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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

Historically Black: Imagining Community in a Black Historic District

by Mieka Brand Polanco, New York: New York University Press, 2014. viii + 184 pp.

This book explores how the idealized understanding of the concept of community, expressed through selection criteria of the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), belies the complex historical and contemporary interactions of people in the rural small town of Union, Virginia. In 1999, Union was registered as a historic district under the NRHP designation “Ethnic Heritage–Black.” Since its founding, Union has consistently been a majority, but never an exclusively, black community. The book’s author was hired post-designation as an intern by a local research institute to compile archival and oral history resources for public use. Through her research, Mieka Brand Polanco finds that the NRHP’s framing of Union as a monolithic community does not reflect the historical truths or the contemporary complexities of the multiracial nature of the community, nor does it adequately represent how Union residents understand their community. Polanco’s framing of the NRHP description of Union challenges a simplified understanding of community.

Brand Polanco’s ethnographic approach involves an investigation of Union’s residents through interviews, historical research, personal observation, and documents related to the NRHP nomination process. Her exploration into the perspectives of community members leads her to recognize three distinct community groups: 1) history brokers, or relatively new, white Union residents not associated with the community’s founding; 2) a historically black descendant community; and 3) “delegitimized historians,” or historically white Union descendants who were excluded from the nomination process. History brokers, who spearheaded and pursued NRHP status, hoped that the status would maintain the rural nature of the town in the face of suburban encroachment. They are current residents who value the town’s isolation from city life. The black descendants

understand their historical relationship to Union's development, yet did not see the value in the NRHP nomination that the history brokers did. They did not interfere with the nomination and directly supported it by sharing their personal narratives with the history brokers. The "delegitimized historians" hoped to be involved in the process of historical designation, but their presence in the community was not deemed valuable by the history brokers. As a result, they were excluded from the process.

What Polanco does well is closely examine the process through which this historical designation is filtered. While she never thoroughly defines the criteria met, she explains how each group imagined a Union that fit its particular needs. The history brokers had the resources and drive to pursue the information that would ultimately convince the NRHP nomination reviewers to perceive Union as historically significant. Historically black descendants had traditionally referenced historical events in the town from a moralistic standpoint, using these events as aids for navigating their daily lives and to make sense of current events. Their productions of history for the nomination process, however, became more factually oriented. Both groups maintained insider status throughout the nomination process, while the delegitimized historians' whiteness compromised their participation in the nomination process. Their exclusion from the historical designation process caused them to create counter narratives in an attempt to write themselves back into Union history. This process of rewriting takes a most poignant form in a map produced by one such resident. Through this map, Union is reimagined as residentially segregated by race since its founding.

Polanco's major contribution to community research arises from her efforts to involve the perspectives of multiple community groups within a single community to look deeper at the process of gaining an NRHP designation. Her work reflects how the desire to pursue designation under one criterion might cause certain parts of a community's history to be ignored, even as it complicates perceived notions of fairness in historic site and district nominations.

Polanco's work would benefit from a more thorough description of Union's NRHP nomination process. This would provide useful insight for readers unfamiliar with this nomination process and help clarify why and how the history of Union was tailored to fit a certain ideal. Such context

might also better flesh out the NRHP's idealization of the concept of community. Some discussion of how power dynamics inherent in framing the NRHP designation might affect the future of Union as a community is also needed. This would strengthen the comparative value of the text, as well as reinforce the information regarding the underlying drive of each community group's effort to imagine history and community in particular ways.

Polanco's work is useful for anthropologists seeking to understand the nuances of interactions between historical sites and local communities. It is a well-grounded case study for those interested in historical archaeology, public anthropology, and community engagement. She pushes for an understanding of community that relies not only on historical documentation but also on the current realities that shape that history. This text serves as a caveat to all students of history as it illustrates just how the valuation and presentation of the histories of peoples and places are altered under the pressure of present needs.

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Cherokee Reference Grammar

by Brad Montgomery-Anderson, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015. xix + 513 pp.

