



Recovered Legacies

*Authority and Identity
in Early Asian American
Literature*

Edited by

Keith Lawrence and Floyd Cheung

I 712.06
E29103

華文

華人中心

Recovered Legacies

*Authority and Identity in
Early Asian American Literature*

Edited by

KEITH LAWRENCE AND
FLOYD CHEUNG



TEMPLE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Philadelphia

Temple University Press
1601 North Broad Street
Philadelphia PA 19122
www.temple.edu/tempress

Compilation and individual articles copyright © 2005 by Temple University, except the following:

"Early Chinese American Autobiography: Reconsidering the Works of Yan Phou Lee and Yung Wing" by Floyd Cheung. This article first appeared in *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 18, no.1 (2003): 45–61. Used by permission of *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*. Reprinted with editorial emendations by the author.

"Unacquiring Negrophobia: Younghill Kang and the Cosmopolitan Resistance to the Black and White Logic of Naturalization" copyright © 2000 by Stephen Knadler. This article first appeared in *Jouvert: A Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 4, no.3 (Spring/Summer 2000). Used by permission of and with editorial emendations by the author.

"Wounded Bodies and the Cold War," from *Race and Resistance* by Viet Thanh Nguyen, copyright © 2002 by Oxford University Press, Inc. Used by permission of Oxford University Press, Inc. Reprinted with editorial emendations by the author.

"Growth" and these additional poems by Toyo Suyemoto quoted in "Toyo Suyemoto, Ansel Adams, and the Landscape of Justice" are used by permission of the estate of Toyo Suyemoto Kawakami: "Gain," "In Topaz," and "Transplanting" are reprinted from *Trek* (The Projects Reports Division, Central Utah Relocation Center, 1943); "Topaz" is reprinted from *All Aboard* (The Projects Reports Division, Central Utah Relocation Center, Spring 1944); "Topaz, Utah" is reprinted from "Voices from a Generation Found: The Literary Legacy of Nisei Writers" by Stan Yogi in *Forkroads: A Journal of Ethnic American Literature* 5 (Fall 1996): 68.

"The 'Pre-History' of an 'Asian American' Writer: N.V.M. Gonzalez' Allegory of Decolonialization" by Augusto Espiritu. This article first appeared in *Amerasia Journal* 24, no.3 (Winter 1998): 126–41. Used by permission of *Amerasia Journal*. Reprinted with editorial emendations by the author.

All rights reserved
Published 2005
Printed in the United States of America

© The paper used in this publication meets the requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.49-1992

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Recovered Legacies : authority and identity in early Asian American literature /
edited by A. Keith Lawrence and Floyd D. Cheung.

p. cm.—(Asian American history and culture)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-59213-118-2 (alk. paper)

ISBN 1-59213-119-0 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. American literature—Asian American authors—History and criticism. 2. Asian Americans—Intellectual life. 3. Identity (Psychology) in literature. 4. Asian Americans in literature. 5. Group identity in literature. 6. Authority in literature.
I. Lawrence, A. Keith, 1954– II. Cheung, Floyd D., 1969– III. Series.

