

## introduction

On a cold and foggy January morning in 2002, Concow–Little Lake Kathy Cook shared her memories of living on the Round Valley Reservation, located in a remote part of northern California. Approximately 180 miles north of the San Francisco Bay area, Round Valley is accessible only by braving the most excruciatingly twisty mountain roads. Born in 1925, Kathy had certainly seen a tremendous amount of historical change in her life. With curly black hair (although she now dons fashionable bandanas) and large glasses that accentuate her friendly and soft face, Kathy described her more than thirty-year tenure in tribal politics and life experiences with her usual good humor and argumentative nature. Kathy’s firsthand knowledge about tribal government was fascinating, but her response to a question about whether or not she picked hops as a youth revealed even more about Round Valley Reservation life in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. “Oh yeah, I picked hops,” she stated, a little surprised that I should ask such a question and that I might not know the answer. “Everybody used to go down

[to the Hop Ranch] and work. It give everybody a job.” Although it had been several decades since Kathy had last plucked hops—small, flowering buds that resemble pinecones—from their sharp and sticky vines, she vividly recalled that the workday began before the sun rose over the blue-green mountains that surround the reservation. “I hated to get up in the morning,” she stated emphatically, as she tends to do. In the predawn hours, Kathy’s employers, the Winters family, which operated the Hop Ranch on the south end of the Valley, sent a truck to pick her up, along with other Indian workers. She then spent the better part of the day picking hops. Kathy’s wages were small—workers made only one cent per pound of hops picked. The days were long and hot and often miserably uncomfortable—the vines irritated the skin. Hop picking provided important sources of income for Kathy’s family, but it was the way in which she described work as creating a common experience for Round Valley Indians that made a profound impact on our conversation. “We were all like migrant workers here,” Kathy said, “probably because people worked on the ranches here: Rohrbough Ranch, White Ranch, Hop Ranch.”<sup>1</sup> Kathy’s statements lead us to a story in which work and labor were fundamental to the way in which Round Valley Indians formed their communities and survived as indigenous people in nineteenth- and twentieth-century California.

The Round Valley Reservation is located in the center of the indigenous homeland of the Yuki, a linguistically unique group native to California, located in present-day Mendocino County. In 1856, the federal government created the Nome Cult Indian Farm (later renamed the Round Valley Reservation) on the Yuki’s native soil and subsequently removed several other California Indian tribes to the area, including, but not limited to, the Con-cows, the Pit Rivers, the Nomlackis, the Nisenans, the Wailackis, and the Pomos. The era of the California gold rush and the Civil War left California Indian communities battered, bruised, and on the verge of disintegration. Systems of unfree labor, squatter settlement, and the removal to the reservation dislocated families and divorced Native Californians from place. After 1865, however, indigenous and removed Round Valley Indians used agricultural wage work to create and maintain community in the face of threats posed by the persistence of white squatters and the maturation of federal Indian policy. Picking hops, shearing sheep, and performing other agricultural jobs produced a shared experience for all reservation residents. These jobs and work sites permitted Round Valley Indians to work with Indians from other California tribal nations and enabled them to retain tribal ties and identities. Additionally, Round Valley Indians participated in a number

of nonwork activities attached to work sites in Mendocino County. Grass game (a traditional gambling game), roundhouse ceremonies, and social drinking brought Round Valley Indians together after the workday concluded. Thus, wage work provided not only much-needed income to Round Valley Indian families but also the opportunity to interact with other California Indians. Round Valley Indians continued to use agricultural and migrant wage labor to maintain community during and after the implementation of allotment, World War I, and the Great Depression. By World War II, the formation of an Indian Reorganization Act tribal government, new religious organizations, and the transition from migrant agricultural to extractive industrial work changed the parameters within which Round Valley Indians made their community.

