

When the “Jungle” Met the Forest: Public Work, Civil Defense, and Prison Camps in Postwar California

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In January and February 1969, winter rains pounded southern California counties mercilessly. The wettest winter in eighty years caused millions of dollars in losses in the region’s agriculture, ravaged canyons with flash floods, and buried roads and freeways east of Los Angeles and neighboring Orange County. Matters went from bad to worse on February 25 when six thousand Southlanders fled their canyon homes in fear of mudslides. Many stayed behind, such as the Quick family: mother, father, and their four children. Five of the Quicks’ neighbors died in the disaster. Cut off from the outside world for three days in Silverado Canyon on the western slopes of the Santa Ana Mountains, the Quick family was rescued by a team of convicts from the region’s prison forest camp.¹

The Quicks were no “bleeding-heart” liberals likely to mollycoddle criminals. Volunteers in Ronald Reagan’s gubernatorial campaign, they supported the Vietnam War and cracking down on Berkeley student protests. But the 1969 flood washed out their law-and-order stand. Grateful for the “heroic deeds” of the sleep-deprived, soaked, and starving “men who put their life on the line for others,” Mrs. R. Quick asked the governor in a letter to reduce their sentences. She showed no interest in the men’s criminal record—it was their race that caused Mrs. Quick’s biggest surprise: “Everyone always shows the worst side of negroes. None were there to record the negro prisoners up to chests in water (raging water) forming a human chain passing children and people to the other side.” It was not just their courage and strength that seemed remarkable, but “the gentle way they handled the children.” Like most of the flood victims, Mrs. Quick saw model citizens in

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¹ William J. Drummond, “Earthslide Buries Pomona Freeway: May Not Be Cleared This Week,” *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 13, 1969, p. A1; Richard West, “Wettest Season in 79 Years: Season’s Rainfall Reaches Highest Mark in 79 Years,” *ibid.*, Feb. 19, 1969, p. 1; George Getze, “End of Rain Won’t Mean End of Slides, Geologist Predicts,” *ibid.*, Feb. 22, 1969, p. A1; Jerry Ruhlow, “Deluge Floods Canyons, Streets, Disrupts Power: Police in County Report Chaotic Conditions after 3-Inch Rainfall in 3 Days,” *ibid.*, Feb. 24, 1969, p. D1; Gordon Grant, “Devastation in Canyons: Sound of Water Sets Scene,” *ibid.*, Feb. 25, 1969, p. C1; and Don Smith, “Drenched County Braces for More Troubles: Canyon Hardest Hit by Up to 7 Inches of Rain,” *ibid.*

these black men, not public enemies. "Perhaps there is some way you can use this as an example to show a lead to the rest of the country," she concluded.²

Such encounters were the result and purpose of California's prison labor camps, which had kept a ready army of inmate so-called volunteers for fire fighting and disaster relief since World War II. During the war, California's wardens had eagerly turned their prisons into factories for federal defense industries and moved prisoners into the depression-era forestry camps of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and California's State Relief Agency (SRA) to suppress both natural wildfires and possible arson by Japanese Americans. In 1944, Gov. Earl Warren took advantage of flush wartime state revenues and his popularity to replace the Board of Prison Director's old system of penal patronage with a modern Department of Corrections. Within a few years, the prison system of the Golden State went from being one of the worst in the nation to being a national and international model of modern corrections. Forest labor camps were the flagship of the department's new approach. Blending civil defense with public works, the camps combined the familiar routines of road gang labor with the political appeal of military service. They enjoyed broad public support at a time when the state's bolder therapeutic experiments, such as its therapeutic community projects, remained controversial.³

Pervasive in the West and not unusual in urbanized industrial states of the Northeast, prison forestry camps had nationwide appeal in the postwar years. California, however, invested more than any other state in this type of incarceration. Under Gov. Edmund G. Brown (1959–1967), the program expanded into a network of three conservation centers and over thirty camps, with more than five thousand prisoners—approximately 18 percent of the state's prison population—training and working forty-eight hours per week, for which each prisoner received a small wage and sentence reduction in return. Prisoners spent as much as 600,000 man hours per year in emergency situations, fighting fires across the state. They worked in reforestation and flood control, as in the San Joaquin Valley in 1955, and provided 80 percent of the cleanup work force during the 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill.⁴

The Silverado Canyon flood, like many previous wild fires, brought prisoners and stranded citizens together on common, if unsteady, ground. Forest camps, more than any other site of confinement, brought prisoners to the margins of institutional order and into public view. Without guns, batons, or handcuffs, forestry foremen relied on prisoners' willful cooperation and solidarity on the fire line. Fire fighting involved less coercion and control than any other prison labor, placed citizens' lives and property in the hands of convicts, and allowed for liminal moments in which prisoners briefly experienced sta-

² Mrs. R. Quick to Ronald Reagan, March 12, 1969, Corrections January folder (1 of 2), box 1969/58, Correspondence Unit, Administration, Ronald Reagan Gubernatorial Records (Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, National Archives and Records Administration, Simi Valley, Calif.).

³ Volker Janssen, "From the Inside Out: Therapeutic Penology and Political Liberalism in Postwar California," *Osiris*, 22 (no. 1, 2007), 116–34.

⁴ Report to Correctional Industries Commission, 2, Dec. 29, 1969, folder F3717:454 Correctional Industries Commission Minutes 1969–1970, Department of Corrections Records (California State Archives, Sacramento, Calif.). Oregon established its camps in 1949, Michigan in 1948, Washington in 1954, and Wyoming in 1964. A number of other states, including Idaho, have similar programs. "Department of Corrections: Agency History," *Oregon Blue Book*, http://bluebook.state.or.us/state/executive/Corrections_dept/corrections_dept_history.htm; "Camps," *Michigan Department of Corrections*, http://www.michigan.gov/corrections/0,1607,7-119-1381_1383--,00.html; "Cedar Creek Corrections Center," *Washington State Department of Corrections*, <http://www.doc.wa.gov/facilities/cedarcreek.asp>; "Wyoming Honor Conservation Camp and Wyoming Boot Camp," *Wyoming Department of Corrections*, <http://doc.state.wy.us/institutions/whcc/index.html>; *Idaho Department of Correction*, <http://www.corr.state.id.us>.

tus akin to citizenship through civic service.⁵ But camps also highlighted another social fact: more than just the law separated prisoners from citizens. As convicts risked their lives to protect citizens against the Golden State's notoriously volatile cycle of disasters, they crossed a border that divided not just freedom from captivity, but also urban blacks and Latinos from rural whites. The Reagan Republicans that sprawled out of Orange County's suburban bedroom communities into southern California's fragile ecosystems and the virtually all-white communities of northern California's mountain counties had little in common with the predominately black and Latino prisoners who came from the urban neighborhoods in Los Angeles and the Bay Area that white flight had left behind. For blacks and Latinos in those urban areas, it was not floods or fires that strained their lives and family ties, but crowded, segregated ramshackle housing; poor access to education, healthcare, and employment; and a hostile police force.⁶ While the emergency and conservation work of these prisoners in the state's forests protected free citizens from harm and the prison camps stimulated flagging local economies, the convicts became targets in a war on crime in what white middle-class Californians considered an urban "jungle."

California's forest prison camps are important to the history of postwar America for four reasons. For one, prisons and prisoners belong at the center of our debate over citizenship. Twenty-eight years of waging a war on drugs and street crime, legislating mandatory minimum sentences, and building maximum security prisons has led scholars to emphasize the historical continuity of confinement as a means of racial oppression and penal slavery, and they frequently cast aside institutional changes as epiphenomenal. By and large, historians of postwar corrections concluded that the proclaimed inclusion of punishment into the realm of the welfare state was not only doomed to fail, but that the politics and practices of "rehabilitation" were little more than smoke and mirrors. Such a dismissal threatens to reinforce an ahistorical understanding of imprisonment and obscures the broad and shifting power that prisons have wielded on the boundary between citizenship and civic death—the complete dissolution of a prisoner's civic rights and legal personhood. Mid-twentieth-century penal institutions and reform-oriented administrators occupied a crucial place in the postwar state and liberal politics, as they participated in a pervasive postwar discourse on rehabilitation that encompassed not only prisons, but also the poor and their urban neighborhoods, veterans, the disabled, the disfranchised, and Native Americans.⁷

⁵ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (New York, 1995), 167.

⁶ Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley, 2006); Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley, 2004); Lawrence de Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor, *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California* (Seattle, 2001).

⁷ While other institutions of the modern state—such as public education, the military, the border, welfare programs—have captured the attention of historians concerned with labor, race, gender identities, and conceptions of citizenship, prisons have yet to find their place in the narrative of postwar liberalism. A recent exception is Michael B. Katz, Mark J. Stern, and Jamie J. Fader, "The New African American Inequality," *Journal of American History*, 92 (June 2005), 75–108. For a work that describes the penal welfare state as the combination of "the liberal legalism of due process and proportionate punishment with a correctionalist commitment to rehabilitation, welfare and criminological expertise," see David Garland, *Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society* (Chicago, 2001), 27. New Left criminologists and more recently activist scholars have doubted the existence of an actual rehabilitative regime in corrections. See Eric Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement* (Stanford, 1994), 13. Prisoners of the penal welfare state certainly knew this, as work on linkages between the civil rights and the prisoner rights movements has shown. See James B. Jacobs, *New Perspectives on Prisons and Imprisonment* (Ithaca, 1983), 33–60; and John Irwin, *Prisons in Turmoil* (Boston, 1980). See also Robert T. Chase, "Civil Rights on the Cellblock: Race, Reform, and Punishment in Texas Prisons, 1945–1990" (Ph.D. diss., Uni-

Second, whereas the political purpose of most prisons was to protect citizens from—and impose order over—inmates, forest camps could turn prisoners into citizen soldiers. As the Silverado Canyon story illustrates, punishment in postwar California was at least in part a very public affair with profound political and social implications for the history of postwar America. When prisoners were sent out to deal with the effects of disasters such as floods, fires, or mudslides, order stemmed not from prison walls, but from a shared sense of civic duty that momentarily united convicts and citizens. The need for civil defense and public works, prison officials thought, created opportunities for convicts to emerge from the shadow of prison walls and transcend rather than reaffirm inequalities of class and race. Indeed, close contact between rural Californians and prisoners as neighbors and fire fighters intimated a universal national masculine identity in which differences of class, religion, and ethnicity could temporarily melt away. If imprisonment meant the suspension of citizenship and release its restoration, then fighting forest fires constituted one of the very few types of workfare that could convince free citizens to think of prisoners “as full citizens.” Over time, racial difference made such shifts in perception far more fleeting and fragile than was the case with Mrs. Quick.⁸

Third, California’s forest camps stood at the center of not only a relationship between citizens and convicts but also the racially charged context of urban renewal and crisis, on the one hand, and the rural-suburban origins of law-and-order conservatism, on the other.⁹ Prisons previously had been, if not in, then certainly of the city, but postwar camps

versity of Maryland, 2008); Heather Thompson, “Blinded by a ‘Barbaric’ South: Prison Horrors, Inmate Abuse, and the Ironic History of Penal Reform in the Postwar United States,” in *The End of Southern History?*, ed. Joseph Crespino and Matthew Lassiter (Ann Arbor, forthcoming). The crucial place of penal institutions in liberal politics is apparent in Jennifer Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare: The Unintended Consequences of Liberal Reform, 1945–1965* (Chapel Hill, 2005); Margot Canaday, “Building a Straight State: Sexuality and Social Citizenship under the 1944 G.I. Bill,” *Journal of American History*, 90 (Dec. 2003), 935–57; Thomas Clarkin, *Federal Indian Policy in the Kennedy and Johnson Administration, 1961–1969* (Albuquerque, 2001); and Paul C. Rosier, “They Are Ancestral Homelands’: Race, Place, and Politics in Cold War Native America, 1945–1961,” *Journal of American History*, 92 (March 2006), 1300–1326, esp. 1301.

