

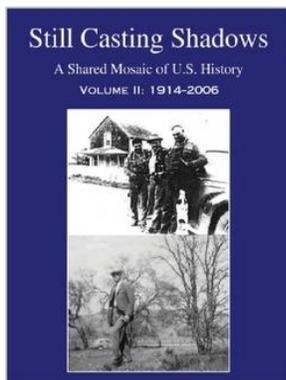


Faculty Review of Open eTextbooks

The [California Open Educational Resources Council](http://www.cool4ed.org) has designed and implemented a faculty review process of the free and open etextbooks showcased within the California Open Online Library for Education (www.cool4ed.org). Faculty from the California Community Colleges, the California State University, and the University of California were invited to review the selected free and open etextbooks using a rubric. Faculty received a stipend for their efforts and funding was provided by the State of California, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Textbook Name:

Still Casting Shadows: A Shared Mosaic of U.S. History Vol. II, 1914-2006



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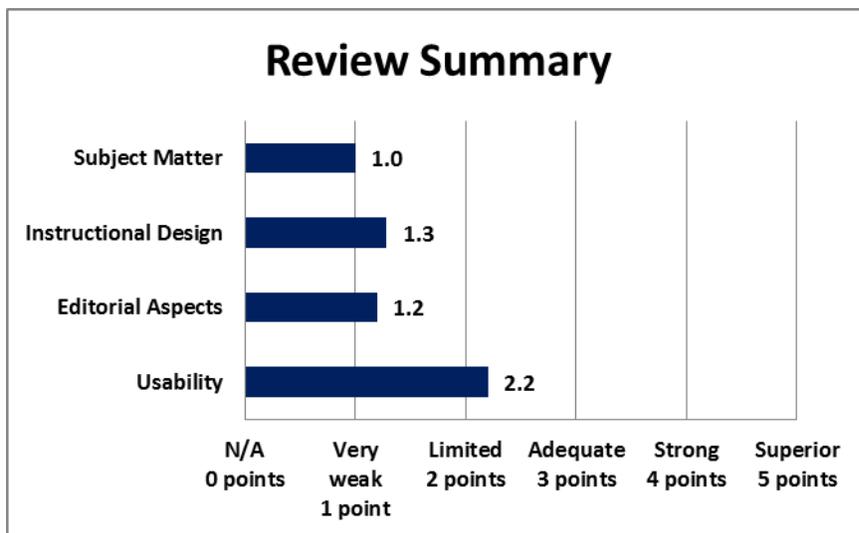
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Title/Position:
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Date Reviewed:
 December 2015

California OER Council eTextbook Evaluation Rubric

CA Course ID: [HIST 140](#)

Subject Matter (30 possible points)	N/A (0 pts)	Very Weak (1pt)	Limited (2 pts)	Adequate (3pts)	Strong (4 pts)	Superior (5 pts)
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Is the content accurate, error-free, and unbiased?		X				
Does the text adequately cover the designated course with a sufficient degree of depth and scope?		X				
Does the textbook use sufficient and relevant examples to present its subject matter?		X				
Does the textbook use a clear, consistent terminology to present its subject matter?		X				
Does the textbook reflect current knowledge of the subject matter?		X				
Does the textbook present its subject matter in a culturally sensitive manner? (e.g. Is the textbook free of offensive and insensitive examples? Does it include examples that are inclusive of a variety of races, ethnicities, and backgrounds?)		X				

Total Points: 6 out of 30

Please provide comments on any aspect of the subject matter of this textbook:

- This textbook tries to reimagine how to narrate the history of the U.S. Rather than organized by decades, each chapter focuses on a single year. Included in the chapters are (often very brief) discussions of events that happened in that year, along with descriptions of a few families whose lives are traced across the book. I believe that the families are the ancestors of the author, who meticulously traced the jobs held, marriages made and unmade, places lived, etc. of his relatives.
- The result is that each chapter reads as highly elliptical, with no real guidance given to the reader as to how all the different bits work together. In addition, while I applaud the author's desire to challenge inherited histories of the U.S., this text too often glosses over major historical events, spends little time on discussing the significance of events included, and provides a history that reads as at once idiosyncratic, glib, and (at moments) factually questionable.
- While I think that using the stories of particular families to illuminate the past could be a fascinating and productive way to illustrate broader historical trends, such is not the case here. With exceptions (for example, the discussion of a soldier's experience -- and death -- in the Vietnam War), many of these passages read as a list of things that happened without any real indication of how representative the experiences of the Shannons or the Kollenborns were of Americans more broadly. For example, the textbook continually notes when people get divorced or married but does not contextualize these events within a broader history of gender roles, divorce laws, marriage rates, etc. The author is attentive to the migrations of the family, but does not situate them within broader historical processes. Accordingly, it is not entirely clear what the reader is supposed to learn from these passages. They do not typically enrich our understanding of social life at the time, nor do they point to larger trends occurring concurrently.
- In addition, while no singular history can cover everything, the omissions in this textbook strike me as especially problematic. There is no discussion of labor history that I could discern. There is little to no discussion of women's history (the only reference to second-wave feminism is the Roe v. Wade decision). There is no meaningful discussion of the rise of post-war conservatism. There is the briefest of mentions of Reaganomics, and little to no discussion of Reagan era foreign policy (nothing on Gorbachev -- save a mention in a quotation from Reagan or discussion of Iran-Contra). The gay rights/liberation movement is absent from this history, and the discussion of Black Power is curt, uninformed, and dismissive. The author does not address the end of World War I and formation of League of Nations or the "red scare" of the 1920s; it pretty much ignores the Second New Deal and the Great Society.
- To put the choices into relief, this text provides extended sections on the OJ Simpson trial, but barely touches on Reagan's economic policies or his Cold War policies (no mention of the Reagan Doctrine or US policy in Central America during the 1980s), the Contract with America/Gingrich revolution, Don't Ask/Don't Tell, the Clinton impeachment hearings, or any of the other facets of late 20th century U.S. history that grapples with the ascent of conservatism into the mainstream of American politics.
- This textbook includes cultural history in its discussion, though frequently these passages read as so shallow as to be not very helpful. The author often tells the reader when important figures were born, or when they published important works, but frequently does not discuss their significance. Why is it useful

to know when *The Catcher in the Rye* was published if the text provides no discussion of what it was about or how it reflected a particular sensibility of the 1950s?

- I will discuss this in more detail below, but the textbook is also notable for its refusal to allow the reader to understand how and why people in the past thought the way they did, or what the rationales may have been for their actions. I do not know if we learn very much about Malcolm X's views on Black Nationalism and racial oppression by his being described as "extremely racist" (201). While it is no way controversial to see the segregationists of the Jim Crow era as on the wrong side of history, we learn nothing of why they opposed civil rights other than they were "pathetic bigots" (168).
- There are images included, primarily of Shannon's family members whose histories the book tells. Each chapter begins with a string of quotations (many of which are not obviously connected to the substance of the chapter), then followed by the list of topics to be covered in the chapter.

Instructional Design (35 possible points)	N/A (0 pts)	Very Weak (1pt)	Limited (2 pts)	Adequate (3pts)	Strong (4 pts)	Superior (5 pts)
Does the textbook present its subject materials at appropriate reading levels for undergrad use?		X				
Does the textbook reflect a consideration of different learning styles? (e.g. visual, textual?)		X				
Does the textbook present explicit learning outcomes aligned with the course and curriculum?		X				
Is a coherent organization of the textbook evident to the reader/student?		X				
Does the textbook reflect best practices in the instruction of the designated course?		X				
Does the textbook contain sufficient effective ancillary materials? (e.g. test banks, individual and/or group activities or exercises, pedagogical apparatus, etc.)		X				
Is the textbook searchable?				X		

Total Points: 9 out of 35

Please provide comments on any aspect of the instructional design of this textbook:

- While I applaud the creativity of this book, in my view it does not succeed in providing a viable alternative to a U.S. history textbook. It is very, very difficult to discern what the reader should be learning from each chapter. As mentioned above, each chapter reads as highly elliptical, with no overarching frame that stitches the different components together. I think, unfortunately, the book is a "mosaic" in the sense that it provides many pieces, yet the pieces never seem to form a whole.

Editorial Aspects (25 possible points)	N/A (0 pts)	Very Weak (1pt)	Limited (2 pts)	Adequate (3pts)	Strong (4 pts)	Superior (5 pts)
Is the language of the textbook free of grammatical, spelling, usage, and typographical errors?		X				
Is the textbook written in a clear, engaging style?		X				
Does the textbook adhere to effective principles of design? (e.g. are pages laid out and organized to be clear and visually engaging and effective? Are colors, font, and typography consistent and unified?)		X				
Does the textbook include conventional editorial features? (e.g. a table of contents, glossary, citations and further references)			X			
How effective are multimedia elements of the textbook? (e.g. graphics, animations, audio)		X				

Total Points: 6 out of 25

Please provide comments on any editorial aspect of this textbook.

- The author was clearly striving to write an engaging text, frequently borrowing techniques from novels (use of dialogue, descriptive language, and so on). However, I often found the tone incompatible with the kinds of texts I would assign in my courses. The attempts for wit or charm often did not work with me as a reader, and I often found the language in the text inappropriate, insulting, inaccurate, or overly glib.
- A few examples: [on the emergence of television in the 1950s] "The process of converting multitudes of

fiercely independent Americans into homogenized nincompoops seemingly unable, or at least unwilling, to think for themselves was well under way by 1951" (151).

- [On the impact of the Black Freedom Struggle]: "Little by little, one battle at a time, the idiotic pathetic bigots were being forced to do what was right. What conscience should have dictated from within had to be imposed on them from without" (168).
- [on the Vietnam War] "Combat is sometimes portrayed as adventurous and glorious fun, not unlike children play Cowboys and Indians with their neighborhood friends, or 'weekend warriors' engaging in paintball contests with their buddies. For those in the infantry in Vietnam, combat was anything but glamorous, or fun. They couldn't call 'time out' and come in for lunch when their mother called them, nor could they look forward to downing a few cold ones after wiping paint splatches off their clothing and skin" (209).
- Not only is the tone inappropriate, in my view, but these passages also signal some fairly big problems with the way the text conceives of the past. The discussion of Civil Rights, for example, reduces it to a Manichean struggle between virtuous, liberal integrationists (the text is dismissive and brashly critical of Black Power and Black Nationalism) and pathetic bigots blinded by their anger. There is no discussion of the ways that racial discrimination operated institutionally or structurally, or the ways that white Americans historically profited from the maintenance of a racial caste system in the U.S. In addition, the book is often inattentive to the multiple labors involved in pushing back against racial discrimination or any discussion of the backlash and its meanings outside from hurling epithets at those white southerners who opposed civil rights.
- The other passages quoted above are indicative of the sometimes glib, dismissive, overstated, or silly passages of the book on whole.
- The book includes an index and a series of appendices, the majority of which provide documents or materials related to the genealogies within the textbook.

Usability (25 possible points)	N/A (0 pts)	Very Weak (1pt)	Limited (2 pts)	Adequate (3pts)	Strong (4 pts)	Superior (5 pts)
Is the textbook compatible with standard and commonly available hardware/software in college/university campus student computer labs?				X		
Is the textbook accessible in a variety of different electronic formats? (e.g. .txt, .pdf, .epub, etc.)				X		
Can the textbook be printed easily?				X		
Does the user interface implicitly inform the reader how to interact with and navigate the textbook?		X				
How easily can the textbook be annotated by students and instructors?		X				

Total Points: 11 out of 25

Please provide comments on any aspect of access concerning this textbook.

- I was able to easily download the book, though was required to register with lulu.com before I could access it. One could print out the pages I imagine somewhat easily.
- I find the design of the book -- a chapter breakdown by year -- to be innovative, but at the end of the day a profound disadvantage. The chapters vary dramatically in length, substance, orientation, coverage, tone, and significance.

Overall Ratings	Not at all (0 pts)	Very Weak (1 pt)	Limited (2 pts)	Adequate (3 pts)	Strong (4 pts)	Superior (5 pts)
What is your overall impression of the textbook?		X				
	Not at all (0)	Strong reservations	Limited willingness	Willing (3 pts)	Strongly willing (4 pts)	Enthusiastically willing

	pts)	(1 pt)	(2 pts)			(5 pts)
How willing would you be to adopt this book?	X					

Total Points: 1 out of 10

Overall Comments

If you were to recommend this textbook to colleagues, what merits of the textbook would you highlight?

- This book strives to offer an alternate way of learning about U.S. history.

What areas of this textbook require improvement in order for it to be used in your courses?

- I do not think that I would ever assign this text. It read to me as something of a vanity project, one that had it been executed better could have indeed provided a provocative and exciting way of learning about U.S. history. As written, though, it reads as disjointed and superficial, incomplete and erratic, confusing and confused.

We invite you to add your feedback on the textbook or the review to the [textbook site in MERLOT](#)
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