This book straddles the fields of American labor history and American Indian history. Since the 1960s, labor history has undergone a significant revolution. Influenced by the work of economist John Commons, early twentieth-century labor histories emphasized the importance of the trade union. Beginning in the 1960s, American labor historians Herbert Gutman, David Montgomery, and others, influenced by British historian E. P. Thompson, sought working people's perceptions, beliefs, and experiences in the industrial workforce. At their best, these scholars traced workers' transition from a preindustrial or agrarian lifestyle to the industrial factory. Once in the factory, scholars turned their attention toward the ways in which factory workers attempted to determine conditions inside and outside of the workplace.<sup>2</sup> More recently, historians have shifted their attention toward agricultural workers, thus diversifying the types of workers included in America's working class.<sup>3</sup>

Until recently, scholars have rarely included American Indians in studies of American labor history. Partly, this results from the view that the American Indian story has been one of unemployment (not employment). Current news stories about Indian Country frequently cite startling unemployment statistics, usually more than 50 percent on reservations. Additionally, many people view American Indians as "antimodern" and as victims of historical and economic change.<sup>4</sup> However, including American Indian workers, like those on the Round Valley Reservation, in accounts of labor history enriches it. This book studies how a group of workers entered the capitalist workforce and looks at their ability to shape that system for their own purposes. Additionally, it considers both the work sites and the home lives of workers. However, this book investigates labor history in newer ways. Rather than considering factories or company towns, I emphasize nonindustrial work,



labor, and community sites, such as hop fields, sheep ranches, and reservations. I assist other scholars in including migrant agricultural workers as part of the American working class. I seek to explain how and why Round Valley Indians organized their labor, participated in recreational activities, and formed their community. In order to include Round Valley Indian agricultural workers in American labor history, this book engages a set of historically contested terms in both American Indian and American labor history: community, work, and labor.

Community formation is a central aspect of Round Valley Indian work and labor history. Much like in the case of labor history, how scholars define “community” has undergone significant revision. Early social theorists, anthropologists, and historians adopted the view that community is in a constant state of declension. In particular, the processes of urbanization, mobility, and capitalism have eroded community. Rejecting the idea that community is in a constant state of decline, this work builds on the idea that community is a set of historically occurring social relations within a given locality. Round Valley Indians, operating in a face-to-face environment, held similar beliefs, created a sense of shared space, maintained reciprocal ties of mutuality, and crafted emotional bonds, which united them into a community. Round Valley Indians constantly re-created the social links with other people and the meanings invested in community under changing social, cultural, and economic circumstances.<sup>5</sup> American Indian and American labor scholars have made community formation central to their inquiries. American workers, for instance, resisted the atomizing forces of industrial capitalism by living in and sustaining ethnic neighborhoods, practicing mutualism on the shop floor, and participating in recreational events that brought them together at specific moments of the year.<sup>6</sup> For American Indians, colonial-era towns and nineteenth- and twentieth-century reservations served as the center of community formation. In these places, American Indians practiced communal economies, participated in important social gatherings, and retained crucial relationships with sacred landscapes.<sup>7</sup> Not all people, however, create their communities under conditions of their choosing. Although we may evoke nostalgic views of community as egalitarian, isolated, and homogeneous, communities possessed their own power relations based on class, gender, or racial conflict. These divisions placed continual strain on community relationships and required people to re-form the ties that connected people to one another into a community.<sup>8</sup>

For Round Valley Indians, community developed over thousands of years through relationships with tribal members, with other Native people in

northern California, and with sacred places. Yuki and Concow creation narratives imbued the landscape with sacred and specific meanings, and economic exchanges cemented social relations among people in towns and villages in ancient time California. After contact with American government officials and squatters, the Nome Cult Indian Farm, the Round Valley Reservation, and migrant agricultural work sites provided Round Valley Indians with the social and economic space necessary to forge relationships with other Native Californians and the land. Yet Round Valley Indians encountered many difficulties in creating relationships with one another and with their places. Federal Indian policy and economic change constrained the circumstances under which Round Valley Indians created their communities. These changing, often asymmetrical, power relations produced conflict between Round Valley Indians and non-Indian intruders and, over time, among Round Valley Indians themselves about the meanings of and ways to create community.

It was precisely in the domain of work and labor that Round Valley Indians participated in and forged the social relations so necessary to the establishment of the Round Valley Indian community in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Work activities on the Round Valley Reservation included migrant or agricultural wage work and unpaid forms of work, such as hunting, harvesting, and everyday household chores.<sup>9</sup> In fact, it makes little sense to differentiate between paid and unpaid work in Round Valley because both contributed to the communal and household nature of the Round Valley Indian economy. Both paid and unpaid work enabled Round Valley Indians to maintain one foot in the growing market economy and one foot in an older subsistence economy and to create community.

