



The African-American Slave Trade; South Africa Since Apartheid

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Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

The new titles in Wayland's modern history series deal with two very different time spans. Grant's tackles nearly three hundred years of the growth and consequences of the transatlantic slave trade, while Sheehan has only just over a decade of the struggling new South Africa to assess. Grant has the benefit of some hindsight, and much historical research, while Sheehan has to sift through today's headlines to form a coherent account.

Both do their job well, helped by an accessible series format which features a narrative text in self-contained chapters. These chapters give them enough space to examine individual aspects of their subjects in reasonable depth.

Grant keeps his subject manageable by focusing on the slave trade itself, and offering less on slavery as a social institution. He also concentrates on the USA, referring to South America and the Caribbean largely for comparative purposes; and including more than is usual of the African end of the trade.

Both authors handily integrate the historical context of their subjects and introduce controversial questions in a way that encourages readers to make their own judgements. They strike a good balance between overall analyses of social, economic and political trends and the consideration of the individual experiences implied in the series title. Sheehan examines statistical evidence for change, while acknowledging, especially in his discussion of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the deep changes in attitudes, behaviour and expectations involved in moving beyond a society firmly rooted in racial inequity and injustice.

The series is at a level of difficulty to suit researchers of up to 16 years of age. It also acts as an introduction to each subject for older students. Both titles draw mainly on adult secondary sources. Grant, while providing a full bibliography, is careful to pick out titles for further reading that might not be too daunting. With his usual consideration for his readership, he includes novels, films and biography.

Running Order:

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