

John Bodnar. *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) 294 pp., \$27.50; \$8.95 paper.

The Transplanted is represented as a synthesis of the immigrant experience in urban America. Bodnar posits the confrontation with capitalism as sole explanation for migration, emigration and immigrant behavior in the new country. His stated intent is to "rescue" immigration history from older views of immigrants as hapless victims of circumstance.

An overview of world-wide immigration patterns is promised by the author. The text however, is limited to discussion of western Europe and the Balkan States. There are fleeting immigration statistics for Russia, Asia, and Mexico but no mention of Central and South America or Africa. Bodnar analyzes patterns of emigration in various countries from 1930 to 1940. His examination proceeds region by region, district by district, in minute detail. Endless statistics are cited to support his contention that increasing industrialization and its consequent economic hardships were solely responsible both for demographic flux (migration) within Europe and for emigration (to America) in search of more favorable economic conditions. The majority of emigrants, up to 1910, he asserts, were skilled and semi-skilled middle-middle and lower-middle class artisans, tradespeople and children of farmers unable to buy land. The lower classes were not represented in this group because they were too poor to emigrate.

Unfortunately, Bodnar's statistics are presented in percentages without reference to the actual numbers or to the population as a whole. The single comparative table of immigration statistics provided is incomplete, omitting several of the countries discussed in the text.

Bodnar's theory excludes all factors other than economic as motivators of emigration. Other mitigating forces such as political and religious persecution or economic discrimination, evidently, are not considered important enough to mention. His efforts to force all phenomena of the immigrant experience into a single, monolithic theory produce grossly oversimplified assertions. Premises and conclusions valid for *specific* groups are extended to all without justification. Bodnar treats the immigrants' confrontation with a highly industrialized society as an isolated phenomena. The dynamic of the immigrant experience, according to Bodnar, resulted from deliberate choices made to obtain the rewards offered by capitalism.

While this approach has validity, Bodnar's perspective is distorted, and his analyses develop strange inconsistencies. He acknowledges the significance of the nuclear family unit, and its importance in the overall social structure, but focusses *only* on economic motives for the family/society dynamic, excluding cultural and psychological factors.

He discusses the many Mutual Aid Societies established by im-

migrants and provides a careful analysis of kinship and extended family structures on the job and in trade unions. Only self-interest and personal gain are advanced as motivation for these structures, however, and Bodnar does not acknowledge (or recognize?) that “family” work-places, union locals, Mutual Aid Societies, and the immigrants’ (relatively) homogeneous communities *all* served as extended families for the immigrants, providing much-needed economic and psychological support, security and reassurance. Bodnar fails to acknowledge also that strong family orientation and extended kinship structures were extensions of similar orientation and structures in the mother countries. Bodnar laments the sacrifice of careers, goals, independence for the sake of the family as a whole, and seems not to understand why anyone would be willing to consider the welfare of the family more important than personal ambition and gain.

The inconsistencies in Bodnar’s text are due, in part, to his inability to effectively discuss the qualitative aspects of immigrant history. He founders badly in attempting to describe the roles of culture and tradition in the immigrants’ response to America’s industrialized society.

Bodnar is obsessed with dissension and schism among ethnic groups. Regional disputes among Slovaks, in particular, are discussed at great length, but there is little mention of harmony, cooperation, and mutual consideration among immigrants. Not mentioned either are social and political conditions in the U.S. during this period, 1860-1940, not one of the most tranquil ones in U.S. history. Among other problems, racism, sexual and economic discrimination were rampant. Internal strife and dissension in “peaceful” small towns have been well-documented. Why then, should Bodnar expect immigrant communities to behave any differently than other communities in the U.S.? In the urban centers under examination, immigrants from many different provinces and countries were thrust into crowded neighborhoods and work places. Differences in opinions, attitudes, traditions and behavior, which would have created contention even in the “mother country,” were thrown into sharp relief by obligatory cohabitation in crowded neighborhoods. “Transplanted” from their more homogeneous “mother” societies, living and working in uncomfortable and stressful conditions, how could immigrants have failed to clash with each other? Was their strife and dissension different or more acrimonious than that of rival political and regional groups in the U.S.? Were immigrant conflicts more vicious or damaging than black-white/North-South conflicts after the Civil War? Was immigrant strife anything more than a microcosmic reflection of the social and economic upheavals during the WWI and Depression eras? Bodnar does not tell us and makes no mention of the world that existed outside the immigrants’ social halls and churches.

The most disturbing of Bodnar’s fixations on schism and dissension however, are his implied ethnic slurs. They arise, in part, from the basic premises of his monolithic theory and from his simplistic value system

which reduces to the following equations:

New = Better than Old

Modern = Capitalism = Good/Desirable Socio-Economic Structure

Socialism/Communism/Unionism = Bad/Undesirable

Socio-Economic Structure

Bodnar returns repeatedly to discussions of drunkenness among the Irish, to pejorative remarks on the drinking habits of Italians and of Catholics in general. He offers lurid reports of violence on immigrant picket lines, includes irrelevant citations of crime among Jews and Italians and a generally denigrating discussion of *unskilled* workers. In contrast, German Protestant immigrants are cited repeatedly as sterling examples of decorum, sobriety, industry, thrift—and material success.

Possibly, Bodnar's intention, in providing copious pejorative commentary, was merely to report remarks of journalists and other commentators. If so, he should have clarified his "objective" role. As he has chosen to present his remarks, it is difficult not to infer a negative, prejudiced attitude towards the immigrants that form the subject of his book.

As arriving immigrants discovered sadly, the "America, the promised land" was not the America they encountered. So it is with Bodnar's book. The new, insightful history of immigration promised us is not the text we encounter.

—Gloria Eive
El Cerrito, CA

Silvester Brito. *Red Cedar Warrior*. (Markleeville, CA: Jelm Mountain Press, 1987) 75 pp., \$9.95 paper.

It easily took me
four fierce years of
watching and hunting
in cold mountain wind
before I heard
your soft voice
whisper to my DNA
that you are
my massacre blood sister.
"Blood Relations"

It is easy for us to hear only the loud noises, the loud voices, the hollers, raucous cries. It is easy for us to pay attention only to the most bright and vivid images. It is easy to move fiercely, angrily, boisterously in response to acts upon us. It is easy enough to be dramatic in our sorrow, our pain, sadness. We easily do not hear the soft voices whispering. Yet, it is the