



A Consumer's  
Guide to

# High School History Textbooks

*DIANE RAVITCH*

A Consumer's  
Guide to  
**High School  
History  
Textbooks**

*Diane Ravitch*

February 2004



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# Foreword

*by Chester E. Finn, Jr.*

Within days of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, major textbook publishers began scrambling to revise their high school history texts to include information about 9/11. An understandable, even commendable impulse, but it went badly. Because these hasty updates or supplements had to be written by early 2002 in order to be included in the 2003 editions of the textbooks—publishing timelines are nothing if not long and slow—by the time they reached classrooms just about all the information in them was obsolete.

Far more troubling, because textbook publishers bend over backwards not to offend anybody or upset special interest groups, the 9/11 information, like so much else in today's history texts, was simplified and sanitized. The reader would scarcely learn that anybody in particular had organized these savage attacks on innocent Americans and citizens of 80 other nations, much less why. The impression given by most textbooks was more like “a terrible thing happened”—reminiscent of the two-year-old gazing upon the shards of his mother's shattered glass vase and saying “It broke.”

I've dubbed such verb usages the “irresponsible impersonal” voice and, regrettably, they're more norm than exception in U.S. history textbooks. As with the vase breaking, things happen in these books (though not necessarily in chronological order), but not because anybody causes them. Hence, nobody deserves admiration or contempt for having done something incredibly wonderful or abominably evil. No judgments need be made. (To judge, after all, might upset a person or group who disagrees with the judgment or dislikes the way it makes them or their ancestors look.) The result: fat, dull, boring books that mention everything but explain practically nothing; plenty of information but no sorting, prioritizing, or evaluating; and a collective loss of American memory.

World-history texts present similar problems. It's hard to name a culture or era that doesn't turn up somewhere in these sprawling compilations, but no real story is told. There's no thread, no pri-

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orities, no winnowing of the important from the trivial, the history-shaping from the incidental. It's as if a car's chrome trim and speaker system were equivalent to its chassis and engine.

Why does this matter? Some successful countries—Japan and Singapore come to mind—get by fine with slender curriculum guides rather than enormous textbooks. That's because their teachers are subject-matter experts in fields like history and, when supplied with guidance about what state or national standard-setters deem most important, can easily generate their own lessons and find their own materials. They don't depend on textbooks except as reference works.

That's not true in the United States, where few history teachers ever learned much history themselves. More than half of high school history teachers did not major or even minor in history in college. Instead, most studied education or psychology or sociology, perhaps with a focus on “social studies education.” As a result, teachers charged with imparting essential information to young

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Americans about the history of their country and world must rely heavily on the textbooks available to them—often textbooks that teachers themselves had little to do with selecting. Because these texts end up serving as students' primary sources of information, it's vitally important that they be accurate and

interesting, and that they establish a narrative of events with a strong sense of context. They must tell “the main story” without neglecting lesser stories that form part of an accurate picture of the past. What they must not be is sprawling, drab assemblages of disjointed information in which everything matters equally and nothing is truly important.

How many—if any—of today's textbooks live up to that obligation? Unfortunately, few independent reviews of textbooks have been conducted to help answer that question. Hence, we at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, as part of our broader effort to strengthen history education and breathe new life into the moribund field of social studies, judged that it was time to look closely at widely used high school level textbooks in American and world history. In the spirit of being constructive as well as critical, we judged that a competent appraisal would provide practical help to educators tasked with the selection of history texts, to parents concerned about their children's education, to policy-makers, and even to publishers eyeing improvements in their products.

## Our Approach

To lead such a project, we turned to the best qualified person in America, our long-time colleague Diane Ravitch, who is both a distinguished historian in her own right and a close and critical reader of textbooks and other instructional materials. Her recent book, *The Language Police*, electrified—and alarmed—the education world with its vivid depiction of the pressures on textbook publishers that have now been internalized as self-censorship regimens that squeeze all the juice out of instructional materials before students get anywhere near them.

To conduct the present review, Ravitch brought together a panel of experts in U.S. or world history to evaluate six widely used high school U.S. history texts and a like number of world history texts. Working with her advisors, she developed a dozen criteria by which each text would be appraised. (Those criteria are explained on page 17.) They emphasize a book's historical accuracy, coherence, balance, and writing quality.

The reviewers themselves span a wide range of political perspectives, professional experience, and ideological viewpoints. They include scholars, writers, school administrators, and history teachers. They submitted their individual evaluations to Dr. Ravitch, and she compiled them into this summary report. It is, to our knowledge, the first time a group of independent reviewers, all experts in history, has undertaken a comprehensive review of some of the textbooks that high school social studies teachers are most apt to assign and that high school pupils are likeliest to read.

Like all book reviews, such judgments are inherently subjective, and the eyes of different beholders often see dissimilar virtues and vices in particular texts. The reviewers of these volumes sometimes conferred sharply different ratings on various criteria, ratings that inevitably reflect the readers'

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historical priorities, education beliefs and literary preferences as well as the quality of the book under review. The diversity among reviewers is occasionally reflected in their diverse ratings of the same text. Because any effort to construct an average or total

score from such disparate ratings risks dulling the reviewers' edges and masking their differences, we also provide each reviewer's rating of each book on every criterion, as well as the totals and averages. (You can find these online at <http://www.edexcellence.net/institute>.) All the edges are there for inspection.