PS153.A84R44 2005

810.9'895—dc22

2004062557

In the series

Asian American History and Culture

Edited by Sucheng Chan, David Palumbo-Liu, Michael Omi,
and K. Scott Wong

- Rajini Srikanth, *The World Next Door: South Asian American Literature and the Idea of America*
- Linda Trinh Võ, *Mobilizing an Asian American Community*
- Franklin S. Odo, *No Sword to Bury: Japanese Americans in Hawai'i during World War II*
- Josephine Lee, Imogene L. Lim, and Yuko Matsukawa, eds., *Re/collecting Early Asian America: Essays in Cultural History*
- Linda Trinh Võ and Rick Bonus, eds., *Contemporary Asian American Communities: Intersections and Divergences*
- Sunaina Marr Maira, *Desis in the House: Indian American Youth Culture in New York City*
- Teresa Williams-León and Cynthia Nakashima, eds., *The Sum of Our Parts: Mixed-Heritage Asian Americans*
- Tung Pok Chin with Winifred C. Chin, *Paper Son: One Man's Story*
- Amy Ling, ed., *Yellow Light: The Flowering of Asian American Arts*
- Rick Bonus, *Locating Filipino Americans: Ethnicity and the Cultural Politics of Space*
- Darrell Y. Hamamoto and Sandra Liu, eds., *Countervisions: Asian American Film Criticism*
- Martin F. Manalansan, IV, ed., *Cultural Compass: Ethnographic Explorations of Asian America*
- Ko-lin Chin, *Smuggled Chinese: Clandestine Immigration to the United States*
- Evelyn Hu-DeHart, ed., *Across the Pacific: Asian Americans and Globalization*
- Soo-Young Chin, *Doing What Had to Be Done: The Life Narrative of Dora Yum Kim*
- Robert G. Lee, *Orientalists: Asian Americans in Popular Culture*
- David L. Eng and Alice Y. Hom, eds., *Q & A: Queer in Asian America*
- K. Scott Wong and Sucheng Chan, eds., *Claiming America: Constructing Chinese American Identities during the Exclusion Era*
- Lavina Dhingra Shankar and Rajini Srikanth, eds., *A Part, Yet Apart: South Asians in Asian America*
- Jere Takahashi, *Nisei/Sansei: Shifting Japanese American Identities and Politics*
- Velina Hasu Houston, ed., *But Still, Like Air, I'll Rise: New Asian American Plays*
- Josephine Lee, *Performing Asian America: Race and Ethnicity on the Contemporary Stage*
- Deepika Bahri and Mary Vasudeva, eds., *Between the Lines: South Asians and Postcoloniality*
- E. San Juan, Jr., *The Philippine Temptation: Dialectics of Philippines-U.S. Literary Relations*
- Carlos Bulosan and E. San Juan, Jr., ed., *The Cry and the Dedication*
- Carlos Bulosan and E. San Juan, Jr., ed., *On Becoming Filipino: Selected Writings of Carlos Bulosan*
- Vicente L. Rafael, ed., *Discrepant Histories: Translocal Essays on Filipino Cultures*
- Yen Le Espiritu, *Filipino American Lives*
- Paul Ong, Edna Bonacich, and Lucie Cheng, eds., *The New Asian Immigration in Los Angeles and Global Restructuring*
- Chris Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor: The Pacific Coast Canned-Salmon Industry, 1870-1942*

Preface

AS PROFESSORS of Asian American literature, we quite naturally find satisfaction and purpose in Asian American literary scholarship: our own research projects engage and motivate us; we are revitalized through our scholarly dialogues and interactions with colleagues. But each of us, in our respective university and college assignments, is first and foremost a teacher. Our first thoughts are always for our students; and in the way we structure our courses, in the texts and authors we choose, and in the discussions and activities we build our classes around, we seek to engage our students, to challenge them, and to develop in them significant and lasting skills that will help them to negotiate literature and life.

In our Asian American literature courses, and especially in our survey courses, we have often lamented the dearth of approaches to or “ways of reading” the pioneer texts of Asian American literature—virtually all texts published before the late 1960s. We have also been troubled by the fact that insofar as theoretical approaches to early texts and authors do exist, they tend to polarize their subjects into “good” and “bad” or “real” and “fake” camps, sometimes quite casually dismissing a text or author for exhibiting the wrong politics, the wrong aesthetic, or the wrong tone. We have longed for approaches to early texts and authors that, through careful and clearheaded analysis, would not only define and explain fractures and flaws but would also engage texts and authors on their own terms and in ways that would fairly and logically reveal their strengths and contributions. This book, in large measure, represents an attempt to satisfy such longings.

