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## Review of *The Italians in Oklahoma* By Kenny L. Brown

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versity of Oklahoma Press, 1980. Illustrations, maps, tables, bibliographical essay, notes. 77 pp. \$2.95.

This volume is part of a Newcomers to a New Land series designed to analyze the major ethnic groups of Oklahoma. Kenny L. Brown has studied the experience of Italians in the state and provides many interesting details on this little known topic.

Though few in number, Italians concentrated heavily in the coal mining districts of Oklahoma and contributed importantly to the communities in which they lived. As miners, they moved early into the labor unions of the coal fields and participated fully in the recurrent strikes that characterized this region in the period 1890-1925. Like their counterparts elsewhere, Oklahoma Italians attempted to transfer as much of their Old World culture as possible to America. Consequently we find evidence of distinctly Italian Catholic parishes, mutual aid societies, labor agencies, and musical bands (but apparently no Italian language newspapers). The author views the Oklahoma Italian experience as being unique on two levels. First, because of their small numbers and frontier-like settlement patterns, he claims Italians underwent "a virtually complete assimilation." Secondly, he notes that a variety of situations peculiar to Oklahoma—Indian claims during the territorial period, prohibition laws, climatic conditions—forced special accommodations among Italians.

The author has stated that this book is written "for the general reader" and it is by this standard that it should be judged. Normally, works of this sort are assessed by the presence of two qualities: a sprightly writing style to provide for enjoyable reading and a thorough grounding in the secondary scholarly literature to insure soundness of judgment. On both criteria the volume must be regarded as deficient. Simply stated, the prose is infelicitous. Moreover, the footnotes and bibliography are so brief and inadequate that they betray a lack of knowledge of available scholarship. When Brown attempts to relate the Oklahoma

*The Italians in Oklahoma.* By Kenny L. Brown.  
Newcomers in a New Land. Norman: Uni-

experience to the larger themes of development in America (unionism, crime, urbanization, etc.), he is frequently off the mark. He is strongest when relating the essential facts and life-stories of the Italians who carved out successful careers in this rugged land. On this basis the work has value, and it should provide a starting point for any future studies dealing with these immigrants.

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