In reading the reviewers' observations, we were struck by the similarity between a group of reviewers rating a textbook and a group of otherwise unconnected authors, editors, or contributors writing that book in the first place. Almost all the texts examined here are group products from the pens of

multiple authors. Several name no author at all. Such a book appears to be the fruit of an anonymous groupthink process involving many participants, more an orgy than a marriage. Inevitably, that kind

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of “authorship” does not just blur differences and dull edges. It also yields a bland consensus product, the least common denominator of the participants’ views. How could such a creation possess a “story line”? How could it be gripping? How could it embody clear views on controversial topics or winnow the

major events and actors of history from the inconsequential? And when the groupthink of a statewide textbook adoption process is superimposed upon group authorship and then subjected to multiple rounds of “bias review,” how could the result be anything but a big, dull mass of themeless information about everything imaginable? It is what some post-modern writers term a “social construction” that includes much that lacks importance, excludes much—for space reasons as well as groupthink—that would capture the interest of young readers, and glosses over much that is controversial. The writing and editing are done with one eye on the marketplace, the other on sundry interest groups.

## Findings and Policy Considerations

Diane Ravitch’s own sober conclusions and thoughtful recommendations begin on page 63. They deserve the reader’s—and policymaker’s—undivided attention. Allow me here simply to share a few reflections of my own.

The books reviewed in this report range from serviceable to abysmal. None is distinguished or even very good. The best are merely adequate. In the hands of a competent teacher, they could get the job done, but not much more than that. No textbook scored better than 78 percent overall—the rough equivalent of a C+ grade. Five of the twelve earned failing marks. Despite their glitzy graphics and vivid pictures, they all suffer from dull prose and the absence of a “story.” Is it any wonder that most students rank history or social studies among their least favorite subjects in school? What a crashing bore it must be to try to learn something from tomes like these.

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The underlying process of textbook creation, publication, and selection is sorely flawed. Unless it is radically overhauled, we cannot reasonably expect much better textbooks in our children’s schools.

And that means we probably cannot expect much better education there, no matter how hard states and Uncle Sam push on standards, tests, and accountability.

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What is to be done, besides counseling conscientious teachers to depend as little as possible upon these textbooks? The reforms that I would undertake parallel those that Diane recommends:

- First and foremost, the more thoroughly teachers know their stuff, the less will they depend on textbooks and the better equipped they'll be to judge and criticize the materials available to them. In other words: better and more subject-centered teacher preparation is essential. High school history teachers should have solid preparation in the history they teach, either an undergraduate degree in history, a graduate degree in history, or credit for passing a rigorous history exam.

- Second, statewide, even district-wide, textbook “adoptions” should end. Individual schools or teachers should select the textbooks they prefer from among all publisher offerings. This is no recipe for chaos so long as every school must attain state or district academic standards and be monitored by state or district assessments. Within that results-based accountability framework, a teacher or school history department should be free to choose whatever books, software, and supplemental materials they believe will assist them to get the job done. This will also liberate the textbook market from the handful of multinational publishing houses that dominate it today and encourage “boutique” publishers to bring more history texts (and other materials) to market. And one hopes it will encourage outstanding scholars to write such books, as was done in earlier generations when widely used U.S. textbooks bore the names of such world-class historians as Richard Hofstadter, Charles Beard, Henry Steele Commager, Samuel Eliot Morison, and Oscar Handlin.

- Third, teachers should have the option of using their “textbook budgets” for alternative materials if they would rather assemble their own—from the Internet, from television, from a variety of publications, and from their own brains and knowledge base. A dazzling array of options present themselves. A teacher should be free to minimize her dependence on conventional textbooks and substitute other instructional materials. This, of course, means empowering individual schools and teachers with budgetary control.

- Finally, with such a wealth of materials available, those doing the choosing need access to expert reviews. America today has only a couple of small textbook-reviewing organizations. We need many more. It should be as easy for a teacher to obtain multiple reviews of textbooks and instructional materials as of novels to take to the beach, movies, and restaurants for Saturday evening, or colleges that one's students should consider.



This is the fourth in a series of reports published by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and Institute as part of “Back to Basics: Reclaiming Social Studies,” which aims to revitalize the subject with renewed focus on serious content, high standards, effective teaching, and sound instructional materials. The first two, *Where did Social Studies go Wrong?* and *Terrorists, Despots and Democracy: What Our Children Need to Know*, identified shortcomings in social studies and provided suggestions for teachers. The third, *Effective State Standards for U.S. History: A 2003 Report Card*, evaluated state standards for their treatment of U.S. history. (You can find these three volumes on our web site at <http://www.edexcellence.net>.) Taken together, we believe, this quartet of reports and others to follow serve to highlight the problems with social studies and to provide teachers, textbook authors, education leaders, policymakers and concerned parents with guidance on how to infuse American classrooms with high-quality history courses and instructional materials.

The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation made this project—and this report—possible, and we’re deeply grateful to that grand organization for its continuing engagement with the oft-daunting challenge of giving history its due in U.S. schools.

We are profoundly appreciative of Diane Ravitch’s work, not only on this project but also her steadfast leadership, courage, and insight these past 25 years and her tireless commitment to reviving the proper teaching and learning of sound history in American classrooms.

We also thank her expert reviewers. In American history: Morton Keller, Jeffrey Mirel, John Pyne, and Edward Renehan. In world history: Marc A. Epstein, Margaret C. Jacob, Walter Russell Mead, Theodore Rabb, and Lucien Ellington. Janice Riddell, too, has earned our appreciation for helping in so many ways with the project’s complex logistics. At the Fordham Institute, I thank associate research director Kathleen Porter, who steered a steady course, Emi Ryan for designing this volume, and Carolyn Conner for parsing the data and making it accessible to analysts, educators, and ordinary mortals.



