

# Book Reviews

Ingrid Semmingsen and Per Seyersted, eds., *Scando-Americana. Papers on Scandinavian Emigration to the United States*. American Institute, University of Oslo, 1980. 213 pp. .

In May 1975 the Nordic Association for American Studies held a conference in Oslo based on the theme "Scandinavian Emigration to the United States". In 1980 the papers read at the conference were published. The editors tell us that this delay was due to their long and in the end unsuccessful efforts to have the papers printed in traditional book form. But the offset format in which they are now available does not really deserve the bad press it often receives.

Because of the delay at least a couple of the contributions have in the meantime been published in other books/journals (Kälvemark, Runeby). Most of the papers have held up rather well from 1975 to 1981. Five to six years may be a significant period in many research fields. Time has been more unkind to some than to others, however. To mention just one detail, in his discussion of American politicians of Scandinavian descent Sten Carlsson writes that "Two of them, Mondale and Bentsen, do not appear in presidential debates any more, but both Humphrey . . . and Jackson can still be regarded as possible future presidents" (p. 165). When historians write about the present, it is often impossible to prevent such somewhat unfortunate statements.

The ten papers presented in this volume cover Scandinavian ('emigration" to the United States in what must be the widest possible meaning of that term. In addition, the methods employed vary with the rather different backgrounds of the ten authors. There are only two fairly straightforward historical accounts closely related to emigration itself: Ann-Sofie Kälvemark's quite interesting and broadly conceived "Swedish Emigration Policy in International Perspective, 1840-1925" and Reino Keo's general overview "Finnish Emigration to the United States."

It is impossible to take part in the international debate on emigration without going into quantitative methods. Sune Åkerman's ambitious "Stability and Change in the Migration of a Medium Sized City" (Worcester, Massachusetts) and Hans Norman's more limited "Demographic Structures in Two Swedish Settlements in Wisconsin" represent that approach in this book. Their papers also clearly reflect the movement away from emigration studies in the old sense to migration, mobility and demographic studies in general.

Charlotte Erickson competently discusses "Explanatory Models in Immigration and Migrant Research." She pays particular attention to various models developed by American social scientists and only very briefly refers to the work of Åkerman and his Swedish collaborators. Those sceptical of quantitative methods will perhaps be heartened to learn that despite her recognition of the

importance of quantitative studies, Erickson still feels that migrants can hardly be seen simply as "pure economic men moved only by income maximizing motives" (p. 12). She apparently has at least as much confidence in the methods of anthropologists as those of economists, but it seems that we can all contribute. Yet, Peter A. Munch's discussion of the relationship between history and sociology, "Immigrant History in Sociological Perspective," despite a couple of interesting points, adds little to our understanding of the phenomenon in question, emigration.

Straightforward history, quantitative history, sociology, and a mixture of many different methods all have their more or less explicit advocates in this volume. Indeed, Einar Haugen has already shown what sociolinguistics can contribute to the study of immigrant history in the United States. He sums up his own pioneering work in a wider perspective in his not immodest "Immigrant Language as in Index of Social Integration."

Dorothy Skårdal's "Problems and Promises of Immigration Literature in Social History" is in some ways the most ambitious attempt to widen the field of emigration research. Her plea is that "the evidence of imaginative literature should be used to support historical generalizations about typical immigrant life on an *equal* footing with other source materials" (p. 149. My emphasis-GL). This is quite similar to a main argument in her book *The Divided Heart*. Obviously, she is right that fictional material can be used with benefit in many contexts. Joan Rockwell has listed several possible kinds of "facts" described in fiction, such as technology, laws, customs, even to some extent social structure and institutions.

Nonetheless, the problems in using fictional material are equally obvious. Skårdal does not really deal extensively with these and the methodology/tests she wants developed to overcome these problems seem rather unclear. For instance, if fictional sources have to be tested against more conventional historical evidence, why do we need them at all? It is also somewhat puzzling that she ends her strong advocacy (and extensive use) of fictional sources on the rather pessimistic note that the many problems in this method "must be resolved before the promise of literature as historical source material can be fulfilled" (p. 152).

The last two papers again represent ordinary political history. The one with the more popular appeal among the ten may well be Sten Carlsson's "Scandinavian Politicians in the United States." Nils Runeby has written a stimulating piece marginally related to emigration, more to the influence of an American idea, i.e. Taylorism, in Sweden at the beginning of the twentieth century, "Americanism, Taylorism and Social Integration".

It is impossible to go into such a collection of essays in any detail, scattered as they truly are in scope and research method. I will only make a few further remarks on two of the papers, those by Åkerman and Carlsson.

Åkerman wants to make an important contribution to the rapidly growing field of new urban history. We have always heard and read that the United States is a country built on mobility. That geographic mobility has been and still is higher in the United States than in Western European countries has generally been taken for granted. Åkerman would like us to see this as a myth. He shows that two of the leaders in the field of urban history, Stephan Thernstrom and Peter Knights, have probably exaggerated the population transfers

s f that most intensely studied of American big cities, Boston. His contention that migration rates in the United States were not "sensationally high" – whatever that means – is interesting and clearly shows the need for comparative research. (By the way, this is one field where non-Americans can really make substantial contributions to the study of American history.) Yet, the evidence Åkerman brings forth on the Swedish side in this article is really too meagre to "prove" his argument. And, the "relatively stable and invariable environment" which he sees "in the very midst of an area with population mobility" (p. 88) is again a fascinating idea, but not much explored in this paper.

Carlsson presents a survey of politicians of Scandinavian ancestry from Knute Nelson to Walter Mondale. The Scandinavian domination of politics in Minnesota is well known not least from Carlsson's own research, but he also goes into the situation in other states. He provides much valuable information on names and numbers and the respective roles of Norwegians and Swedes. He also mentions, probably correctly, that politicians of Scandinavian extraction have not played any prominent role in shaping American-Scandinavian relations. (Someone should study this and Scandinavian influences generally on the policies of Hubert Humphrey based on the Humphrey papers in St. Paul.)

Carlsson argues, again probably correctly, that "a slight tendency for a moderate position may be regarded as rather typical" for the Scandinavians (p. 166). But on the whole he sticks to names and short personal biographies and does not try to answer more comprehensive questions. We read little as to why the Scandinavians were generally Republicans until the First World War (the 1930s?) and, perhaps more difficult to explain, why the leading Scandinavian-American politicians became Democrats at least from the 1940s.

Perhaps it is somewhat unfair to complain about authors not having answered questions of this nature. After all, what can you reasonably expect from such brief papers? All in all, this is a useful collection of essays which deserves the attention not only of emigration specialists, but also of the wider group of persons interested in Scandinavian-American relations in general.