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## Review of Christopher Douglas, A Genealogy of Literary Multiculturalism.

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**Christopher Douglas, *A Genealogy of Literary Multiculturalism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009. 372 pp. ISBN 9780801447693.**

**Reviewed by Justine M. Pas, Lindenwood University, St. Charles, Missouri**

In *A Genealogy of Literary Multiculturalism*, Christopher Douglas identifies a contradictory tendency in contemporary American multicultural literature that represents race as a socially constructed phenomenon but simultaneously views culture as “a racial prescription.” This is a problem, as Douglas explains, because “We erroneously fold into the social science truth that our races are socially constructed the dubious assumption that this construction includes the learning of racially appropriate cultures” (318). This means that even if we see race as a matter of phenotype and not as a carrier of cultural behavior, we continue to believe that cultural behavior is somehow learned in accordance with our physical appearance: “society’s construction of the social reality of race out of its biological delusion *is the same thing as or happens simultaneously with* the learning by children of distinct African American or Chicano or Asian American or Native American cultures” (318). In order to explain the origins, history, and development of this paradox, Douglas divides the history of multicultural writing in the US into three phases as he charts and describes twentieth-century American multicultural literature as a field unified by a “not-yet-recognized debate about *culture* between anthropology and sociology” (5). As he argues, these largely unacknowledged and often-implicit conversations between literature and the social sciences account for how American ethnic writers have represented race and culture over the last one hundred years. Douglas’s book thus explores the trajectory of the current literary paradox by analyzing how American ethnic literature adapted, reconfigured, and informed the anthropological and sociological conceptualizations of race and culture. Finally, Douglas extends his hypothesis to argue that these interdisciplinary debates may explain why contemporary American multicultural fiction and autobiographies represent cultural behavior as a unifying force in minority group formation and endurance, at the same time as they construct the learning of cultural behavior in accordance with group members’ racial identities.

Douglas defines multicultural literature as texts that are “interested in the questions of race, culture, identity, pluralism, and nation” (319) and traces the twentieth-century history and development of African American, Native American, Asian American, and Chicano literatures as he places these four literary traditions in conversation with the social sciences to demonstrate their “common grounding in changing conceptions of race and culture” (7). This shared grounding helps to explain how and why American multicultural literature has represented minority group formation, endurance, and change and how these representations were a response to and/or a reworking of social science research on race and culture. As Douglas demonstrates throughout his book, there is a long history of an exchange of ideas, what he calls a “feedback loop,” between literature and the social sciences “whereby authors seemed to take up ideas that already spoke to them, and then powerfully changed, and sometimes misread, those ideas which then sometimes became the fodder for further social science” (308). The range of his multidisciplinary research, analysis, and interpretation is quite impressive. Spanning almost a century of scholarly and literary output, Douglas’s book examines anthropology, sociology, fiction, and autobiography to demonstrate how an interdisciplinary symptomatic reading of writings that constitute some of the most influential texts in these four literary traditions reveals the origins of our current multicultural paradigm. His book shows that American literature from

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Zora Neale Hurston's ethnographies and fiction to Gloria Anzaldúa's genre-bending autobiography productively adapted social science discourses by positing cultural behavior as an intrinsic component of minority group formation and endurance. Douglas aligns his critique with work by figures such as David Palumbo-Liu, Hazel Carby, Nancy Fraser, Walter Benn Michaels, Richard Ford, and Paul Gilroy, all of whom share a view of multiculturalist reinscriptions as "racially prescriptive rather than culturally descriptive" (10).

