



LOS ANGELES CITYWIDE HISTORIC CONTEXT STATEMENT

Context: Industrial Development, 1850-1980

Theme: Labor History, 1870-1980



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PREFACE

This theme is a component of Los Angeles' citywide historic context statement and provides guidance to field surveyors in identifying and evaluating potential historic resources relating to labor history. Refer to www.HistoricPlacesLA.org for information on designated resources associated with this theme as well as those identified through SurveyLA and other surveys.

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INTRODUCTION

The theme of Labor History examines the history of working people in Los Angeles from 1870 to 1980. The historic context is divided into six sections organized chronologically. It begins with the early pre-industrial era of the city, moves into the battle over the "open shop," and then traces the rise of industrial unionism and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in the 1930s and 1940s. The final two sections explore labor's challenges in the Cold War era, the trend toward globalization and restructuring after 1970, and its impact on organized labor. This historical context covers the major developments, events, and people significant in the history of labor in Los Angeles.

This theme contains three sub-themes. The first is "Organizing the Workers," which includes properties related to organized labor (including union halls, union headquarters, educational centers, and other buildings used to promote workers' rights and well-being) and homes or other places associated with leaders important in the labor movement. The second sub-theme is "Sites of Struggle," which includes public places and work sites where significant labor actions occurred. The third sub-theme is "Working-Class Communities," which includes properties that portray workers' social, political, and recreational way of life, such as worker housing, restaurants, cafes, and other places.

Evaluation Considerations

The theme of Labor History may overlap with other SurveyLA themes as follows:

- Properties may also be significant under themes within the Industrial Development context for their association with specific industries.
- Properties may also be significant under themes within the Public and Private Institutional Development context.
- Properties may also be significant under themes within the ethnic/cultural contexts, primarily those related to civil rights and labor.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

Despite the many qualities that attracted settlers to Los Angeles – the sunshine, open spaces, leisure, the lure of Hollywood – working people encountered formidable challenges. As historian John Laslett writes, “many newcomers found that, contrary to myth, they had to struggle just as hard to make a living in Southern California as workers did in the East and the Midwest – and sometimes even harder.”¹ Labor faced lower wages in many sectors, open shops in the early years, and geographic fragmentation which hindered the process of labor organizing. Racial discrimination by unions also hampered labor power and unity. If these factors made working life harder and the union movement weaker in Los Angeles than in other parts of the United States, laborers nonetheless played a crucial role in the history of Los Angeles as the backbone of the city’s growth, development, and prosperity. Workers from many ethnic and racial backgrounds played a part in this history.

1870-1890: Early history

The early Los Angeles economy was centered on agriculture, with only a small manufacturing base in the 1850s and 1860s. The earliest enterprises were small, local-oriented, operations run by self-employed craftsmen. Industry developed slowly over the following decades with a spike during the 1880s boom. While Los Angeles’ relatively late industrialization hampered the formation of a solid labor movement, a small, tenacious trade union movement took hold by the late 19th century. Federations of skilled craftsmen dominated this movement into the 1930s. Most were racially exclusive, allowing only whites to join, a practice that persisted for decades.²

The most significant, long-lived union to form in this early period was Local 174 of the International Typographical Union (ITU), chartered on October 1, 1875. The ITU agitated for union recognition, wage increases, and equalizing women’s wages and working conditions. As other unions began forming in the 1880s, the ITU stood at the vanguard of the city’s labor movement as the showdown over the open shop commenced, pitting labor against the rabidly anti-union publisher of the *Los Angeles Times*, Harrison Gray Otis. As early as 1883, Otis began aggressive actions against the ITU and labor unions generally, a battle that lasted for decades.³

Beginning in the 1870s, Los Angeles workers also sought change through politics, establishing a pattern that distinguished early California unionism from other regions. A series of labor-oriented political parties supported platforms favorable to white workers and generally leaned further leftward than the more conservative American Federation of Labor (AFL), the main national trade union body.⁴ In the 1870s, the most significant labor-oriented party was the Workingmen’s Party (WP), which held its first open meeting in Los Angeles in August 1877. A regional offshoot of the controversial party based out of San Francisco, the Los Angeles WP quickly gained wide support.⁵ Their platform called for a broad array of reforms, including government safeguards of labor rights, restrictions on Chinese immigration (which

¹ John H.M. Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough: Los Angeles Workers, 1880-2010* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 7.

² Grace H. Stimson, *Rise of the Labor Movement in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955), 3; Michael Kazin, “The Great Exception Revisited: Organized Labor and Politics in San Francisco and Los Angeles” in *Pacific Historical Review* 55, 3 (August 1986), 375.

³ Stimson, *Rise of the Labor Movement*, 32-37.

⁴ Kazin, “Great Exception,” 375, 376-379. As Kazin notes, AFL leaders tended to oppose the political left (376).

⁵ In May 1878, the Party established the short-lived *Voice of the People*, the first known labor newspaper in Los Angeles. From August 1878 to May 1879, it ran the *Daily Star*, under the editorship of Isaac Kinley (Stimson, *Rise of the Labor Movement*, 21).

they believed harmed conditions for white workers), and curbs on business influence in government. In 1878, the WP swept into office in Los Angeles, winning twelve of fifteen council seats, and other municipal offices. Although the WP had disintegrated by the mid-1880s, it left three legacies: it forged a strong link between labor and politics; it created a “tradition of racial hostility” between organized labor and nonwhite, unskilled workers⁶; and its organizational structure became a model for later stable, popular unions.⁷

The 1880s boom brought more business and manufacturers to Los Angeles. Skilled workers began forming unions, many of which are still operating. Workers in the building trades led the pack, forming unions for plasterers, carpenters, and bricklayers, among others. Notable was Local 56 of the Brotherhood of Carpenter and Joiners of America (known as “Old 56”) formed in 1884, which assumed a leadership role in helping organize other building trades workers.⁸ Arthur Vinette, founder of the Brotherhood, was a key leader of Local 56 and ultimately played a central role in the city’s broader labor movement. Unions were also formed by metalworkers, bakers, cooks, waiters, retail clerks, post office clerks, upholsterers, and railroad workers. Workers waged strikes for such issues as the nine-hour day, wage increases (to reach parity with other cities), the hiring of white workers only, and the closed shop. The 1887 strike of the Coast Seamen’s Union in San Pedro marked the first major conflict between an employers’ organization and a labor union, and ultimately strengthened the fairly radical Knights of Labor in Los Angeles.⁹

When the 1880s economic boom went bust by decade’s end, the labor movement was weakened. Still, by this point labor had established a foothold in Los Angeles with the formation of a number of stable unions. The movement had achieved several political goals, including the passage of the federal Chinese Exclusion Laws of 1882 (California labor was a pivotal force behind that measure), and the formation of a string of labor-oriented political parties that gained some success in local elections (including the WP, Knights of Labor, and People’s Party).¹⁰

1890-1920: The battle for Los Angeles - the closed v. open shop

If the Gilded Age was a tumultuous era in America, when capitalist excess came under fire by a wide array of reformers and critics, this same confrontational climate defined the story of labor in turn-of-the-century Los Angeles. An all-out battle between business and labor erupted over the future of the city: would it be an open shop or a closed shop town?¹¹ Would the rights of workers or business prevail? As labor unions gained strength in the early 1900s, a powerful, unified business elite fought back, determined to quash organized labor and ensure that Los Angeles remained a bastion of “industrial freedom.” This, they believed, was critical to the city’s growth and future.¹²

⁶ Stimson, *Rise of the Labor Movement*, 16-31, quote at 29. Also see Alexander Saxton, *Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); David Selvin, *Sky Full of Storm* (San Francisco: California Historical Society, 1975), 10-12.

⁷ Kazin, “Great Exception,” 383-84.

⁸ Local 56 raised funds to build a headquarters for all of the carpenter unions, purchasing a lot on San Pedro Street. Stimson, *Rise of the Labor Movement*, 69-71.

⁹ Stimson, *Rise of the Labor Movement*, 68-77, 81-87.

¹⁰ Stimson, *Rise of the Labor Movement*, 53-67, 92-97.

¹¹ “Closed” shop – or “union” shop – refers to workplaces where all workers are required to belong to a union in order to work there. “Open” shop refers to a workplace where employees are not required to join a union.

¹² Carey McWilliams, *California: The Great Exception* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1949), 127; Kazin, “Great Exception,” 371. Kazin explores labor’s “total engagement” with politics in his article.

The conflict was set off by increasingly unified labor activism after 1890. The 1890 strike of Typographical Union Local 174 was the first major skirmish, which began when Otis joined with three other newspapers to cut wages twenty percent. When the union refused, Otis responded by firing all of his unionized workers and hiring strikebreakers to replace them. Local 174 went on strike, and initiated a consumers' boycott of the People's Store, a large advertiser in the *Los Angeles Times* with a mostly working-class clientele. By 1900, the conflict escalated "from a small, local dispute into a citywide struggle over the open shop, with ramifications at the state and even the national level."¹³ By the mid-1890s, the ITU's struggle against Otis attracted national recognition and support.¹⁴

Both sides consolidated forces during this conflict. The business elite launched a full-blown war against labor unions, seeking to make Los Angeles an open shop city. This campaign was spearheaded by "the disciplined and well-financed juggernaut" of the Merchants and Manufacturers Association (M&M), founded in 1896, and led by Otis and F.J. Zeehandelaar.¹⁵ Otis used the *Los Angeles Times* to attack unionists as "reckless and vicious radicals" and he frequently red-baited them. By 1900, the M&M had "the support of virtually all of [Los Angeles'] leading shipping, lumber, oil, iron and steel, and haulage firms, as well as the citrus growers in the surrounding countryside."¹⁶ Businessmen used other anti-union strategies, including firing union workers, employing industrial spies, and enlisting the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) to intimidate unionists. The open shop became a major selling point in booster campaigns for the city.¹⁷ For its climate of labor hostility, Los Angeles stood in stark contrast to San Francisco, where a strong union movement made it one of the earliest closed shop cities in the nation.¹⁸

Workers also consolidated forces to counteract this open shop push. In September 1890, they founded the Council of Labor – a centralized council that united an array of craft unions – with P.H. Hurley of the Typographical Union serving as the Council's first president. The Council rallied behind the printers during its fight against the *Times*, and spearheaded union drives in a number of sectors. Under the subsequent leadership of Fred Wheeler, it also reached out to minority and women workers.¹⁹ In 1904, the Council of Labor was revamped as the Los Angeles Central Labor Council (CLC), a powerful federation that would dominate the city's labor movement until the 1930s. The CLC essentially served as AFL headquarters in Los Angeles. In both San Francisco and Los Angeles, these "city centrals" wielded much greater power than in Eastern and Midwestern cities, bringing visibility to working-class issues.²⁰

¹³ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 27.

¹⁴ Stimson, *Rise of the Labor Movement*, 176-178, 181-182.

¹⁵ Kazin, "Great Exception," 387; Stimson, *Rise of the Labor Movement*, 189.

¹⁶ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 27.

¹⁷ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*. Laslett notes that Otis was something of an outlier among newspaper editors nationally in his rabid anti-unionism; in most other regions, there was fairly broad acceptance of unionism during the Progressive era.

¹⁸ Stimson, *Rise of the Labor Movement*, 1.

¹⁹ Stimson, *Rise of the Labor Movement*, 123-133; Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 50.

²⁰ Stimson, *Rise of the Labor Movement*, 206, 276; Kazin, "Great Exception," 375-76, 389.



*Central Labor Council headquarters on Maple Avenue, ca. 1906, Demolished
(Los Angeles Public Library)*

Two key figures in these efforts were Wheeler and Lemanuel Biddle. Hailing from Philadelphia, Biddle had been deeply involved in labor and socialist organizations before arriving in Los Angeles in the late 1880s. An able organizer and administrator, he held a number of leadership posts in the Los Angeles labor movement – including AFL district organizer – and he spearheaded the formation of about eighty unions in the area. He was a frequent nominee for political office on the Socialist ticket, led several cooperative ventures, and was embraced as a beloved figure by the labor movement; Biddle frequently preached – and sang – his message on street corners. After his death on Labor Day 1916, his tombstone read, “Grand Old Man of the Los Angeles Labor Movement.”²¹ Wheeler arrived in Pasadena in 1892 after working in Florida, and quickly immersed himself in the labor movement. He was elected president of the Council of Labor in 1898, took a leadership role with the AFL in Los Angeles, helped organize the first teamster union in the city, and was a frequent Socialist candidate for local office.²²

Another leader in this period was Frances Nacke Noel, who was significant for forging alliances among socialists, feminists and trade unionists in Los Angeles. Noel made ideological connections between labor and women’s rights. She organized the Women’s Conference of Los Angeles County in 1911 which united middle and working class women around the protection of women and children in home life; she campaigned for women’s suffrage with the support of the Central Labor Council. In 1913 Noel ran for Los Angeles city council on the Socialist ticket (and lost), and in 1914 helped organize a Women’s Trade Union League chapter.²³ Still, women workers were often ignored by the mainstream unions and left to fend for themselves. Some women organized on their own, such as the domestic servants who created the Progressive Housemaid Club in 1913 for mutual self-help. At their clubhouse on South Alvarado (demolished), they offered low-cost housing and amenities to members.²⁴

²¹ Stimson, *Rise of the Labor Movement*, 98-99. Stimson refers to him as “Lemuel”; John Laslett refers to him as “Lemanuel.”

²² Stimson, *Rise of the Labor Movement*, 205-206; Kazin, “Great Exception,” 382.

²³ Sherry Katz, “Frances Nacke Noel and ‘Sister Movements’” in *California History* 67, 3 (Oakland: University of California Press, Sep. 1988), 180-189. Noel lived in Highland Park (mentioned in Laslett, *Sunshine*, 64)

²⁴ Eileen Wallis, *Earning Power: Women and Work in Los Angeles, 1880-1930* (Reno: University of Las Vegas Press, 2010), 44. The Clubhouse was at 1309 S. Alvarado.

During the 1890s, unions were formed and revived among plumbers, bakers, machinists, clerks, shoe and clothing store workers, cooks, waiters, musicians, railway workers, stone cutters, boilermakers, and building tradesmen.²⁵ From 1900 to 1904, the number of unions jumped from twenty-nine to eighty-two, while membership rose from about 2,100 to 10,000.²⁶ Still, the open shop forces kept labor unions weaker in Los Angeles compared to other cities where unions were growing faster.²⁷

Despite the open shop campaign, Los Angeles workers waged several notable strikes. In the “El Traque” strike of February 1903, about 500 Mexican track workers in Los Angeles struck against the Pacific Electric Railway, demanding a wage increase. While the strike ended quickly when the company fired sixty-eight workers, two months later they regrouped and 1,400 workers went on strike – again ultimately failing. Despite the workers’ loss, this strike was significant in two ways. First, it marked the first time white trade unionists were willing to help Mexican workers establish a union of their own. Second, it was a pioneering union for Mexicans in Los Angeles, marking the first in a long series of labor actions undertaken by Mexican workers, who – along with other nonwhite workers – were mostly excluded from white trade unions.²⁸ In 1906, the Typographical Union stepped up its struggle against the *Times* by launching a new strike and boycott, calling for union recognition and the eight-hour day. Their efforts failed in the face of LAPD protection of imported strikebreakers, and donations to the *Times* by an employers’ trade association. In 1907, the Teamsters also lost their strike in the face of M&M opposition.²⁹

These clashes spurred an even bigger wave of strikes citywide from 1910-11. In June 1910, 1,500 metalworkers struck for higher wages and union recognition in the largest strike of skilled workers in Los Angeles’ history to that date. Particularly targeting Llewellyn Iron Works, the strike prompted violent clashes with the LAPD and the passage of an anti-picketing ordinance by the city council. Other strikes were launched by tracklayers, leather workers, metalworkers, tailors, and brewery workers.³⁰ With his relentless actions against unionists and anti-union coverage in the *Times*, Otis was emerging as labor’s number one foe in the city.

