Inventing Agriculture in Southern California

By Matthew F. Bokovoy

In the early twentieth century, San Diego city leaders hoped that agricultural production and real estate development would spur the city's economic growth. The leaders promoted a regional world's fair in 1915 to boost their dreams and aspirations. The economic future of the city was on the mind of David C. Collier, director general of the Panama-California Exposition of 1915 and developer of the Ocean and Mission Beach city suburbs. As a city leader who advocated progress, he boldly asserted that an Exposition could help "build up San Diego and adjoining territory."¹ G. Aubrey Davidson, President of the Exposition, conveyed the optimism of ambitious San Diego businessmen, proclaiming that the Exposition was meant to call the attention of the world to the possibility of millions of acres of land that have been peculiarly blessed by nature and that have awaited through the centuries the touch that will transform them into the paradises of the Western hemisphere.²

Davidson was sure eastern transplants would "profit by all these efforts" at economic development. Not missing the social and cultural possibilities for regional progress in America's new "Eden," he asserted that "when men turn their eyes to the place where land is still available, they will look towards the west for agricultural comfort and fortune."³

In many respects, the optimism of Collier and Davidson contained a grain of truth. Commenting on the early twentieth century West, historian Donald Worster explains that the region was "only the latest in a long series of experiments in building an irrigation society."⁴ San Diego's Panama-California Exposition of 1915 promoted a vision of the American Southwest and Southern California as a region of Edenic abundance. The millions of tourists and local visitors not only glimpsed the economic opportunities of the region at the fair. Local boosters assured them of the
potential social relationships and community life that arose from the "irrigated society" of the Southwest itself.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, San Diego's business community sought the creation of a local economic infrastructure and the expansion of port facilities for shipping agricultural commodities to Eastern markets. Boosters anticipated that the opening of the Panama Canal in 1915 would allow new markets for agricultural goods and raw materials and bring new settlers to the region. Noted California booster Anges C. Laut wrote that as "regards water transportation, - San Diego thinks she is justified on counting heavily, for she is the nearest port of call of all Pacific ports for the fleets of the world passing through Panama."\(^5\) San Diego businessmen were ecstatic about San Diego's new railroad to Yuma, which hauled the staples of San Diego's agricultural economy, both in the county and the Imperial Valley, outside of the region for the first time. Better distribution encouraged the expansion of the agricultural sector and contributed to San Diego's growing popularity as an area for resettlement and profitable investment. Looking back on the 1910s from mid-1930s, the San Diego county guide published under the local Works Progress Administration (WPA) stated that when "Imperial Valley cotton production was at its peak" in 1917 and 1918:

> leading cotton brokers investigated the possibility of improving the transportation lines from Imperial Valley to San Diego, because San Diego harbor was considered a better shipping point than Los Angeles harbor.\(^6\)

Boosters believed the Valley's cash-crop economy would become the region's engine for growth, noting that the transcontinental route from the city to Houston was "shorter than the other transcontinental all the way from 800 to 1,600 miles."\(^7\)

As the agricultural sector grew, a distinct image of the California Dream emerged in booster writings and became a prominent theme at the Exposition. As boosters pushed agriculture as a political-economic enterprise they also peppered their economic dreams with visions of the unique cultural lifestyle that arose from the land itself. In the process, Anglo boosters defined Southern California as a social place where a middle-class or hard-working American might come to live, work the land with new industrial machinery, and participate in the formation of modern and middle-class rural communities. "The eastern man" who eked out a living, stated the Prospectus, "undoubtedly will laugh at the idea of a farmer with an automobile, and will charge the garage up to the irresponsible enthusiasm of the west; but later he will learn that the farmer of the far west has his automobile just as he has his plow."\(^8\)