The Thomas B. Fordham Institute seeks to improve the quality and effectiveness of American elementary and secondary education and to deepen the understanding of educators, policymakers, journalists, parents and the general public with respect to the problems that impede high-quality education in the United States, and to provide possible solutions to those problems. It shares staff, offices, and trustees with the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and is designed to advance the education reform ideas that it also shares with the Foundation. Further information can be obtained from our Web site <http://www.edexcellence.net/institute> or by writing us at 1627

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# Introduction

*by Diane Ravitch*

Among professionals in history and social studies, there is no doubt that textbooks have an overweening importance in American schools. Historians have always lamented this over-reliance on texts, wishing students would instead spend more time reading primary source documents, investigating controversial issues, engaging in debates, or writing research papers. But, despite the protestations of historians about the inadequacies of history textbooks, the texts continue to have a very important place in our nation's classrooms. In fact, for many teachers, the textbook constitutes both course and curriculum. Unless new electronic technologies leapfrog the current generation of classroom materials to supply new sources of information-on-demand, textbooks will continue to be with us for a long time to come.

There are many reasons that so many teachers rely so heavily on history texts. Many do so because of gaps in their own educational background: According to data collected by the U.S. Department of Education, the majority of those who teach history in grades 7-12 have neither a major nor a minor in the subject; for many of these teachers, the history textbook is the curriculum. It supplies the substance of daily lessons. For teachers who haven't studied history since high school, it is an essential crutch.

Even teachers who had a good history education cannot be expected to know everything in American or world history. They, too, rely on textbooks to fill in the gaps in their own knowledge.

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**Few teachers, no matter how many credits they earned in history, are truly prepared to teach this history of the entire world.**

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Sometimes a teacher with a major or minor in American history is assigned to teach world history, or someone who has a major in Chinese studies is assigned to teach U.S. history. Few teachers, no matter how many credits

they earned in history as undergraduate or graduate students, are truly prepared to teach the history of the entire world. That is where textbooks come to the rescue. They seek to be encyclopedic, to cover everything that any state or locality might possibly expect children to learn.

Though many agree that texts are a valuable resource for history teachers, there is little agreement as to what the next generation should be taught about the past. Every sort of pressure group has sought to bend history textbooks to fit its interpretation of the past. Whenever a state announces that it is holding hearings to decide which history textbooks to purchase, interest groups line up to insist

that their views be included and that views they dislike be excluded from the books. Over the years, the content of history books has been crafted to satisfy demands of many such groups and to sidestep controversy in major book-buying states like California, Texas, and Florida.

The importance of history textbooks in U.S. classrooms is not simply a matter of conjecture. As part of its periodic appraisal of student achievement in American history, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has asked teachers of history how often their students read materi-

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al from a textbook. Based on a 2001 survey, teachers reported that 41 percent of fourth-grade students read from the textbook “almost every day,” while another 47 percent did so once or twice a week. In the eighth grade, 45 percent

read from the textbook almost daily, and another 45 percent did so once or twice a week. And, 44 percent of twelfth graders reported reading from the textbook “about every day,” while another 38 percent did so once or twice each week. In other words, depending on grade level, between 80 and 90 percent of students read from their history textbook in class daily or weekly. For most American students, the history textbook is a very significant instructional tool.

Yet, despite the ubiquity of textbooks in U.S. history classrooms, teachers, curriculum directors, and local and state school boards have very little independent information by which to make decisions about which of them to select. Concerned about the overall quality of history textbooks, as well as the lack of independent reviews of the books, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, with the help of the Lynde and Harry Bradley

Foundation, initiated this review of their quality and adequacy as guides for teaching American and world history. Together, we assembled a group of highly qualified reviewers to assess some of the leading textbooks in

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American and world history on the basis of clearly defined criteria. Thus, the purpose of this report is to put before the public, in particular those members of the public who purchase textbooks, an objective report on the strengths and weaknesses of a representative group of widely used textbooks. We hope that this evaluation will encourage textbook users and buyers to be wise consumers and develop the capacity to judge these products thoughtfully.

## The Reviewers

The reviews were prepared by two panels of experts, one for American history, the other for world history. Each panel was assigned six textbooks. The reviewers include distinguished historians, writers of history, teacher educators, and K-12 teachers of history. Each was selected because of his or her professional reputation and commitment to the improvement of history education.

For American history, the reviewers were:

**Morton Keller**, Spector Professor of History Emeritus at Brandeis University, where he was a member of the faculty from 1964 to 2001. Among his books are *The Life Insurance Enterprise, 1885-1910* (Replica Books, 2001); *The Art and Politics of Thomas Nast* (Oxford University Press, 1968); and *Affairs of State: Public Life in Late Nineteenth Century America* (Harvard University Press, 1977). With his wife Phyllis Keller, he co-authored *Making Harvard Modern: The Rise of America's University* (Oxford University Press, 2001).

**Jeffrey Mirel**, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, Professor of Educational Studies, and Professor of History at the University of Michigan. His major research interest is the history of urban schooling in the United States. He has written *The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System: Detroit, 1907-81* (University of Michigan Press, 1999) and *The Failed Promise of the American High School, 1890-1995* (Teachers College Press, 1999), co-authored with David Angus. He has taught on the K-12 level in the U.S., and as a visiting professor in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

**John Pyne**, a social studies supervisor for the public schools of West Milford Township, New Jersey. He received his Ph.D. in history at the University of Notre Dame and is founding president of the New Jersey Council for History Education.

**Edward J. Renehan, Jr.**, author of *The Kennedys at War* (Doubleday, 2002); *The Lion's Pride: Theodore Roosevelt & His Family in Peace and War* (Oxford University Press, 1998); *The Secret Six: The True Tale of the Men Who Conspired with John Brown* (University of South Carolina Press, 1997); and *John Burroughs: An American Naturalist* (Black Dome Press, 1998).

