

## ***Introduction:***

### ***Stanford Workers and the Problem of “Invisibility”***

“I don’t say he’s a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He’s not the finest character that ever lived. But he’s a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He’s not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person.”

—CHARACTER OF LINDA  
*Death of a Salesman*, Arthur Miller (1949)

## I

The story of labor at Stanford University did not begin in 1969. Its beginning could rather be extended backwards to encompass the many Chinese and Mexicans who laid the stones of the Main Quad in the 1880s, the many workers who rebuilt Memorial Church after it was toppled by the 1906 earthquake, those who dug Stanford Stadium in 1921, and those who labored during the building boom of the 1950s and 1960s. Here, however, we concern ourselves with developments of the last three-and-a-half decades. Though I did not set out to write a history of Stanford labor strictly in the context of union organizing, this study nonetheless suffers from just such thematic constraints. I hope readers will not see in this shortcoming evidence of a belief on my part that

unorganized or depoliticized forms of labor are unworthy of our consideration, but it is an inescapable fact that the available sources on Stanford labor are weighted heavily toward organizing campaigns, certification elections, collective bargaining processes, and strikes. These sources have defined the course of this study in ways that will be immediately evident.

One of the chief premises of this study, when it began in the winter of 2005, was that no one had researched or written about labor at Stanford University. This was a mistaken premise, it turns out. A number of studies addressing workers and workplace relations at Stanford exist, a few of which have been incorporated into this study. Nevertheless, the history of labor at Stanford remains largely unknown. Several studies help to frame this honors thesis, though they do not focus on labor alone. For instance, in their superb study of environment and labor, *The Silicon Valley of Dreams*, Lisa Sun Hee Park and David N. Pellow find that the field of high-tech manufacturing is beset with hazards. These hazards are especially harmful to those workers who are people of color, female, or immigrant: the very workers who in academic language are considered “invisible.” They claim that “[i]nvisibility is a major theme in sociological studies of women of color employed by whites because it is so common in workplaces where, ironically, people of color are unseen but their labor is central to the survival of the enterprise.”<sup>1</sup> This same idea is described in an essay by Daniel Cogan on the segregation of college cafeteria employees from the students they service:

On a campus removed from the town, the collective labor of food service workers makes it possible for some two thousand on-campus students to eat two to three meals daily. Yet, this community of workers *is largely ignored by, and invisible to*, these same students who see the

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<sup>1</sup> Lisa Sun Hee Park and David N. Pellow, *The Silicon Valley of Dreams: Environmental Injustice, Immigrant Workers, and the High-tech Global Economy* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 1–2, 18, 81, 152.

university as a location for higher learning as opposed to a site where labor occurs [*emphasis mine*].<sup>2</sup>

“Invisibility” as invoked by Cogan contains both a literal and metaphorical meaning. Cogan finds that workers are separated from each other and students by physical walls and large kitchen equipment; in addition, they tend to be overlooked in more general ways, such as in student opinion surveys which limit themselves to questions of food quality “at the point of consumption” and wholly “[omit] a significant analysis of workers.”<sup>3</sup>

The theme of “invisibility” is not a recent academic invention. Long ago others applied the term to men and to white families. When the techniques of flash photography came to the attention of a New York police photographer (and Danish immigrant) named Jacob Riis in the 1880s, he found himself suddenly able to uncover “the nether side of city life” in Gotham’s dark and dirty tenements.<sup>4</sup> David Leviatin, editor of a recent edition of Riis’s landmark *How the Other Half Lives*, reports that Riis burst into the homes of startled poor people to capture scenes of urban poverty, then fleshed out the meaning of his photographs with written reports and presented the material at a series of public presentations. His presentations were extremely popular and attracted the attention of the press, which reported on them with headlines like “Visible Darkness: New York’s Under Side Flashed on the Camera.”<sup>5</sup> Jacob Riis presented the concept of the “invisible” working-class person at a basic level: the homes of Riis’s subjects were so darkened as to have been hitherto unavailable for visual documentation, and Riis brought

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel Cogan, “Seeing Power in a College Cafeteria,” in Ann E. Kingsolver, ed., *More than Class: Studying Power in U.S. Workplaces* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), 173.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 176–177.

<sup>4</sup> In introduction to David Leviatin, ed., and Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s Press, 1996 [1890]), 5.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

them, in his own intrusive and forceful way, into the “visibility” of the news. There was a paradox: the well-off public had been unable to comprehend the poverty of the slums because they were too dark to be captured on film; yet the fact they were dark, with its suggestion of deficient lighting, tells us something of just how bad the tenements really were.

“Invisibility” makes its mark several generations later in Arthur Miller’s *Death of Salesman* (1949), whose dejected protagonist Willy Loman complains to his wife that he is “not noticed” in his business travels.<sup>6</sup> It acquires a racial sense in Langston Hughes’s famous poem, “I, Too” (1922):

I, too, sing America.

*I am the darker brother.  
They send me to eat in the kitchen  
When company comes,  
But I laugh,  
And eat well,  
And grow strong.*

Tomorrow,  
I'll be at the table  
When company comes.  
Nobody'll dare  
Say to me,  
"Eat in the kitchen,"  
Then.

Besides,  
They'll see how beautiful I am  
And be ashamed—

I, too, am America. [*emphasis mine*]<sup>7</sup>

There was a labor significance to this poem, too, for it was almost certainly a response to Walt Whitman’s “I Hear America Singing” (*Leaves of Grass*). In that poem Whitman

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<sup>6</sup> Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman: Certain Private Conversations in Two Acts and a Requiem* (New York: Viking Press, 1981 [1949]), 36–37.

<sup>7</sup> Langston Hughes, “I, Too,” 1922, on “Old Poetry” Web site, <<http://oldpoetry.com/opoem/15962>> (12 May 2006).

heard the “varied carols” of American workers—mechanics, masons, working mothers and women—all of them “[s]inging, with open mouths, their strong melodious songs.” “I, too, sing America,” Hughes’s black speaker rejoins, managing to preserve his strength despite being relegated to the unseen corners of the house.

The idea of being “not noticed,” in the different forms in which the sentiment is voiced, surfaces throughout this history of Stanford labor. In the founding of United Stanford Employees in the 1970s, Sarah Eisenstein writes: “Jim Berk made an analogy between the way students related to workers and the way white people relate to people of color: white people are socialized *not to notice* people of color, and students, especially at elite universities, tend to be the same way about workers” [*emphasis mine*].<sup>8</sup> During the campaign of the Office Staff Organizing Committee, a staffer at Student Services named Kathlyn Klindt justified her support for unionization in the “Why I’m for the Union” column of the campaign newsletter: “I am tired of being invisible, unheard, unrecognized, and underpaid.”<sup>9</sup> Victoria Baker corroborated this some weeks later by testifying that her labor was “often almost invisible to those I serve.”<sup>10</sup> Workers were not particularly visible to students during the 1982 strike of United Stanford Workers: students mainly expressed indifference at the strike and, when they became engaged, were most concerned over the consequences of the strike for themselves as opposed to the issues of contract renegotiation. During the scandals of Webb Ranch in the late 1980s and early 1990s, *The New York Times* offered both a literal and metaphorical gloss to “invisibility” when it reported on the ranch’s employees: “The workers, most of whom

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<sup>8</sup> Sarah Eisenstein, “United Stanford Employees, 1969-1974,” unpublished essay, Stanford University, June 1998, 11–12. Quoted with author’s permission.

<sup>9</sup> OSOC newsletter, Box 1283, Department of Special Collections and University Archives (D.S.C.U.A.), Stanford University, 23 February 1981.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 March 1981.

are Mexican, have lived *out of sight* and until recently *out of mind* of their wealthy neighbors” [*emphasis mine*].<sup>11</sup>

Even if we do not know the exact extent to which workers have been “seen” on the Stanford worksite, a review of the self-representations of the university reveal that they are largely excluded from historical memory and record. The available histories of Stanford make mention of a “family” and “community” that does not seem to include workers: “Throughout the whole history of Stanford University the one thing that has stood out above all others has been the unique loyalty of faculty, students, and alumni to the Stanford name, the Stanford ‘family,’ and the University itself.”<sup>12</sup> *The Last of Your Springs* (1998), the memoir of the former university president Donald Kennedy (1980–1992), begins with a similar sentiment: “It would be impossible to name all those who made Stanford University the extraordinary place it has been for me and for so many others. I have now been a member of its faculty, and thus of the Stanford family, for 38 years—more than a third of the University’s existence.”<sup>13</sup>

Kennedy continues by acknowledging “faculty colleagues, graduate students, undergraduate advisees, and members of the remarkable Stanford staff.” Workers achieve a small measure of visibility here, but in most historical accounts by others they are visible only in the most passing fashion. Only in oblique references to the “labor strike” that held up reconstruction after the earthquake of 1906 do workers figure into Orrin Elliott’s *Stanford University: The First Twenty-Five Years* (1937) and *The Memoirs of Ray Lyman Wilbur* (1960). They do not figure at all into Edith R. Mirrielees’s

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<sup>11</sup> Jane Gross, “Menlo Park Journal: Migrant Labor Creating Heat on Stanford Land,” *The New York Times*, 17 April 1989.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Carroll Edwards and Edgar Eugene Robinson, *The Memoirs of Ray Lyman Wilbur: 1875–1949* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1960), 669.

<sup>13</sup> Donald Kennedy, *The Last of Your Springs* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford Historical Society, 1998), vii.

*Stanford: The Story of a University* (1959), and only sparingly appear in Peter C. Allen’s *Stanford: From the Foothills to the Bay* (1980). *A Chronology of Stanford University and its Founders*, authored by alumni and Stanford archivists (2000), includes some vignettes of the major organizing initiatives of the 1970s, but they are limited to descriptive blurbs because of the constraints of the book’s form.<sup>14</sup> It would not be right to say workers are completely “invisible” in these texts, but it is certainly fair to say they are little remembered or historicized.

## II

The representation of the Stanford worker, as well as the aspect of “invisibility,” is both literal and metaphorical, verbal and physical, and it has consequences from the daily to the historical level. It is not enough to say, however, that “invisibility” is more complicated than it appears at first. For it is also a term with serious shortcomings which must be considered as the history of Stanford laborers is told. At least four major shortcomings come immediately to mind: First, “invisibility” lacks specificity and is therefore open to misinterpretation. A reader who is introduced to “invisible” workers may not know to whom these workers are invisible: to each other, to consumers, to politicians, to researchers, or to readers of history? The histories of Stanford demonstrate that workers may be more or less visible to different people, in different ways, with different effects. Second, because it is an absolute term, “invisibility” lends itself to

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<sup>14</sup> Orrin Leslie Elliott, *Stanford University: The First Twenty-Five Years* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1937); Edwards and Robinson, op. cit.; Edith R. Mirrielees, *Stanford: The Story of a University* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1959); Peter C. Allen, *Stanford: From the Foothills to the Bay* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford Alumni Association and Stanford Historical Society, 1980); and Karen Bartholomew, et al., *A Chronology of Stanford University and Its Founders: 1824–2000* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford Historical Society, 2001). According to Elliott, “a difficult labor strike” (151) hindered rebuilding efforts after the 1906 earthquake. Edwards and Robinson elaborate slightly, noting that the reconstruction weathered “difficulties and delays due to a stonemasons’ strike” (136).

generalities that may not be completely accurate. Third, “invisibility” implies that workers are frozen in a state of being unseen, which may prevent an understanding of how they *came to be invisible* in the first place. To write of “invisible” workers, without demonstrating the roots of their invisibility, runs the risk of supplanting historical understanding with a series of well-worn but vague ideas. Finally, because it is a static term, “invisibility” prevents an understanding of how workers may come to be *visible*. The term instead presumes that workers will always be unseen. In the face of a sober and sobering “invisibility,” will historians and other academics explore the impulses, relations, and resistance of workers that may amount to a desire to escape from their ostensible subordination?

The shortcomings of “invisibility” bring me to a new premise for this study: not that Stanford workers are invisible, but rather that they are visible in certain and often contradictory ways, and that these ways merit our careful attention. Far from being invisible to each other, workers took collective action to form a union in the early 1970s, conducted lengthy strikes in 1974 and 1982, and undertook unionization campaigns from 1979 to 1981 (clerical workers) and 1989 to 1991 (Webb Ranch workers). They made common cause against the Vietnam conflict in the 1970s, kept each other company with a vigil and story-telling in the 1980s, and danced to salsa to celebrate their union certification in the 1990s. They were never completely invisible to the public, for the 1982 vigil, the 1991 certification party, and much of the rest of workplace politics at Stanford is known because it was documented in the press. There were complications to this “visibility”—the voices of rank-and-file workers have often remained subordinate to those of union organizers, and acts of vandalism received much greater attention during

the 1982 strike than the political actions of workers—but they were seen. Even if worker visibility in the press has been flawed, however, it seems to have planted certain understandings in the public mind which have had consequences for the outcomes of worker campaigns. Workers are not “invisible”—they are “visible,” for better or worse.

Indeed, workers have long been visible to students. When the Black Student Union wrested the microphone from Provost Richard W. Lyman at the April 8, 1968, convocation, “Colloquium and Plan for Action: Stanford’s Response to white Racism,” at Memorial Auditorium, Point #7 of their “original Ten Demands” read as follows:

Because we are an integral part of the East Palo Alto Black Community, we demand with the Mothers for Equal Education: “The Stanford University advise all of its employees, who deal with the public, of its policy regarding treatment of visitors to the Stanford campus, and especially of its policy regarding visitors belonging to minority groups.”<sup>15</sup>

Black students again turned the energy of solidarity to labor issues in 1971, when they protested the firing of a black hospital employee by holding a sit-in.<sup>16</sup> The union struggled for student attention during the strikes of 1974 and 1982, but neither episode demonstrates “invisibility” per se. In 1974 one union leader felt that the radical impulses of students were impeding their ability to link up productively with workers; in 1982, workers were visible to the students who walked picket lines in solidarity with them, yet they were also visible to the students who thought them a nuisance. Student marches and thousands of their signatures played a role in the controversies of 1989–1991 at Webb Ranch, and student groups like the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán and the Stanford Labor Action Coalition kept Webb issues on the burner through the 2000s.

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<sup>15</sup> Steven J. Phillips, *Justice and Hope: Past Reflections and Future Vision of the Stanford Black Student Union, 1967–1989* (Stanford, Calif: The Union, 1990), 17.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 22–27.

The accounts of Webb Ranch were plentiful. There are certainly instances of vagueness and factual dubiousness, but we should set against them the admirable and incisive investigative reporting that occurred. It certainly cannot be said that these reports ignored the political objectives of workers, for the flurry of press coverage began precisely with the movement toward union recognition. Yet it could be charged that these press reports were *too* caught up in the political dealings, as in 1982, and put too little attention on the voices of workers themselves. Readers will observe that I have much more input from health officials, union representatives, and ranch owners than from workers themselves. This was a bias of the press coverage that I regretfully have reproduced myself. Despite the shortcomings of press coverage, and my coverage, it is evident that rather than suffering a hopeless case of “invisibility,” Stanford workers have engaged in a lengthy struggle for recognition.

The following four chapters each cover an episode in Stanford labor history. Chapter 1 discusses the emergence of the first campus union, United Stanford Employees, in the early 1970s. This story of certification, a strike, and a first contract point up certain elements of labor relations at the university that help us understand subsequent events. Chapter 2 discusses the campaign of the Office Staff Organizing Committee to form a clericals’ union at Stanford in 1979–1981. Although the movement failed it represented an important period of feminist organizing at the university. Chapter 3 discusses the month-long strike of United Stanford Workers in 1982, and the effects of such an event on the campus community. Chapter 4 discusses controversies surrounding work and housing conditions at the Webb Ranch, on Stanford-owned land in Menlo Park, in the late 1980s and early 1990s; this chapter attends to the contradictory nature of the

campaign to unionize the workers at the ranch. My conclusion renews the discussion of the concepts of “invisibility” and “recognition” that was begun in this introductory chapter. I hope it will become evident throughout this study that Stanford workers have fought for something more complex and meaningful than simply being “seen.”



## *Chapter 1:*

### *The Emergence of United Stanford Employees, 1969–1974*

“Each individual possesses at the moment of his birth infinite potential and uniqueness, the ability to introduce something unexpected into the world. And, as a result, it is our job as a society to make a place for dialogue, a place where every man is permitted and encouraged to speak his mind. If we run our world correctly, we will find that each man’s mind holds startling treasures the rest of us can’t begin to guess at. [...] We keep the world alive each time we act or speak with purpose and originality. We are not born in order to die. We are born in order to *begin!*”

—CHARACTER OF HANNAH ARENDT  
*Hannah and Martin*, Kate Fodor (2003)

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One of the available sources on Stanford history is the term paper “United Stanford Employees, 1969-1974,” completed by an undergraduate student named Sarah Eisenstein in June 1998.<sup>17</sup> Eisenstein’s report does not answer all questions of labor that might have arisen during that five-year period at Stanford, nor does it guide us through all episodes of campus labor that followed. Nevertheless, it provides great detail and insight into the creation of United Stanford Employees (U.S.E.). Although I have not attempted to repeat and modify Eisenstein’s research, some aspects of her study have called for

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<sup>17</sup> Sarah Eisenstein, “United Stanford Employees, 1969-1974,” unpublished essay, Stanford University, June 1998. Quoted with author’s permission.

fresh observations. My main objective, however, is to summarize Eisenstein's findings to set the stage for the chapters that follow. Her essay deals with the emergence of a union whose strikes and campaigns figure greatly in my own study, and some of the issues Eisenstein examined remain important through the present, including the segmentation of workers and the combination of progressive politics and labor activism. Some of Eisenstein's passing observations on student involvement and university response have achieved a particular salience in light of subsequent developments surrounding the Office Staff Organizing Committee, the 1982 union strike, and the Webb Ranch case. Workers' movements at Stanford in the 1970s had to achieve a balance between the commitments to progressive ideals about society and improvements in workplace rights and benefits, and in finding this equilibrium were constantly challenged by race- and class-based resentments within the union as well as by the unpredictable and changing degree to which students lent their support and the university rendered subtle impediments or outright opposition.

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The workers organization from which United Stanford Employees emerged was the Stanford Employees Association, founded in 1969 and affiliated with the California Schools Employees Association to create C.S.E.A.-S.E.A. The Employees Association was "essentially a company union" with no evident political objectives. In the spring of 1969, amid the convulsions of the Vietnam War, the organization's president wrote a letter approving of the university's punishment of a group of students, faculty, and staff who had occupied Encina Hall to protest against Department of Defense-funded research at Stanford. Fourteen more progressive members of C.S.E.A.-S.E.A. responded with a

letter challenging their president's decision to speak on their behalf. They were expelled from the group for this impertinence and formed U.S.E.<sup>18</sup>

Although it was not formally certified, the union set out to rectify concrete workplace problems and won considerable support for its successes. When twelve workers were laid off due to budget cuts at Tresidder Memorial Union in 1971, the union won their reinstatement with a highly effective boycott against great odds.<sup>19</sup> The union helped employees with grievances—winning many victories on this front—and kept them informed by publishing pay scales and job classification data. Union leaders placed special emphasis on the grievances and concerns of “Afro-American and third world” workers, creating a welcoming environment for Left-leaning employees while helping to elicit broader public outrage at perceived workplace injustices. Soon there arose a significant opposition—much of it drawn from the withering membership of the Employees Association—which called in the Teamsters in 1970 to organize against U.S.E. and its allegedly “communist” designs. Four entities—Stanford, the Teamsters, C.S.E.A.-S.E.A., and U.S.E.—spent much of 1970 entangled in procedural battles with each other and the National Labor Relations Board (N.L.R.B.) over which employees would make up the bargaining unit in a certification election. According to Eisenstein, in January 1972 the N.L.R.B. settled on “the technical, maintenance, and service unit that SEA had suggested.”<sup>20</sup>

While the unit was diverse in terms of race and job function, there were many more men than women, in large part because the union did not include clerical workers,

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>19</sup> The Superior Court issued a restraining order against the boycotters, and the university's Board of Trustees threatened crackdown.

<sup>20</sup> Eisenstein, *op. cit.*, 2–5. In a bizarre twist, the N.L.R.B.'s hearing officer in San Francisco was “removed from the hearings as a result of bad press in *The Stanford Daily*.”

who were mostly female. Its approximately 1,600 workers represented only 24 percent of the 5,900 non-supervisory, non-professional employees at the university. A certification election was set for March 7, 1972, and offered voters the choice between no union, the Teamsters, C.S.E.A.-S.E.A., and U.S.E. United Stanford Employees resolved to ignore the Teamsters—hoping this tactic would diminish their visibility—and oppose the Employees Association essentially on the grounds that it was a company union. The university made statements and issued mandates that together seemed to countenance supervisors’ intimidation of workers and subtly favor the Employees Association over the union. When no majority took the March 7 election, a run-off was scheduled between the top two vote-getters, no union and the Teamsters. Some radicals within the bargaining unit carpentered complex justifications for supporting the Teamsters, and several options remained open to the union. According to Eisenstein, the union could, for instance, challenge certain questionable ballots from the initial election, or concede victory to the Teamsters and then bargain with them for an “autonomous unit or democracy within the Teamsters unit.” Instead U.S.E. decided to oppose the Teamsters and rally for a no-union vote. They were aided by the Teamsters’ inability to demonstrate commitment to a just workplace and by its unsettling “reputation for violence.” The bargaining unit voted against the Teamsters by an 894 to 372 margin, a 71 percent majority.<sup>21</sup>

According to Eisenstein, “USE continued to organize as an outsider union, leading protests and assisting with grievance procedures because the NLRB requires a minimum one year waiting period before calling new certification election after employees vote no union.” Part of U.S.E.’s continued activity was to affiliate with Service Employees International Union (S.E.I.U.), which provided a paid staff and helped

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 6–8.

win over moderates by softening the radical tone of U.S.E.'s leadership. A new election date was set for June 6, 1973, and U.S.E. prevailed over no union by 660 to 494 votes, a 57 percent victory. After a months-long exchange of proposals between U.S.E. and Stanford failed to result in a contract for the union, bargaining unit members voted by a three-to-one margin to authorize a strike in May 1974. Workers walked off the job on May 13. The strike was hampered by a county Superior Court restraining order against obstructive picketing, mixed student support, and lackluster solidarity within the union and between the union and other Stanford employees. Still, some shrewd strategizing and the supportive presence of the S.E.I.U. helped U.S.E. bring the strike to a timely resolution on June 2, 1974. An initial three-year contract was completed a few weeks later, and it included compensation for weekend and overtime work, an increase in sick leave, and wage hikes totaling 25 percent over three years.<sup>22</sup>

Eisenstein emphasizes the link between workplace issues and progressive ideals in the contract victory:

As Jim Berk explained, the contract, as representative of official union policy, had very little contract language specifically tied to other progressive movements. The union tried to maintain consensus by only taking a stance on workplace issues: for example, if the union had taken an official stance against the war it would have betrayed its constituency. Instead USE was progressive because it used 'the language of idealism' in that it called not only for economic gains, but for justice in the workplace. As a result, it did win gains for workers in ways that were progressive, such as benefiting the workers at the bottom

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 9–13. Eisenstein documents the sneaky success of one union strategy: "The International [...] also helped devise and carry out a strategy for a triangular relationship with the University that would trick the inexperienced administration into bargaining less aggressively. The strategy was to take advantage of Berk's history as a member of the Black Panthers and paint him as an out of control, violent radical. Then the SEIU representatives would have 'secret' meeting with Stanford vice president and confess that they were scared that they could not control Berk, and that they feared that his radicalism would spread to their other locals. A representative from the Santa Clara Trades Council, the umbrella organization for all Santa Clara AFL-CIO locals mediated the meetings and also expressed his concern about containing the radicals. The strategy had two goals. First, Berk, Anderson, and the Santa Clara Trades Council hoped to pressure Stanford into settling the strike quickly. They also wanted Stanford to feel like they were in alliance with SEIU against Local 680, and as a result, do what the International advised in bargaining sessions. [...] The union deliberately hyped up the vandalism that occurred during the strike to validate SEIU's pretense at fear about radicalism and violence" (13).

the most, a program of apprenticeships for minority food service workers at SLAC, and the contract language stipulating that employees could not be fired for their political activity. While these were tied to broader social issues they were extremely relevant to the workplace.

