

*Waucoma Twilight: Generations of the Farm*, by Dona Schwartz. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992. 164 pp. \$24.95 paper.

The cover of this book promises an exploration of the degeneration of a midwestern farming community and the various elements which it embodies. Schwartz depicts the traditional image of the family farm as a mere facade which serves to disguise the reality of modern agriculture: nuclear families flocking to shopping malls and country clubs in the pursuit of an increasingly commodified urban life-style. The modern farmer is held up to be in command of ever increasing technology and vastly larger areas of land--no longer the effigy of the extended family toiling away on the small family farm; and no longer possessing the tight-knit, multi-generational affinity towards the land. The author contends that this book, following a methodological tradition of visual anthropology and sociology, "...explores the nature of family farming as a way of life, as experienced by farm families from Waucoma, Iowa" (p.12). Specifically, this study analyzes the complex web of changes that have been transforming rural life through influences of communications, industrialization, agricultural technology, and capitalism.

Schwartz, who takes the position of an informed outsider, has employed ethnographic methods: including participant observation, intensive interviewing, mapping, documentation analysis, and at the heart of this study--photography. It is the 220 black and white photographs, and excerpts from interviews with several families, which serve as the basis for the content.

The organization of data is categorized into chapters. Each examines different but interrelated spheres and meanings of life in Waucoma: the township--its history and present situation; family structures; leisure and associations; church and community; changing dimensions of farm work and interaction between neighbors; and most significantly, the rural-urban continuum. It is this rural-urban continuum, and an emphasis on the diminished relevance of cultural boundaries which provides the overall theoretical framework. As the author points out, "[s]tudies of rural communities frequently proceed from a conceptual distinction between rural and urban life....Upon further investigation, however, scholars have discovered...that rural and urban cannot be so easily dichotomized" (p.10). Schwartz goes so far to say that "[d]efinitions of the traditional rural community, generated by scholars who observed the social dynamics of rural village life, have not retained their validity" (p.98).

It is this issue of validity within the scholarly body of literature, and the examination of literature in general, that the reviewer expresses hesitation towards. While Schwartz is not a sociologist, this research is, according to the author, grounded sociologically. Mountains of analysis are offered with only sporadic and redundant ties to any *recent* scholarship; a review of the bibliography reveals little more than a handful of references to literature dealing with studies of rural settings. Moreover, the theoretical framing found in the introduction provides nothing more than a cursory, mechanistic appropriation of Toennies, Durkheim, and Cooley. While this area is not the specialty of the

reviewer, a quick trip to the library discovered dozens of significant sources which elucidate the issues covered by Schwartz. Most notably is Michael Bunce's *Rural Settlement in an Urban World*, 1981 as well as Leann Tigges and Deborah Tootle's *Labor Supply, Labor Demand, and Men's Underemployment in Rural and Urban Labor Markets*, 1990. Of most notable exclusion is Deborah Fink's *Open Country, Iowa; Rural Women, Tradition and Change*, 1986.

However, this criticism is not condemning and not intended to overshadow the accomplishments of the research. This book offers much data for the study of rural society and its link to the urban world:

Although it is spatially located from centers of urban industrial culture, many conduits channel urban influences in and out of Waucoma. Farmers' experience of community, once built upon shared values and expectations negotiated in the course of face-to-face interaction, has incorporated a range of external influences. When farmers exchanged horses for horsepower, their world expanded, and the geographic mobility that propelled people back and forth between rural and urban places transported new experiences and ideas along with them. New networks of communication linked the community to regional, national, and international events, agendas, and discourses, modifying patterns of everyday interaction (p.140).

It is this issue of networks of communication which will be addressed last. Interestingly, Schwartz has bound this study on both sides with discussion of the relationship between researcher, subject, and mass media. The author asserts that during the farm crisis of the mid 1980's, the media misrepresented the plight of the farmer and succeeded in creating images and sound bites "serv[ing] as a backdrop for the dramatic tension built up in these stories....There was a difference between this scenario and the media portrayals I had seen" (p.3-4). Interestingly, it is the images and sound bites which provide "[o]ur easy ability to draw upon our shared media heritage...suggesting that the distance separating us in our everyday lives was more geographic than cultural" (p.154).

The shortcoming of the review of literature does little to detract from the value of this book, in fact the lack of copious references lends itself to ease of reading--especially for individuals not interested in overly academic explorations of the subject matter. The book is written in a straight-forward style and makes for ease and enjoyment of reading--facilitating accessibility for anyone.

University of Kansas

Mark P. Worrell