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Review of *Ethnicity on the Great Plains* Edited by Frederick C. Luebke

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Ethnicity on the Great Plains. Edited by Frederick C. Luebke. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980. Maps, tables, illustrations, notes, index. xxxiii + 237 pp. \$15.95.

Ethnicity on the Great Plains is a collection of essays based on a conference sponsored by the Center for Great Plains Studies. The editor has selected some of the best papers from that conference, attempting to maintain a balance among different academic disciplines, ethnic groups discussed, and various subregions of the Great Plains. The focus of the symposia was on the question of the relationship between the physical environment of the Great Plains and the persistence or accommodation of ethnic culture.

The resulting book is a satisfying and path-breaking multidisciplinary achievement on a neglected topic. The study of rural ethnic groups has been greatly overshadowed in recent years by the study of urban ethnic groups, and this volume provides a welcome change of diet and a reminder of the importance of rural settlements to the life of many ethnic groups in North America prior to World War II. Students of the Great Plains are also well aware that the subject of ethnicity in the region has received little scholarly attention, despite its historical importance.

The book includes contributions by historians, anthropologists, a folklorist, cultural geographers, and sociologists. Although a wide variety of disciplines are represented, the result is not a number of disconnected pieces that fail to communicate across disciplinary lines; rather, it is a good mix of different research strategies and theoretical approaches that are mutually enriching. Many of the authors have themselves begun to break down some disciplinary barriers in their own approaches. For example, historian Kathleen Conzen's stimulating theoretical piece, "Historical Approaches to the Study of Rural Ethnic Communities," makes good use of past research in rural sociology, while Josef Barton's "Land, Labor, and Community in Nueces: Czech Farmers and Mexican Laborers in South Texas, 1880-1930" uses the latest insights from cultural anthropology to illuminate the interrelationship between economic adjustment, family and community patterns, and ethnic identity among two different groups in the same region. But even those studies that are firmly implanted within one discipline, such as folklorist Linda Degh's "Folk Religion as Ideology for Ethnic Survival" and geographer Terry Jordan's "A Religious Geography of the Hill Country Germans," are still of wide interest and are intelligible to students of ethnicity in other disciplines.

The essays not only present a variety of disciplines and consequently of different research and theoretical approaches, but they also discuss a wide range of ethnic groups. Plains Indians, Volga Germans, Swedes, Old Order Amish, Hungarians, Czechs, and Mexicans all provide the basis of studies. We learn of the chain migration and settlement patterns of different religious groups of Germans in Texas (Terry Jordan) and of regional subgroupings among Swedes in the Dakotas (Robert Ostergren). We learn about the cultural factors that made it almost impossible for the Old Order Amish to adjust successfully to the plains environment (John Hostetler) and the cultural factors that made it possible for the Volga Germans to adapt successfully on the plains and

pampas in the United States, Canada, and Argentina (Timothy Kloberdanz). For me, one of the most interesting essays is Bruce Garver's on Czech-American freethinkers. For all the other groups discussed in the book, religion was an important source for, if not the basis of, group solidarity. But the majority of Czechs on the Great Plains belonged to free-thought groups that developed their own institutional life through educational societies, gymnastic organizations, fraternal and benevolent associations, and cemeteries in the period between the 1870s and World War I, when the movement began to decline.

As in any collection of essays on a theme, one can isolate many other topics that could have been discussed. Each reader will also come to the book with different interests. Conzen's essay, which suggests future avenues for research, sketches some of the broad outlines of past research findings, and helps explain the paradox of how rural areas can be both a rapid melting pot and also the site of strong ethnic persistence over several generations, is worth the price of the book itself.

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