

## Book Review

### 1. *Black American Biographies: the Journey of Achievement*

Jeff Wallenfeldt (2011)

Jeff Wallenfeldt is a senior editor and manager in History and Geography at Encyclopaedia Britannica. His recently edited works include *The American Civil War and Reconstruction: People, Politics, and Power* (2009), *The American Revolutionary War and the War of 1812: People, Politics, and Power* (2010), *Africa to America: From the Middle Passage Through the 1930s* (2011), and *The Black Experience in America: From Civil Rights to the Present* (2011).

*Black American Biographies: the Journey of Achievement* (2011)—here is Black Americans' plenty from nearly all walks of life. The editor has adapted the information regarding biographies from various biographical and critical works named and acknowledged in the Bibliography section of the book. Around three hundred biographies have been mosaic-ked with rarely found and appropriately labeled gallery of images. This work connects the past to the present of Afro-Americans. It documents the journey of suffering from shackles of slavery in a very precise and brief manner. The reader comes across a host of distinguished Afro-Americans' biographies, ranging from the abolitionists to the sportsmen. It carries the success story of Black Americans. This book specifically caters to the needs of a student of literature getting into Black American studies, tracking down the journey of Black American achievement from the slavery at plantations to the celebration of first African-American President Barack Obama.

Apart from "Introduction" and "Epilogue" sections, the seven chapters include "Abolitionism and Activism," "Protect and Serve," "Exploration, Education, Experimentation, and Ecumenism," "Arts and Letters," "Stage and Screen Actors," "Music," and "Sports", respectively. This book is a well-knit composition of Afro-Americans for a researcher looking for archives and auto/biographies as a method for interdisciplinary research. It starts from the philosophers or social activists in the history and takes on to the present day successful

personalities in various domains of American world. This book not only details the unending struggle of the Black Americans across generations but also acknowledges their concerted services and contribution to the American society. It incorporates the basic philosophy behind the Black American movement. It notes abolitionists like Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman, "the Moses of her people;" activists like W.E.B. Du Bois and Martin Luther King; the politicians like Shirley Chisholm and Barack Obama; government officials, diplomats, and soldier like Crispus Attucks, Condoleezza Rice and Buffalo Soldiers; lawyers, jurists, educators, academics, scientists, writers, poets, painters, photographers and sportspersons like Muhammad Ali, Jerry Rice and Serena Williams to name but a few.

This book is centripetal to Black ethnic experiences, contextualized by the American history. The journey of accomplishment upholds the fundamental rights of "liberty and equality" (p.15) against the biases of race and class. Here we find biographies of many trail blazers of the Civil Rights Movement. These are stories of the black people who stood up for their recognition guaranteed by the American Constitution and rightful place in the segregated society. The biographies of hundreds of African Americans have influenced the Afro-American part of American history and safeguarded the ideals of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

All these epoch making persons win laurels for the ethnic group, Afro-Americans, and exemplify it for the rest of ethnic groups to join the ranks and achieve their true place as equal citizens of the state. In short, this book on the biographies of the first-rank Afro-Americans reads how undeniably the blacks have contributed. They are equally conscious of their African roots and loyal to their new homeland America. They set themselves up as reality and indispensable part of American life. They lead by example to other ethnic groups how organized and incremental struggle pays back finally. They remain rooted in their Africanism with pride and add positively to their country.

Chapter No. 4 "Arts and Letters" can be of particular interest to the students of literature for research purposes. This chapter relates to the contribution of the power of pen. It takes the slave narratives as its starting point and covers "the literary fruits of the Harlem Renaissance (p.147)." This chapter briefs about the life of the writers, introduces us to their works and seeks relations between the biographies and their works. It discusses seminal writers like Ernest J. Gaines, Nikki Giovanni, Alex Haley, Chester Himes, Langston Hughes, Audre Lorde, Claude

