



## Still I Rise: A Graphic History of African Americans

*Roland Owen Laird Jr. , Charles R. Johnson (Foreword) , Taneshia Nash Laird , Elihu "Adofo" Bey  
(Illustrations)*

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*Still I Rise* is a critically acclaimed work with an impressive scope: the entire history of Black America, told in an accessible graphic-novel form. Updated from its original version—which ended with the Million Man March—it now extends from the early days of colonial slavery right through to Barack Obama's groundbreaking presidential campaign. Compared by many to Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, *Still I Rise* is a breathtaking achievement that celebrates the collective African-American memory, imagination, and spirit.

## Still I Rise: A Graphic History of African Americans Details

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Author : Roland Owen Laird Jr. , Charles R. Johnson (Foreword) , Taneshia Nash Laird , Elihu "Adofo" Bey (Illustrations)

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## From Reader Review Still I Rise: A Graphic History of African Americans for online ebook

### Meg Petersen says

I would recommend this to every teacher I know and I am passing it on to my children. The beginning part of the book is really excellent. The perspective is definitely African American, and helps students see how slavery evolved. It is especially good at showing the resistance to slavery and contextualizing the Civil War as part of an on-going history of resistance.

The ending, however, was rushed. I wish more recent times could have been covered more thoroughly. Obama's campaign and eventual election get two quick pages and more recent African American achievements only get quick cameos.

That said, the beginning is SO good and surely less well presented elsewhere that I recommend that every teacher go out and get this book for their classroom library right away.

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### Mariah says

I feel horrible to say this but this was probably the worst book I've read since the dictionary. It was dry and boring. For a quick summary it literally takes you through the African-American history of them being enslaved here in America and shipped, the transition from indentured servants to slaves. Then onto the liberation of slaves that lead to the segregation that was followed up by the fight for equality. Then obviously coming full circle back to the present day with Obama being the first black president. Seriously felt like I was taking a black history courses in under 300 pages... I wanted to rip my eyes out. The text was overwhelming at times to the point where I had to stop reading because my head was throbbing from taking in so much information at once. The sassy commentary was the only bearable thing. I felt as though there was some parts of this that was just too drawn out, especially the beginning of it. Personally, when reading informational driven literature I prefer the pacing of the text to match the flow of the event. So if you're writing about the climb to the civil war maybe not have it reach more than half way through the story. Even though this is a huge rising action in African-American history, I don't believe this should take the whole entire being half and then some of the novel. The end of the history became so rushed because of this and to me that just made the pacing flow so counter-active to the events in the story.

I would not recommend this to anyone that I did not wish to torture. I am really sorry to those of you who enjoy this... I personally just don't enjoy textbook pasted over pictures.

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### Lisa says

This might be the book I most wish I had read in high school (or earlier). Better late than never!

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### Mocha Girl says

Still I Rise is a graphical novel (aka "comic strip" style) structured around the history of America and the

complex, interwoven African American contributions and sacrifices to its success and greatness. Two unnamed characters remain prominent serving as narrators providing supplemental commentaries setting the stage of the eras' social and political climates enhancing the history lessons within the pages. Opening in pre-Colonial times, it traces the events and issues surrounding indentured servitude, greed, and racism that eventually lead to legalized and institutionalized slavery of Africans. It celebrates and recognizes countless unsung and infamous heroes and leaders (of all races) as it progresses through four hundred years. The courage of African Americans is not lost when the book covers America's battles with the English, Spanish, and French, and eventually itself, nor does it spare the ugliness of racism, and the struggle endured during Reconstruction and the Civil Rights Movement. At its core, it is a book that chronicles survival, faith, hope, and perseverance against insurmountable odds.

The collection is one that should be required reading for students (the graphics would appeal to even the youngest and/or attention-challenged readers). I also highly recommend it for more "seasoned" readers as well because of its unique depiction of history. Even the forward by Charles Johnson remains in context and addresses the challenges black illustrators faced in the early 20th century. As a history lover, I loved learning "new" bits of info (the actual names of ingenious people and the rational behind some historical and political decisions) and revisiting all that I knew. I plan to purchase copies for my nephew and niece as it is a tool to initiate those much needed conversations.