The agricultural boosters created a rhetoric of egalitarian economic and social possibilities, while hiding their purely economic motivations. The writer of the Exposition Prospectus assured that "in the state and county buildings are men who will explain to the visitor in detail just what he may expect from each section. These men are not real estate agents with personal pecuniary interests involved."\(^9\) Cultural critic Norman Klein, in his explanation of the booster idea in Los Angeles during the 1910s, reveals a central thread running through urban and agricultural booster literature. Boosters modernized the role that agriculture played in the region, much like their descriptions of the regions' industrial base. Klein perceives that despite all the egalitarian reassurances offered prospective settlers and tourists, "boosterism was rarely stable, though on
One of the ways San Diego fair boosters publicized opportunity in the region was to describe its climatic attributes and potential for rural living, thus avoiding explanation of the divisive racial and class conflicts that plagued Southern California during the 1910s. Boosters, naturally so, concealed the fact that large-scale agribusiness enterprises dominated the rural economy of the Southern half of the state. Yet, if San Diego wished to become a leading West Coast city, its boosters needed to attract residents and the crucial external sources of capital for the expansion of agricultural development. Agricultural boosters involved with exhibition at the Panama-California Exposition promoted a vision for putting Southern Californian land under "production" in the widest sense; not only large-scale capitalist agriculture, but the flourishing of model-rural communities across the region's arid valleys.

The participation of many agricultural enterprises at the fair, such as the International Harvester Company, the Seven California Counties model farm exhibit, and the Imperial County Celebration Day displayed the conflicting aims and variety of ideas about the social function of agriculture in an industrializing Southwest. The agricultural participators promoted three visions that were at once industrial, and suburban and middle class; the third vision a combination of the model-rural community and the inner-city suburb. Nonetheless, audiences could visualize the process-oriented exhibits that embodied the region's future wealth in the varieties of cash and specialty crops. Agnes C. Laut believed the fair embodied a powerful blueprint for California living, showing "southwestern irrigation farming, tea plantations, olive groves, orange orchards, date orchards, palm and bamboo plantations." The Prospectus could claim that other expositions "had their freak, overgrown vegetables," while at San Diego, the vegetables were "sprouting from the ground on [a] five-acre model farm." Other fairs had farm machinery that was "beautifully nickeled and polished and standing inside a great machinery building," while "San Diego's Exposition has the farm machinery at work on the fields."

**Nature, Southern California, and Agricultural Utopias**

San Diego's open landscape and sunshine, the rich soils of its inland valleys, and a temperate frost-free climate were all attributes which helped San Diego boosters create a mental picture of California for potential visitors. Before migrant settlers and real-estate developers came to Southern California, said booster F. Weber Benton, "the whole country from the Rio Grande to the Pacific Ocean was practically one vast desert where naught of vegetation could be seen but cacti, grease wood, sage brush, and occasional mesquite." According to the booster logic, the ingenuity of Anglo settlers during the 1890s and 1900s transformed "waste" into "abundance." Agricultural reformers brought the lands of Southern California under rationalization and reform, during the same era when urban reformers conducted social surveys that aided the expansion of municipal regulation in America's cities.

The most ambitious agricultural reformer in the region was William Ellsworth Smythe. His most prominent accomplishment was his conception of the "irrigated society." Smythe developed this concept through the advocacy of his journal *Irrigation Age* (1891), then the National Irrigation Congress, which he founded in 1893. The "irrigated society" aided the industrialization and
predictability of crop yields for the small family farm, thereby altering water, power, and land tenure needs in Southern California. He finally came into circles of political and economic power as the twentieth-century West correspondent for Charles Fletcher Lummis' *Land of Sunshine* in 1901. Smythe's ideas filtered into the Newlands Reclamation Act of 1902, where he was a prominent witness and advocate of the 40 to 160 acre family farm. Implicit in Smythe's ideas were notions that small farms bred democratic community life, while Federal irrigation and land laws allowed entrepreneurial farmers fair competition with larger growers. He estimated that the "capital required for old-fashioned farms is about $30,000, a figure that is prohibitive for the masses. There must be a new life of the land." Smythe's thoughts on land tenure in smaller, but profitable, tracts signalled a general qualitative change in cultivation methods. He believed that aridity was a blessing and not an obstacle to regional growth. Aridity signalled the need for irrigation, and irrigation brought a systematic and predictable aspect to the production of agricultural goods. Systematic irrigation industrialized farms under 175 acres, both in capital requirements for machinery and irrigation infrastructure. According to historian Kevin Starr, Smythe believed the West "demanded irrigation," which would foster a "higher practice of cooperative citizenship that would lead to social democracy." Smythe envisioned a society of landholdings in the West developed in small and intensively cultivated plots. They would be no larger than the 160 acres required for receipt of Federally-subsidized water within irrigation districts under the Newlands Act. Smythe imagined that the prospects of irrigation on Western lands would create egalitarian participation in the agricultural market and social life on the land. In Smythe's mind, small landholdings should be available for the multitude possessing only small means. Pay a cash return at least as equal to that enjoyed by the owners of large farms. Fill the empty heart -- satisfy the social instinct -- as well as does the city life of today. Be in accord with the highest ideals of American democracy.

