

BOOK REVIEW

Landscape and Race in the United States

**Edited by Richard H. Schein
Routledge, 2006, 262 pages**

Reviewed by Willow Lung Amam

"All American landscapes are racialized", claims Richard Schein, editor of a new collection on race and landscapes in the United States (4). Schein's provocative claim and the larger goal of this work is to challenge the common geographical readings of landscape as a reflection of cultural processes, rather than as a political and social project whereby landscapes come to reinforce racialized systems of power, hierarchy, and control. Its larger ambition is to develop critical discourse and interdisciplinary scholarship on racialized landscapes and racialization as a process occurring in and through landscapes. It proposes only to be a starting point for such research, rather than a definitive collection.

Such a starting point at first appears somewhat elusive. In the introductory chapter, Schein neither establishes a set of issues that this collection raises nor defines the contributions of this book to an existing discourse. He does little more than allude to the "fledgling literature on race and landscape in the U.S.", to which this work is supposed to help synthesize and theorize (113). One wonders what became of the entirety of racial segregation literature that came before this. Interdisciplinary goals are thrown out the window as Schein humbly accepts that he includes no more than three out of twelve scholars outside geography to contribute to the collection.

And yet, all is not lost. What emerges in the rest of the book is well-organized and critical scholarship that clearly demonstrates the significance of this book to the larger discourse on race and space, making up for the limitations of the introduction. Though not treated thematically, the chapters are well-organized around common issues. The first three, written by Micheal Cruther, Steven Hoelscher, and Samuel Dennis Jr. take up the role of race in creating conflicting landscape meanings, interpretations, and the politics of preservation in landscapes of the American South. The next two chapters center on landscapes of exclusion and marginality. In two incisive essays, Gareth Hoskins and Daniel Arreola show landscape visualization and representation as key factors in racial identity formation. Diane Harris and James and Nancy Duncan offer two of the more critical race readings of the suburban

landscapes written to date, demonstrating how privatization and aesthetics simultaneously secure and mask embedded systems of power and privilege. James Rojas, Jonathan Lieb and Derek Alderman focus on the politics of use, memorialization, and symbolism. And finally, Nast exposes how seemingly inane landscapes are contained within larger racialized landscapes and geographies of exclusion.

Together these scholars weave a narrative of how race becomes a complicit part in shaping the everyday American landscape. While underscoring the potency of race, they simultaneously undermine its power by challenging its invisibility - naming the unnamed, and giving voice to the silent and silenced.

Unfortunately, this larger project is only given cursory treatment here, leaving many holes unaddressed and keys issues mere lip service. Here race appears where previous scholarship has taught us to expect it: blackness in the South; whiteness in the suburbs; Latinos in Los Angeles; and Chinese on Angel Island. Few of the authors problematize race as a social and political construct in complex places and forms. They tend to reinforce traditional understandings of racialized power between white majorities and minorities, without also addressing how race can act as a tool of racial empowerment as well as oppression - how it can bridge ethnic minority differences as well as reify them. Many authors express unidimensional views of race, giving little weight to how other intersecting identities such as gender, class, ethnicity helps to structure the *experience* and meaning of race in different landscape contexts.

Despite its shortcomings, this collection was only meant to set the stage for more critical work down the road, and in this respect, it has succeeded. It marks the first scholarly treatment of the racialized American landscape from a cultural geographic perspective, and it provides an opening for scholars to corroborate, critique and further develop the work these authors have begun. For, in fact, where this book is most effective is in exposing just how much of the racialized landscape is yet to receive such attention.