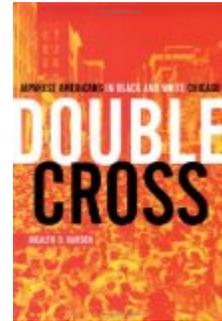


H-Net Reviews

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Jacalyn D. Harden. *Double Cross: Japanese Americans in Black and White Chicago*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003. 368 pp. \$20.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8166-4044-7; \$60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8166-4043-0.

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(Double) Crossing the Line

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In order to study the theory of race relations in that city and in the nation, *Double Cross: Japanese Americans in Black and White Chicago* purportedly examines the lives of a few elderly Japanese Americans who relocated to Chicago after World War II. Taking the idea of the color line from W. E. B. Du Bois, Jacalyn D. Harden believes that double crossing this line is the problem in race relations in the twenty-first century. She defines the term “double cross” in a variety of ways. The obvious definition is “to betray or to trick,” the more literal, but usually unstated, one is “to move between two positions.” Harden believes her work is a double-cross because it “betrays and challenges the assumptions behind the belief that everyday multiracial existence is nevertheless best thought of in terms of black and white” (p. 3). The author herself is doublecrossing the line by being a young African-American with no appreciable ties to Japan, who studies a small group of Japanese Americans so she can argue that the model of race as a black/white division is used to divide and conquer peoples of color. She also double crosses lines as a participant in the Human Rights Committee, whose members she is supposed to be interviewing and observing. Although the author describes the five-chapter work as concentrating on the historical and ethnographic evidence that points to the importance of Japanese Americans in the development and contradiction of contemporary racial theory, the book’s stated composition is a double cross: it is long on theory and short on ethnography.

Nonetheless, the book is innovative in several ways. It breaks down the image of Koreans as the only Asian group in Chicago in conflict with blacks, and more importantly it connects the “great relocation” of Japanese Americans in the 1940s to this city with the racial, migratory, and labor experiences of the “other” minority group, African Americans. It gives some limited insight into Japanese Americans’ experiences between internment and reparation, the latter strongly supported in Chicago. It is not that Japanese Americans have been totally ignored by the media. For example, when Harden asks some of the subjects about their early lives, she can tell from body language or their suggestions that she read certain articles that this aspect of their histories has been documented overly well. What excites her is that most interviewers have never examined Japanese Americans’ relations, whether antagonistic or cooperative, with African Americans. Nor has the question of how this group of Asian Americans both reflects and contradicts the black experience been detailed. Harden also raises the questions of whether and how government, corporations, and academics have formed and maintained our ideas of race and assimilation. She describes how Japanese Americans experienced prejudice based on race and patriotism; she shows that responses to Japanese Americans in economic situations depended on whether they were the only minority group on the job or one of several. She details the racial hierarchy that exists rather than the image of the black/white dichotomy that so often informs racial studies, particularly about Chicago and other large cities.

As a reader, however, I was disappointed not to really get into any details of her informants' lives until half way through the book; and even then, the amplification was uneven among their lives and for different aspects of any individual informant's life. Many questions were raised but not answered. For example, did Rose Yamamura fail to follow her educational training because of gender rather than race prejudice or because of personal choices? As a reader, I came away with the distinct impression that Harden's thesis is not shared by the majority of participants, whatever their race. From her recounting of her own grandmother's perceptions as well as of racial incidents and the focus of the Japanese American Citizens League, etc., it seems that most people of color view themselves in a continuum with one being viewed as the "model minority" and the others being left behind, and that often people of color perceive mem-

bers of other minorities as vying for scarce resources and public good will rather than sharing common experiences and goals. These views are not the perceptions of Harden's few informants, but even they admit they are a dying breed with few survivors left who remember and act on what it felt like to be different and isolated. Lastly, I think it would have broadened the implications of this study if the author had looked beyond the earlier studies of Japanese Americans in Chicago and examined other recent works on minority relations, including among Asian/Asian American peoples and between Indians and Hispanics, and Indians and African Americans. Despite its disappointments, this book is an innovative and pioneering work, which establishes a framework for studying race theory and interracial relations that goes far beyond the prevalent one of a black-white dichotomy.

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