²⁵ Stimson, *Rise of the Labor Movement*, 116-122, 123-127, 136-141.

²⁶ Stimson, *Rise of the Labor Movement*, 204, 210.

²⁷ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 43. From 1904-1909, for example, Los Angeles unions lost three-quarter of the eighty-three strikes they waged against employers, and union membership was fairly low overall.

²⁸ Lemanuel Biddle, secretary of the CLC at the time, announced the formation of Unión Federal Mexicanos, with A.N. Nieto as executive secretary. Two days later the union had 900 members. Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 33-35, 44-46; Stimson, *Rise of the Labor Movement*, 267; Juan Gomez-Quinones, *Mexican American Labor, 1790-1990* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 75-84. Also see Charles Wollenberg, “Working on ‘El Traque’: The Pacific Electric Strike of 1903,” *Pacific Historical Review* 42, 3 (August 1973), 365.

²⁹ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 44-46.

³⁰ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 56-59

Los Angeles' escalating class conflict climaxed in October 1910 with the bombing of the *Times* building by brothers James and John McNamara; the pair were leaders of the Bridge and Structural Iron Workers Union. Job Harriman, a socialist leader and labor advocate, defended the brothers at their trial. Although the bombing crippled much of this strike wave – many employers simply refused to meet demands of picketing workers – unions in the building and brewery trades (the city's largest employers) actually won major concessions around this time.³¹



On October 1, 1910 at 1:07 am, a bomb exploded in an alley adjacent to the LA Times building known as "Ink Alley."
(Los Angeles Public Library, Security Pacific National Bank Collection)

In the face of powerful employer opposition, labor continued to view politics as a viable way to fight for worker rights and to combat the open shop. Labor parties frequently ran candidates for local office and unionists joined left-leaning parties (e.g. the People's Party in the 1890s and Socialist party in the early 1900s). In 1902, the Union Labor Party formed and ran candidates for municipal office; in 1906, the Public Ownership Party called for public ownership of utilities, the eight-hour workday, and an end to scab labor. Both parties lost in municipal elections.³² A strong connection was forged between the Socialist Labor Party and the trade union movement in Los Angeles, especially as the city's Progressive leaders seemed to turn their back on workers. Job Harriman, who arrived in Los Angeles in 1895, was a key leader of the Socialist Party in both Los Angeles and the state, tirelessly championing the cause of working people. Harriman, Biddle, and Wheeler – among others – ran for office on the Socialist ticket, all supporting labor unions.³³

As tensions continued to escalate between labor and the open shop lobby, the Labor-Socialist link reached high tide from 1909 to 1914. In 1909, Wheeler ran for mayor of Los Angeles on the Socialist ticket, carrying all five working-class wards and eastside voters, but lost narrowly.³⁴ Two years later, Harriman won the primary election for mayor, carried by "the longstanding grievances of [Los Angeles'] workers and small business owners, who resented the power of the M&M and its allies."³⁵ Just four days before the run-off election, the McNamara brothers confessed to the bombing of the *Times* building which essentially sank Harriman's chances of winning, given his role as their defense lawyer.³⁶

These events, along with other forces, set the labor movement in decline and secured the open shop in Los Angeles.³⁷ During the 1910s, strikes and attempts to organize by longshoremen, Pacific Electric railway workers, metal workers, and others, mostly failed despite federal support for unionism during World War I. The continued power of open shop leadership in Los Angeles ensured these defeats. Hostility toward radicals and foreigners had grown so heated during the war that in 1919, the California

³¹ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 39-40, 52-58.

³² Stimson, *Rise of the Labor Movement*, 224-236; Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 46-47.

³³ In 1901-02, the socialists regularly convened at Tuesday evening open-air meetings at First and Los Angeles Streets, challenging the city law that prohibited such gatherings (Stimson, *Rise of the Labor Movement*, 228).

³⁴ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 49-50; Stimson, *Rise of the Labor Movement*, 225.

³⁵ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 53.

³⁶ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 59-61.

³⁷ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 67-75.

state legislature passed “one of the most draconian criminal syndicalist laws in the country,” making it illegal to advocate violence or join any group that did so.³⁸ The measure would soon be used against labor, especially the militant International Workers of the World (IWW), which embraced grassroots industrial unionism. The IWW had concentrated on organizing farmworkers, but in 1919 waged a vigorous campaign to organize maritime workers in San Pedro. This effort exploded into one of the most contentious labor battles in California history when maritime workers went on strike in May 1923. Employers countered by using the LAPD, strikebreakers, and the press to defeat the laborers. The LAPD arrested several hundred strikers and IWW staffers – including Upton Sinclair, who was arrested on Liberty Hill for reading the U.S. Constitution aloud – on criminal syndicalism charges. The strike soon collapsed, and the LAPD – with support from the Ku Klux Klan – succeeded in driving the IWW out of Los Angeles by 1924. While the maritime workers had gone down to defeat in Los Angeles, in San Francisco they had become a strong union, symbolizing the power of the open shop forces arrayed against Los Angeles labor in this period.³⁹

1920s: Limited gains in the open shop city

Before 1920, the city’s economy was centered on trade, the professions, and service, with a fairly small manufacturing base. This changed in the 1920s as industry expanded in tandem with population growth. The population boom – driven by real estate, oil, and the film industry – stimulated the broader industrialization of Los Angeles. During the 1920s, Los Angeles’ rate of industrial growth exceeded all major American cities, led by the fast growing petroleum, motion picture, meatpacking, and printing industries. Los Angeles outranked all Pacific coast cities in manufacturing output by 1929.⁴⁰ White-collar work likewise grew rapidly. From 1900 to 1930, Los Angeles was the nation’s “corporate frontier,” with its expanding commercial and service economies. This sector created jobs for clerks, agents, salesmen, stenographers, and office workers. “White-collar workers became pivotal if unheralded actors” in Los Angeles’ transformation into a corporate metropolis. By 1930, nearly twenty-five percent of working males in Los Angeles held a white-collar job.⁴¹

The city, in turn, developed a highly distinctive economic geography by the 1920s, marked by clustering at the core and dispersal to the periphery. In terms of industry, three distinct zones emerged. The east side Industrial District was the city’s old industrial center, concentrated east of Alameda Street between north Broadway and 9th Streets. This district “housed an extraordinary diversity of land uses, activities, and people; foundries, boilerworks, patternmakers’ shops, iron works, stores, restaurants, saloons, and residences.”⁴² These factories were typically locally owned, labor-intensive, operations such as apparel and food processing, and they produced mainly for local markets. A second industrial zone was dominated by branch plants for auto, tires, and steel. While they started out producing for local and

³⁸ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 78. Kazin notes that the Act was aimed largely at the IWW and fledgling Communist Labor Party (Kazin, “Great Exception,” 396).

³⁹ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 79-82.

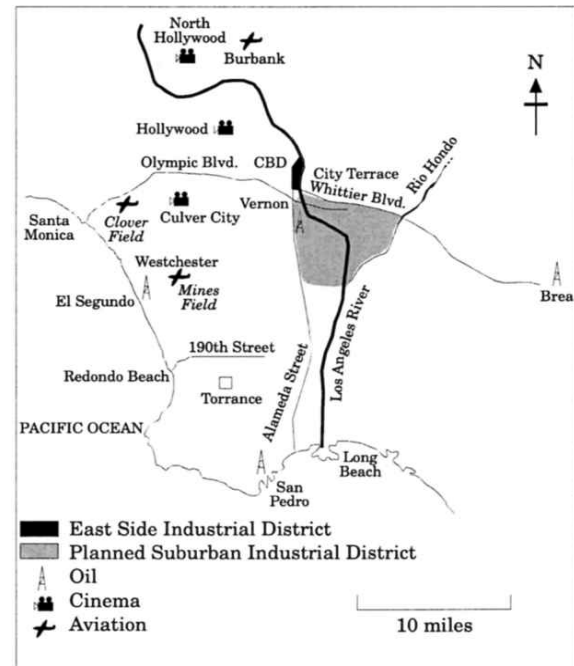
⁴⁰ Becky Nicolaides. *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 48.

⁴¹ Clark Davis, *Company Men: White-Collar Life and Corporate Cultures in Los Angeles, 1892-1941* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 3-4.

⁴² Greg Hise, “‘Nature’s workshop’: industry and urban expansion in Southern California, 1900-1950,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 27, 1 (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2001), 78-79.

regional markets, by the 1930s they were reaching national markets. These were mostly assembly-line factories that clustered in the Central Manufacturing District southeast of Downtown, in the Union Pacific Industrial District, and the suburbs radiating southward. A third industrial zone was located farther afield in the agricultural periphery, where industries producing for national markets took root, including motion pictures, oil, and – by the late 1930s – aircraft.⁴³

The offices and firms that employed white-collar workers clustered Downtown. About forty percent of these workers, in turn, lived just west of Downtown in a 40-block area that stretched from 1st to 10th Street, between Spring and Figueroa. They lived in apartments and boarding houses, in places like the 58-unit Minnewska, 46-unit Zelda, or 85-unit Granada complex.⁴⁴ The second major residential hub for these office workers was Vermont Square, in southwest Los Angeles, where many single family homes were subdivided into apartments, duplexes, and triplexes that were rented out to workers. In both sections, white and blue-collar workers lived side by side, suggesting common lived experiences among these laboring groups.⁴⁵



*Industrial districts of Los Angeles, 1900-1950.
(Hise, "Nature's Workshop," 78)*

In this climate of rapid economic expansion, the heavy hand of business – committed as ever to the open shop – made union work an uphill battle in Los Angeles. In the 1920s, the labor movement remained a lot smaller and weaker than in other industrial cities. Yet modest gains occurred in some sectors. The Hollywood film industry was one. As the number of production workers rose from 6,000 to 30,000 from 1921 to 1940, they faced a number of challenges – especially job instability – as film production rose in the 1920s. In 1916, the AFL sent an organizer to Los Angeles to help studio workers unionize, and they formed Local 33 of International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE), which became the dominant union in Hollywood. In 1917, the producers established their own group the Motion Picture Producers Association (MPPA), to counteract the union. Local 33 waged strikes in 1919 and 1921, both unsuccessful in the face of producer resistance and jurisdictional disputes among unions. After more friction, IATSE and the producers signed the Basic Studio Agreement of 1926, which recognized IATSE and the locals of carpenters, painters, electrical workers, and musicians under its rubric, but also mandated conflict resolution by a committee of producers and union heads in New York. This agreement remained in force for over twenty years.⁴⁶ A few other gains in the decade are worth noting. Membership in the Downtown Building Trades Council rose from 8,814 to 12,328 in the early 1920s, Musicians Union Local 47 improved its bargaining position by controlling the supply of studio musicians, and the Typographical Union won the 44-hour work week. The garment and furniture

⁴³ Hise, "'Nature's workshop,' 74-92; Mike Davis, "Sunshine and the open shop: Ford and Darwin in 1920s Los Angeles," *Antipode* 29, 4 (Hoboken: Wiley-Black, 1997), 356-382; Nicolaidis, *My Blue Heaven*, 49.

⁴⁴ All of these apartments were on Grand Avenue.

⁴⁵ Davis, *Company Men*, 19, 85-90.

⁴⁶ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 61, 84-89. Many studio workers lived in the Gower Gulch area.

industries – both predominated by Mexican American workers – also made progress in union organizing.⁴⁷

Yet, as John Laslett writes, “In nearly every other trade, ranging from the metal shops to the electrical trades and from longshore work to the construction industry, the story was one of apathy, lost strikes, and declining union membership.”⁴⁸ A primary cause was the continued power of the open shop. In June 1921, for example, the M&M opened a free employment bureau Downtown for non-union workers, requiring applicants to pledge to support “the American Plan of Open Shop.”⁴⁹ Other factors included jurisdictional disputes among unions, the rise of welfare capitalism nationally (wherein employers provided fringe benefits to workers as a way of winning their allegiance over unions), and abundant opportunities for homeownership in Los Angeles (which offered workers a semblance of economic security apart from the workplace).⁵⁰ Reflecting this overall weakness, labor was largely marginalized in politics during the decade.⁵¹

1930-1940s: Triumph of unionism in Los Angeles

The 1930s marked a major turning point in the history of labor in Los Angeles, heralding the rise of a powerful union movement and demise of the open shop. A critical catalyst was the New Deal and its policies that supported unionization. This federal mandate spurred the rise of the CIO, marking an alternative to the skilled, craft-oriented, white dominated AFL toward a broader, more racially inclusive type of industrial unionism. As a result, “from 1870 to 1940, California labor had evolved from a lily-white social movement (...) into a multi-racial formation dominated by large industrial unions.”⁵²

These changes grew out of the deep hardship wrought by the Great Depression. In 1933, unemployment was near thirty percent in Los Angeles. In the building trades, joblessness hit fifty percent as the construction industry ground to a halt. As homeownership rates tumbled, squatter camps arose in places like Alameda and 16th Street south of Downtown where sixty families lived in shacks in 1932.⁵³ The local official response to the crisis was woefully inadequate, consisting of measures that ranged from meager county aid to the forced repatriation of ethnic Mexicans to save on relief and purportedly protect jobs. Workers themselves formed co-ops throughout Los Angeles. Some joined the Communist Party, which staged massive street demonstrations on behalf of the city’s jobless, while many working-class voters supported Upton Sinclair’s End Poverty in California (EPIC) campaign (though organized labor was lukewarm toward Sinclair).⁵⁴

⁴⁷ Kazin, “Great Exception,” 39, n49.

⁴⁸ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 102.

⁴⁹ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 102-103.

⁵⁰ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 102-104; Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*, passim, on homeownership. Welfare capitalism was particularly common for white collar workers in the 1920s, such as those working at Security Trust and Savings and Los Angeles First National Bank (Laslett, *Sunshine*, 28).

⁵¹ Kazin, “Great Exception,” 396.

⁵² Kazin, “Great Exception,” 400.

⁵³ Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*, 57-58; Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 108.

⁵⁴ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 110-122.



