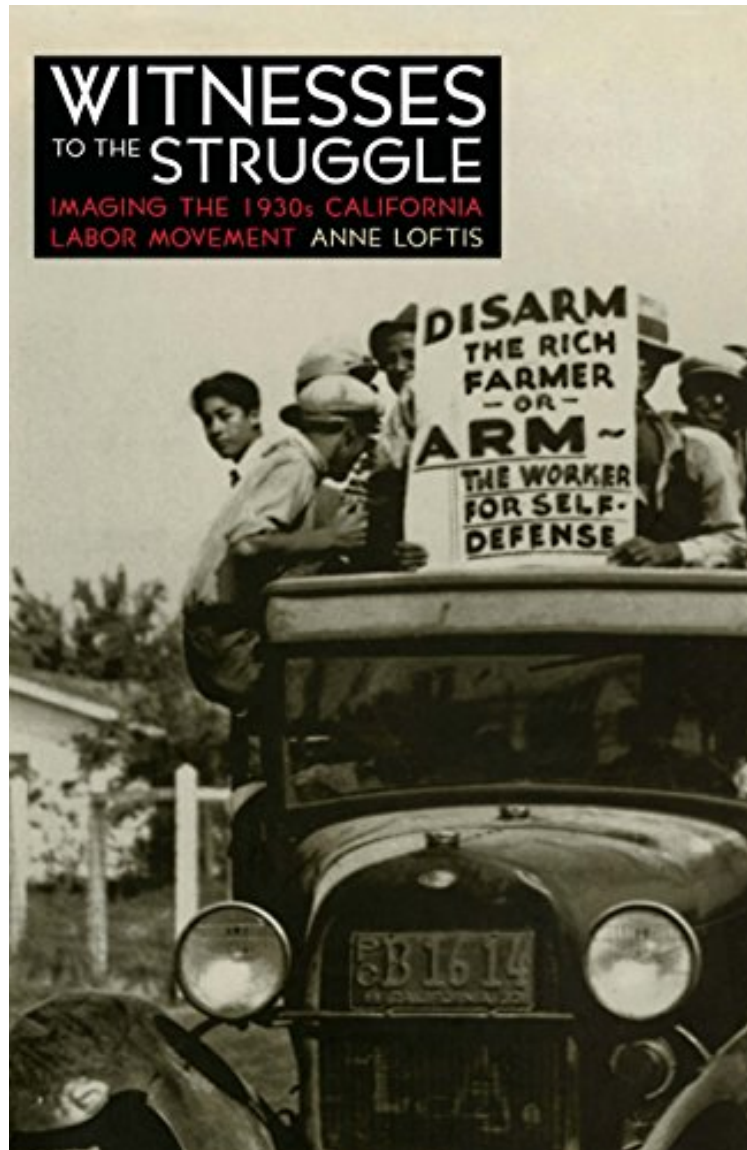


(Free pdf) Witnesses to the Struggle: Imaging the 1930s California Labor Movement

Witnesses to the Struggle: Imaging the 1930s California Labor Movement

Anne Loftis

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Anne Loftis : Witnesses to the Struggle: Imaging the 1930s California Labor Movement before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Witnesses to the Struggle: Imaging the 1930s California Labor Movement:

4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. With all respect you have gotten misinformation on EasttomBy CharlesSherman E. Easttom, the camp committee chairman at the Weedpatch Camp in the era around the first half of

1936, was introduced to John Steinbeck at The Arvin Sanitary Camp by Tom Collins. Numerous biographers have said Steinbeck used the family of Sherman E. Easttom as the model for the Joad Family as portrayed in the Steinbeck Novel *THE GRAPES OF WRATH*, 1939. What Ms. Loftis misrepresented in her book was that Sherman E. Easttom wrote a letter to Paul Taylor, in regards to the democratic camper government which was set up by either the Farm Security Administration or its predecessor agency which planned and built the first two Sanitary Units in 1935 the first in Marysville, CA and the second in Arvin, CA. Ms. Loftis, erroneously claims to have referenced a source she found somewhere in the National Archives, to the effect that Sherman E. Easttom wrote a letter to Paul Taylor, a higher up at the Farm Security Administration headquarters in San Francisco, CA. Being the grandson of Sherman E. Easttom, it is common knowledge in the Easttom Family that Sherman E. Easttom could not read or write and was color blind. I do not slight Anne Loftis for using my grandfather's name, however I do mind the misinformation that is being disseminated by writers who have the occasion to run across Sherman E. Easttom's role in the writing by Steinbeck of *THE GRAPES OF WRATH*, 1939. Ms. Loftis corroborated with the well known Steinbeck biographer, Jackson J. Benson in 1980 on a piece *JOHN STEINBECK AND FARM LABOR UNIONIZATION; THE BACKGROUND OF IN DUBIOUS BATTLE*, by Benson and Anne Loftis, *American Literature*, 52 (May 1980): 194-223. Mr Benson also published his well reviewed book, *THE TRUE ADVENTURES OF JOHN STEINBECK, WRITER* (New York: Viking, 1984; London: Heinemann, 1984). In this book which has been heralded as the definitive "authorized biography" of John Steinbeck as it was indeed cleared by the Steinbeck Family and thus offered Benson an entree into the secretive life of Steinbeck and his friends. Benson disseminated misinformation about Sherman E. Easttom and went further to name Easttom's son, namely, Sammie F. Eastton, (note there was variation in the family as to the exact spelling of the surname) as a "...fugitive from the law and hiding out in Lamont." Benson and Anne Loftis engaged in the same type of name dropping in the writing of *THE BACKGROUND OF "IN DUBIOUS BATTLE"*. I would remind one that the use of the word "fugitive" connotes a fleeing from or flight from justice. My Uncle whom Benson claimed was the model for Tom Joad was only 17 years old in the summer of 1936 when the talks between Sherman E. Easttom and John Steinbeck took place. My Uncle could not have been a "fugitive" in any common understanding of the use of the word, because he was a juvenile at the time Benson claims he was a "...fugitive from the law". Again I bear no ill will to any of the Steinbeck researchers, but only wish to bring forward the factual account according to the Easttom Family.

In this groundbreaking interdisciplinary study, Loftis examines the artists who put a human face on the farmworkers' plight in California during the Great Depression, focusing on writer John Steinbeck, photographer Dorothea Lange, sociologist and author Paul Taylor, and journalist Carey McWilliams. Loftis probes the interplay between journalism and art in the 1930s, when both academics and artists felt an urgent need to be relevant in the face of enormous misery. The power of their work grew out of their personal involvement in both the labor struggles and the hardships endured by workers and their families. Steinbeck, Lange, and the other artists and intellectuals in their circles created the public images of their times. Works such as *The Grapes of Wrath* or Lange's *Migrant Mother* actually helped mold public opinion and form government policies. Even today these works remain icons in our shared perception of that era. Loftis helps us understand why this art still seems the truest representation of those desperate times, three-quarters of a century later.

"Witnesses to the Struggle is a wonderful book, beautifully written and must read for labor, ethnic, economic, western, and social/cultural historians, and for those who treasure Americana." —Choice