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Review of *Prairie Mosaic: An Ethnic Atlas of Rural North Dakota* By William C. Sherman

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Prairie Mosaic: An Ethnic Atlas of Rural North Dakota. By William C. Sherman. Fargo: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1983. Photographs, maps, tables, index. vi + 152 pp. \$12.95.

Ethnic atlases appeal to the general public because they graphically verify long suspected or perceived patterns of local or regional cultural differentiation. They are useful to academia because the geographic pattern portrayed is a variable that is basic to a wide variety of scholarly inquiries. Unfortunately, good ethnic atlases are few in number because compiling the data necessary to accurately describe ethnic patterns at an appropriate scale is a difficult and time-consuming task that few are willing

to undertake. Those who have the patience to do this kind of work deserve our admiration and thanks.

This atlas is the work of a sociologist who has set for himself the demanding task of mapping the ethnic settlement of the entire state of North Dakota. For practical and organizational reasons, he has divided the state into six sections, each of which receives a chapter including a highly detailed map of ethnic population distribution and commentary. The maps show by shading the areas where the rural population is predominantly (at least 95 percent) composed of a particular national group. The approximate composition of the areas where the rural population is ethnically mixed is also noted on each map. Background information on each ethnic group is provided in the commentary. All of the information is based on an ambitious survey of North Dakota's rural households in 1965—a total of 46,486 family units. The author also relied on interviews with key respondents across the state.

Most of the material in this atlas is descriptive. A brief analytical discussion at the end of the book contains essentially three observations. The first emphasizes the lack of change in ethnic settlement patterns. Comparisons between this atlas and several earlier but less extensive efforts to map ethnic groups in the state suggest that the patterns established during the settlement era have largely persisted to the mid-1960s. The second observation proposes a rather ecological interpretation of the settlement behavior of various groups—some were highly aggressive, consolidating and expanding their domain, while others turned inward or failed to exhibit any staying power. The third assertion, with some qualification, is that the patterns depicted in the atlas remain relevant today although considerable social change has taken place on the northern plains since 1965.

Taken as a whole this is a unique and valuable atlas that will be used by many. Its only failing is that it does not really go beyond describing basic patterns. There is no attempt to systematically link the atlas to social science

research on rural ethnic groups. The context is North Dakota, not the broad patterns and processes of ethnic settlement in North America. Neither is there any effort to rigorously test the observations made at the end of the book. While quite possibly true, they appear to be merely impressions at this point. Concerns of this type, however, were probably never intended to be a part of this atlas. Now that the data is organized and mapped, perhaps they will follow.

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