One of the first utopian agricultural communities modeled after Smythe's ideas began at San Diego's border with Mexico, in the town of San Ysidro. Known as the "Little Landers" colony, this cooperative agricultural community founded itself upon Smythe's principles of cooperative irrigation farming and shared community life. Although not a socialist cooperative, such as Job Harriman's Llano del Rio in Los Angeles' Antelope Valley, nor a community modeled after the collectivist political theory of Mary Parker Follet or Herbert Croly, the San Ysidro colony resembled a competitive marketing cooperative. According to Smythe, irrigation and profitable agricultural production were primary ingredients for inventing a new rural social order that allowed collective community life compliant with individualism. "The dominant note of the new life of the land," said Smythe, "will be its high quality of individual independence." Nor was San Ysidro sheerly a classical liberal community, in the laissez-faire sense, for it was in tune with the progressive currents of the early twentieth century. Smythe proclaimed that San Ysidro's first institution was the "town meeting, and this on real New England lines. It was the pure democracy of the Fathers, plus the modern improvements of the West, including full woman suffrage, with initiative, referendum, and recall." The citizen of the agricultural utopia was not a rural farmer, but a tired and weary urban middle-class professional seeking solace and a livelihood in the "country." Smythe and other agricultural boosters passionately advocated a "middle landscape;" a unique type of social place that neither
resembled the city nor the country, but bridged the central tenets of each human environment. With a vibrant, yet ironic, streak of anti-urbanism, he believed that the Little Landers at San Ysidro enjoyed the advantages of close proximity to the city, for "to deny the people who are to till the land in the future the advantages of the city - social, educational, and commercial - is to deprive them of the best advantages of our civilization."  

San Diego's Hinterlands and the Three "Wests"

The Seven Southern Counties Pavilion prominently displayed the idea of the agricultural utopia with a demonstration field of an intensive citrus farm, complete with a model bungalow. Down along the Alameda, the model farm covered "six acres, the demonstration field three acres, the citrus grove five acres, the formal gardens and buildings two acres" for a total of sixteen acres.  

With adjoining acres set aside for vegetables, the working farm was "designed to give a practical demonstration of what can be done on a ranch or farm in Southern California."  

It was difficult, however, to discern whether the model farm was a progressive experiment intended to rationalize intensive-farming, or if it was a developer-led scheme (suburbanization) intended to promote the small agricultural communities in San Diego and Imperial Counties. Booster Mark Watson wrote a glowing report of the model farm, suggesting that "they [spectators] will see that the 'little lander' is not only making a good profit," but enjoyed the benefits of modernized and rural living. He observed that the middle class farmer who worked a small unit was not deprived of family life, and by having neighbors working small units is guaranteed the benefits of community life, good roads, good schools and churches and the same social advantages that town offers. The model bungalow is probably just as important as the model orchard and truck garden and poultry yard which lie about it.  

Technology and machinery also altered social life on the land. The model bungalow on the intensive farm contained "an attractive plaster home in which are living the farmer and his family. On one side of the front lawn, are growing peach, apricot, and loquat trees." The bungalow suited the cultural and physical environment of modernized rural areas. The nature of its design, simplicity, and inexpensive construction cost reflected the egalitarian and mechanized aims of agricultural reform, for the bungalow was also the product of innovations in mass production as well. The bungalow also symbolized the California Dream rhetoric that poured from the booster magazines. This was especially true of boosterism that indicated how the "successful" participation of the small farm family in the agricultural economy would be allowed to use its bungalow for status and increased leisure. William F. Spilling, of San Diego State Normal School, noted that "the bungalow is open to visitors, who are shown by the hostess the attractive features of a home which, although planned for rural surroundings, should be equally suitable to the city."  

