

Donald R. Wright. *African Americans in the Early Republic, 1789-1831*. Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1993. Pp. xii, 252. Paper, \$11.95.

Every new addition to the literature on the African-American experience has something unique—some offer new information based on altogether new primary source materials, others bring fresh insights into what is already known about a particular subject through a re-interpretation of available data, still others attempt to synthesize available pieces of evidence and interpretations and make them more accessible. Donald Wright's new book, *African Americans in the Early Republic, 1789-1831*, belongs to the last category. It is a work of synthesis, well conceived and well executed.

The objectives of the text are limited, and are clearly explained in the introduction. Three main goals are pursued. Firstly, to show that the experiences of African-Americans under slavery and/or freedom in the United States differed in space and in time; secondly, to demonstrate that, contrary to racial stereotypes, "African Americans at any point in the past were neither more nor less than normal human beings;" and thirdly, to emphasize that there was a conflict in American society between slavery and freedom, between the colonists' universal libertarian philosophy embedded in the Declaration of Independence and the continued practice and expansion of African slavery. In the opinion of this reviewer, while these objectives are not new, they cannot be overemphasized.

The text begins with what the author appropriately terms "A Second Forced Migration" and ends with "New Directions." In five evenly-divided chapters, Wright compresses invaluable information, interpretation and re-interpretation about such themes as slave and work systems, family, community and culture, the peoples' perception of their being, and their travails and struggles in slavery and freedom. Wright never loses sight of his goals. He exposes the emptiness of the various reasons whites used to justify slavery, compares northern with southern slavery, juxtaposes plantation with industrial slavery, and employs narratives of former slaves (making extensive use of those of Charles Ball and Frederick Douglass) to reconstruct the daily life of free and/or enslaved African-Americans. Also featured in the text are the "traditional" topics like the origin and basis of white racism, slave rebellions, and activities of white and black abolitionists to 1831. The language is exceptionally controlled, and the entire text reads smoothly.

The text has something for every reader—undergraduate or graduate student, college professor, and the general reader. One feature that students and teachers will find very useful is the way the author poses a question and places opposing viewpoints on that question side by side for critical examination. For instance, on the question "What proportion of slaves moving to the Lower South made the move as a result of planter migration rather than sale to a slave trader?" Wright critically examines the positions of Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman on the one hand, and Michael Tadman on the other. Similar treatment is given to the question of the stability and maturation of the institution of slavery in the United States on the eve of the Revolution, "slave breeding" in the Upper South, profitability of industrial slavery to slaveholders, slavery and the destruction of the black family, and whether Denmark Vesey's plot was real or was "loose talk."

*African Americans in the Early Republic* is not based on primary sources, and its contribution is not in bringing new materials to light. Rather, the author relies on and engages in a critique of "authoritative" secondary sources. He leaves the reader in no doubt about his own position. He maintains the middle ground where a synthesis is possible, and comes up with fresh interpretation where existing conclusions prove inadequate. This helps the reader to understand the complexity of the issues involved in African-American history. The graduate student will find this approach useful in developing a style for writing research papers based on secondary source materials.



The book is useful to the teacher of African-American history, too. It contains the kind of information usually required in a 5-hour class, and the bibliographical essay is a mine of information on other sources and their relative strength and weaknesses. I am currently using it with profit for the United States component of my "Africans in the New World" class.

*African Americans in the Early Republic* only covers a short (early republican) period, but it is a fitting companion to *African Americans in the Colonial Era*, also by Wright, *Black Southerners* by John B. Boles, and *From Slavery to Freedom*, the all-time favorite by John Hope Franklin.

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**Michael J. Puglisi.** *Puritans Besieged: The Legacies of King Philip's War in the Massachusetts Bay Colony.* Lanham, MD, and London: University Press of America, 1991. Pp. 244. Cloth, \$43.50; paper, \$24.50.

Is this well organized and generally readable volume, Michael Puglisi discusses the significance of King Philip's War of 1675-76 in New England society during the last quarter of the seventeenth century. Under the leadership of Metacom (King Philip), native Americans carried on the single greatest challenge to the New England colonists. After fifteen months of conflict, the war ended with Metacom's death in August 1676. According to Puglisi, the legacies of the war were to live long after Metacom and have grave effects on Puritan society for the remainder of the century.

In the first three chapters, Puglisi briefly traces the conflict itself, the role of conflict with natives in the colonists' belief system, and the effect of the war on the Puritan attitudes towards the natives. He then has rather detailed chapters on the cost of the war to the colonists and governmental measures to meet those costs, the struggle to build or rebuild communities in the frontier areas most affected by the war, and the effects of the war on political stability. In the final portion of the book, Puglisi discusses "the intellectual and attitudinal changes which resulted from the conflict and continuing tensions."

The central chapters of the book—those on the war's cost and the war's effect on community building and politics—are based on careful scrutiny of local records. Careful reading of these chapters can provide good insights into life in the various Massachusetts communities in the 1670s and 1680s. It is in the final portion of the book that Puglisi's presentation and argument are least effective. In keeping with his concept of King Philip's War as a "focal point," he relates numerous subsequent events to the war and suggests—but does not demonstrate—causation. He is careful to say that the war was not the only reason for the turmoil of the final quarter of the century, but he generally fails to make clear connections between the war and the attitudinal changes and continuing tensions that ensued.

Although the book is not a definitive study, it can be used to advantage as supplementary reading in courses in American colonial history. The inclusion of a few good maps and perhaps some pictures would have greatly enhanced this volume, particularly if it is to be used in the classroom. Unless the reader has a good grasp of geography, much of the information in the chapter on community building can be difficult to follow. More careful proofreading and editing would also have enhanced the value of this work for classroom use.

The Society of Colonial Wars recognized Michael Puglisi's achievements by awarding this book its 1993 Honorable Mention prize.

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