⁸ Historians of the South have explored the ways southern criminal justice systems facilitated informal and formal encounters between free white citizens and black convicts outside prison walls, but they point out that those encounters functioned only to reinforce Jim Crow racial hierarchies. See, for example, Stephen Garton, “Managing Mercy: African Americans, Parole, and Paternalism in the Georgia Prison System, 1919–1945,” *Journal of Social History*, 36 (Spring 2003), 675–99; and Vivien M. L. Miller, *Crime, Sexual Violence, and Clemency: Florida’s Pardon Board and Penal System in the Progressive Era* (Gainesville, 2000). Early prison release in the South, the flip side of lynch law and other forms of extralegal white justice, often put African Americans in the control of free white citizens. See Christopher Waldrep, *Roots of Disorder: Race and Criminal Justice in the American South, 1817–80* (Urbana, 1998); David M. Oshinsky, *“Worse Than Slavery”: Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice* (New York, 1996); and Mary Ellen Curtin, *Black Prisoners and Their World, Alabama, 1865–1900* (Charlottesville, 2000). Citizen convicts fit squarely into a larger effort to balance the domesticated manliness of postwar prosperity with martial—and dangerous—conceptions of manhood. See James Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (Chicago, 2005); Michael S. Kimmel, *The History of Men: Essays in the History of American and British Masculinities* (Albany, 2005); Robert A. Nye, “Western Masculinities in War and Peace,” *American Historical Review*, 112 (April 2007), 417–38, esp. 417; and Robert D. Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (Amherst, 2001). Workfare, writes Judith Sklar, “is about citizenship, and whether able-bodied adults who do not earn anything actively can be regarded as full citizens.” Judith N. Sklar, *American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), 98.

⁹ The prison, of course, has been a response to urban crises for much of American history. On prisons and urban geography, see Charles Bright, *The Powers That Punish: Prison and Politics in the Era of the “Big House,” 1920–1955* (Ann Arbor, 1996); Timothy Gilfoyle, “America’s Greatest Criminal Barracks: The Tombs and the Experience of Criminal Justice in New York City, 1838–1897,” *Journal of Urban History*, 29 (July 2003), 525–54; Rebecca McLennan, “Punishment’s ‘Square Deal’: Prisoners and Their Keepers in 1920s New York,” *ibid.*, 597–619; Michael Meranze, *Laboratories of Virtue: Punishment, Revolution, and Authority in Philadelphia, 1760–1835* (Chapel Hill, 1996), esp. 78–79, 131–33; and David Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston, 1971), 138–41.

were part of a larger disciplinary network in which improved transportation and communication reduced the administrative challenges of keeping prisoners at remote locations. Once at camp, prisoners were to help shape the landscape of the modern West, and in turn, the West was supposed to shape prisoners. The notion of rehabilitation through forest labor drew on a specific ideological premise: “An essentialist West” was supposed to deliver “men to match its mountains.” If urban blight and industrial decline undermined men’s basic tenets of good citizenship, then forests, mountains, and rural white communities could provide the antidote, so the policy makers thought. Paralleling the turn from welfare to workfare rehabilitation for the urban poor and the rehabilitation projects of urban renewal advocates, prison forest camps were the penal welfare state’s liberal reform treatment for the ghetto. Thus, well before the symbiosis of prison and ghetto became a trope in sociological literature and pop culture, camps meshed the rural Sierras with the declining cities of Oakland, Watts, and Compton. California’s forest camps tied together the stories of urban crisis, liberal reform, citizenship, and rural development. Those stories remind us to add prison administrations to the cast of state actors in the history of urban decline; to cast our net toward the penal diaspora as we try to capture civic agency, activism, and resistance in urban communities; and to consider postwar prisons the birthplace of what I call the transurban ghetto: networks of poverty, community disinvestment, and underground economies that cross regions, such as today’s Central Valley, and even nations, such as with the United States–Salvadorian Salvatrucha street gangs.¹⁰

Finally, the racial dimensions of the 1960s crime and urban crises stimulated an anxious rights consciousness, and not just among suburbanites—rural white Californians had even more immediate experiences with the penal welfare state. But what prompted rural communities to campaign for stricter disciplinary regimes in prison camps and a higher bar between the free and the convicted was the desire to eliminate the social costs of rehabilitation and preserve the economic development nearby state institutions promised.¹¹ Thus, even as the black prisoners from the Don Lugo Conservation Camp were winning

¹⁰ Nancy Stoller, “Space, Place, and Movement as Aspects of Health Care in Three Women’s Prisons,” *Social Science and Medicine*, 56 (June 2003), 2263–75, esp. 2264. On the “morality of place,” see Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens? Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879–1939* (Berkeley, 2006), 170. On prisons and the comparison to welfare, see Premilla Nadasen, Jennifer Mittelstadt, and Marisa Chappell, *Welfare in the United States: A History with Documents, 1935–1996* (New York, 2009), 37. On urban rehabilitation projects in the black neighborhoods of West Oakland, see Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, 2005), 138. Loïc Wacquant, “Deadly Symbiosis: When Prison and Ghetto Meet and Mesh,” *Punishment and Society*, 3 (Jan. 2001), 95–133, esp. 97. This essay expands on the work of urban historians who have traditionally focused on Chicago and other cities of the industrial Northeast. See Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940–1960* (New York, 1983); Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, 1996); and Heather Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca, 2002).

¹¹ On the suburban origins of law-and-order conservatism, see Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, 2001); and Michael Flamm, *Law and Order: Street Crime, Civil Unrest, and the Crisis of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York, 2005). Rural support for a Keynesian carceral state, in which state and local governments invest in the construction and maintenance of punitive infrastructure as a form of regional economic development, has not received much attention from historians of sun belt conservatism either. See Joe Crespiño, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution* (Princeton, 2007); and Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, 2007). Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, 2005). For a discussion of the significance of mass incarceration for the sun belt, see Volker Janssen, “Sunbelt Lockdown: Where the Suburbs Met the Supermax,” in *Sunbelt Rising: The Politics of Space, Place, and Region in the American South and Southwest*, ed. Michelle Nickerson and Darren Dochuk (Philadelphia, forthcoming). Just as combining postwar urban political history with that of suburban development has enriched an otherwise mechanical notion of “white flight,” the growth and decline of California’s forest camps grounds the origins of law-and-order conservatism in racial anxieties as well as the politics of regional development. See Self, *American Babylon*.

the hearts and minds of Silverado Canyon residents, California's camp program was in a crisis. The Department of Corrections conceived of forest camps as a way to fight drug crime in Los Angeles and provide northern California with public works, but increasing distance from the Southland and mandatory assignments with an emphasis on efficiency over the honor system robbed forest camps of much of their original appeal for prisoners. Urban riots and black power activism caused rural communities to respond with increasing apprehension to nonwhite men from the city. To local residents it seemed as though their forests were suffering from the spread of an alien ecology that Ronald Reagan and Los Angeles police chief William Parker labeled "the jungle."¹² In short, rural communities wanted prisons but not the prisoners. When depressed Central Valley counties had to decide whether to host the nation's largest prison construction boom in the 1980s, they followed the example of pioneering northern prison towns like Susanville in northeastern Lassen County—one of two conservation centers built in California's Sierra in the early 1960s. Only in this later era, prisons would channel urban men into the country on an unprecedented scale for rigid exclusion—not liminal camp experiences.

What in the wake of World War II was an internationally famous and by far the nation's boldest penal welfare system has since turned into a "golden gulag"—the largest state prison system in a nation with the largest convict population in the world.¹³ The links forest camps forged between urban decline and rural and suburban development in California and elsewhere compounded the nationwide failure of penal welfare liberalism. Few states were willing and able to follow the Golden State's postwar rehabilitative efforts; but most copied the system of mass incarceration of young urban males in poor rural regions.

The labor camps of California's penal welfare state had their roots in the Great Depression. Rather than jailing the unemployed migrant midwestern youths who arrived in Los Angeles, county probation officer Kenyon J. Scudder assigned the sixteen-to eighteen-year-olds to forest work (for fifty cents a day), a camp bed, work clothes, and food. The SRA adopted the plan in 1933, eventually running up to fifty such camps with populations ranging from thirty to one hundred. The forest camps of the CCC, the popular New Deal public works program, built on California's example and recruited millions of unemployed adolescent males for remote camps. Like Scudder, CCC administrators claimed to imbue their wards with a civic work ethic, train them in important skills, and build malnourished youth into strong, healthy providers.¹⁴

¹² Richard A. Berk, Harold Brackman, and Selma Lesser, *A Measure of Justice: An Empirical Study of Changes in the California Penal Code, 1955–1971* (New York, 1977), 133.

¹³ California housed 174,603 sentenced prisoners as of June 30, 2007. With 178,040 inmates, only the federal prison system is slightly larger. U.S. Department of Justice, *Bureau of Justice Bulletin, NCJ 221944: Prison Inmates at Midyear 2007* (Washington, 2008), 14; Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley, 2007).

