

African american history in book navigating distant shores: a historical overview...

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“ Recreation and Construction”

Perspectives in African American History and Culture is edited by Ronald Dorris, and was published by Tapestry Press in 2007. This 328-page work comprises a table of contents with ten sections inclusive of respective articles, preface, overview and glossary. This critique is centered on the 21-page overview, “ Navigating Distant Shores: A Historical Overview,” written by Dorris. This critique will focus on how Dorris draws from language, tone and chronology to describe the major impact of Africans on the New World, and how they are a principal reason for development of the great country that has evolved today.

The overview opens with “ The foundation of the history of the United States rests on race as a social construct” (1). Language here is the key factor in determining this work as literature replete with bias. The first few pages speak on race as being non-existent and as simply a social construct promoted by those who founded the first thirteen colonies along the eastern Atlantic seaboard, which eventually became the United States of America. This position, in the overview, paints a picture to help the reader distinguish between what is fabricated, and what actually we may sense. Designed in the work sheds light on how social division, that fosters adversity among the human race, goes against nature and the rights of humans. As human beings, we cannot be categorized as black or white because the human race does not constitute skin color. Dorris’ choice of language shows that such characterization is simply a political tool to gain control over a group of people, as they attempted to enslave them. Additional use of language in the

overview shows how whites failed and even, enslaved themselves. Dorris' use of many historical facts and examples from the past, all pointing back to slavery, insist that he is persistent in evaluating and observing slavery as the center and foundation of the United States.

Tone plays just as much as a symbolic role as does language. The tone used in Dorris' overview is one-sided. It does not necessarily force the reader to pick a side, but further highlights key points that address the issues surrounding slavery and the African community in America. Upon finishing the overview, the lasting impression is that Europeans in America have wrongfully treated Africans since their capture in Africa, lasting up until the present day. A sense of favoritism towards Africans is shown when he repeatedly speaks on and references the injustices endured. He states “ Kidnapped Africans politically were defined as black, designated as slaves for life, their status legally mandated not as humans, but as property.” (8). Not only does he side with African-Americans over Europeans, he also empathizes with Native Americans who were murdered and exiled from their homeland, which is today known as the United States of American; more so specifically the land along the Atlantic seaboard. This overview is not simply a down talk on the Europeans, but an uplifting of those who had the greatest impact on the New World, in spite of their captivity and adversities.

Throughout the overview, Dorris references and pinpoints specific historical events by using key years and timeframes. By doing so, he becomes more reputable and his work is seen as reliable. This may be the case, however, as a result of failing to follow a chronological order, Dorris loses some of his

credibility. He highlights a major event, then jumps back ten years, then proceeds thirty years forward and highlights another major event that happened one hundred years prior. It confuses the reader. Not only does it question his credibility as a writer, but also it brings into question the authenticity of his facts and whether or not he is educated on the proper way to write a textbook that is meant to educate students at the collegiate level. Can he be trusted? He does, however, do a remarkable job at illustrating an in depth timeline of the first arrival of Africans to the New World and keeps us informed every step of the way. Details, even those that are minuscule are listed in his work, which could infer that Dorris' is well informed on the topic at hand. There may simply be a lack of knowledge on the procedure of writing chronologically, in order to lessen confusion and misjudgment on his credibility.

“ Navigating Distant Shores: A Historical Overview,” use of language, tone and chronology, all assist in shedding light on the major impact of Africans on the New World. One would have to conclude that this work of literature is extremely bias in content, as it continually makes the reader sympathize not only with Africans, but also with Native Americans. There is a sense of hurt and the yearning to open the eyes of many, as Dorris reveals the historical events that led to the creation and construction of what we know today as the United States of America. His persistence in wanting to unveil the lives of Africans, as well as their skills and past experience of holding fast through adversities and persecutions, reveals that he has sided with them. Also, his own culture and background of being of the same ethnicity, further proves that he is bias in his writing and stands with them. He never outright states

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his position, but it is apparent through the content, as well as the specific language he uses. Overall, this is a dependable and reliable source of factual information, despite lacking a chronological order of dates. In facilitating and lecturing a group of students pursuing collegiate studies, as well as simply giving a lecture to anyone who has an interest in the history of African Americans or Native Americans this work could be used to teach and inform as a reliable source.