*A Genealogy* is organized according to the chronology of multicultural literature's exchange of ideas with the social sciences. For Douglas, the first phase of multicultural writing in the US is marked by its embrace of the early twentieth-century paradigm shift from a concept of biological race to that of ethnic culture, pioneered by anthropologist Franz Boas, who is credited with separating culture from race. Boas, best known for his successful assault on scientific racism or the view that racial difference is biological and therefore inherited, demonstrated that cultural behavior is learned and that, while human beings are phenotypically diverse, their cultural behavior is neither predicated on their appearance nor inherited. Accordingly, the first part of Douglas's book focuses on this phase and explains how in her fiction and her ethnographic research, Zora Neale Hurston, Boas's most famous student, argued for African American "cultural autonomy, long-term endurance, [and] a pluralistic ethos" (3). The second phase of multicultural writing, which Douglas calls "integrationist," pivots on Robert Ezra Park's Chicago School of Sociology. While Park adapted Boasian principles of culture as a learned process, he focused on cultural transformation and argued that, given the right conditions, such change occurs rather quickly and results in the integration of minority cultures within the dominant culture. Douglas dates the beginning of this second, integrationist phase to the publication of Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940) and includes a discussion of Jade Snow Wong, John Okada, and Ralph Ellison. The third phase of multicultural writing begins with cultural nationalisms of the mid-1960s and the rise to prominence of authors such as Toni Morrison, Ishmael Reed, Frank Chin, and N. Scott Momaday. Contrary to the second phase's sociologically-derived notions of rapid transformation and integration of minority cultures, these authors represented minority cultures as independent entities or "separate nations" whose ability to endure in the face of dominant culture's racism and its assimilationist pressures attests to these communities' cultural health. The final chapter of his book examines Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) because, as Douglas asserts, out of "all the third-phase multiculturalist authors, Anzaldúa is the most unapologetic in productively blurring the conceptual distinction between race and culture" (298). In the Conclusion of *A Genealogy of Literary Multiculturalism*, Douglas describes what he calls the multicultural complex or the manner in which contemporary multicultural authors, critics, and scholars rely on identity politics, which risks blurring distinctions between race and culture by treating these distinct concepts as organically related instead of as historically particular and contingent (306).

In his Introduction and first chapter, Douglas outlines the parameters of the first phase of literary multiculturalism as he chronicles the influence of the Boasian cultural paradigm on American multicultural literature during the 1920s and 1930s. In these two chapters, Douglas reviews a compelling narrative provoked by Boas's attack on an entrenched American racial ideology and nativism and describes how Boas and his students waged a successful battle against scientific notions of race as biological, unalterable, and inherited by presenting "a renovated concept of culture as an explanation for group differences" (8). Here, Zora Neal Hurston emerges as a

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crucial, originary voice in American ethnic literature because she not only supported, but also productively transformed Boasian principles. While Boas's contribution to the contemporary understanding of culture emerges as paradigm shifting, it is Hurston who is the true protagonist of this change, especially in terms of her influence on American multicultural literature. Douglas discusses Hurston's work as the best example of "the new Boasian model of minority culture, especially its anthropological characteristics of historical particularism, cultural relativism, dynamic holism, and the disengagement of culture from race" (4). Hurston, perhaps best known for *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), a novel about the diversity, endurance, and longevity of African American southern rural folk culture, contributed to and reconfigured anthropological ideas about race and culture and--importantly for her insistence on African American cultural health and longevity--rejected Boas's thinking about the gradual assimilation of minority cultures. Douglas ends Chapter One with D'Arcy McNickle's *The Surrounded* to show the common threads of the culturalist approaches to group formation because, similar to Hurston's description and construction of African American communal lives, McNickle represented Salish culture as separate "from the white dominant society" and, in many crucial ways, independent of its cultural influences (22). As Douglas explains, Hurston and McNickle later rejected "the 1950s sociologically enabled assimilationist consensus signaled by *Brown v. Board of Education* and the federal Indian policies of Relocation and Termination" (22) precisely because their views and writings were grounded in the anthropologically enabled conceptualization of minority group formation and endurance. That is, Hurston argued that integration was premised on the surrender of the otherwise healthy and vibrant African American culture and McNickle contended that federal Indian Relocation and Termination policies were founded on assimilation grounded in the break up and urbanization of Native American communities.

Douglas argues that the first phase ends when writers like Richard Wright, Jade Snow Wong, Ralph Ellison, and John Okada began to represent cultural belonging and behavior in sociological terms, which "extended the model of cultural assimilation to racialized minorities" (91), and in the next several chapters he puts these authors' texts in conversation with the field of sociology. Thus, while he structures the first phase of literary multiculturalism as a dialogue between literature and anthropology, Douglas proposes the second phase as a conversation between multicultural literature of the 1940s and 1950s and Robert Park's conceptualization of minority groups' transformation and integration into the dominant culture. Chapter Two follows through on several related claims. The first demonstrates that Hurston and not Wright is "an antecedent for our current paradigm of literary multiculturalism" (62). This is because, as the second claim proposes, multicultural writers of Douglas's third phase "could emerge only from the anthropological model of culture used by Hurston, and not the sociological model of culture used by Wright" (63). Douglas identifies the difference between Hurston and Wright not through "politics or aesthetics" or, for that matter, the "clashing of literary egos" but through "a disciplinary argument between anthropology and sociology" (61). This means that Wright--like Park, but unlike Hurston--perceived "African American assimilation as momentarily stalled not because of a vigorous black culture but because of racist social barriers" (78). Douglas points out that the cultural nationalists of his third phase, while claiming Wright as an influential predecessor, were much more indebted to Hurston's "anthropological paradigm of holism, pluralism, health, and equality" (82). As he demonstrates, Hurston is the progenitor of multicultural literature and the distinction between her and Wright "has not been sufficiently understood as actually a difference between anthropology and sociology" (93). While authors

