

chairperson of early history at Innsbruck University, organized a team of scientists and historians from a dozen disciplines to undertake an investigation. His report--published in the United States in 1994 under the title *The Man in the Ice* (New York: Crown Trade Paperbacks)--is a thrilling historical work. Spindler and his colleagues deserve the thanks of the world not because they "made" history, but *because they were its devoted servants*. Theirs was a collective struggle to search for and scrutinize fresh evidence; to fling back the frontiers of the unknown; to bring to birth new truth about human life and human creativity. Their written report is already a part of our historical heritage.

Committee on History in the Classroom

John Anthony Scott

Stephen G. Weisner and William F. Hartford, eds. *American Portraits: Biographies in United States History*. Blacklick, OH: McGraw Hill, 1998. Vol. I. Pp. x, 321. Paper, \$25.43; ISBN 0-07-069141-X. Vol. 2. Pp. x, 317. Paper, \$25.43; ISBN 0-07-069142-8.

Teaching historians often assign biography to supplement reading lists for the introductory survey classroom, even though selecting which life to share might be a difficult process. Biography represents a unique form of history and literature, inviting a reader to come to terms with the significance of human agency. Indeed, a biography possesses the potential to reveal how a particular person influenced and was influenced by broader historical forces. Personal stories allow the student to identify with the subjects of history, that is, the people who made the past. *American Portraits*, however, fails to make these fundamental connections.

Stephen Weisner, a teacher at Springfield Technical Community College, and William Hartford, an independent scholar, have brought together a number of biographical profiles in this two-volume collection. The work is packaged as a supplemental reader for the U.S. history survey classroom, with nineteen selections in the first volume and eighteen in the second. Written by a number of different authors, the essays introduce the lives of noted Americans. While including preliminary material, bibliographic discussion, and primary sources, the editors also provide a few questions to accompany each selection. A picture of each biographical subject appears with the profile.

These texts, though inviting the reader to learn more about a diverse cohort of Americans, do not present the interconnections that create an effective biographical project. The editors' introduction provides no criteria for selection of the various subjects, only suggesting that the brief profiles in this anthology have been selected "not only for their readability but also for the interest they are likely to generate." Furthermore, the excerpts from primary sources seemed awkwardly juxtaposed to the

biographies. For example, the creation myth from the Mandan of the Missouri river follows the portrait of an Oregon pioneer missionary, Mary Richardson Walker. Therefore, the volumes lack a clear demonstration of historical significance; they constitute a historical collage.

The uncertain criteria for inclusion/exclusion of material creates specific inconsistencies in the texts, although these concerns might be particular to me. No American Indian appears until Tecumseh's portrait in unit two, an oversight that distorts the portraits of Columbus, Anne Hutchinson, William Penn, and William Byrd II--all exhibited in unit one. Why omit George Washington from the collection, an eighteenth-century gentleman who remains a mystery for most undergraduates? Where are the stories about America's immigrants? Why include more than seventeen pages about Elizabeth Blackwell, America's first female physician, but only ten pages to explore the remarkable story of African American poet Phillis Wheatley? Even more puzzling was the omission of one of the foremost American lives of the nineteenth-century--Frederick Douglass. The editors gave us Generals William Sherman and Philip Sheridan, but not Robert E. Lee or Clara Barton.

The selections might be justifiable if the authors clarified their criteria, but the biographies also demonstrate an unfortunate unevenness in quality. Clearly, Joe Frantz's profile of Sam Houston in the first volume sets the highest standard, while William Chafe's version of Eleanor Roosevelt in the second volume merits praise. However, I was disappointed by the anecdotal piece about George Patton by Stephen Ambrose and Judith Ambrose, who never mention the general's role in suppressing the "Bonus Marchers" in 1932 nor explore his attitude toward the Soviets during World War II. The Betty Friedan story as presented here was unsatisfactory, since author David Halberstam's narrative was less her individual portrait and more a Fifties' pastiche.

I am puzzled by the final entry in volume two, which considers the economic shifts of post-industrial America. The editors selected an article by researcher Katherine Newman "that provides a collective portrait of various people affected by these economic changes." Whatever the editors' intention for this selection, the profile was not an attempt at biography at all. The displaced manager, unemployed blue-collar workers, and dislocated people were viewed from a sociological perspective by the author. Indeed, the author's photograph appears at the start of the selection, losing the focus of the varied biographies included elsewhere in the collection, which all began with visual images of Theodore Roosevelt, Martin Luther King, and so on.

Without a critical design, this collection lacks the clarity of purpose that one might expect in a supplementary reader. Of course, the effective use of biographies in a U.S. history classroom opens up space for students to understand the power of personal stories and to consider the quandaries of modern historiography. This, in turn, invites students to enter into the debates over the "national standards" for history teachers, or other recent controversies about inclusion/exclusion in the profession.

Without the texture constituted by an explicit criteria, though, *American Portraits* might not represent a critical teaching utensil.

My concern about this clustering of biographies is pedagogical, then. While a number of the personal stories in the collection were interesting, the lack of consistency or continuity undermines the classroom functionality of the texts. Clearly, a package of parts does not make a whole. Agglomeration of unconnected stories will not elevate the level of reflective discourse for students in the survey classroom, although a reading supplement using biographies at least adds flavor to classroom discussions. However, both of these volumes suggest a rather bizarre recipe: add people randomly and stir briefly.

American Portraits provides a kind of uncritical mass of personal stories and anecdotes. With work, the texts might become useful supplements for teaching history. I would not recommend them, though. This collection of biographies allows students to explore a fragmented past, but the collage will not help them to connect some of the pieces.

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Ann D. Gordon, ed. *African American Women and the Vote, 1837-1965*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997. Pp. 217. Cloth, \$45.00; ISBN 1-55849-058-2. Paper, \$15.95; ISBN 1-55849-059-0.

African American Women and the Vote, 1837-1965 is a fine collection of essays dealing with a rarely documented topic: the struggle of African American women to assert themselves in American politics. It is always a pleasure to find a series of readable academic essays, and this book falls into that select group. It is a collection that offers both instructors and students several fine pieces for study and discussion.

Some of the essays in this collection really shine. One of the finest is Elsa Barkley Brown's, "To Catch the Vision of Freedom: Reconstructing Southern Black Women's Political History, 1865-1880," a vivid description of how women without the legal authority to vote still exerted unquestionable clout on election day. Brown's work incorporates a variety of sources that seek to show how women of color used their gender and social positions in the family to sway their husband's, brother's, and father's vote.

Additionally, Janice Sumler-Edmond's "The Quest for Justice: African American Litigants, 1867-1890" is quite an enlightening piece. This paper examines cases that involved African American women who had filed suits in southern courts. It compares the promise and the disturbing reality of how African American trials of the post-bellum era were adjudicated. Sumler-Edmond's painstaking use of legal records and