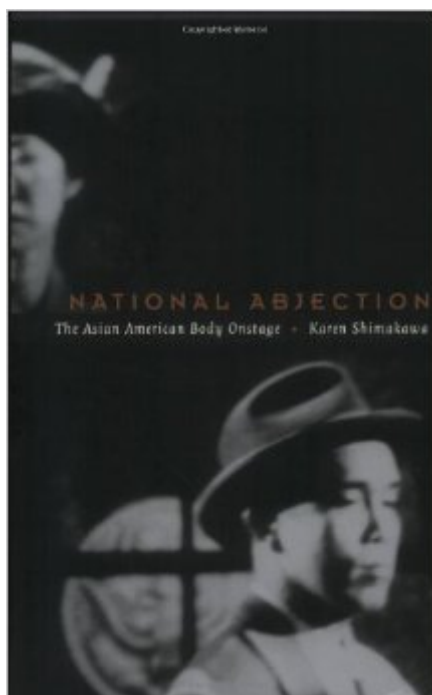


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National Abjection: The Asian American Body Onstage



Synopsis

National Abjection explores the vexed relationship between "Asian Americanness" and "Americanness" through a focus on drama and performance art. Karen Shimakawa argues that the forms of Asian Americanness that appear in U.S. culture are a function of national abjection—a process that demands that Americanness be defined by the exclusion of Asian Americans, who are either cast as symbolic foreigners incapable of integration or Americanization or distorted into an "honor" whiteness. She examines how Asian Americans become culturally visible on and off stage, revealing the ways Asian American theater companies and artists respond to the cultural implications of this abjection. Shimakawa looks at the origins of Asian American theater, particularly through the memories of some of its pioneers. Her examination of the emergence of Asian American theater companies illuminates their strategies for countering the stereotypes of Asian Americans and the lack of visibility of Asian American performers within the theater world. She shows how some plays—"Wakako Yamauchi's 12-1-A, Frank Chin's Chickencoop Chinaman, and The Year of the Dragon"—have both directly and indirectly addressed the displacement of Asian Americans. She analyzes works attempting to negate the process of abjection—such as the 1988 Broadway production of M. Butterfly as well as Miss Saigon, a mainstream production that enacted the process of cultural displacement both onstage and off. Finally, Shimakawa considers Asian Americanness in the context of globalization by meditating on the work of Ping Chong, particularly his East-West Quartet.

Book Information

Paperback: 208 pages

Publisher: Duke University Press Books (December 5, 2002)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0822328232

ISBN-13: 978-0822328230

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 0.5 x 9.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.3 out of 5 stars— See all reviews— (3 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #919,964 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #45 in Books > Literature &

Fiction > History & Criticism > Regional & Cultural > United States > Asian American #479

in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Specific Demographics > Asian

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Customer Reviews

Professor Shimakawa's book is a prime, masterful examination of the historical and cultural situations of Asian Americans in the United States. Employing sophisticated critical analysis, the book's power will clearly be missed by those who lack an historical awareness of Asians and other ethnic groups in the U.S. and the marginalization of these populations. If one approaches the book with an open mind and a desire to learn the history they may not be aware of, much can be taken for this top-notch scholar. Making love across the races does not make for radical politics, but books like this propel us toward a moment when love and radical transformation are not mutually exclusive.

This book is imperialistic in that it positions the Japanese-American critic as the master-mind of Asian-American discourse. Kind of disgusting to see this discourse reasserting itself after finally getting out from under the Japanese juggernaut that pinned down Asian people for most of the 20th century. Does anything ever change?

I had this professor at UC. Was curious to see if the book added a further dimension to what she offered in class. The depth and extent of the anti-white bias was ingrained in all the cultural studies classes but I wonder if this lack of balance can be understood as a necessary phase or whether it just lacks objective value. I was only visiting from Belgium when in her class, and felt that all the classes were more or less the same, probably monitored by some invisible agent like Hashimoto, the top prof in the department. His classes were just plain race hatred toward the white people. I ended up switching to a pre-med schedule to learn something that would be helpful to my community when I got back to Bruxelles. Why the Americans are publishing books like this? It feels very much like a kind of Sarajevo is going on, or trying to surface, but with the multiculturalists fighting against what they consider to be the intolerables: white people. If you read this book you will wonder what the author even wants. Answer? I think it's ethnic purification with the whites removed or exterminated. Maybe I read it wrong. Outside of academia however everybody is making love, not war, across the races.

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