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March 2000

Review of *Visions of Freedom on the Great Plains: An Illustrated History of African Americans in Nebraska*, by Bertha W. Calloway and Alonzo M. Smith.

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Visions of Freedom on the Great Plains: An Illustrated History of African Americans in Nebraska. By Bertha W. Calloway and Alonzo M. Smith. Virginia Beach: The Donning Company Publishers, 1998. Map, photographs, tables, bibliography, index. 192 pp. \$34.95.

Historical or hysterical—that is the question.

An 18 January 1999 *Omaha World-Herald* "Bookwords" column fingered Dr. Smith as "the principal writer" of *Visions*. In a 14 January 1999 review, *The Reader* of Omaha gushed: "an exciting new picture book . . . filled with picture after crisp black-and-white picture . . . a must for anyone even slightly interested in local history."

Napoleon decried history as a fable agreed on. To deem this error-riddled book a "history" would be indeed a fable agreed on. This could have been a magnificent project—but what we have instead merits those saddest "words of tongue or pen . . . : 'It might have been!'"

Visions opens with two full-page ads promoting financial backers US West and US Bank, producing a brazen billboard effect that cheapens the book and undermines the possibility of its being taken seriously as a "history" text.

Visions has a split personality. The "early" portion, relying on the research and writing of others for traditional historical material, is

passably good. As Smith relies more on his own efforts the project deteriorates. The shoddy product, stained by inaccuracy and unreliability, is misleading to readers and a disservice to black people. Failing to recount accurately what engaged yesterday's newspaper hardly inspires confidence in accounts of yesteryear.

It is through pictures and their captions that some of the most egregious errors surface. For example:

A group of white football players in an irrelevant photo are misidentified as "wrestlers" (p. 77).

A 1997 family photo is misdated 1977 (p. 93).

Darryl Eure and Tim Renfro are named after we are told they "are unidentified" (p. 144).

Michael Carter is described as a "former UNL All-American and Heisman Trophy nominee," none of which is true (p. 152).

A photo erroneously identifies *two* black men as "Mayor Calinger" (p. 153).

Johnny Rodgers's name is misspelled: "Johnny Rogers won the 1972 Heisman Trophy . . ." (p. 151). Obviously, "Johnny Rogers" does not appear on the official roster of Heisman winners, suggesting the "Rogers" pictured on page 151 could be an impostor.

Page 98 depicts a civil rights march in Omaha. In addition to erroneously applying the name of Rev. McNair (whose first name is Rudolph, not "John") to Rev. General R. Woods, the caption misidentifies McNair as Rev. Kelsey Jones, who is misidentified as Rev. Woods.

Page 170 presents a photo of Carole Woods Harris (beside a huge campaign button of Brenda Council) without explaining why she is pictured. She is the first black woman elected to the Douglas County Board.

Despite the profound significance of Malcolm X's 1964 speech in Omaha, the year is erroneously given as 1961 (p. 153).