The bungalow on the model farm suggested that the modern rural home would maintain the same gender relationships and household responsibilities prevalent in the homes of urban America. Although the creature comforts of urban civilization existed on the model farm, the rural setting supposedly fostered repose, refinement, and relief from dangerous environment and social classes of the American city. Boosters tried to lure prospective settlers to San Diego's rural areas by creating a moral economy that was anti-urban in orientation. Mark Watson hinted that the
model farm's distance from the city was "the best single answer to the question of 'how to keep the girl on the farm.' It proves there is nothing about the farm to make impossible the comforts of modern home economy." Additionally, the depiction of rural living at the Exposition offered the farm husband and his wife hope that they could participate in the modern consumer economy. The rural farm husband and wife were not relegated to the ranks of the "Babbitry;" the "yokels" and "rubes" of Southern California. Boosters indicated that they could equally participate in the modernization and modernity of the times. The writer of the Prospectus made this point clear, explaining that "While the husband is looking at plows and harvesters, the real head of the family is going to be browsing about the model bungalows." 

The new household appliances common in urban America's department stores, when brought to the farm, promised to eliminate the drudgery, difficulty, and tedium of everyday chores. Modern technology allowed the farm family to "see labor decreased in the meadow, in the barn, in the dairy." "And, what is quite as important," stated one booster, "wives will see labor decreased in the kitchen, the laundry, and the sewing room." Putting the land and the home under "production," in the widest sense, the wife "will discover that the same god of machinery" that helped her husband on his small cultivated plots would allow her to discover that the farmhouse can have all the improvements of the city apartment, and that there is no reason why she should not have a little time away from her work to trail flowers over the front porch - or chat with her neighbor down the street.

The mechanization of the land and the home, following the idea of rural modernization, would create a nostalgic and close-knit democratic community through increased leisure and neighborly rapport. Boosters assured that San Diego's hinterlands would be earmarked for the agricultural market, but the rhetoric of intensive-farming and life on the land sounded distinctly "suburban" in the tone of their writings. The San Diego region's small-farm agricultural belt underwent mechanization in the fields as well. Farm machinery manufacturer International Harvester Company displayed mechanical tractors, harvesters, and reapers, showing audiences an industrialized version of small acreage farms that were central to the "back-to-the-land" movement. On the fairgrounds, the Alameda buzzed with "heavy tractors, harvesters, plows, harrows - not idle." The Harvester demonstration field had a "large acreage sown to different cereals and grasses, with machinery of the heaviest, most improved type, moving up and down the rows in operation." D.L. Kennedy, manager of the Harvester Co. exhibit, was enthusiastic about Harvester's commitment to the transformation of the land in Southern California. The demonstration field impressed Kennedy so much that he revealed his awe at his own company's exhibit, admitting "the extent of which I confess I did not have a clear idea until today. The Harvester Company expects big things of the display here, the largest it has made." The Harvest exhibit even impressed the agricultural technicians. Crop expert F.C. Summer, president of the Montana Seed Growers Association, believed that the "horticultural work is a sermon in itself for the visitor can see that at one time the whole park was sage and chaparral." Yet for Summer, the "big lessons" were "serious lessons." It was a strange occurrence for International Harvester and an agricultural
cooperative to support plans for small-scale land tenure schemes such as the back-to-the-land movement, yet Summer believed that the "agricultural demonstration goes further, and the importance of the model-intensive farm in particular cannot be over-emphasized."  

Despite the agricultural "golden era" in the West between 1900 and 1920, the trend of production and land tenure in the Western agribusiness sector moved towards increased acreage held in fewer hands. Furthermore, as agribusiness became increasingly mechanized, the capital costs of farm machinery and international market prices for agricultural commodities made such purchases prohibitive for small farmers. The enthusiasm of experts for the exhibit indicated the lingering strength of the Jeffersonian agrarian ideal in the West. Summer was optimistic that the agricultural demonstration fields should accomplish a great deal toward helping the back-to-the-land movement simply by proving to a certainty that vast acreage is unnecessary, and that on a few acres a man with intelligence and energy can make a good living, a good deal better living, than is obtainable by the average man in the great city." 

