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Author

Haley, Brian

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**"WE WANT OUR TOWN BACK!":
HOUSING DISCRIMINATION AND EXCLUSIONⁱ**

Brian Haley

Department of Anthropology and Center for Chicano Studies
University of California, Santa Barbara

Soon after my arrival in the rural town of Shandon, California in 1989, and repeatedly during my 22 month stay there, I was told by community residents that ethnic tensions had subsided noticeably from a high point in the early 1980s. I began to wonder why this should be so, particularly as the local school enrollments suggested that the total number and proportion of Mexicans in the community had increased since then. Some theorists have suggested that demographic shifts of this kind should worsen ethnic relations, not coincide with their improvement.

A clue to the answer came when many of the Mexican farm workers began telling me that they had been in the community longer than school records would indicate, far longer in many cases. Until the mid-1980s most Mexicans living in Shandon were adults, and most of these were men. They were transnational migrants whose families, households, and budgets were spread between Shandon and their communities of origin in Mexico.ⁱⁱ Most importantly, the wives and children of those men who were married usually remained in Mexico, where the man, too, expected to return eventually. In Shandon, these transnational migrants shared residences with one another, and sometimes with families of kin.

What had transpired demographically during the 1980s, therefore, was not an increase in the number of Mexicans in the community as the school records alone suggested, but rather a shift in the composition of the Mexican segment of the population. It had gone from a population of adult migrants-

including those who lived in the community year-round-to one of families. This demographic shift corresponded with the reduction in ethnic tensions that so many residents, both Anglo and Mexican, had perceived and described.

Since ethnic tension has been greater in the early 1980s, this raises the question, how was the greater ethnic tension of the recent past or its subsequent reduction related to prejudicial or discriminatory practices targeted against the immigrants? There are relatively few opportunities in Shandon in which ethnic or racial discrimination can be practiced openly in any systematic fashion that also can be readily observed and documented. Shandon's schools have never been segregated and they have tended to promote considerable integration and upward mobility among minority students. Citizenship is the only hurdle preventing substantial Mexican participation in voting, and some naturalized citizens do vote, as do many Mexican American residents. The majority of settled Mexican families are in the process of obtaining citizenship. Community organizations do not have restrictive membership clauses, but few have included Mexican American members, largely because they are such newcomers to the community. Commuter residents, the other recent newcomer group, are also rarely found in community organizations. The agricultural workplace is structured ethnically, but once again, upward mobility is possible and is attained, if only by a very few.

The one sector in which a fairly straight-forward ethnic discrimination frequently occurs and can be observed and documented in Shandon is rental housing. Mexicans have been resoundingly stereotyped as inferior prospective tenants. The issue is so important within the community that stereotypic traits associated with their role as tenants have become crucial aspects of American perspectives on Mexican identity in Shandon, as they have in many other communities in California. I say *American*, because many Mexican-Americans concur with the stereotypes about Mexicans as inferior tenants that are even more

common among Anglos. So despite sometimes experiencing some of this prejudice at least briefly when first trying to rent or purchase housing, some Mexican Americans also participate in the prejudice and stereotyping directed toward Mexicans in the rental housing market. Mexican Americans, however, succeed at circumventing this prejudice quickly and with far less effort than do Mexican immigrants because of their familiarity with the language, rules, procedures, relationships, and manner of comportment that this market requires. Their very Americanness, in other words, brings Mexican Americans success where Mexican immigrants meet with failure due to prejudice.

Agriculture and Immigration in Shandon

Shandon lies midway between Los Angeles and San Francisco in the sparsely populated northeastern corner of coastal San Luis Obispo County, California. Historically a region producing grain and cattle, the community of Shandon encompasses a much larger area beyond the small town itself, including a significant portion of southeastern Monterey County with its village of Parkfield, and a sliver of western Kern County. ⁱⁱⁱ

The social history of the community of Shandon up to the mid-1960s is the subject of anthropologist Elvin Hatch's book, *Biography of a Small Town* (Hatch 1979) and his other writings on rural California. Through Hatch's research, we know that in the mid-1960s Shandon was an Anglo-American farming and ranching community of about 500 people, most of whom were the families of local farmers, ranchers, and their Anglo-American hired hands. Today it is a substantially different community, with a population of roughly 700 people that is about one third Mexican immigrant, with another third comprised mostly of young urban commuters.

I ventured to Shandon to examine the social consequences of grape vineyard development and particularly of Mexican farm worker settlement in this rural community.^{iv} In Shandon's agrarian economy of the 1960s, upland areas were devoted to grain

and cattle, and lowlands along major drainages to the few irrigated crops, especially alfalfa and sugar beets. Intermediate zones were planted to grain which gave way to other crops as irrigation systems advanced during the 1960s. Cattle and grain historically were the most stable and profitable commodities and entailed large landholdings and control over much of local employment. Not surprisingly, cattlemen and major grain farmers were the most influential members of the community. Irrigation farming was an economically tenuous affair, and its practitioners were distinctly lower in social standing than major grain farmers and cattle ranchers. Farm hands held the lowest status of all. In contrast to California's major agrarian valley communities, Mexican farm workers seldom lived in Shandon, generally coming in only to work seasonally in the irrigated crops. Those very few who did live in the area constituted a nearly invisible underclass of a few households (Hatch 1979), and a few men living and working on outlying ranches who made a point of seldom being seen.

