

Robert D. Marcus & David Burner, eds. *America Firsthand*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992. 2nd edition. Vol. I: *From Settlement to Reconstruction*. Pp. x, 310. Vol. II; *From Reconstruction to the Present*. Pp. x, 326. Paper, \$20.00 each.

America Firsthand is a two volume collection of primary sources, most of which relate the personal experiences of those who created them. The work is clearly intended for classroom rather than scholarly usage. Its selections are generally from documents which are either well-known to specialists in the various periods covered by the two volumes (among the many examples are Columbus's letter of February 1493 to Luis de Sant' Angel and Pauline Newman's memories of the Triangle Fire), or would be readily accessible to anyone undertaking research. In addition, the selections are fairly brief, usually less than ten pages, being more often excerpts than complete documents. This aspect will be appreciated by students, however, especially when they read the earlier portions of the first volume where the archaic language may make for heavy going. Amidst the standard sources, there are one or two pleasing surprises, such as a 1909-1910 correspondence from an automobile-obsessed father to his son concerning the purchase of a Cadillac.

As supplementary material for students in the introductory surveys in American history, *America Firsthand* should prove of value. Since the emphasis is on direct experience, most of the documents are in narrative form, which will heighten their appeal to a class. The numerous specific incidents and events that are recounted make the past palpable, and some are likely to stay in memories long after a course is completed. An abundance of autobiographical materials (from, among others, a Mormon pioneer woman, a female slave, a black cowboy, two Vietnam War veterans) provide considerable first-person immediacy.

The organizational scheme for the various documents contained in Volume I is effective, if uninspired, as it follows the standard textbook categorizations of "Discovery and Early Settlement"; "From Colonies to Republic"; "The Creation of a New Nation"; and "Reform, Slavery, Civil War and Reconstruction." The categorizations in Volume II will be more difficult to work with in setting up a course syllabus. After the standard opening sections of "Reconstruction and the Western Frontier" and "An Age of Economic Expansion," there is the catchall section of "Roots of the Modern Era," which ranges in time from 1905 to the middle of World War II, and in scope from a George Washington Plunkitt discourse on graft to oral history selections on the Harlem Renaissance. The volume's final section is "America Since 1945."

If there is any overall theme to *America Firsthand*, it is inclusiveness. For this second edition, the authors sought to pay "more attention to the voices of women, Blacks, and Native Americans, and those whose life styles have traditionally made them inaccessible to the historian." Of the eighty-one documents in the two volumes, one represents a Mexican-American, one a Japanese-American, three represent American Indians, sixteen represent African-Americans, and twenty-eight represent women. Broken down by volume, however, the representation is uneven. Only a quarter of the documents in Volume I have a female voice (as contrasted to almost fifty percent in Volume II), and only one female voice is sounded in the two-and-a-half centuries between 1493 and the 1830s. If the laudable aim of *America Firsthand* is to show "the many ways of being American and the multitudinous minds and characters that make up a diverse history and nation," it has not been fully achieved for the colonial and early national periods.

America Firsthand is also limited in regard to the types of sources it includes. Although there are several varieties of texts—memoirs, letters, diaries, speeches, tracts, reports, testimony, fiction, etc.—every source is textual in nature. The lack of any visual materials, such as drawings, photographs, and statistics, all of which might fit very well with the focus on personal

experience, does not provide an opportunity for students to learn how to handle non-textual sources, and can leave them with a narrow and false view of the types of materials with which historians work. A more minor disadvantage, but one worth mentioning, is that the lack of anything but text, in conjunction with narrow side and bottom margins, gives many of the pages a dense, uninviting look.

For a work devoted so exclusively to literary sources, there are surprisingly few references to text per se in the questions the editors provide at the end of each section. Some directing of students towards language and what it reveals, and does not reveal, as well as towards the way the circumstances under which a document is formed affect its wording and content, would have been helpful. The questions are otherwise useful, although the frequency of one question per document can create a once-over-lightly impression. Instructors who want their students to get the most out of these volumes will have to develop questions of their own in order to more exhaustively mine the various documents.

Instructors may also have to do some research of their own. Since the editors' introductory material is brief, and explanatory footnotes few, students will often desire more information than they have been given. In a number of cases, the class will even experience frustration as some documents end at suspenseful moments. Students will want to know what happened to the people whose stories they have been following, and they will be disappointed if their teachers cannot tell them. Where the class is small enough, and the library sufficiently rich in historical sources, this natural curiosity can be channelled into research assignments, coupled, perhaps, with oral reports on the findings. Bibliographic support will have to come from the instructor as *America Firsthand* does not contain any lists of supplementary sources.

Read with care, these two volumes will provide a host of memorable images—homeless people camping in a large field near Baltimore during the Panic of 1819; a grievously wounded Union soldier beseeching his sister to come to him on the Cedar Mountain battlefield; a gathering of Harlem Renaissance writers sitting on the floor and eating peanuts while doing readings of their poems and plays; the elaborate social cliques among girls in a 1950s Iowa small town. This is visceral history and it should move students.

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John Carmi Parsons, ed. *Medieval Queenship*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993. Pp. 264. Cloth, \$49.95.

John Gillingham, ed. *Richard III: A Medieval Kingship*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993. Pp. 154. Cloth, \$29.95.

Medieval Queenship, edited by John C. Parsons, is a richly informative anthology. The contributors examine the experience of women of ruling houses of Hungary, Denmark, Leon, and Navarre, as well as the better-known Carolingians, Capetians, Plantagenets, and Valois. The occasional rise-to-power of an exceptional woman is an accepted fact. But these writers see status as most often gained by reputation of fertility combined with virtue, and maintained through responsibility for children. As Parsons puts it, the process of the new royal bride was "a passage from daughter's descent and wife's sexuality to maternal care." Later, he explores the Plantagenet queens' education of their daughters for life in foreign courts, and urges further search in the vernacular literature for the "self-perceptions" of medieval women.

The queenship approach opens up fresh insights on the power and the problems of royal women in the early realms of Leon, Hungary, and Navarre. In Denmark, the chronicler Saxo (twelfth century) worked from fiction and legend into a more factual style. For fourteenth-