

**Michael Eric Dyson. *I May Not Get There With You: The True Martin Luther King Jr.* (New York: The Free Press a Division of Simon and Schuster, Inc. 2000). 404 pp., \$25 cloth**

Michael Eric Dyson's approach to his biography of Dr. Martin Luther King entitled "*I May Not Get There With You: The True Martin Luther King Jr.*" is unlike the numerous other biographies of King in that the method he employs in recasting the life of Dr. King is described as "Bio-criticism."

Dyson's major thesis is that we cannot hope to understand the full measure of Dr. King's human rights accomplishments without understanding the complexity of the man. He quite correctly argues that King is more than the embodiment of the "I Have a Dream Speech" which he contends has been co-opted by liberals and conservatives alike, who in their quest to promote their own particular political and social agendas, portray Dr. King as sanitized without the weaknesses of mere mortals. His bio-critique reveals that Dr. King though one of the greatest men of the twentieth century was no saint. His contribution to the Civil Rights Movement cannot be denied. However, at the same time he had his weaknesses: a history of marital infidelity, plagiarism, the failure to fully acknowledge the support he received from others, and his sexist attitude toward women.

Dyson's argument that King would have a lot in common with members of the Hip-hop generation is a bit of a stretch in my opinion when we reflect on the relationship Dr. King has with the more militant youthful members of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) e.g., Stokely Charmichael and Bob Moses, whose ideas often clashed with his. In his attempt to show how much Dr. King had in common with Tupac Shakur, in characterizing their behaviors of smoking, drinking, sexual recklessness, hard work, etc., he could have juxtaposed the name Stokely Charmichael or Bob Moses. But the recounting of those comparative behaviors obscures their deep ideological differences, as would be true also in the case of Turpac Shakur and Biggie Smalls. Dr. Dyson painstakingly discusses the life of King through the trilogy of "Ideology, Identity and Image." He begins with how he was socialized

prior to his Morehouse days through his intellectual development in theological school and Boston University to his arrival in Montgomery, Alabama, at Ebenezer Baptist Church and his cataclysmic introduction to the Civil Rights Movement as the leader of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. It is through this frame that he dresses King in very human clothing helping the reader to understand that King was far more complicated than how he has been deified by the "I Have a Dream Speech." Dyson takes on King's journey through the Civil Rights Movement emphasizing the radical King, the constantly growing King who grew to see how American racism was inseparable from colonialism and how the American hegemony that produced white supremacy and Jim Crow were directly related to our imperialistic involvement in the Vietnam War.

It is at this point where King has reached the conceptual "Mountain Top" that he is assassinated on April 4, 1968, in Memphis, Tennessee, while advocating in support of the sanitation workers on strike.

Except for some excessive hyperbole, which I suspect comes out of his Baptist preacher tradition, Dyson has given us a portrait of an American hero in all of his humanness. It is an excellent book for general readership, Civil Rights scholars, and as a supplemental reader in the Social Sciences and in Ethnic Studies.

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**David Leiwei Li, *Imagining the Nation: Asian American Literature and Cultural Consent*. The Stanford Series on Asian America, ed. Gordon H. Chang. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998). xii. 261 pp. Contains notes to each chapter at end of work, as well as an index.**

Whenever "the nation" is "imagined," Americans of Asian ancestry are excluded by common "cultural consent" as alien/alienated "Others," as citizens of their ancestral nations.