Reviewed by Phyllis  
January 20, 2009

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### **Beverly says**

Still I Rise by authors Roland Laird and Taneshia Nash Laird and illustrator Elihu "Adofo" Bey takes us on a graphical journey of African American history from before slavery was formalized in this country until the election of the first African American President. The book starts off with a foreword by Charles Johnson discussing the challenges faced by black comic artists and the legacy passed on to future black artists. This sets the tone for the rest of the book. At the start of the graphical journey, the reader is introduced to two narrators who guide, educate, humor, and challenge each other, and thus the reader as the storyline progresses from 1618 to 2008.

As the storyline moves through the years, the reader is provided with an understanding of the historical period for the United States, the unique challenges faced by African Americans, and how the issues were addressed. The reader will gain knowledge of the economic, political, and social atmosphere for each era. This provides the context for understanding the need to keep "re-creating" solutions at times to solve continuing issues. The authors and illustrator are commended for providing a good balance of information for the wide time span presented. While the subject matter might be unpleasant at times, the book never falters in presenting a positive attitude along with hope and a strong urge to survive.

I recommend this book be used in schools as an aid to teaching history and should be included in all school library and public library collections. The graphical format of the book will appeal to most young readers and the presentation of the information will lead to many discussions. I also recommend this book for all African American homes as the unique format of the book will be enjoyed across generations.

Reviewed by Beverly  
APOOO BookClub

January 27, 2009

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### **Ronald Wilcox says**

Excellent cartoon graphic novelization of the history of the history of African-Americans. Art work is very good, writing also very good. Occasionally a little disjointed.

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### **Mateen Mahboubi says**

The history of Black America told in a graphical novel. A great introduction to those not as familiar with many of the events that have brought us to where we are today. It covers a lot of ground, so obviously you don't get the detail that would be like at times but it appears to do a good job covering the key figures and events in a way that allows the reader to do their own research on any topics of interest.

The graphical novel format is an interesting choice here. I would argue that while Bey's simplistic drawings don't distract from the history being told, they also don't really enhance the experience for the reader. There are some issues with the way the panels are laid out at times which makes it confusing to follow (the inclusion of arrows on some pages to guide the reader in the most egregious cases shows that this challenge may have been foreseen prior to publication).

I'm also not a fan of the additional 20 or so pages appended for the second edition (2009). While the recent history since the first publishing is appreciated, the art/lettering style changes in a way that is distracting and the entire tone is different. Our two narrators that take us through the journey suddenly appear to be antagonistic with each other due to their differing views of recent events. While the frustration is appreciated, the 180 tone shift from the first 90% of the book is sudden and surprising. Still it's nice that the book ends with a note of hope (sadly, a hope that hasn't really carried us through to today).

A very important read for those who want a quick primer for the history of the Black Experience in the US. There is a lot that we can understand in today's America if we educate ourselves on how we got here and the injustice that Black people have faced in America since their first arrival and the consequences of which continue to this day.

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### **Luke says**

Still I Rise was an interesting concept for a book but not well executed. It had a lot of good information and I learned a lot about African-American history but it was a graphic novel that was obviously written by someone who doesn't do graphic novels. A good graphic novel you should be able to get the gist from just looking at the pictures, here, it was pretty much only people standing at the bottom of a panel with their mouths open and titanic blocks of text. It took me about five minutes to read a page (it should be less than a minute). however i do recommend this for ages +13 and for people who want to learn the other half of American history.

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### **Ladyiconoclast says**

I was recommended this book because of its introduction, which is a cursory history of African American comics and comic creators, do read the introduction if this subject interests you.

I would absolutely recommend this book to anyone who has an interest in African American history, but not much background in the subject. This is not a all encompassing history, but in my ignorance of the full breadth of the subject, this felt like a good overview.

A good comic history on a subject that needs less ignorance, during any month of the year.

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### **Mz. Diana Gagliardi says**

For what it is, it's tremendous- a graphic history of African Americans. Compared to others of its type- Cartoon History of America, Cartoon Understanding Philosophy, Maus, etc- it's not bad but not up with those. Still better than many and VERY educational, showing many sides of the AA experience and the violent and legal struggles that were always a part of it.

Enjoy!

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### **Imani says**

A great book 10/10. I love this author and would have loved to hear more about them but unfortunately, they died. All the greats die young.

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### **Jesse says**

kinda weirdly capitalist, but easy read and informative. good to refer folks without previous education on black history & movements.

