

will most viewers of *JFK*, *Nixon*, or *Wall Street* walk away with? It seems to me that a large part of *Talk Radio* is less about First Amendment rights and conspiracy theories (what most of Stone's critics spend their time arguing about) than about what (mis)understanding people have of important historical events like the Holocaust. When Eric Bogosian's shock jock character in the film asks/shouts at his listeners "What's wrong with you people!?" he is, in effect, asking the question that underlies most critics' fears about the effect of Stone's film on moviegoers: "What's wrong with your understanding of history?" So, is the emphasis on Stone's ideology misplaced? Should we, instead, be writing less about the dubious relationship between film(maker) and audience and more about historical understanding? This is a point Stone seems to pose: Is the difference between history and art all that great? Isn't history, like art, really about meaning? If so, then film, like poetry and song, can enable history to come closer to the world as it is lived rather than scientific rationalist claims to objectivity. What Henri Bergson once said about painting, Jim Morrison once said about film: It is "the closest approximation in art form that we have to the actual flow of consciousness." *Oliver Stone's U.S.A.* opens the door for an important discussion on the interrelationships between myth, fact, and truth.

Oliver Stone's U.S.A. is a fine collection of essays that could enhance many different types of courses, but since the essays rely upon extensive knowledge of a single director, his films, and their relation to the study and presentation of American history, this book is best suited for an upper-division and/or graduate film and American history class or a class in post-World War II American history. It could also be a great tool for a popular culture and American history course as well. The level of sophistication in the essays is accessible and variable, making it easy for an instructor and/or class to pick and choose which ideas they will grapple with. Toplin includes a selected bibliography including both printed and audiovisual material that will be of help to any reader interested in further study.

Floyd College

Tom Pynn

Larry Madaras & James M. SoRelle, eds. *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in American History*. Vol. II: *Reconstruction to the Present*. Guilford, CT: Dushkin/McGraw Hill, 2000. Eighth edition. Pp. xviii, 410. Paper, \$19.95; ISBN 0-07-303162-3.

Whenever a text reaches its eighth edition, one must assume that the editors are doing something right. Such is the case with *Taking Sides*. The editors have tried to strike that ever-elusive balance between social, diplomatic, and political history. They have accomplished this goal as well as anyone else.

Teaching History 26(1). DOI: 10.33043/TH.26.1.47-48. ©2001 Gordon E. Harvey

Supplemental texts such as *Taking Sides* are a varied lot. All try to add to the basic knowledge provided by textbooks and lectures, but not all succeed. Many students see them as just another reading assignment, mostly dull and boring, to go along with what they might judge to be an equally boring textbook. But presented properly, such supplements can enhance a classroom discussion and, if anything at all, provide the students with some real historical issues to debate.

Following a brief introduction, each chapter in *Taking Sides* addresses a controversial historical issue. Each side is represented in an article previously published. What sets *Taking Sides* apart is that the editors do not merely introduce the chapter; they also add a postscript to each, summarizing the opposing points and drawing conclusions while tying the debate to the bigger picture. Very few supplemental readers bother to do this.

Taking Sides provides some nice, juicy controversies for students to chew on. Unfortunately, not all of the selections are good ones. Those on industrialization, Reconstruction, and the nature of robber barons are tired, old, and almost obligatory debates. Many of these questions have been answered in recent scholarship, and they never elicit much student interest. I have a particular bone to pick with the Reconstruction chapter. Too many supplements address whether Andrew Johnson should have been impeached. Since many textbooks now offer deeper coverage of this issue, why not ask the more seminal question about Reconstruction, namely, whether or not it failed? This debate allows the instructor to make the connections to the civil rights movement and the Second Reconstruction of the 1960s.

The strength of the book lays in the later chapters. Issues such as the true nature of the 1950s, whether history will forgive Richard Nixon, and whether the 1980s were greedy years are more suited to eliciting student involvement than splitting historical hairs over just how corrupt Boss Tweed might have been. One last criticism is necessary. I am not one who believes that newer scholarship is necessarily better scholarship, but *Taking Sides* is too heavily comprised of older essays. Almost half the articles in the volume were written between 1955 and 1978. I was also struck by the book's minimal coverage on women; only one chapter addresses the subject at all. Why not include at least several others—such as how the 1960s counterculture movement discriminated against women in leadership positions, or maybe the role of women in the progressive movement and prohibition?

To be sure, *Taking Sides* remains a solid supplemental reader for a survey course, and one that I could recommend quite easily, with a few reservations. Eight editions later, it still works well.

The University of Louisiana at Monroe

Gordon E. Harvey