

## Encounter on the Great Plains: Scandinavian Settlers and the Dispossession of Dakota Indians, 1890–1930

Karen V. Hansen

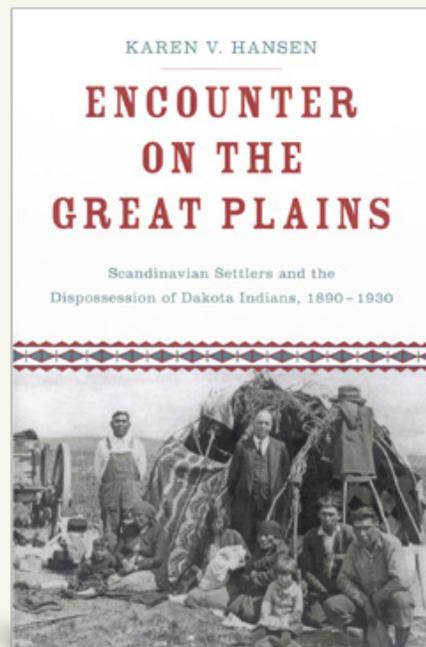
(New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. 332 p. Cloth, \$35.00.)

*Encounter on the Great Plains* began with sociologist Karen V. Hansen's desire to trace the experiences of her great-grandmother, a Norwegian immigrant who homesteaded on the Spirit Lake Dakota Reservation. The resulting monograph explores the intertwined histories of two populations, both removed from ancestors' homelands and facing economic, cultural, and political marginalization, living side by side in north-central North Dakota.

Hansen appropriately begins her historical narrative with the U.S.—Dakota War of 1862, which resulted in Sisseton and Wahpeton Dakotas becoming “settlers in a territory where they had hunted but was not their home.” Soon after the establishment of the reservation, however, allotment and the arrival of land-hungry Scandinavian immigrants resulted in another cycle of Dakota land losses. In one of the most compelling chapters, Hansen walks the reader through the everyday experience of dispossession and cultural colonization. Her thorough mining of federal records allows her to explain not only how policymakers sought to sever the Dakota from their land and their culture but also how the Dakota used federal institutions to resist those policies and maintain some degree of control over their lands.

Similar issues are addressed in the chapter on “Divergent Paths to Racialized Citizenship.” Here too, she discusses both federal policy and Dakota people's determined efforts to contest land loss and work for greater autonomy. Hansen draws parallels between the experiences of Dakotas and Scandinavians who, despite “different legal statuses and contrasting histories, nonetheless had to decide which aspects of American society to accommodate, which to transform, and whether participation in the U.S. polity was worth the price.”

This statement epitomizes her efforts to sort out entwined narratives. While she acknowledges that her grandparents' success came at the expense of the Dakota, her personal investment in the immigrants' story, as well as the analytical frame that she uses for these narratives, ultimately underplays the devastating effect of colonization—including immigration—on indigenous peoples. Hansen consistently uses phrases that suggest a common ground, contradicting the historical record she explores. She writes, for instance, of Dakota and Scandinavians at Spirit Lake as engaged in a “mutual encounter” and later notes that “‘have nots’ were those who lived on the reservation—Dakota and Scandinavian alike,” while Scandinavians viewed their Native neighbors with the same fear and contempt that Yankees viewed Scandinavians.



While Hansen also acknowledges the “social chasm” that separates Natives and Norwegians and the “ethical dilemma” facing her immigrant forebears, her approach to the topic deflects the potential of her efforts to understand in tandem the experiences of immigrants and indigenous peoples. Early on, Hansen tells of a visit to Spirit Lake, when, on the same day, local European Americans were celebrating the centennial of the founding of a town and the Dakota community was holding its annual *wacipi* (powwow). She casually notes that “each group celebrated its continuity at Spirit Lake in its own way.” Had she paused at that point to examine contemporary relationships between the Dakota and their white neighbors, she might have developed a historical analysis that dispensed with notions of mutuality and focused more acutely on the realities of race relations on and around reservations.

—Colette A. Hyman

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