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### **Raymond says**

I really enjoyed reading this graphic novel. I actually learned some new facts especially from the 19th Century.

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## Laura says

I love graphic novels. I love having visual representations, so I'm always excited about reading graphic novels and finding more interesting ways to experience topics like history. Still I Rise is the history of African Americans, presented in a graphic format. Though it wasn't always the most engaging or well-crafted read, I certainly learned a good deal from it.

The novel starts off explaining the reasons the first black slaves were brought to the U.S. From there a very detailed tale of how African Americans survived those dark times and rose above them unfolds. The section covering slavery is, by far, the most extensive section. So much detail is involved and so many people are introduced that the section almost takes away from later sections, like the civil rights movement. It felt almost lopsided. Because the history of slavery was so in depth, the absence of some events during the civil rights movement stood out to me. Maybe it's because I'm from Alabama, but I've heard the story of Rosa Parks my whole life. That story was nowhere to be found. I found that strange. This is clearly not a thorough history, but it isn't quite limited either. I was left wondering why some parts of the history were left out, and who made those decisions.

I will admit that I learned a lot, though we'll see how much I retain. There were plenty of names and stories I recognized from history; there were also many that were new to me. Honestly, I think this is the type of book that's better read slowly, in sections. I read most of it in a week, but I was rarely very engaged. My attention span waned after a story was finished or a point was made. Reading it all at once almost felt like information overload. I think my brain was just processing a TON of so much and I wish I'd given myself a little more time with it. Since it was for a class, that wasn't an option.

This is nonfiction, but strangely enough there are characters present. The narrators of the history are a seemingly elderly man and woman who occasionally have different opinions on some of the issues. The man often exhibits a more optimistic view than the woman. Aside from presenting differing opinions, I see no point to their presence. They are never identified and never develop in any way. The narration could have stood on its own.

That's the perfect segue into my next point. Graphic novels are interesting to read because they incorporate a new medium in a meaningful way. The art helps tell the story. The story, as it's written in the graphic novel, shouldn't be able to stand on its own. Ideally, if the art were absent, the book would have to be rewritten. The art in this graphic novel is neither effective nor particularly good. The blurb on the back of the book claims that this graphic novel has been compared to Maus, and I hope that Art Spiegelman doesn't take that too seriously. The reason why Maus is so lauded is that the art is just as important as the story itself. It's not just compelling because there was an important and emotional story to be told; it's compelling because Spiegelman took the time to craft the story and art equally. The subject of Still I Rise is just as important and emotional, yet there's a disconnect. There is nothing in the art that moved me. Frankly, there's nothing in the art that isn't said in the text. The creators just missed the mark, in that regard.

This is the second edition of this graphic novel (Note: The previous edition subtitled it as a "cartoon history" instead of a "graphic history"). It previously ended with the Million Man March. I think the election of President Obama sparked the creation of the new edition. The problem is that the information is no longer seamless. The Million Man March still feels like a clear ending, and the rest just feels like it was tagged on the end. I suppose that's because it was. The new section covers gang wars and African Americans in politics, but it's clear that the purpose is to celebrate the election of the first black president.

I love the idea of creating graphic novel histories. I think it's a great way to engage disinterested students in a topic they're studying. I also think it's a great way to create histories that are more accessible to people who are more visual and might become bored with reading a history book or learning meaningless facts (that person is me, by the way). I just wish this book had done that well. I'm pretty let down by it, but I'm interested to dig around and see if there are similar books that are crafted better.

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### **Lashawn says**

Very interesting to read. Two "elders", man and woman, tell the history of African Americans from slavery to modern times in graphic novel form. I liked how the elders sometimes bickered with each other as they told the story, and thus illustrating that there are differing opinions on what happened in history. It was also interesting to see that there is no clear-cut absolutes. Wealthy white slaveowners were depicted as greedy pigs, but some were also portrayed sympathetically. Black people were shot at, brutalized, but they're also shown as disagreeing among themselves as to what to do.

The book also showed that black people had a strong presence in politics, even during slavery times. I liked how that the book didn't just focus on slavery, but on the conferences (blacks held a Republican conference at one point. That was delightfully ironic), as well as the writers and scientists.

The only thing that turned me off was the drawing style. It felt a little crude to me. But the history telling was so rich, I soon overlooked it.

This is something I would love to have as part of my library. Four freedom trains out of five.

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