

**Ruthanne Lum McCunn. *Sole Survivor*. (San Francisco: Design Enterprises, 1985) 235 pp., \$14.95 cloth; \$6.95 paper.**

In November, 1942, the British freighter *Benlomond* was sunk by a German U-boat off the coast of South America with the loss of its entire crew except for a young Chinese steward named Poon Lim. Through his resourcefulness and determination, Lim survived on a wooden raft for 133 days before being picked up by a Brazilian fisherman. *Sole Survivor* is a fictionalized account of Lim's experience, the longest such ordeal at sea, based largely on interviews with Lim, military and maritime documents, and magazine and newspaper stories.

The book can be read from at least two points of view. On one level, it is a fascinating tale of survival in a hostile natural environment. Through trial and error, Lim learns to ration his limited supplies, fish with a nail, collect rainwater, catch birds, and withstand the blazing sun, nighttime cold, and harsh storms. Each day presents fresh challenges and tests his will to live. On another level, this book is about a heroic figure who happens to be Chinese. Lim constantly draws lessons and inspiration from memories of Chinese village life and legends. He also has to struggle against racial discrimination. Because he is Chinese, for example, Lim had never been taught anything about the sea except how to put on life-preservers, and while adrift on his raft he is refused rescue by an Allied ship. Later, despite the many honors Lim receives for his bravery, he is unable to settle in the U.S. due to restrictive immigration policies (which are eventually circumvented in his case by special legislation).

The significance of *Sole Survivor* lies in its intertwining of the above two perspectives into a well-written, entertaining story (and perhaps its shattering of the stereotype that Asians don't value life) rather than its analyses or insights into various aspects of ethnicity. This book is the most recent work of Ruthanne Lum McCunn, a well-known Chinese-American writer whose previous publications include *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, a biographical novel about a Chinese-American pioneer woman's experiences in the American Northwest.

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**Alfredo Mirande. *The Chicano Experience: An Alternative Perspective*. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985) ix, 271 pp., \$9.95 paper.**

Developed as a way to clarify and distinguish between Mexican-Americans and Chicanos, *The Chicano Experience* is a narrative of the history and struggles of the Chicanos living in the United States.