

Jacksonian and Antebellum Age: People and Perspectives

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Review

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Cheatham, Mark R., ed. *Jacksonian and Antebellum Age: People and Perspectives*. ABC-CLIO, \$85.00 hardcover ISBN 9781598840179

Surveying the Antebellum Era

Jacksonian and Antebellum Age: People and Perspectives is the latest in the ABC-CLIO series *Perspectives in American Social History*, designed to examine important moments in the American past, not from the perspective of the famous and powerful, but through the eyes of everyday citizens. The books are intended for course use, in particular high school history classes and undergraduate American history classes. The nine essays in the *Jacksonian and Antebellum Age* sketch a variety of themes and events in early nineteenth century history and are supplemented by primary sources that correspond to the articles (so, for example, Michl Morris's lucid article on Indian Removal is accompanied by the texts of *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* and the Indian Removal Act of 1830).

A certain measure of unevenness is to be expected in any collection of essays, and this one is no exception. The unevenness, however, is not so much that of quality, but of depth, complexity, and originality. Some of the essays — for example Mark Cheatham's introduction and his article on African American founding fathers (that is, David Walker, Frederick Douglass, and Nat Turner) — provide a solid introduction to their respective topics by distilling the latest research for high school and freshmen-level readers. Likewise, Michl J. and Mary Beth Fraser Connolly reliably sketch workers' response to industrialization in New England, while Elaine Naylor deftly retells the story of western expansion during the Jacksonian era. Students will likely find Gail Murray's lively depiction of antebellum childhood especially interesting — the horrors of childhood mortality, the nature of sacred and secular education, the arduous work demanded of youth, the dreadful treatment of problem children, and the appearance for the first time of a recognizable child's culture reflected in reading materials, new toys, and furniture designed for children.

Other articles, such as Matthew Warhauser's discussion of the Peggy Eaton scandal and David Voelker's *Religious Sects and Social Reform*, seem to be directed toward a more specialized audience, complete with assumptions of prior knowledge and historiographic asides. Kirsten Wood's *Women, Taverns, and Travel* and Steven Deyle's *Slave Traders*, meanwhile, are more narrowly focused and more original contributions. Wood's piece, in particular, is an examination of women's experiences as travelers, tavern guests, hostesses, and servants, and is a preview of her book-in-progress, one which historians of the early republic should certainly look forward to.

Although the contributors pitched their articles at somewhat differing levels, the essays are uniformly well-conceived and well-executed pieces of scholarship. *Jacksonian and Antebellum Age: People and Perspectives* contains succinct, lucid chapters on interesting and relevant topics that explain not only the significance of the topic at hand but do so, for the most part, in a clear, accessible manner. Indeed, the text would be ideal for classroom use except for one problem: the price. Although I cannot speak for high school teachers, I doubt that many college instructors would wish to saddle their students with an \$85.00 supplementary reader. And thus, although the collection should be praised for its quality, the price of admission, I fear, may undermine the production.

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