

HISTORY FOR EVERYONE*

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"Objectives in the General Education Course"

By Lowry P. Ware, Erskine College

"Sources for the General Education Course"

By Nancy P. Erickson, Erskine College

"Projects in the General Education Course"

By James P. Gettys, Erskine College

"Using the General Education Approach in the High School"

By Geraldine Price, Belton-Honea Path (South Carolina) High School

Erskine College, a small church-related liberal arts institution in South Carolina, has established a series of general education courses to provide "a foundation for students to advance into specialized study and a background for understanding the world in which they will be living and working." History courses in the general education series introduce students to methods of historical research and the use of original documents as well as providing practice in assessing conflicting historical interpretations.

Erskine experimented during the early 1970s with various formats for its history survey courses, finally deciding in 1976 to adopt a "problems" or topical approach in two courses in world history. Instrumental in suggesting such an approach was John

*Eds. Synopsis of session

Anthony Scott, author of Teaching for a Change (1972) who participated in a workshop at the college in 1976. Scott indicated that students in his classes at the Fieldston School in New York responded well to studying themes in history through novels chosen to show "what the major events of modern times meant in human terms."

The Erskine faculty in the fall of 1976 introduced History 111, a course organized around the theme of war and revolution in the modern world. In the spring of 1978 the faculty added a second course (History 112), dealing with developments in science and technology and the impact of these developments on human society. Both courses utilize novels, biographies and personal accounts to demonstrate to students that history "is made by ordinary people."

History 111 begins with a reading of Mikhail Sholokov's Nobel Prize-winning novel, And Quiet Flows the Don, followed by H.S. Bennett's Life on the English Manor. Students analyze similarities between the lifestyle of rural Russia in the early 1900s and Englishmen in the 1400s, then generally discuss the character and problems of pre-industrial societies today. Robert Goldston's The Russian Revolution is introduced next to provide a chronological description of factors encouraging revolutionary activities in the country after the turn of the century. Utilizing Sholokov's book, students evaluate how these factors affected the Don Cossack village and learn not only the methods of Marxist revolutionaries and the elements of Marxist theory, but why such theory is today appealing to underdeveloped countries. To compare Russian attitudes towards World War I with those of the Germans, students read Erich Maria Remarque's All Quiet on the Western Front (or see the film). Through such comparison they realize that despite political, social and economic differences separating the two societies, the war affected men on both sides the same way.

Following discussion of the Russian Revolutions of 1917, the class reads Goldston's Life and Death of Nazi Germany. Lectures provide background on the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century and the origins of racism in German thought and culture. Also assigned is Elie Wiesel's Night, showing the varied effects of concentration camp life on human personality. The last book utilized in the course is C.D. Bryan's Friendly Fire, a book which raises many questions about the nature and purpose of the war in Vietnam.

Though History 112 is organized around the theme of war and revolution, many opportunities emerge for discussing important historic events of the last several centuries. The absence of a text permits discussion to develop around areas of student interest. Lectures supplement books and films by maintaining continuity and sense of chronology. Readings for the course are highly interpretive, leading students to see the importance of learning when and why a work was written. And Quiet Flows the Don, for example, was written from a Marxist perspective, while Night resulted from Wiesel's experiences in a concentration camp. Exam questions test the student's understanding of these inter-

pretations; they might, for instance, be asked to write a Marxist interpretation of some non-Russian historical event to demonstrate whether they can indeed distinguish a Marxist view from some other interpretation of history.

Films are an integral part of History 111, and demonstrate technological developments in film-making as well as propaganda techniques. Through Sergei Eisenstein's Potemkin students see how art can be used to support a particular political and economic dogma. Students are asked to find in the film as many specific examples as possible of a Marxist perspective. A contrasting film is A Man Without a Country, made in 1917 to encourage American enlistment in World War I. While the film is technologically and artistically inferior to Potemkin, it reveals much about American society in 1917. A number of BBC documentaries on Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and the Cold War are utilized as well.

In the succeeding course (History 112), an attempt is made to describe "human cultural evolution from earliest societies to the present, showing man as discoverer with the tremendous capacity to create and destroy." The course is organized around Jacob Bronowski's Ascent of Man film series, with readings assigned relating to specific aspects of the course. C.W. Ceram's Gods, Graves and Scholars is assigned in conjunction with study of the origins of man and early cultures in Greece, Egypt, Babylonia and Latin America. Another assignment is Samuel Eliot Morison's Christopher Columbus, Mariner, which demonstrates the relationship between scientific and technological discoveries and general cultural advancement. Discussion provides opportunity to place exploration in the context of the Renaissance-Reformation period and to compare and contrast the difficulties of Columbus and others with those of modern space explorers.

A difficult task in a course with the scope of History 112 is to show how man's view of the universe's nature at a particular time has affected his view towards other cultural aspects. The scientific theories of men such as Newton, Darwin and Einstein have had enormous consequences in political, social and economic thought. Martin Gardiner's Relativity Explosion is assigned to help the student comprehend the theory of relativity and its impact upon other aspects of our thought and culture. A final assignment in the course is John Hersey's Hiroshima, through which students consider "man's responsibility for his own creative acts."

All sources used in History 111 and 112, whether books, films or lectures, present the student with several perspectives on specific issues. Nancy Erickson of Erskine comments that through the courses students learn that "historical investigation is filled with ethical questions and moral crises. The sources used illuminate such questions so that students can shape their own values and make their own judgments." In the courses, students "must consider whether a nation is, should be, or even can be bound by the same moral considerations as the individual." Students in history 111 and 112 must complete in each course a research paper, a map project and an oral history project. The research paper is based upon a "problems in history" book from which

students select a topic covered by three or more authors whose interpretations clash. Papers examining the various interpretations must be a least five pages in length, with footnotes and a bibliography. Another assignment is to locate some fifty place names on an appropriate map for each course. A last project requires the student to interview a member of his own family concerning historic events discussed in the course. Students may submit either a tape of their interview or a written account. Class discussions precipitated by oral history projects allow students to appreciate that someone who has lived through an event has a different perspective from that of a historian whose knowledge is derived from research in archives and manuscripts.

Erskine faculty members, in conjunction with faculty from Belton-Honea Path High School, have developed a program whereby high school students with an overall "B" average may receive credit at Erskine for a course in World Civilization. Courses are held at the high school, with periodic lectures presented by members of the Erskine faculty. Students read much the same material as in History 111, and are also responsible for a research paper, an oral history project, and a map study. At the end of the semester students receive four hours of credit from Erskine College.