To be sure, this book is directed to fellow scholars. But Asian American literature students, together with those who teach them, constitute our primary audience. Given our pedagogical aims, we have required contributors not only to maintain high standards of scholarship, originality, and sophistication, but also to write clearly and directly to our intended audience, avoiding unnecessary jargon and convoluted language. In our initial formulation of this project, in our selection of pre-1960s authors, and in our own editing of each article, we have had our

student audience in mind. We hope that through the perspectives and analyses afforded by this book, our fellow scholars—students as well as teachers—will discover new ways of looking at favorite texts and that, in some cases, they might adopt “neglected” texts as new favorites.

Certainly, there are omissions in our project. Difficult content decisions were made in line with our desire to put forward lesser known writers and texts. Satisfied that most of our readers would bring with them an appreciation of Sui Sin Far and Hisaye Yamamoto, for example, we elected not to “recover” such writers here. Otherwise, we have tried to represent major Asian American authors and texts before the 1960s, although constraints of space and time meant that deserving texts and writers would be left out and that some analyses would be curtailed. However, the analyses of texts and authors considered in this book also suggest approaches to works and writers we have been unable to include; and we trust our audience to find not only new applications for our ideas and those of our contributors, but other wonderful and productive ways of reading a large body of too-long-neglected works.

To our contributors, we owe our deepest gratitude for their generosity, intellect, loyalty, and patience. We would also like to thank our colleagues—known and anonymous—who have reviewed and nurtured our text through its various stages of development. We acknowledge the unflagging support of our editors at Temple University Press, especially David Palumbo-Liu, Janet Francendese, and William Hammell: they have improved the project with their incisive criticism and sustained us with their encouragement. Many of the articles in this collection began as papers sponsored by the Circle for Asian American Literary Studies (CAALS) and presented at annual conferences of the American Literature Association (ALA). We recognize the executive officers of the ALA—particularly Gloria Cronin and Alfred Bendixen—who helped lay the groundwork for this collection by supporting CAALS as a fledgling organization and by warmly encouraging our scholarly endeavors. We appreciate undergraduate and graduate research assistants who have assisted us with word processing and proofreading responsibilities—especially Cameron Pipkin, whose expert editorial guidance was all the more appreciated because it was voluntary. We are grateful for grants from our respective departments and colleges at Brigham Young University and Smith College and from the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation: these enabled us to do research, to write, to participate in conference activities related to this project, and to create and then sustain CAALS through its first years.

For their care and devotion, we thank our friends and families—all of whom we can acknowledge properly only by returning their love. We owe our fondest gratitude and our hearts to our respective best friends and companions Tracy and Sheri, who have sacrificed much so that *Recovered Legacies* could be compiled. To our students, we dedicate this volume.

Keith Lawrence and Floyd Cheung
May 2005

Chronology of Works Discussed

Date Published	Title	Author
1887	<i>When I Was a Boy in China</i>	Yan Phou Lee (1861–1938?)
1909	<i>My Life in China and America</i>	Yung Wing (1828–1912)
1912	<i>Mrs. Spring Fragrance</i>	Edith Eaton/Sui Sin Far (1865–1914)
1915	<i>Me, A Book of Remembrance</i>	Onoto Watanna/ Winnifred Eaton (1879–1954)
1925	<i>A Daughter of the Samurai</i>	Etsu Inagaki Sugimoto (1874–1950)
1937	<i>And China Has Hands</i>	H.T. Tsiang (1899–1971)
1937	<i>East Goes West</i>	Younghill Kang (1903–1972)
1937–55	<i>College Plays</i>	Various playwrights, including Ling-Ai Li, Wai Chee Chun, and Charlotte Lum
1942–45	Various poems in <i>Trek</i>	Toyo Suyemoto (1916–2003)
1943	"The Travelers"	Toshio Mori (1910–1980)
1945	<i>Fifth Chinese Daughter</i>	Jade Snow Wong (1922–2002)
1946	<i>America Is in the Heart</i>	Carlos Bulosan (1911–1956)
1947	"Unfinished Message"	Toshio Mori (1910–1980)
1949	<i>Yokohama, California</i>	Toshio Mori (1910–1980)
1953	<i>Nisei Daughter</i>	Monica Itoi Sone (1919–)
1957	<i>No-No Boy</i>	John Okada (1923–1971)
1958	"Bread of Salt"	N.V.M. Gonzalez (1915–1999)
1959	"The Long Journey and the Short Ride"	Toshio Mori (1910–1980)