Eisenstein's analysis posits a continuum of union activity that runs from, on one end, a strict focus on workplace issues to, on the other end, a preoccupation with larger political issues. In between is the "language of idealism." We may quibble with the phrase "language of idealism." It seems to imply the taking of rhetorical political stands. An example of using language to express an ideal would have been to state opposition to the Vietnam conflict; indeed, an "official stance against the war" sounds very much like what the "language of idealism" should mean. This is exactly what Eisenstein does not mean, though. Rather, she writes that the union *avoided* staking out positions on matters that were not immediately connected to the Stanford workplace, seemingly in order not to turn off more moderate members of the bargaining unit. At the same time, the union recognized the need to create a welcoming atmosphere for progressive-minded workers and pushed for concrete reforms of the workplace set-up *that could be seen to connect to larger ideas of justice*, such as racism and sexism. It was not the language of idealism that mattered—an official denunciation of the war would have had much more to do with language, and much less with concrete workplace gains—so much as the ability to win gains that amounted to the concrete *realization* of idealism. I would call this "practiced idealism" and consider it an intermediating term between the "language of idealism" and "economic tunnel vision." Semantics aside, it is just this balance that Eisenstein has called the union's "mixed legacy of progressive politics and staunch support for its labor constituency."<sup>23</sup> The early organizing of U.S.E. left a "mixed" legacy inasmuch as it

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 2.

handed down the multiple elements of progressivism and labor strength to future union activists. Yet there is a second connotation of “mixed” that implies a certain balancing or co-existence of themes: what is “mixed” may not necessarily mix smoothly, and certain elements of a movement that come together at one moment may yet break apart under different circumstances.<sup>24</sup>

While the union seems to have struck the appropriate balance in winning its first contract, certain divisions emerged that complicated future union activities. Eisenstein writes:

Most ex-CSEA-SEA members were mostly male “skilled” laborers who *saw themselves as above* the cooks and gardeners who were also in the bargaining unit while at the same time they distrusted the radicals who wanted to make pay scales more equal and take care of those at the bottom of the pay scale first. [*emphasis mine*]<sup>25</sup>

One of the consequences of such white-collar righteousness (and the attendant “distrust” of the more egalitarian-minded radicals) was to complicate the issue of whether to actively support higher wage minimums in behalf of low-scale employees or increased wages all around. The schism did not disappear with the achievement of a first contract, though, and seems to have obtained through the early 1980s. Jack Truher remembers one 1980s union president “trying very hard to deal with the fragmentation between the kitchen workers and other low-paid workers and the high-paid workers.” Many of the technical workers were employed at the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center (SLAC). As former union president Dennis Blake remembers, they often replayed the original tension of the early 1970s by ranging themselves against proposals to lower-paid dormitory employees: “They’d [SLAC union members] flood the meetings to make sure nothing got passed [in favor of lower-paid workers].” High-skilled workers who behaved in this way

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 14–15.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 5–6

were acting out some sort of workplace resentment; but they could only have sown more resentment by doing so.<sup>26</sup>

To see that the divide between skilled and less-skilled workers also represented a racial divide, though, is to better understand the nature of white-collar resentment and to understand that resentment did not only trickle down from above. For SLAC was not only a center of “skilled” labor, but also, in Dennis Blake’s memory, “almost all white.” Blake, the president of the union in 1985, recalls being able to determine where a union employee worked just by his or her race. When he began working at Stanford as a conservation technician in the libraries in 1979, Filipinos and South Asians tended to work at the Medical Center (there were enough Filipinos, mostly women, to warrant Tagalog translation at union discussions during the 1985 contract negotiations), blacks in dormitory-janitorial positions, and whites everywhere else. Blake remembers that Latinos were scarce in his early days at Stanford in the late 1970s but increased significantly in number in the 1980s; nevertheless, they largely filled positions as janitors and dormitory kitchen staff. A river ran between white-collar and blue-collar employees at Stanford, with rhetoric, skepticism, and distrust constantly voiced across it, and race was evident in the language between workers.<sup>27</sup>

Such resentment, it must be remembered, was voiced by both sides. Eisenstein owes some of the union’s success to its willingness to “[call] attention to issues like racism, sexism, or suppression of political activism. This is not to say that USE manipulatively used race and gender to win people to the union, but that these issues appear to have been places where radical ideas were important workplace issues.” Both

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 5–6; Jack Truher and Lon Warneke, podcast recorded for author, 2005; Dennis Blake, interview with author, Palo Alto, Calif., 16 February 2006.

<sup>27</sup> Blake, op. cit.

Jack Truher and Lon Warneke, though, have attested in personal conversation that “attention” indeed turned into “manipulation” as the union lost strength in the 1980s (and perhaps even earlier). Certain union leaders (often those emerging from radical groups like Venceremos) took advantage of the correlation between pay and race to actively pit one group of workers against another. Lon Warneke remembers one former Venceremos member having “played the race card all the time” to stoke minority campus employees’ resentment toward white SLAC technicians. This approach permitted campus workers to shout down SLAC workers at union meetings, and fomented denigration of “those rich white guys” at SLAC. Eisenstein concludes that the union built its cause on “a progressive platform that organized against racism, sexism, and political silencing in the workplace and organized for the lowest-paid worker first.” What seemed progressive to some activists, though, seems to have appeared downright populist to others. The union’s commitment to the “lowest-paid worker first” may not have been as uniformly benign as it first appears. For technicians who gained the enmity of other workers and union leaders were not just rich but white also, and this association that was sometimes forcefully pointed out. In assessing the decline of the union from its 1974 strike victory, Sarah Eisenstein writes: “Finally, internal factions were destroying the union’s cohesion; according to Jim Berk, being an established [union] gave the union power and people wanted to manipulate that power; instead of representing the people they were working for, they began to represent their own interests.”<sup>28</sup>

Although the union’s initial focus on race may have aggravated (if not necessarily created) racial tensions, one cannot discount Eisenstein’s conclusion that such progressive concerns spelled part of U.S.E.’s early success. A strong radical presence

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<sup>28</sup> Eisenstein, *op. cit.*, 1, 3, 6, 16; Lon Warneke, interview with author, Stanford, Calif., 14 February 2006.

existed among workers at Stanford, “many of whom,” says Eisenstein, “had ties to other leftist movements.”<sup>29</sup> These radicals played a central role in the first unionization campaign at Stanford, but their participation in an incipient union could not be taken for granted. During the run-off election of spring 1972, according to Eisenstein, Venceremos supported the Teamsters over no union. While any union was preferable to no union, it made no sense to wait for the eventual second-chance election of U.S.E. in a year, because all unions were limited and thus the difference between any two unions was negligible. To the extent that this position was sincere, and represented the opinion of a significant number of radical employees at Stanford, it was urgent that U.S.E. direct a “language of idealism” to would-be radical unionists. Race was part of that, if an imperfect or invidious part of it. The difficulties with race-based appeals aside, one should not cast off the union’s strategy of progressive outreach as short-sighted or solely divisive.<sup>30</sup> What, after all, might have been the missing ingredients in the failure of the 1982 strike?

While Eisenstein’s study of the creation of U.S.E. nicely demonstrates the twin potential and difficulty of girding labor movements with themes like race, it also points to a number of equally important, if less easily controlled, concerns of campus organizing. For all the divisions and resentments that came with having a diverse bargaining unit, U.S.E. comprised a small proportion of university workers. Despite the success of the 1974, Eisenstein notes, the union lacked the large numbers of people necessary to shut

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<sup>29</sup> Should there be any doubt about the radicalism of U.S.E., endnote #7 in Eisenstein, *op. cit.*, reads: “I will probably be overemphasizing the politicization of USE; foremost, it attempted to represent the interests of all the employees. At the same time, however, I chose to emphasize the political connections because the rhetoric that surrounded USE, in both its own newspaper and other print sources, point to its radicalism, or at least a common perception that it was radical” (17).

<sup>30</sup> Eisenstein, *op. cit.*, 2, 8.

down the university. At the same time, student support was weak: as one freshman noted, “most of the kids [weren’t] really concerned about the strike except as it affects them.” Some students were simply neglectful, while others “feared that increased wages would increase tuition.” Even those students who recognized workers and informed themselves on relevant issues, however, did not become instantly effective allies during the strike. At one meeting with the Associated Students of Stanford University, the student senate, Jim Berk produced this admonition: “[I]t’s wrong to ask what students can do to help the union. Organize to help yourselves; then we’ll have strong allies.” According to Eisenstein, Berk remembers that radicals within student movements “were often trying hard to ‘separate themselves from the mainstream,’” causing disunity among students and preventing them from emerging as a dependent ally of the union.<sup>31</sup>

Though the union was ingenuous enough to overcome these impediments and carry out an effective strike in 1974, the university would eventually adapt to the labor presence on campus and render formidable opposition to union campaigns in the 1980s (see Chs. 2 and 3). The university’s “naïvete” would not last forever. Still, the union’s strategic coordination with the international reflected at least a measure of preparedness on the part of U.S.E., and certain manipulative strategies demonstrated its creativity. Above all, the union took advantage of its radical reputation to manipulate the university during negotiations. Some union leaders were responsible for petty toilet-blocking, tampering, and road obstruction, acts which they performed (and then “hyped up”) in order to burnish their credentials as dangerous radicals and compel the university to negotiate toward a settlement. As rich as these details are for an understanding of the union in the 1970s, they also remind us how far the union must have slipped by 1982,

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 6, 10–12.

when it had neither the preparedness nor the saving creativity to stave off defeat in its thirty-day strike.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 14–15.

## ***Chapter 2:***

### ***The Unionization Campaign of the Office Staff Organizing Committee, 1979–1981***

The Office Staff Organizing Committee (OSOC), a body of clerical workers seeking to form a new bargaining unit within the existing campus union, United Stanford Employees (U.S.E.), was founded in June 1979 and held its first rally in August 1979. After nearly two years of activity, on May 7, 1981, OSOC lost its certification election with the National Labor Relations Board (N.L.R.B.) by a margin of roughly two-to-one, and the attempt to create a clerical workers' union at the university was snuffed out. A history of the Office Staff Organizing Committee must be a story of defeat, for the would-be union failed to realize its immediate goal of N.L.R.B. certification. Yet the story of OSOC emerges as something greater than mere failure. It was a movement for equality between workers at the university, with the attendant concern over the economic realities of a modern American workplace. It was caught and swept along in the wave of feminist clerical organizing in the late 1970s, with the calls for uplift and respect and even liberation that could not have been made twenty years prior. It perceived injustice and wielded the tool of "labor feminism" in the hope of ameliorating it. In its campaign OSOC was formally opposed by the university, and informally distrusted (and ultimately

defeated) by skeptical fellow clericals, for not all staffers felt, as did OSOC, the inequalities of Stanford. Not all thought unions were the source of workplace improvements and protector of individual autonomy; many instead thought unionization threatening. Ultimately most clerical workers at Stanford remained unconvinced of the need for a union, and the campaign for a clericals unit was defeated and has not been taken up again.

## I

Although the press paid little attention to OSOC until it emerged as a social force heading inevitably to a certification election, the first hint of the movement was reported in the June 20, 1979, issue of *Campus Report*. Responding to an exchange over faculty salary increases in recent editions of the *Report*, Natalie Fisher, a clerical in Health Services Research, authored a letter “to introduce discussion about another group of workers”—clericals. Although clericals often held not only bachelor but also advanced degrees, their salaries compared poorly with those of even “unskilled” workers within U.S.E. Fisher thought this a clear injustice to those clerical workers, who often had families to support but “no other source of income” with which to support them. Fisher was quick to point out, however, that her concerns extended beyond the merely financial: “Salaries are not the only issue; we also want more respect and more control over our own situations.” Clericals had no regular procedure to assure their workplace grievances were addressed; a fair resolution rested on the “mercy of chance” and the whims of their supervisors.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>“Clerical Workers Need Raises, Too,” letter by N. Fisher to *Campus Report*, 20 June 1979, 11.

For the purpose of addressing these workplace deficiencies, Fisher's letter urged clericals and others to gather "this Thursday, June 21, after work in room 300, Outer Quad." Initial meetings led to a rally in August, which drew over 300 people and considerable attention. The OSOC newsletter commenced bi-weekly publication on September 15, 1979, and reported that the union had set up subcommittees to address, among other things, membership, research, education, publicity, and telephoning. From an early stage the union exemplified a democratic tendency. In the first newsletter the union announced that a steering committee meeting would be held at the University Lutheran Church in Palo Alto on September 18; it was "[o]pen to interested visitors."<sup>34</sup> Not long after, the union publicized an Office Staff Rally Week wherein clericals would revive the American aphorism of *e pluribus unum* and make, "Out of many, one!" With the democratic ethos came an interest in concurrent movements across the nation, in Boston ("Nine to Five"), Chicago ("Women Employed"), New York ("Women Office Workers"), Washington, D.C. ("60 Words a Minute"), Cleveland, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. In all locations, OSOC reported, "clerical organizations have sprung up in defense of the 11 million women who hold 78% of all office jobs." The movement had struck not only at the municipal level but also on the campuses of Boston University, Brandeis, Tufts, and throughout the University of California system. The movement had local strength, touching San Jose, where the issue of "equal pay for work of equal value" was in ascent, and it spread across the South Bay to incite organizing in Santa Clara

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<sup>34</sup> OSOC newsletter, Box 1283, Department of Special Collections and University Archives (D.S.C.U.A.), Stanford University, 15 September 1979 (all subsequent references to the newsletter will be noted "OSOC").

County, nearby Palo Alto and Redwood City, and the Silicon Valley school districts of Campbell and Cupertino.<sup>35</sup>

For all of the inspiration Stanford clericals drew from similar campaigns, their greatest preoccupation was the maintenance of their own movement, which quickly grew to sufficient proportions to attract the support of outsiders. By February 1980 both Betsy Murray, a former secretary and union activist at the University of San Francisco, and Michael Baratz, the Acting Executive Officer of Local 680 (U.S.E.) and Executive Secretary of S.E.I.U. Local 715, had been entreated to lend support to OSOC. Officials from this union and from Local 925 at Tufts University saw fit to attend a discussion of job classification (and other topics) in early March, and when OSOC organized a “raises and roses” celebration in late April it was joined by a Santa Clara County Supervisor and the Director of the Santa Clara County Commission on the Status of Women. The Organizing Committee had the wherewithal to turn out a bi-weekly publication and win the solidarity of officials from Boston to Santa Clara County. Probably for these reasons it was perceived as being credible on the home campus, where OSOC announced in March 1980 that

A student support group is forming to promote our organizing efforts at Stanford. Spearheading the committee is grad student Nick Alexander, who was alerted to the organizing effort by office workers at SLAC where he is a Research Assistant. Alexander said the purpose of the group is “to inform students of the drive and to let them know who is behind the many functions of the University.”<sup>36</sup>

Those who remained most in need of information, of course, were clerical workers, and their hunger for self-education was satisfied by a constant diet of films, workshops, and meetings. In addition to the discussion on job classification and the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 20 November 1979; Bill Beyda, “Clericals Refused University Recognition; Appeal to NLRB,” *The Stanford Daily*, 18 November 1980, 1; OSOC, op. cit., 29 September 1979; *ibid.*, 19 December 1979.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 10 March 1980; *ibid.*, 12 May 1980; *ibid.*, 24 March 1980.

“raises and roses” fete (each nourished by the expert presence of labor activists or local officials), OSOC organized a “Thursday Evening Film Festival” with a line-up of classic labor movies as well as workshops, speaker events, and leadership trainings. The clerical activists referenced the successes of other movements (and where possible invited their leaders to address OSOC) and invoked larger workplace ideals like “equal pay for equal work.” Organizers undertook to complete surveys and reports on salaries, pension plans, child-care initiatives, and comparative job descriptions. Clericals at Stanford made contacts and shared mutually beneficial information with clericals who were organizing elsewhere. Self-education, in all the forms it took, seems to have borne fruit: committee activists successfully assisted workers with grievance procedures, set out to rewrite the university’s system of job specification and classification, and won a formal N.L.R.B. complaint against the university’s attempt to “[violate] our legal right to organize.” Marking its first formal anniversary in September 1980, the union claimed: “Through research, education, and action, we have become more visible members of the Stanford community and have made significant gains for ourselves.”<sup>37</sup>

As Stanford clericals tapped the well of labor education, history, and organizing in the initial stages of their campaign, they mixed women’s issues into every bucket they drew. Natalie Fisher’s seminal letter of June 1979 made no explicit mention of sex, but the unit of clerical workers she referenced was 95 percent women (as *The Stanford Daily* would later report).<sup>38</sup> Those clericals who “[wanted] more respect and more control” were women, and they depended largely on the “mercy” of the men who held most managerial positions. A similar sex dichotomy seems to have existed in the clerical

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 18 February 1980; *ibid.*, 15 September 1980.

<sup>38</sup> Beyda, *op. cit.*, 1.

movements that inspired OSOC, two of which were named “Women Employed” and “Women Office Workers”; and the aforementioned film festival featured those labor classics—*Union Maids*, *Working for Your Life*, and *Salt of the Earth*—which emphasized women in the labor movement and the modern workplace. Nearly all of the rhetoric and activity of OSOC’s first year included or made reference to women.

While it is possible that OSOC’s focus on women resulted from nothing more than an accident of membership composition, OSOC was not simply another link in the long chain of American workplace disputes that happened to be contested by an overwhelmingly female union. Rather, each time clerical workers drew attention to a traditional workplace issue, it was translated into a particularly female concern. At an initial meeting in June 1979, for instance, Fisher touched on salaries: “The rate of inflation is expected to reach 13 per cent shortly and we are limited to pay raises of 7 per cent. We have no power to do anything about it.” Clerical activists certainly hoped to use “power” to bring about such commonplace improvements like wage increases, but they always viewed power as a tool with multiple purposes. One flyer from 1980 asked clericals a series of questions: “Do you get blamed for backlogs when you’re working harder than ever?” “Did you start work without proper training?” and “Do you feel as if you don’t know enough about your rights?” The implication was that a lack of power would result in unfounded accusations, while the possession of power would translate into the ability to know one’s rights and receive proper training. As with Natalie Fisher’s June 1979 letter, which lamented that a unit of women clericals suffered the caprices of their male supervisors, the suggestion that clericals were unfairly blamed for backlogs imputes denigration of women by men. The lack of proper job training suggests

dereliction on the part of male supervisors—with negative consequences for their female staffers. When Fisher looked forward to unionization as offering her “decision-making power in the questions which affect my life,” as she did in a 1980 newsletter, she voiced an appeal resonant with downtrodden male workers throughout history. In the context of a nearly entirely female work unit, though, Fisher’s vision contained an unmistakable note of female assertiveness. This was equally true when OSOC presented itself as an alternative to “passively [accepting] your present situation for the rest of your working life,” and when seven library staffers asserted that unionization promised a gain in clericals’ “self-respect.” Far from limiting itself to comments on individual conditions within the workplace (salaries and grievances, for example), OSOC critiqued the structure by which workplace relations were set up. No fewer than nineteen of twenty Stanford clerical workers were women, and hence a critique of workplace relations could not help but amount to a critique of *sex* relations. In the shadow of such terms as “blame,” “proper training,” and “rights,” and “passivity,” “self-respect,” and “decision-making power,” there lurked a constant attack on workplace sexism.<sup>39</sup>

While some clericals doubted that OSOC’s energies were truly *feminist*, the record shows otherwise. Ghaida Firestone, who did bibliographic work in the library system, remembers that OSOC’s fight was primarily for equality with unionized workers on campus: “I don’t think at that time we were conscious of being feminists. [...] We had not yet joined a feminist movement.” Her disavowal of a feminist underlay to OSOC should not be taken lightly. The Organizing Committee’s first year of activity, though,

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<sup>39</sup> Carol Sternhell, “Stanford Secretaries Organizing,” *The Phoenix*, October 1979; yellow flyer, OSOC, Box 1283, D.S.C.U.A., 1980; OSOC, *op. cit.*, 27 May 1980; *ibid.*, 20 November 1979; “Seven Library Staffers See Gain in Self-respect with Union Representation,” letter by M. Ballard et al. to *Campus Report*, 8 April 1981, 6.

was coordinated almost exclusively by, for, and about women; moreover, it contained the constant assertion that the framework of sex and workplace relations, not just its surface effects, needed serious reform. If this does not constitute a feminist movement, then the bar has been placed quite high. Yet we must also remember that the word “feminist” does not appear into the sources on OSOC; it may be that OSOC and Firestone were effecting a feminist movement without quite thinking of it that way.<sup>40</sup>

Nevertheless, clericals’ discussion of problems and solutions did not merely recapitulate the demands of a thousand labor struggles past, but stressed—albeit in an oblique voice—the circumstances and disadvantages particular to their sex. Their campaign represented a movement toward power, with all its related benefits; for Natalie Fisher personally, we will recall, unionization promised “decision-making power in the questions which affect my life.” While the desire for power was itself a feminist yearning, the final six words of Fisher’s statement—*the questions which affect my life*—point to just how this feminism was put together. More than by simply exposing the hardships visited on clerical workers at Stanford, and more than by pointing out the sexism tied into those hardships, OSOC burnished its feminist campaign by calling attention to how working conditions affected women *outside the workplace*. One secretary at the School of Education told a reporter from *The Phoenix*: “I’ve worked sometimes three jobs at a time, trying to raise my daughter and support myself on a secretary’s wage. You might not call that a working condition, but it is.” Here is a perfect example of what one might term “labor feminism.” This secretary’s “working condition” emerges when women’s issues intersect with workplace issues, when what is thought a “women’s” concern is seen as affected by customary “workplace” concerns

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<sup>40</sup> Ghaida Firestone, interview with author, Palo Alto, Calif., 28 January 2006.

such as salaries and safety. “Trying to raise my daughter” is not a purely maternal matter divorced from the traditional work-site; nor is “a secretary’s wage” solely a concern of the workplace without consequence for the personal life of the wage-earner. The secretary’s lament comes into fullest view only when its two halves are taken together: *Trying to raise my daughter on a secretary’s wage.*<sup>41</sup>

In order to avoid imposing our own retrospective analytical categories onto the experiences of clerical workers in 1979–1981, it is essential to observe that OSOC demonstrated, in its very own activities, an abiding concern for the two elements—life and work—that constituted labor feminism. In the spring of 1980, OSOC proposed to set up union-sponsored day-care centers, which addressed a “working condition” inasmuch as the proposal sought to reconcile the needs of the home and the demands of the workplace. The Organizing Committee similarly negotiated between domestic and vocational when it informed clericals of the health risks to working women and working mothers; for these risks became intelligible only when the separate concerns of workplace hazards and women’s health were revealed to be not so separate after all. The intersection of female livelihood and female labor came into fullest view, though, in a mailing that enunciated the ten “rights” of office workers:

1. The right to respect as women and as office workers.
2. The right to comprehensive, written job descriptions specifying the nature of all duties expected of the employee.
3. The right to detailed descriptions specifying compensation terms, conditions and benefits of employment.
4. The right to compensation for work not included in our job descriptions.
5. The right to choose whether to do the personal work of employers (typing personal letter, serving coffee, running out for lunch).
6. The right to maternity benefits and to having pregnancy and other gynelological [*sic*] conditions treated as temporary medical disabilities.
7. The right to equal access to promotion opportunities and on-the-job training programs.

