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Migliazzo, Arlin C. To Make This Land Our Own: Community, Identity, and Cultural Adaptation in Purrysburg Township, South Carolina, 1732-1865

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Book Reviews

Migliazzo, Arlin C. *To Make This Land Our Own: Community, Identity, and Cultural Adaptation in Purrysburg Township, South Carolina, 1732-1865*. University of South Carolina Press 2007. 435 pp. \$59.95 cloth. ISBN 978-1-57003-682-8

To Make This Land Our Own sets out to expand upon a growing historiography of community studies that diverge from the more traditional Puritan, New England model. Purrysburg, South Carolina looked a good deal different than many other communities in early America. One of its peculiarities was the ethnic diversity of the first generation. Many from Switzerland (with ethnic affinities leaning toward either the French or German) and a smattering of Italians, English and Germans, these early pioneers adhered to different Christian tenants, spoke different languages, and held different cultural norms. Such ethnic diversity highlights a theme Migliazzo teases throughout his work.

The beginning chapters of *To Make this Land Our Own* revolve around the first generations of settlers to Purrysburg. Stressing their diverse origins, Migliazzo traces the bonds these settlers formed. Often the strongest bonds were familiar, and citizens created relationships along ethnic lines, stressing religious identity, language, and cultural practices. Such a diverse ethnic population underscores a central theme Migliazzo develops after the American Revolution. As Purrysburg became increasingly enmeshed in the cotton economy, Southern ideals that stressed the hegemony of whiteness surfaced. Purrysburg's population did not resist blending into the larger Southern culture, some becoming successful planters who owned slaves. But Migliazzo argues that long standing ethnic identities did not disappear as new racial identities leapt to the fore: "Becoming a southerner did not necessarily preclude [a] simultaneous affinity for white ethnic identification." (308) Particularly in backcountry communities like Purrysburg, ethnic identities persisted through the Civil War. By supporting an argument that stresses the importance of white ethnic identity, Migliazzo takes a tentative step into the growing studies nuancing Southern whiteness.

Differing from ideals of English villages or New England's Puritan towns, Migliazzo argues that community is less rooted in a geographical space and more defined by the relationships people create. He has done a very nice job defining many of these vertical relationships, particularly within religious and governmental structures. And he shows that such vertical alliances do result in the relationships that bind people into a community. In the beginning of Purrysburg, vertical relationships proved stronger than horizontal relationships. It was common for an individual to tie himself more closely to a religious leader or business partner (often a figure outside the geographic bounds of Purrysburg) than a neighbor who may live within shouting distance. In the first generation, language and ethnicity could divide. Yet subsequent generations, Migliazzo shows, tended to build more horizontal relationships—especially as Purrysburg moved through the Antebellum era, embracing the Southern planter ethos, a cotton economy, and racially based slavery. Vertical and horizontal relationships are central to Migliazzo's community. And while he ties people together in terms of land deals, business transactions, religious orientations, marriages, Revolutionary loyalties, or even fluctuating status, it is difficult to weave the fabric of a community without the interpersonal voices of those who lived in the community. The vibrancy of personal relationships—the voices from the community—is often lacking in the book. Migliazzo recognizes this quirk. But there is little he could do to rectify this problem without stretching his sources and putting words into the mouths of otherwise muted characters. His sources are limited. With all his meticulous scouring of archival records there still remains a complete lack of journals, diaries, and very few personal letters. The result is a stale community, one that lacks personalities...and a book that can be tough to read, as the genealogical minutia is ever present. Still, it remains remarkable that Migliazzo could reconstruct such an interwoven network of relationships. It seems impossible that the research missed any sources, and scholars of the Southern backcountry or community studies will find his work a valuable mine.

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