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Frederick M. Binder, David M. Reimers. *The Way We Lived: Essays and Documents In American Social History.* New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000. ix + 309 pp. $33.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-395-95960-2; $33.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-395-95961-9.

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Studying Significant Issues in America's Social History

The stated premise for *The Way We Lived* is the editors' conviction that "modern scholars' growing attention to social history is in part a recognition that knowledge of the experiences, values, and attitudes of ... people is crucial to gaining an understanding of our past" (ix). As indicated in their preface, "the everyday lives of ... people," "people from all walks of life" (ix), need to be the focus of these studies. And it is to that task that Professors Frederick M. Binder and David M. Reimers address themselves in this, the fourth edition of their two volume reader appropriately subtitled "Essays and Documents in American Social History." Most assuredly, they provide materials which afford the student a different way to study the "momentous events" of history as defined by Binder and Reimers as well as a different way of interpreting those events. The essays and documents which comprise this work are, as intended by the editors, "interesting and enlightening" as well as highly provocative at times.

Certainly one of the strengths of this work is the simple and straightforward structure of the two volumes. Each is divided into two parts as follows: Volume I, Part I, Colonial Society, 1492-1783; Part II, Social life in a New Nation, 1784-1877; Volume II, Part I, The Emergence of an Urban Industrial Society, 1865-1920; Part II, Modern American Society, 1920-Present. While I personally believe the divisions to be oversimplified, especially in Part II in each volume, they do work well to achieve the editors' purposes and establish workable frames of reference. Each Part is comprised of seven to nine chapters. Each chapter includes an interpretive essay relevant to the issue and written by highly qualified and widely respected historians. These essays capsulize "episodes" which were "significant in the shaping of our society" (ix). Several documents from the time period or illustrative of the issue complete each chapter. As the editors note, these documents are "examples of the kinds of source materials used by social historians in their research" (ix). Each of the documents is appropriately identified and cited. However, the citations are located at the end of each in fine print rather than in the beginning where general survey students are more apt to note them. In each chapter the editors provide guidelines for the materials contained in the section. It is here that they offer introductory thoughts on the subject or event as well as introduction to the featured essay and questions for thought which might result from reading it. There are also similar overviews and questions provided for each document in the chapter. Each of the two Parts in each volume also includes "Suggestions for Further Reading" which provide a brief bibliographic essay on the issues raised in that specific Part. While these suggestions are most reputable and valid resources, I had expected that this section would also have provided reference materials to events and issues not included in the two volumes yet equally significant in the shaping of the United States and its people, e.g. the creation of the Federal Constitution, the development of the market economy, the post Civil War rise of big business, the Progressive Era, the Cold War. Even though these subjects might not appear to fall in the category of social history, the social history of the United States was wrought in and around these events and, in many ways, influenced by them. They along with others are, for the most part, not included by the editors.

At this point I believe it is necessary to address a rather significant question: Why use this reader? Its narrow focus and limited intent preclude its consideration as a substitute for the traditional survey text. I do not believe, however, that that was the intent of the editors. As an adjunct to a traditional text it serves an admirable albeit narrow purpose–to examine issues in social history. As a general supplementary reader its limitations are evident in the title. And there are numerous general read-

ers available, such as Bailey and Kennedy's *The American Spirit* and Shi and Mayer's *For The Record*, which would serve admirably. Jim McClellan's *Changing Interpretations of America's Past* is another comprehensive, well structured, and Web connected resource. Yet, the merit of the Binder and Reimers work cannot be lightly dismissed. Its pages do contain some exceptionally fine essays as well as some truly fascinating primary source materials which can be effectively used to engage students in ways which not even the finest written survey text can do. Some of the documents (and several of the essays) are almost "video graphic" in their presentation and, as such, are quite capable of catching the attention of the increasingly visually oriented students we encounter in our classrooms. For example, Thomas Dublin's account of the working women in the early Lowell Mills and Drew Gilpin Faust's description of life on the antebellum plantation in the first volume are excellent presentations. Volume II contains an essay by Keith Weldon Medley that gives life to a man rarely examined in American history, Homer Plessy of Plessy vs. Ferguson fame. While one might quarrel with Robert Caro's overall judgment of Lyndon Baines Johnson, one must regard the essay on the Texas Hill Country as a very poignant piece. And there are documents equally illustrative of other issues found here, such as those which describe life in colonial Virginia and Puritan Massachusetts, the movement West in the 1840s, the working immigrants who lived and worked in tenements and others who worked in the "coal region," and the experiences of many who fought bigotry in its manifold forms during World War I as well in the greater part of the twentieth century.