xii CHRONOLOGY OF WORKS DISCUSSED

1964	<i>The Martyred</i>	Richard E. Kim (1932–)
1968	<i>The Innocent</i>	Richard E. Kim (1932–)
1986	<i>Clay Walls</i>	Ronyoung Kim (1926–1987)
1995 (written 1955)	<i>The Cry and the Dedication</i>	Carlos Bulosan (1911–1956)
2000 (written 1944)	<i>The Brothers Murata</i>	Toshio Mori (1910–1980)

Contents

Preface	vii
Chronology of Works Discussed	xi
Introduction	1
<i>Keith Lawrence and Floyd Cheung</i>	
1. Early Chinese American Autobiography: Reconsidering the Works of Yan Phou Lee and Yung Wing	24
<i>Floyd Cheung</i>	
2. The Self and Generic Convention: Winnifred Eaton's <i>Me, A Book of Remembrance</i>	41
<i>David Shih</i>	
3. Diasporic Literature and Identity: Autobiography and the I-Novel in Estu Sugimoto's <i>Daughter of the Samurai</i>	60
<i>Georgina Dodge</i>	
4. The Capitalist and Imperialist Critique in H. T. Tsiang's <i>And China Has Hands</i>	80
<i>Julia H. Lee</i>	
5. Unacquiring Negrophobia: Younghill Kang and Cosmopolitan Resistance to the Black and White Logic of Naturalization	98
<i>Stephen Knadler</i>	
6. Asian American (Im)mobility: Perspectives on the <i>College Plays 1937–1955</i>	120
<i>Josephine Lee</i>	

7. Toyo Suyemoto, Ansel Adams, and the Landscape of Justice <i>John Streamas</i>	141
8. Wounded Bodies and the Cold War: Freedom, Materialism, and Revolution in Asian American Literature, 1946–1957 <i>Viet Thanh Nguyen</i>	158
9. Suffering Male Bodies: Representations of Dissent and Displacement in the Internment- Themed Narratives of John Okada and Toshio Mori <i>Suzanne Arakawa</i>	183
10. Toshio Mori, Richard Kim, and the Masculine Ideal <i>Keith Lawrence</i>	207
11. Home, Memory, and Narrative in Monica Sone's <i>Nisei Daughter</i> <i>Warren D. Hoffman</i>	229
12. The "Pre-History" of an "Asian American" Writer: N.V.M. Gonzalez' Allegory of Decolonization <i>Augusto Espiritu</i>	249
13. Representing Korean American Female Subjects, Negotiating Multiple Americas, and Reading Beyond the Ending in Ronyoung Kim's <i>Clay Walls</i> <i>Pamela Thoma</i>	265
Contributors	295
Index	299

