

The Good Book Guide

THE UNITED STATES 1763-2001 by John Spiller, Tim Clancey, Stephen Young and Simon Mosley. Routledge - Spotlight History series, 2005. xvi + 330 pp, Index. £19.99 pbk.

This book is the latest in the Spotlight History series from Routledge. Content is carefully arranged to meet the needs of any AS and A2 'America' specification, from the struggle for the constitution to domestic and foreign policy from the 1960s to 2001.

Each chapter begins with a simple one-page overview, and a detailed chronology to put content into context, followed by text clearly divided by sub-headings to aid note-taking. Areas of debate and discussion within each topic are clearly highlighted, and there are suggestions for further reading. Most of each chapter is then taken up with worked essay and source questions, from all three exam boards, with further practice questions for students to do alone. The book concludes with an excellent glossary, and useful brief biographies of the main characters encountered in the text.

If your specification covers several USA topics then you might consider this as a basic textbook. It does, however, seem to fall between two stools; to me, as a textbook, it does not contain enough detail to fully explore the topics - interested students will clearly want more; and as an exam guide, while containing plenty of excellent examples of essays and source questions, it carries little explanation as to why these are good.

Alf Wilkinson

GERMANY SINCE 1815 by David Williamson. Palgrave, 2005. xxiv + 482 pp. Index. £18.99 pbk.

Without reference to topic breakdowns from Exam Boards hearsay indicates that there is some drift away from the strong concentration on German History options that was a marked feature when the new AS/A Levels were introduced in 2000. That choice was made by long-suffering teachers as they adjusted to the new specifications. Notwithstanding some drift, German History almost certainly remains the most popular Modern History exam topic. David Williamson, a widely read author of texts on German History with, until recently, classroom experience, has written a book that covers all German History options since Napoleon. Before comment on the book by way of a snapshot, here are the stats. The volume has 381 pages of text, 42 pages for 87



The Capitol, seat of US government after 1800

documents that are collected at the end of the text but referred to by marginal notes, nine maps, 39 illustrations and 20 pages for notes, glossary, bibliography and a very full, 11 page index.

With the exception of the final three-page assessment, each chapter starts with a timeline, introduction and list of key issues before the start of the well sub-headed text. Marginal notes or boxed passages that provide expanded descriptions of terms, events or issues, accompany the text without interfering with the flow of the narrative.

This is neither a text for a blasé post-GCSE hang along nor a book with simple, ready made, answers for a tick-box minded student. It is an accessible narrative that fosters further analysis by readers and opens the opportunity to topic mastery and a high grade. Teachers who can enjoy teaching ambitious students on course for all but the lower two grades should give the title careful consideration.

Gilbert Pleuger

SOCIALISM OR YOUR MONEY BACK. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, 2004. 304 pp. Index. ISBN 0 9544733 1 0. £9.95 pbk.

Many readers will have enjoyed the experience of the unexpected discovery of an ice-cream van or a café during a hot summer walk. This was the sentiment of this writer when he received this title for review, a collection of 70 well-written, informed and thought-provoking articles from the *Socialist Standard* from the years 1904-2004. Written at the time of the events on which they comment the republished articles constitute 'primary evidence' on many of the major events

and issues over the last 100 years. As an indication of their range the essays include 'Fake Labour Government [1924]: the puppet show' in the area of domestic politics; 'How can Hitlerism be Destroyed?' and 'Divide and Rule in India' in the area of foreign policy; 'The General Strike Fiasco: its causes and effects' in the area of labour politics; 'Lord Keynes - Economist of Capitalism in Decline' in the area of economics and, in the area of social and cultural history, 'The Era of Free Love: some capitalist hypocracies exposed'.

Contemporary classroom History teaching requires the use of documents: here is a collection that provides distinctive socialist viewpoints from the last 100 years while simultaneously providing interesting introductions to socialist principles. The modestly-priced volume will be a good addition to department resources.

Tom Wells

MUSSOLINI by Peter Neville. Routledge - Historical Biographies series, 2004. xiv + 256 pp. Index. £10.99 pbk.

Like him or loathe him, Mussolini was one of the most influential men of the twentieth century. Both as the 'founder' of Fascism and the leader of Italy he is worth serious consideration. This new biography in the Routledge series, by Peter Neville, goes beyond the simplistic view of him as a comic character to carefully consider Mussolini as a political leader and player in world politics in the 1930s and 1940s.

Starting with his family and youth, the influences that went to make up the mind-set of Mussolini are carefully analysed, and his actions always placed in a thorough political context. The latest research is used to present all sides of the story, and a surprisingly sympathetic portrait emerges. The contradictory pressures on Mussolini - the elites, Church, royalty as well as the Fascist movement - that limited his scope for being a truly revolutionary leader - are all explored and explained.

The book is extremely readable, and should be accessible to Sixth Form students. Chapters are divided into pertinent sub-sections to aid note-taking. The focus is firmly on Mussolini and his actions, and the contradictions in his personal make-up as much as the limitations on his freedom of action. Especially useful is the section on post 1943, and the legacy he left behind. Teachers looking for an update on the man and his times will find this book invaluable.

Alf Wilkinson