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like Hurston represented cultural longevity and endurance premised on anthropological notions of cultural autonomy, authors like Wright grounded their writings in the integrationist models of cultural absorption of minority cultures presented by the sociologically enabled consensus of the 1940s and 1950s. The feedback loop between multicultural literature and the social sciences thus forms the dividing line between the first and second phase writers of Douglas's hypothesis.

The sociologically enabled model of cultural integration comes into focus in Chapters Three and Four where Douglas examines the writings of Wong, Ellison, and Okada to show sociology's triumph in "the Cold War integrationist ethnic minority literary tradition" (99). Douglas notes that the rather problematic results of sociology's influence "were the social science expectations of truthful, accurate, and representative insider knowledge of the communities" (101). He dates this kind of an ethnographic reading to the publication of Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1950), and while he is not the first to discuss her redefinition of citizenship from racial to cultural whiteness, he contributes to the discussion by reconstructing how Wong's mediation of the liberal consensus came about through her study of sociology. "Hurston's formal training in anthropology," writes Douglas, "and Wong's formal training in sociology produce powerful estranging effects as they both learn to look at their respective communities through the lens of culture" (109). The major challenge of the sociological model writ large in literature, however, is "the assumption of cultural authority heightened by the adoption of social science discourse" (109). That is, unlike Hurston's writings, Wong's "social science willingness to represent and explain the totality of culture" (109) marks this second phase of American multicultural literature. Finally, as Douglas correctly and repeatedly points out, the social sciences did not falsely obscure these writers' visions, but offered a variety of ways through which to represent social and cultural realities. Douglas repeats this important disclaimer to indicate that these writers were never simply passive consumers of social science research, but that they consciously and productively adapted and reconfigured it in their writings.

In Chapter Four, Douglas argues that in its deployment of sociology's theory of the generation gap and marginal man, Okada's *No-No Boy* (1957) does not abandon hope for a new future, even as it critiques postwar promises in the face of internment and continued segregation and racism. The concepts of the generation gap and the marginal man offer particularly productive lenses through which to read *No-No Boy* because the novel, while criticizing American racism, challenges ethnic belonging by imagining "amalgamation as the possibly necessary step to the full cultural assimilation of racialized minorities" (142). As Douglas demonstrates, unlike the authors of his first and third phases, writers like Ellison and Okada did not promote specifically ethnic identities, embracing instead, "a concept of 'American identity'" (156). Thus, even if critical of Japanese American internment, *No-No Boy* is a patriotic novel because "it ultimately upholds the sociological dream of the cultural assimilability of racialized minorities" (156). Here, Douglas reiterates one of his overarching theses about identity when he claims that it is "a way of thinking about being [that] emerged not in continuity from an American nativism of three decades before, but from a Cold War political milieu increasingly pressed to define national character" (157). While a focus on historical circumstances of the Cold War shows an America marred by racism and segregation, identity provided "a technology for separating the question of what a nation is from what it actually does" (157). The emphasis on national identity separates Hurston and Paredes (the subject of Chapter Five) from later authors because while "African American authors were reviving Hurston's anthropological concept of culture and Chicano

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authors were extending Paredes's [. . .], both groups began to attach culture to this Cold War/postcolonial interest in national identity, to identity as such, in a fashion that neither Hurston nor Paredes sanctioned" (157). Hurston and Paredes represented cultural processes rather than cultural products; their ethnographies and novels describe how minority groups cohere around communal practices. In their writings, minority cultures are formed, held together, and endure through common practices, not identities as inherited formations.

