

nizations in black urban enclaves across the area cannot be denied — as Bruce Fehn and Robert Jefferson’s recent article on the Black Panther Party in Des Moines in the Winter 2010 issue of this journal suggests. Furthermore, Joseph V. Hickey’s attempt to understand the creation of rural black communities such as Pap Singleton’s Dunlap Colony in Kansas offers insights into similar migrations that brought African Americans from the South to the coal mines of Muchakinock and Buxton just a few years later.

Unfortunately, none of the essays considers black history on the Great Plains before the Civil War. More important, few of the pieces carefully consider the experiences of black women. Finally, the lack of maps, graphs, or illustrations is frustrating. For instance, photographs of the art produced by Aaron Douglas would greatly enrich Audrey Thompson’s essay on that leading visual artist of the Harlem Renaissance. Despite these flaws, this collection belongs on the shelf of every reader with an interest in African American history or the history of the Great Plains and Midwest.

ACT: The First Fifty Years, 1959–2009. Iowa City: ACT, Inc., 2009. ix, 161 pp. Illustrations, appendix, notes.

Reviewer John Rury is professor of education and (by courtesy) history at the University of Kansas. His research and writing have focused on issues in higher and secondary education.

This book is a “house history” of one of the nation’s premier educational testing and assessment organizations, and displays many of the virtues of such exercises along with a few of the pitfalls. Although written in an authoritative voice and with command of relevant documentary evidence, no author is named. Instead, the book appears to represent an official, institutionally sanctioned account of ACT’s first half-century, documenting its many successes and the various challenges it faced. Composed in the style of a research monograph, complete with footnotes, it strikes a scholarly pose in a glossy, coffee-table format. The resulting narrative is rather dense at times, filled with details about programs and initiatives over the years, but it does provide an informative look inside this widely known Iowa institution.

There can be little doubt that ACT is important to the American educational system, and it has extended its reputation and influence dramatically across five decades. Started by University of Iowa psychometrician E. F. Lindquist in 1959, it expanded upon a tradition of examining the state’s high school students in various subjects. Feeling constrained in one state, Lindquist and his various collaborators built

a regional network of institutions willing to use tests developed by his fledgling organization, the American College Testing Program. Focusing on the Midwest at first, this new enterprise — known widely by its acronym — received critical assistance from Chicago-based Science Research Associates, along with a cadre of state coordinators to develop contacts with institutions and school systems.

The timing was impeccable. With skyrocketing college enrollments in the wake of “baby boom” cohorts of youth and rising secondary graduation rates, demand for testing grew quickly. As colleges struggled with a mounting flood of applications, the services provided by ACT proved increasingly indispensable, and the organization began to expand dramatically. In 1968 ACT moved from cramped facilities in downtown Iowa City to a modern new campus on the city’s outskirts. The number of staff members grew correspondingly, eventually bringing hundreds of highly talented people to Iowa City. And new initiatives were launched to help with financial aid applications and college planning. In less than a decade, ACT had become a major presence in the critical process of preparing for college admission. Its growth continued more or less apace in the years to follow.

ACT’s first decade is covered in the book’s opening chapter. Subsequent chapters each deal with a succeeding decade in chronological order. Each is assigned a somewhat distinctive theme, but the basic logic of the book involves describing the initiatives, people, and external events that shaped the organization’s growth over time. While providing tests to help students decide where to apply and colleges decide whom to accept, along with processing financial aid materials, ACT eventually moved into workforce assessment and career planning services as well, along with limited forays into basic and applied educational research. Each step in this process is described in considerable detail, at times testing the patience of even the most forbearing of readers. Chapters feature sections on administrative and organizational developments, recounting the contributions of such key figures as Ralph Tyler, Oluf Davidson, and Richard Ferguson. An assortment of additional organizational developments is described as well, contributing to a mass of information made all the more challenging by the absence of a comprehensive index to the book.

Attention to the internal dynamics of ACT is not balanced by consideration of context and controversy. The authors attempt to keep abreast of major developments in American education and the larger social and political context with relatively brief accounts of such pertinent events as rising high school graduation rates, college enrollment trends, the conservative revolution represented by Ronald Reagan’s

election, “A Nation at Risk,” and the so-called standards movement. But the bulk of the narrative is inward looking. Certain critical themes, such as controversies connected to race, ethnicity, and testing, receive very brief treatment, and significant historical accounts such as Nicholas Lemann’s *The Big Test* are not even mentioned. This detracts from the volume’s value as a balanced contribution to the history of testing and assessment. What it does represent is an informative description of the growth of a highly successful Iowa institution, one that is likely to remain important as long as post-secondary education continues to play a major role in American life.

Women Elders’ Life Stories of the Omaha Tribe, Macy, Nebraska, 2004–2005, by Wynne L. Summers. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009. xxxii, 112 pp. Omaha language pronunciation guide, map, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00 cloth.

Reviewer Patty Loew is associate professor at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. She has collected oral histories of Native American and African American women in Wisconsin during World War II and is the author of *Indian Nations of Wisconsin: Histories of Endurance and Renewal* (2001).

You might call it cultural gravity — that irresistible force that pulls Native people back to their ancestral land. Re-entry brings redemption. Personal renewal promotes community revitalization.

Wynne Summers has written a lovely book, the beauty of which lies in its poetic expression. The book celebrates the lives of three Omaha elders working to protect the community through political leadership and language preservation. Eleanor Baxter was the first woman to lead the Omaha Nation as tribal chair. Alice Saunsoci and Håwate are language teachers who see Omaha culture embedded in the language. All three women were raised on the Omaha reservation, left for a period of years, and then experienced redemptive homecomings. The gravity that pulls these Omaha women back to their homeland connects them to their community and to the land itself. Each learned valuable leadership skills while orbiting the mainstream. Upon their return, their political activism and cultural spirit rarified Macy’s atmosphere.

Only Summers’s conclusion disappoints. The author chose this chapter to introduce a lengthy and misplaced examination of Leslie Silko’s *Garden in the Dunes* and several other literary works, which distracts readers from reflecting on the three compelling life stories she has just shared. Her effort to situate the lives of Baxter, Saunsoci, and Håwate within a wider literary context is thought provoking and