

February 1, 2010

Dear Readers:

Thank you in advance for reading this work-in-progress. I recently drafted this article manuscript for a forthcoming anthology commemorating the 25th anniversary of the publication of Michael Omi and Howard Winant's *Racial Formation in the United States* (University of California Press, forthcoming). The article comes from research I conducted for my forthcoming book, *A Moveable Feast: The United Farm Workers in the Age of the Grape Boycott* (University of California Press, forthcoming), which I have been working on at Yale University as a fellow in Agrarian Studies. I chose to submit this piece instead of the announced paper, "I heard it through the Grapevine: Internationalizing the UFW Grape Boycott," because the length of this one fits within the accepted format of the colloquium (limit 35 pages), and because I have been invited to present on the history of the boycott at the **Colloquium on Food, Agriculture and the Environment** on March 3, 4:30-6, Kroon Hall. If you are interested in this topic, I hope you will attend.

In this article, I focus on the culture of growers and the ethnic and racial divisions among them, especially those influencing the lives of Armenian and Japanese American growers. The piece is an amalgam of my first chapter that explores the origins of grape growers' culture, and a later chapter concerning the conflict between the UFW and the growers over the rules and regulations governing the Agricultural Labor Relations Board, especially UFW access to farms during union elections. The second half of the paper explores the campaign to settle the debate by popular vote in the form of Proposition 14 during the November 2, 1976 election. Japanese Americans, as you will see, played an important role in the outcome of this election and signaled a new way of thinking about race among growers.

I look forward to your comments.

Sincerely, Matt

Agrarian Studies Fellow, Yale University

**The Importance of Being Asian:
Growers, the United Farm Workers and the Rise of Colorblindness**

By

Matthew Garcia, Brown University

© Please do not cite or quote without permission from the author

The rise in popularity of “food studies” has produced renewed interest in the history of agriculture and U.S. agrarian reform movements, including a virtual renaissance in the study of the United Farm Workers and the farmworker movement of the 1960s and 1970s.¹ These studies have contributed attention to the much overlooked subject of labor, offering a view from below that explores the diversity of workers and activists who struggled for farmworker justice, often with limited success. What is still evolving in the literature is a nuanced look at the growers that these workers and activists faced. Like workers, the growers harbored a significant degree of racial and class diversity that shaped the direction of the movement.

During the early years of California agribusiness development, the cultural divisions among growers proved to be an impediment to organizing within their ranks. Cooperation suggested sameness in modes of production when in reality growers often grew a variety of crops using culture-bound methods on farms located within ethnic-specific colonies. Although the image of the wealthy Anglo-Saxon grower predominates in current literature on California farming, growers were actually a rather ethnically heterogeneous bunch that often harbored suspicions about their fellow growers. In 19th and early 20th centuries, agriculture communities encompassed native Mexican Californios, white colonists from the East and Midwest, as well as large numbers of Italian, Slavic, Armenian, and Japanese immigrants. Later, after World War I, as specialty crops took shape and industries matured, immigrants remained important

participants. According to Marshall Ganz, former strategist for the United Farm

Workers, “agriculture itself was a mosaic of ethnic groups” divided into “tightly knit clumps.”² Like the rest of society throughout the first half of the twentieth century, communities in rural California participated in a process of racial formation, exploring and determining the racial fault lines among them.³ This fluid condition produced resentment, suspicion, and even hatred among growers, even as they strove for greater cooperation. By the time the Farm Workers Movement hit the industry in the 1960s, these divisions became a liability for growers to overcome and an opportunity for farm worker advocates to exploit.

In this chapter, I explore a process of racial formation among owners of grape farms in rural California throughout the twentieth century. My attention to the histories of two immigrant groups—Armenians and Japanese—considered “Asian” when they arrived in the San Joaquin Valley in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, demonstrates the divergent paths some immigrants took in pursuing acceptance from peers of European-descent. While Armenians succeeded in crossing the racial divide from Asian to white during World War II, Japanese Americans found themselves the victims of increased racialized state oppression in the form of Executive Order 9066, which required the evacuation of all people of Japanese-descent on the West Coast to internment camps in the interior of the country during World War II. Over time, however, Nisei (or second-generation, Japanese Americans) small farmers earned their way into the grower class, especially during the height of the labor wars with the United Farm Workers in the 1970s. Unlike the Armenians, Nisei farmers gained acceptance not by pursuing a white identity, but rather, by mobilizing their non-whiteness in the service of all growers, regardless of race. The career of Harry Kubo a 53-year old Nisei small farmer and grower activist in 1975 best illustrates how the importance of being Asian in rural California changed

throughout the 20th century. His acceptance as a spokesperson for agribusiness also demonstrates how white growers adapted to the challenges of unionization through an embrace of a colorblind ideology.

Armenians and Japanese in the founding of Grape Culture

From the beginning in the late nineteenth century through the boom years of the 1970s, immigrants played a significant role in determining the culture of grapes in California. Many immigrants flocked to grape country, drawing on knowledge from their homelands and solidarity with co-ethnics to establish their farms. Armenian, Slavic (specifically Croatian), Italian, and Japanese growers were among the leading ethnic groups, while a number of growers came from Jewish backgrounds.

