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TRANSITION QUESTIONS

In 1893 Southern California's orange growers decided to incorporate as the marketing cooperative we now know as Sunkist. Like McCormick or Morgan, growers sought profit through organization and consolidation, but their story is not as straightforward as much historiography would suggest. Growers worried that incorporation would stifle the individual even as they saw their own incorporation as the best way to save their own businesses. They condemned fruit agents' manipulations of fruit markets while calling for their own rigorous control of the citrus market. They debated, in other words, just what incorporation meant for men and women like themselves while they themselves helped incorporate America. California's orange growers urge us to reconsider much current work on the history of capitalism, which concentrates on abstract systems and financial structures. Incorporation, the growers remind us, was also a messy and uneven local project, a response to their fears and aspirations.

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Ira More grew oranges near Riverside, California, in the 1890s. Since he sold only a few cases of oranges a year, he probably didn't own very many trees.¹ Despite his small crop, or perhaps because of it, he was a member of the fledgling Cucamonga Citrus Fruit Growers' Association, a marketing cooperative that packed and shipped members' oranges under the Condor, Big Horn, and Dove brand labels.² The CCFGA ledgers tell us nothing about More aside from recording his limited annual output.³ We don't know if More found success and profit as a fruit grower or not, but we know that his cooperative did. That cooperative was part of the Southern California Fruit Exchange, later the California Fruit Growers' Exchange, now better known to us by its trademark: Sunkist.

What can the history of capitalism tell us about Ira More? The history of capitalism that has shaped much of Gilded Age and Progressive Era historiography struggles to find a clear place for More and his fellow growers. The current master narrative describes the age of incorporation, during which visible corporate hands, octapoid railroads, giant factories, and early agribusiness swept away artisans, farmers, and individual proprietors with the stiff broom of technological progress and administrative reorganization. There is plenty of room here for protesters and boosters alike, but the trajectory always propels us to one and the same place: a twentieth century of big businesses, organization men, and mass markets.⁴

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But where to put More and his fellow orange growers? Like manufacturers, bankers, industrial labor, and almost everyone else in the United States at the time, growers struggled with the transition to a new social order. They positioned themselves as businessmen and -women, determined to reap the rewards of their property. They had a great zest for profit. They embraced large-scale organization. They demanded and got high tariffs to protect their fruit against ruinous foreign competition. They worked hard to create, control, and manipulate markets for their fruit. Sunkist's reported profits of over a billion dollars in 2014 certainly would seem to put Ira More squarely in the standard narrative of the incorporation of America. And yet, they do not quite fit into the trajectory laid out in this literature. Like other farmers, growers generally identified themselves as small holders and small businessmen. They thought little about increased mechanization and a great deal about shipping and marketing. They combined through cooperative associations, not joint-stock corporations. They called for government regulations of the pernicious railroads, whose discriminatory and uneven rates robbed them of hard-earned profits. They aren't outside the master narrative exactly, so much as athwart it. And this matters not just for a century ago, but for our era as well: Sunkist is still a grower-owned cooperative.⁵

If Southern California's orange growers fit only awkwardly into histories of the incorporation of America, they seem equally out of place in much of the "new history of capitalism" that has emerged over the last ten years or so, particularly in the histories of capitalism that focus on slavery and finance.⁶ These historians see capitalism defined by continuity rather than change; transition questions, they argue, distract us from realizing the stranglehold the past has on the present. Thus historians of capitalism and slavery describe American capitalism then and now as not just indebted to but dependent on its roots in chattel slavery.⁷ Historians of finance (who often also study slavery) share this interest in revealing an enduring capitalist structure, made visible in the intricate workings of financial institutions.⁸ These historians generally avoid transition questions (about, for instance, the shift from industrial to corporate capitalism), shunning the prophetic, developmental narratives that have often dominated Gilded Age and Progressive Era historiography.⁹

The works tell us a great deal about capitalism as a relentless system, but they have very little to say about people like Ira More and his fellow growers. The main actors in this literature are not people, but rather capitalism itself, and that beast of a system energetically goes about destroying, managing, replacing, harnessing, moving, searching, creating, dominating, and generally causing a lot of trouble. The history of finance isn't unpeopled, by any means, but people most often appear as the floundering objects of capitalism's exertions.¹⁰ And yet, while More and his ilk certainly struggled to figure out how to thrive in an age of incorporation, the records they left behind don't show them as pawns trapped in capitalism's structure.

The histories of antebellum capitalism that emphasize cultural contingencies more than financial structures seem to offer a more copacetic abode for California's orange growers. These works follow men (especially clerks) and women navigating the labyrinth of market society in the antebellum period, confronting dizzying change with both ingenuity and pathos. In this historiography, as Brian Luskey and Wendy Woloson put it recently, we see "how the capitalist system worked and how people worked the system."¹¹ But while these works linger on deep descriptions of cultural

economy, they are less concerned with tracing the processes of large-scale economic change that the orange growers struggled to negotiate. Cultural histories of capitalism encourage us to see the growers as active participants in economic transformation, but, in emphasizing the nitty-gritty, these histories perhaps inadvertently obscure the transformations.¹²

But what if we reverse the initial question—what can the history of capitalism tell us about Ira More?—and ask another question instead: what can Ira More and his fellow orange growers tell us about the history of capitalism? “Tell” might be a misleading verb in this case, though, because these growers seem to have had very little definitive to assert about the orange business—or capitalism itself—in the early 1890s. They mainly seem to have had an overwhelming number of questions. The first and most basic question was this: as businessmen and capitalists, just what could they do to survive profitably, faced as they were with ever-larger crops, constantly falling prices, and a depression settling in? Their eventual answer—to form marketing cooperatives—only raised further questions. Was there a contradiction between being an individual grower and a cooperative member? How could you—and should you?—regulate and control a market? How would you live in a society increasing dominated by corporate organizations, be they Sunkist or Standard Oil?

