

Three Sample Book Reviews

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Millbrooke, A.M. (1999). Aviation History. Englewood, CO: Jeppensen Sanderson.

Reviewed by Nanette Scarpellini, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Aviation History delivers an entertaining account and perspective on international aviation history. This book is an excellent resource to students, educators, and aviation enthusiasts. In reviewing this book, the principal criteria included content, organization, and reference sources. While editing errors and organizational incongruities plague some of the latter chapters, many of the shortcomings of this first edition will likely be alleviated by later editions. These problems are only a minor distraction to the story being told.

Starting with the first unmanned hot air balloon flight in 1783 through the announcement of the X Prize that will be awarded to the first non-government sponsored manned spacecraft, the author shows the detailed progression of international aviation and aerospace technology. The reader is taken on a journey through the world of aviation and receives first-hand accounts from the inventors and dreamers who made it possible. The tone of the book reflects a learned appreciation for the marvel of aviation as illustrated by a quote from the 1759 aviation-related novel Rasselas by Samuel Johnson, which explains flight in this fashion: "So fishes have water, in which yet beasts can swim by nature, and men by art. He that can swim needs not despair to fly: to swim is to fly in a grosser fluid, and to fly is to swim in a subtler" (2-5).

The author, Anne Marie Millbrooke, is a proven historian and author specializing in science and technology with an emphasis on aviation history. In addition to acting as a historian for such organizations as the National Park Service and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), she has also managed the Archive and Historical Center at United Technologies Corporation and served as a Research Collaborator with the National Air and Space Museum. Her educational accomplishments include earning her doctoral degree from the University of Pennsylvania as well as her pilot certificate. Millbrooke's multifaceted background establishes her in a strategic position to gather and assemble key pieces of aviation history that span the globe.

The organization of Aviation History allows the reader to easily follow the evolution of aviation. The book is divided into ten chapters. Opening with early aviation of the 18th century, the book progresses through the Wright Brothers, early flight, World War I,

peacetime aviation, the Golden Age of Charles Lindbergh and aviation firsts, World War II, the Cold War, space-age aviation, and finally modern aerospace through 1999 with glimpses of the 21st century and beyond. The appendices conclude with a listing of aviation firsts and space flights, as well as a copy of the Wright U.S. Patent. While it is impossible to thoroughly explore all topics, the detailed bibliography provides sources for obtaining more information. This format spotlights the key phases of aviation development.

The construction of the book meshes well with its organization and lends itself successfully to the study of different time periods in history. Each chapter is broken down into four sections, which typically fit logically into the topic of the chapter. All chapters are composed of several defining parts that maintain a sense of continuity throughout the volume. A Summary of Events for the time period under review leads into the introduction and the chapter goals. Within the text of the chapter, there are an assortment of breakout boxes that either describes an historic event, provides historical evidence to support aviation theories, or relates bibliographical information about individuals who were propitious in shaping aviation history. Unfortunately, the intriguing stories may also confuse readers when they are so numerous as to distort the flow of the text. The chapter is completed by a thorough bibliography, study questions reviewing the material covered, and a timeline augmented by providing events not directly associated with aviation. The book is well-referenced, making skillful use of first-person sources.

The orderliness of the book conforms to an academic curriculum. While the chapters create neatly parceled packages, certain areas seem forced to conform to the ten-chapter plan. For instance, Chapter 9: Space Age Aviation seems oddly burdened by the last third of the chapter which focuses on fighter aircraft and various wars, from Vietnam to the U.S. invasion of Granada, as well as a final section completely on private and general aviation. These subjects can be better covered by creating another chapter or by parceling them into both earlier and later sections. In this situation, the author provides good material and content, which is hampered by poor organization. Overall, a detailed story of the advancement of aviation is shown in readable and entertaining style.

Millbrooke presents a broad analysis of aviation history that focuses on developments worldwide, as opposed to the many history books that single out achievements of the United States. Aviation History offers an objective view of aviation developments and illustrates the interactive nature of the industry. War spurred many of aviation's most significant advances, with countries openly borrowing new procedures and operations from enemy progress in the field creating the most effective fighting fleets. "Nationalistic pride in aviation went beyond the romance and fads of aviation, to national identity and claims of distinctiveness and superiority . . . Legends grew around the British S.E. (scout experimental made by the Royal Aircraft Factory), the French Spad, and the German Fokker" (4-4).

Each chapter is filled with pictures and colorful quotes from people of that era. These firsthand accounts provide deeper insight into what, in some history books, is just a listing of factual information. When the "Red Baron" Manfred von Richthofen describes

his victory over British ace Lanoe Hawker on November 23, 1916, the day comes alive. "I was on patrol that day and observed three Englishmen who had nothing else in mind than to hunt. I noticed how they ogled me, and since I felt ready for battle, I let them come . . ." (in Richthofen's *The Red Baron*, 4-29).

The author supplies an in-depth analysis of various aspects of aviation often glossed over in aviation books. Some of the areas explored include the development of aerial photography, air-to-ground communication with early wireless radio equipment, and airmail expansion beyond the United States. Antoine de Saint-Exupery flew a la Ligne mail route between France and Spain that sometimes crossed hostile territory. On a flight in February 1927 he recounts the following in a letter to his mother. "The trip went well, aside from a breakdown and the plane crashing into the desert" (Schiff. 1994 in 5-41). As evidenced by the stories recounted throughout the volume, early pilots were part mechanic, part inventor, and part adventurer in order to survive.

Aviation History is a collection of significant events in aviation accented by the people who made it happen and correlated with world affairs. The book's use of color and vivid stories helps to make the advancements come to life as something more than significant events on a timeline. While at times the stories may clutter the page, they also breathe life into what is considered by many to be a dull subject. The author's enthusiasm for the topic is obvious throughout the book. More thorough proofreading could help alleviate some of the confusion that is caused by typos and a few mislabeled illustrations. The credibility of the content does not suffer due to these obvious errors which will likely be corrected in the next edition.

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2. A Sample Book Review from <http://faculty.sanjuancollege.edu/krobison/resources/portilla.htm>.

Leòn-Portilla, Miguel. Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind. Translated by Jack Emory Davis. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963.

Review by Kelly Robison

In this ambitious work, Leòn-Portilla endeavors to ascertain the existence of a class of philosophers in Aztec society. If philosophy, and not merely religion, was present in Nahuatl culture, what did these philosophers attempt to accomplish? Through a study of Nahuatl texts and post-Conquest records, Leòn-Portilla examines the manifestations of rational thought and inquiry in Mexico prior to the Conquest.

The Nahuatls developed a philosopher class that differed in purpose from the more rigidly religious objectives of the priestly class. These men, akin in style and intentions to the early poet-philosophers of Greece, probed the most profound questions of the human existence. The tlamatime, as they were called, recognized no difference between "the formal objectives of philosophy,"(xxiii) religion, scientific knowledge, or art. These men thought more deeply about life and the universe than the common people and questioned what was for the commoner truth handed down from generation through generation by the priests in the form of myths and legends.

Leòn-Portilla bases his investigations and conclusions on detailed examinations of the records left by the early missionaries to the newly conquered territories of Mexico and on an in-depth analysis of the surviving Nahuatl texts, including poetry. In these accounts, he finds evidence of a deeply philosophical people. But these men, the tlamatime, differed from the warrior class or the common people in that they sought to "discover the meaning of life on an intellectual plane."(177) The warriors were content to accept traditional religious dogma and use it as the basis for expansion, while the commoners simply accepted it.

The tlamatime, or wise men, first studied the codices and legends and attempted to interpret them. But their studies produced questions as to the meaning of life and the universe. The wise men first perceived that life was fleeting and fragile, dream-like. If this was so, then the question arose of whether anything was worth doing. A second question arose as well, can there be Truth if life is dream-life? The reason for man's existence or purpose deeply troubled the tlamatime.

The wise men recognized the differences between concepts based on magic and superstition and those based on observation and experience. But, if everything on earth was temporary, then truth cannot be found here. Truth must be found somewhere beyond the earthly domain, in those regions where the gods live. But how to get to these regions remained a problem.

Some of the wise men declared that since higher truth cannot be found, one must live life to the fullest and enjoy the time one has on earth. Others did not despair so easily. Intuition became the key to truth for these men. Occasionally, one will pronounce the Truth through the medium of poetry and the arts. This inspiration could allow men to glimpse the truth, reveal the universe, however briefly, and let him express that truth through the arts and, especially, poetry.

Ometèotl, the dual god, was the "supreme metaphor." He was the supreme creator, the cause and effect, and gave men the ability to see beyond the natural world. Along the path of the arts, given to men by Ometèotl, men could find truth. The wise men meditated, thought. They contemplated the heavens and the earth seeking knowledge. They admired and wrought paintings, sculpture and poetry. Each of these endeavors was a meaning and an end. Through the arts the wise men could find truth and they expressed truth through the arts.

Thus "Nahuatl philosophic thought...revolved about an aesthetic conception of the universe and life, for art 'made things divine,' and only the divine was true."(182) The wise men based their way of life upon this world view that they could still not precisely explain. The tlamatime contemplated, wrote, wrought and observed, unlike their brethren who thought little about the deeper meanings of life.

Leòn-Portilla reveals a deep knowledge and understanding of the pre-Conquest Nahuatl mind and philosophical thought in this book. His work is ambitious in that it seeks to explain some of the most intangible elements of the human existence using only sources provided by the conquerors of the Aztecs and the remaining poems of the conquered people. From these few fragments, the author pieces together the world view of a segment of a vanished civilization.

The author's writing is eloquent yet understandable. He uses translations of the original texts liberally to illustrate his contentions, thereby providing a balanced, well-documented work whose thesis could be arrived at by others through the use of the texts supplied.

Organization is the one problem with the work. However, this weakness is outweighed by the work's strengths. Although Leòn-Portilla does divide the work into chapters based, for the most part, on the theoretical constructions of the tlamatime, he could have done a better job of it.

3. A Sample Book Review

Bolland, O. Nigel. *Struggles for Freedom: Essays on Slavery, Colonialism and Culture in the Caribbean and Central America*. O. New York: Bantam, 1997.

by A Sample Author

One of the most common problems with the literature on the Caribbean is that it is limited to islands and, despite a common history, does not include the West Indian communities on the mainland of Central and South America. Moreover, on those occasions when the entire region receives the attention of a scholar, the product is often from the perspective of the British Caribbean and makes no attempt to understand Hispanic influences. The results of such scholarship are often disappointing because it fails to recognize the significance of the circum-Caribbean region as a frontier between for the British West Indies and Hispanic America. The coastal plains of the region are an historic meeting place where empires clashed, cultures fused and new economies were created. With the arrival of the Europeans came the destruction of aboriginal society, the introduction of African labour and the incorporation of the region into the North Atlantic world economy. The post-contact history of this stretch of coastline is intertwined with stories of buccaneers, escaped slaves, indigenous monarchies and international political intrigue. Moreover, it is the scene of one of the most spectacular intra-regional migrations in the modern history of Latin America because as many as 500,000 West Indian migrants passed through or settled in the region between 1850 and 1950. Hundreds of years of interaction between the English-speaking and Spanish-speaking cultures, with the added dimension of the African and Amerindian peoples has produced a very different Caribbean society in this isolated region.

Over the years O. Nigel Bolland's research has offered a different perspective on Caribbean society and history because his work often touches on the frontiers between the English and Spanish-speaking Western Caribbean. Struggles for Freedom, at first glance, appears to be a book that attempts to come to terms with the histories of these two solitudes. The book is a collection of articles by a sociologist who has made a career of the study Caribbean society and he makes an effort to expand his research beyond Belize to the Miskito Coast, Central America and the British West Indies. Bolland's approach is valid because his starting point is on the shores of Western Caribbean and, as a result, he is in a position to take the reader to the places where Hispanic America and the British Caribbean meet.

Struggles for Freedom is divided into four parts that reflect Bolland's interest in the social construction and the history of Caribbean society. The first section establishes the author's approach to the region's history by examining the

concept of Creole society as it is understood in the West Indies. Bolland argues that in addition to understanding Caribbean cultures as being a blend of African and other influences, they must also be viewed in dialectical terms. As a consequence, Bolland's subsequent analysis in the following three sections is framed within a model of class antagonisms in the period between 1492 and the present. Part II, "Colonization and Slavery," is comprised of three chapters. One offers an overview of colonization and slavery in Central America and the other two concentrate on Belize. The chapter on Central America is a survey which is based on secondary sources published in English. The chapters on Belize are much stronger and informative. The third part, "From Slavery to Freedom," is divided into two chapters that examine the problems and politics of freedom in the 19th century. Here, Bolland takes a more general approach by looking at the transition to wage labour in the post-emancipation societies of the Americas, and at the politics of control and freedom in the free societies of the Caribbean. Once again, the first chapter in this section offers a general overview which is based exclusively on secondary sources printed in English. The two chapters that follow are more focused and offer well-researched insights into British Caribbean society during the transitional period after emancipation. The final section of the book offers an analysis of politics, society and the role of ethnicity at the end of the colonial period in the British West Indies. Here Bolland's scholarship is focused on the topics he is most comfortable with. The final chapters also happen to be among the few in the collection that appear for the first time and, therefore, reflect the author's most recent views on Caribbean society.

Although O. Nigel Bolland offers readers a solid analysis of the political and social history of creole society, and his insights are applicable to a broad spectrum of Caribbean societies, his book falls short of exploring the frontier between the Hispanic and English-speaking communities that inhabit the region. Such an omission might be expected, but the book's title does promise to include Central America and the expectation is that Bolland would venture beyond the confines of the only English-speaking country in the region. The author looks out from Belize, but fails to take account of the West Indian communities in neighbouring countries. Bolland's dialectical analysis of Creole society would be put to test if the antagonisms he identifies were examined in the context of an Hispanic environment. For example, are there situations among West Indians in Central America where ethnicity takes precedence over class, and if so, what does this tell us about Creole society in general? Moreover, in his surveys of Central America and the Americas the author did not explore Spanish language sources despite the obvious depth that such material would provide to his analysis. The result is, once again, a study of the history and society of the region from the perspective of someone who does not consider the relationship of Creole society with Hispanic society. Though better than other publications that look across the Caribbean to Latin America, or that look at the region's Atlantic coast from the Hispanic highlands, *Struggles for Freedom* is often as frustrating because it does not see the Western Caribbean as a transcultural region where notions of Creole society can be challenged. Nevertheless, O. Nigel Bolland offers readers some of the best scholarship on the history of Belize and his insights into Caribbean society are a valuable contribution to the field.