

Editor's Notes

Since the passing of two high-profile state legislative bills aimed at Arizona's Latino residents this past April, the significance of ethnicity for American citizens has once again surfaced as a topic for national debate. Whether to legitimize, or just as frequently deny, what defines American identity, the question and meaning of one's ethnic roots continues to be a contested matter for many Americans. In particular, HB 2281, a bill targeting the restriction of ethnic studies curricula in Arizona's K-12 educational system, has prompted accusations that Ethnic Studies scholarship and teachings work against a unified sense of nationhood by encouraging separatism and anti-American sentiment. Yet, as most Ethnic Studies proponents would counter, it is instead the artificial notion of a monolithic American identity, predicated upon a hegemonic rendering of what it is to be an American, that promotes divisions and distrust within a nation. In either case, the ambivalence over how to read the ambiguities of race and ethnicity implicit in U.S. citizenry underscore the ongoing need to address them. As such, the six authors featured in this issue provide fresh and thoughtful examinations of how race and ethnicity complicate understandings of self. Although diverse in content, the articles collectively consider the effects of how the ambivalence of ethnic origins both expand and challenge the meaning of American identity.

In the first three articles, authors explore the possibilities and renewals created through ethnic diversity. Matthew Miller's "Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life*: The Recuperation of Identity" tracks the introspective journey of Franklin "Doc" Hata, the novel's protagonist, a Japanese-raised Korean living in the U.S. Miller posits that the novel provides a rare look into a character experiencing multiple levels of Otherness and is ripe for examining the interrelated experiences

of ethnicity and immigration within transnational and postcolonial contexts. Focusing his analysis around the concept of recuperation, Miller contends that Hata's remembering of past experiences where his sense of identity was compromised by how his ethnicity was perceived within different geographical locations forces Hata to eventually have a personal and cultural reconnection to the body and to memory. This process, in turn, leads to a profound physical and psychological "healing." In "Pachucos, Chicano Homeboys and Gypsy *Caló*: Transmission of a Speech Style," MaryEllen Garcia traces the linguistic relationship between the argot or *caló* of the Spanish gypsies to the pachuco gangs of the 1940's whose lifestyles and marginalized status were held in common. Focusing on the two groups' subversive use of language, Garcia suggests that the *caló* speech style serves the meta-linguistic purpose of indexing a group identity that is ideologically defiant of social and linguistic norms for the Chicano gang member. Words from traditional pachuco *caló*, she further finds, are still employed by the greater Chicano community today and serve as symbols of its defiant past and ethnicity. Kabria Baumgartner's "*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Education and Abolition*" argues that Harriet Jacobs's slave narrative should be read alongside her public activities as an abolitionist and educator. Specifically, she notes the text's dialogical ability to teach white Northern women how to abolish slavery and achieve racial equality throughout the United States. The article examines the various educational moments that appear in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and then uses those moments to explore Jacobs' role in the abolition movement as well as her impetus to open her own school, the Jacobs Free School in Alexandria, Virginia in 1864. These experiences, suggests Baumgartner, illustrate how African American women were key to the development of education as an ideal in antebellum America.

The last three essays in this issue address the conflicts and limitations for individuals at odds with conventional understandings of their ethnic origins. In her article, “George Schuyler, Black and Conservative,” Helen Lock recalls the contradictory life of African American writer and political figure George Schuyler, whose desire to be embraced by a mainstream American audience led him to frequently reject the influences of African American culture. Lock explores the contradictions that his stance generated by analyzing Schuyler’s satirical novel *Black No More* and discussing the ambivalent relationship he held with his biracial daughter, Philippa. Susan Miyo Asai critically examines the influence of popular American music on West Coast *Nisei* (second generation Japanese Americans) as it relates to the formation of their ethnic identities growing up during WWII. Contextualized against the “complex intersection of America’s racialized ideology toward immigrants, California’s virulent anti-Asian agitation, and the economic and political power struggles between the United States and Japan in gaining dominance of the Pacific region,” Asai’s study considers how her interviewees negotiated these obstacles and nevertheless developed American identities, which the popular music of their time helped shape. As Asai discovers, her interviewees’ experiences demonstrate creative and subversive expressions of self that undermine “the treatment of citizens considered inassimilable and considered a threat in times of political conflict and impending war.” Finally, in “If You’re Black, Get Back!” *The Color Complex: Issues of Skin-Tone Bias in the Workplace*,” recipient of NAES’s 2008 Cortland Auser Undergraduate Student Paper Award Letisha Engracia Cardoso Brown describes the nature of her forthcoming study on the color-biased attitudes developed during the American slave era and how they impact the lives of black women today. Citing the effects of colorism, or skin tone bias, in determining certain aspects of socioeconomic

life, such as income, education, and marriage, Brown sets out to interview contemporary Black women and chart how colorism has affected their lives.

In all, the articles represented in this issue encourage readers to view the complications surrounding ethnic origins not as problems that should be erased or ignored, but rather as rich complexities that can move us toward more fluid and comprehensive ways of understanding each other.

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