In the Shadow of Liberty

Emma Patton

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cbmr

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Patton, Emma (2018) "In the Shadow of Liberty," Children's Book and Media Review: Vol. 39 : Iss. 7 , Article 37. Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cbmr/vol39/iss7/37
Today's Americans see the founding fathers and early presidents as men of honor who advocated for the rights of every citizen and ascribed the belief that “all men are created equal.” However, In the Shadow of Liberty exposes the reality that, all too often, there was a huge difference between what these men said and what they did in their personal lives. Larger-than-life historical figures, like George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, were owners of slaves. Though they were sometimes more benevolent and compassionate than other slave owners of the time, they may have offered kindness and mercy for their own, selfish reasons, rather than out of an innate belief that all men deserve freedom and justice. Ultimately, society could benefit from moving beyond the talk about “slaves,” a term which suggests a permanent identity, and instead shifting to seeing them as “enslaved persons.” These figures were, at the end of the day, just people who were trapped by a system that took so much and offered so little.

In the Shadow of Liberty explores the harsh realities of slavery in the United States. The writing is more simple than most works of historical non-fiction, so the book is definitely directed toward a younger audience than adults. Unfortunately, since there is a lack of reliable information about slaves, the book tends to focus more on the lives of the white men who owned them. The subtitle reads “The hidden history of slavery, four presidents, and five black lives.” The book does offer a history of slavery and presidents, but details about the “five black lives” are lacking. The text includes black and white paintings, photographs, and timelines on about every other page, balancing the textual information with visuals. However, perhaps due to formatting issues, quite a few of the graphics are blurry, which sometimes makes the book seem unprofessional. Nonetheless, the research seems sound and, though the author is certainly outspoken in his condemnation of slavery and contempt for the actions of some of America’s “great” men, his opinions are backed by his facts.

*Contains mild sexual content and mild violence.