

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

literate style reveal the disappointing reality for African-American women in courts of the period.

Perhaps the best of the group is Martha Prescott Norman's "Shining in the Dark: Black Women and the Struggle for the Vote, 1955-1965." It recounts the extraordinary suffering African-American females underwent once they had attained the right to vote. Upon registration, these women faced evictions, unemployment, shootings, threats--all in an attempt to assert themselves politically. After reading this piece, I was shocked to think this occurred just a little over three decades ago. Norman, herself a former member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, was a witness to many of the events and personalities with which her essay deals. It is a fine piece of prose, one that will make a real impression on students who read it.

This book would definitely be suitable for use in the college classroom, an excellent tool for any sort of Afro-American history course. Additionally, southern history courses, women's history courses, or twentieth-century American history classes could utilize the information in this collection as supplemental reading assignments. Sometimes touching, and at other times shocking, *African American Women and the Vote* is a valuable addition to the burgeoning field of African American history. Its portrayal of ethnic unity and tenacity makes for excellent academic reading.

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Kenneth S. Greenberg, ed. *The Confessions of Nat Turner and Related Documents*. Boston & New York: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1996. Pp. xii, 148. Paper, \$7.95; ISBN 0-312-11207-6.

Paul Finkelman. *Dred Scott v. Sandford: A Brief History with Documents*. Boston & New York: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1997. Pp. xii, 240. Paper, \$7.95; ISBN 0-312-11594-6.

As most history teachers already know, it is a difficult task finding just the right supplemental readings for a class. If a book is too dense or detailed, many students simply will not read it. Too specialized, however, and the students are unable to place it in any kind of general context. Most teachers constantly search for that elusive balance--don't overwhelm the students, yet try to pique their interest while also introducing relevant historical materials.

Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press once again has presented historians with two works that will certainly meet those perplexing classroom needs. I have used several of their books in my college history classes and they have always been read with enthusiasm by the students. In *The Confessions of Nat Turner* and *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, Bedford has further strengthened its continuing series in History and Culture