

Africa. He demonstrates how these oppressive, confusing, and contradictory laws have systematically subjugated the black population and have even succeeded in “pitting black man against black man” in order to divide and conquer.

At the same time, the book is a tale of hope, courage, and escape. It is the story of a young man hoping to fulfill his dream of coming to America to attend college and play tennis. Mark succeeds in fulfilling this dream but not without sustaining physical hardships and psychological pain.

As an autobiography the book lacks the objectivity to dissect the issues of apartheid and to separate the levels of responsibility for it. However, as an autobiography it does demonstrate the personal and family responses to these oppressive laws.

This book would be an appropriate supplemental text for courses on discrimination, human deprivation, South African apartheid policy, race, ethnicity, and minority studies.

The use of personal photographs supports and enhances the body of the text. This very readable book is a vehicle by which our youth can become aware of the issues of apartheid through the eyes of a young student with whom they can relate.

The negative outcome of reading the book may be that it would have a boomerang effect. It may encourage the false belief that if he (Mark Mathabane) can rise above the rubble—so can everyone else. The result of this type of thinking would be a tragedy and would perpetuate a “victim blaming” mentality. It may lull one into an attitude of complacency and absolve the reader from any responsibility to act on the injustice.

Another possible reaction may be the feeling that the problem is so immense and pervasive that there is no way that it can be solved or no way that one can participate in a solution. The educator would have to be aware of the possibilities of such responses and be prepared to deal with them in the classroom.

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Ruthanne Lum McCunn. *Chinese American Portraits: Personal Histories, 1828-1988*. (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1988) 175 pp., \$16.95 paper.

With her latest book, *Chinese American Portraits*, Ruthanne Lum McCunn adds to her growing list of publications about the painful struggle and heroic survival of the Chinese in America. In an engaging novelistic style, accompanied by equally eloquent photographs, she tells

detailed stories of seventeen diverse men and women, ranging from Yung Wing, educator and patriot, and the first Chinese to graduate from an American university (Yale, class of 1854), to Ho Yuet Fung, writer and filmmaker, who emigrated from Hong Kong in the 1970s. Interspersed within these primary narratives are photographs and lengthy captions telling the stories of other Chinese in America. How the author chose which stories to highlight and which to condense is a mystery, for each story is compelling. On the one hand, the photographs and brief stories interspersed within the pages of longer stories tend to be something of a distraction; on the other hand, in this compromise fashion, many stories beyond the major seventeen get told. The reader cannot help but be impressed by the richness of the author's store as suggested by the large quantity and variety of these small vignettes.

The bibliography at the end of the book attests to McCunn's diligence in researching her subject. The large number of letters to the author and personal interviews may in part account for the personal, sympathetic tone with which she tells each person's tale. McCunn's personal warmth, her empathy for each individual, the patience and evenhandedness with which she relates the hardships that each endured, and the pride she takes in their accomplishments is evident. The book is effective in achieving her purpose, which is identical to Maxine Hong Kingston's in her second book, *China Men*, "to claim America" for people of Chinese ancestry. The evidence McCunn accumulates is most convincing, and the pictures play a highly significant part. The Lee sisters, who grace the paperback cover, for example, in their Victorian ruffles with hair dressed in long curls obviously contradict the late nineteenth-century arguments of the proponents of the Chinese Exclusion Act that the Chinese did not assimilate with whites and never would. Placing her brief summary of "Some Major Legislation Affecting Chinese in America" at the end of all the personal narratives of heroic struggle and survival, serves to emphasize the injustice and the racist quality of America's "protectionist" laws.

For readers who might protest that too much attention is paid to working class people and not enough to the achievements of the upper-class, highly-educated Nobel laureates and business tycoons, the author might respond that her purpose was not to showcase Chinese Americans who have already received wide attention but to show the quiet courage of representative examples of the majority of Chinese Americans—not the exceptions but the rule. *Chinese American Portraits* demonstrates that the ordinary "rule" has itself been extraordinary, and McCunn deserves our sincere thanks.

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