
THE EDITOR'S PAGE

DURING THE academic year, 1971-72, I gave graduate instruction in ethnic studies in a university located in one of the most ethnically self-conscious cities in the United States. I became acutely aware of the importance, and even the compelling necessity, of studies leading to a better understanding of the diverse elements of the population of the United States. Upon returning to Minnesota I found the atmosphere far less charged with warring emotions, but I also found increasing awareness of ethnic origins. It therefore seems timely and useful to launch a major study of the composition of Minnesota's population as it grew from territorial days to the present.

Traditionally, ethnic or nationality group studies go back to the era of the restrictionist controversy, capped by the ending of unrestricted immigration in 1929. A flurry of academic activity in the field developed in the 1920s and 1930s, marked by seminars such as those given by Theodore C. Blegen and George M. Stephenson at the University of Minnesota. Out of these and other seminars came a second generation of scholars, but most of them had to teach other subjects in order to hold academic jobs. When scholars of the older generation died or were retired, the first set of seminars gradually disappeared, and for a time in the late 1950s and early 1960s there was not a single graduate seminar being given in the ethnic or nationality group field in the United States. A few scattered dissertations were produced, but the field had no centers.

Immigration studies have seen a renaissance since the early 1960s because of several factors. These include the maturing of the scholars produced by the earlier seminars, the vigorous promotion by immigrant-American and state historical societies, the impact of the Black power movement, and, most important, the development of refined quantitative research techniques. Exemplifying the latter are Stephan Thernstrom's *Poverty and Progress* (1964) and Merle

Curti's *The Making of an American Community* (1950). Now we are getting scholarly studies from graduate seminars in several universities — among them Minnesota's — but the rate of productivity is still relatively slow.

The enormous collections of the Minnesota Historical Society and allied agencies make the society the logical center for study of the composition of the population of Minnesota. This study of Minnesota's ethnic groups as well as of the native-born is being undertaken with expectation of co-operation from all elements of the people from Minnesota, not to speak of the essential financial support of governmental and philanthropic organizations.

Although the Minnesota Historical Society and other libraries have quantities of the needed source materials, there must be hundreds and perhaps thousands of records of individuals and families who came to Minnesota that are hidden away in chests and attics all over the state and wherever Minnesotans have moved. These records would include letters, diaries, autobiographies, reminiscences, tape recordings, pictures, photographs, newspapers, local histories, museum items, records of ethnic organizations, business records, church records, fraternal society materials, records of musical and theatrical enterprises, literary efforts, magazines, pamphlets, and virtually anything that can throw light on the experiences of the people of Minnesota. We hope to hear from anyone who can help.

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At this writing a request is before the Minnesota legislature for funds to match a Bush Foundation grant to the Minnesota Historical Society to support research for and publication of an ethnic group history. — Ed.



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