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe*, 79.

⁴⁶ Port Gamble Indian Community of the Port Gamble Reservation, Washington., 78–79.

⁴⁷ Port Gamble Indian Community of the Port Gamble Reservation, Washington., 6; “Skilled Labor at Port Gamble in 1865,” n.d., Accession No. 1744-001, Vertical File 715, Pope & Talbot Lumber Co. records, 1849-1955, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, Washington.

water goes up, no steam. If the water goes down there will be a big explosion, everything will be broken, and you will go to hell in a minute. Do you understand?” “Nowitka [Yes],” the new worker replied. “All right, damn you, hyak mamook [hurry up and work].”⁴⁸ Indigenous workers proved indispensable to the Puget Mill Company during labor shortages. Further, the foreman used this Indigenous worker to keep wages down when labor was scarce. Drew decided it was more important to keep wages low than to exclude Indigenous workers from so-called skilled jobs.

Puget Mill Company was not alone in hiring Indigenous workers. Indigenous people traded with British merchants who worked for the Hudson’s Bay Company at Fort Vancouver in the first half of the nineteenth century.⁴⁹ Henry Yesler employed Indigenous workers who provided the majority of his Seattle mill’s so-called unskilled labor.⁵⁰ At Port Discovery in 1851, John L. Tukey hired both white and Indigenous workers to hew ship knees.⁵¹ In Oregon Territory, Indigenous people on the lower Columbia River and in the Willamette Valley began to rely on wage work to supplement their livelihoods in the late 1840s.⁵² The creation of a waged, capitalist economy happened quickly in the Pacific Northwest as extractive businesses relied upon manual labor to grow. Dispossession of Indigenous land coupled with a reliance on Indigenous labor enabled new extractive businesses to survive. As historian Coll Thrush argued

⁴⁸ “Skilled Labor at Port Gamble in 1865,” n.d., Accession No. 1744-001, Vertical File 715, Pope & Talbot Lumber Co. records, 1849-1955, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, Washington.

⁴⁹ Gray H. Whaley, *Oregon and the Collapse of Illahee: U.S. Empire and the Transformation of an Indigenous World, 1792-1859* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 162–63.

⁵⁰ John Robert Finger, “Henry L. Yesler’s Seattle Years, 1852-1892” (Ph.D., Seattle, WA, University of Washington, 1968), 56, <https://www.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/302353459/citation/14550A20D8D3445FPQ/5>; Megan J. Asaka, “The Unsettled City: Migration, Race, and the Making of Seattle’s Urban Landscape” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Connecticut, Yale University, 2014), 16, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1658787431/abstract/1967FEA6BA8F4A68PQ/1>.

⁵¹ Cox, *Mills and Markets*, 60.

⁵² Whaley, *Oregon and the Collapse of Illahee*, 162–63.

in his 2007 book, *Native Seattle*, many settlers in Seattle did not envision a future free from Indigenous people, but rather built towns and cities that, while based on racist and hierarchical beliefs, still included Indigenous people. After all, the fledgling town was wholly dependent upon Indigenous labor.⁵³

But the number of Indigenous workers was not enough to build the kind of businesses that settlers wanted, so employers used various methods to entice non-Indigenous workers to immigrate to the Pacific Northwest. The Puget Mill Company used its established transpacific lumber market connections to locate workers in Honolulu, Hawaii. Such trade networks quickly became migration routes when the company went in search of labor during the Fraser River Gold Rush. The company commissioned a labor broker at the Port of Honolulu who found Hawaiian men to work in their mill. The broker was responsible for arranging transportation to Port Gamble and back to Hawaii for the workers, who in return signed on for a year-long contract. Hawaiian workers were promised fifteen dollars per month in 1858, which was eventually reduced to ten dollars per month in 1862 as the gold rush in British Columbia slowed. The company also promised contracted workers between one and two-month's advance pay. According to historians Jean Barman and Bruce McIntyre Watson, at least thirty Hawaiian men traveled between Port Gamble and Honolulu between 1858 and 1867.⁵⁴ Puget Mill Company's use of a labor broker was not so different from Captain Robert Fay's relationship with Chief Seeathl just seven years earlier. However, this time the contracting occurred thousands of miles across the Pacific Ocean with a group of workers who were not indigenous to the Northwest.

⁵³ Thrush, *Native Seattle*, 47.

⁵⁴ Jean Barman, *Leaving Paradise: Indigenous Hawaiians in the Pacific Northwest, 1787-1898* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), 158.

Although Puget Mill Company successfully hired S’Klallam workers from across the bay and native Hawaiians with whom Pope and Talbot had traded, the company preferred to hire white workers from their home state of Maine. Much like its recruitment of Hawaiian workers on contract, the company “adopted a systematic method of securing such men” from East Machias. The company drew up lucrative labor contracts that enabled workers from East Machias to travel to Port Gamble. In 1859, for example, the company advanced one man \$125 so he could sail to Port Gamble “as expeditiously as possible” to work for Puget Mill Company for one year at fifty dollars per month and board.⁵⁵ Enoch Willey, who sold his oversized timber to the Puget Mill Company in the 1860s, was also a beneficiary of this plan. In East Machias, Willey earned \$30 per month working at a small lumber mill. In 1866, Andrew Pope offered Willey \$125 per month to move with his family from East Machias to Port Gamble. But like many other mill workers, Willey quit his job at Port Gamble after just a few months to try his luck in the Fraser River Gold Rush. He was unsuccessful as a gold miner, however, and he returned to Washington Territory and settled on Oakland Bay in the southern Puget Sound where he opened his small mill with the help of his son, Ben. He remained in good standing with the Puget Mill Company, however, as he continued to do business with the mill for years.⁵⁶ During the same time Puget Mill Company contracted Hawaiian workers at a rate of between \$120 and \$150 per year, the company contracted white workers from Maine for up to an astounding figure of \$1500 per year. The company clearly preferred to hire white workers from their hometown, but were willing to hire Indigenous and Hawaiian workers at a much lower rate.

⁵⁵ “Notes Made at Machias and East Machias, Maine,” by Stewart Holbrook, July to August 1944, Accession No. 1744-001, Vertical File 715, Pope & Talbot Lumber Co. records, 1849-1955, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, Washington.

⁵⁶ “Recollections of Benjamin C. Willey of Oakland Bay, Mason County, Washington, A Typical Gyppo Logger Who Sold Logs to Pope & Talbot All His Life,” n.d., Accession No. 1744-001, Vertical File 715, Pope & Talbot Lumber Co. records, 1849-1955, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, Washington.

By 1870, Port Gamble's population had grown to 326, and that year's census revealed that the town was home to a diverse workforce. Of the 326 people, thirty—or almost ten percent—were native Hawaiians, including three women, twenty-three men, and four children. All of the men worked as laborers, almost certainly for the mill, while the women kept house. In addition, thirteen Chinese lived in Port Gamble, twelve of whom were men who worked as laborers. The lone Chinese woman, eighteen-year-old Hong Wing, was listed in the census as having “kept house.” Nearly half the town's population was born outside of the United States or its territories, but even with many nationalities represented, about twenty-five percent of Port Gamble's residents were born in Maine.⁵⁷ A decade later, only nine Hawaiians were listed as residents of Port Gamble in the 1880 census. Most Hawaiian workers were sojourners who stayed only for their one year-long contract.⁵⁸ It is no wonder why—Washington and Oregon Territories passed various discriminatory laws that prohibited Hawaiians from naturalization, voting, or acquiring land under the Donation Land Claim Act. Companies were satisfied with their labor, but communities did not want their civic participation.⁵⁹ This dynamic would be repeated in subsequent decades for new immigrant laborers from Asia, including Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos.

Lumber milling was central to building the Northwest's extractive economy in the mid-nineteenth century. Its rise demonstrates how dependent early companies were on external markets and financing. With help from the federal government, both through treaty making and lack of oversight, mills were able to take timber from the region's dense forests. Additionally, early mills had trouble securing enough labor to keep up with the rising demand for lumber.

⁵⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, 1870 US Census, Kitsap County, Washington Territory, population schedule, Port Gamble, p. 1-9, Ancestry.com.

⁵⁸ Barman, *Leaving Paradise*, 159.

⁵⁹ Barman, 138.

Businesses like the Puget Mill Company turned first to Indigenous workers to fill job vacancies, and then experimented with early labor brokering both across the Pacific Ocean in Hawaii, and across the continent in Maine.

Hop Picking

While logging was central to the early economic development of the region, agriculture also proved lucrative. In particular, farmers began planting hops in the Puyallup Valley by the mid-1860s and within two decades the hops industry had become an important part of the Northwestern economy. The hop plant produces the hop flower cluster which is dried and used in industrial and craft beer brewing. Ezra Meeker, author of the 1870 pamphlet promoting western Washington, quickly became an early leader in Washington's hops industry. In the 1860s, only a few farms grew hops, and sold them to local brewers. In 1862, Meeker used the Homestead Act to settle his hop farm in the Puyallup Valley, located about ten miles southeast of Tacoma. Meeker sold his hops to a few small brewers near the Puget sound and to Henry Weinhard in Portland, Oregon. However, by the mid-1870s, the majority of Northwest-grown hops were shipped to San Francisco, and then sent eastward by train to markets in the Midwest and northeast. Meeker split his annual crop in 1872, sending nearly 13 thousand pounds of his 31-thousand-pound yield by rail to New York from San Francisco. Eventually Meeker and others shipped their hops further abroad to Great Britain.⁶⁰ Western Washington's temperate climate and fertile river valleys provided optimal hop-growing conditions. Like the lumber industry, hops were primarily an export business and sold outside of the Northwest.

⁶⁰ "Shipment of Hops to New York," *Puget Sound Dispatch*, November 20, 1873, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84022793/1873-11-20/ed-1/seq-3/>; Dennis M. Larsen, *Hop King: Ezra Meeker's Boom Years* (Pullman, Washington: Washington State University Press, 2016), 49, 79.

In 1882, the Pacific-coast hop growers experienced an unexpected blessing. That season, hop plants had failed in all major growing regions except the Pacific coast, and growers saw a boom in sales. In 1881, a pound of hops sold for about twenty cents, and the following year, the price per pound quintupled to approximately one dollar per pound. One year after the international crop failure led to a surge in brewers' demand for Northwest hops, Puyallup Valley hop farmers expanded their landholdings by an average of forty percent.⁶¹ Meeker began to sell his hops directly to New York, and then London, with the completion of rail lines between Tacoma and Portland, Oregon, which cut out the San Francisco market.

As in the lumber mills, farmers relied on Indigenous workers, especially during the busy season. Hops have a brief harvest season that occurs in late August and early September. In the late nineteenth century, pickers needed to harvest the pine-cone shaped flowers during a three or four-week window or the crop would lose its distinct flavor and become worthless.⁶² While hop growers hired some Indigenous workers year-round for planting and maintenance, the vast majority of hop pickers arrived in the fields seasonally during the late summer for the harvest. Indigenous workers dominated as the preferred labor for hop picking, with 2,500 pickers participating in the 1882 harvest.⁶³ According to historian William Bauer, employers recruited Indigenous workers for three reasons: because Indigenous workers left the small hop towns that dotted the Northwest once harvest was over, because employers tried to diffuse anti-Chinese racism by instead hiring Indigenous workers, and because employers "considered American

⁶¹ Dennis M. Larsen, *Hop King: Ezra Meeker's Boom Years*, 71–74.

⁶² William Bauer, "Sudsy Sovereignty: Indigenous Workers and the Hops Industry of the Pacific Slope," *Labor* 12, no. 1–2 (May 1, 2015): 71–72, <https://doi.org/10.1215/15476715-2837508>.

⁶³ Ezra Meeker, *Hop Culture in the United States: Being a Practical Treatise on Hop Growing in Washington Territory from the Cutting to the Bale* (E. Meeker, 1883), 18.

Indians to be clean pickers.”⁶⁴ That is, Indigenous workers did not include extraneous sticks or other plant material in with the freshly picked hops.

As historian Paige Raibmon and others have argued, hop picking provided a way for Indigenous people to earn cash, reconnect with friends and family, and reassert their cultural practices and beliefs.⁶⁵ For example, when Indigenous people worked on hop farms, they could escape the pressures to assimilate that came with life on the reservation. Indigenous workers were free to speak their own languages in the hop fields, unlike on the reservation or in boarding schools that prohibited the use of native languages.⁶⁶ The harvest occurred at a time during the year that complimented many Indigenous peoples’ seasonal migrations. The Quileute, for example, joined the seasonal hop harvest between the end of the berry harvest season and before the fall salmon runs.⁶⁷ Indigenous people came from as far north as Alaska to participate in the hop harvest.⁶⁸ Hop growers understood this pattern, and recruited Indigenous salmon cannery workers at the end of their season to come south to Washington for the beginning of hop-picking season in August. This seasonal labor migration flourished because hop picking coincided with Indigenous peoples’ already-established patterns of seasonal migration.⁶⁹ When the hop picking season ended in September, Indigenous hop pickers packed up their camps and returned to their homes. On the way, they often stopped in Seattle where they purchased food and goods to bring

⁶⁴ Bauer, “Sudsy Sovereignty,” 74–75.

⁶⁵ See: Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Vera Parham, “‘All Go to the Hop Fields’: The Role of Migratory and Wage Labor in the Preservation of Indigenous Pacific Northwest Culture,” in *Native Diasporas*, ed. Gregory D. Smithers and Brooke N. Newman, Indigenous Identities and Settler Colonialism in the Americas (University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 317–46, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1d9nn07.15>; Bauer, “Sudsy Sovereignty.”

⁶⁶ Parham, “‘All Go to the Hop Fields,’” 334.

⁶⁷ Bauer, “Sudsy Sovereignty,” 79; Olympic Peninsula Intertribal Cultural Advisory Committee, *Native Peoples of the Olympic Peninsula: Who We Are*, 147–51.

⁶⁸ Myron Eells, *The Indians of Puget Sound: The Notebooks of Myron Eells*, ed. George Pierre Castile (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985), 204.

⁶⁹ Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast*, 79.

on their journey. Seattle businesses welcomed this annual infusion of cash, which would be later replicated by footloose workers coming and going between farms and other seasonal, extractive jobs over the next half-century or more.⁷⁰

Labor scarcity was a chief fear among the growers who understood that if they could not find enough workers in time, their hops would quickly become worthless. Ezra Meeker wrote about this panic, and explained that when Indigenous workers did not arrive from the north or around the Sound quickly enough, growers would “bid up” the price of labor “and run after fresh arrivals.” Indigenous workers understood their labor power in an industry with such a short and volatile harvest season, and used this scarcity to secure the best wages possible. Meeker speculated that labor, not soil or monetary resources, was the limiting factor of production. “We could raise hops enough to supply the world,” he wrote in 1883, “just how many can be picked is a problem that will be speedily tested by the increased acreage being planted.”⁷¹ However, a catastrophic infestation of hop lice in 1892 would end Meeker’s dreams of a hops empire in the Puyallup Valley. The market for hops crashed as the insects devoured western Washington’s hop crops, which coincided with the national 1894 depression. Ezra Meeker left the hop business in 1896 after he could no longer pay the mortgage on his Puyallup farm.⁷² After the lice infestation, hop production moved east of the Cascade Range to Yakima, where Indigenous workers continued to harvest the crop into the twentieth century.⁷³

In the hop fields of western Washington in the 1870s and 80s, just as with Puget Mill Company’s Hawaiian labor recruitment, we see the early stages of the footloose labor system forming. Hop growers began to establish a systematic approach to labor recruiting in response to

⁷⁰ Parham, ““All Go to the Hop Fields,”” 335.

⁷¹ Meeker, *Hop Culture in the United States*, 20.

⁷² Dennis M. Larsen, *Hop King: Ezra Meeker’s Boom Years*, 197.

⁷³ Parham, ““All Go to the Hop Fields,”” 338.

the volatile nature of hop harvesting. Growers relied on Indian agents, labor brokers, and kinship ties to secure enough workers for the harvest. Indian agents received letters from growers, informing agents of growers' desire for workers and promising high wages and good camping conditions. Labor brokers met migrating Indigenous workers who traveled south to cities like Seattle and Tacoma, and paid the transportation costs from the city to the hop fields. Growers also relied on workers' kinship ties to locate and hire additional help. Both of these latter tactics—arranged transportation and reliance on kinship ties—would become commonplace in the footloose labor system in the following decades.⁷⁴

Fishing and Canning

As some settlers began to establish extractive businesses that benefited from the Northwest's landscape, others turned to its abundant waterways for a chance to strike it rich. In particular, runs of salmon seasonally swelled the rivers and the sounds between California and Alaska. Beginning in the mid-1860s, and taking off in the 1870s, migrants from the United States, Europe, and Asia applied new industrial canning technology to package and ship the fish to market in San Francisco, the Midwest, and Great Britain.⁷⁵ A decade prior, settlers in Seattle attempted to export salted salmon in barrels alongside timber, but were unsuccessful when the salmon spoiled.⁷⁶ The adoption of industrial canning in the 1870s made it possible for canneries to ship preserved salmon to market both more efficiently and safely.

Southeast Alaska, Washington, and Oregon canneries depended upon Indigenous fishers and cannery workers ever since they began their operations in the 1860s. In Southeast Alaska, Tlingit and

⁷⁴ Raibmon, *Authentic Indians*: 86. See Chapter 4 for an excellent description of Indigenous workers' experiences of hop picking in the late nineteenth century.

⁷⁵ Diane J. Purvis, *Ragged Coast, Rugged Coves: Labor, Culture, and Politics in Southeast Alaska Canneries* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2021), 22; Chris Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor: The Pacific Coast Canned-Salmon Industry, 1870-1942* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 11.

⁷⁶ David M. Buerge, *Chief Seattle and the Town That Took His Name* (Seattle: Sasquatch Books, 2017), 117.

Haida men and women worked in the salmon industry. Many of the men worked as fishermen while women worked in the canneries, gutting and processing fish. This was a continuation of traditional gender roles for Northwest Indigenous peoples, adapted to a capitalist economy.⁷⁷ In the Pacific Northwest, many Indigenous hop pickers included both fishing and cannery work as part of their seasonal labor migrations. Most fishing occurred in the early summer and was followed by canning, and then hop picking in the late summer and early fall.⁷⁸ Mobility between different seasonal industries would become a central component of the footloose labor system in the decades to follow.

Some tribes continued to fish using traditional methods, and sold their surplus fish to canneries. The Lummi, for example, relied on fishing for subsistence decades after signing the Treaty of Point Elliott (1855), when federal Indian policies attempted to assimilate Indigenous tribes to American culture through the adoption of agriculture.⁷⁹ Over time, however, Indigenous fishermen adopted the settlers' style of boats and nets, and moved further away from their tribes' traditional fishing locations to be nearer the canneries that sprang up around the Columbia River and the Puget Sound.⁸⁰ By the 1890s, industrial canning took off in the Pacific Northwest, and Indigenous labor was a necessary component of the industry's growth, as Indigenous fishermen and canners contributed necessary knowledge and skill. Indigenous tribes of the Pacific Northwest have been subsistence fishing since time immemorial, but by the late nineteenth century, Indigenous fishermen and canners became integrated into the capitalist economy.

⁷⁷ Diane J. Purvis, *Ragged Coast, Rugged Coves*, 28–35; Lissa K. Wadewitz, *The Nature of Borders*, 72.

⁷⁸ Parham, ““All Go to the Hop Fields,”” 323.

⁷⁹ Parham, 328; Daniel L. Boxberger, “In and out of the Labor Force: The Lummi Indians and the Development of the Commercial Salmon Fishery of North Puget Sound, 1880-1900,” *Ethnohistory* 35, no. 2 (1988): 165–67, <https://doi.org/10.2307/482701>.

⁸⁰ Lissa K. Wadewitz, *The Nature of Borders*, 73.

Seasonal labor migrations would become the annual experience of millions of footloose workers of all ethnic backgrounds in the Northwest. Indigenous peoples of the Northwest coast integrated capitalist wage-labor into their own seasonal work patterns, both from necessity and as a way to maintain connections to traditional practices. Indigenous labor migrations were instructive for the settlers who built an economy dependent upon seasonal labor, and Northwest industries that would mark the labor system of the Pacific Northwest for the following seven decades. By the last decades of the nineteenth century, Pacific Northwest businesses consolidated and grew, like many big businesses did during the Gilded Age. But unlike the industrialized urban centers of the East that relied on factory production, businessmen created a heavily capitalized extractive-industrial economy in the Pacific Northwest. This economy was especially dependent on mobile labor that could be summoned as needed, and just as easily let go. In addition to the Indigenous workers that early businesses hired, single young men from other parts of the United States and the Pacific world joined this mobile pool of labor. In the mid-nineteenth century, employers found it exceedingly difficult to locate and manage this particular kind of labor supply and turned to Indigenous, Hawaiian, and Chinese labor brokers to forge the necessary connection between footloose workers and extractive employers, thus creating the footloose labor system.

The Rise of Chinese Labor Brokers

While a widespread system of labor brokering did not solidify in the Pacific Northwest until the 1880s, the work of Indigenous and Chinese labor brokers in the preceding three decades laid its foundation. Between the 1850s and 1880s, businessmen used various methods to locate, import, and hire workers. Working with Native Hawaiian labor brokers in the lumber mills

industry, Indigenous labor brokers in the hops industry, and Chinese labor brokers in the rail and canning industries, businesses like the Puget Mill Company and others pioneered a system of labor recruitment that would become central to the success of extractive businesses in the Pacific Northwest into the twentieth century.

The life of one of the Northwest's earliest labor brokers, Chin Gee Hee, offers a clear picture of the quintessential labor broker in the Pacific Northwest during the second half of the nineteenth century. Chin immigrated to California in the early 1860s and found work as a miner through a labor contractor, Bow Chew Tong & Co. Originating from a poor family in southern China, Chin left home like many other men from across the Pacific world to strike it rich in California gold mines. And like many other miners in the mid-nineteenth century West, Chin was unsuccessful. However, Chin ended up discovering a more lucrative line of work—labor contracting. By 1868, Chin moved to Washington Territory where he found work as a cook at the Puget Mill Company at Port Gamble. Chin left Port Gamble to work in a laundry, and then moved to Oregon to work on a railroad.⁸¹ His own experience of footloose labor would be replicated by millions of other workers in the Pacific Northwest who came after him, in what historian Carlos Schwantes called “the wageworkers’ frontier.”⁸²

But unlike so many other manual laborers on the wageworkers’ frontier, Chin rose out of the footloose labor system. He first found work in California with a labor broker, and a decade later, Chin had become co-owner of the Wa Chong & Co., Seattle’s first Chinese-owned

⁸¹ Todd M. Stevens, “Brokers between Worlds: Chinese Merchants and Legal Culture in the Pacific Northwest, 1852–1925” (Ph.D., United States -- New Jersey, Princeton University, 2003), 22; For Chin, I use the terms labor broker and labor contractor interchangeably. While not all brokers facilitated long-term or seasonal contracts between workers and employers, all contractors were labor brokers. Chin was both.

⁸² Carlos A. Schwantes, “The Concept of the Wageworkers’ Frontier: A Framework for Future Research,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (1987): 39, <https://doi.org/10.2307/968927>. Although Schwantes deftly articulates the contours of the wageworkers’ frontier in his important 1987 article, he only mentions Chinese workers as the recipients of racism and violence in the 1880’s, and not as footloose laborers in their own right.

business. Wa Chong & Co. was founded by Chin Ching Hock, another immigrant from China, and began as a general store that imported and sold Chinese goods to the city's Chinese population. While the company operated a job placement service as early as 1870, its labor contracting division would not take off for another decade, with Chin at its helm. Chin had some experience working with labor contractors while in California, and once he joined the company, he helped to transport the California-style system of labor brokering to Seattle.⁸³

Chin possessed the unique combination of skills that made a labor broker successful; he had experience working in several crucial Northwestern industries, he spoke English and Cantonese, and he established connections with the region's important businessmen, including Seattle's mill-operator, Henry Yesler, and judge and railroad magnate, Thomas Burke.⁸⁴ Located on the corner of Washington and Third Streets, Wa Chong Co. was in the heart of Seattle's first Chinese neighborhood, the same district that would eventually become the urban center for all footloose labor in the Pacific Northwest.⁸⁵ This combination of general store and labor brokerage became a common business model for subsequent immigrant labor brokers. Chin Gee Hee, the Wa Chong Co., and other Chinese brokers in the Northwest did not invent labor brokering (something that predated the colonization of the region), but their labor brokerages laid the groundwork for future brokering and employment agencies in the Pacific Northwest. They promised to provide employers with a solution to the increasingly chaotic labor market.

Wa Chong Co. established contracts in many of the Pacific Northwest's largest industries, including railroads, lumber mills, and canneries. At the Puget Mill Company in Port Gamble, Wa Chong Co. placed about fifty Chinese workers in 1878. While Wa Chong & Co.

⁸³ Stevens, "Brokers between Worlds," 23–24, 111.

⁸⁴ Willard G Jue, "Chin Gee-Hee, Chinese Pioneer Entrepreneur in Seattle and Toishan," *The Annals of the Chinese Historical Society of the Pacific Northwest*, 1983, 32–33.

⁸⁵ Asaka, "The Unsettled City," 41, 101–2.

was the largest labor contractor in the Northwest, it was not alone.⁸⁶ South of the Puget Sound on the Columbia River, Chinese labor brokers contracted work for salmon canneries beginning in the 1870s. When work dried up after the completion of railroads, such as the Tacoma-Kalama line, hundreds of Chinese workers went south to Portland to find work. As historian Chris Friday argues, the rise of salmon canneries on the Columbia River grew in direct proportion to the number of Chinese workers available in nearby cities.⁸⁷ Railroad workers had assistance from labor contractors to find work in the canneries. Seid Back, labor contractor for Wing Sing Long Kee & Co., managed contracts for the Northern Pacific Railway, the Oregon Railway & Navigation Co., and the Southern Pacific. Additionally, Seid's company managed labor contracts with Columbia River canneries. By the late nineteenth century, Seid also contracted labor for the Fidalgo Island Packing Company, located in the northern Puget Sound. As work dried up on the railroads, labor brokers like Seid were able to organize the flow of labor to canneries both on the Columbia and in the Puget Sound.⁸⁸

Labor mobility between industries was a central feature of the footloose labor system. Workers changed jobs with the seasons and with the boom and bust of capitalist economic cycles. Just as Indigenous workers found employment in lumber mills, hop farms, and canneries, many of the Chinese workers who lost their jobs when they completed building railroads in Washington and Oregon moved on to find work in these extractive industries. And as the footloose labor system developed in the 1870s, brokers began to facilitate this movement across the Pacific, between Canada and the United States, and within the borders of the United States.

⁸⁶ Stevens, "Brokers between Worlds," 21.

⁸⁷ Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor*, 26.

⁸⁸ Stevens, "Brokers between Worlds," 33.

Chinese workers did not always rely on labor brokers to find employment in the Pacific Northwest. When the initial gold rush in California waned in the 1850s, Chinese workers, alongside European and Euro-American workers, migrated out of California to the east and north to Nevada, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana, and British Columbia in response to news of other mining opportunities.⁸⁹ As in California, Chinese miners in the Pacific Northwest sometimes worked as part of small, egalitarian collectives, and other times they found work through merchant-brokers. As historians Mae Ngai and Sue Fawn Chung have described, Chinese placer mining was often a cooperative venture—not one simply undertaken by unfree or indentured “coolie labor,” as white workers in the nineteenth century accused.⁹⁰ That is not to say that Chinese miners did not find employment through a labor broker, however, but instead shows that Chinese workers, like their European and Euro-American counterparts, had a degree of choice in their employment in the nineteenth-century West, at least as much as any worker did in an industrial, capitalist economy. Early on in the settlement of the Pacific Northwest, Chinese gold miners arrived in eastern Oregon and Idaho (both part of Oregon Territory in 1853) in small groups, and purchased depleted claims from white miners. In other instances, white mine owners contracted with Chinese labor brokers to secure Chinese wageworkers for their mines. For example, in Idaho’s Oro Fino district, a mine owner contracted with Shu Lee of Walla Walla, Washington, to hire 200 Chinese miners from San Francisco.⁹¹ Like Chin Gee Hee, Shu Lee was a merchant who also had connections to Chinese workers in need of employment. Labor brokers helped to spur the internal migration of immigrant workers in the North American west.

⁸⁹ Sue Fawn Chung, *In Pursuit of Gold: Chinese American Miners and Merchants in the American West*, Asian American Experience (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), xvi.

⁹⁰ Mae M. Ngai, “Chinese Gold Miners and the ‘Chinese Question’ in Nineteenth-Century California and Victoria,” *Journal of American History* 101, no. 4 (March 1, 2015): 1085, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jahist/jav112>; Chung, *In Pursuit of Gold*, 14–18.

⁹¹ Chung, *In Pursuit of Gold*, 19; Daniel Liestman, “Nineteenth-Century Chinese and the Environment of the Pacific Northwest,” *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 90, no. 1 (1998): 19.

Chinese workers and business owners remained in eastern Oregon, Idaho, and Montana into the twentieth century, but were often met with hostility and violence from both white workers and Indigenous people. While Chinese immigrants may have worked in the same western industries as white workers did, they were not equal members of society. In 1878, the owners of Wa Chong Co. wrote to William Renton of the Port Blakely Mill Company, complaining of the ill-treatment of the contracted workers. Chinese workers on their way to Port Blakely had taken their coats off while aboard a steamer, and could not find them when they docked. The author concluded that the coats “were hidden and thrown overboard by the whitemen [sic],” and appealed to Renton by explaining that “Chinamen have feelings and know when they are properly used—as well as other men.”⁹²

Harassment and violence against Chinese immigrants in the Northwest increased over time. Frank Milbert, a white gold miner from Potlatch, Idaho, grew up hearing stories about Chinese miners in nearby Gold Hill.⁹³ In a 1975 interview, he recalled that Chinese miners were an industrious group, but were also outside of the protection of law enforcement. He learned about a group of white miners who told a group of Chinese miners to leave their established claim site near Gold Creek in the 1880s. When the Chinese refused to leave, the white miners snuck into their camp one evening, doused the cabin in kerosene and burned it to the ground with all but one miner in the cabin. They then shot anyone who tried to flee the building. The only survivor, a man who later worked at the hospital in town, said he would never go back to the site to reclaim his hidden gold, for fear of violence from the white miners who took over the claim

⁹² Letter from Wa Chong Co. to William Renton, November 22, 1878, collection number 0001, Box 38, Folder 52, Port Blakely Mill Company records, University of Washington Special Collections.

⁹³ Sam Schrager, Frank Milbert, Interview One, June 18, 1975, Latah County, Idaho Oral History Collection, MG 415, Special Collections and Archives, University of Idaho Library, Moscow, Idaho, <https://www.lib.uidaho.edu/digital/lcoh/index.html>.

site. Milbert recognized that law enforcement would not seek justice for the murdered Chinese miners, noting that the police “were indifferent...to the death of a Chinaman.... The law never went to any extremes to hunt the murderer of a Chinaman.”⁹⁴

White workers did not pose the only threat of violence to Chinese in the Pacific Northwest. In 1866, a group of fifty Chinese miners set out from Virginia City, Nevada to pursue mining opportunities in Silver City, Idaho, on the encouragement of a white merchant. As they approached the Owyhee River, about 150 Paiutes ambushed the miners, killing all but one. Unlike the arson and murder in Gold Creek, however, this violence was not likely motivated by racism, but rather was a response to growing intrusion from settler colonialism.⁹⁵

In the second half of the nineteenth century, white workers commonly referred to Chinese workers as coolie laborers, and believed that powerful labor brokers coerced these unfree workers across the Pacific Ocean. But in fact, Chinese immigrants made choices about engaging in the footloose labor system, often in much the same way that European and native-born Americans did. Believing that the American West offered economic opportunity, Chinese immigrants found work through word-of-mouth, by chance, or by contracting with labor brokers. Sometimes they contracted work by the season, as was the case in canneries or construction, and sometimes they found work in egalitarian miners’ collectives in California, Oregon, and Idaho.⁹⁶

Many Chinese workers, like their European, Indigenous, and North American counterparts, faced exploitation at the hands of labor brokers, and received false promises of opportunity, encountered wage theft, and poor working conditions. Not all Chinese workers, just

⁹⁴ Sam Schrager, Frank Milbert, Interview One, June 18, 1975, Latah County, Idaho Oral History Collection, MG 415, Special Collections and Archives, University of Idaho Library, Moscow, Idaho., <https://www.lib.uidaho.edu/digital/lcoh/index.html>.

⁹⁵ Liping Zhu, *A Chinaman’s Chance: The Chinese on the Rocky Mountain Mining Frontier* (Niwot, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 1997), 30–31.

⁹⁶ Ngai, “Chinese Gold Miners and the ‘Chinese Question’ in Nineteenth-Century California and Victoria,” 1091.

as not all European, Indigenous, or American workers, were stuck in the footloose labor system in perpetuity. The fluidity that marked this system, however, meant that workers sometimes participated in the labor market as contracted workers, and sometimes they did not. But this specific exploitation did not set Chinese workers apart from white workers, or make them into coolies any more than white workers were for finding work through an employment agent. But white workers portrayed Chinese workers as unfree, servile, and docile, despite sharing commonalities as footloose laborers. Regardless of these commonalities, white workers almost immediately met Chinese workers with hostility and violence as the footloose labor system took shape in the late nineteenth century. This violence eventually prompted the federal government to create restrictive national immigration laws that targeted the Chinese by name.⁹⁷

When settlers arrived in the Pacific Northwest, they immediately recognized its economic potential, but needed to locate and manage a pool of flexible labor in order to turn trees, hops, and salmon into capital. By the 1870s, Chinese labor brokers built on the system established between Indigenous workers and settlers, creating the early phase of the footloose labor system. However, many white workers in the Pacific Northwest in the 1880s began to oppose the inclusion of Chinese labor brokers in the footloose labor system, and violently expelled many of the Chinese communities in the Northwest. Still, Chinese immigrants remained in the Northwest in the face of violence and exclusion. As the Northwest grew, so too did the number of new labor brokers and employment agents. These newcomers built on the early phase of the footloose labor system that Indigenous and Chinese brokers established at the end of the nineteenth century.

⁹⁷ Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor*, 7.

CHAPTER TWO

Chinese Exclusion, Violence, and The Rise of Private Employment Agencies

Chinese merchant-brokers laid the groundwork for the footloose labor system in the Pacific Northwest, and by the late 1890s, labor brokering boomed. The region's earliest employers experienced difficulties in securing a stable labor supply—not unlike the difficulties faced by new colonies across the North American continent in the seventeenth century.⁹⁸ But the Pacific Northwest's labor market required a more fluid workforce than did the Atlantic colonies in previous centuries. As historian Kornel Chang recognized, “employers sought laborers whom they could quickly mobilize during peak seasons and dispose of just as quickly at season's end.”⁹⁹ What developed over the next decade in the Pacific Northwest was a haphazardly organized footloose labor system—a collection of heavily trod migration circuits established by employers, labor brokers, employment agencies, and workers—that saw dramatic migrations during economic and seasonal cycles. Despite the maturation of the footloose labor system during this period, the problem of labor shortages and surpluses did not end. As long as there existed seasonal industries and boom-bust economic cycles, the problem persisted.

When Chin Gee Hee and the Wa Chong Co. began to facilitate the initial streams of labor migrants in the 1870s, the footloose labor system had not yet solidified. Two decades later, the number of labor brokers and employment agents had grown alongside the spike in population in the Pacific Northwest. Labor brokering boomed during the final two decades of the nineteenth century to deal with the particular labor needs of the Pacific Northwest. Two factors led to the rapid growth of private employment agents and labor brokers. First, the completion of two

⁹⁸ For information about labor shortages in seventeenth-century Virginia, see: Edmund S Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: Norton, 2003), 84-85.

⁹⁹ Kornel S. Chang, *Pacific Connections: The Making of the Western U.S.-Canadian Borderlands, American Crossroads* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 29.

transcontinental rail lines in Tacoma and Seattle in the 1880s and 1890s created a population boom in Washington.¹⁰⁰ By the end of 1883, the Northern Pacific Railroad finally reached Tacoma, connecting the Northwest to the rest of the continent through a northern transcontinental rail route for the first time. One decade later in 1893, Seattle became a terminus for the Great Northern Railway. In 1880, Washington Territory's population was just over 75,000 people. A decade later, Washington boasted nearly 350,000 residents.¹⁰¹ Towns and cities throughout the Northwest matured as newcomers arrived each day. Businesses benefited from the growing pool of labor, but continued to rely on footloose workers because extractive industries still made up the bulk of the economy. As more people arrived in the Northwest, a growing number of employment agents and immigrant labor brokers stepped in to manage the ever-increasing number of footloose workers.

The second factor that contributed to the growth of employment agents and labor brokers was the violent expulsion and eventual exclusion of Chinese immigrants to the United States. Chinese labor brokers established a system of labor brokering for the region's early businesses, but in the 1880s, white residents of the Northwest, motivated by racism, used violence and political lobbying to expel many Chinese workers from the Northwest. Employers had relied on Chinese brokers like the Wa Chong Co. and others, to locate, hire, and manage workers. But the exclusion of Chinese immigrants from the region, beginning with the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, meant that employers had to look to new companies to find workers for extractive industries. Employment agencies and new immigrant labor brokers filled the vacuum left by

¹⁰⁰ Carlos Arnaldo Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest: An Interpretive History*, Revised edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 225.

¹⁰¹ Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest*, 226.

Chinese labor brokers who found it increasingly difficult to supply Chinese immigrant workers to businesses.

Labor brokers contracted work for immigrants while new employment agencies solicited business from English-speaking workers. The new labor brokers that emerged after the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act were immigrant middlemen who established businesses in northwestern cities and contracted co-ethnic workers seasonally to work for the region's largest employers. When Chinese labor brokers had an increasingly difficult time hiring out Chinese immigrants because of harsh immigration restrictions, new labor brokers sought to make a business out of connecting employers and workers. By the end of the nineteenth century, Japanese and Greek labor brokers joined Chinese immigrants in the ranks of immigrant merchant-brokers. Alongside these brokers—sometimes literally—dozens of employment agencies opened cramped shops in northwestern cities to fulfill a similar role to that of labor brokers, primarily hiring out so-called unskilled native-born or English-speaking workers. Sometimes these agents worked with European immigrant workers, but almost all workers from Asia found work through Asian labor brokers. Rather than hire workers for the duration of a season, employment agents placed their predominantly white workers in jobs for an open-ended amount of time.

In practice, both labor brokers and employment agents operated as central nodes in the footloose labor network. Workers sought out brokers and agents in Pacific cities like Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Yokohama, Honolulu, and Guangzhou in order to find employment.¹⁰² Brokers and agents in those cities established business relationships with northwestern employers, and organized the movement of workers from Pacific cities to rural work camps across the Northwest. Generally, however, white workers were reluctant to work under contract

¹⁰² Chang, *Pacific Connections*, 37–41, 64.

as gang-labor for entire seasons, and instead demanded to be paid daily, weekly, or monthly.¹⁰³ Immigrant workers, especially those from Asia, had fewer choices in their terms of employment. They were more likely to be employed as seasonally contracted workers. In both cases, however, brokers and agents fulfilled employers' demands for a flexible and mobile workforce that was easily hired during boom times, and just as easily let go when the market slumped.

Chinese Exclusion and Labor Brokering

By the early 1880s, the Wa Chong Co. had successfully established a business model with labor brokers as the central component of the footloose labor system in the Pacific Northwest. Despite this success, not all Northwesterners were pleased with its presence, or the presence of Chinese immigrants. Since the organization of Washington Territory, white settlers feared Chinese workers. In 1863, legislators in Washington Territory passed "An Act to protect free White labor against competition with Chinese Coolie labor, and to discourage the immigration of the Chinese into this territory."¹⁰⁴ Despite this dramatic language, few Chinese immigrants had arrived in Washington Territory yet. By 1870, there were just under 8,000 Chinese immigrants in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho, combined, or about six percent of the total settler population.¹⁰⁵ The 1863 law, which imposed a tax on Chinese immigrants, was more of a response to the passage of similar legislation in California than it was to any real threat of labor competition. But its title demonstrates how the anti-Chinese agitation in California influenced the actions of the Washington Territorial government, and how anxiety about labor

¹⁰³ State of Washington, *Tenth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Factory Inspection*, (Olympia, Washington, 1916), 112-114.

¹⁰⁴ Beth Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go: Violence, Exclusion, and the Making of the Alien in America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018), 43.

¹⁰⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, 1870 Census: Volume 1, The Statistics of the Population of the United States, Table 1, "Population of the United States, (By States and Territories,) in the Aggregate, and as White, Colored, Free Colored, Slave, Chinese, and Indian, at Each Census" 8, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1870/population/1870a-04.pdf>.

competition was a deeply ingrained fear for white settlers in Washington Territory from its founding. To legislators, being Chinese was synonymous with being an unfree laborer, also called a coolie, and the only way to protect white workers was to impose restrictions on Chinese immigration. During and after the Civil War, the concept of “free labor” and “slave labor” became increasingly important.

