“Something To Be Remembered By,” a poignant story of Mankichi Fujii, who returns to his native village in Japan following a forty-year sojourn in America. The story deals with old age, loneliness, and Fujii’s “larger worry”: the desperate desire of a man who has no family, few friends, and little wealth to leave some legacy to posterity. Uchida is a polished storyteller, with a deft, vivid style. Readers may be familiar with her Desert Exile (1982), a beautifully written recollection of her family’s life at Topaz, one of the government-run concentration camps during World War II.

The artwork in this volume—all in black and white—effectively complements the text. Particularly striking are the stylized prints by Tom Kamifuji. Also found throughout the book are photographs of historical interest.

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With the publication of her second book of political essays, internationally acclaimed poet June Jordan has established herself as an important spokesperson for the “First World” viewpoint. Just as she reasonably insists on referring to the majority population as “First World” rather than the more familiar “Third World,” so she opens many common assumptions in cross-cultural and international relations to examination and re-evaluation.

The eighteen essays here collected represent the body of Jordan’s political work in the early 1980s. Although a number of them have appeared elsewhere, the author makes the point that censorship has prevented prior publication of others. Describing herself as a “dissident American poet and writer,” she recounts considerable resistance to the publication of her work, even as her awards and prestigious speaking engagements become more numerous. Defying easy categorization, her work has countered prevailing ideologies of the mainstream as well as of the left as she reports, with courage and clarity, the documentation of her “political efforts to coherently fathom [the] universe, and to arrive at a moral judgement that will determine . . . further political conduct” (2).

Wide ranging, touching upon events as historically removed as a slave girl’s purchase in 1761 and Election Day in 1984 and as geographically disparate as Lebanon and Nicaragua, the essays nevertheless have common themes. In an earlier era, these themes would have been termed populist: trust in individual experience; confidence in the “rightness” of
ideas which can be broadly understood; and faith in the redemptive power of the law. Rightists in power today would dismiss these notions as quaintly irrelevant or distort them to their own purpose, while the intellectual left would see them as dangerously naive: hence, the censorship which Jordan has experienced.

The urgency of Jordan’s political journey throws some of the moral and political issues of our time into high relief and obscures others. Her description of South Africa as the Black Holocaust, and her condemnation of Israel’s support for the Botha regime are informative as well as compelling. Returning from Nicaragua, her portrayal of the under-equipped and overconfident Sandinistas is touching and poignant. She is at her lyrical best in communicating the power of an individual dream, particularly the personal vision of a young black woman, from whatever continent or time.

However, the heartfelt love and outrage that fuel these passages are less useful when the tone turns analytical. The promising sections on Black English stop short of presenting a conscious form of expression grounded in shared experience. While considerable progress is made in this direction, the construct and its rationale remain ambiguous. Her criticism in another essay of Ferrarro’s collected behavior in the pre-election debates misses both the explanation for and the impact of that self-control. In several passages her frustration with censorship leads to a recommendation for shrill activism, a proposal as understandable as it is dysfunctional. Finally, her horror at the effect of Reagan’s policies leads her to pronounce him thoroughly evil, a polarizing stance unlikely to lead to either understanding or change.

Aside from these deficiencies, the work is undoubtedly successful in its fundamental task—to provide a clear, singing record of one loving and articulate woman’s endeavor to “get real: to put [her] life as well as [her] words on the line” (67). We are all heartened, cheered, and informed by her efforts.

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