Changing economic conditions in the 1970s and 1980s brought the complete disappearance of sugar beets production, a massive reduction in alfalfa, and declines in cattle and grain. On irrigated lands, sugar beets and alfalfa were replaced by grapes, mostly premium wine varieties, but also table grapes. Local vineyard acreage expanded from fewer than 50 acres in 1967 to nearly 4000 acres in 1991. Grape production in Shandon is relatively large scale, and tends toward absentee ownership and relatively high mechanization by California standards. Nevertheless, the labor requirements for grapes are as much as 85 times those of the crops they replaced. The wine grape vineyards primarily serve moderately large premium wineries outside the region.

By the time I arrived in Shandon, this agricultural change had thoroughly transformed the composition and social fabric of the community. Farms were sold to the new vineyard owners, and previous farmers and farm hands left the community. New vineyard

managers and farm workers—almost exclusively Mexican immigrants—joined the community. Local social change was also brought about by housing construction in the 1980s and the settlement of young urban workers and their families.

By the late 1980s, older residents who once “knew everybody in town” now routinely claimed that they “hardly knew anybody.” And indeed, they did not. In 1968, of household heads with children in local schools, 38 were farmers, ranchers, or managers; 22 were farm hands; and 15 were commuter workers. By 1989, 19 were farmers, ranchers, and managers, 54 were farm workers, and 59 were commuters. Whereas virtually all the farm hands of 1968 were Anglos, in 1989 the three quarters were immigrants from western and northern Mexico. A half dozen commuter households were Mexican American by 1989, too.

Moreover, because grape farming was prosperous relative to many of the previous crops of the region, irrigation farmers were no longer all lacking in influence relative to cattle and grain ranchers. Grape growers became respectable and influential men in the region. The contrasting fates of the grape growers and the grain and cattle men were sometimes a source of conflict marked by occasional name calling, such as “Damn grape growers!” and “Damn barley growers!”

The old guard blamed vineyard managers for bringing Mexican farm workers to the region, and for not housing them out of town on the ranches. Vineyard managers, in turn, blamed the old guard for alternately excluding the Mexicans from the community or for providing only overcrowded and substandard housing. Yet, vineyard managers also spoke with understanding about the resentment they sometimes felt from the old guard of the community and of the strains caused by the behavior of some of the immigrants. For ultimately, these other prominent agriculturalists comprised their peers whose eventual acceptance they sought.

Housing Discrimination and the Importance of Community

A few researchers have reported a pattern of housing discrimination appearing in American rural communities that have also experienced demographic growth beginning in the 1970s. Fitchen (1991) noted discriminatory practices in reaction to an influx of a variety of low income earners and racial and ethnic minorities in rural communities in upstate New York. Salamon and Tornatore (1994) identified a similar pattern in the midwest, and also found that a rural old guard use housing restrictions or property ordinances when poorer, less educated newcomers occupy older housing in communities whose base is shifting from farming to a "post-agricultural" residential character. García (1994) has encountered similar reactions in both rural Pennsylvania and California when the newcomers are poor Mexican farm workers employed in newer agricultural endeavors. From her ongoing research in Santa Cruz County, California where tourism and labor intensive agriculture coexist, Zavella (1995) observed that periodic calls to remove unsightly housing occupied by farm workers are justified by appeals to the local economic importance of tourism. While it is not explicitly discriminatory, Santa Barbara's no-growth policies have raised housing costs sufficiently that they have the similar effect of driving low-income Latinos to less-expensive communities, creating an "ethnic segmentation of non-metropolitan cities whereby some become more Latino, and others less so" (Palerm 1989:148-149).

The ethnic distinctiveness and relative poverty of the newcomers are characteristics that rural old guard residents interpret as threats to the overall "quality" and character of their communities. From the perspective of old guard residents in Shandon and the communities represented in these previous studies, newcomers perceived as "lesser quality" people pose this threat, and such people are identified readily by the poor care they show for property, especially houses and yards. Limiting access to residential property or enforcing conformity to property maintenance standards become weapons used to protect the

community from a perceived risk of degradation. Although complaints about the lack of care property is given are often objectively made, frequently such complaints become a stereotype used to characterize an entire category of newcomers, such as Mexican farm workers or commuter residents.

Housing discrimination offers the old guard residents who have not fled from Shandon a tool to defend their town against what they perceive as a significant outside threat to the community's essential character and social role. Like other small towns, Shandon is an important social arena in which a person's identity, standing, and self-worth are negotiated, established, and maintained (Hatch 1979). Persons and groups whose behavior does not measure up to local standards are deemed less "respectable" or of lesser "quality" in local idiom. Such persons and groups in Shandon have been from the lower ranks of farm workers, the indigent, Okies, Mexicans, and blacks.

Residents perceive the community's identity as a reflection of its socially and numerically dominant members. Shandon, a town of independent-and independent-minded-ranchers and farmers until the late 1970s, had always properly been a "ranching town," a "cattle town," or a "farm town" in the eyes of longtime residents. They knew where they stood in the local social hierarchy and derived a proud and comforting collective identity from their association with this kind of place. With the rapid growth of Mexican farm worker and commuter settlement, longtime residents fear that Shandon risks becoming a "Mexican town," a characterless suburbia, or an orderless community of "low life." This threat to the character of the community is also a threat to the social standing and identity of the community's old guard. Housing landlords become the community's gatekeepers, but the community organizations and even neighbors who can activate the bureaucratic forces of eviction and property condemnation also fill this role.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, Shandon natives perceived the threat to come from virtually all Mexican immigrants. But with the passage of time, a finer distinction has begun to emerge that focuses concern more specifically on households comprised solely or primarily of groups of men living without their families, and others who cannot be identified as stable residents in the community. Mexican families, who more often than not owe their mere presence in Shandon to the more secure employment of their household heads, come to be recognized as stable, responsible residents. They are more likely to be tolerated as tenants and neighbors.

