

The Good Book Guide

LIBERALISM AND CONSERVATISM, 1846-1905 by David Paterson. Heinemann - Advanced History series, 2001, iv + 268 pp. Index. £9.99 pbk

This book, ostensibly about the two dominant political philosophies in late nineteenth-century Britain, amounts almost to an outline history of that period. Moreover, its structuring around the different AS and A2 exam formats makes it a thoroughly worthwhile investment for cash-strapped Heads of History.

The book follows the series' format with Section 1, 'Narrative and Explanation', for the AS year, the slightly shorter 'Analysis and Interpretation' is intended for A2. The author avoids repetition in the two sections. The AS section mixes narrative with intelligent comment and includes chapter summaries and questions. In the A2 section, many secondary sources are cited and readers encouraged to consider different interpretations. Throughout the book, as is the series' style, marginal notes on Key Terms, Persons, Concepts and so on are included. There is advice on tackling questions in the style of the exam boards.

The writer has read widely and knows what modern Sixth Form historians need. He is particularly good on the period between the fall of Peel and the emergence of more organised parties in the 1870s. Towards the end of the book there is some evidence of hurry. Also, the author infuriatingly uses the term 'Unionist' to describe both the Liberal Unionists after 1886 and the Conservative-dominated alliance of post-1895; and the book's illustrations are run-of-the-mill. These are minor blemishes. This is an excellent study, which will quickly become an invaluable companion for those students fortunate enough to be issued with it.

John Garland

LENIN AND REVOLUTIONARY RUSSIA by David Lee. Routledge - Question and Analysis in History series, 2003. xv + 153 pp. Index. £7.99 pbk.

Students are spoilt for choice on the Russian Revolution. Why should they opt for Lee's new book? On the positive side, it is strong on historiography and contains some interesting sources, and its worked answers are highly competent. As an exam primer, it has virtues. Yet its defects are painfully apparent.

The book is visually unattractive. The layout of the Chronology, for instance, seems almost designed to discourage readers from consulting it. The first chapter - on the nature of history - will bemuse those fresh from GCSE,

while the 'Overview' presented in the second is too brief for an understanding of what is being 'explained' and yet too detailed to help us grasp the basics. Readers really require a decent existing knowledge of the topic to be able to follow it - and certainly they require more information than Lee provides to answer the questions that close this chapter. The book's language level will prove demanding for many sixth-formers. But my real grouse is simply that the book is dull. There is little here which will engross, or even interest, students. As a result, reading it is a chore. I can imagine teachers buying a copy for themselves while ordering a set of better texts for the class.

Robert Pearce

THE ORIGINS OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR by Victor Rothwell. Manchester UP, 2001. vi + 211 pp. Index £13.99 pbk

This book spans the peace settlements after 1918 to the war in the Far East, 1941. This is covered in a scholarly and refreshingly accessible fashion. Rothwell gives perspective on the *debate* over the origins of the Second World War, recognises the significance of A.J.P. Taylor's classic work of the 1960s but takes the reader far beyond to summarise, eloquently, much recent debate. Substantial chapter bibliographies with critical, expert comment provide ample opportunity for further reading or research.

The author is particularly good at providing reminders about the importance of seeing countries' interests other than those of only Germany as reasons for the outbreak of war in 1939 and 1941. This is framed around the exploration of the foreign policies of France, Britain and the USA as well as Germany. Rothwell also reminds readers of the significance of 1939 and 1941; the first a European conflict but, by 1942, this had developed into a world conflagration. Thus, Germany's conflict with the USSR and Japan's with America is considered. A chronological framework keeps the reader aware of the links between developments. Relative military and economic strengths are weighed, the failure of the League to work through the peace settlement after 1920, the question of Appeasement and Britain's imperial role are also considered.

This book fits well with the A2 specifications offered by the exam boards. Its chapter organisation lends itself to country by country or issue by issue analysis which will mean it should find a central place in any teacher's (and able student's) library of resources. The very effective introduction provides a

sure overview of the main arguments.

Mark Allchorn

JFK AND LBJ by Derrick Murphy. FDR by Kathryn Cooper. Both Collins - Flagship Historymakers series, 2004. 64 pp each. Index. £5.99 pbk each

This series seems an excellent idea: a timeline and a short chronological biography, followed by sections that focus on three key issues about the individual. Then exam-style questions, to test students' understanding. It is very minimalist and very exam focused.

Each book begins with a brief section 'Why do Historians Differ?' to set the scene for the 'interpretations' work. To a certain extent it does, but to say that 'a Marxist historian looking at an historical issue may take a completely different viewpoint to a non-Marxist historian' doesn't add much to understanding. The introduction states 'it is important, therefore, for students to understand why historians differ in their views ...'. These texts show *how* historians' views differ, without really exploring the *why*, or giving students enough information to work it out for themselves.

FDR focuses on the three key issues of 'New Deal: success or failure'; 'Was FDR's foreign policy isolationist or interventionist?' and 'Was FDR the first imperial president?' - all critical to understanding his time in office. The structure leads to some repetition, although taken as individual sections the text is a perceptive introduction and to the different ways each topic has been viewed by historians, but that is all. Students would need to look elsewhere to be able to fully understand these debates.

JFK and LBJ, also, focuses on three key issues. The text is particularly good at putting events into context and comparing achievements - in 'domestic policies'; in 'black civil rights'; and in 'involving the USA in Vietnam'. Continuities and changes are effectively picked out by this approach, as is the way Johnson used Kennedy's death to push through Kennedy's - and Johnson's own - agenda; but the brevity of the text, 64 small pages, means students gain only a brief introduction to complex topics and need to go elsewhere for the detail.

Considerable effort has been put into making the texts accessible. Language, structure, and so on, are appropriate for the target audience, and a wide range of historians is used by the authors to tell students the differing views. Even so, these books don't really do justice to such important topics.

Alf Wilkinson