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Beasts of the Field: A Narrative History of California Farmworkers, 1769-1913

Richard Street

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Written by one of America's preeminent labor historians, this book is the definitive account of one of the most spectacular, captivating, complex and strangely neglected stories in Western history—the emergence of migratory farmworkers and the development of California agriculture.

Street has systematically worked his way through a mountain of archival materials—more than 500 manuscript collections, scattered in 22 states, including Spain and Mexico—to follow the farmworker story from its beginnings on Spanish missions into the second decade of the twentieth century. The result is a comprehensive tour de force. Scene by scene, the epic narrative clarifies and breathes new life into a controversial and instructive saga long surrounded by myth, conjecture, and scholarly neglect.

With its panoramic view spanning 144 years and moving from the US-Mexico border to Oregon, *Beasts of the Field* reveals diverse patterns of life and labor in the fields that varied among different crops, regions, time periods, and racial and ethic groups.

Enormous in scope, packed with surprising twists and turns, and devastating in impact, this compelling, revelatory work of American social history will inform generations to come of the history of California and the nation.

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