

STREET, Richard Steven _ *Beasts of the Field: A Narrative History of California Farmworkers, 1769–1913*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004. Pp. 904.

Forty years in the making, this book, the first in a planned trilogy, analyses agricultural labour in California from the Spanish era to the rise of state regulation of the industry. Agriculture was the state's most important economic sector throughout this period. In addition to farm labour history, Street documents transformations in agriculture, farm mechanization, labour recruitment and management, working and living conditions, race relations, and worker resistance.

Street, a professional photographer and journalist with leftist sympathies, set out "to avoid depicting farmworkers only as victims, and growers as victimizers, to factor in the larger world of each", while keeping workers "at the center of the story" (p. xxii). *Beasts of the Field* is more encyclopedia than monograph. Partitioned into six books and 24 chapters, its 625 oversize pages are augmented with 55 black-and-white photographs, five pages of archival references, and 234 pages of endnotes collected from 22 states and three countries. Quotations from labourers chronicle dreams, toil, loneliness, and suffering.

The author successfully blends the development of agriculture, means of production, and each labour force's social and cultural milieu. Indians, Whites, Chinese, Japanese, and East Indians had shared experiences: gruelling and dangerous working conditions, low pay, disease, filthy housing conditions, hostility and violence, discrimination, and legal and political impotence. Except for rare occasions, field hands were unattached males. Fighting, drinking, gambling, and prostitution were common.

This book makes eight contributions. It is the first comprehensive study of California agriculture and farm workers. Secondly, it traces the pivotal role of Indians in agriculture. Thirdly, it shows that every ethnic group sought to improve wages and terms of employment and to protest excessive demands with threats, slowdowns, strikes, or job abandonment. It reveals that white migrants, known as "bindlemen", were always a critical component of farm labour. It argues that factory farming and industrial working conditions began with wheat production in the 1860s. A sixth noteworthy point is that Chinese were never the majority of the state's farm workers, nor were they as powerful as commonly thought. Seventh is the importance of Chinese in establishing wineries in the 1850s. Finally, it records that "China bosses" were the first to supply crews for the farm circuit.

Book 1 discusses how Catholic priests and Baja California Indians established missions along the coastline. Local Indians who were neither free nor slave cleared land, killed insects, dug ditches, planted, weeded, pruned, harvested, and packed crops. Despite their importance, they endured harsh punishment, coercion, rape, starvation, violence, and trickery. Most Indians sought accommodation, but there is evidence of resistance, ranging from running away to rebellion.

Book 2 deals with the transition from mission to Mexican *ranchos* and American farms. Commercial agriculture commenced with the Gold Rush and a scarcity of food and workers. To procure labour, Americans continued the Spanish policy of unpaid compulsory labour with the *Indian Indenture Act*, which forced Indians to work for shelter, food, clothes, and medicine. The Indian population plummeted

because of epidemics and a lack of political, legal, and judicial protection. This indigenous population was routinely kidnapped, mistreated, and murdered. At the same time, Indians descended into violence, vice, drunkenness, and poverty.

In the 1860s farmers began large-scale wheat production for export. With the decline of Indian labour, book 3 examines the exodus of whites from the gold mines into wheat threshing. These grain harvesters became the state's first itinerant agricultural workers. Dusty, noisy, and dangerous, machines frequently injured, maimed, and killed. Crews slept outdoors or in rude bunkhouses. Bonanza wheat production declined in the 1890s.

Book 4 looks at the growth of labour-intensive fruits and vegetables in the 1860s for eastern markets. "China bosses" supplied labour gangs who sweated in fields and reclaimed swampy soil. Street claims that the work of historians like Carey McWilliams and Sucheng Chan created myths that Chinese dominated field labour and established the tradition of cheap migratory immigrant labourers of colour (pp. 236–237; chapter 11 notes 3, 21–22, 32; p. 275; chapter 12 note 19). This section looks at Chinatowns and racist agitation beginning in the 1880s that curtailed Chinese immigration.

The entry of educated and upwardly mobile Japanese field hands is examined in book 5. Led by *keiyaku-nin*, or labour contractors, crews routinely went on strike to raise wages. Street re-examines the 1903 Oxnard multiracial sugar beet strike and the state's first, but short-lived, field union. He goes over Japantowns, anti-Japanese hostility and immigration restrictions, and the transition into farming.

