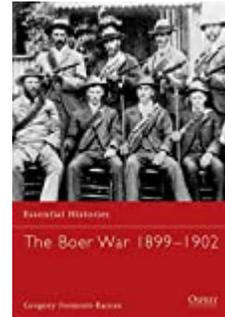


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Gregory Fremont-Barnes. *The Boer War, 1899-1902.* Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2003. 96 pp. \$14.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-84176-396-5.



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The recent centenary commemoration of the South African War was an occasion to see a predictable spate of books rolling off of various printing presses. In Afrikaans alone more than a one hundred titles appeared during this period. It has become increasingly difficult to say something significantly new on this war.

The publication under review presents a standard version of the war in easily digested language. It comprises a slight ninety-six pages that deals with the causes of the war, the composition of the opposing forces, the nature of the military encounter, some biographical sketches, the ending of hostilities, and the aftermath and legacy of the war. There are no surprises here or any hints of historiographical innovation.

Although the series purports to deal with war from “political, tactical, cultural, and individual perspective,” those looking for a meaningful new cultural evaluation of the war will be disappointed. As a matter of fact it is somewhat disconcerting to find that relatively little attention has been paid to the intricacies of black partici-

pation, while wider issues pertaining to gender beyond the concentration camps and the role of the war in subsequent Afrikaner popular consciousness are largely absent. Overall, the work has a somewhat antiquated interpretative quality to it and the author has not quite kept abreast of developments in the field.

It also suffers from errors of judgement. On page eighty-five, dealing with the peace negotiations, the author quotes Kitchener signing the treaty and saying to the Boer leaders: “We are good friends again now.” The author then adds: “Thus was ended on gentlemanly terms, a conflict that had seen many less civil exchanges between Boer and Briton.” What he misses is that it was precisely the kind of British condescension displayed by Kitchener that rankled Afrikaner leaders for years and that fed into robust Afrikaner nationalism in the 1930s.

For those who come to the topic completely fresh this may be a basic introduction, but for those who want more substantial fare will have to look elsewhere.

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