

caught in the meritocracy myth. Much of their argument seems to be a wake up call for those who have believed and suffered from the myth. But McNamee and Miller are surprisingly sympathetic and misleading in their presentation of those for whom the false meritocracy works, the upper class. In Chapter 3 titled "The Silver Spoon," they present the struggles of the upper class: the struggle to justify their wealth and the effects of the isolation they feel as a result of their wealth. And while this demonstrates the problems of meritocracy for all, the authors temporarily abandon their formula used throughout the book when discussing the reasons for the isolation by the wealthy. "Keeping the potential criminals out . . . the super wealthy are also concerned about the potential for kidnapping." This statement, in addition to being false and misleading (based on crime statistics), is just one statement that goes unsupported. The point of the statement is also unclear and the resulting potential for false sympathy for the wealthy is counterproductive to the rest of the book.

The preceding example best demonstrates the main problem with *The Meritocracy Myth*: Its lack of theory leads to a lack of context. The same problem is found again during the brief (5 pages) discussion of the structural solutions. But maybe the context and theory need to be provided in a discussion on the application of the book. However, herein is the challenge. Since the information is not new to the most sociologists, the best audience would be those who have not heard this approach. But the information in its present state is incomplete and overwhelming for a novice sociologist who does not possess an understanding of context. The book is useful to those of us who struggle to convince students of the myth, but those who use this book will need to present the context. And while clever quotes provide some lightheartedness overall, this is a dense and unexciting presentation of the meritocracy myth, as if breaking one's bubble could be exciting in any way.

Scandals and Scoundrels: Seven Cases That Shook the Academy, by **Ron Robin**. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004. 277 pp. \$49.95 cloth. ISBN: 0-520-23578-9. \$19.95 paper. ISBN: 0-520-24249-1.

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In 2005 the mainstream media provided a fascinating look at academic scandals, including Harvard President Larry Summer's remarks about how women's inherent biology was a key reason why there were not more women in academic science positions. In addition, Ward Churchill, an American Indian rights activist and Professor in Ethnic Studies at the University of Boulder, came under assault for his comments on the 9/11 terror attacks. Consequently, academic scandals have become an important part of the escalating role of media spectacle in contemporary society.

The role of media and new technologies in disseminating and criticizing scholarly work and unethical behaviors is one of the key themes of Ron Robin's *Scandals and Scoundrels*, which describes and analyzes a number of academic scandals within the fields of history and anthropology. As Robin explains it:

Scandals exposed in public avoid complexity and ambiguity, and therefore foster the melodramatic. The scandal as a media event is driven by blockbuster mentality: a sensationalist repetition of well-worn dramatic principles, such as the morality tale of pride leading to the fall. It draws on sensational language, polarized rhetoric, personalized conflict, and familiar mass-media images. Deliberations on academic wrong-doings are retooled to fit the media's interpretative frameworks. (p. 23)

Given the nature of the academics involved, especially their celebrity status within the university and professional domains, in conjunction with a growing hostility toward

intellectuals in the United States, it is hardly surprising that academic scandals have become more prevalent within mainstream media. In addition to the importance of the broadcast media and journalism for identifying and addressing academic scandals, Robin argues that the expansion and accessibility of cyberspace technology, internet forms, and web blogs contribute to their dissemination and hype.

The significance of media, especially cyberspace, within the academic realm is also related to epistemological shifts in the humanities and social sciences, which champion subjective standpoint narratives and multiple truths while eschewing dominant modes of thought promoting scientifically based, empirically based, objective studies. These kinds of radical approaches and the increasing fragmentation of disciplinary boundaries have made it difficult to establish authoritative professional associations or panels of experts and peer-reviewed scholarly journals to identify and arbitrate disciplinary disputes. As Robin explains it: "Alternative methods of disciplinary enforcement are thriving. . . . Alternative and highly visible forums of adjudication become visible and vocal when conventional avenues for projecting rules are contested, reassessed, reframed, or rendered obsolete by cultural and technological shifts" (p. 231). However, these forums move academic issues from the relatively private domain of the university into the public domain of media culture. It is within this context that questions about the legitimacy of a scholar's research can become a pretext for character assassinations that can be motivated by professional jealousy or mediated by political issues.

Indeed, the kinds of "academic crimes and misdemeanors" documented in Robin's provocative text lead to serious questions about the pervasiveness of plagiarism, falsification, and misrepresentation within the university, not only by students, but by those who have attained the status of experts and mentors. Even superstar historians like Stephen Oates, Doris Kearns Goodwin, and Stephen Ambrose who frequently appear on television and regularly win awards and recognition within both academia and other forums come under suspicion.