For example, one old guard resident had been critical of Mexicans openly for so long that he had a reputation for offering to "run 'em all out of town." As the number of commuter residents grew at the close of the 1980s his criticism refocused on commuters who did not improve or maintain their yards and homes. "They ought to live in condos," he told one farmer. To the amazement of his listener, he then noted that some of the Mexicans were better neighbors than the Anglo commuters. There is, in other words, a growing recognition by Anglos and Mexican Americans of diversity among Mexican farm workers and their dependents.

Recognition of this diversity has antecedents in the social patterns of mid-1960s Shandon when farm workers were differentiated as a settled, respectable, and responsible "foreman type," and a transient, unreliable, and morally deficient "Okie type" at opposite poles of a gradient (Hatch 1979:129-130). Foreman type farm workers, if not actually foremen, were likely to occupy permanent jobs and were considered capable of becoming actual foremen. Disapproval of "Okie type" farm workers centered on the poor appearances of their clothes, automobiles, and residences. The belief that the distinctiveness of the least settled and dependable farm workers went beyond characteristics of class or poverty to something more basic in their origins was carried in the designation of these people—and

only these people—as Okies (Hatch 1979:129-130, 135; see also Gregory 1989).

There is a certain type of person in [Shandon]. Perhaps they're here for a couple of years and then move away, but might return several years later. Or maybe they stay here continuously but change jobs periodically. These people don't care for their children. They're like a bunch of rabbits—they don't care what their children do, like at school, so long as it doesn't put the parents out any....Their children are usually filthy and run around all the time (Hatch 1979:130).

Okies were not included in community social life, and usually stayed too briefly in Shandon to establish kin ties. They tended to reside in small, run down houses on Shandon Alley, curiously out of the way, despite being in the center of town. In contrast, foreman type workers were members of the social community.

The distinctions emerging in Shandon in the late 1980s about different kinds of Mexican farm workers and households carry over from the "foreman type" and "Okie type" dichotomy, and are framed similarly in local rhetoric on the basis of respectability, stability, and responsibility. This standard is itself measured by visible signs of poverty, occupation, instability, irresponsibility, poor care of property, inappropriate social behaviors, and at key points in the process, ethnicity.

Ethnic tension associated with housing discrimination in Shandon therefore is not primarily a result of ethnic competition over economic or political resources, enacted by means—or because-of a highly stigmatizing racial philosophy, as scholars have usually theorized ethnic and racial competition in the United States.^v For example, housing discrimination typically is theorized as competition for residential use of the same housing space, a fundamentally economic argument (see, for example, Olzak 1992). Some observers have argued that the tensions between immigrants and natives are not significant until an economic downturn creates a sense of economic competition between the two

groups, as Cornelius (1982) has contended in regard to Mexican immigration.

A better model for Shandon's housing discrimination is a demographic theory of discrimination. Many researchers have noted that the level of ethnic tension in economic and political arenas is affected by the size, composition, and visibility of the subordinate ethnic population. Demographic theories of discrimination are prominent in early macroscopic and quantified studies of American race relations (see, for example, Sandmeyer 1991[1939]; Williams 1947; 1964; Blalock 1967; 1982), and have more recently made a return in a limited form (see, for example, Olzak 1992). But demographic factors are not absent from ethnographic studies of ethnic relations. Although they are of minor importance in Barth (1969:20-21), population demography is central to Bruner's (1974) comparative study of two Indonesian cities. Even more relevant, Leonard (1992:33) observes that opinions about various ethnic groups in rural California fluctuate "according to region and speaker," and are "highly dependent on local demographic configurations."

Blalock (1967) has argued that larger or rapidly growing subordinate ethnic populations are viewed as threatening by the dominant group, and therefore draw the stiffest and most discriminatory sanctions. High visibility and weak conformity to local norms of behavior are factors he found that aggravated the discriminatory reaction. These explanations apply well to housing discrimination in Shandon.

Three Small Houses

The quality of ethnic relations in Shandon deteriorated at the close of the 1970s and into the early 1980s. At that time, grain farming was in a small boom, cattle production was beginning its decline, and alfalfa was recovering from its first decline. Local vineyard acreage was expanding for the second time from roughly 2800 acres in 1979 to about 3400 acres by 1982, requiring additional farm workers to do so. The ranches where

Mexican farm workers were employed no longer had housing sufficient for their growing numbers, so many Mexicans were compelled to move into town. Most Anglo farm workers had already been displaced from the community, and the number of Mexican immigrants--and particularly those living in group rather than family households--increased rapidly.

With the rising numbers of Mexican farm workers in Shandon at the start of the 1980s, there was less need or possibility for them to remain physically invisible to the rest of the community. In 1978 and 1979 the adult members of two large extended families arrived in town to work in one of the new local vineyards where a relative of one family held a foreman's position. At first, some of them stayed in the garage of an old ranch house near the vineyard, without heat, hot water, or a bathroom. Soon, the two groups of siblings, some with spouses, became acquainted with a local ranch owner who rented several small, old houses to them. The owner described these houses to me not so much as proper houses, but as "shacks." Additional family members arrived in 1981 and 1982, and the earlier arrivals sheltered those who were there only seasonally, as well. One of the new Mexican tenants remembered the houses this way:

There were three houses. The houses were all right. The most that can be said about them is that they were very old. Various things didn't work. The bathroom plugged up. But, it wasn't dirty.. There was one in front of the post office, one in the middle, and one here in front of the library, which is where I lived. The house in front of the post office had only one room, nothing more. And like ten or twelve people lived there in that room. Men and women. They were relatives, brothers and cousins. [The owner] knew, she couldn't fit them all in. I tell you, [the owner] wasn't concerned about the money.. The house in Shandon where I lived had three bedrooms, a kitchen, and a living room. There were five rooms in all. Living with my husband and I were my father-in-law, my mother-in-law, and a brother-in-law, and my children during vacations. And my father-in-law came for two months and then left. So did one of my brothers-in-law. My brother-in-law and other people, relatives, lived there [when the houses were torn down].