In 1933, striking garment workers were served lunch at strike headquarters, 1110 S. Los Angeles Street. (LAPL Herald Examiner Collection)

Despite federal backing of unionization, Los Angeles' open shop lobby continued to resist unions for much of the 1930s, avoiding compliance by forming company unions and refusing to recognize independent unions. Not until 1939-40 was the labor movement finally able to overcome the open shop forces to gain acceptance as a "legitimate part of civil society."⁵⁵ Still, during the 1930s, the city's workers waged a number of important labor actions.

The first wave of strikes in 1933-34 was instigated, remarkably, by Latina garment workers whom the AFL had largely ignored. In fall 1933, Mexican women dressmakers in Los Angeles initiated the formation of an International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) local.⁵⁶ Rose Pesotta – a Jewish immigrant from Eastern Europe – played an instrumental role, helping raise the workers' consciousness about unionism in a manner notable for its cultural sensitivity toward Latinas. In October 1933, about 3,000 dressmakers went on strike for union recognition and higher wages.⁵⁷ Though employers reneged on the negotiated settlement, the strike was notable for raising morale and union membership, and proving

wrong the assumptions among white male union leaders that Latinas could not be organized. It also catalyzed industrial unionism among Mexicans in Los Angeles, challenging the notion among many white employers that Mexican workers were uniformly docile.⁵⁸

Other significant strikes followed. In May 1934, the longshoremen in San Pedro went on strike as part of a larger action along the entire Pacific coast. The dockworkers – an ethnically mixed group of Anglo, Scandinavian, Mexican, Croatian and Portuguese – were a tight-knit work community. When the ship owners brought in strikebreakers, the strikers retaliated violently in a melee on May 14th that left striker Richard Parker dead and several others injured. The federal government ultimately enforced a settlement favoring the strikers, demonstrating the importance of federal power in bolstering unionism during this time. In 1935, a strike among furniture workers illustrated the rising tide of interethnic industrial unionism in Los Angeles. For years, the furniture industry included skilled white male workers, Jewish cutters and seamstresses, and low-paid Mexican "helpers." In 1935, a Communist-run local of the Independent Furniture Workers Union responded to a wage cut of the Mexican workers by organizing *all*

⁵⁵ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 131-132; Louis B. and Richard S. Perry, *A History of the Los Angeles Labor Movement, 1911-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), Chapter 15.

⁵⁶ On September 27, 1933, they held an organizational meeting at Walker's Theater, involving "1,500 spirited dressmakers." Zaragosa Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights: Mexican American Workers in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 85.

⁵⁷ Strike headquarters were at 1108 S. Los Angeles Street, Los Angeles (Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 134).

⁵⁸ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 132-135, 137; Vargas, *Labor Rights*, 84, 89-90; George Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 232-35.

of the workers and launching a strike. They won, showing the potential power of industrial unionism in which workers were united across skill, gender, and racial lines.⁵⁹

This exemplified the approach of CIO, formed at the national level in 1935. The following year, it sent organizers to Los Angeles who were rebuffed by the conservative AFL-dominated Central Labor Council. CIO organizers proceeded anyway, organizing workers in the rubber, auto, and shoe industries, among others, with key support from the ILGWU, steelworkers, and longshoremen. In contrast to the AFL, the CIO welcomed in workers of all skill levels, races, and genders, and organized into large industrial unions. It took a “social justice” approach to its work, forming committees on political action, minority organizing, and community-based fundraising. By 1938, 50,000 workers in Los Angeles belonged to CIO unions. CIO leadership was generally dominated by white, male unionists, such as Philip “Slim” Connelly who was director of the CIO Industrial Council. Its largest growth occurred during World War II, when the defense industry expanded dramatically in Southern California.⁶⁰

By 1937, the CIO was pulling more and more Mexican workers – from steel, furniture, construction, and other industries – into industrial unionism. Some, such as Manuel García Jiménez, Frank López, Tony Rios, and Bert Corona, played critical leadership roles. Three CIO-affiliated locals in Los Angeles – all mostly Mexican in membership – were considered the most active CIO locals in the city. CIO-based unionism, in fact, had come to occupy a central place in Mexican American activism in the 1930s, as it linked labor rights and civil rights.⁶¹ Luisa Moreno was an exemplary figure in this process. In 1938, the Guatemalan-born activist used five hundred dollars of her own money to travel the southwest to organize local committees of the National Congress of Spanish Speaking Peoples (*El Congreso*). Rooted firmly in the labor movement, Moreno “recognized very early on that workers’ rights for Mexican laborers could be gained only by also working for the civil rights of Mexican women and men.”⁶² *El Congreso* is considered the first national civil rights conference for Latinos in the United States.⁶³

Another important CIO affiliate was the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA), especially active in Southern California from 1937-1940. Two feminist labor organizers – left-wing activist Dorothy Healey and Luisa Moreno – played key roles in spurring the cannery workers (mostly Latinas) to organize; they emphasized a dual commitment to labor and civil rights. At the Cal San plant near Boyle Heights in July 1939, the UCAPAWA formed Local 75. A month later, over four hundred men and women went on strike against Cal San, demanding better wages, union recognition, and the dismissal of abusive supervisors. When Cal San management refused to negotiate, the workers organized a 24-hour picket by children in front of the homes of owners George and Joseph Shapiro. These actions, along with strong community support, helped bring a union victory. Luisa Moreno took charge of Local 75 in late 1940, and rose to become the nation’s leading Latina labor organizer. Local 75 in turn became one of the most well-known unions in Los Angeles.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 140-144.

⁶⁰ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 144-147. CIO headquarters were at 5851 Avalon Boulevard, Los Angeles.

⁶¹ Vargas, *Labor Rights*, 154-55; Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 240-42.

⁶² Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 245.

⁶³ Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 239, 244-45, 249-52; Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 148.

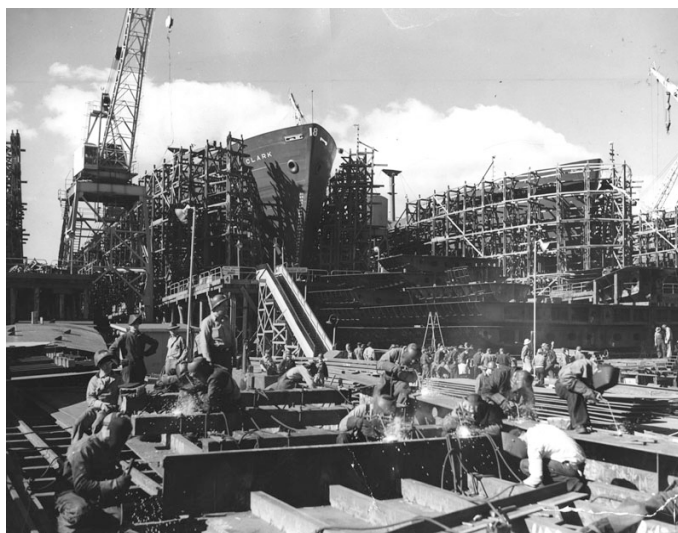
⁶⁴ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 138-140; Vargas, *Labor Rights*, 114, 150-51, 153; Gómez-Quiñones, *Mexican American Labor*, 140-41; Vicki Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1987). The Cal San Plant was at 1583 Industrial Street, Los Angeles (see: *The Associated Grower*, vol. 1, no 1, March 1920). Moreno became vice president of the West Coast CIO (Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 138).

From 1937-1941, the CIO and AFL competed for the loyalty of workers in a number of job sectors in Los Angeles, sparking jurisdictional rivalries among furniture workers, garment workers, longshoremen and teamsters. These disputes were especially prolonged in the nascent aircraft industry, as rival organizational drives were launched in nearby cities: at Lockheed in Burbank, Northrup in Hawthorne, and Douglas in Santa Monica. The CIO made major gains in automobile, steel, aircraft, meatpacking, electrical equipment, and rubber. The AFL's largest growth occurred among the Teamsters, IATSE, and the carpenters. Among white collar-workers, the AFL organized the city's clerical workers (under several unions, including the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees), while the CIO organized workers in the Department of Water and Power.⁶⁵ Overall, the AFL was much stronger in Los Angeles than the CIO, commanding three times as many workers.⁶⁶

By the late 1930s, the open shop was virtually at its end in Los Angeles, a result of several factors: federal policy favorable to unions, the increased militancy of the labor movement, the arrival of new business leaders who accepted unionism, and the 1939 LaFollette Committee and National Labor Relations Board hearings that exposed the abuses of the open shop lobby.⁶⁷

The rising clout of labor in Los Angeles did not translate into a strong labor-Democratic coalition in Los Angeles as it did in other American cities for a few reasons: the relative lack of European ethnic workers in Los Angeles (who were the backbone of this coalition elsewhere), the historic linking of the Republican party to reform in Los Angeles, and – most importantly – the relatively smaller size of the industrial workforce in Los Angeles. Not until World War II did labor begin to exert more political influence in Los Angeles, but even then it was dominated by the business-oriented approach of the AFL more so than the inclusive industrial unionism of the CIO.⁶⁸

World War II transformed Los Angeles in many ways, including expanding the economy through new defense industries and diversifying and strengthening the position of labor. The war created an immense, immediate need for aircraft, ships, and other war materiel. Los Angeles quickly became the center of aircraft production in the state. By 1942, Los Angeles area factories had won sixty-four percent of the state's defense contracts for aircraft (fighters and bombers) and twenty-eight percent for shipbuilding. Many of these factories were huge, such as the Calship plant on Terminal Island which employed 45,000 to 55,000 workers at its peak.⁶⁹



In Los Angeles Harbor, shipyards operated intensively to produce ships during WWII. (LAPL Herald-Examiner Collection)

⁶⁵ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 153-163.

⁶⁶ In 1939, the LA CIO Industrial Council had 39,420 members, while the citywide AFL had 120,000 (Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 171).

⁶⁷ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 172-173; Kazin, "Great Exception," 397.

⁶⁸ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 126-130.

⁶⁹ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 175-176.

At the same time Los Angeles' industrial base was growing, the workforce expanded and diversified. To replace men leaving for military service, women joined the paid workforce in unprecedented numbers. From 1940-1944, 167,000 women in Southern California took jobs in aircraft, shipbuilding, and service industries. "Okie" migrants, Mexican Americans and African Americans also joined the industrial workforce. For the first time, many ethnic Mexican men were hired in relatively well-paid industrial jobs, many in the defense industries, while Mexican women found new job opportunities in textile, aircraft, ship building, and food processing plants.⁷⁰ Many blacks migrated to the region for defense jobs (the city's black population jumped from 67,000 to 125,000 from 1940-1945). After meeting staunch resistance by both employers and unions, blacks were finally hired in the defense plants in substantial numbers by mid-1943, when labor shortages intensified. The efforts of the Shipyard Workers Committee for Equal Participation (SWCEP), formed in 1943 by African American labor organizer Walter Williams, were pivotal in opening the factory door for blacks, even more than President Roosevelt's famous Executive Order 8802, which prohibited racial discrimination in defense plants. The novelist Chester Himes captured the racial hostility confronting blacks in the Calship shipyards in his novel *If He Hollers, Let Him Go* (1945).⁷¹

New mass-produced housing tracts such as Westside Village and Westchester – built near the Douglas Aircraft factory in Santa Monica and North American Aviation in Inglewood – were hastily constructed to house the massive influx of new workers. Public housing projects were also constructed to house defense workers – five permanent and twenty-one temporary – mostly in the Watts, Alameda corridor, and port areas.⁷²

The national wartime accord between organized labor and the federal government had an expansive effect on Los Angeles' labor movement. In exchange for labor's no-strike pledge for the duration of the war, the National War Labor Board expanded the "maintenance of membership principle" to apply to the entire labor movement. In Los Angeles, this resulted in a doubling of union membership, which brought the region more in line with other major industrial cities. By 1945, the CIO Industrial Council had grown to 118,410 members, while the AFL had 143,986. The AFL Teamsters registered the largest growth. This rate of union growth was the fastest in Los Angeles' history – both before and since that time. In turn, a large number of collective bargaining agreements were signed during the war, including wage increases in many sectors.⁷³

Despite these gains, internal divisions and conflicts characterized the labor movement during the war. There were a number of jurisdictional disputes between the AFL and CIO, such as the two-year conflict over which union body would represent Los Angeles' streetcar workers (they ended up affiliating with the AFL's Amalgamated Association of Street Electric Employees). Some unions also showed deep ambivalence toward nonwhite and women workers. For example, Lodge 92 of the Boilermakers Union forced black workers to form a separate auxiliary union, and barred them from gaining skilled, better-paying jobs. International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 13 in San Pedro, in turn, treated black longshoremen as "temporary workers" and ensured they were the first fired at the end of the war. Male leaders of the United Auto Workers and International Association of Machinists also showed ambivalence toward female aircraft workers. Many women war workers faced enormous

⁷⁰ Ricardo Romo, *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988), 165. For example, Mexican Americans were about 12% of all Lockheed aircraft employees, and 80% of them were women who worked in detailed assembly, general assembly, and riveting (Vargas, *Labor Rights*, 233).

⁷¹ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 176, 180-192.

⁷² Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 178-179.

⁷³ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 196-200, 205.

pressures to quit at war's end, even if some would have preferred to stay. Yet at the same time, workers showed a strong sense of unity during the war, uniting for the goal of an Allied victory. The interracial work of groups like the Los Angeles Council for Civic Unity and the Civil Rights Congress illustrated this spirit of unity.⁷⁴

1945-1970: Gains and setbacks in an era of prosperity

World War II pulled the United States out of the Depression, and ushered in what one historian has called “the golden age” of capitalism – a time of economic vitality, job growth, and rising standards of living. In Los Angeles, the war left a strong economy and labor movement in its wake. The city's economy was especially bolstered by federal defense spending in developing high-technology industries like electronics and aerospace.⁷⁵ The 1950s-1960s, then, saw positive gains for Los Angeles' workers, evident in higher wages, low unemployment, the opportunity for affordable home ownership, as well as strong buying power in a consumer-oriented economy. This allowed many working families to climb into the middle class. Yet Cold War red-baiting also put labor on the defensive, creating schisms within the movement and quelling the more militant voices.⁷⁶ At the same time, while minorities made notable gains in some job sectors, job discrimination persisted and created uneven fortunes across Los Angeles' working class.

Labor's power peaked in 1945-46, when thirty-five percent of the nation's workers belonged to a union and when a national wave of strikes involving 4.6 million workers broke out. Unions remained numerically strong in Los Angeles as membership climbed through the 1950-60s – a reflection of the region's expanding economy and population. In 1964, the Los Angeles metro area had the state's largest number of union members, surpassing San Francisco at the end of World War II. Yet the *percentage* of all workers in unions was comparatively lower, signaling the rise of service, high-tech, and white collar jobs, all sectors with lower unionization rates.⁷⁷



*During the 1945 strike of the CSU against IATSE, many of the major movie studios were affected, including Paramount Studios.
(LAPL Herald-Examiner Collection)*

⁷⁴ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 185-186, 200-204.

⁷⁵ Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty!* 3rd Edition (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011), quote at 991-92; Robert W. Cherny, Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo, and Richard Griswold del Castillo, *Competing Visions: A History of California*, Second Edition (Boston: Wadsworth, 2014), 276; Albert Camarillo, *Chicanos in California: A History of Mexican American in California* (San Francisco: Boyd & Fraser, 1984), 88.

