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MIGRATION OF THE GREAT PLAINS

AN INTRODUCTION

The 26th annual Center for Great Plains Studies symposium, "Great Plains Migrations," held at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 7-9 May 2002, was innovative in its interdisciplinary concept and content. The co-chairs of the symposium, Mary Liz Jameson, Research Assistant Professor of Entomology and Museum, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and David Wishart, Professor of Geography, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, brought together scholars from the humanities, social sciences, and biological sciences to examine migration in all its dimensions—from historical and contemporary human migrations to migrations of flora and fauna. The concept of migration is central to the development and dynamics of the Great Plains region from both the humanistic and scientific standpoints.

Of the fifty-five papers presented at the symposium, *Great Plains Quarterly* has chosen three that address a few of the important issues raised by those scholars. We were most concerned with essays that focused primarily on the human migrations to the Plains. John C. Hudson, Professor of Geography and Director of the Program in Environmental Sciences at Northwestern University in Evanston,

Illinois, presented an important keynote paper, "A Longitudinal Approach to Great Plains Migration." The essay published here details Professor Hudson's elegant model for comparing migrations histories for the Plains states. His equations for analyzing census data, from 1850 to 1990, give us a broader understanding of how movements of people from other parts of the country changed and altered the human landscape of the Plains. Professor Hudson asserts, "The longitudinal analysis of migration developed here emphasizes the changing contributions made over time by various countries, regions, and states to the population of the Great Plains. It emphasizes that migration is an ongoing process, not a once-and-for-all shift in populations" (p. 256).

Of course, the most important human migrations in the Plains are those which took place by the original inhabitants of the lands now occupied by the United States. Two essays were chosen that illustrate some important changes in Native migrations that effect populations to this day. Beth R. Ritter, Assistant Professor of Anthropology and Native American Studies at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, in her essay, "Piecing Together the

Ponca Past: Reconstructing Degiha Migrations to the Great Plains,” tells the fascinating story of how tribes historically and currently associated with the Great Plains, such as the Omaha, Osage, Kaw, and, of course, the Ponca, originated from regions outside the Plains, especially from the eastern Woodlands. Using tribal histories, ethnohistoric accounts, and archeological evidence, Professor Ritter clearly illustrates how Degiha-speakers, once a single tribe, gradually moved west because of many social, economic, and environmental factors. As this migration continued, we see how various tribes developed and formed the groups that make up the Native nations that are now on the Great Plains.

The second essay that also addresses an important chapter in the migration of Native peoples takes us back even further in time. Lauren W. Ritterbush, Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Kansas State University, takes on the difficult task of trying to understand the relationship between bison hunting

and migration as early as 11,000 years ago. In “Drawn by the Bison: Late Prehistoric Native Migration into the Central Plains,” Professor Ritterbush points out how a “study of prehistoric human migration into the Central Plains provides insight into this region’s past, its people, and the processes of human adaptation and change. It reveals the diversity of adaptations developed by different populations and the factors involved in decisions to migrate and in adjusting to the Plains” (p. 260).

These three essays, covering migration from prehistory to within the last ten years, demonstrate just a few of the compelling issues that emerged from the Center for Great Plains Studies symposium, “Great Plains Migrations.” Many more important parts of the migration story need to be told, and we plan to continue to present these in future issues of *Great Plains Quarterly*.

CHARLES A. BRAITHWAITE
Editor