

BOOK REVIEWS

LEONARD DINNERSTEIN, ROGER L. NICHOLS, AND DAVID M. REIMERS. *NATIVES AND STRANGERS: ETHNIC GROUPS AND THE BUILDING OF AMERICA*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979. 333 pp. \$13.95 cloth, \$4.00 paper.

Although the past decade has witnessed a surge in the number of publications focusing on ethnic groups and ethnic issues, the genre of study which may be called "*ethnic history of America*" is still weakly represented. As a relatively pioneering effort, the Dinnerstein, Nichols and Reimers book makes a valuable contribution, and it could be justifiably recommended for American history courses, American Society courses, and courses on ethnicity. The general periodization of history is good, and the important ethnic developments within each period are related effectively to the emergence and growth of the United States politically and economically as well as ideologically.

Also laudatory, is the authors' broad definition of *ethnicity*. Rather than conforming to recent trends in both scholarship and public policy, which have come to equate ethnicity with minority status based on race, the authors continue in the tradition of Warner and Srole, Gordon, and Moynihan and Glazer. That is to say, the book deals both with the "minority ethnics" and the "white ethnics." We are told, albeit briefly, about all major ethnic groups in American history, their unique social characteristics, and the terms of their contact with the host society. The main intellectual themes of the book appear to be that ethnic groups were important in the building of the country, and that interethnic processes are best understood in the dichotomized form of "natives vs strangers."

Yet several shortcomings merit mention as well. First, while the authors cover the discriminatory consequences of such ideological frameworks as racism, anti-Catholicism and anti-Semitism, assimilationism is not featured. Yet perhaps nothing has been so universally consequential for ethnicity in this country's brief history as the English settlers' conclusion that the United States was *their* country, and that everyone else had to renounce their own heritage. Indeed, public pressures - both institutionally and policy-wise - to this end were pronounced until very recently. Which is to say, that this reviewer strongly disagrees with the book's interpretation which implies that the non-English people were all just dying to forget their own heritage and to assimilate. Rather, the goal-ideal was imposed, more often than not, coercively by an English-dominated core or host society.

Second, in the past decade there have been profound shifts in both ideology and public policy, respectively, toward multiculturalism and the prohibition of discriminatory practices. The authors' attention is focused on the struggle against discrimination at the expense of the change in ideology. This is not to say that the coverage of the fight for social and economic justice should be lessened in such a book, but that the more or less exclusive focus on it has blinded the authors to the other important societal change which occurred simultaneously, namely the legitimization of multi-culturalism, or, in other words, the displacement of the formerly reigning ideology of assimilationism. Importantly, both changes were forced by the ethnics themselves.

This leads me on the last two points. The authors' statement on page 308 that "*the renewed assertion of ethnic pride and identity is, no doubt, the last gasp of a dying swan,*" appears as a gross overstatement and manifests a seeming assimilationist bias. The choice, in regard to ethnicity, is not limited to ghetto culture on the one hand and anglicized Americanism on the other. One may not only compartmentalize identities, but the ethnic identity may be as modernized - as contemporary - as the core American one, whatever that is. In any case, I know of no empirical evidence which would attest that there has been a profound assimilation of any major ethnic group. Perhaps the confusion ensues, as usual, from the general tendency to confuse assimilation as a social process and as an ideology, and the failure to distinguish analytically between individual and group-level components of ethnic identity. Lots of *individuals* may indeed be "assimilating" (although we cannot seem to pinpoint what these people then have become), but *groups* themselves have persisted.

Lastly, the portrayal of the "white ethnics" in the last chapter, in reactive terms, is unfortunate. The East and South European communities played a significant role in the ideological shift which has occurred; and furthermore, empirical studies show the "white ethnic" in general to have, in the last several decades, a fairly liberal voting record in electing public officials, more so than native white Protestants. That is to say, these groups have often made possible the election of the liberals who were instrumental in responding to minority demands to end discriminatory practices. My own conversations with white ethnic community leaders and the reading of their press would indicate that the *reaction* is not to Black gains, but to the intellectuals', the liberals', and, in general, the new public policies' insistence that the former are all simply *whites*. And indeed, this particular interpretative problem exists throughout the book. When the writers talk about European immigrants, they point out the frequent prejudices and discrimination which the earlier English-Americans displayed. But when the discussion switches to minorities, the authors shift quickly to a basically racial conceptualization. For example, where exactly is the evidence that the Irish oppose Chicano goals and gains, or that the Polish oppose those of Blacks?

These, of course, are problems which permeate the whole field of ethnic study. Yet, if a second edition should be prepared, it would be hoped that the authors attempt to untangle such issues. It would make for a much better book. But even now, this is one of the best ethnic histories of the United States.

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A CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY OF MINORITY ELDERS IN SAN DIEGO: *THE ELDER PHILIPINO* by Roberta Peterson, 46 pp.; *THE ELDER BLACK* by E. Percil Stanford, 63 pp.; *THE ELDER SAMOAN* by Wesley H. Ishikawa, 44 pp.; *THE ELDER JAPANESE* by Karen C. Ishizuka, 61 pp.; *THE ELDER GUAMANIAN* by Wesley H. Ishikawa, 39 pp.; *THE ELDER LATINO* by Ramon Valle & Lydia Mendoza, 103 pp.; *THE ELDER CHINESE* by Eva Cheng, 46 pp. San Diego: The Campanile Press, 1978.

These are seven monographs published by the Center on Aging at San Diego University (The Campanile Press, 1978). Each monograph is the result of a team of researchers investigating an ethnic group. These cross-cultural studies of minority elders in San Diego investigate samples of Blacks, Chinese, Japanese, Latinos, Philipinos, Samoans, and Guamanians aged 50 and over.

With a common methodology, the researchers objectives are:

- To explore and describe the characteristic lifestyles and primary interactional networks of ethnic minority older people.
- To identify perceptions and attitudes of ethnic minority elders toward formal programmatic assistance and analyze the relationship between the characteristic lifestyles and the use and perception of formal assistance.
- To design and test a methodology adopted for appropriateness and effectiveness in obtaining information about ethnic populations, specifically the elders of these populations. (Valle and Mendoza, *LATINO*, p. 1)

The researchers blend traditional methods with modifications--Platica methodology--that are designed to purposively elicit and describe the ethnic populations being investigated. As part of their purposive design, each team of researchers tailored "*The research instruments and contact patterns specifically to the linguistic and situational differentials to be encountered within each ethnic cohort*" (op. cit., p.4). Interviewers were of the same ethnicity as their interviewees. Formal and informal community networks were utilized to gain interviewees; contacts were made through acquaintance networks, social and religious organizations, and other cultural brokers. Interviewer approaches can