

Book offers road map through Black history

"African American History for Dummies"
By Ronda Racha Penrice;
Wiley Publishing, Inc.;
Paperback, \$19.95;
432 pages, illustrated.
ISBN: 978-0-7645-5469-8
By Kam Williams
Sentinel-Voice

"African-American history, to be clear, is so much more than a handful of extraordinary individuals or practices like slavery, Jim Crow, and civil rights. A lot of it is painful, but it's also inspiring and triumphant... It took the Civil War, the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, and a lot of struggle in between to secure African-Americans the basic right to citizenship that White Americans took for granted.

[This book] isn't a big sermon on the struggle; instead, it's a straightforward, interesting (I hope!), and honest overview of African-American history from Africa through the Transatlantic Slave Trade, slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and the 1960s Civil Rights Movement until now. Along the way, that history birthed a culture that includes the Black church and

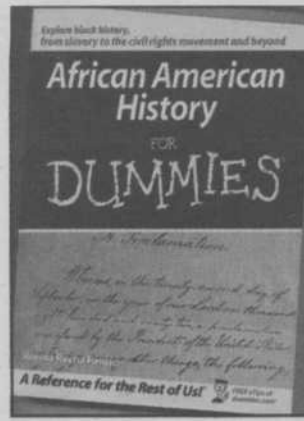
education as well as sports, music, literature, television, and film."

I majored in Black studies in college way back when the new field of study was still generally being dismissed as a joke or, at best, as undeserving of being the focus of extensive scholarly research. So, my interest was particularly piqued by the publication of this book for a few of reasons.

First, I wondered whether the subject matter would be presented in a serious and dignified fashion, given the "for Dummies" subtitle. Secondly, I was curious about how comprehensive the text would be and whether the author would even be able to address most of the significant events in African-American history in a work of just over 400 pages.

Finally, and perhaps most important, I wanted to get a sense of the opus' point of view, since there's a big difference between talking about memorable milestones from the perspective of the victims of racism and that of the perpetrators.

The good news is that "African American History



for Dummies" passes the first two tests with flying colors. The tome is encyclopedic in scope, yet surprisingly engaging in tone, being written by someone with a gift for serving up a chronological

collection of facts on a zillion different topics in a lyrical style that sounds downright conversational.

Credit for achieving this feat goes to author Ronda Racha Penrice, a Columbia University graduate who has served as an editor at the *Quarterly Black Review*, and who has written for such publications as *Essence*, *AOL Black Voices*, *Vibe* and *Africana.com*.

Where I do take issue with her otherwise praiseworthy approach are on the rare occasions that she seemingly attempts to be on both sides of the fence when discussing hot button issues such as the

n-word ("Slaves sometimes referred to themselves as 'niggers.'") and the Dred Scott Decision ("The Supreme Court decided that, because Scott was African-American, he wasn't a citizen and, therefore, couldn't sue anybody.").

By trying hard not to offend anyone in the above quoted entries, Penrice risks, in the first instance, misleading impressionable young minds into believing that the n-word was a slur first used by Blacks.

As for Dred Scott, the actual ruling unequivocally deemed African-Americans, "beings of an inferior order,

and altogether unfit to associate with the White race, either in social or political relations, and so far inferior that they had no rights which the White man was bound to respect," a far crueler declaration than the author's relatively benign interpretation.

Thus, "African American History for Dummies" is recommended reading for those who would prefer the truth at times tempered by euphemisms that appear intended to make the ordeal endured by Blacks in this country over the ages sound a lot less monstrous than it undoubtedly was — the historical equivalent of smooth jazz.

Drifters' last singer Pinkney passes at 81

Special to Sentinel-Voice
Bill Pinkney, the last survivor of the original members of the musical group The Drifters, died Wednesday. He was 81.

Pinkney was found dead at the Hilton Daytona Beach Oceanfront Resort, Daytona Beach Police spokesman Jimmie Flynt said. The death was not considered suspicious, he said.

Pinkney was scheduled to perform for Fourth of July festivities there.

Pinkney's manager, Maxine Porter, declined to discuss his cause of death, but said Pinkney had had health problems.

The Drifters, whose hits include "Under the Boardwalk," "Up on the Roof," and "Save the Last Dance For Me," still performed Wednesday night. An announcement about Pinkney's death was made after the show, said the group's publicist, Donnie Lowery.

Pinkney, born in Dalzell, S.C., wasn't with The Drifters when they recorded their biggest hits. He left in the band in 1958 because of an argument over cash. His distinctive bass voice can be heard on the group's version of the holiday classic, "White



BILL PINKNEY

Christmas."

Even though he left the group, Pinkney didn't let go of The Drifters' name. He fought for laws allowing performers or bands to claim an affiliation with a classic group like The Drifters or The Coasters only if at least one member recorded with the original group.

The Drifters were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1988.

Pinkney was a World War II veteran and pitched for the New York Blue Sox of the Negro Baseball League in the late 1940s and early '50s.

Porter said funeral arrangements were pending but that he would be buried in South Carolina.

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