

they have taken, but practical concerns determined why they became the first presidential electoral contest in the nation. The Iowa political activists who designed the caucus process were left with a basic procedural problem. The caucuses had to be held well before the county, district, and state conventions, which ordinarily took place between March and June. Enough time was needed to complete important clerical duties. The solution was an early caucus held in January or February. Thus was born the Iowa caucuses and all of the unintended consequences of their early venue.

Skipper successfully traces the origins of the caucuses to the demands for reform during the 1960s at both the national level and in Iowa. But he also notes that the original intent evolved into something quite unexpected. An unknown presidential contender, such as Jimmy Carter, can no longer come to Iowa and gain national attention with little or no financial means. The caucuses have become a media event, far more expensive than in the early days, and very often the media interpretation of who won or lost is as important as the actual results. But this evolution explains the continuing importance of the Iowa caucuses; they have become a modern political hybrid composed of one part local politics and the other part national media coverage.

Readers should understand that *The Iowa Caucuses* is not a scholarly work. It is not written for political scientists or political historians, but it does give a readable and up-to-date interpretation of the evolution of the caucuses from local event to national obsession. The book has an index, footnotes, and appendixes of election results and Republican straw polls, which should make it a handy book for teaching about the Iowa caucuses. Generally, it should be read by anyone interested in Iowa history and politics, presidential primary politics, and the role of the national media and the Iowa caucuses as a clearing-house for presidential ambitions.

*Purebred & Homegrown: America's County Fairs*, by Drake Hokanson and Carol Kratz. Terrace Books. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009. xii, 182 pp. Illustrations (mostly color), notes, bibliography, index. \$50.00 cloth, \$29.95 paper.

Reviewer Chris Rasmussen is associate professor of history at Fairleigh Dickinson University. He is the author of " 'Fairs Here Have Become a Sort of Holiday': Agriculture and Amusements at Iowa's County Fairs, 1838-1925" (*Annals of Iowa*, 1999).

Agricultural fairs, as Drake Hokanson and Carol Kratz note in *Purebred & Homegrown*, have played an enormous role in American history,

yet have “escaped the attention of scholars and authors” (7). Hokanson and Kratz’s engaging book helps redress this oversight by explaining county fairs’ importance to rural Americans, especially in the Midwest and New England and on the West Coast. Rather than examine a single fair or region in depth, the authors attended a remarkable number of the 2,200 fairs held annually in the United States in an effort to identify the “universal” elements that compose “the nature of the American county fair” (ix, 10).

Hokanson and Kratz observe that the American county fair has always been a hybrid, part agricultural competitions, part social event. They trace American fairs’ history from their beginnings in New England, where American fairs, distinct from their British forebears, hosted competitions open to all farmers, not only elite livestock breeders. Hokanson and Kratz observe that county fairs invariably include competitions for livestock, crops, and home arts, along with entertainment, such as midway rides and grandstand shows. In the past century, the advent of 4-H programs and a growing emphasis on entertainment have altered both the agricultural and social sides of the fair; yet, as Hokanson and Kratz put it, “the key components of the fair have changed only in degree and not in kind in almost two hundred years,” despite enormous changes in American society over the past two centuries (66).

*Purebred & Homegrown* is extensively illustrated with the authors’ own excellent photographs of contemporary fairs, along with posters, postcards, and other images of past fairs. These images vividly depict fairs’ mixture of homespun competitions, prodigious displays of agricultural abundance, and garish sideshows. Fairs stimulate all of the senses, and the authors also evoke the fairground’s sounds, tastes, and smells. Throughout their history, American fairs have been predicated on the belief that most people learn by looking, and the color photographs in this book transport the reader to the livestock ring and the midway.

Another aspect of the fair is less tangible than a Shropshire judging or a ride on the Tilt-a-Whirl, but more important. According to Hokanson and Kratz, fairs embody “rural ideals,” extolling the wholesomeness of farm life and the values of hard work, self-sufficiency, and frugality (72–73). The authors acknowledge that, to some extent, these values are vestiges of the nineteenth century, when most Americans lived on farms. Formerly an annual respite from the labor and isolation of farm life, fairs now offer an opportunity for the overwhelming majority of Americans, who now live in cities and suburbs, to learn a bit about where their food comes from. But, as Hokanson and Kratz

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.

Reviewer Deborah Fink is an independent scholar in Ames, Iowa. She is the author of *Cutting into the Meatpacking Line: Workers and Change in the Rural Midwest* (1998).

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.