Chapter Five provides a transition between Douglas's discussion of the second and third phases of literary multiculturalism, and Douglas turns to Paredes to show how his work, while anticipating the post-1965 cultural nationalisms, was influenced by Boasian notions of culture. In particular, Douglas looks to "*With His Pistol in His Hand*" as a text that divides "the integrationist, assimilationist, sociology-inspired tradition from a culturalist one that came before it and another multiculturalist one that would come after it" (161). As Douglas asserts and demonstrates in more detail in later chapters, Paredes's work provided a Boasian cultural foundation for the Chicano writers of the late 1960s because "*With His Pistol in His Hand*" describes how cultural practices accounted for "minority cultural endurance in the face of a dominant society" (168).

Douglas locates the third and final phase of literary multiculturalism in the 1960s and 1970s and describes it as multicultural literature's embrace of blood metaphors and ancestral memories as the principles through which ethnic group belonging and longevity are structured. Thus, if American ethnic literature began with what Douglas sees as the productive employment of culture as a learning process, its third phase is a rather ambivalent, if not reductive, turn to identity politics. Moreover, Douglas argues that our current multicultural paradigm is most emphatically informed by this last stage, which, while drawing on the Boasian culture paradigm (culture as learned and not inherited), steers an identity-based model of being and belonging—it is not what we do that matters, but who we say we are. What was once conceptualized by Boas and deployed by writers like Hurston and Paredes as learned group difference has become an identity-oriented focus on minority group formation, belonging, and endurance. This is, indeed, the critical crux of *A Genealogy of Literary Multiculturalism* because, as Douglas observes, texts that represent minority cultures as entities inherited through blood or memory (i.e., who one is and not what one does) threaten to return us to pre-Boasian notions of race. In Chapters Six through Nine, Douglas offers a detailed critique of how such an identity politics came to take root in American multicultural literature by discussing third phase writers, including Toni Morrison, Frank Chin, N. Scott Momaday, Ishmael Reed, and Gloria Anzaldúa, demonstrating that they "laid the pluralist grounds for our current conceptualization of literary multiculturalism" (5). Douglas argues that these writers reattached race to culture by erroneously understanding the previous stages as having engaged with identity as a fundamental and foundational building block of cultural group belonging. These four chapters show how the cultural nationalists looked to their literary predecessors and read into them a concept of culture against which Boas and Hurston argued. Douglas describes this move as a return to Boasian anthropology with a difference and emphasizes that it constitutes "the foundation for our current paradigm of literary multiculturalism" (184).

In Chapter Six, Douglas examines African and Asian American literary traditions through the prism of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Addison Gayle's *The Black Aesthetic* (1971),

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Frank Chin's *The Chickencoop Chinaman* (1971-1972), *The Year of the Dragon* (1974), and *Aiiieeee! The Anthology of Asian American Writers* (1974). Douglas chooses these works because he sees them as "crucial articulations of a larger literary and cultural movement known as the Black Arts Movement" and "analogously the locus of the emerging Asian American cultural and literary nationalism" (185). In fact, Asian American cultural nationalism took Black nationalism as its model as it "articulated itself through a rejection of the sociological model of a minority culture and its trajectory of assimilation" (186). Although he traces the influence on Morrison and the Black Arts Movement to Hurston's work and politics, Douglas takes the former two to task for representing culture as race. According to his analyses, "*The Bluest Eye* stands at the beginning of the third-phase literary multiculturalism, and its logic—that we have to figure out what culture we should have, a question answered racially—is representative of this multiculturalism, and the cultural nationalism out of which it came" (200-201). As he points out, *The Bluest Eye* exemplifies at least three ways in which the novel initiated a multiculturalist literary turn. First, there is a refutation of the earlier sociological models of racialized groups' acculturation because minority groups are represented as stable entities able to withstand the assimilationist pressures of the dominant culture. Second, the novel pays distinct attention "to the anthropological principles of pluralism, relativism, and historical particularity" (202) because it represents a society where African American cultural particularity is grounded in a specific historical trajectory rooted in the rural South. Third and most importantly for his argument about identity politics of third-phase literary multiculturalism, Douglas identifies in *The Bluest Eye* a move that reattaches "culture to race" that "both undoes Franz Boas's principle, and makes possible the treatment of culture as a kind of identity and object of ambition" (202). This is the case, as Douglas argues, because in the novel, description of the characters' cultural practices is not enough to determine their cultural identity. Instead, the novel represents cultural identity in terms of the characters' actions and behavior vis-à-vis the color of their skin. "The mere description of Geraldine's cultural practices," writes Douglas, "is not enough to define who Geraldine is, and in this respect *The Bluest Eye* does not conform to the anthropological model of culture developed by Boas and passed on to the African American tradition largely through Zora Neal Hurston" (202). In the second half of the chapter, Douglas discusses Asian American literature, because, while not directly influenced by anthropology, it shares intellectual and creative characteristics with works by African American and Chicano artists. Douglas shows that the conceptualization of Asian American cultural nationalism that Chin helped to articulate shared with African American writers and intellectuals "the dual strategy of rejecting the assimilative and integrationist Civil Rights era ethos, along with the sociology that helped form it, and of embracing a model of culture that was in many ways reminiscent of Boasian anthropology's culture" (210). Moreover, as much as African American writers productively misread Wright's work, so too did Asian American authors ignore "their authors' [e.g., Okada's] assimilationist cultural politics" (211). However, while Asian American writers "downplayed survivals and links with Asian cultures and emphasized instead the American-grown transformations, adaptations, and syntheses, [. . .] the African American nationalist impulse was a historical particularism that sought to establish possible cultural survivals across the Middle Passage and through the generations" (215).

