

topics. While some subjects have been researched adequately, several writers point out that others have received little or no attention. A related criticism is that western historians have too often failed to relate their studies to the national and global scenes. This weakness, as Gressley particularly stresses, is a serious flaw because recent western events have increasingly been connected to overseas trends and developments. Some of the writers seem to concentrate too much on what has been done in the field and provide too few suggestions as to what needs to be done. Gerald D. Nash's essay on economic history and Glenda Riley's chapter on western women, however, both display a complete mastery of their subjects and contain excellent proposals for future research.

Although none of the writers are identified strongly with the New Western History, passages devoted to the environment, minorities, women, urban development, the western myth, and cultural developments reveal the influence of that school. In line with the New Western History, the field has greatly broadened in terms of the topics now covered and in a tendency to expand focus into the twentieth century.

Books such as this are not always enjoyable reading, but they are extremely important. The essays in the present study allow readers to gauge recent trends in twentieth-century western history and to see some of the possibilities for additional research opportunities.

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*Peasant Maids—City Women: From the European Countryside to Urban America.* Edited by Christiane Harzig. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997. Pp. xii, 344. Notes, maps, illustrations, tables, index. Clothbound, \$39.95; paperbound, \$16.95.)

*Peasant Maids* is the emigration story of single women from four villages or rural communes in Germany, Poland, Ireland, and Sweden to Chicago in the late nineteenth century. The areas of origin in Germany (Mecklenburg) and in Sweden (Dalsland) produced a relatively small slice of the immigrant populations of Chicago and may not be representative of those specific groups or their unmarried female immigrants. Even so some of the behaviors of these newcomers in the Windy City appear to be typical. The Polish and Irish samples, on the face of it, seem to be more representative of their compatriots.

Christiane Harzig's study of these four groups of single women contends that (1) single women improved their lives and enjoyed

more personal freedom in Chicago than in their homeland villages. (2) Immigrant women found a better marriage market in Chicago where the immigrant male to female ratio was often two to one. Polish women whose main goal was marriage went from being single to more than 80 percent married within four years of arrival. (3) First-generation immigrant women married their own kind at the 95 percent-plus level. (4) Single immigrant women seldom associated with Anglo-American women or those not from their ethnolinguistic group. (5) Although Harzig writes in her introduction that "suffrage and temperance had little attraction for ethnic women" (p. 18), she does not seem to consider sufficiently the Swedish chapter, which shows (and other evidence not in this book confirms) that a sizable body of Swedish immigrants, including many maids, were attracted to temperance societies, temperance halls, temperance cafes, and similar places. (6) Divorce rates were low in both the sending and receiving societies. (7) As Harzig states in her introduction, "Romantic love had been an alien concept to peasant cultures but became more important in Chicago." Dowries also became less common as the economic worth of single-women wage earners rose and because of the favorable (for women) sex ratios. Although none of these findings is particularly novel or noteworthy for immigration scholars, they are interestingly told in several chapters.

The chapters dealing with the Chicago experience of the Irish, Polish, and Swedish samples are the strongest in the book. By comparison the German chapter is disappointing for the shallowness of its research and for its slender gender content—only six of the thirty-seven pages deal with women.

In sharp contrast is the story of the Irish, which is much more detailed and better contextualized. Deirdre Mageean highlights the occupational changes occurring among Irish-American women. The first generation worked primarily as domestic servants, waitresses, and kitchen help. The second generation was the beneficiary of upward mobility through education. The vital role of the Catholic schools and training institutions in educating single Irish women as teachers and nurses, Mageean points out, produced a white collar and professional class that nearly doubled that of their Irish male counterparts—8.5 to 4 percent for professionals and 25 to 16 percent for white collars on the job by 1900. This chapter also chronicles the disproportionately large role of Irish-American female union organizers and leaders, including the head of the Chicago Teachers Union, a "Petticoat Butcher" who led strikes in the stockyards, and of course the famous Mother Jones. Partly as an explanation of why the Irish female immigrants broke with old world conservatism, Mageean adds, "Unlike Polish and German Catholicism, the Irish religious were not transmitters of ethnic identity; indeed parishes accelerated the assimilation of Irish immigrants into American life" (p. 259).

Also interesting is Maria Anna Knothe's study of Polish women from a village in Austrian Poland. Knothe shows how the Chicago marriage market for Polish singles "cured" the illegitimacy problem (small as it was at this time). Knothe writes that since men outnumbered women in Chicago's Polonia "even a poor, not particularly pretty woman could easily find a husband" (pp. 314-15). Whereas many writers have argued that urbanization of rural people disrupted family patterns and caused high rates of bastardy in big cities, Knothe's evidence shows just the opposite for Polish Chicago. Between 1894 and 1902 when the illegitimacy rate was 7.5 percent for all births in Poland, in Chicago it shrank to less than 1 percent (0.9) for Chicago's Polish section. Lopsided sex ratios in favor of women turned the tide. The findings of this small case sample casts some doubt on the widely held belief that cities cause urban pathologies.

The Swedish maids chapter by Margareta Matovic points out how Svenska Flickas in Chicago were much more independent minded than their Baltic counterparts from Poland and North Germany and more like the Irish. Lacking the English language fluency of their Hibernian counterparts, they gravitated toward domestic labor. "Being a live-in servant in a millionaire's home was the top of the career ladder," Matovic writes (p. 296). Some housemaids in middle- and upper-income homes were treated very well: they sometimes had their own rooms and private baths and shared in much of their employer's way of life. "It was a blessing for a girl like me to come to such a home," wrote one Swedish maid (p. 291). Living at the top end of the social register made some of them picky about their marriage partners and reluctant to marry young working-class Swedish lads for fear of falling back into a lower class life. In any event the parallels between the independence of the Irish second generation as expressed by the upward mobility and the Swedish maids who married later or sometimes not at all is an interesting similarity.

Editor Harzig seems genuinely puzzled by the stories that she has edited and writes, "In surveying the effects of migration and urbanization on women of four ethnic groups, we discern no neat pattern but a tangled skein" (p. 17). Nonetheless, this book is an interesting collection that enriches knowledge of the immigrant experience and underscores how homeland traditions did, and sometimes did not, shape the behaviors of newcomers to Chicago.

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