

Minnesota, Real and Imagined: Essays on the State and Its Culture

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are an ecological extension of Iowa. All readers will find that *The Nature of Nebraska* stirs appreciation for the need to protect dwindling natural habitats.

Minnesota, Real and Imagined: Essays on the State and Its Culture, edited by Stephen R. Graubard. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2001. xi, 297 pp. Graphs, maps, notes, index. \$14.95 paper.

Reviewer Kristin Elmquist is a high school social studies teacher in Minnesota. Her background is in anthropology and immigration history, and her work currently involves video making with new immigrant students in Minneapolis.

Minnesota, Real and Imagined was originally published in 2000 as a volume of *Daedalus*, the journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. By examining one state from multidisciplinary perspectives, this book attempts to pin down what this state *means*—to those who live here and to those who live outside the state. As an icon of “mid-westernness,” Minnesota evokes images of lakeside cabins, family farms, and accented Scandinavians. However, the realities of contemporary Minnesota life, from the Mall of America to the depopulation of the countryside, contradict those iconic images. Each essay illustrates one aspect of Minnesota life or history. Together, they reveal the patterns and contradictions embodied in the construction known as *Minnesota*.

Several essays in the collection take in part a historical view. A broad, comprehensive overview of the state’s social history gets the volume off to an excellent start and establishes a helpful context for what follows. Other essays have a more specific historical focus, describing the lives of notable Minnesotans of the past or surveying religious life in the state and its context within the waves of immigration that helped shape Minnesota’s culture. Other essays focus on geography, with one essay examining how the location and terrain of the state has shaped the lives of its people, and another looking at outdoor recreation and how the landscape and climate shape Minnesota natives’ views of themselves and their state. Another essay takes a critical look at what Minnesota—as an idea—means, how perceptions of this place were shaped, and how those perceptions may contradict the realities of what is happening to the rural landscapes. Some authors view the state through the prism of its distinctive political culture. These contributions include a survey of Minnesota politics and an analysis of the strange place held by Governor Jesse Ventura in state politics. Another describes Minnesota’s contradictory relationship to the larger world—its contemporary international focus and its isola-

tionist history. Finally, several authors examine contemporary society in Minnesota. One surveys the history of the Dakota and Ojibwe land that became Minnesota and discusses how the loss of that land and the reservation system shaped current realities of American Indian life. One essay describes the roots of Minnesota's reputation for social services, and another contributes to this discussion by describing Minnesota's reputation for philanthropy. In the final essay, Guthrie Theater director Joe Dowling describes the important role of theater in the state, and explains how Minnesota came to be a regional center for the theater arts.

These essays vary in their levels of research and formality, but they complement each other in unexpected ways. The historical background lingers in your mind as you read about contemporary life; ideas about the deliberate construction of Minnesota's image inform views of the state's philanthropic and religious life. Taken together, these essays give readers a full, varied picture of this place—a picture of it through time, and today.

The book's multidisciplinary approach would be of interest for other places similarly overlooked by the national press, such as Iowa. Few places evoke rural farm life more than Iowa. In the national imagination, Iowa is trapped in time as a small-town, cornfield-filled place of old-fashioned values and simple people. As in Minnesota, however, the realities of Iowa life defy that image. While undeniably agricultural, Iowa is also nationally known for its contributions to American literature and arts. While rural, the small towns are emptying and the family farm is struggling to survive. While viewed as homogenous, Iowa is home to a surprising number of new immigrants. The approach taken in this volume—drawing a number of writers and scholars together to write about a place from their own perspectives—is a fruitful way to explore a state or regional identity.

Indian Nations of Wisconsin: Histories of Endurance and Renewal, by Patty Loew. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2001. xii, 148 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.95 cloth, \$21.95 paper.

Reviewer Patrick J. Jung is an adjunct professor of history at Marquette University in Milwaukee. His research interests include Indians in the Great Lakes region.

Author Patty Loew, a member of the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe, originally wrote the material found in this book for a 1998 public history exhibit on Wisconsin Indians. Loew states that because

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