As luck would have it, the houses stood in the very center of Shandon, directly across the street from the post office and store where nearly every resident of the community ventured daily to pick up their mail, chat, and perhaps purchase something at the store. The store had long been an important place where local women socialized, and a bench between the store and post office served a similar role for the older men of the community. The traditional social role of these places was irrevocably altered by the presence of the numerous, unassimilated newcomers in such close proximity.

Tensions mounted with American residents as the now highly visible Mexicans—mostly single men—engaged in behavior which offended and angered the natives. The old guard complained of loud Mexican music blaring from the three homes facing the store and post office, and of trash accumulating in the yards. Men used a hose in the yard to bathe, urinated in the alley next to the store, and drove recklessly in the center of town. After work hours, some drank alcohol publicly and were visibly intoxicated at times. They were unaware of the sharp, historically entrenched, opposition to drinking held by many Shandon residents (see Hatch 1979).

Emboldened by their numbers and sometimes by drink, and with little else to occupy their time after work hours, men would sometimes stand around and whistle at women or teenage girls who came to the store. When one immigrant made the mistake of touching the wife and daughter of a local grower, the grower returned with a shotgun and made a citizen's arrest. There was also an attempted rape of an Anglo woman by Mexican men. At some point in the early 1980s, many native Shandon residents ceased sending their wives and older daughters to the store due to the sexual harassment they anticipated receiving from Mexican men. Mexican parents did the same for precisely the same reason, although the Americans generally were unaware of this.

In September 1982, two Mexican men in a car allegedly were chased by two Anglo men with shotguns for having "run over one man's foot." The Mexican men were injured when their car crashed into a house as they attempted to flee from the two Anglos. Police and Highway Patrolmen cordoned off the town briefly, but many Anglo residents downplayed the incident at the time (Seager 1982). By 1990, as one resident put it, Anglos generally were "too embarrassed by it" to discuss it with me.

Some of the original Mexican tenants moved out of the three houses as alternatives became available, complaining of the noise and trouble brought on by the crowding and poor behavior of some of the other tenants. Once again, however, few Americans in the community were aware of these details. Those who relocated moved to other old houses in Shandon, or to a group of trailers established in an almond orchard a mile or two from town.

The three houses deteriorated considerably due to the heavy use of over-occupancy combined with their already advanced age. Drains stopped up. A faucet would break. Holes appeared in the floors. The owner was so busy with maintenance of the buildings that she could no longer participate in the Senior's Club.

In 1981 a campaign was begun to have the three houses condemned, their tenants evicted, and the buildings demolished. It was initiated by a member of the Women's Guild, an old community organization with an established record of influence with the county government, but which was teetering on the brink of extinction at that time. The few remaining Guild members took up the issue and circulated a petition to have the houses condemned. Potential health code violations were pointed out by members of the campaign. "Next to the toilet you could see the ground through the floorboards," recounted one participant. Indeed, a septic problem occurred and wastewater ran out on the ground.

The campaign failed in its first year. But after a photo of the houses was placed in the Paso Robles newspaper at the

suggestion of a realty agent, the County took action and condemned the buildings in 1982 or 1983. The owner hired a neighbor to demolish them with a bulldozer and a large chain. Most of the tenants moved to Paso Robles. The land once occupied by these houses still stands vacant.

The Making of the Image of the Mexican Tenant

American perceptions of Mexicans were colored by this experience with Mexican farm workers as tenants and neighbors. This set of events and others like it, favored stereotyping of all Mexicans collectively as inferior tenants and neighbors, and low quality additions to the community. But a few residents explicitly blamed only a select subset of the Mexicans. This subset was described as either a particularly poor quality of Mexican immigrant believed to have first appeared in the community in the early 1980s, or more commonly as groups of single men. In the early 1980s, however, the negative view held sway, because very few Mexicans were known as individuals by anyone other than their employers. It would take time for contrasting experiences to accumulate for the latter, more discerning view, to gain more widespread acceptance.

Those who saw Mexicans collectively as the source of trouble often made global generalizations, such as "Mexicans have this thing about trash," or "Mexicans destroy everything." Such people seldom distinguished between Mexicans and Mexican Americans, offering instead such opinions as, "I don't know, they all look alike to me." A common stereotype used either to defend substandard and overcrowded living conditions for Mexicans or to object to a Mexican presence in the community is that Mexicans like living this way because, as the stereotype goes, these conditions are better than what they had in Mexico. A Mexican American farm worker who had visited the homes of two Mexican co-workers in rural western Mexico provided eyewitness testimony to this effect: dirt floors, unscreened windows, and tortilla shops or other small businesses run out of people's homes. Others

justified their generalizations about the quality of housing in Mexico by reference to this eyewitness account.

The wife of a former sugar beet grower who fled the community at this time asserted that Shandon was no longer a good place to raise a family, and that the unity of the old community had disappeared. When she and her husband had moved to Shandon the 1960s, they were one of a number of local irrigation farmers. School activities kept her and her husband involved in community affairs. She used to ride horses to the school to pick up her kids and go riding in the hills with a prominent rancher. But as the vineyards were planted, many fellow farmers and farm hands were displaced. A "different type" of Mexican farm worker appeared in their place who had little regard for local norms and formed "a society unto themselves." The town's store began to cater to the Mexicans with the products they carried and Anglos stopped shopping there. From this woman's perspective, the town now contained separate American and Mexican communities, and the Mexicans made it an unsafe place, especially for girls. She cited poorer attendance at school sporting events as emblematic of the community's loss of unity.

