

America: Past and Present

Review by Fawn Whittaker, BYU-Hawaii Campus

AMERICA: PAST AND PRESENT. Katherine Lancelot-Harrington. Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House, 1982-85. VOL. I, DISCOVERY. pp. 222, \$9.95. VOL. II, CHALLENGE. pp. 222, \$9.95. VOL. III, THE CONTINUING QUEST. pp. 251, \$11.95.

One semester three years ago, our high intermediate English Language Institute reading class was delighted to "discover" a text which led them through American culture from its very beginnings, and did so with real *substance*, none of the usual monotonous pattern of one paragraph of reading followed by four pages of exercises. On a five-point scale from very bad to very good, 33 of the 34 Pacific and Asian students in that semester rated *Discovery*, the first volume of *America: Past and Present*, either "good" (4) or "very good" (5). The two more recent volumes in this series have the same desirable qualities as the first volume differing principally only in increased length and sophistication of content and vocabulary usage as they progress through the sequence of significant American historical events.

Divided into twelve chapters, each volume fits very nicely into a twelve to thirteen-week semester, with time allotted for a midterm and a final review. Advantageous for review purposes is the spiraling effect of content in each separate text. No important historical information or figure within one chapter is left forgotten, but is somehow included in the vocabulary or analytical exercises in a later chapter of the *same* text. (The texts may well be used

separately without reference to the previous volume, if desired.)

Exercises are of a variety of types: comprehension multiple-choice (main idea, factual, comparison-contrast, cause-effect), character identification, putting events in correct order, true-false, information completion, "closest-in-meaning" multiple-choice vocabulary, matching synonym or antonym, fill-in-the blank with the correct word form, mini-cloze study, idiom study, etc. Added for writing and speaking purposes are sentence combination or revised sentence-formation exercises, composition topics, and questions for class discussion.

Not at all unduly imbalanced by a superfluity of tedious exercises as are some other ESL readers, Lancelot-Harrington's series offers much actual reading material, ranging in length from an average of six reading pages in volume I to nine in volume III. History lives both in a cheerful and in a true-to-fact manner at a level readily comprehensible to the intermediate and advanced ESL student. Along with the added realism of relevant photographs, maps, and charts, students and teachers find short well-selected actual writings or interviews by authors or otherwise historically significant figures following each chapter's longer background reading. In fact, these concluding "primary source" selections are usually the climax of a gradual shift from an overview of a new American historical period in each chapter to the outstanding life of a centralized figure in that period of history. Both the background and original source selections are enhanced with a

convenient list of new terms and definitions at the bottom of the pages. Finally, added at the end of each chapter are lists of pertinent museums, parks, or other attractions to visit which would heighten interest in each chapter's study.

There is, indeed, little found wanting in Lancelot-Harrington's new series. Included in each volume's appendix are a copy of *The Declaration of Independence*, *The Constitution of the United States*, and a list of every American president up to the present, which transforms the texts into handy references for any historically- or legally-minded ESL scholar. Nevertheless, for students unfamiliar with the states' geographical patterns and names, a worthy map of the

United States might be recommended, especially in volume I, since not until volume III is such a map with all fifty states and their names presented. In addition, the fact that the answer keys can be removed, if desired, without at the same time removing the list of American presidents on the reverse side of the first page of answers is an improvement in volume III above the other two volumes.

Overall, *America* is a series that most students would not only enjoy and learn a great deal from during a regular ESL study term, but also a series that they would want to keep on their personal bookshelves for reference during regular social science courses later in their university careers.