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<sup>41</sup> Sternhell, *op. cit.*

8. The freedom to choose ones [*sic*] lifiesytle [*sic*] and to participate in on-the-job organizing or outside activities which do not detract from the execution of assigned tasks.
9. The right to written and systematic grievance procedures.
10. THE RIGHT TO UNIONIZE.

Right #6 deals with women's health and maternal concerns, and Right #7 lays aim at workplace discrimination by addressing a key way that sex inequality manifested itself on the job. Above all there is Right #1—"The right to respect as women and as office workers"—the first right and thus fundamental to all else. The two preoccupations of OSOC were women and work, and they could only be comprehended and addressed so long as activists recognized that they were irreversibly bound up in each other—as *women and as office workers*.<sup>42</sup>

More light is shed on the conjoined nature of home and work if we consider two apparently separate questions: (1) How does work affect women *outside of the workplace?* and (2) How can women's particular needs be better served *within the workplace?* When office equipment causes a health hazard to a woman, that is an example of (1), a work condition that affects the whole of the worker's life. Returning to the aforementioned list of "rights," the "right to maternity benefits" (Right #6), is an example of (2), how a woman's particular need is accounted for by an adjustment in work-schedule and work-compensation. These two considerations are quickly seen to be related, however. A workplace hazard that affects the health of a woman worker certainly affects her personal life, but it is likely also to affect her job performance, her interactions with co-workers, and her attitude toward work. A work condition affects the personal condition which ends up influencing the work condition all over again.

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<sup>42</sup> OSOC, *op. cit.*, 7 April 1980; *ibid.*, 18 February 1980; "Roses Are Not Enough ..." Local 680 authorization card mailout, Box 1283, D.S.C.U.A.

Similarly, maternity leave is more than just a “woman’s need” that is brought to the employer in the hopes of flexibility, time off, and continued benefits. The way the employer responds—or the way in which an existing system is set up—will then influence the quality of maternal care the woman-worker can deliver. Each issue related to women’s work, no matter where or how it originates, operates in a recursive fashion: the workplace inflects the personal life which inflects the workplace.

Even the “rights” that appear to be strictly workplace issues have a feminist quality to them. Right #2 calls for “comprehensive, written job descriptions specifying the nature of all duties expected of the employee,” while #3 states a “right to detailed descriptions specifying compensation terms, conditions and benefits of employment.” Right #5 is “to choose whether to do the personal work of employers (typing personal letter, serving coffee, running out for lunch).” And the familiar theme of grievances comes up in Right #9, “The right to written and systematic grievance procedures.” These are all inarguably workplace rights; depending on the efficacy of the union, they would all be served by the realization of Right #10, “THE RIGHT TO UNIONIZE.” How do these appeals tie into the feminist message that was central to OSOC? The seemingly “traditional” workplace rights end up, because of the sex dichotomies present in clerical work, dealing a blow to “tradition.” Each of these concerns is ultimately twisted into a vision of a workplace in which women enjoy the autonomy and power to leave behind their status as undervalued employees and attain to a better life. It is a better life not just as workers, but also *as women*. The demand for “comprehensive” and “detailed” descriptions of terms and conditions approximates a demand to be let into how the workplace system functions; it is a demand for knowledge. The right for a clerical

worker to “choose” which of the employer’s “personal work” she will do suggests that male employers desist from having female employees do their dirty work for them. The “written and systematic grievance procedures” might allow women workers to complain and be heard; in place of the silent hope for “mercy” there would arise the empowered voices of women themselves. Each “right,” no matter how pedestrian it appeared, was about more than wages, job tasks, and grievances: it was about how wages, job tasks, and grievances affected the way in which a woman exercised her right to work. At issue was the extent to which a woman could participate in work, no less than a chief defining activity of our modern world. Behind the plea for “descriptions,” “choice,” and “written procedures” was a criticism of the idea of the doting, obeisant secretary—and of the male supervisors who would take advantage of her.

## II

Although it becomes clear in retrospect that OSOC distinguished itself with an attention to the details of women’s work, perhaps more notable in the 1979–1981 period was its resolve in the face of an unfriendly Stanford administration. The Organizing Committee entered its second year in the summer of 1980 and happily announced that Local 680, U.S.E. (the union with which clericals hoped to be certified), had voted to affiliate with Local 715, its “sister” local with a significant presence in Silicon Valley. When a contest was arranged for the best t-shirt design, the winning entry read “Who Runs Stanford?” on the front and “We Do!” on the back. Seeking recognition as a new bargaining unit within Local 715, OSOC set to gathering signatures and filed more than one thousand with the N.L.R.B. in Oakland in November 1980. The organizing

committee sought to unionize up to 2,300 clericals, comprising more than forty job classifications, on campus, at the School of Medicine, and at the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center (SLAC). Organizers suspected the administration would attempt to reduce the unit size by “[weeding] out” certain job classifications, but their more immediate concern, it turned out, was the university’s refusal to recognize the union until it gathered signatures in secret and held a secret ballot as mandated by the N.L.R.B. An employer who examined any signatures opened itself to the possibility that the union could gain recognition *without* an election. Hence Stanford’s decision to ignore the signatures forced the union to start from scratch collecting authorization cards from 30 percent of those in the proposed bargaining unit. Even then, recognition would not be guaranteed: the composition of the bargaining unit would have to be determined, and workers would have to demonstrate that a “community of interests” truly united this diffuse collection of university employees. The university rejected OSOC’s initial signatures, an affront that compelled organizers to write: “To our knowledge, this Union has become the only one in organized labor history to be denied recognition before it was requested.” Organizers sounded this complaint amid a chorus of frustration at the university’s apparent temporizing, but nevertheless they resolved, “We are not going to go away!” To the charge of “union busting” OSOC added the charge of foot-dragging. “Stall Continues,” read the headline to a newsletter article which mordantly summarized a January 1981 N.L.R.B. hearing:

[I]t is also difficult to understand why management’s two attorney’s [*sic*] and two paralegals cannot prepare for an NLRB hearing. [...] Could it possibly be, that they simply do not know how the University functions? Or could their lack of readiness stem

from a calculated attempt to drag the hearings out as long as possible? The first principle of union busting is to prolong the process.<sup>43</sup>

While the supposed temporizing came to an end in late January with the announcement that a representation election had been set for May 7, some other forms of union opposition seemed to come into view. In a January 27, 1981, letter to faculty and staff, President Donald Kennedy expressed his own opposition to a clericals union on the grounds that it would not automatically resolve the problems of the Stanford workplace. Kennedy defended his personal disclosure—it was preferable, he believed, to propagating “a false assumption of neutrality”—but some workers thought his behavior bespoke a larger pattern of university intimidation. Lise Giraud, a librarian at Green Library, replied that “there is no doubt that an expression of this kind of presidential sentiment constitutes as powerful manifesto of support for all the lower-level supervisors who wish, by one means or another, to dissuade, discourage, or intimidate employees from joining a union.”<sup>44</sup> Ghaida Firestone recalls that some departments had anti-union employees serve as spies on clerical activists. She remembers it being part of a larger campaign in which the university administration “hired this PR company—cost them millions, I think—to fight the unionization movement.” It is often difficult to produce documentary evidence for such accusations, and we lack the sources to know if any intimidation was formally endorsed and, if so, how broadly it occurred. Yet it is certain that the university conducted what in labor circles is known as an “anti” campaign. In his January 27 letter, as we have seen, Kennedy conceded the university did not maintain a position of

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<sup>43</sup> OSOC, op. cit., 6 October 1980; *ibid.*, 25 August 1980; “OSOC Seeks to Organize Campus Clericals,” *Campus Report*, 19 November 1980, 1; “OSOC Hopes to Unionize 2,300 Persons,” *Campus Report*, 17 December 1980, 4; OSOC, op. cit., 20 November 1980; *ibid.*, 12 January 1981.

<sup>44</sup> “Unionization Not a Mistake, but Means of Redressing Problems, Librarian Says,” letter by Lise Giraud to *Campus Report*, 11 February 1981, 6.

“neutrality.” The substance of the university’s position was fleshed out in a *Stanford Daily* news analysis that appeared on the eve of the election and contained, among other frank disclosures, this statement:

Both [Priscilla] Wheeler and [the university’s manager of employee relations Felix] Barthelemy said they had not met with outside consultants or attended any seminars on how to keep out unions. Both said they had read a number of professional journals on the subject, and Barthelemy called Stanford’s anti-union campaign “an approach that is recommended.”<sup>45</sup>

This is not a question of *whether* the university officially opposed the union; it is a question of in what ways and with how much force it rendered this opposition. One central means of opposition appears to have been a series of about five weekly meetings in which Stanford management prepared small groups of supervisors for the questions they would face from employees in the lead-up to the election. Wheeler contended the meetings were not compulsory for supervisors, and Barthelemy that they “did not necessarily have an anti-union tone.” Nonetheless, the leaders of the meeting placed some emphasis on the potential drawbacks to joining a union, and they transmitted to the supervisors a general skepticism about the need for a clericals union. Even within the constraints that university officials professed to maintain, there is no doubt that Stanford University ran an anti-union campaign in opposition to OSOC.<sup>46</sup>

However legal and publicly evident the university’s opposition campaign may have been, though, it turned in some places into *illegal* intimidation. Lon Warneke says that even the most legal of anti-union campaigns must still rely on manipulating messages, an unseemly mix of marketing and psychology. Yet he adds that legal union opposition will often become illegal, as appears to be the case with OSOC. The same

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<sup>45</sup> Neil MacFarquhar, “University Tactics Seem ‘Textbook,’” *The Stanford Daily*, 5 May 1981, 1.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 January 1981; “President Kennedy Expresses Views on Unionization to Whole Community,” *Campus Report*, 4 February 1981, 4; “Kennedy Calls USE Counterproductive,” letter by Donald Kennedy to *Campus Report*, 15 April 1981, 6; Firestone, *op. cit.*; MacFarquhar, *op. cit.*, “University Tactics.”

*Daily* article that analyzed Barthelemy and Wheeler's strategies reported that "at least one possible questionable labor practice has become public":

One supervisor, Paul Kim in the Serial Records Department, recently told the employees under him that employees joining the union and taking the union's loyalty oath automatically give up their First Amendment rights, that a union would make job classifications "rigid" and that under unionization he would be forced to administer a test to job applicants and only consider hiring the top five finalists.

None of this information is correct, and since making specific claims about the results of unionization drive is against NLRB rules, the University held a meeting for those employees who heard Kim in order to correct the mistakes.

The effects of this misinformation are not known, nor how much the consequences were reversed by the university's remedial session. Nor can we guess at how many more such incidents occurred, or how deep their effects ran. It is likely, however, that the legal anti-union efforts and its illegal offshoots accounted for some of the oppositional sentiment directed toward OSOC in the months before the certification election. Another potential hindrance to organization appeared when the university made public 12 to 22 percent salary increases for library support staff and clerical workers in early March 1981. Natalie Fisher speculated that the surprise announcement was nothing more than an attempt to placate workers into voting against the union. It was Fisher who had opened the campaign with the reminder, "Salaries are not the only issue," and it was she who would once again urge her fellow workers to unite on May 7 over the "many more issues" at hand.<sup>47</sup>

The certification election of May 7, 1981, proved, however, that clerical workers at Stanford University remained divided. Rather than being equally split, though, and in spite of OSOC's great energies of the preceding two years, clericals were in fact very much more opposed to unionization than in favor of it. Eighty-five percent of the 1,743

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<sup>47</sup> MacFarquhar, op. cit., "University Tactics"; "University Staff Salary Plans Announced by Personnel," *Campus Report*, 11 March 1981, 1; "Salaries Are 'Last Minute Concessions,'" letter by Natalie Fisher to *Campus Report*, 25 March 1981, 4.

eligible workers turned out to vote, and they opposed the union by a count of 930 to 554, or 63 percent. (There were fifty-eight challenged ballots, two of which the N.L.R.B. declared void.) The university resolved to take on some of the problems clericals had brought to light during the campaign, including but not limited to the announced salary hikes. Joyce Tipps-Coates, the head of OSOC, said the pay increases were “the direct result of organizing.” There was another way in which their campaign had not been futile even in its ultimate defeat: “People want to form some sort of coalition,” said Tipps-Coates. “Lots of us have grown through this experience [...] Women do not yet feel responsible for themselves and their own livelihood. We’ve got to continue educating other women.”<sup>48</sup> Said Bob Anderson, a union spokesman, “You’re breaking ground here. Whenever you do something that hasn’t been done before, it’s tough.” Workers vowed to continue the campaign until victory and formed their stiff upper lips around a modified version of the song “I Shall Not Be Moved”:

We’re not afraid of Wheeler, we shall not be moved.  
We’ll pay no heed to Donald, we shall not be moved.

The union filed sixteen objections with the N.L.R.B. over the university’s behavior during the campaign, which the university dismissed as unsubstantiated. A regional director of the N.L.R.B. recommended turning aside the objections, twelve were withdrawn and three overturned, and the final remaining objection was dismissed in April 1982. The election was formally certified in the summer of 1982.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Jay Raymond Mills, “OSOC Organizers Determined to Keep Up Unionization Effort,” *The Stanford Daily*, 8 May 1981, 1.

<sup>49</sup> “Office, Library Support Staff Vote 930 to 554 Against USE,” *Campus Report*, 13 May 1981, 4; Neil MacFarquhar, “Clericals Reject Unionization Proposal: University Pledges to Review Clerical Workers’ Problems,” *The Stanford Daily*, 8 May 1981, 1; “USE Files 16 Objections with NLRB on May 7 Election,” *Campus Report*, 20 May 1981, 23; “NLRB Answers Union Protest,” *Campus Report*, 9 December 1981, 10; Karen Bartholomew, “NLRB Dismisses Last Complaint in USW Election; Appeal Set,” *Campus*

## III

There is ample evidence that, even if clericals did not use the word “feminist” and in fact disavow its influence today, their movement was one of women’s uplift. It may seem surprising, then, that nearly two-thirds of women clerical workers at Stanford opposed what was inarguably a movement for female empowerment. The university’s campaign of opposition must have contributed to some degree to the election-day defeat, but the certification vote also turned on more organic divisions within women workers at Stanford. Workers found themselves divided on unionization above all because of their differing conceptions of how to be useful women in society.

Curiously enough, it was President Donald Kennedy who offered the first notable analysis of worker disunity, with a speech to the Academic Council on the topic of staff relations in January 1981. In urging faculty members to respect and encourage their staffers, Kennedy pointed out that a “dichotomy between two subcultures” separated the more senior employees, who maintained a loyalty to the institution, from the less-senior recent hires, who tended to “see Stanford not so much as a special place with a special mission, but instead as an employer.”<sup>50</sup> Kennedy’s generalized dichotomy was impossible to verify, of course, and it drew immediate criticism. Terri Owens of OSOC admitted to being confused by Kennedy’s implication that “along with loyalty goes self-denial”—that faithful university veterans were as a matter of course less inclined to favor unionization. While Kennedy had not suggested that more recent hires exhibited a patent disloyalty to the university, the distinction between *more* loyal and *less* loyal staff

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*Report*, 28 April 1982, 16; “NLRB Certifies Spring 1981 Clerical Vote,” *Campus Report*, 11 August 1982, 1.

<sup>50</sup> “Kennedy Asks Faculty to Respect, Encourage Staff,” *Campus Report*, 14 January 1981, 20.

members seems to offer useful terms with which to analyze the fissures between pro- and anti-unionist clericals. Some clericals were models of Kennedy's loyal employees and opposed the union because they enjoyed the environment of working at Stanford. "Loyalty" appears to accurately describe how Sharon Dean, a staffer in Humanities & Sciences/Development, felt about the prospect of unionization:

I wonder how many union sympathizers are aware of how favorably Stanford's working atmosphere compares with that of the nonacademic world. In addition to attractive grounds, proximity to nonindustrial neighborhoods and excellent cultural and recreational opportunities, there is at Stanford the chance to work with a variety of people of better-than-average intelligence—interesting, involved people with quick wits and good senses of humor.

Dean's fealty to the university resonates with the "loyalty" that documenters of university history have observed in members of the Stanford community. Paul Edwards and Edgar Robinson, co-editors of the memoirs of former Stanford president Ray Lyman Wilbur, have contributed this perspective on Stanford history: "Throughout the whole history of Stanford University the one thing that has stood out above all others has been the unique loyalty of faculty, students, and alumni to the Stanford name, the Stanford 'family,' and the University itself." It is easy for us to place members of OSOC in opposition to clericals like Dean, and to say that OSOC felt less loyalty and instead approximated Kennedy's younger, more restive employees, who viewed and criticized Stanford primarily as an employer. In this charge there would be the hint of the critique of previous generations of activists on the Stanford campus. Peter C. Allen has touched on the student activity against the Vietnam War and for minority rights in this language: "The pleasantness [of Stanford] was to be temporarily dimmed by the onset of student activism late in the sixties and into the seventies." From this viewpoint one might say

that OSOC activists were less loyal and more demanding, that their political activity had a similarly toxic effect on the campus on which Dean felt so sanguinely at home.<sup>51</sup>

Clerical organizers may have been less loyal to Stanford than their more seasoned colleagues, and they may have felt they were employees first and family members second—or not at all. From a distant view the chaos and commotion of the clericals movement seems to form into intelligible shapes, “loyalty” on the one side and “less loyalty” on the other, satisfaction counterposed against protest. These are only the most external symbols, however, of the nuances of individualism, women’s rights, protection, and liberation which come into view only with close attention. It is too easy to allow the analysis to slip into the language of “loyalty” and the too-simple conclusions it draws us to. “Loyalty” does not tell the whole story, and if an analysis is limited to this one term then it is possible to completely overlook the role of womanhood.

The work of OSOC brought together the twin concerns of a woman’s life and a woman’s working space in what I have termed “labor feminism.” Clericals at Stanford believed the realization of labor feminism would come with the certifying of a union, which would secure a faster and fairer grievance process that allowed women clericals’ voices to be heard and their concerns addressed. Natalie Fisher said a union promised “participatory democracy” within the non-democratic setting of a university, and thus a more level playing field for women. A union would nurture “self-respect” amid impersonal bureaucratic structures even as it demanded plain old “respect” from male

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<sup>51</sup> “Kennedy Said 20 Years behind Times,” letter by Terri Owen, for Office Staff Organizing Committee, to *Campus Report*, 28 January 1981, 6; “Secretary Vehemently Opposes Union,” letter by Sharon M. Dean to *Campus Report*, 15 April 1981, 7; Paul Carroll Edwards and Edgar Eugene Robinson, eds., *The Memoirs of Ray Lyman Wilbur, 1875–1949* (Stanford, Calif., Stanford University Press, 1960), 669; Peter C. Allen, *Stanford: From the Foothills to the Bay* (Stanford, Calif., Stanford Alumni Association and Stanford Historical Society, 1980), 68.

supervisors. To meaningful participation and respect was added the idea that female clericals could insert themselves into the very university history from which workers had traditionally been excluded; this sentiment was most excitedly voiced by Terry Owens when she wrote, in a 1980 newsletter, “We have a chance to make history!” Organizers believed unionization would give women workers voice, not only in the workplace, but also in the history of the workplace. Voice, respect, and participation were the fruits of victory, and they could only be grasped if clericals were released from the infantilizing conditions of working at Stanford. As Jan Wick, an administrative assistant in the Medical Center, put it:

I am an adult and I want to act like one and be treated like one. Begging for a decent raise, pleading with the University at a grievance hearing, and hoping to somehow survive on a bankrupt Social Security system and a meager retirement are not the actions of an adult. [...] I am paid 59% of what a man with my educational background and comparable work is paid. I want to put at least a few more percentage points on that figure.

To organizers with OSOC, unionization promised not only certain measures of uplift and economic gain, but indeed liberation from the privations and injustices associated with being a woman worker. Any of these objectives, if achieved through the union, would serve many women. But it was each individual woman who sought to be recognized and compensated, and so when OSOC members appealed to other clericals, they spoke in the language of individualism. Two weeks before the certification election Joyce Tipps-Coates assured clericals in an interview of the ultimately personal gains of collective unionization: “Voting ‘yes’ means you’re promoting your own interests.” These passages call up a sense of emancipation, and so OSOC’s campaign was voiced, not only in the words of feminism, but more specifically in the words of feminist *liberation*. It is probably true that clerical organizers viewed Stanford foremost as an “employer,” and

thus felt little of the familial “loyalty” of others, but their unionization campaign rested on a far sturdier foundation than the mere impulses of a dissatisfied work force: freedom for individuals could only be won through collective freedom struggle. If there was a want of loyalty among some Stanford clericals, it was less a cause to organize for a better workplace than a symptom of the problematic workplace they faced every day.<sup>52</sup>

Where OSOC’s campaign called up notions of realizing and protecting individual freedoms, then, conversely, opposition to the union emerged from something more complex than simple-minded fidelity to their employing institution. Indeed, most opponents of OSOC who made their views public did so not by praising Stanford but rather by doubting or outright denigrating the concept of unionization. Though Sharon Dean reminded union sympathizers of Stanford’s “attractive grounds” and “excellent [...] opportunities,” her statement of union opposition quickly turned to her distaste for the world a union would impose upon her. She pointed out that she was “an adult, not a four-year-old,” needed no assistance in her grievance procedures, and preferred advancing on her own merit to relying on the support of a conformist union. In a letter to *Campus Report*, Dave Criswell (the rare male clerical) echoed Dean’s fear that a union threatened individual autonomy, seeing little difference between being “forced to abide by the effects of [union] representation I did not elect” and the “taxation without representation” imposed on colonists by British rule in the pre-Revolutionary period. One clerical feared the union would unleash a “big brother [on workers] to raid our pay checks”; another was disturbed that a first-class university could be “muscle by the ambitions of a few narrow-minded unionists.” Even as OSOC supporters cautioned that a majority of the

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<sup>52</sup> “Salaries Are ‘Last Minute Concessions,’” op. cit.; Neil MacFarquhar, “Tipps-Coats Justifies Unionization Effort: Clericals Don’t Need to Be ‘Taken Care Of,’” *The Stanford Daily*, 23 April 1981, 7; OSOC, op. cit., 6 April 1981; OSOC, op. cit., 23 June 1980.

electorate, and not a rash few, would have to endorse the union for clerical workers to be organized, opposition was still centered on the idea that the union was a threat to individuality. As OSOC thought that unionization would enable and protect the cause of female self-determination, its opponents thought unionization threatened self-determination. Clerical organizers believed unionization could dissolve the chains of their labor, while others believed unionization would impose new chains altogether. Proponents of unionization looked at the conditions of their workplace and saw infantilization; opponents looked to the prospect of being represented by a union and feared they would themselves be infantilized. Opponents of OSOC were not necessarily resigned to being subordinated—but they remained unconvinced that a union provided the way out of workplace inequalities.<sup>53</sup>

While some clericals raised Orwellian specters to demonstrate how frightened they were that a union would threaten their individuality, other critics believed that the union's greatest threat was to a *collective* characteristic of Stanford, that is, the ostensibly collegial atmosphere between supervisors and staffers. This appears to have represented the public position of the university. Kennedy declared U.S.E. "confrontational" in an interview and charged them with contributing to a "tense and hostile" environment for labor relations. Such statements drew angry rejoinders from pro-union clericals, some of whom in a letter charged *him* with being "unusually negative and counterproductive." Ghaida Firestone plumbed the topic further when she discerned an inconsistency in the university's rhetoric:

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<sup>53</sup> "Secretary Vehemently Opposes Union," op. cit.; "Department Management Responsive," letter by Dave Criswell to *Campus Report*, 22 April 1981, 6; "Personal Freedom of Choice in Jeopardy," letter by Mrs. L. Black to *Campus Report*, 22 April 1981, 6; "Benefits from Union Dues Doubted," letter by Hannelore Karrer to *Campus Report*, 29 April 1981, 9.