⁷⁶ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 236.

⁷⁷ The Los Angeles Metro area had 803,000 union members in 1964, compared to 481,000 in San Francisco (Selvin, *Sky Full of Storm*, 75-76).

Although the strike upsurge did not hit Los Angeles as hard as it did the East and Midwest, Los Angeles had its fair share of strikes, some of which illustrated the effects of the Cold War. In March 1945, a major strike of film studio workers began, lasting on and off for several years and involving over 10,000 workers. It began as a jurisdictional dispute between the AFL's IATSE and the CIO's Conference for Studio Unions (CSU), over who would represent studio carpenters and set decorators. IATSE, in collusion with the studio heads, began accusing the CSU of communist influence, sparking a number of strikes and heated conflicts on the picket lines. While the most violent, headline-grabbing conflicts erupted at Warner Bros. Studios in Burbank, workers also picketed Paramount Pictures. The strike lasted until 1949, when the CSU was finally defeated, and IATSE became the sole union for Hollywood craft workers, a position it still holds. During much of the conflict, CSU and its leader Herbert Sorrell were red-baited, with backing by the Screen Actors Guild (SAG).



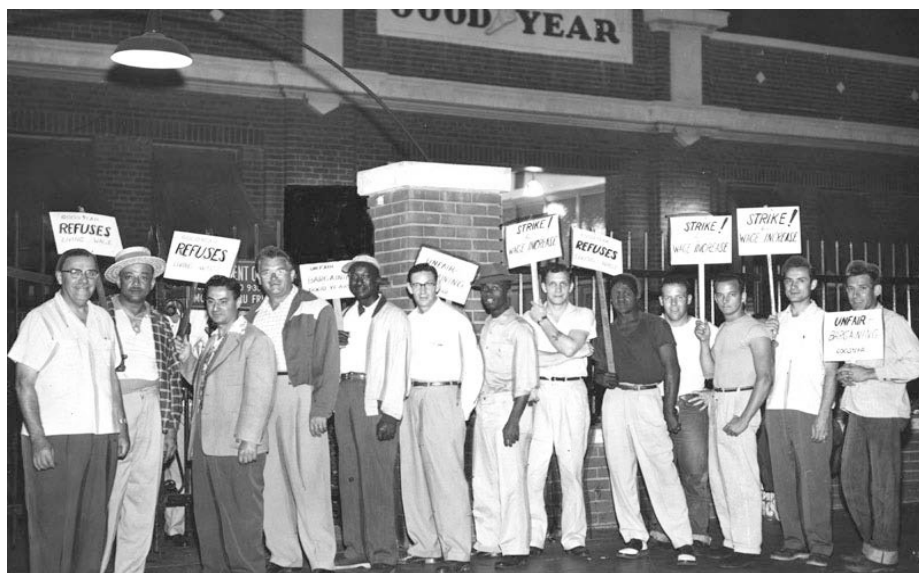
Long-term home of the Screen Actors Guild, an entertainment union representing all actors in television and motion picture, the headquarters building at 7750 W. Sunset Boulevard was dedicated in 1956. (SurveyLA)

Ronald Reagan, then an actor serving as second vice president of SAG, claimed this fight against communist infiltration in Hollywood around strikes like this helped set him on the road to politics. The strike also pushed Warner's leaders from left to right, politically.⁷⁸ Other strikes in the postwar years involved transit, garment, and retail workers, who demanded better wages and job security.

⁷⁸ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 210-214; "Sheriffs Arrest 326 Pickets at Warner Studio," *New York Herald Tribune*, October 11, 1945; "Film Pickets, Police Battle; 78 Are Injured," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 9, 1945; "Hollywood Riot Flares in Strike," *New York Times*, October 6, 1945.

In the 1940s and 1950s, blacks and especially Latinos made some inroads into industrial employment, thanks to sustained demands by civil rights activists and CIO leaders.⁷⁹ For ethnic Mexicans, World War II prosperity enabled them to “achieve their greatest gains in job and wage advances.”⁸⁰ For the first time, large numbers of Latino men were hired in relatively well-paid industrial jobs, with skilled and semi-skilled workers outpacing unskilled laborers. There was also a small but gradual rise of professionals and white-collar workers, thanks in part to the G.I. Bill, which opened up higher education to some Mexican Americans. Many Latinas, in turn, moved out of semi-skilled factory jobs and into clerical and service positions. Together, these trends reflected a nascent broadening of the Mexican American middle class, although some of these gains would be offset by de-industrialization after 1970.⁸¹

By the 1950s, the labor movement had begun shifting from militant to moderate, subdued by Cold War anti-communism. This political climate spurred a wave of counterattacks on labor unions, the retreat of New Deal liberalism, and the rise of cultural conservatism, which together had dampening effects on labor militancy.⁸² The massive infusion of federal money into defense industries, moreover, “bound organized labor even more tightly to its friends in high places,” thus tempering its liberal orientation.⁸³ As workers and unionists enjoyed higher wages and benefits, along with opportunities for home ownership under programs like the G.I. Bill and the Federal Housing Authority, labor unions became more of a pragmatic resource than object of personal loyalty for many workers.⁸⁴



Pickers at the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co., 1954. Membership in this CIO union was increasingly interracial by this time. (LAPL Herald-Examiner Collection)

Federal policy also began to shift against labor. In 1947, a Republican-dominated Congress passed the Taft-Hartley Act, which rolled back many of the gains that labor had won in the New Deal. This Act banned mass picketing, sympathy strikes, secondary boycotts, the closed shop, and allowed states to pass “right to work” laws, which permitted workers to opt out of union-negotiated contracts.

Taft-Hartley also required union leaders to pledge they were not Communists. The AFL supported this measure, as did the CIO, which was moving away from its progressive orientation in the Cold War climate. In Los Angeles, both the AFL and CIO worked to purge leftist sympathizers – or those who

⁷⁹ Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*, 252-253.

⁸⁰ Zaragosa Vargas, “Latino Workers,” NPS Latino Theme Study, 202-203.

⁸¹ Mario Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest* (Norte Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 136; Camarillo, *Chicanos in California*, 72-74; Vargas, *Labor Rights*, 11, 285.

⁸² Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 209.

⁸³ Kazin, “Great Exception,” 401.

⁸⁴ This theme is developed in Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*, chs. 5-6.

simply refused to sign the anti-Communist pledge on free speech grounds – which set off a “virtual union civil war.”⁸⁵ Dorothy Healey, a leader in the Los Angeles Communist Party, was one key target. While a number of white workers who were purged ultimately returned to the labor movement, a more vulnerable target was Mexican American unionists with leftist sympathies, such as Luisa Moreno who was pressured to leave the United States. (She eventually settled in Guatemala.) In 1954, the federal “Operation Wetback” targeted undocumented Mexicans – especially labor leaders – for deportation; one account claimed about 52,000 ethnic Mexicans in Southern California were deported under this program.⁸⁶

In 1958, anti-labor sentiments coalesced in the Proposition 18 ballot initiative, which proposed adding a “right-to-work” clause to the California Constitution. Farmworker union leaders, such as Ernesto Galarza, perceived Proposition 18 as a scheme to “relegate industrial labor to the ‘right to work’/‘voluntary unionism’ status of agricultural labor, which was the law in eighteen states at the time.”⁸⁷ Organized labor launched a massive, successful grassroots campaign to defeat Proposition 18, which ultimately helped usher in a Democratic sweep of state political offices.⁸⁸

At the same time, the anti-communist climate in postwar Los Angeles also pushed many unionists working for civil rights toward more moderate positions. Groups like the Community Services Organization (CSO), whose leaders had union backgrounds and which relied on union money for support, as well as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, repudiated communism while maintaining their commitment to civil rights and progressive policies.⁸⁹ The CIO similarly retreated from its vigorous defense of civil rights. This was evident in the weakening of several unions that earlier championed the cause of minority workers. For example, the cannery workers unions were weakened dramatically after a takeover by AFL teamsters unions and persistent red-baiting, while the ILGWU in Los Angeles paid less attention to Mexican workers and thus experienced declines in membership during the 1950s and 1960s.⁹⁰

Despite job gains for some minority workers, particularly in mass-production industries, discrimination and unemployment remained a problem for many nonwhite workers. Ethnic Mexicans, for example, tended to hold inferior jobs with lower pay compared to Anglos.⁹¹ Those patterns were even worse for African Americans in places like Watts. By the late 1960s, African Americans and ethnic Mexicans remained concentrated in the bottom third of the job hierarchy, and unemployment was over six times higher in Watts and East Los Angeles than in nearby white communities by 1973.⁹²

⁸⁵ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 219.

⁸⁶ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 217-224.

⁸⁷ Mark Brilliant, *The Color of America Has Changed* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 154.

⁸⁸ Brilliant, *The Color of America Has Changed*, 154-156.

⁸⁹ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 224-228.

⁹⁰ Ruiz, *Cannery Women*, 113; John Laslett and Mary Tyler, *The ILGWU in Los Angeles, 1907-1988* (Inglewood: Ten Star Press, 1989), 90-92; Gómez-Quíñones, *Mexican American Labor*, 171; Vargas, *Labor Rights*, 285 .

⁹¹ Gómez-Quíñones, *Mexican American Labor*, 171.

⁹² Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 245.

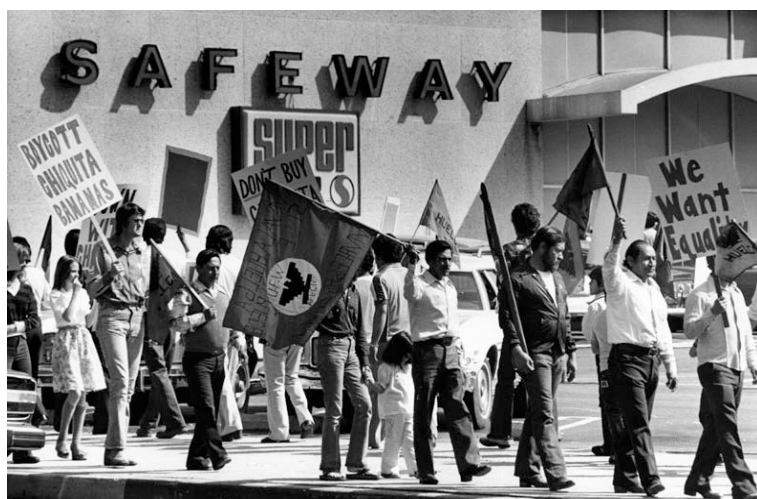
To combat these conditions, several groups worked to improve job, housing, and educational conditions for minorities, and they were supported by labor unions that had come around to championing the cause of civil rights again. One example was the Watts Labor Community Action Committee (WLCAC), formed in 1965 a few months before the Watts Riots. Led by Mississippi-born Ted Watkins, a longtime member of the United Auto Workers (UAW), which assigned him to lead the organization, the WLCAC focused on job creation and economic assistance. The WLCAC received financial support from several labor unions, including the meat cutters, teamsters, longshoremen, service workers, and laundry/dry cleaners. Labor unions supported a similar Latino organization, the East Los Angeles Community Union (TELACU), founded in 1968 in Boyle Heights. Headed by another former autoworker, Esteban Torres, it also focused on improving housing, education, and job opportunities for Latinos. Although both groups had only modest success in job creation, their history suggests “the best evidence of trade union support for the civil rights movement during the entire decade.”⁹³ Other civil rights groups in Los Angeles – such as the Congress of Racial Equality and the United Civil Rights Committee – worked to improve minority hiring, while organized labor was a vigorous supporter of fair housing in Los Angeles.⁹⁴



Station attendant assists a customer at WLCAC-run service station at 103rd and Central in Watts, 1967 (Los Angeles Public Library, Herald-Examiner Collection).

1970-1980: Economic restructuring and labor’s decline

In the 1970s, minority workers began achieving more substantial gains, but this came on the cusp of a major economic shift in Los Angeles which would have a divisive, harmful effect on many of the city’s workers.



Cesar Chavez leads a boycott against Chiquita Banana in front of a Safeway grocery at Vermont and 3rd St (Los Angeles Public Library, Herald-Examiner Collection).

Two rising leaders – Cesar Chavez and Tom Bradley – improved the conditions of minority workers in this period. Chavez, the influential leader of the United Farm Workers (UFW), “exerted a major influence over both the civil rights and labor movement in Los Angeles.”⁹⁵ Most significantly, Chavez – along with female leaders of the UFW, such as Dolores Huerta – inspired a new generation of Mexican American activists who would reenergize the Los Angeles labor movement in the 1990s. Tom Bradley, in turn, was elected mayor in Los Angeles in 1973. He

⁹³ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 241-243; <http://www.wlcac.org/our-past.htm> (accessed September 29, 2015).

⁹⁴ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 241-244, 254-256.

⁹⁵ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 258.

quickly set in motion federal affirmative action mandates, hiring minorities and women in unprecedented numbers in city government positions, setting a broad example for hiring in other public sector jobs, such as teaching, social welfare, and public health service.⁹⁶

Yet the onset of Los Angeles' next phase of economic development – economic restructuring – challenged many of these gains and ultimately helped recast the city's labor movement. Economic restructuring refers to the intertwined trends of globalization, outsourcing of American industry, and a new stratification of the job market, all occurring since the 1970s. During economic restructuring, the most unionized sectors of the industrial economy experienced factory closures and layoffs, weakening established labor unions in the process. Jobs stratified into high-skilled, high-wage work on the one end – especially in the high-tech industry – and low-paid, low-skilled service and manufacturing jobs on the other – many of them non-union and part-time – flexibly organized to meet changing labor demands in the new global economy. The middle class, meanwhile, contracted. Scholars generally see a link between the basic forces behind restructuring and increases in immigration from Latin America and Asia. New immigrants arriving in the wake of the 1965 Hart Celler Act – mostly from Latin America and Asia – selectively filled these expanding labor needs, with many poor Mexican, Central American, and Asian immigrants taking low paid sweatshop and service jobs.⁹⁷

These changes had two key effects on labor in Los Angeles. First, women and nonwhites became a majority of the labor force for the first time in the city's history, while many white industrial workers found themselves out of work. Second, in Southern California, capital shifted away from the large unionized auto, rubber and steel factories and into smaller electronics and high tech-plants in the San Fernando Valley and neighboring counties; low-tech, labor-intensive factories rose to replace the shuttered mass-production factories. These new enterprises – invariably non-union – grew in the 1970s, producing goods like furniture, clothing, printing, and jewelry. Many immigrants found jobs in these new plants (some of them virtual sweatshops), while many formerly unionized white workers were forced into low-paid service jobs – a trend known as the “Wal-marting” of the labor force.⁹⁸

Restructuring hit factories in southern Los Angeles and the San Fernando Valley especially hard; plant closures eliminated many unionized jobs. In south Los Angeles, eight major plants closed from 1975 to 1986, leaving 12,000 people out of work. More closures came as defense contracts ended in the 1990s – especially in aircraft and shipbuilding – with the end of the Cold War.⁹⁹

In addition to these broad changes, the economic crisis of the mid-1970s and a rightward shift in politics further eroded the power of organized labor. Business went on an anti-labor offensive in the 1970s and 1980s, seeking to weaken the union movement. They were bolstered by anti-unionism at the federal level, led by President Ronald Reagan who set the tone. In 1981, he fired striking air traffic controllers and replaced them with non-union workers, and championed business deregulation. In emerging high-tech industries, like electronics assembly plants, as well, owners were anti-union and often fostered sweatshop-like conditions in their plants.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 256-264.

