

BOOK REVIEWS

From protest to challenge: A documentary of African politics in South Africa, 1882-1990. Volume 4, Political Profiles 1882-1990

(Jacana Media 2017, 649 pp. ISBN 978-1-77009-883-1)

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This book is the fourth volume in a series covering African politics in South Africa from 1882 to 1990. It presents the work done by 571 carefully-selected individuals that were critical in forging a way to emancipate African society from colonial and apartheid oppression. The culmination of the profiles of each of these individuals is how they contributed immensely to the making of present-day South Africa.

Although the book clearly identifies its focus to be on African politics, it shows how colonial oppression was experienced by people of different racial profiles such that it was also challenged by individuals from across the broad spectrum of South African society. It covers resistors to the establishment of early colonial systems such as Chief Bambatha, early African nationalists such as John Dube and Sol Plaatje, academics such as Professor DDT Jabavu and Dulcie September, trade unionists such as Clements Kadalie and Lilian Ngoyi, student activists such as Tsietsi Mashinini and Ongkopotse Tiro and representatives of different political formations such as Nelson Mandela, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Fathima Meer, Joe Slovo and Robert Sobukwe.

The characters that are in the book are of various profiles regardless of race, gender, age and political affiliation. While the already well-known historical characters such as Nelson Mandela are in the book, their profiles are not necessarily accorded more space than those of lesser known characters.

It should be stressed that the book does well to put women at the centre stage of shaping South African history, especially by highly recognising their role in the struggle against colonialism and apartheid. Examples of the featured women are Winnie Mandela, Ruth First, Helen Joseph, Mamphela Ramphele, Florence Matomela, Charlotte Maxeke and Ruth Mampati. While all these names may be famous, there are other unsung profiles such as Jacqueline

Sedibe who was “the highest ranking woman in Umkhonto weSizwe (MK)” (p. 476) and Elizabeth Mafekeng who is described as an “outstanding trade unionist” (p. 216). Admittedly, there are more male profiles than those of women in the book, yet the authors make it clear how women from different backgrounds and structures played a pivotal role in South African history.

In terms of style, the book presents a strong sense of authenticity. It demonstrates evidence of thorough research on the particular individuals, painting not just convincing, but very fascinating profiles. Each of the characters has all their full names, including their aliases and maiden names (for those who had them). Also provided are dates of birth and death (where applicable), places of birth and careers. None of the profiles is over-elaborated, so no character seems obviously more prominent than others. However, while the profiles are all brief, they are very detailed.

I would recommend this book to readers who are keen on history for both academic and leisure purposes. This means that History teachers can also use this book as a reference as they prepare for their lessons. Furthermore, all enthusiasts of freedom from all around the world may find this book to be a very rich resource.

The Black Consciousness reader

(Jacana Media, 2017, 354 pp. ISBN 978-1-4314-2578-5)

B Ndaba, T Owen, M Panyane, R Serumula and J Smith

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The book is about the history of blackness and what it means to be black. It is a philosophical account about Black Consciousness (BC) which draws the narratives from interviews, opinions of authors and secondary data. The book recognises Steve Biko as significant within the BC movement history but also identifies other personalities such as Nkosi Albert Luthuli, Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe, Ongkhopotse Tiro, Vuyelwa Mashalaba, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Assata Shakur, Neville Alexander, Thomas Sankara, Walter Rodney, Lefifi Tladi, and Ready D who played an important role in the history of the philosophy. Themes that come into play in explaining the philosophy are politics, land, women, power, art, music and religion. The