

of what most other people would regard as political realities. Carter "never adequately defined a mission for his government, a purpose for the country, and a way to get there." Brick by brick, Kaufman builds the structure that would ultimately be named "Jimmy's Failure." Whereas Greene evinces respect for Ford, but not much more, Kaufman reveals the disappointment in Carter of someone who really did want him to succeed, and thinks he could have succeeded. (Along the way, incidentally, Kaufman makes the interesting observation that Carter was actually closer to being a Progressive than a Populist.)

Greene and Kaufman each had the task, then, of describing a presidency that lacks the natural drama of Roosevelt's New Deal or the lasting legacy of Truman's stewardship. Both authors have overcome this difficulty well: Their books are effectively organized, clearly-written, well-edited, grounded in the historical record (the archival record in particular), and carefully reasoned. Both volumes smoothly place the presidency under discussion into a broad context that is itself capably summarized. Both books are occasionally critical of their subjects without being harsh, although Greene does succumb to second-guessing Ford from time to time. In short, these two volumes in the University of Kansas series were a pleasure to read as reasonably straightforward accounts of the two presidencies between 1974 and 1981.

Both of these books would make fine resources for the classroom, either as supplementary readings in an advanced course in recent American history or the presidency as an institution. Reading them would benefit an instructor who wishes to have capable overviews of the modern presidency as well as of the events of the 1970s. Both have annotated bibliographies that students and instructors alike will find useful.

Kaufman makes the point about Carter's foreign policy that although most Americans "did not fault Carter on any specific issue . . . their overall assessment was negative," and that he was "a prisoner of events he could not control." These themes run through both of these studies, in fact, leaving the reader with the nagging suspicion that *no* president during the late 1970s could have succeeded—in overcoming the public's disillusion and distrust, in countering a newly energized and ornery Congress, and in finessing a series of domestic and foreign shocks that exposed some of America's most severe limitations. Perhaps Ford and Carter were destined to be failures as well as soulmates in the presidential interlude between Nixon and Reagan.

I realize this line of thinking brings me perilously close to wondering if a Reagan Administration or something like it was required to put the country back on track again in its attitude toward the presidency itself, and to prove that the country was indeed governable. Fortunately, the book review editor did not send me the next volume in this series!

National Archives and Records Administration

Donn C. Neal

Michael L. Conniff and Thomas J. Davis. *Africans in The Americas*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994. Pp. xi, 356. Paper, \$23.00.

Africans in The Americas is a useful addition to the growing revisionist literature on the diasporic experience of Africans. The object of the authors is clear and concise, ". . . to convey to the college student and the informed reader the intellectual challenge and excitement of the recent research that has greatly sharpened our understanding of the myriad of ways that the African-American experience has shaped today's world." True to this purpose, the text is the outcome of a collaborative project involving seventeen historians working at the advanced edges of their field.

The text is divided into four parts, with a total of fifteen chapters. Each chapter is written in lucid, concise, and insightful narrative. Part I, "Africa, Europe and the Americas," contains a survey on the dawn of human existence until the fifteenth century, focusing on the great African kingdoms of the Nile valley and the Sudan region. Other chapters in the section examine the economic relationship between Africa and Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and also the Africans' early experiences in the Americas as slaves in an emergent economic system. Part II, "The Slave Trade and Slavery in the Americas" presents detailed accounts of conditions of slavery, accommodation, and resistance in Colonial America, Latin America, Brazil, and the Caribbean. Part III, titled "Ending the Slave Trade and Slavery,"

focuses on the enduring efforts to abolish the iniquitous slave trade, and the enervating struggles of enslaved Africans for freedom and human dignity. The central theme of this section is that formal emancipation in the nineteenth century marked only a tiny step towards full citizenship and equality for blacks. In the four regions surveyed, extralegal barriers not only prevented freed blacks from fully integrating into the socioeconomic system but also fostered racial injustice and inequality.

Part IV, "Africans in the Americas since Abolition," illustrates how abolition of involuntary servitude changed the countenance of the Americas notably by initiating population movements, as freed blacks, determined to improve their life circumstances and conditions, entered both local and long distance migrations. This phenomenon, of which the northward migration of Blacks in the United States from 1910 to 1940 is a paradigmatic case, not only redistributed millions of blacks from rural area to urban area, from island to mainland, but subsequently transformed social attitudes and atmosphere in the recipient regions. A final chapter examines America's fragile ties and relationships with the modern states of Africa.

This text's merits are its multicultural approach and the interconnectedness of its four sections. Indeed, the historical sojourn of black people in the Americas is viewed within the context of global history. For instance, the black diasporic struggle for emancipation, political citizenship, and social equality is delineated within the context of the Age of Revolution—that period from the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, when discontented and oppressed people the world over fought to free themselves from inherited socio-political, economic, and intellectual restraints.

An especial strength of the text is that the synthesis of the various parts is well executed. For instance, it is obvious in Part I that economic and not racial considerations underpinned chattel slavery. Yet it is clear in Parts II and III why the opprobrium of racism, which complemented the iniquity of slavery, was necessitated by the need to maintain an ethnocentric social order in a constantly evolving social climate. Additionally, while the text portrays elements of a common legacy vis-a-vis the shared and similar experiences of peoples of African descent, it does not yield to the common albeit false notion of a monolithic experience of Black people. In this respect, Black people are presented as active participants in what anthropologist Van Sertima called the rendezvous of history—that common meeting ground of humanity.

Overall *Africans in the Americas* is a contemporary and vibrant survey. And although its narrow focus—the diasporic experience of blacks—limits its use to essentially a corollary text for Caribbean, Latin American, and African-American history courses, its revisionist interpretations of the diasporic experience in a style that is clear and unpretentious, makes it a text that can appeal to students and instructors alike.

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Cheedy Jaja

Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob. *Telling the Truth About History*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1994, Pp. 322, Cloth, \$25.00; Paper, \$13.95.

This book—part intellectual history, historiographic essay, and salvo in the contemporary culture wars—attempts to rescue history from the clutches of an increasingly fashionable cultural and intellectual relativism. Though perhaps too demanding for most undergraduate students, this important book should be read by every historian whose students have argued that one opinion about the past is pretty much as valid as another, or who has encountered those who dismiss history as a form of literary diversion, the truth of which is only in the eye of the beholder.

No brief review can do justice to the many layers of this timely and thought-provoking book. The authors argue that since the 1960s old intellectual certainties and absolutes have collapsed in the face of a growing skepticism that "any form of knowledge, including history, could be modeled on the scientific method inquiry." While acknowledging the merits of the skeptics' case, in this book the authors successfully reassert history's claims. "We are arguing here [they state] that truths about the past are possible, even if they are not absolute."