

challenge to researchers. That Savells and Foster accepted a challenge is commendable and most encouraging. These efforts can be useful as a component in the growing number of ethnographic research studies. As Savells, Foster, and others continue ethnographic research, they are encouraged to demand rigorous methodology and develop theoretical creativity.

—Margaret Laughlin

Critique

This article, by Jerry Savells and Thomas Foster may well be useful for researchers attempting studies of groups living voluntarily outside of the “mainstream” of American society. To a non-specialist like this historian, however, the article is ultimately frustrating.

A more thorough historical and demographic background would have been helpful. Over the years, have the Old Order Amish grown, lost members or remained stable? Given their relatively small numbers (95,000), despite characteristically large families, is it possible that more have been lost to the dreaded “creeping urbanization and the pressures of . . . industrial society” than the authors and the Amish are willing to concede? The fear of outsiders may well be related to worries about the attractions of that outside world. At any rate, without supporting data, it is difficult to evaluate the assertion that “the Amish have been largely successful in practicing voluntary separatism.”

From a methodological point of view, it is not at all clear whether the group which was willing to cooperate was typical of the Old Order Amish. As co-author Savells correctly points out, the small numbers (106 families) participating in the study make it “illogical and unwise” to offer an assessment of the Amish condition in America based upon its findings.

Savells does suggest a qualified “yes” to the issue of whether the Amish have shown “an increasing vulnerability to the forces of social change.” However, he drops this provocative question with a weak “but it is not simple or easy to explain.” An attempt, at least, to do so would have been worthwhile.

This reviewer realizes that it is unfair to suggest to authors that they should alter the scope, purpose, or focus of their paper. Nevertheless, some anecdotal material would have added a great deal. Did the authors win any real friendship from any of their subjects? If so, how was this accomplished? One longs for some stories or comments from those kind, earthy, and jovial aged Amish. The authors are obviously saving all this “juicy” material for another paper, but the reader is certainly entitled to hope. As an historian, this reader longed for the kind of concrete material

that might have led to some tentative conclusions about the Amish experience.

The caveat that researchers must avoid ethnocentrism and not conclude that modern ways are best certainly should not be necessary for anthropologists and sociologists in 1987. Sadly, however, there must still be some who have not yet learned this lesson. On the other hand, the authors seem to fall prey to the opposite "noble savage" syndrome which accepts the superiority of a more "primitive" life style which is credited with having "successfully avoided most of the negative effects of technological and social change . . ." The authors fail to note that the concomitant consequence is an avoidance of the positive effects of change such as greater tolerance of human differences, at least on the intellectual, if not the emotional, level. Perhaps they believe that there are no positives to the Post-Industrial Society. This uncritical assumption of the superiority of the simpler life also leads to an uncritical acceptance of the obvious sexism inherent in the Amish world.

Despite all of these reservations by one churlish historian, one can readily concede that this paper might be very helpful to anyone planning to do research among separatist groups that are cut off from, and suspicious of, the outside world. Such a researcher might well find the experience of Savells and Foster to be a useful model. Certainly their stamina and persistence are grounds for admiration and envy. This reviewer can hardly wait for another paper which might present some further conclusions about the Amish experience in a changing American society.

—Louise Mayo