Richard Holeton

Encountering Cultures

Reading and Writing in a Changing World

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EDITED BY

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FOR VERONICA

PREFACE

Encountering Cultures is a composition reader that addresses issues of cultural interaction both at home and abroad. My premise is that the increasing cultural diversity in the United States can be best understood in a global context; my goal is to engage students in critical reading and writing by encouraging them to articulate, test, and enlarge their perspective on cultural differences and similarities. I take a broad view of "culture" in this book, using the metaphor of travel to emphasize interactions across cultural boundaries based not only on race, ethnicity, and national origin, but also on language communities, regional subcultures, class, gender, and sexual orientation.

Selections

I have chosen the sixty-three full-length selections for their excellence of expression and their wide range of difficulty, viewpoints, aims, audiences, and styles. An abundance of analytical, argumentative, and documented academic essays offers intellectual frameworks that can be applied to the other selections—of oral history, personal experience, journalism, and fiction—making *Encountering Cultures* both reflexive and largely self-contained.

All of the main selections were written by contemporary Americans or by people who now live in the United States. In one sense, then, *Encountering Cultures* is about "Us"—Americans—encountering one another at home and encountering "Them" abroad. Exactly who constitutes Us and Them, however, is one of the ongoing debates in this book; reflecting the "changing world" of the subtitle, more than half of the authors are women and nearly half are people of color.

This diversity extends to the fifty-one Brief Encounters, short selections that open each chapter, introduce major themes, and place these themes in a broader historical or international context. I have also chosen the Brief Encounters for their high interest level and their usefulness—based on extensive classroom experience—as the stimulus for discussion, as the basis for exercises, and as models of writing strategies and techniques.

Eleven complete, contemporary short stories, one self-contained novel excerpt, and seven fictional Brief Encounters give *Encountering Cultures* a strong literary component. These stories, many anthologized in a composition reader for the first time, dramatize the major themes of the book movingly and powerfully.

Organization

The selections are grouped into six chapters:

1. The Writer in a Changing World: Encountering Language and Culture
2. The Writer as Traveler: Discovering American Places and People
3. The Writer as Traveler: Discovering Foreign Places and People
4. The Critical Journey: Encountering Diversity at Home
5. The Critical Journey: Encountering Cultures Abroad
6. The Imaginary Traveler: A Stranger Comes to Town

Chapter 1 addresses some of the current pressures on the English language, introduces the idea of writing as a social and political act, and suggests connections among self-discovery, writing, language, and culture.

Chapters 2 through 5 alternate between domestic and global perspectives on cultural interactions. Chapter 2 establishes a range of American experiences, emphasizing places and people, that can be used to explore domestic diversity more critically in Chapter 4. Similarly, Chapter 3 offers a variety of American experiences abroad as a basis for exploring international cultures more critically in Chapter 5.

Chapter 6 groups together all the fiction in the book, allowing instructors maximum flexibility in integrating short stories with earlier chapters or choosing to teach a separate literary unit.

This organization reflects the order that many composition courses follow—from reading and writing that grows out of personal experience ("The Writer as Traveler") to more analytical, argumentative, and academic discourse ("The Critical Journey")—and allows students to try to develop their own critical perspectives before

reading those of the "experts." Except for the distinction between fiction and nonfiction, however, I do not draw these lines rigorously or rigidly in any chapter. On the contrary, I have placed some personal writing with a strong argumentative edge early in the book and have included, in Chapters 4 and 5, analytical and scholarly pieces that express a personal voice. And in the questions concluding each chapter, I suggest many connections among readings throughout the book, so that instructors can easily proceed in any order they wish.

Apparatus

I have carefully designed the editorial apparatus, based on my classroom experience with the readings, to be as useful as possible without being obtrusive.

A general **introduction** gives students an overview of the book, its broad concerns, and its organization.

Brief **chapter introductions** indicate why each chapter's readings have been grouped together, explain their place in the overall logic of the book, suggest a few of their major common themes, and offer background information for additional context. I try not to direct students how to interpret any individual selection.

The **headnotes** (actually, footnotes) accompanying each selection are brief, objective, and nondirective. They give the essential context of the reading (where and when it appeared originally), locate the author in time and place, and list selected publications. In an anthology with pluralistic intentions, I believe it is especially important not to position writers relative to one another with glowing adjectives, recitations of awards, or other value judgments.

About thirty **questions,** most of them classroom-tested, appear at the end of each chapter, in three groups:

1. *Reading and Writing about [the subject of the chapter]* includes questions about individual selections and students' own experiences. These questions emphasize critical thinking by asking students to make connections between their experience and their reading and between the readings themselves; they emphasize the interdependence of form and content by integrating questions about technique with questions about substance and purpose. They may be variously appropriate for discussion, exercises, essay assignments, or collaborative work, in or out of class. Those questions which in my experience lend themselves particularly well to a certain approach—such as small-group or partner work—will specify that approach.

2. *Making Further Connections* reaches out, with questions similar to those in the first group, to other chapters in the book. These questions may refer to short stories from Chapter 6 or Brief Encounters from any chapter, but, to avoid redundancy, they refer to main selections only from previous chapters. Instructors using the book nonsequentially need only refer to each group of *Making Further Connections* questions to find useful connections that run in both directions; thus, any chapter can act as the hub of these spokes.
3. *Exploring New Sources* makes suggestions for research papers and projects. Some of these ask students to gather their own primary materials and to integrate them with academic sources. Other questions—reflecting the influence of my colleagues at Stanford and elsewhere who are integrating public service and "real writing" projects into their composition courses—encourage students to get involved in the local community and to make proposals to real-world audiences.

A **rhetorical index** organizes the readings according to writing strategies. I treat the traditional strategies as complementary and as subordinate to the writer's purpose rather than as mutually exclusive; each selection, therefore, may exemplify several strategies at once.

A thorough **Instructor's Manual,** bound separately, includes overviews of all the readings; suggested responses to the end-of-chapter questions; additional questions; recommendations for related selections; and other classroom-tested suggestions. Rhetorical strategies are listed with each main selection and for all selections (including the Brief Encounters) in an alphabetical index.

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—Richard Holeton

INTRODUCTION

In the 1990s, few people in the United States would deny that what happens in, say, Kansas or Rhode Island can be shaped by events in a Kansas-size country in Africa or a Rhode Island–size country in the Middle East—even if many Americans could not locate Uganda or (until recently) Kuwait on a world map.

Global economic interdependence—exemplified by the relationship between political events in the Persian Gulf and the price of gasoline at the corner pump—is one feature of our changing world on the verge of the twenty-first century. Other features include lightning-speed communication and media coverage, ecological pressures from overpopulation and industry, great gaps between wealthy nations and poor ones, regional tensions based on ethnic or religious divisions, movements for freedom and political self-determination, the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction, and large migrations of people fleeing lost dreams or seeking new opportunities.

This book asks you to think about this changing world in conjunction with the increasing cultural diversity of the United States. As Ishmael Reed writes in Chapter 4, "The world is here"; indeed, "The world has been arriving at these shores for at least ten thousand years from Europe, Africa, and Asia."

The newest Americans—the immigrants and refugees coming in record numbers over the past two decades from Central America, Asia, the Caribbean, and other places—have made the rest of the world's problems visible in the United States now more than at any other time in recent history. In addition, other minority groups with deeper roots in the United States—African Americans and Mexican Americans—are growing faster than the white-Anglo majority. In

the fastest-growing states such as Texas and Florida, many cities and counties no longer have any single ethnic majority. In California, whites already make up less than half the population of Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Jose, and Oakland, and by the year 2003 they are expected to lose their majority status statewide.[1]

While experts predict that ethnic diversity in the United States will continue to increase dramatically, political and economic power has been much slower to shift. California, for example, is quickly becoming one of the most culturally diverse and complex societies in history, but whites still held 37 of the state's 45 congressional seats and 104 of 120 seats in the state legislature in 1991.[2] And nationwide, compared with Anglos, much higher proportions of blacks, Mexican Americans, and other ethnic groups live in poverty.

Change and resistance to change are the constants of human history. How will you cope with the new world you are inheriting? You can choose, with Anglo-Indian novelist Salman Rushdie (Chapter 1), to celebrate "the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs." You might share with the narrator of Grace Paley's short story "The Long-Distance Runner" (Chapter 6) a "wide geographical love of mankind," but still—like Joan Didion in El Salvador, Kate Millett in Iran, and other overseas travelers in Chapter 3—"be attacked by local fears." Or perhaps you, like migrant worker Maria Moreno in Chapter 4, are still "waiting and hoping" for a better life in the United States.

In *Encountering Cultures* you will find a range of perspectives on cultural diversity in the United States and the global context from which it grows. The authors of the main selections are all Americans or people who have come to live in the United States; reflecting their "changing world," nearly half are people of color and more than half are women. You will see that they differ widely in their experiences, attitudes, opinions, and styles of writing; you will also discover attitudes and styles shared by people of different cultural backgrounds.

Culture, according to anthropologist Renato Rosaldo in Chapter 5, "refers broadly to the forms through which people make sense of their lives, rather than more narrowly to the opera or art museums." These forms include everything from the dialect or language people speak to the way they eat their food, build their homes, educate their children, treat strangers, define gender roles, tell stories, or

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[1] Carol Ness, "The Un-whitening of California," *San Francisco Examiner*, April 14, 1991, p. A–1.

[2] Edward Blakely, professor of economic development planning, University of California, Berkeley, speaking at the Stanford Centennial Symposium on Ethnicity, Equity, and the Environment, Stanford University, April 12, 1991.

write essays. But since people within the same group also differ individually in all these ways, just where do you draw the boundaries between groups? That depends, of course, on who you ask. If you ask the authors of the selections in *Encountering Cultures,* you will get answers based not only on race or ethnicity or national origin, but also on rural, urban, suburban, or regional differences and on language communities, economic class, educational status, gender, and sexual orientation.

This book uses as an organizing principle the metaphor of travel or the journey to emphasize people's interactions across these cultural boundaries:

Chapter 1, "The Writer in a Changing World: Encountering Language and Culture," explores the connections between self-exploration and writing, culture, and language.

Chapter 2, "The Writer as Traveler: Discovering American Places and People," considers how Americans relate to their local community, the place they grew up, or less familiar places or people close to home.

Chapter 3, "The Writer as Traveler: Discovering Foreign Places and People," takes Americans overseas, focusing on meetings with strangers or unfamiliar customs.

Chapter 4, "The Critical Journey: Encountering Diversity at Home," returns to the United States with a more analytical, critical look at cultural differences and similarities.

Chapter 5, "The Critical Journey: Encountering Cultures Abroad," takes a similarly analytical look at international cross-cultural encounters, adding the perspectives of social critics and social scientists.

Chapter 6, "The Imaginary Traveler: A Stranger Comes to Town," dramatizes both domestic and international cultural encounters in short stories, exploring in contemporary fiction many of the themes raised earlier in the book.

Each chapter begins with a brief introduction highlighting some of its major themes, to help you put the readings into a larger perspective. Concluding each chapter are three groups of questions that ask you to think critically about the readings by (1) reflecting on your own experience in conjunction with what you've read, (2) making connections among the readings, and (3) considering various ways to learn more about the subjects that most interest you. At the back of the book, a rhetorical index organizes the readings according to common writing strategies; you may find this index useful when you're asked to write certain kinds of essays, such as a description, comparison, or analysis.

As the reader, you are the most important "traveler" who encounters cultures in *Encountering Cultures.* Just as an ideal traveler

does not simply listen to canned lectures from a tour guide but goes out and experiences the culture firsthand, the ideal reader of this book will not be a passive receiver of knowledge but will actively and critically engage the readings. And if, as anthropologist Rosaldo writes, "all human conduct is culturally mediated," you will also ask yourself to what extent the personal and cultural baggage that you carry colors your view of the journey.

The importance of this journey cannot be overemphasized for those who see the United States—with its cultural diversity, its gap between rich and poor, its deep-seated racial divisions, its economic opportunities and egalitarian ideals—as a microcosm of the world's worst problems and best hopes. This country is often called an experiment. If history proves that people have not yet learned to deal constructively with their differences as well as their similarities, then you can make no better use of your reading and writing than helping to make this experiment succeed.

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