By the way, since USE/SEIU Local 715 has been the cause of the “tense and hostile” atmosphere in the departments where union members work, how are we to account for the “tense and hostile” atmosphere in the departments where the employees do not belong to the union?

For all of OSOC’s rebuttals, however, the specter of a destabilizing clericals union continued to cast its shadow over some workers. One staffer named Caroline Gordon wrote to *Campus Report* that unionization would spell “instant breakdown of communication between 1,800 employees and their supervisors.”<sup>54</sup> We have seen that the relationship between joining a union and maintaining one’s autonomy as a female worker did not directly depend on one’s “loyalty” to the university but instead turned on concepts of what constituted protection of individuality. For those who felt threatened by the union’s *collective* effect on Stanford, however, “loyalty” may have been a driving concept. A clerical did not have to feel an affinity with the institution to be concerned that unionization would usurp her capacity for personal decision-making. To think that the union brought hostility and division to the pleasant atmosphere of Stanford, though, was to express concern for the university at large. It is easy to see how this concern may have been felt more strongly by more “loyal” staffers. Furthermore, the threat to collegiality was the exact worry of Kennedy, so any staffer who voiced the same concern stood, consciously or not, in alignment with the university president. Loyalty could have driven that decision as well. Hence the side-taking related to unionization was pushed by several forces. One’s position seems to have depended primarily on one’s view of the best means to address nettlesome issues of labor feminism—the source of protection and liberation, in whom to put one’s trust for the realization of individual self-determination. The two sides seem to have conformed to differing degrees of felt “loyalty,” even if

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<sup>54</sup> “Pro-union Flyers Purposely Misleading,” letter by Caroline Gordon to *Campus Report*, 29 April 1981, 9.

loyalty was not the force that drove all clericals' decisions. Yet for the university administration, and those clericals who ranged themselves against the union because it posed a collective threat, "loyalty" appears to have been an important factor in their decision, not just a byproduct or external symbol of it. Finally, all sentiments of opposition, whether grounded in a worldview of women's individuality or based in an affinity to the institution, may have been intensified by the university's opposition campaign.<sup>55</sup>

In a climate in which the university used a careful "anti" campaign based on the dissemination of information at meetings, and in which Kennedy's public position was shared by and may have influenced some clericals, we see why issues of language and objective representation were so central to the debate over OSOC. We have observed that clericals took opposite positions on what was the best manner in which to realize or preserve their individuality, but it is not that all clericals perceived an equivalent threat and differed only on the means to overcoming that threat. A month before the certification election in 1981, one staffer named Barbara Livingston wrote that "calling for a union contract is like shooting a gnat with an elephant gun." Livingston was simply not as fazed as others by the unfavorable wages and working conditions highlighted by OSOC. Some clericals may have perceived the same workplace problems and sincerely differed on their preferred solution, but some viewed the very *problems* in an entirely different manner than others. Those who perceived major workplace problems were willing to sign onto the risk—but the relatively *preferable* risk—of unionization; many of

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<sup>55</sup> "Election Bulletins Called Misleading," letter by Muriel Allen et al. to *Campus Report*, 22 April 1981, 6; "Employer Has No Right to Pick Union," letter by Ghaida M. Firestone to *Campus Report*, 22 April 1981, 7. The idea that United Stanford Employees threatened the collegial harmony of the university would surface again during the union's thirty-day strike of September–October 1982 (see Ch. 3).

them thought it quite promising. Those who did not think Stanford such a negative work atmosphere may have believed that OSOC's assertive campaign for liberation represented an unnecessary excess. The only way to justify the "elephant gun" of unionization was to believe there truly were elephants to kill.<sup>56</sup>

The Organizing Committee's cause may have been harmed by how it was represented, in two ways. First, the union was derogated by some opponents in the press, thus contributing to the sense that unionization was an excessive measure. Second, the problems of the Stanford workplace were not presented in such a way as to convince all clerical workers of their supposed seriousness. Thus the OSOC campaign turned on threat perception: How great was the threat to clerical workers in their everyday worksites? How great was the potential union threat to workers' individuality and the university's civility? Because of the disputatious nature of the press surrounding the campaign, and because no consensus existed on the information presented by either side, the foregoing questions were subject to multiple varied interpretations. Ultimately, many more clericals seem to have felt threatened by unionization than attracted to it. Because the perception of workplace or union threat appears to have depended on how information was transmitted during the campaign, then the attention to language by both sides makes sense. The repartee on the pages of newsletters and broadsheets makes sense. The charges and counter-charges of "tension" and "hostility" make sense. The selective use of history by each side makes sense. Dave Criswell's invocation of "no taxation without representation" makes sense, insofar as it amounted to a desire to place the story of unionization in a larger historical context. And two clerical workers' rapid response—

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<sup>56</sup> "Why Pay to Fit the Union Mould?" letter by Barbara Livingston to *Campus Report*, 8 April 1981, 7.

How many people who did not vote in the last presidential election, or who did not vote for Reagan, decided to disassociate themselves from the U.S. when Reagan won? [...] We *do* live in a democracy, and that means, with very few exceptions, we accept what a majority of the voters want.

—makes sense. The screening of labor films and discussions of labor history make sense. All of the language, all of the colloquy, had its use. It was all aimed at persuading others of the worthiness of one's side, to trump up or talk down the idea of threat. The university and the anti-unionists won out, and theirs was a victory of worldview and language.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> "Election Can Bring Greater Rights," letter by Chrissy O'Keefe and Claudia Patton to *Campus Report*, 29 April 1981, 9.



### *Chapter 3:*

## *The Strike of United Stanford Workers, September–October 1982*

### *PICKET LINE IN AUTUMN*

The face getting brown  
as morning falls  
just ripe out of the sky—  
a change from last night's  
cold, warm gloves and  
frost poured into  
these empty coffee cups—

you've never been so much  
in the world as now,  
spending all daylight  
and all night too outdoors,  
going in circles like the world does,  
though sometimes it seems  
standing still, getting nowhere—

except you know your tired feet  
are turning the earth  
and someday the sun  
will give itself up to you,  
the leaves surrender—  
you know they will, if  
you keep on walking long enough.

—*Mary Fell*

In *The Making of the English Working Class*, E.P. Thompson undertook to include in history “The blind alleys, the lost causes, and the losers themselves.” The forgotten actors were “valid in terms of their own experience,” he contended, and their own trials provided lessons for contemporary observers.<sup>58</sup> Although the month-long strike of United Stanford Workers (U.S.W.; née United Stanford Employees) in fall 1982 was also a “lost cause,” there is something to be learned from it. The union struggled to convince students and administrators that its walkout was legitimate (even legal), it suffered from poor press and division within its ranks, and it ended up ratifying a final university proposal that was, as all observers attested, indistinguishable from the one that had provoked the strike in the first place. Many students and the university administration felt the union had threatened the collegial equilibrium of the campus, and this sentiment seems to have intensified the disgust felt by students, who were bewildered to arrive on campus for fall quarter to meet dirty rooms and a scramble to secure meals. The economic and workplace issues at hand were poorly presented in the press, which focused on a recurring string of vandalism and on the always contentious and sometimes obstreperous behavior from all sides.

The 1982 strike was not only a generally cheerless episode but, it seems, a poorly documented episode. Among press accounts I have reviewed only *Campus Report* and *Stanford Daily* coverage, and so my study relies overwhelmingly on these internal university perspectives. They may contain biases and inaccuracies. A further limitation of *Campus Report* is that it was published only once a week; in addition, because the strike commenced during the intersession period between summer and fall quarters, *The*

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<sup>58</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York, Vintage Press: 1966 [1963]), 12–13.

*Daily's* first fall publication appeared eighteen days into the walkout. For these reasons it is hard to gain a sense of the day-to-day events of the strike. Although I have located and interviewed some former workers and union activists, my pool of interviewees has been too small to allow me to attempt a complete recreation of the events of September and October 1982.

I am thus forced to emphasize one notable element of the strike: the *language* surrounding it. The way the strike was described in the press helps us to understand the strategies of the union and the university, the perceptions of faculty and students, the dilemmas and impediments that doomed the union to failure. Press coverage of the strike does not describe the union's failure completely, but one can certainly understand how it was discussed. From the telltale signs of the press, then, one might gain at least a sense of why the strike failed. By looking backward and forward, with interviews and previous studies of Stanford labor, one can additionally place the failure of 1982 into the lengthy story of unionization at Stanford. The strike of 1982 grew out of the creation of the union in the early 1970s, and the struggles of today are related to the consequences of 1982. Workers and some observers felt the strike was a necessary action in pursuit of reasonable wages and benefits, but to the university administration and many students and faculty members, the strike was unreasonable and threatened the campus equilibrium to intolerable degrees. It was this latter perspective that ultimately carried the day, and most union members and sympathizers thought the strike a failure.

The first hint of labor unrest on the Stanford campus appeared in 1982 appeared in early July on the pages of *Campus Report* and *The Stanford Daily*. Readers of the July 14, 1982, edition of *Campus Report* learned that the university and the union had begun negotiations for their fourth contract, which would replace the agreement signed in September 1979 and set to expire August 31, 1982. United Stanford Workers (U.S.W.) was a 1350-member bargaining unit composed of technical, maintenance, and service workers on the main campus and at the nearby Stanford Linear Accelerator Center (SLAC).<sup>59</sup> According to *The Daily*, contentious issues included wages, benefits, and grievance procedures; Michael Baratz, the executive secretary of U.S.W., expected hard negotiations over these “major problem areas.”<sup>60</sup> When the union made an initial proposal calling for an annual wage increase of twenty percent or \$320.00 (whichever was higher), the university responded with its own more modest offer of a seven percent wage hike in the first year followed by five percent in each of the next two years. Negotiators met the weekend of August 21–22 for a bargaining session, but it was reportedly “considered unproductive by both sides.”<sup>61</sup> The union rented strike headquarters in Palo Alto and organized food, hardship, and picket committees. As the union made arrangements for a strike, the university vowed to honor its responsibility to remain open as it prepared for the arrival of thousands of students and the beginning of autumn quarter. In late August some 250 workers, part of but acting independently from the union, staged a “sick-out” to protest what they saw as delays in negotiations on the university’s part. This act of defiance did not force the university to significantly alter its

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<sup>59</sup> “Contract Talks Under Way,” *Campus Report*, 14 July 1982, 1.

<sup>60</sup> Ray Newman, “Contract Discussions Start,” *The Stanford Daily*, 7 July 1982, 1.

<sup>61</sup> Karen Bartholomew, “Little Progress Reported in USW Contract Negotiations,” *Campus Report*, 25 August 1982, 1.

proposal, which Priscilla Wheeler, staff counsel in the university's legal department, judged a "very sensible initial offer, given the state of the economy."<sup>62</sup> The union rejected the university's final offer on September 7 by a membership vote of 465 to 172 and began an indefinite strike on September 10, 1982.<sup>63</sup>

Whatever the limits of the sources, they provide enough information to help us understand the offers and counter-offers, charges and counter-charges, and demonstrations, disputes, and perceptions of the strike of September–October 1982. The first available reports of the work stoppage were mentioned in the September 15 edition of *Campus Report*. The paper reported that 800 workers remained off the job through the fifth day of the strike. On the first day hundreds of workers marched on the offices of Wheeler and Donald Kennedy, the university president. Workers formed picket lines in various locations, including construction sites, where they registered their "most serious disruption" when building trades unions maintained solidarity and refused to cross. Deliveries to campus "slowed dramatically" following sanction of the strike by the Teamsters Joint Council, and work at SLAC was impeded by significant picketing.<sup>64</sup> The museum and gallery were closed indefinitely.<sup>65</sup> Work at the Medical School clinics continued apace, and there was little effect at the university proper, which was on recess and largely free of students. After temporary shutdowns, some construction projects resumed (some pickets were voluntarily withdrawn, according to Baratz), and at the

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Karen Bartholomew, "800 Workers Stay on Strike in Fifth Day: Construction Slowed," *Campus Report*, 15 September 1982, 1.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Karen Bartholomew, "Mediation Effort Resumes as Strike Enters 20th Day," *Campus Report*, 29 September 1982, 1.

university in general “most operations remained near normal.”<sup>66</sup> The apparent continuity of campus operations can perhaps be explained by the surprising number of unionized workers who did not initially honor the strike. Although only 311 of the 1,121 members of the bargaining unit reported to work on the fourth day (according to *Campus Report*), because the preponderance of workers were on vacation during the intersession, those 311 turncoats represented fully 73 percent of those scheduled to work.<sup>67</sup>

Although operations remained largely free of disturbance, the calm atmosphere of campus was ruptured by acts of vandalism committed by unknown perpetrators. The vandalism of the first day was petty, consisting of sabotaged toilets and the alteration and undoing of doors, hinges, and locks. Vandalism escalated by the fourth and fifth days, though, when, among other incidents, somebody made a bomb threat at the Medical School, several car tires were slashed, and a picketer smashed the windshield of an independent trucker (the offender was briefly detained and then released). These incidents coincided with reports of skirmishes on a number of picket lines.<sup>68</sup> The vandalism “diminished” by the second week—though it did not disappear—but plenty of less physical and perhaps more effective militancy occurred.<sup>69</sup> When strikers constrained themselves to leafleting spectators at a mid-September Stanford football game and hired a helicopter to fly by with a banner that read, “STANFORD UNFAIR TO WORKERS,” they earned Kennedy’s gratitude for their restraint and “real class”—but their message reached 60,000 fans.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Karen Bartholomew and Bob Beyers, “Strike Still Deadlocked in 12th Day,” *Campus Report*, 22 September 1982, 1.

<sup>67</sup> Bartholomew, op. cit., “800 Workers.”

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Bartholomew and Beyers, op. cit., “Strike Still Deadlocked.”

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

While vandalism temporarily ebbed and militancy assumed different forms in different places, *Campus Report* told readers that “claims and counter-claims escalated.”<sup>71</sup> This was to put it modestly. The university claimed the union had gone to strike over contract demands illegally, by failing to express its intentions to the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service before the contract expired. The union counter-claimed that no such forewarning was necessary since the strike was called on the grounds of an unfair labor practice—as a union representative claimed, “[t]he University’s refusal to provide certain information to the union concerning contracting, temporary workers, and other non-bargaining unit workers.”<sup>72</sup> Kennedy claimed that Stanford’s contract offer had been “fair and generous,” pointing for evidence to a Bureau of National Affairs report that “average settlements this year have been for a 4.8 percent increase.”<sup>73</sup> Baratz counter-claimed:

They offered (USW) 9.5 percent, and that’s it in the first year. But we know that the budget’s going up 14.5 percent; we know that operating department managers were told 11 and 12 percent for wages in their budgets; we know that the clerical workers got 10 percent plus their step increases, up to 15 percent; we know that all the faculty are getting 10.5 and above; we know that everybody here is getting 10 or more.

[...] It’s just crummy, facing an 11.2 percent cost-of-living increase in the Bay Area through June.

Stanford has some interesting practices: you might look and say that \$6 an hour sounds OK, but you still can’t live on it; you have to live in the dorms here to survive or get up at 4 in the morning in San Jose to take the bus to work at 6 or 6:30.<sup>74</sup>

Wheeler insisted the university had negotiated fairly; Baratz accused the university of union-busting to intimidate hospital employees who wanted to organize. Wheeler

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Bartholomew, op. cit., “800 Workers.”

<sup>73</sup> “Kennedy: Offer Fair, Generous,” *Campus Report*, 15 September 1982, 3.

<sup>74</sup> “Michael Baratz Gives USW Views on Labor Negotiations,” *Campus Report*, 15 September 1982, 4.

claimed the union had never raised the charge of unfair labor practices during negotiations; Baratz, remembering the meetings differently, called her a “liar.”<sup>75</sup>

Although these disputes did not cease with the arrival of 12,000 students for the beginning of autumn quarter in late September, *The Daily*, back in publication, could report that each side was “particularly anxious to gain the sympathies of the Stanford community.” The union called in a federal mediator to help renew negotiations on September 29 and planned a candle-lit vigil at Kennedy’s on-campus residence, the Lou Henry Hoover House. The union entreated students to join picket lines and don green ribbons in solidarity with workers, a strategy which appears to have been initially successful. While Kennedy conceded that the university was less outgoing than the union—in part because of his insistence that the labor dispute be decided not in the press but at the bargaining table—he added, “there is more need for us to explain our position.” After all, despite the normality of campus it remained plausible that the strike would threaten the daily functioning and public image of the university. “Whenever there’s a work stoppage,” Kennedy said, “there is work that is not done so you look a little unkempt around the edges. There’s an atmosphere that is less than harmonious and we don’t particularly like that.”<sup>76</sup>

Some of the work not done during the strike was the rendering of food and janitorial services to students, and this wore thin the patience of students. The university consolidated the available food service staff to keep the Wilbur dining hall open for breakfast and lunch, and service was later extended to Florence Moore Hall. Students

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<sup>75</sup> “Questions and Answers about the Strike—Priscilla Wheeler,” *Campus Report*, 15 September 1982, 4; David Azrin, “Strike Talks to Resume This Week,” *The Stanford Daily*, 27 September 1982, 1.

<sup>76</sup> Bartholomew, op. cit., “Mediation Effort”; David Azrin, “Both Union, University Seek to Gain Community Sympathy during Strike,” *The Stanford Daily*, 27 September 1982, 3.

received cash rebates which they were encouraged to spend at off-campus restaurants or at the suddenly popular eateries of Tresidder Memorial Union. Fraternities and eating clubs provided stopgap meals, and “resident fellows,” or faculty members residing in dorms, put on their oven mitts and cooked to demand.<sup>77</sup> The leading light in alternative eating strategies was Professor of English Ronald Rebholz, a resident fellow in Trancos House, who initiated five rotating “eating groups” among his eighty freshman residents. One unit would cook in his apartment, and two apiece would bike into neighboring Palo Alto and call on cooperative houses, where upperclass students hastily made excess food to spoon out on their front lawns.<sup>78</sup> Yet these emergency measures were a burden—and they hardly resembled the long-awaited freshman experience. Rebholz recalls that students became “bewildered and hostile” toward the administration, a sentiment encouraged by him and his resident assistants, who were sympathetic to the union’s cause and carefully deployed their “educational influence” over the dorm. Yet Rebholz also remembers that his staff’s best efforts at tidying rooms for move-in day failed to obviate the anger and dismay of students and parents. While Rebholz vowed to “go knock on Kennedy’s door and ask him to come run Trancos,”<sup>79</sup> students directed their anger not just at the administration but at all parties to the strike: not one of fifteen freshman interviewed for a piece in *Campus Report* “voiced strong support” for strikers. Instead they despaired at the relative squalor of their rooms, sullied by “bits of garbage scattered around,” and complained about the inconvenient timing of the strike.<sup>80</sup> “I hope the students will realize that we are not unreasonable and that both sides must bargain,” said

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<sup>77</sup> Julie Kaufmann, “Food at Flo Mo [sic],” *The Stanford Daily*, 29 September 1982, 1.

<sup>78</sup> Julie Kaufmann, “Strike Disrupts University Life,” *The Stanford Daily*, 27 September 1982, 1.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*; Bartholomew, *op. cit.*, “Mediation Effort.”

<sup>80</sup> Katherine Hutt, “Profile of a USW Striker,” *The Stanford Daily*, 5 October 1982, 3; Ronald Rebholz, interview with author, Stanford, Calif., 15 February 2006.

Michael Baratz.<sup>81</sup> But these hopeful words fell on the deaf ears of students, faculty, and administrators.

Challenging as it was to protect the fabric of student support from the ripping disruptions of a strike, stitching together worker solidarity was no less difficult. As mentioned previously, nearly three-quarters of scheduled workers reported to work even during the first week of the strike. *The Stanford Daily* announced on September 29 that: “Members of USW are faced with the familiar striker’s problem of having the work they are leaving behind done by union members who refuse to strike—or by temporary workers brought in by management.”<sup>82</sup> Many of these “scabs” were part-time student employees; many of them were sympathetic to the strikers but cited a range of pragmatic concerns in deciding against honoring the picket line. The union reserved most of its contempt, not for these students, but for workers who offered “cockamamie excuses” in defense of crossing the picket lines or quitting the union altogether.<sup>83</sup> Yet the same issue of *The Daily* that described the “scabs” reports that, “[a]lthough the strike has gone on for 20 days, morale remains high among USW members.” Approximately 850 workers remained on strike, it said, which was 64 percent of the bargaining unit—with 36 percent crossing.<sup>84</sup> Oddly, the October 5 *Daily* held that “about 36 percent” of the 1321-member bargaining unit had come to work on the fourth and reported this fact as if it were the highest turncoat rate of the strike. Yet 36 percent plainly remained unchanged from the week before.<sup>85</sup> “Divisions Grow within United Stanford Workers’ Union as Strike Enters

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<sup>81</sup> Azrin, op. cit., “Both Union, University.”

<sup>82</sup> Seth Zuckerman, “?? pickets and Scabs: USW Adjusting to Strike Conditions: Union Workers Bitter toward Temporary Help,” *The Stanford Daily*, 29 September 1982, 1.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Katherine Hutt, “?? pickets and Scabs: USW Adjusting to Strike Conditions: Employees Working at ?? Picket Lines,” *The Stanford Daily*, 29 September 1982, 1.

<sup>85</sup> Julie Kaufmann, “University Police Arrest 13 Strikers,” *The Stanford Daily*, 5 October 1982, 1.

28th Day” was the headline of a October 7 *Daily* article, noting that more than a third of union workers had crossed picket lines.<sup>86</sup> *Campus Report* on the sixth added, “The proportion of bargaining unit members on the job has risen slowly from 27 to 36 percent,” also suggesting not just divisions, but *growing* ones.<sup>87</sup> It is true that many workers crossed picket lines in the first days of the strike, when class was out of session, but once the school year began, all news sources consistently reported that around 850 workers were honoring the strike (if anything, this showed *increasing* support). The day before the strike ended, said *Campus Report*, “37 percent of the bargaining unit was working”—once again, little change from previous levels.<sup>88</sup> It would be wrong to suggest that the union was not conflicted and broken into factions, but it seems that the press acted too hastily and ignored its own numbers in declaring that these divisions had widened. And when the first sentence of a *Daily* article read that “University figures show employees are trickling back to work,” the impression of a struggling union must have been planted in the public mind.<sup>89</sup> We cannot know what effect, if any, such misrepresentations had on those who were on strike. Today’s readers, looking back, might be induced to cautiousness when assessing the history of labor on campus.

Proportions aside, those workers who participated in the strike did so under great duress. Five hundred of them were “actively involved” on the picket lines or at strike headquarters, where they answered phone calls, distributed food to picketers, and cared for the children of strikers for 100 dollars weekly strike pay. Many workers had no other

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<sup>86</sup> David Azrin, “Divisions Grow within United Stanford Workers’ Union as Strike Enters 28th Day,” *The Stanford Daily*, 7 October 1982, 1.

<sup>87</sup> Karen Bartholomew, “Mediating Talks Resume at 10 a.m. Thursday,” *Campus Report*, 6 October 1982, 1.

<sup>88</sup> “420-100 Vote Ends Longest Campus Strike,” *Campus Report*, 13 October 1982, 1.

