

**Cav. Valentine J. Belfiglio. *The Italian Experience in Texas.* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1983) viii, 299 pp., \$12.95.**

Many people, even native Texans, may be surprised to learn the extent to which Italians have been present and influential in Texas, especially since the late nineteenth century. They are aware of the various cultures that settled the state, such as Hispanics, Germans, Czechoslovakians, and blacks; yet few know that "Italians have been a part of the history of the state since 1540."

Professor Belfiglio has filled a gap in Texas history by detailing for the first time in a concise, well-written, well-documented book the story of a minority group that, for the most part, has been heretofore overlooked by historians. Through extensive research that led him to libraries, court records, historic sites, festivals, and personal interviews across the vast regions of Texas, Belfiglio has documented the migration of Italians to Texas as they came first as explorers, adventurers, or missionaries, but later as miners, railroad workers, farmers, and artists. He depicts the immigration of these poor, struggling Italians during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries to a state that needed their skills for a developing economy. The chapter on Italian artists in Texas makes the point that though most of the immigrants became farmers, laborers, or merchants, many numbered among the outstanding sculptors, architects, and painters of Texas.

Belfiglio found that the Italians in Texas, though a minority, have encountered only limited resistance and have experienced acceptance by both the ruling majority and the other minorities—due basically to the willingness of Italians to adapt and also to their custom of helping each other through benevolent societies.

The result has been that the modern Italian has been assimilated into the mainstream of Texas social, political, and cultural life and "bears little resemblance to his forebears." Very little of the Italian heritage has been left untouched. Nevertheless, Hansen's Law has been in effect, for though "first and second generation Italian Texans were largely committed to assimilation, . . . third generation Americans living in the state demonstrate considerable interest in their ethnic identity."

As a Texan of Italian descent and an associate professor of history at Texas Woman's University, Belfiglio, who was awarded in 1982 the rank of Knight of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Italy for his work in promoting Italian culture internationally, is uniquely qualified to present the Italian experience in Texas. His extensive writing—two previous books and numerous articles in Italian and English journals—accounts for the careful attention to detail, the depth of scholarship, and the welcomed readability which the book enjoys. Abundant photographs (46) throughout the book vivify the printed words; tables and figures illustrate and authenticate the author's assertions, and data from

personal interviews add freshness and currency. An index and several appendices that provide additional pertinent data are provided.

Historians and the general reader alike will welcome this book as a trustworthy, needed addition to Texas and ethnic studies.

— Marvin Harris  
East Texas Baptist College

**Joseph Bruchac, ed. *Breaking Silence: An Anthology of Contemporary Asian American Poets.* (Greenfield Center, NY: Greenfield Review Press, 1983) 295 pp., \$9.95.**

Bruchac has compiled an anthology of contemporary Amerasian poets who speak in clear and melodious voices. These poets of Hawaiian, Korean, Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino backgrounds present and affirm fresh ideas and viewpoints in poetic form. They offer an understanding of their backgrounds through variant ideas. Each one captures some sense of her or his background culture and shows how their individual lives have been affected by it.

Merle Woo, one of the poets, transfers one thought of background culture to an ordinary classroom setting when she writes: "Classrooms are ugly, Cages with beautiful Birds in them. Scraped, peeling walls, Empty bookcases, An empty blackboard—no ideas here" (248).

Woo's "Poem for the Creative Writing Class, Spring 1982" tells of all the cultures concentrated in one small cubicle, and how a good teacher can break the silence of that room. Her idea actually strikes at the core of a social order. The role of a learning institution is the offering of ideas; the straight line of any action is achieved through them. The summits of science, art, and poetry are reached in ordinary classrooms. The whole spectrum of life is centered there.

Some other "action ideas" presented in the anthology are as follows:

- Write letters laced with thank yous.
- Be with someone who can "chew the fat for hours."
- See all the relatives in a certain area.
- Walk around a city and catch old memories.
- Have a sense of your own worth.
- Appreciated watching a bird over a river.
- Talk about the old days in your own accent.
- Dabble in academia after picking up street corner wisdom.
- Walk towards *Spring Street*, past the iron security gates.
- Snap some gum in time to the wonder of Stevie Wonder.
- Find the Balance between art and politics.