



## 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](http://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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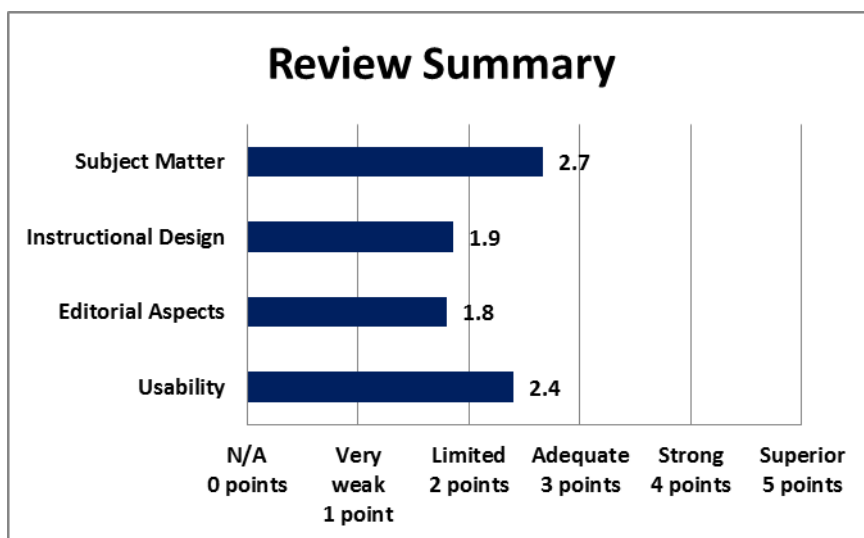
Professor

Format

Reviewed:

[Online](#)

A small fee may be associated with various formats.



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)
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: 16 out of 30

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

- This textbook is a series of webpages, organized by "chapters." The first page provides an overview of the chapter, and the subsequent pages provide overviews and discussions of particular subtopics. Some of the pages include insert boxes that either go into a topic in more depth or provide an excerpt from a relevant primary source document. To the left of the main text of each page are links to other web sources; to the right are advertisements.
- There are without question discussions in this textbook that provide very informative and solid overviews of the material. Notable pages are the discussion of the Scopes Trial, the Bonus Army, and the New Deal. They provide clear, detailed accounts that flag the broader historical significance of the material.
- In addition, this text covers an impressive array of topics. It includes a focus on social, political, and cultural history and often strong discussions of US foreign policy. Its chapter on the Civil Rights Movement (chapter 54) provides a fairly in-depth examination of the landmark events of the Black Freedom Struggle, and of the diverse strategies, and understandings of harm/injury, that motivated people to act to redress racial discrimination.
- That said, the book provides a far more cursory examination of other ethno racial groups in its history. The page "Others Demand Equality" offers a highly truncated examination of Chicano Rights, Native American Rights, and the environmental movement. Similarly, while the cultural history provided in this text is attentive to African American forms of cultural expression (an entire page on the Harlem Renaissance, discussion of African American contributions to popular music in the 1960s), by and large other discussions of American arts and culture are limited to white Americans' contributions as novelists, filmmakers, entrepreneurs, etc. And the discussion of the anti-war movement during Vietnam entirely neglects the participation of communities of color (as well as of clergy, veterans, etc.).
- Like other U.S history textbooks, this one races through the history of the 1980s onward. While the discussion of the 1980s hits on a number of key themes -- Reaganomics, the escalation and then end of the Cold War, the "greed is good" cultural dominant of the time -- it provides a sense that everyone looked to Reagan as the great benevolent father who ushered in a period of optimism after a decade of malaise. In other words, to read these pages is to be entirely unaware of the anti-nuclear movement, the AIDS crisis and the (appalling) lack of response of the administration to it, the war on drugs and its consequences, or Central American solidarity movements. This chapter struck as especially one-sided and incomplete, owing perhaps to the comparative lack of attention provided to the decade in comparison to previous eras.
- The final chapter similarly covers a tremendous amount of ground quickly (its scope is 1990 to the present), and thus offers a somewhat odd and erratic view of trends in American history and culture after Reagan left office.
- In addition, the discussions of cultural history are often so glib and thin, that one almost wishes they were omitted from the text altogether. These chapter sections frequently provide a list of important writers, artists, musicians and fairly under-developed discussions of their themes, import, etc. The tone of these pages increasingly becomes a bit irreverent and mocking, and implicitly models that cultural history is a somewhat breezy and silly access point to the past.

- Perhaps my biggest reservation about this book lies not in the specific quibbles I have with its content, but with its presentation. This is an authorless text. There are no references on any pages, no nods to historians whose work informs its content, no meaningful indication of debates about how to make sense of the historical events at the center of its pages. There are not any even "suggested for further reading" lists to flag what works to read in order get a more an in-depth understanding of the topic. In their stead are what to me read like an arbitrary collection of links related to the topics at hand, some of which are dead links, some to expected websites (the "history matters" collection published by GMU; PBS or NPR); and others to sites that are seem trivial (a "name the vegetables in the victory garden" game), commercial, or part of a personal website.
- My concern is that this conveys to students that there is a singular, agreed upon narrative about the past; it erases the labor of historians whose work had been required to enable these passages to be written; and it diminishes how history is an interpretive act in which historians debate the how and they why of the past. In this way, the textbook reinforces misperceptions about history that students often hold and then many of us try to undo in our college level courses.
- History textbook frequently include images (photos, maps, charts, etc) to illuminate the content. Each of the pages in this text includes a somewhat small captioned image that refers back to the content of the page. In addition, some of the links on the left hand side lead the reader to pages with images, videos, and so on. The images within the main text are fine, and seem to operate in analogous manner to printed textbooks.