<sup>89</sup> Kaufmann, op. cit., “University Police.”

income, but, as one worker attested, “your grocery bill goes on, your rent bill goes on, and the people with the large families, they’re really in a bind.” Said Bob Elmore, the head electrician at University Plant Services: “It’s come to the point now where we’ve had to cut corners in every possible way.” Yet twenty workers could be found on the second-to-last night of September maintaining a vigil outside Kennedy’s house, “telling stories and drinking coffee by the light of two candles as they bundled themselves in blankets and sleeping bags.”<sup>90</sup>

I have included the foregoing testimonials in the narrative, as they are among the very few workers’ perspectives available in the sources. Much more frequent in news articles were accounts of vandalism, arrests, and the disputes of hard-headed negotiators from both sides. Throughout the news coverage it becomes clear that each side had dug in for a fight. Much of the reporting on the negotiating terms, in both *Campus Report* and *The Daily*, consisted of quotations from Wheeler, Kennedy, or Baratz, each reiterating his or her own side and expressing frustration at the opposition’s alleged intransigence. Some reporting examined the effects of a strike on campus life, which we have reviewed. Some news pieces devoted inches of column space to accusations and rejoinders. There was little investigative reporting into the merits of the arguments, though, and less still into the actual economic context and market pressures said to influence the negotiations. *The Daily* ran a front-page report on the arrest of Baratz and two others in a “paint-throwing” incident one day, which was followed the next day by an above-the-fold piece on the arrest of thirteen picketers for unlawful assembly and

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<sup>90</sup> Hutt, op. cit., “[P]ickets and Scab”; Hutt, op. cit., “Profile”; David Azrin, “Deadlock Prompts Meetings in SF Today,” *The Stanford Daily*, 30 September 1982, 1.

obstructing traffic. Reports of more vandalism surfaced, and a *Daily* editorial furnished this taxonomy of unlawful behavior:

In the last few days, 16 strikers were arrested on charges of unlawful assembly and obstructing traffic, including Michael Baratz, USW executive secretary. Incidents involving slashed tires, broken windshields, flooded restrooms and other acts of vandalism have been well-documented. In the most recent incident, a main fire-alarm loop was deliberately cut on Monday night, leaving a substantial number of buildings and dorms without direct communication to the Fire Department. A total of 24 workers and union organizers have been arrested since the beginning of the walkout, despite statements by the police about its reluctance to get involved.<sup>91</sup>

There were many indiscretions; they were “well-documented” and seem to have reflected negatively on the strike. It is impossible to know exactly how students reacted to the constant news of vandalism, but probably not positively. Seeming both to reflect and perpetuate feelings of weariness with the strike, one article concluded with this somber précis of events: “There are still no negotiations scheduled in the longest strike ever against the University. Union and University officials last met Oct. 1 with federal mediators, but no progress was made.”<sup>92</sup>

While a comprehensive understanding is lacking of how students perceived the lengthening strike, a series of cartoons in *The Daily* suggests they had run out of patience—if not a certain gallows humor. Mark Wilson’s “Gradepoint” cartoon, published in *The Daily*, suggests students were nourished by a steady dose of confusing assertions, and not much else. One cartoon showed Donald Kennedy congratulating the incoming class of 1986 for being “a diverse collection of resilient, no-nonsense folk, that would probably just as soon go hungry as be spoon-fed”—which, he thought ruefully to himself, “brings me back to the strike.”<sup>93</sup> The next day’s cartoon saw Kennedy

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<sup>91</sup> “A Dangerous, Ignoble Battle.” Unsigned editorial, *The Stanford Daily*, 7 October 1982, 4.

<sup>92</sup> Kaufmann, op. cit., “University Police”; Julie Kaufmann, “Police Arrest 3 Union Members,” *The Stanford Daily*, 4 October 1982, 1.

<sup>93</sup> Mark Wilson, “Gradepoint” cartoon, *The Stanford Daily*, 28 September 1982.

concluding his address with a hopeful call to pull together during the strike, only to have the auditorium electricity immediately cease to function.<sup>94</sup> Rather than empathize with workers, most students seem to have related to the “strike victim” in the next day’s “Gradepoint,” whose trip to the tuition office was enlivened by pickets blocking his bike, overgrown shrubs obstructing the office’s sign, and the accumulated weakness of several days without food.<sup>95</sup> The topic of nutrition reached its most sardonic level in a conversation between two student-characters in an early October cartoon by Wilson:

FEMALE STUDENT: “Look, Fitzlloyd, more press on the strike: ‘In yesterday’s marathon negotiations the university repeated its cost-of-living and wage statistics.

‘The union accused the university of comparing apples and oranges, and suggested they stick to the bread and butter issues.

‘The university counter-asserted that recent union proposals were merely warmed-over cabbage—nothing meaty enough to sink your teeth into.’”

FITZLLOYD: “I think I’m going bananas.”

FEMALE STUDENT: “‘At which point the federal mediator decided to break for lunch.’”<sup>96</sup>

Students’ preoccupation with food service must have derived partly from their sincere hunger. In *The Daily*’s estimation, the strike had indeed enfeebled students “nowhere [...] more than in their stomachs.”<sup>97</sup> But the recurring jibes at the lack of available food provided a space in which other less jocular concerns could rise to the surface. The theme emerged with a new subtlety in an editorial-page cartoon in *The Daily*, where a menu on a dining hall counter promised a “special” of “strike rhetoric gruel”: Said the glowering cook, “It’s tough, it’s greasy, and it’s hard to swallow, but it’s all we’re serving.”<sup>98</sup> A want of sustenance had been aggravated by a want of intelligible discussion, and this sentiment likewise arose in the aforementioned *Daily* editorial:

<sup>94</sup> Mark Wilson, “Gradepoint” cartoon, 29 September 1982, 2.

<sup>95</sup> Azrin, op. cit., “Deadlock.”

<sup>96</sup> Mark Wilson, “Gradepoint” cartoon. *The Stanford Daily*, 5 October 1982, 5.

<sup>97</sup> “Students Suffer,” op. cit., *The Stanford Daily*.

<sup>98</sup> ?? Marquil, Untitled cartoon, *The Stanford Daily*, 5 October 1982, 4.

The search for food has raised the ire of many students—some who in the past may have been strong supporters of unions—who now find themselves resenting the union for interrupting their daily routines. Students arriving back from their leisurely summer vacations suddenly have been thrust into the center of a hostile, sometimes violent strike.

There were the interruptions that students, like Wilson's "strike victim," faced every day. There was the "hostility" and "violence" which, as we have seen, students read about every week. While students who accepted a temporary job seemed to range themselves against the union, and those who distributed leaflets, in favor, not everybody found a suitable way to declare preferences. In between lay an uncomfortable space of "neutrality." *The Daily* queried,

[...] is it really possible to remain neutrally unconcerned about something which is such a central issue on campus?

A recent union newsletter states that by eating at Tresidder Union, picking up food supplies at the University commissary, or just having packages sent by the United Parcel Service, students are knowingly or unknowingly siding with the University. What about crossing picket lines to attend classes? Does that too constitute support for the University?

Students were confused but had not sufficiently sought out information on the strike. The union petitioned for solidarity but was unclear in the details. The university shrunk from adding a public element to its own negotiating efforts and neither comforted nor edified its students.<sup>99</sup>

The strike was finally concluded in the second week of October. Early in the month, the university rejected a union proposal that workers return to their jobs while an "advisory arbitration team" assessed the dispute and made recommendations to both sides. At the failure of that strategy Baratz released a confidential report in which the university's compensation department had "recommended first-year wage increases more than 3.5 percent higher than the University's most recent offer." The university officials

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

did not want a “third party” influence on collective bargaining, though, and neither did they think the compensation department’s recommendations were safeguarded by sufficient evidence.<sup>100</sup> On October 5 the union dropped its request that the university supply information on temporary, non-union workers (the absence of such information was the basis for the charge of unfair labor practices), which *The Daily* thought would free up negotiators to focus on resolving the impasse over wages and benefits.<sup>101</sup> Negotiators at last reached a resolution on Saturday, October 9, for a new three year-contract with wage increases totaling 24.5 percent and a “cost of living escalator” in the third year. Workers ratified the final proposal by 420 to 100, but union representatives thought it a defeat. “Nobody accepts this proposal in any sense of the word as fair or just,” said Michael Baratz: “The university continued to bargain in bad faith, to lie, to not provide justification.”<sup>102</sup> Lon Warneke recalls, “We ended up really settling for the original offer the university put on the table. We didn’t really gain much that year that I remember.”<sup>103</sup> The first edition of *The Daily* after the strike’s conclusion shared this judgment:

The final settlement [...] differs little from the University’s proposal offered Sept. 7. The new contract provides workers with a 7 percent wage and a 3 percent additional step increase as well as an additional \$5 a month towards medical coverage in the first year.

The University’s Sept. 7 proposal offered a 9.5 percent across-the-board wage increase and no additional medical benefits in the first year.<sup>104</sup>

Donald Kennedy expressed pleasure at the conclusion of the strike, but one retired staffer named Julia Harvey wrote in a letter to *Campus Report* that this was a “hollow

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<sup>100</sup> David Azrin, “University Rejects Arbitration Offer,” *The Stanford Daily*, 4 October 1982, 1.

<sup>101</sup> David Azrin, “Important Stumbling Block Removed from University Strike Negotiations,” *The Stanford Daily*, 6 October 1982, 1.

<sup>102</sup> “420-100 Vote Ends Longest Campus Strike,” *Campus Report*, 13 October 1982, 1.

<sup>103</sup> Jack Truher and Lon Warneke, podcast recorded for author, 2005.

<sup>104</sup> David Azrin, “USW Strike Settled; Workers Return to Jobs Today: Contract Little Increase over First Univ. Proposal,” *The Stanford Daily*, 11 October 1982, 1.

victory” for Stanford. The university “had to demonstrate its power over workers,” and workers would return under a cloud of anger and resentment.<sup>105</sup> Felix Barthelemy, Stanford’s manager of employee relations, did not think the resolution a victory, even a hollow one: “The proposals reflect some compromises by both sides [...] The University didn’t gain anything from the strike. We weren’t looking to win anything. It really didn’t do us any good. It had a serious impact on everyone [*sic*], students, workers, their families, and the institution.” Treatment of the vandalism and violence was handed over to the district attorney, but the university stated its unwillingness to retaliate against workers for mere participation in the strike.<sup>106</sup> Freedom from retaliation was a rather thin silver lining, though, for everyone seemed to see clouds. To *The Daily*, the strike amounted to a “dangerous, ignoble battle”: “The academic environment is what we’re supposed to preserve at Stanford. At the risk of sounding like we’ve been unfairly deprived of our isolation, one would think that a university and its workers would deal with a strike in an intelligent, diplomatic manner.”<sup>107</sup> The union had debased itself with its vandalism, and the university had neglected the effects of the strike on the community. Skeptics of the university would emerge with a hardened view of things, for, the editorial said, “[t]he apparent intransigence of the University’s bargaining position and the final terms of the settlement only give credence to those who associate Stanford with the ‘robber-baron’ image of its founder.”<sup>108</sup> It was a final negative bar in a long and grim song.

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<sup>105</sup> “420-100 Vote,” op. cit., *Campus Report*.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> “Dangerous Battle,” op. cit., *The Stanford Daily*.

<sup>108</sup> “Strike Settlement Settles Little,” Unsigned editorial, *The Stanford Daily*, 11 October 1982, 4.

## II

At the conclusion of the 1982 strike, if the university felt embattled, United Stanford Workers felt completely defeated. For workers the strike was a story of failure. The union's immediate failure was its inability to win what it perceived to be fair wages and benefits. The university's September 7 proposal made wage and benefit offerings that the union did not perceive to be fair. Unsatisfied, the union struck in an attempt to pressure the university's negotiators to make what the union would consider sufficient concessions: to compel the university into taking the steps necessary to end the strike. Since the union settled on a resolution in October that was, by all accounts, largely similar to the proposal rejected in September, the essential failure of the union was its inability to bring sufficient pressure to bear on the university's negotiating team. United Stanford Workers did not create enough of a crisis with the strike to force the hand of the university. Ultimately, then, the union found that its own hand was forced.

Where was pressure exerted upon the university, and where was it vulnerable to more? Unlike plants, mills, and workshops, universities are not workplaces where a physical product is created. Hence, a university's revenue and financial well-being do not depend on its continued production and sale of a good. Instead, the university deals mainly in the production of knowledge. The institution hires faculty members to create and disseminate knowledge, an endeavor that is largely compensated for by students and parents, who pay to receive (and sometimes participate in the creation of) that knowledge. The university must render certain services to maintain the welfare of these students, chiefly food, lodging, and classroom and lab space, but also outlets for physical activity and entertainment. While a strike of unionized clerical workers and librarians

might pose a threat to the educational mission of the university, no such clericals union exists at Stanford. Even when a great majority of workers representing the variety of jobs grouped under U.S.W. went on strike, the university did not grind to a halt; its “production” did not stop. Those employees who were unionized in 1982 were technical, maintenance, and service workers: life-science technicians, carpenters, plumbers, painters, machinists, custodians, food-service workers, delivery personnel, gardeners, and storekeepers.<sup>109</sup> Technicians on strike must surely have hampered the scientific work at SLAC, but that work is not the central or decisive concern of Stanford. Construction projects suffered greatly, at first, then swung back into action. Dorms were messy, but students continued to live and attend classes. While food service was extremely shortchanged, scarce, and of low quality (to hear students tell it), students found ways to eat. Lawns went unmowed, which troubled Kennedy, but this could be tolerated. Even a broad and prolonged strike failed to jeopardize the day-to-day economic stewardship of Stanford University the way a production line walkout might disable an auto plant or an apparel-preparing *maquiladora*. The diverse services provided by U.S.W. employees certainly helped Stanford’s information factory run smoothly, but the absence of them for a month was only unpleasant, not dire. Furthermore, as the studies of Stephen Pitti, as well as Lisa Sun-Hee Park and David Pellow, demonstrate, by the early 1980s Silicon Valley had already experienced an “agricultural deindustrialization” with an accompanying ballooning of the service sector and popularization of temporary work.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> David Azrin, “Strike Talks to Resume This Week,” *The Stanford Daily*, 27 September 1982, 1.

<sup>110</sup> Lisa Sun Hee Park and David N. Pellow, *The Silicon Valley of Dreams: Environmental Injustice, Immigrant Workers, and the High-tech Global Economy* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), ix, 1–2, 18, 81, 152, 154, 209–210; Stephen Pitti, *The Devil in Silicon Valley: Northern California, Race, and Mexican-Americans* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), 193. Today, according to Park and Pellow, Silicon Valley has the greatest number of temporary workers per capita of any region in the country.

Hence if the absence of striking employees had made the work of the university untenable in the fall of 1982, Stanford could always have drawn labor from the great nearby pool of service workers in the Bay Area—and this is even more true today. There was no threat of economic apocalypse in 1982 and no pressure to be exerted on that front.

Even if a strike could not have threatened Stanford's finances by detaining its "production"—for much of its productive capacity is serviced by workers who become either expendable or replaceable in the short-term turmoil of a strike—there is another manner in which a strike could threaten the economic stewardship of Stanford. It turns on image. When Kennedy lamented that the campus was "a little unkempt around the edges," he was concerned about the physical appearance of the university; his anxiety at the "less than harmonious" atmosphere represented a fear that the collegiality of a liberal university had come under threat.<sup>111</sup> The sloppiness and friction of a strike could diminish Stanford in the eyes of an outside observer; it is conceivable that alumni might withhold donations and potential students shift their interests elsewhere. Alumni donations and student tuition are two of the chief sources of university revenue, and the thought that they were in jeopardy could have compelled the university to make concessions toward a new contract. This sort of economic pressure differs from the suspension of product-line work, though, because it probably must remain either constant for a protracted period (perhaps more than a month) or intense for a short period.

Stanford was unkempt and tense, but not for a long time or to an intense degree. After all, Kennedy lamented only that the university was "a *little unkempt around the edges*"—but the famous palm trees had not come crashing to the ground. The strike dialogue was bitter and uncompromising and on full display in the press, yet we have no

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<sup>111</sup> Donald Kennedy, interview with author, Stanford, Calif., 14 October 2005.

evidence of national or regional coverage, and it is possible that the sharpest exchanges were restricted to the on-campus publications. Even if news of the strike did surface nationally—or at least catch the attention of local alumni who read *Campus Report* and *The Daily*—the union was more vocal than the university and employed more extreme and personally-directed characterizations. Each side accused the other of stubbornness: although the union's attempts to exert external pressure on the negotiating table may have been pragmatic, their laborious efforts to do so could have seemed overreaching to general readers. Meanwhile, against all the accusations that it was intransigent, the university remained collected and defended its wish that negotiations be limited to the bargaining table. One side lunged, the other parried, and those who lunged always came out looking worse. Stanford was tense and unkempt during the 1982 strike. But to have seized the opportunity to bring a delayed economic pressure to bear on the university, U.S.W. would have needed to render campus yet tenser and more unkempt.

What avenues were too little explored? Despite initial indications that students were supportive, most seemed unsatisfied with the “strike rhetoric gruel” that was offered to win them over to the union's side. Uncertainty grew into resentment with the absence of expected services. It is true that *The Daily* laid some blame for student hardship at the feet of an unresponsive administration. It is also true that some community members felt (with Rebholz) that student want was caused not by the union's decision to declare a strike, but by the administration's unwillingness to make sufficient concessions to end it. The predominant opinion among students, though, seems to be that the strike was a painful experience for students and that it had been precipitated (at least in part) by the

union. Perhaps the union was not completely to blame, but it appeared too much to blame to win the support of hungry students.

There remained the possibility that some faculty members would speak out against the university, but the sources suggest that simply not enough professors were willing to shame the administration into making concessions. The ever-present Rebholz wrote or co-wrote a handful of opinion pieces in *Campus Report* and *The Daily*, and he was frequently quoted in news articles, but his own exasperation does not seem to have extended to many of his colleagues. On the one occasion in which he collaborated with five other professors to urge the university to accept the union's offer, their letter was premised by the need to educate their colleagues who "have told us they do not understand the issues at stake."<sup>112</sup> An embarrassing faculty revolt against the administration was unlikely to occur in this atmosphere of misunderstanding. Further still, Rebholz was driven to speak largely because he felt the direct pains of the strike as a resident fellow in the Trancos dormitory. Few other professors would have shared this experience. At all events, some professors who were troubled by the strike turned their difficulties into a desire to defeat the union. Donald Kennedy at one point related that many exasperated members of the Stanford community urged him, "Why don't you starve them."<sup>113</sup> Kennedy recalls that these sentiments were whispered to him not only by fellows at the conservative Hoover Institution but also by regular professors.<sup>114</sup> Finally, Rebholz and others worried in a joint letter that students' hostility toward workers "might quickly translate into hostility toward racial minorities" because of the

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<sup>112</sup> "University Should Improve Final Offer, End Strike Quickly—Six Faculty," Letter by Ronald A. Rebholz et al. to *Campus Report*, 29 September 1982, 21.

<sup>113</sup> Azrin, op. cit., "Both Union, University."

<sup>114</sup> Kennedy, op. cit.

preponderance of people of color among the service segments of the bargaining unit.<sup>115</sup> But for a faculty that seemed either short on information or patently hostile to the union, this appeal to racial considerations failed to stick.

Although the union's entreaties for public support intended to pressure an otherwise unwavering institution, these efforts not only failed to win over enough students and faculty but were indeed used by the university to portray U.S.W. as a danger to the civil balance of Stanford. In the final week of the strike, Donald Kennedy addressed a meeting of the Faculty Senate:

Those experienced with labor negotiations, here and elsewhere, have had a good deal of difficulty in interpreting this strike. It is said to be about an unfair labor practice, yet actually deals with contract terms; and the union leadership, instead of using the process of collective bargaining seriously, has sought to settle it in every other way possible—on the picket line, in the media, by political pressure, and now finally by personal harassment. But it will be settled only at the table—and only through the introduction, by USW's representatives, of a note of realism in the bargaining process.<sup>116</sup>

Here Kennedy does not complain that the strike deprived students of clean rooms or made them work for their dinner; he does not restate his displeasure at an unkempt campus. His complaints with the union were not over certain bothersome consequences of the strike. What troubled Kennedy most was that the union's political strategies, though insufficient, seemed to vitiate the university's self-conception as a friendly citadel of rational pursuits. Where the union saw an unfair labor practice as the strike's justification, Kennedy saw only a willful manipulation and cover for the real concern of contract terms. The union raised pickets and released statements thinking it could increase awareness, but Kennedy saw only distractions and diversions. The university emerged cleaner-looking from the media colloquy, and this discrepancy acted against the

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<sup>115</sup> "University Should," *op. cit.*

<sup>116</sup> "'Significant' Union Move Needed in Negotiations, Kennedy Tells Senate," *Campus Report*, 6 October 1982, 9.

union's attempt to create tension. However sincere Kennedy's concerns may have been, his response had the effect of turning the union leaders' very hope for success against them. The union's political endeavors invited the admonitions of a university guarding its civil terrain, but these admonitions were especially specific and probably quite damaging. The union's attempt to bring the 1982 strike into the public realm were necessary, in their view, yet ultimately insufficient. In the climate of 1982 they appear outright counterproductive. Had the union deployed a broad and airtight outreach campaign, the accumulated political support might have overridden the university's response. Yet all attempts to impugn the university met with the decisive rebuke of civility, and the union was overtaken. Defeated in the media, the union could only watch as its support withered. The 1982 strike turned on threat, and those who seemed most threatened won out over those who seemed most threatening.

## ***Chapter 4:***

### ***Webb Ranch, 1988–2003***

On the property of Stanford University, in unincorporated neighboring Menlo Park, there sits a farm, nearly 250 acres in size, called Webb Ranch. For many years a variable number of Mexican immigrant farmworkers has tended the land. Since the land has been leased to the Webb family for more than eighty years, these workers are directly hired by the ranch management, not by Stanford University itself. Although the university has held certain informal relationships with the ranch that exceed normal tenant-lessee activities, Stanford has long and consistently maintained that it cannot exercise any legal control over working conditions at the ranch. This point about the relationship between the university and the workers at Webb rose to great importance in the late 1980s when the degraded working and living conditions of Webb's employees were publicized during a campaign to unionize them. During the resulting controversies, though, few if any of even the most shocked observers disputed the legal separation between Stanford University and Webb Ranch. It could be said that the topic of labor at Webb Ranch most readily falls into any number of categories, from "farm labor, California" to "labor camps, San Mateo County."

Yet the question of labor at Webb Ranch is very much the question of labor at Stanford, and belongs as much to this discussion as to any other. Webb employees indeed worked on the campus proper, from time to time, in the very subcontracting arrangement that first revealed an avenue through which union activists could attempt to bring Webb workers into their union. The unionization effort drew attention in Menlo Park and Palo Alto, in San Mateo County and in *The New York Times*, but it occasioned its most intense uproar among students and faculty members at Stanford. The university's president and legal staff constantly reaffirmed the legal wall that enjoined it from taking active involvement in the workers' cause, but community pressure nevertheless forced them to return again and again to the topic. Several matters arose—subcontracted employment, the threat of strike, and the public image of Stanford University—which resonated in some way with other labor episodes in Stanford's recent history. Finally, it was possible to see the shadow of prejudice directed toward racial minorities and low-wage workers, which deserved comparison to similar attitudes directed toward campus workers in other settings. Perhaps the most convincing case for the inclusion of Webb Ranch in a study of Stanford labor, however, is found in the dozens of references to the farm that have appeared on the Internet in the fifteen years *after* the battles of the late 1980s resulted in unionization and a first contract for workers. Webb Ranch has entered the labor vernacular of Stanford University, and probably irretrievably so. This is useful, for the conversation about the ranch is less about history than it is about current events. Though the scandals of 1989–1991 led to unionization and contract, it is unclear that some of the most wrenching problems at Webb Ranch have been resolved. It is a history of contradiction and unintended consequences; I am not the

first to tell it, and neither have I in any way “completed” it, but I hope I have made some contribution to deepening the understanding of the ranch.

