

**Ken Levine and Ivory Waterworth Levine (Producers). *Becoming American, The Odyssey of a Refugee Family*, (1983). 16 mm film or video cassette, 58 ½ minutes, color, film \$800.00; rental \$85.00; videocassette \$625.00; or 30 minutes condensed version, color, film \$495.00; rental; \$50.00; video cassette \$425.00. Iris Films/WNET - 13 TV, distributed by New Day Films, P.O. Box 315-D, Franklin Lakes, New Jersey, 07417; (201) 891-8240. Preview for purchase available. Special rates to church and refugee groups.**

*Becoming American* is an extraordinary documentary which traces the odyssey of Hang Sou and members of his extended family as they flee the highland hills of war-torn Laos, await resettlement in a refugee camp in Thailand, and eventually resettle in the United States. Sou and his family are preliterate farmers, who served as mercenaries for the CIA's "secret war" in Laos. The Sou family face months of intense culture shock and prejudice after being transported thousands of miles in physical distance from their homeland as they seek to adapt to their new urban and alien environment in Seattle. For the most part they and other displaced persons were not welcome when they arrived in the United States.

Throughout the film elements of the Hmong culture (daily life, rituals, and native music) are carefully and gracefully included in the script, sounds, and photography. The cinematography is outstanding and records the events through the eyes of Sou and his family. The film personalizes the drama of human survival and provides a rare insight into many issues related to resettlement policies and cross-cultural concerns. These are addressed during the film through low key overvoice narration by social scientists, educators, and refugee workers. *Becoming American* graphically portrays the hardships of one of the new immigrant groups as they seek to adapt to a new culture—new language, new customs, new housing, new food, and new expectations, and describes how the American culture must appear to those coming from other cultural traditions. Hang Sou and his family are taught various coping skills such as language, shopping, and cooking in order to function each day in the fast-paced American society. The film clearly portrays a clash of cultures: tribal culture vs. urban life.

The film has already won several awards such as The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Recognition of Special Merit award for being a "documentary of high quality in concept and execution" (1983); the "best of the festival" film in the 1983 National Education Film Festival; and during the same year it was the first place winner in the National Council on Family Relations Film Festival. This award winning film has had major showings to such diverse and important

groups as the United States House of Representatives, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees; the national conference of the American Anthropology Association; and the TESOL International Bilingual Educators' Conference.

The film is suitable for a variety of audiences such as secondary and college social science and education classes, public library groups, and civic and religious organizations. It delivers a forceful message about human survival. Those who view the film will, no doubt, begin to develop a sense of understanding and empathy for refugees who are victims of circumstances beyond their control. It is a thoughtful and warm presentation which speaks with eloquence on behalf of the many displaced persons trying to survive in a new cultural environment. The film is highly recommended for viewing and reflection.

There is a study guide to accompany the documentary which includes helpful background information, a teacher's guide, several illustrative questions to initiate a follow-up discussion, a glossary of unfamiliar terms, and an annotated bibliography for additional reading and study by members of the viewing audience.

— Margaret Laughlin  
University of Wisconsin, Green Bay

**Nellie Y. McKay, *Jean Toomer, Artist*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984) xv, 262 pp., \$27.00.**

Nellie Y. McKay's *Jean Toomer, Artist* is an account of Toomer's life and work from his birth in 1894 to the publication of his long poem "Blue Meridian" in 1936. McKay's is the most complete biography of Toomer published thus far, and it also includes the most extensive analysis to date of Toomer's literary work. For the biographical material, McKay has made heavy use of the Jean Toomer Special Collection at Fisk University, especially the autobiographical manuscripts and the manuscript letters therein. A detailed scholarly investigation of Toomer has been sorely needed now that his important place in the canon of American literature has been recognized. Unfortunately, though this book has much to commend it, it is not the definitive study one would have hoped for.

The principal focus of the book is properly upon *Cane*, for *Cane* is clearly Toomer's major literary contribution—a work that, since its