Then again, perhaps “tell” is the right verb after all. These questions are precisely what the growers tell us about the history of capitalism. They tell us that capitalism did not march forward predictably, relentlessly determining the actions of orange growers (and everyone else). They tell us rather that growers constantly reshaped the intricate inner forms of capitalism in ways that were sometimes unintended and rarely foreseeable. And too, these questions urge us to periodize the history of capitalism without succumbing to determinism. For the growers strove to answer their own questions within the larger framework of the transition from industrial to corporate capitalism during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. Sunkist was far from inevitable, but it was also very much of its moment, just like the growers’ persistent questions.

California’s orange groves began as the dreams of men such as John Wesley North, developer of Riverside. North had been an abolitionist and a founding member of the Republican Party. He always had one or another utopian scheme in mind.¹³ Riverside was another in a long list, but for North it was also always about financial gain. As soon as he arrived in Southern California in 1870, North imagined the vast grasslands of the San Bernardino Valley filled with orange trees, their green and gold beauty only enhanced by their possible profitability. The orange “is truly ‘golden fruit’ in more sense than one,” marveled North. “If all of our family were here, what nice times we would have among the oranges.”¹⁴ North’s dream of fields of orange trees came true. By 1887, promotional literature for Riverside, the “Home of the Orange,” showed prospective settlers photographs of a valley filled with neat row after neat row of perfectly round orange trees, all arranged in tidy squares of land. The trees seem to go on for miles, until they are little more than faint dots and the mountains rise up from the plain. Nothing interrupts the endless groves except a few broad, straight roads, the occasional white house, and the very small town of Riverside itself.¹⁵ The men and women who came to live in Southern California were almost never as interested as North in utopian possibilities, but they

definitely shared his interest in money-making citrus. By and large, they were not farmers chasing a Jeffersonian dream of independence and self-sufficiency. Most were middle-class professionals from eastern and midwestern cities who hoped to restart their lives as orchardists, enticed by promoters' promises of good profits on ten-, twenty-, and forty-acre plots of trees. In general, men such as J. A. Beattie, later secretary of the CCFGA, had little or no agricultural experience, and they saw themselves as businessmen rather than farmers. They certainly knew nothing about orange growing and very little, if anything, about marketing western specialty fruits in the East. As professionals and businessmen, though, men like Beattie did usually know something about making money in midcentury America.¹⁶

They did not, however, know as much as they imagined about money making in the tumultuous 1880s and 1890s. Most prospective growers seem to have arrived, as F. P. Morrison did in 1882, convinced that "a man owning an orange orchard is sure of a large income" provided he be willing to do "a small amount of light and not disagreeable work." And they anticipated feeling like the grower who declared that he was "a little proud of [his] success" for, as he explained, "there is some satisfaction in the fact that you are your own boss."¹⁷ For the most part, explained Horatio Livermore to the State Fruit Growers Convention, early growers were content to be found "staying home, minding their own business."¹⁸ They were exemplary proprietary businessmen, what Steven Stoll has called "orchard capitalists."¹⁹ At first growers sold their small crops locally, but as the crop grew in size—and railroad lines multiplied—growers began sending their fruit across the country, packed in crates and stacked in boxcars.²⁰ When the oranges reached their final shipping destination, they were sold to wholesalers by commission agents, who took (in theory) a small cut and returned the rest of the profit back to California. Commission agents were also supposed to be the eyes of the growers on the ground and send word back west to increase supply to one locale or hold off on shipments to another. In practice though, remembered grower Emmett Norman, commission agents helped only themselves and left the orange growers to make their own shipping decisions. The result was financial disaster. Since no single grower in California knew what any other grower was doing, "when the Chicago market was up, many growers would rush their oranges there. ... [T]he result was a glutted market. Then they would all stop shipping for a while, and the market would go up again ... as regular as the tides." The returns to the grower were so dismal that "during one of those years," said Norman, "I received eleven cents in stamps for a forty or fifty box shipment." Other growers miserably "received a bill of charges instead of a check," their fruit "sacrificed" for the profits of the commission agents.²¹ By the early 1890s, most growers' account books were drenched with red ink.

Growers were certain they knew whom to blame for their failure to generate profits: the "d—d Commission whelps" in distant cities were the proximate cause of their misery.²² But to circumvent the middlemen, growers had to know which market was saturated and which was not; they had to get the right size and variety of fruit to the right city at the right time; and they had to make sure that the fruit arrived in good condition. Individual growers could not possibly manage these tasks. They would have to join together, like everyone else in the 1890s.²³ Growers had only to look around them to see that "[a]ll is combination from the manufacture of matches and pins to that of thrashing machines and steel rails.... [E]very imaginable combination exists where men can combine for

their mutual benefit.”²⁴ And they were not the only ones who thought that agriculturalists should combine. Even Chauncey Depew, president of the New York Central Railroad, insisted “You farmers will never enjoy the best fruits of your labor until you are thoroughly organized. Great corporations are organized; labor is fully organized; nearly every industry is organized except the industry you represent. ... My advice is to organize.”²⁵

Despite the whirl of combination and incorporation all around them, growers combined only haltingly at first. In 1892, T. H. B. Chamblin and several like-minded growers sat down outside of Riverside and organized a small cooperative for selling their oranges, the Pachappa Orange Growers Association.²⁶ A few other towns followed suit. Then in 1893, around a hundred orange growers met in Los Angeles, determined to expand the Pachappa cooperative model across the region. By August 1893, most of the details had been more or less hammered out in an “Organization and Marketing Plan” for the new Southern California Fruit Exchange.²⁷ By 1905, after initial growing pains and some costly missteps, the SCFE was reconstituted as the California Fruit Growers Exchange, trademark Sunkist.