For world history, the reviewers were:

**Lucien Ellington**, Co-director of the Asia Program and Professor of Education at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. He holds advanced degrees in history, economics education, and education and is founding editor of *Education About Asia*, a journal for instructors published by the Association for Asian Studies. He has authored three books on Japan and currently is series editor for ABC-CLIO's *Global Studies: Asia*. Ellington was a high school world history and economics teacher for eight years.

**Marc A. Epstein**, an Advanced Placement world history and American government teacher at Jamaica High School in New York City. He is a world history teacher and holds a Ph.D. in Japanese-American diplomatic history from the State University of New York at Buffalo.

**Margaret C. Jacob**, Professor of History at the University of California at Los Angeles. She is a past president of the American Society for Eighteenth Century Studies and a member of the American Philosophical Society. She is a specialist in the history of science. Her recent books include: *The Enlightenment: A Brief History with Documents* (Bedford, 2001); *Scientific Culture and the Making of the Industrial West* (Oxford University Press, 1997); and, with Larry Stewart, *Practical Matter: The Impact of Newton's Science, 1687-1851* (Harvard University Press, forthcoming).

**Walter Russell Mead** is Henry A. Kissinger Senior Fellow for U.S. Foreign Policy at the Council on Foreign Relations. His most recent book, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* (Routledge, 2002), received the Lionel Gelber Award for the best book in English on international relations in 2002. He is currently working on a book entitled *Power, Terror, Peace, and War: America's Grand Strategy in A World at Risk* (Knopf, April 2004). Mead writes regularly on international affairs for leading newspapers.

**Theodore K. Rabb**, Professor of History at Princeton University. Among his many books are *Enterprise and Empire* (Routledge, 1999); *The New History* (Princeton University Press, 2002); *The Struggle for Stability in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford University Press, 1975); *Climate and History* (Princeton University Press, 1981); *Renaissance Lives* (Random House, 1993); *Jacobean Gentleman* (Princeton University Press, 1998); and *The Making and Unmaking of Democracy* (Routledge, 2002). He has chaired the trustees of the National Council for History Education.

## The Textbooks

The dozen textbooks reviewed here are in wide circulation and are broadly representative of the genre. All were produced by major publishers and have current copyrights.

In American history, these six textbooks were reviewed:

- Joyce Appleby, Alan Brinkley, and James M. McPherson, *The American Journey: Building a Nation* (Glencoe, 2003), and Joyce Appleby, Alan Brinkley, Albert S. Broussard, James M. McPherson, and Donald A. Ritchie, *The American Republic Since 1877* (Glencoe, 2003). (This pair of books was treated as a single entry.)
- Paul Boyer, *The American Nation* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 2003).
- Henry W. Bragdon, Samuel P. McCutcheon, and Donald A. Ritchie, *History of a Free Nation* (Glencoe, 1998).

- Andrew Cayton, Elizabeth Israels Perry, Linda Reed, and Alan W. Winkler, *America: Pathways to the Present* (Prentice Hall, 2003).
- Gerald A. Danzer, J. Jorge Klor de Alva, Larry S. Krieger, Louise E. Wilson, Nancy Woloch, *The Americans* (McDougal Littell, 2003).
- Gary B. Nash, *American Odyssey: The United States in the Twentieth Century* (Glencoe, 2002).

In world history, the following six textbooks were reviewed:

- Roger B. Beck, Linda Black, Larry S. Krieger, Phillip C. Naylor, Dahia Ibo Shabaka, *Modern World History: Patterns of Interaction* (McDougal Littell, 2003).
- Elisabeth Gaynor Ellis and Anthony Esler, *World History: Connections to Today* (Prentice Hall, 2003).
- Mounir A. Farah and Andrea Berens Karls, *World History: The Human Experience* (Glencoe, 2001).
- William Travis Hanes III, ed., *World History: Continuity and Change* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1999).
- Sue Miller, ed., *World History: People & Nations* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 2000).
- Jackson S. Spielvogel, *World History: The Human Odyssey* (National Textbook Company, 1999, Glencoe, 2003).

## **The Criteria and Rating Process**

After reviewers and textbooks were selected, each reviewer was asked to grade each text according to the following twelve criteria. (For the full set of instructions, see <http://www.edexcellence.net/institute>):

- 1. ACCURACY:** Is the text accurate in its presentation of facts and major historical issues?
- 2. CONTEXT:** Does the text present historical events and ideas in a context that enables the reader to understand their significance?
- 3. ORGANIZATION:** Does the text offer a well-organized, coherent narrative that emphasizes the most important eras, cultures, events, and ideas in U.S. (or world) history?
- 4. SELECTION OF SUPPORTING MATERIAL:** Does the text illustrate the most significant events, ideas, and individuals with relevant, accurate, vivid, and interesting stories?

