

on its own. The six-tape format available from Barr Media goes particularly well with this text and can even be used profitably in upper-division courses.

But there exist problems and some minor irritations with what for the most part is a very praiseworthy series. Rabb's entire premise behind this production can be challenged. What exactly is the link between these changes and the emergence of the "modern west"? The answer to that question depends upon one's definition of modernity. One can plausibly argue that the world we now inhabit—the world of nation states, of mass politics with strong democratic and egalitarian impulses, of industrialized economies based upon a consumer culture, of science and technology, of secular culture—emerged in the late nineteenth century and any connection to the Renaissance remains tenuous at best. Rabb has stretched the continuing relevance of the Renaissance to the breaking point. On the somewhat frivolous side, in the long telecourse version the announcer's introduction to Rabb's discussions strikes me as being overly pretentious, flowery, and trite, and the set and props look kitschy and tacky, all of which detracts from Rabb's remarks. And I still have some lingering suspicions about actors in black turtleneck sweaters acting like members of an ancient Greek chorus. But the production does employ some innovative techniques and ideas that move it beyond the documentary or talking-head approach to telecourses, so it rightly deserves the attention of not only those interested in long-distance learning or the Renaissance and Reformation, but anyone teaching in a number of academic disciplines.

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REVIEWS

J. Kelly Sowards, ed. *Makers of the Western Tradition: Portraits from History*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994. Sixth edition. Vol. I: Pp. xiv, 338; Vol. II: Pp. xiv, 336. Paper, each volume \$19.99.

Social history ("history from below," "the history of daily life," or, as George M. Trevelyan described it better than half a century ago, "the history of a people with the politics left out") is scarcely a new field. Its antecedents may be discerned in the works of the Father of History, Herodotus, who enlivened his story of the struggle between East and West with wonderful if not always accurate accounts of the eccentric habits and curious mores of the various ethnic groups who populated the Persian Empire. Even so, social history along with such affiliates as women's history and ethnic studies now seems to be entering a veritable golden age. Any western or world civilization textbook worth its salt today has sections on the treatment of women and the lifestyles of the more humble social orders in the past. Some surveys even use social history as an organizing principle. A recent example of this genre devotes twice as much space to the significance of foot-binding in Sung China (968-1279) as to the unification of Italy and Germany combined.

The challenge facing J. Kelly Sowards, Professor Emeritus at Wichita State University, was to create a sixth edition of his highly-successful readings book that adapted to the currency of social history without abandoning the distinctive character of his anthology's earlier editions. This was quite a challenge. *Makers of the Western Tradition*, as the title suggests, is built on the inveterate assumption that elites in politics, thought, and culture are the basic stuff of history; Sowards's "portraits from history" focus on prominent individuals who dominated, shaped, or personified the elements composing their eras. How could such a collection of biographies be

made compatible with textbooks reflecting the impact of what proponents like to call the "new history"?

In solving this problem, Sowards has retained the structure of his work from previous editions. Twenty-seven individuals are examined in the two volumes. Each selection begins with Sowards providing a brief biography and choosing a theme to be pursued. Next follows one or more contemporary accounts; a standard, historical evaluation of the person under scrutiny; and a more recent discussion, often at odds with the accepted view preceding it. Thus students are urged to come to terms with varying interpretations and different types of sources. Finally, there is a bibliographical essay. For this edition Sowards has added to every section a handful of questions for debate or study.

The most significant difference between the sixth edition of *Makers of the Western Tradition* and its predecessors is the increased attention given to those who were not Caucasian males. Seven women are represented: four queens (Eleanor of Aquitaine, Elizabeth I, Catherine the Great, and Victoria), a soldier/mystic (Joan of Arc), an existentialist writer (Simone de Beauvoir), and a poet (Sappho). The particular topics dealt with range from the extent Eleanor and Victoria might be seen as active participants in political affairs to de Beauvoir's feminism. However, no topic is likely to inspire so much classroom controversy as the one associated with Sappho. She was, arguably, one of the finest poets of antiquity, but that subject would interest few undergraduates. Sowards wisely concentrates instead on Sappho's presumed lesbianism, on the attitude of Greek civilization toward homosexuality (actually, bisexuality), and, by implication, on our own attitudes. The ancient Greeks typically come through in introductory history courses as creatures of intellect rather than emotion, but Plato found the topic of same-sex love so important that he analyzed it extensively in *The Symposium*.

Even more unorthodox for a collection of readings in western civilization is the inclusion of a Native American (Montezuma) and an African nationalist (Jomo Kenyatta) to give students insights into imperialism from the point of view of the victims instead of the conquerors. The Montezuma selection provides both Spanish and Aztec accounts of the conquest of Mexico and then raises the question of why Montezuma, with all of his resources, was so ineffective in combating Cortés. The chapter on Kenyatta discusses whether the British violated their own much-vaunted legal system in their zeal to convict him of terrorism. This section also could lead to a discussion of what sorts of action are justifiable as one people seeks to escape rule by another.

Sowards has successfully introduced elements of social history and some of its offshoots into his book without compromising the work's fundamental premise. The result, as ever, is a very readable and useful supplement for any western civilization textbook. *Makers of the Western Tradition* is most effective when students already have a reasonable framework in which to put the assigned biographical material. For instance, Voltaire's deism is best understood on the basis of perceiving the general outlines of the Enlightenment as a whole, while the problem of whether Napoleon betrayed the ideals of the French Revolution cannot be resolved without first knowing those ideals and tracing their permutations through the 1790s. By reminding students of the role of the individual, with all of his or her complexities and contradictions, in producing our historical legacy, Sowards definitely helps to rectify the tendency of some social history overviews to dissolve identifiable persons into faceless masses imprisoned by changeless routines or into puppets of blind socio-economic forces somehow generated but not controlled by human beings. This is a valuable service.