McKay and their works in the respective eras. In literature, it notes Toni Morrison's exploring identity crises, Maya Angelou's writings, and generally covers the themes of thorough love for African American culture; segregation; economic, racial, and sexual oppression; mysticism; mythology, and spiritualism. However, we can also find Afro-American works of literary merit in other chapters as well like *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1845), a classic autobiography in American literature, Barack Obama's memoir, *Dreams from My Father* (1995), Martin Luther King, Jr.'s famous speech, "I Have a Dream," Lonne Elder III's *Ceremonies in Dark Old Men*, a classic American Drama, Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow Is Enuf* (1975), a book of poetry, and Curtis Mayfield's *Poetic License: In Poem & Song* (1996). This book evades Barak Obama's *Of Thee I Sing: A Letter to My Daughters* (2010), a book for children.

This book however does not recognize that this is not the end of journey. This compendium overshadows many unsung heroes and heroines of the movement which is still fighting for having its way to the real meanings of empowerment, emancipation and equality. Winning the presidency is only the realization of political part of the dream. I can safely say that it is an outline and chronological documentation of meticulously selected persons from the Afro-American movement for liberation, social justice, equality and equity. It travels down from the realm of ideas into the practical aspect. The reader essentially gets the notable points and facts about the blacks even though this book lacks details.

### **Reviewer**

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## 2. *Media and Communication Research Methods*

Asa Arthur Berger

Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2000

*Media and Communication Research Methods* is an introduction to theoretical approaches and methodological research in communication, culture, and society. The book focuses on the role of language in media discourse, communication research, and cultural studies, and contains subsections on linguistic, psychoanalytical, sociological, political, and literary theory. The author, Asa Arthur Berger, is Professor Emeritus of Communication Studies at San Francisco State University and has published over sixty books.

Part 1, "Getting Started," notes the differences between qualitative and quantitative research methods. It also provides an extensive listing of information sources, including abstract collections, bibliographic databases, periodical indexes, and research guides. The internet research tools listed here ought to interest readers given the budgetary constraints of libraries in Pakistan. Berger notes that 'research' is derived from the Latin words *re* (again) and *cercier* (to search) (p. 3). This etymology defines research as an endless quest. Berger contrasts quantitative research, its emphasis being on statistics and measurement, with qualitative research which takes more interpretative liberties. Berger defines five aspects of communication: the intrapersonal, in which we communicate to ourselves via a journal or other means; the interpersonal, in which we communicate with someone else; small group (such as a class); organizational; and mass media, including radio, television, and film (pp. 13, 15).

Berger identifies several binary oppositions that contain hidden assumptions and which shape our critical outlook. The opposition between the sacred and the profane was popularized by the distinguished historian of religion, Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), whose work explores the meaning of myths. Another important binary opposition is the one between the id and superego, two terms that we owe to the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). An opposition that recurs often in media analyses of civilization and culture is the one between West and East, which implicitly relegates Islam to a mythical Orient while ignoring its kinship with other monotheistic religions.

University students will find Part 2, “Methods of Textual Analysis,” useful in understanding critical approaches to understanding media and culture. Berger first introduces the reader to semiotics, the study of language as a system of signs, a discipline founded by the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and the philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914). We owe to Saussure the notions of the signifier, namely the sounds and images that constitute signs, and that of the signified, which refers to the concepts that those signs evoke. Berger notes that signs can be misleading (i.e., “bald men wearing wigs”) and that symbols differ from signs in that they are not arbitrary (i.e., Saussure’s example of a pair of scales as a symbol of justice) (pp. 37-38).

Berger explains the concepts used in semiotic analysis, such as denotation, connotation, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and inter-textuality, and proceeds to define culture as “collections of codes” (p. 42). He asks his students to understand themselves as bearers of messages by having them bring an object that reflects them in some way (p. 44). Berger defines syntagmatic textual analysis (studying texts as a chain of events), and paradigmatic textual analysis (studying texts in terms of their oppositions) (pp. 44-48). As an example of semiotic analysis, Berger shows how different kinds of eye glasses might foreshadow certain characteristics of the person wearing them (p. 49).

