

EDUCATION

William G. Moseley, ed. *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial African Issues*. Guilford, Conn.: McGraw Hill/Dushkin 2004. xxi + 390 pp. Tables. Index. \$24.69. Paper.

This is one of several recent books to guide both Africa specialists and people in other fields who seek to incorporate Africa into their teaching but face the daunting task, within an expanding literature, of separating the high-protein wheat from the toxic chaff. By providing extracts of previously published material drawn from a wide range of sources, this collection takes such a project a step further, speaking both to teachers and to students. *Taking Sides* provides a valuable aid to teaching important issues in a thought-provoking manner, presenting complex issues while not defining answers.

In this collection, two texts, taking contrasting positions, are presented on each of twenty issues. This may seem too adversarial a format for issues in which there are many more than two views and where differing views often overlap and intersect. Nonetheless, the selected texts largely obviate this problem: They are sufficiently subtle and rich to avoid a confrontational tone, not addressing the other text directly but moving beyond to illuminate the intricate nature of the issues themselves. Yet there is a danger here, since many of the issues can only be addressed adequately within their particular cultural context, in a series of case studies, rather than a broad “yea-nay” framework. Indeed, for some issues a historiographical rather than adversarial format might have been more appropriate. But solving problems from the outside—imposing a definitive position defined by the West—is less the objective here than exploring and communicating—and, in fact, complicating—the issues themselves. Introducing the issues in such a fashion provides a great service.

Four broad themes are presented, each subsuming four or five separate issues. The general themes include: development (SAPs, NGOs, debt relief, “Afro-pessimism”); agriculture/environment (food production, biotech crops [GMOs], parks and conservation, deforestation); social issues (FGC, AIDS policies, demography, gender, language policies); and politics/governance (democratization, foreign aid, corruption, “peace-keeping” initiatives). For each issue, presented as a question, there are two texts five-to-ten pages in length, taking “yes” and “no” positions and preceded by short introductions. The editor also provides a short introduction and a “postscript” to the issue as a whole; these frame the larger cultural and historical contexts involved.

The issues are well articulated and the texts well chosen. The book is clearly organized and well presented. One can always quibble over specific texts chosen, intellectual positions represented, or authors included (fewer than ten of forty authors are women), but many such differences are easily

resolved by teachers' adding their own texts or elaborating on the discussion in class. Furthermore, while this is not a textbook—indeed the texts presented need to be supplemented—maps situating the various textual references would have been useful for beginning students. Moreover, a book of this length does raise problems of cost and class time. Rather than producing such an extensive collection in one volume, the editor and publisher might well have adopted a “modular” approach, producing four shorter and less expensive editions, one focusing on each of the four general themes. That would have allowed teachers to incorporate the essays into larger class material without such a huge investment of class time and student book fees.

Nonetheless, this volume provides a very welcome resource for teachers as well as an interesting and valuable approach for students. *Taking Sides* is an extremely effective way to lead students to discuss not only “facts” and “positions” but also forms of argument and effective presentation.

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E. B. Fiske and H. F. Ladd. *Elusive Equity: Education Reform in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004. Bibliography. Index. Cloth. \$32.95.

This text comes at a time when those with a stake in the answers are asking questions about the transformation of education a decade after the end of apartheid. Quite rightly, the title underscores the key point that equity goals are not so easy to attain, especially in the “new” South Africa where significant change is a historical imperative. The authors are a husband-and-wife team based in the United States: Fiske is an educational journalist and Ladd a policy studies specialist. They spent the first six months of 2002 in South Africa, and to judge by the list of references, they consulted with a wide range of political figures, educationists, and local resources on education. Although they acknowledge that they cannot claim the same insights as those who specialize in educational reform and who have had direct experience of the education system in South Africa, their account of the struggle for equity offers the independent viewpoint and objectivity of informed outsiders, and it is evident that they have the skills to do justice to the complex story.

Elusive Equity begins with two background chapters describing the context and analytical framework and providing a brief history of the racial policies and practices of apartheid South Africa. Chapters 3 and 4 examine the role of education in first maintaining and then dismantling apartheid, along with the political aspirations that led to changes. Chapters 5 through 9 constitute the core of the book. They measure recent reform efforts in