

pied and transformed most of the North American continent into one of the most dynamic and powerful nations in the history of the world. In its basic outline this narrative has a power far beyond our ability to bend it to our purposes, no matter how much we argue about what we ought to call it.

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*The Minds of the West: Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Middle West, 1830–1917.* By Jon Gjerde. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997. Pp. xiii, 426. Maps, tables, notes, index. \$39.95.)

The Middle West has the well-deserved reputation of being distinctly “American.” This designation covers a range of distinctions, of which not-being-like-Europe is critical. But how could it be that the region is so different from Europe when so many of its people came from Europe, and not so very long ago? For Jon Gjerde the answer lies in a convergence of attitudes and values. The pioneer settlers were joined after the 1840s by millions of immigrants from Europe. Gjerde is especially concerned with the largest and least studied group, the Germans, and their interaction with the Yankees. The book, although it touches upon many midwestern points, is centered in a one-hundred-mile radius around Dubuque, Iowa, which itself was the epicenter of Germania.

Gjerde ranges widely over social, political, and intellectual themes, with much on farming, religion, marriages, and children, and with some attention to education and occupation. Migration is a major theme, as he demonstrates how communities reassembled themselves in the New World. Would they isolate themselves and echo the old country (as the French did in Canada), or would they interact with and learn from other groups, change and Americanize themselves? Would America be balkanized with groups hating and killing each other? (Gjerde does chronicle the intergroup violence, but there was not very much.) The Germans had a strong tendency to become farmers. Indeed, they tended to stay in agriculture long after other groups moved on to the towns and cities, so the chapters on rural life are especially revealing. The Germans were strikingly religious, although the Lutheran half warred with the Catholic half whenever it was not battling heretical Lutherans or dangerous secularists. The Scandinavians are well represented, and Gjerde contrasts their lifestyle and Lutheranism with that of the Germans. He is effective in showing how the immigrants built their own uniquely American churches and used them as a base to establish family roles and moral

standards. He also shows how the immigrants succumbed to the lure of American individualism.

The Germans brought with them strong family and community ties and built strong churches here (especially the Missouri Synod and Wisconsin Synod Lutherans). Yet they were practical people who took advantage of their financial opportunities and thereby became more individualistic and less beholden to their ministers, elders, and community notables. The Yankees took the lead in aggressive modernization, trying, as promoters of temperance, antislavery, education, and corporations, to convert everyone to their social, economic, political, and ethical viewpoint. But the Yankees were too frenzied, too obtrusive, too immoderate for the Germans, and conflict repeatedly erupted in politics, especially regarding the prohibition issue. Simply put, the Yankees (in alliance with the Scandinavians) attempted to dry up the Midwest and put German beer out of business.

Gjerde's text moves gracefully among many different types of evidence and styles of writing. The book is full of tables, but also of revealing pithy quotes from newspapers (especially Dubuque's foreign language press), and from diaries, letters, and memoirs as well. Political historians will appreciate the author's fine coverage of the ethnocultural theme in politics, especially the raging debates over liquor, schooling, and women's rights. The outcome is not told—Gjerde touches too lightly on the decisive years of World War I. He or another equally talented historian needs to bring the story up to date to show how the descendants of Germans and Swedes, Yankees and southerners, have become indistinguishable individualists today, each learning from and teaching the others, each forgetting their cultural heritage.

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*Main Street Revisited: Time, Space, and Image Building in Small-Town America.* By Richard V. Francaviglia. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1996. Pp. xxiv, 224. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. Clothbound, \$39.95; paperbound, \$17.95.)

In each of our respective pasts, there exists some form of Main Street—a place that evokes recollections of the corner drugstore, memories of simpler times, or images of a vibrant and bustling community. Whether it exists in the quaint countryside of New England, the farming communities of the American heartland, towns of the Southwest, or simply as a part of our collective memory, Main Street has been visible in our history, culture, and built environment since the beginning of American settlement. Fascinated by its central role in our lives, Richard V. Francaviglia has spent decades gathering images from small towns across the American landscape and studying the evolution of this corridor as both physical space and cultur-