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Orm Overland. *Immigrant Minds, American Identities: Making the United States Home, 1870–1930*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000. Pp., x, 243. Index. US$34.95

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1897 "reflects the social embeddedness of invention and innovation." (67) What this means, I think, is that inventors registered the largest number of patents when the bicycle market was booming, to take advantage of the opportunity for profit.

In his determination to demonstrate the singular importance of the bicycle, Norcliffe also makes some rather extravagant claims. He argues that early bicycle trekkers "stretched space by travelling to new frontiers on their bicycles," creating "a new geography in which travel to the ends of the earth was increasingly the norm." (222) Yet his own evidence shows that such treks were not at all the norm and that the handful who did undertake such world travels depended on other modes of transportation to get to the furthest reaches of the planet. He also asserts that farming communities "were less given to mechanical invention than the towns of central Canada engaged in making various kinds of machinery." I think that the historical record of agricultural innovation shows the exact opposite: Canadian farmers were constantly inventing, adapting, and building machines to help them do their work. Some of their innovations were far more significant and enduring than the largely cosmetic refinements offered up by most Canadian bicycle inventors. Finally, he suggests that the bicycle was responsible for turning the countryside into "a recreational space" for city dwellers. (230) This might come as a surprise to historians of sport, recreation, and boat-building in this country who have documented our long tradition of recreational use of the countryside.

I also had problems with Professor Norcliffe's writing style. He writes almost exclusively in the passive voice which tends to obscure the human actors who are generally at the centre of historical events. When he does use the active voice, it is the ideas, movements, and projects that are acting. Thus, we have innovations occurring, arriving in clusters, developing, and driving industrial modernity. Modernity is a movement and a project that is contested and marches, advances, and otherwise moves forward, all apparently without the help of human beings. When people do appear in the story it is either as part of a specific narrative – the Karl Kreelman tour – or as subjects being acted upon by the forces of modernity. This not only makes the book difficult to read, it also leaves readers with the erroneous impression that technological and cultural change are not the products of human action.

Norcliffe's "two-wheeled" approach to his subject did not work. The theoretical analysis is not well integrated into the narrative but seems to sit on top of it. As a result, he presents us with detailed theoretical discussions followed, often abruptly, by long passages devoted entirely to descriptive narrative that only tenuously relate to the arguments he is making. The detailed excerpts from Karl Kron's travels (157–68) tell us a great deal about the state of roads but not how the bicycling community contributed to their improvement or whether Kron saw himself in the vanguard of cultural and technological progress.

For all of its problems, I think that this book is worth a careful read. Norcliffe's research is first rate and he has documented hitherto unknown events, artifacts, and individuals central to the history of cycling in Canada. Though his theoretical analysis was not very successful, he nevertheless demonstrates the value of exploring the history of technology and the necessity of placing technological developments in a broad social and cultural context. Given the appalling lack of academic interest in the field of technological history in this country, this alone makes the book an admirable effort.

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Orm Overland. Immigrant Minds, American Identities: Making the United States Home, 1870–1930. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000. Pp., x, 243. Index. US$34.95.

This book reflects the American immigration historian's ongoing fascination with the process of integration and even assimilation into American society. Recent works by George Sanchez, Jon Gjerde, Donna Gabaccia, Mario Maffi, and others have described processes of ethnicisation. They agree widely that ethnicity is invented, not some kind of transplanted cultural "essence." What then can another book on the topic add to this discussion, especially one that emphasizes Western European immigrants that became integrated into American society with seeming effortlessness?

Much indeed, for Overland has made an intelligent and insightful contribution. Unlike other works on ethnicisation, he looks at the process by which immigrant group organizations sought the favour of the wider American society by asserting and even heralding their ethnicities. In these proclamations of ethnicity they did not contest America, but sought to place themselves at its very centre. Each group advocated a particular "foundation story," claiming a seminal place within American culture. The obvious claims Italians had on Columbus the "discoverer" of America, the Irish on the idea of liberty, or the Norwegians on the status of "frontiersman", were made alongside more obscure assertions of Washington's "Italian sentiment" (60), of Columbus's Jewishness, of German socialism's affinity with American citizenship, of Dutch "true religion", of Norwegian "discovery" of fourteenth-century Minnesota. It did not matter that such assertions often were spurious; they constituted a particular strategy of integration.

The book has many strengths. The first is this central thesis. But the many ironies and surprises that support the central thesis make the book a fascinating account. The fluid nature of invented identities undermines any notion of national "essentialism", but the very phenomenon of "myth making", argues Overland was an "essential feature of American ethnicity," the creative identity of white non-English immigrants wishing "inclusion" (21). The drive for inclusion was that of the European immigrant, but "excluded" groups also found paths of integration: African Americans by asserting national partnership with the English, the Chicanos by professing true Spanish descent from

the conquistadors. The assimilative message of the public schools diminished immigrant cultures initially, but the assimilative language of "acceptance" propelled the immigrant mind not into a cultural acquiescence but towards ethnic assertions of worthiness. Full acceptance may have been presented to the immigrant in terms of minority-majority relations, but the fact was that the greatest challenge to being accepted lay in outwitting other ethnic groups willing to wage acrimonious interethnic "homemaking wars," each group seeking to weaken the other groups' claims to legitimacy. Thus ethnicity was not about continuity, but was in fact the final act of discontinuity. Its assertion was always an attempt by the immigrant to be integrated into a nation that itself was obsessed with questions of belonging, legitimacy, merit, and acceptance. Ethnic identities did not mark the shibboleth of Americanism, they were its very expression (20).