⁹⁷ Ed Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), chapter 8; Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*, epilogue; Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 258.

⁹⁸ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 256-2; Allen Scott, *Technopolis: High Technology and Regional Development in Southern California* (University of California Press, 1993), 3.

⁹⁹ Gómez-Quíñones, *Mexican American Labor*, 267-269.

¹⁰⁰ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 278-286; Foner, *Give Me Liberty!*, 1111; Zaragosa Vargas, *Crucible of Struggle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 346, 363.

As a result of these multiple factors, labor unions declined in power and militancy. Unions were further weakened when the practice of “double-breasting” – whereby employers hired both union and non-union workers – began spreading in some job sectors like trucking, construction, and garment work. The results were devastating for established unions: from 1965 to 1985, the percentage of teamsters belonging to unions fell from ninety-one to forty-six percent. Among carpenters, it dropped from one hundred to forty percent from 1955 to 1985, as the number of undocumented Latino workers also rose in this field. By paying low wages, these non-union operations could outbid unionized workers, a trend that “virtually destroyed” several local chapters of the carpenters union. The trend was even worse among garment workers – membership in the once-powerful ILGWU fell from 7,000 to 3,700 from 1962 to 1979, even as the garment industry was expanding in Los Angeles. Similarly, Local 399 of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) – which had long represented Downtown janitors, mostly whites and African American – shrank from 5,000 to 1,800 members, as employers increasingly hired lower-paid immigrant workers. An exception to the trend was Local 13 of the ILWU in San Pedro.¹⁰¹

As John Laslett writes, by the late 1980s, most unions in Los Angeles “were in free fall,” reflecting national trends.¹⁰² The downturn was not because manufacturing had disappeared, but rather because it had changed in the context of globalization and restructuring. The results were often poorer working conditions, inadequate pay, and a seeming return to an earlier era in Los Angeles’ history, when the open shop prevailed. These conditions set the stage for a resurgence of labor activism in the 1990s, in which Los Angeles played a pivotal role nationally.

Postscript: 1980s and beyond

Globalization and restructuring posed new challenges for Los Angeles’ workers. In the ongoing quest to secure jobs, decent wages and working conditions, labor launched innovative initiatives and ultimately redirected the labor movement to confront these challenges. An early example was the 1980s campaign to stop the closure of the General Motors plant in Van Nuys which, by 1986, was the last remaining auto plant in Los Angeles. Members of (United Auto Workers) UAW Local 645 spearheaded this effort, a grassroots campaign that lasted several years and drew on the support of 200 local organizations. Eric Mann, Mark Masaoka, and Pete Beltran led a multiracial group of autoworkers in this campaign. While their efforts delayed the closure for ten years, the plant was ultimately shut down in 1992 only to be replaced by a shopping center which symbolized the nature of changing jobs in the city.¹⁰³

This UAW campaign led to the formation of the Labor/Community Strategy Center, which spearheaded a new wave of labor activism known as “new organizing.” Their initiatives shifted the focus away from factories and white male workers, toward advancing conditions for service sector workers as well as improving urban resources used by diverse working people in the city. This has become a broader focus of the recent labor movement in Los Angeles.

¹⁰¹ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 288-291.

¹⁰² Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 291.

¹⁰³ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 270-27; Gómez-Quíñones, *Mexican American Labor*, 267-269; Eric Mann, *Taking on General Motors: A Case Study of the Campaign to Keep GM Van Nuys Open* (UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, 1987).

Labor unions, in turn, took a two-pronged approach to revitalize its mission in this period: first, strengthen public employee unions, such as the municipal workers and teachers unions, and second, reach out to the swelling number of low-wage immigrants in the city. In June 1990, the Justice for Janitors campaign launched by workers in SEIU Local 399 became “the largest private sector immigrant-organizing success since the United Farm Workers’ campaign of the 1970s.”¹⁰⁴ Their protests at the Century Plaza Towers were historically significant for demanding that building owners were liable for wages and working conditions. Similar successes were achieved by drywall workers and hotel workers, with the help of leaders like María Elena Durazo.¹⁰⁵ In 1999, in the largest organizing effort since the 1930s, SEIU Local 434B in Los Angeles won union recognition for 74,000 home healthcare workers, while Local SEIU 399 represented 45,000 workers. The United Teachers of Los Angeles likewise had grown, representing 30,000 teachers by 2006. These numbers illustrated the expansion of public employee unions and the importance of immigrants to organized labor in Los Angeles.¹⁰⁶ Latinos played a pivotal role in this union resurgence, which had an energizing effect on the labor movement nationally.



*Justice for Janitors picketers rally at 5th and Flower, 1989
(Los Angeles Public Library, Herald-Examiner Collection).*

Labor also partnered with social justice activists working on issues like equitable transportation, environmental justice, and youth empowerment. This new style of labor organizing has grown in the context of the emerging global economy, and suggests a new era in the city’s labor movement.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Vargas, “Latino Workers,” 207.

¹⁰⁵ Gómez-Quíñones, *Mexican American Labor*, 322; Vargas, “Latino Workers,” 207-208. Durazo continued to rise within the leadership of organized labor. In 2004, she became Executive Vice President of UNITE-HERE International, and in 2006 was elected Executive Secretary Treasurer of the LA County Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO (Vargas, “Latino Workers,” 209).

¹⁰⁶ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 298-305; Vargas, *Crucible of Struggle*, 368; Vargas, “Latino Workers,” 208; Laura Pulido, Laura Barraclough, and Wendy Cheng, *A People’s Guide to Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 201.

¹⁰⁷ Pulido et. al., *People’s Guide*, 271; Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow & Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

CHRONOLOGY OF LABOR HISTORY EVENTS IN LOS ANGELES, 1870-1980

- 1875 International Typographical Union (ITU) Local 174 is chartered. This union leads the fight against the open shop in Los Angeles.
- 1877 The Workingmen's Party forms in Los Angeles; it is a regional offshoot of the San Francisco-based party. The Workingmen's Party wins municipal elections in the late 1870s, but disintegrates by the mid-1880s.
- 1884 Carpenters Union Local 56, which spearheads union organizing in the building trades, is formed.
- 1890 The Council of Labor, a centralized council that united the city's craft unions, is founded. It allied with the AFL in 1894.
- 1896 Merchants & Manufacturers Association, which spearheads a long-lived campaign for the open shop in Los Angeles, forms.
- 1902 The Union Labor Party forms and runs candidates for municipal election.
- 1903 The "El Traque" strike, involving about 500 Mexican American track workers against the Pacific Electric Railway, breaks out marking a pioneering union initiative among Latino workers.
- 1904 Council of Labor is revamped as the Central Labor Council. This powerful federation dominates the city's labor movement up to the 1930s, and represents the headquarters of the AFL in Los Angeles.
- 1907 Los Angeles women trade unionists form the Wage Earners Suffrage League.
- 1910 Los Angeles Times building is bombed by Ironworkers national secretary-treasurer John McNamara and his brother James; twenty-one people are killed.
- 1911 The McNamaras confess guilt to the Times building bombing on the advice of their attorney Clarence Darrow. Their confession sinks labor/Socialist candidate Job Harriman's chances for winning the mayoral election. Los Angeles stays open shop for the next quarter century. California passes worker compensation and 8-hour day for women laws.
- 1916 Film studio workers form Local 33 of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) which becomes the dominant union in Hollywood.
- 1917 Film producers form the Motion Pictures Producers Association (MPPA) to counteract the unions.

- 1919 California legislature passes Criminal Syndicalism Act (repealed in 1991), which provides sweeping anti-union powers to law enforcement agencies. California teacher union locals form the California State Federation of Teachers.
- 1923 Maritime workers strike in San Pedro setting off a heated conflict with employers. The Los Angeles Police Department arrests several hundred strikes and IWW members, including Upton Sinclair who is arrested for reading the U.S. Constitution out loud on Liberty Hill.
- 1926 Several Hollywood unions sign the first Basic Studio Agreement.
- 1933 International Ladies Garment Workers Union, led by Rose Pesotta, runs successful strike of mostly Latina garment workers in Los Angeles. The National Industrial Recovery Act passes, guaranteeing the right of employees of companies with government contracts to organize and bargain collectively (it is later declared unconstitutional).
- 1935 The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), also known as the Wagner Act, establishes the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively. The Social Security Act passes which authorizes unemployment insurance.
- 1935 The Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) forms at the national level, splitting away from the American Federation of Labor (AFL).
- 1936 The Anti-Strikebreaker Act makes it unlawful to bring in strikebreakers from outside the state. The public Contracts Act establishes a minimum wage, the eight-hour day, and forty-hour work week on government contracts. It includes child and convict labor provisions, health and safety requirements.
- 1937 The Greater Los Angeles CIO Council is formed. This body rejects the AFL focus on craft unionism, and organizes workers of all skill levels, races, and genders into large industrial unions. The CIO is committed to racial inclusion and civil rights.
- 1938 Luisa Moreno forms El Congreso, which links labor and civil rights for Latinos.
- 1938 From 1938-39, the LaFollette Committee holds hearings in Los Angeles which expose abuses of the open shop lobby.
- 1939 Cannery workers form United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA) Local 75 and initiate an important strike against Cal San. Local 75 becomes one of the best-known unions in Los Angeles and helps launch Luisa Moreno to national leadership in the labor movement.

- 1941 Thousands of workers at North American Aviation go on a wildcat strike; the strike is broken up by federal troops.
- 1943 President Franklin D. Roosevelt issues Executive Order 8802, creating the Committee on Fair Employment Practices. The intent is to eliminate discrimination in war industries and in government on the basis of race, creed, color or national origin.
- 1943 African American labor organizer Walter Williams established Shipyard Workers Committee for Equal Participation, which does more to help Los Angeles blacks get defense jobs than Executive Order 8802.
- 1945 Jurisdictional conflict between IATSE and other unions lead to series of strikes by the militant Conference of Studio Unions in Hollywood. IATSE colludes with studio bosses to win and becomes sole union for studio craft workers. Red baiting during the conflict helps set off the Red Scare in Hollywood.
- 1945 Rate of union growth is fastest in Los Angeles history – both before and since that time.
- 1947 The anti-labor Taft-Hartley Bill passes over President Harry Truman’s veto. It rolls back protections contained in the NLRA for worker militancy. It also requires a non-Communist pledge by union leaders.
- 1949 The International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) leaves the CIO rather than be ejected for “communist domination.” Ten other CIO unions are kicked out. The Fair Labor Standards Act is amended to prohibit child labor.
- 1954 “Operation Wetback” targets undocumented Mexicans – especially labor leaders – for deportation.
- 1955 The AFL and CIO merge to become the world’s largest labor federation.
- 1958 AFL and CIO unions join in grassroots effort to defeat Proposition 18 (“Right to Work”).
- 1959 The Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO forms, representing a countywide merger of the AFL and CIO in Los Angeles.
- 1959 Governor Edmund Gerald “Pat” Brown signs the Fair Employment Practices Act. The federal Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act becomes law, which requires reporting of union business practices and safeguarding union election procedures.

- 1963 The Equal Pay Act is signed, prohibiting different wages based upon a worker's sex under the Fair Labor Standards Act.
- 1964 The Civil Rights Act is passed; Title VII bans discrimination. The Economic Opportunity Act becomes law which provides work and education programs, loans to low-income farmers, businesses, and other community anti-poverty programs.
- 1965 A few months before the Watts Riots, the Watts Labor Community Action Committee forms – with support from several unions – to spur job creation and economic assistance.
- 1966 Amendments to the Fair Labor Standards Act extend minimum wage protection to 10 million workers previously excluded.
- 1968 California Legislature passes the Meyers-Milius-Brown Act, legalizing collective bargaining for public sector workers (except public education), in response to efforts of Service Employees International Union.
- 1968 The East Los Angeles Community Union forms in Boyle Heights, with support of organized labor.
- 1973 Tom Bradley is elected mayor; he launches affirmative action mandates in city government positions.
- 1975 The Rodda Act passes in California which legalizes collective bargaining for public education employees, after a decade of organizing by teachers. The Trade Act of 1974 passes, helping workers who lost their jobs because of imports.
- 1975 Beginning of plant closures in south Los Angeles, eliminating many unionized jobs. Over the next eleven years, 12,000 people are laid off from factory jobs in the area.

THEME: LABOR HISTORY, 1870-1980

SUB-THEME: ORGANIZING THE WORKERS, PLACES

Labor organizing was a crucial aspect of labor history in Los Angeles. It signified the efforts of working people “to protect themselves by using collective strength to overcome the growing imbalance of power between labor and capital to advance their quality of life and standards of living.”¹⁰⁸ They accomplished this in several ways: forming labor unions; engaging in politics by forming labor parties, running pro-labor candidates on mainstream tickets, and influencing the mainstream parties; establishing mutual aid programs which “exemplified strong traditions of grassroots self-help among American workers”¹⁰⁹; and launching other collective self-help initiatives.

The centerpiece of these efforts was the union movement. Los Angeles workers had it particularly hard in terms of union organizing, facing a well-entrenched open shop movement in the early twentieth century. Union organizing evolved in phases, influenced not only by the initiative of the city’s workers but also by the changing nature of the region’s job market, labor policy, and the national labor movement itself. In the early years (1870-1900), the most important unions were the ITU and the Carpenters unions. From 1900-1930, they were joined by the railroad workers, longshoremen, sailors, metalworkers, film studio workers, and many others. In this period, unionists formed a centralized body initially called the Council of Labor (established 1890), then the Central Labor Council (CLC; established 1904). The CLC acted as the main headquarters of the AFL in Los Angeles. During these decades (1870-1930), most unions were fairly small organizations, comprised of skilled craft workers. Many chose to affiliate their unions with the CLC, and thus to align with the skilled, craft-oriented AFL. For the most part, these unions were predominantly white, and either excluded Latinos, African Americans, Asians, and other minorities from their ranks, or forced them into separate auxiliary unions.

In the 1930s and 1940s, changes in federal policy and the national labor movement ushered in a new era of union organizing in Los Angeles. New Deal policies bolstered labor unions in general, which dealt a critical blow to the city’s “open shop” forces and placed organized labor on a firmer footing. The national formation of the CIO in 1935, moreover, marked a shift from the craft-based, mostly white AFL toward a broader, more racially inclusive type of industrial unionism. New labor organizing pushes by the CIO focused on mass-production industries (such as automobile, rubber, shoes) as well as garment, steel, and dock work. CIO unions tended to be large, welcoming workers at all skill levels within a particular industry, and were inclusive in terms of race and gender. Latinos emerged as key actors in CIO unionism by the late 1930s, marking the beginning of their long, important role within Los Angeles’ union movement.

