

of all the various constituencies that make up the nation, Meltzer has proven that it can be done and done well.

Within these pages, students will find what the Depression's impact was on African Americans, women, farmers, factory workers, and the middle class who got hooked into the new wave of advertising, installment credit, and consumerism. Throughout the narrative, Meltzer provides snippets of essays and commentaries from distinguished writers such as Edmund Wilson, John Dos Passos, and Gordon Parks, as well as popular music that was composed by Florence Reece and Woody Guthrie, among others. But for the most part it is the people themselves to whom Meltzer gives much space, thereby enabling students to read and hear the words of the Kentucky mine worker or the wonderful account of the young hobo who travelled throughout the South and then on to California in search of work. Meltzer does not slight the ways in which families coped with the Depression, especially women who were abandoned by their husbands who could no longer support them. There are many specialized studies that are appearing that deal with gender in the Depression, but the overview here is a good starting point for students who might want to do theme papers on that topic.

A word of caution must be given here about the bibliography at the end of the book. To my mind it is very thin. Over the last twenty years there has been a wave of studies on the Great Depression covering all of the areas that are looked at in this book. Yet I found that nothing is provided on the intellectual history that figures so importantly during that period (Richard Pells's work, *Racial Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression years*, should have been cited.) Undoubtedly, students are going to wonder why there was not more political upheaval and there are books such as Pells's that address that very matter. Likewise, Raymond Wolter's and John B. Kirby's work on African Americans in the Depression and during the Roosevelt era should have been mentioned.

In the end, this is a work, despite the bibliographic caveat, that is well worth presenting to students. Meltzer has deftly woven in an understanding of current events in an effort to get students to better understand the meaning of the Great Depression. But despite the possibility that the subject may be very depressing to address and somewhat complicated, the best part of this book is its demonstration of how all Americans were affected and how they coped. For that we are in Professor Meltzer's debt for this wonderfully lucid and moving account.

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Carole Ann Pearce. *Amelia Earhart*. New York and Oxford: Facts on File Publications, 1988. Pp. 169. Cloth, \$16.95.

In *Amelia Earhart*, Carol Ann Pearce has written a brief biography of the famed pioneer in American aviation. Pearce is a free lance writer who produced this work for the "Makers of America" series of biographies, under the general editorship of John Anthony Scott, an historian. The series is primarily for young and general readers.

The book is written in an easy to read style and focuses primarily on Amelia Earhart, a pioneering woman, in a field and a time when women were not thought capable of doing things like flying airplanes. There are no footnotes, which may bother some educators, but there is a bibliography. This is not a scholarly book about Earhart or her times, but it is an interesting book probably most useful in introducing high school students to the topic of women's history or aviation. Young women in particular might appreciate the difference between today's society and the twenties and thirties in terms of a woman's options.

There is a general theme to the book of Earhart showing the world that women can, and should, do the daring, dangerous, and foolish things that men do. Her list of accomplishments and awards takes up two pages. She was the first woman to solo the Atlantic by air in 1932 and the first person to solo over both the Atlantic and Pacific. Earhart also set altitude and speed records at

various stages of her career as flyers constantly sought to outdo each other in the headline grabbing stunt and speed competition of the 1920s and 30s.

Amelia Earhart is portrayed as a bright and daring young woman who grew up in a household with a strong and steady mother, but with an alcoholic father who wandered from one job to another. Amelia decided early that she would fly and set about wheedling flying lessons in an age when many men simply refused to teach women flying. Eventually Neta Snook, the first woman to graduate from the Curtiss School of Aviation, gave her lessons and started her off on a dramatic career.

Amelia's life with George Putnam, the prominent New York publisher, is developed in some depth. Her marriage arrangement was again unusual by the standards of the day as she kept her own name, although newspapers often referred to her as Mrs. Putnam. She also pursued her career with great independence. On the other hand, her husband was supportive, and actually helped promote her career. He was her campaign coordinator and publicist as well as her greatest admirer.

The author portrays Earhart as supremely self-confident in her skills and careful about details. Yet in her last fatal trip there were some gaps that are hard to explain. Her navigator, Fred Noonan, was drinking heavily, yet she kept him. Earhart also chose tiny Howland Island as a landing spot despite warnings about the difficulty of locating it given the radio and instrument capacity of the time. Inexplicably she set out on the most dangerous journey of her life without agreement between herself and the navy and coast guard on such crucial items as the radio frequency she would use and the directional equipment she would need. Was it tempting fate, foolish, or supreme self-confidence in her own flying ability?

The author discusses several theories about what went wrong and what happened to Amelia Earhart between Loe, New Guinea, and Howland Island in July 1937, but doesn't make any conclusions. In fact, this is a technique she used often in the work to raise questions but not draw conclusions on Earhart's motives or judgment.

This reviewer would recommend this volume for the young reader or as an introductory work to the topic of women in aviation.

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George Donelson Moss. *Vietnam: An American Ordeal.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990. Pp. xii, 420. Paper \$23.00.

Jeffrey P. Kimball, ed. *To Reason Why: The Debate About the Causes of U.S. Involvement in the Vietnam War.* New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990. Pp. xvii, 355. Paper, \$14.95.

George Moss's *Vietnam: An American Ordeal* is the most thorough, up-to-date, and analytical account of the Vietnam War since George Herring's classic *America's Longest War*. Setting out to provide an "objective" account of the long agony of Vietnam, Moss has made splendid use of a vast variety of sources to provide a balanced and comprehensive history of the American experience.

Some readers may not agree with Moss's central thesis that there was never any realistic prospect for America's goals in Vietnam, but their argument must be with his sources, not with his interpretation. Moss asserts, for example, that at no time from 1954 to the final collapse in 1975 was the South Vietnamese government a viable state. Profound corruption, incompetence, and an unwillingness to reform to win popular support Moss locates in what he calls "the essential South Vietnamese conundrum: How to achieve a stable political order without supporting revolutionary changes." He is equally harsh with his assessment of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). In neither period during which self-defense was the assigned task for the ARVN by the American war managers--1954 to 1965 and "Vietnamization" 1969-1975--was the ARVN more than an illusion. Incompetently led by largely corrupt officers, unlike their revolutionary counterparts, ARVN soldiers were "serving time, not a cause."