



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 etextboks 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:

American History



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Find it: [eTextbook Website](#)

Textbook Authors:

The Independence Hall Association

Reviewed by:

Gerald Shenk

Institution:

California State University, Monterey Bay

Title/Position:

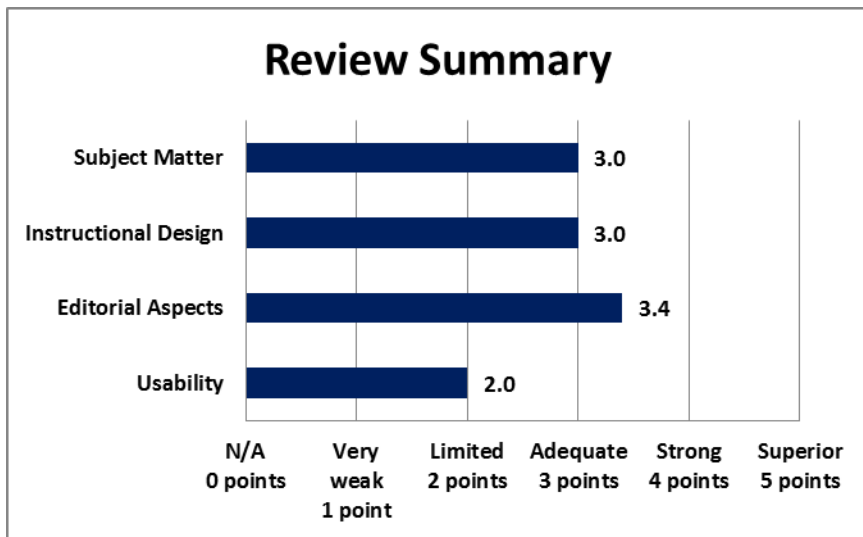
Professor

Format

Reviewed:

[Online](#)

A small fee may be associated with various formats.



Date Reviewed:

August 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)
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: 18 out of 30

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

- First, the authors of this text should be lauded for their brief introductory discussion of history as a field of study. It is quite generic, with few specifics about how to study history. Nevertheless, it does here what none of the other texts reviewed do. And it poses a question that can guide students through the text: "What is an American." This can get lost, as there is no prompt to keep asking this question as you go through the various chapters. This text, like the others in these reviews, follows a very traditional chronological periodization and thematic organization.
- I find the content mostly accurate, with the exception of explanations related to various U.S. wars. These are not so much inaccurate, as politically-biased statements about causation, characterizations of opposition to war, and the "lessons" supposedly learned. I found the description of the draft in World War I inaccurate and misleading. The account of how the U.S. become involved in Vietnam, from Truman through Nixon includes many statements presented as fact that are actually political claims. Some of these are contradicted by the evidence. For example, the Vietminh was not a "Marxist Liberation Movement," and U.S. support for the French in Vietnam was not because of the "Marxist" Vietminh. Ho Chi Minh did not create the Viet Cong. And the following statement is the subject of ongoing politically-charged debate that many scholars disagree with: "Of all the lessons learned from Vietnam, one rings louder than all the rest — it is impossible to win a long, protracted war without popular support." This becomes the foundation for characterization of G. Bush and the First Gulf War, as follows: "Bush, remembering the lessons of Vietnam, sought public support as well. Although there were scant opponents of the conflict, the vast majority of Americans and a narrow majority of the Congress supported the President's actions." If you were on a university campus in 1990, this statement will not ring true, as there were many large demonstrations against that war. Nor was the opposition in Congress scant.
- My criticism of other texts in these reviews on the issue of race, class and gender applies here as well. It does not reflect any of the recent social history on intersections of race, class, gender. Separate sections on "women," "African Americans," Chinese, "Hispanics," etc., assumes anyone not a woman or racial minority has neither gender nor race. There are other problems.
- In the section on "the frontier, it contrasts the "West" with the "East," failing to account for the uniqueness of the "South" as a region in this process. It has good coverage of the Indian wars of this period, although the Dawes Act description is insufficient, and misses the main point about the relationship between private property, nuclear families, race and U.S. citizenship. And this discussion needs to be connected to that on Indian Boarding Schools.
- The Chapter on Populism fails to adequately address the regional variations of this movement.
- The section on the Harlem Renaissance suggests "white supremacy" was exclusively a southern phenomenon. Also, it implies race is only relevant to African Americans, and perhaps occasionally, Asians and Mexicans.
- The final chapter covers the 90s, and nothing is covered after the year 2000. It refers to this period as "Toward a New Millennium," painting a rosy picture of the U.S. as effective "peacemaker" around the world. Thus: "The United States passed its first test of the post-Cold War world. Skillful diplomacy proved that the United Nations could be used as an instrument of force when necessary." Then, with no meaningful social or historical context at all, it provides a brief account of the 1992 Los Angeles riots, which it introduces as one of the "additional problems that beset President Bush in 1992. . . . In April, the city of Los Angeles erupted into a five day looting and burning rampage that killed more than 50 people and claimed damages nearing \$1 billion." Thus, in this account, it was an inexplicable spontaneous combustion, left at that as simply another problem for the President. This is not acceptable, especially for

a California audience. Finally, since the current web site lists the copyright year as 2015, one would think the authors might have at least added some reference to current issues to relevant historical events. For example, when they included a link to the Glass-Steagall Act in the section on the Great Depression, one would think they did so because of its relevance to understanding the economic crisis of 2007-8. But they make no reference to it.

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: 21 out of 35

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

- The text is easy to read, but the content is nearly all text, with some images that require text. So it pays little attention to the needs of visual learners. In this, it is not unique. The organization is pretty standard, but it's not clear at what point a student should click on one of the marginal links. The titles of the links may or may not appear related to the topics covered in the main page on which they appear. Often, they are unrelated in any way except that they deal with something that happened in the same time period. The design does not appear to reflect any particular pedagogy, other than a banking model (i.e., learn lots of facts). Little boxes in the margins give students the opportunity to vote their views on various issues. These include for Presidential or Radical Reconstruction; Whether or not Johnson should have been impeached. Students may comment on anything in a "share your thoughts" window. Once they open that box they can see other comments, but these comments are not organized by any topic or time period, and appear to be random topics in the order in which they have been submitted. This does not appear to be very useful.

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: 17 out of 25

Please provide comments on any editorial aspect of this textbook.

- Embedded graphics tend to be small and not subject to enlargement. There are some graphics in the linked pages. Some of these are nicely done, while others seem to have paid no attention to inviting and useful formatting. Some links take you to completely irrelevant pages. The link to the 1992 Rodney King riots in L.A. lands you in the city web site for a suburb, Rancho Cucamonga, on which you will find nothing relevant. Other links are to such things as presidential biographies. Whether these are useful to students will probably depend on how the course is taught.

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: 10 out of 25

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

- I could find no option for converting chapters to other formats, and printing requires selecting frames, which can be a bit confusing. As noted above, students may post responses online, but these go randomly to an archive, and do not seem to be useful as a learning tool for students.

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		
How willing would you be to adopt this book?	Not at all (0 pts)	Strong reservations (1 pt)	Limited willingness (2 pts)	Willing (3 pts)	Strongly willing (4 pts)	Enthusiastically willing (5 pts)

Total Points: 5 out of 10

Overall Comments

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

- This is a mainstream, mostly well-written and readable text. It covers all required topics and most time periods (except for since 2000).

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

- Political views of the authors presented as historical fact need to be presented as a political perspective, and alternative perspectives recognized. Some of the factual errors should be corrected, although these are fewer than in most U.S. history texts. It needs more thoughtful questions for students to discuss, and needs to stimulate thinking about the significance of this history for understanding themselves and the world they now live in.

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

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