

collections readily available from those years.

The final segment, that dealing with Reconstruction, is certainly the least successful installment. It is entirely too simple, incomplete, and disjointed to be otherwise. The issues of the hour remain fragmented and cloudy. And one finds it ironic that while excessive emphasis is accorded blacks during this era, the 13th Amendment to the Constitution is not even mentioned.

In printed and visual particulars, "The Civil War: Two Views" could have been improved had more attention been given to proofing (the war did not begin in 1860, for example) and less to background music that is frequently annoying and counterproductive. Perhaps some of the defects of this work are the result of transferring an earlier filmstrip to a "new" medium. A competent instructor who recognizes the deficiencies of this endeavor, however, will go some distance in the direction of making it worthwhile in the classroom.

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Ross Gregory. *America 1941: A Nation at the Crossroads*. New York: The Free Press, 1989. Pp. x, 339. Cloth, \$22.95.

Americans have a continuing fascination with World War II. This interest is reflected in a recent avalanche of books, films, and television miniseries about the "Good War." Among the best of these is Ross Gregory's engaging portrait of America on the verge of war. In impressive detail, he captures a nation lurching toward an uncertain future.

Gregory opens with a cogent description of Franklin Roosevelt's December 29, 1940, "fireside chat," a radio address that outlined the perilous new year for his listeners. Americans in 1941 were constantly bombarded with news of Asian and European wars, yet many of them were reluctant to prepare for or think seriously about an American role in another world war.

Gregory's entire work revolves around this contradictory sense of reluctance and uncertainty coupled with a feeling that climactic changes were imminent. Holding up a mirror to American society, he describes in succeeding chapters the creation of the first peacetime conscripted army and an economy recovering from depression and coping with labor disputes, government planning, and consumer demands. Many of Gregory's Americans are also on the move to new homes, coping with rural poverty, and losing interest in mainstream religion. These themes, along with chapters on Americans' penchants for entertainment and a detailed appraisal of blacks' status as the war began, are skillfully woven together to create a picture of political, economic, and social life before Pearl Harbor. The concluding chapter ends the uncertainty and ushers the nation into war.

Several aspects of Gregory's book make it especially valuable as a classroom resource for courses on World War II, American social history, and twentieth-century America. No one can accuse Gregory of muddling prose; his writing style is lucid, terse, and easily approachable. This is professional historical writing at its best—engaging, challenging, and readable.

The text is complemented by the judicious use of references and photographs. Gregory lets the voices of Americans in 1941 speak by relying heavily on contemporary newspaper and periodical accounts as well as memoirs, novels, and historical accounts from the postwar period. Photographs, many of them from National Archives and Library of Congress collections, focus on personalities from the era and aspects of rapidly changing daily life.

Teachers will find the book's organization particularly conducive to classroom use. Gregory builds each chapter around a particular theme. In "Things of the Flesh," changes in Americans' behavior are illustrated by examining smoking and drinking practices, marijuana use, dancing, sexual conduct, divorce, and the status of women in 1941. Personal accounts, statistical reports, and references are carefully interspersed with the author's observations, interpretations, and conclusions. While each chapter can easily stand on its own as an introduction to a topic, this thematic approach does not detract from the book's tightly constructed unity.

Ross Gregory has crafted an impressive chronicle of tradition and change, of a simpler era before television, computers, and the Bomb. Superb writing, accessible organization, and detailed references combine with a fascinating subject to make Ross Gregory's *America 1941* a valuable contribution to bookshelf and classroom.

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