

The foreword by Professor Martin E. Marty, the concluding essay on sources, footnotes, and an index add to the virtues of this study.

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PAUL WROBEL. *OUR WAY: FAMILY, PARISH AND NEIGHBORHOOD IN A POLISH-AMERICAN COMMUNITY*. Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979. 207 pp. \$12.95.

Paul Wrobel's study of a Polish-American community provides valuable insight into one of America's largest white ethnic groups. Recent studies of Polish-Americans, such as Neil Sandberg's *Ethnic Identity and Assimilation: the Polish American Community in Los Angeles* (New York: Praeger, 1974), have been few and often lacking in insight, even if providing some information. Wrobel provides a window for outsiders to look at St. Thaddeus parish on the north-east side of Detroit, a neighborhood reflecting "the cultural attitudes and values of its residents, especially their need for order and cleanliness." (p. 46.) He takes care to emphasize that his study is only a start, describing and analyzing one particular community to provide the basis for future comparisons. Wrobel, a third generation Polish-American, with the assistance of his wife Kathleen, used participant-observer techniques for the study during the three years they and their children lived and worked in the neighborhood. This was supplemented with semi-formal interviews, census materials, parish records and city directories to gain an overview of the area.

He studied a Catholic parish because, for urban working-class Polish-Americans, life is focused on family, parish and neighborhood, with the parish and neighborhood viewed by residents as forming a unit. Since a proper Catholic education is considered essential for their children, the parish school provides the key to a viable community, stemming the flow of people to the suburbs and attracting new residents.

In his discussion of St. Thaddeus' people, Wrobel makes an important point regarding assimilation of white ethnic groups. He notes that the focus of most studies of groups, such as Polish-Americans, have looked at them in terms of the remnants of their European culture and how much of this has been abandoned in favor of American cultural traits. Instead Wrobel emphasizes that white ethnic groups need to be studied in their own right, so he looks at Polish-American culture as distinct with its own norms, life-style, value system, attitudes and behavior. Further, the Polish-American culture is not dying out but is being transmitted through

socialization to new generations. One example he gives would be the playing of polkas at dances. True the polka came from Europe but as he notes,

...the folklore that surrounds the polka in this country, ...the cultural significance of lyrics, the radio stations which feature this music, and even the intense competition among groups, is something very Polish-American. (p. 119)

In describing Polish-American culture, Paul Wrobel attempts to deal with some of the stereotypes of Polish-Americans. He shows that the husband/wife relationship is not the domineering male and submissive female relationship often depicted. Instead, the marital roles show a flexible division of labor. Part of the misconception comes from outside observers who are unfamiliar with Polish-American culture; and, as Wrobel cautions, part comes from the assertions of Polish-Americans themselves. For like the Italian-American woman, the Polish-American woman is reluctant to discuss her actual power in the family. It is enough to use the power without a public announcement of it which could lead to conflict in the home.

The harm which stereotypes can cause is also examined, for the men of the parish were well aware of the larger society's negative views of blue-collar Polish-American men. They had internalized some of these views which led to a low self esteem. Interestingly, it was this point which was seized by the media, placing Wrobel in a precarious position with the larger Polish-American community. His epilogue deals with his difficulties and should serve as an eye opener for social scientists who hope to publicize scholarly studies.

One criticism of Wrobel's work is of his discussion of W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki's massive study, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (New York: Dover Publications, 1958). Wrobel sees the work as "misleading and not representative" (p. 21) based on a lack of interest in Polish-Americans as a group worth studying in their own right and on preconceived notions which saw the group in a negative light. This is an overly simplified view of Thomas and Znaniecki's work which, in seeking to find negative aspects, succeeds. One of the reasons for which Thomas chose to study this group was to dispute simplistic views which saw the Polish immigrants as inferior because of their heredity, as examined in *The Discovery of Society*, by Randall Collins and Michael Makowsky (New York: Random House, 1978). Instead, he looked at the group in terms of people undergoing the pressures of social change and this, not an inferior nature, led to high rates of social disorganization. He mastered the Polish language, established a network of contacts within the Polish-American community and made frequent trips to Poland, where he met Znaniecki, to add to his understanding of their culture.

Thomas and Znaniecki saw disorganization among Polish-Americans and, as Wrobel suggests, possibly overemphasized it. However, they also saw that the Polish language press and Polish Catholic parishes, instead of retarding assimilation as some nativists claimed, integrated the Polish-American community and prevented further disorganization. That Wrobel quotes Thomas and Znaniecki's observations on the importance of the Polish-American parish (p. 34) indicates that, despite his criticism, he found material of value in their work.

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LOUIS CHU. *EAT A BOWL OF TEA*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979. 250 pp. \$6.95 paper.

Louis Chu's *Eat a Bowl of Tea* is the most recent addition (and a most welcome one) to the series of Asian-American classics that the University of Washington Press is reprinting in paperback format. Other titles in this series that come to mind are the uncompromisingly naturalistic memoirs of the Filipino-American Carlos Bulosan, *America is in the Heart*, and the gripping novel about a Japanese-American who resists the World War II draft, John Okada's *No-No Boy*. Louis Chu's novel, which had first appeared in 1961 to unappreciative and uncomprehending notices, is every bit as essential to the canon of Asian America as the works of Okada or Bulosan.

Like Bulosan and Okada, Chu portrays an Asian America that is not merely a dainty morsel in America's white dominated melting pot; rather, it is a hard communal tile of distinctive character and color within the total mosaic of American society. There is no attempt at facile assimilation here, no effort to fudge away ethnic distinctions and idiosyncracies.

Perhaps this ethnic identity emerges most startlingly in the very medium of the novel, its language. Its dialogue, for instance, is a realistic and aggressive Chinese which has been rendered with skill and originality into a stylized kind of English. There is no bleaching away of Chinese linguistic patterns, and through Chu's dialogue we know that the characters are speaking, cheating, and hating in Chinese. The authenticity of voice and inflection here is worlds away from the coy exoticism of Earl Biggers' Charlie Chan. For the initiated reader, the pleasure and shock of recognition in Chu's dialogue are similar to the effects wrought by Hemingway's rendered Spanish. Here, for example, is an exchange between the male gossip mongers of the Wah Que Barber Shop who act as a comic chorus for the book: