

## ***Explorations in Sights and Sounds***

exclusively “old” families or corporate “branch” executives. This is particularly true in the case of the “growth machine” created by foreign-born builders and developers.

A second example of how urban development of Miami differs from other cities lies in the clash between local and outside corporate control. While this clash exists in Miami, proliferating local small businesses are owned mostly by immigrants, while the corporate “branch” offices are American-owned. Many of the latter are there not to produce goods for the domestic market but rather to sell services to other foreigners, often through the mediation of the local immigrant-owned firms.

Another unique difference in Miami is that the overlap of parallel social systems in the same physical space has given rise to what the authors describe as “acculturation in reverse” — a process by which foreign customs, institutions and language are diffused within the native population. As a consequence, biculturalism has emerged as an alternative adaptive strategy to full assimilation into American culture. Opponents of biculturalism, immigrants and natives alike, must either withdraw into their own circles or exit the community.

In conclusion, this book presents a fresh approach to understanding racial and ethnic conflict that may well play itself out in many urban cities on the edge of the future.

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**E. San Juan, Jr. *Racial Formations/Critical Transformations: Articulations of Power in Ethnic and Racial Studies in the United States.* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, Inc., 1992) ix 176 pp., \$35.00 cloth.**

Those who have read *Racial Formation in the United States* (1986) by Michael Omi and Howard Winant will find in E. San Juan, Jr.’s book an interesting, if not provocative, complement. Both books assert the centrality of race and racism in the social formation of the United States; however, Omi and Winant’s book is grounded in social science whereas San Juan, Jr.’s project is from a literary perspective.

Appropriately enough, the first chapter of the book focuses on race and literary theory. San Juan, Jr. acknowledges some of the reforms in the canon that have resulted in the inclusion of literary works by people of color. However, he thinks that while such efforts may have enlarged the parameters of the discipline, they have not been deepened enough. He sees, moreover, a certain contradiction in

the fact that the very people who accept the inclusion of non-white texts and who utilize varieties of Western approaches to interpreting and analyzing Black texts resist the idea of Blacks developing their own theories of criticism. Such resistance is a part of what he calls “a new hegemonic strategy.”

San Juan, Jr. sees the same hegemonic strategy in what he refers to as “The Cult of Ethnicity and the Fetish of Pluralism”—which is also the title of his second chapter. His criticism of the ethnicity paradigm is an important addition to the growing interdisciplinary critique of that paradigm. The proponents of the ethnicity paradigm, according to San Juan, Jr., reduce race to one criterion of ethnicity, thereby avoiding discussions of racism. The author also sees a similar avoidance in the Marxist analysis which, he states, “has always subsumed racial conflicts into the class problematic” (42). This critique of Marxist analysis is the focus of the third chapter. Also in this chapter, San Juan, Jr. undertakes a brief critique of Omi and Winant. For example, he faults them for losing sight of the “global picture” with regard to racial aspects of capitalist hegemony—something that is clearly outside the purview of their book. Furthermore, he accuses Omi and Winant of “absurd wishfulfilling” for declaring that “minorities have achieved significant (though by no means equal) representation in the political system.”

In all fairness to Omi and Winant, they make that statement in their assessment of contemporary changes in the racial order in the United States. These changes, they point out, have been brought about by, among other things, minority-based movements that challenged the dominant racial ideology. These challenges have led to the development of new “rules of the game.” They acknowledge, however, that these new rules also “contain both the legacy of movement efforts to rearticulate the meaning of race and to mobilize minorities politically on the basis of new ideologies thus achieved, and the heritage of deep-seated racism and inequality” (Omi and Winant, 83).

Chapter four, entitled “Hegemony and Resistance: A Critique of Modernist and Postmodernist Cultural Theory of Ethnic Studies,” is the longest chapter in the book and is divided into seven parts. In this chapter, San Juan, Jr. examines various counterhegemonic efforts (resistances?) in cultural studies. These efforts, according to him, discount race and elevate ethnicity. Some theorists, like Werner Sollors, go a step further by attempting to expunge the term “ethnicity” itself from critical vocabulary. The end result is a return to normalcy of a hegemonic Eurocentrism.

“Beyond Identity Politics” is the title of the fifth chapter, which is the second longest of the book. Here, San Juan, Jr. focuses on the predicament of the Asian American writer in general and on the

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Filipino American writer in particular. It is his opinion that the Asian American writer has been left out in the questioning of the Eurocentric canon by feminists and other people of color, especially African Americans, Chicanos, and American Indians. This predicament may be attributed to a number of factors, foremost amongst them is the diversity of groups classified as Asian Americans. Secondly, according to the author, although Asian Americans are now being touted in the media as “a model minority,” they nonetheless have been marginalized by “state-ordained juridical exclusions.” This history of exclusion has been described by others, but more competently by Ronald Takaki in *Strangers from a Different Shore* (1989). Nevertheless, San Juan, Jr. worries that Takaki has articulated “the hegemonic doctrine of acquisitive/possessive liberalism as the informing principle of Asian American lives” (101), and, whether or not he intended it, ends up vindicating the American Dream.

As for the Filipino American writer, he is in the same predicament for the same reasons as other Asian American writers and for others unique to the Filipino American experience. San Juan, Jr.’s recommendation to Filipino American writers, as well as other Asian American writers, is, ideally, to undertake a critique of hegemony before exploring racial or ethnic identity.

Finally, in the afterward San Juan, Jr. assesses the prospects for cultural diversity, racial politics, and ethnic studies in the twenty-first century. He sees, as far as ethnic studies is concerned, an “emancipatory project” of theoretical and practical deconstruction of the hegemonic rule founded on normative pluralism.

By way of conclusion, let me state that this book is an invaluable addition to a growing body of theoretical works in ethnic studies. One significant but less substantive weakness of the book is San Juan, Jr.’s rather excessive use of postmodernist (he may call it language of contemporary critical theory) vocabulary that not only undercuts the book’s utility to a non-specialist reader, but also makes him seem interested in language games.

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