In Chapter Seven, Douglas discusses N. Scott Momaday's 1968 novel, *House Made of Dawn*, which, like Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, rejects the idea that one must surrender one's culture in order to survive and flourish in mainstream white America. Both novels, as this chapter

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demonstrates, are “representative of the new paradigm of literary multiculturalism based on the embracing of cultural pluralism and the rejection of assimilation” (223). This constitutes, as Douglas reminds us, an overt rejection of cultural assimilation theorized by Park’s sociology. This is, however, the Boasian culture paradigm with a difference because what is at stake in Momaday’s novel is not culture exactly, but “identity—cultural identity, identity through birth” (223). That is, authors like Morrison and Momaday represented characters whose cultural existence is rooted not in what they learn in and from their cultural communities, but in what they inherit as their cultural identities and how they may enact that inheritance. This notion of identity as inherited instead of culture as learned is the crux of this chapter as Douglas continues to show how third-phase authors engaged with Hurston’s work at the same time as they shifted their emphases from cultural processes to cultural products. As a result, Douglas explores identity as a “supplement to an anthropological notion of culture” (250) and shows that it allows for an account of being that is “an antidote to description, and its tendency is against historical particularism and toward an ahistorical essentialism” (251). The crucial question, as Douglas intimates earlier and begins to answer now, is why the multiculturalist turn inaugurated by cultural nationalists like Morrison, Chin, Momaday, and Reed was “accompanied by a notion of identity in addition to (and sometimes instead of) anthropological culture” (252). Douglas finds the answer in the earlier 1950s liberal consensus because of the emphasis on national identity during the Cold War. “The cultural nationalism at the end of the 1960s,” Douglas writes, “embraced identity partly in reaction to the national embrace of national identity during the Cold War and its liberal consensus: the nationalists’ rebellion against the oppressive conformity of national culture entailed pluralism but also, paradoxically, the very strategy of identity that made patriotic right feeling possible” (252-253). Thus, the concept of identity came to matter much more because it offered group ontology without having to describe or represent that group’s cultural practices or beliefs (254).

While discussing Reed's and Anzaldúa's work in Chapters Eight and Nine, Douglas reminds us that each turned to respective anthropological predecessors: Hurston for Reed and Paredes for Anzaldúa. At the same time, however, “like Momaday, Reed and Anzaldúa ultimately ground African American and Chicano cultural retentions in race, thus erasing the hard-won conceptual disengagement of culture from race that had been the orthodoxy for Hurston and Paredes” (261). To demonstrate how this operates in Reed’s work, Douglas examines *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972) in Chapter Eight and notes that while “for Momaday the key metaphor is memory in the blood, for Reed the key metaphor [. . .] is epidemiology” (266). Reed, like Hurston, insists on cultural continuity. Unlike Hurston, however, but like Morrison and Momaday, Reed “undoes one of the fundamental qualities of Boas’s culture concept: that of its difference from, and irreducibility to, race” (268). Douglas finds that *Mumbo Jumbo* “stretches the hypothesis of cultural survivals geographically and temporally,” but at the same time, “slides into a racial explanation” of how such survivals endure because the novel represents how culture is inherited and not how it is learned (283-84).