## I

While this essay primarily concerns the unionization movement of 1988–1991, such a limited frame of attention should not suggest that the labor history of the six preceding decades was in any way less important or “eventful.” There is simply too little documentation of the life and conditions of Webb Ranch before the late 1980s. The broadest history of Webb Ranch is *The Webb Ranch: Pioneers to Pumpkins: Berries, Barns and Bygones*, by Clifford Pierce, and published by a local press in 2000. It is a useful document, written in a lively manner, but its author is a former pilot who has stabled horses at Webb since 1972, and he has written a thin book that unsurprisingly takes much more interest in the owners and frequenters of the ranch than in its employees. While Pierce’s account of Webb Ranch does not attempt to be comprehensive or especially critical, it does suggest a history of activity and change, significant construction and farming. In this way the account suggests the constant participation of a hard-laboring workforce, whose stories may yet be unearthed and told someday.

Webb Ranch lies to the west of Stanford University (see map, p.119). It was sold in 1882 by one James Dixon to Leland Stanford, the railroad magnate and politician who was to found Leland Stanford, Jr., University in remembrance of his deceased son. The ranch was purchased about the same time as a number of other land acquisitions that today constitute Stanford. The university leased the land to a number of growers, dairy

farmers, and livestock breeders. Along with other adjacent parcels, the ranch was occupied by the United States Army during World War I. Under the name of Camp Fremont, tens of thousands of troops and horses carried out military exercises there, pummeling hillside targets with millions of rounds whose metal remains had to be unearthed and removed after the war. After this peculiar interval the university leased the land to a future state governor named James Rolph. Rolph happened in turn to meet a man named George Webb, a fledgling strawberry farmer struggling to support his young family, and the two arranged a sublease. Webb occupied an existing house and began growing strawberries; in 1929, he moved his family in from Watsonville. Rolph ascended to the governorship in 1931 and handed over full control of the lease to Webb, who introduced electricity in 1932 and the first horses in the 1950s. The first workers we passingly learn about are a group of nine or ten Japanese employees, who lived with their families in houses located along the San Francisquito Creek, which runs through the property. During World War II, the wartime mandates of the U.S. government once more interrupted the labor routines of Webb Ranch, albeit in a much graver and more unspeakable fashion: by Executive Order #9066, the Japanese workers were relocated to concentration camps.<sup>117</sup> They never returned, according to Pierce, and George Webb was forced to secure a new labor pool composed of Mexicans. Webb ceased using pesticides in 1965 and moved to organic growing, which would later become a popular selling-point in promotional materials and the press. The ranch ended dairy production in 1940 and shifted emphasis to produce harvesting, amassing enough fruits and vegetables to allow George's granddaughters to open a produce stand in the postwar period. The

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<sup>117</sup> The internment of Webb Ranch's Japanese workers would make for an important and deeply sobering study on its own, but the topic lies beyond the scope of this project.

construction of Highway 280 in the mid-1960s split the property, and the 1980s saw a rash of construction, including the polo field, two show arenas, two barns, and a covered bridge.<sup>118</sup>

The workers of Webb Ranch enjoy only fleeting attention in Pierce's book, and so the story of labor at that farm must begin here with the publicization of a curious subcontracting agreement between the ranch and the university's athletics department. In late 1988 it came to the attention of the campus union, United Stanford Workers (U.S.W.), that the university had taken to using the labor of Webb Ranch employees for work actually performed on the Stanford campus. In November 1988 the union filed an unfair labor practice charge against Stanford, charging that "at least a dozen" union jobs in the Department of Athletics were being filled, improperly, by non-unionized ranch workers. In the subcontracting arrangement, *The Stanford Daily* later reported, between four and seven laborers would come to work on campus on a daily basis and up to fifteen for football games and other "special occasions." According to Ron Barnette, a union activist, the casual use of non-unionized laborers to do on-campus union labor certainly violated the spirit of good faith bargaining. But the fact that two Webb Ranch employees were doing campus work on a *full-time* basis invited concern that indeed the letter of the law had been breached. While this latter point appears to have formed the substance of the unfair labor practice charge, other aspects of the labor arrangement aroused serious concern. Members of the "floating crew," for instance (as they were termed by Alan Cummings, an Athletics Department official), were supposed to have been paid an \$8.25

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<sup>118</sup> Cliff Pierce, *The Webb Ranch: Pioneers to Pumpkins: Berries, Barns and Bygones* (Menlo Park, Calif: Prodigy Press, 2000), 10–12, 16, 18.

hourly wage but in fact received as little as \$4.25 per hour.<sup>119</sup> The subcontracting arrangement at the golf course not only seemed illegal, thus providing the legal spark by which the unionization campaign could be set in motion, but in an ironic way it introduced the ranch workers to the benefits of being in a union and thus planted the desire for certification. An article in the *Palo Alto Weekly* in April 1989 read:

If Stanford didn't routinely use Webb Ranch workers to groom the golf course and help with other landscaping on campus, the farmworkers might never have learned how much USW workers earn for comparable work, or that they receive health care and other benefits, said Reuben Serna, a USW representative. And that, said Serna, is what led several ranch workers to ask if they could join the union.<sup>120</sup>

Where workers glimpsed the dangling fruit of unionization, union activists felt the urgency of it when they visited the ranch. Reuben Serna, who had cut his teeth as an organizer with César Chávez at the United Farm Workers, remembered that “nothing might have come of [workers’ aspirations] if, by chance, he hadn’t had to visit Webb Ranch one day in January, leading him to the barracks and what he calls the ‘disgraceful’ living conditions there.”<sup>121</sup> It is conceivable that living conditions at Webb Ranch had long been meager, but only when workers were granted amnesty did the prospect of unionization become realistic. A U.S.W. representative named Alan Wagner testified that, while a few years prior workers would have been deported for expressing interest in a union, they were free to take such action in 1989 because they had received amnesty by dint of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA).<sup>122</sup> The Webb Ranch owners appear to have actively procured the labor of undocumented workers while taking little interest in helping these workers gain documentation when IRCA presented them

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<sup>119</sup> Cummings’s first name was incorrectly spelled “Allan” in the news piece.

<sup>120</sup> Don Kazak, “Taking a Stand: Mexican Farm Workers at Webb Ranch Are Hoping the Recent Union Election Will Give Them Decent Living Conditions and Health Benefits,” *Palo Alto Weekly*, 19 April 1989, 13–17.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

with the possibility to do so. According to Thomas Brida, whose 1992 undergraduate honors thesis at Stanford University was a lucid study of unionization at Webb Ranch, Stanley Webb admitted to Reuben Serna that “he had a contact, or ‘coyote,’ who ran illegal workers across the Mexican border to Webb Ranch.” With the passage of IRCA, though, according to Brida, “[u]nlike large agricultural employers who helped legalize their farm workers, the Webbs did not inform their workers of the new immigration law. The workers only learned through the Spanish-language media [...]”<sup>123</sup> At any rate, in February 1989 the union officially demanded the inclusion of Webb Ranch employees in the campus bargaining unit, and by that time forty-nine of fifty-four ranch workers had signed petition cards expressing the same desire.<sup>124</sup>

Although these initial disclosures and charges were sufficient to begin the unionization campaign, the union quickly organized a tour and press conference which brought to light the squalid conditions generally facing the workers and earned the distressed attention of the broader community. *The New York Times* later summarized the union’s tactics as follows:

The workers, most of whom are Mexican, have lived out of sight and until recently out of mind of their wealthy neighbors.

The strategy of union officials was to mount a noisy public relations campaign that cast the university as the villain, and in that task they found eager support from a handful of Stanford faculty members and students.”<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Thomas Brida, “The Organization of Farmworkers in California: A Case Study of Stanford University’s Webb Ranch,” unpublished honors thesis, Department of Political Science, Stanford University, June 1992, 44, 66.

<sup>124</sup> Bobby Landon, “USW Wants Webb Ranch Workers to Be Union Members,” *The Stanford Daily*, 15 February 1989.

<sup>125</sup> Jane Gross, “Menlo Park Journal: Migrant Labor Creating Heat on Stanford Land,” *The New York Times*, 17 April 1989.

Brida elaborates upon the broad strategy that underlay the unionization campaign and explains that creating immediate publicity served the purpose of protecting the workers against the worst possible response of their owners:

According to [campus laborer and union steward Linda] Crouse, the workers devised a strategy with union members to overcome their plight. The plan was 1) to make sure everyone had their immigration papers; 2) to publicize the situation as quickly as possible (to prevent the Webbs from simply firing the workers); and 3) to bring pressure upon the university to utilize their power over the Webbs.<sup>126</sup>

This passage helps us understand the exact usefulness of a “noisy public relations campaign.” In addition, though, there is an important connection between points (2) and (3). Because the publicity surrounding Webb Ranch was *negative*, it not only prevented Webb Ranch workers from being covertly fired—point (2)—but also angered the community into demanding the university’s attention—point (3). Indeed, the publicity was negative from the start. Some two dozen reporters attended the initial press conference and took down in their notebooks a series of disturbing allegations. Workers received no benefits, vacations or Social Security accounts, even as gross wages were \$4.25 per hour. A seventy-two-hour workweek was distributed over six twelve-hour days that commenced at 5:00 in the morning. Though all workers paid seventy-five cents per hour for rent (it was deducted from their wages), nighttime found some employees sleeping in their cars or on the ground; occasionally six to eight workers would pack themselves into a room designed for two. Toilets consisted of “a row of stools without partitions in a separate building,” and sleeping quarters had no heating. Thomas Hubbard, the ranch manager, confirmed when interviewed that a boarding fee of more than \$400 a month was routinely deducted from workers’ salaries. One worker added

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<sup>126</sup> Brida, *op. cit.*, 45.

that a monthly utilities charge ran to more than \$100.<sup>127</sup> After all these deductions, net pay was \$2.25 per hour. “These are slave labor conditions for farm workers,” said union lawyer Jim Eggleston, “and the university is maintaining this.”<sup>128</sup>

While a Stanford lawyer named Michael Vartain rejoined that “Our people are not callous, but legally we are not responsible,” the union maintained: “Stanford is a joint employer along with ranch operator Stanley Webb, and therefore the USW should have the right to represent the ranch workers.”<sup>129</sup> Local 680 filed two petitions with the California Agricultural Labor Relations Board in Salinas on February 21, 1989, one seeking access for union officials to the ranch workers’ work site and the other stating the intent to unionize them. In the meantime, readers of the February 22 edition of *Campus Report* learned that San Mateo County Environmental Health Department inspectors had discovered about sixty health and safety violations (later reports revised the number upward to seventy-five) in the housing units at the ranch during an inspection on February 17. The county officials emphasized that most violations were “minor,” and these, along with more “serious” infractions, were almost completely rectified in the coming weeks, but the ever-present topic of health code breaches must have constantly reminded newspaper readers of the unfortunate housing conditions at the ranch.<sup>130</sup> In one early example of student interest, a certain Chip Bartlett was so stunned by a visit to the ranch that he wrote a letter to *The Stanford Daily*, saying “I felt frustrated at a sense of powerlessness to do something.”<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Bobby Landon, “USW Points Out Plight of Webb Ranch Workers,” *The Stanford Daily*, 16 February 1989, 1.

<sup>128</sup> Mary Madison, “‘Slave Labor’ Accusation by Union,” *Times Tribune*, 16 February 1989, 1.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.; Eric Young, “University Delays Response to USW,” *The Stanford Daily*, 17 February 1989.

<sup>130</sup> Kathleen O’Toole, “Campus Labor Union Moves to Represent Webb Farmworkers,” *Campus Report*, 22 February 1989.

<sup>131</sup> “Webb Ranch Visit Prompts Frustration at University,” letter by Chip Bartlett to *The Stanford Daily*, 22

The charges that continued to accumulate against the ranch owners became more personal and difficult to verify, but nevertheless they seemed to bespeak an unhappy work environment at Webb. The union representative Serna reported that Webb Ranch had charged a \$350.00 rental deposit and threatened to evict employees who did not pay, and a press report implied that these deposits were “illegal.” The union responded by filing a class action suit in Superior Court against Webb Ranch and the university, “seeking a restraining order that would free workers from the deposit payments, and charging breaches of the Employee Housing Act, civil rights violations, negligence, and breach of contract.” A worker named Salvador Salas described being kicked out of the tiny room that he shared with his wife and three children, a move made in anticipation that county officials would deem their living arrangement illegal. Hubbard dismissed the charge as “absurd.”<sup>132</sup> At a press conference on February 22, a young Mexican employee named Cayetano Soto rose with great passion to accuse Hubbard of having manhandled him by the collar for inquiring into the recent lack of work for the farm laborers. Two other workers corroborated the charge, but Hubbard contended that the run-in had been nothing more than a confrontation over a poorly parked truck. Hubbard also denied as “completely untrue” the accusations regarding deposit payments. It is nearly impossible to tease out any truth from these charges and counter-charges. A physical run-in with a boss, for instance, could be a serious matter with serious consequences for both worker and boss, but it is daunting to imagine how to reconstruct and understand any of this sequence of events nearly fifteen years after they occurred. In the absence of confirming

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February 1989. Later, many more students would take the same initiative as accusations mounted against the ranch management, but they would act against feelings of powerlessness by circulating petitions and organizing awareness-raising events.

<sup>132</sup> Landon, op cit., “USW Points Out Plight.”

evidence, though, the string of disputes can still suggest certain characteristics of the work environment at Webb Ranch. It is evident, for example, that the relationship between ranch owners and at least some workers was marked by antagonism and mistrust. It seems probable that Webb Ranch compensated its laborers at a low level, and it is likely that these wages were reduced even further by the deductions and deposits reported by workers and the union and, in one case, even admitted by the ranch manager himself. Besides having a diminishing effect on wages, some of the deductions may have broken the law. Finally, one may conclude that the financial terms at Webb Ranch were either vague enough to be misunderstood and discrepantly reported, or were simply lied about to the press by workers or management or both. At any rate, on February 22, San Mateo County Superior Court honored U.S.W.'s request by enacting a temporary restraining order "preventing Webb Ranch from evicting or harassing ranch workers." The available evidence suggests an unfriendly set of labor relations, but when Webb Ranch management agreed two days later to discuss housing issues with U.S.W. there appeared a glimpse of hope that these relations were bound for a fairer and more reliable destiny.<sup>133</sup>

Even as a pathway appeared to open toward a bargaining process, members of the union and the Stanford community pleaded with the university to somehow speed up or improve the chain of events at Webb Ranch. Responding on February 23 to a letter by U.S.W. president Alan Wagner that had requested that both the ranch and the university "recognize and bargain with Local 680 with respect to the terms of employment of the agricultural employees of Webb Ranch," Michael Vartain, of the university, assured

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<sup>133</sup> Mary Madison and Michael McGuire, "Restraining Order Against Webb Ranch," *Times Tribune*, 23 February 1989, A-1; Nathanael Cousins, "USW Files for Restraining Order to Prevent Ranch Worker Eviction," *The Stanford Daily*, 23 February 1989, 1.

Wagner that Stanford was concerned as a neighbor and landowner with the health and safety violations, had expressed this concern to the ranch management, and was planning to meet with the owners for further discussion. Yet these assurances came with the reinforcement of Stanford's policy of non-intervention:

Stanford University is not the employer of any agricultural employees at Webb Ranch, either solely or jointly with Webb Ranch, and does not have now, nor has it in the past, had [*sic*] authority over Webb Ranch's agricultural enterprises or the wages, hours and other terms of employment of Webb Ranch's agricultural employees. Your demand to Stanford for bargaining is therefore misdirected and Stanford must necessarily reject your request.<sup>134</sup>

President Donald Kennedy insisted at a Faculty Senate meeting in late February that "I don't plan to act on the assumption that our legal obligations represent the extent of our obligations," but he later reminded Ronald Rebbholz, an English professor urging university engagement, that his options for action could be "somewhat limited."<sup>135</sup> To the extent the university could involve itself in the imbroglio, Kennedy wondered how effective that involvement would prove to be if it were taken in haste: "I want to tell you that we're very determined not to take precipitous action that will get the problem off our backs but make things worse for the very people you're concerned about."<sup>136</sup>

What was needful deliberation to Kennedy, however, appeared to others to be an evasion of urgently important matters at Webb Ranch. Political science professor John Manley urged Stanford community members to visit the ranch—"you will see what it means to live in poverty and you will be appalled"—and he castigated "Massa" Kennedy for distancing himself and the university from the injustices of Stanford's "plantation": "To claim anything less than full responsibility for the lives of people who work on

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<sup>134</sup> "Vartain: Stanford Does Not Employ Workers at Ranch," letter by Michael Vartain to Alan Wagner, 23 February 1989, in *Campus Report*, 1 March 1989.

<sup>135</sup> *Campus Report*, 1 March 1989.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

Stanford land, as Kennedy has done, is at best amoral. This is the kind of behavior one expects from corporations, not universities.”<sup>137</sup> Fifty-five campus resident assistants made the same appeal to “moral responsibility” in a letter in March. Though the efforts to shame Stanford into taking positive action could not hope to override the legal walls maintained by the university, the university brought itself to exert some small amount of pressure on the owners of Webb Ranch. Even Michael Vartain’s affirmation of legal non-intervention in February contained the assurance that “we have directed our lands manager to immediately express our concerns to Webb Ranch and have requested an immediate meeting with the tenant to discuss those concerns.” One problem with this statement is its vagueness—although the university’s legal team may have been prohibited from elaborating any further—and it allows for the possibility that concern for bad press as much as for bad conditions drove the university to make limited intervention. Nonetheless it was clear that Stanford would not keep its hands entirely off the Webbs. A *New York Times* feature in April contained a similar suggestion, stating obliquely that, “Privately, the university has pressured the Webb family to improve conditions and promptly begin collective bargaining.”<sup>138</sup> The clearest elaboration appears in a letter Kennedy wrote in response to the anxieties of two students, Chip Bartlett and Xavier Briggs. “What then can the University reasonably do in response to the type of health and safety allegations made against Webb Ranch management?” Kennedy asked. He offered: “First, we can express our deep concern about them to our tenant, and we have done so both by letter and in person. We have also cooperated—and will continue

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<sup>137</sup> Mary Madison, “Webb Ranch Farm Workers Plan March,” *Times Tribune*, 8 March 1989, A-3; “Protest University’s Amoral Webb Ranch Policy on Workers,” letter by John Manley to *The Stanford Daily*, 8 March 1989, 5.

<sup>138</sup> Gross, *op. cit.*; Mary Madison, “Stanford Resident Assistants Protest Webb Ranch,” *Times Tribune*, 15 March 1989, A-3.

to cooperate—fully with any agencies in their efforts to determine legal compliance on the part of the Ranch.” Kennedy went on to sound another note of characteristic caution:

Is it really known, for instance, how the conditions at Webb Ranch compare with standards for the state’s farming industry as a whole? How much above the industry standard is it reasonable to ask this employer to be? Who, if any, of the various interested individuals and groups should determine what is acceptable?

Kennedy settled on the university’s support for “the free choice of Webb Ranch employees” to join a union, with the expectation and encouragement of mutual good faith collective bargaining should unionization occur. The community, Kennedy wrote, might consider

additional efforts that could be undertaken—perhaps particularly through the Public Service Center—to the benefit of Webb Ranch’s employees and their families. This latter sort of involvement, as opposed to involvement in the negotiation of wages and conditions, is again more consistent with the University’s mission as an educational institution.<sup>139</sup>

If the university appeared to put its eggs in the basket of unionization and collective bargaining, then it must have been cheered to learn of the virtual resolution of the health and safety violations in April 1989. It would also have been put at ease by *Campus Report*’s explanation of the rental deposit charges. According to Tom Hubbard, the article said, “Some employees who had not previously signed agreements allowing for rental payments to be deducted from their paychecks were asked to give written permission for the deductions.”<sup>140</sup> The union was distinctly less heartened by these news reports. Reuben Serna charged that the Webbs were refusing jobs to past employees, who would be likely to vote in favor of unionization, in order to hire new employees who

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<sup>139</sup> “Agreement on Webb Ranch ‘Encouraging,’ Kennedy Says,” letter by Donald Kennedy, President of Stanford University, to Chip Bartlett and Xavier Briggs, in *Campus Report*, 5 April 1989.

<sup>140</sup> Kathleen O’Toole, “Campus Union’s Bid to Organize Ranch Clears One Hurdle,” *Campus Report*, 1 March 1989, 1.

might tip the scales away from certification.<sup>141</sup> The union demonstrated against this strategy in the early morning of March 8 at Hubbard's dwelling, demanding that ten former Webb employees be rehired. Each re-hire represented an essential step toward the number forty-six: to be certified the union needed more than half of the harvest-season peak of ninety workers to participate in a certification election. Hence the key number of forty-six—and there were only forty-one employees at the ranch in the late winter of 1989. Management responded by denying that the ten proposed workers were former employees.<sup>142</sup>

In spite of the continued testiness, the discussions led to a vote. In late March, U.S.W. and the Webbs reached an interim agreement whereby Webb Ranch would allow an A.L.R.B.-officiated union election to take place within the week, while “[reserving] the right to protest if the election [were] not conducted legally.”<sup>143</sup> *The Palo Alto Weekly* reported that the promising news nevertheless met with some trepidation. “The workers know that joining the union is not without risk,” the paper wrote, “and they know the future is uncertain.” Said Vincente Chávez, a worker with about a decade of Webb experience under his belt: “I believe that the results of the election are going to be good for us, but who knows[?]” The sense of caution did not fully supplant optimism, however, and for election day in late April the young women of the ranch dressed up. At the announcement of union certification workers furnished barbecues and champagne, and they passed their sweetest shift to the taste of beer and the sound of salsa music.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Madison, op. cit., “Workers Plan March.”

<sup>142</sup> Mary Madison, “Professor’s Proposal to Visit Webb Ranch Is Rejected,” *Times Tribune*, 10 March 1989, A-6.

<sup>143</sup> Mary Madison, “Webb Ranch, Workers Agree on Union Vote,” *Times Tribune*, 31 March 1989, A-3.

<sup>144</sup> Kazak, op. cit.

Workers recalled their farm labor travails. “I do everything,” said Vincente Chávez in Spanish:

I work the machines, I drive the cars as a chauffeur to wherever they want me to, I work in the blackberry and strawberry fields, I pick whatever they want me to pick [...] I do painting, I do carpentry, I do plumbing. [...] It’s a hard job and you get tired. They used to treat us as stupid people.<sup>145</sup>

Workers recalled being “sent to the barracks for the rest of the day” when caught taking one of their legally-mandated breaks. Chávez recounted how he had paid his own medical bills for a broken skull bone, four years earlier, even though he had sustained the injury falling off a ladder while on the job. “If they [U.S.W.] give us the benefits they say they are going to, then life here is going to be good,” said Marta Lucarto.<sup>146</sup>

## II

If to the victors go the spoils, as it is said, then the victory of unionization at Webb Ranch brought halting and contradictory spoils indeed. The wage increases won by the Office Staff Organizing Committee demonstrated that the failure to achieve an ultimate goal may yet bring intermediate rewards, but more often in Stanford history it has been the case that unionization is beneficial but hardly sufficient for workers. This reality is as true for Webb Ranch as it was for the star-crossed strike of 1982. In his study of Webb Ranch, Thomas Brida has concluded that “the involvement of the Stanford community during the Webb campaign was the key to its success.” Although students served no legal purpose, they applied a “soft” pressure on Donald Kennedy that ultimately forced him into abandoning his position of neutrality to side with the workers—and kept up a din of publicity that made it impossible for the ranch owners to

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

preempt unionization by firing employees. The pressure brought against the university was exerted largely by the students and faculty who “assumed an integral role in the struggle to unionize” with (among other things) their letters and editorials in the campus and local press.<sup>147</sup>

Although Kennedy et al. never evinced the belief that unionization would be a blanket solution to the labor problems of Webb Ranch, the university had strongly promoted the ethic of collective bargaining partly in order to parry the appeals of troubled community members. When the shortcomings of unionization became evident in the spring of 1989, therefore, it was with especial anger that students and faculty demanded the university at last take action of a non-neutral form. Unionization did not alone bring a contract, and unionization did not alone alleviate the material want of the ranch workers or repair their squalid housing. It did not quiet the critics of these problems, who grew in number as the bargaining dragged on into 1990 and ever more management indiscretions were exposed. The experiences of Webb Ranch workers after they were certified as a union provide an important corrective to the simplistic idea that unionization is a tool that comes ready and fully equipped to solve all problems. The caution that ranch workers felt on the eve of their certification election appears, in retrospect, to have been quite well-founded after all.