The Exchange worked like this: Individual growers joined local associations, such as the Cucamonga Citrus Growers Association. Terms of membership, usually the purchase of at least one share, were set locally, and there was no acreage requirement for joining. The association was responsible for grading, sizing, branding, and packing (or arranging for the packing) of the fruit. District exchanges coordinated the efforts of associations, managed the day-to-day marketing, and connected the locals to the central Exchange. The Exchange in turn collected market information to manage shipping volume from all districts. By the early twentieth century, it controlled sales nationally (via its own agents) and began to set continental advertising strategies.

Compared to some of the other cooperative ventures started around the same time, the SCFE had very limited goals. While some farmers saw large-scale combination via cooperatives (such as the ambitious Texas Exchange) as a means to right some of the “in-equities accompanying industrial and commercial development” broadly speaking, citrus growers had showed little such ambitions.²⁸ Orange growers’ cooperatives provided them with a practical way around the deleterious “caprices of the middlemen.”²⁹ And this practical solution of cooperation raised a number of sticky questions for growers. The cooperative was supposed to manage the citrus market so that the market “worked.” But just how much should a market be managed? And how should a market “work” exactly? Was this combination a trust that would stifle the market? Or was it ... something else? These questions were nothing more or less than transition questions—what were the growers moving away from and what might they be moving toward? They would dominate growers’ discussions for the next ten years.

Hitherto growers had spoken as if they believed in the liberal vision of the marketplace. Their descriptions of how the orange market should and could work showed buyers and sellers meeting as equals, agreeing upon prices and terms that seemed reasonable to each party. Neither tried to fleece the other, and no one tried any sneaky shenanigans. They were “part and parcel of the same business,” as one shipper put it.³⁰ As good businessmen, each sought to maximize his profit but not through outright deception. Despite growers’ rhetorical insistence on the existence of the marketplace of equals, by the 1880s they knew that this ideal marketplace, or anything even remotely close to it,

was a pipe dream. Now middlemen, fumed Southern California newspapers, had become “fattened from the results of their wonderful manipulation of shipments consigned to their care.”³¹ Nor, as Emmett Norman had pointed out, did middlemen think anything of gleefully exploiting growers’ relative ignorance of a local market’s fruit supply, consumer demand, and current prices. The way fruit was shipped—and the way fruit was sold—by individual growers as soon as they heard about a hot market—and the way fruit was sold—by commission agents—made it all too easy for fruit brokers to manipulate supply and sales for their own juicy profits, leaving growers with nothing but bills and bitter pith. It was, explained the *Citrograph*, a regional newspaper that catered to fruit growers, just like what happened in the American whaling industry: “As soon as the catch is known and the whalers are in port, a few of the dealers and handlers of bone and oil get together and make a low bid on certain amounts of the Arctic product and the whaler then has to deliver and settle with his company on that basis. Thus, where bone was worth \$5 and \$6 per pound only a very week before, the whaler arrives in port and finds a sham sale made at \$3 to \$3.50 per pound, which is used as the criterion of market value.”³²

The comparison of orange culture and whaling may seem a bit odd, but it works to highlight just how corrupt growers understood the fruit market to be. Whaling, as any reader of *Moby Dick* knows, was dangerous work, filled with uncertainty. Would the ship find whales? Could the whalers make the kill? Would the whalers make it back to port alive, cargo intact? The voyage and the hunt took place far away from the markets for bone and oil, and the whalers could know nothing about those markets until they physically arrived in port after months at sea. Then and only then would they learn what whale bone was worth. And when they did arrive safe and sound, they found prices set not by supply and demand, not by a transaction between equals, but by a sham. The very idea of a sham sale, of course, assumes that there could be a “real” sale, a just transaction that would reflect “real” market values and reward all actors appropriately. But not in this port town, because a handful of dealers—not even the majority of them—had conspired with each other to fleece the whalers. They behaved not as profit-driven businessmen but as deceitful thieves. Without those few malevolent dealers, the *Citrograph* implies, the market would have set bone’s price based on supply and demand, and the whalers would have been paid an honest sum. But even if that market should exist, and maybe it did exist somewhere, for all practical purposes it had become a fiction in this town. In manipulating the market the dishonest dealers also destroyed it, replacing the “true” market in bone with a “fake” market. But that fake market—their lie—stands. It becomes the only market in whale bone.

The *Citrograph*’s picture of the whale bone/orange market must have been a depressing one for growers who had imagined that they could move to California, grow oranges, and sell them for a reasonable profit to Americans across the continent. Perhaps none ever had complete faith in the reasonable market, but their shock and seemingly genuine dismay at the perfidy of middlemen suggest that their expectations about how the fruit market should work were, to say the least, not met. But combination gave citrus growers a way to circumvent the manipulations of the middlemen. No longer would individual orange growers compete with each other because of misinformation, driving down prices. Now the central Exchange would direct fruit toward undersupplied markets and away from glutted ones. No longer would the lone grower with a small supply of oranges try to negotiate over great distances with commission agents. Now

the Exchange would represent numerous growers and large supplies of oranges. In combination, the orange growers could manage the market themselves. With the right coordination and good information, the nascent Pasadena Fruit Growers Association hoped, the Exchange would be able “to thoroughly canvass eastern cities in order to open up new markets; to keep fully informed from day to day in fruit season of the condition of the various eastern markets; to see that there be no overstocking at any one point and to see that all are supplied, so as to keep up the movement of fruit and secure remunerative sale for all;...[and] to establish and maintain such prices that eastern consumers can afford to buy the fruit.”³³ Or, as the *Citrograph* rather more bluntly put it, with cooperation “we can handle the orange market in a satisfactory way.”³⁴

