

MEDIA REVIEWS

Leaders of the 20th Century. 26 videocassettes, each 24 minutes. Film study guides for each film and a companion volume. Available in 1/2" VHS, 1/2" Beta I or II, and 3/4" U-Matic. Order from Learning Corporation of America, 108 Wilmot Road, Deerfield, IL 60015. 1-800-621-2121. \$89 per unit (\$79 per unit if order ten or more).

The videocassette is literally revolutionizing the use of audiovisuals in the classroom. For less than it costs to rent films on a one-time basis, institutions can now purchase videocassettes for their permanent collections. This minimizes the problems of scheduling films well in advance, battling over the film rental budget, and dealing with the ever unfaithful projector. The ease of operation of VCRs and their increasing availability in classrooms allow professors to employ audiovisuals more efficiently and productively at the proper points in their classes. As libraries and departments expand their holdings of videocassettes, they will play an ever more important role in the classroom, especially for teachers who previously found the inconveniences and expense of films greater than their value.

Of the myriad of new resources available in this medium, the Leaders of the 20th Century video series is one of the most useful that I have found. The 26-part series, each unit 24 minutes long, consists of an introductory segment, "Prologue: The End of the Old Order, 1900-1918," and profiles on 19 world leaders. Seven of the leaders have two films devoted to them (noted with an asterik below), although each unit is self-contained and can be used by itself. The leaders profiled are: Konrad Adenauer, David Ben-Gurion, Winston Churchill,* Charles DeGaulle,* Dwight Eisenhower, Elizabeth II, Francisco Franco, Emperor Hirohito, Adolf Hitler,* John Kennedy, Nikita Khrushchev, Mohandas Gandhi, Mao Tse-tung,* Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Franklin Roosevelt,* Joseph Stalin,* Joseph Broz Tito, and Harry Truman.

Henry Fonda serves as general narrator for the series, but each unit has a journalist commentator from the staff of the New York Times, an individual who covered the individuals and events treated in the film. Drew Middleton is the contributing journalist for nine films; Harrison Salisbury for seven; Turner Catledge for two. All three collaborated on the "Prologue" unit. Richard Elder, Robert Trumbull, David Binder, Raymond Anderson, Terence Smith, Paul Grimes, and Robert B. Semple, Jr., each do one leader.

The individual films all follow the same format. Each employs extensive documentary film and the correspondent's commentary. All put the leaders into context and address the questions of why and how he came to power, his manner of leadership, talents and weaknesses, and the results of his tenure. Each unit comes with a very useful two-page film study guide that gives a quick summary of the film, before-viewing and after-viewing discussion questions, and a bibliography. The guides were written by both college and high school teachers. A companion volume, Portraits of Power, compiled by Jeremy Murray-Brown, contains expanded pictorial essays on each leader written by the journalist correspondents for each film.

I have used many of the individual units in several different courses. My most extensive experience with the series comes from employing a large number of the films in an innovative freshman-level offering, "Comparative History: Makers of the Modern World" (see article on the course in Teaching

History, Spring 1988). I also had good success using them in a week-long summer camp on "Leadership" directed for high achievement eighth graders.

I will not attempt to discuss individual units. As with any series, some are better than others; a few, especially those on the Shah of Iran and Queen Elizabeth II, are dated. But on the whole, I find the series incredibly good, an exemplary source of very high quality work that provides a fine overview of leaders and important events, and the documentary footage is unsurpassed. The units provide a sound basis for class discussions. Moreover, the film guides are excellent. The backgrounds, overviews, and summaries are well done, and questions are good ones that stimulate discussion. Just as the films themselves, the guides are useful for either high school or college students. Many of the suggested class activities, though, are more appropriate for the high school than the college level. The companion volume, written for a popular audience, contains marvelous pictures, but the essays could be more substantive. The volume is better suited for the high school level. Incidentally, the book is difficult to obtain, and it has no resale value when students rush to the ever present semester-end book buyers. Finally, since the original films are products of the late 1970s, the bibliographies, which refer to works of the 1960s and 1970s, are dated.

While the series is an excellent contribution, if it truly is to deal with the leaders of the present century, it needs to be expanded. For one, it needs a film on Lenin, arguably the most influential leader of the century. Also it needs units on individuals such as Leonid Brezhnev, Lyndon Johnson, Fidel Castro, and Martin Luther King, whose stature is on a level with many included in the series. More emphasis on Third World leaders is necessary, and women are woefully underrepresented. The one female figure, Elizabeth II, is hardly the caliber of leader of the others in the series, nor is she a representative female leader of the century. I would suggest units on Eleanor Roosevelt, Golda Meir, Eva Peron, Indira Gandhi, Margaret Thatcher, and Mother Theresa.

In sum, this is a series that colleges and high schools should acquire. The relatively modest price makes it a good bargain for a source that can be employed time and time again, semester after semester.

Converse College

Joe P. Dunn

The American Revolution: Two Views. 65 minutes. One videocassette, teacher's notes, full text of the narration, students' pre-and post-tests, chronology, activities, bibliography, card catalog kit. Available in Videocassette Beta (7VB0050) or Videocassette VHS (7VH0050). Order from Educational Audio Visual, Inc., 17 Marble Ave., Pleasantville, NY 10570. \$189.00.