Virtually every senior, long-term resident of the community described Shandon as having become a "Taco Town," a "Little Tijuana," or as a place the Mexicans had "invaded," or "taken over." And they deeply resented this turn of events. From their perspective, the changes in the community were so great that it could no longer be described as a "cow town" of ranchers and cowboys, or a town of independent farmers. "We want our town back the way it used to be," declared one retired old guard rancher descended from some of the community's original homesteaders. This sentiment was nearly universal among old guard residents and the elderly in particular.

Many of these same old guard residents viewed the prospects for Mexican integration as improbable, because Mexican immigrants are thought to be reluctant to Americanize. Their commitment to

life in America is questioned and doubted. It is felt that most intend to return to Mexico, and that those who do remain here will not adopt local customs. One relatively self-critical old-timer noted that residents know that they should try to integrate the newcomers into the community as would have been done in the past, but they do not know how to go about it with the Mexicans. But in truth, the will to integrate Mexican newcomers has often been hard to find.

But this sense of a community lost due to Mexican encroachment shades into a more discerning perception of Mexicans by other segments of the community. This alternative viewpoint did not blame all Mexicans for the local problems. A member of the organization that campaigned to condemn the three houses in the center of town described the occupants as a lesser quality of Mexican who hadn't maintained the residences. They were, she observed, principally single men living together, and went on to contrast them with a Mexican family she knew and respected that had also been in Shandon since the 1970s. These views were more common among recent settlers in the community, including many commuters and vineyard managers.

Distinctions Americans make between recent immigrants and longer term immigrants and their descendants provide a basis for those willing to differentiate among acceptable and unacceptable Mexicans. One vocal critic complained of the problems of trash blowing in from a neighboring Mexican yard, of drunken men living in a group household harassing his teenage daughter in years past, and of signs in Spanish in the post office. But he and his wife dearly love their son-in-law and his mother, a Mexican immigrant, and eagerly anticipated the birth of their grandchildren. Placing any qualifications on their love for these "family members" because they, too, were Mexicans of a sort was unthinkable to them.

Indeed, most American adults whose children had grown up with Mexican playmates in school easily distinguished these known

families who were accepted as "members of the community" from the lesser known, and especially from the predominantly male group households. As a result, when their children attended school and who their schoolmates were often determined which families they knew of and accepted. Typically, these were the Mexican families that had settled during the 1970s, if not earlier, and whose children had been in local schools long enough to be thoroughly integrated. They were referred to as "Americanized" or "our" Mexicans, Mexican Americans, or even as "my people" when from the same community (Parkfield, in this case), and were contrasted with "wetbacks," "Mexican Mexicans," or "migrants."

Thus, although Mexicans might be collectively demonized as inferior tenants and neighbors, if an individual family was able to remain in the community long enough to establish a reputation as responsible workers, tenants, and family, then they could obtain the references needed to procure and retain housing in town when the need arose, as it inevitably did. All of the factors influencing this process selectively favor keeping family households in the community over group households.

Over time, therefore, a growing recognition of variability among Mexican residents was emerging for Anglo and Mexican Americans, one with its roots in the old dichotomy between respectable "foreman type" farm workers and undesired "Okie type" farm workers. By 1990, long-outspoken critics of Mexican settlement in the community could be heard comparing some of these respectable Mexicans favorably to newcomer Anglo commuter residents, merely because of the greater care some of these Mexican families gave to their yards and homes.

New homes, old homes, and trailers

As the 1980s wore on, the suburban housing development which had begun quietly in 1979 began to gain momentum and to further influence the housing problem. Rising residential property values added an economic incentive to ethnic discrimination in housing that had been absent previously. For the most part,

there was little direct competition for housing between the Mexican farm workers and the incoming commuters. The commuters settling in Shandon were rarely interested in acquiring the oldest homes that were all the Mexicans could afford, and few old homes were replaced by new ones. The construction of new homes selling for more than \$100,000 did not alleviate the pressing needs of the farm workers for more housing, because they could not afford the new homes. But in some instances these new economic conditions did drive more Mexicans from the community.

A few farm workers were forced to give up their residences because their rents were raised. One man working at a local vineyard and living with his wife and children in a small cottage behind a house in Shandon had his rent raised twice in two months, finally to a level he could not afford. The family moved to Paso Robles, and the man then had to commute to work in Shandon. An Anglo tenant replaced his family at the cottage.

An Anglo man who had recently retired and settled in Shandon bought property adjacent to his home to resell at a profit as property values continued to rise. Across the street stood a dilapidated old house occupied by a non-family group of mostly male Mexican farm workers. The retired Anglo man believed the presence of the run down and overcrowded building held down the value of the property across the street he hoped to sell. After he made a series of complaints to the County Health Department, the offending building was condemned in early 1990, the tenants were evicted, and the building was destroyed. When he described his actions to a group of long-time residents of Shandon, he was uniformly congratulated for what he had accomplished.

About the same time, an old guard family evicted their Mexican tenants from two old homes they owned. In one, the primary tenants had concealed the fact that they were sheltering additional residents. These additional residents caused damage which worsened because the owner was slow to make repairs. The primary tenants were held accountable, of course. The other

house was the subject of a drug raid. The tenants, it turned out, were no longer those the owner had originally rented to. The owners decided they would no longer rent to any Mexicans. The first house, which was both larger and in better condition, was sold to a local contractor who restored it. The primary former tenants cast off their less reliable coresidents and were lucky enough to find another old home to rent in Shandon. They subsequently established reputations as exemplary tenants, and several years later they purchased an old home in the community. All the other tenants from the two houses left the Shandon region.

