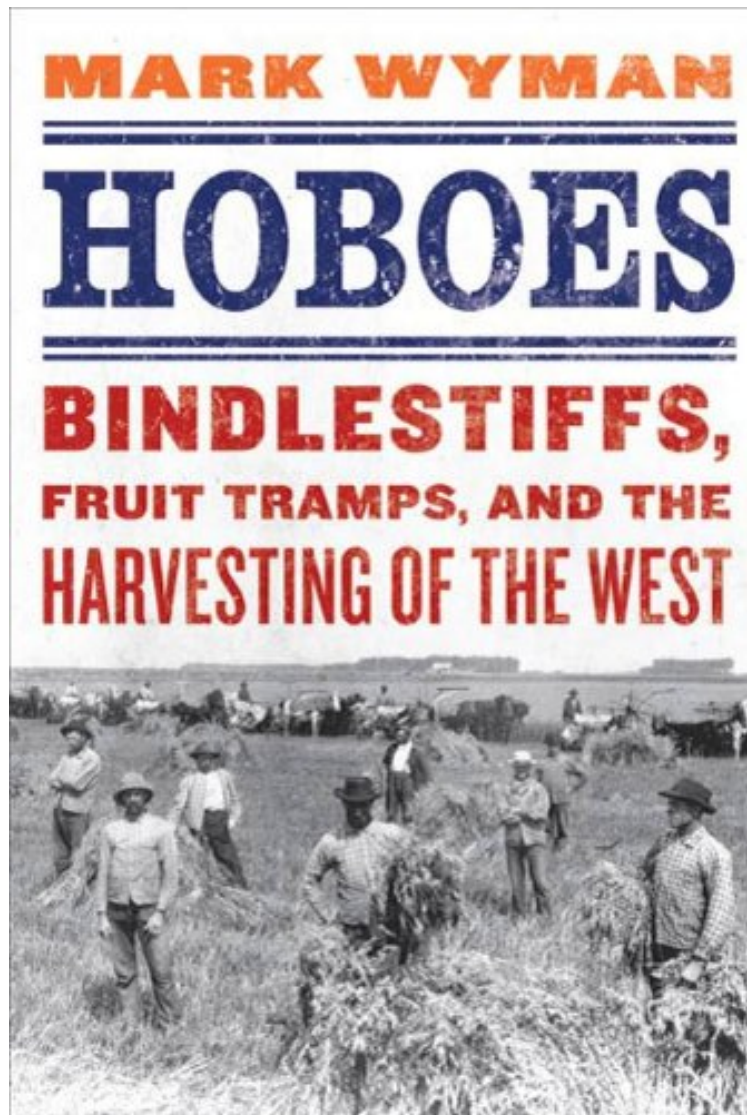


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Hoboes: Bindlestiffs, Fruit Tramps, and the Harvesting of the West

Mark Wyman

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Mark Wyman : Hoboes: Bindlestiffs, Fruit Tramps, and the Harvesting of the West before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Hoboes: Bindlestiffs, Fruit Tramps, and the Harvesting of the West:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. How the West was Sown, Harvested...and the Reader MisledBy T. M. JohnsonThere is no question Mark Wyman's book is informative, well-written, extensively researched and documented, so it might seem strange to assign it only a 3-star rating. Hoboes, Bindlestiffs, Fruit Tramps, and the Harvesting of the West is a history book, a detailed account of the agricultural development of the West, post-Civil War and early 19th century, and the factors that brought this vast, for the most part deserted territory under the