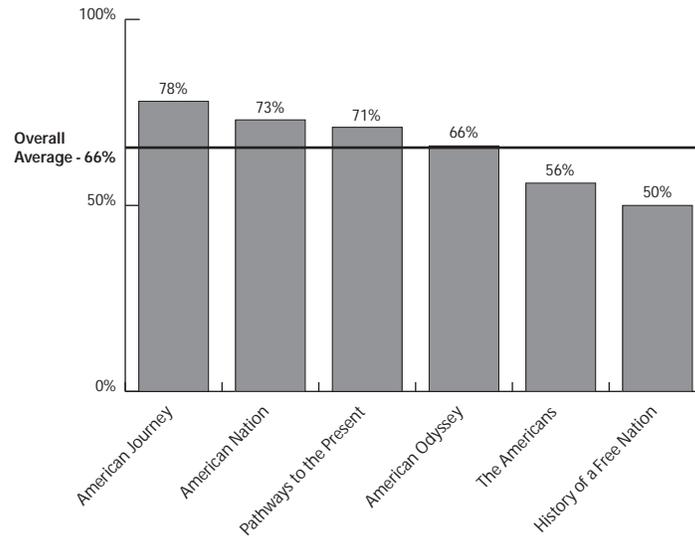
5. **LACK OF BIAS:** Is the text free of political or ideological bias?
6. **HISTORICAL LOGIC:** Is the text free of presentism and moralism?
7. **LITERARY QUALITY:** Does the text have a writing style that engages the reader?
8. **USE OF PRIMARY SOURCES:** Does the text make good use of well-chosen primary source documents?
9. **HISTORICAL SOUNDNESS:** Does the text give adequate attention to political, social, cultural, and economic history?
10. **DEMOCRATIC IDEAS:** Does the text give appropriate attention to the development of democratic institutions, human rights, and the rule of law?
11. **INTEREST LEVEL:** Are students likely to want to learn more about history as a consequence of reading this textbook?
12. **GRAPHICS:** Do the graphics and sidebars in the text contribute to the reader's interest and understanding of history?

In addition to rating the books according to these specific criteria, reviewers were asked to explain what they liked most and disliked most about each textbook, thus giving them ample opportunity to expand their comments beyond the narrow confines of a numerical grid.

## The Winners

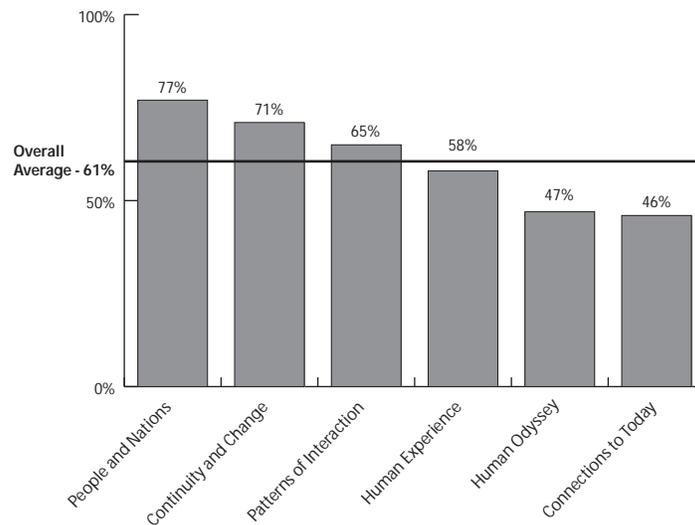
Based on the results from the reviewers' assessments of the six American history texts, *The American Journey*, written by Joyce Appleby, Alan Brinkley, and James M. McPherson and published by Glencoe, earned the highest overall score, and was considered best of breed. The runner-up is *American Nation*, written by Paul Boyer and published by Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

## American History Textbooks: Overall Score



Of the six world history textbooks that were reviewed, *World History: People & Nations* earned top marks, while *World History: Continuity and Change* was the runner-up. Both are published by Holt, Rinehart & Winston, but neither has an identified author. Like many of today's textbooks (including those that do have named authors), these texts were assembled by a large staff of editors, writers, and consultants, rather than by a single author or small group of co-authors. The general editor for *People & Nations* was Sue Miller; the general editor for *Continuity and Change* was William Travis Hanes, III.

## World History Textbooks: Overall Score



## General Observations

After reading half a dozen world history textbooks, Theodore Rabb summed up his overall reactions. Like other reviewers, he was troubled by problems of style, coherence, and presentation. “This has been a fairly dispiriting exercise,” he writes:

Even a generous set of grades could not bring any of the books above 65 percent. . . . And those numbers masked some fundamental lapses of organization and judgment. All of the books seemed more concerned to have endless features and pictures than to tell a good story, and in the worst cases (e.g. Beck’s *Patterns of Interaction*) the present-mindedness and hankering

for glitz drained away any pretense that they were offering students serious history.

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None of the authors seemed to have a clear idea of what history students ought to know, and why. Except in

the Holt *People & Nations*, the effort to entertain swamps the attempt to instruct. Even when there is the occasional good patch, it is vitiated by lamentable misjudgments elsewhere in the book, with the latter almost always enjoying an easy supremacy. I hate to be so negative, because there are good things in all the books; but the steadiness of purpose that a major undertaking like this requires is nowhere to be seen.

I have a feeling that the immensity of the task—the need to cover the entire world in 1000 pages or less—is just too daunting to allow authors to create a coherent and cogent piece of work. My guess is that students will leave the courses that follow these books only minimally more knowledgeable than when they started; confused about the structure of the past; and certainly unclear about the reasons they ought to be reading about history in the first place. The fact that some individual chapters come off quite well suggests that, if one wants to teach high schoolers what history is about and why it is important, it would be far more effective if one narrowed, rather than broadened, one’s horizons.

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**None of the textbook authors seems to have a clear idea of what history students ought to know, and why. In most texts, the effort to entertain swamps the attempt to instruct.**

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(You can find Rabb’s critique, along with the critiques of all reviewers, online at <http://www.edexcellence.net/institute>.)