One section of Part 2, “Rhetorical Analysis,” introduces Aristotle’s three modes of persuasion, which are ethos, depending on the charisma and character of the speaker; pathos, which appeals to emotion, and logos, which is based on reasoning (p. 54). This section provides a glossary of such rhetorical devices as exemplification, irony, metaphor, and simile. Another section, “Ideological Criticism,” outlines the theoretical framework of both Marxist and feminist media criticism as well as Aaron Wildavsky’s notion of four political cultures: fatalists, individualists, elitists, and egalitarians.

Although he cites the Marxist contention that capitalist ideological content tends to remain invisible in media because capitalism remains the dominant belief system, Berger nonetheless, laments that Marxist analysis of advertising and consumer cultures is doctrinaire, and pre-determined by Marxist theory” (pp. 74, 80). It is hardly noteworthy that Marxist theory shapes Marxist criticism. Moreover, Berger fails to acknowledge the existence of different varieties of Marxist criticism. When Berger comments, in a glaring misuse of the passive, “It has been suggested that just about the only

Marxist critics you find nowadays are teaching in American universities. There's a certain amount of truth to this notion," we are left wondering who suggested this notion and just how much truth there might be to it.

The final section of Part 2, "Psychoanalytical Criticism," provides an overview of Freudian notions such as the unconscious, Oedipus Complex, id, ego, and superego; Jungian concepts such as archetypes, the collective unconscious, and the myth of the hero; as well as a glossary of defense mechanisms such as avoidance, denial, rationalization, and repression. Despite the occasional cliché ("Freud's ideas have always been controversial, and Freud is continually being relegated to the ash heap of history" (93), the section effectively summarizes psychological theory.

Part 3, "Qualitative Research Methods," is devoted to the art of interviewing, historical analysis, and the use of ethnomethodology in media and communication research. Berger shows how interviews may be informal, unstructured, semi-structured, or unstructured, depending on the focus of the interviewer. Berger explains how ethnomethodology, which is concerned with "how people think and act in everyday situations," can have practical applications, such as in advertising (p. 146).

Part 4, "Quantitative Research Methods," is concerned with media content analysis, surveys, experiments, descriptive statistics, and research reports. Berger shows how media content analysis is quantitative in its measurement of facts while pointing out the difficulty of deciding what to measure. He asks, for instance, whether cartoons ought to be included in a media content analysis concerning violence on television programs (p. 178).

Part 5, "Putting It All Together," describes nineteen common thinking fallacies, such as imperfect analogies, misrepresentation of ideas, incorrect assumptions, and false conclusions. This final part also explains how to write outlines and drafts of research reports, addressing questions of style, including the use of gender-neutral language and the effective use of transitional words and phrases. Berger does not always follow his own sound advice, for he notes, "What gives research authority is the quality of the thinking and of the research, not using the passive voice" (p. 254). The book concludes with an extensive bibliography and a glossary.

In sum, the book fosters cross-disciplinary research in linguistics, culture, and literature with a focus on theory and communication. The various approaches to textual analysis and to the understanding of discourse should prove of interest to students from many disciplines.

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## Artist Statement

Barbara Bickel and R. Michael Fisher

### *Spiritus Praxis*

5.5 x 8 inches

mixed media drawing on watercolor paper

Sept. 11, 2011

*[S]pirit is a relationship that contains numerous aspects of human existence such that to speak of human spirit means a commitment to a philosophy of becoming, in which the self can become Other to itself, and from that position either remain alienated or transcend itself. (Ryoo, et al., 2009, p. 135).*

*In the movement to regain our humanity through education, we can draw upon [Thich Nhat] Hahn's words that stress the importance of love over force, and love over fear. (Ryoo, et al., 2009, p. 141)*

*Spiritus Praxis* is the result of a collaborative co-encounter on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of September 11th. The process began by reading a collaboratively written article entitled "Critical Spiritual Pedagogy: Reclaiming Humanity Through a Pedagogy of Integrity, Community, and Love" by Ryoo, Crawford, Moreno, and McLaren.