The second house was repaired by the owners and again put up for lease, but only Mexicans expressed interest in the small building. A Mexican family invested weeks of effort to persuade the owners to lease the house to them. "They really didn't want to rent to Mexicans," one family member recounted. The owner frankly admitted this, and did so to illustrate to me how the image of all Mexicans easily but unfairly could be influenced by the bad behavior of a few.

Oh yeah, there was no way we would rent to Mexicans. This poor [Mexican] lady, apparently they were living at a place on the ranch, and they were going to tear the house down and build an office or something. And they just had to get out. And she just kept coming back and coming back, and coming back, and saying, "Oh, but I'm clean, Mr. Sherman, I'm clean! I'm clean!" But she is. She is clean! But, it was the first time Bill ever...but he had had it with Mexicans up to here. He just was not gonna rent to a Mexican. And, we're glad that we did [rent to this Mexican family]. We'll be gladder if they buy the property.

Groups of men increasingly were pushed out of the community to Avenal in Kings County, where more old houses were available for group households and Mexicans have a stronger foothold. One vineyard manager thought he had closed a lease on a house in town for a group of his workers, but when the owners learned that it was a group of Mexican farm workers who would become the tenants, they found a way to back out of the deal. These men ultimately

obtained housing in Avenal, over 40 miles by car from their daily place of work.

Persevering families might still find local housing, but this required lucky timing-an affordable house had to be on the market-and either considerable persistence with a landlord or the intervention of American friends as references. A farm worker with whom I had become acquainted lost both his job and his employer-provided trailer home for his family of five in a dispute with his employer. A skilled vineyard tractor driver, he was justifiably unconcerned about finding new employment, for this he accomplished in less than a week. But the task of finding a new home was both daunting and traumatic for the family. The mother and children were brought to tears first by the prospect of homelessness, then by the frustration of encountering prejudiced landlords. They were turned down at both the available locations in Shandon, because they were Mexican.

But they were persistent with the owner of a small, very old house. The owner refused to rent to them, claiming that their teenage daughters would bring men into the house to stay with them, so the house would soon become overcrowded. The farm worker sought out two persons to intervene in his behalf, a bilingual Mexican American who often assisted local farm workers in a number of matters, and an out of town landowner from an old local family who had once rented him a trailer to live in. The out of town Anglo landowner even accused the landlord of anti-Mexican prejudice to pressure him into renting to the family. Both individuals provided references for the family which eventually overcame the landlord's reservations. This family also proved to be exemplary tenants and in less than a year, old guard residents living nearby were openly admiring the care the family demonstrated for the yard and house.

By 1990 most of the severely overcrowded households in town had been eliminated. The buildings themselves had been demolished, or the tenants replaced by single family households.

Conditions most comparable to those of the three old houses in the center of Shandon in 1978 to 1982 still existed at a collection of five trailers several miles outside of town on agriculturally zoned land. The trailers owed their existence to the general shortage of housing farm workers could afford, aggravated as it was by the practice of discrimination. The County had found this to constitute an illegal trailer park. They fined the owner, who was a member of a long-time grain farming family.

The owner refused to evict his tenants, insisting that he was acting in a humanitarian fashion, and that the real culprits were the local vineyard operators who would not provide sufficient housing for their workers and thereby fueled a "climate of racism" towards Mexican farm workers. He was perceived by the tenants and other Mexicans in the community as a savior. In fact, he received several requests every month to create additional housing space for more Mexican farm workers. But the vineyard operators saw him as another example of the "hypocrisy" of the older families, who either excluded the Mexicans from Shandon housing entirely or rented substandard and overcrowded housing to them while blaming the vineyards for the housing problem.

And the trailers were substandard. Two families shared a single trailer, and all were overcrowded. The trailers housed more than 30 people, though how many more is unclear. The smallest was merely a travel trailer with five men calling it home. There were health code violations—missing screens, inadequate sanitation, exposed electrical wires, chicken coops nearby, etc.—which the owner attempted to correct, but could not keep pace with. A feud simmered between two extended families, occasionally resulting in violence.^{vi} Warned repeatedly by a couple in town concerned with the overcrowding and feuding, and fined for several years by the County, the owner refused to evict any of the tenants, even after warning the troublemakers that he might do so. Not until the feud ended in the shooting deaths of

two farm workers in 1994 did the County finally close the trailers down.

All of Shandon knew of the existence of the trailers, and many residents were aware of the occasional trouble there. But few complained, because the trailers were out of sight and out of the daily lives of most of the community. They were, in fact, precisely what many members of the community had hoped to achieve through housing discrimination: the removal of "the problem" to someplace else, making the tenants invisible again. The Mexicans of Shandon, the local vineyard managers, and personnel at the local schools who were faced with the problems generated by the long-running feud between the trailer's residents were the only community members who regularly expressed concern about the condition and overcrowding of the trailers or the associated social conflicts.

The Position of the Grape Growers

The grape growers' opinions about the trailers allude to their unique position among Shandon's Anglo residents in regard to Mexican workers and the housing problem. I have noted that the recent prosperity of grape growing relative to grain, cattle, and hay has not only elevated the standing of grape growers in some ways, but has also made them the targets of some criticism. Of course, employers who depend heavily on a minority labor force are often the targets of substantial criticism from within their own ethnic group, although this is most often encountered when the minority worker competes economically with members of the majority for the same jobs.^{vii} There is little such job competition between American and Mexican workers in Shandon, but the desire to exclude from the community those who are deemed low quality residents makes the issue of housing for Mexican farm workers one of the most common criticisms directed at grape growers.