The participation of Armenians in the world of the growers challenged the boundaries of citizenship and whiteness. Armenians came to the United States in waves, often in response to ethnic and religious persecution from Turks in their homeland. Between 1915 and 1923, the Ittihad Party in the Turkish capital of Constantinople attempted to exterminate two million Armenians living within the Ottoman Empire. Of this total, one million were massacred and another 500,000 escaped to become part of a worldwide Armenian Diaspora.⁴

Throughout this period, Armenians migrated to the United States in search of “Yetterm” or an “Eden” away from the religious and ethnic persecution at home. Although Armenian immigrants established communities in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Illinois and New York during the 19th century, few claimed to have found paradise until hearty pioneers traveled across country to the Central Valley of California during the 1880s. By 1920, Armenians accounted for 25% of Fresno County’s foreign-

born population, enough to establish Yettum, the only all-Armenian town in the United States.⁵

Most Armenians found Eden elusive in the San Joaquin Valley. Often labeled “Dirty Armenians” and “Fresno Indians” by their neighbors, Armenians found themselves the subject of restrictive covenants and hostile, racist attitudes from white residents. Discrimination in housing made clear the racial dimensions of this harassment. The San Joaquin Abstract Company maintained restrictions in their sales contracts for property barring “any person born in the Turkish Empire [or] any lineal descendent of such person” from buying land in a new, upscale portion of north Fresno. Such restrictive deeds against Armenians remained in contracts through 1944.⁶

The debate concerning Armenians’ racial identity went beyond Fresno realtors to U.S. courts. During the first quarter century, Armenians played a prominent role in determining the boundaries of whiteness in the U.S. in two federal immigration cases: *In re Halladjian* in 1909 and *United States v. Cartozian* in 1925. In *Halladjian*, four Armenian immigrants challenged a U.S. Bureau of Naturalization decision to bar their application for U.S. citizenship on the basis of their “Asiatic” origins. Not only did the Massachusetts court overturn the bureau’s decision, but it also established a definition of whiteness in the course of its decision. On the question of their “Asiatic” origins, the court held: “They are no darker than many west Europeans, and they resemble the Chinese in feature no more than they resemble the American aborigines.”⁷

By the 1920s, the courts challenged skin color and origins as the primary criteria for determining the boundaries of whiteness. In 1922, Japanese immigrant, Takao Ozawa questioned his exclusion by arguing that Japanese had a white complexion, and therefore should be granted U.S. citizenship on the basis of their whiteness. The courts denied his

request finding that Ozawa “is clearly of a race which is not Caucasian.” When a District Court in Oregon granted Indian immigrant Bhagat Singh Thind U.S. citizenship in 1920 on the premise that he was a Caucasian and thus should be eligible for citizenship, government lawyers succeeded in convincing the court that even an “average man” in the U.S. could see that Thind was not white. According to legal scholar Ian Haney López, the *Thind* decision established a “common knowledge” test for determining the racial status of immigrants based on “popular, widely held conceptions of race and racial divisions.”⁸

The new “common knowledge” litmus test created by *Thind* forced Armenians back into a racial grey zone given the everyday discrimination against them in places like Fresno, California. Having achieved success in reversing the naturalization of Ozawa and Thind, the United States went after the citizenship eligibility of Armenian applicant Tatos O. Cartozian in 1925 on the grounds that he was “not a free white person within the meaning of the naturalization laws of Congress.”⁹ In *United States v. Cartozian* (1925), the courts ruled in favor of Cartozian, arguing: “that the Armenians are of the Alpine stock” and therefore must be considered white by law. To establish this fact, the defendant called in famed anthropologist Franz Boas to explain away the Asian identity of a people whose origins resided well within the “Asian” territory of the Turkish Empire. Boas testified: “The evidence is so overwhelming that nobody doubts any more their early migration from Thrace across the Hellespont into Asia Minor.”¹⁰ The Christianity of Armenians in a Muslim world provided perhaps the strongest argument for their European ways, though expert witnesses also cited their history of marrying Russian royalty as evidence of their “aloofness” towards Turks, Kurds, and other questionable races in Asia Minor. Cartozian’s lawyers also claimed that Armenian men, upon their arrival in the United States, commonly married “American wives.” Embracing

the logic of “white is what white does,” the courts saw such behavior as a sign of the whiteness of Armenians and thus, their eligibility for citizenship.¹¹

The courts’ verdict flew in the face of local treatment and opinions of Armenians in the grape growing regions of California. In 1930 Stanford researcher Richard Tracy LaPiere conducted a survey of the 474 non-Armenian residents of Fresno County concerning their impressions of Armenians. LaPiere conducted his studies in the tradition of the “Chicago School,” a research group started by University of Chicago sociologist Robert Park concerned with the attitudes of the dominant white population towards immigrants and minority groups. True to his training, LaPiere directed most of his questions towards a deeper understanding of the racial tension within society. For Fresno and Armenians, LaPiere’s results were not encouraging. When asked “What do you find are the principal characteristics of Armenians?” respondents listed a total of 1,119 derogatory traits, including “dishonest” (16%), “undependable” (12%), “arrogant” (11%), and “tricky” (9%). LaPiere also recorded 198 positive comments, though many of these were preceded by a negative comment. For at least half of LaPiere’s respondents, Armenians reminded them of Jews, while 92.5% refused to accept marriage between Armenians and members of their kin. A majority of respondents also rejected Armenians as neighbors or playmates for their children and advocated barring Armenians from becoming U.S. citizens. The Christian backgrounds of Armenians did not convince at least 42.5% of respondents to accept them as members of their Church. Although the courts considered Armenians white in 1925, that whiteness remained “of a different color” for those who policed racial boundaries in grape country throughout the 1930s and 40s.¹²

LaPiere described the divisions between non-Armenians and Armenians as “racial-cultural” given the racial language used by some of his respondents. For example, a banker who provided credit to many Armenian businessmen in the county told LaPiere, “the Armenians are, as a race, the worst we have to deal with.” Claiming that they “steal, lie and do everything to save a penny,” the man compared them to “the nigger who steals his dinner on the way home from church.”¹³ In the raisin industry, fellow growers accused Armenians of being resistant to the organization of the California Associated Raisin Company though the number of Armenians resisting did not substantiate their accusations. According to LaPiere, at the time of the Associations’ attempts to organize a cooperative of between 60 and 80 percent of the growers in the industry, Armenian growers produced between 10 and 15 percent of the raisin crop.¹⁴ For those who were wary of joining the cooperative, it should come as no surprise that Armenians harbored doubts about joining an organization made up of people who opposed their presence in the valley.

