

American customs? What American character?

Pointedly absent are contemporary Italian American scholars who are overturning traditional analysis of western civilization and pointing to a just world. Among them are L. Luca Cavalli Sforza's studies of DNA and the Y male chromosome, confirming African origins of everyone and confirming feminist scholarship on signs of the dark mother of pre-history and Emmanuel Anati, whose archeological findings locate the oldest sanctuary in the world (40,000 BCE) in the path of migrations out of Africa into the Sinai. Also missing are the younger Italian Americans who come out of Italy's deepest traditions of justice. Where IS Mario Savio? Where are the probing questions: Who is an Italian? Who is an Italian American? Who is a European? What is an Italian American vision of the future? What is a definition of ethnicity that can survive what is now confirmed in science and cultural history? I feel that this book could have benefited from touching on some of these questions and issues.

Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum  
California Institute of Integral Studies  
San Francisco

**Gustavo Leclerc, Raúl Villa, and Michael J. Dear (eds.). *Urban Latino Cultures: La Vida Latina en L A.* (Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999). Vii, 214 pp., 29.95 paperback.**

Throughout the twentieth century (and now the twenty-first), the specter of a Latina/o past, present, and future has haunted the myth of Los Angeles as a sunny, bucolic paradise. At the same time it has loomed behind narratives of the city as a dystopic, urban nightmare. In the 1940s Carey McWilliams pointed to the fabrication of a "Spanish fantasy heritage" that made Los Angeles the bygone home of fair señoritas, genteel caballeros and benevolent mission padres. Meanwhile, the dominant Angeleno press invented a "zoot" (read Mexican-American) crime wave. Unlike the aristocratic, European *Californias/os* of lore, the Mexican/American "gangsters" of the

1940s were described as racial mongrels. What's more, the newspapers explicitly identified them as the sons and daughters of immigrants—thus eliding any link they may have had to the *Californias/os* of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries or to the history of Los Angeles in general.

*Urban Latino Cultures: La Vida Latina en L. A.*, edited by Gustavo Leclerc, Raúl Villa and Michael J. Dear, interrupts and explodes what Mike Davis has termed the “sunshine” and “noir” narratives of Latina/o Los Angeles. Acutely aware of the erasure of L.A.'s Latinas/os from discursive, social, and physical spaces, the editors have gathered photographs, autobiographical essays, film and video stills, scholarly articles, poems, cartoons and performance pieces that reinsert Latinas/os into the Los Angeles landscape. The Latinas/os who emerge from this insightful collection are not only *Californio* ranchers, but tough *cholas*, poets, activists, born-again Christians, *paleteros*, *chacha boys*, musicians, and, among other things, spies posing as maids.

*Urban Latino Cultures* succeeds as a fresh and illuminating study of late twentieth-century Latina/o Los Angeles because of its multi- and interdisciplinarity. Its contributors work within and, at times, between an array of fields, including architecture, art, geography, and journalism. The text's emphases include Mission revivalism and restoration; L.A.'s underground Chicana/o music scene; the significance of the front yard in producing and maintaining social relations among residents of East L.A.; and one woman's very personal struggle to foster a sense of community among the tenants in her East Hollywood apartment building. In addition, the essays jump between L.A., Tijuana, Havana and Mexico City, and between English, Spanish Spanglish and Caló. As a result, the collection provides kaleidoscope glimpses of Latina/o life in Los Angeles and beyond.

In particular, *Urban Latino Cultures* charts Mexican and Chicana/o Los Angeles from multiple perspectives—among them the past, present and future. The collection's most apparent shortcoming is that it could—and should—have devoted more attention to L.A.'s growing Central American population, which has begun and will continue to play an increasingly important role in city and regional politics (as well as in

“Chicana/o,” ethnic and American studies). Nonetheless, *Urban Latino Cultures* reclaims Los Angeles for the Latinas/os of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries by stressing that the village once known as El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora de los Angeles de Porciúncula (now known simply as “L.A.”) is more palimpsest than *tabula rasa*. The collection is a valuable contribution to American, Chicana/o, ethnic and urban studies and is an exciting addition to the burgeoning fields of Latina/o cultural studies.

Catherine S. Ramirez  
University of New Mexico

**Rachel C. Lee. *The Americas of Asian American Literature: Gendered Fictions of Nation and Transnation*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999). xi, 205 pp., \$49.50 cloth, \$16.95 paper.**

Rachel C. Lee acknowledges that understanding Asian American experiences merits the study of transglobal migrations of persons and capital. Rather than criticize this scholarly trend in Asian American studies (and, I would add, in ethnic studies more broadly), Lee integrates into them a greater attention to gender. Like much of historical and social scholarship, works on the Asian American diaspora tend to neglect gender. By examining how gender figures into the various ways in which four Asian American writers imagine “America,” Lee reminds us that gender, like race, always matters.

Lee first analyzes *America Is in the Heart*, Carlos Bulosan’s semi-autobiographical novel first published in 1946. Often read-and taught-as a progressive text for its resistance to racism and classism, Bulosan’s novel also emphasizes fraternal bonds threatened at several junctures by women’s sexuality. While the novel’s famously upbeat conclusion affirms the possibility of a unified America, the narrator’s vision comes only at the expense of acknowledged and celebrated difference, including that of gender.

Lee similarly complicates our understanding of Gish Jen’s