
Sebastian Braun

Iowa State University, sfbraun@iastate.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/language_pubs

Part of the American Studies Commons, Cultural History Commons, European Languages and Societies Commons, Indigenous Studies Commons, and the Women's Studies Commons

The complete bibliographic information for this item can be found at https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/language_pubs/213. For information on how to cite this item, please visit http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/howtocite.html.

Abstract
In Encounter on the Great Plains, Karen Hansen investigates Scandinavian immigrants and settlers who came to live on the post-allotment Spirit Lake Reservation in North Dakota. She does so through examining stories by Scandinavian as well as Dakota residents. As the subtitle indicates, Hansen is interested in the question of dispossession: Did the Scandinavians, among whom were her ancestors, contribute to the dispossession of the Dakotas? As she writes, “[w]hat does it mean when one group’s acquisition of land is predicated on the dispossession of the other?” (3). Her answer is multifaceted and reveals the complexities of lives and narratives in a situation of rapid social, economic, and political change.

Disciplines
American Studies | Cultural History | European Languages and Societies | Indigenous Studies | Women's Studies

Comments
affected by the North American Great Plains environment. In the thirteen or more thousand years the erect walking mammal has occupied the Great Plains, almost every other “big” mammal, whether extinct or extirpated, has disappeared entirely from the Great Plains—or at the very least has been reduced in number to a tiny fraction of its original population.

American Serengeti reads like a well-written novel. But don’t be fooled by its easy reading; the pages are full of natural and human history information. Flores covers numerous large mammals to some extent and discusses a half dozen in depth: pronghorns, coyotes, horses, grizzly bears, bison, and wolves. With great passion and detail, the author dedicates a chapter to each, describing its peak existence and subsequent decline (or outright removal) from the Great Plains. The coyote, or “prairie wolf” as William Clark called it in 1804, stands alone as the one prairie mammal discussed by Flores that has adapted to human civilization and even thrived.

Intertwined with the natural history of the Great Plains is, of course, human history. This is not lost on Flores, and his writing addresses both as inseparable. Other than the very first peoples to live on the continent (Clovis peoples or possibly earlier cultures), all human populations in “Big History” have had to adapt to changes in the environment caused, at least in part, by previous populations. Many species of large mammals such as giant sloths, mammoths, mastodons, and giant bison provided food for people of one time period, but then disappeared, resulting in cultural changes for another period. Horses disappeared and then were reintroduced by Spanish conquistadors. The conquest of the plains by Euro-American farming technology brought new methods of food production at the cost of the natural habitat—a habitat necessary to sustain most of the native large mammals existing up to the early nineteenth century.

Flores ends on a more hopeful note that at least parts of the “American Serengeti” will return in the form of repopulated grasslands, whether government-regulated public lands or land privately owned for profit. The author suggests even the often despised 1980s buffalo commons theory put forward by Frank and Deborah Popper has gained some popularity, albeit with probable less government involvement. Whether the Great Plains returns to some form of its “American Serengeti” manifestation only the future knows. But there is no doubt it will be different and changed as it enters another period in “Big History.”

Len Thorson is the museum registrar at the State Historical Society of North Dakota. He is a proponent of an integrated approach to natural history and human history interpretation.

In Encounter on the Great Plains, Karen Hansen investigates Scandinavian immigrants and settlers who came to live on the post-allotment Spirit Lake Reservation in North Dakota. She does so through examining stories by Scandinavian as well as Dakota residents. As the subtitle indicates, Hansen is interested in the question of dispossession: Did the Scandinavians, among whom were her ancestors, contribute to the dispossession of the Dakotas? As she writes, “[w]hat does it mean when one group’s acquisition of land is predicated on the dispossession of the other?” (3). Her answer is multifaceted and reveals the complexities of lives and narratives in a situation of rapid social, economic, and political change.

