

dozen classroom activities per chapter. The book is aimed at elementary through high school instructors, though clearly some of the suggested activities could be used profitably by college teachers as well.

#### A few examples of Projects:

1. Write a TV script on the activities of Sir Francis Drake.
2. Make up a play or epic poem about Lincoln's assassination.
3. Make a manual called *How to Use and Care for Your Model T Ford*.
4. Do research on the effect McCarthyism had on one individual's life and career.

#### Homework Assignments:

1. Write a headline and accompanying article for a British or American newspaper for July 5, 1776.
2. Write a response to a slave owner who says he treats his slaves very well.
3. Do you think Sacco and Vanzetti would be found guilty if their trial were held today? Explain.
4. Do you agree with the U.S. policy forbidding religious identification by U.S. personnel stationed in the Middle East? Explain.

Classroom Activities include such things as having the students write a new "Constitution" to govern their class or school; discussing which abolitionist tactics were the most effective in combating slavery; debating who in a family gets to emigrate to America; describing your feelings if you are a woman whose World War II job has just been given back to a returning G.I. in 1945; discussing how far you would go in 1960s-style protest (boycotting a product, taking over an office, marching, signing a petition, going to jail, leaving the country, etc.). Chapter 20, "Current Events—The Nineties and Beyond," new to this edition, has a different format, with suggestions for stimulating interest in current news (study of political cartoons, creating a news broadcast, using a newspaper as a "textbook" to study a particular topic, etc.). A final chapter lists 62 topics for classroom debates on current social and ethical issues (AIDS, drugs, freedom of speech, school prayer, gay rights, cheating, and the like).

There are literally hundreds of such activities and assignments here, and experienced teachers have used some of them, although that does not diminish the usefulness of the book. For any instructor who values classroom discussion and interaction (and we all should), it would be wise before moving into a new period to scan the appropriate chapter here to pick up ideas for essays or to spark discussions. It is worth remembering that topics that seem stale to veteran instructors may set off a donnybrook in a classroom of younger students.

Chapters 21 and 22, also new to the second edition, are less valuable. "Term Papers" gives in four pages basic but rather skimpy instructions. Chapter 22 on creating a classroom library has some useful tips, but the accompanying reading list is anemic—for example, only one book each on World War I and Vietnam, and three on women in the nineteenth century.

These minor criticisms aside, *Breaking Away from the Textbook* is well worth keeping nearby and well-thumbed by any history instructor, especially those who are certain there is no other way but their own to approach a particular topic or period of history.

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R. Douglas Hurt. *American Agriculture: A Brief History*. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1994. Pp. xii, 412. Cloth, \$34.95.

The author of this text/reference book has done an excellent job in synthesizing nearly four hundred years of American agriculture in four hundred pages. R. Douglas Hurt, who has authored seven books on

agricultural history, possesses the expertise to condense the material needed to cover the vast time period involved, while at the same time making it both scholarly and readable. The narrative, which is chronological, is divided into nine chapters as follows: 1. The Native America Experience; 2. The Colonial Years; 3. The New Nation; 4. Antebellum America; 5. The Gilded Age; 6. The Age of Prosperity; 7. Troubled Times; 8. Days of Uncertainty; 9. Epilogue.

Within each chapter relevant topics of significance are discussed. They include: land policy, political developments, rural life, regional differences, technological advances, and farm policy. Other subjects covered include agrarianism, slavery, the role of women in farm life, veterinary medicine, farm organizations, and agricultural movements. The human factor in history is enhanced by the inclusion of short biographical sketches of such varied personages as John Deere, Mary Elizabeth Lease, George Washington Carver, and Henry A. Wallace. Each chapter is followed by a list of "Suggested Readings." Excellent use is also made of photographs, illustrations, charts, and maps. An "Appendix" includes three statistical tables: agricultural price index, farm characteristics (1900-1990), and farm income (1910-1990).

While taking due note of the "risk taking, entrepreneurial spirit, and courage" of the farmers who helped build a great nation, the author nevertheless contends that "the history of American agriculture is also a story of daring fraud, insatiable greed, ruthless speculation, vicious racism, malicious corporate power, callous government policy, and incredible violence." Thus in this work farmers at times are characterized as heroes; at others they are castigated as villains.

The very nature of this type of work dictates brevity, but some omissions are regrettable. Little, if anything, is mentioned on tariffs vs. free trade and its effect on agriculture. Harry S. Truman's signing of the Agriculture Act of 1948 with flexible price supports and then his political use of the farm issue to win the 1948 election by championing high, rigid supports (embodied in the Agriculture Act of 1949) is not clearly explained. Nor is the Brannan Plan covered. More recognition of the role of Ezra Taft Benson (he is not even mentioned in the text) should have been given for his role in the Eisenhower administration. Benson's policies tried to depoliticize the use of federal subsidies, increase USDA consumer research, enlarge exports, and help U.S. agriculture to adjust to the realities of the world market. Yet he was vilified politically for his reform efforts. Agricultural policy of World War I is covered, but no mention is made of Herbert Hoover and the Food Administration. One last negative comment—the index is not complete.

*American Agriculture* is certainly usable as a textbook for beginning students in agricultural history or as a reference tool for either college or high school libraries. It might also be helpful as a supplementary text for courses in farm economics or rural sociology. This book is well organized, contains a vast storehouse of information, and is written in an easily understood narrative style. After reading it, one will be amazed at the rapid transition agriculture has undergone since colonial times. We were once a nation of farmers. Now the figure is 1.8 percent of the population. The author correctly concludes: "In retrospect, then, the history of American agriculture has been the story of nearly constant change, for better or worse."

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Barbara Melosh, ed. *Gender and American History Since 1890*. London & New York: Routledge, 1993. Pp. xii, 308. Cloth, \$49.95, ISBN 0-415-07675-7. Paper, \$15.95, ISBN 0-415-07676-5.

In *Gender and American History Since 1890*, the authors provide an intriguing and unique examination into the multi-dimensional role of gender as an influence on contemporary American history. Barbara Melosh, the text's editor, has assembled a collection of essays that discuss varied gender influences that have affected the course of U.S. history. In the table of contents, the editor has organized eleven articles into three component themes. The themes are: Part I: Sexuality and Gender, Part II: Work