¹⁴ "Criminologist and Social Engineer: Kenyon Judson Scudder interview by Donald J. Schippers," 1965, transcript, pp. 228–35, 237, 244–46 Oral History Program (Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles); Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (New York, 1989), 138; Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts* (New York, 1937), 410–12; Lloyd Thorpe, *Men to Match the Mountains* (Durham, 1972), 42–48; Harold D. Carew, "A Fair Deal Wins—A Foul Dole Loses," *California History*, 62 (Fall 1983), 172–74, 173. For an exploration of the Civilian Conservation Corps as a "builder of men," see Jeffrey Ryan Suzik, "Building Better Men: The CCC Boy and the Changing Social Ideal of Manliness," in *Boys and Their Toys? Masculinity, Class, and Technology in America*, ed. Roger Horowitz (New York, 2001), 111–38, esp. 129. On crime and the New Deal, see John A. Pandiani, "The

Among the men on the economy's margins, however, adult convicted felons stood beyond the reach of most work programs. Because shoring up economic citizenship for the poor (but free) was a priority in the New Deal, convicts occupied the lowest level of eligibility. Only the inclusion of prisoners in government-funded industries in World War II opened up significant new employment opportunities for convicts. On freedom's edge, prisoners had been transformed by the war from public enemies to public assets in seasonal harvests and forest camps and in manufacturing industries in the San Quentin and Folsom prisons. As the draft and war industries rapidly emptied the camps of the SRA and the CCC, California's State Forestry found itself without the manpower on which it had come to rely. Worse, fire marshals predicted that bombing and sabotage increased the risk of fires, threatening food production and crucial watersheds near army installations and Kaiser Shipyards.¹⁵

The civilian defense argument prompted the creation of forest camps, but it sounded the death knell for a staple in convict labor dating back to the Progressive Era—road labor camps. The federal War Production Board refused to include convict road labor camps on its list of essential war efforts and rushed urgent infrastructure projects to completion with the maximum use of machines and a minimum of labor. The industrialization of road construction during the war left convict road labor projects in the dust.¹⁶

As the war solidified the boundary between citizens and enemies of the nation, prison administrators and many convicts had high hopes for a new fellowship with free Americans and a more favorable position on the continuum between citizenship and exclusion. "The men inside the walls feel they are working shoulder to shoulder with fellow Americans on the outside," reported Clinton S. Duffy, the warden of San Quentin State Prison—at the same time that Japanese Americans at Tule Lake's Relocation Center rose in protest of their imprisonment. Communities seemed equally pleased with the convicts' new role, and the prison administration received "a great many commendatory letters from citizens" and communities. Prisoners, too, for the most part embraced the labors that brought them one step closer to community membership. War industries paid comparatively good wages, and institutional training in welding and other industrial skills often led to early parole and immediate employment at navy yards in Los Angeles, the Bay Area, or Hawaii. Early release for military service or work on the home front combined

Crime Control Corps: An Invisible New Deal Program," *British Journal of Sociology*, 33 (Sept. 1982), 348–58, esp. 350–51, 354.

¹⁵ On prisoners climbing the ladder of eligibility in the twentieth century, see Agnes Czajka, "Inclusive Exclusion: Citizenship and the American Prisoner and Prison," *Studies in Political Economy: A Socialist Review*, 76 (Autumn 2005), 111–42, esp. 122–23; and Edward W. Sieh, "Less Eligibility: The Upper Limits of Penal Policy," *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 3 (June 1989), 159–83. Harry Elmer Barnes, *Report on the Progress of the State Prison War Program under the Government Division of the War Production Board* (Washington, 1944), 24, 33, 40. Maury Maverick, *Prisons in Wartime: Report of the Progress of State Prison Industries under the Government Division of the War Production Board* (Washington, 1943), 29; California Department of Corrections, *Biennial Report 1946* (Sacramento, 1947), 76; Elvin Hatch, *Biography of a Small Town* (New York, 1979), 114; Michael D. Brown, *The History of Chino Prison: The First Fifty Years of the California Institution for Men, 1941 to 1991* (Sacramento, 1991), 121–23.

¹⁶ Frank G. Forward to Earl Warren, July 12, 1943, folder F3640:3092 Natural Resources—Penology/Board of Prison Directors, Administrative Files, Earl Warren Papers (California State Archives); State Board of Prison Director Julian H. Alco to Warren, July 16, 1943, pp. 1–3, folder F3640:3093 Board of Prison Terms and Paroles, *ibid.*; C. H. Purcell to Warren, Aug. 16, 1943, p. 6, *ibid.*; Assistant State Highway Engineer R. M. Gillis to Warren, memo, Sept. 13, 1949, p. 1, folder F3640:922 Department of Corrections, March–April 1950, Administrative Files, Warren Papers. Although the labor performed on roads by chain gangs in the American South resembled the work of inmate workers in California's forests, in each place the implications for the convict workers' claim on citizenship differed substantially. See Alex Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor: The Political Economy of Convict Labor in the New South* (New York, 1996).

with a decline in new commitments and a policy of military parole to decrease prison populations in California and across the nation.¹⁷

Not all prisoners participated willingly, however, and not all free citizens were enthusiastic about the new wartime freedoms for prisoners. The dramatic changes in the relationship between prisoners and the political economy taxed the mechanisms of penal control beyond their limits. A dramatic increase in escapes prompted Gov. Earl Warren to launch a long overdue prison reform program.¹⁸ California's ballooning tax revenues made reforms much easier to implement, and the war boosted the prisons' legitimacy, making it possible to claim that "it pays to spend money on rehabilitation." The new CDC that emerged from the reorganization on May 1, 1944, did not simply tighten discipline in state prisons. Prison admission and release became increasingly complex administrative processes. More rules governed the relations between prisoners, guards, and civilians—be they visiting family members, shop foremen, journalists, or lawyers. Forest camps were also reformed: the new department banned barter, gambling, alcohol, sick-ins, excessive complaining, unsupervised contact with outsiders, and refusal to work. But it also established minimum standards for food rations, clothing, and dormitory space, and introduced overtime pay and wages far above those of correctional industries. Any violation could result in an inmate's return to the main institution and the forfeiture of all his earnings. Corrections professionals understood their task not so much as controlling a definitive boundary between convicts and citizens but managing the continuum on which they both existed.¹⁹

Within the institutional order of prisons, camps maintained an exceptionally delicate balance between freedom and confinement. "Men [were] placed on their honor not to escape," explained the former probation officer Kenyon Scudder, now superintendent at the new minimum security prison in Chino. Despite plenty of opportunities for escape, "these men had given their word, and they would not violate it," claimed Scudder. Honor camps credited convicts with having a sense of service and civic obligation not unlike that of men in the military. By consenting to camp rules, hard work, healthful living, and

¹⁷ Kenyon J. Scudder, *Prisoners Are People* (Garden City, 1952), 119–29; "Convicts May Work in Forest Camps," *San Francisco Chronicle*, Dec. 11, 1940, p. 8; "Convicts May Work in Forest Camps," *ibid.*, Dec. 17, 1940, p. 29; "Convicts May Work in Forest Camps," *ibid.*, Jan. 1, 1941, p. 8; "Prison Camps Planned," *ibid.*, Nov. 5, 1941, p. 16; Clinton T. Duffy to Warren, Nov. 8, 1943, esp. pp. 3–7, folder F3640:3090 Natural Resources—Penology, Administrative Files, Warren Papers; Isaac Pacht to Warren, June 29, 1943, pp. 1–2, *ibid.* Following a loosening of the standards of the Selective Service Act, the armed forces began admitting convicted felons and parolees; by 1943 between 50,000 and 100,000 ex-convicts and parolees served in the military. Albert G. Fraser, "Annual Report of the Executive Secretary," *Prison Journal*, 23 (Jan. 1943), 271.

¹⁸ "Lifer's Trips Bring Warden Suspension; Folsom Convict Taken in San Francisco Woman's Apartment," *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 29, 1943, p. 1. For the history of California's protracted struggle for prison reform, see Shelley Bookspan, *A Germ of Goodness: The California State Prison System, 1851–1944* (Lincoln, 1991).

¹⁹ John Aubrey Douglass, "Earl Warren's New Deal: Economic Transition, Postwar Planning, and Higher Education in California," *Journal of Policy History*, 12 (Dec. 2000), 473–512, esp. 474. California was not the only state that recognized the war as a window for reform. See Rebecca McLennan, "The New Penal State: Globalization, History, and American Criminal Justice, c. 2000," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 2 (Sept. 2001), 407–19, esp. 413; Jonathan Simon, *Poor Discipline: Parole and the Social Control of the Underclass, 1890–1990* (Chicago, 1993), 255. "Public Service Broadcast by Governor Earl Warren, ABC Network, Dec. 6, 1949," transcript, pp. 1–3, folder F3717:1374 Administration Speeches 1948–1957, Department of Corrections Records. On the discussion of prison spending by Richard A. McGee, the first director of the new Department of Corrections, see Richard A. McGee, "Saving Prison Waste," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 293 (May 1954), 59–69, esp. 62–63, 69. California Governor's Investigation Committee on Penal Affairs, *Final Report of Governor's Investigation Committee on Penal Affairs, January 21, 1944* (Sacramento, 1944), 7, 10–11; "State Prisons Reorganization Plan: Recommendation of Special Prison Investigation Committee," *San Francisco Chronicle*, Jan. 22, 1944, pp. 1, 3; "Department of Corrections Created, Effective May 1, 1944," *ibid.*, Feb. 1, 1944, p. 8; "Replacement of Convict Bosses and Other Inmate Help with Free, Civilian Personnel Planned," *ibid.*, Nov. 21, 1944, p. 15.

earning a wage for family back home, camp prisoners were making a renewed moral commitment to manly independence and virtue, and a social commitment to family, community, and the state. "There is no form of work which will develop better character habits than out-of-door employment in the forests of the state," CDC administrators stated in consensus with lawmakers in the department's biennial report of 1946.²⁰

With California's rapid postwar population growth came an increase in the state's prison population. By 1955, the state held three times as many convicts than at war's end, and wartime tax revenues had paid for four more large institutions.²¹ By building prisons on former military compounds and federal lands the state avoided much local controversy. Honor camps, on the other hand, depended on the consent and cooperation of nearby small communities. In town hall meetings, letters, and local papers, rural Californians discussed not just the risks and benefits of prison camps in their vicinity, but also the honor and trustworthiness of convicts and their own civic rights and responsibilities.

Young, male, mostly urban, and separated from friends and family, prisoners differed sharply from the rural residents who were the camps' neighbors. These Californians prized rural life for its safety and the life it offered their families, and they prided themselves on their deep roots. Even the differences between ordinary newcomers and "natives" could take decades to overcome in these rural areas. For many, the difference between native and outsider resembled that of race. "We're not an old family," explained a man in the mid-1960s, even though his family had come to the small town during the depression. "I know that people feel about me, in a way, like they feel toward the Negro," he continued. Actual issues of race often separated villagers and camp men, however. In 1949, for example, a resident of the small town of Magalia, ninety miles north of Sacramento, claimed to be speaking the minds of "people in this community" when he threatened to rescind the lease on his land because he had assumed that "there would be no Negroes or Japanese prisoners in the camp." Of course, not all prisoners were Japanese, black, or Latino; but virtually all residents of California's Sierra foothills were white. The boundary between free and unfree was hardly just a matter of color. Racial diversity made prisoners visible, however, in a place that looked less like a prison and more like a Boy Scout camp and where prisoners dressed like forest workers, not convicts. As the proportion of black and Latino prisoners steadily grew, tensions mounted in California's urban-rural geography between residents of all-white rural communities and prisoners from highly segregated city neighborhoods.²²

²⁰ San Quentin, Folsom, and Chino Minute Summary Books, April 24, 1943, p. 3, folder F3717:1039 State Board of Prison Records, Department of Corrections Records; Bookspan, *Germ of Goodness*, 114; Brown, *History of Chino Prison*, 92–94; "Regulations Relating to Prison Camps Established under Article 5, Chapter 5, Title I Part 3 of the Penal Code," Jan. 1944, San Quentin, Folsom and Chino Minute Summary Books, 1944, folder F3717:1040 State Board of Prison Records, Department of Corrections Records; Scudder, *Prisoners Are People*; Fred Fromm, *The Intensive Treatment Program, Phase II: A Condensation of Working Papers* (Sacramento, 1966), 82; California Department of Corrections, *Biennial Report 1946* (Sacramento, 1947), 68; Kenyon J. Scudder, "To What Extent Can Open Institutions Take the Place of the Traditional Prison?," in *Report to the Twelfth International Penal and Penitentiary Congress: Proceedings* (The Hague, 1950), 131–37, esp. 133.