The SCFE’s “hanging” of the orange market, however, meant substantially rethinking what it meant to be an “orchard capitalist.” Growers had believed (or at least rhetorically insisted) that capitalists make money but not by outright deception, by lying about supply, or holding fruit in order to later glut a market.³⁵ But commission agents insisted that the Exchange was committing the exact same sins it had pinned on the agents. After all, if the middlemen were unscrupulous “whelps” for controlling supply and demand to set prices, how could the Exchange be much better for doing what amounted to the same thing? At least the commission agents acted independently from agents in other cities, they said, while the Exchange was acting exactly like a trust. And “trusts” were an especially vexing problem in the 1890s, following the passage of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act (1890) and several antitrust cases that gripped the public imagination. Trusts, after all, behaved like those pesky middlemen, only on a much larger scale. They were seen as assuring their own profit by eliminating or at least minimizing competition and by setting prices for their own profit at the expense of producer and consumer.³⁶ They warranted a good deal of worry and, in 1899, a full-scale hearing before the Industrial Commission, which heard testimony for supporters and opponents alike. At the hearings, P. E. Dowe, claiming to represent 350,000 commercial travelers, told the Industrial Commission that “the combination of interests” was “the cankerworm gnawing at the vitals of commercial integrity.” Restraint of trade, Dowe explained, was motivated by nothing other than “selfishness, forgetting Americanism, ignoring all sentiment of patriotism.”³⁷ The very word trust had become a “term of opprobrium.”³⁸ And yet, surely, the SCFE was there to regulate prices, minimize competition (however inadvertent) between growers, and make growing oranges profitable.

Some growers enthusiastically embraced the trustiness of the SCFE as the logical means of survival: “The only remedy in sight is closer alliance between growers. We must have our own trust, if we would successfully combat the trust at the other end. We must control sales at the other end, if there is no other way. We must fight trust with trust....”³⁹ But other growers were a bit nervous about just what kind of trust they were creating. In another twenty years, California’s raisin growers would have no trouble describing their cooperative as a benevolent trust, but in 1893, the growers’ cooperatives needed a bit of justification.⁴⁰ When Riverside growers organized into the Riverside Fruit Exchange, one of the first things the newly appointed (and unpaid) board did was explain just what kind of trust the Exchange was to be. “Let it be noted,” the Board of Directors began, “that this corporation is not a trust having for its object the fixing and maintenance of high prices, but rather to introduce and promote such systematic and orderly methods of handling and marketing our products as will

give some stability and permanence to the fruit industry of Southern California.”⁴¹ They were willing, it seemed, to embrace a trust in form but not in spirit—at least not in bad spirit.

The orange growers’ move to combine was of course part of a larger, national phenomenon in the late nineteenth century: the incorporation of America. Everyone from Standard Oil to International Harvester to the American Federation of Labor combined. Certainly the growers themselves, as we saw earlier, understood themselves as doing, in San Antonio Fruit Exchange secretary P. J. Dreher’s words, exactly what “day laborers, masons, plasterers, carpenters, laundrymen, shipbuilders, clerks, grocerymen, canners, shippers, packers, millers, lumbermen, street cars, railroads and steamship lines” were all doing.⁴² And yet, the changing meaning of capitalist—from proprietary individual to corporate shareholder or even salaried employee—was hardly straightforward or easy. P. E. Dowe, commercial traveler, was not the only American to see incorporation as threatening individual autonomy and limiting, if not eliminating, individual opportunity. Though other witnesses before the Industrial Commission supported trusts as necessary and even beneficial, the questions with which the commissioners peppered their witnesses suggest widespread concern about just what incorporation might mean for individual men. Representative John Gardner asked F. B. Thurber, president of the United States Export Association, if trusts weren’t the end of opportunity for prospective capitalists: “It is a common thing,” Gardner said, “to hear men say, ‘I cannot put my son into business. Combines, department stores, trusts, etc., absorb everything.’” Is that the case, he asked? Charles J. Harris followed quickly with a similar question: “What is going to be the effect of trust organizations on the great middle classes of the community, the men who have formerly been owners of plants, and their sons after them, and [Dowe would surely have been happy to hear this] what is going to be the effect upon the traveling salesmen?” Thurber did his best to convince them that no, the end of individual opportunity was not nigh, but the implication of their questions was clear: hereafter capitalists could not be independent individuals, not even in the imagination.

Henry O. Havermeyer, president of the American Sugar Refining Company and beneficiary of the Sugar Trust, did nothing to allay Harris or Gardner’s fears. When New York Representative John M. Farquhar asked Havermeyer if it were true that “the great combinations” acted “against the well being of the people of the United States and the individuals that are in business?,” Havermeyer dismissed the individual altogether. “If the mass of the people profit at the expense of the individual,” Havermeyer insisted, “the individual should and must go.” His statement must have been cold comfort to Peoria distiller Charles C. Clark who “went into a trust” but soon, he said, found that he “objected to losing my individuality very much.”⁴³

Such loss was apparently also a difficult pill for some growers to swallow as they struggled to reconcile their self-image as independent businessmen with the new collective reality. Some growers simply did not want to join the Exchange.⁴⁴ Others wanted to join in theory, but were reluctant to let the local and district exchanges control the fate of their crops. They still wanted to administer their own businesses and benefit from the cooperative enterprise. The exchanges found this half-way covenant untenable. The crop was the grower’s own property, the exchanges agreed, but he was either all in or all out of the cooperative.⁴⁵ “I think, wrote P. J. Dreher of the San Antonio Fruit Exchange, “a grower should be compelled to put in all his citrus fruits, or none.” Growers’

cooperatives also set how much each grower could pick, and when. But during shipping season, secretaries' desks were covered with pleas from owners for permission to pick their fruit earlier or later than scheduled and in greater or lesser quantity. "I am asked nearly every day by one member or another," sighed J. A. Beattie of the Cucamonga Fruit Growers' Exchange, "to hurry off his navels, as they are puffing or getting soft, and the only thing I can do, is to treat all alike ... always with proper regard for market conditions" at that particular moment. "If the fruit was all yours and you wished them sent," Beattie explained to one particularly insistent grower, "it could be done but others are interested and their interests must be considered." Growers did not always respond to such explanations with kind words and understanding.⁴⁶