Labor organizing expanded further during and after World War II, as Los Angeles’ defense economy expanded and more workers poured into the city. In this period, both AFL and CIO unions experienced their fastest growth in Los Angeles’ history – both before and since that time – and many signed collective bargaining agreements that ensured decent wages and set the stage for postwar prosperity among Los Angeles’ working families. A number of CIO unions also vigorously supported civil rights in this period. Following these gains, labor organizing struggled during the 1950s in the context of Cold War anti-communist sentiments, which cast a negative light on worker organizing and militancy. By the 1970s, economic restructuring further weakened the labor movement, with plant closures and the

¹⁰⁸ Eric Arnesen, et al., “American Labor History” Theme Study (Washington, D.C., United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2003), 134.

¹⁰⁹ Eric Arnesen, et al., “American Labor History,” 152.

stratification of the labor market. These developments dealt a huge blow to much of the progress made in labor organizing to this point.

The built environment created by these organizing efforts correlated with several factors: the level of organization (from city/county-level entities down to individual union locals), the size of unions, and the financial resources of individual unions.¹¹⁰ Moreover, the history of factionalism among unions and labor organizers (i.e. between AFL and CIO, communists and anti-communists, white and nonwhite unions) meant that the histories of individual union locals could be quite fluid and changing. Unions might amalgamate, be absorbed, or disappear – leaving an ambiguous, sometimes inscrutable footprint on the landscape.

City/County Level Organizations and Union Headquarters

One type of building was city/county-level labor headquarters. At the highest level of leadership were several city/county-wide organizations that spearheaded labor organizing in Los Angeles. They occupied labor headquarters that served as central hubs for the city and county's individual unions.

The history of these organizations is complex as some of them disappeared or amalgamated with other central bodies. Below is a brief summary of the major central labor organizations in Los Angeles:

- Los Angeles Federation of Labor (1889): This was officially organized by five distinct unions on June 23, 1889: printers, cigar makers, tailors, carpenters, and bakers.
- Los Angeles Council of Labor (1890): On September 7, 1890, the Los Angeles Typographical Union procured a charter from the San Francisco Federated Trades in order to form the Los Angeles Council of Labor. In 1894, the earliest Los Angeles Council of Labor, in an effort to create strength and unity, affiliated itself with the AFL.
- Los Angeles Central Labor Council (1904): The Council of Labor was revamped in 1904 as the Los Angeles Central Labor Council (CLC), a powerful federation that would dominate the city's labor movement until the 1930s. This was the main headquarters of the AFL in Los Angeles.
- Los Angeles Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) (1937-1959): During the 1930s, the National AFL was rocked by an internal split that resulted in the establishment of the CIO. The National CIO chartered the Greater Los Angeles CIO Council in May 1937, which maintained a separate existence for two decades.
- Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO (1959-present): The National AFL and CIO merged in 1955 and the California State Federation of Labor was established in 1957. This set in motion a countywide merger in Greater Los Angeles between 1957 and 1959. By early 1959, the Los Angeles Central Labor Council and five other central labor bodies — Long Beach, Pomona, San Gabriel Valley, San Pedro-Wilmington, and Santa Monica — as well as the Greater Los Angeles CIO Council, merged to create the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO.¹¹¹

The Central Labor Council was a key, long-lived organization that acted as central headquarters of the AFL in Los Angeles. It existed under this name from 1904 to 1959. In 1904, the CLC revived efforts to build a Labor Temple, raising funds over the next several years. The Temple, a seven-story structure that represented a "source of pride to Los Angeles unionists," was completed in 1910 and was located at 52

¹¹⁰ John Laslett phone interview conducted by Becky Nicolaides, December 4, 2015.

¹¹¹ This listing is mostly taken from "Guide to the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor Collection, 1937-1975," Urban Archives, California State University, Northridge, <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c8vt1v7d/>.

S. Maple Avenue (demolished).¹¹² At the dedication ceremony in 1910, in which 2,500 people attended, San Francisco Mayor P.H. McCarthy called it perhaps “the greatest monument to organized labor in the United States.”¹¹³ The Temple building included business offices, meeting halls for the CLC and its unions, three auditoriums, and recreational spaces. In the 1910s, the Labor Temple also hosted private boxing matches.¹¹⁴

By the late 1930s, the CIO Industrial Council established a headquarters at 5851 Avalon, “in the heart of South L.A.’s factory district, where many of its affiliated unions had their center of operations.”¹¹⁵ Growing out of its progressive, social justice orientation, the CIO sponsored a range of activities that included “committees for political action, minority organizing, sports organizing, a radio show, and community-based fundraising” – most of which were directed from the Avalon headquarters.¹¹⁶

The Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO has its current headquarters at 2130 W. James M. Wood Boulevard in Los Angeles.



*Headquarters of the CIO Industrial Council (1922)
5851 S Avalon Boulevard (SurveyLA)*



*Headquarters of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor,
AFL-CIO (1963), 2130 W. James M. Wood Boulevard (Google Maps)*



*ILGWU (Local 52) Headquarters,
per 1929 city directory (1925),
656 S Los Angeles Boulevard (SurveyLA)*

¹¹² Stimson, *Rise of the Labor Movement*, 286-288.

¹¹³ “Labor Temple is Dedicated,” *Los Angeles Herald*, February 23, 1910.

¹¹⁴ Stimson, *Rise of the Labor Movement*, 288; Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 43.

¹¹⁵ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 146.

¹¹⁶ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 146.

Union Halls and Meeting Places

Individual union locals also had their own meeting places. These ranged the gamut from dedicated buildings constructed for the union local, to meeting rooms they might have used at one of the Central Union Headquarters, to rented space. It often depended on the size and financial resources of the individual union.¹¹⁷ Historian John Laslett points out that many small union locals – particularly in the



*Embassy Auditorium, HCM #299
843-855 S Grand Avenue Downtown
(Office of Historic Resources)*

pre-CIO era, before 1936 – would rent a building which would serve as their union hall, simply because they could not afford to purchase a property. He surmises that a majority of Los Angeles’ unions in this era probably rented. Only the larger unions with ample fiscal resources would have owned their own building. During periods of intensive union organizing, strikes, or walkouts, some unions also rented out or were donated the use of larger facilities; the Embassy Auditorium (Historic-Cultural Monument No. 299) was a key meeting place of the ILGWU during the 1933 strike, and UFW leader Cesar Chavez gave talks at the Church of the Epiphany (Historic Cultural Monument No. 807) in Lincoln Heights.



*Church of the Epiphany, HCM #807
2808 Altura Street in Lincoln Heights
(Office of Historic Resources)*



*Cesar Chavez at the pulpit,
Church of the Epiphany
(SurveyLA Video)*

¹¹⁷ Lists of CIO Affiliated unions (and non-affiliated unions) from 1940-1961 are available at California State University, Northridge archives: <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c8vt1v7d/admin/#scopecontent-1.2.6>.

Dispatch halls were also associated with union halls. They could be a separate dedicated building or part of an existing union hall. Dispatch halls tended to be run by the union; they were buildings where members of a union would come to get a job assignment. Dispatch halls were used by private sector unions, not public sector unions, because workers in the latter secured jobs through different means; workers typically had to take the civil service exam and go through a different hiring process. Dispatch halls were especially common among the construction trades, teamsters, longshoremen, and film production workers.¹¹⁸

There were hundreds of unions in Los Angeles over the years, many which had union halls. For example, the ILWGU, with its roots in the early twentieth century, eventually established a large hall near MacArthur Park (675 S. Park View), which was used by other labor groups as well.¹¹⁹

Another notable example is Musicians Union Hall, Local 47, in Hollywood. Local 47 was the first musicians union in the United States that began as a racially segregated union but later integrated. It was founded in 1897 as a predominantly white union (it included Mexican Americans), but barred other minorities. In 1918, African Americans formed their own Local 767, which welcomed people of all races. The two unions functioned separately for decades, with Local 47 receiving the vast majority of jobs with higher wages and benefits. In the 1950s, various individuals – including jazz musician Buddy

Collette – instigated efforts to amalgamate the unions, which finally happened in April 1953 when all musicians became part of Local 47. Their union hall is at 817 Vine Street in Hollywood.¹²⁰



*UCLA Labor Center (1941), 675 S Park View Street, Westlake
(Westlake Recovery Community Redevelopment Area - Intensive Survey)*



*Musicians Union Hall, Local 47 (1950), 817 Vine Street, Hollywood
(SurveyLA)*

¹¹⁸ Lenny Potash (labor activist in 1960s and 1970s) phone interview conducted by Becky Nicolaides, December 14, 2015.

¹¹⁹ "International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) Project Files, 1914-1993," Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research, <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/ft9j49p13z/>.

¹²⁰ Pulido et. al., *People's Guide*, 60-61. The Union is voting on plans to sell the building, and open new facilities in Burbank. On this referendum, see: <http://www.timeisnow47.org/>.

Other purpose-built union halls identified through SurveyLA include:



*Bendix Local 179 United Auto Workers (1954)
11625 Sherman Way, Sun Valley (SurveyLA)*



*Warehousemen's Building Association Union Hall (1960)
5625 S. Figueroa, South Los Angeles (SurveyLA)*



*United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, Local 1506 (1935)
5168 W. Santa Monica Boulevard, Hollywood; represented carpenters
employed to build sets and scenery for the film industry (SurveyLA)*



*Studio Utility Employees Local 724 (1946)
6704 W. Melrose Avebue, Hollywood (SurveyLA)*



*International Longshormen Workers – Pacific Maritime Association (ILWU-PMA), (1963)
627 N Fries Avenue, Wilmington; union hall and training center (SurveyLA)*

Self-Help Organizing

Besides unions, workers also organized to promote their welfare and rights through other means. They formed mutual aid groups, which provided services like insurance, housing, and even health care.

“These programs exemplified strong traditions of grassroots self-help among American workers and were an alternative to victimization of employer-controlled health care.”¹²¹

In Los Angeles, one example of this was the mutual aid group of Socialist Jewish workers called the *Arbeter Ring* (Workmen’s Circle), Branch 248, formed in 1908. It provided Jewish burials, death benefits to the families, and “sick-man’s benefits when they fell ill and couldn’t work.”¹²² This in turn fostered union organizing; “a handful of “Ladies’ Tailors” who were members of the *Arbeter Ring* formed their own Tailor’s Union” in 1909.¹²³ This union eventually amalgamated with another to become ILGWU Local 52. More branches of the *Arbeter Ring* formed in subsequent years. In Boyle Heights, the International Workers Order (IWO) was a Communist Party-affiliated insurance, mutual benefit and fraternal organization, with its headquarters at the Cooperative Center at 2706-2708 Brooklyn Avenue (now Cesar Chavez). The IWO spun off from an independent branch of the *Arbeter Ring* to bring mutual aid-based benefits to all neighborhood residents.¹²⁴

Another example was the Progressive Housemaid Club, formed by domestic workers in 1913 for mutual self-help. At their clubhouse at 1309 South Alvarado (demolished), they offered low-cost housing and amenities to members.¹²⁵

Workers Education Movements

Early examples of workers’ education in Los Angeles were the adult educational classes and public lectures offered by the Jewish organizations *Arbeter Ring* and *Poalei Tzion*; the first lecture was given in 1911 by Bundist scholar Baruch Charney Vladeck. “These lectures aimed to educate local workers and to expose them to new ideas, particularly the revolutionary principles of socialism.”¹²⁶

Nationally, a workers’ education movement flourished during the 1920s which engaged in labor organizing, political movements, and social reform.¹²⁷ Its participants included trade unionists, political radicals, and middle-



The Vladeck Center, 126 N. St. Louis in Boyle Heights served as a meeting hall for local Jewish labor organizations and was considered to be the secular heart of Jewish life in Boyle Heights between 1941 and 1960. (SurveyLA)

¹²¹ Arneson, et. al., “American Labor History,” 152.

¹²² Caroline Luce, “Visions of a Jewish Future: the Jewish Bakers Union and Yiddish Culture in East Los Angeles, 1908-1942” (Ph.D. dissertation, UCLA, 2013), 63-64, 90.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Luce, “Visions of a Jewish Future,” 63-64, 90, 97.

¹²⁵ Wallis, *Earning Power*, 44. The Clubhouse was at 1309 S. Alvarado.

¹²⁶ Luce, “Visions of a Jewish Future,” 71.

¹²⁷ Arneson, et. al., “American Labor History,” 152.

class reformers. Historian Tobias Higbie writes, “workers’ education served as a training ground for the generation of activists that brought the labor movement into political power during the 1940s. (...) The typical student (...) held broadly anti-capitalist sentiments, and hoped for fundamental changes to the American economic system.”¹²⁸ By the early 1920s, activists had formed at least twenty workers’ “colleges” and “institutes” nationally – such as Brookwood Labor College (New York) and Bryn Mawr Summer School (Pennsylvania) for Women Workers in Industry – which trained union activists and played a key role in the development of industrial unionism in the United States. As Rose Pesotta put it to an audience at Brookwood Labor College in 1926, “To me, Workers’ Education is synonymous with the labor movement as a whole. There isn’t one working class. There are groups and conflicts” which workers’ education could help bridge.¹²⁹

By the 1930s, women workers initiated an effort that turned Los Angeles into a “hot spot” of workers’ education. In the late 1920s, women garment workers involved with the YWCA industrial clubs raised funds to send members to the Bryn Mawr Summer program. Garment worker and union member Sadie Goodman, who led the effort, soon realized the need for a west coast program. She and two other activists spearheaded efforts to bring workers’ education to Los Angeles. Enlisting the support of the YWCA, the California Department of Education, the ILGWU, and the Unemployed Cooperative Relief Association, they eventually partnered with the University of California Extension Division. In 1933 and 1934, they established a Western Summer School for Industrial Workers on the Occidental College campus in the Eagle Rock community, attended by twenty-nine students in 1933. It offered programs in topics like “Class Consciousness” and a debate over “communism v. socialism.” The program came under fire from conservatives who worried the institute was teaching radicalism and was moved to Berkeley in 1935.¹³⁰

By the 1940s, workers’ education had become subsumed by the University of California (UC), which funded the Institutes for Industrial Relations (IIR) on the Berkeley and Los Angeles campuses. This move was part of a national trend that tempered the content of workers’ education by “professionalizing the relationship between labor and management, and cooling the heated rhetoric of class conflict so common at the time.”¹³¹ In its early years, the University of California, Los Angeles IIR offered free labor education classes through the Los Angeles public schools; union hall lectures and workshops; and summer institutes for steelworkers, ILGWU, central labor councils, and labor editors and educators. In 1962, the UC and California Federation of Labor agreed to increase funding for “a more vigorous labor extension program,” but ultimately one that fell under the authority and control of the university itself.¹³²

¹²⁸ Tobias Higbie, Working Paper 2013-4: “Stirring the Pot and Adding Some Spice: Workers Education at the University of California, 1921-1962” (Los Angeles: UCLA Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, June 2013), 2-3, 7-8.

¹²⁹ Higbie, “Stirring the Pot,” 6-7, 32.

