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James P. Danky, Wayne A. Wiegand, eds. *Print Culture in a Diverse America.* Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1998. x + 291 pp. $30.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-252-06699-3; $52.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-252-02398-9.

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For half of a millennium there has existed a print culture, but only in the past thirty years or so have scholars begun to recognize the complex relationship that exists between the reader and what is written. One response to this new awareness has been the creation of several centers throughout the United States focusing on questions relating to print culture. This book contains selected papers from a 1995 conference held by the Center for the History of Print Culture in America in Madison, Wisconsin. Danky and Wiegand, both long-time activists in the history of libraries and print, who also share directorship of the Center that hosted the conference, have collected a remarkable group of papers demonstrating both the vitality and the scholarly sophistication of this burgeoning field of inquiry. Although the cultural impact of reading and publishing the works of well-known European authors has been ceaselessly explored over the years, the title of this work reflects its commitment to exploring lesser known, but still important, aspects of America's diverse populace.

Worth the price of admission is Wayne Wiegand's excellent introductory essay, which explicates in a few tightly written pages the panorama of scholarship on print culture that has appeared over the past three or four decades. Wiegand ably summarizes the major emphases into four categories: 1) literary studies, 2) reader-response theory, 3) ethnographies of reading, and 4) print culture history. For each section, he points out the major scholars and their works so that anyone interested in gaining an understanding of the entire picture has at their fingertips the most representative literature by prominent theoreticians. In so doing, Wiegand has provided his readers access to the foundational literature and saved us all a lot of work.

The essays that follow are divided into three groups: forgotten serials, literature affected by race, class, and gender, and finally, print literature that reconstructs events. The last group is the one that seems to stretch our limits of understanding the wide possibilities for investigating print culture, since most of us can most readily comprehend some of the issues concerned with the production of newspapers or journals by various sub-groups. Thus in the part titled "Deconstructing Forgotten Serials," Rudolph Vecoli surveys the output of the immigrant Italian press between 1850 and 1920 in cities large and small to delve into the impact that print had on a population that was struggling to learn a new culture while maintaining strong links to its past. He concludes that print was only one of many sources of information for the average Italian immigrant and that attention must be paid to the influence of oral tradition as well. Attention to ethnic publications is also reflected in Violet Johnson's well-crafted essay on the *Boston Chronicle* and its impact on pan-Africanist thinking in New England between 1930 and 1950. Johnson illuminates the diversity of African-American newspapers published during this time period and helps us understand more clearly intermingling of radical politics and nationalism during a time of transition in the African-American world of Boston.

The West coast is the source for Yumei Sun's informative piece on the *Chung Sai Yat Po*, which was San Francisco's most prominent Chinese-language newspaper in the first two decades of this century. Undoubtedly for many American readers of European descent, the cultural mileau of Chinese-Americans is largely a mystery, which makes Sun's explication of this significant newspaper during this dynamic period of California history so enlightening. The stories from its pages help open a window into the lives of these new immigrants, and Sun's language skills and background in Chinese culture provide for the reader an unparalleled opportunity for understanding this unfamiliar territory.

The section on ethnic publications also contains an interesting essay by Norma Fay Green on the *Streetwise*, which was Chicago's largest and best know newspaper produced by its homeless community. Green provides an in-depth look at all aspects of this remarkable effort begun in 1992 by a marginalized community to enter the

world of enterprise and produce a print product worthy of distribution and sale. In addition to basic news, *Streetwise* also fostered a mission of helping the homeless to get back on their feet, and, ironically enough, leave the unsafe world of park benches, bridges, and heat grates where they would no longer be in need of *Streetwise*'s information and assistance. As the homeless drift along the substratum of our consciousness, barely acknowledged by proper American society, a publication such as *Streetwise* exemplifies, probably more than any other, the true nature of forgotten serials.

The next section of *Print Culture in a Diverse America* focuses on the impact that race and class have on the print environment. Similar to Green's essay on *Streetwise*, Lynne Adrian grapples with a publication sponsored by another highly migrant group–the hobo. As rootless as the homeless, but with greater range, the hobo represents another segment of *untermenschen* within American society that has been neglected. In his highly informative piece on African-American periodicals that were influential within that community during the first third of the twentieth century, Michael Fultz emphasizes how the need for more education was a constant topic in such periodicals' pages. The African-American reader is also the topic of Elizabeth McHenry's "Forgotten Readers: African-American Literary Societies and the American Scene." McHenry points out in her examination of these groups during the decades before and after 1900 that such societies helped articulate and promote common social goals for their communities. It is remarkable how much we do not know about the reading habits of ethnic minorities, yet we can take heart with scholarship like McHenry's that begins to mark out at least the broad dimensions of this question. This section concludes with an impressive study by Christine Pawley that breaks new ground by analyzing the reading habits of a small Iowa town at the end of the nineteenth century. Through a close examination of public library circulation records, Pawley demonstrates the incredible amount of information that can be gleaned from this rather mundane source. She links this data with other archival information relating to Osage, Iowa and from all of this draws important conclusions about who read what and why. Pawley's methodology deserves to be replicated again and again throughout this country!

The final section represents three papers that explore how the printed word reflects the actual event. This is especially intriguing with the timely essay by Steven Biel on how contemporary periodicals and books treated the meaning of the 1912 *Titanic* disaster. As a cultural historian, Biel brings to his writing a finely tuned understanding of the nuances of text within society. In her article on Langston Hughes in the 1930's, Elizabeth Davey explains how Hughes became increasingly frustrated with publishing outlets available to him and began promoting his poetry through public performances. In so doing, he expanded his readership in a novel manner, which, Davey reminds us, print scholars must also take into account. Finally, Jacqueline Goldsby explicates the complicated background to the 1927 publication of James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. The original text was first published in 1912 by an obscure press, and when it reappeared in 1927 the times for African-Americans were much different than in the pre-World War I era. Goldsby reveals the conflicts with Johnson and the political pressures on him as an African-American author struggling to survive in the first two decades of this century.

Danky and Wiegand's *Print Culture in a Diverse America* is a first-rate collection of essays that contribute greatly to our understanding of the role of books and periodicals created for and consumed by those outside the mainstream American culture. For anyone wanting to learn about the history of print in America, this excellent book will be a good place to start!

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