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Review of *Plains Families: Exploring Sociology Through Social History* By Scott G. McNall and Sally Allen McNall

J. Allen Williams

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, jwilliams2@unl.edu

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Plains Families: Exploring Sociology Through Social History. By Scott G. McNall and Sally Allen McNall. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983. Photographs, charts, graphs, bibliography, index. xiii + 328 pp. \$8.95.

Scott and Sally McNall, of the University of Kansas, provide a new and interesting way to teach sociology. *Plains Families* uses the social history of the Great Plains region of the United States from the 1860s to the present to demonstrate how abstract sociological ideas and concepts are grounded in reality.

A variety of source materials (e.g., letters, diaries, interviews) are used by the authors to construct composite case histories of families. The presentation of each case is followed by a chapter designed to illustrate a major dimension of sociology. The illustration, in turn, affords the reader a much better understanding of not only that specific family living in that time and place, but, more abstractly, how social forces influence human behavior. The Henry and Lucy Martin family began homesteading in western Kansas in 1873. The concepts of culture and social structure are used to analyze how this family adapted to the plains environment. The story of the Wade family in Nebraska's sandhills begins in 1882 and continues when daughter Eleanor marries Thomas Patchen from Lincoln. They farmed and were active in the community life of Fairview. Two other Wade children moved to Omaha and went into the clothing business. The Wades and the Patchens lived during a time

of rapid urbanization and their farm, small town, and city experiences offer useful material for a discussion of the sociological meanings of community and association. The Higbees and the Davises of Cooley, Kansas, lived through the Great Depression and World War II. Important changes in socialization practices and sex roles occurred during those years. The people living in Baker, South Dakota, during the 1950s and 1960s (a composite) are examined through the concepts and theories of social class and stratification. The closing section includes an in-depth interview with 86-year-old Vi Mercer who lived and worked on farms in Minnesota throughout most of her life. Vi's life history gives substance to a discussion of social change and stability.

Plains Families is a textbook and is not meant to be an original contribution toward understanding life on the Great Plains. Thus, while it may incidentally offer new insights to the advanced scholar, that is not its purpose. As a textbook it does an outstanding job.

J. ALLEN WILLIAMS, JR.
Department of Sociology
University of Nebraska-Lincoln