

also remind us, fairs have endured not because of fairgoers' wistfulness for a bygone or even mythic rural past, but because these annual fairs still mark the yearly cycle of planting and harvesting (168). Far from an exercise in nostalgia, agricultural fairs persist and even remain vibrant because, although few Americans today are farmers, agriculture remains an utterly indispensable aspect of our lives. Similarly, despite its folksy title, *Purebred & Homegrown* does not treat fairs as kitschy Americana, but captures their vitality.

Postville, U.S.A.: Surviving Diversity in Small-Town America, by Mark Grey, Michele Devlin, and Aaron Goldsmith. Boston: GemmaMedia, 2009. xxiii, 184 pp. Glossary, bibliography. \$14.95 paper.

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Postville, a quiet town in northeast Iowa, came in for traumatic change after an Orthodox Jewish family moved in to open the nation's largest kosher slaughterhouse in 1987. A diversity explosion followed. The authors of *Postville, U.S.A.* are an anthropologist with experience working in Iowa immigrant communities, a public health specialist, and an Orthodox Jewish rabbi living in Postville. They bring an impressive package of tools and credentials to this narrative of the town and its encounter with diversity.

The book chronicles the rise, fall, and aftermath of the slaughterhouse, which operated with cheap and exploitable labor, including undocumented immigrant workers. In 2008, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials swooped down on the plant, arresting large numbers of immigrant workers and eventually charging plant managers with hundreds of felonies. Many people scattered, and most of the new workers who were recruited stayed only briefly. Then the plant closed and the town further imploded, causing yet more problems.

Postville, U.S.A. could be a chapter in the story of the meatpacking industry in Iowa, a microstudy of Iowa's new immigrant populations, a continuation of Osha Davidson's *Broken Heartland* account of Iowa's rural decline, or a response and epilogue to a 2000 book, *Postville*, by Stephen G. Bloom. Instead, the authors hang the Postville narrative on a critique of the "diversity industry," which purports to counsel individuals, companies, and communities on how to do diversity, but which the authors consider a big ripoff.

The book's failures are too numerous to cover in the allotted space. I bring up but a few of its more critical and egregious shortcomings.

Given the ten years of research and the large number of interviews that went into the book and the facts that one of the authors is an anthropologist and another resides in Postville, there is remarkably sparse information on what was actually happening in Postville. There is no inside look at the people, no story behind the story. The account of the 2001 city council race, in which author Aaron Goldsmith was opposed by a woman named Tracey Schager, is one example of a missed opportunity to tell something about the town and its citizens. We read that one Arlin Schager put up his daughter to run against Goldsmith. Who were Arlin and Tracey Schager? Was she a teacher? A poet? A meatcutter? A generic redneck? What was her role in the narrative? Was there any attempt to interview her? Who were her supporters? What issues were at stake in the election? We do not know. We know only that Goldsmith won the race, which the authors declare "a victory for tolerance, decency, and common sense" (39). Why?

Even more puzzling is the absence of any detail on the production workers at the plant, a significant percentage of the town population. There are laundry lists of their countries of origin, but their faces and personal histories are blanks. If the authors had any contact with these workers, it does not come out in the book.

The screeds on diversity are puzzling and off-center. There is an account of author Grey's presentation on diversity at a meeting with 30 Postville leaders. With experience and knowledge of diversity, he began, in professorial mode, by asking each person to write down their definition of diversity. Everyone failed to do this correctly, most being too cowed to even respond. How, he remonstrated, were they going to achieve something they couldn't even define? They weren't even ready to begin. Awful.

Yet, for the authors, various public diversity professionals are even worse. The diversity business rakes in billions every year training, consulting, and recruiting, but most of what is done is nebulous and ineffective. Even those professionals don't understand the true nature of diversity. The irony is that the *Postville, U.S.A.* authors themselves fail to define what they mean by the term. If diversity means something different than, well, diversity, what is it?

In the chapter before the afterword, lessons from Postville are laid out point by point to instruct others facing similar challenges. The first lesson is that "primary employers and organizations serving newcomers in rural communities must adhere to the highest ethical, legal, and human standards of operation" (142). Yes. In fact, everyone should. But in the world we've got, people fall prey to such timeless sins as

greed, pride, sloth, and mendacity. A moral lecture is not a lesson in history or a guide for moving forward in the real world.

Postville aficionados will want this book in their collections. Students of Iowa history, immigration, rural demography, or meatpacking will find more enlightenment elsewhere.