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Letters

Peterloo not Waterloo

Friday December 30, 2005

[The Guardian](#)

Max Hastings doubts that it is possible to teach British history in a way engages members of minority communities. (This is the country of Drake and Pepys, not Shaka Zulu, December 27) He quotes approvingly a Washington historian who told him that he often sees tears in the eyes of young Korean or Mexican Americans when he reads Lincoln's Gettysburg address to them. Surely that is because Lincoln words - "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal ... " - have real meaning to their lives. They have come to America to enjoy that liberty and experience that promised equality. How could they fail to be moved by such a powerful assertion of those ideals?

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Hastings wants the educational establishment to reconcile new Britons to the fact that our identity is wedded to Crecy

and Waterloo, Pepys and Newton. If we hope to explain to our newest citizens where the liberties which they enjoy come from, we should perhaps focus more on Naseby and Peterloo, Tom Paine and the Chartists. The knowledge that the British people have struggled for liberty and equality throughout their history may offer them something to identify with.

Billy Bragg

Bradstock, Dorset

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