Hansen begins the book with the Minnesota War of 1862, thus from a perspective of conflict between the Dakota and non-Dakota—a conflict narrative in which she includes the Scandinavians. These, she writes, “lived close to the indigenous people they had just disposessed” (3), drawing a direct relationship between Scandinavian settlement and Dakota dispossession. This fits in with US history as Hansen describes it: she argues that “Indians had intentionally been excluded from the Constitution” (12) and that the Homestead Act is “the perfect example of how outrageously the United States could undermine treaties it had signed just over a decade before” (14), leading up to the Dawes Act, which opened the “surplus land” of the reservation for settlement.

As Hansen points out, however, Dakotas did not lose their capacity to act. They “boldly embraced the entitlements of citizenship, exercising the franchise and protesting when county officials denied them their political rights” (17). And they shared with the Scandinavians “an outsider status” (9), as neither group fully fit in with “American” values and culture. The history Hansen investigates in her book is complicated, full of personal entanglements that contradict public perspectives, and much of it takes place outside of public notice. It is this history that comes to life in the narratives that make up much of Encounter on the Great Plains. Here the reader sees the human sides of history, unfolding between people who had to get along somehow—not all the time, and not everybody, but most people at most times. “Neither group,” Hansen concludes, “followed the road to assimilation planned by government officials and reformers”
Both made “radical claims against the government and economic system.” Thus, it is the personal stories that transform the grand narrative of one group dispossessing the other into a complex and interesting story of two cultures trying to get along and preserve their unique values.

One lesson that might be of importance to North Dakota comes out of Hansen’s surprise that today, the community parade in nearby Warwick sports a “visible absence of Dakotas” (32)—while in the past, Indians participated in parades and non-Indians attended powwows. Perhaps the necessities for being neighborly have become weaker, at least for Scandinavians who have joined mainstream society; perhaps the willingness and ability to overlook some disagreements for the benefits of living together have followed.

**Bookmarks**

*Vanished in Hiawatha: The Story of the Canton Asylum for Insane Indians.* Carla Joinson. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016. 399 pp. $29.95 (hardcover). Illustrations, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. *Vanished in Hiawatha* documents the mistreatment of Native American patients at the Canton Asylum for Insane Indians, a federal institution in Canton, South Dakota. Founded in the early 1900s, the asylum operated for more than three decades. Joinson examines individual cases as well as mismanagement in the context of broader mistreatment of Native peoples through forced federal assimilation in the early twentieth century.

*Sunflowers and Thistles: Bessarabian Germans Speak Out.* Elvire Bisle-Fandrich; trans. James T. Gessele. Fargo: Germans from Russia Heritage Collection, 2016. xiv+ 310 pp. $35.00 (hardcover). Maps, illustrations, table, appendix. Published in English for the first time by the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection at North Dakota State University Library, *Sunflowers and Thistles* is a collection of oral histories and photos from Bessarabian Germans gathered by Elvire Bisle-Fandrich, an educator born in Bessarabia (a region of modern-day Moldova and Ukraine) who resettled with her community in Germany. James T. Gessele, a native of Mercer, North Dakota, translated the text from German to English.

*The Bakken Goes Boom: Oil and the Changing Geographies of Western North Dakota.* William Caraher and Kyle Conway, eds. Grand Forks: The Digital Press at the University of North Dakota, 2016. vii + 382 pp. $15.00 (paperback) or free digital download. Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography. Published by the Digital Press at the University of North Dakota, *The Bakken Goes Boom* is a collection of essays by scholars, journalists, and artists documenting the recent transformation of the Bakken Formation region. The volume also examines the historical impact of oil booms and population flux in North Dakota.

*The National Historic Preservation Act: Past, Present, and Future.* Kimball M. Banks and Ann M. Scott, eds. New York: Routledge, 2016. 306 pp. $150.00 (hardcover). Maps, illustrations, charts, tables, notes, bibliography, index. Released on the fiftieth anniversary of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), this volume examines the impact of this key piece of legislation on heritage practices in the United States. The editors and contributing authors, including staff from the North Dakota State Historic Preservation Office, summarize how we approached compliance in the past, how we approach it now, and how we may approach it in the future.