Jeffrey Mirel, who reviewed American history textbooks, offers an overview that (like Rabb’s) identifies certain problematic features common to all the books. Mirel was struck by the

textbooks' remarkable similarities. The books, he says, are similar in structure, organization, illustrations, length, even weight. They typically run to more than 1,000 pages and weigh about seven and a half pounds. All include tips on how to read and use the book, a list of themes in American history, strategies for taking tests, lists of primary sources, features about how to improve critical reading and thinking skills, and sidebars that highlight the contributions of important individuals, especially women and minorities. The books "overflow with drawings, graphs, maps, paintings, photographs, and political cartoons," Mirel comments. He finds that as much as 40 percent of the books consists of graphics, and that, in addition, each page usually contains a great deal of white space. Stylistically, sentences and paragraphs are short.

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**Because publishers try to meet overlapping demands presented by fifty different states, all of which want the texts to be pedagogically useful, multicultural, and graphically appealing, there is remarkable similarity between all of the texts.**

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This remarkable similarity, he points out, results from publishers trying to meet the overlapping demands presented by fifty different states, all of which want the texts to be pedagogically useful, multicultural, and graphically appealing. Mirel avers that the degree of similarity among the books is "unnerving. Indeed, the differences between the various formats of these sprawling and cumbersome textbooks are not even as great as those distinguishing, say, the Whopper and the Big Mac. Rather it is more like the difference between the Big Mac, with or without cheese."

The reason that textbooks do a poor job of presenting history, Mirel believes, is that they attempt to cover so much material that they are unwieldy. It is not true, he asserts, that they fail to teach about pivotal figures in American history. They do. But they include so much about so many topics and people that it is nearly impossible for teachers or students to know what information or themes are of greatest importance. The books overflow with information and graphics, but they do not have the dramatic stories of human beings that so often cause people to fall in love with history. Teachers and students are swamped instead with bland themes and oceans of disconnected facts; they are left "completely adrift in trying to determine where to put most of their time and attention."

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**One major flaw in the U.S. history texts is that they consistently define multiculturalism in relation to race or color, but not ethnicity or religion.**

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One major flaw of the U.S. history textbooks, Mirel finds, is their treatment of diversity. The textbooks implicitly and consistently define multiculturalism in relation to race or color, but not ethnicity or religion. They pay close attention to the experiences of African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and Asian Americans, but they are almost entirely indifferent to the experiences of European immigrants. As soon as European immigrants step onto U.S. shores, Mirel writes, "they

quickly (almost instantaneously) disappear into the undifferentiated mass of American white people never to be heard from again. As far as European immigrants are concerned, the authors of these texts seem like the last true believers of the Americanizers' credo in World War I that 'There must be no hyphenated Americans.'" The books repeatedly call attention to color-defined minorities, but European immigrants "who made important contributions to American life are either not mentioned or their immigrant backgrounds are left out." Because of this blind spot, the authors downplay the importance of religious bigotry in American history and fail to acknowledge the overcoming of it in recent years. Mirel also complains that the texts ignore the development of the organized labor movement in the 1930s and 1940s.

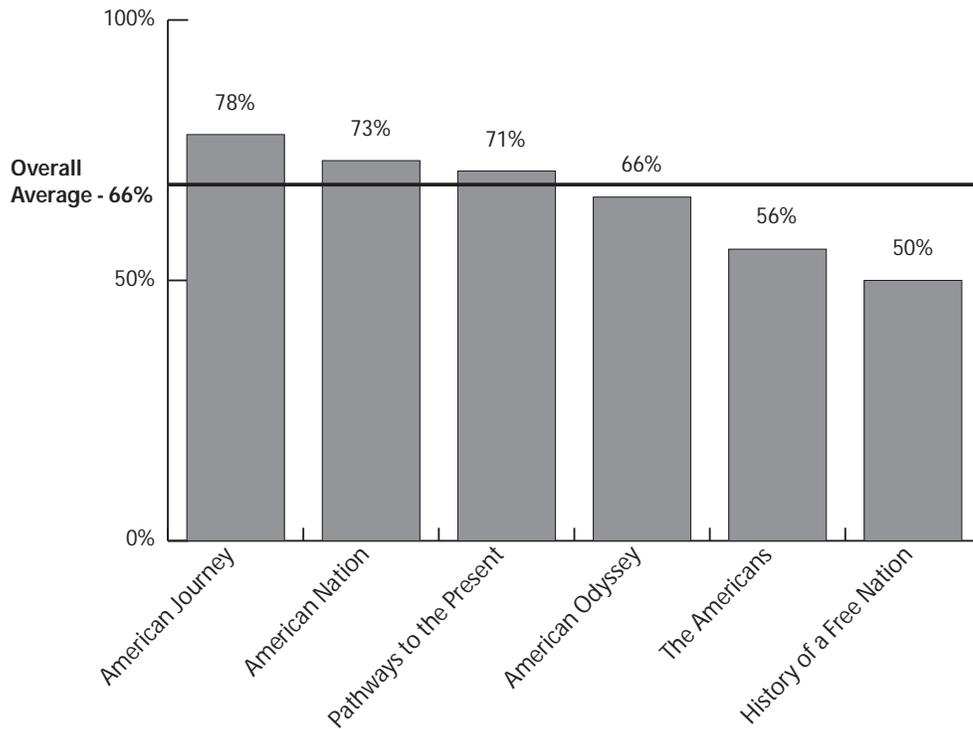
Walter Russell Mead summarizes a world history text with a comment that might have applied equally to many other texts: "Unfortunately, students using this text are likely to cram for exams, quickly forget most of what they have learned, and close its covers at the end of the year with a profound sigh of relief. They will think of history as a complicated and dull subject and will have no idea that in reality it is as fascinating, spectacular, frightening, exhilarating and engaging as human life."