¹³⁰ Higbie, “Stirring the Pot,” 8, 12-18.

¹³¹ Higbie, “Stirring the Pot,” 28.

¹³² Higbie, “Stirring the Pot,” 30.

Political Organizing

Los Angeles workers had a long history of involvement in politics. In the early years, they formed their own independent political parties which experienced some success in various elections. In the 1870s, the most significant was the Workingmen's Party (WP), which held its first open meeting in Los Angeles in August 1877. Their platform called for a broad array of reforms, including government safeguards of labor rights, restrictions on Chinese immigration, and curbs on business influence in government. In 1878, the WP swept into office in Los Angeles, winning twelve of fifteen council seats, and other municipal offices. Although the WP had disintegrated by the mid-1880s, it left three legacies: it forged a strong link between labor and politics; it created a "tradition of racial hostility" between organized labor and nonwhite, unskilled workers¹³³; and its organizational structure became a model for later stable, popular unions.¹³⁴ In subsequent years, political organizations included the more radical Knights of Labor and People's Party, and the Socialist Party. By the 1930s, organized labor had aligned itself with the Democratic Party.¹³⁵

¹³³ Stimson, *Rise of the Labor Movement*, 16-31, 29; Selvin, *Sky Full of Storm*, 10-12.

¹³⁴ Kazin, "Great Exception," 383-84.

¹³⁵ Stimson, *Rise of the Labor Movement*, 53-67, 92-97; Kazin, "Great Exception," 401.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA: ORGANIZING THE WORKERS, PLACES

Summary Statement of Significance:	Resources evaluated under this theme are significant in the areas of Industry, Social History, and/or Ethnic Heritage. They are directly associated with unions that played an important role in the labor history of Los Angeles. Property types reflect places relating to labor organizing and management, as well as with training, educating, and supporting the welfare and rights of workers.		
Period of Significance:	1870-1980		
Period of Significance Justification:	The period of significance encompasses the early period of labor history in Los Angeles to 1980, the end date for SurveyLA. The end date may be extended over time. Extant identified resources date primarily from the 1920s to the 1970s.		
Geographic Location:	Citywide, often located in the proximity of the associated industry.		
Area(s) of Significance:	Industry; Social History; Ethnic Heritage		
Criteria:	NR: A	CR: 1	Local: 1
Associated Property Type:	Institutional, Commercial		
Property Type Description:	Associated property types include purpose-built structures as well rented or donated meeting space. Property types are primarily institutional and include union halls, labor temples, union headquarters, dispatch halls, labor party halls, support group headquarters, as well as educational, religious, and medical facilities.		
Property Type Significance:	See Summary Statement of Significance above.		
Eligibility Standards:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Was constructed or used during the period of significance• Is directly associated with influential groups, unions, political parties, organizations, or institutions that played an important role in labor organizing in Los Angeles		
Character-Defining/Associative Features:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Retains most of the essential character-defining features from the period the institution occupied the property• Interior spaces that functioned as important gathering/meeting places should remain readable from the period of significance		

- For the National Register, properties associated with events that date from the last 50 years must possess exceptional importance

Integrity Considerations:

- Should retain integrity of Location, Design, Materials, Feeling, and Association from the period of significance
- Some original materials may be altered or removed
- Adjacent land uses may have changed
- In some cases original use may have changed

SUB-THEME: ORGANIZING THE WORKERS, PEOPLE

Significant individuals include labor organizers, labor leaders, and others (such as attorneys) who furthered the cause of workers in Los Angeles. The list below is not exhaustive, but includes prominent labor figures, shown in approximate chronological order, with the dates they were most active. United Farm Workers Union leaders are not included here since their efforts focused mostly outside of the City of Los Angeles.

Antonio Redondo Residence – 2456 Cincinnati Street (1918- 1940 various sources) – Redondo (1877-1948) founded the Los Angeles chapter of Alianza Hispano-Americano in the 1920s, a Mexican American mutualista based in Texas.

Antonio Rios Residence – 523 Wabash Avenue (1957 U.S. Naturalization Records) – Rios (1913-1974) was one of the founders of CSO and organized voter registration drives. He was also a member of Steelworker's Union and served as its president.

John T. McTernan – A high profile civil rights attorney, who won four of the six cases he argued in front of the U.S. Supreme Court. Many of his cases focused on segregation, labor unions and restrictive housing covenants involving African Americans. He also had a practice with equally famed civil rights lawyer Ben Margolis.

Arthur Vinette (1880s): key leader of Carpenters Union Local 56; ultimately played a crucial role in the city's broader labor movement.

P.H. Hurley (1880-90s): served as first president of the Council of Labor, the city's first significant central labor body; member of the Typographical Union.



*Antonio Redondo Residence, 2456 Cincinnati Street,
(Google Maps)*



*Antonio Redondo Residence, 2456 Cincinnati Street,
(Google Maps)*



*McTernan Residence, HCM # 1065
2226 N Wayne Avenue,
(Office of Historic Resources)*

Fred Wheeler (1890-1910s): avowed socialist, head of Carpenters Union, head of Central Labor Council (he appealed to minority and women workers during his tenure), frequent Socialist candidate for local office.

Lemanuel Biddle (1890-1910s): held a number of leadership posts in the Los Angeles labor movement, including AFL district organizer; spearheaded the formation of about eighty unions in the area. Biddle was a frequent nominee for political office on the Socialist ticket, led several cooperative ventures, and was known as “The Grand Old Man of the Los Angeles Labor Movement” (these words appear on his tombstone).

Frances Nacke Noel (1910s): a leading reformer who campaigned to unite labor and women’s rights; spearheaded the formation of a Women’s Trade Union League chapter in Los Angeles.

Job Harriman (1910s): key leader of the Socialist Party in Los Angeles and California; championed the cause of working people and served as co-counsel for the McNamara brothers who bombed the *Los Angeles Times* building.

Upton Sinclair (1920-30s): championed the cause of labor – especially during the clash on Liberty Hill in 1923 – when he was arrested on criminal syndicalism charges for reading the U.S. Constitution aloud.

Rose Pesotta (1930s): Jewish feminist, anarchist, labor organizer. Pesotta played an instrumental role in organizing the primarily Mexican immigrant garment workers in 1933, which led to the ILGWU strike of 1933-34. Pesotta’s success in Los Angeles led to her appointment as vice president of the national ILGWU in 1934; Pesotta was only the third woman to serve in this capacity.

Dorothy Ray Healey (1930-60s): former home located at 1733 W. 84th Street (extensively altered) Los Angeles. Labor activist and leader, Communist leader, CIO organizer. Played a key role in the El Monte berry pickers strike of 1933 and the cannery worker strike in 1939. During the Cold War, Healey was jailed for her communist activism, but subsequently returned to labor and social justice activism in the 1960s and 1970s.¹³⁶



Photo shows five women who were arrested in a strike outbreak. Rose Pesotta sits in the middle union organizer, and was held on a charge of battery. July 29, 1941 (Los Angeles Public Library)

J.W. Buzzell (1930s): secretary of the Central Labor Council during the New Deal era when labor was expanding its power.

Tony Rios (1930-40s): leader in the CIO Steel Workers Organizing Committee, later served as president of the Community Service Organization.

¹³⁶ Pulido, et al., *People’s Guide*, 135-136.

Philip “Slim” Connelly (1940-50s): began as a newspaper reporter and became a professional labor organizer in 1938. Served as executive secretary of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor and as director of CIO Council in late 1940s. In 1949, was purged from the CIO for his ties to communism. Became Los Angeles editor of the *People’s World*, a Communist newspaper; was subsequently tried and convicted of violating the Smith Act in 1952, and sentenced to five years in prison. Was married for several years to Dorothy Healey.¹³⁷

Albert T. “Blackie” Lunceford (1940-50s): executive secretary of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor.

James L. Daugherty (1930-40s): President of United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America, Local 1414. Worked with Philip “Slim” Connelly to build up CIO unions in Los Angeles. In 1946, Daugherty became president of the California CIO, a leadership position that was cut short when the labor movement was caught up in anti-communist purges during the Cold War.¹³⁸

Walter Williams (1940s): African American labor organizer who formed the Shipyard Workers Committee for Equal Participation to fight job discrimination against minority workers in 1943.

Leo Gallagher (1920-60s): Los Angeles attorney who specialized in labor law and was known throughout his nearly 40-year practice for the defense of the rights of labor unionists, minorities and the poor.¹³⁹

Bert Corona (1930-60s): key leader and CIO organizer, particularly of Mexican American workers in Los Angeles; also worked extensively for Latino civil rights.

Luisa Moreno (1930-40s): founder of *El Congreso*, the national civil rights conference for Latinos which forged a tight link between labor rights and civil rights. Was active in organizing female cannery workers, and rose to become the nation’s leading Latina labor organizer.

Paul Schrade (1960s): leftist director of the UAW District 6 (Western Region), which included 14,000 autoworkers workers. Vigorously promoted civil rights, and spearheaded the founding of the Watts Labor Community Action Committee.

¹³⁷ Obituary of Philip “Slim” Connelly, *New York Times*, June 3, 1981.

¹³⁸ Information taken from Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research (SCLSSR): <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf6w1005bt/admin/#bioghist-1.7.3>. His papers are at the SCLSSR.

¹³⁹ Information taken from SCLSSR: <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf0779n48d/admin/#bioghist-1.7.3>. His papers are at the SCLSSR.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA: ORGANIZING THE WORKERS, PEOPLE

Summary Statement of Significance:	Resources evaluated under this theme are significant in the areas of Industry, Social History, and/or Ethnic Heritage. They are directly associated with persons who played an important role in the labor history of Los Angeles. Significant individuals include labor organizers, labor leaders, and others who furthered the cause of workers in Los Angeles. Associated property types reflect places relating to labor organizing and management, as well as with training, educating, and supporting the welfare and rights of workers.		
Period of Significance:	1880 - 1980		
Period of Significance Justification:	The period of significance encompasses the early period of labor history in Los Angeles to 1980, the end date for SurveyLA. The end date may be extended over time.		
Geographic Location:	Citywide		
Area(s) of Significance:	Industry; Social History; Ethnic Heritage		
Criteria:	NR: B	CR: 2	Local: 2
Associated Property Type:	Residential; Single Family Residence; Multi-Family Residence Institutional (varied) Commercial (varied) Sites		
Property Type Description:	Property types may include single-family and multi-family residential buildings that were the homes of prominent leaders in the labor movement, such as activists, union leaders, and political leaders. Property types may also include institutional and commercial buildings and sites where individuals may have worked or led activities associated with the labor movement.		
Property Type Significance:	See Summary Statement of Significance above.		
Eligibility Standards:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Was constructed or used during the period of significance• Is directly associated with the productive life of a person who made important individual contributions to the labor movement• Individual must be proven to have played a significant and influential role in the labor movement		

**Character-Defining/Associative
Features:**

- Retains most of the essential character-defining features from the period the person occupied the property
- Individual must have resided in or used the property during the period in which he or she achieved significance
- For multi-family properties, the apartment or room occupied by the person must be readable from the period of significance
- For the National Register, properties associated with individuals whose significant accomplishment from the last 50 years must possess exceptional importance

Integrity Considerations:

- Should retain integrity of Location, Design, Feeling, and Association from the period of significance
- Integrity is based on the period during which the significant individual occupied the property
- Adjacent setting may have changed
- Some original materials may have been altered or removed
- In some cases, original use may have changed

SUB-THEME: SITES OF STRUGGLE

The history of labor in Los Angeles is a history of struggle – for union recognition, decent wages, job safety, and workers’ rights. Los Angeles workers fought an uphill battle in the early years, facing a formidable foe in the open-shop business establishment. Over one hundred years, workers waged numerous strikes, walkouts, and demonstrations, some of which turned violent. “Strikes are important for showing the pattern of intense conflict between unions, company operators, and the federal government between the late 19th and mid-20th centuries caused by industry competition as well as the risk to health and safety on the job.”¹⁴⁰ Strikes often took place in public areas in front of worksites – along streets and sidewalks – as a way of bringing public attention to labor’s demands at the place of work.



Left: Picket at Valley industry, 1954. Striker “is member of Local 636, AFL Glaziers and Glassworkers Union, which is striking at glass companies in Valley. Stoppage affects estimated 70 union men.” (LAPL Valley Times Collection) Right: Striking fishermen picket at San Pedro Municipal wharf in a cannery price dispute, 1965. (LAPL Herald Examiner Collection)



Left: Striking United Auto Workers, Van Nuys, 1958. “Striking United Auto Workers hold impromptu conference in front of Chevrolet plant in Van Nuys. ... Total of 2,500 workers is involved in Valley walkout.” (LAPL Valley Times Collection). Right: ILGWU Strike, 1944. “Pickets for the International Ladies Garment Workers Union are shown marching in front of 719 South Los Angeles Street, a building housing five or six unorganized garment factories.” (LAPL Herald Examiner Collection)

¹⁴⁰ Arneson, et. al., “American Labor History,” 152.

Several sites of struggle were notable and serve as key examples in the city's labor history. This is a preliminary list that may be expanded with further research:

- The 1887 strike of the Coast Seamen's Union in San Pedro marked the first major conflict between an employers' organization and a labor union. The dispute ultimately strengthened the fairly radical Knights of Labor in Los Angeles.¹⁴¹
- In the "El Traque" strike of February 1903, about five hundred Mexican track workers in Los Angeles struck against the Pacific Electric Railway, demanding a wage increase. While the strike ended quickly when the company fired sixty-eight workers, two months later they regrouped and 1,400 workers went on strike – again ultimately failing. Despite the workers' loss, this strike was significant in two ways. First, it marked the first time white trade unionists were willing to help Mexican workers establish a union of their own. Second, it was a pioneering union for Mexicans in Los Angeles, marking the first in a long series of labor actions undertaken by Mexican workers, who – along with other nonwhite workers – were mostly excluded from white trade unions.¹⁴²
- In June 1910, 1,500 metalworkers struck for higher wages and union recognition in the largest strike of skilled workers in Los Angeles' history to that date. Particularly targeting Llewellyn Iron Works, the strike prompted violent clashes with the LAPD and the passage of an anti-picketing ordinance by the city council.
- In 1923, the Marine Transport Workers Industrial Union 510, a branch of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), called a strike that immobilized ninety ships in San Pedro. The union protested low wages, bad working conditions, and the imprisonment of union activists under California's Criminal Syndicalism Law; the Syndicalism Law was ruled unconstitutional in 1968. Denied access to public property, strikers and their supporters rallied at this site they called "Liberty Hill." Writer Upton Sinclair was arrested for reading the U.S. Constitution to a large gathering. The strike failed but laid a foundation for organizing successes of the International Longshoremen's Association, the precursor to the ILWU on the West Coast. The strike also spurred the formation of the SoCal Chapter of the ACLU.
- The successful strike of Jewish Bakers Union Local 453 in Boyle Heights (which took place in front of the bakeries on Brooklyn, now Cesar Chavez Avenue) in 1926 exemplified strong community solidarity among working class, professionals, and business owners. This union used a three-part strategy of a union label campaign, employment practices at the Cooperative Bakery on Temple Street, and gift giving to foster community unity and union support.¹⁴³
- The International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) was especially significant for its actions in its 1933-34 strike. By 1924, Los Angeles was the fourth largest garment center in the United States. In 1933, Mexican women dressmakers in Los Angeles initiated the formation of

¹⁴¹ Stimson, *Rise of the Labor Movement*, 68-77, 81-87.