²¹ California Department of Corrections, *Biennial Report 1954* (Sacramento, 1955), 18. Only the Correctional Training Facility near Soledad was built on formerly private property.

²² Hatch, *Biography of a Small Town*, 122; "Criminologist and Social Engineer," 176, 204–25. Molina, *Fit to be Citizens?*, 170; Jess Whitlow to Department of Corrections, April 25, 1950, folder F3717:408 Camp Magalia, 1949–1962, 1968, Corrections Conservation Camp Services, Department of Corrections Records.

Age, gender, geography, and racial differences, together with the prisoners' criminal record, fed much of the local opposition to honor camps. But some locals favored honor camps despite those differences, as was the case in Meadow Vista, Placer County, in 1949. Like citizens in other counties in the Coastal Range and the Sierra foothills, Placer residents prided themselves on a wholesome environment that set them apart from urban pollution and crowding. Most residents also believed in their superior moral and political climate. But when the small community had to decide whether to consent to a prison camp the issue "split their little community" apart. Meadow Vista, like many other communities on the urban-rural fringe, split into natives and newcomers. Recent arrivals were often former city dwellers who understood rural life as a recreational experience instead of hard work. Mostly interested in property values and attracting respectable families to residential developments, the newcomers characterized themselves, in the words of the self-described California native son Joe Carmel, as law abiding, honest, taxpaying, property owning, and hard working. An honor camp, residents told Placer County supervisors, would threaten their "natural escape" from "the trials of city life" such as traffic congestion, pollution, crime, and political and social conflicts over urban development, segregation, civil rights, unemployment, and public education. As was the case with those who participated in "white flight" from city to suburb, the concern of Meadow Vista residents over property, family, and convicts' sexuality stemmed from safety concerns as much as from racial anxieties.²³

Longtime residents, in contrast, had seen their local economies decline since World War II and understood their community and surrounding land as "a utilitarian landscape of commerce and work," not one of leisure. Local shop owners, builders, the sawmill owner, and lumber suppliers thus looked forward to the \$200,000 investment, a monthly payroll at the camp of \$4,000, improved firebreaks and roads, and easier access to water. They also imagined the many benefits of "sixty men who are never idle." Like international foes, domestic public enemies, too, could become community allies, suggested the owner of a marketing company promoting winter sports in 1959: "If we can cooperate so well with our ex-enemies the Japs and the Germans, we ought to be able to work this out."²⁴

²³ John Heppen, "The Changing Political Landscape of California, 1968 to 2000," *Yearbook of the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers*, 63 (2001), 25. Communities in the rural, mountainous parts of northern California developed an increasingly strong political allegiance to the Republican party in the 1960s and remained overwhelmingly white. Claude S. Fischer, "The Spread of Violent Crime from City to Countryside, 1955-1975," *Rural Sociology*, 45 (Sept. 1980), 416-34, esp. 431; "Placer County Supervisors' Minutes Book X," pp. 596-97, folder F3640:921 Department of Corrections Jan.-Feb. 1950, Administrative Files, Warren Papers; Paula M. Nelson, "Rural Life and Social Change in the Modern West," in *The Rural West since World War II*, ed. Douglas R. Hurt (Lawrence, 1998), 38-57, esp. 38-41. For some of the hundreds of letters rural Californians wrote to Gov. Edmund G. Brown regarding the camps, see Joe R. Carmel to Edmund G. Brown, Dec. 21, 1961, folder 3, box 300, Edmund G. Brown Gubernatorial Papers (Bancroft Library, Berkeley, Calif.); and Jay Lincke (Publicity Inc.) to Governor Brown, April 8, 1959, *ibid.* For a similar collection of letters, see folder F3717:413 Murphy Hill 1960-61, Conservation Camp Services: Camps-CDF, Department of Corrections Records. "Placer County Supervisors' Minutes Book X," pp. 596-97; memo to Richard McGee, Feb. 18, 1950, folder F3640:921 Department of Corrections Jan.-Feb. 1950, Administrative Files, Warren Papers. William H. Friedland, "Agriculture and Rurality: Beginning the 'Final Separation?'" *Rural Sociological Review*, 67 (Sept. 2002), 350-71, esp. 354-55; Sonya Salamon, "From Hometown to Nontown: Rural Community Effects of Suburbanization," *ibid.*, 68 (March 2003), 1-24; Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 96; Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight*; Kruse, *White Flight*.

²⁴ Michael Bunce, *The Countryside Ideal: Anglo-American Images of Landscape* (London, 1994), 35; Deborah Che, "Constructing a Prison in the Forest: Conflicts over Nature, Paradise, and Identity," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 95 (Dec. 2005), 809-31, esp. 809; Nelson, "Rural Life and Social Change in the Modern West," 43; "Placer County Supervisors' Minutes Book X," p. 596; Gerald D. Nash, *The American West Transformed: The Impact of the Second World War* (Bloomington, 1985), 203-4; Lincke to Brown, April 8, 1959, folder 3, box 300, Brown Gubernatorial Papers.

In the end, Meadow Vista residents favored the camps, but in a vote too divided, 146 to 99, for the CDC director Richard McGee to establish a camp there. Elsewhere in the foothill counties the department also compromised and avoided the organized opposition of community factions more invested in residential growth and property values than in small-business opportunities. Objections from the rapidly growing populations in Sonoma and Santa Clara counties north and south of San Francisco Bay prevented the establishment of forest camps there, despite the pleas of professional fire fighters. In the Sierra foothills, the northern Coastal Range, and southern California's San Bernardino Mountains, however, support from rural business interests permitted the camp network to expand from six sites with less than 650 inmates in 1947 to twenty-four camps with almost 1,150 prisoners in 1959.²⁵

Despite the opposition of property owners and racial anxieties of rural Californians old and new, camp inmates occasionally seemed to make the transition into rehabilitated manly citizenship. People whose homes were saved by prisoners beating back flames frequently showed their gratitude. "I don't care who they are," an elderly woman wrote to Governor Brown in September 1961 in praise of camp inmates, "they saved my house." In April 1964 the residents of Crestline, a town with five thousand homes in the San Bernardino Mountains, presented over 1,300 signatures at an appreciation dinner for nearby Pilot Rock camp and erected a statue to commemorate what the CDC called a "unique California 'army'" of prison fire fighters who had battled blazes on the outskirts of the town. The citizens of Weott in northern California gathered one hundred signatures for a thank-you letter after prisoners saved their town from a flood in 1960. Former inmate Wayne Hunnicutt remembered grateful communities frequently "[bringing] stuff out for us." During fires, he recalled, "no one treated us like prisoners. It was like being a civilian. You were . . . treated better . . . more as a human being." Charles Dean, one of the many college student volunteers in the fire seasons of 1954 and 1955, remembers working next to prisoners: "There simply was no line between us." The commander of the Los Angeles County Fire Department praised the inmates for their excellent "conduct in fire camp. . . . I could pay no fire crew a higher compliment."²⁶

Camp life offered other promises as well. At a time when even in California most prison labor remained uncompensated, camp inmates earned stable wages. Outdoor life appealed to prisoners whose alternative consisted of doubling up in a cell on a stinking,

²⁵ Memo, Feb. 18, 1950, folder F3640:921 Department of Corrections Jan.–Feb. 1950, Administrative Files, Warren Papers; "Placer County Supervisors' Minutes Book X," p. 597, *ibid.*; Ray V. S. Lynn, Chairman of Citizens against Lexington Dam Prison Camp to DeWitt Nelson, April 1962, box 568, Administrative Files, Brown Gubernatorial Papers; Petersen to Brown, memo, Feb. 25, 1955, box 492, *ibid.*; Petersen, Deputy State Forester, to Brown, memo, April 28, 1959, *ibid.*; Sonoma County Firemen's Association to Brown, Feb. 7, 1961, box 492, Brown Gubernatorial Papers.

²⁶ "Placer County Supervisors' Minutes Book X," p. 594; L.A. County Fire Department Commander to Department of Corrections, memo, Nov. 29, 1958, folder F3717:385 California Conservation Camp Services, Camps General, Department of Corrections Records; John H. Schubert to Department of Corrections, Sept. 11, 1961, folder F3717:387 Camps General, *ibid.*; Allen Cook, Superintendent Deuel Vocational Institution, Tracy, to McGee, April 11, 1958, folder F3717:391 Camp Fire Crews, 1953–64, *ibid.*; Merle Schneckloth to Fred Engle Jr., Aug. 24, 1960, *ibid.*; Citizen of Weott to San Quentin Warden, Feb. 12, 1960, folder F3717:402 Camps CDF—High Rock, 1959–1961, *ibid.*; "Report of the Director of Corrections to the Board of Corrections, June 3, 1964," p. 4, folder F3717:1776, 1961–1968, *ibid.*; Memo Aug. 12, 1964, folder California Conservation Center, box 726, Brown Gubernatorial Papers; resolution of Crestline citizens during Pilot Rock Appreciation Week, April 24, 1964, *ibid.* The citizens gathered over 1,300 signatures on this resolution. Wayne Hunnicutt interview by Volker Janssen, Dec. 8, 2003, audio file (in Volker Janssen's possession); Charles Dean interview by Janssen, April 20, 2008, recording (in Janssen's possession); "Flames Still Roar in Northern California Counties," *San Francisco Examiner*, Sept. 5, 1961, p. 11.

noisy prison tier. And work in the woods could be a healthy activity compared to a shift in the prison's laundry, a maintenance crew assignment in the cell blocks, or a job in San Quentin's cotton mill. There was a thing or two to learn about pacing oneself through an eight-hour day of hard physical labor. Controlling wildfires was no job for rookies and clearing a fire line under intense time pressure in clouds of hot dust and smoke required the precise and efficient movements of tools and men. But many camp benefits amounted to little more than promises. Forest labor was not an easy trade to sell to employers upon release. Although forestry wages had the specific purpose of introducing prisoners to the role of provider for their families, camps severed prisoners' ties with family and their home community more than any other prison assignment. As much as the CDC public relations efforts regarding the camps tried to deflect attention from the fact, most imprisoned men loved and missed their families—their spouses, children, and parents—and needed their contact more than ever. Camps were isolated, mail deliveries infrequent, and telephones rare and their use prohibited. Even for camps in southern California, visiting privileges did not help impoverished families for whom the journey from Los Angeles to the mountains was a difficult one at best. In camp, the dual role of father/husband and provider was as difficult to square as that of mother and provider for women who received Aid to Families with Dependent Children back in the city.²⁷

While some camp inmates made permanent escapes from the camps, many others simply left camp for a few hours to a day. In a camp in central California's Big Sur, a group of inmates frequently met their wives in the woods for picnics and sex. An inmate at another camp often left to visit the family of a forestry staff member and to maintain romantic affairs with the wives of two others, before finally escaping with his lovers' help. Another inmate arranged for his son to vacation near the camp to allow for frequent visits. The need for love and intimacy motivated most of the unauthorized leaves, but prisoners also left camps merely to get a break from boredom, take walks, go into town to buy liquor, or brew moonshine in crude distilleries made from fire engine and truck parts.²⁸

Even at their most orderly, camps lacked many of the boundaries and spatial regimentation of regular institutions. The short leaves enjoyed by the convicts were often taken with the tacit consent and sometimes assistance of guards, forestry personnel, and their families. The CDC director Richard McGee excused occasional transgressions in light of the public service rendered through the prisoners' disaster-prevention efforts. Responding to a complaint from a local judge about the loose discipline for prisoners while they were fighting a fire, McGee responded that the men did not “*necessarily* represent dangers from the standpoint of crimes and violence.” “The property of an entire county [had been] in jeopardy,” and if the person who complained felt “that the public interests [would] be

²⁷ “Criminologist and Social Engineer: Kenyon Judson Scudder interview by Donald J. Schippers,” 233, 236; Thorpe, *Men to Match the Mountains*, 87–88; Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare*, 9–14.

