

## Book Reviews

*Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, edited by Stephan Thernstrom. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980. pp. xxv, 1076. Maps, tables, bibliographies. \$60.00.

Perhaps no other nation can claim an ethnic heritage as diverse and dynamic as the United States. That this claim has more than a little merit is well illustrated in one of the most remarkable single-volume reference works to appear in recent years. The *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, edited by Harvard social historian Stephan Thernstrom, provides an authoritative introduction to the origin, history, and current status of more than one-hundred ethnic groups who have played or are playing a role in shaping American society and America's identity. Five years in production, the Encyclopedia represents the work of 120 international contributors and offers the best available overview of American ethnicity to date.

The Encyclopedia is both broad in scope and in its definition of what constitutes an ethnic group. The 106 alphabetical group entries—ranging in length from 3,000 to 40,000 words—encompass national, regional, and ethnoreligious groups. Entries include historic and recent immigrant groups (e.g. Germans, Koreans), refugees (e.g. Latvians, Bangladeshi), and those who became part of the American community through conquest or annexation (e.g. Acadians, Aleuts). Most will applaud the editorial board's decision to include loosely defined "ethnic" groups of strictly American origin; for the essays on Afro-Americans, Appalachians, Mormons, and Yankees, among others, greatly add to our understanding of ethnic identity in the U.S. Some will question the decision to treat the numerous groups of Native Americans under the single entry "American Indians" while providing separate entries for the Dutch and Frisians, but such questions only point to the difficulties of decision-making inherent in editing reference works of this type. To the editorial board's credit, cross-references abound for specific groups treated under general entries (e.g. Vietnamese under Indochinese) and for alternative names of ethnic groups.

The usefulness of the Encyclopedia is augmented by the inclusion of twenty-nine major thematic essays and a similar number of brief definition entries. Among the former are comparative and philosophical discussions of education, family patterns, health beliefs and practices, and language maintenance, while among the latter the reader will find adequate definitions for such terms as Aryan, mother tongue, and Spanish-surname. Conveniently, a separate list of the thematic essays is provided at the beginning of the book. The reference value of

the Encyclopedia also has been enhanced by the addition of numerous tables, maps, and bibliographies. Some one-hundred statistical tables are scattered throughout, while another twenty-three tables of selected census data compiled between 1850 and 1976 have been appended. The eighty-seven maps especially commissioned for the book clearly illustrate the regional origins of the various ethnic groups. Each ethnic group entry concludes with a short annotated bibliography composed, according to editorial policy, of non-technical books likely to be found in medium-sized public or academic libraries—another sensible decision.

All-in-all, the *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* is an intelligent, useful reference work which should prove to be a real find for historians, librarians, social services personnel, and those interested in the ethnic component of American life. Though its cost may prohibit its purchase by smaller libraries, the Encyclopedia should be found in the collections of all academic and mid-sized public libraries.

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## Book Notices

*From Memory to History: Using Oral Sources in Local History Research*, by Barbara Allen and Lynwood Montell. (Nashville: American Association for State & Local History, 1981. pp. xii, 176, appendices, bibliography, index, \$12.50 cloth.)

AASLH has previously published books dealing with oral history methodology and techniques (Willa Baum's works *Oral History for the Local Historical Society* in 1969 and her work, *Transcribing and Editing Oral History* in 1977). Now they have carried on with the publication of this work. It is one thing to be able to effectively gather oral history and to properly transcribe the tapes, but it is another thing to properly interpret the information and validate its historicity—*From Memory to History* does this. The book tells how oral history differs from formal, written history; suggests ways to test for his-

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