Faculty Review of Open eTextbooks

The California Open Educational Resources Council 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:

The American Yawp

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The American Yawp by Joseph Locke and Ben Wright is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0

Find it: **eTextbook Website**

Textbook Authors:

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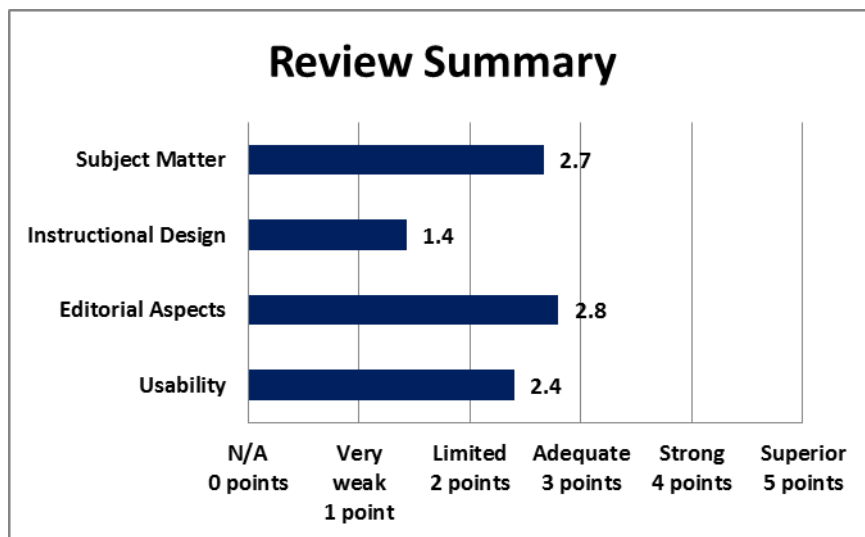Institution:

University of California, Irvine

Title/Position:

Professor

Format Reviewed:

Online

A small fee may be associated with various formats.

Date Reviewed:

December 2015

Review Summary

Category	Rating
Subject Matter	2.7
Instructional Design	1.4
Editorial Aspects	2.8
Usability	2.4

N/A 0 points | Very weak 1 point | Limited 2 points | Adequate 3 points | Strong 4 points | Superior 5 points

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:

- The American Yawp is a collaboratively authored textbook. This feature has both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, its chapters cover a wide range of topics and strive to present a wide-reaching overview of the historical era under discussion. On the other, the chapters can sometimes read as internally disjointed, and there are evident inconsistencies across the chapters in theme, depth, orientation, and approach.

- In this vein, a number of the chapters read as lists of things that happened, and often neglect to address their broader significance or their relationship to one another. This aspect of the text becomes especially pronounced in the chapters addressing more contemporary U.S. history (such as the chapter on The Sixties), which read as a list of "greatest hits" of historical events without any real overarching framework to help the reader make sense of how these different elements fit together.

- The "conclusions" of a number of chapters read as insufficient, and I speak to this overall problem of the text. First, there is an inconsistency in the operation of the concluding sections. Some gesture to the chapter to come; others provide a very, very brief summary of the chapter. At points, the conclusions seem to be afield, politically and tonally, from the substance of the chapter. Thus rather than weaving together the chapters' various elements, the conclusions often feel tacked on and do not provide the reader with a cogent view of the broader significance of the material presented.

- And while I applaud the integration of cultural history into many of the chapters -- a facet of U.S. history frequently ignored in textbooks -- the discussions of it often read as overly cursory, sometimes factually incorrect, or as dropped into the narrative as a series of titles of texts with little to no discussion of their meaning. Indeed, while the chapters strive to demonstrate the complexity of America politics and social movements, their discussion of cultural history is often flattens the contradictions and conflicting currents within this area of the U.S. experience.

- While I think that the chapters on, say, WWI and WWII appropriately stress the causes of the conflicts and the experience of soldiers who served, they are in my view a bit too thin in their discussions of the home front. The WWI chapter, for example, very briefly mentions the Creel Committee and the restrictions on free speech during the war. There is no discussion of the vast suppression of civil liberties at home, nor the uses of the Espionage and Sedition Acts to attack labor organizers and radical groups during this period. Similarly, the chapter on WWII offers detailed narratives about the breakout of the war, but provides a very quick gloss over Japanese internment and all but ignores the mobilization of the culture industries as tools for wartime propaganda. Neither chapter addresses anti-war resistance during these period.

- To this point, in often (though not always), privileging breadth over depth, the chapters do not consistently explain to the reader the "why" of the activism, political mobilizations, or political shifts that they document. While, for example, there is a discussion of opposition to the Vietnam War, there is insufficient attention to why so many different communities opposed the war.

- Perhaps because of the collaboratively authored nature of the text, there are unnecessary repetitions across the chapters (of the Sacco and Vanzetti case, for example) and there are references made that are not defined or discussed. This occurs frequently, but the first example that comes to mind is the mention of Elvis in the chapter on the 1950s, without any discussion of who he was or why he mattered.