The development of the water supply was a crucial ingredient needed to make possible small agricultural and human settlements. The water supplies of Southern California, those of the Owens Valley and the Colorado River, were brought to the areas where agricultural boosters planned to attract small farmers and settlers. The urbanization of Southern Californian cities and agricultural boosterism spurred reclamation projects that exploited water resources so that Southern California, the Great Imperial Valley, and "what was once the Arizona Desert" enjoys a supply of pure fresh water adequate to all the needs of the hundreds of thousands of people who have made this garden land their permanent homes.  

Due to the abundance of water and the temperate climate, one commentator asserted that "we [California] have the things in superabundance and at a time of the year which no other section [of the country] possesses." In order to prove the optimal cultivation of agricultural commodities in the county, San Diego boosters produced a portrait of the viability of small farming, soil fertility, and overall production. The town of El Cajon, east of San Diego, was known for the "fertility of its soil - throughout the country." In 1910, approximately 1,500 carloads of agricultural commodities were sent from the region, including "hay, grain, raisins, oranges, lemons, olives, and all kinds of green fruit." The 100,000 acres of land under cultivation in the town of Escondido was "in the frostless belt, is susceptible to water development, and with soil adapted to citrus fruit growing and alfalfa," added the commentator. Incidentally, the writer observed "the grapefruit grows to perfection here, the equal of any other district of Southern California."  

In the drier climes of the county, olive ranching offered the best social and economic opportunities for families seeking to live on the land. Adding to the myth of the successful small
farmer, *Why Not San Diego County, California?*, an agricultural booster publication, declared that during the "time it takes for the orchard to come into bearing, an industrious and frugal family can live from the ten acres of land by putting in various crops, and with chickens and cows." Olive ranching provided a sufficient metaphor for the exhibits of agricultural boosterism at the San Diego fair. To west coast-bound settlers who looked for opportunities outside of the industrial Northeast and Midwest, the agrarian ideal found its summation in the "olive orchard - a gold mine that never plays out - the trees bearing for centuries." Imperial Valley agricultural developers stood much to gain from their participation at the Exposition, in addition to San Diego county agricultural hamlets. The communities of the Valley made an effort to attract permanent settlers rather than promote themselves as industrialized agricultural stations. One local newspaper remarked that the completion of the San Diego and Arizona Railway insured that "the future of Imperial and San Diego" would be "indissolubly linked." The Imperial Valley embodied the triumph of human ingenuity and technology over nature; agricultural boosters reaped profit and established communities in the midst of non-reclaimable land. The shifting channels of the Colorado River left rich deposits of silt and loam on the Valley floor over the centuries, creating a fertile and ideal area for long-term agricultural production and settlement. Agricultural boosters created a popular metaphor that suited the transformation of the Valley from hard-baked clay to cantaloupe and cotton fields:

Egypt's Nile brings down the fruitful sediment of the highlands to spread it over a desert incapable of yielding even a spear of grass. The Colorado River is only required to furnish water for Imperial -- she will do the rest.

The local municipalities of the Imperial Valley stressed the interdependence between the Valley and San Diego, not only as a port facility for agricultural markets, but also as a model for modern cultural life and leisure. During the Exposition's second season in 1916, the Imperial Valley had its own celebration day on June 10. Besides agricultural profits, inexpensive land, and stable crop prices, El Centro and Valley communities offered audiences visions of rural community life. Boosters promoted an image of the Valley as a modernized agricultural settlement, in tune with the currents of Progressivism, municipal planning, and modernity that swept the state and the nation. Don C. Bitler, Commissioner of the El Centro Chamber of Commerce, boasted that economic opportunity was not the only reason for residing there, it was his town's "metropolitan aspect." He believed that El Centro was "a place in which to live; where life may be enjoyed in its fullness." Bitler voiced other sentiments that nostalgic Americans knew so well with the passing of the agrarian order and the emergence of the twentieth-century industrial state. He explained that El Centro's "civic pride is an expression of fellowship and harmony" and the "warm community spirit does not hide its light under a bushel."

