

Black Neighbors: Negroes in a Northern Rural Community, by GEORGE K. HESSLINK. Indianapolis, Ind.: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1968. 190 pp. Clothbound, \$6.00. Paperbound, \$2.95.

As our often unwarranted generalizations about "Negroes," "whites," "Jews," or "Italians" indicate, the structure of our language, the nature of American culture, and the scientific ethos of our discipline too often make benign racists of us. If for no other reason this little study is an important reminder of the significant qualitative variation that exists in American black-white relations.

Cass County in rural Southwestern Michigan has had a stable bi-racial population for more than a century. Its relative racial harmony and formal integration make it an atypical American community well worthy of study.

Using an imaginative array of methods that vary from the analysis of tombstones and real estate documents to observation and unstructured but focused interviews, Hesslink seeks to describe and understand this community. In the tradition of earlier demographically oriented University of Chicago studies, this work is complete with charts, maps, and census-like data, some of which are not of overpowering interest.

The core chapters in the book deal with "historical antecedents," "economic institutions," "the political process," and interaction and stratification. These vary considerably in quality, with the latter two clearly being the best.

Of the "basically unique combination of events" that promoted the original settlement of blacks, the most important seem to have been the following: the desire of Quaker abolitionists (themselves Southern migrants) to create a haven for fugitive slaves; the convergence of the major Midwestern underground railroad lines in Cass; and an agriculturally based economy based on sparsely settled land, which removed competition and increased interracial cooperative efforts.

Today there are some small black industries and businesses in the town. Banks freely give credit. Schools are integrated and blacks can live almost anywhere. However, in spite of the Quaker traditions and the absence of overt rancor, whites have a definite sense of group position and a disproportionate share of scarce resources. Integration is restricted primarily to impersonal and instrumental relationships. Social relations and patterns of residence tend to

be structured by race and length of time in the community.

The most interesting material in the study deals with the stratification of the community into three groups: whites, recent Negro migrants, and Calvinites. The latter are firmly established, long-time residents with some dark skin pigmentation who are described (and treated) as "light, bright and damn near white." These three "status groups" show varying degrees of separation and intermeshing. Patterns of association transcend race and vary considerably within racial groups, depending on whether or not an individual is known as a long-time resident. Such distinctions provide continuity with the area's history and traditions, while still permitting exclusion of threatening (and culturally somewhat alien) recent black migrants.

Calvinites forsake identification with blacks (to the point of picketing the NAACP) and in return receive relatively better treatment from whites, though national civil rights events and continued immigration pose a clear threat to this delicate and essentially hypocritical pattern.

This book is clearly written and contains an abundance of facts, though at times the clarity borders on superficiality and some of the details are extraneous. Whatever unity the study has comes from its subject matter, not from a dominant intellectual theme, a consistent theoretical framework, or a carefully articulated set of research questions. There is an unfortunate tendency to take the point of view of the actor as if it were the only reality. The unit of analysis is sometimes unclear, and varies from the Cassopolis school district to the entire County, to the township of Calvin. Black behavior is viewed almost entirely as a reflexive response to white behavior. However, the study does offer useful insight into a curious phenomena.

One finishes this work feeling both optimism and pessimism: optimism in that it suggests that a stable biracial community with an appreciable degree of integration is possible; pessimism in that significant, if muted, racial inequality and separation continue to exist despite Quaker traditions, the area's unique history, and the diffuseness and egalitarianism of rural life.

GARY T. MARX

Harvard University