

**Dorothy Burton Skardal and Ingeborg R. Kongslien, eds. *Essays on Norwegian-American Literature and History*. (Oslo: NAHA-Norway, 1986) 375 pp., \$12.00 paper.**

Why should readers and students of ethnic studies be interested in essays on a group who are no longer a viable ethnic minority and who wrote primarily in a language few Americans read? The answer is that their literature and history are a part of American culture; it also is to be found in the similarities between the problems and attitudes of the Norwegian immigrants a century ago and the situations of contemporary ethnic groups. A perusal of this volume can contribute insights into the American ethnic experience.

These essays were among the papers delivered at the first seminar in Norway devoted exclusively to the Norwegian immigrant. Sixteen of the twenty-six essays are on immigrant authors; the others treat various historical topics and individual immigrants. Eighteen of the writers are *candidatus philologiae* graduates of the University of Oslo. Seven are Americans.

Like most collections, this one is uneven in the quality and significance of the individual essays. Articles are extremely varied in style, focus, and the impressions they leave of authors or specific works. A few very minor writers are given more importance than they deserve. Some papers are chiefly biographical; others give sketchy surveys of an author's entire output. Perhaps the best of the literary essays is Arne Sunde's on Jon Norstog. He succeeds in presenting Norstog's views and accomplishments by limiting his analysis to three works (Norstog published 22); he also places Norstog's work in the larger literary scene.

There is good variety in the topics of the historical essays—from discussions of Norwegians in Missouri and Norwegian-American artists, to evaluations of the careers of such Norwegian immigrants as the labor leader, Andrew Furuseth; the socialist editor and author, Emil Mengshoel; and the United States senator, Knute Nelson. Those interested in immigrant history will find the essays by Odd Lovoll and Old Moen to be especially helpful. Lovoll looks at the development of Norwegian-American historical scholarship, and Moen examines the work of two well-known immigrant historians, Theodore C. Blegen and Marcus Lee Hanson.

*Essays* is a book worth reading. It provides information on a specific immigrant group; it also asks one to consider different aspects of the American immigrant experience. Questions raised by Norwegian immigrants several years ago are still valid in the United States today.

The book is available in this country through the Norwegian-American Historical Association.

—Gerald Thorson  
St. Olaf College