In the town of Imperial, "the oldest city in the valley," the city's booster remarked that the valley was a "man-made country. Man brought in water, man plants the seed and cultivates the ground. Nature does the rest - and does it well. The products of nature, aided by the "slight" intervention of irrigation technology, "magically" sprouted from the ground. The distribution of Southern Californian agricultural commodities across the United States defined the Valley as a
permanent settlement, indicating that Imperial was not just another "boomtown." The locale's booster described how he had sent a package of green peas to a friend in "an eastern city." Upon opening the gift, the friend was astonished that the peas were as "'fresh as though having been gathered right from the garden, and most delicious.'" Of course, the box the peas had come in read, "Green peas, from Imperial Valley, Cal."\(^{52}\)

**The California Dream, Racial Minorities, and the Mode of Production**

In late December of 1914, on the eve of San Diego's first Exposition, a writer for the *San Diego Evening Tribune* forecasted that the Imperial Valley and Southern California, the "so-called 'arid regions'," were "destined to be the richest and most fertile on the earth."\(^{53}\) However, the wealth and abundance created and enjoyed by regional boosters and their cohort of middle-class settlers came at a great economic and social cost. The efforts of boosters had submerged and dire consequences for the region's near future, both for sustainable development and for the equal participation of all citizens in the California Dream. On one hand, the promotion of small intensive farming left the middle-class farmer at a great economic disadvantage, even when agricultural commodity prices were high during the 1910s. The revered five to forty acre farm actually was a thinly veiled and nascent form of the Southern Californian suburb. As small farms failed and landholders sold off their excess acreage, subsequent developers planned and built large suburban communities on rural lands that were in close proximity to urban San Diego, namely the areas of Mission Valley, Clairemont, and Grossmont.\(^{54}\) As the citrus orchards were plowed under by developers, tract homes grew up in their place, creating a developmental template for years to come in Southern California.

Despite the overflowing optimism agricultural boosters invested in their efforts, the consequences of excluding non-Anglos from booster writings indicates that the California Dream was an exclusive social notion, except where descriptions of non-Anglos could aid commerce or offer labor for Californian Dreams. Even though the agricultural methods of the Anglos benefitted from the age of mechanization, boosters still invoked the Mexican era in California, which lasted from 1821 to 1848, as the yardstick with which to measure their progress. Commenting on the strides taken by Anglo rural farmers and capitalist agriculture, the *Prospectus* remarked that "Waste, then, is turned into plenty by labor, accomplished by common sense."\(^{55}\) The rural order of the Mexican ranchero system, as an economic enterprise, consisted of land grants of thousands of acres, decreed to elite Californios for their military or public service. Anglos, when they first poured into California around 1850, viewed the ranchero system as inefficient and wasteful of natural resources and they squatted on the claims of many an elite Californio family. The Land Law of 1851 worked to disenfranchise the Californios from their ranchos, and eventually, Anglos came to hold significant portions of arable land for agriculture and grazing.\(^{56}\) Even further, the economic foundations of the Mission system pioneered by Spanish Franciscan priests in the late eighteenth century, from San Diego to San Francisco, had not brought Southern Californian land under maximum production. Agricultural boosters in early twentieth century California saw themselves as inheritors and improvers of the land, creating a region for efficient, productive, and profitable capitalist agriculture.

By 1915, the year of the exposition, Texas and Californian cotton capitalists had descended upon the Imperial Valley. Along with the increased acreage put under production every year, the
Valley suffered labor shortages. Wilbur J. Hall, writing for *Sunset Magazine*, indicated that the "care of cotton does not require skilled labor, and as to the harvesting it is often true that a small child can pick more of the white crowns in a day than a grown man." Racial thought among Anglo Americans throughout California in the 1910s generally defined racial minorities as part of the laboring classes. Mexicans, Punjabi Mexicans, Japanese, and Chinese were viewed as "child-like" and needed reform and moral guidance from whites. From the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 to the 1910s, Anglos resigned European American immigrants, Mexicans, blacks, Asians, and Indians into a descending racial and labor hierarchy based on employment desirability and other prejudiced "cultural" criteria.

This racial hierarchy also followed the creation of San Diego's agricultural utopias throughout the city's hinterlands. "Indians and Mexicans are not highly satisfactory or efficient farm hands," said Hall, "but they can be had in large bands in the valley. They work cheaply, and in the end, the planters may employ them profitably." The Alien Land Law of 1913 formally enacted legislation that allowed the discriminatory practice of withholding the sale of agricultural land to the Japanese, thus pushing many former entrepreneurial farmers into the rural wage-labor market. The Japanese were superb intensive farmers, but their exodus into wage labor strengthened their resolve to organize, then resist labor exploitation. Anglo farmers saw them as undesirable: "Japanese can be had, but they demand high wages and are exceedingly independent and untractable." Blacks seemed to be more desirable than Asians and planters hoped that this group of wage laborers would bring the California Dream to fruition in the Imperial Valley, imagining a society similar to the antebellum plantation South:

The picturesque negro, with his music and drollery, was missed by the old-time cotton growers, but it is thought that they may be brought into the valley in the future and interested in the work.