# American History

A summary of the reviewers' findings

## American History

Overall Results



\*\*For a breakdown of the above graph into Individual Reviewer Grades, see Appendix E\*\*

<b>Appleby, <i>American Journey</i></b> Overall Grade: 78 % <b>C+</b> "Acceptable"	
<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Average Rating (out of 10)</b>
<b>Accuracy</b>	<b>8.5</b>
<b>Context</b>	<b>6.75</b>
<b>Organization</b>	<b>7.5</b>
<b>Selection of Supporting Materials</b>	<b>6.75</b>
<b>Lack of Bias</b>	<b>8.25</b>
<b>Historical Logic</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Literary Quality</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Use of Primary Sources</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Historical Soundness</b>	<b>9.25</b>
<b>Democratic Ideas</b>	<b>9.5</b>
<b>Interest Level</b>	<b>7.75</b>
<b>Graphics</b>	<b>7.75</b>
<b>Overall Average</b>	<b>7.8</b>

***The American Journey: Building a Nation***, Joyce Appleby, Alan Brinkley, and James M. McPherson, (Glencoe, 2003)

***The American Republic Since 1877***, Joyce Appleby, Alan Brinkley, Albert S. Broussard, James M. McPherson, and Donald A. Ritchie, (Glencoe, 2003)

(This pair of books was treated as a single entry.)

Of all of the American history textbooks reviewed, Appleby, Brinkley, and McPherson's *American Journey*, which reviewers read in tandem with the same authors' *American Republic Since 1877*, earned top marks. The book earned a cumulative score of 372 points (of a possible score of 480 awarded by four reviewers). If the scores were converted to a grade, it would be 78 percent. This book was also the top choice of two of the four reviewers (Mirel and Renehan) and ranked first among the American history textbooks reviewed.

### **Merits of *American Journey***

Keller's general impression of this book is "quite positive." It is fair-minded, he observes, in its treatment of controversial topics like the impact of the Spanish conquistadors and the arrival of Columbus—both of which are often infused with politically correct moralism. The book is "relatively restrained in its obeisance to the Great God Diversity" and properly attentive to political and governmental history while not neglecting social and cultural history. It manages to balance attention to the "darker aspects of American history—slavery and racism, the treatment of Native Americans, the secondary status of women...without slighting the positive aspects of the American experience: the opportunities opened by migration, immigration, and economic-technological development, the capacity of the society to confront and try to cure its ills." It's not "a revisionist-driven text," Keller writes. It contains a goodly number of maps, reflecting a tie-in with the National Geographic Society. The text lives up to its responsibility to teach children "how the polity in which they live took form." It does not slight "the economic and political achievements, northern cities, farms, and towns, the spread of education, or the scale and importance of the European immigration of the early nineteenth century." In contrast to some of the other books reviewed, *American Journey* is balanced in its discussion of American society in the 1950s: "It doesn't try to reduce the 1950s to Cold War hysteria and mindless consumerism."

Mirel says, “the single finest aspect of this book is its discussion of the development of American democracy,” with “very good explanations of the historical, philosophical, and religious background needed to understand the rise of democratic ideas in the English colonies.” He describes the text as “careful, balanced, and accurate.” The book is the product of a “collaboration of three outstanding historians, each of whom is a specialist in a particular century—Appleby in the eighteenth century, McPherson in the nineteenth, and Brinkley in the twentieth. They take a careful, balanced, and accurate approach to the numerous topics they address. For the most part, they do not demonstrate any strong ideological bias.” According to Mirel, high points of this textbook include its explanation of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Dred Scott case, and the change in Lincoln’s views about slavery.

Renahan admires the “straightforward” telling of the nation’s story, “without a lot of jumping around.” The key themes of the saga are summed up in precise “sound-bites that succinctly and accurately render” the topic at hand. History is personalized through biographical accounts and quotes from important figures. “Facts are accurately stated. Analysis overall seems to be fair, measured and reasonable.” The maps, graphics, and literary excerpts are well chosen. Reflecting the expertise of historian McPherson, the chapters on abolitionism, the Civil War, and Reconstruction are “especially strong.” The book contains good sections called “Fact, Fiction, Folklore,” which debunk popular myths of American history.

Pyne considers this text “balanced in terms of the coverage of political, diplomatic, military, economic, social, and cultural history,” and “for the most part...well-written, interesting, and informative for students.” He likes that the authors do not focus solely on the Bering Land Bridge theory to explain the early peopling of the Americas, but instead “explain that historians are unsure how the first Americans arrived...and provide evidence from several newer theories which challenge the conventional wisdom.” Pyne is glad to see that the Declaration is not only well-explained but reproduced at the appropriate place in the text instead of relegated to a distant appendix. He also likes the coverage of the western frontier, women progressives, African American “Exodusters,” and World War II.

### ***Shortcomings of American Journey***

Although the reviewers, on average, consider this to be the best of the U.S. history textbooks, they nonetheless express a number of criticisms.

Keller thinks the text “could have been more forceful about trying to give its readers a sense of the distinctive character of each of its eras...This would help them to put together—make sense of—the plethora of information that is put before them.” Lacking this sense of context, readers would have trouble understanding “how political, economic, and social developments relate to one another.” Keller complains that the sidebars called “People in History” are disproportionately tilted towards “blacks, women (four of the first five in the colonial period), Native Americans, and Hispanics—but

not Lincoln, Washington, or FDR.” He also faults the absence of any reference to “the pro-Tory inclinations of many Native Americans during the Revolution,” Chinese in the Gold Rush era, the Chautauqua movement, the racist element in anti-imperialism and the Progressive movement, or to gays and lesbians as among the groups now seeking rights. Keller objects to descriptions of Coughlin, Townsend, and Long in the 1930s as “liberals” and to followers of Henry Wallace as “liberal Democrats.” He finds that the text was clear but “colorless,” in need of vivid anecdotes. The description of the nation since 1968, he concludes, “lacks a larger, unifying worldview.”

