

A Gypsy Girl, 1940. Photograph by Alexander Alland from *Reframing America*.

POINTS OF ENTRY, a three-volume book series distributed by the University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque:

A Nation of Strangers

Essays by Vicki Goldberg and Arthur Ollman

Museum of Photographic Arts, San Diego
18 color plates, 87 duotones (includes 3 gatefolds), 144 pages

\$24.95 paper, ISBN 1-878062-03-4

Reframing America

Essays by Andrei Codrescu and Terence Pitts

Center for Creative Photography, Tucson
61 duotones, 96 pages

\$19.95 paper, ISBN 0-933286-70-8

Tracing Cultures

Introduction by Andy Grundberg

Essays by Rebecca Solnit and Ronald Takaki

The Friends of Photography, San Francisco
48 color plates, 12 duotones, 96 pages

\$19.95 paper, ISBN 0-933286-69-4

Words are often useless to arriving immigrants. Faces are what they learn to read first. Faces are on their visas and in the snapshots they send home or carry from countries they may never see again. Faces are cameoed in the studio photos that the whole family sits for—proof that they have truly “arrived.”

Documentary-style portraits by Jacob Riis, Lewis Hine, and others are among the more conventional “faces” in *A Nation of Strangers*, the historical portion of Points of Entry, a three-part photography exhibit on immigration currently traveling the country. Since their aim was to be comprehensive, the curators who mounted the show and edited the accompanying books couldn't omit from this first volume in the series the familiar mothers in babushkas and mustached laborers full of quiet expectation. But their less orthodox choices from the past give the whole historical moment more texture, and accuracy.

Consider a group portrait taken on Ellis Island in 1911 by Augustus Sherman, a gov-

ernment employee. Perhaps by happy accident, Sherman's composition of three black women arriving from the French West Indies is an historical document as well as a genuinely artful piece. Richly attired in long post-Victorian dresses and elaborate hats, this haughty trio are nothing like Riis's and Hine's tranquil Madonnas, who tell a completely different story. How impatient Sherman's subjects look as they stare down the camera, eager to begin their new lives; how innocent of what indignities await proud people of color on the mainland.

The collaborating museums also painstakingly chose recent images from numerous depositories. And while many of these photos are eloquent by themselves, they become even more so when shown with the older ones (the effect also works in reverse). Readers will benefit from making connections among the contemporary ones, too. A favorite pair of mine were shot in Florida in 1994. One shows five Cubans on a raft in open sea. As photographed by Walter Michot from a helicopter, their vessel looks no stur-

dier than Huckleberry Finn's. But the men wave their arms and mug for the camera: they are riding a magic carpet to America. In the other photo, by Eric Chu, vacationers on a Boca Raton beach watch in disgust as a front-end loader carts away an abandoned “Cuban raft” (as captioned by the newspaper where the picture was originally published).

Anti-immigrationists aren't addressed directly in the exhibit or its catalogs, but the second volume in the series, *Reframing America*, seems designed to remind us all how much émigrés enrich and replenish the culture. To illustrate this notion freshly (and fittingly) the editors present the work of seven European-born photographers—representatives of a larger group—who pioneered modern photography between the 1920s and 1950s. Lisette Model, Alexander Alland, Marion Palfi, and Robert Frank, among others, introduced novel techniques and some of the same aesthetic notions that modern European painters and sculptors developed during that period. Model's zaftig Coney Island bather lolling in the surf, for



example, resembles nothing so much as one of Henry Moore's reclining women. And Alland's neon signs for "Four Roses" and "Chevrolet" in the night sky above Manhattan look like surrealistic constellations.

Who knows if Alland intended the irony that the cars and good whiskey those signs advertised were literally out of reach for many Americans in the 1930s, when he made the picture? Other photographers in this group deliberately depicted poverty and divisions of race and class—grim truths all the more disturbing to émigré artists because that's not what they had expected to find beyond the golden door.

Strikingly different from the rest of the series, the third volume, *Tracing Cultures*, is nonetheless its logical conclusion, showing how immigrants and their descendants perceive themselves. The works include photographs as well as "photo-related installation art." Better simply to say that the dominant mode of the eleven artists is stylized *self-portrait*—even if they don't always include their actual faces.

Instead, many of them express ideas about displacement and loss, conflicts over adjustment, and their status as "Other" by utilizing cherished family albums and stark ID photos (remnants of family members' alien status) as well as media and religious icons, newspaper clippings, postage stamps, even food. They also, aptly, employ montage, superimposing symbols of the disparate cultures they hope to bridge.

Words are often part of these ingenious creations. "Leaving my country was not a simple task," Korean-born Young Kim has written below an eerie photo of ocean waves. "I now realize that I never really left nor really arrived."

"Grabbing snatching blink and you be gone" is the text of one of Carrie Mae Weems's photographs of the "slave coast."

Weems uses images of doorways, stairways, ladders—structures that lead in two directions. She says her own inverse journey to her ancestors' homeland helped her "finally discover something real" about her past, which, at the same time, made her present more comprehensible. Readers of the volumes that make up *Points of Entry* won't fail to be rewarded with similar, synchronous revelations about our country and ourselves.

—Jeanne Schinto

Chronicle Books

We See Things Differently

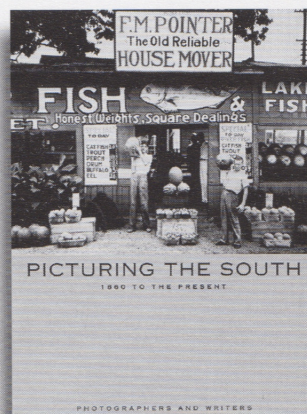
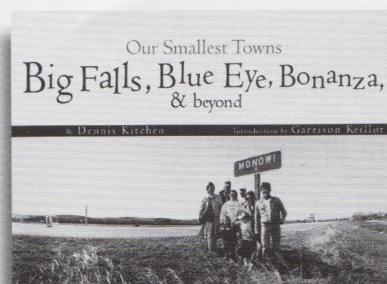


Paradise Garden

A Trip through
Howard Finster's Visionary World
Photography by Mary Ellen Mark,
Karekin Goekjian, and
David Graham
By Robert Peacock with
Annibel Jenkins

Our Smallest Towns

Big Falls, Blue Eye, Bonanza, & Beyond
Introduction by Garrison Keillor



Picturing the South: 1860 to the Present

Photographers and Writers
Edited by Ellen Dugen

Bob

CHRONICLE BOOKS

[HTTP://WWW.CHRONBOOKS.COM](http://www.chronbooks.com)

CALL FOR A FREE CATALOG: 415.777.6070