The San Ysidro Little Lander's colony was also prohibitive of racial minorities, but had adopted some of their agricultural methods. Indeed, one of Smythe's trickiest maneuvers, in the words of historian Lawrence Lee, was "to attract gullible Eastern Americans to a form of intensive agriculture better practiced by the despised Orientals." In urban areas, developers created restrictive covenants which dictated who could purchase a home in newer city neighborhoods. In some ways, the agricultural boosters of this period mimicked the racial currents of the time, while selling the dream of life and abundance on the land in California. Looking at the by-laws of the San Ysidro colony, with its professed creation of progressive individualism and democratic community life, the California Dream seemed little but an Anglo entitlement and a democratic farce. Lawrence Lee explains that the "Little Landers also reflected the prevailing majority's racist sentiments, for the By-Laws were later amended to exclude Orientals and Negroes from owning property in the colony."

The tenor of Southern Californian boosterism at the Panama-California Exposition of 1915 revealed some happy and not so happy facets of the California Dream. To be sure, some new middle-class residents of the Southland did successfully run farms with small acreage, yet agricultural boosters still promoted intensive-farming despite the trend of agricultural consolidation. In addition, the egalitarian claims of land reform, irrigation, and model-rural communities contained clear racial and ethnic limitations, especially the case of Japanese truck
farmers after 1913 and San Ysidro's restrictive covenant on racial minorities. Finally, the dialectic of nature in booster writings (soil fertility, abundant water, longer growing seasons, and general opportunity) was the cultural equivalent to the economic over-development that plagues California's cities and suburbs today, in addition to environmental destruction and how climate has become ideology in the region.⁶⁴ Early twentieth-century Californian developers and land speculators clearly evaded (naturally so) the realities of social and economic opportunity, while promoting their own special interests, often using public monies and institutions to do so.⁶⁵ The capitalist transformation of the land in Southern California and urban/rural interdependence mitigated against the success of the small farmers that William Smythe had envisioned. Some historians note that the trend of urban/hinterland relations centralized economic power in cities after 1890.⁶⁶ Even though San Diego's largest industry was agriculture, boosters created powerful, and sometimes erroneous, ideologies about social life, climate, and environment that contributed to their promotion of a distinct political economy in Southern California. Booster rhetoric not only aided capital formation, but convinced hundreds of thousands of Americans and immigrants to pull up their roots, move, and try to live the California Dream in the "Land of Sunshine." Without the veneer of "temperate," "America's Mediterranean," and "fertile and rich," it is doubtful that boosters would have been able to attract immense numbers of Eastern and Midwestern Americans to what was once a vast and non-arable desert.

Notes

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9. Panama-California Exposition, Prospectus, 757. It should be noted that the Prospectus has no legitimately recognized author. Although, the only San Diego resident capable of compiling such a comprehensive volume of some one-thousand pages covering everything from agriculture to regional folklore and native American history was William Ellsworth Smythe. The tone of the Prospectus is eerily reminiscent of his Conquest of Arid America (1899).


11. For the debate on the structure of agribusiness in late nineteenth and early twentieth century California, see David Vaught, "Factories in the Field Revisited," Pacific Historical Review, LXVI, no. 2, (May 1997): 149-184. Vaught characterizes three-quarters of farms in California in 1910 as less than 175 acres. His analysis concludes that the "factory" metaphor for the state's agribusiness, coined by Carey McWilliams, is inaccurate. Yet, he provides no definition of "industrial agriculture" himself in this article, ignoring the important issue of whether size (quantity) or method (quality) distinguishes agribusiness from the family farm. For an argument for qualitative changes, see Worster, Rivers of Empire, 122-125.


18. Vaught, "Factories in the Field Revisited," 164-167, 178-184. Vaught missed the opportunity to analyze the qualitative changes made in the small farm sector through irrigation, and how the booster literature evaded the difficult economic predicament experienced by small farmers in competition with large growers.


