

REVIEWS

MEDIA REVIEWS

Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads - 1965-1985. Produced by Blackside, Inc., Boston, MA, 1989. Order from PBS Video, 1320 Braddock Place, Alexandria, VA 22314. (800) 424-7963. 8-part series: \$395.00 (VHS) or \$575.00 (3/4" U-Matic)

Of all of the cataclysmic events of the mid twentieth century the American civil rights movement ranks among those whose eventual outcome is still being played out in various individual and societal struggles. Unlike other great social movements, this one developed and matured at a time when a great communication revolution was also occurring, namely the advent of television as a mass medium within our society. As both evolved, the record kept by television provides us with a powerful means to reexamine not only the historical outcomes but the actors and their motivations during critical moments of this period.

PBS first provided us with an early look at the civil rights struggle in *Eyes on the Prize Part I*. This second series of eight programs picks up the story in 1964 with a look at the impact of Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam on black Americans and carries us through the reelection of Harold Washington as the first Afro-American mayor of Chicago in 1987.

In viewing each of these programs the sense of a personalized view of this era comes through. The camera takes us from Harlem in the mid 1960s through James Meredith's march in Mississippi. It focuses on Martin Luther King as he attempts to integrate a hostile Chicago after the Watts riots of 1965. It continues to Cleveland as Carl Stokes is elected mayor. The use of force in controlling these unleashed forces is presented during a confrontation with Huey Newton. The assassination of King and the rise of black pride is examined as well as white reaction to the civil rights movement in the form of the Boston school boycott and the reverse discrimination issues raised by the Bakke case. The series concludes with a look at the black communities in Miami and Chicago.

In addition to the eight video tapes, an extensive teaching guide is also provided. This guide has a lengthy bibliography for each program as well as teaching suggestions and explanatory notes.

This series would be an excellent addition to a media library and could be a focal point of a course in Recent American History or a History of the American Civil Rights movement. It is appropriate for both secondary as well as collegiate audiences. In an age when students spend more time in front of the television than in elementary and secondary classrooms combined, these tapes are a perfect vehicle to capture their interest and, at the same time, provide them with an open window to their heritage.

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Richard A. Diem

The Western Tradition. With Eugen Weber. The Annenberg/CPB Project, 1989. A television course in two semesters of 13 units, 52 half-hour programs. VHS or Beta 1/2", \$350.00 semester I or II, \$650.00 both semesters, \$29.90 per cassette, 2 consecutive programs. 3/4", \$500.00 semester I or II, \$950.00 both semesters, \$45.00 per cassette, 2 consecutive programs. (Order from: The Annenberg/CPB Project c/o Intellimation, P.O. 1922, Santa Barbara, CA 93116-1922. 1-800-Learner)

The Western Tradition is a major new college television course constructed around the western civilization lectures of Eugen Weber, Professor of History at UCLA, and the author of *A Modern History of Europe* (1971) and the highly praised *Peasants into Frenchmen* (1976). The tendency in recent successful telecourses, such as Kenneth Clark's *Civilization*, J. Bronowski's *The Ascent of Man*, or the recent Annenberg/CPB Project, *Art of the Western World*, has been to consciously take the host or scholar of the series out of the classroom, away from the lectern, and transport him to some dramatic historical backdrop such as the palace of Versailles or the Parthenon. Sensing quite naturally that television is an action oriented medium, directors normally like to have their hosts in constant motion. So when the scholar in the *Art of the Western World* describes a Gothic cathedral, he appropriate enough does so while casually walking around the ambulatory. Such a format does solve the problem of the boring talking head with spectacles that marked so many educational films from the 1950s, such as the Encyclopedia Britannica series. Still, such a format can easily give an impression of being staged or contrived, with an actor merely reading his lines, rather than a scholar/teacher engaged in a dialogue with his audience or students. Eugen Weber has not been

transported to exotic locales in *The Western Tradition*. He remains firmly entrenched behind the lectern back at UCLA. Each program opens with Professor Weber standing before a shadowy class of students as he proceeds with his analysis of western culture. So students viewing the television image are given a sense of intimacy with the instructor, given a sense of his persona as professor. In the course of the series they get to know his peculiarities of speech, and other eccentricities, that mark the inspiring teacher. So I think you do have here a very successful marriage between the intimacy and naturalness of a front row seat at a university lecture with television's ability to deliver the visual image. Slides, films, and audio segments form an integral part of every program.

Such a marriage is successful largely because of Weber himself. He possesses an engaging style, an aura of European culture, and humor, that does seem to hold the attention of students, including those who have only a minimal amount of interest in history. Indeed, I have had several students who initially thought he was Harvey Korman doing a European professor routine! Weber draws upon a lifetime of teaching and research for the presentation of fascinating anecdotal material that cannot be matched, yet he always keeps it within the context of a tight historical analysis. The series is also particularly strong in the area of social history, where so much new research has been done in the last 25 years. This fact would make programs in the series particularly appealing to those teachers who are not familiar with some of the new trends in scholarship, but desire to add some social history to their courses. However, the programs are a bit uneven. Program 41, "The Industrial Revolution," I found inspired and touching as Weber described famine in Europe when people simply fell dead in the streets or ditches, or tried to eat their own hands. I found Program 47, "The First World War and the Rise of Fascism," less than inspiring, but that might have been because I was expecting so much. That there would be some unevenness in the course of 52 programs is not surprising, but the overall quality of production and performance is excellent. Weber always remains within himself, never trying to be something that he is not, for instance, never worrying about breathing correctly so that you get a professional, "canned," narration sound. And I believe that this sincerity comes across to students.

The Western Tradition can be used as a complete college credit course, or as supplemental material for courses in western civilization, world history, literature, and art history. Personally, I have had a great deal of success using specific programs to give historical background in an interdisciplinary humanities course. Individual instructors will have to determine for themselves what programs work best for them. Jay Boggis, a novelist and Harvard University Ph.D in history, has written excellent, and very useful, student and faculty guides to accompany the course. In addition to the usual lecture outlines, test banks, and optional readings and activities, the faculty guide has suggestions for administrators about course promotion in the school and community. This innovative television course should make the teaching and learning of history at the college level more popular and interesting, without trivializing history.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988. Pp. xi, 314. paper, \$12.95.

Juliet Gardiner, ed., *What is History Today?* Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1988. Pp. vi, 167. Cloth, \$39.95; paper \$12.50.

Oral history is the oldest variety of all, probably beginning with tales told around cooking fires in the era before written language. It went on to troubadours' tales, Norse sagas, and finally to well organized projects and archives of interviews. Paul Thompson, of the University of Essex, has now given us both a why-to-do-it and how-to-do-it book. Tracing the development of oral history, he shows us its value in various ways, even as a counterweight to official documents, commenting, "When social historians are reduced to writing history from the records of government spies, the constraints imposed are clearly extreme." With oral history one can go far beyond surviving documents (which have their own bias) and balance leaders' accounts with those of followers or bystanders.

Thompson moves on to explain how to interview people to get as much information and as much accuracy as possible, how to handle the emotions provoked by interviews (whether of