



Mass Politics and the Revolutions of 1848. History Courseware Consortium,

Reviewed by Susan Mitchell Sommers

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Mass Politics and the Revolutions of 1848 by Professor J. Breuilly is a CD-ROM that leads the reader through the process of the European revolutions of 1848-49, from the rise of popular politics and buildup of tensions in the 1830s and 40s, through the aftermath of the revolutionary events and their subsequent interpretation. Each section consists of an introduction with a brief description of the topic, and a series of readings, primary documents, images, maps and secondary essays designed to enhance understanding and provoke discussion (based on questions provided). All sections focus on either the participants in popular political actions or their perception and treatment by the governments they criticized. Despite rapid changes that have brought technology into the classroom in astonishing ways, we are still in our pedagogical infancy when it comes to smoothly integrating new media into our teaching. We are also still at the experimental stage when it comes to designing applications that both suit our academic needs and live up to the promises offered by technology. One real dilemma is how to get both technological expertise and scholarship together. Media consultants rarely have either the classroom experience or depth of knowledge in the subject needed to provide teaching professionals with what we really require. Alas, few of us, as scholars and teachers, are sufficiently versed in the intricacies of hardware and software and programming to do a competent job ourselves. Until these two weak-

nesses are reconciled and compensated for, the result of many efforts, like the one at hand, will remain disappointing. The work is not without merit. It appears to be a natural outgrowth of teaching, and consequently Breuilly is selective in what is included and how it is arranged. Breuilly demonstrates a command of primary sources, and a practiced eye in matching them to discussion topics. The product also benefits from the opportunity to customize it, allowing professors to add their own material to the CD once they have purchased it for use. However, the CD, produced by the History Courseware Consortium, remains essentially an amateur foray into high tech. Most of what can be criticized about this brave attempt is technical, or even cosmetic. These are nonetheless important issues. Our students, and particularly the undergraduate audience for which this disc is presumably intended, are accustomed to enticing visual presentations and lots of skillfully used graphics. *Mass Politics* has neither. Beginning with the dizzying background and fuzzy image on the title page, and proceeding through the indices, maps, graphics and text, the presentation is monotonous. Images are not integrated with the text, even when it would be most advantageous. Many maps lack keys, and even the most attractive one is in German, leaving an anglophone audience no clue as to the meaning of the nice little red flags. The few pictures are mostly black and white newspaper sketches or fairly generic engravings, neither of

which offer much substantive information. Even with copyright restrictions, surely more and better are available? <p> Other concerns focus on content. There seems to be an overemphasis on Britain, to the disadvantage of the rest of Europe. While Britain is an interesting case, enduring much unrest but avoiding outright revolution, does it deserve to dominate discussion? Throughout, the sparsity of text is also a concern. Background information is brief and heavily analytical. Breuilly assumes that the student will have already acquired most of the facts elsewhere. Secondary sources by recent scholars are more helpful, but lack sufficient biographical information to allow the reader to judge the reliability of the essays. These expert essays also seem a bit too specialized for the non-major undergraduates who populate our classrooms. This leads to a question that kept occurring as I read--who is the intended audience? How is this product to be used? Too narrowly focused and analytical to be suited to most undergraduate surveys, the CD is too general for graduate work. <p> Ultimately, Breuilly's work is probably a very useful tool for enriching the course out of which it appears to have grown. As such, it is something that many instructors would be satisfied as having produced for their own use, but it really isn't ready for the market yet. My test for technology in the classroom is a practical one. Is this significantly better than a handful of photocopies and some slides? Not yet; but I look forward to later versions that have the glitches worked out. Glitches which, I must add, seem to be as much the result of that endemic divide between technology experts and teachers, as they are the fault of either party.

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