22. Ibid., 19, 22.

23. Ibid., 19.


27. Panama-California Exposition, 1915, Prospectus, 755.


30. Panama-California Exposition, 1915, Prospectus, 266.


32. Panama-California Exposition, 1915, Prospectus, 266.

33. Ibid., 262.


37. Ibid.

39. Summer quoted in "Exposition Shows Possibilities of Farming."


48. *Imperial Valley Program*, "El Centro, the County Seat," 10 June 1916, Box 18, Ephemera Collection, (SDHC).


51. *Imperial Valley Program*, "Imperial, the Oldest City in the Valley," np.


54. Discussion with Mary Beth Simon-Miller and Daniel Miller, August 1995, Wellington, Colorado. The pressure of urban expansion and suburbanization cause land rents radiating from the periphery of a center city to increase (during population growth), oftentimes causing an increase in the price of farmland per acre. Farmers in the Wellington area of Northern Colorado, such as the Millers, face this encroachment of the real-estate market. This is an extreme case of land value differentials, the Denver metropolitan area, which serves as bedroom community to the mother city. Farmland two hours north and east of Denver, outside Fort Collins and its hinterlands!, is experiencing this increase in value due to expanding suburbanization; desirable less as potential farmland than for its residential development value.


58. Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 1-16, 183-213. Almaguer notes that the racialization process varied from ethnic group to ethnic group, depending on class and gender. His analysis has a thorough specificity that cannot be done in this essay due to its complexity, yet the hierarchy sketched here is an accurate assessment of his discussion.

59. Hall, "Just Like Dixie Land," 175.

60. *Ibid.*, 175.


64. Carey McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island on the Land*, (New York: Duell, Sloan, & Pearce, 1946), 96-112; See Mike Davis, *The Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), 35-55. Notably, Davis appeals to the impact of development on the natural world, arguing that the promotion of unregulated regional growth in Southern California will not be supported by the environment itself. One must note that the organization of *The Ecology of Fear* is Davis' debt to Carey McWilliams' *Southern California Country*.


Matthew F. Bokovoy recently received his Ph.D. in history at Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His dissertation was entitled "San Diego's Expositions as Islands on the Land,
1915, 1935: Southwestern Culture, Race, and Class in Southern California." His article, "Producing the Culture of Abundance in Southern California," about the 1935 California Pacific Exposition in San Diego, will soon be published in the Pacific Historical Review. Raised in San Diego, his interests include the U.S. West, urbanism, cultural criticism, and regionalism. His next project will be a cultural history of surfing in twentieth century California.

The entire text of William Ellsworth Smythe's *The Conquest of Arid America* is now available in digitized form from the American Memories website of the Library of Congress.

Map of the Southern California Model Farm at the 1915 Panama-California Exposition in Balboa park. Sponsored by the Seven Southern Counties of California, the exhibit covered seventeen acres and featured a wide variety of fruit trees as well as grains and a vineyard. A model bungalow was also part of the exhibit and blue prints for the home cost $1.00. [photo # 90-18260-1]

[Photo 91:18564-2649] The International Harvester Company had an agricultural exhibit at the 1915 Panama-California Exposition to promote their products and encourage new agriculture in the semi-arid Southwest.

[Photo 2552-2] View of the Model Farm, facing west. In the background can be seen the California building and Tower, to its left the back of the Sacramento Valley Building (now replaced by the Museum of Art) and to the far left (in the enlarged image) the back of the Botanical Building.
An interior view of the Exposition's Model Bungalow showing the kitchen. Fair promoters claimed that such a house could be built for $4000.

A close view of the Exposition's Model Bungalow with maturing trees and landscaping.

Three Little Landers, ca. 1911-15, in a garden with a typical basic house and animal buildings (possibly chicken coops). These plots were usually one to two acres in size.

El Centro, in Imperial County east of San Diego, was one of the agricultural towns trying to make farming in the desert with irrigation a success. In this ca. 1915 photograph, it is a prosperous looking town with brick buildings holding a department store, bank and other businesses as well as showing wide streets with automobiles and overhead electric lines.
Welcome to Southern Agriculture! We're a family-owned pet and animal supply store founded in 1981.

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