

James Craig-Holte. *The Ethnic I: A Sourcebook for Ethnic-American Autobiography*. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988) 207 pp., \$39.95.

This is indeed a fascinating collection from a diverse group of ethnic-Americans. The book generally fulfills a need for the study of ethnic perspectives from the standpoint of literature and culture. Autobiographical insights, though basically personal, present us with historical, social, cultural, sexual and racial perceptions which are crucial to the interpretation of life, role, and identity in a pluralistic society. The major goal of Craig-Holte's book is "to provide an overview of the genre of ethnic-American autobiography and to examine the work of representative writers from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and historical periods."

The format utilized in this book is, first the presentation of a short discussion of each of the twenty-nine works, followed by a section containing abstracts, descriptions and analyses. Last, the author provided a criticism of about two or three paragraphs. While it is understandable why he wanted to introduce as many ethnic autobiographies as possible, it is unfortunate that he devoted so much time to description and analysis and so little to a presentation of the real words of the autobiographers. For example in *Iacocca*, there were three hundred and thirty-two lines altogether, but three-hundred and eleven were devoted to biography, description and analysis and criticism, while only twenty-one lines from the autobiography were presented. Craig-Holte must have assumed that he was doing his readers a favor with his analyses and descriptions, but I consider this too much "preaching and teaching," particularly for the sophisticated readership he intends to attract. He would have achieved more effect by allowing his autobiographers to tell their own story a little bit more. I find it frustrating to be deprived an opportunity to hear more from Black Elk or Maya Angelou, two colorful personalities. While Black Elk was quoted in fourteen lines, Maya Angelou had nineteen lines of material from her work. This kind of treatment is meted out to all of the autobiographies in the collection, doing a disservice to the authors as well as short changing the readers.

As a sourcebook for ethnic-American autobiography, *The Ethnic I* is disappointing in its dearth of raw material from the works presented. However, the book has some merit. Written in a lucid style, it fulfills a dire need as an introductory text in ethnic-American autobiography. Considering the variety of works examined, it is obvious that the author spent a lot of time researching, dissecting, and analyzing. He should be commended for his scholarship and accomplishment. Despite the limitation of not quoting sufficiently from the original works to make the book more interesting, the overall impact of *The Ethnic I* is positive.

—Samuel Hinton
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