

“novels.” There are long stories of characters such as Seese who becomes a companion of Lecha, a seer whose duty it is to transcribe the notebooks of a Native American “Almanac of the Dead.”

There are throughout the book various pictorializations of the southwestern United States and northern Mexico; many scenes in many of the books or parts of books are placed in Tucson. One will come to the conclusion, I am sure, that Silko has attempted to create a world. She interweaves with her fictions—histories and chronologies of the Native Americans and of the oppressions they have undergone. The story line (or lines) tends to point where the native peoples in South and Central America rise up to regain their tribal lands.

Much patience will carry the reader through the “histories” of the characters Zeta and the group surrounding her, as well as of Calabazaz and Sterling. The latter two are the outstanding Native American characters and much is told from their viewpoints.

The final product of Silko recalls generally the structure and the spread of Dos Passos’s *USA* with its myriad of characters and its mosaic of sites, people, and historic events. Reading it offers a challenge not only to fiction readers, but especially to Silko aficionados.

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**Werner Sollors, ed. *The Invention of Ethnicity*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) xx, 294 pp., \$38.00**

*The Invention of Ethnicity* is obviously and admittedly shaped after Hobsbawm's and Ranger's *Invention of Tradition*, published in 1986, when the essays in this volume were finished. In the meantime, much of what Sollors argues for in his editor's introduction has become accepted knowledge under the general heading of *the constructedness of identity and subjectivity*. If, however, the book has not, as might appear probable at first sight, been overtaken and made obsolete by the very success of the views it advocates—if the reverse, rather, seems to be true and to justify a belated discussion in these pages—this is so because it also affords one an opportunity to reopen questions that may have been prematurely closed.

*E pluribus unum* can carry many different stresses, and this volume, like much new historicist criticism that we have seen since its publication, stresses the *unum*: the sequential relationship according to which *themany* make or are made *one*, difference being abolished or integrated into a larger whole in the process. But where the new historicism has consistently and programmatically termed inventions or fictions of identity *ideological* and based its notions of unity on that of ideology, this term and concept is not central to Sollors's volume. It thereby evades certain pitfalls. In the new historicism, the concerns with ideology have embodied the historicist attempt to relate the fiction, the invention to its background; but this very background has frequently been denied historical (material) specificity by new historicist tendencies to collapse everything

historical into one notion of *discourse* (and then to equate ideology with bad faith). This volume, by way of contrast, is imbued with a sense of historical specificity in essays such as Alide Cagidemetrio's on patterns of ethnic inclusion and exclusion (as translations of sociocultural problems) in historical fiction that addresses themes of nation building; Cathleen Neils Conzen's on nineteenth-century German American public festivities as a problem solving institution in a modern(izing) society; Judith Stein's on constructions of blackness in America between 1890 and 1930; and Thomas Ferraro's on the representation of a family/business fusion in popular writings about the Mafia.

In other words, though the thrust against essentializing views and the grounding of ethnicity in biological or historical *givens* and the argument for notions of construction is pervasive, and though the volume as a whole thereby appears to go in the direction of new historicist and similar dissolutions of history into discourse, it does also preserve a central notion of representation. It thereby has to accept the implied givens of what is being represented or (re)constructed. Not only does ethnicity have to be invented and re-invented, it will also in the process, in so far as it is seen as a *constituens* of identity, have to be invented as the always already given. On a more general level it serves as an idiom to symbolize and thus to point at a sociocultural given—an antecedent asymmetry of power.

In their insistence on the inventedness of categories of self-definition, whether "ethnic" or "American," Sollors and some of his authors tend to share a debunking attitude with much of the new historicism: The madness of things is read as an index of their inauthenticity. (An organicist or essentialist criterion is affirmed, in a roundabout way, through the denial of its applicability—ever.) There frequently seems to be a greater concern with the dangers of constructions of ethnicity, such as the "freezing" of people in stereotypes and the stress of conflict, than with their uses or underlying motives. This perspective overlooks, arguably, that those dangers arise from the symbolized situation (specifically, the power relations in it), rather than from the act of symbolization itself. Behind this view seems to lie a profound uneasiness with conflict, a moral and political preference for consensus.

At the same time, the historical specificity of the volume as a whole counters this theoretical predilection and indirectly enables or even forces one to reconsider the *uses* as well as the *abuses* of inventions of ethnicity. (This becomes particularly clear in William Boelhower's exploration of a certain type of narrative construction of ethnicity.) It leads one back to the consideration that ethnicity in many instances is of several possible "areas" on terms used to symbolize difference, whereby it is placed firmly in a (yet-to-be-explored) functional interaction with class and gender. (Stein, for instance, deals with various discourses or strategies of "Othering" and possible counter-strategies by "others" in a survey in which it is *class* terms that provide her with a critical perspective upon the process of construction. Similarly, Richard Rodriguez, in an autobiographical statement, plays *ethnicity* against *class* and for a long time seems to accord the latter greater reality than the former.)

The essays so far referred to are of particular importance to this argument.

Others flesh out the image of nineteenth- and twentieth-century constructions of Americanness and American ethnicity. There is a character sketch of Jewish American authoress Anzia Yezierska by Mary Dearborn, an insightful discussion of sociologist W. I. Thomas's analysis of deviance in women by Carla Cappetti, a reflection by Albert Murray on his co-writing the as-told-to (auto)biography of Count Basie, and four brief texts by Ishmael Reed, et al.

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**Craig Storti. *Incident at Bitter Creek: The Story of the Rock Springs Chinese Massacre.* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1991) xii, 193 pp., \$21.95.**

In September 1885 a petty dispute among Euro-American and Chinese Union Pacific miners in Wyoming exploded into a homicidal spree which left twenty-five confirmed dead Chinese miners, and another twenty-six missing and presumed dead. In the weeks and months which followed, other Chinese miners and laborers were robbed, killed, or hounded out of the United States. Some of the parties responsible for these atrocities were arrested and brought to trial, but juries found no one guilty of these genocidal crimes. Many local, state, territorial, military, and federal government officials made good-faith efforts to protect the Chinese, but their efforts primarily hastened the exodus of the Chinese contract workers from American shores; for protection usually meant little more than safe passage away from the danger areas, and most of the western US was a dangerous area for Chinese nationals after Rock Springs. Craig Storti's brief account of these events revives long dormant, shameful memories of an era in American history when racial and ethnic prejudices ran unchecked and labor unrest all too easily led to homicide.

As Storti develops the tale, the Union Pacific Railroad bears a heavy burden of guilt for the murderous events at Rock Springs and thereafter. It is ironic that the Union Pacific mines had been highly supportive of the Chinese laborers both before and immediately after the brutal events. Chinese workmen were hired as cheap labor and were effective strikebreakers. But the Union Pacific mines gave them acceptable wages, good housing and, importantly, better working conditions than the European Americans were provided. This led to hostility between the two labor pools. Resentful European American miners, angry with anti-union company policies, lashed out at the beneficiaries of those policies, the Rock Springs Chinese laborers.

As a tale of the lives of common Chinese laborers in the western coal fields, the book is a disappointment. The book covers the Knights of Labor and unionism quite well and introduces many of the key corporate and political figures in the drama adequately. It digresses into a disconnected story about the Shoshoni Chief Washakie and US government dealing with the Indians twenty years before the Chinese massacre, a Rock Springs myth about Butch Cassidy evading arrest there once, and a few other interesting irrelevancies. A few of the