

Explorations in Sights and Sounds

Two good selections that are relevant to readers of ethnic experiences are “Grandmother’s Secret” and “Paloma.” The former does a respectable job of delineating family ties and local color in the Cuban-American community while it also depicts the differences between the older generation of immigrants and the assimilated generation of their grown children. The latter focuses on the experiences and plight of the huge number of illegal Hispanics in the United States. Although it is sometimes confusing to follow, it contains some of the most poetic writing in *African Passions*. It suffers, as do several other stories, from too many characters, too many complicated relationships, and too little character and story development.

The author presents a portrait of a dozen or so willful, occasionally obsessed women, regularly amusing, sometimes tired, and relentlessly driven. Even with the shortcoming noted, Beatriz Rivera shows a great deal of promise of becoming a significant voice in the growing Cuban-American literary community.

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Clovis E. Semmes. *Cultural Hegemony and African American Development*. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992)

The purpose of this book is to examine cultural aspects of hegemonic relations between White Americans and African Americans, a neglected topic which the author believes should provide the basis for African American Studies programs. Although Semmes establishes culture as the focus of his analysis, political and economic forces are clearly important for understanding the position of Black Americans in the changing social organization of the United States. Defined as regularity in subjective states, culture is theorized as interacting with social organization, as institutional settings frame cultural expressions and vice versa.

Despite the rather narrow definition of culture, the author analyzes a wide variety of cultural forms and elements related to Black American experience. These include both routine activities and artistic work as well as the constraints on cultural expression at different points in time, the availability of resources to support cultural creativity, the effects of positive forms, and the reasons for maladaptive ones.

Critical to the author’s argument about the centrality of culture is the notion of cultural hegemony, the systemic negation of one culture by another, which forms one end of a dialectical process whose manifestation is dehumanization. Cultural hegemony is theorized to create the need for cultural reconstruction among Blacks, a life-affirming, humanizing response to cultural negation. This theoretical approach is offered

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with reference only to its relation to the work of Black scholars and those concerned with the African American experience. However, this work can be understood as well as an important contribution to recent critical analyses of modern society and the subordination of minority cultures by such authors as John Ogbu, Zygmunt Bauman, and Joel Spring.

The uniqueness of this book, however, is that it builds on the cultural discussions of previous efforts which focused on the political and economic exploitation of African Americans. Drawing on the work of E. Franklin Frazier and Harold Cruse, in particular, the author reveals the importance of culture by illuminating how culture interacts with political and economic orders to create contradictions and dilemmas for Blacks in different historical periods. The theoretical framework informs substantive analyses of several key concepts and topics: The implications of legitimacy for mental health; cultural production, economics, and the media; the role of religion; health conditions and their effects on development; and cultural revitalization.

Several flaws distract from the contributions of this work, however. Greater theoretical clarity is needed in several discussions of culture and its relation to power and economics. Additionally, the lack of any visual aids (graphics, photographs, inserts), the type-face selected by the publisher, and the lack of breaks in the text make for tedious reading. Nevertheless, this book offers detailed, interesting discussions of the theories and research of early Black scholars as well as provocative analyses of African American culture and social dilemmas and potential solutions to develop problems. This book is well worth reading for these contributions as well as for its inspiration for the analyses of other non-White groups' experiences with the dynamics of assimilation in American cultural history.

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Janet D. Spector. *What This Awl Means: Feminist Archaeology at a Wahpeton Dakota Village.* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1993) 161 pp., \$32.50 cloth, \$15.95 paper.

Janet Spector has written a book which is enjoyable, enlightening, and thought-provoking reading. Those involved in anthropology, history, gender studies, and ethnic studies would do well to read this small volume carefully and ponder its issues. As she promises in the book's subtitle, Spector presents archaeological evidence pertaining to the Wahpeton Dakota (Eastern Sioux) within a framework which lacks the Eurocentric and androcentric perspectives which too often characterize the study of American Indian pasts.

The book pivots around interpreting an awl, a punch-like imple-