

Richard Drinnon. *Keeper of Concentration Camps: Dillon S. Meyer and American Racism.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) 339 pp., \$24.95.

While American history is replete with outrageous and tragic examples of racism, two of the most prominent in recent memory are the government's World War II removal and internment of Japanese Americans and its postwar attack on the tribal rights and consequently the services, reservations, and cultural integrity of Native Americans through a policy known as "termination." Ironically, these two episodes intersect in the person of Dillon Meyer. Meyer ran the vast archipelago of Japanese American concentration camps as the Director of the War Relocation Authority (WRA) from 1942-46 and then administered a larger system of Indian reservations as the Commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) from 1950-53. In this latter post, Meyer launched an aggressive effort to withdraw the government from its commitments and responsibilities for Native Americans that culminated in termination legislation after he left office.

Keeper of Concentration Camps examines the internment and termination episodes using the career of Dillon Meyer as a reference point. Author Richard Drinnon, a recently retired professor of history at Bucknell University, provides a wealth of detail and interpretation which serves as a powerful indictment of government activities and as a challenge to such widespread but flawed beliefs as those regarding the "benevolence" of the WRA. His groundbreaking work sheds much light on specific but crucial topics, for example the symbiotic relationship between the WRA and the Japanese American Citizens League and the extensiveness of the BIA's moves to deny Native Americans a voice in the appointment of their own legal representatives. Perhaps most significantly, Drinnon's analysis points out important linkages in the treatment of these two racial minorities, for instance between efforts to control the confined Japanese Americans through force, deceit, and the denial of due process and parallel efforts to control Native Americans on reservations, and between a program to solve the "Japanese problem" by scattering this group across the country in hopes of forcing their absorption into the mainstream society and an analagous program to solve the "Indian problem" through relocation and eventual assimilation.

The portrait of Dillon Meyer that emerges from this book is not one of a monstrous villain but rather of an ambitious, efficient, and relatively undistinguished Federal bureaucrat who had little understanding of his Japanese and Native American charges and who was imbued with the prevailing—often racist—social and political values of his time. Meyer carried out his destructive tasks because the institutions he served encouraged or at the very least did not constrain them. Drinnon's work is therefore a dramatic illustration of the pervasiveness of racism in the fabric of American society. It is also yet another reminder that consti-

tutional and other legal rights mean very little unless they are constantly enforced and protected.

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T. Obinkaram Echewa. *The Crippled Dancer*. African Writers Series. (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1986) 227 pp., \$7.50 paper.

At the end of *The Crippled Dancer*, Ajuzia asks, "Was everyone coincidentally and inadvertently carrying a bag packed by other people?" Like Browning's Andrea del Sarto who says, "So free we seem, so fettered fast we are," Ajuzia appears to accept the limitations fate and/or custom place upon the individual. Both men accept with reluctance, however, for both are free, creative spirits aware of the waste of their own talents.

From childhood on, Ajuzia has been menaced by his grandfather's foes, the village chief and his adherents. Ajuzia, who has no basic interest in the feuding (over witchcraft, inheritance, power, property and social standing), and who is an excellent student and a near-free thinker, is forced into the conflict by people on both sides. The final resolution—a halfway win for the grandfather's side—is hardly achieved as a result of Ajuzia's acumen; chance and external interference are the major factors.

The events in Ajuzia's life of frustrations are often humorously told to the reader. A narrative style, rich in folk sayings (often cryptic and even contradictory) gives the reader a feeling for the village life, somewhat exaggerated, but generally credible. There are some slow-moving passages and a bit of needless repetition, but the reader can easily survive them. The book is pleasant reading.

Like Andrea—and, indeed, like Voltaire's *Candide*—Ajuzia, the Igbo, makes a gentle, philosophic comment:

O well . . . Life was truly a court case, and he, Ajuzia had best be like the crippled man of the popular proverb, and whether he had lost or won his case, he should go home swinging, swagging, and dipping as if he were dancing.

—D. K. Bruner
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