

ABSTRACT

AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE RURAL SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY, CALIFORNIA: COLONIZATION EFFORTS AND TOWNSHIPS

This ethnohistorical study examines several rural nineteenth and twentieth century African American enclaves across the agricultural landscape of California's Central Valley. San Joaquin Valley agricultural labor contractors, beginning in the 1880s and continuing until shortly after the introduction of mechanical cotton-picking machines and the widespread adoption of defoliants, after World War II, recruited large numbers of southern African Americans. This thesis focuses on the history of several almost invisible black communities that arose during that period, as well as the conditions that contributed to their creation and maintenance.

This study differentiates planned colonies, such as Allensworth, from townships, like Cookseyville, Bowles, Fairmead, Sunny Acres, and Lanare, which grew organically outside existing towns. Utilizing oral-history interviews, newspaper clippings, census records, and other primary sources, the author begins to shed light on the impact of African Americans on the rural landscape of the San Joaquin Valley.

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