As in his analysis of Reed’s work, Douglas similarly critiques Anzaldúa’s mythical extension of cultural survivals because he finds that they are written in blood or biology. While there is a gap between Reed’s 1972 *Mumbo Jumbo* and Anzaldúa’s 1987 *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Douglas explains that such a temporal leap is designed to show “the themes and politics that third-phase multiculturalism consolidated and intensified in the 1980s” (289). In this last chapter, Douglas

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focuses on how Anzaldúa used anthropological notions of culture, which, as he points out, have not been attended to as much as her feminist revisions of Paredes's work. Yet, as much as Anzaldúa deploys anthropological concepts of culture, relying on Paredes and thus hailing back to Hurston and Boas, her "substantiation of cultural survivals is authenticated by a no less racial and essentialist logic than Reed's" in *Mumbo Jumbo* (297). Unlike the first-phase authors, the third-phase writers like Anzaldúa, while relying on anthropological concepts of culture, found it "to be not quite enough, and to require a more metaphysical anchor for its pluralism and relativism. That anchor function is performed by two related concepts, race and identity" (298). Douglas further elaborates that while the first- and second-phase authors "almost never used biological metaphors to talk about culture," Anzaldúa's text "repeats these three key words, 'culture,' 'race,' and 'identity,' treating them synonymously, as different terms for the same group ontology" (300). As Douglas reiterates at the end of this final chapter, Reed and Anzaldúa are not the only authors whose texts "reattach culture to race" (304), but the two are representative of a creative and intellectual trend whereby "a notion of cultural continuity and endurance can slide into a formulation in which learning is assumed rather than demonstrated, and so becomes the object of racial essence" (305). As Douglas details in his conclusion, identity has replaced culture and, as such, has provided for "far too much continuity and homogeneity in what have actually been vastly complicated cultural mixings, migrations, adaptations, and transformations" (306).

Douglas ends his study with a Conclusion in which he critiques "the contemporary social science based-ethnic studies practice of treating literary work as a kind of data set for proving, illustrating, or disproving social science theory about cultures and their content" (308). This is untenable, as Douglas argues, precisely because of the century-long exchange of ideas between literature and the social sciences. As happened with *The Bluest Eye* and *Native Son*, for instance, the social sciences sometimes engaged with literature as if it were an objective set of data about group formation and cultural belonging. That is, when readers look to literature for information about culture and minority groups, they risk finding what originated in the social sciences in the first place. There are at least two significant consequences of reading literature for social science information. First and most obvious, as Douglas demonstrates throughout his book, is the possibility of recycling information that may have originated in the social sciences. Secondly and perhaps even more importantly, reading literature for cultural and social insider information means reducing prolific and talented authors to the status of social observers and commentators. In a 1991 interview, Gish Jen, author of *Typical American* (1991) and *Mona in the Promised Land* (1996), offered an incisive critique of such reductive reading practices when she said that being an ethnic American writer involves resisting readers' and critics' insistence on one's work as social documentary: "When people look at a picture by Cézanne, no one's really interested in the apples. They're interested in the way in which he has transformed those apples. But if you're an Asian American writer, people are not interested in the quality of artistic transformation; they're interested in your material." [1] As much as twentieth-century American ethnic writers may have grounded their texts in the anthropologically and/or sociologically enabled conceptions of race and culture, Jen is correct in insisting that we need to study and enjoy art, ethnic or otherwise, for how it transforms the world, and not for how it ethnographically documents the parameters and contents of minority cultures. In fact, reading practices dictate that we approach ethnic American fiction and autobiography as we would any other literature, American or otherwise. This means attending to literature not for its social science contributions but for the

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manner of its storytelling. Jen's protest aligns well with the findings of and conclusion to *A Genealogy* because, as Douglas astutely observes, multicultural literature "no longer gives us pristine images of cultures—in fact, it never did" (325).

Douglas's *A Genealogy of Multicultural Literature* provides a carefully detailed groundwork for future studies of comparative American ethnic literature. Douglas's three-phase hypothesis is a productive starting point whereby comparatists can engage in further studies of multicultural literature's relationship to the social sciences. As Douglas shows throughout his book, both the social science disciplines and literature do not exist in a vacuum and have put their respective research findings, discourses, and representations into use as they determined and creatively represented the longevity and direction of cultural learning and transmission.

#### Notes

[1] Scarlet Cheng. "Gish Jen Talks with Scarlet Cheng." *Belles Lettres* 7.2 (Winter 1991): 20-21.

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