- The chapters strive to write an inclusive history, one that considers the U.S. within a transnational context and one that also is attentive to the multiple experiences of differently located Americans in the periods

under discussion. Some of these discussions read as a bit abrupt and under-developed (the Chicano movement is covered in a few paragraphs that are mostly overviews of key leaders in the movement, for example; the discussion of second-wave feminism does not provide much attention to groups outside liberal feminist organizations like NOW).

- The final chapter of the textbook covers 25 years, the 1990s to the present. It is without a doubt tricky to write a chapter about such recent events. As a result, the focus is overwhelmingly on political history and the signature actions of presidents from Bush I through Obama (and a bit on the Millenials). As a result, it is emblematizes the problems of the text on whole, as it does not have a coherent framework or viewpoint as to how to make sense of these years. (And, parenthetically, it surprisingly makes no mention of the Internet or digital culture, though the text's previous chapters had discussed the arrival of film, radio, television, and so on as key developments in American social and cultural history).

- I should note that the more in-depth sections provided are often excellent. The discussion of the Brown case in 1954 is quite good, as is the section on the development of the suburbs and the role of the federal government in assisting their growth while also limiting who could benefit from them. The chapter on the Great Depression is also very strong.

- To be sure, no singular textbook can do everything. But in trying to do too much, The American Yawp often provides, in my view, a somewhat superficial overview of an historical period that flags "what happened" but does not consistently aid the reader in understanding the significance of the events, or their relationship to what came before them.

- Each chapter includes photographs and other visual aids (maps, posters, film stills, etc). The images are captioned. But they often are not discussed in the narrative (there are exceptions, such as an analysis of a Dorothea Lange photo in the chapter on the Depression).

- This was perhaps most notable to me in the chapter on the 1920s, "The New Era." The image that introduces the chapter is that of Al Jolson, in blackface, from the final scene of The Jazz Singer. The chapter briefly mentions the film (in relationship to its integration of sound into motion pictures), but does not address its narrative nor its use of the blackface tradition. While the chapter briefly mentions how the movie craze of the 1920s was at once democratic and discriminatory (theaters could be segregated or offer segregated seating), it never addresses how race operated in this form of popular culture, or the cultural meanings of blackface performance in this era. Such a discussion seems necessary to me, given the prominence of this image in the chapter.

- The chapters do offer excellent lists of "recommended readings." The website provides links to primary sources, though this is not complete for much of the second half of the survey (links are only included through the chapter covering WWI). The selection of these texts are strong, but do not always complement the main chapter. For example, the primary sources for the WWI chapter include a speech by Emma Goldman and the text of the Sedition Act, though as noted above the chapter does not really address wartime suppression of speech.

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: 10 out of 35

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

- The American Yawp is designed much like a print-based textbook. Each chapter includes links at the top of the page that allows the reader to easily access any section of the chapter. The chapters do not include any kind of "study guides" (goals of the chapter, study question, etc.). They do not provide any activities or exercises to supplement student learning. In addition, they do not bold (as many print textbooks do) key concepts, individuals, events, acts, etc. that the reader should flag and be attentive to.

- Where the textbooks seems to take most advantage of being an online book is in its capacity to be collaboratively authored and edited. It does not, for example, provide hyperlinks within its text or provide an interactive experience for its reader.

- As my comments indicate above, The American Yawp reads as a solid reference/resource, but I would imagine that my students would struggle to make sense of all the bits of material that are included in each chapter.

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 latid0out 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: 14 out of 25

Please provide comments on any editorial aspect of this textbook.

- The language of this textbook is appropriate for students. However, while students will be able to understand individual sentences, often the broader meaning or significance of what is being communicated will be lost on them, as the text often rushes through topics too quickly.

- I found the pages easy to read (there were few to no large blocks of text), and the typeface is lovely and fine. There is no glossary or index, though there is a useful table of contents for the book on whole and for each individual chapter.

- The lack of index/glossary, however, diminishes one of the key benefits of this text, which is its coverage of wide range of topics. It could operate as a solid reference book for students, though it would be tricky for students to locate where in the text they would be able to find the discussion of the event/person/concept that they seek.

- As noted above, the book does not include any multimedia elements, save images scattered throughout the chapters.

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.

- From what I can tell, this textbook can only be read online. The reader does not have the option to read the chapters as PDFs or in any other format. One could print the pages, but they would be printed as webpages. But the text should be accessible from any web browser.

- There is an option within each chapter to improve the chapter by making comments on individual paragraphs. However, as far as I can tell, there is no ability for students to annotate the text as they read. (This may speak to my own techno-illiteracy with such things).

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: 3 out of 10

Overall Comments

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

- This textbook covers an impressive array of topics. It strives to be attentive to the varieties of experiences and challenges of people in the U.S. in its discussion of major historical eras. Its writing style is accessible. Its collaborative nature and use of wikis indicates that the quality of the text may only improve over time, as it will draw on the collective wisdom of its readers to produce a solid overview of U.S. history.

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

- I would prefer to assign a textbook that provided a stronger framework/narrative that makes sense of the history being told and the relationship of events within the text to each other and larger historical forces. As written, too many of the chapters read as disjointed lists of things that occurred. While I have noted other concerns with the text, this would be the one that most would deter me from assigning it.

We invite you to add your feedback on the textbook or the review to the textbook site in MERLOT
(Please register in MERLOT to post your feedback.)

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