

**Philip Butcher, ed. *The Minority Presence in American Literature: 1600-1900.* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1977) Volume I, 452 pp., \$11.95; \$7.95 paper. Volume II, 421 pp., \$11.95; \$6.95 paper.**

*The Minority Presence in American Literature: 1600-1900*, volumes I and II, is the first publication of the Morgan State University Series in Afroamerican Studies. The series is intended to provide a basis for examining the cultural, religious and social experiences of Afroamericans. Each title in the series is intended to serve as a guide, outline, or syllabus for college courses in Afroamerican studies, American ethnic studies, history and culture, American literature, and American studies. In keeping with these aims, Philip Butcher has compiled two anthologies of major and minor American writings that can be used as readers and course guides. The selections explore the experiences of Native Americans, Afroamericans, European and Chinese immigrants in the New World between the seventeenth and early twentieth centuries.

Volume I includes writings by Benjamin Franklin, Phillis Wheatly, James Fenimore Cooper, Edgar Allen Poe, Harriet Brent Jacobs, and Henry David Thoreau. Volume II contains significant selections from the works of Bret Harte, Mark Twain, Kate Chopin, Frank Norris, William Dean Howells, and Charles Chesnutt. Each volume also includes works by lesser known writers such as Mary Rowlandson, John Murrant, Dion Boucicault and Emma Lazarus. Butcher introduces each volume with the same three essays in which he attempts to establish standards for appraising the selections both as literature and as social document. He synthesizes the more than three hundred years of experiences of American minorities in a broad survey which succeeds in showing that Africans, Chinese, and Irish as Americans suffered upon their arrival here because of residential segregation, religious intolerance, and job exploitation. Nevertheless these same minorities, as well as the Germans, demonstrated their commitment to the nation's interests by volunteering time and again to fight in its various wars waged between 1600 and 1900.

The introductions to the texts, along with the listings of additional readings, suggested research projects, and study questions at the end of each selection make them useful as references for undergraduate and graduate students. However, Butcher's questions and projects are often too broadly stated for an undergraduate. Graduate students who have had some experience in studying literature, who also have a broad background in American history and literature, will benefit most from using this collection of writings.

The wide range of readings, if studied carefully, would help a student develop a comprehensive picture of the way minorities were perceived and described in American letters. The selections Butcher includes

reveal that writers were generally more sympathetic towards minorities than were their fellow citizens. Nevertheless, these men and women were often overly zealous in their humanitarianism such that some, such as James Fenimore Cooper and Lydia Maria Child, nearly idolized Native Americans and Afroamericans as “noble savages.” Walt Whitman, as another example, incorporated contradictory attitudes towards minorities in his poetry because he saw himself as “containing multitudes.” He claimed every American of every ethnic background as his equal, but his tone of voice often seemed patronizing and overbearing. Butcher argues in his Prefaces to these volumes that modern readers must “deal with the selections in the context of the time of publications . . . and to appreciate the authors’ accomplishments rather than to disparage their work for flaws more easily detected from our perspective than from theirs.” One could counter this by saying that a modern detection of flaws in these texts helps us to better understand the complex attraction to and repulsion from minorities which constitutes the history of race relations in America.

Butcher’s collection is unique and much needed. Each student can and should use it to develop a succinct picture of America’s evolving attitude towards its minority citizens. These selections should be used to supplement the standard texts in American collegiate courses on American literature, history, and culture.

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**Pastora San Juan Cafferty and William C. McCready, *Hispanics in the United States: A New Social Agenda*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1985) vi, 257 pp., \$29.95; \$12.95 paper.**

The editors of this book, associate professors at the University of Chicago, state that their work seeks to promote understanding of and raise questions about Hispanic social issues in the hope that a “collective social agenda” can result.

*Hispanics in the United States* is one of the few books available which examines the public policy issues associated with the social problems faced by Hispanics. The editors have selected significant issues: immigration, assimilation, socioeconomic mobility, and the reactions of law enforcement and social service agencies, although they fail to explain what theme or other feature the collected articles have in