



Review of

Randall C. Bailey, Tat-siong Benny Liew, and Fernando F. Segovia, editors,
They Were All Together in One Place? Toward Minority Biblical Criticism
(Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 397 pp.

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They Were All Together in One Place? Toward Minority Biblical Criticism is edited by Randall C. Bailey, Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Hebrew Bible at Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Georgia, an African American, a noted ideological critic, with special interest in Pentateuch, historical books and new methods of interpretation; Tat-siong Benny Liew, Professor of New Testament at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley California, an Asian American whose scholarly interests include postcolonial studies, literary

theory, gender/sexuality studies, and ethnic studies (particularly Asian American history and literature); and Fernando F. Segovia, the Oberlin Graduate Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at the Divinity School and the Graduate Department of Religion at Vanderbilt University, a Hispanic American, a biblical and cultural critic whose interests include postcolonial studies, minority studies, Diaspora studies, methods and theory and ideological criticism.

The book results from a project funded through a grant from the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion. The project was entitled “Reading and Teaching the Bible as Black, Asian American and Latino/a Scholars in the U.S.” This volume, number 57 in the Society of Biblical Literature’s Semeia Studies, is a pursuit in “crossing the ‘color line’ in order to work out a disciplinary coalition or alliance with transformation in mind” (5). The methodology employed entails defining the term minority and why it is necessary cross the color line. Why an alliance of racial-ethnic minority persons across the color line is desirable and /or feasible. A description is presented of historical and theoretical outlines of biblical minority criticism and finally the outlining of rhetorical forces present in minority criticism. A disclaimer of sorts is placed in the preface regarding the use of the word “minority”. The term is used with reference to “minoritization” or “being minoritized.” The existence of minority refers to “power” as opposed to presuming numeric ratio as the criteria.

Minority criticism is defined in this work in opposition to dominant criticism (objective-universal) in reference to location and agenda. It stretches the boundaries of contextualization in that the need to place the text in the time and place of its situation is not essential to the meaning of the text. Minority criticism shatters the ideals of dominant criticism. Four strategies are employed in shaping minority criticism: “Puncturing Objectivity and Universality”, “Expanding the Area of Studies”, “Problematizing Criticism” and “Taking the Interdisciplinary Turn”. Essays

written by the biblical scholars are grouped under these headings in Part One. Part Two are assessments by scholars whose disciplines are not within biblical studies. In the conclusion Segovia presents critical assessments of the contributors and points out gaps and possible paths to be taken in furthering the study in minority criticism.

The attempt in forming this work was for equal representation from all three groups. In the conclusion Segovia explains the unequal representation of critics. The problem in achieving this goal was with the lack in areas in one group or another of available scholarly literature, for example, the lack of Latina women in Hebrew Bible studies and women scholars in early Christianity. Inequality in the diversity of representation of each group is blamed on lack of numbers.

In addition to the editors, the contributors are: *Cheryl B. Anderson*, Associate Professor of Old Testament at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston Illinois; *Francisco O. Garcia-Treto*, JFR King Professor of Religion, Emeritus, at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas; *Jean-Pierre Ruiz*, Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at St. John's University in New York; *Frank M. Yamada*, Associate Professor of Hebrew Bible and Director of the Center for Asian American Ministries at McCormick Theological Seminary; *Gale A. Yee*, Nancy W. King Professor of Biblical Studies at Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts; *Jae Won Lee*, Assistant Professor of New Testament at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago; *Gay L. Byron*, Baptist Missionary Training School Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School in Rochester, New York; *Demetrius K. Williams*, Associate Professor in the Department of French, Italian and Comparative Literature and the Religious Studies Program; *Mayra Rivera Rivera*, Assistant Professor of Theology at Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California; *Evelyn L. Parker*, Associate Professor of Christian Education at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University in Dallas,

Texas and *James Kyung-Jin Lee*, Associate Professor of Asian American Studies and English at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

In Segovia's criticism not all of the essays address or reflect minority criticism according to the definition given. In his concluding remarks he characterizes them as "inchoative" starting points. He notes however that the essays of Jae Won Lee, entitled "*Paul and Ethnic Difference in Romans*" and Gay Byron, entitled "Ancient Ethiopia and the New Testament: Ethnic (Con)text and Racialized (Sub)texts" more closely meet the standards set. One example: Byron, under the heading of "Expanding the Field of Studies" addressed in her essay underrepresented racial and ethnic minority groups as central in examining the stories about Ethiopians in early Christian writings. She views race and context as lenses to view Acts 8.26-40, Luke's story of the Ethiopian eunuch. Thus, in recontextualizing early Christian literature through an Ethiopian lens the field of criticism is expanded beyond Anglo-European and postcolonial interpretations.

Two dynamics I found interesting in looking at minority criticism was the implications of "reading race and using race as a lens to read the Bible" (6). The alliance spoken of in this work includes African American, Asian American, and Latino/a American models of Biblical interpretation. Each group was brought to this country under different circumstances but they also "came with knowledge of and often under the guidance of 'the Book' and its institution, the church" (21). This commonality seems to be the basis for their inclusion in this work. Mention of the exclusion of Native Americans and other minorities is based on the above and also lack of biblical literature from these groups. However, given the diversity of minorities studying in universities, inclusion of other voices would further the field of minority criticism.