

Michael W. Homel. *Unlocking City Hall: Exploring the History of Local Government and Politics.* Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Co., 2001. Pp. 182. Paper, \$18.50; ISBN 0-89464-987-6.

About the time I received this book for review, I received a note from a graduating history major who had written her senior thesis on the short life (1978–2000) of a local grassroots organization, the Danbury Preservation Trust. The purpose of the student's letter was to thank me for suggesting the topic because her research on the efforts to save "the old, dusty buildings" that provided the physical backdrop to her life had made the study of history exciting and meaningful. This young historian without realizing it strongly endorsed the rationale for the Exploring Community History series of which this slim volume is the third and most recent publication.

More than twenty years ago David Kyvig and Myron Marty, the editors of Exploring Community History, provided the basic field guide (as well as a felicitous descriptive label) for the enterprise of researching localized history in their book *Nearby History: Exploring the Past Around You* (American Association for State and Local History, 1982). Since then the two men have been persistent in recruiting scholars with expertise on specific aspects of the field and resourceful in finding ways to get their valuable knowledge into print. All teachers who have the opportunity to guide student research projects should be grateful that Kyvig and Marty persuaded Michael Homel, an historian at Eastern Michigan University and a former Mayor of Ypsilanti, Michigan, to prepare this clear, sensible primer to probe the past of local government and politics.

The book attempts many things in a few pages. Information on the organization and duties of local government orients the reader. The author provides a concise description of the type of sources, both primary and secondary, that might be encountered in doing research at this level. Scattered throughout the 161 pages of text are capsule summaries of published work by professional historians that illustrate various approaches to presenting the political experience of towns and cities. Local elections, often dramatic and blessed with a full public record, merit a full chapter in this manual.

However, the strength of the book is that it brims with suggestions of possible subjects for research that are offered not in perfunctory lists but amplified with thoughtful questions that a student might ask about each of them. It is possible in a short review to mention only a few examples of this technique. One bit of advice that would engage my student mentioned above is to look critically at local government buildings (city hall, the library, the police station) or public monuments (plazas, statues, parks). Finding out when they were built, why they were built, whether the construction was accompanied by conflict about design or location, and whether the use or appearance of the structure changed over time would shed light on the values of the community. Other beginning researchers might be interested in documenting the history of local government services such as police and fire protection; road building, maintenance, and cleaning; or parks and playgrounds. Homel urges students to think about the history of

a universal and seemingly mundane municipal responsibility such as supplying water as a window into the local power structure. He suggests asking the following questions: Who made the basic decisions about the water system: Politicians? Private companies? Technicians? Was the supply and cost equitable in all parts of the community? Did any disagreements about water quality, such as the fluoride controversy of the 1950s and 60s, take place? This enlightened version of "tell and show" forms the backbone of this modest book and enables it to fulfill its function of inspiring and guiding fledgling researchers.

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Patrick Manning. *Navigating World History: Historians Create a Global Past.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. Pp. xiii, 425. Cloth, \$75.00; ISBN 1-4039-61174. Paper, \$26.95; ISBN 1-4039-6119-0.

Most new history teachers are prepared to teach an upper-level class in their field of research, but are most likely to be asked to do the opposite—to teach a survey of Western Civ or even more startling World Civilization. As a new colleague said in tones of whispered panic, "That's *everywhere*, all the time." Compounding the problem is the institutional disconnect in which surveys of World History are popular, but only a handful of graduate programs in the world turn out professors specifically trained to approach history with a broad, comparative view. Patrick Manning, who has been in the vanguard of this developing field for twenty-five years, now offers a handbook that, although not likely to reduce my colleague's panic, gives a roadmap of where World History came from, the myriad directions it is going, and how to educate yourself for the classroom application of a global view.

From the early writings of Han court historian Sima Qian and the Abbasid chronicler Al-Tabari to the synthesis works of H.G. Wells and Oswald Spengler, Manning tracks the move towards viewing history beyond national borders, area studies, and single groups. Manning gives the reader the classics, including Lewis Mumford's *History of Technology*, Fernand Braudel and Henri Pirenne, Alfred Crosby's work on the Columbian Exchange and the 1918 Flu, and Karl Jasper's *Axial Age*, before demonstrating how this new view has affected public memory through changes to the celebration of the 400th anniversary of Columbus's voyages and the journeys of Lewis and Clark. Tantalizing new research techniques, such as DNA analysis, satellite photos, and the cracking of previously unknown languages are discussed as new avenues for World History. Manning offers examples of the variety of World History being practiced—the comparative economies of Han China and the Roman Empire, gender studies of women as agents of the British Empire, diaspora work on Chinese laborers, biographies of travelers and explorers, and ecological studies of domestication and land use.