Certainly, these policies represented a significant break from a past in which each grower proudly claimed his or her oranges, every box stamped clearly with the grower's name. Some early cooperatives even continued to ship boxes under the grower's own name.⁴⁷ But quickly, as the "Plan for Marketing Riverside Oranges" insisted, each association had to "establish a purely local brand without individual or company name attached, under which the fruit embraced in each Association shall be packed respectively."⁴⁸ Now, instead, the cooperatives seemed to push the individual grower—or at least the outward sign of the grower—to one side. The association or exchange—the group or collective whole—had superseded him. When a grower's oranges left the grove and headed to the packinghouse, the *California Cultivator* explained, they were weighed and grouped by grade. In the process, "each man's fruit loses its individuality when received in the packing house." It was the association that "own[ed] the brand, and no name of any person appear[ed] therein or in any of the printed matter." At the end of the season, each grower was given his share of the proceeds based on weight and grade delivered, but no compensation was meted out for superior oranges from one orchard or slightly inferior fruit from another within a particular pack. We might call this a quasi-socialism of orange packing.

However frustrating, each grower's loss of complete control over his fruit was now necessary, cooperatives' supporters insisted. No individual could "have as intelligent a view of the whole field as our Exchange system." "The individual must either sell in the dark at home, or ship upon commission without the power of a reckoning or knowing whether he is getting a fair deal," J. W. Jeffreys, associate editor of the *Cultivator*, still had to explain eleven years after SCFE began. Puzzled over the reluctance of some growers to join the exchange, he asked: "Do the individual citrus growers who pride themselves upon the independence of their course realize that their policy is contrary to the spirit of modern progress?" After all, Jeffreys concluded, "There is nothing left of individualism in the marketing of farm products." The only options were to "organize and keep organized" or fail.⁴⁹

The growers' cooperatives did not fail. For the 1896–97 season, the San Antonio Exchange reported a total "volume of business nearing two million dollars" with only "about \$225.00" in "bad or unpaid accounts."⁵⁰ Three years later, the Ontario-Cucamonga Exchange announced that it had sold one thousand rail cars of fruit for a "gross over One Million Dollars."⁵¹ Profits continued to rise throughout the twentieth century and into this one. Organization for profit worked.

And yet, despite the bottom line successes of the growers' marketing cooperatives, we can't say that "all was combination" at the start of the twentieth century. Even as many

growers enthusiastically joined marketing cooperatives, the incorporation of America was uneven at best. Indeed, it was rather contradictory, at least in the orange groves of Southern California. Growers stopped being proprietary businessmen precisely so they could continue being proprietary businessmen of a sort; they combined so they could remain independent. The necessity of organization—and the subsuming of the individual in the collective—were explained through precisely what it was to replace: the language of proprietary individualism.⁵² After all, one of the most troubling things about the commission agents, according to the growers, was that they robbed growers of the fruits of their labor, literally and figuratively. The right to the fruits of one's labor, the keystone of midcentury social and economic thought, seemed so obvious, so natural that the *Citrograph* barely had to spell it out in its comparison of orange growing and whaling. The bone dealers are so unscrupulous not just because they lie, but because they “squeeze[] the profits out of [the whaler's] Arctic voyage,” because they take his rightful reward. After all, who endured the dangers and isolation of whaling? Who risked everything—literally—to kill the whale? Not the dealers. They made a killing in the market, not the Artic.⁵³ The cooperative, then, was a defensive move, designed to restore to growers their just reward. As P. J. Dreher of the San Antonio Fruit Exchange perfectly put it, combination was the only option, “and who cannot see it must be blinded to his own interests.”⁵⁴

But if the cooperative was designed to help growers remain independent businessmen each attuned to his own interest, it also signaled a change in what being an independent businessman or orchard capitalist meant. For with a subtle sleight of hand, “fruits of labor” had turned into the “legitimate profit of the grower” who “invest[s] money and toil and take[s] the risk.”⁵⁵ Productive labor, the bedrock of moral worth through much of the nineteenth century for workers and businessmen alike, had now become “legitimate profit” and “return on investment.”⁵⁶ In that same deft move, marketing—the distribution and sale of fruit—slid in to replace production as the central concern of the grower.⁵⁷ The independent orchard capitalist of 1900 was not the same as his predecessor of 1875, at least not as imagined by promoters and settlers alike. He was a successful producer only to the extent that Sunkist oranges traveled quickly to the right places. His independence was founded on dependence and cooperation, not commercial self-determination. He was one of many, another name in a ledger, but the owner of his own land. He was Ira More.

Why should we care about transition questions? Why should it matter that Ira More and his compatriots debated, worried, and fussed over incorporating? That they incorporated as a marketing cooperative? We still know where we end up: in incorporated America. But I think the questions do matter, and they particularly matter to us as historians. They matter to how we recount that process of incorporation. If the standard narratives attribute incorporation to the inescapable force of either captains of industry or to the system of capitalism itself, then incorporation becomes a trauma, a wound, an injury done to American society.⁵⁸ That is the story we usually tell in textbooks, in lectures, and in monographs. It's incredibly fatalistic. We include, of course, moments of resistance to incorporation, but they always appear, and within this narrative must always appear, doomed to failure. We know the past through the present.