²⁸ Statement of Jimmy Robinett, prisoner no. A-13011, Oct. 25, 1951, folder F3717:410 Conservation Camp Services, Camps, cdf Miramonte 1949–62, Department of Corrections Records; “Statement of Joseph Everett Hendrix in Regard to Fire in Back of Camp 37 on July 4, 1952,” folder F3717:430 Highway Cedar Springs 1946–53, *ibid.*; R. E. Sprecker to E. J. Oberhauser, July 9, 1952, *ibid.*; Walter Dunbar, memo, Jan. 23, 1958, folder F3717:385 Camps General 1950–1959, *ibid.*; “Report on Escape from Konocti Conservation Camp by Jerry Gamble, A-27248, June 17, 1966,” folder Sierra Conservation Camp, box 899, Brown gubernatorial Papers; Field representative Malcolm E. Harris to John H. Klinger, Jan. 15, 1951, p. 3, folder F3717:420 Conservation Camp Services 1951, 1959–1960, Department of Corrections Records; Judge H. G. Jorgensen to Warren, Nov. 3, 1948, folder F3640:918 Department of Corrections, Aug.–Dec. 1948, Administrative Files, Warren Papers.



Prisoners playing croquet at Camp Rainbow near Temecula in San Diego County. Despite the casual appearance of camp life in this photo, leisure time was actually more limited in camps than in the main prisons since camp inmates worked the schedules of forestry staff. "Recreation at Rainbow Camp," F3717:871 (b). *California State Archives*. Courtesy California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

better served if we refuse to send men out to fight these fires," the department would be happy to oblige.²⁹

Life and labor in the outdoors, however, did not necessarily produce healthier bodies. In fact, it seemed to consume them. Camp administrators had to ask institutions repeatedly to send only fit and strong prisoners. Medical care was hard to come by in the remote camp locations. Summer heat could be severe anywhere in the state, and in the Sierras and the Coastal Range winters came with heavy snowfall. Hot weather in the summer caused exhaustion and heatstroke, cold winters were accompanied by colds and influenza. The way prison camps were run also did not match official assurances that the camps would be better for prisoners' welfare. Inmates often lived in "dilapidated cabins" that either lacked ventilation and light or were exceedingly drafty. Maintaining an ample and healthy diet was a logistical challenge for the institutions. Prisoners had to cope with chronic water shortages, a lack of electricity, insufficient heating, poor plumbing, dirty kitchens and bathhouses, and—ironically—fire hazards. Prisoners often took charge of their own welfare, both with and without their guards' consent. One crew of prisoners used their lunch hours to loot nearby cabins for "canned goods and other food stuffs," which they then "distributed to other members of the crew and [ate] on the job or back in camp." Many prisoners, looking for ways to augment their provisions with food, alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs, established contacts on the outside for smuggling contraband.³⁰

²⁹ McGee to Warren, Dec. 6, 1948, folder F3640:918 Department of Corrections, Aug.–Dec. 1948, Administrative Files, Warren Papers.

³⁰ Scudder, *Prisoners Are People*, 120; minutes of a meeting of the State Board of Prison Directors, April 24, 1943, p. 6, folder F3717:1039 San Quentin, Folsom, and Chino Minute Summary Books 1943, Department of Corrections Records; *Pioneer News*, Feb. 23, 1946, folder F3717:1839 Newsletters 1945–1946, 1966, Institutions Publications, California Institution for Men (Chino), Department of Corrections Records; "May 11, 1959, Inspection Relative to Fire and Life Safety," folder F3717:409 Conservation Camp Services, Camps-Minnewawa 1947–1961, Department of Corrections Records; "Report on Camp Rainbow, California Institution for Men, for



In contrast to the conservation camps built after 1958, honor camps such as this one in the Sierra Nevadas resembled old lumber camps or were refurbished camp sites of the Civilian Conservation Corps. Later conservation camp designs sought to combine “the feeling of openness” with clear perimeters, which made supervision easier. “Honor Camp #21,” F3717:869 (b). *California State Archives. Courtesy California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.*

While daily work in the wild brush and forest lands could be quite dangerous, fire fighting, of course, carried the biggest risks. Crews could be out on a fire line for days with scarce provisions, or they could get cut off from the outside world without food or relief. Trapped in a blaze because of shifting winds, one fire crew during the 1944 fire season spent eighteen hours huddled on the ashy ground. In 1954, three Folsom inmates burned to death in a fire, and in 1956, a 46,000-acre fire injured three state prisoners and killed seven county inmates, three forestry personnel, and one county officer. One fire so badly surprised a crew and its foremen at their base camp that inmates did not even have time to pick up their gear as they ran to escape the flames. In such emergencies inmates best relied on each other and often saved each other’s lives without hesitation. Flood and earthquake assignments bore their own dangers. One prisoner who was brought out to fight floodwaters remembered, “They brought us up here for two weeks to freeze our ass off and get out there and do sandbagging.” Tied to ropes, inmates worked “in the water all the time and on occasion in water over their heads.” These assignments were not routine, but with six hundred thousand man hours a year spent in emergency situations, dangers to a prisoner’s life and limb could accumulate quickly.³¹ Not surprisingly, actual casual-

the 12 months period between August 26, 1946, and September 31, 1947,” pp. 2–4, folder F3717:1482 Corrections Administration, Institutions, C.I.M., Chino Camp Records, 1941–1948, *ibid.*

³¹ Judith R. Johnson, *The Penitentiaries in Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah from 1900 to 1980* (Lewis-ton, 1997); Blake McKelvey, *American Prisons: A History of Good Intentions* (Montclair, 1977); Brown, *History of Chino Prison*; *Pioneer News*, 1944, p. 10, 12, folder F3717:1839 Institutions, Publications, California Institution for

ties embarrassed the CDC and turned pride in correctional expertise into concerns about mismanagement and the abuse of power. Deaths were rare, indeed, but the CDC further downplayed the number of fatal accidents and misleadingly announced every casualty to be the first in its history.³²

There is little indication that the CDC risked the lives of their prison workers carelessly. More to the point, by proudly pointing out the risks of fire fighting, corrections officials astutely harnessed the martial discourse that has shaped modern citizenship in the United States, as if a convict's rehabilitation to citizenship had been achieved through this willing self-sacrifice. The idealization of convicts as citizen soldiers would have been unimaginable for prisoners engaged in road labor or prison industries. In the CDC's stories of prisoners' heroism, risk was always a choice and never the result of an order. What was more indicative of manhood than making the free and independent choice to risk life and limb? What could be more suggestive of an essential skill than the ability to look death in the eye and get away unscathed? What higher aims could rehabilitation accomplish than rebuilding a convict into a man willing to die in the course of civic duty? The inversion of capital punishment, prisoners' willful sacrifice on the fire line, demonstrated the state's capacity to shape, elevate, and direct life even to the point of ending it in manly civic duty.³³ Turning public enemies into martyrs, then, was the apogee of rehabilitation.

Like prison officials, residents of California communities valued prisoners' readiness for self-sacrifice, not just their work. The strong opposition to most other forms of prison labor demonstrated that prisoners could not simply claim their place in the community with low-wage work alone. Civilians as well as prison administrators described camp inmates as "troops" or "soldiers" and their work sites as "trenches" or "battlefields." Whether the convicts were dealing with floods, airplane crashes, or earthquakes, state agencies and reporters typically described prisoners' emergency relief work in military terms. Communities usually showed their appreciation for inmates engaged in *fighting* fires rather than those working in fire prevention. And prisoners themselves demanded respect as fire fighters first and as forestry workers second. This use of martial vocabulary allowed a consensual shift in the discourse from penal discipline to military discipline and suggested if not a volunteer's

Men (Chino) Newsletters 1945–46, 1966, Department of Corrections Records; Superintendent Allen Cook, Deuel Vocational Institution at Tracy, memo, April 11, 1958, folder F3717:391 California Conservation Camp Services, Camp Fire Crews, 1953–63, *ibid.*; field report to Conservation Camp Services, July 20, 1959, folder F3717:436 Camps U.S.F.S. 1951–1954, 1959–1964, Department of Corrections Records; Hunnicutt interview; "Report of the Fact-Finding Committee on Governmental Administration: Expanded Use of Prison Inmates in the Conservation Program," in *Journal of the Senate*, March 1961, appendix vol. 1, p. 13.

³² Nancy Quam Wickham, "Rereading Man's Conquest of Nature: Skill, Myths, and the Historical Construction of Masculinity in Western Extractive Industries," in *Boys and Their Toys?*, ed. Horowitz, 91–110, esp. 92–94; Michael Meranze, "Michel Foucault, the Death Penalty, and the Crisis of Historical Understanding," in *Historical Reflections/Reflexions Historique*, 29 (Summer 2003), 191–209, esp. 200–201. Three Folsom inmates died in September 1954, seven Los Angeles County inmates died in December 1956. Paul E. Chamlee, Captain, Chief Camp Supervisor to Warden Heinze, Sept. 24, 1954, and Dec. 11, 1956, folder F3717:391 California Conservation Camp Services, Fire Crews 1953–61, Department of Corrections Records. Prisoners died again in 1990 and 1999. Marita Hernandez and Ashley Dunn, "Death Toll of 2 Is Low for Such Huge Fires," *Los Angeles Times*, June 30, 1990, p. 27; Matt Surman and Julie Ha, "Inmate Killed Batling Fire in Mountains," *ibid.*, July 19, 1999, p. 3.

³³ On the role of the citizen soldier in the nation-state, see Elizabeth D. Samet, *Willing Obedience: Citizens, Soldiers, and the Progress of Consent in America, 1776–1898* (Stanford, 2004); and Michael S. Neiberg, *Making Citizen-Soldiers: ROTC and the Ideology of American Military Service* (Cambridge, Mass., 2000). On the parallels between the discovery of group counseling in the therapeutic culture of the postwar military and that of the prison, see Volker Janssen, "Convict Labor, Civic Welfare: Rehabilitation in California's Prisons, 1941–1971" (Ph.d. diss., University of California, San Diego, 2005).



