

Linda Mack Schloff. *"And Prairie Dogs Weren't Kosher": Jewish Women in the Upper Midwest Since 1855.* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1996). x, 244 pp., \$29.95 cloth, \$14.95 paper.

Wit and wisdom permeate this tome from its wonderful title to the end of the last chapter. The idea of Jews even considering the possibility of consuming brisket of prairie dog (without the cream gravy, of course) is hilarious. But behind this humor is the serious question of why the matter would even be considered. The book's title comes from the child of early Jewish immigrants of South Dakota recalling "my parents got tired of eating potatoes, and prairie dogs weren't kosher."

This book was originally planned to accompany a large exhibition entitled "Unpacking on the Prairie: Jewish Women in the Upper Midwest" organized by the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest and the Minnesota Historical Society. After opening in St. Paul, a smaller traveling exhibit (very instructive in itself) was to have been shown at other sites throughout the midwest. The book, however, has taken on a life of its own in dealing with a subject often ignored, namely, the survival of ethnicity in families or small groups of people who are somewhat isolated from their larger ethnic groups which, in turn, are often minorities within a larger society. In this case, studies of Jews in New York and other metropolitan centers, particularly in the urban east, are abundant. On the other hand, studies of Jews in the midwest and south are small in number. The covert strategies of survival and the historical experiences that Jews have had in the midwest, however, are quite instructive regarding ethnicity. The experiences of Jewish immigrants in the United States are not monolithic. To the contrary, they have varied. In essence, Jews living in the midwest have perhaps been forced to conceptualize and nurture their identities more than metropolitan Jews whose group identities are normally assumed and sustained by communal synagogues, mikvahs, yeshivas, and kosher butchers. Using the voices of Jewish pioneer women, and working from a wide variety of published, archival, and oral historical sources, Schloff discusses how and why families left the old world, settled in the midwest, set up households, found work, established synagogues, and created supportive sodalities. Jewish women were compelled to figure out ways, for example, to maintain a kosher household or least preserve their religious traditions as they perceived them. If, in fact, the food they prepared was not strictly kosher, then these pioneer women could at least honor and perpetuate the Sabbath (ritually and conceptually) by lighting the ceremonial candles and saying a blessing over their challah.

The text is accompanied by abundant photographs and maps that help tell the stories and elucidate the general pattern that Schloff is interpreting. This book is a worthwhile source for those interested in

women's studies, Jewish studies, and ethnic studies in general—because the issues dealt with here apply to other ethnic groups as well. My recommendation is to use this book in conjunction with other sources (also quoted by Schloff) that deal more in depth with the experiences of individual rural Jewish families: for example, *Dakota Diaspora: Memoirs of a Jewish Homesteader* by Sophie Turnoy Trupin (University of Nebraska Press, 1988) and *Rachel Calof's Story: Jewish Homesteader on the Northern Plains* edited by Sanford Rikoon (Indiana University Press, 1995). Although prairie dogs are, indeed, **not** kosher, Schloff's book offers much food for thought and provides some excellent examples that can be plugged into a number of theoretical frameworks dealing with ethnic identities, social adaptations, and cultural continuities.

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Brooks Thomas, ed. *Plessy v. Ferguson: A Brief History with Documents*. (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997). 205 pp, \$19.95 paper.

One hundred years ago the Supreme court of the United States of America ruled in the case of *Plessy vs. Ferguson* that “separate but equal” was the law of the land. The high court finally decided in the 1954 case of *Brown vs. Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas*, that *Plessy* was unconstitutional. In his delivery of the *Brown* decision Mr. Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote: “We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.”

During 1996, NAES CU-Boulder's Ethnic Studies Department, Howard University, and other organizations and institutions used this centennial anniversary to revisit that infamous case and examine its lasting legacy. Brook Thomas' book is a welcome addition to works analyzing the Court's reasoning.

Thomas presents the case of Homer Plessy, a man defined by blood quantum as “seven-eighths white,” but according to the laws of Louisiana at that time was “colored.” After being arrested after refusing to remove himself from an intrastate Jim Crow railroad car, Plessy pleaded his case before Judge John Howard Ferguson, a carpetbagger from Massachusetts. After losing the case before Ferguson, Plessy took it before the Supreme Court. The Court's decision purposely placed African Americans in a permanent second-class status reminiscent of the 1857 *Dred Scott vs. Sandford* case. In the latter, Chief Justice Roger Taney's opinion declared the following about Black people: