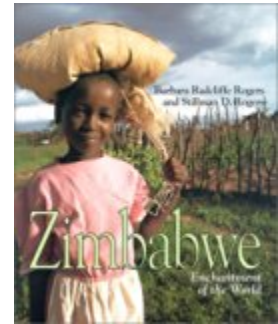


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Barbara Radcliffe Rogers, Stillman D. Rogers. *Zimbabwe*. New York: Children's Press, 2002. 144 pp. \$34.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-516-21113-8.

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Zimbabwe: Enchantment of the World

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Readers will like this book because it has beautiful pictures and covers a wide variety of subjects, including cultural and economic history as well as current political, religious, and cultural life. It also provides a time line of Zimbabwean history and “fast facts” about the country. The book is intended for young readers in the upper elementary grades and is part of the Enchantment of the World series published by Scholastic.

The analysis of current events is stronger than the treatment of Zimbabwean history. This reflects the focus of the series, but historic background gives the basis for understanding the present and is, therefore, very important. One of the most egregious examples of historical inaccuracy comes in chapter 4, “People in Motion,” when Rogers and Rogers are discussing European colonization and the roles of Rhodes and Lobengula. Their version reminds one of Eurocentric accounts by white historians that promoted white settler perspectives. Both the photo caption describing Rhodes (p. 48) and that describing Lobengula (p. 49) say that Rhodes “negotiated” for British settlers to enter the country and that Lobengula “gave” and “granted” these rights. This vocabulary leads the reader to believe that the Rudd Concession was undertaken in a transparent and honest manner, which it was not. Many white Rhodesians believed that these negotiations were made in good faith because white historians often wrote Rhodesian history in this manner.

Another example of confusing historical comment concerns the taking-over of white farmlands. The au-

thors state that “primarily veterans of the war for independence” took over the farms (p. 58). Two pages later, they write, “Although the ‘squatters’ who took over the farms claimed to be veterans of the war of independence in the 1970s, many of them were only in their twenties, too young to have fought in that war” (p. 60). These contradictory sentences may confuse the young reader.

Apart from the table of contents pages, the first two pictures of people related to the text are white: Queen Victoria and David Livingstone. These choices influence readers and, in this case, can lead them to think that these white people were key figures in Zimbabwean history.

Chapter 3, “Where the Lion is King,” presents Zimbabwe’s wildlife and a discussion of economic and environmental issues. The Enchantment series may require this ordering of contents, but it would be refreshing to see a children’s book on an African country that does not begin with white people and wildlife.

Rogers and Rogers cover the pre-colonial history in the next chapter and, although it is difficult to follow their historical trail at times, this chapter does give the reader a basic idea of the complexity and importance of early Zimbabwean cultures.

Historic facts become blurred again when the book discusses the pressure for independence. A white settler point of view is evident in the authors’ claim that, “although Great Britain did not recognize UDI and still considered Rhodesia a British territory, for the next fourteen years Rhodesia was an independent country” (p. 53).

In fact, only South Africa recognized Smith's UDI; the rest of the world followed the British lead. Again, young readers could interpret the text by thinking that only the British refused to recognize Rhodesia's declared independence.

Discussing the 1979 Muzorewa government and, indeed, adding a photograph of him as prime minister wastes space in the book. This inclusion may indicate reliance on pro-settler sources regarding this episode in Zimbabwean political history; surely the event was seen as sham at the time and as Smith's last effort to preclude black majority rule under the major Zimbabwean African parties.

The constant use of the words "tribe" and "tribal" are annoying and represent a colonial vocabulary, even if some Zimbabweans use the words in an effort to fit into European thought. One would hope that this terminology in children's literature would be replaced by now: why not write "the Shona" instead of "the Shona tribe"?

Despite these criticisms, Rogers and Rogers do present important issues for consideration. They discuss

the importance of agriculture and industry and point out again and again that it has been and remains to a large extent in white hands. They discuss political controversies and give the Movement for Democratic Change its due in the current political scene, and they discuss Mugabe's increasing autocracy. They underscore the development of an elite class, both white and black, and point out the gap between this multiracial elite and the poor.

There are several very nice, small additions to the text: the etiquette of eating sadza, for example, gives young readers a taste for Zimbabwean manners and cooking. The section on mbira music and its technical parallels to jazz is of interest. The discussion of Zimbabwean writers is important, even though the only photo is of Doris Lessing. Why not use the space of the Muzorewa photo for one here of Charles Mungoshi or other black authors named in the text?

If teachers and librarians can help young readers understand the text and talk with them about the problems raised, this book can be a source of understanding contemporary Zimbabwe.

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