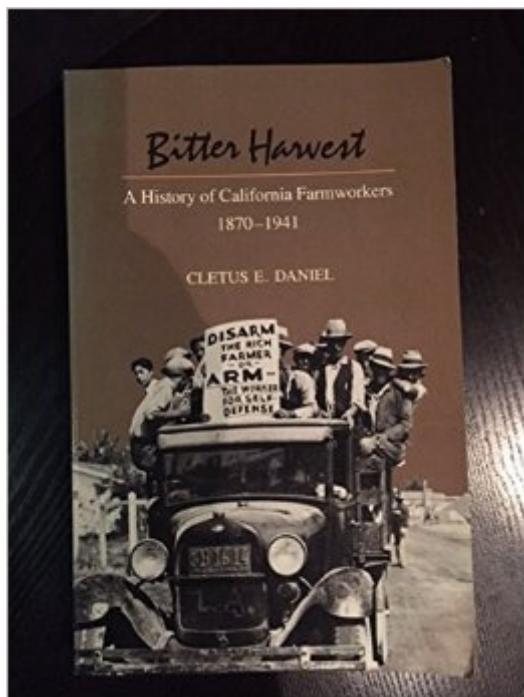


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Bitter Harvest: A History Of California Farmworkers, 1870-1941



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Customer Reviews

This is a very readable book on the California farm workers. Daniel uses an impressive array of primary sources from the period studied to show the powerlessness and misery of California farm workers (whose many problems of the 1930's remain today). He begins by describing the last gasps of Californian agrarianism in the late 19th century and the racist ideology constructed by growers about their use of Chinese immigrant labor. An interesting part of the book is the section dealing with the California Housing and Immigration Authority. This Authority, created in 1913 in response to worker unrest on California farms, investigated farm working conditions and of course found them to be horrendous. Workers lived in ramshackle mud and wood huts, were paid below starvation wages, and so on. One of the leaders of the Authority peppered his written investigations with very learned Freudian analyses describing how the misery and hopelessness of farm worker life created all sorts of complexes in the victims. Daniel describes how the Authority tried to undermine any signs of unionism among California farm workers. The Authority engaged in extensive spying operations against the IWW, gathering material the federal Justice Department made use of during the World War I era Red Scare. The Authority, according to Daniel, coaxed some growers to modestly improve conditions of workers but such improvements were beaten back during the ultra-free market, anti-union climate of the 1920's. Daniel describes the half-assed and half-hearted effort of the A.F of L to try to organize California farm workers before World War one along with a highly inept effort by the IWW. Daniel does an excellent job describing the lukewarm attitude the New Deal progressives had toward unionization.

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