Old guard residents tend to blame vineyard managers for bringing Mexican farm workers to the region in the first place,

but they are even more likely to blame them for not housing their workers out of town and out of daily sight on the ranches. Vineyard managers, in turn, are prone to blame the old guard for alternately excluding the Mexicans from residence in town or for providing only overcrowded and substandard housing.

One vineyard manager explained that he and the other managers all benefited from the reservoir of labor at the trailers. But that did not justify the conditions that existed there, he contended, and like the other managers, he condemned the trailers' owner as a "slumlord." One of the vineyard managers complaints about substandard housing for their workers is that it brings bad publicity to their industry.

A few grape growers invested in local housing on a small scale as they prospered and as others sold off their excess housing in the late 1970s and 1980s. They did rent to Mexican workers, and in one case ultimately sold a house to a Mexican farm worker and his family. These growers had similar experiences with group households as other landlords, and some of these homes were also demolished. So the managers do express some sympathy for the stresses of social change felt by the old guard, and join in criticism of certain behaviors sometimes engaged in by Mexican workers in the community.

Nevertheless, grape growers collectively remain enormously defensive on the issue of farm worker housing, because they feel so much pressure to take responsibility. Why must they pay the cost for discriminatory practices of others, they ask. The opposed parties to this debate privately voice harsh criticism of one another over this very issue, impugning base motives and grievous flaws of character in one another. With these two groups engaged chiefly in finger pointing, Mexicans workers and dependents in Shandon cannot hope for a rapid improvement in the local housing situation.

The Position of Shandon in County Housing Politics

By 1990, Shandon had acquired a blemished reputation with members of the San Luis Obispo County government as a community from which there were a disproportionate number of complaints about substandard housing. The County paid a private firm to conduct a county-wide needs assessment for farm worker housing at this time, and Shandon received some attention in their report that may have reinforced this impression.^{viii}

Some members of the County government held an image of the housing and ethnic relations problems in Shandon that assumes the housing and ethnic relations problems are begin with, and are aggravated by, Mexican family settlement. In this image, settled farm working families are said to have a "shirt-tail effect," meaning that they draw seasonal workers—and the ethnic tensions associated with them—to the communities in which they settle, because they are the most reliable source of housing for the seasonal workers. Settled families do frequently shelter some seasonal workers, mostly kin from Mexico. But these are clearly not the conditions that lead to the greatest ethnic tensions and conflicts. Those conditions predate and were substantially reduced by the shift to settled families in Shandon.

Advocacy for farm worker housing in the county consists largely of efforts to convince the grape growers to provide housing for their workers. Housing advocates hold growers responsible for the shortage of farm worker housing, though they do not always express this openly to the growers. They find justification for their views in the exceptional cases of flagrant misconduct by individual growers that arise every few years. When housing advocates in the county blame growers for the housing problem, they overlook the equal relevance of old guard residents' rejection of Mexican farm workers. From the grape grower's perspective, these housing advocates appear to be taking the side of their local critics among old guard residents.

Families valued

The combination of insufficient low cost housing and housing discrimination in Shandon did not halt the growth of the Mexican population in the community, but it did constrain and configure it so that growth favored permanently resident families over groups of single and seasonal workers. The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 accelerated the pattern of family settlement. Wives and children joined husbands and fathers who already resided in the community. In this manner some of the same "single" males categorized by the community as "a low quality of Mexican" were transformed virtually overnight into the more acceptable heads of families. It is not surprising, therefore, that most of the Mexicans viewed as "respectable" by 1990 had emerged from this faceless mass of "low quality" Mexicans in the early 1980s.

Even though American residents were rarely aware of these specifics, they did note a more favorable atmosphere in the community. A few Americans clearly understood why it had come about. As one longtime ranch and vineyard foreman observed in 1991,

There are more families now among the Mexicans than there were in the early 1980s. When single men were common, there were more problems.

The vineyard managers concurred. "Things are much better now," or "Things have really settled down," were common pronouncements from these men, from the longer-term Mexican residents, and from a variety of other members of the community.

Indeed, in 1989 all of the local vineyard operators could claim quite legitimately that the majority of their workers lived elsewhere, especially Paso Robles or Avenal, but some come from as far away as Bakersfield, roughly 90 miles to the east. At least two-thirds of the region's vineyard workers live outside the Shandon community. For the vineyard operators, the fact that so many of their workers live outside the local community proves to be an effective argument to defuse the criticism from old

guard residents. It also provides a way to gloss over the record of local discrimination. For example, one vineyard manager suggested,

These people are logical. Most of them live in Avenal and that way they can come here or go to the [San Joaquin] Valley in season.

The Mexican workers remaining in Shandon are principally crew foremen, irrigators, tractor drivers, labor contractors, and other more permanent workers in the vineyards and ranches of the region. Even many workers in these types of positions have had to seek housing outside of Shandon. However, the responsibility of housing the majority of the peak seasonal migrant workforce has been transferred largely to Paso Robles and Avenal. Thus, those workers remaining in Shandon have the qualities of the old "foreman type" farm workers, and hence, have a degree of respectability that seasonally migrant workers do not have. These settled workers and their families are not perceived as the same threat to the community that seasonal workers are, and many long-time resident's fear of Shandon becoming the kind of "Mexican town" that Avenal is now widely perceived as being is substantially reduced.^{ix}

In 1990 and 1991 as community concern rose about the pace of suburban development and the poor care even some of the commuter residents took of their yards, some of the voices which had long been critical of Mexican tenancy began to notice that some of the best maintained older houses in Shandon were occupied by Mexican farm working families. One of those cited was rented by the tractor driver's family with the teenage daughters who had been forced to move out of their employer-provided trailer. Another was the home owned by a former resident of the long-since demolished three small houses in the center of town. A third was that of the couple that had to persuade the old guard owners to rent to them after their previous experiences with Mexican tenants. Those who cited these examples sometimes did not know the individuals living in these houses, and rarely knew their

particular histories. All they knew or cared of was that the families occupying these homes showed more concern for the appearance of the community than did some Anglo residents of more expensive houses. That made these Mexicans more desirable community residents than the new Anglos who showed less care for their homes and yards.

