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Lewis H. Carlson, Kevin B. Vichcales, eds. *American Popular Culture at Home and Abroad.* Kalamazoo: New Issues Press, 1996. 388 pp. $20.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-932826-43-5; $40.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-932826-42-8.

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New Anthology on American Popular Culture

Suggesting that someone define Popular Culture is like asking a fish to explain water. Opening their "Introduction" with this line, the editors then proceed to take us out to sea, through waters rough and smooth, using definitions old and new. It is a long and satisfactory voyage, with twenty-one well-documented essays and helpful biographical sketches of contributors.

The origin of the collection helps explain its tone and diversity. Lewis Carlson was so impressed with a 1993 meeting in Paderburn, Germany, centering on American Popular Culture, that he invited twenty-five German and American scholars to continue the discussion at Western State University in Kalamazoo, Michigan. The essays in this book are the product of that international conference.

Some of the German contributors(for example, Hans Borchers, Wolfgang Karrer, Ann Troester, Hanspeter Dorfel, and Karin Esders) bring insights that will be new to most of us who do not see the world "through German eyes." Centering on myths used for propaganda, Borchers focuses on the American small town as evoked in Office of War Information films, 1944-45. Troester examines the figure of the scientist in film adaptations of Bram Stoker's perennially popular *Dracula*. Venturing into cyberculture, Esders looks at computer chip art and popular image-making. Computer graphics, she contends, "allow any individual, trained or untrained, to test and show off his or her creative energies, and to stand out from the multitude" (p. 377).

The lead essay is by Ray Browne who, say the editors, "is the real 'Pop' of Popular Culture." Browne predicts that "success in the study of Popular Culture is inevitable and imminent"; he musters impressive statistics and describes a number of advancements to back his claim. For him Popular Culture is "The New Humanities," marked *homo empatheia*, people who empathize with one another, seeking understanding and affection.

Meanwhile Carlson has opened up a new area of investigation: film images of World War II prisoners of war. He argues that many of these films did a great disservice to those who were actually prisoners. Clearly, the actual POW experience was much more complicated that these films suggest.

American films feature prominently in this book. One of the essays confirming this is James Ferreira's "Real Heroes and the Real World." He centers on four tall, Nordic examples–Wallace Reid, Gary Cooper, John Wayne, and Ronald Reagan–who over many years embodied America's fantasy image for millions of viewers. Ferreira does not agree with those who say that Hollywood studio executives or the nativist establishment were behind this creation of heroic images. Instead, he argues that "Audiences, not the media, determine who is the hero of the moment." The essay by Peter Rollins on Will Rogers further explores the interaction between a major studio image and the American audience.

African Americans in sports, films, and the military represent a new kind of hero, as do Asian Americans in films. A number of other essays pay special attention to minorities and women.

Western Michigan University, long a school strong in American Studies, has added to its reputation with this volume. Students of popular culture will note that their interests are well represented and advanced by this handsome book. The synthesis we have long advocated and welcomed is indeed under way.

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