Along a ridge in the Los Padres National Forest north of Santa Barbara, conservation camp inmates march behind their forestry foremen toward a brush fire that charred over 24,000 acres in June 1966. Suggesting both military discipline and service, the California Department of Corrections praised these “specially trained and conditioned” prisoners for attacking the fire “like soldiers [in] battle.” *Reprinted from California Department of Corrections, Biennial Report: Correctional Progress, 1965, 1966 (Sacramento, 1966), cover. Courtesy California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.*

willful submission to state authority, then at least the legitimate conscription of compliant men in a state of emergency.³⁴

Until 1958, improvements in the management of forest camps were largely piecemeal, and despite the substantial growth of the camp system, they had nonetheless failed to keep pace with the overall growth of the prison population, which had increased from 5,710 to almost 19,202 prisoners since 1944. As the state’s prison population overcrowded the main institutions, political pressure grew for a dramatic expansion of the capacity of the camp system to more than three thousand inmates by 1965. In 1957, the California Senate Committee on Natural Resources stressed the importance of conservation work as part of an effort to prevent “the complete dissolution of our national wealth” as a result of the state’s rapid postwar population growth and urbanization. The initiative for the conservation camp program did not originate with the CDC, the State Forestry, or environmental groups such as the Sierra Club, but rather with lawmakers from rural

³⁴ Citizen of Weott to San Quentin Warden, Feb. 12, 1960, folder F3717:402 California Conservation Camp Services, Camps, CDF High Rock 1959–62, Department of Corrections Records; Allen Cook to McGee, April 11, 1958, folder F3717:391 Camp Fire Crews, 1953–1961, *ibid.*; “Report of the Director of Corrections to the Board of Corrections,” June 3, 1964, p. 4, folder F3717:38 Board of Corrections Reports, 1958–66, *ibid.*

northern counties who sought to “help retarded economies,” and aid the local leisure and timber industries with reforestation efforts.³⁵

Fiscal conservatives and welfare-state liberals supported the expansion of the camp system, but for different reasons. “Progress in corrections,” Democrats hoped, would eventually turn large brick-and-mortar prisons into redundant “blights on the landscape.” Nature, they argued, is as important in prisoner rehabilitation as it is in the education of children. Like the summer camps advocated for the urban poor by Los Angeles’s Welfare Council, prison camps were social “laboratories” where, Democratic senators suspected, “ailing dependent[s]” would become “helpful citizen[s].” Distorted by a deviant inner city, young urban delinquents would discover essential social truths about good citizenship in nature, just like their younger brothers and sisters were supposed to do in summer camp. Conservatives, on the other hand, reasoned that the state should not further “spoil” prisoners. “When American troops . . . can live in tents throughout the year in Alaska,” they argued, “there does not seem to be any good reason why prisoners cannot be so housed in the balmy climate of California.” Conservation camp workfare united advocates of rehabilitation with those of punishment.³⁶

Liberals and conservatives not only agreed on the importance of labor, but also on the dangers of the city and the degenerate effects of prison. By 1959 prison sociologists were praising camp imprisonment as the ideal response to two key sources of prison unrest: idleness and homosexuality. The nationwide prison riots of 1952 and 1953 were not the result of hunger or mistreatment, they found, but of the excessively intimate life of idle men in crowded quarters. Because prisoners had nothing but time and each other, went the argument, uncivilized aggression and wild “depravity” were likely to erupt. The absence of a productive outlet in industry, the separation from wife and family, and the dense homosocial environment of a prison cell were precisely the ingredients for what sociologists called “situational” homosexuality. Whether one feared the coddling or the repression of prisoners, conservation camps promised relief. For both liberals and conservatives, camps promised to fulfill the mission of postwar corrections to let the prisoner “feel like a man again!”³⁷

³⁵ Conservation Camp Services to Walter Craven, memo, Jan. 28, 1974, folder F3717:389 California Conservation Camp Services, Camp Administrator’s Conferences and Meetings, 1959–60, pp. 73–74, Department of Corrections Records; “Study on Building Needs of State Correctional Institutions. Report of the Senate Special Committee on Governmental Administration,” in *Journal of the Senate*, California, March 1955, appendix vol. 1, p. 23. “Proposed Plan for Base Camps,” n.d., p. 2, folder Department of Corrections, April 1959, box 300, Brown Gubernatorial Papers; “Report of the Fact-Finding Committee on Governmental Administration,” p. 5; Thorpe, *Men to Match the Mountains*, 111.

³⁶ “The Research Department of the Welfare Council of Metropolitan Los Angeles Report No. 9, June 1950,” pp. ii, 49, Social Welfare Archive (Special Collections, University of Southern California, Los Angeles); Michael B. Smith, “‘The Ego Ideal of the Good Camper’ and the Nature of Summer Camp,” in *Environmental History*, 11 (Jan. 2006), 70–101; “Report of the Senate Interim Committee on Natural Resources, Study on Prison Labor and Forestry Camps. Senate Resolution No. 162,” *Appendix to the Journal of the Senate*, 1957, regular session, vol. 3, p. 34; letters to Edmund G. Brown from March 28 to April 16, 1959, folder 3, box 300, Brown Gubernatorial Papers; “Idle Convicts Must Work, Brown Says,” *Valley Times*, March 28, 1959.

³⁷ “Study on Building Needs of State Correctional Institutions,” 23, 32–33. Prisoners often shared the view that idleness and confinement promoted homosexuality. Wilbert Rideau and Billy Sinclair, “Prison: The Sexual Jungle,” in *Male Rape: A Casebook of Sexual Aggressions*, ed. Anthony M. Scacco (New York, 1982), 3–30. The explosion in criminological, sociological, and popular writing on prison homosexuality reflected a new urgency about homosexuality in the culture at large. Regina G. Kunzel, “Situating Sex: Prison Sexual Culture in the Mid-Twentieth-Century United States,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 8 (Sept. 2002), 253–70, esp. 262. An increasing concern over aggressive homosexuality led to stricter controls of women prisoners as well. See Estelle Freedman, “The Prison Lesbian: Race, Class, and the Construction of the Aggressive Female Homosexual, 1915–1965,” *Feminist Studies*, 22 (Summer 1996), 397–423, esp. 403. “Report of the Fact-Finding Committee on Governmental Ad-

In October 1958, Governor Brown, a Democrat, declared the expansion of the camp program one of the central goals of his criminal justice policy. Honor camps became “conservation” camps, and Brown, taking his cue from Franklin D. Roosevelt’s slogan for the Civilian Conservation Corps, dedicated the program to “saving resources—and saving men.” A key to this expansion was the establishment of conservation centers. These minimum-security facilities would serve as bases and central administration hubs for the camps, which had previously been administered by regular prisons. Arrayed across the state from north to south, the new prisons in Susanville, Jamestown, and near Chino had no conventional cells. The prisoners were instead housed in dorms of sixteen men, the size of camp work crews. Selected by case workers upon entry into the prison system, inmates completed a physical conditioning program modeled after military training, received classroom instruction in fire fighting and conservation, and practiced the use of tools under the supervision of forestry personnel. The conservation centers became self-sustaining and reliable labor pools for the camps. As inmates became “better trained [and] conditioned,” they proved “capable of more production.” The infrastructural support from conservation centers permitted longer stays in camp; the average forestry assignment stretched from 4.3 months in 1960 to 13 months in 1966.³⁸

Expanding honor camps into a conservation program was more than a change in name and scale. Poorly organized and easily susceptible to abuse, honor camps relied on the assumption that prisoners shared the same sense of civic and male responsibility as their free neighbors. The tightened management of the centers and their satellite camps, however, meant that prison administrators did not have to rely so heavily on that assumption. If honor camps had been freer than their appearance had suggested, the new camps looked more open than they were. Under the new system, many of the transgressions inmates had enjoyed under the honor system were eliminated. W. Dennis Stovall, who designed the “campus” of the Sierra Conservation Center near Susanville in northeastern California, described the underlying premise as giving prisoners “the feeling of openness even though it is not.”³⁹

The program lost its appeal for many prisoners as the physical distance between the prisoners and their families grew. The geographical concentration of the conservation camps reflected the shift from a wartime emphasis on the southern part of the state to a new focus on the economically depressed northern counties in the 1960s. This shift worsened the separation of prisoners from wives, children, and parents, because the northward move coincided with an increase in the number of prisoners from southern California. Between 1947 and 1965, the share of inmate commitments from the ten southern counties had grown from slightly more than half to two-thirds. At the same time, only

ministration,” 25–26, 83; for a series of newspaper articles, see “From Convict to Citizen,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, Aug. 29–Sept. 2, 1949. On the prison riots in 1952 and 1953, see Gresham M. Sykes, *The Society of Captives: A Study of a Maximum Security Prison* (1958; Princeton, 1971); and Irwin, *Prisons in Turmoil*.

³⁸ “Brown Dedication Speech, Susanville,” July 13, 1963, pp. 1–2, 4, folder F3717:439 California Conservation Camp Services, Sierra Conservation Camp, 1961–1963, Department of Corrections Records; McGee to Departmental Secretary Charles W. Johnson, July 13, 1960, folder F3717:386 Camps General, *ibid.*; A. Q. Mankian to E. M. Kelly, July 11, 1961, folder F3717:408 Magalia Camp, 1949–1962, 1970, *ibid.*; “Summary of Items, 1977,” May 1977, p. 2, folder F3717:1639 Corrections Administration, New Digest, 1977, *ibid.*; “Proposed Plan for Base Camps,” n.d., 2; Thorpe, *Men to Match the Mountains*, 147, 193–208. Brown, *History of Chino Prison*, 133–36; “Report of the Fact-Finding Committee on Governmental Administration,” 1, 19, 22; “General Plan for California Conservation Center,” p. 4, folder F3717:385 California Conservation Camp Services, Camps General 1950–1959, Department of Corrections Records.

³⁹ “Convicts on Forest Duty,” *Oakland Tribune*, Aug. 12, 1965, p. 8.



