

The importance of self-identity is expressed in prose and poetry of “Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise.”

My blood commenced early. The farther back you go the thicker it becomes. And the mother is named the link, the carrier—the source of the Nile. Did she attend each birth with caution? Waiting to see the degree of our betrayal?

The issue of color is unfortunately, as Du Bois so accurately pointed out, of utmost importance. Cliff also tells us in her prose piece, “If I Could Write This in Fire, I Would Write This in Fire.”

Color was the symbol of our potential: color taking in hair “Quality,” skin tone, freckles, nose width, eyes. Those of us who were light-skinned, straight-haired, etc., were given to believe that we could actually attain whiteness—or at least the qualities of the colonizer which made him superior.

*The Land of Look Behind* is a creative blend of prose and poetry. It is filled with stark images, from the slaughter of a pig: “A small knife is inserted in her throat, pulled back and forth until the throat slits, the wound widens, and blood runs over, covering the yard”; to slavery: “A pregnant woman is to be whipped—they dig a hole to accommodate her belly and place her face down on the ground.”

This unique book is filled with music of Toni Morrison’s Sulu and the mules and men of Zora Neale Hurston. In “Travel Notes” we hear the music of the River Ouse before Virginia Woolf walks into it.

Michelle Cliff is strongest in her prose where her vision is not constrained within the poetic verse. In the poem, “A Visit from Mr. Botha,” the subject matter is strong, but some of the lines of the poem are weak because of their forced end rhymes:

Send them flying into crowds with armored lorries  
That should begin to put aside your worries.

*The Land of Look Behind* is a journey through a history that still lives.

—Aisha Eshe  
Iowa State University

**James D. Cockcroft. *Outlaws in the Promised Land: Mexican Immigrant Workers and America’s Future*. (New York: Grove Press, 1986) 306 pp., \$19.95 cloth, \$10.95 paper.**

In place of myths about Mexican immigrant workers, Cockcroft establishes several well-founded realities. One is that the border is porous because U.S. business interests want it that way so they can have cheap labor to exploit as needed by means of a border “revolving door.” Another is that there is such an interrelated U.S.-Mexico economy, achieved through “silent integration,” that in effect the border is a legal fiction. A third is that Mexican “undocumented” workers contribute substantially more to the U.S. economy than they take out. A fourth is

that U.S. immigration policy is not at all simple and internal. Instead, many social, cultural, historical, economic, and political forces are intertwined with an international context to form a complex network that determines U.S. immigration policy.

The focus in this intelligent, sensitive, and humane study is the phenomenon of Mexican immigrant workers, its nature, its basis, the causes and circumstances surrounding it, and the broader implications and impact of the immigration process. This social science explanation of Mexican “outlaw” workers (basically meaning they are “outside the law” and thus have no rights whatsoever and are therefore readily exploitable) is clear and well-organized. Cockcroft, an outspoken defender of Mexican immigrant workers, considers the inter-relationship and solidarity of Chicanos and Mexican “illegals” and sees the possibility of organizing these workers for their benefit. The defense of human rights is also a special concern here. Ultimately, Cockcroft argues cogently that human rights violations against “illegal aliens” undermine basic concepts of American democracy and are thus potentially alarming. Also, this book makes clear the importance of Mexican immigrant workers since they have a strong impact on so many areas of American culture and society. In fact, Cockcroft makes sound estimates that clearly point to the strong likelihood that these Mexican immigrant workers along with Latinos already in the United States will soon constitute the largest U.S. minority group.

*Outlaws in the Promised Land* is buttressed by impressive research sources which are acknowledged in extensive notes and bibliography. A chronology of immigration to the U.S. is another useful feature, as is the text of the “Bill of Rights for the Undocumented Worker.” The index is analytical and thus of practical reference value. Although published before the enactment of the recent Simpson-Rodino Immigration Reform Bill, this analytical study sheds light on the issues involved. In short, the book as a whole is a valuable contribution toward an appreciation of the emerging Latino presence in the United States.

—Arthur Ramirez  
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