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The Chalk Circle: Intercultural Prizewinning Essays

Tara L. Masih, editor
Wyatt-MacKenzie (May 15, 2012)
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America has long been revered as a melting pot or a salad bowl, a nearly fabled place where almost everyone has come from somewhere else. As David Mura says in *The Chalk Circle*'s introduction, "America is and always has been centered on the intercultural."

The voices of the essays in *The Chalk Circle* tell of the tensions and beauties that come about as a result of intersecting, intertwined, and diverging cultures. The book gathers a variety of stark, honest, and well-rendered first person narratives. Each is unique, but readers will find commonality in their questions and quests.

The origin of the book's unique title, according to the foreword, is this: "In 1845, Jane Carlyle wrote to her husband, essayist Thomas Carlyle, 'Instead of boiling up individuals into the species—I would draw a chalk circle round every individuality and preach to it to keep within that, and preserve and cultivate its identity at the expense of ever so much lost giltlacker of other people's isms.' Jane was ahead of her time. We in this collection also believe in preserving and cultivating identity within a chalk circle, a medium that is common and permeable and allows for some migration across the individual boundaries."

The collection's editor, Tara Masih, is a writer with many accolades. Her Indian-American heritage and her literary credentials make her an astute editor for this collection. David Mura—an author who is, among other cultural descriptions, a sansei, the Japanese-American term for third generation—crafts a fitting and compelling introduction.

The final section of the book presents intercultural connections between the essays and discussion questions, highlighting one of the book's main goals—dialogue. The twenty essayists included in the collection examine all aspects of the intercultural experience: guilt, responsibility, racial identity (including the complexities of being part of the dominant white culture), religion, family, the idea of home, and travel. They ponder identity through the filters of what I am and what I am not. From Li Miao Lovett, who probes the value of aristocracy in her largely peasant ancestry to Samuel Autman, who first faced opposition as a black man when he moved to Utah to join the staff of the *Salt Lake Tribune* to M. Garrett Bauman, who contemplates culture through photos sent by his middle-aged father-in-law serving with the Peace Corps in Botswana to Bonnie J. Morris, who finds the "sorrow and sweetness" of the ten Egyptian plagues cast in chocolate candy an interesting reflection on Passover—the contributions lead readers through the rough and rewarding search for truth in our intercultural world.
MELISSA ANNE WUSKE (Summer 2012)

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