Eventually, however, Armenians’ “European origins” and Christian beliefs opened the door for them to secure white privilege through a performance of whiteness, especially in the realm of business. Krikor Arakelian of Fresno County provides perhaps the earliest and best example of how good business acumen translated into acceptance among the elite members of society. Born in Marsovan, Turkish Armenia in 1871, Arakelian moved with his parents to Fresno County in 1883 where he spent a substantial portion of his youth. In 1892, Arakelian returned to Marsovan for college where he became an outspoken critic of the Ottoman Empire and an advocate for Armenian independence. The Islamic government imprisoned Arakelian for revolutionary activities though he quickly gained his release on account of his U.S. citizenship.

Arakelian sought refuge from political persecution in Fresno where he invested all of his savings in a 40-acre melon farm. Within a short time he became known as the “Melon King of America,” based on the sale of his “Mission Bell” brand watermelons and cantaloupes. In 1919, Arakelian again tempted fate when he retired from melons and bought two of the largest vineyards in California at severely discounted prices after the specter of Prohibition dampened investments in the wine industry. Although Prohibition became law in 1920, Arakelian foresaw a robust raisin and table grape market he could exploit. Marketed under the same “Mission Bell” brand that he used for his melons, his success in raisins and grapes earned him the respect of his Anglo peers who admired his ability to expand within the limits of his personal credit during the Depression. Despite the economic crisis, Arakelian built six packinghouses throughout the San Joaquin Valley and purchased property in Fresno, Kings, Madera, Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties. In 1933 when Prohibition ended Arakelian parlayed his good fortune into wine production, developing the “Madera” brand used for sacramental, medicinal and manufacturing purposes across the United States.¹⁵

The economic success of grape growers like Arakelian laid the foundation for the acceptance of other Armenians after the Great Depression and World War II when a new wave of Armenian immigrants arrived in California and expanded grape farming into the deserts southeast of Los Angeles. Names such as Karaharian, Carian, and Bagdasarian became more common among the owning class during the 1950s and 1960s as many brought a cultural knowledge of grape cultivation to bear on the burgeoning grape industry in Coachella Valley. Richard Bagdasarian, for example, purchased 80 acres in Mecca, California just beyond the northern tip of the Salton Sea in 1952. By the mid-1950s, Bagdasarian established his reputation and brand name, “Mr. Grape,” for his special compost technique and model vineyards.¹⁶ The appreciation of his agricultural

and marketing skills in the pages of the leading industry magazines signaled a break down in the prejudices experienced by previous generations of Armenians.

As subsequent generations of Armenians settled in California, the tendency to marry non-Armenians gradually became more common. Kikor Arakelian's marriage to Rose Agamian a fellow Armenian immigrant from Constantinople in 1899 would have placed them among 90% of Armenian couples who chose a spouse of the same ethnic background during that period. By 1980, however, Armenians were as likely to marry a non-Armenian as an Armenian, an act that made it harder to deny them their whiteness. While too much can be made of these marriage patterns, they suggest that assimilation *and* a retention of ethnic identity occurred among Armenians in Fresno at a time when grapes dominated the agricultural landscape of rural California.¹⁷

If the grower culture somehow could forget the Asian identity of Armenians and bring them into the fold over time, it could not do the same for Japanese growers. Several Japanese immigrants (Isei) arrived in California during the late 19th and early 20th century with the ambition of owning their own farms. By 1920, 5,152 Japanese residents achieved this goal on 361,276 acres, producing crops valued at \$67 million.¹⁸ This fortunate class of horticulturalists constituted a minority among the majority of Japanese immigrants who never transitioned from laborer to owner. Nevertheless, the few who succeeded as farmers mirrored that of Armenians if not in outcome, at least in approach. Under the assistance of Japanese businessman Kyutaro Abiko, Japanese farmers established three colonies in the San Joaquin Valley: Livingston, Cressey, and Cortez.

Local resistance to Japanese farmers proved to be too strong for their assimilation into San Joaquin Valley society. By 1919, rural opposition to Japanese settlement became more pronounced as Abiko established the 2,000 acre Cortez Colony in Merced

