

## The San Antonio Pecan Shellers' Strike

### FACTS about the Decade 1930-1939 in U.S. History:

Population: 123,188,000 in 48 states

Life Expectancy: Male, 58.1;  
Female, 61.6

Average Annual Salary: \$1,368

Unemployment rises to 25%

Car Sales: 2,787,400

Food Prices: Milk, 14 cents a qt.;  
Bread, 9 cents a loaf; Round  
Steak, 42 cents a pound

Lynchings: 21

From the Kingwood College Library, a campus of North Harris Montgomery (Texas) Community College District

In the 1930s, San Antonio's West Side was the home of many Mexican American families who had lived in the city for many generations; other people continued to arrive from war-torn Mexico each week, and they also settled on the West Side. All needed food, housing, and employment.

Since almost half of the nation's pecans were grown near San Antonio, many found jobs shelling pecans. They worked in dark, unheated sheds and were paid a few cents for each pound of shelled nuts they turned in. In a week, the average pecan sheller earned about \$2.75.



In January of 1938, pecan company owners announced a reduction in the rate of pay. The workers went on strike, led at first by 21-year-old Emma Tenayuca. The strike lasted three months, and the workers succeeded in their goal of increasing their wages.

However, the pecan companies soon began to purchase pecan-shelling machinery, and most pecan shellers lost their jobs. Still, the people had learned that working together is a good way to reach common goals.