In this photo of California inmates practicing rescue techniques at the minimum security prison in Tehachapi in 1959, only the tall fence and floodlights in the background suggest the prison setting. Locked up as dangers to the outside world, both black and white prisoners in the conservation program transformed from public safety risks into first responders who saved not just fellow convicts, but civilians, guards, and forestry personnel. *Reprinted from California Department of Corrections, Biennial Report: Correctional Progress, 1959, 1960 (Sacramento, 1960), p. 26. Courtesy California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.*

one-fifth of prisoners placed in camps remained in southern California, and almost half of all camps were north of Sacramento. As the conservation camp program grew tighter and more efficient, offered fewer liberties and more isolation, prisoners turned instead to other prison assignments. When an all-volunteer work force became impractical, the CDC started to turn camp assignments from an “honor” to a duty.⁴⁰

As the prisoners’ enthusiasm for camp assignments waned, the prison administration’s ambitious plans expanded from a rural public works program to a war against an urban crisis and drug epidemic. In 1946, drug trafficking in controlled substances was an offense in California as rare as escape. By 1965, however, drug convictions were third behind burglary and robbery. Initially, prison officials had found offenders with drug dependencies unreliable for camp, but by the early sixties officials learned that narcotic offenders could prove fairly healthy and fit for hard labor if sufficiently isolated from their drug supply and familiar environment. Sending narcotics offenders northward and severing their community ties seemed to combine rehabilitation with good manpower policy. Yet drug offenders were, in terms of race and region, the most homogeneous group of prisoners. In 1965, Governor Brown’s administration commissioned the defense contrac-

⁴⁰ These numbers were generated from the population statistics prepared for the California Department of Corrections and published under the auspices of the Research Committee of the Board of Corrections and by the Bureau of Criminal Justice Statistics between 1944 and 1966. See *California Prisoners: Summary Statistics of Prisoners and Parolees*, http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Reports_Research/Offender_Information_Services_Branch/Annual/CalPrisArchive.html. Thorpe, *Men to Match the Mountain*, esp. 128, 143; folder F3717:1391 Corrections Administration, Administrative Bulletins 1964 (Folder 2), Department of Corrections Records; minutes, Sept. 15, 1959, folder F3717:436 California Conservation Camp Services, Camps U.S.F.S. 1951–1954, 1959–1963, *ibid.*; “Home Visit for California Convict—Sex Leave First in California,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, Sept. 6, 1964, pp. 1, 2, 6.

tor Space General Corporation to conduct a geographical study of delinquency in Los Angeles. The study found that 70 percent of all narcotic commitments were of blacks or Mexican Americans. Sixty percent of all drug cases came from Los Angeles alone, with most of those coming from a corridor stretching from Compton across Watts, Florence, and Avalon to downtown. In addition, the overall proportion of African Americans and Mexican Americans in the prison population had been gradually but steadily increasing. In 1950, 65 percent of new commitments were white, while barely a third were black or Mexican American. In 1965, the proportion of white prisoners had declined to 60 percent, and to 52 percent in 1972. By 1977, black and Mexican American prisoners constituted the majority of new commitments.⁴¹ Partly because of these demographics and partly because of the particular attention paid to drug offenders in camp assignments, the CDC began placing more urban black and Mexican American men in the midst of distant rural white communities.

On August 11, 1965, two weeks after the governor received the delinquency study, Watts erupted in riots that killed thirty-six people. This event further heated the controversy over whether mostly nonwhite young urban men deserved rehabilitation and welfare—or law and order. It also stimulated the convergence of the discourses on the urban crisis and the prison crisis. In December 1965, Gov. Pat Brown appointed the former Central Intelligence Agency director John McCone to head a commission to investigate the causes of the riots. In testimony before the McCone Commission, urban sociologists and poverty experts formulated pathologies for the ghetto and its inhabitants strikingly similar to those ascribed to prisons and their convicts: Both places were characterized by a lack of employment opportunities, overcrowding, and poor health care services, and many of the inhabitants suffered from a severe lack of education and an abundance of dangers to family and youth. Prisoners and ghetto dwellers, experts argued, brought violence on each other, formed gangs, and were hostile to law enforcement, sexually deviant, poor, corrupted by dependency, and resistant to reform.⁴²

⁴¹ These numbers were generated from the population statistics prepared for the California Department of Corrections, 1955 to 1977. See *California Prisoners*, http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Reports_Research/Offender_Information_Services_Branch/Annual/CalPrisArchive.html. Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton, 2001), 173–75; Jennifer S. Light, *From Warfare to Welfare: Defense Intellectuals and Urban Problems in Cold War America* (Baltimore, 2003), 3, 80; “A Study of Prevention and Control of Crime and Delinquency. Final Report PCCD-7,” July 29, 1965, pp. 213–17, folder F3717:1388 Corrections, Youth and Adult Corrections Agency. Reports 1965, Department of Corrections Records; Lawrence E. Davies, “Computers Turn to Crime Causes: Brown Hails New Project of Coast Space Concern,” *New York Times*, Aug. 30, 1965, p. 35; Thorpe, *Men to Match the Mountains*, 128; “Forestry Training Program Study Report,” April 14, 1970, folder F3717:1774 California Conservation Camp Services, Camps General, Reports Misc., 1970–1974, Department of Corrections Records; “Conservation Camp Study Team Report,” April 21, 1970, *ibid.* By 1959, narcotic offenders had already become “a liberal segment of the camp group.” See “Minutes of Seminar on Inmate Programming for Camp,” June 4, 1959, p. 2, folder F3717:389 Camp Administrator’s Conferences and Meetings, 1959–60, 73–74, *ibid.*

⁴² On the Watts riots and the McCone Commission, see Sides, *L.A. City Limits*; and Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (Charlottesville, 1995). For expert testimony from the McCone Commission, see Fred E. Case, “Housing in Los Angeles Riot Area,” in *California Governor’s Commission on the Los Angeles Riots*, vol. XVII: *Reports of Consultants* (Los Angeles, 1965); John Chapman, “Epidemiological Analysis of the South Central Los Angeles Area,” *ibid.*; Frances Lomas Feldman, “Public Welfare: Dependency, Despair—and Opportunity,” *ibid.*; Paul Bullock, “Employment and Training,” *ibid.*; Michael E. DePrano and Jeffrey B. Nugent, “Economic Aspects of the Los Angeles Riots and Proposed Solutions,” *ibid.*; Walter A. Fogel, “The Employment Problems of the Los Angeles Minority Groups,” *ibid.*; Leo G. Reeder, “Mental Health Report,” in *California Governor’s Commission on the Los Angeles Riots*, vol. XVIII: *Reports of Consultants* (Los Angeles, 1965); Milton Roemer, “Health Services in the Los Angeles Riot Area,” *ibid.*; Henry J. Steinman, “Constitutionality of Exclusion of Press from Riot or Disaster Areas,” *ibid.*; Kenneth A. Martyn, “Report on Education,” *ibid.*; Melvin Seeman and E. Edward Ransford, “Attitude and Other Characteristics of Negroes in Watts, South Central, and Crenshaw Areas in Los Angeles,” *ibid.*

Cities and prisons were both dangerous places, concluded the Republican contender in California's 1966 gubernatorial race, Ronald Reagan. "With all our science and sophistication, our culture and our pride in intellectual accomplishment, the jungle still is waiting to take over," Reagan warned, "The man with the badge holds it back." Judging by Reagan's overwhelming victory in 1966, suburban and rural Californians readily accepted the racialized landscape metaphor of the jungle, conflated public displays of civil unrest with street crime, and deciphered media images of young black men rioting in distant cities as another threat to the principles of good citizenship. At the same time, black power activism and protests against the Vietnam War and for free speech in Berkeley elevated white Californians' anxiety about domestic safety above their Cold War fears for national security. "It is far more important *NOW* to give our attention to these problems than it is to beat the Russians to the moon," wrote one citizen to Reagan in 1968, adding that it was time to put "less emphasis on Civil Rights and more on *Civil Obedience*." The welfare state, it seemed, had turned liberties into license, and rural Californians increasingly feared that conservation camps might bring to the mountains not just the urban jungle of Watts, but that of East Los Angeles, Oakland, and even Berkeley.⁴³

The Watts riots marked the high point of California's forest camp expansion. Governor Brown's conservation program had increased the number of camp inmates from just under a thousand in 1958 to almost 2,600 in 1965. The rate of camp assignments had doubled from 5 to almost 10 percent of the prison population in the same period. Combined with the number of prisoners in the three new minimum-security conservation centers in northern, central, and southern California, 4,400 prisoners, close to 17 percent of the state's total prison population, were assigned to conservation work. Between 1965 and 1969, camp assignments stagnated, while the populations of the conservation centers continued to grow. At the turn of the decade, both numbers dwindled noticeably. By 1976, fewer than 1,000 inmates—only 4.5 percent of the prison population—worked in forestry camps.⁴⁴

Prisoners, guards, and rural communities grew discontented with the once-popular program—for different reasons. Prisoners began escaping in growing numbers, though most were caught within days. Between 1960 and 1976 camp escape rates rose unevenly from 3.6 percent in 1962 to 16.4 percent in 1972, averaging 6.5 percent annually for the period. In comparison, at its worst, the escape rate for the entire California prison system was 2.5 percent, in 1972. A study of the fugitives' motives confirmed that the main source of discontent was isolation from family. That grievance was particularly strong among African Americans, who escaped from their almost exclusively white guards four times as often in 1968 as they had in 1960. Officers in the conservation centers of Susanville and Jamestown began cultivating information networks among white inmates to check on the activities of black prisoners. Within a few years of their completion, conservation centers seemed almost as conflict ridden as notorious prisons such as San Quentin and Folsom. On October 31, 1972, eight hundred prisoners in Jamestown staged the largest labor strike the old gold-mining town had ever seen. It was the rift between urban and rural,

⁴³ Berk, Brackman, and Lesser, *Measure of Justice*, esp. 58; Myra B. Deutsch to Governor Reagan, Jan. 26, 1968, folder Juvenile Delinquency, box 73, Correspondence Unit, 1968, Reagan Gubernatorial Records; Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 96–97; Flamm, *Law and Order*.

⁴⁴ These figures are taken from the population statistics prepared for the California Department of Corrections, 1944 to 1977. See *California Prisoners*, http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Reports_Research/Offender_Information_Services_Branch/Annual/CalPrisArchive.html.

between black and white, that doomed the camp program, argued James Williams of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The prisoners “felt isolated from persons representing the environment to which they had to return upon being released,” he noted in 1973, “Friction and mistrust was the rule [and] minority employees were hard to get.” The conservation centers, Williams concluded, were “a failure in the major area for which it was constructed: rehabilitation of inmates.”⁴⁵

The CDC blamed tensions on a “new type of inmate,” who they described as angry, young, black, radical, and simply too dangerous. The “ideal camp man,” which correctional officers described to the writer Lloyd Thorpe as helpful and cooperative—as a “boy scout”—became hard to find. “Reasonable,” even “marginal” men, would have to suffice, as long as they could be turned into good workers “by training and counseling,” the San Quentin associate warden James Park recognized after Brown expanded the camp program.⁴⁶ Making the determination if an inmate was “suitable” for camp, however, was anything but hard science. Classifying a prisoner as a “minimum security risk” was an institutional judgment that reflected social context and historical change. The Watts riots and other examples of social unrest had sensitized the public and the CDC to the dangers of violent crime, especially when committed by urban blacks and poor Latinos. Prisoners convicted of assault; escape; manslaughter; rape and other sex offenses; and kidnapping—men whom the department considered a security risk in 1970—had been confidently sent to camp in 1960. More important than the actual risk these prisoners posed to the community was the degree to which the perceived risk threatened the public legitimacy of the prison system. What had been acceptable costs of rehabilitation in the earlier postwar years became increasingly dangerous liabilities after 1965.⁴⁷

Rural Californians grew no less apprehensive about maintaining law and order given the racial composition of the conservation program. The black correctional officers the CDC assigned to camp duty as part of its affirmative action program experienced almost as much disapproval as the prisoners. Local property owners kept nonwhite staff away with real estate covenants. Those who found housing soon left in the face of open harassment and discrimination, leaving behind a tense racial division between white guards and nonwhite prisoners. The white residents felt threatened in other ways as well. “At least four different people have been forced to drive escaping convicts to various parts of California under threat of bodily harm,” a group of fifty residents from Jamestown complained in 1971. One “escapee entered a home, assaulted the occupants . . . and left them bound

⁴⁵ Minutes of superintendent’s staff meetings, June 28, Aug. 7, Sept. 4, 11, 1968, March 5, 12, Oct. 8, 1969, Feb. 2, 1970, folder F3717:442 California Conservation Camp Services, Sierra Conservation Center, Department of Corrections Records; Paul Morris, John Oneto, Larry Richey, “Conservation Study Team Report,” April 21, 1970, folder F3717:1360 California Conservation Camp Services, Camps General, Reports Misc., 1970–1974, *ibid.*; “Escapes from Camp and Average Monthly Camp Population 1971 through March 1973,” folder F3717:1360 Corrections, Human Relations Agency Statistical Reports, *ibid.*; “800 Inmates Start Sit-Down at Sierra Center,” *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 31, 1972, p. A2; James Williams, former President of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, to Department of Corrections, Feb. 2, 1973, folder F3717:1780 Sierra Conservation Camp, Correspondence, 1972–76, Department of Corrections Records.

