

REVIEWS

Let the Record Show: Practical Uses for Historical Documents. Slide/audio cassette or videotape (VHS or U-Matic). 16 minutes. Free for one week. (Order from Terri Sewell, New York State Archives & Records Administration, Cultural Education Center, room 10A46, Albany, NY 12230.)

How could historical records help the Dance Theatre of Harlem, a fourth grade class, a botanist, and homeowners lobbying for a new bridge? This fast moving videotape shows us that "these people needed information from the past" and concludes, "It may be hard to foresee now, but at some time historical records are sure to be useful to you too."

The videotape uses interviews, narration, and good organization to make its point. It begins with its interviewees explaining what they need to know about the past, then pauses to discuss historical records, how they are produced, where they are located, and the role of archivists in their preservation and use. Then we hear the success stories. The dance group, for example, saves time and money because its own archives can show how it has staged past productions or if it can expect problems on the road. The fourth grade teacher wanted to bring history to life and helped her students use a nineteenth-century child's letters, old photographs, and historic buildings to enact a Victorian Day. The botanist used botanical journals and specimens in the Buffalo Museum of Science to demonstrate the impact of a century of tourism on a site's flora. A proud member of a homeowners association tells how his work in historic blueprints and correspondence in the Erie Canal Museum helped produce a well-documented case that convinced the highway department to build a new bridge.

The tape is well executed. Visually, it consists entirely of still images, mostly photographs of the interview subjects and their projects mixed with a few historic views. Scenes from the Victorian Day are delightful, but the first section on the Dance Theatre of Harlem needed more pictures. The sound uses people telling their own stories, music, and brief continuity and analysis provided by the narrator, Diane Ward.

Who could use this tape? In the classroom it could challenge college and advanced high school students to think about the basic questions of history: What can we learn from the past and how do we do it? The tape could also inspire teachers to design innovative class projects, and the successful Victorian Day project demonstrates that elementary students can put historic records to good use. Finally, much of the tape seems aimed at convincing a general adult audience of the value of historic research and work of archivists. If it can find that audience, its argument should prove persuasive.

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Robin Blackburn. *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848*. New York: Verso, 1988. Pp. 560. Cloth, \$47.50.

Robin Blackburn's work is an extraordinary study of anti-slavery throughout the Western hemisphere. It offers a sweeping investigation of the complex origins of anti-slavery, giving attention not only to abolitionists but also to political crises in imperialist powers, to slave resistance and rebellion, and to social and political pressures that impelled "metropolitan decision makers" to accept anti-slavery.

Beginning with the medieval origins of anti-slavery, the volume treats emancipation acts in the United States, the violent overthrow of slavery in Haiti, independence and emancipation in Spanish America, Cuba, and Brazil, and British and French abolitionism. The author pursues such a wide ranging study because, for him, slave systems were "integrated," each affecting the other in various political, economic, and social ways. Understandably, the book focuses on Great Britain because that nation, more than any other, reversed its own policies regarding slavery and the slave trade.

Teachers and students of anti-slavery will want to give this book much attention not only because of its geographical breadth of coverage but also because of its argument. Blackburn points out an important contradiction in previous historical assessments regarding anti-slavery: "If slavery developed in the wake of capitalism," how can historians also argue that the "capitalist advance also prompted anti-slavery impulses?" For Blackburn, economic explanations for the demise of anti-slavery are insufficient, because they do not take into account the boost that capitalism gave to various forms of industrial slavery. Blackburn also rejects traditional explanations that emphasize the