

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.

At the outset Mirande emphasizes the sociological differences between Mexican-Americans and Chicanos, and criticizes the generalizations about Chicanos that sociologists have made over the years due to the oversight of these differences. This has resulted, he explains, in a misconception of the Chicano culture. The Mexican-American, he continues, is in the United States voluntarily whereas the Chicano is an involuntary immigrant. This basic difference lies behind many of the misconceptions, and Mirande wants to set the record straight by explaining the Chicano's history and the true differences between these two populations.

The true value of the work lies in the implications for all social scientists, for it gives a clear perspective of the Chicano—the person, the values, and the feelings. Although the work is directed primarily toward sociologists, there are some key psychological implications in the work which have not been highlighted as such. Some examples of these issues are: 1) the value system of the Chicano who only seeks counseling after failing to secure help from his/her family; 2) the emotionality of the male Chicano which is often kept hidden because of *machismo* issues; and 3) the importance of religion in the Chicano culture, an issue which should always be considered in providing marital therapy to a Chicano couple.

Mirande openly sides with the Chicano in his narrative, and in so doing fails to point out some of the problems brought about by the presence of the Chicano in the United States, such as a higher rate of unemployment among American blue collar workers in the Southwest. The author also emphasizes the subservient attitude of the Chicano working in this culture and some of the problems that it has caused, yet he fails to give any suggestions for improvement.

The chapter describing the Chicano family should be especially enlightening to the Anglo reader and, in spite of the fact that the Chicano family system is often criticized because it encourages dependence, the author points out how those criticisms would definitely improve the quality of life in the United States if some of those practices were followed in Anglo families.

The Chicano Experience is recommended to Anglo readers who want to obtain an overall view of the Chicano culture, remembering as they read it, however, that what is being presented is only one side of a two-sided issue. The work has thought-provoking ideas but, unfortunately, many of them are not obvious to the reader. The impact of the work would have been much greater had these implications been made clearer.

—Albert F. Inclan
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