plow. According to Wyman the steam locomotive perches atop the New West food pyramid, and his account of the iron horse's crucial role in the settlement and agricultural expansion of the Western Frontier is the most fascinating segment of the book. It was a "win-win" situation for the railroads, their owners, and backers. To encourage railroad construction, the Federal government offered free land--so many acres per mile of track laid (6,400 acres per mile to one railroad), and federal loans as enticements. The railroads in turn carried passengers and freight to the frontiers, not only charging travelers fares, but also selling them the land on which to settle. Towns sprung up along railroads, attracting more settlers to this new "civilization." When the land was farmed and crops harvested, railroads transported the goods to markets. And, of course, the railroads brought workers to the fields to harvest the crops. For those who may have wondered how the wilds of the West came to be parceled out into the hands of private landowners, the answer lies with the railroad industry. Extensive monocultures became part of the West's agricultural landscape: wheat, corn, sugar beets in the Midwest; cotton moved westward from the deep south; and hops, nut crops, citrus fruit, apples, soft fruits and berries were cultivated in the Far west. The rest of Wyman's story involves the matter of harvesting these crops, the mass of humanity needed to reap, pick, and gather the fruits of the field. The author emphasizes how oftentimes ambitious farmers overextended their acreage to the point there was inadequate labor to harvest the surplus. The introduction of irrigation systems, Wyman explains, transformed once arid lands into fertile fields and the increased acreage further served to exacerbate labor shortages. As well as the native drifters ("hoboes, bindlestiffs and fruit tramps") employed to "bring in the sheaves," Wyman's book discusses the many immigrant ethnicities who worked the harvests: Native Americans, Chinese, Japanese, German-Russians, and most prominently the Mexican labor force. Wyman further explains the attitude many farm owners, townsfolk, and settlers had toward these migrants: much sought after come harvest time; spurned when harvest was over. These attitudes and subsequent mistreatment of the labor force led to labor disputes, rise and involvement of agricultural unions (and the IWW) which in turn led to strikes, riots, and bloodshed. (Note: two of the issues Wyman addresses still exist today in the agricultural West. The Hispanic (Mexican) immigrant situation, an issue then, continues to be an issue; Mexicans, whose histories are tightly intertwined with the agriculture of the West and its expansion, have fallen in and out of favor time and again with resident Westerners. Secondly, the labor shortages that plagued the early agricultural industry persist still. Just last fall the governor of my home State of Washington issued a statewide plea requesting help in the harvesting of the season's record apple crop.) But while Wyman includes a generous amount of fact, numbers, and figures in his narrative, the book's title--why I purchased the book in the first place--is sadly misleading. Aside from a few definitions of the native itinerants who worked the harvests of the West: "...the hobo 'a migratory worker, a tramp is a nonworker, a bum is a stationary nonworker,'" we learn very little about the humanity behind the unwashed, weatherworn faces. Who were they? What were their stories? I wanted to know and Wyman never says. If one seeks information about agriculture and its role in the settling of the west, and the crops that turned desert and wilderness into farms...how those crops were harvested, I recommend Wyman's book. But if you truly want to understand the drifters, ("apple knockers"), gypsies who "followed the fruit," read Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (by the way, Wyman overlooks the exodus of Dust Bowl victims). Or better yet, rub elbows with Woody Guthrie and sixty "troubled, tangled, messed up men" aboard a rattling boxcar in "Soldiers in the Dust," Chapter One of Guthrie's autobiography *Bound for Glory*. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating Read By Ralph A. Weisheit Mark Wyman's book *Hoboes* is about the various transient groups that roamed the West harvesting crops in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The book is thoroughly researched gives the reader a feel for what life was like for hoboes, bindlestiffs, and fruit tramps. Predecessors of modern migrant workers, these groups shared the modern workers' experience of being both necessary for economic development while simultaneously vilified. This is just the kind of book that Ken Burns would use to frame a historical documentary. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Four Stars By G>D>interesting

When the railroad stretched its steel rails across the American West in the 1870s, it opened up a vast expanse of territory with very few people but enormous agricultural potential: a second Western frontier, the garden West. Agriculture quickly followed the railroads, making way for Kansas wheat and Colorado sugar beets and Washington apples. With this new agriculture came an unavoidable need for harvest workers--for hands to pick the apples, cotton, oranges, and hops; to pull and top the sugar beets; to fill the trays with raisin grapes and apricots; to stack the wheat bundles in shocks to be pitched into the maw of the threshing machine. These were not the year-round hired hands but transients who would show up to harvest the crop and then leave when the work was finished. Various called bindlestiffs, fruit tramps, hoboes, and bums, these men--and women and children--were vital to the creation of the West and its economy. Amazingly, it is an aspect of Western history that has never been told. In *Hoboes: Bindlestiffs, Fruit Tramps, and the Harvesting of the West*, the award-winning historian Mark Wyman beautifully captures the lives of these workers. Exhaustively researched and highly original, this narrative history is a detailed, deeply sympathetic portrait of the lives of these hoboes, as well as a fresh look at the settling and development of the American West.

.com Best Books of the Month, May 2010: *Hoboes*. The word calls images of the dusty downtrodden: a subterranean

vagabond society communicating through secret symbols and riding rails from one terminus to another; the iconic hobo scruff and shouldered bundle stick. Mark Wyman's fascinating, deeply researched, and groundbreaking *Hoboes* strips away the rust from hobo history, revealing the intricate, multi-ethnic tapestry that hung in the background of the Old West--and in many ways drove its economy. From bindlestiffs and beeters to betabeleros and buranketto boys (not to mention gasoline tramps and apple glommers) *Hoboes* documents the lives, travails, and impact of the itinerant workers who sought opportunity--most often short-lived at best--as the railroads pushed the frontier into the memory of the modern United States. --Jon Foro

From Publishers Weekly

Historian Wyman offers a richly detailed study of the thousands of workers who followed the booming railroads west during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in order to pick, prepare, and load crops, from cotton, wheat, and hops to apples, beets, and oranges. These transients moved about the country, often accompanied by their families, who worked as well. They endured generally low wages, backbreaking labor, and awful living conditions--mitigated only slightly in the 1910s, for the select few who could afford automobiles and were thus granted greater mobility. Periodic efforts to unionize, especially by the radical Industrial Workers of the World, were invariably met with hostility. Wyman's extensive research translates into readable, often moving prose with details that illuminate the lives of previously obscure people and reveals a surprising ethnic and racial diversity among this often-overlooked group. The author of several books, Wyman has become a leading source on the American West and here makes a case for a more complex narrative of the region, one that ought to include hoboes in the list of "Western heroes," along with "cowboys and Indians, explorers and entrepreneurs, first settlers and gunslingers." Copyright copy; Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. "Vivid, accessible prose . . . Wyman colorfully describes the rough camaraderie among hoboes riding the rails and sharing their scant food in outdoor "jungles"; the only accommodations available to transients so distrusted by settled folks that any hobo venturing into a town was likely to be jailed as a vagrant. Later chapters stirringly cover the battles fought by the radical Industrial Workers of the World, the only group willing to represent migrant workers viewed by other labor unions as unskilled and impossible to organize."

mdash;Wendy Smith, Los Angeles Times