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"The African American Years" Book Review

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Carolyn J. Radcliff

EDITOR

REFERENCE BOOKS

The African American Years. By Gabriel Burns Stepto. *Chronologies of American History and Experience*. New York: Scribner, 2003. 475p. alkaline \$125 (ISBN 0-684-31257-3).

The African American Years brings to the reader, through the use of a chronology, essays, and important primary source documents, a thorough understanding of the history of African Americans in the United States. Author Gabriel Stepto (son of writer Robert Burns Stepto) says in his preface: "To write and read the story of African Americans who for large parts of their experience in the United States were not treated even as human beings, much less citizens or people of record, we must turn to a wealth of sources. Memoirs, letters, family histories, newspapers, oral histories and city directories—these are just a few of the types of materials writers and readers must draw upon both to construct the past and to reconstruct prior interpretations of that past" (ix). With this book Stepto hopes to give the reader the "tools" to make his or her own interpretation of the history and experience of African Americans rather than rely upon prior interpretations put forth by others.

This one-volume book is divided into two parts: a sixty-five-page chronology (1444–2002) and essays on the following topics: "The Colonial Period and the Revolutionary War," "The Civil War: Reconstruction," "The Long Journey toward Integration," "African Americans in the Modern Era," and "African Americans Coming to the Fore of American Identity." At the back of the book, two indexes are provided, one general and one for primary sources. Bibliographies are provided at the end of each article, and "see references" to the title and page

number for the appropriate primary source document are included in each section (including the chronology). Throughout the book Stepto makes use of excerpts from these primary source documents by interspersing them with the essays to illustrate a point. For example, to illustrate the section on African Americans and the Law and the *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court Case, Stepto provides excerpts from the opinion of Justice Brown who delivered the opinion of the Court. He also uses illustrations such as flyers, engravings, newspaper clippings, and photographs from the Library of Congress and museums.

The African American Years is an original work and is the only one of its kind which so aptly illustrates the importance of primary source documents for an understanding of the history of the African American. In comparison, Alton Hornsby's *Chronology of African American History* (Gale Research, 1991) or Everett Jenkin's *Pan African Chronology* vols. I, I, III (MacFarland, 1996, 1998, 2001) are excellent chronologies. However, *The African American Years* is unique in the way that it illustrates history through documents, some famous, some obscure. I highly recommend this wonderful reference work for public and academic libraries.—Elaine Hughes, *Liaison Librarian, Pullen Library, Georgia State University*

Amazons to Fighter Pilots: A Biographical Dictionary of Military Women. Ed. by Reina Pennington and Robin Higham. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 2003. 2 vols. alkaline \$175 (ISBN 0-313-29197-7).

From Adelaide of Turin through Ilona Zrinyi, *Amazons to Fighter Pilots* documents the military contributions of some three hundred women combatants from antiquity to the present. Group entries ("Algerian-French War, Women In") and numbered entries ("46th Tamansky Guards Bomber Aviation Regiment") supplement individual profiles, adding to the dictionary's impressive chronological and geographical coverage. All entries are

signed and each contributor is identified. A short bibliography of sources accompanies each article. Black-and-white photographs illustrate some entries, while others are enhanced by sidebars containing statistics, quotations, or other pieces of information. The dictionary concludes with an especially useful 125-page timeline listing women, date of activity, and military event in parallel columns; two bibliographic surveys, one on women as prisoners of war and the other about the battlefield experience of women ambulance units, nurses, and doctors; a thirty-five-page bibliography of books and journal articles; and an extensive index.

In keeping with its primary focus, biographical articles in *Amazons to Fighter Pilots* stress the subject's military role, often in greater detail than is found in other biographical works. Such is the case, for instance, when comparing articles about Arsinoe III and Hojo Masako in *Amazons to Fighter Pilots* to those found in Anne Com-mire's and Deborah Klezmer's *Women in World History: A Biographical Encyclopedia* (Yorkin Publications, 1999, 17 vols.), although the latter provides information about their personal lives absent from *Amazons to Fighter Pilots* and offers a guide to the pronunciation of their names. On the other hand, the biographical entry for Violette Szabo in *Women in World History* offers considerably more detail and analysis than does the entry in *Amazons to Fighter Pilots*, which only treats women agents who engaged in actual combat. Furthermore, although there is duplication of subjects between these two works, each has its own unique entries and objective.

Jessica Amanda Salmonson's *The Encyclopedia of Amazons: Women Warriors from Antiquity to the Modern Era* (Anchor Books, 1991) covers much of the same territory as *Amazons to Fighter Pilots* but differs in being a work of single authorship and by including women of myth, legend, and imagination such as Baba Yaga, Long Meg, and Wonder Woman. Victoria Sherrow's *Women and the Military: An*