¹⁴² Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 33-35, 44-46; Stimson, *Rise of the Labor Movement*, 267; Juan Gomez-Quiñones, *Mexican American Labor, 1790-1990* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 75-84. Also see Charles Wollenberg, "Working on 'El Traque': The Pacific Electric Strike of 1903," *Pacific Historical Review* 42, 3 (August 1973), 365.

¹⁴³ Luce, "Visions of a Jewish Future," 101-102.

an ILGWU local.¹⁴⁴ In October 1933, about 2,000 dressmakers from eighty shops went on strike, including Mexican women who were among the most active participants. At union headquarters – located at 1108 S. Los Angeles Street – strikers were registered, organized into shop groups (which each elected a chair), and issued an ID card which gave them access to meals in the commissary, groceries, and a weekly cash benefit. Picket lines were also organized. By the end of the first day, most of the dress industry was shut down.¹⁴⁵ The strikers also met at the Embassy Hotel for strike meetings. This strike was notable for raising morale and union membership, and proving wrong the assumptions among white male union leaders that Latinas could not be organized. It also catalyzed industrial unionism among Mexicans in Los Angeles, challenging the notion among many white employers that Mexican workers were uniformly docile.¹⁴⁶ One historian claimed the strike marked a milestone in labor/civil rights activism among American-born Mexicans.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ On September 27, 1933, they held an organizational meeting at Walker’s Theater, involving “1,500 spirited dressmakers” (Vargas, *Labor Rights*, 85).

¹⁴⁵ Vargas, *Labor Rights*, 84; Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 232-35; Perry & Perry, *History of the Los Angeles Labor Movement*, 253.

¹⁴⁶ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 132-135, 137; Vargas, *Labor Rights*, 84, 89-90; George Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 232-35.

¹⁴⁷ Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 234.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA: SITES OF STRUGGLE

Summary Statement of Significance:	Resources evaluated under this theme are significant in the areas of Industry, Social History, and/or Ethnic Heritage. They are directly associated with events that played an important role in the labor history of Los Angeles. Significant labor actions include strikes, walkouts, and protests directly associated with the struggle for workers' rights. Events were often led by significant persons and may also be significant under the theme "Organizing the Workers, People."		
Period of Significance:	1880 - 1980		
Period of Significance Justification:	The period of significance encompasses the early period of labor history in Los Angeles to 1980, the end date for SurveyLA. The end date may be extended over time.		
Geographic Location:	Citywide		
Area(s) of Significance:	Industry; Social History; Ethnic Heritage		
Criteria:	NR: A	CR: 1	Local: 1
Associated Property Type:	Commercial Industrial Residential Institutional Sites		
Property Type Description:	Associated property types are places that relate to events such as strikes, walkouts, and protests for workers' rights. Property types are varied and may include sites and work locations such as factories, waterfront/port sites, and railroad yards, and residences.		
Property Type Significance:	See Summary Statement of Significance above.		
Eligibility Standards:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Was constructed or used during the period of significance• Is directly associated with influential groups, unions, political parties, organizations, or institutions that played an important role in labor history and workers' rights in Los Angeles		
Character-Defining/Associative Features:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• For buildings, retains most of the essential character-defining features from the period of significance		

- For the National Register, properties associated with events that date from the last 50 years must possess exceptional importance
- May also be significant under Criterion B for association with important individuals in labor history

Integrity Considerations:

- Should retain integrity of Location, Design, Materials, Feeling, and Association from the period of significance
- Some original materials may be altered or removed
- Adjacent land uses may have changed
- In some cases original use may have changed

SUB-THEME: WORKING-CLASS COMMUNITIES

Outside of unions and the workplace, laborers in Los Angeles formed and experienced communities. Some historians have suggested that this realm of life was as significant in shaping working-class consciousness as unions and the workplace itself. As Ira Katznelson has written, “Paradoxically, just at the moment when the development of industrial capitalism undercut the skill levels and control over work that artisans had exercised, the working-class became capable of developing and controlling the institutions of daily neighborhood life.”¹⁴⁸ Life outside of work – in families, neighborhoods, recreational venues, and churches – represented critical sites of working-class community and identity formation. The National Park Service describes this as: “Working class communities that portray workers’ social, political, and recreational way of life. Examples of such places include housing, bars and restaurants, churches, theaters, and neighborhoods.”¹⁴⁹

Small hotels were one early housing type for workers, particularly in the industrial area east of Downtown. Extant examples include the Canadian Hotel (now the American Hotel (303-305 S Hewitt). Constructed in 1906 and designed by Morgan & Walls, this four-story brick building was built as a first-class hotel for African-Americans, many of whom worked nearby as Pullman car porters. Just to the south, hotels housed Chinese working at City Market (also known as Market Chinatown) and included the Continental Hotel (1912, 800-810 E. 7th St) and Market Hotel (1914, 964-968 South San Pedro Street).¹⁵⁰



Continental Hotel on E. 7th Street, SurveyLA

Another important site of working-class community was neighborhoods, where property was marketed to working-class buyers. Los Angeles contained a range of housing for working-class people, from unplanned communities where workers built their own homes, to planned developments built expressly for laborers to multi-family housing.¹⁵¹ From 1900 to 1940, self-built housing in working-class communities existed across a range

of areas in Los Angeles, including the Graham-Florence section of South Los Angeles, other modest neighborhoods in South Los Angeles including Watts, and around streetcar stops in Canoga Park,

¹⁴⁸ Ira Katznelson, *City Trenches: Urban Politics and the Patterning of Class in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 52; Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*, 26-35, and passim.

¹⁴⁹ Arneson, et. al., “American Labor History,” 134.

¹⁵⁰ City Market occupied 10 acres at 1057 South San Pedro Street. Most of City Market was demolished in 2013. For more information see the Chinese American Historic Context.

¹⁵¹ Becky Nicolaides, “‘Where the working man is welcomed’: Working-class suburbia in Los Angeles, 1900-1940,” *Pacific Historical Review* 68, 4 (November 1999), 517-559; Greg Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the 20th Century Metropolis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Davis, *Company Men*, 19-87, 90.

Reseda, and Van Nuys. In Canoga Park and Van Nuys, owner building of homes was required of lot buyers during the 1930s.¹⁵²

By contrast, other tracts were developed and built by developers expressly for working-class buyers. Historian Greg Hise has explored this extensively, showing that by the late 1930s, a new wave of suburban development appeared near decentralized industrial growth poles, especially around aircraft plants in North Hollywood, Mar Vista, and Westchester. The need to provide housing for defense workers was acute, and these developments aimed to meet that need.¹⁵³ Hise explores several notable developments, including Windsor Hills, Westside Village (in west Los Angeles), Toluca Wood (in North Hollywood), and Westchester.¹⁵⁴

Examples of purpose-built worker housing, in which large companies purchased, developed, and constructed homes to lease or sell to their employees, are extremely rare in Los Angeles. A notable example of planned worker housing is the Goodyear Gardens Housing development in the Florence area



Goodyear Gardens Housing development tract homes on 59th Places in South Los Angeles designated – clockwise from top left – Historic-Cultural Monument Nos. 1033, 1034, 1035, and 1036 in 2013. (Office of Historic Resources)

¹⁵² Nicolaides, "Where the working man is welcomed," 534-550. Places outside the city of Los Angeles include parts of east Los Angeles (such as Belvedere Heights and Belvedere Gardens) and West Hollywood near the old Pacific Electric labor camp which contained modest bungalows housing factory workers and other low-income laborers.

¹⁵³ Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles*; Hise, "Home Building and Industrial Decentralization in Los Angeles: The Roots of the Postwar Urban Region," *Journal of Urban History* 19 (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1993), 95-125.

¹⁵⁴ Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles*, 139-145.

of southeast Los Angeles, which was built by the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company.¹⁵⁵ The company purchased 480 acres of the Ascot Park tract and the Slauson tract in 1919, with plans to build a rubber manufacturing plant and housing for employees.¹⁵⁶ The plan for Goodyear Gardens was widely featured in newspapers at the time; the homes and landscape were to be designed by preeminent Los Angeles architects, Sumner Hunt and Silas Burns, and landscape architect, Paul Thiene. As plans were underway for this large-scale project, Goodyear constructed the small tract of 48 single family homes in 1920 on E. 59th Place between San Pedro Street and Avalon Boulevard as immediate housing for laborers, providing a short-term solution to their housing needs as the larger development was constructed.¹⁵⁷ In 1922, not long after the E. 59th Place tract was constructed, Goodyear abandoned its plans to construct the rest of Goodyear Gardens and sold its undeveloped parcels to developers, who seized the opportunity to construct modest homes for the area's laborers.¹⁵⁸



Rancho Vega Garden Apartment in North Hollywood (1945) was built for workers at the nearby Lockheed-Vega aircraft plant during World War II (SurveyLA)

A second example of planned worker housing is the Rancho Vega Garden Apartments in North Hollywood. Designed by Paul R. Williams as defense-worker housing, Rancho Vega represent Williams' interest in the social benefits of garden city planning principles for residents of multi-family housing in Los Angeles.

Besides neighborhoods, working-class communities also coalesced in commercial venues like bars, restaurants, theaters, bowling alleys, and sports venues. Working-class

¹⁵⁵ Although the 59th Place tract as a whole does not appear to retain sufficient integrity to convey its significance as a potential historic district (or Historic Preservation Overlay Zone), a small handful of intact residences remain.

¹⁵⁶ "Goodyear Rubber Company to Build Great Factory at Ascot Park." *Los Angeles Times*, June 24, 1919.

¹⁵⁷ "Swift Work on Great Plants." *Los Angeles Times*, March 7, 1920.

¹⁵⁸ "Much Goodyear Park Property Sold in Month." *Los Angeles Times*, October 29, 1922; "Goodyear May Pay Dividends." *Los Angeles Times*, January 6, 1923.

saloons were popular meeting places. As the *Los Angeles Record*, a working-class newspaper, described it in the 1910s: “The saloon is the poor man’s club, where he finds warmth, and light, and society, and a chance to look at the papers or play a game of cards.”¹⁵⁹

When Progressive reformers tried to ban saloons in Los Angeles in the early 1900s, voters defeated the measure by a large majority, illustrating the popularity of these social hubs.¹⁶⁰ At Santa Monica Boulevard and Vermont Avenue, a “rowdy shantytown” housed oil workers, who found “prostitutes in tents and gamblers in shacks crowded around twenty-four-hour saloons.”¹⁶¹



Union members milling about outside the Labor Temple, 1943. Photo shows the Labor Temple Café, an example of a restaurant aimed at workers. (LAPL Herald Examiner Collection)

¹⁵⁹ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 31.

¹⁶⁰ Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 32.

¹⁶¹ Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 126.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA: WORKING CLASS COMMUNITIES

Summary Statement of Significance: Resources evaluated under this theme are significant in the areas of Industry, Social History, and/or Ethnic Heritage and are directly associated with the lives of labor workers. Places outside of the work place include residential housing and neighborhoods as well as places related relating to recreational and social activities. These places reflect family and neighborhood life and represent critical aspects in the formation of working-class community and identity.

Period of Significance: 1880 – 1980

Period of Significance Justification: The period of significance encompasses the early period of labor history in Los Angeles to 1980, the end date for SurveyLA. The end date may be extended over time. Extant identified resources date primarily from the 1920s and later.

Geographic Location: Citywide

Area(s) of Significance: Industry; Social History; Ethnic Heritage

Criteria: NR: A CR: 1 Local: 1

Associated Property Type: Commercial - Food – Restaurant, Bar/Lounge
Commercial - Entertainment – Theater , Bowling Alley
Commercial - Lodging – Hotel, Boarding House
Residential - Single-Family
Residential - District – Garden Apartment/Worker Housing
Residential - District – Neighborhood/Worker Housing
Institutional - Religion and Spirituality – Church

Property Type Description: Associated property types include a variety of residential, commercial, residential, and institutional buildings where the working-class lived and socialized.

Property Type Significance: See Summary Statement of Significance above.

Eligibility Standards:

- Was constructed or used during the period of significance
- Is a significant example of purpose-built worker housing or was an important place of recreation and socialization for the working class

Character-Defining/Associative Features:

- Retains most of the essential character-defining features from the period of significance

- For the National Register, properties associated with events that date from the last 50 years must possess exceptional importance
- Worker housing may be associated with noted architects

Integrity Considerations:

- Should retain integrity of Location, Design, Materials, Feeling, and Association from the period of significance
- For historic district, the district as a whole should retain integrity of location, design, feeling, and association
- Some original materials may be altered or removed
- Adjacent land uses may have changed
- In some cases original use may have changed

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Archival Resources:

Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research (<http://www.socallib.org/>). This repository holds a number of important records on unions throughout Los Angeles' history. They include:

- Union Files, 1920s-1980s: This is a collection of materials from over 150 unions spanning the decades from the 1920s through the 1980s. The variety of material types is immense including: by-laws, constitutions, contracts and agreements, newsletters, fliers, financial records, minutes, correspondence, reports, organizing materials, manuals, and posters. There is a small amount of Spanish-language material. The majority of the material comes from unions active in the Southern California area.
- Separate Collections of individual unions; a small sample of these include:
 - Asociacion de Vendedores Ambulantes (Street Vendors Association) Records, 1986-1995
 - Shevy Wallace Healey Papers (CIO Los Angeles Organizing), 1938-1962
 - International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) Project Files, 1914-1993
 - Los Angeles Teachers Union Collection, 1933-1982
 - William A. Seligman Papers (United Shoeworkers of America - Los Angeles), 1928-1941
 - United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America Records, 1936-1981

CSUN Urban Archives (<http://library.csun.edu/SCA/UrbanArchives>). This archive holds important collections on labor in Los Angeles. Some of their collections include:

- Los Angeles County Federation of Labor Collection, 1937-1975
- California Federation of Teachers Collection, 1941-1986
- California Farm Workers Oral History Project Collection, 1995-2005
- Baldo Loy International Longshoremen's and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Ephemera Collection, 1924-1977
- Henry Gaitán International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU), Local 13 Collection, 1960-1983
- International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU), Local 13 Records
- Robert Olvera, Sr. and Robert Olvera, Jr. International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU), Local 13 Collection, 1960-2003
- Tony Salcido International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU), Local 13 Collection, 1919-1992
- International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU), Local 13 Oral History Project Collection, 1980-1994
- Paul Kelly Los Angeles Typographical Union, Local 174 Collection, 1944-1972
- Paul J. Goldener United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America, Local 645 Collection, 1937-1979
- United Teachers Los Angeles Collection, 1962-1992

UCLA

- Justice for Janitors papers (<http://socialjusticehistory.org/projects/justiceforjanitors/>)