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Dharma, Color, and Culture: New Voices in Western Buddhism

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Dharma, Color, and Culture: New Voices in Western Buddhism Edited by Hilda Gutiérrez-Baldoquín. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2004, 239 pages, ISBN 1-888375-42-6 (paperback), \$16.00/£11.99.

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Over the past five years there has been a steady increase in publications authored by people of color engaged in Buddhist practice. This volume, an edited anthology, is a welcome addition to this developing body of work. Although it is largely aimed at practitioners, it makes useful reading for scholars concerned with how Buddhism is being adapted in the West.

The collection is structured around the respective themes of the Four Noble Truths with a fifth and final section on "The Truth of Bringing the Teachings Home." Throughout, the authors share their perspectives on dukkha in its general forms and specific manifestations for people of color. In this short review it is not possible to do justice to all the pieces in this book, so I will only mention a few examples of those which at an initial reading potentially appeared to be of greatest interest for scholars.

Luis Ressig's chapter in the first section addresses issues of identity and challenges us to question the enclaves people can unwittingly make in this process. In the second section, Thich Nhat Hanh urges the reader to recollect interconnectedness, question the separate categories caused by race-thinking, and from thence address issues arising out of such thinking through non-violence.

The third section continues the message that true freedom, independent of external conditions, can be had through freeing the mind in a way that does not ignore difficult social realities. The fourth section looks at how each element of the Noble Eightfold Path can be used by everyone to address the realities of racism. In the final section, Alice Walker shares her experience of Buddhist practice, suggesting that it can heal not only the selves of people of color, but also what she describes as the ancestral pain carried by both people of color and their oppressors.

Overall, the editor has succeeded in getting a significant number of contributors who are major figures in their own right, and this adds to the weight and quality of this work which is full of insights, especially about issues of identity and the implications of issues of "race," ethnicity, and racism for presentations of Buddhism in the West.