

BOOK REVIEWS

Benjamin Reilly. *Disaster and Human History: Case Studies in Nature, Society, and Catastrophe.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., Publishers, 2009. Pp. 399. Paper, \$49.95; ISBN 978-0-7864-3655-2.

The breakdown of the global economic system in the first decade of the twenty-first century has shed further light on the incapacity of national governments to plan effectively for and deal with natural disasters. This is perhaps most evident with the Asian Tsunami of 2004, Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and more recently the devastating earthquakes and aftershocks near Port-au-Prince, Haiti, where hundreds of thousands of casualties occurred. But these are only the most recent catastrophes that mankind has dealt with poorly. Reilly's intention with his world history textbook on human interaction with natural catastrophe is "to give readers the necessary historical and scientific knowledge they need to make informed decisions about how to address global warming and other problems raised by mankind's often disastrous interaction with the natural environment." With this goal in mind, the author produces a primer that examines volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, environmental changes, tropical cyclones, floods, tsunamis, famines, and disease and how humans have interacted with environmental tragedy.

The first chapter of *Disaster and Human History* delivers a brief sketch of global historical phenomena over the past five hundred years. Each successive chapter is broken into two areas. The first area examines the scientific and historical context of each sort of natural disaster. The second part examines specific disasters as case studies. These sections allow Reilly to examine wide-ranging disasters such as the eruption of the Krakatau volcano in 1883, *El Nino* and desertification phenomena, and hurricanes such as Andrew in 1992 among many others. He also examines events that triggered famines such as Mao's Great Leap Forward and the Irish Potato Famine. Finally Reilly investigates what he describes as diseases of imperialism, industry, and globalism: malaria, cholera, and AIDS respectively.

Reilly produces a very usable environmental manual for history, geology, political science, and public policy classes. His writing is engaging, his conclusions are provocative, and he has a clear handle on the current scientific and historical context. By concentrating on the science and the history of environmental calamities from diverse locations, he suggests that humans around the world have had to interact with and negotiate the physical environment. But his textbook also critically examines how social constructions of race, class, and gender have hampered humankind's historic ability to respond effectively to natural calamity. Natural disasters, claims the author, disproportionately affect the most vulnerable people and, to make matters worse, some of these natural disasters are significantly enhanced—sometimes even created—by human activities. Human agency, the author argues, is even more prevalent in the social constructions that rule human interactions with the natural environment. Reilly points much of his criticism toward the failure of state-run

humanitarian efforts at preventing starvation, disease, and fire that often come after a natural disaster hits. These tragedies frequently have political consequences; French authorities in Martinique, for example, provided economic inducement to largely poor black citizens in the town of Le Morne-Rouge to stay put while citizens from the largely white and wealthy nearby town of St. Pierre were evacuated—this despite the continual eruption of the volcano Mount Pelée for nearly a year beginning in August 1900.

This textbook, grounded in the discipline of world history, could be a valuable resource for those seeking ways to develop lectures or explore environmental issues in their classes. Reilly has produced a text that is significantly relevant in a world of increasingly intense natural catastrophes and an increasing global system that has yet to prove completely reliable or effective in predicting and dealing with tragedy. The author limits his focus to natural catastrophes of the Industrial Age and beyond with very limited discussion of the Pre-Modern and Antiquity periods. Creative historians will have to work hard to use this text in broad introductory classes, but courses concentrating on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries will have a provocative text full of effective case studies. This text perhaps would be most effective as a source for upper-division courses or introductory graduate-level courses. In these sorts of classes, Reilly provides a text that would be very helpful in beginning a discussion about the way humankind has employed modern social and economic systems to respond to natural catastrophes.

Georgia Highlands College

Shannon Bontrager

Wilson J. Warren and D. Antonio Cantu, eds. *History Education 101: The Past, Present, and Future of Teacher Preparation*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc., 2008. Pp. 270. Hardcover, \$73.99; ISBN 978-1-59311-861-7.

This volume of thirteen essays explores the current state of history education for pre-service teachers. Warren and Cantu divide the essays into three sections: "Context," "Practice," and "New Directions." For educators and academics who share in the education of pre-service history teachers, the topics explored in this collection are, unfortunately, all too familiar. Despite the resurgence of attention paid to the education of history teachers that began in the late eighties and reached its greatest public attention with the publication of the *National Standards for History* in the mid-1990s, it appears there is less interest or investment by academia in this issue now than ever before.

In the "Context" section, co-editor Cantu opens with a statistical analysis of data provided by the *AHA Directory* and job-postings that present a demographic landscape for understanding the past and current conditions of history education and training. Russell Olwell offers an exploration of the AHA's efforts during the Cold War decades,