

UC Irvine

UC Irvine Previously Published Works

Title

Review

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

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

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.