A contract had not been signed by the end of May 1989, and on the last day of that month several dozen individuals delivered a petition signed by 1200 students and community members to the office of President Kennedy, who was out at lunch. The assembled crowd listened to the political science professor John Manley intone against a

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<sup>147</sup> Brida, *op. cit.*, 1, 50, 76

university “[taking] profits from the labor of those living in poverty.”<sup>148</sup> Although an organization called the Community Action Agency of San Mateo County (C.A.A.) undertook to rehabilitate housing at the ranch, it could only do so with the cooperation of Gary Webb, the ranch’s operator. Kennedy urged cooperation at a meeting of the Faculty Senate, but he maintained that the university had no business intervening any further in matters at the ranch. “There is no room at the bargaining table for other parties,” he said, “however concerned they might be.”<sup>149</sup> The union feared workers would remain without a contract until the end of harvest season in November, by which point most of the ranch’s seasonal workers (who numbered fifty-five by one report) would have moved on. Webb offered wage increases amounting to twenty-five cents over three years—an increase their lawyer Terrence O’Connor said was comparable to the industry standard—but the union turned it down. The union hoped to collaborate with C.A.A. to erect “barracks-style housing” at Webb for sixteen workers, but the Webbs felt themselves to be operators of a fruit stand, not landlords, and would allow the construction of only eight units. The family strengthened this preference in late December 1989 by announcing the eviction of workers living on the property. O’Connor explained that the Webbs were evicting workers because of fights, drinking, dangerous meddling with machines, and the fact that rent revenue was unsustainably low.<sup>150</sup> The Webbs later elaborated that their eviction mandate would come with a \$300.00-400.00 “relocation fee” per worker, wage raises, and subsidies toward medical care.<sup>151</sup> Though one union organizer was to observe

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<sup>148</sup> Mike Habata, “Marchers Find Doors Locked: Webb Ranch Workers Head for President’s Office,” *The Stanford Daily*, 1 June 1989, 1.

<sup>149</sup> Michael Friedly, “Kennedy Pushes for Agency to Upgrade Webb,” *The Stanford Daily*, 7 June 1989; Nora Zamichow, “Stanford Bows Out of War at Ranch,” *The San Jose Mercury News*, 16 June 1989, 1B.

<sup>150</sup> Michael Friedly, “Webb Workers May Lose Housing,” *The Stanford Daily*, 11 January 1990, 1.

<sup>151</sup> Carl Irving, “Stanford Stirred by Farm Evictions: Professors, Ministers Vow to Fight for Embattled Laborers,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 11 February 1990, B-1.

that worker evictions were a tactic used by growers to break farmworker unions, the eviction announcement more immediately occasioned the solemn attention of local religious organizations. An article in the *Peninsula Times Tribune* reported that “[a]bout 100 people gathered on a chilly Tuesday evening [December 19, 1989] to participate in a Posada, a Latin American religious service, to pray for the workers and their families.”<sup>152</sup>

January and February 1990 proved to be dramatic months in several ways, from the increased involvement of religious organizations to the heightened militancy of union activists, and from negative press coverage of the already-announced evictions to a devastating new series of reports over ranch exploitation in the early 1980s. Contract talks made little progress, and the San Mateo County Labor Council authorized a strike in early January.<sup>153</sup> Local ministries simultaneously prepared to provide temporary housing to workers should they suffer evictions, but the uncertainty continued into the next month. At a press conference on February 8, Byron Bland, a minister with United Campus Christian Ministry, read a statement signed by thirty-one students, faculty, and staff, which decried the “embarrassing” fact of the university’s having “profited from the running of a migrant farm on its land for almost 70 years.” The letter imagined a model migrant farm whose workers would enjoy comfortable living, a fair contract, and comprehensive benefits.<sup>154</sup> But the same day this hopeful statement ran in *Campus Report*, the *Palo Alto Weekly* reported that Agustín González had been issued a sixty-day

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<sup>152</sup> “Group Wants Stanford to Better Ranch Conditions,” *Campus Report*, 14 February 1990, 3. Barnette instanced the Western Growers Association’s alleged habit of evicting workers in order to preempt union certification; Diane Evia-Lanevi, “Season of Doubt for Webb Workers,” *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 20 December 1989, B-1.

<sup>153</sup> Mary Madison, “Webb Ranch Workers Get Strike Sanction in Protest Over Pay,” *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 11 January 1990, B-3.

<sup>154</sup> “Group Wants Stanford to Better Ranch Conditions,” op. cit.

eviction notice.<sup>155</sup> The union held fast to its tactics of direct action and the arousal of negative publicity; on a Saturday morning in January the union attempted to publicize the threat of eviction by leading about twenty-five individuals in a picket at the entrance to Webb Ranch. The union steward Linda Crouse believed that a more immediate economic sanction should also be taken and thus announced a plan to “[rally] horse owners to withdraw their horses” from the ranch stables.<sup>156</sup>

A mass withdrawal of horses does not seem to have occurred, and it was probably not necessary, for what next befell Webb Ranch was the release of three investigative reports by *The Stanford Daily* that were so shocking as to help speed up the settlement of a first contract for ranch workers. On February 20, 1990, *The Daily* published a front-page story with the headline, “Webb Violated Income Tax Laws, Records Show.” By reviewing pay sheets from 1983 to 1989, the newspaper had discovered that Webb Ranch, appeared to have violated federal and state income tax laws by “improperly deducting” unemployment taxes from their workers’ checks. The article also accused the owners of failing to deduct disability insurance from workers in the months after April 1989, when with unionization workers had become required by state law to make such contributions. Although as far back as April 1989 the *Palo Alto Weekly* had quoted Alan Wagner as saying that ranch workers had illegally resided in the United States before IRCA and amnesty, this *Daily* piece more specifically revealed that some ninety percent of ranch workers had been undocumented in the years before 1986. The union had a charge, too, that Webb was taking “voluntary deductions” for rent and utilities from

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<sup>155</sup> Don Kazak, “Statement Issued on Webb: Stanford’s Religious Community Offers Support to Webb Ranch Workers,” *Palo Alto Weekly*, 14 February 1990, 11.

<sup>156</sup> Michael Friedly, “USW Leads Picket at Webb Ranch: Stable Entrance Blocked to Protest Living Conditions of Ranch Workers,” *The Stanford Daily*, 22 January 1990, 1.

workers' paychecks without "written authorization from workers," which was compulsory under Section 224 of the California Labor Code.<sup>157</sup> The next *Daily* had further revelations, these on the topic of the golf course sub-contracting of the 1980s. More new information came to light. In the period of 1981 to 1985, the university had occasionally summoned ranch employees to campus to tend the Stanford Golf Course; this information was no surprise, though it appeared with the most specifics yet in this article. What was entirely new and remarkable was the payment maneuvering that occurred. The university would pay Webb Ranch \$8.00 for every hour of an employee's labor at the golf course. The pay sheets unearthed by *The Daily*, however, revealed that Webb Ranch had turned over only \$2.75 per hour to its employees—"and sometimes less." Ranch owners thus took an intermediary cut of at least \$5.25 per hour. The minimum wage during the entire period was \$3.35, as established in 1981. While pay sheets demonstrated that workers indeed received the minimum wage from 1985 onwards, owners took deductions of \$.75 per hour for rent and monthly utilities charges: "Such deductions without written authorization from the workers violate the California Labor Code." According to the union, ranch workers were "charged \$30 per month by Webb Ranch for University equipment used on Stanford property, such as gloves and fuel for lawnmowers." While the evidence indicated working conditions that were even more exploitative than previously thought, some other information was odd but seemed more an affront to university bookkeepers than to workers themselves. Sometimes, for instance, Thomas Thatcher, the golf course superintendent, would ask workers to do personal yard work at his house. Informal yard labor compensated by cash is a common

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<sup>157</sup> Michael Friedly, "Webb Violated Income Tax Laws, Records Show," *The Stanford Daily*, 20 February 1990, 1.

practice, and some of this work was performed on the weekend and paid for by Thatcher's wife. But when Webb Ranch employees were "summoned to Thatcher's house during regular work hours [...] this work was charged to the University."<sup>158</sup> The next edition of *The Daily* explained in great detail how Webb Ranch workers remained without medical benefits even after ten months of union representation.<sup>159</sup>

The *Daily* exposés dealt almost exclusively with indiscretions from the early to mid-1980s, yet even these distant events appear to have spurred a 1990 audience into redoubling its call on the conscience of Stanford University. Contract negotiations were at an impasse, and the threat of eviction loomed, but neither of these things appears to have worsened in the last two weeks of February. Still, the *Daily*'s investigative reports infuriated a large and already impatient body of Stanford faculty and students, whose anger was aroused to new levels by the ability to place the temporizing of 1990 into a story of mistreatment that stretched back at least as far as 1981. "Qui tacit consentit," fumed *The Daily*'s editorial board—"through silence, consent." The editors branded the university's non-interference policy "both cowardly and despicable," and beseeched Stanford to first "*admit* that the current situation is intolerable," and then enact sanctions

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<sup>158</sup> Michael Friedly, "Webb Ranch Workers Underpaid for University Labor," *The Stanford Daily*, 21 February 1990, 1.

<sup>159</sup> Michael Friedly, "Webb Ranch Workers Lack Benefits: Medical Insurance Not Covered by Membership in USW," *The Stanford Daily*, 22 February 1990, 1. While U.S.W.'s contract with the university mandated full medical coverage, full dental coverage, and a retirement pension for all workers employed more than three-quarters' time, this coverage did not extend to the employees of Webb Ranch. Their ability to secure health insurance was complicated by at least five factors: (1) Though IRCA had granted amnesty to Webb Ranch workers, delivering them from the undocumented status in which they could not receive coverage, long-term coverage under the Medi-Cal program could not be initiated until the Immigration and Naturalization Service had "[performed] a check on the patient"; (2) to receive Medi-Cal attention or, for those ineligible, the alternative county coverage, workers had to "prove permanent residence *in the county*" [*emphasis mine*], a tall task for itinerant workers who spent much of the year in Mexico; (3) workers had limited literacy, either in English or their native Spanish, and most ranch workers, reported *The Daily*, could not render the necessary proof of county residency; (4) workers who did not fall under the aegis of Medi-Cal, but could evidence their residency in San Mateo County, still had to prove they earned below the poverty line; and (5) in the area of injury compensation, injured workers could file for state workers' compensation, but they would be compensated only if their injuries occurred while on the job.

against the Webbs should the exploitation continue.<sup>160</sup> One hundred fifty people rallied on March 6, and a petition with an impressive 1900 student signatures (this represented almost a third of undergraduate students; 700 signatures were new) was delivered to Kennedy's office.<sup>161</sup> Seventy-two faculty members signed a petition requesting "discussion and action" by the Faculty Senate. Kennedy announced that a continued impasse between the owners and the union would spell the termination of the Webb family's lease, which had been renewed on a monthly basis and at a 120 percent rental rate since its expiration in August 1989.<sup>162</sup> On March 8 the Faculty Senate unanimously voted to urge the pursuit of a "fair and equitable settlement, including provisions acceptable to workers for the improvement and maintenance of housing" (there were two abstentions).<sup>163</sup> They could have made just such a request three weeks prior, but it was the telling of an appalling history that seems to have forced their hand.

These students and faculty members were no doubt cheered to see that their rage, which had its root in labor difficulties of that moment but only surfaced as an outcry against past wrongs, coincided with a rather quick resolution of a contract at Webb Ranch. Ranch owners offered in early March to increase wages from \$4.25 to \$5.00 or \$6.00 per hour, eliminate rent deductions, and, according to their lawyer, "help renovate current housing and facilitate the construction of a new dormitory for seasonal employees." The union rejected the offers on the grounds that pay would remain

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<sup>160</sup> "Break the Silence: University Inaction Contributes to Many Webb Ranch Problems," unsigned editorial in *The Stanford Daily*, 26 February 1990, 4.

<sup>161</sup> Lisa Lapin, "200 Protest Stanford's Slow Response at Ranch: A Dozen Workers Join Student Rally over Webb Ranch," *The San Jose Mercury News*, 7 March 1990.

<sup>162</sup> "Kennedy Urges Speed in Reaching Webb Pact," statement by Donald Kennedy, President of Stanford University, in *Campus Report*, 7 March 1990, 11.

<sup>163</sup> Lisa Lapin, "Workers Backed: Faculty Supports Webb Ranch Employees," *The San Jose Mercury News*, 9 March 1990, 1B; Tracie L. Thompson, "Farm Workers Get a Boost from Stanford," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 9 March 1990, A5.

substandard for California agriculture and that, in terms of housing, workers would “inherit [its] worst problems.”<sup>164</sup> On March 13 the Webbs decided to agree to a university-paid neutral mediator that Kennedy had been offering since January, though a union lawyer named Jim Eggleston thought this invitation premature because of the “Grand Canyon” divide that lay between the union and the university.<sup>165</sup> Even as the ranch insisted it could not remain responsible for housing, the union thought its proposal implausible, because, Eggleston said, “There’s no chance in hell a group of migrant farm workers could qualify” for the \$2 million insurance policy necessary for housing rehabilitation.<sup>166</sup> These impasses were eventually bridged, though, and according to Thomas Brida in large part due to a declaration by Donald Kennedy: his “declaration in March of 1990 that he might use the Webb’s land for academic purposes’ was the deciding factor in the collective bargaining process.”<sup>167</sup> On April 4, 1990, workers voted by twenty-three to one to ratify a new contract. Wages increased and housing terms were modified. The Webb family would refurbish the dormitory buildings and recreational vehicles that housed seasonal laborers as well as fund the construction of fifteen new housing units. The workers would “set up a nonprofit corporation to maintain their housing and to join with the owners in asking Stanford and foundations to help finance construction of the new units.”<sup>168</sup> President Kennedy announced that he was delighted, but Professor John Manley warned that student and community support for workers “will be reactivated if the agreement is not honored in the spirit and the letter.”<sup>169</sup> Perhaps,

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<sup>164</sup> Jeff Brock, “USW Rejects Reforms Offered by Webb,” *The Stanford Daily*, 10 March 1990, 1.

<sup>165</sup> Jeff Brock, “Webbs Accept Kennedy’s Contract Mediator Offer: USW Lawyer Calls Whole Idea ‘Premature,’” *The Stanford Daily*, 14 March 1990, 1.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Brida, op. cit., 76.

<sup>168</sup> *The Stanford Daily*, 5 April 1990.

<sup>169</sup> “Webb Ranch Workers Approve Contract,” *Campus Report*, 11 April 1990, 3.

after all, it had taken the rupture of the *Daily* investigations to compel a fair resolution for workers at Webb Ranch.

### III

Donald Kennedy took “delight” in the achievement of a contract at Webb Ranch, yet there is something portentous in this term. Not like “contentment” or “satisfaction,” which are more rounded and permanent, “delight” has a fleeting or hollow sense. I have not had the time to conduct significant research on labor relations at Webb Ranch in the 1990s, but even a cursory look at that decade finds a troubling picture.

Ronald Rebholz believes the union may not have very well served ranch workers, except in securing trailers: “I feel a certain guilt about this, because in encouraging them to unionize we thought we were doing a good thing, and it turned out we were not.” If unions indeed betrayed Webb workers, then Rebholz attributes his own part in the process to a mix of “not understanding the nature of the unions” and exposure to plain “misinformation.”<sup>170</sup> At a Faculty Senate meeting in 1993 Rebholz reported that wages languished between \$5.00 for “general labor” and (at most) \$6.50 for “those who operate machinery” at the Webb Stables. “It’s time to recognize that, as a *Daily* editorial put it, this is not a problem of law, but a problem of moral obligation,” Rebholz said, requesting that Stanford intervene to establish an \$8.00 minimum hourly wage. President Gerhard Casper responded that the university lacked the legal “leverage” to enact such a change;

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<sup>170</sup> Ronald Rebholz, interview with author, Stanford, Calif., 15 February 2006.

the university not only did not have the *obligation*, in his view, to step in and raise wages above the legal minimum, it did not have the *right* to do so.<sup>171</sup>

In 2000, things again heated up. In a letter to *The Stanford Daily*, four workers noted that the Webb Ranch employees lacked a medical plan, in spite of their constant encounter with “a variety of dangers”; received no paid vacation days or holidays, “even though almost 50% of our workers have been working for the company for over 25 years”; and were paid wages that did not meet external standards. The letter closed with a request for a “fair contract and a better salary, so that we can give our children a better level of life [...] so that they do not have to experience the same humiliations and exploitation as their parents.”<sup>172</sup> After three months of negotiations, in February 2000, U.S.W. and Webb Ranch management agreed to a “tentative new contract” promising wage increases and paid vacation time. Student activists from the recently-founded Stanford Labor Action Coalition (SLAC) and the longtime Chicano-Latino activist organization Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA) had supported the workers while Professors John Manley and Luis Fraga from the Department of Political Science wrote a letter of support. No health care was added; costs were so high in the U.S. that one worker, Agustín González, found it was cheaper to return to Mexico and receive medical attention.<sup>173</sup> One student, an undergraduate named Shaw San Liu, wondered in a letter, “How much really changed on Tuesday?” Wages remained low—

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<sup>171</sup> “Faculty Senate Hears about Three-year Degree, Webb Ranch, Medical Center,” Stanford University News Service, 8 March 1993, <<http://www.stanford.edu/dept/news/pr/93/930308Arc3375.html>> (5 August 2005).

<sup>172</sup> “Webb Ranch Workers Protest,” letter by Juan Gonzalez et al. and The Worker Union of Webb Ranch to *The Stanford Daily*, 23 February 2000, <[http://daily.stanford.edu/tempo?page=contentandid=2109andrepository=0001\\_article](http://daily.stanford.edu/tempo?page=contentandid=2109andrepository=0001_article)> (5 August 2005).

<sup>173</sup> Melissa Lambert, “Webb Ranch Workers Get Raise—Labor Conditions on Stanford-owned Land Were at Issue,” *The Stanford Daily*, 1 March 2000, <[http://daily.stanford.edu/tempo?page=contentandid=2011andrepository=0001\\_article](http://daily.stanford.edu/tempo?page=contentandid=2011andrepository=0001_article)> (5 August 2005).

for many, only 65 cents above California's minimum wage—and health coverage was non-existent.<sup>174</sup> Nearly three months of negotiations had arguably gained workers very little. John Manley argued that the lease with the Webbs be terminated and its workers hired as direct employees of the university,<sup>175</sup> and in a letter to *The Daily* on May 22, 2000, Fraga, Manley, and Rebholz said:

A few days before John L. Hennessy's designation as Stanford's president-elect, 598 members of the Stanford community petitioned University President Gerhard Casper to refrain from signing a new long-term lease on Webb Ranch where farm workers continue to live and work in poverty.<sup>176</sup>

In addition to poverty, allegations of derelict management continued to surface throughout the 1990s. In the summer of 1991 Stanford made a donation to Webb Ranch of eight mobile homes which had once housed students and were being moved to accommodate the construction of two undergraduate dormitories in the Manzanita housing area.<sup>177</sup> After an unexplained eighteen-month period, the transferal date was not fixed until February 1993. At this point the hook-up was delayed by some commonplace San Mateo County regulations, but several months later, Ronald Rebholz came to the first Faculty Senate meeting of the 1993–1994 academic year with some unseemly news.<sup>178</sup> The task of assigning the Manzanita trailers had been improperly taken over by the Webbs. Bypassing the Webb Ranch Worker Tenants' Council, which was initially

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<sup>174</sup> “Equitable Treatment for Webb Ranch Workers,” letter by Shaw San Liu to *The Stanford Daily*, 3 March 2000, <[http://daily.stanford.edu/tempo?page=contentandid=1988andrepository=0001\\_article](http://daily.stanford.edu/tempo?page=contentandid=1988andrepository=0001_article)> (5 August 2005).

<sup>175</sup> “Clarifying the Webb Ranch Debate,” letter by John Manley to *The Stanford Daily*, 27 March 2000, <[http://daily.stanford.edu/tempo?page=contentandid=1933andrepository=0001\\_article](http://daily.stanford.edu/tempo?page=contentandid=1933andrepository=0001_article)> (5 August 2005).

<sup>176</sup> “Stanford Should Sever Ties with Webb Ranch,” letter by John F. Manley et al. to *The Stanford Daily*, 22 May 2000, <[http://daily.stanford.edu/tempo?page=contentandid=1230andrepository=0001\\_article](http://daily.stanford.edu/tempo?page=contentandid=1230andrepository=0001_article)> (5 August 2005).

<sup>177</sup> “Manzanita Trailers to House Webb Ranch Workers,” Stanford University News Service, 24 July 1991, <<http://www.stanford.edu/dept/news/pr/91/910724Arc1246.html>> (5 August 2005).

<sup>178</sup> “Faculty Senate Hears about Three-year Degree, Webb Ranch, Medical Center,” Stanford University News Service, 8 March 1993, <<http://www.stanford.edu/dept/news/pr/93/930308Arc3375.html>> (5 August 2005).

intended to decide trailer assignment, the Webbs were “claiming ownership” over the trailers and had even begun to assign several of them. They had apparently given one to a supervisor.<sup>179</sup> Both Casper and Rebholz looked into the matter for the October 14 meeting of the Faculty Senate. During this interval it was learned that, in addition to unfairly taking the responsibility to assign trailers, and then assigning one to a supervisor, the Webbs had provided another to retired couple who no longer worked on the ranch. As if to make their distributionary preference even more explicit, the Webb Family paid one worker \$2,000 “to surrender his right to a trailer.”<sup>180</sup> President Casper declined Rebholz’s urgings for university action: The university “cannot manage other people’s businesses,” Casper said, adding that the university “does have very urgent business to attend to and every minute I spend on these matters means a minute I cannot spend on Stanford University business.”<sup>181</sup>

None of the foregoing events and allegations will be fairly understood until it is researched with greater depth than I have provided here, but the record nevertheless suggests that the story of Webb Ranch in the 1988–2000 period has not been one of unidirectional or unimpeded progress. Although the founding of a union and the establishment of a contract as the basis for labor relations at Webb Ranch seem to have been inarguably positive steps for the workers at the ranch, it is not clear that the labor atmosphere has grown demonstrably fairer over time. The story of Webb Ranch neither “began” with amnesty and the interest in unionization in 1987–1988, nor “ended” with the securing of a first contract in 1991. The task of extending our history back to the

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<sup>179</sup> “Webb Ranch Trailer Assignments Are Not University’s Business, Casper Says,” Stanford University News Service, 19 October 1993, <<http://www.stanford.edu/dept/news/pr/93/931019Arc3101.html>> (5 August 2005).

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

labor camps of the 1960s and 1970s, and perhaps then to the Japanese workers of the 1930s and 1940s, and bringing it forward to the present, will have to be left to a future researcher.