County on the heels of creating a second colony in Livingston in 1918. Journalists writing about the “hordes of nonassimiliable” Japanese in the local newspapers prompted the Merced County Farm Bureau directors to form a special committee to oppose further Japanese colonization. Elbert G. Adams, editor of the *Livingston Chronicle*, sounded an ominous tone in the pages of his daily beginning in 1919. Differentiating between the original inhabitants of Yamato and the new arrivals, Adams opined “we could not blind our eyes or deaden our senses to the fact that more Japanese were coming in here; Japanese not of the type of the original twenty-one families.” While the first Yamato colonists tended to be better educated and have more money than later settlers, the increased hysteria around the “Japanese Problem” signaled a rise in anti-Japanese sentiments more than separatist behavior on the part of new immigrants. By 1920, Merced County maintained one of the most aggressive Anti-Japanese Associations that routinely posted signs stating, “No more Japanese wanted.” They also circulated cards among landowners requesting a “morally binding” agreement not to sell land to Japanese buyers. When these measures did not work, exclusionists in the state Assembly passed the California Alien Land Law barring the transfer or lease of land to Japanese nationals and preventing the ownership of land by any corporation in which Japanese held a majority stock. In 1924, the federal government imposed a two percent quota and prohibited the entry of any “alien ineligible to citizenship” as a part of that year’s Immigration Act. This legislation essentially cut off all further immigration from Japan.¹⁹

Harry Kubo and the Rise of Colorblindness

This was the world into which Harry Kubo entered on December 4, 1922 in Sacramento, California. As a son of Japanese immigrant tenant farmers in Placer County,

Kubo came of age at the height of anti-Japanese sentiments. Prior to World War II, Kubo recalled discrimination in local restaurants where Japanese Americans were denied service even when accompanied by a white friend. “I had a Caucasian friend with me, and we waited and waited and waited to be waited upon.” After several customers behind them received service, his friend inquired with the waitress who told him with disgust, “when you get rid of the Jap friend, then we will wait on you.” Such discrimination intensified after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Kubo had been attending Community College when the raid happened on a Sunday. Kubo recalled, “The first thought that came to mind was...I do not particularly care to go to school [on Monday] knowing the climate that already existed among these few people.” His parents refused to allow him to stay home as an act of defiance against such racism. “When we entered the bus the following morning,” Kubo remembered, fellow riders peppered the family with insults, “why don’t you Japs go home, you dirty Japs.” Although Kubo and other Japanese American students felt tension throughout the winter and spring on campus, few incidents occurred. Kubo attributed the absence of conflict to the “docile” and “quiet” nature of Japanese Americans, and prided himself on being a part of a people who “were non-reactionary and were able to take abuses...because it doesn’t solve anything to get in confrontations with people who don’t understand the situation.”²⁰

In spite of this alleged demeanor, Kubo, like other Japanese Americans fell victim to Executive Order 9066. The authorities came for the Kubos on May 12, 1942 and told the family they had 48 hours to prepare to relocate to an Assembly center in Arboga, California. Kubo saw the internment as “one of the darkest days amongst the people of Japanese ancestry,” mainly for the ways in which the government intruded upon their lives and removed private property from his family and other Japanese

Americans. Kubo reflected: “Can you imagine ordering a citizen without due process—you are going to be uprooted from your home; we don’t know when you are going to get back, but in the meantime we want you to settle your business; we don’t know where we are going to take you; but be prepared to leave for anyplace that we may wish you to go?” Local whites, whom Kubo referred to as “vultures” in his 1978 oral history, offered to buy appliances at severely discounted prices from the family, adding insult to injury. “It took a lifetime to buy those things,” Kubo explained, “and they were offering my parents for the refrigerator and the washing machine two dollars, a dollar and a half, five dollars, and my father said, ‘well, even if we had to throw it away, we wouldn’t give it to them.’”²¹ Fortunately for the Kubos, the Leak family who owned the property where they sharecropped stored their possessions, and even sent them their portion of the profits after they moved to the internment camp at Tulare Lake in Modoc County, California. Still, the threat of losing everything and watching other Japanese American families have their private property appropriated by the state inspired in Kubo a distrust of government that bordered on a political philosophy of libertarianism that existed within the far wing of the Republican Party during the 1970s.

Following their release from the camp, the Kubos landed in Sanger just outside of Fresno where the entire family worked as field hands for 75 cents per hour. By 1949, they pooled their earnings into one bank account and purchased a 40-acre grape and tree fruit farm in the neighboring town of Parlier. While the family worked the homestead, Kubo and his brothers continued as farm workers to pay off the mortgage and to raise money to buy another 60 acres from a neighbor in 1954. By the mid-1950s, the Kubo family owned 110 acres in the Parlier-Sanger section of the San Joaquin Valley on their way to owning 210 acres in 1976. Kubo took great pride in the ability of Japanese

Americans like himself to recover from the trauma of internment to become small farmers.

In 1971 Kubo joined with fellow Japanese American farmers Abe Masaru and Frank Kimura to organize the Nisei Farmers League. The League's defense of private property rights and vigorous push back against United Farm Workers' attempts to unionize field laborers drew both Japanese and non-Japanese growers into the organization. The League began with 25 neighboring farmers; under Kubo's leadership, it grew to 250 members within a year. By 1976, the League swelled to more than 1,400 members, of which surprisingly, only 43% were of Japanese descent.²²

Kubo served as the first President of the League and emerged as an outspoken critic of UFW President César Chávez. The two first butted heads in 1970, when the UFW attempted to corral a small group of independent family farms constituting 15% who had escaped signing the grower-union accord on July 29. Chávez and UFW co-founder Gilbert Padilla directed United Farm Workers' pickets against eight packing houses handling their fruit and 17 farms throughout Tulare and Fresno County. Japanese Americans owned 14 of the 17 fields picketed, including the Kubos' small farm.²³ During the conflict, tension erupted into occasional acts of vandalism, including slashed tractor tires, nails and spikes in driveways, arson-caused fires, and yearling trees cut down at the trunks. Larry Kubo, Harry's son, remembered one incident in which a number of young UFW picketers entered the Kubo farm at night. Larry recalled, "I was 14 and they ran on to our property and started screaming and yelling at us, and they were not much older than me." In their exuberance, the group vandalized the Kubo tractor, though Harry kept his family inside and told his son to "stay where you're at" until the

group passed. Such incidents alarmed the Japanese grower community and precipitated the formation of the League and inspired Kubo's activism.²⁴