Instead of discussing this thought-provoking article which overtly brings together a combination of pedagogies and contexts that rarely mix well, that is, critical pedagogy and spirituality (although Freire and hooks have forged various pathways to bridging these domains), we engaged a dialogical arts-based inquiry with one foundational agreement: let the art lead.

We come to this collaboration as pedagogues, researchers and artists having journeyed together in a 21 year life-partnership, with distinct aesthetic preferences, and content-specialties. We knew this collaboration would be simultaneously enriching and challenging. Indeed it was quite chaotic overall.

Prior to meeting in the shared studio space, we individually read the article, made notes and sketched. Once in the studio, which we recognize as a creative and legitimate site of critical inquiry, we worked on our own spontaneous responses to the article with wet and dry art

materials. Although working independently at this point, we were aware and affected by each other's energies and material use. After exhausting our individual explorations, we brought our work together and responded to their co-encounter. This provoked us to let go of our own ideas and subjectivity as "celibate artists" to working as "something more," capable to resolve aesthetic problems and unify a comprehensive idea and design.

We cut, tore, and made holes, juxtaposed and over-laid various elements, but disagreed on how the art piece was unfolding. We decided to start anew, this time working on the same paper simultaneously. This was followed by two more failures before one of us suggested that we change our attitude, format and medium. We agreed to use a smaller paper size and a dry pastel medium that was more conducive to physically blending marks, shapes and colors. The result was a resolve from the more aggressive and individualistic mark making. A transient equanimity emerged.

One of us drew a free-hand frame, which gave us a manageable space to work within. This was followed by a decision to create a dividing line using masking tape, one side became cool colors and the other warm. But we felt there was no "critical" or challenging element to reflect Ryoo *et al.*'s paper. We sensed we were facing another failure.

In that moment of tension, an accident occurred in the studio, requiring a concerted cleanup effort. While one cleaned, the other continued working in an attempt to salvage the art. A single length of string was laid over the surface using a spiral movement, and became the mediator differentiating individual loops. The loops were then inscribed onto the paper by drawing on either side of the string. The tracings, left random lines and shapes producing a coherent design, which had various parts competing for attention.

We shifted our mark making then to an ordered and simple contemplative process of coloring in the negative spaces. This process reflected a more nurturing life-force. The aesthetic impact created a three-dimensional depth and sense of mystery. This was very satisfying. Yet, we both agreed more criticality was needed to embody the negative darker-side of the article.

At this point, one of us returned to the failed art pieces, and cut one strong piercing line out from each. The three lines were glued onto the surface, irreverently cutting across the image of swirling round

shapes, integrating the aspects of the negative (fear) and positive (love) that were binaries in the article. We achieved the primary aesthetic conflict we were looking for. However, secondarily we fore-grounded our failures and thus our vulnerabilities in these remainders.

In contrast to the criticality achieved, one of us saw a “divine-like” shrouded figure in the upper right. It was both made of the strings, and at the same time emanating those strings to extend into the world as connectivity, and ultimately symbolized a source of unconditional love—a Platonic One-and-the-Many.

Through working with the unknown, the becoming, the tension, and sometimes overt conflict, we practiced our best pedagogical theories of liberation, acting as individual agents confronted with a plentitude of choices. We needed to negotiate a philosophical, analytical and yet an aesthetic-ethical agreement. One of us was intent to represent the chaotic darker-side of the article and the other, the integrity, and lighter-side. To manage the complexity, and to come to a place of transcendence without rejection required a full grounding within the *spiritus* of the artist as researcher in free association. As individuals, with egos and preferences, and our real moods at any moment, we were more rigid and judgmental. We observed this latter trait frequently and talked through it, which allowed us to return to letting the art lead.

At this moment we do not fully understand this art piece, as it has become Other to itself. We know the process; we reflect and make meanings about it. Yet, ultimately, it is for all of us to find meaning within it. Rather than taking our words too preciously we invite you to dwell within the art and the central paradox of language “that communication itself avoids communication.... We have so many ways of not saying what we are saying that it takes a particular kind of listening to hear the void” (Britzman, 2003, p. 31).

## References

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