After an introductory chapter on academic scandals and why they happen, Robin

offers a three part overview that begins with three chapters on recent history scandals, three case studies of scandals in anthropology, and in the final section, a discussion of hoaxes, with particular emphasis on the case of Alan Sokal, a physicist who faked an article on postmodern science that was published in an issue of the prestigious journal *Social Text* in 1996. In this final section, Robin goes on to discuss "the science wars" and postmodernism, as well as providing analyses of the nature, meanings, and implications of proliferating academic scandals. He does so within the context of contemporary U.S. culture, with its obsessions with celebrity, voyeurism, and *schadenfreude* in seeing the powerful and prestigious brought down.

On the whole, Robin provides balanced and descriptive narrative accounts of the scandals. His method is to describe the emergence of the scandal, the criticisms of the academic in question, and how the scandal played out. He is generally judicious in his judgments and balanced in presenting the opposing sides and players in the academic scandals. One wonders why, however, he downplays the significance of Doris Kearns Goodwin's plagiarism scandals, focusing instead largely on Oates and Ambrose. Robin implies that Goodwin's sin was simply inadvertent plagiarism from Lynne McTaggart in writing her Fitzgerald-Kennedy family book for which she apologized and paid off in an out-of-court settlement (p. 32); whereas an August 4, 2002 *Los Angeles Times* article demonstrates with copious documentation that Goodwin systematically plagiarized in a whole series of her major works.

Another criticism emerges in the way he fits postmodernism into his narrative. Generally, Robin takes the most extreme versions of postmodern theory as exemplary of the trend, rather than seeing there are a diversity of postmodern positions, not all of which advocate extreme relativism and the denial of truth and objectivity as Robin claims. In some sense, the recent academic scandals are influenced by a pervasive context of postmodern media, spectacle, and a loosening of modern critical standards in key academic disciplines; but they are also influenced by the culture wars and an especially acrimonious set of battles between left and right in a variety of issues since the 1960s.

Robin provides captivating accounts of some of the major academic scandals of our times and illuminates the conditions around the seven major areas of scandals that he engages. But he does not always appear to grasp the highly conflicted political context around the scandals and the ways that organized interest groups, mostly on the right, are fueling the scandal wars as part of a larger political agenda that involves attempts to gain total hegemony of U.S. society for the right.

Compelled to Excel: Immigration, Education, and Opportunity Among Chinese Americans, by **Vivian S. Louie**. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004. 227 pp. \$21.95 cloth. ISBN: 0-804-74985-X.

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The Asian American educational success of middle and working class groups is always utilized to confirm the assumption that race and class do not matter in contemporary American society. Numerous studies support this assumption by suggesting that it is the distinctive Asian ethnic cultures that lead to students' academic achievements. Is it true that class and culture are more relevant today than race? In *Compelled to Excel*, Vivian Louie explores the question by looking at educational experiences among the second and 1.5 generations of Chinese Americans from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Louie confronts the Model Minority Myth and suggests that Chinese Americans' educational opportunities have much to do with their socioeconomic status and with racial discrimination.

The book begins with bifurcated immigrant journeys of the respondents' families: a journey to mainstream suburban America and a journey to urban-enclave America. Louie then elaborates second-generation Chinese Americans' understanding of education. Children emphasize the importance of ethnic cultures in shaping their motivation to succeed in education. They attribute the reason that parents stress education to the cooperated functions of immigrant optimism and immigrant pessimism. Chinese immigrant

parents are optimistic about the widespread availability of quality public education in the United States and in the pay-off for that education in the labor market; they are, however pessimistic about their possible futures in the existing American racial hierarchy (p. xxxii). Higher education is regarded as the means to offset the effects of racial discrimination. Louie argues that the road to college is ultimately shaped by social class rather than ethnic culture. Urban-enclave children see that their paths to college are different from their counterparts in the suburbs in terms of family resources, especially parents' involvement in their schooling. The book also looks at how the respondents' lives are affected by being second generation. Children's powerful sense of obligation in response to parents' sacrifices shapes their educational aspirations and affects their academic decision-making. Religious participation, dating choice, politics, and leisure pursuits associated with the identity of the second generation are discussed as well. The Conclusion uncovers the influence of race in the workplace and, likewise, the upward mobility of second-generation Chinese Americans.

In a major strength of the book, Louie manages to address how race and class affect Chinese Americans' educational opportunities, in a framework that combines ethnic culture and structure propositions. Rather than confining herself to one of the arguments, Louie develops a fruitful approach that looks at the impact of structure in the United States on immigrants' homeland cultures. The approach offsets the limitations of each proposition and enables the research to tell us not only the values of homeland country, but also the immigrant experience in socioeconomic adaptation. This study fills a research gap for Asian Americans. Prior to this research, little was known about children's understanding of parents' role in their schooling and how it fits in with their own understandings of the social world in which they live (p. xvi). This study informs us how the Chinese immigrant children frame the influence from family in their understanding of educational motivation and achievement.

The methodology that Louie drew upon perfectly fits the purpose of this study. She interviewed 68 members of the second and 1.5 generations of Chinese Americans, who