If we start with the growers' transition questions rather than with the answer of our present circumstances, if we try to know the present through the past, we tell a different story, one that is less straightforward. The growers most certainly saw themselves as responding to great changes around them, and they recognized that their combining was part of larger trends toward combination. At the same time, though, they also helped shape those trends; they were also the incorporators of America. Seeing incorporated America as the creation—in part, at least—of California's orange growers doesn't deny the suasion of industrial magnates nor mask the reshaping of market relations through changes in production and distribution. But it does mean incorporation was not just foisted on American society by a few plutocrats or imposed by an inescapable financial system; it was a project of American society. The orange growers were part of that project. They proceeded to combine in a way that reflected their own concerns, most notably the preservation of independent proprietorship within a corporate structure that would, they hoped, make them money. At least in the orange groves of California, we see the incorporation of America as something other than an either/or story, one in which the proprietor will dissolve before the corporate onslaught.

The narrative we get from starting with the growers' questions, then, is considerably messier than the one we usually tell. Instead of the structural imperatives of capitalism, we see capitalist institution made up of people, laws, customs, and habit, which is to say, social relations. Institutions shape and define society, without a doubt, but how they do so shifts with changing social relations. We find less rigid distinctions between heroes and villains. Small proprietors and businessmen are not subsumed by corporations but persist to shape the economic landscape along with the state, corporate interests, and banks. Everyone was complicit in America's incorporation. That narrative may sound as fatalistic as the standard one we tell now, but the growers would tell us that it's not. Just as they changed their ledger books from red to black, just as they helped incorporate America, we can change the course of our narrative too.

NOTES

¹For comments and suggestions, many thanks to Peter Blodgett, Matthew Guterl, Klaus Hansen, Noam Maggor, Jeffrey McNairn, Steven Stoll, and Christopher Warley.

²Ledger book for 1899–1900 season, Records of the Cucamonga Citrus Fruit Growers Association (hereafter CCFGA), Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, CA (hereafter HEH).

³It is possible that this citrus grower was the same Ira More who moved to California from Minnesota in 1875 and became principal of the State Normal School at Los Angeles in 1883. Though this More retired to Cucamonga in 1893, he apparently only lived there for four years before he died, which makes it unlikely that he would show up on the 1900 records of the CCFGA. Perhaps his death was misdated or perhaps the CCFGA Ira More is a different More altogether. I have been unable to find census data for an Ira More from the 1900 census. On the educator Ira More, see *The Los Angeles State Normal School: A Quarter Centennial History, 1882–1907* (n.p.: n.d.), 12; *An Illustrated History of Los Angeles County, California* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1889), 281–82.

⁴Many fine works have relied on this narrative sequence. See, for instance, Alfred Dupont Chandler, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977); David Montgomery, *Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865–1925* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982); William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991).

⁵On the history of agricultural cooperatives in the United States, see H. E. Erdman “The Development and Significance of California Cooperatives, 1900–1915,” *Agricultural History* 32 (July 1958): 179–84; H. E. Erdman, “the Commodity Cooperative Association: Its Strength and Weakness,” *Journal of Farm Economics* 6 (Jan. 1924): 106–16; Joseph G. Knapp, *The Rise of American Cooperative Enterprise: 1620–1920* (Danville, IL: The Interstate Printers & Publishers, Inc., 1969); Victoria Saker Woeste, *The Farmer’s Benevolent Trust: Law and Agricultural Cooperation in Industrial America, 1865–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

⁶William Sewell, “A Strange Career: The Historical Study of Economic Life,” *History and Theory* 49 (Dec. 2010): 146–66, especially 162–66; Sven Beckert, “History of American Capitalism” in Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr, eds., *American History Now* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 314–35.

⁷Walter Johnson’s *Soul by Soul* was an early example of this combination, though less insistent than his later *River of Dark Dreams*. Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); and *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013). See also Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

⁸The emphasis on a temporally and geographically far-reaching system owes more to Karl Polanyi than to Karl Marx. It comes in particular from Polanyi’s call to understand the enduring “trauma” of living in a society that had become “submerged in the economic system” rather than one in which “man’s economy” was “submerged in his social relations.” Karl Polanyi, “Our Obsolete Market Economy: Civilization Must Find a New Thought Pattern,” *Commentary* 3 (1947): 110, 112 and quoted in Zakim and Kornblith, “An American Revolutionary Tradition,” 4. The details of the description change over time, “contests over rival models of capitalist enterprise” periodically erupt, but the basic conditions of the capitalist structure remain the same. Jeffrey Sklansky, “The Elusive Sovereign: New Intellectual and Social Histories of Capitalism,” *Modern Intellectual History* 9 (Apr. 2012): 37.

⁹A number of recent articles on the history of capitalism have pointed out the field’s avoidance of deterministic narratives such as those implied in terms like “Gilded Age and Progressive Era” or in transition questions more generally. See, for instance, Michael Zakim and Gary J. Kornblith, eds., *Capitalism Takes Command: The Social Transformation of Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Kenneth Lipartito, “Connecting the Cultural and the Material in Business History,” *Enterprise & Society* 14 (Dec. 2013); Jeffrey Sklansky, “Labor, Money and the Financial Turn in the History of Capitalism,” *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 11 (Winter 2014); *Radical History Review* 118 (Winter 2014), an issue devoted to “The Fictions of Finance,” especially Aaron Carico and Dana Orenstein, “Editors’ Introduction: The Fictions of Finance,” 3–13.

¹⁰Michael Zakim and Gary J. Kornblith, “An American Revolutionary Tradition” in Zakim and Kornblith, eds., *Capitalism Takes Command*, 2; Matthew Garrett, “History with a Capital H,” *Radical History Review* 118 (Winter 2014): 198. For a dazzling example of this kind of financial history in action, see Jonathan Levy, *Freaks of Fortune: The Emerging World of Capitalism and Risk in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

¹¹Brian P. Luskey and Wendy A. Woloson, eds., *Capitalism by Gaslight: Illuminating the Economy of Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 4.

