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REVIEW: Sweetgrass Baskets and the Gullah Tradition

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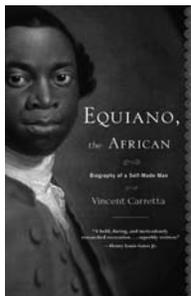
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chapter are many photos from the war front. The fourth chapter presents the reader with a look at the different jobs within the railroad and the people who performed those jobs. The book concludes with a chapter on steam trains. Too often, books of this nature tend to focus only on pictures of trains. This book goes beyond showing just the trains and lets us see the people who have made the railway what it is today. In doing so, we see the bravery of those who served in World War II, the dedication of the railway workers, and the excitement of those who watch the trains go by. Many photos from Georgia locations other than those identified above are included in this book. Any library that has the first book by these authors should also have this one. It is also recommended for those libraries located in communities with close ties to the railway. ►►

— Reviewed by **Lonnie Roberts**
Altamaha Technical College

Equiano, the African: Biography of a Self-Made Man by Vincent Carretta
(University of Georgia Press, 2006
ISBN 0-8203-2571-6, \$29.95).

Author Vincent Carretta offers a fresh perspective on the life of Gustavus Vassa, also known by the African name, Olaudah Equiano. Vassa is best known for his autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1789), in which he chronicles his life as a captured African, slave, seaman with the British Royal Navy, manager of other enslaved Africans, and finally as a free man. Vassa's autobiography is significant because at the time of its publication, it added a much needed voice to the abolitionist movement, a firsthand account of one who had experienced the horrors of capture, the Middle Passage and enslavement. The success of the autobiography, which went through nine editions, was a monumental feat for any man of that time, but particularly for a formerly enslaved person of African descent. In *Equiano, the African*, Carretta reveals circumstantial evidence that contradicts Vassa's claims regarding his birth in Africa and Middle Passage experience. Citing a baptismal certificate and naval logs, Carretta argues that Vassa more than likely constructed an African identity. Those expecting the author to devalue the historical and literary significance of Vassa's autobiography will be disappointed. Interestingly, the author's analysis and revelations about Vassa's life only serve to enhance the greatness of his achievements. Using a vast array of primary resources, Carretta places

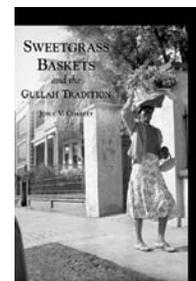


Vassa's life experience within historical context. As a result, the Gustavus Vassa that emerges is a rich, complex, multi-dimensional and at times contradictory individual. Any collection containing *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* would do well to add this book to its collection. Recommended for academic libraries. ►►

— Reviewed by **Shaundra Walker**
Georgia College & State University

Sweetgrass Baskets and the Gullah Tradition by Joyce V. Coakley
(Arcadia, 2005; ISBN 0-7385-1830-1,
\$19.99).

Joyce V. Coakley was born and raised in the Christ Church Parish District of Charleston, South Carolina, where her ancestors lived since the 18th century. Ms. Coakley interviewed and collected oral stories from relatives, friends, and acquaintances for over 30 years. The result is an insider's collection of personal photographs and stories gathered from the community, woven together to illustrate Gullah sweetgrass baskets and history. The book includes a glossary of common sweetgrass terms, Gullah names and titles, Gullah verbs, and common Gullah phrases. "Hush da nize" means "hush the noise" and "yiddie so" means "I heard it." A chapter titled "Flowers and Other Vendors" discusses the necessity of growing and selling flowers and vegetables as a means of income for newly freed slaves. *Sweetgrass Baskets and the Gullah Tradition* is primarily a scrapbook of photos and art; this is a story told in a series of vignettes of old photographs (there is a page or two of text at the beginning of each chapter). Each photograph is accompanied by a description and a glimpse of history. The importance of religion, family, friendship, and learning is stressed. Photographs of people, houses and locations are interspersed with photographs of sweetgrass baskets. Forty-nine artists provided baskets and background for this book. Basket design history and innovations are mentioned. This book does not contain an index, but it is a good collection of personal photographs of a community's journey from slavery to present day. Reading this book is akin to visiting relatives and hearing interesting tales told by the family storytellers. *Sweetgrass Baskets and the Gullah Tradition* is recommended for school and public libraries. Academic libraries may be interested in the photo collections and accompanying short stories. ►►



— Reviewed by **Laura Tartak**

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