One of the strengths of this reader lies in the keen research done by the editors, which is demonstrated in the frequent correlation between the essay and the documents that follow. Often in reading the essay one is referred to or a conclusion is reached by drawing upon primary source materials that one then is able to find in the chapter. Not only does this provide enhanced credibility to the point of view maintained by the author(s) of the essay, but it affords the student an opportunity to see how historians "craft" their positions by use of primary sources. This also permits examination of the record as well as an opportunity for the enterprising teacher to challenge the record and the interpretation with her or his students. While frequently weighted to one side, many of the these chapters do provide another point of view or at least a challenging document. As an example, the presentation of President Andrew Jackson's defense of Native American removal is set against the painful discussion of the "Trail of Tears" and President George Bush's quarrel with Roe v. Wade is set within the discussion of the Revival of Feminism. For me, this does not occur often enough yet it is enough, at least, to acknowledge the possibility of differing interpretations or the complexity and conflict in the record. I have used Meirion and Susie Harries's *Last Days of Innocence* in classes yet I have also been able to discuss the successes of the Wilson Administration in mounting the mobilization effort, harrowing though even Wilson himself knew those experiences would be. I have long regarded history as celebration and critique. Reading Binder and Reimers, I was frequently in search of celebration yet very much aware of critique.

Another admirable quality of the work of the editors is their own use as well as the use by the selected essayists of what I would call bridges to the present. Others might use the term relevance. By whatever description, there is an awareness that students and other Americans today might see certain phenomena as "utterly foreign" and an effort is clearly made to provide meaningful comparisons and contrasts.

The essays used are drawn from a variety of sources and scholars. Some are clearly "stand alone" pieces of writing; others rise from (and require) integrated works readily available to any student who wishes to examine them. Pauline Maier's description of Boston and New York in the eighteenth century and Margaret Hope Bacon's examination of Lucretia Mott being examples of the former; the Harries' piece mentioned earlier and William O'Neill's discussion of World War II being examples of the latter. They are all eminently readable, whether one agrees with the overview or not. Where necessary statistical data is presented in clear form. The documents selected for inclusion range from the overly familiar letters of Abigail Adams and Malvina Reynolds's "Little Boxes" to the unique experiences of Harriet Hanson Robinson in *Loom and Spindle* (1898), Walt Whitman's "Recollections of War 1875," and Ella Baker and Marvel Cooke's graphic description of the Bronx Slave Market in 1935. Certainly classics such as John Winthrop's "Citty upon a Hill," Edwards's "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," DuBois's "Call for Equality," and the Port Huron Statement are included.

Teachers are best advised to use these volumes selectively and as materials integrated within the context of the survey course as well as with reference to a standard text or additional supporting materials. The average survey student may well lack the frames of reference with which to place these in proper context and they will not survive as stand alone materials. However, with appro-

priate introductory and/or background information provided in some format (lecture, reading, visual), the chapters will serve as stimuli for discussion and thesis development. Conversely, it may be necessary and/or desirable to use them as introductions to a more fully developed issue which can be examined in any of the formats suggested. To cite an example, the chapters on "Conflicting Cultural Values in Early America" and "Husbands and Wives, Parents and Children in Puritan Society" open the doors to discussion of the growth and development of the Northern/Southern dichotomy which will provide a framework for the Civil War. Yet, all the thirteen original colonies need to be presented as an integral part of this discussion. These selections found in Binder and Reimers's work are interesting and engaging "trees" but we have an obligation to describe and to discuss the "forest." These individual "trees" will certainly engage many students including those often disinclined to "like" history. It is the obligation of the teacher to use these as a means to an end, not an end in themselves. Suffice it say, Abigail Adams may have offered some valid advice to John yet it must be noted that John and Thomas and Ben remained deaf to this advice yet still managed to bring about a rather successful break with the "mother country."

There are manifold options for the actual use of these materials. They may be simply read by students with the instruction to examine the questions posed by the editors and to provide formal or informal written responses to the questions. Or, the individual documents may be examined with instruction to react or respond to them as valid primary sources using internal and external criteria for judgement. Or, the essay may be assigned with the obligation to seek additional source validation for its conclusions as well as comparison of new sources with those already presented by Binder and Reimers. Even the use of the Web should not be discounted as an adjunct to the use of these volumes which examine "momentous events." These are admittedly general suggestions. Closer reading of these works may suggest other more creative methods for their use.

One also must recognize that several issues resurface in the Binder and Reimers work and present the opportunity to "string" the chapters together. As a matter of fact one of the weaknesses of the work is its periodic reintroduction of issues and individuals. Yet it remains without any substantive reference to the Revolution (George Hewes notwithstanding), to the Federal Period, to Lewis and Clark, to the development of American political parties (which served as major social institutions in the nineteenth century), to Populist and Progressive reform, or to the Cold War and its impact at home, to name a few. However, I believe that the individual professor will need to examine her or his philosophies and purposes, the goals and objectives of the survey course itself, and the academic character of the students prior to making a choice of these volumes and implementing that choice. What Binder and Reimers have determined to do, they have done well. Whether that is the direction or one of the directions that an individual teacher wishes to travel with her or his students is a choice one must make based upon personal and philosophical considerations.

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