

Explorations in Sights and Sounds, No. 13 (1993)

multicultural autobiography. For example, Ruoff provides a clear example of bicultural autobiography in the work of John Joseph Mathews. Foster focuses on the “in-between” period after the Civil War but before the end of the century and gives an account of the difficulties Keckley encountered in controlling the circumstances of publication, the first of many such accounts in this volume. Sau-ling Wong considers issues of the ethnic autobiographers conflicting “obligations” to her own ethnic community as well as to “outsider” readers, in addition to charges of fictionalization in autobiography. Saldivar, by including American authors not in the United States, demonstrates that political boundaries may be obscuring our perception of cultural relationships.

As Payne states in his concluding remarks in the introduction, there are still cultures absent from this volume that need to be explored, such as personal histories of Irish Americans, Puerto Ricans, Arab Americans, and immigrants from East India and Korea, and he hopes that this volume will inspire others to add their voices to the true cultural diversity of American life writing. As he says, “[t]here is much work, much exploration, to be done before we decide what is the ‘essential’ American language and character.” *Multicultural Autobiography* is certainly a leap toward the goal of giving recognition to the true multivocal diversity of American lives.

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Alejandro Portes and Ruben G. Rumbaut. *Immigrant America: A Portrait*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) xx, 300 pp., \$11.95 paper.

The subtitle of this book is apt. Its authors paint a rich and varied portrait of recent and turn-of-the-century immigrants to America: Vietnamese and Cuban refugees, Mexican, Chinese, Polish and Irish laborers, Indian professionals, Korean entrepreneurs. Unlike many works which focus on a particular nationality or type of immigrant, Portes and Rumbaut attempt a broad comparative sketch. The result is an enlightening synthesis of a very large literature. The authors discuss origins—who the immigrants are and why they come; the *context of exit*, or conditions under which people leave home; issues of *adaptation* (economic, social, and psychological); and *contexts of incorporation*, such as local labor markets, affecting immigrants’ integration into American society.

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The authors take diversity as their major theme. Not only do national origins vary, especially today, but also educational levels, occupations, and legal status. Portes and Rumbaut distinguish four types of immigrants: labor migrants, professional immigrants, entrepreneurs, and refugees or asylees.

Types of immigrants share similar characteristics, regardless of origins. The authors follow this typology while discussing the spatial location of immigrants within the United States, strategies for economic mobility, acculturation, language acquisition, mental health, and political participation. They dispel myths and stereotypes by emphasizing variation within and between nationalities. At the same time, the authors attempt to allay fears of established citizens by emphasizing immigrant adaptation; for example, the shift from home-country monolingualism to English monolingualism by the second or third generation.

Portes and Rumbaut are optimistic about immigration's impact on American society. Taking a critical perspective on orthodox economic approaches, they argue that employer labor demands and prior relationships between countries, not poverty per se, initiate and maintain migrant flows. Most immigrants are self-selected in terms of education and ambition; the majority are young, tax-paying workers who enrich our society through their labor and skills.

Alejandro Portes is a sociologist who has focused on theories of immigration, the Cuban immigrant experience, and Latino immigration in general; Ruben Rumbaut is a nationally-known specialist on Southeast Asian refugee mental health. The book reflects their research interests and priorities, focusing on comparative issues rather than ethnic identity. Although the authors meet their goals, some readers will miss a fuller discussion of newcomer cultural traditions.

While the book has sufficient statistics, maps and tables to provide a good basis for the authors' arguments, it is enlivened by photographs and individual case studies. This is an excellent text for college classes. Both general audiences and specialists will enjoy the book's readable style and clear explanations of complex issues.

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