

# The Good Book Guide

EUROPE 1783-1914 by William Simpson and Martin Jones. Routledge, 2000. ix + 388 pp. Index. £15.99 pbk.

The past and present Heads of History at Cheltenham College have produced an A-Level textbook which is a model of its kind, covering European history from the *ancien régime* to the First World War.

Each chapter (most of which are arranged to cover states and international relations in chronological chunks, though a few are thematic) begins with a list of key dates. Section A then gives a detailed narrative interspersed with suggestions for further reading, Section B contains a selection of source extracts, with questions following. The pattern is sensible and works well, despite some inevitable repetition.

Chapters vary in length and quality, those on great power relationships being generally less detailed than others. There are some errors, both factual and typographical. But the pluses greatly outnumber the criticisms. The narrative text is fluent and easy to read. Past and current historical controversies are highlighted. The suggestions for further reading are up to date and accessible. Illustrations and maps are clear though not generally out of the ordinary. Above all, the questions based on sources are infinitely superior to those in most A-Level texts, and should stimulate lively class discussion.

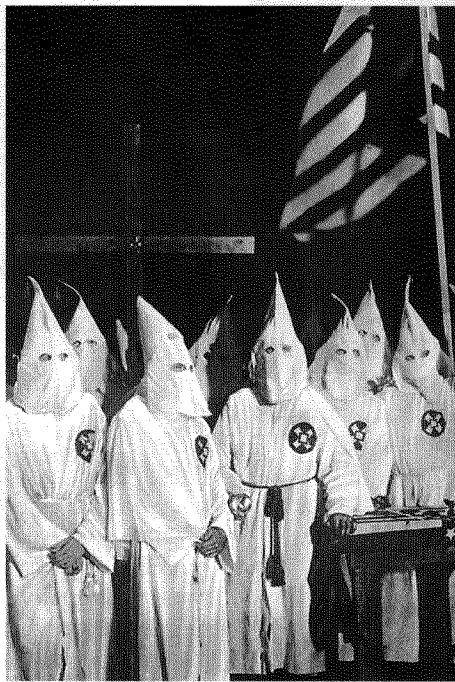
As a narrative source and launching pad for wider reading and thinking, this book could hardly be bettered. It deserves to become the best friend of many A Level Modern History students.

John Garland

UNITED STATES 1776-1992 by Derrick Murphy, Kathryn Cooper and Mark Waldron. Collins Educational - Flagship History series, 2001. 432 pp. Index. £19.99 pbk.

This weighty and, for some, intimidating tome, at first glance, falls between several stools. It appears to be an ideal class text and yet it lacks some data expected from a comprehensive book, such as details of USA population growth. Further, covering over 200 years, it inevitably contains much that will be irrelevant to the studied module and yet this redundancy must be paid for in the purchase price.

However, this latest addition to the Collins Flagship series does have one very great strength: it manages to pick its way through the seemingly ever more complicated demands of A-Level History. It strikes a balance, very successfully, between depth and analysis and, more



*A Ku Klux Klan meeting in 1923* impressively, juggles the need for pupils to focus on interpretation without resorting to historiography.

The authors can thus be congratulated for anticipating the confusion felt in both classes and departments when the post-exam mark reviews were received last September. Thus, while the need for such an 'exam specification' book may be a cause for regret, there can be no doubt that the authors have identified, and filled, a niche in the market.

Jeremy Farrell

COMMUNIST RUSSIA UNDER LENIN AND STALIN by Chris Corin and Terry Fiehn. John Murray - SHP Advanced History Core Texts, 2002. vi + 330 pp. Index. £13.99 pbk.

The Schools History Project's text on a favoured topic is a comprehensive workbook that constantly engages pupil readers with challenging questions and exercises and contains an outstanding collection of sources on the period, both pictorial and textual.

The thoroughness and depth of the content is beyond question but, seeking to provide content for most needs, the arrangement is far from straightforward and more complicated than for most AS and A2 texts. Teachers will need to decide how to navigate a way through any chapter in advance. As an illustration, most chapters have the following: focus route, talking points, learning trouble spots, introductory overview summary, summary key points,

two types of ongoing glossary as boxed items in the wide margins as well as charts, diagrams and activities. The latter three are exceptionally good. Not surprisingly, the page that must not be missed by a teacher is the introductory 'Using this book'.

Teachers in sympathy with the SHP ethos will, of course, welcome this book while others, adjusting to the approach, could find this text a considerable aid to the engagement and motivation of pupils of all abilities. It will be a very confident, or staid, teacher who does not give this SHP text a careful purchase review.

Tom Wells

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE SOVIET EMPIRE by Raymond Pearson. Palgrave - Studies in Contemporary History series, Second edn 2002. xxiv + 211 pp. Index. £14.99 pbk.

This second edition is published barely six years after the book first came out, but what a lot has happened in that time. The Soviet Union no longer exists, and rarely figures prominently in the news coverage we see. Yet archives have opened, and revisionist historians are having a field day looking at Lenin, Stalin and others. Whether there is quite enough 'distance' yet for us to re-assess the Cold War is another question.

Content begins with a useful detailed chronology of the Cold War, then each chapter focuses on a turning point in the development, and ending of, the Cold War - Yalta 1945, Belgrade 1948, Budapest 1956, Prague 1968, Gdansk 1980, Berlin 1989 and Moscow 1991. Each set of events is carefully placed in context, and pulled together with a thoughtful concluding chapter on 'The Last Empire'.

The text is clearly aimed at undergraduates, but should be accessible to good Year 13 students. Ironically, the introductory chapter covering the development of the Soviet Union and Yalta is perhaps the hardest-going of all, but is worth persevering with. The final chapters, on the collapse of the 'Outer Empire' in Eastern Europe, and the 'Inner Empire' of the Soviet Union are particularly good, offering a penetrating analysis of events and causes. Historians' views, and areas of debate, are clearly indicated and explored.

I suspect this will make a good teachers' book, or volume for the History Library, rather than a class text, but the author is to be commended on making relatively accessible some complex ideas and arguments about Soviet, or should it be, Russia's Empire in the second half of the twentieth century.

Alf Wilkinson