I think it is useful to add a cautionary note here: historical accuracy is a very exalted star which I have only been able to grasp at from a distance in this study of Webb Ranch. I was unable to include an oral history component in my study, thus forcing me to rely on a plentiful yet surely imperfect tranche of newspaper articles. The voices of union leaders and activists were favored in these reports, and even those audible workers' voices were dominated by a handful of individuals. There were other workers, and wives and children, whose input would surely have shaken and perhaps greatly revised my reading of history. We must take extreme care to remember this limitation of newspaper sources, yet we must likewise bear in mind that even the information within a newspaper source may contain inaccuracies. At the outbreak of the Webb Ranch controversy in February 1989, an article in the *Times Tribune* contained the allegation that workers labored for seventy-two hours a week and had seventy-five cents per hour deducted from each paycheck for rent. A prior *Daily* article had Thomas Hubbard's confirmation that workers paid \$400.00 a month rent. But the numbers do not square. Seventy-five cents deducted over seventy-two hours totals a deduction of \$54.00 per week. For five weeks (slightly *longer* than a month, of course) this multiplies through to a monthly deduction of \$270.00—barely two-thirds of Hubbard's reported deduction. Was seventy-five cents an hour thus reasonable, or was it still high? Was there simply a misreporting of the fact? Was Hubbard's admission the real number—and since it was \$400.00 a month, was it high? At any rate, it is certainly rare that an employer should claim to be taking higher

deductions from his workers than even his political opponents are charging! Such information was often used as evidence to describe the squalid conditions at Webb Ranch, and so these discrepancies are more than an academic concern. These statistics deserve our caution and the careful attention of our calculators. They remind us of the value of empiricism, and above all they remind us to be skeptics at the doorstep of historical truth.<sup>182</sup>

Because of the impediments to a comprehensive understanding of Webb Ranch, I think it is, for the time being, best understood by a reflection on contradiction. The same university administration which had opposed the unionization of clerical workers in the early 1980s, when pressed to act vis-à-vis the ranch workers who were not even directly hired by Stanford, ranged itself so consistently in favor of unionization as to virtually construct an ethos around collective bargaining. The university's faith in collective bargaining was evidently stronger than that of workers, who evinced a strong desire to be in a union but a muted skepticism at its prospect of success. Yet the university was often accused of temporizing in the face of poverty, and one of the justifications for a deliberate approach that Donald Kennedy offered to Ronald Rebholz was that "we're very determined not to take precipitous action that will get the problem off our backs but make things worse for the very people you're concerned about." These words proved to have an ironic prescience when Rebholz later conceded that the good intentions of supporting unionization were, in retrospect, misplaced or inadequate. The university's insistence that Webb Ranch employees were not their direct problem stirred activists to intensify their efforts, which only made Webb Ranch more of a problem for Stanford.

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<sup>182</sup> Mary Madison, "'Slave Labor' Accusation by Union," *Times Tribune*, 16 February 1989, 1; Landon, op. cit., "USW Points Out Plight."

Such student and faculty activists were much more willing to render deep and sustained support for Webb Ranch employees in 1989–1991 than for union members during the 1982 strike, even though the workers at Webb Ranch were physically separated from campus, were minority immigrants, and did not usually (if at all) speak any English. These elements of segregation may actually have helped the ranch workers to gain campus support; for unlike the direct nuisances of the 1982 strike, the Webb Ranch episode intruded only on the conscience of students and faculty members, not on their the stomachs or daily routines. A campaign that acted indirectly on the emotions of the campus instead of directly on its physical territory was thus, contrary to intuition, more successful. In like vein, U.S.W. employed less rhetorical flourish over the Webb Ranch case than the 1982 strike, but workers may have benefited from the union's relative level-headedness to the extent that it allowed them to more easily gain the community solidarity that Thomas Brida has shown to have been essential.

Nevertheless, the greatest contradiction of all may be the mix of success and victory with which the history of Webb Ranch has unfolded. The victory of a first contract allowed the wrenching questions of poverty and exploitation to be defused, and the evident problems that persisted or arose anew would never again capture the righteous attention of a third of Stanford undergraduates and the entirety of its faculty senate. Yet even this contraction has its own sub-contradiction, for Webb Ranch has not been entirely removed from the table of concern. A Stanford University news release from 1994 on the topic of undergraduate recipients of a public service fellowship listed, among one winner's qualifications, her participation in a Coalition for Dignity and

Justice at Webb Ranch.<sup>183</sup> A report to the 1994–1995 Faculty Senate entitled “Minority Student Experience at Stanford” contained an observation on intra-ethnic empathy that began:

White students and faculty sometimes fail to appreciate the strength of this ethnic bond [that cuts across various “categories that distinguish one individual from another”] and are puzzled by, for instance, the intensity of the fellow feeling with which some Chicano graduate students respond to a perceived injustice to Webb Ranch workers [...]<sup>184</sup>

During Webb Ranch contract negotiations in the winter and spring of 2000, no fewer than seven letters, editorials, op-ed columns, and articles appeared in *The Stanford Daily* discussing or referencing conditions at the ranch.<sup>185</sup> In spring 2003 six students undertook a week-long hunger strike in favor of a labor “Code of Conduct,” and their fast began on the heels of a rally at Webb Ranch and made reference to improving health benefits there.<sup>186</sup> At a celebration of the memory of César Chávez at Stanford that spring, the immigrant and women’s rights activist Dolores Huerta spoke, drawing

special attention to the fight for better conditions at Stanford’s neighboring Webb Ranch, at one point inviting workers from the ranch onstage to voice their opinions.

“It’s just a disgrace that Stanford can be right next to a ranch where they are oppressing workers and not giving them the wage they deserve,” Huerta said.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> “Three Seniors Awarded Gardner Public Service Fellowships,” Stanford University News Service, 7 June 1994, <<http://www.stanford.edu/dept/news/pr/94/940607Arc4227.html>> (5 August 2005).

<sup>184</sup> “Minority Student Experience at Stanford,” Report to the Faculty Senate of Stanford University, 1994–1995, <[http://facultysenate.stanford.edu/archive/1994\\_1995/reports/103690/103684.html](http://facultysenate.stanford.edu/archive/1994_1995/reports/103690/103684.html)> (5 August 2005).

<sup>185</sup> “Webb Ranch Workers Protest,” op. cit.; Lambert, op. cit.; “Equitable Treatment for Webb Ranch Workers,” op. cit.; “Clarifying the Webb Ranch Debate,” op. cit.; “Stanford Must Take Firm Stance on Webb Ranch Issue,” unsigned editorial, *The Stanford Daily*, 27 March 2000, <[http://daily.stanford.edu/tempo?page=contentandid=1931andrepository=0001\\_article](http://daily.stanford.edu/tempo?page=contentandid=1931andrepository=0001_article)> (5 August 2005); Jennifer Weskelbaum, “All I Needed to Know—I Learned in My Dorm,” *The Stanford Daily*, 21 April 2000, <[http://daily.stanford.edu/tempo?page=contentandid=1589andrepository=0001\\_article](http://daily.stanford.edu/tempo?page=contentandid=1589andrepository=0001_article)> (5 August 2005); “Stanford Should Sever Ties with Webb Ranch,” op. cit.

<sup>186</sup> Eric Eldon and Anthony Ha, “Fast Ends as Students Reach Agreement with Hennessy,” *The Stanford Daily*, 4 June 2003, <[http://daily.stanford.edu/tempo?page=contentandid=11530andrepository=0001\\_article](http://daily.stanford.edu/tempo?page=contentandid=11530andrepository=0001_article)> (5 August 2005); Hai Binh Nguyen and Anna Sale, “Justice for Stanford Workers: Students Fast for Code of Conduct,” *The Stanford Daily*, 28 May 2003, <[http://daily.stanford.edu/tempo?page=contentandid=11443andrepository=0001\\_article](http://daily.stanford.edu/tempo?page=contentandid=11443andrepository=0001_article)> (5 August 2005).

<sup>187</sup> Camille Ricketts, “Chavez Celebrated,” *The Stanford Daily*, 9 April 2003, <[http://daily.stanford.edu/tempo?page=contentandid=10807andrepository=0001\\_article](http://daily.stanford.edu/tempo?page=contentandid=10807andrepository=0001_article)> (5 August 2005).

Unionization appears to have been insufficient, yet it was unionization that inserted the issues of Webb Ranch into the discourse of labor at Stanford University. It has become part of the conception of labor at the university, where once it was not conceived of at all. Workers may not receive a “deserved wage,” but there exists the “disgrace” that may one day compel a more equitable solution. The history of Webb Ranch is inscribed into this eternal and contradictory space between victory and defeat.



## ***Conclusion:***

### ***Stanford Workers and the Struggle for Recognition***

This study of Stanford labor is a collection of separate episodes that are related in certain important ways but remain, for the most part, quite distinct. There was the founding and certification of United Stanford Employees in the early 1970s, and then, under different circumstances a decade later, the union's resolute but doomed attempt to win a better contract through a strike. There was the movement of female clerical workers at the turn of the 1980s, with its feminist yearnings overtaken by a skeptical opposition, and the movement of male Mexican farmworkers at the turn of the 1990s, with its wholly different concerns of poverty, housing, and extreme workplace exploitation. Yet a common strand that runs through and connects each movement is workers' attempts to leave behind a status in which they have felt unseen, unheard, and undervalued, in favor of visibility, valuation, and recognition. It may be tempting to cast Stanford workers in the role of "invisibility," but we might more appropriately remember this history as a struggle for recognition.

A "struggle for recognition" more accurately describes the history of labor at Stanford than "invisibility." It suggests a *process*, rather than an immovable state. Unlike the adjective "invisible," "recognition" can easily take a range of verbal forms

that have different meanings; a worker may “recognize” another worker, a consumer, or a political opponent, and be “recognized” by any of these individuals in turn. Like visibility, recognition is associated with the act of seeing or having been seen, but it also calls up a sense of “cognition,” of bringing something into one’s mind. Whereas one must tease non-literal meanings from “invisibility” (and do so at the risk of confusion), it is no stretch to find in “recognition” a connotation of acknowledgment and acceptance. A struggle for recognition thus implies more than the simple act of making a worker visible; it encompasses the process by which a worker’s presence impresses upon one’s mind or enters into one’s political space. “Recognition” can be visual, at one level, verbal, aural, and mental at another, and legal at yet another. Finally, recognition is not just a characteristic broadly applied by an observer to his or her subject; it acknowledges workers not just as the passive recipients of others’ vision, but as political and social aspirants and actors in their own right.

This struggle has been fought in formal and informal trenches, but neither has been more important or necessarily more lasting than the other. Instead, they have been connected and dependent on each other. The creation of the first union brought workers into a formal position of collective bargaining with the university while allowing for a careful incorporation of radical sentiments. The Office Staff Organizing Committee’s (OSOC) campaign of 1979–1981 repudiated clericals’ status as “invisible, unheard, unrecognized, and underpaid” university employees and sought respect, power, and formal grievance and bargaining procedures within a feminist context. In addition to being a customary strategy for bargaining leverage in labor relations, the thirty-day strike of university workers in September–October 1982 represented the informal—but

momentous—insertion of labor politics into the everyday life of the university. And the attempt to unionize and ameliorate the living and working conditions of Mexican farmworkers on the university-owned land of Webb Ranch saw a set of dramatic emergences, from undocumented to documented, from ignored and exploited to publicized and empathized with, from political disempowerment to union representation.

The word “struggle” has a special significance in this discussion, for the history of labor at Stanford has been anything but a predictable progression from worse to better (or, for that matter, from better to worse). There is no finish line of “recognition” which is crossed once the necessary effort has been expended. Instead, the ability of workers to achieve more or different forms of recognition has been dependent on a host of external factors. It has depended on the university administration’s ingenuity and coordination, which has been high or low at various points. It has depended on the specific politics of the moment, as seen in the Vietnam letter in 1969, which caused the essential break between company unionists and radical unionists; and in the OSOC campaign, which drew inspiration and support from the feminist organizing of the late 1970s across the country. It has depended on the presence and organization of students, whose support has neither expanded nor contracted in a consistent way but has oscillated significantly through the years. It has depended on the time of the school year, for the 1982 strike was especially unwelcome to students beginning a new academic year. Finally, the struggle for recognition has been stimulated or retarded by matters of race and class identity, which have not proceeded in one predictable path. The history of labor cannot be traced along one unbroken path of progress, nor is it a defeatist’s tale of unremitting failure, nor is it dependent on one factor or variable to the exclusion of all others. Various elements

of a movement may align, with positive or negative consequences, but they may also simultaneously trace radically different paths. U.S.E. organizers in the 1970s alternately pointed up and deemphasized their political persuasions, and their focus on race matters seems to have carried initial benefits but portended later friction. Clerical workers in the late 1970s and early 1980s argued for a union by an emphasis on individual interests, but were defeated by counter-arguments of individualism. The strike of 1982 was tenaciously fought by the union, yet resulted in what they considered a defeat. The unionization of Webb Ranch was seen as a major victory when it occurred in 1990, but has been doubted ever since. In this equation, “victory” and “success” are neither constant nor inevitable. The history is complex, and there is certainly more of it that needs to be told.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> A final thought: is it possible that men and women hold different relationships to “recognition”? Ava Baron reminds us that “Women workers, like men, adopted styles of organization and forms of resistance that fitted their needs, work schedules, and work cultures.” In Ava Baron, ed., *Work Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 11. How do the well-known concepts of “consciousness” and “double-consciousness” figure into the equation, either in terms of gender or race? It seems that there is more anthropological work to be done on this front.

***Appendix:***

***Health and Safety Code Violations at Webb Ranch,  
February–April 1989***

What was the exact nature of these health code infractions? What constituted violations that were not “minor”? What does the accumulation of health violations tell us about the nature of labor at Webb Ranch? According to the February 22, 1989, edition of *Campus Report*, on February 17 San Mateo County Environmental Health Department inspectors found about sixty health and safety violations in the housing units. Most of the violations were “minor,” but some of them were “serious” and deserved later re-inspection. The *Stanford Daily* of February 24 reported that actually “70-some-odd” violations had been discovered. An inspector named Brian Zamora reported that Webb Ranch had run “one of our better labor camps in San Mateo County.” Zamora expressed satisfaction that “[t]here is no record of sewage overflows and no [record of] inadequate drinking water” and pointed out that “[w]e haven’t gotten any complaints from employees there.”<sup>189</sup> Throughout the process in which violations were filed and then corrected, most reports contained approving statements that were similar to Zamora’s, although in one instance a county official expressed skepticism over the idea that Webb

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<sup>189</sup> Kathleen O’Toole, “Campus Labor Union Moves to Represent Webb Farmworkers,” *Campus Report*, 22 February 1989.

Ranch was a “model” camp.<sup>190</sup> One of the violations dealt with overcrowded sleeping areas, but Zamora said some of the overcrowding may have been voluntary.<sup>191</sup> An article in the *Times Tribune* of March 18, 1989, reported that inspectors had made a surprise visit on March 16, at which point Zamora was happy to find that the ranch had corrected forty-nine of the seventy-five violations.<sup>192</sup> The *Palo Alto Weekly* of April 19 wrote that “by a second followup inspection April 7, only 12 violations remained.”<sup>193</sup>

The files of the San Mateo County Environmental Health Division reveal that in addition to the initial inspection and the two follow-ups, a fourth and final inspection occurred April 17, 1989. Six violations remained uncorrected. Several of the original infractions were serious. There is a letter dated February 21, 1989, from Ken Robinson of the county to Tom Hubbard of Webb Ranch, detailing the “deficiencies of the Employee Housing Act.” Violation #28 in the “Augustine Family Trailer” notes a “Slight cockroach infestation observed”; Robinson suggests the Webbs “[o]btain the services of a licensed pest control operator to exterminate for cockroaches.” Violation #42 occurred in the “Vidal Family House” and consisted of “Strong evidence of a roof rat infestation observed within and around this house.” This violation, as with the previous one, has an “OK” mark of approval written in on the health division’s copy of the record. Both were corrected by the first follow-up, and noted as such by the inspector. Violation #54 discusses the presence of an “elderly woman” in the “Four Room Summer Dorm.” It

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<sup>190</sup> Jill Daniels, “USW, Webb Ranch Set to Negotiate,” *The Stanford Daily*, 24 February 1989, 1; Stanton Samuelson, “Nasty Battle Heating Up: University Denies Tenant Responsibility,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 4 March 1989, 1.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Mary Madison, “County Praises Webb Ranch for Fixing Problems,” *Times Tribune*, 18 March 1989, A-1.

<sup>193</sup> Don Kazak, “Taking a Stand: Mexican Farm Workers at Webb Ranch Are Hoping the Recent Union Election Will Give Them Decent Living Conditions and Health Benefits,” *Palo Alto Weekly*, 19 April 1989, 13–17.

was February; by law nobody should have been in summer housing between Labor Day and Memorial Day. The woman was “cooking on a hot plate” amid an “array” of zip cord wiring; she was not in the “Community Kitchen,” the only permissible place to cook, and furthermore was cooking in a unit described as “inadequately fire proofed.” Violation #69 is the presence of portable heaters in the units of the “General Area”: “Except for the summer use barracks, all units must be provided with a permanent sense of heat.”<sup>194</sup>

Ken Robinson, a longtime inspector with San Mateo County, indicated in an interview that these most serious health code violations do not suggest that the Webbs were negligent landlords. Cockroaches may enter the structure of a building for any number of reasons—often to seek food or warmth—and will stay so long as the building remains dirty or otherwise appealing. The burden is on the owners to exterminate the roaches, but the cleanliness of the tenants will largely determine whether or not the problem persists. Rats present a similar dilemma. They will generally enter a dwelling for warm harborage at night rather than food, yet may be attracted to enter if dog food, for instance, is left inside. Once more the burden falls on the owners to rodent-proof the dwelling, but tenants must also modify their behavior to assure a rodent-free unit. Tenants must, for example, be sure to leave dog food outside. Hot plates and portable heaters are outlawed because they pose major fire hazards, and it is the landlord’s task to insist that his or her tenants not use such machines. According to Robinson, if tenants continue to operate these machines, the guidelines become difficult to enforce: either an

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<sup>194</sup> Archives of San Mateo County Environmental Health Division, 455 County Center, Redwood City, Calif., reviewed 13 December 2005, 3–4, 6.

owner must constantly enter workers' dwellings, or threaten other recourse if tenants' behavior does not come into line with the law.

Robinson said that there are multiple mechanisms by which to ensure enforcement. During their visits inspectors will educate farmworkers about what constitutes safe and unsafe behavior, while demanding that owners take responsibility for the units that they own. Owners must in turn interact with their workers to ensure compliance, and they are compelled to do so by the time follow-up inspections take place. What may not be the direct fault of an owner, therefore, is still sometimes his or her indirect fault, for neglecting to stop a dangerous behavior or enforce a housing guideline. An inspector must regulate owners to regulate their workers.

It seems likely, therefore, that the efficacy of such a system would depend on the levels of respect and ability to communicate between owners and workers. Furthermore, the ability to achieve safe housing would rely, not only on the atmosphere of worker-owner relations, but also on the willingness of workers to voice complaints in the first place. Although inspections occur at least on an annual basis, workers can best assure that any hazards arising in the twelve months between inspections be dealt with only by rendering complaints to the county office. Being part of a union helps, for workers can have union representatives send a letter to ranch owners requesting that a violation be fixed by a given date. If the letter is carbon-copied to the county health inspectors, then the union can seek regulatory assistance if the correction does not occur by the agreed-upon date. Such assistance is only available, however, if the original violation has been set down in writing, hence the importance of communicating by letter. But with or

without union protection, Robinson points out additional complications for workers, and especially Spanish-speaking immigrants:

A lot of [them] are Spanish-speaking, a lot of them [... are] afraid that if they complain they'll be evicted or something will happen to them. We're trying to get across that that would be a violation if anybody were to evict you or do anything in retaliation. [...] A lot of people are migrants, they're up here and they don't really know what their rights are. So we get very few complaints. [...] If they were white, English-speaking, I'd probably get [more complaints].<sup>195</sup>

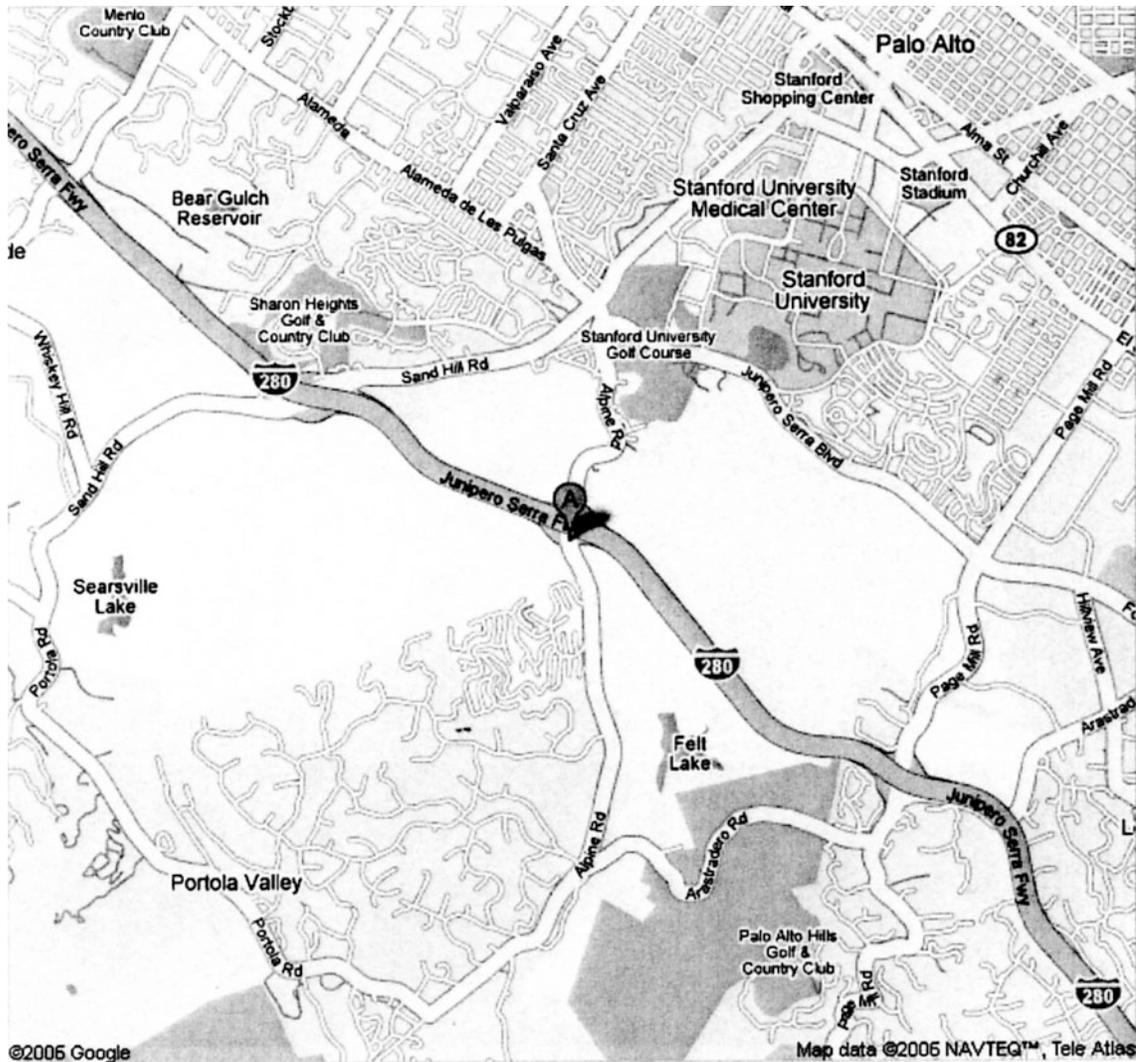
The foregoing information suggests an anthropological element to housing conditions. I have been unable to explore it in this study, but it may interest a future student of the topic.

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<sup>195</sup> Ken Robinson, interview with author, Redwood City, Calif., 22 February 2006.



*Map*



*“A”*: Webb Ranch, 2720 Alpine Road, Menlo Park, CA 94028.