Despite restrictive legislation in the Northwest, the region’s largest businesses had established productive and profitable business relationships with Chinese labor brokers, including Seattle’s Wa Chong Co. and Portland’s Wa Kee & Co., by the 1870s. Over the course of the decade, the number of Chinese living in Washington Territory grew from a few hundred to at least 3,000, making up about 4 percent of the territory’s population in 1880.¹⁰⁶ These numbers likely undercounted many thousand Chinese workers who were employed in remote work camps along rapidly expanding rail lines. For example, the Northern Pacific Railroad employed 15,000 Chinese workers to build the track that ran east through the Cascades to Montana in the early 1880s.¹⁰⁷ Making it even more difficult to pin down exact numbers, many Chinese workers did not migrate straight from China to the Northwest, and therefore did not cross official ports of entry into the region. Instead, labor brokers facilitated their migration out of California, which had grown increasingly hostile to Chinese immigrants, and found work for them further north on railroads, in lumber mills, and in canneries.¹⁰⁸

In California, anti-Chinese racism reached a fever pitch in the late 1870s with the rise of the Workingmen’s Party, led by Irish immigrant Denis Kearney. Starting in San Francisco,

¹⁰⁶ Carlos A. Schwantes, *Radical Heritage: Labor, Socialism, and Reform in Washington and British Columbia* (Moscow, Idaho: University of Idaho Press, 1994), 23.

¹⁰⁷ Todd M. Stevens, “Brokers Between Worlds: Chinese Merchants and Legal Culture in the Pacific Northwest, 1852–1925” (Ph.D., United States -- New Jersey, Princeton University, 2003), 119, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/305309871/abstract/DF9DBAB55960463APQ/1>.

¹⁰⁸ Stevens, “Brokers Between Worlds,” 122.

Kearney drew crowds of white workers with impassioned speeches against Chinese immigrants and the white employers who hired them, famously declaring, “the Chinese must go!” He took his diatribes on the road, and traveled across the United States giving speeches to workers, inflaming anti-Chinese sentiment across the country. Back in California, the Workingmen’s Party successfully lobbied the California legislature to amend the state constitution to prohibit the employment of Chinese workers and ban Chinese immigrants from securing business licenses or fishing rights. Federal courts invalidated these provisions, ruling that they violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. But this was not the end of workers’ agitation for anti-Chinese legislation.¹⁰⁹

The anti-Chinese agitation in California existed within the larger context of Reconstruction politics, which loomed large in the West. The Fourteenth Amendment defined federal citizenship for the first time, reserving its rights and privileges to people born on American soil or naturalized. But as both Republicans and Democrats courted western voters to secure power at the federal level, they accepted the argument that Chinese immigrants could not become citizens because they were not “free white persons”—a limit the federal government had established in 1790. As the last of the Civil War Republicans faded from national prominence, both parties embraced racist anti-Chinese rhetoric and legislation to shore up support in the West.¹¹⁰ In 1882, Congress passed, and a Republican president signed, the Chinese Restriction Act, which intended to slow the migration of Chinese laborers, particularly in the West.¹¹¹ In

¹⁰⁹ Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go*, 42–43; *In re Tiburcio Parrott*, 1 F. 481 (9th Cir. 1880); Evelyn Atkinson, “Slaves, Coolies, and Shareholders: Corporations Claim the Fourteenth Amendment,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 10, no. 1 (2020): 55.

¹¹⁰ Heather Cox Richardson, *How the South Won the Civil War: Oligarchy, Democracy, and the Continuing Fight for the Soul of America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), 98–99.

¹¹¹ Historian Beth Lew-Williams makes a compelling case for understanding the 1882 legislation as the Chinese Restriction Act, rather than the Exclusion Act, because that was its original name and intention. It was not until the subsequent 1888 and 1892 laws that complete exclusion was the goal. See Beth Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go*, 43.

practice, the law frustrated immigration inspectors who had minimal funds to enforce its provisions. Rather than quelling anti-Chinese violence in the West, as some of the law's supporters had hoped, the act further radicalized white workers who saw anti-Chinese racism enshrined in law.

With both main political parties vying for the support of western voters in the 1870s and 80s, the contrast between free labor and slave labor dominated the public discussion about Chinese immigration. The ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865 abolished legal enslavement except as punishment for crime. However, journalists, politicians, and labor unions argued that slavery persisted on the Pacific coast in the form of Chinese coolie labor. Senator James G. Blaine, a Republican from Maine, defended his vote for a bill restricting Chinese immigration in 1879 by framing the vote as an anti-slavery measure. He argued that Chinese immigration to the United States had all been organized “under contract through agencies” and was therefore unfree. Blaine explained that such a system of labor migration degraded the condition of white workers by forcing them to compete with workers who could be forced to work in poor conditions for artificially low wages. Drawing a connection to antebellum labor, Blaine explained, “The free white laborer never could compete with the slave labor of the South. In the Chinaman the white laborer finds only another form of servile competition, in some aspects more revolting and corrupting than African slavery.”¹¹² This rhetoric turned Chinese workers into slaves, which they were not, but rather than condemning contract labor as an exploitative system and characterizing Chinese workers as victims of that system, Blaine condemned Chinese workers for degrading white labor, and voted to criminalize their presence.

¹¹² “Chinese Restriction Bill,” *The Corvallis Gazette*, March 7, 1879, 4.

Chinese workers were wage laborers who contracted with labor brokers, sometimes seasonally. But Blaine, unable to separate ancestry from condition, saw them as the equivalent of slaves.¹¹³

Local political parties echoed Blaine's sentiments that the presence of servile Chinese workers undercut wages for white workers. In December 1870, the hyper-partisan newspaper, *The States Rights Democrat* of Albany, Oregon, published an article contrasting how Republicans and Democrats regarded Chinese workers. The article argued that Republicans were for "Chinese importation to reduce the rates of labor," while Democrats were against the "importation of Chinese coolies to compete with the American laborer, and reduce his wages to a few cents a day." The article concluded simply, "White Men only to rule America."¹¹⁴ By the late 1870s, any such gap between the two political parties on the West Coast had narrowed, as both favored Chinese exclusion. In 1882, the Benton County, Oregon Republican party published its platform, which condemned President Chester A. Arthur's initial veto of the Chinese Restriction Act, and instead argued for "the right of the American nation to prevent the incursion of hordes of Asiatics, whose cheap labor may improperly depress the wages earned by American citizens."¹¹⁵ Democrats and Republicans alike argued that Chinese immigrants were to blame for the troubles of white workers and promoted anti-Chinese legislation.

Politicians were not the only people to rally against Chinese immigration. White workers and labor unions across the Pacific Northwest drew an explicit connection between employers' use of contracted Chinese laborers and the poor wages and conditions of white workers. Just as the 1863 Washington Territorial legislature had declared all Chinese immigrants "unfree coolie

¹¹³ Moon-Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006) 6; Kevin Kenny, "The Antislavery Origins of US Immigration Policy," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 11, no. 3 (2021): 361-362.

¹¹⁴ "Radicalism--Democracy: The Principles and Measures of the Two Parties," *The State Rights Democrat*, December 16, 1870, 2, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84022644/1870-12-16/ed-1/seq-2/>.

¹¹⁵ "Republican County Convention Platform," *The Corvallis Gazette*, April 21, 1882, 2.

laborers,” so too did white workers in the 1880s. Their opposition to their Chinese neighbors grew, and by the early 1880s, the Knights of Labor (KOL) began to organize the region’s craft workers around the “Chinese Question,” claiming approximately 2,000 members.¹¹⁶ As in California, organized labor in the Pacific Northwest focused its first organizing efforts in opposition of Chinese workers. To white workers in the western United States and Canada, and especially along the Pacific coast, Chinese workers posed a paradoxical threat. They were described as servile and slavish while also being cunning, successful, and capable of taking over society.¹¹⁷ This contradictory stereotype fueled racism among workers who believed that Chinese labor brokers colluded with regional businesses to drive down wages by employing contracted Chinese workers. Anti-Chinese racism in the Pacific Northwest often followed the lead of anti-Chinese agitation in California. In 1882, one Idaho newspaper reprinted an article from the *San Francisco Argonaut* that declared, “If New England has its way the Republican party will become the party of millionaires, aristocrats, and cheap labor lords, and the Democratic party will become the party of free labor and white civilization.” In the eyes of many white Northwesterners, free labor could only exist in an all-white society.¹¹⁸

The issue of Chinese immigration after the enactment of the Restriction Act in 1882 became all-encompassing in the town of Port Townsend, Washington Territory. Located at the northern end of the Olympic Peninsula, Port Townsend was an international port that received ships coming from China. Fearful of imported contract workers, the Port Townsend assembly of the Knights of Labor published a list of demands concerning the hiring of Chinese workers in the *Puget Sound Argus*. Making the well-worn argument that employing Chinese workers undercut

¹¹⁶ Robert E. Ficken, *The Forested Land: A History of Lumbering in Western Washington* (University of Washington Press, 1987), 73; Schwantes, *Radical Heritage*, 27.

¹¹⁷ Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go*, 40.

¹¹⁸ “The Two Parties.” *Idaho Semi-Weekly World*, May 12, 1882.

the condition of white workers on the Pacific coast, the assembly predicted that this practice “will soon pauperize and bring [white workers] to the verge of starvation and despair.” The Port Townsend KOL’s stance echoed the 1863 territorial legislation, exclaiming that “the importation under contract of Chinese cheap labor” caused “the terrible degradation of the laboring masses on the Pacific Coast.”¹¹⁹

Three years after the Chinese Restriction Act, a new restrictive immigration bill made its way to the floor of the Senate in February 1885. Organized labor across the country supported the bill, which became known as the Foran Act. Titled, “an act to prohibit the importation and migration of foreigners and aliens under contract or agreement to perform labor in the United States, its Territories, and the District of Columbia,” the bill made it illegal for immigrants to contract a job in the United States from outside the nation’s borders. Additionally, the bill prohibited employers, businesses, labor contractors, or any person “to prepay the transportation, or in any way assist or encourage the importation or migration of any alien or aliens, any foreigner or foreigners, into the United States.” One key way labor brokers facilitated the transnational movement of workers was by paying transportation costs, to be remitted back to the broker once workers earned wages.¹²⁰

The passage of the Foran Act reveals the fear Congress and the Knights of Labor had concerning the importation of contract workers. On the Atlantic coast, labor unions opposed Italian contract workers brought to the United States by labor brokers known as padrones. Like their western counterparts, eastern labor unions also feared that southern or eastern European immigrants would flood the East Coast with laborers who would drive down wages.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ “Memorial,” *Weekly Puget Sound Argus*, March 4, 1886.

¹²⁰ Change, *Pacific Connections*, 64-65.

¹²¹ Gunther Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 86.

Especially targeted in the congressional debates were Hungarian and Italian contract workers, whom Senator John Tyler Morgan (D-AL) referred to as a “filthy, dirty set.”¹²² Morgan worried that the bill would ban desirable immigrants from northern and western Europe, explaining that southern employers had been attempting to entice German immigrants to settle “colonies” in Alabama. He suggested that rather than outlawing all foreign-contract labor, Congress should have the courage to single out Italian and Hungarian immigrants the way it had done with Chinese immigrants, in order to prevent “an unfit class of people to come into this land.”¹²³ New Jersey senator John McPherson disagreed with Morgan, and threw his support behind the bill. His reasoning echoed the Port Townsend Knights of Labor, as he believed that competition with immigrant contract labor would turn the white American worker into “a tramp, seeking bread from door to door.”¹²⁴ Not only did McPherson and the Port Townsend Knights of Labor make the common argument about Chinese workers undercutting white workers, but they also argued that the employment of Chinese contract workers turned white workers into tramps and paupers.

The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* published an article that celebrated the Foran Act and its similarity to the Chinese Restriction Act. “The passage of this bill should be peculiarly satisfactory to the Pacific Coast,” this article noted, “since it involves a principle similar to that involved in the exclusion of Chinese laborers.”¹²⁵ The article explained that “the people of the Eastern States” finally understood the “injustice” foreign contract labor imposed once that region was affected by an “influx of foreign laborers” similar to the Chinese on the Pacific coast. While the article celebrated “the protection of the American laborer,” what was important was that the

¹²² Congressional Record, Vol. 16, 48th Congress, 2nd Session, 1792.

¹²³ Congressional Record, Vol. 16, 48th Congress, 2nd Session, 1793.

¹²⁴ Congressional Record, Vol. 16, 48th Congress, 2nd Session, 1833.

¹²⁵ “Foreign Contract Labor,” *Seattle Daily Post-Intelligencer*, February 24, 1885, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045611/1885-02-24/ed-1/seq-2/>.

Foran Act would enable “the barring from us the viler classes of mankind, in preserving in its purity the Anglo-American blood.” Rather than discussing wage differentials or exploitative employers, the author’s main desire in supporting the Foran Act was to secure American racial purity. Just as the *State Rights Democrat* wrote fifteen years’ earlier about “White Men only to rule America,” the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* made clear that at the heart of calls for excluding Chinese contract workers lay a desire for a white-only nation.

Despite its popular support in the Northwest, the Foran Act proved very difficult to enforce. Immigration inspectors with small budgets were left to determine whether or not any given immigrant had contracted work before arriving in the United States. Historian Gunther Peck explained that the subsequent Supreme Court rulings clarifying the law had entrenched the “racialized and skill-based criteria” that immigration inspectors were to use to determine if an immigrant was a contract worker.¹²⁶ For Democrats, who were joined in the 1880s by Republicans, contract labor was not simply an exploitative economic arrangement between workers, brokers, and employers. Instead, contract labor reflected the servile nature and inferior race of certain undesirable immigrants. For those who wanted to ban foreign contract labor, migrant workers were not the victims of exploitation under a rapidly expanding system of industrial capitalism. Rather, contract workers’ race, language, religion, and country of origin determined whether or not politicians, unions, and journalists deemed workers as slaves or coolies. Many native-born white Americans viewed so-called coolieism as a biological trait inherent in all Chinese, and in some European workers. To ban contract labor was to ban Chinese and some European workers. They became inseparable.

¹²⁶ Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor*, 86.

Frustrated that the Chinese Restriction Act and the Foran Act did not put an end to Chinese immigration or labor contracting, armed mobs gathered in cities throughout the Northwest to create their own remedies to the “Chinese question.” Prior to the 1880s, acts of violence against Chinese immigrants largely occurred in rural camps. However, by 1885, white workers’ frustration with the failure of the Restriction and Foran Acts to eliminate Chinese workers from the Northwest coincided with climbing unemployment and a slumping lumber market. The completion of multiple railroads, including the Northern Pacific Railway in Oregon in 1883, the Oregon and California line in 1884, and the Canadian Pacific railroad in British Columbia in 1885, accelerated the migration of thousands of unemployed Chinese workers to Seattle, Tacoma, and Portland.¹²⁷ The Knights of Labor and the International Workingmen’s Association (IWA), a secret, radical working-class organization, whipped up public outrage against the growing number of Chinese residents of the Puget Sound region.¹²⁸ As part of a larger wave of anti-Chinese violence across the western United States, mobs of vigilantes organized expulsions of Chinese from Tacoma, Seattle, Olympia, and Portland.¹²⁹

The first expulsion occurred in Tacoma in November 1885. It was not a spontaneous event. On the contrary, months of deliberation, planning, and agitation led to the forced expulsion of virtually the entire Chinese community in Tacoma. In October, massive parades of anti-Chinese agitators marched through Seattle and Tacoma’s streets, declaring “Down with the Mongolian slave,” while women offered cakes decorated with the words, “The Chinese Must Go!” Bonfires lit up the evening, where according to historian Carlos Schwantes, “the glow was

¹²⁷ Stevens, “Brokers Between Worlds,” 233.

¹²⁸ Carlos A. Schwantes, “From Anti-Chinese Agitation to Reform Politics: The Legacy of the Knights of Labor in Washington and the Pacific Northwest,” *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 88, no. 4 (1997): 177.

¹²⁹ Stevens, “Brokers Between Worlds,” 206.

to represent the ‘light of a dawning day’ for free white labor.”¹³⁰ After these demonstrations, many Chinese residents of Tacoma began to leave the city, fearing for their lives. On November 3, vigilante groups, with the tacit approval of the mayor and sheriff, raided Tacoma’s Chinatown, intimidated the remaining 200 Chinese men and women, and marched them eight miles out of the city in driving, cold rain. Chinese merchant-brokers in Tacoma scrambled to use what influence they had established to contact the territorial governor, Watson Squire, begging for protection from the mob. Squire refused assistance. Reports of the expulsion reached the Chinese consulate, but it was too late. Two men died of exposure, and the remaining refugees were deported to Portland. Soon after, fires destroyed the Chinese section of the city, and the forced removal was complete.¹³¹ The anti-Chinese coalition in the territory celebrated the “Tacoma Method,” and set their sights on other cities around the Puget Sound.

News of the violence and expulsions in Tacoma quickly reached Chin Gee Hee in Seattle. Chin used his international clout and influence to get word to the Chinese minister in Washington D.C. that Chinese residents of Washington Territory were still under duress. The minister contacted the Secretary of State, alerting the federal government of the ongoing violence in the territory. The police arrested Chin on trumped up charges, but quickly released him from jail. Attempting to avoid a fate similar to that of the Chinese in Tacoma, Chin, alongside four other Chinese merchants, and Seattle Mayor, Henry Yesler, met with the anti-Chinese coalition in Seattle to agree to terms for the voluntary removal of Chinese from the city, if granted enough time to vacate. Additionally, federal troops arrived in Seattle on November 8 to prevent the “Tacoma Method” from taking place. The deal between the two parties held for a time, but

¹³⁰ The *Seattle Daily Call*, October 11, 12, 26, and November 2, 1885, as cited in Schwantes, “From Anti-Chinese Agitation to Reform Politics,” 178.

¹³¹ Chang, *Pacific Connections*, 47; Schwantes, “From Anti-Chinese Agitation to Reform Politics,” 178; Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go*, 98–102.

further unemployment and local legislators' failure to pass several anti-Chinese ordinances inflamed the anti-Chinese coalition, and vigilante committees once again took to the streets to demand the removal of Chinese from Seattle. On February 7, 1886, Chinese residents awoke to the sound of a violent mob, and were ordered to leave the city immediately.¹³²

Anti-Chinese vigilantes marched 400 Chinese residents to the wharf where they boarded the *Queen of the Pacific*, a steamer bound for San Francisco. Receiving news of the expulsion-in-progress, Judge Thomas Burke, a long-time associate of Chin, successfully filed a writ of habeas corpus in the Washington Territorial District Court for the Chinese on the ship. The judge ordered the ship to remain in port with the Chinese on board overnight, and ruled the following day that they could either voluntarily depart on the ship or return to their homes. Most Chinese left the city immediately, and over the next few days even more fled north and south, out of the territory.¹³³

The forced removal of Chinese workers from cities throughout the Puget Sound region severely damaged the system of labor migration that Chin Gee Hee and other labor brokers had established over the past fifteen years. Some Chinese merchants remained in the city, as they had important connections with local businesses, but the expulsions of 1885 and 1886 marked a sharp change for the footloose labor system. In 1889, Chin Gee Hee began a new labor contracting firm, Quong Tuck & Co. and continued to secure work for Chinese laborers in and around Seattle, where they graded roads and worked on rail lines. Finding it increasingly difficult to secure Chinese workers, Chin turned to hiring Japanese immigrants. Around 1900, he left his business to his son, Chin Lem, and returned to southern China to establish the Sunning Railway Company. In 1906, Chin Gee Hee traveled from China to the United States to raise funds for his

¹³² Stevens, "Brokers Between Worlds," 241–42; Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go*, 106–7.

¹³³ Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go*, 110–11.

company, planning to use his position as an elite businessman to navigate the increasingly rigid immigration regime.¹³⁴

Chinese immigration did not evaporate overnight. In 1892, Congress passed the Geary Act, which hardened the requirements of the 1882 Chinese Restriction Act, and led to a sharp decline in the number of Chinese immigrants. This act required Chinese workers who remained in the United States to carry papers declaring their legal status. As the remaining workers from China grew older, Chinese labor brokers found it increasingly difficult to furnish Chinese workers for the region's employers with whom they had worked for decades. This was made even more difficult with the passage of the Scott Act in 1888, which voided the return certificates tens of thousands of Chinese immigrants used to come back to the United States after Chinese Exclusion went into effect. After years of anti-Chinese discourse, violence, and expulsion, the 1892 Geary Act ultimately led to the decline in the number of Chinese immigrants entering into the United States.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Willard G Jue, "Chin Gee-Hee, Chinese Pioneer Entrepreneur in Seattle and Toishan," *The Annals of the Chinese Historical Society of the Pacific Northwest*, (1983): 34–35.

¹³⁵ Beth Lew-Williams, "Before Restriction Became Exclusion: America's Experiment in Diplomatic Immigration Control," *Pacific Historical Review* 83, no. 1 (2014): 50-52, <https://doi.org/10.1525/phr.2014.83.1.24>.

Table 2.1 ¹³⁶

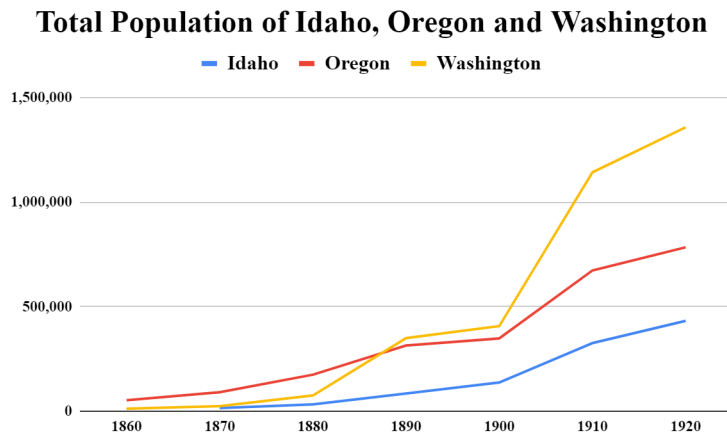
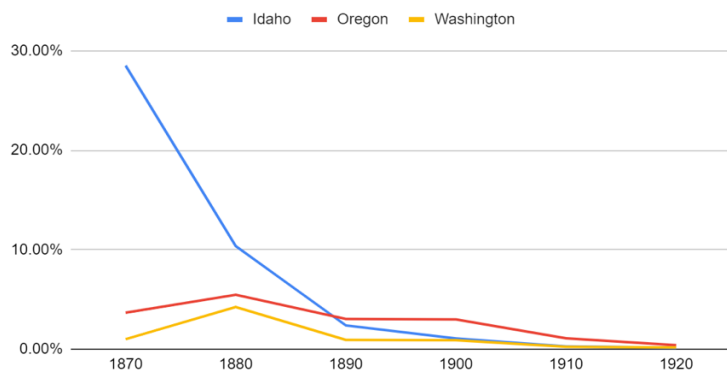


Table 2.2 ¹³⁷

Chinese Population in Idaho, Oregon and Washington, by Percentage



¹³⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, 1940 Census of Population: Volume 2. Characteristics of the Population Part 2: Idaho, Table 3, “Urban and Rural Population, For the State: 1870 to 1940,” 395, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-volume-2/33973538v2p2ch5.pdf>; U.S. Census Bureau, 1940 Census of Population: Volume 2. Characteristics of the Population Part 5: Oregon, Table 3, “Urban and Rural Population, For the State: 1850 to 1940,” 963, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-volume-2/33973538v2p5ch9.pdf>; U.S. Census Bureau, 1940 Census of Population: Volume 2. Characteristics of the Population Part 7: Washington, Table 3, “Urban and Rural Population, For the State: 1860 to 1940,” 303, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-volume-2/33973538v2p7ch4.pdf>.

¹³⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, 1940 Census of Population: Volume 2. Characteristics of the Population Part 2: Idaho, Table 3, “Urban and Rural Population, For the State: 1870 to 1940,” 395, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-volume-2/33973538v2p2ch5.pdf>; U.S. Census Bureau, 1940 Census of Population: Volume 2. Characteristics of the Population Part 5: Oregon, Table 3, “Urban and Rural Population, For the State: 1850 to 1940,” 963, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-volume-2/33973538v2p5ch9.pdf>; U.S. Census Bureau, 1940 Census of Population: Volume 2. Characteristics of the Population Part 7: Washington, Table 3, “Urban and Rural Population, For the State: 1860 to 1940,” 303, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-volume-2/33973538v2p7ch4.pdf>.

New Immigrant Brokers

Despite the wave of violence and expulsion Chinese immigrants experienced in the Pacific Northwest in the 1880s, labor brokering did not come to an end. Instead, the expulsion and exclusion of Chinese immigrants coincided with a period when labor brokering took off and private employment agencies abounded in the Pacific Northwest. Organized labor's cries against the importation of coolie labor had more to do with racism and xenophobia than it did with a critique of the employment of contracted workers in the late nineteenth century. By the 1890s, new groups of immigrants and native-born Americans found themselves increasingly reliant on a network of labor brokers and employment agencies to find work in the Northwest's many extractive industries. The region's industrial barons looked to new groups of workers to replace Chinese workers. Employers hired Japanese, European, and North American laborers to work in many of the same industries that Chinese workers had been employed during the 1870s and 80s.

Employers in the Pacific Northwest once again turned to labor brokering companies to solve their need for workers. At the beginning of the twentieth century, labor brokers recruited Japanese immigrants to work in canneries, mines, lumber mills, and on farms and railroads. The brokering system that Wa Chong Co. and others developed in the 1870s had become robust and commonplace for workers of all lineages participating in the footloose labor system. The Oriental Trading Company (OTC), for example, became one of the largest Japanese labor brokering companies in the Northwest. Established in 1898 in Seattle by Charles Tetsuo Takahashi and Ototaka Yamaoka, the company organized the movement of Japanese laborers between the United States, Hawai'i, and Japan.¹³⁸ Unlike Wa Chong Co., the OTC entered the world of labor brokering in the midst of harsh immigration restrictions. Part of the appeal for

¹³⁸ Chang, *Pacific Connections*, 61.

employers contracting with the OTC was the promise that it would navigate the complex new immigration laws in both Japan and the United States.

The Oriental Trading Co.'s contracting relationship with the Great Northern Pacific Railway (GNPR) offers a clear example of how labor brokers navigated these restrictive immigration laws. Since its establishment in 1898, the OTC contracted with the GNPR to furnish thousands of Japanese railroad workers on the line between Seattle and St. Paul, Minnesota. The Foran Act's restriction of foreign contract laborers created new obstacles for employers who wanted to hire workers from outside the United States. Labor brokers met the challenge. Paradoxically, the Foran Act did not constrain the footloose labor system as its creators intended; rather, it created the conditions where labor brokers became further entrenched in the footloose labor system.

In December 1899, after a year of working with the OTC to hire Japanese laborers for railroad track work, P. T. Downs, the assistant general superintendent of the GNPR, received new terms for the upcoming year. Takahashi informed Downs that the OTC was able to "supply strictly first class Japanese laborers in any number which the Railway Company may require," for between \$1.05 and \$1.10 per worker per ten-hour day worked. Takahashi expected the GNPR to pay "one bookman or interpreter for each gang" and to cover the cost of transportation from Seattle to the points of work, and back when the work was completed. Additionally, Takahashi asked that the company "supply necessary tents or boarding houses; also to furnish individual time statements on or before the third of each month." The OTC would provide their workers with cooking equipment and housing supplies for the work camps. In addition to the above terms, the OTC secured a bond with the American Bonding & Trust Company indemnifying the

GNPR “from all claims for wages of the men supplied under this agreement.” Takahashi concluded by asking to secure the contract under the same terms for the next four years.¹³⁹

Japanese workers in the Pacific Northwest did more than construct railroads. Logging companies and lumber mills used labor brokers to hire Japanese workers and often segregated them from white workers. In the first quarter of the twentieth century, Japanese workers represented a significant portion of the workforce in the lumber industry. In 1907, approximately 20 percent were Japanese.¹⁴⁰ Two lumber workers, Mr. Kubayashi and Mr. Ohye, described how exploitative labor brokering was in the mill town of Selleck, Washington. The labor broker (also called a bookman), Mr. Abo, had a near monopoly on labor contracting for the mill in Selleck. Kubayashi and Ohye explained how he made “over \$1000 every month,” by cheating the mill company. “He contracts chain work [a type of job in the mill] from [the] company and they give him wages for thirty men. Then he only put on twenty-five men and he keep five men’s wages himself.” They also alleged that the bookman charged rents on all the houses in town, charged for wood, and collected a commission from the Japanese store. As the two workers explained, “That’s no good for working man—just good for boss.”¹⁴¹ Despite how commonplace labor brokering was, bookmen were not always corrupt. Japanese workers at the Crown Lumber Company elected their own bookman yearly, and he did not claim a commission from the Japanese store.

S. Shiota’s experience was typical of most footloose workers on the Pacific coast in the early twentieth century. Born in Kochi Prefecture, in southern Japan in 1878, Shiota immigrated

¹³⁹ Letter from Charles Tetsuo Takahashi to P.T. Downs, December 18, 1899, collection number 4415-001, Reel 1, Records of the Northern Pacific Railway Company, University of Washington Special Collections. Location of original files held at the Minnesota Historical Society.

¹⁴⁰ Ronald Olson, “The Orientals in the Lumber Industry in the State of Washington” (1928), 5, Survey of Race Relations records, Box 28, Folder 198, Hoover Institution Archive, Stanford University.

¹⁴¹ Crown Lumber Company, 10, Survey of Race Relations records, Box 28, Folder 203, Hoover Institution Archives.

to Seattle in 1906. Soon after his arrival, he moved to California to work in the fruit orchards. He stayed in California for a year, then returned to Washington and worked at a lumber mill near Tacoma for four years. After that, he worked at Nettleton Lumber Company in Seattle for two years. Leaving Seattle to work in southwestern Washington, Shiota worked at a mill in Onalaska, Washington for only a few days, but found work nearby at Walville Lumber Company, where he stayed for at least seven years loading railcars, working under a labor contractor, Mr. Okabe.¹⁴² In 1924, the company employed 300 workers, with 150 in the mill and 150 in the logging camp. Thirty-seven of the 300 men were Japanese. The majority of them worked in the mill, and nine worked on the section track for the logging railroad. Walville was a small, segregated mill town. White workers typically accepted their Japanese coworkers, sometimes condescendingly. One worker told an interviewer, “I don’t mind working with them—they sure are cheerful little devils to work with.”¹⁴³ Shaffer, the mill superintendent, explained his feelings in more economic terms, “There ain’t none of us but what would rather run with an all-white crew but by God, you can’t run with one.... After all we’ve got to look at the financial side of it just as every company has to. And so we have to keep them around to do the dirty work and the overtime work.”¹⁴⁴

Japanese immigrants also worked for Japanese employers. In Yakima, in the eastern part of Washington state, Yahachi Suzuki worked for two Japanese farmers. Suzuki was born in Aichi Prefecture, Japan in 1889, and immigrated to the United States when he was twenty-two years old. He worked on the railroad in Montana for a year before heading to Seattle, where he found winter work in a nearby logging camp. By the following spring, Suzuki headed east for

¹⁴² Walville Lumber Company, 9, Survey of Race Relations records, Box 28, Folder 208, Hoover Institution Archives.

¹⁴³ Walville Lumber Company, 14 Survey of Race Relations records, Box 28, Folder 208, Hoover Institution Archives.

¹⁴⁴ Walville Lumber Company, 16 Survey of Race Relations records, Box 28, Folder 208, Hoover Institution Archives.

Yakima, and spent the next four or five years as a farm hand. Like many farm hands, he experienced long hours, poor food, and constant movement. “When a month’s job was over, I moved to the next farm,” Suzuki explained, “I rolled the tent up tightly and put it in the canvas sack with my comfort and eating utensils, and was on my way.” After several years of poor treatment, Suzuki packed his belongings, and moved back to Seattle.¹⁴⁵ Even when labor brokers did not place Japanese immigrants in jobs, brokers were still crucial to the survival of Japanese immigrant farmers. Before the Yakima Valley was irrigated, Sakitaro Takei explained how he and his family survived starting a farm without any capital. “Brokers advanced the money against the coming harvest—a kind of contract farming—\$20 for one acre of cantaloupes, or \$200 for ten acres.”¹⁴⁶

Chinese and Japanese workers were not the only immigrants looking for employment in the Pacific Northwest in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Workers from Europe also found their precarious place in the footloose labor system. Greek, Finnish, Italian, and Scandinavian immigrants secured work through their own co-ethnic labor brokers, often known as padrones. In the Pacific Northwest, these immigrants constituted a smaller portion of the labor pool, but still show up in the records. For example, Oregon’s state labor commissioner, O.P. Hoff warned in 1912 of the “menace of foreign labor” emanating from Southern Europe. He argued that white workers’ opposition to Asian workers caused employers to hire “other foreign types” from southern Europe, and made “the condition very little, if any, better.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Kazuo Ito, *Issei: A History of Japanese Immigrants in North America* (Seattle: Japanese Community Service, 1973), 425.

¹⁴⁶ Ito, *Issei*, 427.

¹⁴⁷ *Fifth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Inspector of Factories and Workshops of the State of Oregon*, (Salem, Oregon), 13.

In 1905, K. N. Wilck followed in the footsteps of Chin Gee Hee when he opened the Scandinavian American Employment Office at 610 Third Avenue, in Seattle. Only two blocks from Quong Tuck & Company, Wilck's new office was in the heart of the city's employment agency district. Like Chin, Wilck began his career not as a labor broker, but as a laborer. He worked as a foreman in nearby sawmills, and saw a business opportunity in furnishing Scandinavian workers to sawmills. He criticized other labor brokers for not understanding the requirements of skilled trades, and promised that he could save employers "both money and trouble."¹⁴⁸ More than skill, Wilck recognized that there was an "increasing and preferred demand for Scandinavian laborers for the sawmills," and like other brokers before him, attempted to meet the desire of employers to hire workers of particular ethnicities.

Many native-born workers expressed hostility towards European immigrants, often contrasting them with Japanese workers. Ben Dick, a millworker at Crown Lumber Company in Mukilteo, Washington, explained that he and his wife "would rather have those Japs for neighbors than Greeks and other foreigners."¹⁴⁹ The yard boss at Crown Lumber Co., Mr. Patterson, harbored similar sentiments. "I am no Jap lover," he said in an interview, "I don't like them especially well, just like I don't like foreigners very well. But these Japs are a damned sight better than Greeks or Hindus." Patterson explained his dislike of immigrants by criticizing the high labor turnover of Euro-Americans: "I don't especially like any foreign labor but we are forced to have it because you can't keep a steady white crew on the job."¹⁵⁰ Another mill worker at Walville Lumber Company was not as hostile to his Japanese coworkers. Explaining how Japanese workers compared to other immigrants, he explained, "They are a damned sight

¹⁴⁸ Letter from C.N. Wilck to Puget Lumber Co., January 16, 1905, Collection number 3820-001, Box 93, Folder 5, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

¹⁴⁹ Crown Lumber Company, 3, Survey of Race Relations records, Box 28, Folder 203, Hoover Institution Archives.

¹⁵⁰ Crown Lumber Company, 9, Survey of Race Relations records, Box 28, Folder 203, Hoover Institution Archives.

different than these Greeks they have working in some places. If a white man has to work with a bunch of those Greeks they all stick together and they all work against him.” As in other parts of the country, Northwesterners established a labor hierarchy that placed native-born white workers at the top, and, depending on the decade or region, various immigrant groups below. Often, but not always, non-white workers were located at the bottom of the hierarchy, regardless of where they were born. As in the 1870s and 1880s, by the turn of the century, ethnicity and job status were strongly tied together.

When Greek and Finnish workers joined a mill strike in southwest Washington in 1912, local vigilantes resorted to similar expulsion methods used against Chinese immigrants in the 1880s. In March 1912, workers walked off the job at lumber mills in the Grays Harbor region, (which included the towns of Aberdeen, Hoquiam, and Raymond) and demanded better wages and shorter hours. Having been active in organizing footloose workers in the timber industry, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)’s Forest and Lumber Workers’ Industrial Union No. 432 swiftly joined the action. Throughout the month of March, thousands of workers joined the strike, as it spread from mill to mill. The strikers met resistance from other residents and the mill owners, who formed vigilante, or “citizens’ committees,” and used threats of violence to force them back to work. Among the strikers were 120 Greek workers employed in Raymond.

The strikers refused to return to work, and on Friday, March 29, members of the vigilante committee used “strong arm” tactics to force the striking workers, including 120 Greeks, onto boxcars, and “deported” them fifty miles west to Chehalis.¹⁵¹ John Pallas, a Greek millworker described the deportation, “Friday they grab us. Everybody have guns, clubs, break in our houses [and] say: ‘You go to work.’ We say, ‘No we not want to work.’ Then woof! [They] hit us with

¹⁵¹ “Ousted Greeks to Sue,” *East Oregonian*, April 1, 1912; “Deported Strikers Tell of Atrocities,” *The Tacoma Times*, April 1, 1912.

gun and throw us in box car like cattle.” Another worker and fellow Wobbly (workers’ nickname for members of the IWW), A. C. Gulley recalled the degree to which pro-company men were armed, “I went to town from camp Thursday to try to get the boys and the mill men together to arbitrate and found the town full of special police armed with guns, rifles, slingshots or any weapon with which murder could be committed, and they were throwing everybody into box cars and shipping them away.”¹⁵²

The Greek workers were able to contact the Greek consul in Tacoma, who met with them when they reached Chehalis. The consul departed for Raymond but was pulled off his train and beaten over the head with a club before he was loaded into an automobile and taken to Raymond. The strikers asked to return to town to withdraw their money from the banks and to return to their wives and children, but were forced to go to nearby cattle sheds before they were once again forced on boxcars and taken to Tacoma. On April 4, mill owners in nearby Aberdeen made a statement that they would only hire American workers, “and would assist in driving out the Greeks and other Slavic races” from the city. By April 12, the strike was over. The strikers had won some wage concessions, but did not gain union recognition.¹⁵³

While not as extreme or permanent as the anti-Chinese expulsions of 1885 and 1886, the Raymond deportation illuminates the growing prevalence of vigilante committees in the West, particularly in labor disputes with immigrant workers. Vigilantes continued to oppose undesirable workers, but there were also key differences from the earlier expulsions. Rather than supporting “law and order,” businessmen joined the side of the vigilantes to handle their labor problems. They used deportation as a tool to end strikes. Although they did not deport striking

¹⁵² “Deported Strikers Tell of Atrocities,” *The Tacoma Times*, April 1, 1912.

¹⁵³ “Effort to End Strike,” *The Newport Miner*, April 4, 1912.

workers out of the country, they still used violence, or the threat of violence, to remove undesirable workers from Raymond.

By the early twentieth century, Chinese brokers no longer had a monopoly on labor brokering. Japanese, Greek, Finnish, and Scandinavian immigrant brokers established labor brokerages to fuel the footloose labor system. Immigrant workers most commonly worked in the industries that relied on seasonal labor, and many immigrants in the Northwest became part of the footloose labor system, as workers, brokers, and employers. But immigrants were not the only workers who found themselves in the footloose labor system. Increasingly, native-born Americans moved throughout the West in search of work.

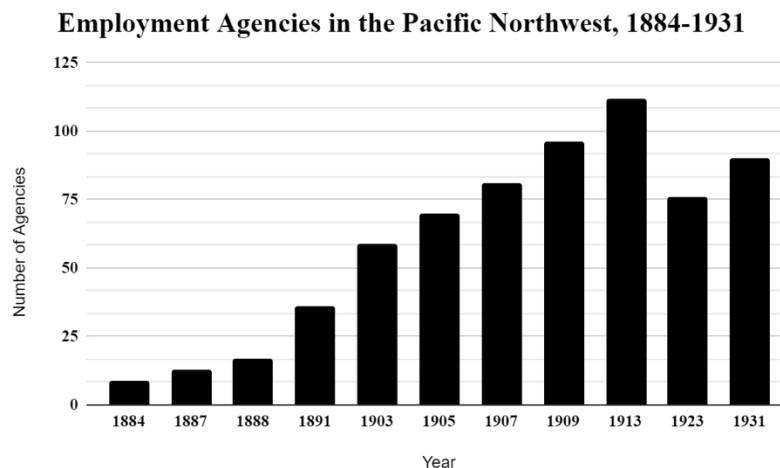
The Rise of Private Employment Agencies

While Congress and the Bureau of Immigration created and enforced new restrictions on immigrant contract laborers entering the United States in the 1890s, private employment agencies became ubiquitous in cities throughout the American West, fulfilling a similar role to that of immigrant labor brokers in the footloose labor system. In addition to Japanese and European immigrant brokers, Northwestern employers increasingly turned to private employment agencies to solve their labor supply problems. The work of labor brokers and employment agencies overlapped, but generally, labor brokers found work for immigrant workers, often of the same ethnicity, while private employment agencies advertised their services in English, and catered to native-born migrants. While the distinction between “labor broker”

and “employment agent” is not clear cut, Northwesterners understood them as two separate groups.¹⁵⁴

The proliferation of private employment agencies paralleled both the population boom in the Northwest and the decline in the number of Chinese immigrants. In 1891, three years after the Scott Act made it impossible for Chinese laborers to return to their jobs in the United States, there were thirty-six private employment agencies listed in a Northwestern business directory, with offices dotting the Northwest from Eugene, Oregon, to Seattle and Spokane, Washington. In 1903, a year after the passage of the Geary Act, which cemented and made the Chinese Exclusion Act more restrictive, fifty-nine private employment agencies advertised their services in local directories or solicitations in the Northwest. By 1913, there were at least 112 private employment agencies.¹⁵⁵

Table 2.3 ¹⁵⁶



¹⁵⁴ I use both terms, “labor broker” and “employment agency” to refer to the middlemen-businesses that contracted jobs between employers and workers. However, I use “labor broker” to refer to the immigrant brokers who worked primarily with co-ethnic immigrants, and “employment agency” for the businesses who worked primarily with English-speaking white workers (without regard for immigration status). It is very difficult to know the immigration status of those who patronized employment agencies, unless in rare cases the agent made explicit mention of the worker’s background. I differentiate these two terms only because people at the time did so.