Kubo's star rose in 1976 around an attempt by the United Farm Workers to strengthen the Agricultural Labor Relations Board (ALRB). In 1975, California passed the Agricultural Labor Relations Act, which established the board and a number of regional offices to regulate farm labor disputes and execute union elections. During the first five months of the law's existence, these agencies oversaw hundreds of union elections. The flurry of activity reflected the pent-up demand for justice; however, it also quickly exhausted the budget of the agencies. The UFW won a majority of the elections, prompting growers to appeal to state senators to block an additional appropriation to keep the ALRB functioning through the year. When the agency ran out of money in February, the United Farm Workers turned to the voters in 1976 by sponsoring Proposition 14, an initiative that could circumvent the state legislature and create a new labor law by majority vote of the electorate that would secure year-round funding for ALRB.

The United Farm Workers also designed Proposition 14 to address the thorny issue of union access to workers on California farms. Although ALRA recommended equal access to unions, in practice, this provision was honored more in the breach than the observance by farmers and agents. The UFW experienced difficulty in gaining entry to farms before and after work, and struggled for time equal to that permitted to the Teamsters by growers. The initiative sought to write into the law an "access rule" that required growers to permit union representatives on their property one hour before work, one hour after work, and at lunch time. Marshall Ganz, head of the "Yes on 14" campaign, simplified the union's argument for the rule change as "an access to information" issue. "If you are going to have free union elections," he explained, "the workers must be fully informed."²⁵

The growers responded first by organizing an Ad Hoc Committee composed of many organizations including the Nisei Farmers League to determine how to fight Proposition 14. At the meeting, Kubo distinguished himself as a knowledgeable and credible voice on farm labor issues and earned the grudging praise of his peers as the chairperson of the committee. “[Kubo’s] not polished and he’s not a professional,” one unidentified leader of a statewide farm group told a reporter, “but he knows what he’s talking about and he knows how to tell it to the people.” The local newspaper took note of Kubo’s rags-to-riches story, deeming him “the ineloquent speaker-turned-spokesman” for all farmers in 1976.²⁶ His handle of labor issues facing a wide spectrum of the agricultural community, from large-scale farmers to small family farmers like himself provided useful cover to corporate entities who had become easy targets for derision in the David and Goliath struggle. Seeking greater organization and a more sustained campaign, the Ad Hoc Committee chose to form a formal “No on 14” organization known as Citizens for a Fair Farm Labor Law and named Harry Kubo as their President.

Chávez and the “Yes on 14” advocates viewed Kubo’s involvement merely as a cynical ploy by wealthy growers to hide behind a small farmer, and saw his concern for private property rights violations as disingenuous. Throughout the campaign, Chávez emphasized the \$2.5 million budget of his opponents, which they used to hire “experienced manipulators of public opinion” who tried to “persuade a lot of people that passage of Proposition 14 will give the right to Mexican farm workers to enter their homes without permission.” Such allusions to white racist fears of home invasion never directly entered into Kubo’s vocabulary, though growers encouraged others to disseminate these ideas to the public.²⁷ In his public speeches and published commentaries, Kubo remained focused on the consequences of the rules change to farmers and farm workers. For farmers, he worried, “you kick an organizer off the farm

for being disruptive...and the next day the guy is back on your farm and you have to let him enter and he can disrupt things all over again.” For workers, Kubo argued, “under ‘14’ the worker would just about lose his right to work or not work under a union contract.” He added, “the union could bring such pressure on him...he’d have to join even if he didn’t want to.”²⁸ In his rebuttal, Chávez ignored nuances in the anti-14 position, inserting a not-so-subtle jibe at Kubo’s credibility by asserting that agribusiness had “started a slick campaign with... a small grower as a front, presenting Proposition 14 as a violation of property rights.”²⁹ Kubo rarely, if ever, criticized Chávez’s character in public, though in his oral history, he shared his impressions of the labor leader after they met for the first time in 1974 at a debate held at the Hilton Hotel in Fresno. “My first impression of him,” he told his interviewer, “was a person that was very arrogant, very arrogant in his statements, but I also found that he was a very intelligent man, a person with total dedication to the cause that he was pursuing.” Kubo maintained an abiding respect for Chávez, acknowledging that their “roots are the same” and they shared a commitment to improving farm workers’ lives though by different means.³⁰

The cities became the battleground for Proposition 14, with both the UFW and Citizens for a Fair Farm Labor Law investing much time and money into winning the war of ideas among these large blocks of voters. Kubo traveled over 30,000 miles in 1976, engaging Chávez in a number of debates and becoming what one newspaper called “[the] focus of Chávez’s wrath.”³¹ He organized highly visible “no on 14” rallies in Los Angeles, the San Francisco Bay, and San Diego areas in the week prior to the election drawing as many as 4,000 participants at each event.³² In each location, he orchestrated successful door-to-door campaigns that rivaled the UFW’s supremacy in grassroots outreach, and conducted media events, complete with a country-western music concert that inspired supporters to attend rallies throughout the state. Kubo honed the position of

the growers' to an easily-digested message, "Protect Private Property—No on 14

Committee," that the public understood and editorial boards of several urban newspapers and television and radio stations picked up and incorporated into their opinions on the subject.³³ These efforts gave the growers an unprecedented voice in the cities, and helped raise political contributions that supported an increased presence of campaign ads on the airwaves.³⁴