Labor, alternatively, is a social relationship.<sup>10</sup> The family and household was the basis of labor relationships in Round Valley and northern California. The work Round Valley Indians performed, whether in the hop fields as described by Kathy, on the reservation, or elsewhere in California, was social labor because Round Valley Indians mobilized families to work in the fields, where they interacted with other California Indians. Men and women, young and old, worked in order to sustain families and communities in Round Valley. The social interactions continued once the workday concluded. After work, Round Valley Indians participated in “big times,” a California Indian term for feasts or celebrations, at their workplaces.<sup>11</sup> In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, big times associated with workplaces featured roundhouse celebrations, grass game, and social drinking. These

activities were essential to the creation of community in Round Valley and Mendocino County.

Work and labor activities also forged relationships between Round Valley Indians and the places around them. Hunting, fishing, and harvesting practices brought Native peoples into a conversation with their environments. Hunters and fishers needed to understand the precise movements of animals and their seasonal activities. Furthermore, harvesters needed to make the land productive for the cultivation of food and basketry materials. These relationships persisted after the creation of a reservation in the 1850s. Round Valley Indians traveled across the landscape and invested new meanings in old and new places. Although often ignored in the California scenery, Round Valley Indians and other migrant workers helped create California's distinctive landscape and invested their own meanings in the land. This process concomitantly allowed Indians removed to Round Valley to maintain ties to their homelands.<sup>12</sup>

Mobility and seasonal migration thus occupied a vital component of Round Valley Indian work, labor, and community. The Round Valley Reservation is home to several California Indian tribal nations relocated from other parts of the state, and these Native Californians re-created community on the reservation. They associated with other reservation Indians while working and engaging in nonwork activities, thus making Round Valley their homeland. Removed Indians also reestablished ties with those tribal members who lived off the reservation. By traveling well-worn migrant worker paths, relocated Indians reconnected with family and friends who lived off the reservation and with their sacred places. In this way, the Round Valley Reservation served as the hub for economic and community strategies that permitted Round Valley Indians to deflect the centrifugal effects of modernization.<sup>13</sup> Leaving the reservation to work and play permitted Round Valley Indians to form a community that, although centered on the reservation, included Native peoples from other parts of California.

Fusing American Indian and American labor history addresses the ways in which Native peoples have survived in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America. The persistence of indigenous Americans was not foreordained. In the nineteenth century, many Americans believed that Native Americans were a vanishing race. By 1900, the American Indian population reached its nadir (250,000) at the same time that the federal policy promised to totally assimilate American Indian people. Academics used several events to foretell the demise of Native peoples, including removal and the Wounded Knee

massacre in 1890. In California, scholars saw the death of Ishi in 1916 as the passing of the “last wild Indian” of North America. Yet, in the last two decades, scholars have been writing that by the year 2000 the American Indian population had increased to 4 million, engaged in cultural renewal, and created its own nations within the boundaries of the United States. For many American Indians, the reservation has served as the location for many of these twentieth-century developments. Reservation and national histories have explored the abilities of American Indian family life, religions, and political leadership to adapt to changing circumstances and persist into the twenty-first century. In Round Valley, Native peoples have used everyday work and nonwork practices to forge group cohesion and maintain and create new identities, cultural practices, and communities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the process, they have defied the myth of the vanishing Indian by persisting as a political unit to the present day.<sup>14</sup>

Recently, scholars have demonstrated how wage work and economic change have assisted in Native peoples’ survival in the twentieth century. Menominees, Metlakatlangs, Dinés, and Tohono O’odhams, to name a few, adapted cultural practices to nineteenth- and twentieth-century wage work. American Indian labor historians stress the importance of social networks, usually family and kinship groupings, but also including village or tribal ties, and stress that wage work was part of a range of economic choices rather than the only economic activity of Native peoples. Rather than viewing Round Valley Indians as victims of economic change, work and labor become examples of Round Valley Indian agency, cultural adaptation, and survival.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps no other place in the United States is better suited for examining indigenous survival and wage work in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries than California. For many years, the story of California Indians emphasized population loss and cultural decay. In the late eighteenth century, there were perhaps more than 300,000 Native people living within the state’s current boundaries. By the eve of the California gold rush, that number had fallen to 150,000, with the worst still to come. By 1860, only 30,000 California Indians had survived the flood of immigrants to the state. The population continued to decline throughout the nineteenth century, bottoming out at about 22,000 people in 1900. Although they were integrated into California’s market economy, the gold rush left California Indian families and communities on the verge of disintegration. Studies of demographic collapse, cultural loss, and the corrupting influences of modern American

society abound in Round Valley historiography. Anthropologists and historians have depicted Round Valley Indians as a vanishing and culturally degraded people, and recent scholarship specific to northern California, in general, and Round Valley, in particular, still contains the words “destruction,” “killing,” and “genocide” in titles.<sup>16</sup>