The American Revolution: Two Views is a videocassette version of a set of four filmstrips released in 1975. No alterations have been made in the substance of the filmstrips nor in supporting materials for teachers and students.

This videocassette can serve in the secondary school classroom as an introduction to or a review of the American Revolution and its aftermath. It is divided into four relatively equal segments: 1) The Colonies before the War; 2) Britain before the War; 3) The War; and 4) The Aftermath. The presentation is essentially a textbook-like survey of the development of the

Revolution, the war, and the creation of the new nation, with some consideration given to the differing views of the colonies and Great Britain as well as within each society.

The subtitle for the videocassette suggests that two distinct perspectives on the causes, course, and results of the American Revolution are presented. There is some attempt to present the American and British views, but the effort is only moderately successful. In fact, the organization of the presentation on the colonies and Britain before the war may confuse students. A chronological presentation on the colonies from 1760-1772 (Part I) is followed by a presentation on Britain 1760-1772 (first three-quarters of Part II). Thus, for example, the Boston Massacre is presented twice, each time in a fleeting manner that fails to delve below the surface. The final portion of Part II (still under the heading of Britain) covers the years 1773-1775 on both sides of the Atlantic. The reorganization of Parts I and II with careful attention to focus on "two views" could greatly improve the videocassette.

Although this is a textbook-like presentation, it brings to the students audiovisual experiences unavailable in their books. The presentation makes abundant use of political cartoons, paintings, lithographs, and music from the period. Teachers who use The American Revolution: Two Views can enhance these experiences through careful planning for classroom use of the videocassette.

University of Wisconsin-Whitewater

Mary E. Quinlivan

Reconstruction. 35 minutes. One videocassette, teacher's notes, spirit masters with questions for discussion, activities chronology, bibliography, card catalogue kit. Available in Videocassette Beta (7VB 0067) or Videocassette VHS (7VH 0067). Order from Educational Audio Visual, Inc., 17 Marble Ave., Pleasantville, NY 10570. \$104.00.

With the spread of technology to the classroom and the influx of students with inadequate reading skills, instructors are turning to video format to relieve themselves of the necessity of preparing lectures and to make students feel at home. Some of the resulting materials are quite satisfactory; unfortunately this cassette leaves something to be desired.

The cassette purports to be an "in-depth view of the period of Reconstruction in U.S. history, of its impact on the North, on the South, and on the nation's future." The production is anything but in-depth, however, for about all one can do in thirty-five minutes is to present broad generalizations that often lack meaning. For example, the first spoken lines announce that "in 1861, the United States was the only country in the world that gave legal status to slavery while proclaiming itself a democracy." True, but just how many countries in the world proclaimed themselves democracies in 1861? Similar expansive generalizations follow. The narrative suggests that there was a unity on Reconstruction policy among business interests that did not exist, that there is no longer any historiographical debate on whether Lincoln "had come to believe that the freed slaves had to be accepted as full citizens," and so on. If some statements are misleading, others are just plain erroneous.

The goal of this material is to impress firmly upon the student that the opportunity to give black Americans the rights and privileges to which they were entitled was lost during Reconstruction, primarily because of

Southern resistance, President Johnson's lack of understanding, and the economic interests of northern businessmen. However, given the racial attitudes of most Americans of the times, North and South, I doubt that such an opportunity actually existed (some historians would probably disagree with me at this point).

The sad outcome of Reconstruction that this cassette portrays is true enough, but there is little attempt to grapple with some of the subtle complexities of the period. Even the most idealistic Americans, for example, mistrusted strong government, and there was concern that a government that was strong enough to ensure the rights of blacks would also be strong enough to subvert the freedom of the people. Roscoe Conkling sarcastically remarked that when the government "interposes to check murders, and burnings, and barbarities . . . it is suddenly discovered that we are in danger of 'centralism'" (quoted in W. R. Brock, An American Crisis, 300). But Conkling was a spoilsman who attacked reformers and ex-Confederates with equal enthusiasm. That Conkling advocated a strong policy on the southern question was sufficient to discredit the idea in the eyes of some Americans.

The over-simplified presentation leads to the conclusion that this production is aimed at junior high schools and perhaps those high schools where history is taught by the coach. On the other hand, discussion materials seem aimed not at the lower levels at all, but rather at the college and even graduate level. Some of the suggested activities relate to northern white racism as illustrated by the 1863 longshoremen's strikes, the treatment of Reconstruction in Birth of a Nation, Gone with the Wind, and Light in August, and the uses of the Fourteenth Amendment as illustrated by Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad Company--none of which are mentioned in the script.

I do not mean to be hypercritical. How should a videocassette be prepared in order to meet the need for good audio-visual material? First, the script writer must have frequent recourse not only to a library but to a qualified historical advisor who will be sufficiently satisfied with the script to insist upon being listed in the credits (none is listed in either cassette or script). The advisor can explain some of the nuances that the writer did not catch. Second, these explanations should be written into the script. This may make it longer, but it will also make it better. As it stands, this cassette is not worth \$104, except at the junior high level, where it might find some good use, but not at the high school level. It provides some introduction, a foundation on which to build, but no more. I must admit, however, that critical professors, myself included, might be sobered by the challenge of trying to write a half hour script that would be much better. I'm not sure it can be done.

University of North Dakota

Richard E. Beringer