¹²See, for instance, Thomas Augst, *The Clerk’s Tale: Young Men and Moral Life in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Michael Zakim, *Ready-Made Democracy: A History of Men’s Dress in the American Republic, 1760–1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Wendy Woloson, *In Hock: Pawning from American Independence through the Great Depression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Brian Luskey, *On the Make: Clerks and the Quest for Capital in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: NYU Press, 2010).

¹³Merlin Stonehouse, *John Wesley North and the Reform Frontier* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965), 205–32; Tom Patterson, *A Colony for California: Riverside’s First Hundred Years* (Riverside, CA: Press-Enterprise Company, 1971), 21–62.

¹⁴John Wesley North to Ann Loomis North, May 26, 1870; John Wesley North to Ann Loomis North, May 29, 1870; John Wesley North to May North, May 26, 1870, John Wesley North Papers, Box 21, HEH.

¹⁵“Riverside, Looking East from Rubidoux Mts.,” unnumbered plate in *Souvenir of Riverside: Home of the Orange* (Columbus, OH: Ward Brothers, 1887). By 1890, over a million orange trees had been planted in Southern California. By 1910, there were over 6 million orange trees. Richard Walker, *Conquest of Bread: 150 Years of Agribusiness in California* (New York: The New Press, 2004), 44, 32.

¹⁶Promoters were often quite frank in telling would-be colonists that some up-front capital would be needed, though they also assured prospective settlers of certain returns on any initial investment. See, for instance, "Description of Redlands, Situated in the Fines Part of the celebrated San Bernardino Valley, San Bernardino County, California," San Francisco, Pacific Rural Press, 1882), 19–20. For more on early colonizers, see Steven Stoll, *Fruits of Natural Advantage: Making the Industrial Countryside in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); David Vaught, *Cultivating California: Growers, Specialty Crops, and Labor, 1875–1920* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Douglas Sackman, *Orange Empire: California and the Fruits of Eden* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

¹⁷Redlands Orange Grove and Water Company, "Some facts relating to Orange Culture in Southern California," (Redlands, CA: Citrograph Steam Printing Office, 1889), 14; S. S. Southworth, California for Fruit-Growers and Consumptives. Health, Profits and Drawbacks. How Californians Make a Profit of \$150 per Acre (n.p.: Sacramento, CA: 1883), 67.

¹⁸Biennial Report of the State Board of Horticulture of the State of California for 1885 and 1886 (Sacramento, CA: P.L. Shoaff, State Printer, 1887), 92. Livermore was an early proponent of cooperation. Many in his audience were not.

¹⁹Stoll, 32–62. By proprietary businessman, I mean the central figure of proprietary competitive capitalism as Martin Sklar defines the term: "capitalist property and market relations in which the dominant type of enterprise was headed by an owner-manager (or owner-managers), or a direct agent thereof, and in which such enterprise was a price-taker rather than a price maker, price being determined by the conditions of supply and demand beyond the control of the enterprise short of anticompetitive inter-firm collusion." Martin J. Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism: The Market, the Law, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 4n1. For a more vivid description of proprietary businessmen in action, see Brian Luskey, "Jumping Counters in White Collars: Manliness, Respectability, and Work in the Antebellum City," *Journal of the Early Republic* 26 (Summer 2006): 173–219 and Phillip Scranton, *Proprietary Capitalism: The Textile Manufacturer of Philadelphia 1800–1885* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

²⁰Navel oranges, the primary citrus crop of Southern California, arrived in Riverside in 1873. By the 1880s, Riverside and its sister colonies were lush gardens, with over a million citrus trees and a crop worth around \$2.2 million. California orange growers thoroughly dominated the cultivation of the popular navel. Florida navel trees were "shy bearers" and offered no significant competition. N. M. G. Prange, *Citrus Culture for Profit*, 2nd ed. (np: William & Toomer Fertilizer Co, 1913), 12.

²¹Norman, Emmett B., "Early Citrus Industry: Picking, Packing, and Marketing, 1938, October," 24, type-written manuscript, HEH; Ontario *Observer* (Ontario, CA), "Ontario Fruit Exchange. Its Simple System and What it is Here For," Jan. 11, 1896; Elmer Wallace Holmes, *History of Riverside County* (Los Angeles: Historic Record Company, 1912), 121.

²²O. H. Cougar to James DeBarth Shorb, Oct. 6 1885, Box 31, Folder 22, Papers of James DeBarth Shorb, HEH. In the 1880s, some growers banded together in the Orange Growers Protective Union hoping to mitigate the worst aspects of the current distribution system, but too little control over shipping and selling and too little accord among Union members doomed the experiment.

²³Naomi R. Lamoreaux, *The Great Merger Movement in American Business, 1895–1904* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

²⁴Secretary's Report, 1901–2, Box 1, San Antonio Fruit Exchange Records, 1893–1947 (hereafter SAFE), HEH.

²⁵"Chauncey M. Depew," *Pacific Rural Press*, Apr. 8, 1893.

²⁶Chamblin soon helped organized 10 additional local associations and brought them together under the umbrella of the Riverside Fruit Exchange. Similar efforts took place near Claremont at about the same time.

²⁷SFGE was formally incorporated in 1895 under California laws governing benevolent and other corporations "for purposes other than profit." Rahno Mabel MacCurdy, *The History of the California Fruit Growers Exchange* (Los Angeles: n.p., 1925), 16; W. I. Brobeck and R. M. Sims, *The Corporation Laws of California* (San Francisco: Bancroft-Whitney Co., 1904), 428–43.

²⁸Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 11, 104–33, 4.

²⁹David Vaught argues that the later cooperatives of raisin, hops, and grape growers did combine pursuit of profit with commitment to virtuous small communities, but early orange growers spent their time focused on the problems of commission men, not the quest for community. David Vaught, *Cultivating California: Growers, Specialty Crops, and Labor, 1875–1920* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999). While marketing cooperatives were focused on increasing profits, those profits went to the growers after the cooperatives took out

expenses and future improvement (voted on by members in most cases). The cooperatives as organizations made no profit themselves.