Book 6 focuses on the culture, working and living conditions, and exploitation and resistance of bindlemen, who held the bulk of the state's field jobs. They hitched rides on trains and lived in jungle camps. Constables, train guards, and vigilantes often beat them. Street dubiously asserts that bindlemen may have been the most poorly treated field workers in the state's history (p. 529). He also traces the activities of the Industrial Workers of the World and its free speech protests.

Despite its many insights, this book has a host of shortcomings. It barely mentions counties south of Los Angeles and mostly ignores truck farm, dairy, packing shed, and cannery labourers, who often toiled in or alongside fields. The book scarcely notes casual family labour and Mexicans, Filipinos, and Puerto Ricans. Moreover, Street has an aversion to theory. He shies away from discussing class, race, or gender. He is also uncritical of sources such as the propaganda of *padres* to superiors (p. 26). Additionally, there are several glaring errors. Street attributes the moniker "Wobblies" to boxcar motions or a Chinese restaurant owner's mispronunciation (pp. 592–593). He also incorrectly writes that the United States paid Mexico \$50 million for the American Southwest (p. 113).

Beasts of the Field is unnecessarily long and will scare off non-specialists. Its bulk and scope will make it difficult to assign to undergraduates. Determined to tell the full story, Street inserts scores of irrelevant anecdotes. The editor should have cut 250 pages of text and notes. Readers will also find the absence of maps, a conclusion, and a bibliography regrettable. Some material in the notes belongs in the text (for instance, preface note 9). Citations are inconsistent and incomplete.

Despite these drawbacks, it is essential reading for anyone interested in Califor-

nia's labour and social history. The reader with the fortitude to finish it will see labour history in a new light.

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VAUGHAN, Frederick — *Aggressive in Pursuit: The Life of Justice Emmett Hall*. Toronto: The Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History by the University of Toronto Press, 2004. Pp. 293.

In the 1960s, when few Canadians other than those in the legal profession paid attention to judges on the Supreme Court, Justice Emmett Hall became a household name. Although Hall earned acclaim for his lone dissent in the reference case reviewing Steven Truscott's murder conviction, Canadians probably best knew Hall as the chair of the Health Services Commission that recommended the establishment of a national universal health-care scheme. As Frederick Vaughan reports in this engaging biography, no less a figure than Tommy Douglas acknowledged that national medicare would not have been possible without Hall and his commission's persuasive report. It is perhaps ironic then that Hall, a lawyer and judge whose "life was almost exclusively wrapped up in the law", arguably left his most lasting mark on Canada in the field of health care (p. xii).

Hall was born in 1898 in Saint-Columban, a small rural community not far from Montreal. Lured by the promise of a prosperous future in Saskatoon, the Hall family boarded the Canadian Pacific Railway settlers' train and ventured west in the spring of 1910. Emmett Hall called Saskatoon home, in spirit if not always in practice, for the rest of his long life. After graduating from high school, Hall articulated with a small Saskatoon firm and enrolled at the College of Law. While attending lectures, Hall had the good fortune to befriend a future prime minister, John Diefenbaker. Their competitive friendship, though it frayed late in Diefenbaker's life, shaped Hall's future in ways that neither could have predicted while they were debating partners at law school (they lost) or young lawyers lending each other money during the occasional lean moment of early practice.

It did not take long for Hall to find financial stability in his profession. Through talent, ambition, and diligence, Hall built a successful career, first practising in small towns and then joining a lucrative partnership in Saskatoon. Vaughan recounts a number of Hall's criminal defence and civil litigation cases from these years, most interestingly perhaps his defence of the "trekkers" charged in the aftermath of the Regina Riot in the summer of 1935. As a lawyer, Hall earned a reputation as a determined and aggressive advocate, typified by his "fierce demeanour on cross-examination" (p. 56). As his legal career flourished, Hall set his sights on securing judicial appointment. In this respect, Hall's membership in the Conservative Party and his friendship with Diefenbaker proved fortuitous. Within months of becoming prime minister in 1957, Diefenbaker appointed his old friend chief justice of the Saskatchewan Court of Queen's Bench.