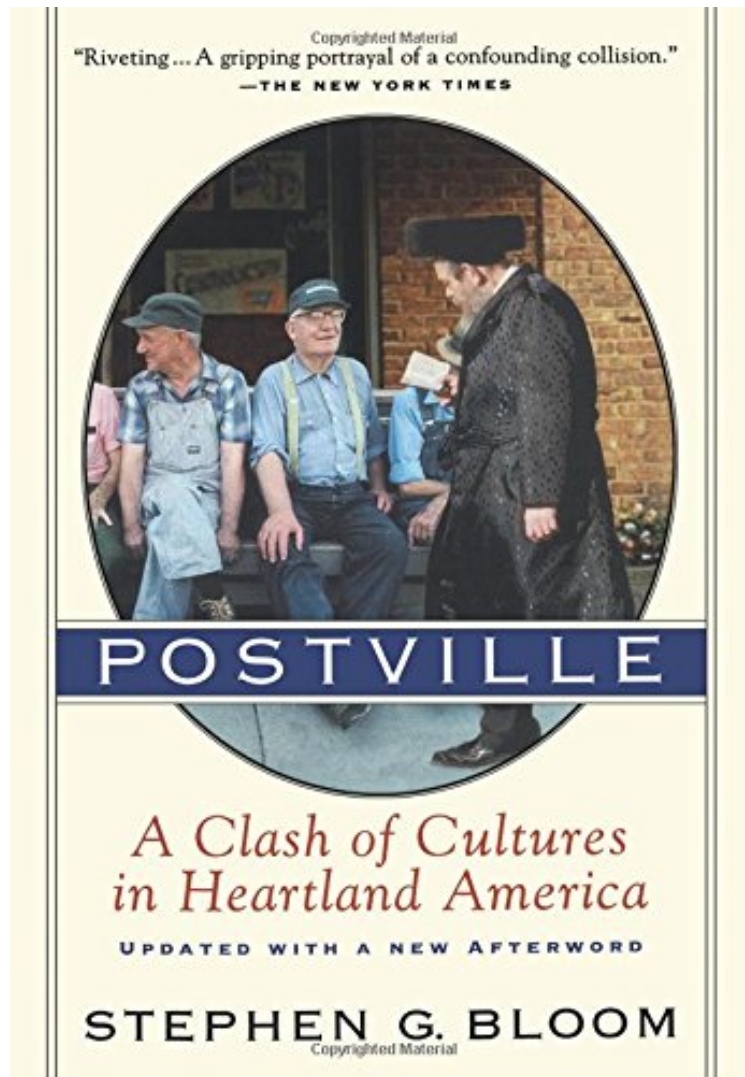


(Pdf free) Postville: A Clash of Cultures in Heartland America

Postville: A Clash of Cultures in Heartland America

Stephen G. Bloom

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Stephen G. Bloom : Postville: A Clash of Cultures in Heartland America before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Postville: A Clash of Cultures in Heartland America:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Intriguing, well written, gripping story and really engaging narrative style. By S. Oppenheim I truly thought this could be a dry anthropologic treatment of the clash of cultures, but instead the journalist-narrative really strives to bring humanity dripping with details and candor in every page. It made me want to stay up late reading more about his journey into the partly-closed-off hasidic community and interviewing with friendly locals who eye the jews with a mixture of curiosity, racism, acceptance, and gratitude for rejuvenating the local economy. Highly recommended! 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Great historical drama