¹⁵⁵ R.L. Polk & Co.’s *Oregon, Washington and Idaho Gazetteer*, 1891.

¹⁵⁶ See Appendix A for a list of sources.

Private employment agencies, along with their labor broker counterparts, were the center of the footloose labor system by the turn of the twentieth century. Located in cities throughout the Pacific Northwest, employment agencies became important clearinghouses of job information for both the region's workers and employers. Agents made their business by establishing relationships with the most important industries in the Northwest, including lumber mills, logging outfits, ranches, railroad companies, hotels, restaurants, mines, and general contractors.¹⁵⁷ Mirroring the extractive industries they served, employment agencies also operated seasonally. In the winter, agencies like the Pacific Coast Employment Office desperately solicited work from businesses by sending mail advertising their services. One such letter informed the manager at Puget Mill Co. in Port Ludlow, Washington, that the agency kept "a classified list of experienced help, such as sawyers, filers, planer and stickermen, edgers and trimmers, lath machine men, ratchet setters, firemen, engineers, boom men etc." and if the mill needed any workers, the agency "would be pleased to hear from [them]."¹⁵⁸ Such solicitation was common. During the lean winter months, agencies became creative in order to retain business.

For example, the People's Employment Company of Seattle wanted to get a head-start on its sale of job information in January 1900. Also writing to the Puget Mill Co., the People's Employment Co. offered to send the mill "a part of the men that you will be taking on during the spring and summer," hoping to both collect fees from workers for the information and to secure an entire year's worth of orders before the season was underway. They pitched their employment agency as "better than any other office" because they were located on Yesler Way, which was the main street in Seattle leading to the docks and train station. They also claimed to have a

¹⁵⁷ Letter from Rae & Arnold to Puget Mill Co. September 2, 1900, collection number 3820-001, Box 90, Folder 26, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

¹⁵⁸ Letter from Rae & Arnold to Puget Mill Co. January 18, 1900, collection number 3820-001, Box 90, Folder 14, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

“superior class of men” because they were located away from the saloon district.¹⁵⁹ The People’s Employment Company’s strategy replicated that of the Oriental Trading Company, which warned the Great Northern Pacific Railway that it needed to finalize the contract hiring of 2,500 Japanese workers by March 1, 1900, or risk losing the chance to hire those workers because they would be hired elsewhere. The general superintendent of the Great Northern Pacific Railway agreed, and acknowledged that in 1899, he had waited too long to hire workers and “other employers secured them before we got our full quota.”¹⁶⁰ Just like the Oriental Trading Company, the People’s Employment Company recognized the need to establish contracts with employers before the spring work season began, and the accompanying seasonal labor shortage.

When spring arrived in 1900, private employment agencies and businesses’ roles reversed, and Puget Mill Co. solicited orders for workers from the Pacific Coast Employment Office. Writing that May, the Pacific Coast Employment Office told the manager at Puget Mill Co.’s Port Ludlow mill that they could not secure the five workers that the mill had requested, but were still working on fulfilling the order. Recognizing the difficulty of finding workers in the spring, the employment office wrote, “men seem very hard to pick just now for mill work. However we are rustling for you and will get some men down there Tuesday sure.”¹⁶¹ A competing employment agency wrote to the Puget Mill Co. two days later, acknowledging the same problem, “It is almost impossible to get mill laborers now at any reasonable price. We have been doing all possible to get you the men but have had poor success.”¹⁶² By October, the roles

¹⁵⁹ Letter from Ben C. Mooers to Puget Mill Co. January 25, 1900, collection number 3820-001, Box 90, Folder 14, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

¹⁶⁰ Letter from F.E. Ward to P.T. Downs, December 28, 1899, collection number 4415-001, Reel 1, Records of the Northern Pacific Railway Company, University of Washington Special Collections. Location of original files held at the Minnesota Historical Society.

¹⁶¹ Letter from Rae & Arnold to Puget Mill Co., May 6, 1900, collection number 3820-001, Box 90, Folder 19, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

¹⁶² Letter from George W. Crane to Puget Mill Co., May 8, 1900, collection number 3820-001, Box 90, Folder 19, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

again reversed, and several private employment agencies solicited orders for workers from Puget Mill Co., as the work season had slowed down going into the winter, and workers were easy to find. Desperate for business, the Puget Sound & Alaska Employment Co., the Pacific Coast Employment Office, the Washington Employment Bureau, Crawford & Pratt, and Crane's Employment Agency, had all solicited Puget Mill Co. for orders of workers in the waning months of 1900.¹⁶³ This cycle carried on for the next two decades as private employment agencies struggled to place workers in jobs in the fall and winter months, and then businesses struggled to find workers to fill positions in the spring and summer.

Employment agencies existed because they could turn a profit by selling job information to workers. At first glance, private agencies seemed to offer a much-needed solution to the Northwest's chaotic labor market by addressing seasonal labor shortages and surpluses. Through employment agencies, employers could find workers, and workers could find jobs. But despite their seemingly useful position in the footloose labor system, employment agencies were rife with abuse. Agencies regularly advertised that they provided their services free to employers, but notoriously charged exorbitant fees to workers. Agencies commonly sold false job information to men and women looking for work, causing them to move out of the city, only to find out they had been tricked, losing the day's or week's wage. Agencies' fees also fluctuated with the state of the labor market. In the summer, when workers were hard to find, agencies sold job information for as little as twenty-five cents in 1915. In the winter when unemployment was

¹⁶³ Letter from Crawford & Pratt to Puget Mill Co., September 19, 1900, collection number 3820-001, Box 90, Folder 27, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections; Letter from Rae & Arnold to Puget Mill Co., September 4, 1900, collection number 3820-001, Box 90, Folder 27, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections; Letter from Wiseman to Puget Mill Co., October 5, 1900, collection number 3820-001, Box 90, Folder 28, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections; Letter from Crawford & Pratt to Puget Mill Co., October 23, 1900, collection number 3820-001, Box 90, Folder 29, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections; Letter from George W. Crane to Puget Mill Co., November 20, 1900, collection number 3820-001, Box 90, Folder 31, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

high, job information sold for between two and ten dollars.¹⁶⁴ Rather than stabilizing the chaotic labor market, agencies only created more mobility, and created barriers to employment if workers could not afford their fees. Agencies had little incentive to bring order to the northwestern labor market. They wanted to control the chaos in order to profit from it. As historian Kornel Chang observed about Yip Sing and other Chinese labor brokers, employment agencies offered employers “not only their ability to fuel and foster mobility across great distances but also their capacity to discipline that mobility, to lock migrant workers firmly in a place.”¹⁶⁵ While the manual laborers who patronized employment agencies did not typically need assistance crossing international borders, they did rely on employment agencies to find work in the rural hinterlands surrounding Northwestern cities.

Not all workers in the footloose labor system found work through labor brokers or employment agents. For example, agricultural workers in eastern Washington in the first two decades of the twentieth century arrived annually in farming towns during the harvest season, and waited for farmers to hire them for a couple of weeks’ work. When their work was completed, they stole passage on passing boxcars to travel to the next town for more harvest work. Desirable only during peak harvest season, these “bindle stiffs” were often chased out of town or arrested on charges of vagrancy once the season ended. In the early twentieth-century Pacific Northwest, single, native-born white men made up the majority of the population of migrant farm workers, but they were not the only footloose laborers to work in agriculture.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ United States Commission on Industrial Relations, *Final Report of the Commission on Industrial Relations* (Washington: GPO, 1916), 172.

¹⁶⁵ Chang, *Pacific Connections*, 30.

¹⁶⁶ Greg Hall, *Harvest Wobblies: The Industrial Workers of the World and Agricultural Laborers in the American West, 1905-1930*, 1 edition (Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University Press, 2001), 45.

Workers with experience in skilled positions often found work without the help of employment agencies. Bandsaw filers at lumber mills, for example, were especially desirable. Rather than going through an employment agency, they often wrote to employers directly asking for work. In December 1901, C.S. Dibble wrote to the Puget Mill Company at Port Ludlow inquiring about work for the following season. He offered references from a previous employer, and described his experience. He added that he would “furnish” his own helper, and could “bring first class sawyer if wanted.”¹⁶⁷ Dibble’s offer illustrates the importance of labor networks for skilled workers. Rather than having to negotiate employment through a third-party agent or broker, skilled workers had opportunities to deal directly with employers. They also could bring other workers with them, securing employment for several people at once. Despite Dibble’s status, however, he was subject to the extreme seasonal employment of the Northwest. His status simply provided him with more opportunities in the footloose labor system.

Labor Brokers versus Employment Agents

Labor brokers and employment agents were central to making the footloose labor system profitable for northwestern employers. Brokers and agents shared much in common, but they were not always the same. The main similarity between the two groups was their physical location in the footloose labor system. Brokers and agents set up shop in cities throughout the Northwest, and facilitated the movement of workers from the hinterland, whether it was Guangdong or Nebraska, to worksites across the region. In Seattle, employment agencies and labor brokers operated side-by-side in the same neighborhood. The main difference was the kind of workers to whom they advertised their services and the experiences of these workers.

¹⁶⁷ Letter from C.S. Dibble to Puget Mill Co., December 14, 1901, collection number 3820-001, Box 91, Folder 7, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

Agents' skill in making business connections with employers like Puget Mill Co. and the Great Northern Pacific Railroad was crucial to the success of their businesses. Brokers and agents often held contracts with employers for many years, learning about the kinds of workers they requested, smoothing the transition between seasons by finding workers before the spring rush came on. In addition to working with employers, brokers and agents secured transportation for the workers they hired out. They purchased train and ship fares ahead of time, offering tickets to workers leaving the city for rural camps. Once workers arrived, employers remitted the cost of transportation from the workers' pay, and sent it back to the broker or agent in the city. Brokers and agents collected job fees from workers in exchange for their service. For Chinese and Japanese workers, who were most frequently contracted seasonally, employers paid brokers a certain percentage of workers' wages at the end of the contract. Employment agencies typically charged a flat fee before they sold job information, usually between one and five dollars (but sometimes more during busy seasons), and if a worker could not pay it before accepting a job, employers withheld the job fee alongside the price of transportation, and remitted it back to the employment agency. In a broader sense, brokers and agents both took on the actual work of finding workers to fill jobs. Employers outsourced the work of finding employees to third-party brokers and agents. Agents promised to do the work of selecting, filtering, and transporting workers to businesses, and always guaranteed first-class men, regardless of who they sent. They made their business by keeping employers happy. Northwestern employers depended on brokers, regardless of who ran the business.

While labor brokers and employment agencies fulfilled fundamentally similar functions in the footloose labor system, there were important differences between them. Most importantly, labor brokers secured employment for immigrants from their home country. Chin Gee Hee and

the Wa Chong Co. worked primarily with Chinese immigrants. Charles Tetsuo Takahashi and Ototaka Yamaoka, through the Oriental Trading Company, brokered employment for Japanese immigrants. While there was some crossover, especially in the canning industry where Chinese labor brokers had a firm hold on the hiring process, immigrant labor brokers typically worked exclusively with their countrymen and women. Language barriers between new immigrants and northwestern employers and foremen made this arrangement logical. It made sense for immigrants who spoke little or no English to approach co-ethnic labor brokers to secure work. In addition, kinship or regional ties often meant that immigrants and brokers shared a degree of trust. Many immigrants, despite the regulations of the Foran Act, were recruited by labor brokers before they left their home country. Once in the United States, contracted workers found lodging, groceries, and employment through co-ethnic labor brokers, who largely shaped the new immigrants' experiences in the United States. But labor brokers also exerted an enormous amount of control over immigrant workers who rarely spoke English and could seldom look for work on their own.

Immigrant labor brokers also had more of an interest in ensuring that the workers they placed in jobs received their pay. Unlike employment agents, who often secured their fees upfront, businesses paid labor brokers only after contracts were completed, often at the end of the construction or canning season. If an employer refused to pay its contracted workers, labor brokers also lost their income, so they had an incentive to fight for workers to receive the pay for which brokers had bargained. It was not uncommon for brokers to sue employers for nonpayment of wages. The relationship between immigrant workers and labor brokers was complex. In addition to securing better working conditions, brokers also enticed workers with

gambling games, sometimes forced workers to shop at their shop for groceries, or hooked workers on opium that they could only purchase from the broker's importing firm.¹⁶⁸

Employment agencies had a simpler and more antagonistic relationship with workers. They did not offer protection, nor did they sue employers for lost wages. The only benefit they offered workers was job information in exchange for a fee. But much of the time, job information was bad (sometimes intentionally), and employment agencies had a nefarious relationship with employers that boosted job turnover in a way that earned agents more fees, but did nothing to help workers secure long-term employment.

Another key difference between footloose workers was that native-born and English-speaking workers had more employment options than immigrant workers, especially Asians. Racism structured the hierarchy of jobs in the Pacific Northwest, as it did in the rest of the United States in the late nineteenth century. Employers sought out immigrant and non-white workers because they could pay them less than white workers, or they were easier to keep on the job long-term due to the seasonal contracts signed with brokers. Chinese and Japanese immigrant workers had to overcome restrictive and racist immigration laws, and were more dependent than hobos and tramps on labor brokers to find work. It is important to recognize these differences between immigrant brokers and employment agencies. Yet, despite their differences, labor brokers and employment agencies were central to the development of the footloose labor system, and fulfilled many of the same functions for the employers with whom they worked.

In the waning decade of the nineteenth century, labor brokers and employment agents established themselves as the center of the footloose labor system in the Pacific Northwest.

¹⁶⁸ Stevens, "Brokers Between Worlds," 97.

Promising to bring order to a chaotic labor market, they instead became some of the most important figures in perpetuating and controlling the migration of thousands of workers from cities to rural workplaces and back again. While Chinese merchant-brokers pioneered the footloose labor system in the Northwest, restrictive immigration laws caused employers to look elsewhere for middlemen brokers. They turned to new immigrant groups and increasingly, to employment agencies that could supply native-born white workers to labor in positions reserved for white men. Because of brokers and agents' growing control over the footloose labor system, government bureaucrats, labor unions, and individual workers began to contest their power. In the first decades of the twentieth century, brokers and agents fought hard to retain their grasp on the footloose labor system.

CHAPTER THREE

The Rise of Public Employment Agencies

Crane's Employment Agency was one of the oldest in the city of Seattle, in operation since the mid-1880s. George W. Crane's office was located in the heart of Pioneer Square, where the city's footloose workers lived when they came to town to spend their stake, or to wait out unemployment in the winter. Having decades of experience, Crane was straightforward about what prospective employers could expect from his business. His employment agency plainly advertised, "No bums, loafers or agitators allowed here."¹⁶⁹ Employment agencies understood the stigma migrant men carried and promised employers to root out any who might be undesirable. By hiring through employment agencies, businesses knew that the agency had done the work of excluding workers who might slack on the job, or worse, those who would organize. The Crane's Employment Agency advertisement told employers that they offered not only to find workers, but that they would hire men who would not upset the established order between labor and capital. Private employment agencies entered the twentieth century in a strong position. They held contracts with the Northwest's largest employers and leveraged their power to control which workers received a job.

Despite private employment agencies' growing strength, local governments and workers fought for control over workers' employment. Cities throughout the Northwest established public employment offices, where workers and employers connected through tax-funded bureaus. Seattle, Everett, Tacoma, and Portland each opened their own public offices to cut down on the exploitation workers faced in the footloose labor system. Progressive bureaucrats ran many of these offices with a focus on settling migrant men. If settlement in one profession was not an

¹⁶⁹ Postcard from Crane's Employment Agency to Puget Lumber Company 12 October 1900, Collection number 3820-001, Box 90, Folder 28 Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

option because of the highly seasonal nature of work in the northwest, then at least a scientific and bureaucratic management over footloose workers' movement was the goal. These offices cut down on the abuse suffered by workers, but did not contest the economic system that relied on mobile labor and the racial and ethnic hierarchy that characterized the footloose labor system.

Workers fought back against private employment agencies through both collective and individual actions. Wobblies advertised job information in their own newspapers to divert workers away from patronizing private employment agencies. The IWW also organized direct action tactics like boycotts and protests to draw attention to problems within the footloose labor system. Wobblies also imagined a world in which they controlled the supply of labor, forcing employers to bend to workers' terms of employment. Workers also acted alone in opposing employment agents, and sometimes used violence as revenge against exploitative labor brokers.

Voters in the state of Washington attempted to regulate the fees that private employment agencies charged through new legislation that was eventually appealed to the federal Supreme Court. Finally, state labor commissioners in the Northwest tried to wrest control away from Chinese labor brokers in order to secure jobs for white workers. When this failed, they instead turned to advocating labor legislation that protected footloose workers. Collectively, these multiple scales of opposition demonstrated by bureaucrats, workers, and voters, illustrate how Northwesterners fought for control of the labor system—and by extension, society—in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

In 1893, a nation-wide economic depression threw thousands of people out of work across the country. Hundreds of banks and businesses failed, causing the worst economic

depression the country had yet witnessed.¹⁷⁰ Seattle was hit hard by the depression, and unemployment rose in the region that was already familiar with economic busts. In response to depression, Seattle opened the nation's first municipal public employment office in April, 1894.¹⁷¹ The Seattle Board of Aldermen established the public employment office as part of an amendment to the city charter, which created a municipal commissioner of labor statistics who would, among other tasks, "organize and establish a free public employment office" that connected workers looking for jobs, and employers looking for workers.¹⁷² Funded by city taxes, the office was free to employers and workers alike, and was created to cut down on exploitation of workers by private employment agencies. The office operated in the same fashion as private agencies, where employers sent requests for workers by mail, telegraph, and later, telephone. The public office kept a list of workers in search of employment, and promptly matched them to job openings, as close as Seattle, and as far away as Portland, Oregon, and Juneau, Alaska.¹⁷³ Workers looking for same-day matches waited inside a cramped office, or outside near a blackboard that listed current job openings.

Seattle's first commissioner of labor, John Lamb, was a middle-class Republican-turned-Progressive who believed in government solutions to social problems. Born in 1853 to Irish-immigrant parents in Illinois, Lamb attended the University of Minnesota and spent his early years as a teacher and bookkeeper. In 1892, he moved to Seattle, where he took a job in the city's engineering office. Two years later, Lamb became Seattle's first labor commissioner, where he

¹⁷⁰ Carlos Arnaldo Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest: An Interpretive History*, Revised edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 261.

¹⁷¹ Civil Service Commission Annual Report, 1896 (appendix), Civil Service Commission Annual Reports, Record Series 1802-F7. Box 1, Folder 1. Seattle Municipal Archives.

¹⁷² "Lopping off Boardism," *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, November 13, 1893.

¹⁷³ Civil Service Commission/Labor Commissioner Annual Report, 1895, Civil Service Commission Annual Reports, Record Series 1802-F7. Box 1, Folder 1. Seattle Municipal Archives.

continued his work for the city.¹⁷⁴ Lamb studied the question of labor turnover, and was deeply familiar with the trouble between footloose workers and employment agencies; he believed the free public office offered a remedy. He argued that the public office would not misrepresent jobs for the sake of earning a fee, would not collude with “unscrupulous employers” to constantly shuffle in new workers to extract their fees, and would not place an “incompetent person” in a job simply to take their fee.¹⁷⁵ The public office did not have the same greedy drive that the agencies did to coax workers from one job to another and replace them with new workers. These improvements, he believed, would reduce the amount workers paid to secure employment and lower the chronic labor turnover that Northwestern industries experienced.

The commissioner had another reason for opening the public office; reducing the damage private industries caused workers was not its sole purpose. In his annual report in 1895, the commissioner noted, “the office was created by popular vote, with the idea, as I believe, that, if it were found practicable to conduct a public office in a responsible and successful manner, the private offices would no longer be licensed, having no legitimate claim to existence.”¹⁷⁶ Thus, the intent behind the free public office would not only offer a free alternative to the private so-called “pay offices,” but to undercut their business entirely, rendering them obsolete.

While eliminating the abuses of private employment agencies may have been the aim of the city when it created the office, the succeeding commissioner, Arthur H Grout, brought a new objective: to control labor migration more efficiently than the private offices. Like many Northwesterners, Grout was born in New England and moved to Seattle in 1886. After first

¹⁷⁴ Clarence Bagley, *History of Seattle from the Earliest Settlement to the Present Time* (S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1916), 131-132.

¹⁷⁵ Civil Service Commission/Commissioner of Labor Statistics Annual Report, 1894, Civil Service Commission Annual Reports, Record Series 1802-F7. Box 1, Folder 1. Seattle Municipal Archives.

¹⁷⁶ Civil Service Commission/Labor Commissioner Annual Report, 1895, Civil Service Commission Annual Reports, Record Series 1802-F7. Box 1, Folder 1. Seattle Municipal Archives.

working as an office manager for a hardware company and several lumber mills, Grout became Seattle's second labor commissioner, and eventually went on to serve as Seattle's Civil Service secretary.¹⁷⁷ In addition to operating an alternative to the system of private agencies that exploited workers, Grout's goal was to reduce Seattle's population of unemployed men who he believed brought crime and vice. He argued that the public office would do just that, stating, "the rougher element and floating population are given work out of the city and are thus taken from the temptations which always surround these without means of support."¹⁷⁸ By moving workers out of the city in an efficient manner, the commissioner exercised control over the decisions footloose workers made and discouraged them from taking too much time away from work in the city—a common practice.

The work of the public office certainly reduced the exploitation that footloose workers experienced at the hands of private agents. However, the commissioner's paternalistic beliefs in helping unemployed workers were reflective of middle-class Progressives' attitude toward working-class people. Rather than creating a pro-labor utopia, the city's labor commissioner believed his role to be one of controlling the more undesirable elements of society. Progressive reformers believed that footloose workers did not always understand what was best for them and needed to be shepherded to make more industrious decisions. Many footloose workers, however, countered the work ethic espoused by employers and reformers with an alternative conception of labor. They would not take a job if they had enough money to survive the winter in the city and instead left those jobs to less fortunate workers.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ "Pioneer City Official Dies," *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, November 22, 1947.

¹⁷⁸ Civil Service Commission/Labor Commissioner Annual Report, 1897, Civil Service Commission Annual Reports, Record Series 1802-F7. Box 1, Folder 3. Seattle Municipal Archives.

¹⁷⁹ Frank Tobias Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts: Hobo Workers and Community in the American Midwest, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 2.

If sending workers out of the city quickly was important for the commissioner, so too was the idea of drawing them back in. Making Seattle the hub of footloose labor in the region was good for the city's businesses, and in 1901 Commissioner Grout explained that "a considerable portion of the money earned by the floating population is spent in Seattle; and, as this class number many thousands of working men, the benefits derived by the merchants of the city can hardly be estimated."¹⁸⁰ Although it was important for the commissioner to ensure footloose workers did not spend too much downtime or money in the city's brothels or saloons, he approved of workers spending their newly-earned money in the city's more respectable establishments. This control was part of the Progressive Era push toward social reform through government agencies.

Seattle's Public Employment Office faced several early challenges. It was initially housed in a "rough board cabin, among unsightly shacks" wedged between saloons on each corner of the block.¹⁸¹ Commissioner Lamb explained that this made it especially unsuitable for women employees looking for work. Once the weather turned cold and rainy in winter, the office moved to the old City Hall building located on North Fifth Avenue and Yesler Ave (now Fifth Avenue and Yesler Way). While more comfortable, this location was three steep blocks east of Pioneer Square, the district where footloose laborers, employment agencies, saloons, and flop houses concentrated. Lamb believed that "very few people will walk three blocks up hill for the sake of learning an order for help at a free employment office in preference to a private office that is conveniently at hand."¹⁸² Moving the public office to the "heart of the city," he argued,

¹⁸⁰ Civil Service Commission Annual Report, 1901, Civil Service Commission Annual Reports, Record Series 1802-F7. Box 1, Folder 4. Seattle Municipal Archives.

¹⁸¹ Civil Service Commission/Labor Commissioner Annual Report, 1895, Civil Service Commission Annual Reports, Record Series 1802-F7. Box 1, Folder 1. Seattle Municipal Archives.

¹⁸² Civil Service Commission/Labor Commissioner Annual Report, 1895, Civil Service Commission Annual Reports, Record Series 1802-F7. Box 1, Folder 1. Seattle Municipal Archives.

would as much as double the number of orders they could fulfill. Over the years, the office moved several times, and the commissioner reiterated that the location and quality of the office was paramount to its success. By 1917, the office erected blackboards in the “old established employment district” in Pioneer Square to advertise jobs. Workers had the opportunity to see the jobs available before trekking across the city to inquire about work.¹⁸³

In addition to its poor location, the public employment office was chronically understaffed. Commissioner Lamb explained that promptness was central to the success of all employment offices. When businesses sent requests for workers, they often sent them to multiple agencies. If an employment office took too long to respond, a worker could be sent out to a job that had already been filled by another agency. This meant that that worker traveled from Seattle, possibly hundreds of miles, to fill a job that was already taken. It was difficult to track down the workers who had applied for work with only one person working in the office, Lamb pointed out, and forty or fifty dollars per month salary for a second employee “would be money well spent, and would sure to bring very satisfactory returns.”¹⁸⁴

The public office struggled to serve more than a few thousand workers per year in the first three years of existence. But by 1897, Seattle’s luck would change with the discovery of gold in the Yukon. That July, gold miners arrived in Seattle, bringing thousands of dollars’ worth of gold and the news of a new gold strike in the Yukon. Word quickly spread about the latest gold rush on the Pacific Coast, and by 1898, thousands of workers were migrating to Seattle to

¹⁸³ Civil Service Commission Annual Report, 1917, Civil Service Commission Annual Reports, Record Series 1802-F7. Box 2, Folder 2. Seattle Municipal Archives.

¹⁸⁴ Civil Service Commission Annual Report, 1896, Civil Service Commission Annual Reports, Record Series 1802-F7. Box 1, Folder 2. Seattle Municipal Archives.

purchase gear and passage to Yukon Territory to seek their fortune in the Klondike Gold Rush.¹⁸⁵ Through creative publicity, Seattle became the jumping-off point for those headed to gold fields. Many gold rush migrants never made it out of Seattle, and instead used both the public office and private employment agencies to find jobs in the Northwest. By 1898, the public office placed more than 24,000 men and women in jobs. This figure was double the number of workers from the previous year, which included some gold rush migration, and six times the number placed in its first year, 1894. The Klondike Gold Rush was a boon to Seattle, helping pull the city out of the years-long economic slump from the depression of 1893 as merchants and hotel proprietors made a fortune selling goods and services to prospective miners.¹⁸⁶

After the Klondike Gold Rush, Seattle experienced larger seasonal migrations, with workers coming into the city at the beginning of the rainy season in October from Alaska and the Yukon, and with the end of the harvest season from eastern Washington and the Great Plains. Employers who had difficulty securing labor throughout the summer months knew they could rely on an autumn surplus to find the workers they needed, often at lower wages. One Grays Harbor company official noted in late August 1918, “We find it very hard to get help. We are holding our own and hope that it will ease up when men come from Alaska and the wheat fields.”¹⁸⁷ D.W. Lyman, the Assistant Labor Commissioner for Seattle in 1913 also recognized these ebbs and flows. Lyman acknowledged that many of the men entering the city wanted work, and suggested the city do something more for the relief of the large numbers of workers waiting out the winter season.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest*, 268.

¹⁸⁶ Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest*, 270.

¹⁸⁷ Letter from Neil Comey to Edwin Gardner Ames, August 26, 1918, Collection number 3820-001, Box 18, Folder 14, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

¹⁸⁸ Civil Service Commission Annual Report, 1913, Civil Service Commission Annual Reports, Record Series 1802-F7. Box 1, Folder 7. Seattle Municipal Archives.

As the city's labor commissioner had wanted, Seattle soon became the hub of seasonal migrants. By 1901, the free public office had placed more than 126,000 workers in jobs, saving workers an estimated \$157,240 in fees (or about \$4.3 million in 2015) since its inception seven years prior.¹⁸⁹ These figures demonstrate both the financial benefit to unemployed workers and the amount of money private employment agencies had stood to gain from charging footloose workers fees to secure work. Recognizing this dynamic, the commissioner concluded, "private employment agencies are, in the long run, a benefit to no one but the agents themselves."¹⁹⁰

Table 3.1¹⁹¹
Seattle Public Employment Office Job Report, 1894–1913

Year	Total Male Help Supplied	Total Female Help Supplied	Grand Total	Average by month	Total expense By the Public Employment Office	Cost of Each Position
1894	2724	1243	3967	441	\$909.65	\$0.23
1895	3881	1898	5779	482	\$1,120.00	\$0.19
1896	1782	1756	3538	284	\$727.50	\$0.21
1897	9053	2573	11626	969	\$724.08	\$0.06
1898	20389	3794	24183	2015	\$1,377.13	\$0.06
1899	22137	5468	27605	2300	\$1,239.41	\$0.04
1900	18764	4082	22846	1904	\$1,132.61	\$0.05
1901	20876	5684	26560	2214	\$1,276.69	\$0.05
1902	20722	5183	25905	2159	\$1,320.91	\$0.05
1903	24767	5639	30406	2525	\$1,479.70	\$0.05
1904	16771	3787	20558	1713	\$1,308.36	\$0.06
1905	18565	3203	21768	1814	\$1,413.19	\$0.06

¹⁸⁹ Civil Service Commission Annual Report, 1901, Civil Service Commission Annual Reports, Record Series 1802-F7. Box 1, Folder 4. Seattle Municipal Archives; This amounts to \$4,384,535.66 in 2015 dollars. Source: <https://www.in2013dollars.com/1901-dollars-in-2015?amount=157240>

¹⁹⁰ Civil Service Commission Annual Report, 1901, Civil Service Commission Annual Reports, Record Series 1802-F7. Box 1, Folder 4. Seattle Municipal Archives.

¹⁹¹ Civil Service Commission Annual Report, 1913, Civil Service Commission Annual Reports, Record Series 1802-F7. Box 1, Folder 7. Seattle Municipal Archives. The highlighted sums in the Grand Total column differ from the original report, which likely contained arithmetic errors. The rest of the data are left in their original form, even when their equations do not add up based on the erroneous math.

1906	34282	3552	37834	3153	\$1,526.11	\$0.04
1907	29049	2305	31354	2589	\$1,549.30	\$0.05
1908	20123	2060	22183	1848	\$1,321.70	\$0.06
1909	36322	2514	38836	3237	\$1,623.05	\$0.04
1910	29010	1821	30831	2569	\$1,620.71	\$0.05
1911	20080	2682	22762	1897	\$2,209.63	\$0.10
1912	29305	4715	34020	2835	\$2,273.14	\$0.07
1913	27352	3798	31150	2596	\$2,732.62	\$0.08

While male workers made up the majority of those served by Seattle's Public Employment Office, the office also secured employment for women workers. Although women worked in different industries from their male counterparts, the commissioner recognized similar migratory habits. Employed as domestic workers in homes and hotels, women also suffered from unemployment and exploitative working conditions. Seattle experienced a chronic shortage of domestic workers for decades, and families often complained of difficulties keeping domestic workers for extended periods of time. Commissioner Arthur Grout explained that the reason for this was in part a "restlessness and desire for a change pervades the atmosphere of the west," but also the negative treatment domestic workers experienced at the hands of their employers.¹⁹²

Several explanations were put forth as to why the public office experienced difficulty in placing women workers in domestic employment. Journalists in the late nineteenth century attributed this shortage in part to a biological characteristic of people in the West. In 1884, an article published in *Harper's Magazine* described people on the Pacific coast as "strangely nomadic," with a "vagabondish spirit." The author complained that "men are likely to forsake their employers at very short notice, and go somewhere else with ill-defined purpose."¹⁹³

¹⁹² Civil Service Commission/Labor Commissioner Annual Report, 1897, Civil Service Commission Annual Reports, Record Series 1802-F7. Box 1, Folder 3. Seattle Municipal Archives.

¹⁹³ E Ingersoll, "From the Fraser to the Columbia," *Harper's Magazine*, May 1884, 871.

According to Grout's 1897 report, women workers also exhibited this "vagabondish spirit." But poor work conditions were more likely than an innate desire to move to be the cause of high labor turnover. Like their male counterparts in extractive industries, women workers who experienced exploitative working conditions moved frequently to find less abusive work. Grout said as much in his report, calling on employers of domestic workers to treat their help more kindly to retain their services.¹⁹⁴ Women workers leveraged the persistent shortage of domestic workers to their advantage, and left jobs in search of better pay, knowing that they could find work easily again. It is no surprise that Seattle's public employment office had difficulty finding women domestic workers in the late nineteenth century—Seattle ranked highest in percentage of male population among cities in the United States in 1900, with sixty-four percent.¹⁹⁵

While the public office served primarily European and Euro-American workers, it also occasionally placed Japanese, Filipino, and Mexican workers in jobs.¹⁹⁶ In 1899, because of the shortage of domestic workers, the public office reluctantly turned to Japanese "boys" to fill this demand. Commissioner Grout, who was in charge of the office that year "hesitated to encourage the use of Japanese and Chinese as domestic servants," but eventually felt forced to do so because of the severe shortage of white women workers.¹⁹⁷ The employment of Chinese and Japanese men in place of white women for traditionally female jobs was common in the West. Families hired Chinese and Japanese men as domestic workers. They also served as camp cooks, and worked in laundries. Being relegated to work traditionally done by women meant they

¹⁹⁴ Civil Service Commission/Labor Commissioner Annual Report, 1897, Civil Service Commission Annual Reports, Record Series 1802-F7. Box 1, Folder 3. Seattle Municipal Archives.

¹⁹⁵ Carlos A. Schwantes, "The Concept of the Wageworkers' Frontier: A Framework for Future Research," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (1987): 45, <https://doi.org/10.2307/968927>.

¹⁹⁶ Civil Service Commission/Labor Commissioner Annual Report, 1916, Civil Service Commission Annual Reports, Record Series 1802-F7. Box 2, Folder 2. Seattle Municipal Archives. The commissioner explains "few of these classes frequent the office."

¹⁹⁷ Civil Service Commission/Labor Commissioner Annual Report, 1899, Civil Service Commission Annual Reports, Record Series 1802-F7. Box 1, Folder 3. Seattle Municipal Archives.

received less pay than white men, and that they would not disrupt the social order where white men took the best, highest-paying jobs. Commissioner Grout was likely reluctant to hire Japanese workers because of the decades of anti-Asian violence committed by white workers in the West. He carefully explained that while the public office had found more employment for Japanese workers than they had done in the past three years, he promised that the office gave “preference always to female help of our own race, subject to the wishes of the employer.”¹⁹⁸ Seattle’s public employment office cut down on exploitation by private employment agencies, but continued to uphold sexist and racist employment structures that privileged white, male workers over non-white and women workers.

In 1916, employers sought out Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino workers through Seattle’s public employment office. But these workers did not often find employment through the public office, and instead continued to secure job contracts through co-ethnic labor brokers. Lacking a direct connection with Asian immigrant workers, the public office turned to immigrant “commercial importing firms” to find and place these workers in jobs.¹⁹⁹ The following year, however, the public employment office sent Filipino and Mexican workers to Alaska, joining immigrant labor brokers in facilitating seasonal migration to Alaskan canneries.²⁰⁰ This collaboration suggests that immigrant labor brokers did not always operate separately from other employment offices, but instead cooperated with them when the conditions were right. At times they worked together as part of the same system that facilitated the migration of workers to job sites outside of the city.

¹⁹⁸ Civil Service Commission/Labor Commissioner Annual Report, 1899, Civil Service Commission Annual Reports, Record Series 1802-F7. Box 1, Folder 3. Seattle Municipal Archives.

¹⁹⁹ Civil Service Commission/Labor Commissioner Annual Report, 1916, Civil Service Commission Annual Reports, Record Series 1802-F7. Box 2, Folder 2. Seattle Municipal Archives.

²⁰⁰ Civil Service Commission/Labor Commissioner Annual Report, 1917, Civil Service Commission Annual Reports, Record Series 1802-F7. Box 2, Folder 2. Seattle Municipal Archives.

Private employment agencies were notorious for assisting employers to find replacement workers when their workers went on strike. Trying to combat the accusation from unionized workers that all employment offices were complicit in this behavior, Commissioner Grout explained that the public office made no inquiry about a worker's union status, except "if an employer specifies that he wants union men, we are careful to send none other; and if he demands nonunion men, his instructions are followed to the best of our ability."²⁰¹ The commissioner also received accusations from employers, who charged that the public office was secretly run by the city's unions. Commissioner Grout insisted that Seattle's public office generally disregarded whether a worker was a member of a union. In fact, he argued that the union jobs were typically filled by word-of-mouth by other union members, and that those jobs rarely went through the public employment office. He explained, "if unions did not control the work of their respective trades, the greater part of these positions would be filled through the Public Employment Office."²⁰² That is, contrary to employers' accusations, non-unionized jobs were more regularly advertised at the public office than were unionized ones.

In addition to quelling exploitation and providing a fee-free service, the city's labor commissioner advocated for legislation that strongly regulated for-profit employment offices. He believed that undercutting the business of for-profit employment agencies by providing free-to-the-worker services would not sufficiently eliminate the graft of for-profit agencies. Early on, the commissioner recognized how private employment agencies exploited footloose workers. In 1898, Commissioner Grout called for more regulations on private agencies, asking, "Is it not advisable and really necessary that a law be enacted defining more clearly their rights and

²⁰¹ Civil Service Commission/Labor Commissioner Annual Report, 1899, Civil Service Commission Annual Reports, Record Series 1802-F7. Box 1, Folder 3. Seattle Municipal Archives.

²⁰² Civil Service Commission Annual Report, 1901, Civil Service Commission Annual Reports, Record Series 1802-F7. Box 1, Folder 4. Seattle Municipal Archives.

abridging their power for evil?”²⁰³ In 1903, Commissioner Grout was not alone in calling for restrictions on private agencies, and Seattleites circulated a “monster petition” that demanded the outlawing of private employment agencies. The city council took up the question, and determined that it did not have sufficient authority to prohibit private agencies from operating. However, in June of that year the city council passed a new ordinance imposing further regulations on agencies that charged workers fees for employment.²⁰⁴ It required all private employment agencies to pay a \$250 annual licensing fee. The city council also set limits on the fees that private agencies charged workers, and required receipts for all fees. It gave the labor commissioner the power to enforce the ordinance. After a few months, private employment agents appealed the new ordinance in court, and a judge struck it down and replaced it with a watered-down version in December 1903. In order to enforce the provisions of the ordinance, workers had to sue employment agents in a court of law, often requiring time and money they did not have. Despite the new regulations, it was difficult to hold private agencies to account.²⁰⁵ Still, this push for stricter legislation demonstrated how the labor commissioner understood that as long as private employment agencies operated, they continued to harm workers. The monster petition also illustrated how workers increasingly turned to legislation to restrict private employment agencies’ power.

By 1913, Seattle’s Public Employment Office had filled over 470,000 jobs and Seattle’s geographic location as both a port city and major railroad terminus positioned the city to become

²⁰³ Civil Service Commission/Labor Commissioner Annual Report, 1898, Civil Service Commission Annual Reports, Record Series 1802-F7. Box 1, Folder 3. Seattle Municipal Archives.

²⁰⁴ Civil Service Commission Annual Report, 1903, Civil Service Commission Annual Reports, Record Series 1802-F7. Box 1, Folder 4. Seattle Municipal Archives.

²⁰⁵ Civil Service Commission Annual Report, 1903, Civil Service Commission Annual Reports, Record Series 1802-F7. Box 1, Folder 4. Seattle Municipal Archives.

the main hub of unemployed workers for the Pacific Northwest.²⁰⁶ There was no financial incentive for the public office to mislead workers, so by offering their services for free, the Seattle Public Employment Office cut down on the exploitation workers suffered from private agencies. However, because the public employment office took a large amount of business away from private companies, this meant that it also took more control over the hiring and movement of transient workers in the Northwest. In multiple reports, the commissioner explains the discretion the office used to place workers in jobs. Early on, Commissioner Grout reported that he had received complaints that workers were not offered jobs on a first-come first-served basis, but rather based on who the commissioners considered the most “qualified” applicant. He justified this decision by arguing that “the best interests of the public, the employer and the laborer are conserved by a judicious choice on the part of the Labor Commissioner,” and that such a course would benefit the reputation of the public office.²⁰⁷ The Northwest experienced another economic downturn in 1914, and with it, high unemployment. Because of this, Commissioner Grout gave instructions to the public employment office to give employment preference to married men with families.²⁰⁸ Regardless of justification, Seattle’s public employment office exercised discretion over which workers received jobs, and when. Much like private employment agencies, the public office exerted power by determining the ebb and flow of labor in the Pacific Northwest.

²⁰⁶ Civil Service Commission Annual Report, 1913, Civil Service Commission Annual Reports, Record Series 1802-F7. Box 1, Folder 7. Seattle Municipal Archives.

²⁰⁷ Civil Service Commission Annual Report, 1898, Civil Service Commission Annual Reports, Record Series 1802-F7. Box 1, Folder 3. Seattle Municipal Archives.