Introduction

KEITH LAWRENCE AND FLOYD CHEUNG

FOR MORE than a century, immigrants from various Asian countries and their descendants have made America their home. Throughout this time, writers whom we could call Asian American have expressed their joys, lamented their losses, crafted new forms, and imagined new worlds in their poetry, stories, novels, and plays. *Recovered Legacies: Authority and Identity in Early Asian American Literature*, which focuses on the period of Asian American literary history between roughly 1880 and 1965, assists in the recovery of the rich, diverse, and complicated writings of Asian American literary pioneers. We acknowledge, as Cary Nelson reminds us, that "literary history is never an innocent process of recovery. We recover what we are culturally and psychologically prepared to recover, and what we 'recover' we necessarily rewrite, giving it meanings that are inescapably contemporary, giving it a new discursive life" (1989, 11). Working at the dawn of the twenty-first century, our contributors and we recover and reassess many texts that have been ignored or denigrated by previous critics of Asian American literature. We have found that by approaching early texts with a wider range of expectations, paying close attention to the circumstances of their composition (including their original historical, social, and sometimes archival contexts) while applying traditional and recent critical theories to our readings of them, we have been able to rediscover what was valuable about the texts for their initial audiences as we infuse them with new discursive life for contemporary readers.

The subtitle of our volume would suggest that, from our perspective, affording new life to early Asian American literature is synonymous with establishing its authority and identity. We appreciate that *author* is the root of *authority*—and that both words derive from the Latin *auctor*, or "creator." We wish to restore, in measure, the authority of (and for) early Asian American literary texts to the respective authors of these texts. One of our fundamental assumptions here is that every literary

text is engendered by unique circumstances—that, more precisely, these circumstances dictate how the author of a given text will shape it and what he or she will include in it. If the authority of (or for) this text is to be restored to its author—especially if the text is historically removed from us—we are thus obliged, as a point of departure, to re-create and understand the text's engendering circumstances. The *identity* of a literary text, given connections of the word itself to the Latin *idem* ("same," "consistent") and *essentitas* ("being"), will derive, certainly, from these "engendering circumstances" as well as from the text's self-contained structure and content. In this sense, the identity of a late nineteenth-century Asian American text should not depend (to put it bluntly) on the agenda of an early twenty-first-century reader. In emphasizing literary authority and identity, this volume contributes to the study of the "early" period of Asian American literary history in two ways: first, as a corrective to the presentist trend in existing scholarship, and second, as part of an effort to rethink why multicultural—in this case, Asian American—perspectives from the period matter.

TRANSCENDING PRESENTISM

As the recent publication of *Re/collecting Early Asian America* (Lee, Lim, and Matsukawa 2002) signals, the time has come to reconsider how we "recollect"—that is, how we select and remember—early Asian American cultural productions. One key historical marker for the work of Lee et al. is the same for us: the significance of 1965 as the year of the Hart-Celler Act, which mandated changes in the immigration quota system and consequently allowed for many more immigrants from Asian countries to enter the United States, thereby fundamentally changing the demographic composition of Asian America. Another date of importance for us is 1968, when students at San Francisco State University (joined by their peers at many other institutions) called for an end to U.S. military intervention in Vietnam as well as for reforms to an educational system that did not address their needs. Finally, the late 1960s saw the invention of the terms "Asian American" and "Asian American literature"; during this period, concerted efforts were made by Asian American writers and scholars, especially in California, to define, codify, and stimulate appreciation for Asian American literary production. These events help to make the late 1960s a watershed moment for Asian American literary studies. And as David Palumbo-Liu (1995) has pointed out, most scholarship has focused on literature following this moment—and indeed on

literature of the moment, a phenomenon he calls the “fetishization of the present” (qtd. in Chang 1996, xv). Overcoming or transcending such presentism depends on successfully meeting at least three challenges: to dismantle the resistance/accommodation model of the Asian American experience, to resist prescription while embracing dialogue, and to perceive America as (in Rémi Brague’s words [2002]) an “eccentric culture.”