The union countered these events with an aggressive grassroots campaign of their own, which included community groups that communicated their message via leaflets and door-to-door appeals. In Los Angeles, for example, the Coalition for Economic Survival (CES) worked on behalf of the union to challenge the private property argument as "the old 'big lie' campaign." "They have poured millions into a demagogic 'vote no' campaign," CES's steering committee wrote to its members, "using the phony 'private property' slogan."³⁵ As the election neared, Chávez's attack on the validity of the private property argument became more urgent. In a speech to 800 supporters in National City, Chávez implored the partisan crowd not to take victory for granted and urged everyone to take individual responsibility for challenging the growers' attempt to confuse voters. "We've got to tell the people that [the private property argument] is a phony issue," he warned, "or we're in trouble."³⁶ In many posters and fliers throughout the months leading up to the election, the UFW routinely drew attention to Kubo's private property argument as "the Big Lie" and republished articles identifying the wealthy growers who contributed to Citizens for a Fair Labor Law.³⁷ The union also highlighted the many politicians whom they counted as allies, including President Jimmy Carter, Governor Jerry Brown, Mayor of San Francisco, George Moscone and Mayor of Los Angeles, Tom Bradley.³⁸

None of these endorsements helped the union in the end. Voters handed the UFW a crushing defeat, rejecting Proposition 14 by a better than 3-2 margin on November 2, 1976. The “No on 14” forces garnered over 2 million more votes than advocates for the initiative, and carried 56 of the 58 counties in the state, with Alameda and San Francisco the only two counties voting in favor.³⁹ Although the growers’ newsletter interpreted the outcome as “a repudiation of the naked power grab of César Chávez” and “a major defeat for Governor Gerald Brown,” Kubo offered a more sanguine evaluation, highlighting the importance of the organizing drive: “[It was] amazing to see the grassroots response from agriculture. People we didn’t know were out there came to the front and pitched into the effort to defeat this bad initiative. It was this all-out support that made the victory possible... Every grower—all of agriculture—can be proud of this accomplishment.”⁴⁰ Union organizers tried to attribute the outcome to the growers’ \$2.5 million budget that fueled their intense media campaign, though, in the end, the UFW spent a substantial sum of \$1.3 million of their own.

Support for Kubo’s message manifest common ground between him and voters on the sanctity of private property in California. The electorates’ decision was consistent with an entrenched preoccupation with the rights of property owners, perhaps most clearly articulated in the repeal of the fair housing law known as the Rumford Act in 1964. Amidst the Civil Rights movement, the California Assembly passed the law named for William Byron Rumford, the first African American elected official in northern California, that prohibited discrimination in most privately financed housing and outlawed racial discrimination by home lenders. In response, a coalition of the California Real Estate Association, the Home Builders Association, and the Apartment Owners Association organized a successful campaign to overturn the law by way of an initiative—coincidentally, also Proposition 14—that passed by a two to one margin.

Racism clearly played a role in the vote though many voters also expressed their opposition to what they perceived as the state interfering in the management of private property.⁴¹

Kubo's role as the spokesman also signaled an important turn in the political strategy of the growers. Prior to their victory, they had attempted to discredit Chávez as a false prophet, the UFW as a social movement rather than a union, and the violent Teamsters as the superior choice for workers. None of these strategies worked. In Kubo, however, they found a life story and a sympathetic character whose experience successfully countered the appeals of the UFW on behalf of poor farm workers. By 1976 much of the public accepted the Internment of Japanese Americans during World War II as an injustice and saw Kubo as a victim of the misguided Executive Order 9066. Indeed, within two short years, the Japanese American Citizens League believed it had enough of the public's sympathy to launch a reparations movement. By 1983, a Congressional Committee issued the report *Personal Justice Denied* recommending compensation to the victims, and in 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act offering \$20,000 in redress to surviving detainees. Kubo's history and the growing sentiment in society regarding the mistake of internment gave him increased credibility with the public and enabled him to articulate a political position that questioned the states' right to determine who could enter private property. Perhaps the most enduring and effective image of the "No on 14" campaign was a poster of Kubo standing in front of his home with the following message in bold letters: "34 years ago, I gave up my personal rights without a fight... IT WILL NEVER HAPPEN AGAIN."⁴² Such an evocations of the internment paid tremendous dividends for large and small growers alike who, ironically, now relied on a man of color and an act of racial injustice to stem the UFW's momentum since ARLA's passage.

In the wake of the growers' success, Kubo enjoyed a level of celebrity unique among Japanese Americans that provided him a platform to advance his conservative viewpoints. In the same election in 1976, Mill Valley resident, former San Francisco State University President, and fellow Japanese American, S. I. Hayakawa won a seat in the U.S. Senate as a Republican candidate and appealed to Kubo to run for public office. Kubo declined, though he continued to serve the Nisei Farmers League as an effective lobbyist for growers in Sacramento and became a member of the Parlier school board, happily leaving the responsibility of farming to his brothers and children. As a public figure, he espoused a political message of racial uplift consistent with an emerging colorblind ideology that challenged racial minorities not to make excuses for their problems and to take responsibility for their own lives.⁴³ In his oral history, Kubo shared his philosophy: "If you have a chip on your shoulder and you're going to feel sorry for yourself, you will never get ahead in this life... I've seen too much of that, because you are an ethnic minority, you have lived under poverty, the government owes you a living, that is not an attitude Japanese-American people have; we're going out and trying and this is what we did."⁴⁴

