

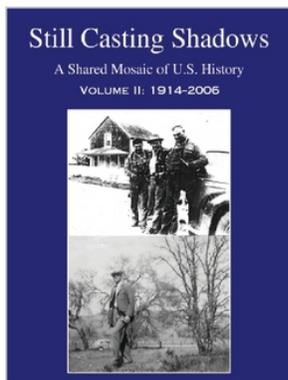


## Faculty Review of Open eTextbooks

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](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:

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



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Format

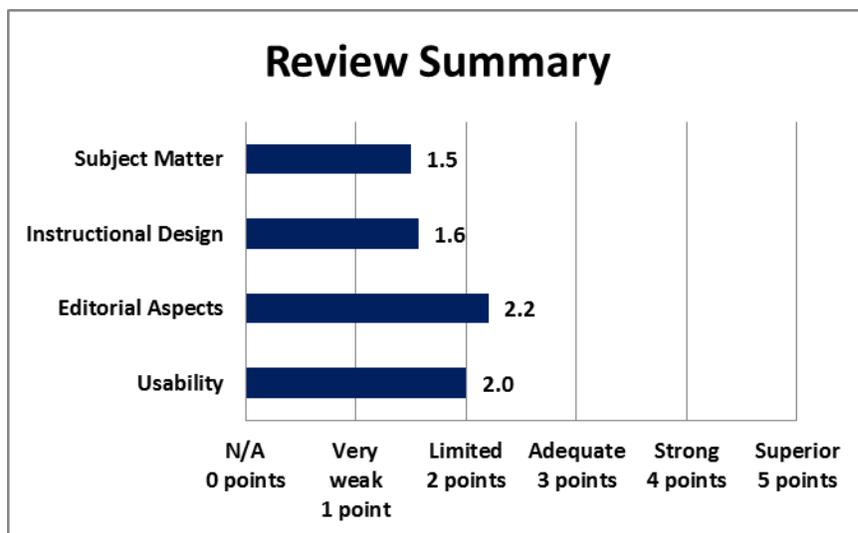
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Date Reviewed:

August 2015



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: 9 out of 30

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

- The author describes it as: "This collection of family and national stories and events," and accurately states that it is "certainly not a comprehensive history of the United States (it contains only a brief mention, if any at all, of many important events." In other words, it is a history of the author's family with a lot of fairly random U.S. history thrown in. The text is quite rich with historical details, but it's often unclear why they've been included. It can make for interesting reading, but what was the point of, say, describing the invention of Crayola? Much of this can only be described as corny.
- There is extensive coverage of the West, especially Indians on the Great Plains, and various aspects of the Pacific West, proportionately much more than other texts. But this is at the expense of other important parts of U.S. history since 1865. There are frequent statements that pass for facts, but are actually the author's particular political take on an event. Thus, the question of accuracy is bound up with the question of bias. It is difficult to disentangle the two. This also relates to the question of adequate coverage, as some major events are unimportant to the author, so they are dispensed with in a flippant or dismissive manner. One egregious example is the very brief treatment of Reconstruction. The following paragraph, which is nearly the entirety of the coverage of Reconstruction, illustrates the problems of accuracy, bias, and coverage running through the whole text: "Two years prior, in 1866, some minorities had won a victory when a Civil Rights Bill passed (Congress overrode Andrew Johnson's presidential veto of it), and equal rights were granted to all persons born in the United States. Well, not really all—for the purposes of that Bill, Indians were not considered persons. Although blacks could now vote for the first time in America, the land's original inhabitants were still barred from the polling places. At any rate, that legislation this year became a part of the U.S. Constitution, being appended to that highest national legal document as its fourteenth amendment." (Vol I, 375) This is in contrast to 2 1/2 pages on the Chicago fire, and 7 pages on Custer.
- There is quite a long section on Indians in the West during the late 19th century, which is mostly good, if you can get past the flippant writing style.
- Coverages of Vietnam and the Iranian hostage crisis are woefully inadequate, despite a very long section on the experience of combat during Vietnam. The text ends with 9/11/2001, although there are documents up to 2005.

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			
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Total Points: 11 out of 35

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

- The style of writing is accessible, when the author uses a narrative style. But some of this reads like an outline, or brief notes on some topics, many of which are simply named without any further explanation. It is structured as a yearly diary, with a chapter for each year. (Volume I extends all the way to 1913, and Volume II begins in 1914 and ends in 2001.) Part of the problem is that the text is mostly organized around genealogical evidence for two families across generations that span most of the history of the U.S. That means the important parts of U.S. history that do not fit neatly into the stories of these families are either left out, or just stuck in with no attempt to make any connection to the main narrative. The author provides no thematic guide that would provide clues as to why certain things are included, while others are not, or why certain characteristics attributed to people and events.

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: 11 out of 25

Please provide comments on any editorial aspect of this textbook.

- As noted above, the writing is idiosyncratic in the extreme, although mostly without serious grammatical or spelling errors. The long narratives about the families the author has followed throughout both volumes can be quite engaging, and they often do give us a real sense of the social, economic and cultural worlds of the times.
- The text is laid out in a more readable format than most of the other textbooks reviewed, in that the column-widths and line spacing make for comfortable reading. However, there is nothing visually attractive about this text, and the images are few. The appended documents are related to the family histories (e.g., an autobiography, a traffic accident report, genealogies, etc.).

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.

- Text is only available as a pdf that opens in a web page, and was not searchable in the form I was able to open it in. Navigation is exclusively through scrolling.

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?

- Interesting family history over many generations can illustrate social change over time and across geographic regions in the U.S. up to 2001.

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

- It would be very difficult to make this into a comprehensive U.S. History. The main focus is the Shannon family through U.S. History. This would have to be more tightly written, and linked thematically to major events in U.S. history. The author's flippant writing style would need to change to a more serious tone. Finally, recent historical scholarship needs to be reflected.

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