Challenge 1: Dismantling the Resistance/Accommodation Model

We have been inspired by scholars of other ethnic American literatures as they have moved beyond the necessary and important work of canonizing so-called representative writers and texts to consider American multicultural production from new and more broadly developed perspectives on diversity and interconnectedness. We acknowledge, for example, the work of Kirsten Silva Gruesz (2001) on late nineteenth-century Latino writing, where she adeptly demonstrates how hitherto unknown Latino authors creatively engage not only the historical shifts in U.S.-Latin American relations but also such writers of the mainstream tradition as Whitman, Longfellow, and Bryant. While she pays careful attention to historical and materialist concerns, Gruesz works among a growing body of scholars who no longer choose to view their field solely through the binary lenses of resistance and accommodation, lenses worn by many late twentieth-century critics of ethnic American literature. Indeed, the resistance/accommodation model of Asian American experience is closely attached to present-centered Asian American literary and social theory. As one of our contributors, Viet Thanh Nguyen, argues in *Race and Resistance: Literature and Politics in Asian America*, “Resistance and accommodation are actually limited, polarizing options that do not sufficiently demonstrate the *flexible strategies* often chosen by authors and characters to navigate their political and ethical situations” (2002, 4; emphasis in original).

Collectively (and we are both oversimplifying and extrapolating Nguyen’s argument here), Gruesz (2001) and fellow scholars like Geneviève Fabre and Michel Feith (2002) and Craig Womack (1999) remind us that the resistance/accommodation model is problematic in two ways. First, it is clearly the product of its own era, measuring both “resistance” and “accommodation” by codified standards of the late twentieth century. Second, and more crucially, it measures (and again, only in codified ways) little more than how politically, emotionally, or socially active one is as an “American” or, in contradistinction to it,

an “ethnic American” of a particular type. Larger issues of one’s materialism, ideology, spirituality, aesthetics, biology, morality, culture, or sociality—of one’s identity and humanity—are thus misrepresented or altogether ignored. Take, for instance, the case of Edith and Winnifred Eaton, who wrote under the names of Sui Sin Far and Onoto Watanna at the beginning of the twentieth century.

A review of Sui Sin Far’s and Onoto Watanna’s differing receptions—past and present—provides insights into trends in Asian American literary criticism, especially a sense of how changing political priorities have affected the ways in which scholars interpret and evaluate the work of early figures. As one of the first authors to be recovered after the birth of the field in the 1960s, Sui Sin Far consistently has attracted scholarly attention, thus making her a particularly good case for our consideration. Writing for a range of newspapers and literary journals during the turn of the twentieth century, she published her only book-length work, a collection of short stories titled *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, in 1912. After her death in 1914, her literary reputation remained dormant until about 1970, when scholars in the field of Asian American studies began recovering her work. Initially, scholars celebrated her stories and other writings for reasons that made sense in the critical climate of the 1970s. Half English and half Chinese, Sui Sin Far, née Edith Eaton, chose to write under a Chinese pseudonym. Scholars interpreted this choice as brave, proud, and confident during an age when Sinophobia was dominant in America. Accordingly, they historicized Sui Sin Far as an early exemplar of the values they themselves advocated through the Asian American movement: greater ethnic pride and increased social accountability. In particular, they emphasized how Sui Sin Far’s protagonists—who were invariably likable and complex human individuals—countered negative stereotypes of Chinese as inhuman hordes. Following the success of *The Woman Warrior* in 1975, feminist critics searched for Maxine Hong Kingston’s (1975) antecedents to recover an Asian American women writers’ tradition; and not surprisingly, they identified Sui Sin Far as one of Kingston’s “literary grandmothers” (Ammons 1992, 60). Routinely throughout the 1970s and 1980s, critics and teachers compared her favorably with her sister, Winnifred Eaton, who chose to write under the pseudo-Japanese penname of Onoto Watanna at a time when Japan and things Japanese were positively viewed by most Americans. Thus, the narrative forwarded by such scholar-teachers posits that while Edith heroically emphasized her Chinese identity, Winnifred chose a much easier and more lucrative path, one that appeared to support

stereotypical notions of a problematically exotic and devious Japanese character. During the first period of recovery, in short, early authors were measured—and embraced or denounced—according to their apparent ethnic pride and ostensible resistance to negative stereotypes of Asians and Asian Americans.

