

2013

Review of *Nikkei in the Interior West: Japanese Immigrants and Community Building, 1882–1945* By Eric Walz

Jonathan Dresner
Pittsburg State University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>

Dresner, Jonathan, "Review of *Nikkei in the Interior West: Japanese Immigrants and Community Building, 1882–1945* By Eric Walz" (2013). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 2506.
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/2506>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Nikkei in the Interior West: Japanese Immigrants and Community Building, 1882–1945. By Eric Walz. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012. x + 236 pp. Maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, index. \$50.00.

Studies of Japanese immigration into North America generally focus on the larger Hawaiian and West Coast populations, but there is a small body of work on other areas, including New York, Texas, and the Canadian heartland. The core of Eric Walz's book is a pioneering source-rich examination of Japanese immigration and settlement experiences in the American West, including Nebraska, but excluding the coastal states and Midwest. As long as its focus stays on these sparsely distributed migrants, the book is an interesting addition to the literature, though not a final word. The decision to include Japanese historical and cultural context is admirable, though executed poorly, and the decision to close the narrative at the end of World War II leaves later developments unresolved.

Walz introduces and demonstrates stages of immigrant ethnic formation, from initial forays into a new frontier, individual settlement and family stages, and finally construction of ethnic

communities with local, regional, national, and sometimes international connections. These central chapters feature vivid details drawn from oral histories, memoirs, diaries, newspapers, and government records. The presentation is roughly chronological, guided by concepts of diasporic ethnic formation found in recent scholarship on Japanese and other migrations. While this is not a comparative study, discussion of Latter-day Saint communities as another ethnic tradition occupying much of the same geography is fascinating and productive.

Early chapters (and later sections, such as chapter 7's discussion of Japanese religion) are supposed to provide context for the origins of Japanese migration and the culture that immigrants brought with them to add a transnational component to our understanding of the American interior. Unfortunately, most of the secondary sources cited are outdated and nearly useless, at least for understanding Japanese social history and labor migrations, and some errors are egregious. The conclusion also disappoints: a great deal of energy is put into describing the state of Japanese American community formations and the effects of World War II surveillance, arrests, relocations, and conscription. Aside from some discussion of postwar "model minority" discourses, however, the question "Can Community Survive?," which headlines chapter 8, goes unanswered.

The energy and ambitions of Japanese immigrants helped shape the agriculture, economy, and communities of the American West, and Walz has done a service to the history of the Great Plains by drawing these stories together. But the origins of that energy, and the end of the story, remain unexplained and deserve further attention.

JONATHAN DRESNER
 Department of History,
 Philosophy, and Social Sciences
 Pittsburg State University
 Pittsburg, Kansas