²⁰⁸ Civil Service Commission Annual Report, 1914, Civil Service Commission Annual Reports, Record Series 1802-F7. Box 1, Folder 8. Seattle Municipal Archives.

Despite the twentieth century turn to legislation and regulation, bureaucratic responses to the rise of private employment agencies were just one way that people fought back against agents and brokers' control of the footloose labor system. Workers themselves took individual and collective action against employment agencies. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) made opposition to the region's employment agencies the center of their organizing campaign in the 1910s. The IWW sought to organize the region's footloose workers into a single industrial union, and their radical vision for the future included the abolition of capitalism and the wage system. The preamble of the union's constitution makes clear that in their polarized view of the world, "the working class and the employing class have nothing in common."²⁰⁹ The IWW was particularly strong in the Pacific Northwest, and they aimed much of their criticism at the region's employment agents, or as they called them, "labor sharks." Rather than fighting for reform and regulation, the IWW instead used direct action tactics to force employment agencies to close.

By the early twentieth century, The American Federation of Labor (AFL), the county's largest labor federation, showed little interest in organizing the footloose laborers that migrated throughout the West. Additionally, the AFL was racially segregated, and refused to organize Chinese and Japanese migrant workers.²¹⁰ The IWW criticized the AFL's conservative craft unionism, where unions were organized by trade, rather than by industry, and believed they privileged only the most skilled native-born white workers and did nothing to abolish the wage system or lift up the working class in its entirety. Craft unions fought each other for representation of workers and often did not organize women, so-called unskilled laborers, and

²⁰⁹ Joyce Kornbluh, ed., *Rebel Voices: An IWW Anthology*, Revised edition (Chicago, Ill: Charles H Kerr, 1988), 12.

²¹⁰ Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest*, 339; Kornbluh, *Rebel Voices*, 99.; Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World*, ed. Joseph A. McCartin, Abridged edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 73.

non-white workers. The IWW's vision for the future included organizing workers into "one big union," where all workers, regardless of skill, trade, race, nationality, or gender, would be organized together. Shortly after its establishment in 1905, the IWW decided against participating in electoral politics to secure economic revolution and instead took the battle against capitalism to the shop floor and the street.²¹¹

The IWW was established in Chicago by a group of radicals who sought to organize an industrial union that would overturn the capitalist system. This group included well-known labor leaders and socialists like Mother Mary Jones, Eugene Debs, Big Bill Haywood, and Daniel De Leon. It was Haywood of the Western Federation of Miners that pushed the IWW to include migrant workers.²¹² After 1905, thousands of predominantly white northwestern migrant workers joined the IWW, sometimes because of their radical ideology, sometimes because they thought the best chance of better wages was through the union, and sometimes both. One IWW member saw the connection between better wages and a radically different society. In a 1922 account, he explained that he joined the IWW because it was "the only group offering me any sensible program under which I could operate with a view to gaining these good things in life, and such changes in society as I desired."²¹³

Not only did the IWW set out a new ideological vision for the future, but it also helped workers find employment in the present. Issue after issue of their northwestern newspaper, the *Industrial Worker*, afforded above-the-fold coverage to western labor conditions. In an ongoing column titled, "Labor Exchange, News Items," the IWW printed accounts mailed in from workers about various job opportunities, wages, and camp and working conditions from

²¹¹ Kornbluh, *Rebel Voices*, 6.

²¹² Kornbluh, *Rebel Voices*, 2.

²¹³ Kornbluh, *Rebel Voices*, 288.

worksites across the West. The *Industrial Worker* posted these notices to offer worker-sponsored job information that undercut employment agencies' business. One worker warned readers of camp conditions at Alder, Washington, noting, "\$2 to \$3.50; rotten grub; bunk house; employment sharks furnish help; 11 hours a day and \$1 hospital fee. Keep away."²¹⁴ Another worker cautioned Wobblies against seeking employment in the U.S. Forest Reserve near Spokane, writing, "\$2 per day; sleep out doors; bum grub and a long hike' no good. Keep away."²¹⁵ The IWW used this column to inform workers of poor conditions so that they were empowered to find better work elsewhere. Workers also mailed accounts about promising opportunities, helping funnel their fellow workers to better camps. One logger described work in Clear Lake, Washington, "\$2.50 to \$4.50 per day; good grub; good bunkhouse; no discount or hospital fee. All around it's a pretty fair layout, considering everything."²¹⁶ The *Industrial Worker* column had the dual purpose of improving daily conditions while also loosening employment agencies' grip on the flow of footloose labor.

The IWW also used the *Industrial Worker* to explain to workers why the union believed in abolishing employment agencies, both public and private. The IWW understood that employment agents exerted what some Wobblies called "industrial control." Regardless of whether the agents were public or private, the IWW argued that their status as the middlemen between bosses and workers meant that employers used them to select "the most willing and the most ignorant slaves, those that are the hardest to organize." One writer for the *Industrial Worker* explained further,

The fresh supply of help and the fight between the workers allow bosses to keep down the food supply, to increase the hours and furnish worse conditions of work. A different story where Mr. Boss has to come to the Union for his help and take not 'fifty Italians,

²¹⁴ *Industrial Worker*, September 2, 1909.

²¹⁵ *Industrial Worker*, September 2, 1909.

²¹⁶ *Industrial Worker*, October 27, 1909.

twenty Swedes, ten Americans, etc.’ but that many Union men who are looking for the BEST of it!²¹⁷

The IWW envisioned a system where workers, not city-run offices nor private employment agencies, controlled the supply of labor. The writer also recognized that employers hired workers according to their ethnicity and that, by offering their own labor exchange, workers could stand together regardless of ethnicity and set the terms of their employment.

In addition to promoting their own labor exchange through the *Industrial Worker*, Wobblies took their fight against employment agents to the streets. One of the union’s first direct action campaigns was the free speech fights that rocked the West in the early twentieth century. These urban conflicts began in 1907 when Wobblies stood up on soapboxes on street corners in industrial centers across the West to decry the abuses caused by the region’s employment agencies. The IWW understood that private employment agencies controlled the labor supply by deciding who could get a job and where they would go. They even shipped workers out to non-existent jobs simply to collect fees. For the IWW, the private employment agency represented the center of corruption in the western economy. But reaching workers through the *Industrial Worker* only went so far. The IWW needed to reach footloose workers at the site of exploitation—directly in front of the private employment offices.

One of the most explosive of these fights took place in Spokane, Washington. Located between the logging, farming, and mining districts of eastern Washington and northern Idaho, Spokane was the regional hub for migrant workers in what was known as the Inland Empire—a term that dates back to the mid-nineteenth century.²¹⁸ By 1908, Spokane had dozens of private employment agencies that sold jobs to unemployed footloose laborers who found themselves in

²¹⁷ *Industrial Worker*, March 25, 1909.

²¹⁸ George W. Fuller, *The Inland Empire of the Pacific Northwest, a History* (Spokane, Denver: H.G. Linderman, 1928), 2.

need of work. These agencies were notorious for selling bad information and sending workers to job sites where they were fired after only a few days. Agents colluded with job foremen to split the job fees. The scam worked like this: workers paid employment agents the typical one to two-dollar fee and immediately traveled to the worksite, where the foreman fired the worker after only a few days on the job. The foreman then sent a request for a new worker to the employment agent who sent a new worker out to the job. The foreman and agent split the job fees, reaping a large portion of the worker's small wage. Workers often referred to this as the three-gang system with "one crew coming, one working, and one going."²¹⁹ Despite workers' distrust, many employers hired exclusively through these agents, and workers could not usually get a job without going through an agent who issued work tickets as proof of payment. Thus, Spokane's private employment agencies had a virtual monopoly on the footloose labor market and used that control to lower wages and prevent pro-union workers from gaining employment.²²⁰

The IWW initiated their direct-action campaign against Spokane's employment agents in the autumn of 1908, when footloose workers returned to the city at the end of the harvest season. The campaign began as a boycott of all employment agencies—where Wobbly organizers stood up on overturned soapboxes directly in front of private employment agencies and demanded their fellow workers not to "buy jobs."²²¹ Soapboxing as a direct action benefitted the IWW in two ways. First, it drew upon the Gilded Age boycotts, where working class members of a community refused to patronize boycotted businesses.²²² If the IWW could persuade footloose workers to turn away from patronizing employment offices, they could undercut these businesses

²¹⁹ United States Commission on Industrial Relations, *Final Report of the Commission on Industrial Relations* (Washington: Govt. Print. Off., 1916), 174, <http://archive.org/details/finalreportofcom00unitiala>; Harvey O'Connor, *Revolution in Seattle: A Memoir* (Haymarket Books, 2009), 34.

²²⁰ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 174.

²²¹ Kornbluh, *Rebel Voices*, 94.

²²² Michael A. Gordon, "The Labor Boycott in New York City, 1880-1886," *Labor History* 16, no. 2 (Spring 1975): 186.

before workers had a chance to purchase job information. If successful, they could drive the “sharks” out of business. The second benefit to this strategy was that the IWW could use the highly visible action to increase their membership, and reach workers before they went to remote job sites where organizing was extremely difficult. Wobblies believed that once they had eliminated private employment agencies, the IWW would offer their own hiring halls. If the IWW secured a strong enough membership, they would then force employers to hire directly through the union, cutting out private agencies altogether.²²³

Spokane’s private employment agencies fought the direct-action campaign. In late 1908, they formed the Associated Agencies of Spokane, and lobbied the city to pass a street speaking ordinance to outlaw all disruptive speech.²²⁴ With a second ordinance, the city allowed religious groups like the Salvation Army to continue its street speaking, but arrested forty-eight Wobblies who defied the law. As spring 1909 came to Spokane, footloose workers began their seasonal migration out of the city, and the IWW halted their campaign until the following autumn, as many of the workers were no longer there to organize. But by that October, the IWW reignited the street speaking campaign, which lasted for five months and resulted in the arrest of hundreds of workers. Once imprisoned, Wobblies faced horrific conditions. The *Industrial Worker* reported on the city’s use of a “sweat box” where twenty-eight prisoners were held in a six-by-ten-foot overheated room for thirty-six hours, packed in so tight they did not have enough room to take off their clothes, and went without access to a toilet. Several men fainted from the extreme conditions.²²⁵

²²³ *Industrial Worker*, March 25, 1909.

²²⁴ “Synopsis Spokane--Free Speech Fight.” *Industrial Worker*, March 19, 1910. P1, 4

²²⁵ “Synopsis Spokane--Free Speech Fight.” *Industrial Worker*, March 19, 1910. P1

Wobblies fought their charges of disorderly conduct in court, arguing that the ordinance infringed on their First Amendment right to free speech, but the judge sentenced forty-eight prisoners to break rocks for the city in late 1909. The prisoners refused the prison labor, and were instead put on a diet of bread and water, which they rejected in favor of starvation. The IWW claimed it was the first hunger strike in the United States.²²⁶ The *Industrial Worker* responded to the hundreds of arrests by calling for reinforcements. They planned to fill the jails and become such a nuisance that the city would be forced to capitulate. Heeding the call, Wobblies jumped on trains from across the West to join the fight on the streets of Spokane. When a speaker stepped up on the soapbox to speak, police immediately arrested them, but another person would take their place and start the process over again. Wobblies kept the police busy with speech after speech, and the *Industrial Worker* mocked the officers for running around the city to keep up with infractions.²²⁷ The police eventually closed the IWW meeting hall and confiscated the *Industrial Worker*, forcing the paper to move production temporarily to Seattle.²²⁸ The police arrested the rank and file workers on disorderly conduct charges and arrested IWW organizers for conspiracy, a charge that held a much longer six-month jail sentence. An exasperated police officer reportedly exclaimed, “Hell! We got the leaders, but damned if it don’t look like they are all leaders.”²²⁹

The free speech campaign continued over the winter. Workers were tried and convicted on either disorderly conduct or conspiracy charges and began serving their sentences in the city and county jails, respectively. But the tide began to turn by the end of 1909 when news coming out of the prisons claimed that one member of the campaign had been clubbed to death by the

²²⁶ *Industrial Worker*, Nov 10, 1909.

²²⁷ *Industrial Worker*, Nov 10, 1909.

²²⁸ Kornbluh, *Rebel Voices*, 99.

²²⁹ *Industrial Worker*, Nov 10, 1909.

police. The arrest of popular IWW organizer Elizabeth Gurley Flynn for speaking at a private event about the campaign drew public sympathy from the Women's Club, who paid her \$5,000 bail, and she was never tried.²³⁰ Public support began to swell for the imprisoned IWW members, with both the Women's Club and the German Society pressuring the city to end the war. The mayor and IWW organizers, both tired from months of struggle, agreed to discuss terms to end the dispute. The city agreed to release the imprisoned workers and organizers, permitted the union to rent a union hall once again in the city, allowed distribution of the *Industrial Worker*, and revoked the licenses of the most egregious employment agents in the city. The campaign was a major victory for the IWW, demonstrating to the union that non-violent direct action could accomplish tangible successes for footloose workers. While the fight erupted into a larger struggle over freedom of speech, the IWW continued to demand the abolition of employment agencies and succeeded in getting the city government to enforce regulation over Spokane's agencies. The fight demonstrated the lengths the IWW went to protest the system of exploitation from which employment agencies profited.

In addition to fighting collectively against employment sharks, individual workers also opposed employment agents, sometimes literally. In March 1909, a young man from Macedonia named Fotius Kapuranis shot and killed George Kostas, a labor broker, for allegedly fleecing him out of thirty dollars in fees. Kapuranis had known Kostas for two years, having first met him in California. Kapuranis came to Seattle about a year before the shooting and had worked grading Seattle's steep hills. Kostas offered jobs for six men, including Kapuranis, for five dollars per job. Kapuranis paid the broker the thirty dollars and planned to meet him the following day to receive information about where to go for the jobs. Kostas failed to show up

²³⁰ Kornbluh, *Rebel Voices*, 100.

and Kapuranis and his fellow workers were left without their money or job information. The following night, Kapuranis sought out Kostas at his boarding house and asked for the money back. Kostas refused, and Kapuranis spat in his face and left. Kapuranis claimed to have met the broker the next day by chance at another job that Kapuranis secured. He again asked Kostas for the money and said that Kostas told him, “Go away fool, I have no time to bother with you.”²³¹ After learning that the broker carried a revolver, Kapuranis took the gun from the broker’s coat pocket and shot him dead. He was arrested for murder the same day.

Although a five-dollar fee was an exorbitant amount for a labor broker to charge, Kostas likely believed he could get away with stealing the money from Kapuranis because workers had little recourse. Seattle’s labor commissioner noted that when workers had credible cases to make against corrupt employment agents, the court fees and time it took to pursue the cases were prohibitive.²³² Kapuranis took the matter into his own hands, and while his response was extreme, it demonstrates how seriously workers took this kind of exploitation.

Workers fought against exploitation on multiple scales. The IWW believed that the only way to beat employment agents was through revolution—by directly taking control of the nation’s (and eventually the world’s) economy and thus enacting change on a massive systemic level. The murder of George Kostas demonstrates an impromptu decision made by a worker to exact revenge on an individual who wronged him and his countrymen. Eventually, the state of Washington joined workers and city governments in pushing back against the damage private employment agencies caused.

²³¹ “He Feared and Hated the Man Who Robbed Him,” *The Seattle Star*, March 31, 1909.

²³² Civil Service Commission Annual Report, 1903, Civil Service Commission Annual Reports, Record Series 1802-F7. Box 1, Folder 4. Seattle Municipal Archives.

By the 1910s, private employment agencies were well-known for their exploitative fees and practices. As part of a larger push toward Progressive-Era reforms, the state of Washington amended its constitution in 1912 to allow voter initiatives and referenda to create direct legislation. The 1914 election saw the first use of ballot initiatives in the state. Reformers, labor unions, and other progressives proposed seven initiatives for the ballot, known collectively as the “Seven Sisters.” Five initiatives gained enough signatures to make it onto the ballot, including Initiative 8, popularly known as the “Abolishing Employment Offices Measure,” which prevented employment agencies from charging fees to workers for help securing jobs. It did not, however, prevent agents from charging businesses for the service of finding them workers. The law was intended to reverse the long-standing practice of employment agencies charging fees to workers for job information.

Employers and agents alike detested the initiative, but for reasons other than the regulation of fees. The case laid out against Initiative 8 in the 1914 voters’ pamphlet explained that private employment agencies served seventy percent of the state’s population that was not unionized, because the public agencies only hired out union men.²³³ Opponents of Initiative 8 further argued that without private employment agencies, non-unionized workers would lose out on the opportunity to find work. This paternalistic appeal positioned private employment agents as allies of non-unionized workers who without private agencies could not secure work. But it was not true. Seattle’s labor commissioner explained that non-unionized workers filled the majority of jobs that the city’s public office listed. Ultimately, business managers feared that unions ran the public offices, and that without private offices to exclude pro-union workers,

²³³ *A Pamphlet Containing a Copy of All Measures “Proposed by Initiative Petition,” “Proposed to the People by the Legislature,” and “Amendment to the Constitution Proposed by the Legislature”* (Olympia, Washington: Secretary of State, 1914), 29. Available at: https://www.sos.wa.gov/_assets/elections/voters%20pamphlet%201914.pdf. Accessed on 17 January 2019.

bosses would be at the mercy of the state's public office to find employees. When asked about the passage of Initiative 8, Puget Mill Company manager, Edwin G. Ames put it simply: "I believe in the old plan of employment agencies. The law in this State, in my opinion, was designed purely in the interests of organized labor, and is very unsatisfactory."²³⁴ Ames, and other managers, falsely believed that unions ran the public office. If the new law put private agencies out of business, Ames believed, employers would be forced to use the public office to hire union-approved workers. Initiative 8's opponents' primary concern was not that the prohibition of fees was unfair, but that it would mean an end to employers' ability to find non-union workers through private agencies. Employers relied on private employment agencies to control the labor supply.

One vocal political organization in particular made opposition to the new initiatives their primary goal. The Stop-Look-Listen League of Washington state opposed the Seven Sisters, and published pamphlets, letters, and newspaper advertisements to make its stance known. The League was silent about who was behind their organization and funding. According to one of their pamphlets, the League was "formed for the purpose of good government, equitable taxation, and fair representation."²³⁵ In their 1914 pamphlet analyzing the Seven Sisters laws, they argued against the passage of Initiative 8. They instructed voters to reject the employment agency law because "Under this measure, the employment agent would, therefore, act not as the representative of the workingman but as the servant of the employer."²³⁶ This bold claim was based on the idea that if the employment agents received money from businesses, rather than

²³⁴ Letter from Edwin Gardner Ames to R.L. Shaw, March 27, 1916, Collection number 3820-001, Box 13, Folder 32 Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

²³⁵ Stop-Look-Listen League, "Plain Talk to You: and Other Thinking Men and Women of Washington." 1914 Washington State Library, pamphlet collection. Accessed: <https://apps.leg.wa.gov/oralhistory/pdf/OH568.pdf>

²³⁶ Stop-Look-Listen League, "Plain Talk to You: and Other Thinking Men and Women of Washington," 13, 1914. Washington State Library, pamphlet collection. Accessed: <https://apps.leg.wa.gov/oralhistory/pdf/OH568.pdf>

workers, they would not adequately represent workers' interests, since they had been paid instead by employers.

But it is clear that agencies' subservience to employers existed prior to the initiative. When the U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations (USCIR) published its findings on the reasons and remedies for industrial disputes in 1916, its report detailed the abuses committed by employment agents against footloose workers. Of these, the report highlighted the way private employment agencies kept workers in perpetual motion by splitting job fees with foremen. The USCIR found private employment agencies so odious that they concluded, "The business [of private agencies] as a whole reeks with fraud, extortion, and flagrant abuses of every kind."²³⁷

For employers in Washington State, Initiative 8 meant a loss of control over the labor supply. The pre-Initiative 8 labor system worked for them. Businesses did not spend money looking for workers, and the employment agencies ensured that businesses received vetted workers. Private employment agencies made money by managing the movement of workers, and did not want to cede control to the public offices. For example, the Puget Mill Company continually sought workers for their Port Gamble and Port Ludlow lumber mills, which were located on the west side of the Puget Sound across from Seattle. H.C. Sawyer, foreman for the Port Ludlow mill, had a long-term business relationship with several of Seattle's larger employment agencies, and periodically sent them orders for mill hands. Writing to Sawyer regarding his September 1900 order for mill laborers, The Pacific Coast Employment Office stated, "We send you two more men according to yours of a recent date which fills the order. Quite a few men coming in and looking for mill work for the winter. Think we can pick you up a

²³⁷ United States Commission on Industrial Relations, *Final Report of the Commission on Industrial Relations*, 173.

few good men every few days.”²³⁸ Because of the Puget Mill Company’s recurring orders for day laborers, the Pacific Coast Employment Office continually sought out mill workers to fill the order. The business relationship between the Puget Mill Company and the Pacific Coast Employment Office created a network of labor migration between Port Ludlow and Seattle, facilitating the movement of hundreds of mill workers between the city and rural lumber camps. By abolishing the fees private agencies charged to workers, Initiative 8 would undermine the network of labor migration that companies like the Pacific Coast Employment Office had established since the late nineteenth century, turning their business, and thus control, over to the Seattle Public Employment Office.

After much opposition from employers, the Stop-Look-Listen League, and private agencies, Initiative 8 passed with fifty-three percent of the vote in November 1914 and went into law that December.²³⁹ Employment agencies refused to accept this defeat. The Associated Labor Agencies of the State of Washington, a business association for private employment agencies, mounted a legal appeal of the new employment agency law. The association solicited money from local businessmen to pay the fees for this battle, telling them that they were “ready to carry this fight to the end of the earth.” More than simply wanting to preserve their job fees, private employment agents appealed to businesses to help them because if the law was settled, “labor organizations [would] then be in position to carry out their plan of organizing employment bureaus of their own and dictating to employers as to terms of employment as to persons to whom employment can be given.”²⁴⁰

²³⁸ Letter from Rae and Arnold to Puget Lumber Company, October 2, 1900, Collection number 3820-001, Box 90, Folder 28, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

²³⁹ “Election Search Results - Elections & Voting - WA Secretary of State,” accessed December 31, 2019, https://www.sos.wa.gov/elections/results_report.aspx.

²⁴⁰ Letter from J.J. Wilms to Edwin Gardner Ames, January 11, 1915, Collection number 3820-001, Box 102, Folder 20, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

When their appeal to the district court in Seattle was unsuccessful, the Associated Labor Agencies appealed the law to the U.S. Supreme Court with the help of two expensive law firms and donations from businesses across the state. After a two-and-a-half-year fight, the Supreme Court decided the case of *Adams v. Tanner* by a five-four majority in favor of the employment agencies, finally overturning Initiative 8. The majority held that preventing employment agents from charging fees to workers was illegal because the law deprived the agents' of their Fourteenth Amendment right to "engage in a useful business."²⁴¹ Further, the court argued that working as an agent for employees was different than working as an agent for bosses. That is, the court believed that private agents worked on behalf of job seekers because that was who paid the fee, and agents could not be expected to charge fees to businesses instead, because that would be a separate business venture altogether. The majority echoed what opponents of Initiative 8 argued, that when private agencies charged fees to workers, they represented workers' interests. However, as numerous government reports showed, that was not the case, but was merely a talking point to keep workers bearing the brunt of the cost of labor turnover. With the Supreme Court's 1917 decision, private employment agencies once again charged fees to workers in exchange for jobs. Despite a widespread popular campaign to end the fee-based system of private employment agencies in the early twentieth century, employment agents, joined by their partners in business, were powerful enough to retain their grasp on the footloose labor system in the Pacific Northwest.

While unions, workers, and local governments spent the first decades of the twentieth century fighting private employment agencies, state labor commissioners in Washington and

²⁴¹ *Adams v. Tanner*, 244 U.S. 590, 597 (1917).

Oregon also attempted to seize Chinese labor brokers' control of employment in Northwestern salmon canneries in order to replace Chinese workers with native-born white workers. The state labor commissioners' motivation was similar to that of the Seattle labor commissioners' because like their municipal counterpart, state commissioners sought to wrest control of jobs from labor brokers in order to control who had the first chance at a job. When the Washington labor commissioner was ultimately unsuccessful at this takeover, he turned to recommending labor legislation that protected workers against the worst abuses committed by brokers.

Initially, Washington and Oregon labor commissioners believed that Chinese Exclusion legislation was the best solution to ending Chinese control of the labor supply in canneries. In 1914, Washington labor commissioner Edward W. Olson celebrated what he thought was the end of the contracting system, explaining that investigations into the subject had discovered that the Chinese Exclusion Act led to the decline of Chinese labor contracting because few new Chinese workers were able to migrate to the United States.²⁴² Olson, who deplored the contracting system in canneries, explained, "Everybody recognizes that the Oriental contract labor system when so generally practiced as it was a few years ago, was a positive menace to the white American laborer."²⁴³ This common belief littered the commissioners' reports, arguing that white workers could not secure cannery jobs because Chinese brokers "had ready access to the hordes" of Asian workers who they would hire first.²⁴⁴ In 1911, Oregon labor commissioner, O.P. Hoff exclaimed that white workers in Oregon could not compete against Asian workers for jobs because "their

²⁴² State of Washington, *Ninth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Factory Inspection*, (Olympia, Washington, 1914), 68.

²⁴³ State of Washington, *Ninth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Factory Inspection*, (Olympia, Washington, 1914), 69.

²⁴⁴ State of Washington, *Tenth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Factory Inspection*, (Olympia, Washington, 1916), 114.

mode of living excludes the possibility of any competition with American workingmen.”²⁴⁵ In 1915, Washington’s commissioner complained that Chinese labor brokers discriminated against white workers in the canning industry, noting, “Heretofore [white workers] have not been given equal opportunity with the Asiatics in procuring employment in this particular industry.”²⁴⁶ Ultimately, Chinese labor brokers represented outsider control over jobs the labor commissioners believed were the birthright of white American workers.

Commissioner Olson celebrated that exclusionary immigration laws resulted in fewer Chinese workers coming to the U.S., thus diminishing the number of workers to whom contractors had access. With fewer workers, the commissioner believed Chinese brokers would cease to operate as hiring agents for Northwestern canneries. While the labor commissioner recognized the dangerous working conditions and potential for exploitation, he was not interested in protecting Asian workers from the abuses of the footloose labor system. Rather, he saw this abuse as proof that Chinese workers were cheap and degraded. Paradoxically, Olson believed that Chinese workers both received an unfair advantage in receiving cannery jobs from brokers, but also took dangerous and low-paying jobs white men refused to do. Either way, Olson did not believe that Chinese workers were worthy of the same protections white migrant laborers received from the state government.

In addition to exclusionary immigration laws, Commissioner Olson believed that mechanization offered an opportunity to undercut Chinese brokers in canneries. As its name suggests, the new butchering machine, the “Iron Chink,” offered the prospect to cannery owners and the labor commissioner that white workers would be able to replace Chinese workers. This

²⁴⁵ O.P. Hoff, *Fourth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Inspector of Factories and Workshops of the State of Oregon* (Salem, Oregon), 9.

²⁴⁶ State of Washington, *Tenth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Factory Inspection* (Olympia, Washington, 1916), 116.

new machine cut and cleaned salmon as they entered the cannery, and thus eliminated the job that Chinese contractors had reserved for skilled, long-time seasonal workers.²⁴⁷ Olson praised mechanization for its ability to turn the undesirable task of gutting and cleaning fish into an attractive job for white men. He explained, “As a matter of fact, when the canning of fish was first begun...the work was degrading in so many respects that the white laborer would not do it and the canneryman had to employ Orientals.” New machine work offered white men a respectable position in canneries. Contradicting himself, the commissioner emphasized that it was the degrading nature of work, rather than Chinese brokers’ control of the system, that prevented white men from taking on cannery work. He explained, “With the passing of the Oriental goes not only the excuse but the principal cause of the deplorable working conditions that once existed in many of the canneries.”²⁴⁸

It is notable that Commissioner Olson promoted mechanization—a process that would eliminate jobs and something of which a labor commissioner might otherwise be skeptical. Typically, employers—not labor advocates—used mechanization to undercut workers’ power on the job. As historian Richard Rajala has explained, employers in the Pacific Coast timber industry used mechanization in the early twentieth century to standardize production in order to control workers’ output and increase productivity.²⁴⁹ The labor commissioners praised the Iron Chink because it undercut skilled Chinese workers’ hold on important cannery jobs and would turn their “degraded” positions into fewer skilled and respectable cannery jobs for white men. Employers, not labor commissioners, traditionally sought to wrest control from workers in order

²⁴⁷ Chris Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor: The Pacific Coast Canned-Salmon Industry, 1870-1942* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 84–85.

²⁴⁸ State of Washington, *Ninth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Factory Inspection* (Olympia, Washington, 1914), 91.

²⁴⁹ Richard A. Rajala, “The Forest as Factory: Technological Change and Worker Control in the West Coast Logging Industry, 1880-1930,” *Labour / Le Travail* 32 (1993): 79.

to exert control over the labor process and make it more profitable. In this case the labor commissioner, a state-appointed official whose job it was to protect workers, used the same tactic as employers to eliminate Chinese workers from the canning industry. Even if mechanization meant fewer jobs, the commissioner was satisfied that those few jobs would be reserved for skilled white, male workers.

Despite the commissioners' persistent concern with white employment, white men and women did in fact work in canneries. At the peak of each season, contractors hired additional workers to assist with packing and canning. Each year the number of workers fluctuated based on the size of the salmon run, but typically people hired at the peak of the season worked for a few intense weeks and were paid by the hour. Approximately twenty-five percent of those hired in Washington canneries were in this short-term group, making up between three and four thousand workers.²⁵⁰ Cannery owners lamented that this group of white workers was undesirable, however, because they were often "drifters" who did not return year after year, as Chinese and Japanese workers did.²⁵¹ The commissioner recognized that the short-term jobs attracted a less-desirable class of white workers because white workers often refused to contract seasonally. He argued that monthly salaries and better conditions would attract the "right kind" of white labor—that is, settled, married white men.²⁵²

However, much to the dismay of the next commissioner, C.H. Younger, Chinese brokers retained control over labor contracting in Washington canneries by hiring Japanese, Italians, and native-born Americans in order to fulfill employers' demands for workers. In 1915, Younger

²⁵⁰ State of Washington, *Tenth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Factory Inspection*, (Olympia, Washington, 1916), 112.

²⁵¹ State of Washington, *Tenth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Factory Inspection*, (Olympia, Washington, 1916), 113.

²⁵² State of Washington, *Tenth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Factory Inspection*, (Olympia, Washington, 1916), 113.

explained, “It is almost invariably the rule that Japanese are filling the places thus vacated by the Chinamen, and this intensifies the problem rather than offering a solution, for the [whites] in general have greater antipathy toward the Japs.” At first, Chinese contractors sought out Japanese workers directly to work in the industry’s menial and worst-paid jobs, and kept long-time Chinese workers in more desirable, skilled positions. When contractors initially placed Chinese and Japanese cannery workers in the same position, Chinese workers earned a higher monthly wage. But as historian Chris Friday has demonstrated, wage disparities between immigrant groups in Northwestern and Alaskan canneries diminished after the first decade, with the caveat that Chinese workers retained more skilled positions than did Japanese workers.²⁵³ After hiring Japanese workers directly, Chinese contractors turned to Japanese and Filipino subcontractors to fill open cannery positions.²⁵⁴ Contractors paid subcontractors to locate and hire co-ethnic workers in Seattle and Portland to send to Alaskan canneries. Subcontractors bridged the cultural and language barriers between Chinese contractors and non-Chinese workers, much in the same way Chinese contractors bridged the gap between American cannery owners and Chinese workers. Seattle’s public employment office also turned to labor brokers to locate cannery workers, because they had the connections the public office lacked.

Despite restrictive immigration laws and mechanization, labor commissioners in Washington and Oregon did not see the end of Asian workers in northwestern salmon canneries. That Chinese and Japanese labor brokers retained control over a portion of the footloose labor system outraged state labor commissioners in Oregon and Washington. Commissioner Younger

²⁵³ U.S. Immigration Commission, *Reports*, Vol. 25 “Immigrants in Industries: Japanese and other Immigrant Races in the Pacific Coast and Rocky Mountain States” (Washington, DC, 1911), 48; Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor*, 96–97; State of Washington, *Tenth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor, Statistics and Factory Inspection* (Olympia, Washington, 1916), 111.

²⁵⁴ State of Washington, *Bureau of Labor: Eleventh Biennial Report*, (Olympia, Washington, 1918), 55.

was so concerned about placing white workers in canneries that in 1915 he suggested the same strategy Seattle labor commissioners used to undercut private employment agencies twenty years earlier. Younger proposed that the newly established US Employment Service, a federally supported public employment office, collect applications from rural white workers ahead of the canning season to ensure that they secured jobs in canneries before Chinese contractors had a chance to hire their own workers. He argued that the reason why the state Bureau of Labor was so concerned with changing the footloose labor system in canneries was to “open the way for a more general employment of our white homeowners whose earnings will be expended in the development of the State.”²⁵⁵ With this acknowledgment, commissioner Younger’s reasons for wanting exclusion, mechanization, and federal control over hiring becomes clear. He, like the bureaucrats who ran the Seattle public employment office, wanted to control the supply of labor, and thus control which workers found employment. If the public employment office secured control over cannery jobs, the commissioner believed Asian workers would once and for all be expelled from the canning industry—the industry where Asian workers had one of the largest footholds in the Northwest.

But the commissioner’s proposed solution would not replace Asian workers with just any white worker. The commissioner wanted the “right kind” of white worker—that is, white *homeowners*, who he argued had “not been given equal opportunity with the Asiatics in procuring employment in this particular industry.”²⁵⁶ By suggesting that cannery jobs go to white homeowners, Younger revealed that his concern was with who deserved employment, and where they spent their wages. Younger wanted white homeowners because he believed they deserved

²⁵⁵ State of Washington, *Tenth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Factory Inspection* (Olympia, Washington, 1916), 116.

²⁵⁶ State of Washington, *Tenth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Factory Inspection* (Olympia, Washington, 1916), 116.

employment above Asian immigrants and migrant white workers. Controlling the footloose labor system, however, meant more than simply determining who received a job—it meant shaping who was considered a model citizen, and who deserved the state’s protection. Younger believed that white homeowners were the ideal Americans who spent their wages in the communities in which they were earned. Immigrants and “drifters” were undesirable because they sent remittances home or were otherwise unrooted to a single community. The U.S. Employment Service did not in fact take over cannery hiring, but commissioner Younger’s anxiety about white employment in canneries demonstrates how he believed that white, settled workers were the most deserving of the state’s protection.

By 1918, commissioner Younger changed his approach to regulating cannery work. After years of reports of blatant wage theft by contractors and subcontractors, the commissioner recommended new state labor legislation that would give legal protections to seasonal workers hired in Washington who worked outside of the state. Perhaps because of the wartime focus on American democracy and the heightened need for workers, Younger was concerned about the negative opinions immigrant workers might form about the United States because of the abuse they experienced. Further, he worried that their mistreatment “does not make these foreign groups very desirous of American citizenship.”²⁵⁷ While Younger changed tactics to fight labor brokers, his motivations remained the same. He wanted to quell abuses because it made immigrants less likely to settle. But Chinese workers, who only two years’ prior had made up the majority of workers in Washington’s canning industry, were ineligible for citizenship. Instead, the commissioner had taken up the cause of Filipino cannery workers and pleaded with the state legislature to grant him more oversight power to ameliorate their condition.

²⁵⁷ State of Washington, *Bureau of Labor: Eleventh Biennial Report*, (Olympia, Washington, 1918), 56.

Alongside the federal Department of Labor's Acting Director, Lawrence Wood, commissioner Younger conducted investigations into the Alaskan canning industry. Interviews with cannery workers revealed the tricks labor brokers used to steal wages. James Marchese, an Italian-American cannery worker from Chicago, experienced abuse at the hands of cannery contractors in the summer of 1917. Marchese signed on with Wong On, a Portland labor broker, for cannery work in Alaska at fifty dollars per month for the canning season from April to September. When Marchese returned to Portland in September after fulfilling his contract, he requested his pay of \$280 for approximately six months' work. The contractor, however, only offered Marchese \$85 for the entire season's pay. Marchese was outraged because the contractor deducted his food and clothing from his pay—even though the worker was promised food as part of his compensation. Marchese complained that the workers were only offered Chinese food, and that he was forced to purchase American food at the grocery store. Marchese reluctantly admitted that part of the money for groceries, which was listed in his account book and signed off by the grocery clerk, was actually spent on gambling tickets. Contractors coerced workers into purchasing gambling tickets for the chance to win groceries—but workers seldom won these games, and owed most or all of their wages back to the contractor at the end of the season.²⁵⁸

Arsenio Hernandez also testified to the commissioner about his withheld wages. Hernandez arrived on the West Coast from the Philippines in early 1917. He signed on with a Chinese contractor to leave Portland to Alaska with thirty-six other workers for the summer season in 1917. Like Marchese, Hernandez described poor working conditions, physical abuse from foremen, inadequate food, and long working days. Protesting the contractor's refusal to pay for the additional hours they worked in a day, Hernandez participated in an eight-day strike to

²⁵⁸ State of Washington, *Bureau of Labor: Eleventh Biennial Report* (Olympia, Washington, 1918), 56.

demand overtime pay. The contractor refused and deducted \$23.30 from his pay for missing eight days of work. The contractor continued his refusal to pay overtime, which Hernandez estimated at \$26.20 for the days he worked over eleven hours. Hernandez believed his pay amounted to \$190 for the season, but when he requested his pay upon return from Alaska, the contractor offered him only \$45, citing the deductions from the strike, groceries, lodging in Portland before the season started, and transportation.

Seasonal workers like Marchese and Hernandez collected their pay at the end of the canning season, rather than daily or weekly as was common in other industries (and what some white cannery workers insisted upon). This was typical for seasonal work, where workers contracted to work for a specific period, usually coinciding with the salmon run or the harvest season. Seasonal workers were open to more extreme wage theft because they had to complete an entire season's work before they received their pay, and contractors often looked for any excuse to dock their wages to reduce the amount of money contractors paid out at the end of the season. Contractors benefited from this system because they kept more of the money, but also because it guaranteed that they left workers in poverty and desperate for the next employment opportunity, thus securing their next group of workers for the following season. Commissioner Younger understood that the system was "so insinuating and so uniformly successful that the great majority of the laborers who go north return home at the end of the season almost destitute, some of them unable to buy a meal when landed."²⁵⁹

To combat this wage theft, commissioner Younger recommended that the Washington state legislature pass new legal protection for seasonal workers who worked outside of the state. In 1919, the legislature agreed, and passed the Seasonal Labor Law that gave the commissioner

²⁵⁹ State of Washington, *Bureau of Labor: Eleventh Biennial Report* (Olympia, Washington, 1918), 56.

power to hold hearings, enforce, and provide penalties regarding matters relating to seasonal labor contracts.²⁶⁰ In September 1919, the Washington Department of Labor used its new enforcement power to hear the case of eleven Filipino cannery workers who contracted with the Filipino Cannery Supply Company that year. Similar to the case of James Marchese, these eleven workers were induced to gamble their wages on their return trip from Alaska. The deputy commissioner who heard the case, C.M. Shrader, found the bookkeeper and head foreman of the Filipino Cannery Supply Company guilty of coercing cannery workers into gambling away their wages. Shrader ordered the Filipino Cannery Supply Company to eliminate the gambling debt from the workers' wages, which amounted to over \$200 each and totaled \$2,231.95 for the group of workers. This settlement represented a dramatic departure from Commissioner Younger's earlier approach toward regulating cannery work. While this marked a significant shift that clearly benefitted Asian and other foreign-born workers, it was one of the few reform efforts at the time that did not clearly favor white, native-born workers.

Private employment agencies and labor brokers in the Northwest began the twentieth century in a position of strength. They had business contacts throughout the region, made thousands of dollars from workers in search of work, and their numbers grew. But this success and profitability was met with resistance from individual workers, unions, and governments, both local and federal. While the stakes were high for workers—who paid money they did not have with the hope of gaining employment—the underlying issue for employers, workers, and governments was one of control over the footloose labor system. People increasingly grappled with the question of how best to organize the labor market, and who should have ultimate control

²⁶⁰ Washington (state) Session Laws of 1919, Ch. 191.

over workers' employment, and who deserved to be protected by the government. The United States' entry into World War I in 1917 further raised the stakes over control of work and workers.

CHAPTER FOUR

Wartime, Labor Revolt, and the First Red Scare

In April 1917, the United States formally entered World War I. With the war came new opportunities for Northwestern businesses to increase their production, and for Northwestern workers to fight for better wages and working conditions. Just as the U.S. entered the war, however, an industry-wide timber strike threatened to cut production of one of the nation's most important wartime commodities. The federal government became involved in settling the strike by improving working conditions and pressuring workers to support the war effort in the name of patriotism. The war also prompted a massive expansion of the shipbuilding industry in Seattle. This new year-round industry, combined with the improvements in the timber industry, meant more workers were settling down. In addition to workplace improvements, state-supported vigilantes used deportation, intimidation, and even murder to eliminate the threat of labor radicalism all throughout the West. These three factors—improved workplace conditions in the timber industry, steady work in the shipyards, and anti-radical violence—created both the opportunities and the pressure for white workers to leave migrant work behind.

