Title
We Were All Like Migrant Workers Here: Work, Community, and Memory on California's Round Valley Reservation, 1850–1941. By William J. Bauer, Jr. (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2009. xviii + 286 pp. $49.95)

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2s17b415

Journal
Pacific Historical Review, 80(1)

ISSN
0030-8684

Author
Thorne, Tanis C

Publication Date
2011-02-01

DOI
10.1525/phr.2011.80.1.135

License
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/ 4.0

Peer reviewed
Review

Reviewed Work(s): We Were All Like Migrant Workers Here: Work, Community, and Memory on California's Round Valley Reservation, 1850–1941 by William J. Bauer

Review by: Tanis C. Thorne

Source: Pacific Historical Review, Vol. 80, No. 1 (February 2011), pp. 135-136

Published by: University of California Press


JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at https://about.jstor.org/terms

University of California Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to Pacific Historical Review
We Were All Like Migrant Workers Here: Work, Community, and Memory on California's Round Valley Reservation, 1850–1941. By William J. Bauer, Jr. (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2009. xviii + 286 pp. $49.95)

Wailacki-Concow scholar William Bauer’s book is a significant landmark in California Indian history. Bauer side-steps the topic of genocide that dominates the historical literature on Round Valley to tell “a positive story of economic adaptation and community building” (p. 204). Ever since the 1988 publication of Indian Survival on the California Frontier by Bauer’s mentor, Albert Hurtado, the historiography on California Indians has been undergoing a gradual and profound paradigm shift. Eschewing victimization and destruction, Bauer places the emphasis upon Native Californians’ agency and survival. Bauer creatively frames his study within the larger field of labor history, supplementing extensive archival research with oral history interviews.

Labor, Bauer asserts, was “both the site and the foundation of Indian power, adaptation, and survival” (p. 11). He surveys
the economic survival strategies at Round Valley, beginning with the establishment of the Nome Cult Farm in the 1850s. Rational and resourceful in their choices, Round Valley people embraced a “multi-source” economy against the yeoman-farmer model promoted by the federal government. Craft production, gardening, hunting, and herding were blended with seasonal off-reservation work on neighboring farms and ranches and later in expanded migratory routes to logging and railroad jobs. Round Valley Indians’ sixty-year-long engagement in Mendocino County’s seasonal hop industry forms the book’s centerpiece. Bauer’s most critical comments are directed at the poorly executed allotment program at Round Valley. The allowance of a mere 8.5 acres per capita prevented even the most capable and determined resident from prospering.

Bauer’s analysis of labor strategies provides the book’s richest insights. Historical works documenting California Indian experience after the Civil War are lacking, and the dominant national narrative stresses the superfluidity of Indian labor in an expanding world system. California Indians integrated into the capitalist system at an early date, and their mobility across reservation boundaries drew them into widening geographic and social spheres with “other” Indians. Seasonal off-reservation work sites were places of community building, Bauer contends (p. 7).

The book’s most serious weakness is the lack of attention to the internal dynamics of community building at Round Valley. Twelve different ethnic/tribal groups were relocated to this reservation—and these identities persist into the present day—but we learn little about residential patterns, demographics, or interactions among the twelve groups: their alliances, intermarriages, economic cooperation, or social/ceremonial activities (or lack thereof). Without a study of kinship, what Bauer means by “community” remains elusive.

Bauer has nonetheless advanced an innovative model for writing Indian-centered history, grounded in Indian memory. His book is nuanced by its intersections with labor history and national Indian history. What is most commendable are its insights into California Indian experience, providing important clues about the persistence of Indian identity in the world system and paving the way for a statewide synthesis.

University of California, Irvine

TANIS C. THORNE