with insight into the world of ultra ...By Carol PolkGreat historical drama with insight into the world of ultra conservative Jewish people in Iowa. Going to visit Postville in September.2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Pre-ICE Raid PostvilleBy Glenn S. LeachPostville: A Clash of Cultures in Heartland AmericaThis book describes the author's family move from the sophistication of life in San Francisco to Iowa in 1993. The author's acceptance of a position as professor of journalism at the University of Iowa necessitated not only a change of location, but also of world view and life style, as witnessed by his shock in reading a newspaper review of the better sea food restaurants in the Cedar Rapids area and finding Red Lobster and Long John Silver listed.I purchased the book because like so many, I was horrified at the multi-million dollar raid performed by ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) at the Postville Agriprocessor's meat packing plant in May 2008. The raid netted some 400 workers, principally of Guatemalan and Mexican descent, working at the plant that day. I wanted to know the history of the town and the plant that brought these people to this small Iowa town, to a factory operated by Hasidic (ultra-orthodox) Jews. At the time of the raid, the plant provided nearly 60% of the kosher beef, lamb and poultry in the US.In an often humorous, but always serious and evenhanded way, Bloom tells the tale of the dying town that was resurrected by the opening of the kosher operations at the abandoned meat packing plant there. The creation of more than 400 jobs, even though the jobs did not attract workers from Iowa, was still an economic miracle for Postville, but as Bloom explains, the blessing was also a curse, as it meant the the Hasidic Jews had accomplished that which the town and state had not. It also meant that the Jews were the wealthy people in town who effectively called the shots on much of town life. Finally, there were the cultural and religious differences that had never quite been overcome.Bloom's tells this story of culture clash from several perspectives, and the people, real people (although some are re-named from their actual names) are living, breathing people, not stereotypes. On one level, Bloom's book is a history of economic and culture clash in a small, rural town. On another level, possibly not intended, the book is a tale of globalization, and the shifting role of the US in a global economy. The tensions and clashes in the book seem to parallel or foretell the rise of globalism and its clashes with rising nationalism and nativism.The book is a valuable and comfortable read on its own. As we learn more and more of the social and economic paralysis now besetting Postville (not to mention the cost to tax payers for the raid itself), I believe Bloom's book will be a valuable tool in defining a baseline and illuminating the very intangible sociological elements of the town's existence.

In 1987, a group of Lubavitchers, one of the most orthodox and zealous of the Jewish sects, opened a kosher slaughterhouse just outside tiny Postville, Iowa (pop. 1,465). When the business became a worldwide success, Postville found itself both revived and divided. The town's initial welcome of the Jews turned into confusion, dismay, and even disgust. By 1997, the town had engineered a vote on what everyone agreed was actually a referendum: whether or not these Jews should stay.The quiet, restrained Iowans were astonished at these brash, assertive Hasidic Jews, who ignored the unwritten laws of Iowa behavior in almost every respect. The Lubavitchers, on the other hand, could not compromise with the world of Postville; their religion and their tradition quite literally forbade it. Were the Iowans prejudiced, or were the Lubavitchers simply unbearable? Award-winning journalist Stephen G. Bloom found himself with a bird's-eye view of this battle and gained a new perspective on questions that haunt America nationwide. What makes a community? How does one accept new and powerfully different traditions? Is money more important than history? In the dramatic and often poignant stories of the people of Postville - Jew and gentile, puzzled and puzzling, unyielding and unstoppable - lies a great swath of America today.

.com Postville, Iowa (population 1,478), seems an unlikely place to find a sizable Jewish population, let alone an ultra-Orthodox Lubavitcher population. It is, after all, in the heart of pork country, and the world headquarters of the Lubavitchers is far away in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. But when the Hygrade meat processing plant, just outside Postville, went belly-up, threatening the town with decline, Sholom Rubashkin bought it and turned it into a glatt kosher processing plant, complete with shochtim and a rabbinical inspectorate. By the late 1980s, "Postville had more rabbis per capita than any other city in the United States, perhaps the world." The enterprise was a huge international success, with its kosher meats exported even to Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. The Jewish population grew to 150, and they were rich. The town was saved, and the people were grateful. All's well that ends well? Not quite. The Hasidim kept to themselves, did things their own way, and basically had no interest in integrating into Postville. And why would they? Their laws are strict, their mission clear, their community defined by race and religion. They are not interested in watermelon socials or coffee klatches at the diner. Their little boys do not swim with their little girls, are not educated together, and do not go on play dates with goyim. Small-town Iowans, on the other hand, are very friendly. They know each other's news, they support each other's businesses, they wish each other Merry Christmas, they want you to feel at home. They don't like that the new townspeople stomp up the street hunched over, talking in a foreign language and looking straight through them when greeted. They really don't like it when one of the newcomers drives around town with a 10-foot candelabra strapped to his car playing music at full volume for eight consecutive winter nights. They don't actually know about menorahs or Hanukkah. Into this comes secular Jew Stephen Bloom, a professor at the University of Iowa. By the time he arrived in Postville, the town was riven along religious lines. One of the

