

Seclusion within a protective ghetto is hardly unique to the Chinese, yet Kinkead never clearly makes that point. And her discussion of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act—the only law in U.S. history to have excluded an entire people based on their nationality—that helped to create and shape Chinatowns nationwide is thin. That act, and subsequent laws that existed until World War II, prevented most Chinese from bringing their wives and children to America. Until the fifties, Chinatown was a preponderantly male “bachelor society” whose members toiled arduously to support families in China while dreaming—often in vain

—of returning there to die. It was only after the Immigration Act of 1965 that the gender gap closed, families multiplied, and significant numbers of Chinese began moving beyond Chinatown’s protective borders.

A deeper problem stems from Kinkead’s analysis of Chinatown as a “closed society.” “So few whites hang around Chinatown that any who do are assumed to be there on police or government business, and people shut off automatically at the sight of a white person—particularly one asking questions,” she writes. Chinese immigrants can be tough interviews. But to suggest that they are put off by the

presence of white people is a stretch. This is, after all, a neighborhood that endures thousands of tourists tromping through its streets and gawking in its windows each year—the overwhelming majority of them white.

Every reporter must confront the difficulties of gaining access, so why should she raise the issue here? Because Kinkead’s purpose is to define Chinatown as singularly apart and insular. Thus, every diffident shopkeeper and suspicious waiter fits into her larger concept of Chinatown as a claustrophobic, jail-like place from which the immigrants would flee if only they had the chance. Her verbal images help drive home her point: Recent immigrants are “prisoners of Chinatown” who are “isolated” and “feel trapped.” A woman equates leaving Chinatown with “an animal escaping a cage.” And when they do “escape,” they “can’t assimilate because they can’t speak English.”

I don’t mean to suggest that this is all wrong. But I do think that Kinkead is missing something: namely, that Chinatown is a far more open and cosmopolitan place than it has ever been. This is no longer the grim enclave of bachelors who dug their heels into lower Manhattan because they were prevented from assimilating. Beyond its restaurants and garment factories, Chinatown has become home to an Asian financial center staffed by an emerging class of lawyers, bankers, and entrepreneurs. These are people who deal daily with the outside world, namely Wall Street and City Hall, and who know something about the American system and how to use it. Though Chinatown remains the economic engine for working-class Chinese, its growing service sector is likely to determine the community’s future.

There is a less tangible point to be made here as well. To the rapidly growing community of Chinese immigrants and their children throughout the metropolitan area, Chinatown is more than just a place to eat, shop, find work, or bunk down on the cheap. It is a community where people meet up with friends, nourish their cultural needs, and refuel in a familiar ambience. It is a place that immigrants come to because it welcomes them. That is the double-edged nature of

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immigrant communities: What makes them seem closed to outsiders is also what makes them nurturing to those within.

This book has infuriated many Asian-American writers who see it as one more act of cultural imperialism by a white author who has painted lovely details only to produce a flawed canvas. I don't find this completely fair. Kinkead is a sensitive and observant chronicler, and the book is valuable to anyone who wonders about Chinatown. But it should not, and will not, be the last word on the subject.

—James Dao

III-Advised: Presidential Health and Public Trust. Robert H. Ferrell. *University of Missouri*, \$19.95. This book couldn't be timelier considering the nagging concerns about George Bush's health—see *Who's Who*—and the revelation that even the righteous Paul Tsongas had an undisclosed recurrence scare after he had said his cancer had disappeared. And the story Ferrell tells is not reassuring. Both presidents and their doctors seem to have a gift for deceiving either themselves—as FDR and Dr. Ross T. McIntyre did—or the public—as John Kennedy and his physicians did. While Wilson, Cleveland, Harding, and Reagan (or their physicians) emerge as deceivers, the shocker of this book is that Eisenhower's medical team, which had heretofore been thought to be honest almost to the point of excess, with its daily reports of the general's bowel movements, was also guilty of concealing important medical information from the public. There's evidence that the president had a heart attack, a stroke, and showed early signs of a serious intestinal disease before a second heart attack, stroke, and a full-blown case of Crohn's disease became widely known.

—Charles Peters

Privacy For Sale: How Computerization Has Made Everyone's Private Life an Open Secret. Jeffrey Rothfeder. *Simon & Schuster*, \$22. Most of the anecdotes presented in this book have been carefully chosen to scare you witless: You could be the elderly cancer patient who discovers

that a malicious Harlem resident has found a way to run up huge bills on your credit cards, or the perfectly healthy man who's denied medical insurance because a faceless, misguided supercomputer thinks you have AIDS. Jeffrey Rothfeder, who first began to investigate the subject of computer data-record surveillance as an editor at *Business Week*, has set out to expose the shadowy world of megadatabases, technospying devices, and international information exchange. Much of what he has to tell is frightening indeed.

The issue of privacy looks as though it's going to be a big one in the next few years, and justifiably so. The thesis of this wide-ranging—if somewhat paranoid—survey is that our country needs new laws to protect its citizens' privacy against the now-overwhelming powers of computers and other technology. Credit bureaus, insurance companies, and government agencies are more capable than ever of keeping and retrieving information about you. Computer records—medical, credit, bank, tax, what have you—have pro-

liferated in scope and accessibility. And if you, sensibly, have a hard time trusting the legitimate institutions that make those records, you should really be worried about the marketing agents and con artists who can access those same private files.

But we should be careful to choose the correct problems to address: Are we worried about privacy for its intrinsic value to us as individuals and members of a society or are we worried simply about the effects invasions of privacy can have upon us? The question is an important one that's not really asked in this book, and many of the privacy issues with which Rothfeder concerns himself have long existed—they've only been exacerbated by machines. This makes solving the problems themselves wiser than trying to legislate them back to the precomputer age.

For instance, Rothfeder makes a big deal out of direct-mail companies that now use database profiles to target different neighborhoods for special deals and offers, like the store in a little town in Georgia that placed ads for

"A real stereotype buster. The anchors of the six o'clock news shows (all channels) must read this quite moving book."—Studs Terkel

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—*Kirkus Reviews*

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