1917 Timber Strike

In the first quarter of the twentieth century, logging camps in the Pacific Northwest were filthy. Logging companies housed their workers in communal camps in the dense evergreen forests that blanketed the western side of the Cascade mountains. Upwards of eighty men shared damp cabins, dimly lit by kerosene lamps, and heated by smoky wood stoves. The beds were often stacked two-high, packed in tightly to fit as many men into one house as possible. Workers had to supply their own bedding (also known as bindles or bundles), earning the footloose

laborers who carried their bindles on their backs, the name “bindlestiffs.” Moving from filthy camp to filthy camp, these bindlestiffs brought lice and bedbugs to the places they temporarily lived. Loggers hung their wet clothes to dry in the bunkhouse, where the wood stoves caused the clothes of dozens of men to steam, but never dry. The climate and the lodging’s close-quarters made diseases such as tuberculosis and gonorrhea common. Contrary to today’s popular image of the lumberjack as a hyper-masculine symbol of rugged individualism, migratory loggers in their era earned a reputation for being a floating population of louse-ridden degenerates who were a drain on society.²⁶¹

In his 1964 memoir about the labor movement in Washington state in the early twentieth century, former Wobbly and writer Harvey O’Connor described the life of migrant loggers as one of ostracism from society. The so-called “timber beast” worked for two to three months at any given logging camp, then quit due to “unending toil, no recreation,” and made his way to Seattle where “he got drunk, whored, gambled, and spent his stake.”²⁶² After he ran out of money in one week, the logger once again needed a job and sought out work for another two to three months, when the cycle began again. In a worldview typical of Wobblies, O’Connor lamented how loggers were “the men who produced the fundamental wealth upon which the economy of the region rested [but were] regarded as pariahs, condemned to body-breaking toil and to animal-like existence whether on the job or away....”²⁶³ O’Connor’s memoir articulated what many pro-

²⁶¹ Joyce Kornbluh, ed., *Rebel Voices: An IWW Anthology*, Revised edition (Chicago, Ill: Charles H Kerr, 1988), 268-270, 251; Harvey O’Connor, *Revolution in Seattle: A Memoir*, (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2009,) 61; Erik Loomis, *Empire of Timber: Labor Unions and the Pacific Northwest Forests*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016,) 18; Cloice R. Howd, “Industrial Relations in the West Coast Lumber Industry,” in U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Bulletin No. 349* (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1924), 41-42; United States Commission on Industrial Relations, *Final Report of the Commission on Industrial Relations* (Washington: GPO, 1916), vol. 5, 4211.

²⁶² O’Connor, *Revolution in Seattle*, 63.

²⁶³ O’Connor, *Revolution in Seattle*, 64.

IWW footloose loggers expressed—that they were social outcasts who toiled for the benefit of capitalists alone.

Paul Page, president of the Page Logging Company in Buckley, Washington offered a different interpretation in a 1914 interview with the US Commission on Industrial Relations (USCIR). He explained that loggers worked between thirty and sixty days and then quit, went to Seattle to spend their “stakes,” and according to Page, “a great deal of that money is simply thrown away,” compelling the logger to find another job for another thirty to sixty days.²⁶⁴ According to Page, about ninety percent of his most skilled loggers were of the “roving” sort, who listened to “agitators” and spent their time “reading all this stuff about the downtrodden laboring man.” He contrasted these difficult workers with the “earnest working man who wants to get ahead,” who “works with the employer instead of working against him.”²⁶⁵ Where O’Connor saw an exploitative and dangerous economic system in which workers could only exert control over their lives by quitting, Page saw a large group of undisciplined, “high-strung, reckless men” undeserving of sympathy.²⁶⁶

In northwestern lumber mill towns, a large number of settled workers lived near the mill in small houses or shacks. Page explained that mill workers were a “different class of men entirely” from loggers, and noted that some of them were even married with families. But the average worker in the lumber yards, he wrote, was “a rover—he is worse than the logger.”²⁶⁷ In the company towns of Port Gamble and Port Ludlow, Washington, the Puget Mill Company took pride in its long-term employees. Often bragging about the longevity of their employment, mill

²⁶⁴ United States Commission on Industrial Relations, *Final Report of the Commission on Industrial Relations* (Washington: GPO, 1916), vol. 5, 4251.

²⁶⁵ USCIR, *Final Report*, vol. 5, 4250-4255.

²⁶⁶ USCIR, *Final Report*, vol. 5, 4251.

²⁶⁷ USCIR, *Final Report*, vol. 5, 4251.

manager Edwin G. Ames wrote to numerous acquaintances and friends describing the company's bond with its oldest workers. "Our regular men," he explained to fellow lumberman E.G. Griggs, "are very well satisfied with existing conditions, and so far as I can find out have no desire or even disposition to go on strike."²⁶⁸ Like Page, however, Ames recognized that the Puget Mill Company hired a number of "transients" in whom the company had "no confidence," and he believed that the workers "without doubt belong to unions, and many of them without doubt are IWWs."²⁶⁹

The footloose workers Ames described often found their way to his mills through employment agencies that had furnished the Puget Mill Company with lumber yard workers from Seattle for decades. Both logging and lumber mills relied heavily on migrant workers, yet lumbermen (the owners and managers) despised them. Like agriculture and salmon canning, timberwork was a seasonal industry. While it did not completely shut down in the winter, it went through slower periods when the daylight was reduced to just eight and a half hours at the darkest part of the year. But more than its seasonality, the industry employed many "rovers" because working conditions were so poor that workers left jobs rather than try to reform them.

The reliance on footloose labor in the logging industry was a concern for more than just the lumbermen. In 1914, Washington state's labor commissioner, Edward W. Olson, argued that the most pressing problem of the day was "intermittent employment" in the state. Because the state's economy relied so heavily on extractive industries, he remarked, there was not much anyone could do to change the demand for highly flexible, mobile labor. The state's Bureau of Labor Statistics investigated the fluctuations in the labor market and found that throughout the

²⁶⁸ Letter from E.G. Ames to E.G. Griggs, July 20, 1917, Collection number 3820-001, Box 16, Folder 19, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

²⁶⁹ Letter from E.G. Ames to E.G. Griggs, July 20, 1917, Collection number 3820-001, Box 16, Folder 19, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

year 1913, the largest logging and lumber manufacturing businesses employed 26,290 workers at the height of the season, 4,978 of them intermittently.²⁷⁰ This figure did not include all workers in these industries, but it demonstrated the proportion of longer-term workers to seasonal ones. About 19 percent of the workforce surveyed in the logging and lumber industries made up the so-called “army of unemployed” during the slow seasons. Statistics on the number of loggers, both employed and unemployed, vary wildly, however. As Paul Page remarked in 1914, about 90 percent of the loggers he employed were “rovers.” The Report of the President’s Mediation Commission estimated that there were approximately 70,000 men employed in the timber and lumber industries in Washington state in 1918.²⁷¹ Another source estimated that there were 120,000 workers employed in both timber and lumber industries in the greater Pacific Northwest.²⁷² Oslo further estimated that about twenty-five percent of all workers in Washington were employed only intermittently, creating a large pool of workers who “constantly patronize our employment agencies, [and] gather in our large cities.”²⁷³

Not only was intermittent employment rampant, but investigators also found the concomitant labor turnover even more troublesome. The President’s Mediation Commission estimated that the industry experienced an astounding 600 percent turnover every year. In addition to the seasonal surges in employment, hundreds of thousands of workers left one job for another in the timber and lumber industries, or they found temporary work in other extractive industries such as agriculture, canning, and mining. Most contemporary investigations noted that

²⁷⁰ State of Washington, *Ninth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Factory Inspection*, (Olympia, Washington, 1914), 50-51.

²⁷¹ U.S. Department of Labor, *Annual Report of the Secretary of Labor*, vol. 6 (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1918), 19, <http://www.dol.gov/%5Fsec/media/reports>.

²⁷² John Herbert Geoghegan, “The Migratory Worker in Seattle: A Study in Social Disorganization and Exploitation,” (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Washington, 1923), 25.

²⁷³ State of Washington, *Ninth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Factory Inspection*, (Olympia, Washington, 1914), 15.

the large turnover was due not only to the seasonal nature of work, but primarily because of workers abandoning unsanitary camp conditions, foremen firing workers to collect more employment agency fees, high fatality rates on the job, and little to no social life for workers in the remote hinterlands of the Northwest.²⁷⁴

Not only were investigators alarmed by the high labor turnover from an economic perspective, but they also argued that the footloose labor system in the timber industries led to a radicalization of workers. Olson described the way the IWW rose in the winter months, when workers congregated in cities, and dispersed in the spring when jobs were plentiful. He believed that the IWW fed on unemployed footloose workers' discontent, breeding a "deplorable spirit which tends toward anarchy and produces turmoil." Contrary to Harvey O'Connor's description of the IWW, Olson explained that the organization was merely a band of "paid agitators" who "invaded the state" from elsewhere.²⁷⁵

Over the course of the 1910s, the IWW sent "walking delegates" to remote timber camps and mill towns to recruit footloose workers to their cause. Using employment agencies, Wobblies found work in logging camps or lumber mills, and once on the job, handed out radical literature and preached the union gospel.²⁷⁶ Despite these attempts, the union had little success in organizing any kind of lasting labor or political action. The IWW was not the only union that attempted to organize timber and mill workers. Sporadically in the first two decades of the twentieth century, loggers, shingle weavers (makers), and mill workers organized into more traditional craft unions to advocate for better wages and working conditions. Undergoing

²⁷⁴ Geoghegan, "The Migratory Worker in Seattle," 23; State of Washington, *Ninth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Factory Inspection*, (Olympia, Washington, 1914), 13-17.

²⁷⁵ State of Washington, *Ninth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Factory Inspection*, (Olympia, Washington, 1914), 17.

²⁷⁶ Letter from E.G. Ames to E.G. Griggs, July 20, 1917, Collection number 3820-001, Box 16, Folder 19, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

numerous amalgamations over the first two decades of the twentieth century, two unions affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL) emerged—the International Shingle Weavers’ Union of America and the International Timber Workers union. These two unions had little success, however, and by 1917, only workers in established mills around Puget Sound and Grays Harbor were members.²⁷⁷ But with a tight labor market, poor working and camp conditions, and the desire for the eight-hour workday, timber and lumber mill workers across the Northwest began planning for a strike.

In April 1917, loggers in Idaho and eastern Washington began to walk off their jobs to protest bad working conditions, secure the eight-hour day, and raise wages. A new IWW local, the Lumber Workers Industrial Union No. 500, which formed the month before the impromptu strikes, jumped at the chance to organize workers into collective action east of the Cascade Mountain range. The AFL-affiliated International Timber Workers Union planned to shut down lumber mill production in western Washington that July, and the IWW decided to call a similar strike by its members, spreading the initial strike westward to the Puget Sound and the Pacific coast. The two unions protested for similar improvements, particularly the eight-hour day, and only begrudgingly worked toward the same material goals.²⁷⁸ IWW membership soared throughout the summer because members could apply for aid through their strike fund, reaching an approximate peak of 7,000 dues-paying members. The BLS reported the strike shut down between seventy-five and eighty-five percent of logging and mill operations in Washington that summer. However, both unions had little success organizing long-term strike actions in Oregon.²⁷⁹ Ultimately, although not all strikers were members of any of the three unions,

²⁷⁷ Robert L. Tyler, *Rebels of the Woods: The I.W.W. in the Pacific Northwest* (Eugene, Or.: University of Oregon Books, 1967), 88–89.

²⁷⁸ Tyler, *Rebels of the Woods*, 92–94.

²⁷⁹ Tyler, *Rebels of the Woods*, 94.

approximately 50,000 men were idle throughout the strike, refusing to work either because of solidarity or intimidation.²⁸⁰

The IWW experienced one of its largest successes in the 1917 timber strike. One poem published in the union's newspaper, *Solidarity*, depicted Wobblies' sense of grievance and camaraderie:

Fifty thousand lumberjacks, fifty thousand packs,
Fifty thousand dirty rolls of blankets on their backs.
Fifty thousand minds made up to strike and strike like men;
For fifty years they've "packed" a bed, but never will again.²⁸¹

For many workers, the blanket roll symbolized the poor working and living conditions that loggers endured. More than the eight-hour day, Wobblies protested the wretched conditions that so many footloose workers experienced in the damp woods and dreary mill towns.

As Wobblies organized the strike that spring, the United States officially entered the First World War. What began as a struggle between labor and capital quickly grew into a struggle between labor and the federal government over the production of war materials. The introduction of aerial warfare brought an increased demand for new raw goods. World War I-era aircraft engineers required a particular kind of lumber, spruce, to build the strongest planes. According to historian Harold Hyman, aviators preferred spruce because it was "straight-grained, resilient, tough, yet relatively light in weight, [it] was especially suitable for use in the main members of wing spars and fuselage frames, and for lamination into propellers."²⁸² The forests of the Pacific Northwest were one of the last remaining places in the world where the Allies could harvest this

²⁸⁰ Robert L. Tyler, "The United States Government as Union Organizer: The Loyal Legion of Loggers and Lumbermen," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 47, no. 3 (1960): 437; Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Industrial Relations in the West Coast Lumber Industry," 70.

²⁸¹ Kornbluh, *Rebel Voices*, 267, as cited from the August 4, 1917 edition of *Solidarity*; Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Industrial Relations in the West Coast Lumber Industry," 70.

²⁸² Harold Melvin Hyman, *Soldiers and Spruce; Origins of the Loyal Legion of Loggers and Lumbermen*, (Los Angeles: Institute of Industrial Relations, University of California, 1963), 44.

necessary resource. With the new demand for spruce, the outcome of the struggle between timber barons and loggers in the far-western reaches of the nation immediately took on greater importance for the federal government. No longer was the conflict about who should control the means of production, long hours, or dangerous working conditions, instead, a strike over timber production came to be viewed as an impediment to the war effort, and therefore anti-American.

With their strike fund depleted, the IWW called for the strike to move “on the job” in September.²⁸³ Workers went back to work, but intentionally slowed down production in mills and in the woods, and quit work after eight hours, forcing bosses to recognize their demand for shortened hours. Workers were not the only ones organizing. Lumbermen in the Pacific Northwest joined together to create the Lumbermen’s Protective Association (LPA) in July. The LPA’s chief concern was maintaining the ten-hour day, but more than that, the organization was created to stand as a bulwark against workers’ collective action.²⁸⁴ The LPA remained steadfast in its refusal to accept an eight-hour day, despite the efforts of Secretary of War, Newton D. Baker, and Washington state governor Ernest Lister to bring them to the table and concede to the strikers’ terms to advance the war effort. Lumbermen argued that they simply could not move to an eight-hour day and compete with the timber industry in the South, where the ten-hour day was the rule.²⁸⁵ The LPA rejected arbitration, and timber production limped along as summer turned to autumn.

The strike caused massive disruptions in both the logging and lumber industries, shutting down most production and triggering dramatic labor shortages. In response to the 1917 timber strike, employers resorted to a variety of methods to stabilize the labor market. F.W. Phelps,

²⁸³ Tyler, *Rebels of the Woods*, 97.

²⁸⁴ Hyman, *Soldiers and Spruce*, 51; Ficken, *The Forested Land*, 138.

²⁸⁵ Robert E. Ficken, *Lumber and Politics: The Career of Mark E. Reed* (Santa Cruz, California: Forest History Society, 1979), 35.

editor of the conservative trade journal, the *Pacific Coast Mechanic*, tried to sell a plan to Edwin Ames to remedy the shortage. Recognizing that the IWW benefited from the situation, Phelps complained that “the over-demand for the working populous [sic] here is giving labor agitators the harvest of their lives.”²⁸⁶ He claimed to have received “thousands of inquiries” from workers in the eastern part of the country regarding the living and working conditions on the West Coast. If someone could simply mail out publications advertising that there was “plenty of work at good wages,” he argued, they might entice 50,000 workers to move west. Regardless of the accuracy of this message, or its convenient omission of information about the ongoing strike, Phelps believed that ultimately the plan would work to end the labor shortage. More importantly, he believed that “flooding our town with workmen, helps to keep wages down to what is right and just and prevents the labor agitators from controlling the situation and making the profit that belongs to the employer.” Northwesterners knew that slack labor markets brought cheaper wages. Commissioner Olson remarked on this phenomenon in his 1914 report. “Naturally, with the slump in demand for common labor,” Olson wrote, “comes a corresponding slump in wages offered.” He explained that railroad contractors paid their workers \$2.00 per day in the summer, but lowered wages to \$1.75 per day “when the men began to come back from the harvest fields, the berry patches and the woods.”²⁸⁷

Phelps’s plan reveals what was truly at stake during the strike. When the shortage of laborers brought production to a standstill, labor agitators used the shortage to try to secure improvements that would cut into business profits. Importing workers from outside the region—controlling labor migration—meant controlling wages, working conditions, and ultimately the

²⁸⁶ Letter from F.W. Phelps to E.G. Ames, July 17, 1917, Collection number 3820-001, Box 16, Folder 19, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

²⁸⁷ State of Washington, *Ninth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Factory Inspection*, (Olympia, Washington, 1914), 16.

industry as a whole. Citing other obligations, Ames declined to participate in Phelps's scheme, but tacitly supported the idea.

Phelps, however, was not the only one interested in labor migration as a solution to the tight labor market. Alex Polson of the Polson Logging Company from Hoquiam, Washington, devised a remarkably similar plan to solve the labor shortage problem caused by the strike. Echoing Phelps's strategy, and that of dozens of employers for decades before him, Polson turned to a labor broker to import strikebreakers and undercut the strikers, once and for all. He enlisted an employee, a man with three years of experience as a timber faller, to work for the company as a labor broker. Polson planned to send the broker thousands of miles back to his home to recruit workers who would migrate to western Washington for jobs in the dense forests of the Northwest. Polson suggested to another lumberman that the broker, if successful in supplying the Merrill & Ring Company with enough labor, could furnish workers to other businesses, as "there is a market here for thousands of them."²⁸⁸

The broker assured Polson that he still had connections back home, and would be able to send men to Hoquiam if the companies paid the transportation costs for the workers. Optimistic about the plan, Polson explained to fellow lumberman, R.D. Merrill, that the broker "seem[ed] to think he can get lots of good men," and that he could even "get enough good sawmill men here to run all the mills on the [Pacific] Coast."²⁸⁹ A surplus of imported workers had always been beneficial to employers, and especially so when workers went out on strike. Polson also recognized that while importing new workers might cause tensions with the current workers,

²⁸⁸ Letter from Alex Polson to R.D. Merrill, September 13, 1917, collection number 0726-001, Box 7, Folder 22, Merrill & Ring Lumber Co. records, University of Washington Special Collections.

²⁸⁹ Letter from Alex Polson to R.D. Merrill, October 9, 1917, collection number 0726-001, Box 7, Folder 22, Merrill & Ring Lumber Co. records, University of Washington Special Collections; Letter from L.J. Ownbey to Polson Logging Company, October 2, 1917, collection number 0726-001, Box 7, Folder 19, Merrill & Ring Lumber Co. records, University of Washington Special Collections.

such importation was necessary to eliminate the threat posed by the IWW. “I do not say we will get along with these [workers],” he explained, “but we will not get along with the classes here that are running around in a ring. We will have to import some good loyal fellows, if they can be had.”²⁹⁰ In September 1917, Polson and his broker entered into a contract, much like the contract signed between the Great Northern Pacific Railroad and the Oriental Trading Company two decades before, and the broker went off to find workers for both the Polson and Merrill & Ring Logging companies. Eventually he found dozens of men willing to move to Washington to work in the forests and mills.

Unlike Takahashi and Tetsuo of the Oriental Trading Co., Polson’s labor broker, L.J. Ownbey, was originally from Tennessee. Like other labor brokers before him, Ownbey faced several logistical and legal challenges to moving numerous workers thousands of miles. Locating workers who wanted to move across the continent was simple enough. Workers in western North Carolina expressed their desire for a new life out west, and a willingness to move for work if the pay was right. One logging train engineer, Rex Yelton from Pensacola, North Carolina, explained that the information Ownbey gave him made Yelton want to move west. He asked for more information about housing for families, transportation fares, and then offered, “if wages are what Mr. Ownbey recommended them to be I can bring 5 or 6 good men with me.”²⁹¹

Like other migrants, Yelton offered to bring other workers with him, creating a potential network of transcontinental migration between North Carolina and Washington state. Many workers that Ownbey contacted explained that they wanted to go west, but could not afford the train fare. Avril Wilson, a logger from Coeburn, North Carolina, wrote to Merrill & Ring, “I saw

²⁹⁰ Letter from Alex Polson to R.D. Merrill, October 9, 1917, Collection number 0726-001, Box 7, Folder 22, Merrill & Ring Lumber Co. records, University of Washington Special Collections.

²⁹¹ Letter from Rex Yelton to Merrill & Ring Lumber Co., October 28, 1917, Collection number 0726-001, Box 7, Folder 19, Merrill & Ring Lumber Co. records, University of Washington Special Collections.

a man he said to write you if I wanted to go West. I told him I did, me and my wife and I aint go[t] money enough to go on and I will pay it back just as soon as I can work it out after I get there.”²⁹² Mirroring an arrangement established by other labor brokers, Ownbey persuaded Polson and Merrill to advance workers the cost of transportation to be taken out of their first paychecks. By early October, Ownbey began sending lists of names of workers to Merrill & Ring Logging Co, including one man who shared his surname and was likely a relative. As with the many labor brokers and employment agents before him, Ownbey described the characteristics of the workers he found. “All the men I have recommended are good men and will give you entire satisfaction,” and “these are a very high class of experienced men...and will pay back any transportation you may advance them.”²⁹³

Finding willing migrants was simple enough, but Ownbey had a difficult time securing transportation for these workers, despite Polson’s and Merrill’s promises to advance fares. Southern lumber companies pressured regional railroads not to carry workers out of the South and threatened to boycott any railroad that offered passage to emigrating loggers. Fearing a labor shortage in their own industry, southern lumbermen did not want Ownbey to raid workers from their labor market. Undeterred, Polson explained to Merrill that his lumber company was “bending every effort to get men.”²⁹⁴ Southern lumbermen were also wary of outsiders coming to their camps and poaching workers for employment elsewhere. Ownbey explained to Merrill & Ring that in Forney, North Carolina, “the men are very scarce here and every man that shows up

²⁹² Letter from Avril Wilson to Merrill & Ring Lumber Co., undated, Collection number 0726-001, Box 7, Folder 19, Merrill & Ring Lumber Co. records, University of Washington Special Collections.

²⁹³ Letter from L.J. Ownbey to Merrill & Ring Lumber Co., October 12, 1917, Collection number 0726-001, Box 7, Folder 19, Merrill & Ring Lumber Co. records, University of Washington Special Collections; Letter from L.J. Ownbey to Merrill & Ring Lumber Co, October 29, 1917, Collection number 0726-001, Box 7, Folder 19, Merrill & Ring Lumber Co. records, University of Washington Special Collections.

²⁹⁴ Letter from Alex Polson to R.D. Merrill, October 26, 1917, Collection number 0726-001, Box 7, Folder 22, Merrill & Ring Lumber Co. records, University of Washington Special Collections.

in these camps are watched very closely and if I mailed a letter at the post office in the woods addressed to your firm it would be a give away as the postmaster is always one of their employers.” He further explained the legal hurdles obstructing their plan, “it is a \$500 fine and six months imprisonment to induce a man to leave his employer in this state.”²⁹⁵ Ownbey nonetheless found a way around the law, instructing interested workers to write to Merrill & Ring directly, asking for employment on an individual basis.²⁹⁶

Ownbey’s work was cut out for him. Polson and Merrill hired the broker to navigate the legal and logistical challenges of recruiting a large number of workers from outside the Northwest. He relied on regional knowledge and likely kinship ties to engender trust with the prospective employees. Ownbey also found a way around the North Carolina law that prevented organized out-migration of workers, instructing workers to send mail directly to Polson and Merrill & Ring Logging companies. In his correspondence with employers, Ownbey vetted and vouched for each worker he recommended, and spent considerable time sifting through men to find workers he deemed suitable. Ownbey’s foray into labor broking was off to a strong start, but as the United States expanded its wartime production, a new federal request endangered Polson’s plan.²⁹⁷

In January 1918, Merrill & Ring’s secretary responded to a job inquiry from Thomas Angel of Prentiss, North Carolina. Despite Polson and Merrill’s months-long effort to recruit Appalachian workers, Merrill & Ring informed Angel that the logging company was not hiring any workers from outside of the Northwest. The secretary explained that the federal government

²⁹⁵ Letter from L.J. Ownbey to Merrill & Ring Logging Co., October 10, 1917, Collection number 0726-001, Box 7, Folder 19, Merrill & Ring Lumber Co. records, University of Washington Special Collections.

²⁹⁶ Letter from L.J. Ownbey to Merrill & Ring Logging Co., October 10, 1917, Collection number 0726-001, Box 7, Folder 19, Merrill & Ring Lumber Co. records, University of Washington Special Collections.

²⁹⁷ Letter from L.J. Ownbey to Merrill & Ring Logging Co., October 12, 1917, Collection number 0726-001, Box 7, Folder 19, Merrill & Ring Lumber Co. records, University of Washington Special Collections.

was “endeavoring to stabilize labor conditions,” and had instructed “industrial companies to refrain from employing workmen in districts other than those in which they are operating.” Merrill & Ring, therefore, could not offer Angel employment.²⁹⁸ The secretary suggested that Angel “take the matter up with the Government” to inquire about work in Seattle’s growing shipbuilding industry, as the government was hiring shipyard workers to boost wartime production. And at the federal government’s suggestion, Merrill & Ring ended their plan to recruit Appalachian workers.

It is not clear whether the Polson Logging Company or Merrill & Ring Logging Co. ultimately hired any of the workers that Ownbey recruited in the fall of 1917, though census data suggests that many of the men from North Carolina who enquired about jobs did not live in Washington state by 1920. Regardless of the outcome, Polson’s use of a labor broker to recruit Appalachian workers is a clear example of how employers continued to turn to labor brokers to exert control over the labor market in the Northwest. More than simply showing another case of labor brokering, the example of Appalachian labor brokering demonstrates how closely labor brokering within the borders of the United States mirrored the international labor brokering that existed in the Northwest over the past four decades. Brokers had to understand regional differences, navigate legal structures, facilitate transportation, and vet prospective employees. As F.W. Phelps understood, bringing in outside workers with promises of better wages and opportunities (whether or not these were true) ultimately benefited businesses’ profits and control over their industries.

²⁹⁸ Letter from Merrill & Ring Logging Co. to Thomas Angel, January 23, 1918, Collection number 0726-001, Box 19, Folder 1, Merrill & Ring Lumber Co. records, University of Washington Special Collections.

The Loyal Legion of Loggers and Lumbermen

While Ownbey scoured North Carolina for strikebreakers, the federal government developed its own plan to bring the timber strike to an end. In order to both defeat the IWW strike and increase lumber production for the war effort, the federal government implemented a unique strategy to end its labor troubles. The War Department hired three Progressive academics, Carleton H. Parker, Henry Suzzallo, and James Scherer, to study the labor situation and to implement a quick resolution. Parker, a University of Washington economics professor, was known for his study of migrant labor in California. Suzzallo was the chairman of the Washington state Board of Defense and President of the University of Washington. Scherer, a social scientist with a focus on economics, was president of the California Institute of Technology. After months of research and touring multiple logging camps, Parker concluded that the best way to end the strike was for the government to become a third-party arbitrator, and force the lumbermen to give in to the demands of the workers. Parker was appalled by the situation in the logging camps. Despite the conventional wisdom that the Wobblies were radical agitators, Parker agreed that their demands were reasonable. Lumbermen were deeply skeptical of the three academics, and Edwin Ames even paid to have a private detective spy on Carlton Parker.²⁹⁹

By autumn 1917, the War Department called General Brice P. Disque to service in the Pacific Northwest to implement a novel solution. Disque, a veteran from the Philippine-American War, left his job as a prison warden in Michigan and traveled by rail to Seattle that October. Taking into consideration the work the three academics produced over the summer, Disque persuaded them, at a meeting with the region's prominent lumbermen, to sign on to the formation of a "patriotic organization" of loggers and lumbermen. The members of this

²⁹⁹ Hyman, *Soldiers and Spruce*, 54.

organization swore loyalty to the United States and increased woodcutting in the name of patriotism for the war effort. Using the language of patriotism and loyalty, Disque convinced the lumbermen to agree to arbitration. The threat of being perceived as disloyal, along with the promise that the Army would send in troops to end the work slowdown, convinced the lumbermen to concede to working with the War Department.³⁰⁰ Disque created the Spruce Production Division (SPD) to facilitate speedier spruce harvesting. The War Department also gave him the power to recruit soldiers, both enlisted and officers, to fill the labor shortage and to increase production. The Army eventually sent 100 officers and 25,000 enlisted men to the Vancouver Barracks in Washington state before the end of the war. The SPD recruited enlisted soldiers who had prior logging experience, and paid them civilian wages while they worked in the logging camps.³⁰¹

By late 1917, the new patriotic organization, dubbed the Loyal Legion of Loggers and Lumbermen (Four-L), began recruiting new civilian members. Organizers for the Four-L were trained to appeal to workers' sense of patriotism if they were hesitant to join. Timber workers rapidly joined the Four-L, out of a sense of duty or coercion. Before the year was through, the Four-L had over 20,000 members, both bosses and workers.³⁰² New members were required to sign loyalty pledges, reading:

I, the undersigned, in consideration of my being made a member of the Loyal Legion of Loggers and Lumbermen, do hereby solemnly pledge my efforts during the war to the United States of America, and will support and defend the country against enemies both foreign and domestic.... That I will stamp out any sedition or acts of hostility against the United States Government which may come within my knowledge, and I will do every act and thing which will in general aid in carrying this war to a successful conclusion.³⁰³

³⁰⁰ Hyman, *Soldiers and Spruce*, 124.

³⁰¹ Robert L. Tyler, *Rebels of the Woods*, 103-104.

³⁰² Hyman, *Soldiers and Spruce*, 179.

³⁰³ Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Industrial Relations in the West Coast Lumber Industry," 78.

The new organization was structured around the principle of “50-50 unionism.” This philosophy—foreshadowing New Deal-era unionism—held that if workers and bosses talked about their issues, they could come to a consensus and improve the industry as a whole. Four-L officers installed comment boxes in logging camps and mills throughout the Pacific Northwest to give a direct line from workers to the organization if working conditions were not satisfactory.

One of the most important consequences of the introduction of the SPD and the Four-L was the improvements they made in northwestern logging camps. Two primary factors went into cleaning up the camps. First, Parker promoted a theory that the majority of workers who supported the IWW did not do so for ideological reasons, but instead were motivated by “environmental” reasons. In other words, the poor wages, living, and working conditions created a population of radicalized migrant loggers who supported the IWW because they believed it would satisfy their demands.³⁰⁴ Second, because soldiers were present at the logging camps, the government was obligated to provide a military standard of living and the SPD enforced new regulations for how logging camps operated. Cleaning up the camps supported the Four-L’s mission, both by undermining the IWW’s argument about poor conditions and by improving camp conditions enough to allow the Army to bring in soldiers to fill the labor shortage.

Beginning in March 1918, employers were required to provide clean bedding for the workers, eliminating the bindles that were symbolic of bug-ridden, footloose labor that loggers carried on their backs. The Army also built new latrines, bathhouses, installed electricity, built mess halls with porcelain dishes, and installed hot water heaters, all to bring the camp conditions up to Army regulations.³⁰⁵ In addition, Disque declared that the entire industry would begin

³⁰⁴ Hyman, *Soldiers and Spruce*, 60.

³⁰⁵ “Conditions in Camps Improved by L.L.L.L.,” *Monthly Bulletin* 1, no. 4 (June 1918): 15; Loomis, *Empire of Timber*, 65.

operating on an eight-hour day starting on March 1, 1918. By the summer of 1918, a year after the strike that caused the formation of the Four-L, the Legion held its first convention. The Four-L created a constitution and elected regional delegates, one employee and employer for each of the twelve districts to represent the interests of workers and bosses. By July 1918, the Four-L, had a membership of around 110,000 loggers and lumbermen. This far exceeded the IWW's membership even at its height. In addition to successful membership drives, the Army's intervention also increased lumber production from 1.5 million to 22 million board feet per month in 1918.³⁰⁶

Despite the Four-L's scheme to expand wartime production, many lumber companies only reluctantly endorsed the organization. A 1919 article in the trade journal, *The West Coast Lumberman*, highlighted this hesitation. "The L.L.L.L was a war measure, unpopular at places but deemed necessary," the author explained. "Many opposed it bitterly but secretly, for no man dared express himself publicly against it."³⁰⁷ Arguing that a labor union was inevitable for the industry after the war, *The West Coast Lumberman* pleaded with industry leaders to support the Four-L, believing the industry-wide union was better for bosses than the radical IWW or the strike-prone American Federation of Labor (AFL). Lumbermen were keen to retain control over their workforce and saw the Four-L as the best way to secure their power. The structure of the Four-L allowed lumbermen to retain a stronger bargaining position for the future. Ultimately, the establishment of the Four-L successfully ended the remnants of the timber workers' "strike on the job."

While the government's improvements to camp conditions, wages, and hours solved the problems timber workers had fought for in their 1917 strike, the improvement alone does not

³⁰⁶ Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Industrial Relations in the West Coast Lumber Industry," 84-85.

³⁰⁷ "Gentlemen, Pick your Letters: I.W.W; A.F.L; L.L.L.L" *West Coast Lumberman* 36, no. 420 (April 1, 1919): 47.

account for why so many loggers joined the Loyal Legion so rapidly. An examination of the rhetorical power of patriotism and masculinity illuminates that ideological issues were also at stake for many loggers during World War I. A key component of the Four-L's work was to win the hearts and minds of loggers in the Northwest. The organization's newsletter, the *Monthly Bulletin*, attempted to do just that.

The *Bulletin*'s first issue, published in March 1918, went out to workers and employers across the Northwest. Spencer Best of the Military Information Section of the Spruce Production Division was the *Bulletin*'s editor. In a letter to Francis B. Morse of the Associated Press, Best inquired about news material he could include in the Legion's new magazine. He explained the motivation behind the magazine, "The purpose of the publication, as you will readily see if you read it closely is purely propaganda, to inspire into the hearts of a bunch of semi-seditious foreigners and I.W.W. a certain degree of loyalty for our country and to encourage them to speed up in this work."³⁰⁸ Best's reasoning demonstrates that the SPD understood the Four-L to be a propaganda organization to secure the loyalty of loggers for the war effort. This letter further highlights how the federal government understood the conflict in absolute terms: turning "semi-seditious foreigners" away from the IWW and toward a loyal, pro-American union. The wartime volumes of the *Monthly Bulletin* were designed to appeal to loggers' patriotism and masculinity so that they would join the Four-L, and encourage their coworkers to do the same.

³⁰⁸ Letter from Spencer B. Best to Francis B. Morse, April 9, 1918. This letter, found digitized by Google Books from a Princeton University Library edition of the *Monthly Bulletin*, v. 1, no. 1., was likely not part of the *Bulletin*. The letterhead indicates this was actually a separate document, but was accidentally digitized as part of the *Monthly Bulletin*. It is highly unlikely Best would have been this explicit about his intentions for the magazine within the pages of the *Monthly Bulletin*. Further, this bound volume of the *Monthly Bulletin* was gifted to Princeton University from Francis Morse himself, and the letter from Best was likely accidentally included within the pages of the book. The URL can be accessed here: https://www.google.com/books/edition/Monthly_Bulletin/btcsAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0.

Although the material gains workers experienced from the Four-L were important in garnering support for the union, many of the workplace improvements took place after the union had already secured a large membership. Why, then, did the majority of workers switch their support of the IWW in favor of a government-run union before camp and hourly improvements had been made? The rhetoric in the *Monthly Bulletin* provides one answer. By joining the Four-L, timber workers were cast as heroic, manly, loyal, and patriotic. In return for their loyalty, the Four-L provided these workers with the workplace improvements they sought through striking with the IWW. After decades of being looked down upon as “timber beasts” by dominant society, the Legion offered many bindle stiffs and bums respect for their patriotic work in the woods. In addition, the *Monthly Bulletin* cast pro-IWW workers as dangerous impediments to the war effort, and commonly referred to them as disloyal spies for the German Kaiser. The *Monthly Bulletin* thus created a choice that timber workers had to make—one was either an anti-American “Hun” sympathizer or a “100-percent American” who valued loyalty and patriotism. In a period of heightened consensus, most timber workers tossed out their IWW red cards, and agreed to join the union that stood for manly patriotism.

Engaging with contemporary currents of patriotism and anti-radicalism, the Four-L appealed to early twentieth-century conceptions of masculinity to call loggers to service on the home front. Rather than being separate from patriotism, however, the Four-L coded notions of loyalty and Americanism in masculine terms. Many members who wrote to the *Monthly Bulletin* also echoed this language, and the *Monthly Bulletin* in turn published workers’ letters in many issues. In this sense, masculinity and patriotism were not only top-down projects the federal government or the lumbermen used to control workers. Instead, workers also articulated their own patriotism in masculine and loyal terms. Although the *Monthly Bulletin* chose which letters

to publish from its membership, doing so acted as the filter through which workers rearticulated their own masculinity and patriotism.³⁰⁹

One Four-L member, Charles Teetz, offered his opinion in the pages of the *Monthly Bulletin* about what it meant to be a logger. He argued that dominant culture saw loggers as,

a cross between a pile-driver and a Kansas Cyclone, with a decided disposition to do deviltry with the resulting energies. He is supposed to browse on fir and hemlock boughs, wash them down with whisky, comb his hair with a devil club, shake himself like a shepherd dog every time he washes his face, take his peerless tobacco with a hay fork and his snuff with a scoop shovel.

He countered this popular notion with his own hyper-masculine definition of what he believed made a logger,

The lumber-jack is of virile, pulsating manhood, with red corpuscles in his blood, gray matter in his head, and sand in his gizzard...Beneath his stag shirt beats an honest and generous heart, and under his Stetson rests a brain that radiates common sense....There is more principle in his great toe than in the whole being of the pink-cuffed, pill-puffing, pernicky prigs with one only idea strong enough to agitate their cranium, to pander to the whims of fashion and cater to the calls of custom and conventionality.³¹⁰

Teetz felt compelled to respond to common perceptions of loggers, and articulated a counter-narrative. He refuted this stereotype by arguing that lumberjacks were virile, generous, and principled—by implication stating that most people did not believe lumberjacks to have these characteristics. Further, he mocked the “pink-cuffed, pill-puffing, pernicky prigs”—elite men who lived settled lifestyles. By casting these “pink-cuffed” men in effeminate terms (pill-puffing referred to women who smoked cigarettes), Teetz constructed himself as the opposite—strong and manly.

The *Monthly Bulletin* provided a space where Teetz could share his thoughts, and distributed issues to thousands of other Four-L loggers, but it was not neutrally passing on this

³⁰⁹ Loomis, *Empire of Timber*, 87.

³¹⁰ “In Defense of the Poor Despised Logger,” *Monthly Bulletin* 2, no. 1 (September 1918): 34.

message. By choosing to publish Teetz's letter, the Four-L participated in the circulation of knowledge and ideas that told migrant loggers that Four-L members were manly and principled, and radiated "common sense." Much of the language that Teetz used in his article echoed Wobblies' own ideas of masculinity. This was likely no accident, as the *Monthly Bulletin* attempted to draw in readers who were otherwise sympathetic to the IWW.³¹¹

Expressions of masculinity permeated in less explicit ways as well. The *Monthly Bulletin* cast average loggers as home-front heroes during the war by creating the opposing "Hun" and the Wobbly as enemies. The *Bulletin* further portrayed the Wobblies as anti-American because their labor agitation was no longer just relegated to the struggle between capital and labor, but was actively hampering the war between America and the tyrannical "Hun." The *Bulletin* described pro-Four-L loggers as loyal heroes who stamped out seditious behavior on the home front. N.W. Guiberson, a secretary for Four-L Local 3, District 6, published an article in the *Monthly Bulletin* titled, "Why We Should Join the L.L.L.L." Expressing his frustration that any logger would refuse to join the Four-L, Guiberson argued that the government had a right to know whether or not its citizens were loyal to the nation. He also argued that any man who refused to join the Four-L "places himself in the eyes of the Government and his fellow men, on the slacker list, along with disloyalists [sic] and pro-Germans."³¹² Guiberson explicitly articulated what the *Monthly Bulletin* was designed to do—to create a stark contrast between pro-American loggers, and seditious, supposedly pro-German non-members.

³¹¹ "In Defense of the Poor Despised Logger," *Monthly Bulletin* 2, no. 1 (September 1918): 34; Todd DePastino discussed the importance of a similar kind of masculinity for Wobblies in the early twentieth century. See: Todd DePastino, *Citizen Hobo: How A Century of Homelessness Shaped America* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2003), 118-121.

³¹² "Why We Should Join the L.L.L.L.," *Monthly Bulletin* 2, no. 1 (September 1918): 28.

The caricature of the Wobbly sympathizer was no stranger to the pages of the *Monthly Bulletin*. Starting only a few months after the inaugural issue, the *Bulletin* published a monthly serial about “Strawberry’s Pal.” Initially responding to the previous issue’s call for letters telling the magazine what individuals were doing for the war effort, this serial begins with a heavily accented explanation:

I aint no good at writin', Sergeant, so I'll just tell you verbally and you can put it in writin' and send it in to the magazine on what I done to help win the war. Taint that I think I done anything, but they asks us to all write what we done to help and I'm in favor of doin' everything the L. L. L. L. asks us to do. See? ³¹³

This recurring story is told from the point of view of an average logger who happens upon a few Wobbly troublemakers. The protagonist goes along with them, and even encourages them to commit acts of sabotage, all so he can set a trap to inform on them. The prose is written in the logger’s vernacular with misspellings included. Unlike the other letters published from workers, this serial attempted to appear as though it came from someone with very poor grammar and little education. It is likely that a non-logger was responsible for writing this serial, and used it to cast Wobblies as bumbling, anti-American fools.