townspeople was running for mayor on the sole platform of annexation of the land on which the plant stood. Rubashkin was threatening that he'd shut the plant and leave if that came to pass. Bloom closely considers both sides, and the result is a wonderful book. It is a fascinating tale of culture clash in the American heartland: the John Deere cap meets the black fur hat. It is a book about identity and community and what it means to be American. It covers all the things you aren't supposed to talk about at the dinner table--religion, politics, and even sex. It is full of suspense: Will the plant be annexed? Will the Jews leave? And it is also Bloom's exploration of his own sense of belonging. --J. Riches

From Publishers Weekly Bloom's account of a vicious clash between the residents of a small, intensely Christian town and the group of Lubavitcher Jews who open a highly successful kosher slaughterhouse there is a model of sociological reportage and personal journalism. In 1987, after a Hasidic butcher from Brooklyn bought a slaughterhouse in Postville, Iowa, and began to relocate Jewish and immigrant workers to the area, the town began to change. While some residents were suspicious and anti-Semitic, most were happy to see the town rise above its previous financial destitution. But the Lubavitchers, who traditionally live and work within their own closely knit communities, were not interested in fitting into Postville, and many were dismissive of, or overtly hostile to, its original citizens. After the Lubavitchers started buying real estate and exerting greater influence on the town's finances, longtime Postville residents began to feel marginalized, yet their reactions caused the Jews to become more isolationist. The slaughterhouse also caused problems: workers were paid below minimum wage and were uninsured, women workers were sexually harassed and fighting among the (often illegal) immigrant workers escalated. Finally, the town took legal action to gain more control over the slaughterhouse. Bloom, a professor at the University of Iowa, writes cleanly and with great insight and temperance about these events. As a secular Jew, he also weaves in his own story as he tries to find some common ground with the Lubavitchers. His book proves an illuminating meditation on contemporary U.S. culture and what it means to be an American. Agents, David Black and Gary Morris. BOMC and QPB selection; 8-city tour. (Oct.) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal

When a group of Hasidic Jews opened a kosher slaughterhouse just outside the small, financially struggling town of Postville, IA, their arrival brought financial benefits as well as cultural conflict with the locals. In order to force the slaughterhouse administration to pay taxes to the town, the Postville authorities decided to annex the land where the slaughterhouse was located and held a vote to see whether the townspeople support this idea. Bloom (journalism, Univ. of Iowa) came to Postville not just to investigate the story but to reach out for a bit of his Jewish heritage, which is hard to maintain in Iowa. He was frustrated by the Hasidim, who at first wanted no part of him and then sought to convert him and his family, and they were angered by his refusal to take their side. By the end of the story, Bloom realizes that he can maintain his Jewish identity and live in the middle of the Iowa farmbelt, the Hasidim realize that they may have to make adjustments to stay in Postville, and the people of Postville realize that the Hasidim are there to stay. Part cultural history, part search for identity, this book makes for balanced, interesting, and insightful reading, but a glossary of Jewish terms would have been extremely helpful. For American studies, Iowa history, Jewish studies, and social studies collections. ADanna Bell-Russel, Library of Congress Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.