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: 13 out of 35

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

- The text provides useful introductory pages to each chapter; the subsequent pages are organized thematically. Key terms, figures, events are bolded in the text, which would be helpful to students as they read. The overviews flag the big picture of the chapter, yet they do not provide explicit learning goals or questions for the chapter.
- Intermittently, the text offers quizzes to assess student learning. The logic of when a quiz will be available is not clear. There are not, for example, quizzes at the end of each chapter or end of each historical era. The quizzes are multiple choice. Some of the questions appropriately test student comprehension of concepts or historical trends; others are oriented toward seeing if students have retained certain facts. The inconsistency of the application of the quizzes, and the inconsistency in terms of the rigor of the questions, rendered them a bit less than useful to me as a teaching tool.
- The textbook does not provide activities outside the intermittent quizzes.
- The links to the left of the main text, along with the intermittent quizzes, provide the only interactive features of the textbook. There are no hyperlinks on the main content webpages to direct readers back,

for example, to previous pages that can help set the stage for the discussion. And, as noted, the links provided are of inconsistent value. It is also unclear how the author(s) of the textbook imagine that readers will use these links.

- The text does include occasional inserts that either flesh out in more detail an event or person or that provide excerpts of primary documents that are relevant to the topic under discussion. Joseph McCarthy's Wheeling, WY speech is available, for example, as is the Black Panther Party Platform. I find that these inserts enrich the text though, as with the quizzes, they are only intermittently provided across the textbook's pages.
- The design of the book makes it easy to skip around to chapters or to read it straight through. I am not sure that there is a coherent narrative being told, nor is there often an explicit attempt to illuminate how what is being discussed owes to the history that the book already has provided. I could imagine it being tricky for students to suss out how each element of each chapter makes sense together. There are no conclusions to the chapters that bring the material together for the reader.
- The breaking up of each chapter into between five and seven separate webpages allows for an ease of reading the text. It also would enable instructors to pick and choose topics in each chapter of relevance to her/his particular course.
- This is perhaps idiosyncratic to me, but I found the advertisements on the right panel of each page to be distracting.

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: 9 out of 25

Please provide comments on any editorial aspect of this textbook.

- The language of the text is at an appropriate level for college students. However, I will note that I often found the tone to be overly glib. In the service of making the tone of the text conversational, it too often reads as flippant, overstated, or dismissive. Examples include: "the 1970s marked the height of self-expression, mixed with a healthy dose of absurdity and poor taste"; [on the counterculture] "Moreover, it's one thing to say you want a revolution, quite another to try to affect one."
- The pages themselves are a bit busy. As mentioned, the main text is in the center, and frequently includes images under which are captions of a smaller font than the main text. The left side of the page includes links to other websites; the right side includes a central advertisement that changes along with an ad inviting one to "buy a history poster." One can navigate the site by using buttons include at both the top and the bottom of the page to go forward, back, or home. In addition, there is a dropdown box that one can use to skip around to another page from any page on the site. Each chapter also includes a banner that appears at the top of each website and a button to "cite the "page" and "share your thoughts." In short, it is not the cleanest or most elegant design, though it has useful features.
- As noted above, the integration of external links are of mixed success. A number of the links I clicked on were broken or took me to a website that was not the one I had anticipated. There is a wide variety of external links provided. Some lead you to primary sources; others to course webpages in which the instructor has provided additional information on a topic; others to sites of public history (like museums)

that have online content of relevance to the topic.

- In addition, some of the boxes to the left that feature links provide solid information as to what one can find if one clicks; others do not. There does not seem to be a streamlined process as to how the links are presented to the reader.
- There is no glossary, citations, index, or further references included in this textbook. The table of contents is fairly detailed, but this would be one's only guide to finding the material one was interested in pursuing. There is no way to know the sources the author(s) drew on in writing this content.

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: 12 out of 25

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

- As far as I can tell, this text can be read in any web browser. The pages, however, cannot be downloaded as PDFs, word documents, and so on. There does not seem to be any way to annotate the pages. One can provide comments on the text on whole, but one cannot make notes or comments in the margins as one reads.
- The site is fairly easy to use. As noted above, there are two different methods to navigate the site (the back/home/next buttons and the dropdown menu) that are fairly intuitive.

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 pts)	Strong reservations (1 pt)	Limited willingness (2 pts)	Willing (3 pts)	Strongly willing (4 pts)	Enthusiastically willing (5 pts)
How willing would you be to adopt this book?	X					

Total Points: 2 out of 10

## Overall Comments

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

- This textbooks approaches the history of the U.S. through multiple lenses. Across its chapters, it examines political, cultural, and social history in an accessible and easy-to-read manner.

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

- The improvements that I would want in order to assign this text would be substantial. Primarily, I would want the author(s) to cite the source they draw on and to acknowledge (perhaps through recommended reading lists) the work of historians who make textbooks like this possible. That would be my top priority. I would also want a revision of the last two chapters so that they offered more nuance and substance to the periods under discussion. And throughout I would want to see a greater discussion of the experiences of Latinas/os, Asian Americans, and Native Americans in relationship to the periods studied.

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