³⁰Report of the Sixth Annual State Convention [of Fruit Growers, 1886] in *Biennial Report of the State Board of Horticulture of the State of California for 1885 and 1886* (Sacramento: State Printing, 1887), 308.

³¹Newspaper clipping, no title, no source, no date, Notebook 1, Box 3 Records of the Pasadena Orange Growers' Association (hereafter POGA), HEH.

³²"How Fruit Growers Get Left Out," *Citrograph*, Aug. 5, 1893.

³³Clipping, "From the Pasadena Star," no date, no title, Notebook 1, Box 3, POGA, HEH. (The clipping cites the "Pasadena Fruit Growers Association" instead of the Pasadena Orange Growers Association.)

³⁴"Consigned His Fruit," *Citrograph*, Apr. 8, 1893. Mr. Kingsley, the consigning grower of the title, lost his money because he "expected to be smarter than his neighbors." The *Citrograph* offered "no sympathy at all."

³⁵Most workers would have strongly disagreed with this definition of "capitalist," but the growers did not consult them.

³⁶The cases involved the Diamond Match Trust, Standard Oil Trust, Sugar Trust and the Whiskey Trust. Martin J. Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism: The Market, the Law, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 98–99. Though the attention these cases received "was disproportionate to their importance in the development of restraint of trade jurisprudence," these cases solidified the Trust Question in the public mind (98).

³⁷*Hearings before the Industrial Commission on the Subject of Trusts and Industrial Combinations* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1899), 26.

³⁸"Co-operation Among Beekeepers," *California Cultivator* (Los Angeles), Jan. 1898.

³⁹"Nothing for the Grower," *Citrograph*, Dec. 15, 1894.

⁴⁰Woeste, *The Farmer's Benevolent Trust*.

⁴¹"Address of the Board of Directors of the Riverside Fruit Exchange," *Citrograph*, May 20, 1893.

⁴²Secretary's Report, 1901–02, Box 1, SAFE, HEH. See also J. W. Jeffrey, "Not a Trust," *California Cultivator*, July 6, 1900 and "It Is Not A Trust," *California Cultivator*, Oct. 5, 1900.

⁴³*Hearings before the Industrial Commission*, 7–8, 135, 181.

⁴⁴J. W. Jeffrey's editorials for the *California Cultivator* were filled with pleas for growers to see the light and join the exchange. See, for instance, "Contrasts are Painful," June 8, 1900; "Standing Together," June 15, 1900; "Combinations Unpopular," Jan. 25, 1901; "Controversial Co-operation," Feb. 15, 1901; "What Was It Begun For," May 21, 1901 all in *California Cultivator*. See also excerpts from the *California Fruit Grower*, Jan. 31, 1891, carton 12, H. E. Erdman Papers Relating to Agricultural Cooperatives, BANC MSS 74/161, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; "About Redlands," *California Citrograph*, Dec. 16, 1893; "Independent Associations," *Los Angeles Herald*, June 27, 1897.

⁴⁵Copy of typescript of Secretary's Report for 1896–97, Office of San Antonio Fruit Exchange Pomona, Sept. 1, 1897, Box 1, SAFE, HEH. See also J.A. Beattie to Offices of Ontario-Cucamonga Fruit Exchange, Dec. 8, 1899, Letterbook 1898–1901, CCFG, HEH.

⁴⁶J.A. Beattie to C.T. Brown, Feb. 28, 1900, Letterbook 1898–1901, CCFG, HEH.

⁴⁷Norman, 34.

⁴⁸"Plan for Marketing Riverside Oranges," clipping dated May 13, 1893, Notebook 1, Box 3, POGA, HEH.

⁴⁹"Orange Growers Organize," *California Cultivator*, October 1893; J.W. Jeffreys, "From a Business Standpoint: Individualism vs. Co-operation," *California Cultivator*, Jan. 15, 1904.

⁵⁰Secretary's Report for 1896–97, Pomona Sept. 1, 1897, Box 1, SAFE, HEH.

⁵¹Office of Ontario-Cucamonga Fruit Exchange, "Some facts and figures regarding the season's business for the year 1899–1900," [North Ontario? Calif., 1900], 1.

⁵²H. Vincent Moses has argued that the CFGE under the leadership of G. Harold Powell wholeheartedly embraced corporate managerial capitalism in the early twentieth century. I would suggest that any late nineteenth-century moves toward corporate liberalism as Martin J. Sklar has defined it or toward Chandler's managerial revolution was far from straightforward and reflected growers' grappling with questions about incorporation, individualism, and laissez-faire. Vincent Moses, "G. Harold Powell and the Corporate Consolidation of the Modern Citrus Enterprise, 1904–1922," *Business History Review* 69 (Summer 1995): 119–55.

⁵³"How Fruit Growers Get Left Out," *Citrograph*, Aug. 5, 1893. The *Citrograph* was uninterested in the profits of those who did the actual harpooning or fruit picking, it should be noted.

⁵⁴"Annual Report, 1900–1901," dated Sept. 1, 1901, Box 1, SAFE, HEH.

⁵⁵“Address. Of the Board of Directors of the Riverside Fruit Exchange,” *Citrograph*, May 20, 1893; “From the Pasadena Star,” clipping, no source, no date, Notebook 1, POGA, HEH.

⁵⁶Daniel Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 11–14; Shultz, 87–89.

⁵⁷The search for economies of scale, technological innovation, and cheaper labor that drove manufacturing in the late nineteenth century meant nothing to the orchardist; efficient distribution, good advertising, and growing markets meant everything.

⁵⁸“Trauma” is Alan Trachtenberg’s word. The Gilded Age, he argues, was “in many ways a period of trauma, of change so swift and thorough that many Americans seemed unable to fathom the extent of the upheaval.”