A second strength of the book is that Overland has identified a phenomenon that is dynamic. The book is specifically about contestation; "how organized groups responded to the problem of being considered foreigners." (2) Much information is offered on the western European immigrant elite – the journalists, the editors, the novelists, the preachers – but their writings are never one-dimensional. They arise in the context of immigrant inferiority complexes, Anglo-American exceptionalism, the anomie of assimilation, and the desire to be American. The immigrant groups could see what the host society and its historians could not and that was that the great divide between "history" and "heritage", to employ David Lowenthal's concepts, was duplicitous: the Mayflower Compact was as interwoven with teleology as the most "grotesque" filiopietist narrative of contribution history. And the book is also historical, arguing that the ethnic proclamations marked a particular stage in the integration of European groups; after the birth of racial theories of Anglo-Saxon superiority, but mostly before World War II when waning immigrant waves weakened American xenophobia (89).

Each of the three sections of the book carries this message of irony and dynamism. These sections describe three kinds of identity creating myths, the stories placing the immigrant at the very seat of the nation founding, stories suggesting that the immigrant was a truer voice of the nation's ideals that the host society itself, and stories recounting the valour of sacrifice. In this wide coverage the book leaves few gaps.

Still some questions remain. How did the many sectarian immigrants, such as the Amish and Hutterites, who placed their very legitimacy as people on a successful rejection of the wider society, jibe with the book's sweeping explanation of ethnicisation? How can one still argue that the phenomenon of ethnic identities was a New World phenomenon, when scholarship has shown that the mindset of European groups was shaped by monarchical patriotism, religious wars and internal migrations? How can one suggest that ethnicisation ended in the context of the tolerant post-World War II era, when hostilities were directed to such groups as the Haitians, Koreans, and Arabs who in turn were compelled to assert athletic prowess, entrepreneurial skill, or peaceful tradition. The story may just be even more complex than Overland's evocative portrayal demonstrates.

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Isabelle Backouche. La trace du fleuve. La Seine et Paris (1750–1850). Paris : Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2000, Pp. 430. Glossaire, bibliographie, cartes, figures, tableaux, index.

La Seine « était dynamique au XVIIIe siècle, animée par une grande diversité de pratiques et d'acteurs et dominée par une tension permanente entre les usages et leur régulation. Elle devient statique au XIXe siècle, la ceinture de quais ayant pour objectif principal d'enfermer et de contenir le fleuve » (p. 344). Depuis nous dit Isabelle Backouche, le fleuve – et ses abords – est un « espace étranger à la vie de la capitale ». Il est « musée », il est architecture, il est esthétique; il n'est plus le moteur d'urbanité qu'il a été, l'« espace urbain » au cœur de la vie parisienne.

Partant de ce constat, l'objectif Backouche est de faire connaître la relation entre Paris et son fleuve avant et pendant la « rupture » opérée au cours de la première moitié du XIXe siècle. Comment la Seine a-t-elle perdu le rôle prédominant qu'elle tenait dans Paris? Comment le lien entre Paris et son fleuve a été tissé puis, quand et comment s'est opérée la rupture? Divisé en trois parties, l'ouvrage couvre la période 1750 à 1850, soit au moment où de « réels enjeux, économiques et politiques, s'attachent aux relations entre Paris et son fleuve », jusqu'au moment où le devenir de Paris devient indépendant de son fleuve.

Dans la première partie de l'ouvrage (*Un espace partagé*), l'auteure dresse le portrait des pratiques sur le fleuve et ses abords au tournant des années 1750. Grâce à un usage judicieux des documents légaux et administratifs de l'époque, l'auteure retrace les multiples rôles du fleuve : réception de produits de toutes sortes, accueil de migrants, constitution de « dynasties fluviales » familiales propriétaires de nombreux bateaux. En examinant la disposition des bateaux et des quais, des ponts et des rues avoisinantes au fleuve, l'auteure dévoile le processus de « zoning » dont la Seine est à l'époque l'objet et l'instigatrice.

Le fleuve est « un espace qui envahit la vie urbaine » (p. 103) en 1750. Il agrémente ou impose des contraintes aux déplacements de tous les Parisiens, se pose comme un lieu de rassemblement et de consommation, permet à tout un chacun de s'investir d'une appartenance géographique intra-parisienne (appartenance à la rive Gauche, à la rive Droite). Enfin, Backouche démontre que, de par son rôle central, la Seine bénéficie d'un statut – juridique notamment – complexe qui la distingue dans la cité (p. 141) et dont le contrôle est jalousement gardé par les autorités locales et leurs représentants (inspecteurs, contrôleurs, receveurs).