⁴⁶ Nicholas Horrok, “New Breed of Convict: Black, Angry, and Radical,” *San Jose Mercury*, Sept. 26, 1971, p. 58; Allen F. Breed, “The Significance of Classification Procedures to the Field of Correction,” in *Report of the United States President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice* (Washington 1967); James Park remarks at Seminar on Inmate Programming for Camp, minutes, June 4, 1959, p. 6, folder F3717:389 Conservation Camp Services, Department of Corrections Records; Thorpe, *Men to Match the Mountains*, 128, 131–32.

⁴⁷ Information Officer James P. Alexander to Deputy Director Fred J. Engle, Dec. 13, 1961, folder F3717:387 California Conservation Camp Services, Camps General, Department of Corrections Records; reviews of conservation camp placements, Dec. 14, 1960, folder F3717:398 California Conservation Camp Services, Camps CDF Crystal Creek, 1955–1961, *ibid.*; Berk, Brackman, and Lesser, *Measure of Justice*, 67.

and gagged,” their petition stated. “It is only a question of time before some of us in this community will be killed by these criminals.”⁴⁸

While Jamestown residents found it “unfair and unjust . . . to quarter hardened criminals in [their] community,” they did not want the facility closed. Instead, they asked the state in 1971 to “take all measures . . . necessary to halt the flow of escapes . . . and provide for the safety and well being of . . . citizens.” Jamestown and other rural communities had too much at stake to give up the economic benefits of the state institutions. The “curtailment of Eel river conservation center in our area [is creating] an economic crises,” complained the president of the Garberville Chamber of Commerce in northern California’s Humboldt County in 1968. The town’s lumber industry had shrunk from forty-seven mills and 1,700 workers in the mid 1950s to four mills and two hundred employees in 1968, and officials had been in negotiations with the state government for a conservation center since 1959. The town argued in vain that the state “owed” the county a prison. At the same time, petitioners from half a dozen other counties tried to keep their nearby conservation camps from closing. Logging operators worried that their workers and machinery would be mustered for emergency services more often if prisoners were not available. Businesses and citizens had come to appreciate the cheap labor of the convicts they had so grudgingly tolerated over the past decade. Feeling entitled to essential services such as brush clearing, fire fighting, and flood control, they predicted that ending convict labor would mean new duties for taxpaying citizens, who either had to pay full wages to fire fighters or do the work themselves.⁴⁹

As was the case in other programs of the modern welfare state, the growing population of the state prison system and the institution’s change in clientele from white to black and brown sparked staunch public opposition. Rural Californians began to identify prisons as a civic right and economic opportunity, at the expense of prisoners. When the CDC announced the closure of the conservation center near Susanville for lack of “suitable” inmates, the town promptly came together to protect the institution that had kept the town on the map past the decline of the county’s logging industry in the 1950s. Local citizens had invested “a considerable amount of tax money” in the institution, making it theirs as much as the state’s, pointed out the town’s Save Our Center Committee. An exodus of correctional staff would cut tax revenue and enrollments in frail local schools and community colleges. Turning Susanville into a medium- or maximum-security facility, on the other hand, would preserve local citizens’ rights to employment and education while maintaining their personal safety. In March 1973, the CDC director Raymond Procnier consented to the town’s arguments and turned the superfluous conservation center into a regular medium-security prison, which filled quickly.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Minutes of the wardens and superintendents’ conference, June 11, 1964, p. 8, folder F3717:247 Corrections Administration Wardens/Superintendents Meetings, Department of Corrections Records. To maintain peaceable prison operations, the federal Law Enforcement Assistance Administration recommended that at least 36% of prison staff be nonwhite. “Susanville Crisis Blamed on Racism, Poor Detention Facilities,” *Sacramento Bee*, April 17, 1977, p. B4; Petition of Tuolumne residents, 1971, Conservation folder, box 56, Correspondence Unit, Administration, Reagan Gubernatorial Records.

⁴⁹ William D. Brown to Governor Reagan, Sept. 12, 1967, Feb. 5, 1968, March 18, 1968, California Conservation Camp folder, box 62, Correspondence Unit 1968, Reagan Gubernatorial Records; correspondence to Governor Reagan, Jan. 27–June 22, 1971, Conservation folder, box 56, Correspondence Unit 1971, *ibid.*

⁵⁰ Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare*, 9–14; Jill Quadagno, *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War on Poverty* (New York, 1994); Michael B. Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare* (New York, 1989); “ccc Closure Jars Susanville,” *Sacramento Bee*, Dec. 8, 1972, p. B1; “Lassen County Residents Gain Support in Battle to Halt Closing of Susanville Prison,” *ibid.*, Dec. 28, 1972, p. B1; Charles Hillinger, “Susanville Economy at Stake: Townspeople Battle Order to Close Prison,” *Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 14, 1973, p. 2;

The region's economic dependence on the prison did little to raise locals' appreciation of prisoners—or their families. Local residents did their best to make prisoners' wives feel unwelcome. "These Susanville people cried their eyes out when the state wanted to close the prison. They love the bulls (guards) and their paychecks, but they sure don't want us prisoners' wives," complained a mother of four who had tried to settle down in the small town to stay close to her husband. Other family members of prisoners also complained about abusive language and discrimination in housing, employment, and health care. "They tell us out at the prison we're doing our men good by being here and visiting and trying to keep the family together," said a mother of five, "But it's so hard—so terribly hard—to make it here." Susanville successfully fought to keep a prison on its own terms, while also driving away black guards and prisoners' families.⁵¹

In their last protest against prison conditions in 1977, Susanville's inmates lost both battle and war. Guards responded aggressively to their nonviolent strike, shooting almost 120 rifle rounds at windows and doors over several hours, but not killing anyone. In its investigation, the CDC cited "provincialism," "resistance to affirmative actions," and cultural clashes between urban and rural Californians as the underlying causes. This unprecedented, official public criticism enraged officers and law-and-order advocates across the state. Within a month after the prisoners' strike, guards staged their own "sick-day" and publicly criticized affirmative action and prisoners' rights as "violations of their rights as state employees and as individuals." The prisoner and guard strikes at Susanville marked the rise of the California Correctional Officers Association as a new power in the state's political landscape and the beginning of a harsher prison climate in rural California.⁵²

Rural Californians preserved for themselves the benefits of the postwar welfare state while helping make hollow its central promise—the inclusion of those on the margin. In fact, from California's most northwestern forests to its hot southeastern deserts, prisons have become the backbone of today's punitive state. Since Susanville put itself on the map as a law-and-order town in the 1970s, the county of Lassen has bolstered its economy with two additional state prisons and one federal facility that together house almost 30 percent of the county's population and 90 percent of its black population. During the statewide prison-building boom of the last twenty years, many localities have followed this pattern, and rural high-security prisons have become the standard nationwide. When the town of Corcoran, California, was deciding whether to consent to the construction of a nearby prison, city elders looked at Susanville and found their role model. And when the CDC suggested constructing its first supermax lockup facility in Pelican Bay near Crescent City in 1989, the town responded with enthusiasm. A tsunami had destroyed much of the city in 1964, and conservation camp workers had not been able to save the county

"Costs to Convert Susanville Prison to Med Security Prison," *Sacramento Bee*, Feb. 2, 1973, p. B1; Ralph Couso to Department of Corrections, Feb. 1973, folder F3717:1780 California Conservation Camp Services, Sierra Conservation Camp, Correspondence 1972–76, Department of Corrections Records.

⁵¹ "Problems Faced by Wives of Susanville Inmates," *Sacramento Bee*, Oct. 21, 1973, p. A1; Jessica Mitford, *Kind and Usual Punishment: The Prison Business* (New York, 1973), 10.

⁵² "Susanville Crisis Blamed on Racism, Poor Detention Facilities," *Sacramento Bee*, April 17, 1977, p. B4; "Investigation into Shooting of Inmates," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 13, 1977, p. 5; "Investigation into Shooting of Inmates," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 7, 1977, p. B2.

from economic doldrums. The new maximum-security prison, however, brought a steady payroll and very few visitors for convicts from the cities of the Southland.⁵³

Forest camps still exist and regularly provide the fire fighters necessary to keep Southland suburbs, northern lumber supplies, and Malibu mansions safe. But the camps' four thousand inmates make up less than 2.5 percent of over 170,000 California prisoners, who appear in public discourse as "incendiary others" rather than convicted citizen soldiers in civil defense. The boundary-breaking experiences of prisoners as defenders against natural disasters pale in comparison to the systematic exclusion practiced through mandatory sentencing, supermax detention, overcrowding, and institutional neglect. It is not inmates soldiering for public safety, but guards that hold the line between national forest, suburban gardens, and the urban jungle on "the toughest beat."⁵⁴

⁵³ Marie Gottschalk, "Prisoners of the Census Bureau; How and Where the U.S. Counts Inmates Has Huge, and Unsettling, Consequences," *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 19, 2007, p. A19. For an article in the *Los Angeles Times* series "The Price of Punishment: The Booming Business of Running California's Prisons" that focuses on these developments, see Maria L. LaGanga, "New Prisons No Panacea for Ills of Rural California: They Bring Jobs, but Also More Demand for Government Services," *ibid.*, Oct. 18, 1994, A1. "The Central Valley: California's Gulag Archipelago," *Sacramento Bee*, May 6, 2004, p. B7; Christian Parenti, *Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis* (London, 1999), 211–13; Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, 151, 166; Matthew R. Engle, "When a Prison Comes to Town: Siting, Location, and Perceived Impacts of Correctional Facilities in the Midwest" (Ph.D. diss., University of Nebraska, Lincoln, 2007).

⁵⁴ Mike Davis, *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster* (New York, 1999), 131; Joshua Page, *The 'Toughest Beat': Politics, Punishment, and the Prison Officers' Union in California* (New York, forthcoming); William Richard Wilkinson, *Prison Work: A Tale of Thirty Years in the California Department of Corrections*, ed. John C. Burnham and Joseph F. Spillane (Columbus, 2005), 160–62.