Kubo identified both farm workers and African Americans as the largest and most significant groups carrying such a "chip." He labeled farm workers a "unique" people whose unpredictable nature made them undeserving of anything more than the minimum wage. According to Kubo, "some come early, some won't show up at all," but on average, "they're not responsible enough in a lot of instances to call up and say I won't be there tomorrow." Kubo reserved his harshest criticism for African Americans, whom he called a "handicapped people" for their presumed dependence on welfare. According to Kubo, by providing African Americans welfare "you destroy any incentive or desire [for them] to work on their own and to persevere."⁴⁵ Kubo contrasted these groups and

others interested in government subsidies with Japanese Americans whom, he testified, pooled their resources and labor to become successful farm owners. Kubo believed, “If the Japanese-American can do it under these handicaps, the alien land laws, the fact that our parents couldn’t be naturalized and the incarceration during the war years, and they could still come back and have enough perseverance and determination to try, then anybody in this country could own a piece of land if they really wanted to.”⁴⁶

Such beliefs went well beyond the property rights position advocated by the growers, though Kubo’s thoughts on a range of issues, from worker responsibility, to welfare, to the assumed culture of poverty among many racial minorities provided a window into the conservative politics of a grower class that now made room for Japanese Americans. For former detainees of the internment camps, the postwar shift in racial attitudes did not earn them an immediate spot among their grower peers, though Kubo fondly remembered those in the San Joaquin Valley who assisted them in their reintegration to society. When the Kubos’ came out of the camp at Tulare Lake, they landed as tenant farmers with an Armenian family, the Peters, living just outside of Fresno. Kubo appreciated the “similarity between the Armenian[s] and Japanese,” though this perception of belonging to what George Lipsitz’s calls “a family of resemblance” had more to do with the sharing of food, childcare and the duties of farming rather than a consciousness about the two groups’ parallel histories of pursuing whiteness in U.S. courts during the early 20th century.⁴⁷ He acknowledged how instrumental the kindness of others was in their road back to society, at one point emphatically stating, “I don’t ever recall any acts of discrimination, prejudice, [or] uncomfortableness” after the war.⁴⁸ Kubo’s focus on his own story of triumph and the generosity of neighbors, however, fostered an ignorance concerning the differences between the period of his ascendancy in the late 1940s and 1950s, and the 1960s and

1970s when Mexican and Filipino workers butted up against new challenges such as undocumented immigration, stagflation, the growth of corporate farms, and the continued upheaval in Mexican and Philippines economies that fed the postwar stream of poor itinerant workers into California fields. These blind spots did not stop Kubo from comparing his struggles to those of contemporary farm workers. In a speech to a local seventh-grade class, for example, Kubo told his mostly Mexican audience “I’m one of you, too” referring to his life as a son of immigrants, though he could not help but broaden the comparison to “Indians,” “Germans,” “Armenians” and “probably thirty or forty ethnic groups in this country.”⁴⁹ For Kubo, the struggles of farmworkers in the 1970s represented an earlier version of his own life without the corrosive power of the state restricting their movement and ownership of property.

The paths towards assimilation and acceptance from white peers differed among Armenians and Japanese Americans due to the relative “Asian-ness” of each group and the usefulness of their identities to the wider grower community. Both Armenian and Japanese immigrants attempted to challenge “the racial state,” as Omi and Winant describes it, by proclaiming their whiteness in court; however, only Armenians succeeded.⁵⁰ Armenians retained their whiteness not by claiming that Armenia falls within the boundaries of Europe, but rather that their “homeland” northeast of Baghdad and north of Tehran became so after their migration from the West. The establishment of the “common knowledge” litmus test for Asians with the *Thind* decision placed South Asians and Japanese Americans on the outside of whiteness. Such ideologies influenced their access to U.S. citizenship, which remained off-limits until the passage of the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 allowed for their naturalization.

In the end, the acceptance of Japanese Americans by white growers depended on the activism of Nisei farmers who, like Harry Kubo, espoused political positions useful to all growers regardless of race. By the time Kubo initiated his “No on 14” campaign in the name of private property rights, the racial ideology of California society had shifted from a belief in skin-color as a determinant of intellect and ability to a notion that these markers had little consequence in the trajectory of “minority” groups. Kubo served as the ideal representative of this idea, having overcome the internment to become a successful farmer and a valued member of the agribusiness community. His value was largely predicated on his willingness to articulate a “model minority” perspective that challenged Mexicans, Filipinos, and African Americans to be more like Japanese Americans and allowed growers not to take responsibility for the poor health and inadequate education of their workers. Finally, the example of Kubo’s life illustrates how, at least for Japanese Americans, the path of acceptance by society now came by way of embracing non-whiteness and identifying with a history of racialized oppression rather than disowning it.

¹ Pawel, Miriam, *The Union of Their Dreams: Power, Hope and Struggle in César Chávez’s Farm Worker Movement*, Bloomsbury Press, 2009; Ganz, Marshall, *Why David Sometimes Wins: Leadership, Organization and Strategy in the California Farm Workers Movement*, Oxford University Press, 2009; Shaw, Randy, *Beyond the Fields: Cesar Chavez, the UFW, and the Struggle for Justice in the 21st Century*, University of California Press, 2008. Forthcoming books on the topic include: biographies of César Chávez by Stephen Pitti, and another by Paul Henggeler, the latter entitled *After the Harvest*; and two more books about the union, including one by union-veteran, Frank Bardacke, and my own, tentatively titled *A Moveable Feast: The United Farm Workers in the Age of the Grape Boycott*, forthcoming University of California Press.

