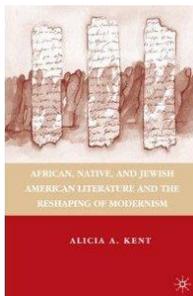


Professional Book Review

Kent, A. A. (2007). *African, Native, and Jewish American Literature and the Reshaping of Modernism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 230 pp., ISBN: 978-1403977976 (hc). \$75.00.

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African, Native, and Jewish American Literature and the Reshaping of Modernism is an in-depth and reliable book for those in academia, as well as those who wish to hear the silenced voices of the African, Native, and Jewish American cultures, as they come to life in this text. The book is also for those who value the works of ethnic authors and their contribution to modernism, as well as those who teach ethnic literatures. In her book, Kent helps to redefine the definition of modernism using the literatures of African, Native, and Jewish Americans. She provides a way for the reader to put into perspective what the modern era looked like to those branded “primitive” or “traditional” (2). This book encompasses the importance of these literatures within the discipline of English and ensures these ethnic groups’ fiction writing a strong and respected place within modernism.

Kent focuses on making ethnic voices come to life through their writings, instead of being interpreted via the ways others see them. She accomplishes this through her explanation of how these three ethnic groups, African, Native, and Jewish American authors, came into their own as modernistic writers. By comparing *and* uniting the writing of these authors, Kent allows the reader to be immersed into their worlds without the interruption of the viewpoints of others. In five chapters, Kent demonstrates to the reader that African, Native, and Jewish American literatures have a strong place among modern texts.

Kent is very familiar with the writing practices of multicultural literatures. An associate professor of English at the University of Michigan-Flint, Kent teaches classes in Native American, Jewish, and African American Literatures, as well as literary analysis. *African, Native, and Jewish American Literatures and the Reshaping of Modernism*, her most recent publication, is her greatest contribution to the genre of ethnic literature and modernist texts. In this book, Kent demonstrates her knowledge of multicultural literatures and her respect for the subjugation that each ethnic group endured and uses that perception to provide an interesting way of relating these three ethnic groups to each other.

Kent begins the book with a strong introduction that lets the reader know that she is going to be using ethnicity and race to discuss modern texts: "*African, Native, and Jewish American Literature and the Reshaping of Modernism* focuses on what modernity would look like when viewed from the vantage point of those labeled 'primitive'" (2). Kent demonstrates this task by breaking the book into three subsequent chapters. Kent not only analyzes each ethnic group's works, but also uses historical context to provide evidence for her analysis.

"African Americans: Moving from Caricatures to Creators, Charles Chesnutt, and Zora Neale Hurston" is an intriguing chapter that provides the reader with a clear view of how African Americans overcame the migration of their people and the oppression of both their views and works, and became one of the most prominent voices in multicultural literatures. Kent evaluates Charles Chesnutt and Zora Neale Hurston to convey this transformation. According to Kent, this shows how African-Americans fought their way up from being used as caricatures and overcoming slavery to creating great works that are read in many classrooms today. This chapter would be beneficial to those teaching African American literature, as well as those who are interested in visualizing the historical context and importance that is provided by African American literature.

"Native Americans: Moving from Primitive to Postmodern, Mourning Dove, and D'Arcy McNickle," is another chapter that explains to the reader how, similar to the African Americans, the Native Americans too had to overcome hardships and the injustice of stereotypes. However, they also managed to overcome the adversity and migration of their people, and their works are now considered among the top of multi-ethnic literatures. Kent focuses on the works of Mourning Dove and D'Arcy McNickle to express her knowledge of these authors in regards to Native American cultures and their ability to use their oppression to form influential works of art through their writings. This chapter would be a great addition for those teaching Native American literature as it encapsulates the strength and beauty that is displayed in the works of Native American authors from past to present.

In "Jewish Americans: Moving from Exile to Authorship, Abraham Cahan and Anzia Yezierska," Kent analyzes the works of Abraham Cahan and Anzia Yezierska to underscore her contention that Jewish Americans too had to overcome great oppression, the sting of stereotypes, and the painful memories of their displacement. However, like their brethren in literature, the Jewish Americans use these injuries to create great works that are revered among today's modern texts. This chapter, like the African American and Native American chapters, would be a great addition to teaching Jewish literature in the classroom as it clearly portrays the significance Jewish literature has on modernism.

After reading *African, Native, and Jewish American Literature and the Reshaping of Modernism*, the reader will have accumulated a newfound respect for multicultural literature among the modern texts. Kent argues that the roles of these ethnic groups' works are not only influential but also concrete. Kent writes,

“By claiming their new role as fiction writers, these novelists implicitly reject the role of de facto native informant and instead forge new literary forms that not only add to the cadre of literary expression but also expand the form of the modern novel itself” (160).

Kent demonstrates the connection among these three ethnic groups using the turn of the century’s migration, dislocation, and displacement as her argument for these groups’ works being considered among modern texts. Like other modern writers, these writers faced “a crisis of representation,” the crisis resulting from the need to respond to racist and anti-Semitic depictions of these ethnic groups. In the historical section of her book, Kent includes visual examples of some of these representations.

Through her knowledge of African, Native, and Jewish American literatures, her high regard for these three ethnic groups and her understanding of modern texts, Kent effectively shows why the works of these three ethnic groups belong among the works of modern authors. Not only does she provide a clear, authoritative viewpoint, but she also incorporates historical context and images to provide support for her claims. This is a book that offers a fresh take on modernistic views, leaving the reader with a unique concept of connection among African, Native, and Jewish American literatures and their impact on early modern and contemporary literature.