

prior to his Morehouse days through his intellectual development in theological school and Boston University to his arrival in Montgomery, Alabama, at Ebenezer Baptist Church and his cataclysmic introduction to the Civil Rights Movement as the leader of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. It is through this frame that he dresses King in very human clothing helping the reader to understand that King was far more complicated than how he has been deified by the "I Have a Dream Speech." Dyson takes on King's journey through the Civil Rights Movement emphasizing the radical King, the constantly growing King who grew to see how American racism was inseparable from colonialism and how the American hegemony that produced white supremacy and Jim Crow were directly related to our imperialistic involvement in the Vietnam War.

It is at this point where King has reached the conceptual "Mountain Top" that he is assassinated on April 4, 1968, in Memphis, Tennessee, while advocating in support of the sanitation workers on strike.

Except for some excessive hyperbole, which I suspect comes out of his Baptist preacher tradition, Dyson has given us a portrait of an American hero in all of his humanness. It is an excellent book for general readership, Civil Rights scholars, and as a supplemental reader in the Social Sciences and in Ethnic Studies.

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David Leiwei Li, *Imagining the Nation: Asian American Literature and Cultural Consent*. The Stanford Series on Asian America, ed. Gordon H. Chang. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998). xii. 261 pp. Contains notes to each chapter at end of work, as well as an index.

Whenever "the nation" is "imagined," Americans of Asian ancestry are excluded by common "cultural consent" as alien/alienated "Others," as citizens of their ancestral nations.

Due to recent immigration from many Asian nations, the globalization of economies, including the Pacific Rim, and especially the efforts of some Asian American writers, the situation has improved—somewhat. Still, if Asian-American writers stress the American in their representations, they are denying the Asian. If they stress the Asian, they have bought into American “cultural consent” its racist representations of Asian-Americans. Further, they themselves can’t help but think within “the nation’s” ongoing restrictive racist “cultural consent” paradigm, because as Americans they have unconsciously internalized it.

Li offers Frank Chin, the hyper-masculinist militant nationalist, as his premier example of the most successful attempt to dramatically destabilize this bind, although Chin reinforced it for gay and/or feminist writers. He viciously attacked the likes of David Henry Hwang, author of *M. Butterfly*, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Amy Tan for their cultural heresy in daring to tinker with traditional Asian myths written by and for men and hitherto unchanged for thousands of years, as well as for consciously allowing themselves to be manipulated by racist white feminists and publishers into reinforcing white American racist “cultural consent” that “Othered,” feminized, and emasculated Asian American males.

Li justly valorizes Chin’s greatest contribution, his undeniably brilliant critique of American “cultural consent” in relation to how Asian-American men are “imagined.” Unfortunately, he chooses to use the weakest link in Chin’s thinking to second Chin in trivializing the contributions of Kingston et al., especially Kingston, with the claim that they *consciously* wrote for huge white racist and feminist audiences. Chin’s weakness lay in trivializing *his* own powerful insights by appending to them this specious and petty sexist and homophobic attack on his colleagues. In all probability he was motivated to do so by wounded ego and *Invidia*. While he remained ignored and obscure, mere *women* and/or gay writers received critical acclaim and grew rich and famous.

Li’s discussions of lesser-known texts, especially by women, are perfunctory and (too) often miss the mark. For example, readers would never know that Gish Jen’s *Typical American* is a tragi-comedy, as fine a satire of Emersonian indi-

vidualism and American capitalist materialism as has ever been published. Or that Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone* is a feminist novel about how three young Chinese American women in San Francisco's Chinatown respond to traditional obligations to their family and their ancestors, their "bone." The obedient daughter chooses suicide rather than rebellion or compliance. The post-feminist daughter (significantly, a flight attendant) selfishly escapes her filial obligations and duties, flying away from them forever. The feminist daughter (also, significantly, a social worker) leaves home for good, leaves the past "back dair," as well, but with the husband of her choice, while still working as a community "bridge" within Chinatown.

Warning. Readers will find Li's haut scholarly jargon impenetrable, but no worse than many others, mine included.

Reviewed by: Phillipa Kafka
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Aldon Lynn Nielsen, ed. *Reading Race in American Poetry: An Area of Act* (Urban and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000). X, 232pp., \$49.95 cloth; \$18.95 soft cover.

For some time now it has been fashionable when reviewing any sort of anthology to focus critical lens on what the anthology leaves out. In both formal and informal reviews of literary anthologies and collections of essays what an editor does not include in his or her text often takes precedent over the relative virtues of the texts actually appearing in the anthology itself. In the most postmodern of moments, absence erases presence.

Despite every good intention on my part to avoid such an approach, *Reading Race in American Poetry: An Area of Act* demands at least a passing interrogation of what it is not. What it is not is a book about the many races that comprise America and its poetry. For Nielsen and his well-respected contributors,