² Marshall Ganz, interviewed by author, March 26, 2008.

³ See Almaguer, Tomás, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California*, University of California Press, 1994. Almaguer draws on Omi and Winant’s *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (1986) for analysis of California’s racial history.

⁴ Jerdian, Matthew Ari. “Assimilation and Ethnicity: Adaptation Patterns and Ethnic Identity of Armenian-Americans in Central California,” Ph.D. Dissertation in Sociology, University of Southern California, August 2001, 46-51.

⁵ Ibid. 62; Minasian, Edward, *The Armenian Community of California: The First One Hundred Years*. Los Angeles, CA: The Armenian Assembly Resource Center.

⁶ Jendian, 67.

⁷ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998, 231-233.

⁸ Ian F. Haney Lopez, *White By Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (1996), 5.

⁹ UNITED STATES v. CARTOZIAN, District Court, D. Oregon, 6 F.2d 919; 1925 U.S. Dist.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid. Tehranian, John, "Performing Whiteness: Naturalization Litigation and the Construction of Racial Identity in America," *The Yale Law Journal*, Vol. 109, No. 4, (Jan., 2000), pp. 817-848.

¹² Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998; Richard Tracy LaPiere, "The Armenian Colony in Fresno County, California: A Study In Social Psychology," Ph.D. Dissertation, Sociology, Stanford University, May 1930.

¹³ Richard Tracy LaPiere, "The Armenian Colony in Fresno County, California: A Study In Social Psychology," Ph.D. Dissertation, Sociology, Stanford University, May 1930, 380.

¹⁴ Jendian, 64-65; Richard Tracy LaPiere, 383-385. Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

¹⁵ Winchell, Lilbourne Alsip, *History of Fresno County and the San Joaquin Valley*, Fresno, CA: A. H. Cawston, 1933, 291-292.

¹⁶ Marshall Ganz interviewed by the author, March 26, 2008; and "Mr. Grape and the Compost Pile," *Southwest Rancher*, November 1954, 4. Today, Bagdasarian ranch is also known for denying its workers breaks and forcing employees to eat pesticides-laden grapes to test their readiness for the market, *The Riverside Press-Enterprise*, May 9, 2008.

¹⁷ Jendian, 176. Matthew Jendian, in his interesting study of Armenians in Fresno entitled "Assimilation *and* Ethnicity" (italics in the original) makes the important point that assimilation and the retention of ethnicity are processes that are not mutually exclusive.

¹⁸ Matsumoto, Valerie, *Farming The Home Place: A Japanese American Community in California, 1919-1982*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993, 31.

¹⁹ Ibid. 42.

²⁰ Kubo interview, 6.

²¹ Kubo interview, 10.

²² "Who Is Harry Kubo?" *The Fresno Bee*, February 22, 1976. Also, Kubo interview, 32-33. With two additional satellite groups in Stockton, Los Angeles, and San Diego county, the total membership topped out at 2,200 in 1976.

²³ Kubo interview, 29. Gilbert Padilla interviewed by the author, January 11, 2010.

²⁴ Larry Kubo interviewed by the author, January 6, 2010.

²⁵ LAT, April 15, 1976.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ LAT, October 24, 1976.

²⁸ Ibid.

- ²⁹ César Chávez letter to supporters, September 1976, UCLA Political Literature Collection.
- ³⁰ Kubo interview, 33, 36.
- ³¹ “Who is Harry Kubo?” *The Fresno Bee*, February 22, 1976.
- ³² Kubo interview, 36.
- ³³ Council of California Growers Newsletter, September 20, 1976; October 4, 1976, Scrapbook April 16, 1975-August 20, 1976, Table Grape Negotiating Committee papers, Fresno State University.
- ³⁴ Council of California Growers Newsletter, September 13, 1976; November 1, 1976, Scrapbook April 16, 1975-August 20, 1976, Table Grape Negotiating Committee papers, Fresno State University.
- ³⁵ Coalition for Economic Survival letter to CES Members and Friends, November 2, 1976, UCLA Political Literature Collection.
- ³⁶ National City Star-News, September 19, 1976, UCLA Political Literature Collection.
- ³⁷ Flyers, n.d., UCLA Political Literature Collection.
- ³⁸ The Fresno Bee, September 6, 1976.
- ³⁹ San Francisco Chronicle, November 4, 1976; The Fresno Bee, November 3, 1976. Council of California Growers, Newsletter, November 8, 1976, Fresno State University.
- ⁴⁰ Council of California Growers, Newsletter, November 8, 1976, Fresno State University.
- ⁴¹ Lipsitz, George, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit From Identity Politics*, Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2006, 114. Elaine Elinson and Stan Yogi, *Wherever There’s A Fight: How Runaway Slaves, Suffragists, Immigrants, Strikers, and Poets Shaped Civil Liberties in California*, Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2009, 148-149.
- ⁴² Poster, n.d., UCLA Political Literature Collection.
- ⁴³ For the emergence of a colorblind ideology, see Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and The Making of Race in America*, Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2009, 287-306.
- ⁴⁴ Harry Kubo interviewed by Sam Suhler, Fresno, California, October 13, 1978, 18.
- ⁴⁵ Harry Kubo interviewed by Sam Suhler, Fresno, California, October 13, 1978, 27-28.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid. 23.
- ⁴⁷ George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1990, 150.
- ⁴⁸ Kubo interview, 2-3, 18-19.
- ⁴⁹ Kubo interview, 44.
- ⁵⁰ Omi and Winant, 81.