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***Ethnicity and Gender Debates. Cross-Readings of American Literature and Culture in the New Millennium.* Peter Lang, 2020, 298. ISBN 978-3-631-79223-0.**

Ethnicity and Gender Debates. Cross-Readings of American Literature and Culture in the New Millennium is a multi-faceted collection of essays intended to explore issues of great historical and contemporary significance. Following a Foreword by Philip Davies and an Introduction by the volume's editors that set the overall tone, the book is divided into three parts: "Race Matters: Past and Present Challenges," "Immigration Revisited," and "Gender Focus: New Perspectives." Significantly, several of the book's chapters draw on recent public debates, including the ones surrounding the Me-Too movement, the George Floyd protests, the laws governing the US- Mexican border, the socio-political situation in America in the aftermath of the Obama administration, as well as on economic and political relations between US-American culture and some European and Asian cultures.

The volume's first section opens with two essays that analyse examples of racial stereotyping in medical practice. In her study, Carmen Birkle revisits Frances Harper's well-known and much discussed novel *Iola Leroy; or, Shadows Uplifted* (1892) as she examines the critical situation of the medical profession for African Americans in the post-Civil War period, when racial prejudices were still a very powerful social factor. In the context of Harper's novel, the nation could be healed from harmful prejudices and false images through the actions of the main characters, Dr Frank Latimer and Iola Leroy, who represent a self-sacrificing African American elite determined to uplift the most downtrodden section of their own people. Employing the racial and medical discourses of tainted blood to describe the ongoing practice of biological miscegenation, Latimer and Leroy attempt to dispel the widespread fear of a threat to the dominant white race and improve the lot of African Americans.

In the second essay, Lea Stephan investigates conflicting cases in healthcare services and addresses the issue of racial inequality in the US healthcare system. Stephan remarks that the Medicare-Medicaid programme, albeit well-intended, not only failed to fulfil the given promises but had a negative impact on lower class African and Hispanic Americans who, as it turned out, received limited access to health care services. To support her arguments, Stephan provides a plethora of statistical data and diagrams.

The third essay by Ileana Jitaru investigates race in Solomon Northup's memoir *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853) and its 2013 film adaptation, directed by Steve McQueen. Jitaru makes use of the semiotic approach in her analysis, relying on the five codes of meaning developed by Roland Barthes and Christian Metz's famous technique, the so-called *La Grande Syntagmatique*. Her analysis proves that the black protagonist and narrator and the objective camera narrator could be viewed as truthful storytellers. Therefore, the experiences of black people that they represent should be deemed historically accurate by readers/viewers.

Entitled "That Which Is Unspeakable by the White Enemy Is Speakable by Us": Examining Racial Tensions and the Failures of Law Enforcement in Joyce Carol Oates's *The Sacrifice*," Raluca Andreescu's essay is an attempt to expose the racist undercurrent in a society that prides itself on its inclusiveness. Looking at the controversial rape case depicted in Oates's novel, Andreescu addresses the problems of sexual violence, police brutality, media manipulation, and racist misconduct in the 1980s.

Some of these problems subsequently resurfaced in the Black Lives Matter demonstrations of 2020. The author also considers the issue of lost trust in US institutions, such as the police force.

The last essay in the first section, written by Aitor Ibarrola-Armendariz, is part of Native American Studies. The author proposes new ways of reading Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007), which has been pronounced inappropriate for young adult readers on account of its explicit representations of violence, sex, and racism. In his analysis of the novel, Ibarrola-Armendariz stresses Alexie's originality and alerts readers to the social critique that the text provides through sardonic commentary and sharp wit. For him the novel is valuable as an effective vehicle for raising readers' awareness of the situation of young Native Americans in the new millennium.

Part Two, "Immigration Revisited," presents studies of migration within North America as well as explorations of mobility out of Asia and Europe into the United States. The thematic thread that connects this section to the volume's first part is the authors' determination to expose some of the failings of the US-American social and political model. Thus, much-needed light is shed on the discrimination that newcomers experience in their encounters with the host culture. The traumas engendered by dislocation are also discussed.

In the second section's first essay, Noelia Gregorio-Fernández presents a reading of Robert Rodriguez's film *Machete* (2010). She concentrates on the film's hyper-realistic representation of violence on the US-Mexican border and its subversion of essentialist notions of border conflict in both Chicano and Hollywood films. Angeliki Tseti discusses images of ethnic violence and xenophobia represented in the photo-novel *The Lazarus Project* (2008) by the Bosnian American author Aleksandar Hemon. Through parallels to two migrant destinies, she attempts to delineate the traumatic experiences of present-day "strangers," that is, immigrants. Studying two forms of narrative, visual and textual, Tseti arrives at the multidimensional perspective of the relationship between ethnic communities and American culture in the post-9/11 (or post-Abu Ghraib) period.

The next three essays focus on aspects of Asian American identities as represented in literary texts. Pi-hua Ni discusses the Taiwanese American Identity in Julie Wu's highly acclaimed novel *The Third Son* (2013). Defined as the cornerstone of Taiwanese American literature and a landmark in Asian American Studies of the twenty-first century, the novel focuses on the conditions of small ethnic groups, the historical and political circumstances that forced these groups to migrate to America, and their struggles for survival in their new country. Overall, Wu's text has contributed to the empowerment of Taiwanese Americans as a relatively small group within the Asian American community. Jiachen Zhang explores Chinese American gender identity as portrayed in Gish Jen's *Typical American* (1991). Iuliana Vizan presents a reading of Karen Tei Yamashita's *I Hotel* (2010). She discusses the theme of segregation in the context of the Civil Rights Movement in Chinatown, San Francisco.

The third and last section of the volume under discussion is comprised of four essays which focus on constructions of femininity and feminism. In the first essay, the art historian Marianne B. Woods explores the development of mural art. A particular focus is set on several American women artists from the late Victorian era to the Second World War period who were involved in large-scale mural painting projects, intended for the decoration of homes and public edifices. Drawing on notable female figures such as Mary Cassatt, Mary McMonnies, Dorothea Mierisch, Katherine McEwan, Annie Lee Willets, Cora Millet Holden, and Hildreth Meière, Woods challenges the stereotyped notion that this profession should be exercised by men only.

Entitled "Expanding the Transnational Mapping of the Modern Girl to Eastern Europe," Barbara A. Nelson's chapter discusses the little known autobiography of Zizi Lambrino, wife of King Carol II of Romania. Nelson's aim is to investigate the portrayal of the iconic – and scandalous – New Woman as a transnational phenomenon of the twentieth century in the context of the book *The Modern Girl around the World* (2008). Elizabeth Boulot's main concern in her essay is with gender equality. The last essay of this section is dedicated to Lana Del Rey's music. Constantine Chatzipapatheodoridis reads her work as a cultural product rooted in camp and melodrama.

The fourteen essays that make up this volume engage with a wide variety of themes and approach the key concepts of race/ethnicity, identity, and gender from a multiplicity of perspectives. Despite the

authors' different research methodologies and areas of expertise, a fruitful dialogue is maintained between them on the pages of the book. Overall, *Ethnicity and Gender Debates. Cross-Readings of American Literature and Culture in the New Millennium* provides ample evidence of the ingenuity and intellectual riches that the generation of cultural and literary critics of the new millennium has in store for us as colleagues and appreciative readers of their work.

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