

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



**Mary Ann Stotko.** *South Africa*. Milwaukee: Gareth Stevens Publishing, 2002. 96 pp. \$29.26 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8368-2347-9.

**Reviewed by** Brenda F. Randolph (Africa Access)

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Stotko's *South Africa* is an adequate though not outstanding country study of South Africa. The text is generally accurate, the colorful photographs chosen well, and the author treats certain controversial topics with aplomb. The discussion on Shaka, the well-known Zulu leader, avoids the sensational treatment seen in many other children's books and the section "Traditional Healers in Modern Society" is also balanced well. The author describes traditional health practitioners as "the backbone of the primary health care system on which many South Africans rely" and she notes their considerable knowledge: "[t]raditional healers are specialists in botany who, with no formal training, possess incredible knowledge of the chemistry and nutritional and medicinal values of hundreds of herbs" (p. 69). Other strengths include the section on ecotourism and sidebars that direct readers to more extensive information within the text.

The weakest part of the book is the historical discussion. Like most children's books on South Africa, the retelling of early South African history is unbalanced. Centuries of history before European settlement

are summed up in a few sentences and greater emphasis placed on the colonial period when Dutch and English immigrants began settling in the land. Black South Africans are occasionally discussed but primarily in relationship to the white settlers. Early twentieth-century history is also spotty. The author devotes two pages to the South African War of 1899 (also known as the Boer War) but devotes only a sentence to the Native Land Act of 1913. This act stripped black South Africans of most of their land, impoverished millions, and helped to establish the template for the apartheid system. The period of resistance in the post-World War II era is covered fairly well but there are gaps. There is a photo of protesters in Cape Town but none of the massive demonstrations that took place through much of this period in South Africa. The author also misses an excellent opportunity to connect South African resistance campaigns to civil rights demonstrations in the United States and the efforts of Native Americans to regain land lost during the conquest and colonization of the United States. I recommend the book, but teachers will need to supplement the volume with books that fill in the gaps.

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