Brad Montgomery-Anderson's *Cherokee Reference Grammar* is equally useful to language scholars and Cherokee language curriculum developers. In contrast to many descriptive grammars, the work contains a description of structural rules at the beginning (Part I) before discussing complex polysynthetic phonological changes (Part II). Framing the text as a contribution to Cherokee language revitalization initiatives, Montgomery-Anderson offers a concise overview of language revitalization efforts undertaken thus far by the Cherokee Nation, the United Keetowah Band, and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. The grammar is structured as a "teaching" approach, where concepts are presented in order of increasing difficulty in order to appeal to those who develop Cherokee language pedagogical materials.

For linguistic anthropologists and linguists, this grammar gives a thorough description of the Cherokee language as well as a comprehensive compendium of Cherokee language scholarship. It is grounded in the work of other Cherokee language scholars such as Durbin Feeling, William Pulte, Janine Scancarelli, and William Cook, although Montgomery-Anderson departs slightly from previous work on Cherokee verb structure by treating aspect suffixes and verb bases as a single unit, the verb stem. He signals this distinction by naming verb stems that include grammatical aspect as "completive," "incompletive," and "present continuous" rather than perfective and imperfective, where the terms latter refer to grammatical aspect specifically rather than to verb stem type. The author eschews the complex aspect suffix charts of earlier grammars in favor of a simplified five-stem approach, making the grammar more appealing and useful for non-linguists.

At the end of each chapter, Montgomery-Anderson provides a brief "sources and additional reading" section that explains topics discussed in the chapter and offers directions for future research in those areas. In keeping with the goal of making the text accessible to non-linguists, the

author confines discussion of theoretical scholarship to these final sections of each chapter and to the 28-page glossary of linguistic terms in an appendix. This glossary allows readers to refer to the meaning of a linguistic term without needing to consult a separate book or online resource. Each glossary entry includes the definition of a technical term used in the book, a short linguistic example for each term, and a list of relevant sections where the term is applied to language description in the book's text. The glossary enables language researchers conducting comparative research to briefly visit the text to determine if a feature of Cherokee is relevant to their own work.

Montgomery-Anderson nods toward Cherokee literacy by representing each entry in the Cherokee syllabary in addition to a romanized phonetic writing system used by a handful of contemporary Cherokee language scholars. Use of the syllabary signals attempts to decolonize language research by including native systems of representation. The syllabary can also reveal semantic relationships between words and dialects that may not otherwise be evident in phonetic representations. The easily overlooked publisher's colophon at the end of the book provides a small window into issues surrounding the orthography and typesetting of Native American languages and hints at the fascinating orthographic history of the Cherokee syllabary.

The modified phonetic orthography used in this text provides a single vowel for short vowels and a double vowel for long vowels. Diacritic marks over the vowels represent the six linguistic tones of the Cherokee language. This writing system for Cherokee is thorough but presents a learning curve in comparison to the syllabary or the simplified phonetic system used by many Cherokee speakers and learners. Readers who wish to follow the pronunciation rules represented by the modified orthography may consider keeping a separate guide sheet nearby to remind themselves of the meaning of the diacritic markings. Though this grammar is aimed at language revitalization, it is unlikely that Montgomery-Anderson's modified writing system will ever become the popular medium of instruction for language classes. Language researchers, however, will find it effective for representing pitch and accent in Cherokee language. I find the author's descriptions of linguistic tone useful to my own research on the intersection of linguistic tone and melodic pitch contours in Cherokee songs.

Two narrative stories included in another appendix give a sense of Cherokee language structures in more extended texts, although it would be helpful if recordings of the texts were included on one of the two CDs that accompany the book. The audio tracks on the CDs comprise a solid collection of single words and phrases that demonstrate grammatical features described in the book. These recordings are essential for hearing and understanding examples of tone and stress. As a grammar, the work necessarily excludes examples of speech genres and registers that would appeal to linguistic anthropologists and scholars interested in broader pragmatic concerns. Additionally, the book suffers from a handful of minor editorial-type errors, such as listing the incorrect prefix set name and a small error in the English gloss. Given its scope and subject, however, the text is very well edited and arranged.

In conclusion, *Cherokee Reference Grammar* is a valuable tool for guiding language research and creating materials for Cherokee language instruction. I have already read the text to create simplified textbook-style explanations of language features for undergraduate students that are paired with literary texts demonstrating the particular features being studied for that lesson. Advanced undergraduate Cherokee language students and graduate students can use this work for self-study and classroom reference. Of all the Cherokee language resources currently available, this book may prove to be the most broadly usable.

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