

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

Anne Williams, best known for her widely acclaimed novel *Dessa Rose*, and Carole Byard, whose illustrations for children's books have twice won the Coretta Scott King award, team together to produce a children's book, the result has to be magical and evocative. It is.

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Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, ed. *Immigration Reconsidered: History, Sociology, and Politics*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) vii, 352 pp., \$38.00 cloth, \$19.90 paper.

Immigration Reconsidered presents the latest paradigm of immigration studies from some of the leading scholars in three disciplines. Contributors include historians Samuel Baily, Sucheng Chan, Philip Curtin, Kerby Miller, and Virginia Yans-McLaughlin; sociologists Suzanne Model, Alejandro Portes, Ewa Morawska, and Charles Tilly; and political scientists Lawrence Fuchs and Aristide Zolberg. Several individuals have degrees or interests in more than one field. This book is the outcome of a conference held to celebrate the Statue of Liberty's Centenary. The papers are carefully chosen, of high individual quality, and integrated more than most collections of essays by scholars' responses to each other and the editor's analytical overview.

The authors place American immigration history in a broad comparative framework ranging in time from the slave trade to recent migration flows from Asia and Latin America. The book makes the point that national boundaries are artificial. Immigrants move across them like clouds over the earth in response to an international labor market. Throughout much of the last four hundred years, the United States has been on the periphery of world capitalism. It is neither unique in terms of its immigrant experience nor a "melting pot." Not everyone wants to come to America; not everyone stays (between 25 to 60% of all immigrants have returned to their countries of origin). Repatriation and immigration elsewhere are common alternatives. This book is valuable because it seeks to avoid an ethnocentric or parochial perspective and to place American immigration in a wider context. It also compares the labor market experiences of African Americans with those of European and Asian immigrants and documents the complex relationships between these groups. Most work on American immigration does not.

Specifically, what is being reconsidered here? The editor and other authors, especially Morawska, criticize an older immigration model (still very much alive in popular discourse) which emphasizes

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assimilation and human capital theory. The classical assimilation model views linear acculturation to American mores as both inevitable and desirable. Human capital theory focuses on individual characteristics and strategies of self-improvement. However, recent social science research emphasizes structural analysis, such as the effect of local labor markets on immigrant success or failure, and collective rather than individual strategies.

This book disappointed the reviewer in only one respect. Although the editor is clearly sympathetic to anthropology and ethnographic methods, no essays by anthropologists appear in *Immigration Reconsidered*. Synthesizing recent approaches to immigration among historians and sociologists was probably a formidable enough task without adding yet another discipline. However, it seems unfortunate to exclude representation by a discipline which is inherently comparative and cross-cultural, and whose practitioners have produced rich discussions of ethnicity.

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