Rather than continuing to view California Indians as a people who disappeared from the California landscape or as victims of American expansion, historian Albert Hurtado urges scholars to ask different questions using these oft-cited statistics. “The same numbers,” Hurtado writes, “that illustrate the destruction of native populations also show where and how some Indians survived in a land that was starkly different than the one their grandparents had known.” I contribute to these stories of Indian survival in California by exploring Round Valley Indian efforts to use work and labor to persist into the twentieth century. By emphasizing Round Valley Indians’ adaptation to economic change in northern California and their re-creation of community through wage work, this book documents efforts of California Indians to survive in the state. Rather than disappearing from California’s agricultural workforce, Round Valley Indians remained important participants in Mendocino County’s workforce. Round Valley Indians who worked in Mendocino County ensured that California Indian culture and people survived into the twenty-first century and contributed to California’s economic growth.<sup>17</sup>

An important area in which we can see the ability of Round Valley Indians to adapt to economic change and integrate into the wage work market is through the use of oral histories and traditions. For at least fifty years, scholars have attempted to understand American Indian and American labor history from the perspective of the people. Ethnohistorians, for instance, have struggled to present cultural encounters from the perspective of American Indians. The so-called new Indian history strove to make American Indians the central actors in historical narratives and to understand their rationale for action. Oral history is an important way to understand and interpret history from the perspective of the Round Valley Indian workers themselves. Between 1930 and 2003, historians, anthropologists, and archivists interviewed and recorded the oral narratives of Round Valley and Mendocino County Indians. Oral history and ethnographic projects from the 1930s, 1970s, and 1990s included statements about and memories of the migrant labor experience, and every person I interviewed for this study remembered picking hops and performing other agricultural jobs. Round

Valley Indians described their jobs with more detail than found in archival sources, which assists in telling this story from a Round Valley Indian perspective.<sup>18</sup>

Oral histories and traditions also offered interpretive guidance for this book. Scholars of oral history, tradition, and memory argue that these sources are created, often in a dialogue with contemporary events.<sup>19</sup> Relying on oral sources allows Round Valley Indians to produce interpretations of historical events. As is true for those of the Dakota and indigenous people in the Yukon Territory, Round Valley and Mendocino County oral narratives about work and labor conveyed a sense of “belonging” under periods of economic and social change. Narratives about work and labor become crucial to maintaining community and identity in the twentieth century.<sup>20</sup> Oral histories and traditions also foregrounded the social labor that maintained community in Mendocino County. Round Valley Indians expressed their memories of work in the plural, using words like “we” to describe the process and mentioning the people with whom they worked. In this way, these memories conveyed a collective memory for Round Valley. Hop picking and other forms of agricultural labor created a collective experience in Round Valley and Mendocino County, akin to attending off-reservation boarding schools, in which Round Valley and Mendocino County Indians share histories and life experiences that cut across lines of reservation and rancheria (lands purchased for “homeless” Indians in California). Oral histories also linked people and history to specific places. Not only did Round Valley Indians describe the people with whom they worked, but they also remembered where they worked. These memories forged essential relationships with the land around the reservation as well as with the places to which Round Valley Indians workers traveled for work. Finally, oral narratives offered an alternative historiography for California Indian history, western history, and California history. They established what labor meant to the Round Valley community, which differed from what outsiders perceived, and challenged historical narratives that erased them from the agricultural workplace and the California landscape.

It is the goal of this book to make the following story recognizable to the Round Valley Indian community. I grew up on the Round Valley Reservation, and I could have dwelled on stories of cultural loss and economic decline—there are very few Native languages spoken on the reservation, unemployment seems to be rampant and uncontrollable, and the attendant social problems associated with underdeveloped economies (alcoholism, drug abuse, and overreliance on social welfare programs) appear out of

control. However, after talking with Kathy and other reservation residents, I became more aware of the layered meanings and other historical interpretations found in their oral histories. Rather than telling a story of cultural declension and victimization, these people told one in which labor was both the site and foundation of Indian power, adaptation, and survival. With these thoughts in mind, I have written this book from a community perspective and for the community of Round Valley. This book is in deference to those conversations and could not have been written without them.