

Immigrant Minds, American Identities: Making the United States Home, 1870-1930

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quential demographic event in modern American history" (271). The baby boom spurred America's postwar growth and fueled two decades of unbounded optimism.

The end of the baby boom and the simultaneous 1965 Watts riot brought this period of national and western optimism to a close. The passage of immigration reform legislation the same year contributed to a new wave of immigration, mostly from Asia, Mexico, and Central America. Nugent rounds out his discussion of the modern West by touching on urban and reservation Indians, the internal diversity of Latinos, the rise of the counterculture, the growing visibility of gay communities, Rocky Mountain resort towns, the ongoing (European American) depopulation of the Great Plains, the Immigration Reform Act of 1986, and the "fall and rise of California" (362) in the 1990s. Nugent concludes by offering some tentative "postmillennial projections" (377). He speculates that the West Coast could well become the dominant region of North America and wonders if a new language, "perhaps combining Spanish, English, and Chinese" (379), might develop.

When I first picked up this book, I feared that its demographic approach would make it dull. Fortunately, my worries were unfounded; this is a fascinating book. In a work of this scale, it is always possible to find fault. I would have appreciated a little less celebration of diversity for diversity's sake and more attention to the structures that continue to reproduce racial and class injustice. Overall, though, *Into the West* is a lively and informative book. I recommend it highly to all those interested in the history of the U.S. West.

Immigrant Minds, American Identities: Making the United States Home, 1870-1930, by Orm Overland. Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Centennial Series. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000. x, 243 pp. Notes, index. \$34.95 cloth.

Reviewer Donna R. Gabaccia is the Charles H. Stone Professor of American History at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Her latest book is *Immigration and American Diversity* (2002).

Portraits of the United States as a nation of immigrants can obscure the scorn Anglo-Saxon Americans typically expressed toward European "foreigners" in the nineteenth century. So severe was that scorn that immigrants of that era could not easily feel "at home" in America. Even the Protestant and literate Scandinavians who settled the rural Midwest faced social rejection and responded by creating what Orm Overland calls "home-making myths." In *Immigrant Minds, American Identities* he analyzes the creation of three of these "home-making

myths" among European immigrants in the years between 1870 and 1930. (A separate chapter traces the entwining of these myths in Norwegian America.) Overland thus focuses on ubiquitous tales of immigrant Swedes', Italians', and Germans' "contributions" to American life. Taking these naïve stories seriously, Overland's account will help historians understand better the filiopietistic accounts they rejected in order to write a "new" social history of immigration in the 1960s. For general readers, the book also serves as an excellent reminder that multicultural history and identity were as closely linked in the past as they are in the present.

Overland views home-making myths as a response to American life, not as a product of Old World ethnic nationalism. Most recently arrived immigrants did not possess clear national identities; they developed them only in the United States. Specialists in immigration history have long known that ethnic and American identities developed in tandem. But Overland's book adds something new by arguing that American ethnic identities emerged defensively, in response to the insecure place of the foreigner in American society. That most immigrants mounted broadly similar arguments for their groups' right to feel "at home" in America can be attributed, Overland argues convincingly, to the cult of Anglo-Saxon America. Inspired by Social Darwinism, white Americans after the Civil War defined the United States as a nation with roots in the British Isles, thus building the foundation for immigrant ethnic nationalism.

Like American paeans to Anglo-Saxonism, immigrants' "home-making myths" focused on the contributions persons of their own backgrounds had made to American life. "Home-making myths" fell into three categories. Intellectuals and businessmen hoping to represent their immigrant communities positively to the wider American community scrutinized the past and found evidence that Germans, Scandinavians, or Italians—along with the British—"were here first" as discoverers and explorers of North America or as contributors to the development of colonial American society. Overland finds particularly complex examples of the myth that "we were here first" in Italian Americans' fascination with Christopher Columbus and Scandinavians' attachment to Leif Eriksson. There was of course no Italy when Columbus sailed, nor was Leif Eriksson a product of Sweden or Norway. Yet ethnic nationalists argued that "we"—the entire national group—were represented in America from the beginning by these individuals. Filiopietistic tales of Columbus or Eriksson were myths not because they falsified the historical record but rather because they harnessed history explicitly to the needs of the present. In particular,

Germans' insistence that "we were here first" encouraged the writing of some of the first "multi-cultural" alternatives to a national history of Anglo-Saxon triumphs.

Equally popular—and mythic in their intentions—were numerous accounts documenting an immigrant group's service and sacrifices during the American Revolution and the Civil War. With far less evidence, some immigrants also argued that the origins of American democracy, or American culture's concern with liberty or representative government, could be traced to Old World origins, whether in medieval Scandinavia, ancient Greece or Italy, or in the forests of Germany. Overland calls this home-making genre the myth that "we were American to begin with." Along with tales of discoverers, founders, and soldiers, these histories provided evidence aimed to convince skeptical Anglo-Saxons that foreigners deserved inclusion in the nation.

Immigrant Minds, American Identities succeeds in offering a sympathetic portrait of both the origins and forms of immigrant home-making myths without ignoring their limitations. Overland rightly notes that alternatives to American ethnic identities always existed, notably in various expressions of working-class internationalism that dismissed national loyalties as irrelevant for mobile workers in an international economy. His book also offers a sensitive comparison of home-making myths among European immigrants and American minorities—indigenous peoples, Spanish-speakers in the Southwest, and the descendants of African slaves—who were excluded not only from the circle of national belonging but from citizenship and its rights. Finally, Overland rightly emphasizes how immigrants' claims that they were "Americans to begin with," were "here first," or "gave our blood" almost inevitably sought to position one group of foreigners above others and above the native minorities of the country. In competing for a home in America, ethnic American identities too often closed the door to persons unlike themselves.

Swedes in the Twin Cities: Immigrant Life and Minnesota's Urban Frontier, edited by Philip J. Anderson and Dag Blanck. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2001. x, 367 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, index. \$34.95 cloth.

Reviewer Norma J. Hervey is professor of history at Luther College. Her research interests include ethnicity and immigration history.

This work of 24 essays by prominent scholars in the United States and Sweden testifies to the remarkable history of published monographs on immigration history in Minnesota. This is an important work that

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