By portraying Wobblies as pro-German enemies, the *Monthly Bulletin* called on members to root out any seditious IWW actions in the woods. In the second issue of the magazine, the Four-L asked members to report any suspicious behavior to the proper authorities. However, the *Monthly Bulletin*, quoting from General Disque, advised members to “stamp out sedition...in a lawful and dignified manner” because of the increased occurrences of mob violence against “traitors or supposed traitors.” The *Monthly Bulletin* cautioned its members against the use of violence, especially against Wobblies, and instead asked them to turn over suspected traitors to the government. This warning is curiously juxtaposed by many articles, jokes, and poems

³¹³ “Strawberry’s Pal Tells Sergeant All About It,” *Monthly Bulletin* 1, no. 5 (July 1918): 13.

published in the *Monthly Bulletin* that hinted at the need to drive out pro-German Wobblies through acts of violence. Elmer E. Davis of Raymond, Washington wrote,

The coming generation/will want to know how 'twas done,
How this mixed population/Put the Kaiser on the Run.
We will tell them of his treason/How the Kaiser rose and fell,
How the good old Loyal Legion/Helped put Kaiser Bill in hell.
Think of this boys, while you're working/Don't always think of fun--
When you catch a Wobbly shirking/Get a club and make him run.³¹⁴

Davis shared what several other members published in the *Monthly Bulletin*—anti-Wobbly violence was acceptable because it was patriotic and in the name of the war effort.

The Four-L and the *Monthly Bulletin* were not the first to encourage violence (implicitly or explicitly) against radical unionists in the Northwest. Violence and deportations were common tactics used by vigilante groups to suppress strikes and expel undesirable workers. Immigrant and radical workers often bore the brunt of this violence in the previous five decades, and it is unsurprising that the Four-L turned to these tactics to whip up support for the government-sponsored union. What is remarkable, however, is how quickly loggers went from supporting an IWW-led, industry-wide strike in 1917 to joining a government-run union that promoted violence against Wobblies in its official organ by 1918. The wartime context is crucial, as it ushered in a new period of heightened social expectations that loggers would become manly citizens who loved their country, and that this sentiment would continue even after the war.

But the effects of the war hit not just workers, they also hit employers. Workers used patriotic rhetoric to criticize employers who did not live up to the Four-L's standards. Holding his employer accountable was a patriotic endeavor for Thomas Park, an employee of the Puget Mill Company and veteran of the Spanish American War. In April 1918, Park wrote to Colonel Disque to complain about the quality of food served in the camps run at the company's two

³¹⁴ "Make 'Em Run," *Monthly Bulletin* 2, no. 1 (September 1918): 34.

locations on the Puget Sound, explaining that “the regular meals are not fit for a person to eat.” He blamed the poor quality of food on the Chinese cooks who worked at the mill, and framed the problem as one of war profiteering. “It is not right for a wealthy concern to take advantage of the men who make their wealth and who are such an important help in this time when our country is at war, men who want to refrain from strikes or demonstrations, that at this time would hinder our speeding the war.” Park claimed that the “Pro Germans” (likely Wobblies) used the poor camp food to “breed dissatisfaction” among the workers at Port Gamble. In this way, Park argued that any poor conditions that the company allowed eventually became fodder for radicals who he believed wanted to undermine the war effort.³¹⁵

The Four-L had a substantial effect on the timber industry. The 1917 strike and the wartime importance of spruce led the federal government to intervene to clean up camp conditions and the temporary establishment of the eight-hour day. In an effort to induce workers to join the Four-L, the union also offered loggers an opportunity to prove their patriotism and manliness. Employers relied on a variety of tactics to end the strike—some old, including the use of labor brokers to import strikebreakers, and some new, like the introduction of a government-sponsored union of employers and workers. In either case, by the end of the war, a dramatic shift in the timber and lumber industries was underway. Timber and lumber workers faced more pressure to settle down and become loyal, patriotic citizens. Improved working conditions and the Four-L’s anti-radical, patriotic ideology shifted the balance of power from the IWW to the company union, which ultimately ended the strike. But mass arrests of IWW leaders by local police, empowered by the passage of the Espionage and Sedition Acts, severely damaged the union’s power in the Northwest. As part of a larger nation-wide trend, IWW members faced a

³¹⁵ Letter from Thomas K. Park to Col. Brice Disque, April 5, 1918, Collection number 3820-001, Box 103, Folder 20, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

trampling of their civil liberties, and hundreds were arrested and tried for speaking out against the government during the war.³¹⁶

Shortly after the war ended, the federal government cut official ties with the Loyal Legion. Despite this setback, the Four-L voted to continue as a peacetime organization until 1938 when it finally disbanded. The *Monthly Bulletin* published General Disque's speech at the December 1918 Four-L convention, where he called on loggers and lumbermen alike to continue the fight against radicals in the logging industry. Disque argued that patriotism should continue to be a daily part of loggers' work in the woods, and that it "is not a virtue which thrives only in time of war." Foreshadowing the coming Red Scare, Disque warned, "Those who try to stir up strife and class hatred in America are traitors to our country; they are a cancerous growth in our political body and must be treated as such."³¹⁷ Even after the war, Disque continued to portray IWW agitators as anti-American traitors who must be rooted out.

As a civilian organization, the Four-L continued to investigate complaints from workers about poor conditions in timber camps and lumber towns. In January 1920, the Four-L once again received numerous complaints against the Puget Mill Company's quality of food served in their camps. Workers complained once again about "the inefficiency of Chinese cooks," claiming that the food arrived at the table "in an unpalatable and unappetizing condition."³¹⁸ Careful not to anger the company, the Four-L sanitary officer made it clear to the mill manager that the fault was not with the company for "refusing to furnish the proper material" but instead was "directly due to cooks inefficiency in preparing same." Within a week, Edwin Ames shot

³¹⁶ See Tyler, *Rebels of the Woods*, chapter 5, "Attack of the Master Class," for a detailed description of this repression in the Northwest.

³¹⁷ "Cooperation Instead of Conflict the Solution of Industrial Problems," *Monthly Bulletin* 2, no. 4 (December 1918-January 1919), 7.

³¹⁸ Letter from Dr. T. Tharaldsen to Puget Mill Co., January 20, 1920, Collection number 3820-001, Box 104, Folder 4, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

back a fiery response to the Four-L officer. Ames chided the officer for calling his company housing “camps,” and explained that Puget Mill Company “were the first, so far as we are aware, to break away from the old idea of cookhouses and cabins and unattractive accommodations for single and transient employees.” The mill’s early change in company housing marked the beginning of a larger industry-wide transition away from crowded, damp bunkhouses and migrant loggers, and toward a housed and settled population of workers. This transition did not occur overnight, but affordable automobiles would accelerate this process in the next decade. In 1920, however, the Puget Mill Company was ahead of the curve.³¹⁹

In paternalistic terms, Ames described the company’s relationship with its workers over the past sixty-seven years when the mill at Port Gamble was first established, and told the officer that the company never had any labor troubles—which was not true. Ames and his predecessor (and father-in-law), Cyrus Walker, had taken very careful measures to prevent workers from organizing in their mills. In March 1900, for example, the company compiled a list of twenty-six workers under the heading, “blacklisted employees.” Puget Mill Co. continued to surveil its employees on and off for over a decade from the 1910s to the 1920s, hiring local labor spies from the Thiel Detective Service to go undercover and report on any potential trouble. Ames told the Four-L officer that over the course of the past six decades “the kindest of feelings exist and have existed between the management of our company and its employees,” but it is clear that Ames did not trust his workers without surveillance.³²⁰

³¹⁹ Letter from E.G. Ames Dr. T. Tharaldsen, January 26, 1920, Collection number 3820-001, Box 104, Folder 4, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

³²⁰ “Blacklisted Employees,” March, 1900, Collection number 3820-001, Box 112, Folder 6, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections; Letter from E.G. Ames to Captain W.S. Seavey, May 8, 1912, collection number 3820-001, Box 98, Folder 51, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections; Letter from E.G. Ames to Thiel Detective Agency, July 19, 1916, collection number 3820-001, Box 103, Folder 2, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections; Letter from H.P. Wunderling to E.G. Ames, December 13, 1920, collection number 3820-001, Box 21, Folder 29, Edwin Gardner

Ames suggested that the complaints, rather than coming from one of their long-time employees, made against the company likely originated from “transient men” who, when newly arrived in the company town, “go into the dining rooms and see the Chinese help, [and] make [a] complaint simply on that score.”³²¹ Echoing wartime accusations, Ames concluded that the complaints the Four-L officer referenced were “simply a complaint of one of these trouble-makers.” Footloose workers, or “outside agitators,” were easy targets and were frequently blamed for any labor disruptions in the Northwest. During the 1917 strike, Ames explained to E.G. Griggs, a fellow lumberman and officer in the Army during the war, said that he was keeping close watch over the “transient men” in his employ, “in whom we have no confidence.”³²² While it is plausible, and even likely, that migrant loggers complained about Chinese cooks at Port Gamble and Port Ludlow, Ames’s strong dismissal of the complaint about poor food and blame of transient workers without any investigation reveals more about his assumptions about his workers than anything else.

Ames’s objection to the Four-L officer’s reference to “camp food,” rather than acknowledging that the food was served at the mill’s lodging house, illustrates the importance he attached to moving away from a camp-style operation. While lumber mills and logging operations in the Northwest still relied heavily on footloose workers, it is clear that Ames saw them as a nuisance that needed to be controlled. The Puget Mill Company owned not only the mills at Port Ludlow and Port Gamble, but also the towns themselves. This meant that the company had final say over where employees lived. Although millwork was more stationary

Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections; Letter from E.G. Ames Dr. T. Tharaldsen, January 26, 1920, Collection number 3820-001, Box 104, Folder 4, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

³²¹ Letter from E.G. Ames to Dr. T. Tharaldsen, January 26, 1920, collection number 3820-001, Box 104, Folder 4, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

³²² Letter from E.G. Ames to E.G. Griggs, July 20, 1917, collection number 3820-001, Box 16, Folder 19, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

compared to its sister industry of logging, mills also employed and housed a number of “transient” employees. Eight years before the establishment of the Four-L, Puget Mill Company built a lodging house for millworkers at their Port Ludlow mill in 1910, which was known as “the Annex.”³²³ The new lodging house was three stories tall, and was equipped with both dormitories and single rooms for workers who wanted to pay a higher rate. The implementation of better living conditions was not simply a benevolent move on the part of employers, it was a tactic to actively de-radicalize the large, migratory population of lumber and timber workers.

By January 1911, all unmarried millworkers employed at Port Ludlow were required by Puget Mill Company to lodge at the Annex, pending management’s approval of their application. Edwin Ames instructed George Shea, the man charged with overseeing the company’s housing, to hire two “white men” to run the daily and nightly operations of the Annex. Such managers would be responsible for keeping a small store on premises as well, selling items like cards, tobacco, and chewing gum.³²⁴ The managers were also responsible for posting and enforcing lodging house rules, which included the prohibition of women on the premises. If a lodger was found to have violated one of the rules, the manager was tasked with informing the worker’s department head in the mill. The requirement for workers to live at work and follow the employer’s rules at all times of the day undoubtedly was desirable for more oversight and control over workers.

One religious leader also took part in creating better camp conditions to stamp out radicalism. A prominent Seattle pastor, the Reverend M.A. Matthews of the First Presbyterian Church, preached weekly for his Sunday radio show in 1922. He wrote to Edwin Ames that

³²³ Letter from E.G. Ames to George Shea, November 15, 1910, collection number 3820-001, Box 98, Folder 34, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

³²⁴ Letter from E.G. Ames to George Shea, November 15, 1910, collection number 3820-001, Box 98, Folder 34, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

September and explained his plan to use his radio show as a way to “counteract the influence of the anarchist, the red socialist, the communist, and the bolshevist.” However, most logging camps were not equipped with radios for people to listen to. Matthews planned to install radios in camps across the Northwest. Asking Ames for a donation, the Reverend promised to broadcast Sunday sermons, including “sermons of good citizenship, constitutional government, and personal righteousness,” as well as music on weeknights. He argued that his radio broadcasts could undercut the “red literature, the red doctrine, and the red propaganda” in the Northwest’s various logging, mill, and construction camps, but needed to raise between \$25,000 and \$50,000 to do so.³²⁵

The Reverend Matthews sought to improve camp conditions in a very particular, anti-radical way. This improvement was not simply about adding more entertainment in workers’ daily lives, but a very specific kind of entertainment, one with a political and religious agenda that matched his own. Like Puget Mill Company’s Annex, and the Four-L’s *Bulletin*, the project to install radios across the Northwest had an anti-radical agenda that was meant to control what information workers came into contact with. Matthews’s broadcasts were targeted at migrant workers, many of whom spent their free time reading and discussing radical literature and philosophy.³²⁶ Ames rejected Matthews’s offer to install a radio in Puget Mill Co.’s towns, but only because the company already had radios. As he explained to Matthews, “we own and control everything in connection with our lumber manufacturing plants, logging camps, etc.”

³²⁵ Letter from M.A. Matthews to E.G. Ames, September 29, 1922, collection number 3820-001, Box 104, Folder 22, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

³²⁶ John Spargo, *The Psychology of Bolshevism* (New York; London: Harper & Brothers, 1919), 72.

Despite his refusal, Ames donated \$100 from the Puget Mill Company “in the interests of a good cause.”³²⁷

The 1917 timber strike was instructive for workers and businesses alike. While the IWW entered the post-war era in much rougher shape, the striking timber and mill workers saw short-term improvements in wages, hours, and camp conditions. Many mills and logging companies, however, slashed wages and reinstituted the ten-hour day after the war due to the post-war slump in demand for wood products. Camp conditions varied across the industry, but did improve overall, as employers found that better camp conditions led to a dramatic decrease in labor turnover. This was part of a wider turn toward “welfare capitalism” in the 1920s.³²⁸ The logging industry did not immediately settle its footloose workers after the war, but federal intervention laid the foundation for the beginning of the end of the footloose labor system in the timber and mill industries in the Pacific Northwest.

Expansion of Shipbuilding and New Settled Workers

Logging was not the only industry that expanded production in the Northwest’s wartime economy. Merrill & Ring’s advice to prospective employee Thomas Angel to consider working in Seattle’s growing shipyards reflected the growing importance the yards would have around the Puget Sound and Portland during and after the war. At the outbreak of war in Europe in 1914, only one shipyard existed in Seattle: the Seattle Dry Dock & Construction Company. In September 1916, Congress established the United States Shipping Board to oversee the construction of new steel shipyards around the country and created the Emergency Fleet

³²⁷ Letter from E.G. Ames to M.A. Matthews, October 5, 1922, collection number 3820-001, Box 104, Folder 22, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

³²⁸ Loomis, *Empire of Timber*, 70.

Corporation (EFC) as a subsidiary of the Board to handle the business of constructing shipyards. Although the US had not yet entered the war, the federal government wanted to expand its capacity to build a merchant marine fleet that would guarantee the U.S. would no longer be dependent on foreign shippers who were threatened by German submarines during the war. While these new yards were to be privately owned and operated, the EFC was in charge of financing and supervising construction and the use of ships, and responsible for recruiting shipyard workers.³²⁹

Contracts to build both shipyards and ships in Seattle and Portland were extremely lucrative for northwestern businessmen. In Seattle, the industry grew by 1918 to include five firms that constructed steel ships, while twelve more manufactured wooden vessels. The availability of local timber for shipbuilding made wooden ships easier to produce than steel ships.³³⁰ With the construction of new shipyards came a desperate need for workers—both those who would work directly in the yard and those who worked in allied trades—an estimated 20,000 workers.³³¹ In order to fulfill this demand, the fledgling U.S. Employment Service (USES) was put in charge of recruiting workers from across the West.³³² The USES had struggled to get off the ground since its establishment in 1915, but had an opportunity to prove itself in 1917 with what one historian called “the Seattle experiment.”³³³ Washington state Labor Commissioner C.H. Younger attempted to use the new agency to give preferential hiring to white homeowners in the state’s canneries in 1915, to no avail. In late 1917, the Shipping Board, which

³²⁹ Robert L. Friedheim, *The Seattle General Strike*, Centennial edition. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018), 58; William Courtney Mattox, *Building the Emergency Fleet: A Historical Narrative of the Problems and Achievements of the United States Shipping Board Emergency Fleet Corporation* (Cleveland: The Penton Publishing co., 1920), 17, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000969230>.

³³⁰ Friedheim, *The Seattle General Strike*, 59.

³³¹ W. J. Breen, *Labor Market Politics and the Great War: The Department of Labor, the States, and the First U.S. Employment Service, 1907-1933* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1997), 56.

³³² Friedheim, *The Seattle General Strike*, 60.

³³³ Breen, *Labor Market Politics and the Great War*, 54–55.

oversaw the construction of new shipyards throughout the country, decided to allow the USES to experiment with a top-down model for recruiting shipyard workers to Seattle. The influx of government contracts for shipyards allowed the companies to pay workers high wages. That, along with the strength of the Metal Trades Council of Seattle, a collection of labor unions in the shipyards, created the conditions for thousands of workers who wanted high wages to come to the city.³³⁴

But many employers in the state were critical of the USES. Fearful that the government would create a “closed shop” where only unionized workers could gain employment, Edwin Ames, along with Seattle’s business community, resented the federal government’s use of a public employment office to secure the thousands of needed workers. The USES’s policy was that it would not take a position on a prospective employee’s unionization status, but in effect, almost all workers in the shipbuilding industry were unionized. When the USES opened its hiring hall in Seattle in December 1917, it brought together the already-existing employers’ and unions’ employment offices into a single agency. Unions had the power to determine the qualifications of workers, and to issue them work permits.³³⁵ While not technically a closed shop, this arrangement gave the already strong shipbuilding unions important control over the hiring process.

Rumors swirled among the business community that the USES mandated union membership for all shipyard workers. Edwin Ames took particular interest in this question, and called on the Federal Labor Board to clarify its position. In ongoing communications with other businessmen, he told Frank McDermott of Seattle’s department store, The Bon Marche, of numerous rumors he had heard about workers being refused employment in the shipyards

³³⁴ Breen, *Labor Market Politics and the Great War*, 54–55.

³³⁵ Breen, *Labor Market Politics and the Great War*, 56

without first securing a union card. Outraged that even the USES's application cards had the printer's union label included, Ames remarked that "an alien who is a printer, by joining the union has rights superior to the rights of citizenship of the man who does not belong to a union."³³⁶ By mid-August 1918, accusations of pro-union bias against the USES had developed further. The *Business Chronicle of the Pacific Northwest* published an alleged interview between a shipyard worker and the USES director, where the director told the worker that he had to join a union to gain employment in the shipyards. This created a serious credibility issue, as the USES was supposed to be a neutral party tasked with reducing labor turnover in the name of the war effort. But the USES did not reduce labor turnover, as unions used their power to move workers around in order for them to secure higher wages. Ultimately, the USES's operation in Seattle did not bring the federal employment office the prestige and victory that it had been looking for. Fearful of unions' rising power in the shipyards, employers did everything they could to discredit the employment office.³³⁷

In addition to concern over the USES's placement practices, one of the most pressing issues facing Seattleites during the surge of labor migration in 1917 and 1918 was the demand for housing. This problem extended beyond the Northwest, and most of the cities with expanded wartime shipbuilding faced similar shortages of housing for the influx of shipyard workers. The Seattle Chamber of Commerce, anticipating the housing shortage in December 1917, called a meeting to strategize solutions. Led by Judge Thomas Burke, the Chamber considered options to manage the estimated influx of up to 20,000 workers. Charles Bebb, a prominent Seattle architect and the president of the state's chapter of the American Institute of Architects,

³³⁶ Letter from E.G. Ames to Frank McDermott, January 19, 1918, collection number 3820-001, Box 17, Folder 35, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

³³⁷ Breen, *Labor Market Politics and the Great War*, 59.

compiled notes from the meeting. The Chamber argued that they would solve this problem not out of “philanthropy or paternalism,” but instead because it was “a matter of cooperative investment” between landowners and wage earners.³³⁸

The federal government also addressed the shortage, called for the construction of both new housing (single-family homes and apartments), and expanded transportation between the new homes and shipyards. For example, in 1918, the federal government threatened to withhold shipyard contracts worth \$200 million if Seattle could not meet the growing demand for housing.³³⁹ The Seattle Chamber of Commerce supported a new plan to build 4,000 new homes in August of that year. Named the “More Homes Bureau,” the new group set out to “facilitate the building of the thousands of new homes needed in Seattle,” and recruited local businessmen to support the effort, including long-time Seattleite, Judge Thomas Burke.³⁴⁰ The Bureau, created as part of the patriotic fervor of August 1918, advertised itself as a way to support the war effort by supporting wartime workers. Appealing to local residents’ wallets as much as their hearts or minds, one More Homes Bureau advertisement exclaimed, “Patriotism and Profit Call!! BUILD A HOUSE!”³⁴¹ By the war’s end, the More Homes Bureau organized the building and sales of 2,000 homes in Seattle. The push to house workers was not simply a chance for local businesses to profit off of the housing shortage in Seattle; as the war ended, community efforts to turn workers into homeowners also had an ideological motivation.

In 1919, John Spargo, a former Marxist turned anti-communist, published a book that

³³⁸ “Housing the Wage Earner,” December 20, 1917, collection number 3820-001, Box 17, Folder 20, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

³³⁹ John J. Caldbick, “Seattle ‘More Homes Bureau’ Housing Campaign Kicks off on September 3, 1918.,” HistoryLink, August 17, 2009, <https://www.historylink.org/File/9109>; *Seattle Daily Times* (Seattle, Washington), August 25, 1918: 8.

³⁴⁰ “Seattle Building Drive Attracts Wide Attention,” *Seattle Daily Times* (Seattle, Washington), August 16, 1918: 25.

³⁴¹ “Patriotism and Profit” *Seattle Daily Times* (Seattle, Washington), August 25, 1918: 8.

explored why native-born Americans supported “Bolshevism” and the IWW. Looking specifically at migrant workers in the West, Spargo wrote almost sympathetically about these workers. He recognized that the western economy relied on a class of footloose workers, and it was the conditions created by this economic system that led to workers’ embrace of socialism, anarchism, and Bolshevism. Spargo found it unsurprising that these same workers did not want to participate in electoral politics, as many of them were disenfranchised by their mobility. He explained, “many a hardworking, intelligent American, who from choice or from necessity, is a migratory worker, following his job, never has an opportunity to vote for State legislators, for Governor, for Congressman or President. He is just as effectively excluded from the actual electorate as if he were a Chinese coolie, ignorant of our customs and our speech.”³⁴² This assertion was not true, of course, as Chinese immigrants were barred from citizenship by hostile laws based in white supremacist ideology. By likening white migrant workers to Chinese contract laborers, however, Spargo attempted to make a larger argument about the lack of rights to which native-born migrant workers had access. Spargo understood that this rootlessness caused workers to become disenchanted with capitalism, and drove them towards radicalism and the IWW.³⁴³

Spargo criticized the industries that created this downtrodden group of workers, especially the lumber industry. He explained that it “builds camps instead of cities. It does not want citizens, men with civic ideals and responsibilities. On the contrary, it wants men content to be camp-dwellers, content to live under abnormal conditions, without home and family life.”³⁴⁴ At the same time, he recognized that the western economy depended on migrant workers,

³⁴² John Spargo, *The Psychology of Bolshevism* (New York; London: Harper & Brothers, 1919), 77.

³⁴³ Spargo, *The Psychology of Bolshevism*, 77.

³⁴⁴ Spargo, *The Psychology of Bolshevism*, 75-76.

insisting that “it is necessary and its disappearance would be attended by economic disaster.”³⁴⁵

While Spargo did not propose a solution, other reformers believed that improved camp conditions, and homeownership opportunities would turn workers back from radical politics.

Months after the More Homes Bureau built thousands of homes in Seattle, another program was underway to turn workers into homeowners in Portland. In December 1918, Portland residents organized the “Own Your Own Home” campaign. Similar to Seattle’s More Homes Bureau, the Own Your Own Home campaign recruited high-status members of the city to build and sell homes to working-class residents.³⁴⁶ The practical need to find housing for Portland’s residents was accompanied by a desire to stamp out radicalism in the immediate post-war period. Ellis Lawrence, a member of the committee, explained that “Statistics prove that American people, especially in the cities, continue [as] renters rather than home owners. As a result the population becomes restless and lacking in that permanency which ensures our democracy.”³⁴⁷ Portland’s project to create homeowners was created to settle the single, footloose men who labored in the region's industries, and to turn them into family men who would be less prone to radicalism.³⁴⁸

The drive to produce more housing was the logical result of the arrival of tens of thousands of workers. But cities in the Northwest had experienced seasonal influxes of workers for over forty years. Every winter, thousands of workers streamed into cities like Seattle, Portland, and Spokane to wait out slow seasons and unemployment. In the mid-1880s, urban populations boomed in the Northwest with the completion of railroad construction to Seattle and

³⁴⁵ Spargo, *The Psychology of Bolshevism*, 76.

³⁴⁶ Erica J. Ryan, *Red War on the Family: Sex, Gender, and Americanism in the First Red Scare*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015), 79.

³⁴⁷ City of Portland (OR) Archives, Housing Committee – Own Your Own Home Campaign, AD/9685, 1918.

³⁴⁸ Ryan, *Red War on the Family*, 81-82.

Tacoma. In 1897, the population again jumped with the discovery of gold in the Yukon. So why was there a large, organized effort to house this new influx of workers in 1918? In part, this was because shipbuilding was a stationary and non-seasonal line of work, unlike logging and canning—Seattle’s largest industries.³⁴⁹ Expanding non-seasonal industries was precisely what Washington state’s labor commissioner, Edward Olson, hoped for in his 1914 report. He explained that “intermittent employment” was the foundational problem for workers in the state of Washington, and that the situation could be improved by “attracting and fostering such industries as will offer permanent work in all seasons of the year.”³⁵⁰ The expansion of shipbuilding in Seattle offered such a solution, and with it came an enormous demand for housing.

Yet the committees in Seattle and Portland did not simply want new housing for new workers. They also wanted opportunities to create improved and heteronormative home-lives as a means of de-radicalizing the population.³⁵¹ Just as Reverend Matthews tried to improve camp conditions by exposing workers to conservative religious and political indoctrination, pro-homeownership forces in Seattle and Portland believed that building houses was both good for business and would stamp out radicalism in their communities. This belief became widespread in the United States in the decade after World War I, and was summed up in the words of a Massachusetts industrial relations manager:

It is a well known fact that the best way to convert a man from Socialism is for him to own some property. A man who owns his home will not throw bombs, he will not go to radical meetings. He will not have time for he will have his garden, hens and pig to look

³⁴⁹ USCIR, *Final Report*, vol. 5, 4099-4100; State of Washington, *Ninth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Factory Inspection*, (Olympia, Washington, 1914), 51-52, 92.

³⁵⁰ State of Washington, *Ninth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Factory Inspection*, (Olympia, Washington, 1914), 13.

³⁵¹ Erica J. Ryan, *Red War on the Family: Sex, Gender, and Americanism in the First Red Scare* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015), 81, 89.

after, especially in the earlier years when he is paying for the house, in the later years, well, old men dont [sic] throw bombs anyway.³⁵²

Thus, with the expansion of permanent employment in shipbuilding trades and the improvement of camp and living conditions for the region's timber and lumber workers, Seattle's shipyard workers started to become more stationary. Those who refused to renounce their radical visions for the future, however, and those who did not fit the racial requirement for homeownership, faced violence, not integration.

Vigilante Violence and Social Control

The homeownership programs in Seattle and Portland represented one response to anti-radical fears at the end of the war. Businessmen and homeownership groups expended the effort to build homes for white footloose workers, both native-born and immigrant. But when workers were considered to be too radical or ethnically "unassimilable," vigilante groups and government agencies turned to violence and deportation as a means of social control. The Seattle Minute Men formed during the labor unrest of the region's timber strike in September 1917. Made up of approximately 20,000 members from the city's business class, the Minute Men was a patriotic organization that "organized for the purpose of giving information to, and doing the investigation work for, the federal government."³⁵³ They were part of a national wave of anti-radicalism that attempted to stamp out the perceived threat of Bolshevism and anarchism by spying on, harassing, and arresting radicals in the late-1910s. By May 1918, the Minute Men merged with

³⁵² Letter from C.P. Marshall to Francis C. Holmes, February 2, 1920, Case 47, Plymouth Cordage Co. Records, Baker Library, Harvard Business School.

³⁵³ "Minute Men Become a Part of a Nationwide Organization," *Seattle Daily Times* (Seattle, Washington), June 16, 1918: 21; "Minute Men Seek Fund of \$100,000," *Seattle Daily Times* (Seattle, Washington), December 1, 1918: 22.

and became a division under the American Protective League (APL), a national organization with similar motivations.

After the United States officially joined the First World War, citizens caught up in the patriotic fervor targeted footloose workers for being “slackers,” that is, those who refused to enlist in the army or work in critical wartime industries. In October 1918, the Minute Men organized a “slacker drive” to round up Washington state’s unemployed workers. With the approval of both the state’s Attorney General and the Department of Justice, the drive was planned for the end of the month. However, it seems that this round up never took place, as there is no newspaper record of the event. With the armistice coming shortly after the planned dates for the round up, the Minute Men likely called off their plan. Despite this, the slacker drive reveals the support vigilantes had from state and federal governments to conduct such a raid, and also just how threatening unemployed workers were to the state in this period.³⁵⁴

After the war, labor troubles in Seattle offered the like-minded “American Committee” an opportunity to carry on the work of the Minute Men. A wage dispute between shipyard workers, who were represented by the Metal Trades Council, and several shipyard managers claiming to represent all shipyard employers, devolved quickly into a strike in January 1919.³⁵⁵ The Metal Trade Council balked at the managers’ offer of an 86½ cent per hour raise to only the shipyards’ skilled employees—an offer approved by the Emergency Fleet Council. Because the war was over, however, the Metal Trades Council was no longer required to negotiate with the EFC. Rejecting the proposal, shipyard workers went on strike on January 21. Both the employers and the EFC refused to negotiate further with the Metal Trades Council. Within a day, the Seattle

³⁵⁴ Letter from American Protective League to Merrill & Ring Lumber Co., October 15, 1918, Collection number 0726-001, Box 8, Folder 31, Merrill & Ring Lumber Co. records, University of Washington Special Collections.

³⁵⁵ Friedheim, *The Seattle General Strike*, 72.

Central Labor Council, the wider association for the AFL-affiliated unions in the city, decided to poll its member unions on whether to call a city-wide general strike in support of the shipyard workers. Believing that victory in the shipyard strike was crucial to the health of the labor movement in Seattle, member locals voted overwhelmingly in favor of the general strike, which was planned to begin on February 6. Contrary to the belief of local conservative businessmen, the IWW and Bolsheviks alone did not lead the strike. Wobblies were central to promoting the ideology behind the general strike, but it was the craft unions, affiliated with the conservative AFL that voted for the general strike.³⁵⁶ While Wobblies and other anarchists helped to plan and advertise once it had been called, Seattle's labor movement broadly supported the general strike.

Residents of Seattle largely supported the striking shipyard workers. But reports of a looming revolution, stoked by newspapers and Seattle's Mayor Ole Hanson, turned public opinion away from the general strike.³⁵⁷ Going forward with their plan, the Central Labor Council shut down almost every industry in Seattle on February 5. Five days later, with no clear goals and lack of public support, individual unions voted to return to work. On February 10, the Seattle Central Labor Council called off the action. While most unions found the general strike to be a success, fears of radicalism drove the public's support away from the strike.³⁵⁸

In the wake of the general strike, eight members of Seattle's elite formed the American Committee. Among its members were the reverend M.A. Matthews and longtime Seattle judge, Thomas Burke. The committee sent statements to prominent lumbermen in the region, including Edwin Ames of the Puget Mill Co. and T. Jerome, of Merrill & Ring, asking for their support. The committee drew a direct connection between the IWW persistent presence in the lumber

³⁵⁶ Freidheim, *The Seattle General Strike*, 84-90.

³⁵⁷ Freidheim, *The Seattle General Strike*, 105-118.

³⁵⁸ James Gregory, "The Seattle General Strike in Pictures," in *The Seattle General Strike*. Centennial edition. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018.

industry and the “Bolshevist trouble in Seattle” during the general strike. It further argued for the “immediate expulsion of ALL ALIEN AGITATORS and publishers...if we are to have Industrial peace in this country.”³⁵⁹ [emphasis original]

Despite the fact that the general strike in Seattle took place at the direction of, and with undeniable support from, non-IWW unions, the committee was convinced that the IWW was the mastermind behind the labor action. The American Committee also claimed to have labor spies placed within the ranks of loggers to “secure information of intended radical action” in order to inform foremen of any dissent on the job. Prominent lumbermen, including E.B. Chinn of the Loggers Information Association, E.S. Grammer, manager of the Admiralty Logging Company (a subsidiary of the Puget Mill Co.), W.H. Boner of the Weyerhaeuser Timber Co., and lumberman and U.S. Army officer E.G. Griggs, signed a statement which the committee included, that attested to their belief “that the deportation of the social enemies will remove the main cause of discontent from the rank and file of our employees.”³⁶⁰ Asking for the lumbermen’s financial support, the committee promised to “secure lasting relief through immediate deportation of the alien agitators from American soil.”³⁶¹ Within twenty-four hours, Ames replied to the committee, pledging his support and a check for \$50.³⁶² As with labor disputes in the Northwest, employers clung to the idea that deportation would solve their problems. The American Committee believed that 90 percent of “anti-government agitators” were foreign-born, and thus, deportation could prove to be a decisive way to eliminate the threat

³⁵⁹ Letter from the American Committee to T. Jerome, February 25, 1919, Collection number 0726-001, Box 12, Folder 3, Merrill & Ring Lumber Co. records, University of Washington Special Collections.

³⁶⁰ Letter from the American Committee to E.G. Ames, February 25, 1919, collection number 3820-001, Box 19, Folder 30, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

³⁶¹ Letter from the American Committee to T. Jerome, February 25, 1919, Collection number 0726-001, Box 12, Folder 3, Merrill & Ring Lumber Co. records, University of Washington Special Collections.

³⁶² Letter from E.G. Ames to W.C. Dawson, February 26, 1919, Collection number 0726-001, Box 19, Folder 30, Merrill & Ring Lumber Co. records, University of Washington Special Collections.

they posed. While employers faced labor shortages and strikes, they used migration, both through the importation of strike breakers and the deportation of radicals, to achieve their aims. Of course, this was the case not only in the Northwest, but also throughout the United States in the early twentieth century. But the Northwest's heightened dependence on footloose labor meant that coerced labor migrations were central to employers' strategies for controlling and retaining power over the labor market.

The reactionary backlash against the general strike is only one example of a larger trend of growing anti-radicalism in the Northwest in the late 1910s and 1920s. The message was clear to labor organizers: abandon anti-capitalist rhetoric or face the consequences. This turn was part of a wave of anti-radicalism that swept the United States during the first World War and its aftermath. And in the wake of the Russian Revolution in 1917, many Americans grew paranoid about leftist politics at home. This was especially true in the American West, where vigilante groups used violence to end the widespread labor unrest. Possibly the most notorious example occurred in Bisbee, Arizona, where a strike remarkably similar to the wartime lumber strike in the Northwest unfolded in the copper mines in June 1917. Assisted by the IWW, miners in Bisbee petitioned the mine companies, owned by Phelps Dodge, for safer working conditions and "an end to discrimination of foreign and minority workers."³⁶³ When the company refused, mineworkers went on strike. As with the Northwest lumber strike, locals in Bisbee painted the strikers as "pro-Germans" sent by the Kaiser to disrupt production. In response to the strike, a local pro-business "Citizen's Protective League," formed to put down the strike, rounded up just over 1,000 men, including many who had nothing to do with the strike, forced them onto boxcars, and dumped them in the desert across state lines in New Mexico. The Bisbee

³⁶³ Dan Kanstroom, *Deportation Nation: Outsiders in American History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 142.

Deportation mirrored similar labor deportations in the Pacific Northwest, including the deportation of striking Greek millworkers from Raymond, Washington in 1912.

In addition to deportations, mobs eliminated the IWW threat through violence. Frank Little, an IWW organizer, went to Butte, Montana in 1917 to assist striking copper miners. Six masked men burst into his room on the night of August 1, bound Little, and drove him out of town. He was then dragged behind the car and lynched from a railroad trestle.³⁶⁴ Two years later in Centralia, Washington, Wobblies were targeted by members of the American Legion during the Armistice Day parade in November 1919. Having been tipped off about a raid on their organizing hall, Wobblies armed themselves inside their headquarters downtown Centralia, and prepared for an attack. When the parade reached their hall, multiple shots were fired by both parties, including from across the street. The mob chased one Wobbly, Wesley Everest, from the hall and eventually caught him on the banks of the nearby Skookumchuck River. Everest, both a World War I veteran and IWW member, shot and killed a member of the American Legion as he was captured. The group of Legionnaires knocked Everest unconscious, and took him prisoner in the local jail. That evening, a mob broke into the jail, abducted Everest, and drove him to a nearby railroad trestle where he was lynched. The next evening, after the body had been cut down and left to float in the river's shallows for hours, Everest's body was moved to the jail where ten Wobblies sat imprisoned for the Armistice Day events. The body of Wesley Everest was dumped on the floor in front of his fellow Wobblies and left for two days to terrorize the prisoners who escaped the lynching.³⁶⁵

In the coming months and years, Wobblies across the West found themselves targeted for their participation in the union. The Centralia Massacre, as it would come to be called, and the

³⁶⁴ Tyler, *Rebels of the Woods*, 121.

³⁶⁵ Joyce L Kornbluh, *Rebel Voices*, 256; Tyler, *Rebels of the Woods*, 155-163; Loomis, *Empire of Timber*, 79-80.

end of World War I are often cited as a crucial turning point in the union's history.³⁶⁶ Their anarchist rhetoric, scathing critiques of capitalism, and perhaps most importantly, their attempts to organize the West's simultaneously despised and necessary footloose workers into one big union drew the ire of an increasingly anti-radical nation. Employers mollified some footloose workers' demands with better housing, temporary wage increases, and improved job status. For those radical organizers who refused to join the Loyal Legion, however, or otherwise accept the status quo, vigilante groups, made up of prominent businessmen and supported by state and federal governments, used deportation, violence, and murder as a remedy to the problem of disruptive footloose workers.

While the United States joined World War I relatively late compared to the other combatants, the war had an enormous effect on life in the Pacific Northwest. The wartime context created an opportunity for the US government to alleviate many of the problems that had plagued footloose workers' lives in the Northwest for decades. The federal government forced lumbermen to clean up logging camps, increase wages, and temporarily move to an eight-hour day—satisfying many of the Wobblies' demands. But the government also increasingly cracked down on radicals, both by alleviating the economic and housing problems they believed led to radicalization, and by deporting or otherwise allowing violence against those who refused to, or were barred from, conforming to Americanism and homeownership. This carrot-and-stick approach was enormously consequential for the footloose labor system, as there was growing pressure on white migrant workers to settle down. Advances in technology after the war would

³⁶⁶ Tyler, *Rebels in the Woods*, 184.

create even greater opportunities for white workers to leave the footloose labor system once and for all.

CHAPTER FIVE

The End of the Footloose Labor System

After World War I, several factors converged to reduce the number of footloose workers circulating between industries throughout the Pacific Northwest. Among these factors included persistent anti-radicalism from the region's business elite that sought to replace disruptive pro-IWW migrants with settled family men or entire families. The army of predominantly white hobos, tramps, and bums that rode the rails in search of work between urban islands and industrial hinterlands from the 1880s until World War I started to become a relic of the earlier period of industrial expansion—what historian Carlos Schwantes called the “closing of the wageworkers’ frontier.”³⁶⁷ A decline in the number of railroad and construction jobs also occurred as the settlement of the Pacific Northwest slowed infrastructure development. Finally, the introduction of labor-saving technologies in agriculture, logging, and canning reduced the number of workers in these industries, while the adoption of affordable automobiles turned footloose workers into commuters who drove between homes and work sites, largely reducing the need for remote work camps.

But migrant labor did not disappear from the Northwest; farms continued to rely on short-term workers during harvest seasons. After World War I, the footloose labor system shrank to regulate the movement only of farmworkers, and to a lesser extent those working in canneries. Farmers, businessmen, and workers contested just who would do this difficult and highly seasonal work, at what price, and under which conditions. While white farm workers continued to make up the largest share of seasonal agricultural labor in the Northwest, the Great Depression

³⁶⁷ Carlos Arnaldo Schwantes, *Hard Traveling: A Portrait of Work Life in the New Northwest* (University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 64.

ushered in a rapid change, replacing single, white men with white families. Legislation barring further migration from Asia, created the avenue for Filipino and Filipina workers to take the majority of cannery jobs.