But this opinion has been voiced quietly, for widely divergent and emotional beliefs are held by friends and neighbors, and Mexican respectability is still a relatively new idea in town. Anglo friends still warn or tease one another that Mexicans would be moving in next door. This, too, reveals the divisions among Anglos: "Good," said one, after receiving such a warning. "Maybe *they'll* take care of the place."

In one chilling sense, and from a decidedly narrow point of view, housing discrimination appears to work. It is due in part to discrimination that local ethnic tensions have been reduced, at least in the short run. As Williams (1947: 60) and Blalock (1967) predict, this is what happens when the undesired subordinate group has been dispersed to other communities. Of course, this is a Shandon-centered and an American-centered perspective. It does not take into account the suffering of those driven from the community, those of the Mexicans who remain, nor those of residents in other communities receiving Shandon's unwanted. And on this latter point, there is at least some ill-will toward Shandon. In 1990 an official in Paso Robles' government stated that the city resented receiving the workers from neighboring rural communities and intended to find a way to get rid of them.

The most important result for Shandon, however, is that housing discrimination was a process through which the community's gatekeepers—at first its old guard families but subsequently a more diverse group—successfully selected for the personal characteristics they favored among residents of the community. Housing discrimination facilitated this without

requiring the Americans to significantly integrate the Mexican adults into their social network. The Americans noticed the reduction in ethnic tensions without necessarily grasping that it occurred because the remaining Mexican families shared in common with them elements of the old guard's standards of behavior and community life. Until the late 1980s few American residents considered it likely that any Mexican farm workers could meet the standards of a "foreman type" worker, but as the commuter resident population grew at the end of the decade these same people began to express their surprise and satisfaction with many of the Mexican residents.

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ⁱ This paper is taken primarily from Chapter 6 of my forthcoming doctoral dissertation, "Newcomers in a Small Town: Change and Ethnicity in Rural California," Department of Anthropology, University of California, Santa Barbara.

ⁱⁱ For general theoretical treatment of transnationalism, see Sassen-Koob (1982), Sassen (1989; 1990), Glick Schiller *et al.* (1992), Basch *et al.* (1994), and Kearney (1995). Massey *et al.* (1987) primarily address the rural Mexican end of transnationalism, though their study also addresses California. Rouse (1989) considers a transnational circuit linking communities in Mexico and urban California, whereas transnationalism in rural California appears in Kearney and Nagengast (1989), Palerm (1989; 1991), and Palerm and Urquiola (1993), among others.

ⁱⁱⁱ For convenience, and because it is a fair reflection of local perspectives, I have used the boundaries of the local school district to define the spatial extent of the community. Shandon Unified School District lies entirely within San Luis Obispo and Monterey counties, but historically has also drawn from portions of western Kern County.

^{iv} My research in Shandon is based in part on data obtained from daily systematic, repetitive, and longitudinal observations of people's words and actions in public and private settings regarding ethnic relations. I also conducted interviews with a broad cross-section of the community's residents, including ranchers, growers, farm workers, school employees, community leaders, seniors, youth, and others. Finally, I compiled yearly demographic data for the period 1967 to 1990 primarily from local school records, but augmented by interview data. By addressing this time frame, I was able to document the shifts in agriculture and community life from the point at which Elvin Hatch's research leaves off to the time of my field research.

^v See, for example, Myrdal (1944), Williams (1947), Solomon (1956), Blumer (1965), Blalock (1967), Blauner (1972), Bonacich (1972; 1976), Barrera (1978), and Almaguer (1994).

^{vi} The original cause of the feud was never made entirely clear to me. The feud was between in-laws, and included at least one extramarital affair and a bad debt. But one local Mexican woman explained it to me as a matter exacerbated by drugs and alcohol,

and fighting between the growing number of children who were joining their parents in these cramped conditions in 1989-91. Though the children did not start the feud, they may have kept it alive.

vii See, for example, Blalock (1982:56). This theory of ethnic and racial conflict perhaps is best known from Edna Bonacich's model of split labor markets (Bonacich 1972; 1976). The position for grape growers that I describe here is not historically unique. Earlier in the history of the California wine industry, growers and vintners attempted to defend their Chinese workforce from discrimination and violence, though they ultimately failed to do so (Heintz 1977; Chen 1984).

viii If this report did buttress belief among County officials that Shandon was the site of more than its fair share of housing problems as I strongly suspect it did, this is an unintended consequence of the use of examples from Shandon. The report itself contains a disclaimer explaining that the examples were not unique to the community (Peoples' Self-Help Housing Corporation 1990: 46, n. 18).

ix This is not to say such fears are gone for good. After my departure from Shandon, a proposal to build a very large poultry operation a short distance from town was hotly contested within the community. In opposition to the project were environmentalists and opponents of more Mexican farm workers coming to the community. In support of the project were contractors and others seeking business opportunities, and advocates of unrestricted private property rights. There was some interest among farm workers, as well, for potentially more remunerative and stable employment.