

REVIEWS

Percoco, James A. *A Passion for the Past: Creative Teaching of U.S. History*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998. Pp. xxiv, 149. Paper, \$17.50; ISBN 0-325-00061-1.

One of the problems facing history/social studies methods instructors is the difficulty in finding a relevant text for use in their courses. While there are numerous methods texts available, few if any are written by and/or from the perspective of the classroom teacher. Those methods teachers who have encountered this same situation will find James A. Percoco's book to be a great substitute for the clinical secondary social studies textbooks currently on the market. Secondary history teachers will also find *A Passion for the Past* to be an invaluable resource for learning more authentic teaching strategies to incorporate into their classroom.

One of the reasons this book is able to provide such an accurate picture of the secondary history classroom is that its author, James A. Percoco, is a veteran classroom teacher. He currently teaches U.S. and Applied History at West Springfield High School in Springfield, Virginia. His innovative and engaging manner of teaching has resulted in his appointment as educational consultant to the National Archives, the National Gallery of Art, and the National Park Service. Percoco's efforts have even been recognized nationally, being named Outstanding Social Studies Teacher of the Year at the 1993 Walt Disney Company American Teacher Awards. This is the caliber of teacher who devised these teaching strategies and penned this book, not a college professor long removed from the high school classroom.

The organization of the book is a reflection of Percoco's logical, common-sense approach to teaching. After a brief definition and introduction to his style of teaching, which he terms *applied history*, he introduces readers to a collection of pedagogical strategies. These classroom teaching strategies are examined in separate chapters of moderate length, typically twenty pages. Activities outlined by Percoco include both the traditional, such as guest speakers and field trips, and *avant-garde*, such as "historical heads" and sculpture analysis. Other activities examined by the author include academic bumper stickers, photo essays, music analysis, journal writing, film critiques, portfolios, and internships.

In every case, these strategies emphasize higher order thinking skills, such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. While these teaching strategies build upon a strong conceptual and knowledge foundation, they do not end there. For example, the author's "public history project" calls on students to conduct primary source research documented in extensive bibliographies. Next, students design and construct multimedia, three-dimensional, information exhibits. The project also requires them to examine cultural, social, economic, and political implications in both their exhibits and culminating oral presentations.

Another strength of *A Passion for the Past* is the manner in which each activity is introduced. Percoco discusses how and why he developed the activity and how to

implement it in the classroom, and provides student examples when possible. This approach is one that classroom teachers will appreciate and methods instructors will find easily adaptable to their current curriculum. Percoco's *applied history* teaching strategy can be implemented into a methods class curriculum as either one instructional strategy with each activity comprising its syntax, or one can integrate each as activities for use in a variety of instructional strategies such as cooperative learning, mastery learning, concept attainment, and jurisprudential inquiry.

Even after nine years of teaching high school American history and one year as a methods instructor, I was impressed with the variety of critical thinking activities used by Percoco in his U.S. history classroom. While secondary history teachers will find the book a valuable personal resource for adding to their repertoire of classroom teaching strategies, I believe college methods instructors will find it either a great substitute or supplement for existing social studies methods texts.

Ball State University

D. Antonio Cantu

Antony Alcock. *A Short History of Europe: From the Greeks and Romans to Present Day.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998. Pp. x, 304. Cloth, \$59.95; ISBN 0-312-21003-5. Paper, \$18.95; ISBN 0-312-21036-1.

Antony Alcock has managed to narrate the history of Europe, east and west, during the past 4,000 years in a scant 270 pages. An inherent instinct to charity inclines me to compliment him on this achievement, but having persevered through all of these pages I find charity elusive. Almost from the start I found myself out of sympathy with the author's predominant approach to history as past politics. Granted, one needs a central organizing principle in order to integrate such a vast array of information, and implicitly Alcock tries to find one in the idea of European integration, but Sir John Seeley's late Victorian conception of history is too outdated to speak arrestingly to most of today's undergraduates. Let me be fair: although politics--in the form of impersonal social and economic forces--dominates the book, the author is quite adept at explicating the intricacies of religious disputes such as Petrine doctrine and the Monophysite controversy (though I would have sacrificed here for later mention of Queen Victoria or Freud or Margaret Thatcher) or presenting the (comparatively) exhaustive history of tribal and ethnic groups migrating across or settling down in the Eurasian plain. But for all its lecture room sweep, this book remains a history devoid of humanity. While individuals do get mentioned--a half sentence is the norm--only two--Luther and Hitler!--are presented with any detail. One comes away with the sense that this is history written not for humanists but for--and there is a foreword that calls attention to this--the bureaucrats and technocrats at Brussels. Indeed the book's final chapter on Europe since 1945 treats little of the history of the period and instead