

Encyclopedia of the Great Plains, edited by David J. Wishart. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004. xviii, 920 pp. Illustrations, tables, maps, index. \$75.00 cloth.

Reviewer Amanda Rees is assistant professor of history and geography at Columbus State University, Georgia. She wrote her dissertation on the Great Plains region and its future and edited *The Great Plains Region*, one of eight volumes in the *Greenwood Encyclopedia of American Regional Cultures* (2004).

First imagined in 1989, the *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains* has been 15 years in the making. Inspired by the *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (1989), this extensive tome covers both the American Great Plains and the Canadian Prairie Provinces. Funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Center for Great Plains Studies at the University of Nebraska has created an encyclopedia that articulates the Plains as both a real place and an intellectual concept (xiii). Establishing a region without resorting to rigid boundaries is one of the most challenging and intellectually engaging activities in American regional work, and editor David Wishart seizes this challenge enthusiastically. Drawing on a rich variety of criteria from climate, physical environment, the region's expansive feel, settlement, and the dramatic effects of the railroad, as well as a wide-ranging discussion of the profound influence of American Indians, this book is both extensive and engaging.

The text is organized thematically, including 27 chapters organized by race and ethnicity (such as African, Asian, European, Hispanic, and Native American), physical and cultural space (Architecture, Agriculture, Cities and Towns, Folkways, Physical Environment, and Water), as well as the themes of Education, Film, Gender, Images and Icons, Industry, Law, Literary Traditions, Media, Music, Politics and Government, Protest and Dissent, Religion, Sports and Recreation, Transportation, and War. Cross-references help readers connect to other chapters, and black-and-white images are used liberally.

Each of the 27 chapters begins with a three- to seven-page introductory essay, and each chapter is divided into subthemes. For example, the Folkways chapter includes 44 subthemes ranging from dance, music, songs, grave markers, and cattle guards to plant lore and roadside attractions. The reading certainly challenges the assumption that the Great Plains is dull, flat, and should be driven through or flown over as quickly as possible. For example, Michael Taft of the American Folklife Center reveals the unique Plains tradition of cross-dressing mock weddings, played out to raise money or to celebrate weddings and wedding anniversaries (306).

The encyclopedia offers an excellent discussion of protest and dissent in the Plains, which is fascinating in light of the media's present

focus on Central Plains politics—in particular, Kansas and its conservative educational focus on creationism—complemented by Thomas Frank's critique in *What's The Matter With Kansas* (2004). However, no discussion of creationism appears in either the Religion or Education chapters. Instead, creationism is relegated to a discussion of Plains politician William Jennings Bryan, who defended creationism at the trial of John Scopes in Tennessee in the early twentieth century.

Along with the rise of religious conservative Republicanism in the Great Plains, there is yet one more aspect of Plains culture that remains illusive: a discussion of Great Plains subregions. One of the challenges of engaging with the Great Plains is that one can easily believe it to be a homogeneous, flat surface that runs undifferentiated for 500 miles wide and a thousand miles long. Indeed, in his introduction Wishart comments, "Modern geographers have also identified the absence of features as an integral part of the regional character of the Great Plains." In one sense it is true that there are no dramatic mountains or deep river gorges: indeed, the Great Plains region offers up a very subtle landscape. However, in another sense it is very much untrue: regions such as the Texas Staked Plains or the Nebraska Sandhills remain invisible in this text, and it is a great shame for such an extensive encyclopedic endeavor to reiterate this misconception.

What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America, by Thomas Frank. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004. 306 pp. Map. \$24.00 cloth, \$14.00 paper.

Reviewer Jon Lauck is senior advisor to U.S. Senator John Thune. He previously practiced law and was assistant professor of history at South Dakota State University. He is the author of *American Agriculture and the Problem of Monopoly* (2000).

Thomas Frank embraces a common theme of the American Left in his book *What's the Matter with Kansas?* He argues that the success of political conservatives in recent decades has been due to their success in subordinating once prominent economic issues to cultural values. His book focuses on his home state of Kansas, where political conservatism has had many victories. Frank concludes that, because of their political choices, Kansans suffer from a "derangement," have been taken in by an "illusion," live in a "panorama of madness and delusion," and have embraced the "politics of self-delusion." To behold a Kansas conservative is to "realize that we are staring into the eyes of a lunatic." Kansas can tell us much, Frank believes, because "things that begin in Kansas—the Civil War, Prohibition, Populism, Pizza Hut—have a historical

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