

dents with the same SAT scores, educational background, and other qualifications as white students under-perform as a group as measured by the college grades received. However, the authors theorize that poor high school education, poor study techniques, and continuing stereotyping of Blacks in college may explain the difference. It is important to note that the academic records don't reflect and the research design has no way of measuring professor bias toward African American students.

*The Shape of the River* is the most comprehensive and thorough research accomplished to date on the subject of the long-term consequences of considering race in college admissions. The research design is creative and scientific. Although there remain some lingering questions on why African Americans with similar backgrounds under-perform when compared to white Americans, this is a book that should be read by all scholars of Affirmative Action. It could be profitably used as additional reading for classes in the area of Civil Rights.

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**Lean'tin L. Bracks. *Writings on Black Women of the Diaspora: History, Language, and Identity. Crosscurrents in African American History, Vol I.* (New York: Garland, 1998). xii, 139 pp., \$39.00 cloth.**

In her "Preface" to this study, Lean'tin Bracks describes her purpose as being "to describe a model which may provide for today's black woman a means to take control of her destiny by retrieving her Afrocentric legacy from the obscured past" (xi). This model, which she applies through discussions of *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, Related by Herself* (1831), Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1988), Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), and Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow* (1984), is tripartite: "historical awareness, attention to linguistic pattern, and sensitivity to stereotypes in the dominant culture" (xi).

As the series title perhaps suggests, the most valuable part of Bracks's model is her focus on contextual African American and Afro-Caribbean history, which takes up nearly half of each chapter except that on *Praisesong*. Bracks offers useful insights on topics ranging from African cultural retentions in the Caribbean under slavery to the social ascendancy of the mulatto in the United States in the early twentieth century, with some particularly informative and sensitive discussion of the incidence and motivation of infanticide among slave mothers. Bracks's bibliography also lists a number of important historical and sociological texts and resources.

When it comes to the literary analysis of Bracks's four chosen narratives, however, the study can best be described as unexceptionable. While there is little with which readers familiar with these texts are likely to take issue (although Bracks's reading of the character of Beloved is perhaps questionable), there is also little new or original analysis—perhaps not surprisingly, since *Beloved*, *The Color Purple*, and *Praisesong* have already been (so it seems, at least) almost exhaustively studied, but more focus on the “attention to linguistic pattern” aspect of Bracks's model, which in fact little-addressed, would have provided an opportunity for fresher insights. The chapter on the less-familiar and accordingly less-analyzed *Mary Prince* is thus likely to be of most interest to readers whose concerns are primarily literary. It might also have been useful if an additional non-African-American text had been included, in order to make the study's scope more truly diasporic.

Bracks's stated goal for this study is ambitious, and only the individual reader—specifically, the individual black woman reader—can judge if she has attained it. Most readers are likely to find her approach interesting, if not especially innovative, and there is much here to value, perhaps to find inspirational. The book is well-written and well-researched (although the notes placed at the end of chapters make for awkward reading, and in many cases should have been incorporated into the text itself), and, despite some shortcomings, it deserves an audience.

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