Labor brokers and employment agents, too, had to adapt to the new labor system that developed in the interwar period. The dramatic reduction of immigration from both Europe and Asia, along with a successful Filipino-led unionization drive in the canneries, meant that long-established immigrant labor brokers had become largely obsolete. With the onset of the Great Depression and the U.S.'s entrance into World War II, the federal government once again took up the job of public employment agent. In 1933, the Secretary of Labor, Frances Perkins, revived the United States Employment Service (USES) for workers already in the United States. And to encourage the temporary immigration of farmworkers, the federal government established the Bracero Program, which contracted Mexican farm workers to alleviate labor shortages in agriculture. Logging outfits, mills, and shipyards began to transition away from the third-party employment agent (both private and public), and established in-house employment departments—staffed by new scientific “employment managers”—to locate, filter, and secure workers for their companies. Ultimately, the federal government helped shape the new hiring systems commercial employers developed in place of brokers’ long-standing practices.

Loggers Settle Down

By the end of the 1920s, American writers and filmmakers began to both eulogize and mythologize the passing of the hobo. James Stevens, a popular Northwest author who wrote more than 250 stories, spent his youth as a footloose laborer in the Northwest where he migrated between logging camps before joining the Army in World War I. In 1925, Stevens published an

autobiographical article in *The Century Magazine*, titled “The Hobo’s Apology: Wherein He Disavows Being a Tramp.”³⁶⁸ Stevens set out to memorialize the importance of hobos in the development of the West, and argued that while the word “‘Hobo’ is a name applied to any ragged fellow who appears to be a shiftless rover,” the footloose worker was in reality “an honest working-man.” Stevens offered a short history of hobos’ social and work lives that echoed the main points of what contemporary hobo-turned-sociologist Nels Anderson had done in his 1923 monograph, *The Hobo: The Sociology of Homeless Men*. But “The Hobo’s Apology” was more than a description of a predominantly white and single male subculture of workers in the West. Stevens evoked a Frederick Jackson Turner-inspired image of white footloose workers as those who “spent [their] days of labor in remote, unpeopled places” and whose “labor built the railroads, sank the mine-shafts, drilled the oil-wells, dug the irrigation-ditches, felled the trees, dammed the rivers, reared the cattle and sheep, and harvested the crops in new, raw regions, where the settled worker, the family man, could not or would not go.” This particular footloose worker was very much a western hero in Stevens’s account, and the author lamented that the hobo was “almost a memory...he is gone because the need for him is gone.”³⁶⁹

While Stevens was not wrong about the centrality of footloose workers to the settlement of the West, his article offers an illustration of how hobos became mythologized exactly when they began to disappear from the West. Numerous other popular depictions of hobos, bums, and tramps emerged, with Charlie Chaplin’s “Little Tramp” as probably the most popular example. Stevens concluded his article by recognizing the shift towards a more settled West, where “camp

³⁶⁸ Bob Bumstead, “James Stevens (1892-1972),” 2018, https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/james_stevens_1892_1972_/; James Stevens, “The Hobo’s Apology: Wherein He Disavows Being A Tramp,” *The Century Magazine*, 1925, James Floyd Stevens papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

³⁶⁹ James Stevens, “The Hobo’s Apology: Wherein He Disavows Being A Tramp,” *The Century Magazine*, 1925, 466, James Floyd Stevens papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

life still goes on, of course, in the woods, on construction work, and in the oil-fields. But these camps are nowadays populated largely by laborers who support families, and who own automobiles, tailored clothes, and bank accounts.”³⁷⁰ Steven’s article tapped into the emotions a former hobo felt about the change to a more settled society in the West. He was right that by the mid-1920s, the growth period of the American west began to slow. Historian Carlos Schwantes called this period the “closing of the wageworkers’ frontier,” as industries ceased to rely so heavily on footloose workers and railroad construction subsided.³⁷¹ The male population in the state of Washington in 1890, for example, was about 62% and by 1930 it fell to 53%.³⁷²

Perhaps the most dramatic change to migrant labor in the Pacific Northwest came as a result of affordable automobiles. Between 1920 and 1930, American automobile ownership increased 183% percent, while overall population growth was only 13.7%.³⁷³ Loggers in particular began to commute to work, rather than live on-site in remote work camps. For example, the town of Forks, Washington grew from a population of 209 in 1920 to 655 in 1930, and to over 1000 in 1940.³⁷⁴ Located on the far northwestern corner of the Olympic Peninsula, Forks became home to many loggers and pulp and lumber mill workers once these workers began to use automobiles to commute to work. In the preceding decades, footloose loggers, and

³⁷⁰ Stevens, 472.

³⁷¹ Schwantes, *Hard Traveling: A Portrait of Work Life in the New Northwest*, 65.

³⁷² U.S. Census Bureau, 1940 Census of Population: Volume 2. Characteristics of the Population Part 7: Washington, Table 4, “Race, By Nativity and Sex, for the State: 1850 to 1940,” 304, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-volume-2/33973538v2p7ch4.pdf>.

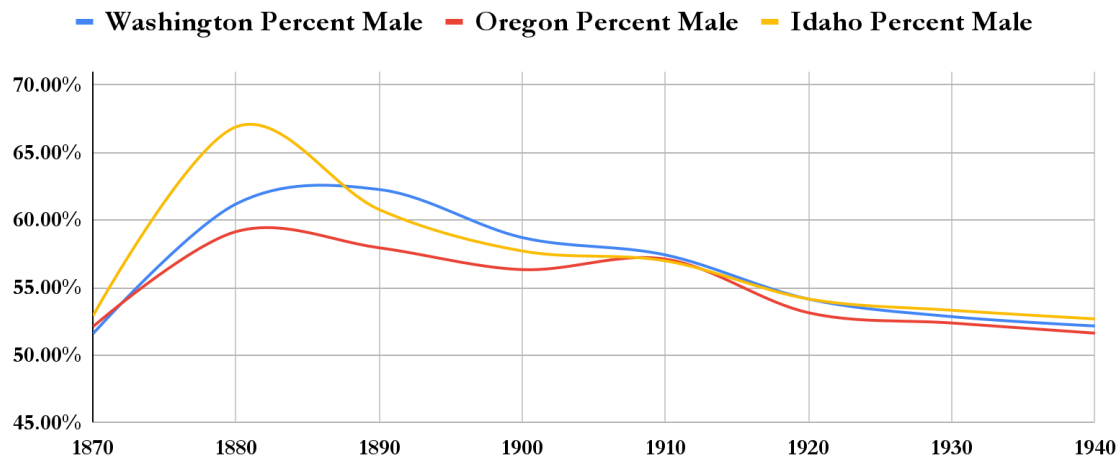
³⁷³ U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Association, Table MV-1, “STATE MOTOR VEHICLE REGISTRATIONS, BY YEARS, 1900-1995,” April 1997, <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ohim/summary95/mv200.pdf>; U.S. Census Bureau, 1930 Census: Volume 1. Population, Number and Distribution of Inhabitants, “United States Summary,” 5, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1930/population-volume-1/03815512v1ch02.pdf>.

³⁷⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, 1920 US Census, Clallam County, Washington, populations schedule, Forks Precinct, p. 54-56, enumeration district (ED) 9, sheet 1A-5A, Ancestry.com; 1930 US Census, Clallam County, Washington, populations schedule, Forks Precinct, p. 62-69, enumeration district (ED) 5-13, sheet 1A-8B, Ancestry.com; 1940 US census, Clallam County, Washington, populations schedule, Forks Precinct, p. 85-93, enumeration district (ED) 5-16, sheet 1A-8B, Ancestry.com.

to a lesser extent mill hands, worked for a few days or months in the old-growth forests of the Olympic Peninsula before they took their “stake” back to Seattle, Tacoma, Olympia, or Portland. But when automobiles became affordable, loggers, who were predominantly white, began to purchase or rent houses, get married, and have children. With this new lifestyle, loggers were less likely to quit their jobs and seek freedom out on the road.

Table 5.1 ³⁷⁵

Gender Ratios in the Pacific Northwest: 1870-1940



The transition to settled life for loggers did not occur overnight, but can generally be described in three stages that coincided with the adoption of new technologies on the job. The first stage of white loggers’ housing consisted of communal shacks or bunks that housed dozens of men in shared lodgings. The company employed a camp cook (sometimes a Chinese or Japanese worker) and loggers provided their own bed rolls. This was commonplace from the

³⁷⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, 1940 Census of Population: Volume 2. Characteristics of the Population Part 2: Idaho, Table 3, “Urban and Rural Population, For the State: 1870 to 1940,” 395, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-volume-2/33973538v2p2ch5.pdf>; U.S. Census Bureau, 1940 Census of Population: Volume 2. Characteristics of the Population Part 5: Oregon, Table 3, “Urban and Rural Population, For the State: 1850 to 1940,” 963, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-volume-2/33973538v2p5ch9.pdf>; U.S. Census Bureau, 1940 Census of Population: Volume 2. Characteristics of the Population Part 7: Washington, Table 3, “Urban and Rural Population, For the State: 1860 to 1940,” 303, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-volume-2/33973538v2p7ch4.pdf>.

1880s until World War I, when the IWW led loggers on strike for better working conditions. During the second phase, companies transitioned to building family camps, where the families of loggers lived in the woods. This practice reached its peak in the decade after WWI, when camp conditions improved drastically. Loggers' wives cooked food and cleaned linens for the camp to earn extra income for the family—work that had been done previously by Chinese immigrants. The third phase became widespread after 1932 when logging trucks overtook logging railroads as the primary way loggers hauled timber from the forests. As automobiles became more affordable and logging-truck roads penetrated the forests, loggers began to drive to work while their families remained in homes in nearby towns.³⁷⁶

As a result of these changing dynamics in logging, women took on important roles in the industry. During World War I, timber companies in the Northwest hired women workers to fill positions left open by male loggers who joined the military and went overseas. Women typically did jobs that were less dangerous, including the “whistle punk,” who sounded signals as part of the logging process. More commonly, women began to take on important day-to-day jobs in logging camps, such as cooking, washing, and childcare.³⁷⁷ Catherine Gilmore ran a camp cookhouse for a shingle weaving company in which her husband Joseph worked as a millwright in Van Zandt, Washington. In 1898, she gave birth to a son, Marc, with the assistance of another woman who worked with her. As was common with most woods workers, Joseph Gilmore changed jobs frequently and worked for various lumber companies in the early twentieth century. At a logging camp in nearby Blue Canyon, Washington, Catherine earned \$100 per month

³⁷⁶ Norman S. Hayner, “Taming the Lumberjack,” *American Sociological Review* 10, no. 2 (1945): 218, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2085640>.

³⁷⁷ Robert E. Walls and Dora Zimpel, “Lady Loggers and Gyppo Wives: Women and Northwest Logging,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 103, no. 3 (2002): 366.

working in the cookhouse making food for forty-five men.³⁷⁸ In 1911, Joseph was killed when a boiler exploded at the sawmill, and Catherine sued the boiler company for \$500 to pay for her husband's final expenses. Because of his father's death, Marc began his lifelong career in the woods at thirteen years old, earning money to support his family. This type of family economy became more common after the first World War, as loggers left bachelor living behind, and many turned to family life in the woods.

A new kind of logger emerged from the 1917 strike, and became more commonplace in the following decades. "Gyppo" loggers—those who operated as small-scale independent contractors—reshaped employers' relationships with workers, and workers' relationships with one another and their families. Historians are not certain where the name "gyppo" comes from, but it likely takes its meaning from the word "gypsy," as there was (and sometimes still is) a derogatory connotation to the word, often similar to "scab."³⁷⁹ Gyppo logging began as a response to IWW radicalism, where employers hired loggers as contractors and paid them piece rates for the timber they harvested. With their companies shut down during the 1917 strike, lumbermen turned to independent loggers who would break the strike. Wobblies understood the danger gyppos posed to building solidarity, and disparaged their individualism and lack of class consciousness. Most gyppos opposed unions, and preferred to operate on their own schedule.³⁸⁰ Many gyppo loggers worked in small family groups that created leaner logging operations. Wives of gyppo loggers took on both paid and unpaid work that allowed their husbands to work

³⁷⁸ Marcellus Gilmore, "Memories of Working in the Woods and Personal Remembrances," interview by Michael A. Runestrand, September 29, 1979, Collection of Oral History Interviews on Whatcom County (Wash.) and Regional History, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Libraries Archives & Special Collections, Western Washington University, Bellingham WA 98225-9123.

³⁷⁹ E. B. Mittelman, "The Gyppo System," *Journal of Political Economy* 31, no. 6 (December 1923): 840, <https://doi.org/10.1086/253566>.

³⁸⁰ Mittelman, 840; Erik Loomis, *Empire of Timber: Labor Unions and the Pacific Northwest Forests* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 76–77; Walls and Zimpel, "Lady Loggers and Gyppo Wives," 367.

as contractors. In addition to working as flunkies, truck drivers, and whistle punks, this also included bookkeeping, cooking, administering first aid, hunting and foraging food, and selling needle crafts.³⁸¹ Women's labor was central to the ability of gyppo loggers to make a living.

But technology was just as important to the development of gyppo logging. Gyppos were able to operate with smaller crews with the introduction of motorized chainsaws, heavy equipment (Caterpillars or "Cats"), and logging trucks. According to sociologist Norman Hayner, the town of Forks, Washington became a predominantly gyppo logging town by the mid-1940s. Twenty years earlier, almost every logger was a migrant, and many were sent to the Olympic Peninsula by employment agencies in Seattle, Tacoma, and Olympia. By 1944, however, many loggers were married, lived in town, and commuted to work. Al Morgan, a gyppo logger from Forks, explained the desirability of this transition, "Small operators carry steadier crews and get more work out of the men. My crew is almost entirely 'home guard.' This makes a better class of labor. There are exceptions, of course, but in general, married men are more dependable."³⁸² The adoption of new technology in the logging industry enabled loggers to work more independently from large-scale logging companies, and created the conditions for loggers to finally leave footloose work behind.

It turned out that lumbermen were right about one thing during the war—offering homeownership and stability were effective tools that de-radicalized the sorts of workers who only a few decades before were willing to join an anti-capitalist labor union that sought the abolishment of the wage system entirely. Not every logger worked as a gyppo, however, and the passage of the 1935 National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) created an opening for the first

³⁸¹ Walls and Zimpel, "Lady Loggers and Gyppo Wives," 369–81.

³⁸² Hayner, "Taming the Lumberjack," 223.

widespread unionization drives in the Pacific Northwest logging industry.³⁸³ After World War II, even non-gyppo loggers began to settle down, purchase homes, and commute to work. The adoption of automobiles created the conditions for smaller, independent logging companies to succeed, and virtually eliminated the footloose logger from the woods. Just as the expansion of thousands of miles of railroad tracks helped usher in the period of high labor mobility in the late nineteenth century, the automobile also fundamentally changed Northwesterners' relationships to their jobs.

Settlement became possible for another reason in addition to deradicalization efforts, as lumbermen responded to growing environmental problems in the first half of the twentieth century. Before the 1940s, timber companies did not participate in reforestation, and instead, took the timber they wanted from one tract and moved on to the next, leaving a ravaged landscape in their wake. One early Northwest settler claimed that the timber of the region was so plentiful in 1870 that "we need have no fear that it will ever be exhausted."³⁸⁴ But improved logging technology and the extension of rail lines into the Puget Sound region accelerated deforestation, causing psychologist John Spargo to highlight the connection between widespread deforestation and the problem of footloose labor in 1917 writing,

The lumber industry moves from place to place like an immense, ravaging monster-locust. It enters a well-timbered district, remains a little while and leaves a ragged, dreary, forlorn waste. It builds camps instead of cities. It does not want citizens, men with civic ideals and responsibilities. On the contrary, it wants men content to be camp-dwellers, content to live under abnormal conditions, without home and family life.³⁸⁵

³⁸³ Loomis, *Empire of Timber*, 90.

³⁸⁴ Ezra Meeker, *Washington Territory West of the Cascade Mountains: Containing a Description of Puget Sound, and Rivers Emptying into It, the Lower Columbia, Shoalwater Bay, Gray's Harbor; Timber, Lands, Climate, Fisheries, Ship Building, Coal Mines, Market Reports, Trade, Labor, Population, Wealth and Resources* (Olympia: Washington State Transcript Office, 1870), 18–19.

³⁸⁵ John Spargo, *The Psychology of Bolshevism* (New York; London: Harper & Brothers, 1919), 75–76.

Timber and mill companies had turned hundreds of millions of acres of dense, ancient forest into denuded stumpland. In 1905, the state of Washington amended its tax code to require annual payment based on the value of the timber. This policy encouraged large landowners to log quickly and dispose of the clear cut land by selling it to farmers or “stump ranchers.”³⁸⁶ Once a company had logged its land, there was no reason to continue paying taxes on land that no longer had any commercial value to the company. With the tax increases, forested lands that lumber companies owned for decades had become too expensive to hold onto as company assets for future logging.³⁸⁷

Coinciding with a financial incentive to sell was the growing desire to settle white family farmers on the land. The Northwest was in the midst of a “back to the land” movement that urged unemployed urbanites’ settlement in rural areas so that they would improve the land for farming. Lumbermen did not look to reforestation as a profitable use of their lands, and as historian Richard White noted, “Planting trees did not correct urban social ills; new forests would not drain large numbers of unemployed workers.”³⁸⁸ Puget Mill Company owned much of the land surrounding the Puget Sound, and in 1916 undertook a new venture to turn its vast timber holdings into desirable real estate. The company developed 7,000 acres of semi-logged land between the cities of Everett and Seattle into five-acre “farmettes” that they sold to prospective farmers, or “little landers” as they called them, to raise poultry for egg production. Puget Mill Company named the development Alderwood Manor, and began advertising their

³⁸⁶ Edwin T. Coman Jr. and Helen M. Gibbs, *Time, Tide and Timber: A Century of Pope & Talbot* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1949), 227–28.

³⁸⁷ Richard White, “Poor Men on Poor Lands: The Back-to-the-Land Movement of the Early Twentieth Century: A Case Study,” *Pacific Historical Review* 49, no. 1 (1980): 118, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3639306>.

³⁸⁸ White, 109.

farmettes in local newspapers. Alderwood Manor also included a demonstration farm that new farm owners could turn to for information about raising hens.³⁸⁹

One advertisement in the *Seattle Times* told readers to learn more about Puget Mill Co.'s development if they were "one of the thousands craving emancipation from the drudgery of wage toil."³⁹⁰ Another advertisement told women that they would find "absolute equality" with men at Alderwood Manor, and that women who were "no longer satisfied with a bare living" could operate a poultry farm to supplement her husband's income.³⁹¹ Puget Mill Co. portrayed a wholesome, white, and family-centered opportunity to the little landers who purchased farmettes. By 1922, nearly 1500 people called Alderwood Manor home, but rather than becoming successful poultry farmers, most residents eventually commuted to Seattle and Everett via the interurban streetcar or automobile.³⁹² This was just one experiment in turning over logged off lands for residential use. A decade later, development companies expanded on the farmette model to sell cheap, subdivided farms for rabbit or goat farms to desperate Depression migrants.³⁹³

Throughout the Northwest, stump ranchers purchased land at an affordable price and planned to clear it for farming. But logged-off land was not easy to transform into profitable farmland, as leftover stumps from ancient Douglas fir, cedar, hemlock, and alder trees were notoriously difficult to remove. It took an enormous effort for farmers to make the land ready for farming, and farmers used a variety of methods, including exploding old stumps with dynamite and hauling the remains away with a horse and rope, or char-pits to burn stumps away.³⁹⁴ The

³⁸⁹ Edwin T. Coman Jr. and Helen M. Gibbs, *Time, Tide and Timber: A Century of Pope & Talbot*, 238–42.

³⁹⁰ "The New Life of the Land," *Seattle Daily Times*, accessed March 9, 2022.

³⁹¹ "Egg Farming for Women," *Seattle Daily Times*, accessed March 9, 2022.

³⁹² White, "Poor Men on Poor Lands," 118–19.

³⁹³ Carey McWilliams, *Ill Fares the Land: Migrants and Migratory Labor in the United States* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 56.

³⁹⁴ White, "Poor Men on Poor Lands," 120.

extensive time needed to transform the land meant that stump ranchers often found employment outside of their farms to make up for lost income for several years.

Lumber mills had multiple incentives for selling their logged off land—the company relieved itself of the tax burden, and used the profit from land sales to buy uncut timberlands elsewhere in the region. Mills also benefited from the sale of logged off land to stump ranchers, because the new farmers sometimes worked at the mill until their farms were ready for cultivation. Unlike the footloose workers whom mills had relied on for decades, stump ranchers tended to be less interested in agitating for better labor conditions. Cloyce Howd, in his report on logging conditions on the Pacific coast, explained that a rancher had little interest in joining unions because working in the woods or the mill was not his main purpose. Employers found the stump rancher to be a desirable employee because “he does not readily leave the job, he seldom complains of wages, hours, or working conditions, and on most questions he is inclined to take the point of view of the employer.”³⁹⁵ Environmental factors made stump ranching extremely difficult for most farmers. Unlike the eastern United States, the soil in which the Northwest’s massive trees grew was not compatible with most crops until newer fertilizers were developed decades later. In addition, erosion from heavy rainfall made traditional farming difficult in cutover lands. But despite this failure, the sale of logged off land signaled an important change in the economy that for the first time since the settlement of the Pacific Northwest, timberland owners used the sale of cutover lands as a solution to their financial problems.³⁹⁶

White mill workers were not the only ones to participate in stump ranching. Japanese farmers also purchased stumpland at affordable prices and applied many of the same techniques

³⁹⁵ Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Industrial Relations in the West Coast Lumber Industry” (Washington: Govt. Print. Off., 1924), 47–48, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008319964>.

³⁹⁶ White, “Poor Men on Poor Lands,” 119–21.

as white farmers to rid the land of stumps in order to turn it into farmable land. In the Hood River valley in northern Oregon, for example, Shiroe Sato bought eight and a half acres of land in 1907 where the Oregon Lumber Company had previously logged. Sato worked for the lumber company to earn enough money to hire men to help him clear his land. Once Sato had planted apple trees, he added strawberry plants in order to harvest a faster-growing crop. After a few years, he switched from full-time to part-time work at the mill, and began contracting himself out to clear stumpland for his white neighbors. Sato's wife joined him in 1912, and by 1918 he purchased an additional twenty acres of land and planted pear trees. Affordable cutover lands gave Sato the opportunity to buy land that others might have rejected, and with an immense amount of labor both on his farm and off, he settled with his family on the land.³⁹⁷ Sato's wife was able to come to the United States due in part to the fact that immigration policies did not outright prohibit the immigration of Japanese women, as they had done in 1875 for Chinese women with the Page Act. This meant that Japanese footloose workers were more likely to settle down in family groups than the Chinese footloose workers who preceded them.

In western Washington, Japanese farmers settled most notably in the Puyallup valley, Bellevue, and Bainbridge Island, and grew berries, fruits, and vegetables. One farmer, Sentaro Tsuboi, worked a strawberry farm on the western side of the Puget Sound in Kingston, Washington for nine years beginning in 1910. Like many Japanese farmers in the Northwest, Tsuboi immigrated to San Francisco in 1906, and worked as a railroad laborer in Carson City, Nevada, and as a farmhand in California before moving north to Seattle. In Kingston, Tsuboi joined seven or eight Japanese families who had farms in the small town, and leased thirty acres of partially cleared land to start his own strawberry farm with a business partner. During the

³⁹⁷ Kazuo Ito, *Issei: A History of Japanese Immigrants in North America*, trans. Sinichiro Nakamura and Jean S. Gerard (Seattle: Japanese Community Service, 1973), 485–86.

winters there was little farm work, so he took short-term jobs elsewhere to earn supplemental income, but when the three-month harvest season arrived, Tsuboi worked fourteen hour days harvesting strawberries. Eventually, he hired a married couple for additional help, and the wife cooked meals while the men worked in the fields. Tsuboi fished in the nearby Puget Sound, kept chickens for eggs, and purchased additional groceries from the Furuya Company in Seattle. Furuya Co. was a well-known importer of Japanese goods, and served as a labor broker for Japanese workers.³⁹⁸

It was common for Japanese farmers to sell their crops on consignment to brokers, but they collected a sizable portion of the profits from farmers. After his first crop failed, Tsuboi went into debt to Furuya for \$300. When his second crop succeeded, Tsuboi had to pay a significant amount of his profit to the broker, and found it difficult to get out of debt. Soon, Japanese strawberry farmers across the Puget Sound created an association to sell their crops directly to the canners, so that they could avoid middlemen, and control the price to earn a small profit.³⁹⁹ Tsuboi's journey from newly arrived immigrant in California, to railroad worker in Nevada, to farmer in Washington was similar to other footloose workers in the Northwest who used mobility across space and industries as a tool to find better opportunities.

In the drier, hotter climate east of the Cascade Range in Washington, Japanese farmers operated or worked on farms of a much larger scale than those west of the mountains in the early twentieth century.⁴⁰⁰ Some rented farms while others were footloose farmworkers who migrated between farms as different crops came into season. After clearing the native sagebrush in the early twentieth century, these farmers planted onions, melons, potatoes, wheat, and alfalfa.

³⁹⁸ Kazuo Ito, 445–46.

³⁹⁹ Kazuo Ito, 445–46.

⁴⁰⁰ Kazuo Ito, 421.

Japanese workers leased farmland and began to leave the footloose labor system during the same period that white workers did, but because of ascendant anti-Japanese racism in the 1920s, many Japanese farmers struggled to remain on the land in the following decade.⁴⁰¹

Unlike their white counterparts, society did not encourage Japanese footloose workers to leave migrant work behind and join the “back to the land” movement of the 1910s and 20s. When the economy slumped after the first World War, the Pacific Northwest saw a resurgence of anti-Asian racism directed this time at Japanese and Japanese-Americans. Many in the Northwest, especially working-class whites, wanted to see the passage of a “Japanese Exclusion Act” that would override the Gentlemen’s Agreement.⁴⁰² This 1907 diplomatic agreement had previously curtailed the immigration of Japanese citizens to the United States without codifying immigration restrictions into law. But anti-Japanese agitation on the Pacific coast simmered, and in 1920, the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Immigration and Naturalization held hearings about Japanese immigration to the United States. Washington state representative Albert Johnson chaired the committee that heard testimony on the enforcement of the Gentlemen’s Agreement, and assimilation and possibilities for naturalization of Japanese Americans.⁴⁰³ Johnson, a Republican and former newspaper editor from Grays Harbor, was known for his strong stance against Asian immigration, especially because he represented many white workers who were vehemently opposed to Asian immigration.⁴⁰⁴ While the majority of the committee’s interviews took place in California, a smaller contingent of representatives, including the chairman, traveled to Seattle and Tacoma to hear from Washington constituents

⁴⁰¹ Kazuo Ito, 427.

⁴⁰² Letter from George B. Lamping to Puget Mill Co., August 31, 1922, Collection number 3820-001, Box 104, Folder 19, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

⁴⁰³ Doug Blair, “The 1920 Anti-Japanese Crusade and Congressional Hearings,” Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project, https://depts.washington.edu/civilr/Japanese_restriction.htm.

⁴⁰⁴ Letter from William P. Dillingham to Edwin G. Ames, August 23, 1921, Collection number 3820-001, Box 22, Folder 18, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

about their views on Japanese immigration. Washingtonians cited the same tired stereotypes about Japanese immigrants in the hearing that had been used in decades before against Chinese immigrants: they lowered wages, they subsisted on less and therefore no American farmer or worker could compete against them, they abused drugs and alcohol, and their presence would inevitably lead to intermarriage between Japanese and Americans.⁴⁰⁵ But the committee's hearings were a prelude to a larger anti-Japanese frenzy brewing in the Northwest.

This 1921 version of exclusionism took the form of legislation that prohibited Japanese residents from renting land. Since a race-based law would have been a clear violation of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. constitution, state legislators instead mimicked language in California's 1913 Alien Land Law, which prohibited "aliens ineligible for citizenship" from owning or acquiring long-term leases of land. Legislators in Washington state got to work in early 1921, and by March, passed their own Alien Land Law which made it illegal for any alien who did not "in good faith declare[d] his intention to become a citizen of the United States" to own or rent land.⁴⁰⁶ This was a linguistic maneuver to allow European immigrants to purchase or rent land while making it illegal for immigrants from Asia to do the same, as law at the time said that Asian immigrants were not permitted to become naturalized citizens under the U.S. Constitution.⁴⁰⁷ This race-neutral language was typical for the time, and other states across the West passed similar Alien Land Laws in the first half of the twentieth century. While Washington's 1889 state constitution had already prohibited aliens who did not declare their intention to naturalize from owning land, the 1921 law made it illegal for

⁴⁰⁵ United States, *Japanese Immigration: Hearings before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, House of Representatives, Sixty-Sixth Congress, Second Session*, vol. 4 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1921), 1091, 1226, 1251, 1446, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008611560>.

⁴⁰⁶ Session Laws of the State of Washington, Seventeenth Session, 1921, Chapter 50, 156.

⁴⁰⁷ Mae M. Ngai, "The Architecture of Race in American Immigration Law: A Reexamination of the Immigration Act of 1924," *The Journal of American History* 86, no. 1 (1999): 85, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2567407>.

Asian immigrants to lease any property.⁴⁰⁸ It also included provisions that banned Asian immigrants from acting as trustees “if any part of the estate is land.”⁴⁰⁹ That is, Japanese immigrants could no longer purchase land in the name of their American-citizen children and hold the land in trust. This was the legislature’s attempt to remove a commonly used loophole left in the state constitution. For the first time in state history, the legislation also made it a crime for any person to knowingly sell, transfer or hold in trust a land title to an immigrant from Asia, so as to also punish anyone who would assist Asian immigrants from owning or leasing land.

To support the legislative effort, a pro-labor Seattle newspaper, *The Seattle Star*, drummed up anti-Japanese xenophobia and published a steady stream of front-page stories highlighting what they called the Japanese “invasion” of the state, focusing particular attention to the Japanese farmers in eastern Washington.⁴¹⁰ The *Star* regularly published headlines designed to incite white Washingtonians to panic about their Japanese neighbors, including: “JAP TRICKERY EXPOSED,” “JAPS’ PLANS MENACE WHITE CIVILIZATION,” and “AMERICAN-BORN JAPS HOLD DOUBLE CITIZENSHIP.”⁴¹¹ Although the 1921 Land Law imposed even harsher restrictions against immigrants from Asia leasing land, Japanese farmers found ways around the racist law, or ignored it altogether. Many farmers renewed their leases prior to the passage of the law, allowing them to remain on the land for several more years. Others sublet farms from owners or lessees who were sympathetic to the farmers’ plight.⁴¹²

⁴⁰⁸ Washington State Constitution, Art. 2, Sec. 33, (original text)

⁴⁰⁹ Session Laws of the State of Washington, Seventeenth Session, 1921, Chapter 50, 157.

⁴¹⁰ “Japs from California to Invade Eastern Washington,” *The Seattle Star*, December 3, 1920.

⁴¹¹ “JAP TRICKERY EXPOSED,” *The Seattle Star*, (Seattle, Wash.), July 14, 1920; “JAPS’ PLANS MENACE WHITE CIVILIZATION,” *The Seattle Star*, (Seattle, Wash.), July 23, 1920; “AMERICAN-BORN JAPS HOLD DOUBLE CITIZENSHIP,” *The Seattle Star*, (Seattle, Wash.), July 28, 1920.

⁴¹² Thomas H. Heuterman, *The Burning Horse: Japanese-American Experience in the Yakima Valley, 1920-1942* (Eastern Washington University Press, 1995), 41.

Oregon followed its neighboring Pacific coast states in 1923, and passed its own Alien Land Law, which largely mirrored the language in the Washington and California laws.⁴¹³ Oregon legislators initially hesitated to join Washington and California because the state Chamber of Commerce lobbied against the law, as many Japanese farmers had fled to Oregon from Washington and California, and substantially contributed to the state's economy through wheat and hop production. After the American Legion and the Ku Klux Klan stoked fears that Japanese immigrants would take over the Pacific Coast, nativists won the fight and Oregon's Alien Land Law went into effect in February 1923.⁴¹⁴

In the same year, Washington passed an additional Alien Land Law which attempted (unsuccessfully) to tighten up the 1921 law. The American Legion, fresh from its anti-IWW agitation two years' prior, began organizing against Japanese farmers in Yakima and Wapato. Members of the Legion understood that if they were successful, there would be a need for new farmers to produce the crops that the Yakima Valley economically depended on, so they suggested replacing Japanese farmers with German and Scandinavian farmers from the Midwest.⁴¹⁵ But after several years of agitation, and violence against Japanese residents, the Legion—and its successor in its anti-Japanese crusade, the Grange—were largely unsuccessful at expelling Japanese farmers from the Yakima Valley. Japanese farmers remained on their farms in the state of Washington until President Franklin Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, which interned Japanese and Americans of Japanese descent as a military necessity after the Japanese military bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹³ Amy K. Buck, "Alien Land Laws: The Curtailing of Japanese Agricultural Pursuits in Oregon" (Master's Thesis, Portland, Oregon, Portland State University, 1999), 47, <https://doi.org/10.15760/etd.5872>.

⁴¹⁴ Buck, "Alien Land Laws," 44–45.

⁴¹⁵ Heuterman, *The Burning Horse*, 43.

⁴¹⁶ Carlos Arnaldo Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest: An Interpretive History*, Revised edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 418.

After World War I, both white and Japanese footloose workers turned to farming to leave the footloose labor system behind in order to put down roots in the Pacific Northwest. But as newspaper advertisements encouraged white residents to settle down and establish families, Japanese residents found their settlement met with racist headlines, exclusionary legislation, and violence. The proponents of the Alien Land legislation envisioned an all-white society that excluded Japanese and all Asian immigrants. They thought that the presence of Japanese in the region degraded working conditions, based on their belief that workers from Asia undercut white workers, and caused lower wages. Importantly, fears of assimilation and “race-mixing” tormented anti-Japanese agitators. A number of factors contributed to the rise of anti-Japanese racism in the 1920s, including the growing nativist movement in the country at the time. But it is important to recognize that since its settlement, there had always been anti-Asian racism in the Northwest. The flurry of legislation aimed at removing Japanese farmers from the land occurred precisely at the same moment that boosters promoted the settlement of white footloose workers and farmers in Washington and Oregon. They were in the process of actively constructing an all-white Pacific Northwest.

As the House Committee on Immigration Naturalization continued its hearings on the so-called “Japanese Question” in the summer of 1920, however, one interviewee countered the anti-Japanese opinions that dominated the hearings. While his oppositional views were rejected at the time, his views on immigration would become more acceptable during the labor shortages of World War II. Frank Terrace, a farmer from Orillia, Washington, had employed Japanese farmers on his land for the past fifteen years, and told the committee that “Americans” simply refused to cultivate any of the stump lands that littered the region. Terrace instead hired Japanese workers for his dairy farm and explained that they were more reliable than white men, wanted

“just as big a wage as any white man,” and that they did “not want to work any more than any other white man would.” He suggested to the committee that rather than exclusion, Congress should allow for the immigration of one million Japanese workers to clear the logged-off land that “Americans” refused to cultivate in western Washington and Oregon. While this was untrue—as Howd’s BLS report on stump farmers demonstrated—it became a common argument among employers who preferred to hire immigrant workers.

Edwin Ames, the long-time Puget Mill Company manager, shared Frank Terrace’s vision. Throughout the 1910s and 20s—as nativism reached a fever pitch—Ames repeatedly argued to numerous politicians, relatives, and prominent citizens that, “The average white man does not care to labor with his hands, and do the hard work necessary under existing conditions. He wants to use his head and become an overseer, a foreman, a superintendent or an operator on his own account.”⁴¹⁷ Both Terrace and Ames believed that the only solution to labor shortages was to increase the number of immigrant workers from Asia who would work as second-class non-citizens.

But this view did not go over well at the immigration hearing in Seattle in 1920. Representative John C. Box, a Democrat from Texas and member of the committee, accused Terrace of making the same argument that was used to favor the slave trade at the nation’s Constitutional Convention. Terrace disagreed, but Box pushed on, “Don’t you know that the men of the South said, ‘We must have Negroes from Africa to do our work,’ ...and that the one argument that brought those people into the South brought the trouble that nearly tore us all the pieces was the argument you are making now?” Terrace refuted the claim that his idea was the same pro-slavery ideology that led to the Civil War, and again repeated his belief that the region

⁴¹⁷ Letter from Edwin G. Ames to John F. Miller, May 23, 1917, Collection number 3820-001, Box 16, Folder 11, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

had “thousands and thousands of acres of the finest land that ever laid out of doors, with stumps ranging all the way to ten feet in diameter, which no white man wants to tackle.” Box pressed his point further, and asked Terrace, “Does not that, my dear sir, involve the idea that society will consent for our people... to withdraw themselves from the soil and to let there be introduced millions of laborers ...and create two strata in society?” Terrace suggested again that without Japanese workers, food prices would continue to rise, but Box retorted, “They told my father and my grandfather if they took his slaves away we would all starve.” Chairman Albert Johnson interjected, asking Terrace if he believed the hypothetical new Japanese immigrants should receive citizenship, to which Terrace said “no.” Johnson asked if Terrace would allow the immigrants to stay, and Terrace again said “No; a certain limited time.” Johnson then told Terrace that he was suggesting the establishment of “a form of peon labor” in the Northwest, to which Terrace once again denied—instead telling the Chairman that they would “work for wages, the same as any other man.”⁴¹⁸

After some back-and-forth with several committee members, Representative John E. Raker, a Democrat from California, asked Terrace if he wanted “to have a class of people in this country that will be in cities and on the farms that do not work and then to have another class that does the manual work?” Terrace denied this was his intent, and told the Representative that he had “been endeavoring for the last twenty years, to get the American boy and girl to stay on the farm... but they will not do it.” Terrace told Raker that he favored his farm employees being married, and Raker responded, “Are we going to have a million Japanese men come to this country with their wives and to raise their families and to become part and parcel of the country?” Terrace shot back that he did not want Japanese people to become “part and parcel,”

⁴¹⁸ United States, *Japanese Immigration: Hearings before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, House of Representatives, Sixty-Sixth Congress, Second Session*, 4:1217.

and that he did not “intend them to have one say—one vote or one word—as to the government of this country. They do not ask it and we are not going to allow them to have it.” Exasperated, Chairman Johnson told the committee that they “might as well abandon this.” But Raker pressed on, telling the Chairman that he wanted Terrace’s “viewpoint as an American citizen who...believes in our form of government.” Terrace responded simply, “I do.” Raker asked if he was opposed to peonage, and Terrace said, “I am.” Raker asked, “You are opposed to slavery,” and once again Terrace answered that he was. “You are in favor of the laboring man having the same opportunity as the man that runs the bank or runs the store,” Raker asked, and again, Terrace answered in the affirmative. Seeing a contradiction, Raker quizzed Terrace further, “Then you are going to bring the Japanese here with his wife, to allow him to raise boys and girls who will become citizens, and deny him the right, and his wife the right, to be citizens; is that right?” Terrace, unsure, explained that he did not know the answer but that he sometimes believed “they would be as valuable citizens as some we have already.”⁴¹⁹

Terrace struggled to reconcile his approval of his Japanese employees and his desire for more Japanese immigrants with his belief that they should not be granted the same rights of citizenship that other residents of the Northwest had. When the committee confronted Terrace with the notion that his desire for more Japanese immigrants with no citizenship rights meant that he favored a form of peonage and that he offered the same arguments made by enslavers, Terrace did not have a good explanation for how it differed. But he was not alone in wanting this kind of system. Edwin Ames held similar views, and had no issue with acknowledging that this kind of labor system resembled slavery. Writing to his brother in 1920, Ames explained that young white Americans who were born on farms increasingly were educated “to a higher

⁴¹⁹ United States, *Japanese Immigration*, 4:1221.

standard of living,” and that meant that “some way has got to be provided to furnish a class of labor that is willing to do the drudgery for the man and woman who are good managers, industrious, and are willing to use their brains and muscles.”⁴²⁰ Ames was clear that the management class should be white, while Chinese workers would suit the region’s manual labor needs the best. “As I see it,” he explained in 1922 to John T. Condon, Dean at the University of Washington, “agricultural enterprises will be successful only when there is a large amount of cheap labor to do the work.”⁴²¹ For Ames, the price of labor was an important factor in his desire to hire Chinese workers. He continued, “Slavery was popular in the South because it provided a class of cheap labor necessary in their agricultural enterprises.... In California the growing, cultivating, harvesting and shipping of fruits requires large quantities of cheap labor to successfully conduct it.” Ames wrongly called slavery “cheap labor,” and conflated the system of chattel slavery with poorly paid agricultural labor. But unlike Frank Terrace, Ames accepted, and even promoted, a labor system built on a permanent, racialized class of laborers who were barred from holding the same rights as other Americans. Remarkably, it was Representative Box, the southern Democrat who (at least publicly) rejected this idea, while Ames, a Maine-born Republican, who accepted it.