In the past ten years, a body of criticism by a new generation of critics—including Yuko Matsukawa (1994), Min Song (1998), Dominka Ferens (2002), and our contributor David Shih—asks a different set of questions of both Sui Sin Far's and Onoto Watanna's writings: To what degree did these writers act as trickster figures? How do new theories of gender and sexuality afford fresh lenses through which to interpret their work? Does it matter that early writers sometimes positioned themselves as insiders when, in contrast to the Asian and Asian American communities about which they wrote, they were indeed outsiders by virtue of their class and mixed-race identities? In what ways did the demands of their publishers affect what they could write? What other constraints—and opportunities—attended their idiosyncratic careers?

As the example of the Eaton sisters' reception demonstrates, scholars in the field of Asian American literature have begun to move from a compensatory to a transformative mode. During the first phase of recovery, Asian American literary critics tended to read early literature as either supportive or unsupportive of present-day political goals—and to advocate individual texts according to such readings. In a sense, these politically conscious, committed, and well-intentioned critics asked not what they could do for early Asian American literature but what early Asian American literature could do for them. More to the point, they asked which early figures anticipated the compensatory cultural work that they themselves sought to perform through their own criticism and teaching. While exceptions exist, only in the past decade have critics in the main begun to ask different and more open questions, approaching literature of the past with greater attention to original circumstances of production. For Sui Sin Far and Onoto Wantanna, especially, this work is well under way, but for many other early figures—some of whom are discussed in this volume—the work of transformative reassessment has just begun.

Challenge 2: Resisting Prescription and Embracing Dialogue

In *The City of Man* (1998), Pierre Manent satirically observes that relying on accepted scientific methodology, the scholar has virtually boundless freedom in setting up and developing arguments—especially given that

"he is methodologically exempt from connecting to other facts, which is to say from the whole of the human phenomenon," so that he is "spared the sole true difficulty of knowledge." Such scholars, Manent continues, tend to rely on interdisciplinary research, "as if the sum of the biases they profess could ever yield the unity of an impartial examination." Indeed, such reliance stems in large part from a complicit understanding among disciplines about which rules may, with impunity, be broken—to the end that " 'interdisciplinary research' is to scientific rigor what routing is to military discipline or a stampede to horsemanship" (111, 112). For Manent, there is an attendant scholarly problem, one centered in "the contrast found in the spirit of modern democracies between reforming activism under the banner of universal rights and scientific passivity in the name of cultural diversity." The problem is not simply that the tension between scholarly passivity and action is finally unresolvable, but that asserting man as a cultural being in measure contradicts and is contradicted by asserting man as a being with rights (148, 149). Put differently, the doctrine of rights leads sociologists quite naturally to the doctrine of cultural diversity—but paradoxically makes full or genuine diversity impossible. Either this or a championed diversity begins to impinge upon an unfettered possession or exercise of rights.

Manent's argument should give any body of scholars pause. It has, it seems to us, a number of important ramifications for Asian American literary studies; but we focus on only one here. We began our discussion with an indictment of presentism—which as a matter of course champions both *rights* and *diversity* as Manent uses the terms. The presentist model prefers to ignore tensions or schisms between the two; at best, it makes only cursory efforts to reconcile or arbitrate such tensions. Somewhat ironically, however, it rewards the fervor with which moral convictions or prescriptions are drawn from analyses of diversity or rights (or both together)—perhaps to call attention away from the logically flawed processes whereby such morality is deduced. More problematic still is the possibility that in employing the presentist model, one begins a textual analysis with a moral judgment or prescription already in mind, so that the resulting study is more parable than analysis, exemplifying (to collapse Manent's terms) all the rigor of a stampede.

Admittedly, aesthetic criticism is and must be, in important ways, prescriptive. But even a casual analysis of the critical tradition tells us that prescription is a double-edged sword—and that, for every legitimate or healthy prescription, there are probably dozens that, because they invoke censorship or abuse, only compound ignorance, bigotry,