

VIEWPOINT

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KAREN LEONARD

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SCHOLARLY RESPONSIBILITIES

I am a social historian and anthropologist who does some research and teaching on the Asian American experience. When I received a copy of Ronald Takaki's recent book, *Strangers From a Different Shore*, from the publisher, I was pleased to see that Takaki listed some of my work in his bibliography. As I read the relevant sections of the book, however, the way in which my research material was used by Dr. Takaki struck me as unethical and/or extremely careless. I was dismayed to see that he had used large chunks of very personal material from an unpublished paper of mine without permission (quotes from Moola Singh's life history, which I have taped and transcribed, pp. 65 and 309). I also noted that his footnoting techniques were so careless that readers would be unable to tell whether some of the data cited were mine or his. (This is especially true of p. 310, where he gives the types of spouses of the Punjabi men. This breakdown took me years to complete and is the result of family reconstitution from vital statistics in many county record offices in California. Other material of mine in this long paragraph is covered by a single footnote which does include my unpublished paper. But my statistical breakdown has been published in several articles and a separate footnote was needed for this major finding.) It is also unclear whether Takaki had found certain obscure materials himself or through my work. (On p. 306, the "white landlord" quote is from a source I cited fully in a published article; Takaki's

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footnote does not include the correct citation for the quote but does include my published article). Indeed, readers may easily imagine that some of the conclusions reported by Takaki are his own rather than mine (p. 307), and in one case he appears to attribute an incorrect conclusion to me (Moola Singh did *not* become a Catholic, as represented on p. 311).

I had never met Dr. Takaki or heard him speak, and I wondered about his scholarly reputation. Checking around, I found that I was not the only person who felt wronged because of Takaki's use of the work of others in his book. Some of us then complained formally to the University of California, Berkeley, sending detailed documentation of our complaints. A confidential investigation followed, in the course of which Dr. Takaki was given my name and called me to discuss my charges! Despite this strange breach of confidentiality, I welcomed the opportunity to discuss things with him directly, but I found that he was unapologetic. He stated that he had tried to reach me by telephone a year or two earlier but that I had not been in my office. My secretary has standing orders to give out my home phone, but he had not called my secretary, left a message, or made further efforts to reach me. In any case, he said, his call was not to secure permission to use my unpublished paper but to ask me to read over part of his manuscript. When I asked why he had not asked for the necessary permission, he replied that it was the publisher's fault, that they had someone who was supposed to ensure that all the necessary permissions had been obtained. He went on to blame the publisher for his inadequate footnoting too, saying he had been advised to put only one footnote at the end of each paragraph. I pointed out that such advice need not be followed, and that in any case it was perfectly possible to indicate in that one footnote which sources documented which facts. He also blamed the inadequate citations on the size (big) of his book; carelessness was to be expected, apparently. At the end of our conversation, I agreed to send him a copy of my complaint (he had not been given one) so that he could see the specific problems. He subsequently sent me a written apology and promised to remedy the various problems in the next edition of his book.

At the recent Asian American Studies conference at Santa Barbara, I was disappointed to discover that the book prize was to be given to Dr. Takaki for this book, which not only presents no original theme or theory but sets a very poor example of the scholarly responsibility to acknowledge the contributions of others. Recently the United States Supreme Court let stand a ruling that biographers and historians may not use unpublished materials without permission, and a column in the

*Chronicle of Higher Education* called for formal sanctions on the plagiarists in academe (Stephen Nissebaum, March 28, 1990). The *Chronicle* column was aimed at the American Historical Association. The response of Franklin Odo, President of the Association for Asian American Studies at this time, also stressed the Association's lack of a process for the investigation of plagiarism charges when Takaki's work became an issue for the Board. But the Book Prize Committee apparently went ahead without investigation and made its decision. Franklin Odo's opening remarks at the Book Award ceremony stressed the free lesson he had been given years ago about the need to acknowledge fully the work done by others, including graduate students, leading me to think Dr. Takaki's work would not receive the prize after all. But in the absence of the Book Prize chair, it then fell to Dr. Odo to present the award to Takaki. Dr. Takaki ignored the advice indirectly offered to him by Dr. Odo and used his acceptance speech, not to thank all those whose research had contributed to his popular work of synthesis, but to regale us with trivial anecdotes about his appearance on the *Today* show. After that performance, I felt no hesitation about contributing my comments for publication in *Amerasia Journal*. I feel the Association for Asian American Studies has been harmed by its apparent endorsement of work which falls below scholarly standards.

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