But not only was it that Chinese workers represented “cheap labor” to Ames, he explained in 1914 that he favored the immigration of Chinese workers because, among other reasons, they were “never on strike, and [were] easily kept under proper control.”⁴²² Just as Ames and other employers turned to employment agencies and labor brokers to better filter and

⁴²⁰ Letter from Edwin G. Ames to Alfred K. Ames, May 24, 1920, Collection number 3820-001, Box 21, Folder 11, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

⁴²¹ Letter from Edwin G. Ames to John T. Condon, January 9, 1922, Collection number 3820-001, Box 22, Folder 32, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

⁴²² Letter from Edwin G. Ames to Chamber of Commerce of the United States of America, January 19, 1914, Collection number 3820-001, Box 102, Folder 12, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

control the labor supply, Ames sought Chinese immigrant workers because he believed that they were more docile than white workers, who were more likely to join the IWW. Ames was wrong that Chinese workers did not strike, but it was true that Chinese immigrants (and other Asian migrants) had fewer opportunities to secure upward economic, social, and political mobility. Labor unions almost universally excluded Asian workers from joining their organizations, which prevented them from taking the highest paying jobs, while strict land laws prevented Asian immigrants from purchasing homes and farms, which would grant them more economic security. Asian immigrants in the Northwest fought against these barriers, but they did not have the same ability as their white counterparts to leave a job when it paid too little, when work conditions were too dangerous, or when discrimination became too unbearable. Whether he understood it or not, these factors, not an innate docility, made Edwin Ames support the immigration of Chinese workers.

Ames and Terrace both agreed with Representative Johnson and the other exclusionists that no Asian immigrants, or their American-born children, should be landowners or citizens; but Ames and Terrace did not want them expelled. Instead, Ames, like Terrace, envisioned a plan to recruit more workers from Asia on short-term contracts to fill the jobs he claimed white workers would not do, and both men refused the idea that Asian immigrants and their American-born offspring should become citizens. With increased government surveillance over their migration and employment, Ames believed that he had found the perfect solution to the chronic problem of labor shortages, surpluses, and strikes. He proposed a federal system of immigration regulation that allowed in workers when labor was scarce but would not offer them citizenship.

Ames's vision of a highly organized and state-run guest worker program would not be realized for another twenty years. While Representatives harangued Terrace for suggesting a

scheme that would establish “a peonage system” of migrant labor, Terrace’s proposal was similar to what would happen in the years following the U.S.’s entrance into World War II. In the meantime, proponents of an all-white Pacific Northwest won major legislative victories in the 1920s. At the state level, legislatures in Washington, Oregon, and Montana passed legislation that prevented Asian-Americans from owning or leasing land. At the federal level, Washington state representative Albert Johnson became the driving force behind the racist immigration legislation that created a “national origins” quota system in the 1924 Immigration and Naturalization Act. Both Ames and the proponents of restrictive immigration legislation were wrong about Asian immigrant workers. They were neither docile, nor were they content with cheapened wages for their work. Cannery and farm workers continued to organize to improve their working conditions and even eliminated the role of the labor broker from the Pacific canneries—a remarkable feat.

Seasonal Labor Carries On

As residents of Washington and Oregon debated which people belonged in the Northwest, the settled population of the region grew during the interwar period. There were more smallholders, towns began to dot the rural hinterlands with the growing accessibility of automobiles, and new technologies and social pressures towards homeownership created the conditions for many white workers to settle down.⁴²³ Even so, two important industries in the Northwest continued to rely on migrant labor: agriculture and canning. The footloose labor system that once moved workers between logging, mining, harvesting, canning, and construction narrowed in the postwar period to include only the industries that could not escape seasonal

⁴²³ Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest*, 365.

fluctuations and the concomitant seasonal labor. Residents of the Pacific Northwest argued, sometimes violently, about which workers should do the remaining footloose labor. But by the late 1930s, both the surge of families of Dust Bowl migrants and unionization in the canning industry had fundamentally altered the footloose labor system to the point where it was no longer reliant on labor brokers.

The transition away from itinerant single men in the fields to a more family-centric labor force mirrored many of the changes in the logging industry, including a similar de-radicalizing effect in agriculture. Because of the highly seasonal nature of harvesting, however, farm workers could not settle down and purchase homes, and instead followed the harvest through its seasonal fluctuations. Even before workers purchased their own cars, growers began to use automobiles to collect workers from employment agencies. The *Hood River Glacier* reported in October 1921 that a prominent married couple, Harriet and Simon Benson—the former lumberman and Portland businessman—each drove their own vehicle to the state Apple Growers Association employment office to secure seasonal workers for the apple harvest on Harriet’s Oak Grove, Oregon ranch. They found approximately forty men and “a few” women waiting for work. The reporter noted that “the big cars were soon piled high with blanket rolls and other apple harvest camp equipment,” and that the Bensons “made the time record” for hiring their harvest workers.⁴²⁴ In this particular case, the employers were not reliant on the workers or the employment agent to find transportation to move the workers to the fields. Simon Benson served as the chairman of the Oregon Highway Commission in 1920, and it is likely that he and his wife

⁴²⁴ “Mr. and Mrs. Benson Fill Picking Crews,” *The Hood River Glacier*, October 6, 1921, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn97071110/1921-10-06/ed-1/seq-8/>; “Weddings,” *The Hood River Glacier*, November 11, 1920, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn97071110/1920-11-11/ed-1/seq-5/>; “Big Crowd Is Indicated,” *The Hood River Glacier*, August 26, 1920, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn97071110/1920-08-26/ed-1/seq-1/>.

used the opportunity to demonstrate the efficiency of automobiles and highways in hiring and transporting seasonal harvest workers from employment agencies to farms.

More commonly, however, workers used their own vehicles to travel to the orchards and fields for seasonal work. The year before the Bensons met their workers at the employment agency, the *Hood River Glacier* noted in September 1920 that “a large share of the harvest help this season has arrived by automobile over the highway, their cars loaded down with camp equipment.”⁴²⁵ In 1922, the *Glacier* reported on local growers’ fears that enforcement of the new Oregon auto license law would prohibit “this class of itinerant labor” from participating in the apple harvest.⁴²⁶ In August 1925, *The Seattle Star* published an article that remarked upon the change seen in the wheat fields of Kansas, noting that the “old-type ‘Bindle Stiff’ [was] replaced by Flivverite.” Flivvers—or cheap automobiles—quickly became the primary mode of transportation for seasonal farm workers in the Pacific Northwest by the end of the decade. The new “strange and luxurious” method that harvest hands adopted meant that workers drove “to the harvest fields in automobiles” and when they completed their work, “dr[o]ve on to the next field” before they “return[ed] to their homes by motor car.”⁴²⁷ Much in the same way loggers became commuters, farmworkers also adopted cars and trucks to follow seasonal harvests in the Northwest.⁴²⁸ Growers quickly saw so-called “auto-tramps” as a more efficient labor source on which to rely.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁵ “Apple Harvest Is Under Way,” *The Hood River Glacier*, September 30, 1920, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn97071110/1920-09-30/ed-1/seq-1/>.

⁴²⁶ “License Law Is Worry to Growers,” *The Hood River Glacier*, August 17, 1922, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn97071110/1922-08-17/ed-1/seq-3/>.

⁴²⁷ “Harvest Hands Use Autos,” *The Seattle Star*, August 15, 1925.

⁴²⁸ Carlos A. Schwantes, “The Concept of the Wageworkers’ Frontier: A Framework for Future Research,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (1987): 54, <https://doi.org/10.2307/968927>.

⁴²⁹ “License Law Is Worry to Growers,” *The Hood River Glacier*, August 17, 1922.

Automobiles also changed the agricultural labor force to include more women and children, because automobile travel allowed wives and children to join their husbands in the fields. Prior to the automobile, harvest hands were predominantly single men who often surreptitiously hitched rides on boxcars and moved between different farms or even industries. This kind of labor migration was dangerous, especially as sneaking onto trains could lead to violence, injury, or death.⁴³⁰ With an automobile, families could more safely travel together, make camp, and carry their belongings with them. The old hobo jungles, where single, footloose laborers congregated outside of town, were replaced steadily with the auto camp. Families packed everything they needed to camp near the latest harvest. These atomized auto camps replaced the communal space created in the old hobo jungles—something employers were happy to encourage. Farmers preferred migratory families to hobo workers, and began to provide space for auto camps and even schools for farm workers' children.⁴³¹

Automobiles benefitted employers in other ways, too. In 1919, *The Hood River Glacier* reported on the effects a shortage of railroad cars had on that year's apple harvest. The reporter explained that workers and their families came to the Hood River Valley by trucks, and due to a recent railcar shortage, the husband would leave his wife and children to pick apples while he used the family's truck to haul "fruit from packing plant to city."⁴³² The onset of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl further accelerated this trend as farm families from the Great Plains migrated westward to escape both financial and ecological disaster. By 1942, 71.5 percent

⁴³⁰ R. Alton Lee and Steven Cox, *When Sunflowers Bloomed Red: Kansas and the Rise of Socialism in America*, (Bison Books, 2020), 183.

⁴³¹ Todd Depastino, *Citizen Hobo: How A Century of Homelessness Shaped America* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2003), 177, <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/C/bo3631480.html>.

⁴³² "Car Shortage Hits Valley," *The Hood River Glacier*, October 16, 1919, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn97071110/1919-10-16/ed-1/seq-1/>.

of apple and hop harvesters in the Yakima Valley arrived to the fields by automobile, while 15.4 percent rode freight trains.⁴³³

The consequences of new technology were widespread for the footloose labor system. Although the Bensons hired workers from the Apple Growers' Association's employment office, the automobile, coupled with Dust Bowl migrations in the 1930s, meant that the labor market was saturated with migrant families looking for employment. Carey McWilliams, a California journalist noted for his writings on migrant labor during the Depression, explained this transition in his 1942 book, *Ill Fares the Land*. Of the recruitment tactics workers found in the Yakima Valley, McWilliams listed "advertisements" and "placards put up in gas stations, tourist camps, and posted on the highways." He noted that so-called "labor bosses" had been paid fifty cents per worker to secure laborers for farms in the previous years, but the influx of surplus labor meant that "most of the labor is of the 'drive-in' variety; it appears at the gate and seeks employment."⁴³⁴ Private employment agencies continued to operate, however, if at a smaller scale and of decreasing importance to the footloose labor system. The McGregor Land and Livestock company, for example, continued to hire "occasional laborers" through a private employment agency even after World War II.⁴³⁵ As in logging, the acceptance of new technological developments in wheat harvesting dramatically reduced the number of seasonal workers farmers relied upon. Wheat farmers replaced their horses and mules with gas-powered tractors, threshers, and combines by the end of the 1920s, which drastically reduced the number of farm hands employed during the harvest season. For example, the number of wheat harvesters at the McGregor wheat ranch on the Columbia Plateau in eastern Washington dropped 72%

⁴³³ McWilliams, *Ill Fares the Land*, 61.

⁴³⁴ McWilliams, *Ill Fares the Land*, 61.

⁴³⁵ Alexander Campbell McGregor, *Counting Sheep: From Open Range to Agribusiness on the Columbia Plateau* (Seattle: London: University of Washington Press, 1982), 407, n43.

between 1927 and 1930, due to the arrival of tractors. Hobos had for decades made up a central part of the wheat harvesting labor pool, but with the implementation of new technology, had largely been eliminated from the wheat fields.⁴³⁶

Although the adoption of the gas-powered tractor and thresher changed wheat production after World War I, it was difficult to mechanize the harvesting of many of the Northwest's staple crops. Fruit, berries, and hops in particular required hand-harvesting, rather than with a machine, and thus required a much larger, more seasonal labor pool.⁴³⁷ While the Yakima Valley had for decades relied on seasonal migrant labor to harvest its major crops, the pool of laborers changed with the repression of the harvest Wobblies, the accessibility of the automobile, and the arrival of Dust Bowl migrants. But this change did not mean that growers in the valley no longer needed migrant labor—on the contrary, growers continued to hire short-term workers to harvest their apples, pears, peaches, prunes, grapes, apricots, cherries, and hops. Growers hired on a mix of seasonal workers, which included drought migrants from the Midwest, local seasonal farm workers, transient workers (those who came from outside of Yakima and participated in seasonal labor migrations), and casual workers (those who did not otherwise participate in seasonal labor migrations, such as out-of-work urban laborers). At the height of the harvest in the second week of September 1935, for example, Yakima Valley growers employed nearly 33,000 farmworkers on all irrigated farms. The vast majority of these workers came for the hop harvest, which was extremely hand-labor intensive for a short few weeks in September. By the end of September, nearly 6,000 workers were employed. Three weeks later in October, over 11,000 workers found

⁴³⁶ Alex C. McGregor, "From Sheep Range to Agribusiness: A Case History of Agricultural Transformation on the Columbia Plateau," *Agricultural History* 54, no. 1 (1980): 21–23; Schwantes, "The Concept of the Wagerworkers' Frontier," 54.

⁴³⁷ Richard Wakefield and Paul H. Landis, "Types of Migratory Farm Laborers and Their Movement into the Yakima Valley, Washington," *Rural Sociology* 3, no. 2 (June 1938): 133.

employment in the Valley, most working on the apple harvest. As winter descended on the Valley, only about 500 workers found employment on the same farms.⁴³⁸

The migrant workforce had changed enough by the Depression that when the IWW attempted to organize hop pickers in the Yakima Valley for higher wages in 1933, they drew only a few hundred workers to their rallies. When they called a strike that August, the union was met with the typical vigilante violence and imprisonment that its organizers had experienced in previous decades. But the 1933 hop strike failed in large part due to the change in farmworker demographics. No longer were there thousands of bindlestiffs for the IWW to organize into a revolutionary force with hopes of overthrowing the wage system. Instead, IWW organizers increasingly found groups of family migrants who during the Depression were less likely to risk losing even their low wages for an unknown future. While many hop pickers were sympathetic to the strike, times had changed, and the new workforce meant labor organizers needed to change their strategies in the coming decades.⁴³⁹

While the majority of Washington's seasonal harvest workers were white in the 1930s, Filipino workers also contributed to the harvest.⁴⁴⁰ The Philippines became an American Territory following the Spanish American War in 1898, and the United States granted Filipino migrants legal status as nationals and not aliens. This allowed them to enter the United States freely, even after the restrictive Immigration Act of 1924 that established a National Origins quota system to further prohibit the immigration of virtually all laborers from all of Asia.⁴⁴¹ In

⁴³⁸ Paul H. Landis, "Seasonal Agricultural Labor in the Yakima Valley," *Monthly Labor Review* 45, no. 2 (1937): 307.

⁴³⁹ Cletus E. Daniel, "Wobblies on the Farm: The IWW in the Yakima Valley," *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 65, no. 4 (1974): 169.

⁴⁴⁰ Greg Hall, *Harvest Wobblies: The Industrial Workers of the World and Agricultural Laborers in the American West, 1905-1930*, (Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University Press, 2001), 45.

⁴⁴¹ Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton University Press, 2014), 96-97.

the early twentieth century, Filipino workers began labor migrations to work on Hawaiian sugar plantations, and between 1907 and 1929, 72,000 Filipino workers immigrated to Hawai‘i.⁴⁴² The first Filipinos in the Northwest came as students to the University of Washington, however, and took up seasonal work to offset the cost of schooling. By 1930, they were joined by thousands of Filipino footloose workers who found employment in Northwestern canneries, orchards, and hop fields, in addition to some work in lumber mills and box factories, especially in Southwest Washington. Like other footloose workers in the 1920s and 30s, Filipino workers turned to automobile travel to make their labor migrations. Some combined finances to purchase cars together, while others made down payments on a vehicle, but missed later payments and the automobile was repossessed by the car company.⁴⁴³ If they did not have access to cars, Filipino workers caught rides on freight trains between California, Oregon, Washington, and Montana.⁴⁴⁴

When Filipino migrants arrived by ship in Seattle in the 1920s, they joined a half-century-old footloose labor system. Ben Rinonos, from the Philippine province of La Union, made the trans-Pacific voyage to Seattle in 1928. He did not have any family to greet him, so he booked a room in a Chinatown hotel for a week before he secured a job with a railroad doing track maintenance. Rinonos quit the railroad job after a month, and moved back to Seattle where he contracted work in the Alaskan canneries for that summer. Rinonos had to wait a month in Seattle, living off of credit extended to him from the labor broker, before the cannery crew departed the city for Alaska. After spending a “couple months” in an Alaskan cannery, Rinonos returned once more to Seattle when he again left the city for Yakima where he picked hops that

⁴⁴² Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 101.

⁴⁴³ Chris Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor: The Pacific Coast Canned-Salmon Industry, 1870-1942* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 128.

⁴⁴⁴ Toribio M. Martin, Sr., “Pinoy Pioneer: Migratory Work and the Filipino Community in the Thirties,” interview by Dorothy Cordova, April 27, 1976, Washington State Oral/Aural History Program interviews, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Libraries Archives & Special Collections, Western Washington University, Bellingham WA 98225-9123.

autumn. In following years, Rinonos returned to Seattle at the end of the canning season each September, and instead traveled to either California to harvest lettuce or grapes during the fall and winter, or to Bainbridge Island, Washington, where he worked for Japanese farmers as a harvest hand. When the spring arrived each year, he once again contracted cannery work in Seattle for another summer in the Alaska canneries.⁴⁴⁵ This familiar labor migration, made by thousands of footloose workers before him, became a common experience for many Filipino workers on the Pacific Coast. From labor brokering to seasonal employment, Rinonos's story demonstrates how Filipino workers' experience in the footloose labor system mirrored that of the workers who came before him. But by the 1930s, the shrunken footloose labor system faced a dramatic shock when Filipino migrants organized the first combined cannery and farm workers' union in the Pacific Northwest. That shock would fundamentally change the footloose labor system in the canneries.

Canners in Washington and Alaska, like farmers, continued to depend on footloose workers to pack salmon into cans. The labor contracting system, sometimes referred to as the "China gang" system, which Chinese labor brokers pioneered and Japanese brokers joined, also carried on. As with the past fifty years, many workers offset their seasonal employment in the canneries with work in construction or agriculture, thus participating in the broader footloose labor system. But with the enactment of more exclusionary immigration laws, it became increasingly difficult for aging Chinese labor brokers to hire younger Chinese and Japanese immigrant workers. By the 1920s, they turned to Filipino workers to fill seasonal positions in the canneries. Despite making up about three quarters of the cannery workforce, Filipinos found it

⁴⁴⁵ Ben Rinonos, "Filipino Immigrant and Historical Facts about the Pinoy Pioneers on the West Coast," interview by Theresa Cronin, 27 March, 1975, Washington State Oral/Aural History Program interviews, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Libraries Archives & Special Collections, Western Washington University, Bellingham WA 98225-9123.

difficult to break into the ranks of contractor, as long-time Chinese and Japanese contractors had a stranglehold on the position. Cannery workers also preferred to collaborate with the contractors with whom they had established decades-old relationships.⁴⁴⁶

As the Great Depression strangled the national economy, cannery workers also felt the effects of reduced wages in the 1930s. Frustrated by low wages and little representation in the canneries as contractors, Filipino cannery workers formed the Cannery Workers and Farm Laborers Union (CWFLU) in the summer of 1933. Many of these workers participated in the footloose labor system as hop and apple pickers in the fall after the canning season, but because farm wages were at a historical low, many Filipino footloose workers struggled to make ends meet through any of their typical seasonal jobs—this dissatisfaction gave rise to growing support for unionization. The union voted to affiliate with the American Federation of Labor that same summer, and quickly got to work uniting the several diverse Filipino ethnic groups within the Northwest.⁴⁴⁷

At the same time, cannery workers wanted to combat decades of bad press that exposed the exploitative contract system, and began to rethink their hiring practices. Many cannery workers agreed to the new labor provisions set out by the Roosevelt administration's National Recovery Administration (NRA), that ultimately undermined the labor contractors, and brought hiring within the companies' structures. With contractors' waning influence, the CWFLU was in a strong position to fill the gap left in their wake. But on December 1, 1936, the CWFLU's president, Virgil Dunyungan and union official Aurelio Simon were murdered by Placidio Patron in the Gyokku Ken Cafe in Seattle. The cafe was owned in part by Japanese labor contractor, George Nishimura, and Patron was the nephew of another contractor. Patron died at the scene

⁴⁴⁶ Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor*, 130.

⁴⁴⁷ Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor*, 132.

from gunshot wounds. While it is not known exactly why Patron murdered Dunyungan and Simon, their deaths made them martyrs for the union, and the Filipino community in Seattle rallied around the union which created the popular support it needed to finally oust the contractors from the canneries.⁴⁴⁸

The CWFLU spent the next two years gaining the support of Japanese and Chinese workers and leaders to create a stronger and more representative union. After a tumultuous internal fight, the CWFLU left the AFL to affiliate with the racially progressive Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). By 1938, the CWFLU replaced the role of labor broker in Washington and Alaskan canneries. Ironically, it was not their vocal opposition to the contract system that allowed them to overtake contractors, but instead was their collaboration with the few Filipino contractors that opened the door for union control over hiring, along with the canneries' desire to leave the contract system behind. On the eve of World War II, the oldest contracting system in the Pacific Northwest—the one that created the model upon which the footloose labor system evolved—was over.

The Transformation of the Employment Agent

In the period between the World Wars, immigrant labor brokers ceased to be central figures in the labor market. The sharp restriction of immigrant laborers from Asia and southern and eastern Europe with the passage of the 1924 Immigration and Naturalization Act and the CWFLU's toppling of the old "China gang" system made immigrant brokers increasingly obsolete. The employment agent, however, did not fade away as quickly as the immigrant broker had, but the days of labor sharks in small buildings wedged between smoke-filled saloons and

⁴⁴⁸ Friday, 146. As Friday explains, along with the union officials, Placidio Patron was also killed.

sordid flop houses were waning.⁴⁴⁹ With the disappearance of the hobo, the employment agent too had to adapt to the new labor market. Lumber mills, timber companies, shipyards, and other Northwestern businesses hired employment agents directly and created new employment departments within their companies' structures.

When Northwest residents demanded legislation barring Japanese immigrants from leasing land, they also supported measures to strip Japanese-owned businesses of their licenses. Seattle's city council revoked eleven business licenses from Japanese businesses on August 17, 1920, including pool halls, pawn shops, and two employment agencies—one operated by S. Hosokawa at 411 Main Street, and another by F.K. Uyeminami of the A.B. Employment Agency. The following week, the city council proposed granting licenses only to those who could speak English. In October, three Japanese businessmen, including the two labor brokers, successfully sued the city's licensing department for racial discrimination.⁴⁵⁰ Despite the brokers' successful lawsuit, this case demonstrates that exclusionists intentionally targeted working-class Japanese businesses to undermine their existence in the Northwest. Harsh immigration laws did strike a blow to immigrant labor brokers, but laws alone do not account for brokers' decline.

The turn towards the professionalization of the employment manager began in the mid-1910s when Progressive reformers published books on proposed solutions to unemployment. These included *Hiring the Worker* (1918), by Harvard University professor Roy Willmarth

⁴⁴⁹ Gunther Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 229–30.

⁴⁵⁰ "Council Denies 11 License Renewals," *Seattle Daily Times*, August 17, 1920; "Japanese Suing City," *Seattle Daily Times*, October 6, 1920; "Japanese Case Opened," *Seattle Daily Times*, November 15, 1920; Gail Lee Dubrow, "'The Nail That Sticks Up Gets Hit': The Architecture of Japanese American Identity in the Urban Environment, 1885–1942," in *Nikkei in the Pacific Northwest*, ed. Louis Fiset and Gail M. Nomura, Japanese Americans and Japanese Canadians in the Twentieth Century (University of Washington Press, 2005), 141, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvct01ht.9>.

Kelly, and *The Labor Market* (1919), by Don D. Lescohier, an economics professor at the University of Wisconsin, both of which drew inspiration from Oxford professor Sir William H. Beveridge's book, *Unemployment: A Problem of Industry* (1912), which tackled the problem of unemployment in Great Britain. Kelly's book in particular advised employers on how to create and staff new employment departments. He explained that "The term 'employment manager' is still new in the commercial and industrial world," and that his book "was written primarily to assist superintendents, foremen, and employment managers to solve their employment problems."⁴⁵¹ In the Northwest, the University of Washington established five courses in "employment management" as a result of the 1917 timber strike. Nearly two dozen employers agreed to send representatives to take courses on "the relationship between the employer and employed," "camp sanitization and construction," "accounting in the woods," "camp recreation," and "forest economy."⁴⁵² As the first World War drew to a close, businesses throughout the Northwest rethought their hiring practices along so-called scientific principles.

Shipyards in Seattle saw the economic benefit of reorganizing their hiring practices. The Ames Shipbuilding and Drydock Company in Seattle (no relation to Edwin Ames) introduced a new program in late 1917 that moved away from the "grab-bag method of picking shipyard employes [sic] twice a day from the crowd around the employment office," and instead used its own "employment department" to hire "the family man or the single man who wants a steady job."⁴⁵³ The *Seattle Times* highlighted the shipyard's new plan and explained that when a worker left the job after two or three days, he "cost the company as much as he earned, if not more." The company's employment department would instead adopt a system in which applicants filled out

⁴⁵¹ Roy Willmarth Kelly, *Hiring the Worker*, (New York: The Engineering Magazine Co., 1919), iii–iv, [https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.\\$b280684&view=1up&seq=13&skin=2021](https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.$b280684&view=1up&seq=13&skin=2021).

⁴⁵² "Lumbering Industry Classes Open Monday," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, January 13, 1918.

⁴⁵³ "Industrial Slacker and Quitter Hard Hit By Yard," *Seattle Daily Times*, December 24, 1917.

their qualifications in “application blanks,” and submitted them to the employment department. According to E.E. McMurray, the shipyard’s employment manager explained that the new plan would “cut out a lot of floaters who work for a day or two and then quit,” because it would enable the shipyard to turn down repeat applicants who had previously worked for the company and quit. Ames Shipyard & Drydock Company was the first shipyard in Seattle to implement this new system, but the expansion of employment departments would soon undermine the footloose labor system.

Following this trend, Puget Mill Co. established their own internal employment department, and around 1918, the company hired Ella Hanford to be its employment manager. Hanford also worked as the employment manager for Admiralty Logging Company—a sister company to Puget Mill Co., in which Edwin Ames served as the president. It was unusual for a woman to hold such a position, and she claimed to be the only woman in the country to work as a logging or mill company’s employment manager.⁴⁵⁴ The *Seattle Times* described her as “husky” and “stunning,” and remarked on how well she understood the logging industry’s jargon.⁴⁵⁵ During World War I, Hanford became known as “Four-L Mary” because she hired exclusively Four-L members in two of the three logging camps in which she supplied workers. Much of her work resembled that of an employment agent—she spent her days in Seattle’s “skid road” district, posting job listings on a street-side blackboard. She also visited logging camps so that she understood the different jobs, and many of the loggers that frequented Seattle grew fond of Hanford. As with the employment agents that preceded her, she navigated labor disturbances by placing pro-IWW loggers in Four-L camps where they were likely to do the least harm to the

⁴⁵⁴ Timber Queen Rules Loggers, *Seattle Times*, July 13, 1919.

⁴⁵⁵ Timber Queen Rules Loggers, *Seattle Times*, July 13, 1919

business. Rather than working as an independent employment agent, however, Hanford was a waged employee of both the Puget Mill Co. and Admiralty Logging Co.⁴⁵⁶

Hanford's use of monthly reports signified the transition to a more internally organized operation—one that no longer relied on an external, ad hoc style of hiring, but instead moved towards a kind of scientific management that Kelly and Lescohier had advocated. In April 1922, she began compiling statistics of the men she hired for the Puget Mill Co., listing how many men went to each mill at Port Ludlow, Port Gamble, and their new logging camp across Gamble Bay called Camp Gamble.⁴⁵⁷ In April 1923, Hanford resigned her position as employment manager for Ames' companies. In her place came another employment manager, J.A. McKinnon, who continued to send Ames monthly reports of the hiring numbers. Soon, McKinnon sent these reports under the heading of "Employment Department," further formalizing their takeover of hiring operations.

When Ella Hanford left Puget Mill Co., she took a job as the employment manager for the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company. Hanford was so well-liked that in 1935, even the IWW offered her a free desk and telephone line if she worked out of their new hiring hall on Skid Road in Seattle. Hanford declined the union's offer, and explained that she had been freelancing to find workers to go to lumber camps that had been declared "unfair" by the AFL—that is, hiring workers for outfits that the AFL wanted workers to avoid.⁴⁵⁸ Hanford continued to work for the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company for twenty-eight years, until she contracted a

⁴⁵⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, 1920 Census, Year: 1920; Census Place: Seattle, King, Washington; Roll: T625_1929; Page: 1A; Enumeration District: 341, Ancestry.com.

⁴⁵⁷ Letter from Ella Hanford to Edwin G. Ames, June 1, 1922, Collection number 3820-001, Box 104, Folder 17, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

⁴⁵⁸ Angus D. Chisholm, "Angus D. Chisholm Letter to William C. Ruegnitz Regarding the Labor Movement in Sultan and the I.W.W. in Seattle, December 30, 1935," accessed September 11, 2021, <https://jstor.org/stable/10.2307/community.29378592>.

three-month-long illness, and passed away on June 15, 1950, at the age of sixty-nine.⁴⁵⁹

Hanford's position, listed variously as "manager," "employment manager," "employment clerk," and "logging-employment manager," was one that replaced the old-style private employment agents, and became more ubiquitous as the twentieth century progressed.⁴⁶⁰

Unlike private employment agencies, public employment offices—those run by cities, states, and the federal government—took on greater importance as the country combatted the effects of the Great Depression. Congress revived the United States Employment Service (USES) as one of the first acts under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, under the Wagner-Peyser Act in 1933. The USES had languished in the decade after World War I, as there was no wartime desire to manage the labor market. When millions of people became unemployed as a result of the Great Depression, the federal government once again funded the USES and used it to recruit workers for the Civilian Conservation Corps. A year after its revitalization, the USES had registered 12.5 million workers, and during World War II, was central to managing the home front workforce.⁴⁶¹ The USES supported the federal government's response to the unemployment of the 1930s, but it addressed the problem of nationwide unemployment—one that differed from the historical management of the footloose labor system.

In addition to the USES, the federal government facilitated the hiring of seasonal workers in another way. Beginning in 1941, with the passage of the Lend Lease Act, the United States once again increased its production of war materials. In the Northwest, shipyards and aircraft

⁴⁵⁹ "Ella Hanford, Veteran Logging Manager, Dies," *Seattle Daily Times*, June 17, 1950

⁴⁶⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, 1920 Census, Year: 1920; Census Place: Seattle, King, Washington; Roll: T625_1929; Page: 1A; Enumeration District: 341, Ancestry.com; U.S. Census Bureau, Year: 1930; Census Place: Seattle, King, Washington; Page: 12A; Enumeration District: 0079; FHL microfilm: 2342230, Ancestry.com; U.S. Census Bureau, 1940 Census, Year: 1940; Census Place: Seattle, King, Washington; Roll: m-t0627-04380; Page: 7A; Enumeration District: 40-216, Ancestry.com; *Seattle Daily Times*, "Ella Hanford, Veteran Logging Manager, Dies." June 17, 1950.

⁴⁶¹ Henry P. Guzda, "The U.S. Employment Service at 50: It Too Had to Wait Its Turn," *Monthly Labor Review* 106, no. 6 (1983): 18.

production boomed and drew in thousands of workers who sought high wages and strong labor protections. The federal government also called on Northwestern farmers to increase their food and fiber production to meet wartime needs, but farmers had a difficult time securing the seasonal labor for whom they had so long depended on because those workers found remunerative and stable work in factories and shipyards. As a result of the labor shortages in World War II, the 1942 harvest season in Washington, Idaho, and Oregon was marked by unprecedentedly high labor shortages, and farmers turned to extreme methods to harvest crops, like hiring school children, prisoners, and Japanese internees.⁴⁶²

Lumbermen faced a similar problem during World War I, when loggers and mill workers left their jobs in the woods for the booming shipyards along the Puget Sound, which operated on shorter hours with better wages. In order to meet the labor shortages in the woods, U.S. Secretary of Labor William B. Wilson told Miles Poindexter of the Spruce Production Division in January 1918 that the federal government should require lumbermen to shorten their workday from ten to eight hours, and to implement time and one-half pay for all work done after eight hours. “I know of no other way in which civilian labor can be obtained to secure the necessary production of lumber,” Wilson explained.⁴⁶³ Improving working conditions through better hours, wages, and camp sanitization, was the federal government’s answer to lumbermen who could not secure enough workers to produce the necessary lumber for the war effort. But in World War II, the federal government opted for a different solution.

In 1942, farmers struggled to secure the flexible farm labor that they had always relied upon because of competition with industrial employers. In the decades prior, farmworkers in the

⁴⁶² Erasmo Gamboa, *Mexican Labor and World War II: Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1947* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 22–27.

⁴⁶³ Letter from William B. Wilson to Miles Poindexter, January 25, 1918, Collection number 3820-001, Box 17, Folder 36, Edwin Gardner Ames papers, University of Washington Special Collections.

Northwest had often cobbled together employment in both agricultural and industrial sectors, as each relied on seasonal workers. Once industrial employment moved away from extractive production and became centered in factory production—as in ship and airplane production—many workers found better, long-term employment. Further, the benefits of the 1935 National Labor Relations Act (also known as the Wagner Act) gave workers the legal right to form unions and better labor protections in most industries, but importantly, the Wagner Act excluded farm laborers from such protections. When farmers complained that they could not secure white laborers for farm work, it was in large part because white workers had access to better jobs than their non-white counterparts.

To remedy the dire situation, the United States and Mexico established the Bracero Program in August 1942, which created a system for Mexican farmworkers to come to the United States on temporary work permits, while being guaranteed suitable working conditions. While abuses abounded, the intent behind the program was to alleviate the labor shortages faced throughout the country, including shortages on Northwestern farms. During World War I, there was no political appetite for the creation of any kind of immigrant contract labor program. Exclusionists like Representative Albert Johnson, and much of organized labor, would have opposed the idea of a government-sponsored contract labor program to alleviate the wartime labor shortages. This is what led Secretary Wilson to say that he “kn[e]w of no other way” to lessen the labor shortages except by improving working conditions. But in the early 1940s, the passage of the restrictive 1924 Immigration and Naturalization Act almost twenty years earlier made the fear of contract labor much smaller. In the 1920s, Frank Terrace and Edwin Ames had been unpopular for their belief that the government should import contract workers to serve as the region’s “cheap labor.” But instead of Chinese or Japanese workers, immigration legislation,

politics, and geographic proximity made Mexican workers the go-to source of footloose labor for farmers after 1942.

The Bracero Program lasted until 1964, but by the end of World War II, farmers in the Northwest had largely abandoned the program, due to strikes and complicated bureaucratic factors. Despite its brevity, the program changed the face of agriculture in the Northwest. In 1940, fewer than 7,000 Latinos resided in Washington, but by 1950, they numbered approximately 17,600.⁴⁶⁴ Yakima and Wapato, where so many Japanese farmers had eked out a living decades before, became the center of the Mexican community in Washington state by the 1950s. In the 1970s, Mexican workers became more numerous in the forestry industry as well, taking on an important role in replanting cutover lands as timber companies shifted to more sustainable forestry.⁴⁶⁵ It would take another few decades, but by the end of the twentieth century, whites no longer made up the majority of farm workers in Washington state.⁴⁶⁶

The period between World Wars in the Northwest saw the end of the footloose labor system. New technologies like the automobile, gas-powered tractors, caterpillars, combines, and trucks dramatically changed production in agriculture and logging, thus changing the workforce. An increased social movement to settle white families on the land created the space for white workers to leave the footloose labor system, while racist alien land laws and the creation of the Bracero program made migrant farm labor increasingly non-white. The successful unionization campaign in the canneries toppled the oldest piece of the footloose labor system—the labor

⁴⁶⁴ Oscar Rosales Castañeda, “Mexican-American Struggles to Organize,” Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project, https://depts.washington.edu/civilr/farmwk_ch5.htm.

⁴⁶⁵ Mario Jimenez Sifuentez, *Of Forests and Fields: Mexican Labor in the Pacific Northwest* (Rutgers University Press, 2016), 4.

⁴⁶⁶ James N. Gregory, “Toward a History of Farm Workers in Washington State,” Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project, https://depts.washington.edu/civilr/farmwk_ch1.htm.

broker—and new, scientific employment managers replaced the old-style private employment agents. The footloose labor system that employers, workers, and brokers all used to turn the region's rich natural resources into capital, had finally faded away.

CONCLUSION

Between 1850 and 1940, Pacific Northwest employers, labor brokers and employment agents, and workers fought for control of footloose labor. When native-born Americans settled in Oregon Territory in the mid-nineteenth century, they started businesses that extracted the Northwest's natural resources and shipped them to external markets in California, throughout the Pacific world, and eventually to the eastern United States and Europe. But employers needed to find workers if they wanted their businesses to succeed.

Initially, managers of lumber mills, canneries, and farms hired Northwest Indigenous peoples to remedy their labor problems. Soon, Chinese immigrants, who came to California in the wake of the 1849 gold rush, began to travel to the Northwest and joined the ranks of footloose workers. Employers turned to labor brokers to locate and manage both Indigenous and Chinese workers in the mid-nineteenth century. With the completion of two transcontinental rail lines in Seattle and Tacoma in the 1880s and 90s, the population of the Northwest swelled as Americans from the eastern United States settled there in increasing numbers. More and more workers were drawn into the footloose labor system as new businesses opened and old businesses expanded. In addition to the Northwest's population growth, the late-nineteenth century's recurring economic downturns created dramatic shifts between labor shortages and surpluses, and employers increasingly needed labor brokers and new private employment agencies to locate, filter, and manage the ebb and flow of footloose workers.

Although white and Asian workers both participated in the footloose labor market, they often did not perform the same jobs. Racist hierarchies within and across industries gave native-born white workers opportunities to take the highest-paying jobs while at the same time relegating immigrant and Indigenous workers to the least desirable and lowest paid work. Many

white workers understood this hierarchy, but feared that their wages and quality of life would be reduced with the employment of immigrant workers—especially Chinese—in the Northwest’s key industries. Rather than critique the racist labor system, white workers blamed Chinese immigrants, and used a combination of violence and political influence to expel Chinese workers from the Northwest.

After federal immigration legislation in the 1880s and 90s reduced the number of Chinese immigrants to the United States, employers turned to newer immigrant groups to fill positions once held by Chinese workers. Japanese, Greek, Finnish, Swedish, and Norwegian workers arrived in the Northwest at the turn of the twentieth century, joined by their respective co-ethnic labor brokers who served as the go-between for these new workers and the region’s employers. Native-born white workers also began to rely on private employment agencies to find work in lumber mills, on farms, and in canneries, as employment agencies became central clearinghouses for job information. Both brokers and employment agents exploited desperate workers by charging exorbitant fees for their service, excluded radical workers who attempted to organize unions, and sometimes trapped workers in a system of debt peonage. Employers of footloose labor found labor brokers and employment agents indispensable for the control, management, and cultural brokering they offered, and brokers and agents became entrenched fixtures of the labor market in the Northwest by the early twentieth century.

Workers, government bureaucrats, and labor unions began to oppose the growing control labor brokers and employment agencies exerted over migrant workers in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Opponents of brokers and agents experienced some success at blunting their power. States and cities opened public employment offices that undercut the business of the fee-charging private agencies. Footloose workers who organized with the Industrial Workers of

the World, attempted to eliminate employment agencies through dramatic free-speech protests. But opponents were unable to eliminate labor brokers and employment agencies from the labor market. At best, they blunted the edges of an abusive system.

During World War I, the federal government became more involved in settling labor disputes, and in the process created the conditions for some footloose workers to settle down. The 1917 timber strike became the turning point for footloose labor in the logging industry. After the federal government improved living conditions, hours, and wages in logging camps, labor radicalism among footloose workers declined. As the United States entered the Great War, shipbuilding accelerated in Seattle, which created more long-term, stable employment. Knowing that shipyard workers were here to stay, housing proponents in Seattle and Portland used the opportunity to create settled, anti-radical communities in those northwestern cities. For those footloose workers who could not or would not settle down, anti-radical militias used violence and deportation as methods of ridding the northwest of those they deemed subversive.

Ultimately, technological advancements, including the gas-powered tractor and the affordable automobile, led to a decline in the footloose labor system. The number of seasonal workers needed to harvest wheat, for example, declined as farmers adopted new technologies. The affordable automobile meant that workers could commute between home and remote work sites, rather than living in logging camps. Some industries, like canning, continued to rely on seasonal workers, but successful labor organizing in the 1930s eliminated the position of labor broker. Employment agents, who for decades had served as the essential middlemen between workers and employers, were replaced by employers' in-house employment departments.

Farmers, especially those who grew fruit and hops, continued to rely on seasonal footloose workers throughout the twentieth century. Labor shortages during World War II

pushed the federal government to create the Bracero Program, an agreement between the United States and Mexico to allow temporary farmworkers to fill labor shortages caused by the war. While seasonal labor continued to exist in the 1940s, the footloose labor system had become a thing of the past. White workers had largely left the footloose labor system, leaving seasonal work to Mexican immigrants. By the mid-century, the Northwest's economy had shifted away from extraction and towards manufacturing, with the growth of ship and aircraft building. The seasonal ebb and flow of workers between cities and remote work camps in the forests, fields, and along the shores declined as the economy changed. Labor brokers and employment agents who had once been so entrenched in the labor market were no longer needed. Today's system of migrant work in the Pacific Northwest did not develop with the Bracero program of the 1940s. It is much older, dating back to the 1850s, and migrant labor has been central to the Northwest's economic development ever since. The footloose labor system always depended upon a highly mobile pool of workers who were kept on the fringes of society to do the difficult, cheapened, and necessary work of turning natural resources into food and wealth.

APPENDIX A

Northwest Employment Agencies, 1884-1931

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