

ing the commendable northern Democratic success in the "search for Negro support," the author suggests: "Northern Democratic racial liberalism helped to blunt and defeat Republican desires to safeguard Negro suffrage" (p. x).

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Conquering the Great American Desert: Nebraska. By Everett Dick. *Nebraska State Historical Society Publications*, Volume XXVII. ([Lincoln]: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1975. Pp. xiii, 456. End maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$10.95.)

Since the appearance of his *Sod House Frontier* in 1937, Everett Dick has impressed his fellow historians with a vast array of subsequent studies. Here is another volume which will surely become a classic too. It is a study of Nebraska agriculture utilizing the motif of the Great American Desert, a description which was applied erroneously to the area west of the one hundredth meridian during the first three quarters of the nineteenth century. Dick surveys the origin of the desert myth and traces the challenges facing Nebraska settlers in the period following the Civil War into the early twentieth century.

West of the one hundredth meridian settlers faced a topography increasingly devoid of trees, the lack of which posed problems with housing, fuel, and fencing. The tale of constructing homes on the treeless plains is fascinatingly told in the chapter on sod construction. Accompanying photographs of sodbusting plows, of the cutting and loading of sod bricks, and of various types of sod houses illustrate the hardships and hazards associated with those early dwellings. The chapter on fencing, drawn from traditional sources, examines the use of sod and osage orange for fences and discusses the impact of barbed wire on the farming and cattle industries. Since timber was also in short supply as a fuel source, settlers resorted to burning corn, hay, and "buffalo chip." However important the sunflower was for Kansas, Dick maintains that its dried stalks were never widely used as a fuel in Nebraska.

The lack of timber explains why settlers in this region became early advocates of tree culture. One of Nebraska's

contributions to the national heritage of the United States is the Arbor Day festival, first celebrated in that state in 1872. So zealous were Nebraskans in their sylvan devotion that the legislature in 1873 passed a law protecting trees: "In those gun-toting days in Nebraska, if you had something against your neighbor, it was safer to whip out your gun and shoot him than to cut down his trees. You could plead self-defense when you shot someone, and often a killer got away scot-free; but no such subterfuge could be claimed by a tree mutilator. It was the penitentiary for him, according to the law" (p. 120).

Dick differs with Walter Prescott Webb's view that the windmill is best identified with ranchers on the Great Plains; rather, his research on Nebraska suggests that the prairie farmer deserves the credit for popularizing these devices. On another controversial point for which extant data are confusing, Dick contends that the temporary decline of settlement in Nebraska during the period from 1873 to 1877 owed more to the national economic depression than to the local grasshopper scourge. The volume concludes with an incisive analysis of irrigation and its effect on Nebraska's rural economy up through the recent 1950s.

In summary, the research for this volume is impressive, and it is written in a refreshingly exciting style. The book is a handsome addition to the *Nebraska State Historical Society Publications* series as well as to the general history of the frontier and Great Plains. It is truly a definitive study in which Dick and the society can take pride.

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David E. Schob

A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930. By Kenneth L. Kusmer. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976. Pp. xiv, 305. Notes, tables, figures, maps, illustrations, appendixes, bibliographical essay, index. \$12.95.)

Rare are those studies which successfully bridge the varied specialty areas in American historical research. Kenneth L. Kusmer's *A Ghetto Takes Shape* is such a book. It is a valuable study on a city long neglected by urban historians. At the same time it makes an important con-