

ABSTRACT

LECHNER, STEVEN E.B. *Recalling Ethnic Yorkville: The Histories, Heritage Practices, Imaginaries, and Identities of Two Ethnic Communities in One Urban Neighborhood* (Under the direction of Dr. David A. Zonderman).

Recalling Ethnic Yorkville examines the histories and heritage practices of two hybrid communities – German Americans and Hungarian Americans – with deep connections to Yorkville, an urban neighborhood on Manhattan’s Upper East Side. The working-class ethnic enclaves these migrants constructed in the late-nineteenth century survived for nearly a century until succumbing to the forces of gentrification during the last third of the twentieth century. Book I traces the active and declension phases of the enclaves, while foregrounding the dynamic and transnational nature of the hybrid identities by which each cohered. It also tracks the development of a politically compliant, socially conformist, and artificially linear story that portrays Yorkville’s ethnic constituencies as having melted away into undifferentiated Americanness, a result hailed as consistent with the nation’s need for socio-cultural unity. This imagined past reinforces nationalizing myths such as the melting pot metaphor, a largely racialized distortion that depicts Euro-Americans as the “good” immigrants by which all subsequent newcomers must be judged. Moreover, by proclaiming ethnic Yorkville’s death, the dominant narrative ignores the communities’ contemporary heritage afterlives. Book II, through four case studies, reconnects these ethnic heritage practices to their historical roots, analyzes their present manifestations, and explores the complex relationship between ethnicity and place. This intervention is intended to transcend problematic tropes about America’s immigration past to enrich our public discourse concerning its immigration present and future.