Rehnan faults the “truncated style in which many of the primary source items are presented.” He thinks it would be better to show all 14 of Woodrow Wilson’s 14 Points, not just three of them. He also complains about the inclusion of edited versions of the Articles of Confederation, various Federalist papers, Washington’s Farewell Address, and the Emancipation Proclamation.

Pyne finds several features in the book “essentially unappealing, useless, or mistaken.” The space for pedagogical activities throughout the book “could have been used to explore historical events in sufficient detail to enable students to comprehend their significance.” In addition, “the main idea listed at the beginning of each section is often so general and banal as to be virtually useless to students.” For example, “The first Americans spread throughout North, Central, and South America,” “Several factors led to the rise and decline of great civilizations and empires in the Americas,” and “Many cities grew tremendously during this period.” Equally banal is the main idea about the Progressive movement: “Many men and women became part of a widespread movement to bring about reform.” Additionally, many of the brief stories at the beginning of each section are “unappealing and unhelpful. Due to their brevity and lack of context, they fail to stimulate interest or excitement in students.” Worse, the authors do not cite the source, and students cannot tell whether the excerpt is a primary or secondary source, who is its author, and what is its context. Moreover, the text is long on coverage and short on the kind of engaging details that would put events into context and enable students to comprehend their significance. The text is frequently and abruptly disrupted by the introduction of new topics, making it less readable. “Students are provided short snippets of information in-between headings, sub-headings, and graphics...Interest and excitement is sacrificed in the race to cover as many topics as possible.”

Pyne also notes that the story of the Jamestown colony is written “in a decidedly uninspiring and unexciting way,” with many important questions never raised. The Revolutionary War is covered “far too briefly.” The treatment of efforts to regulate big business in the late nineteenth century is shallow, and the text fails to explore the anti-democratic aspects of progressivism. He faults the text for paying inadequate attention to Eugene Debs, Woodrow Wilson’s segregationist policies, the organized campaign to segregate African Americans in the South between 1890 and 1907, the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision of 1896, the second Ku Klux Klan, discrimination against Chinese and Japanese, racial violence in the late nineteenth century, and social Darwinism, as well as labor unrest and assaults on civil liberties during World War I.

Mirel criticizes the book for downplaying discrimination against European immigrants, as compared to non-European immigrants (but noted that this is a common problem in all of the books reviewed). He observes that discrimination against Asians “receives over 30 percent more space textually than the sections on anti-Catholicism and anti-Semitism *combined*.” The book inaccurately asserts that the principles of free, tax-supported public schools with well-trained teachers and compulsory attendance were well-established by 1850; Mirel notes that these principles had not yet been adopted widely and Massachusetts was the only state with a compulsory school law at that date. He also faults the text for “grossly” understating the barbarism of Stalin’s regime in the Soviet Union.

***The American Nation***, Paul Boyer,  
(Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 2003)

In second place among American history textbooks is Paul Boyer’s *American Nation*. It received a cumulative total of 352 points (out of a possible 480). If the scores were converted to a grade, it would be 73 percent.

**Merits of *American Nation***

Renahan gives *The American Nation* its highest score (100 of 120 points) and writes admiringly of its splendid graphics. He also praises the book’s “logical, even, event-driven narrative,” its integration of outstanding prose and poetry into the historical flow, and its rich collection of primary source documents. He likes the biographical vignettes that help the book “deliver a cohesive and logical picture of evolving trends and issues.” More than 90 such short bios are “artfully and unobtrusively woven into the text at the precisely correct moment in the narrative.”

<b>Boyer, <i>American Nation</i></b> Overall Grade: 73 % <b>C-</b> “Acceptable”	
<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Average rating (out of 10)</b>
<b>Accuracy</b>	<b>8.5</b>
<b>Context</b>	<b>8.5</b>
<b>Organization</b>	<b>7.5</b>
<b>Selection of Supporting Materials</b>	<b>7.75</b>
<b>Lack of Bias</b>	<b>6.25</b>
<b>Historical Logic</b>	<b>7.75</b>
<b>Literary Quality</b>	<b>6.25</b>
<b>Use of Primary Sources</b>	<b>7.5</b>
<b>Historical Soundness</b>	<b>9.25</b>
<b>Democratic Ideas</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Interest Level</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Graphics</b>	<b>6.75</b>
<b>Overall Average</b>	<b>7.3</b>

Mirel terms Boyer’s book “a solid, middling text that presents American history accurately and without apparent ideological bias.” He notes that *The American Nation*, unlike other texts, does pay attention to the history of European immigrant groups. The section about Stalin’s regime is brief but appropriately damning. Mirel praises Boyer’s attention to the role of religion in American life, as compared to the other texts—but finds it strange that he devotes nearly a full page to the Nation of Islam. Islam and Hinduism in the U.S. receive far less space despite their

vastly larger number of followers. Boyer's treatment of religion, Mirel thinks, would have been better still if it had been included in the text, rather than in sidebars.

Pyne finds the Boyer text to be readable, interesting, informative, and notable for its use of interesting historical anecdotes; he also likes the single-column format, which means less frequent interruptions for graphics. Pyne admires Boyer's treatment of Meso-American cultures (Olmec, Maya, Toltec, Aztec, and Inca, as well as the various early cultures in North America) and the text's coverage of the Civil War.

Keller describes Boyer's text as "reasonably even-handed (although a soft-liberal leaning prevails throughout). It certainly meets its production quota for giving due and more than due attention to women, African-Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans." He praises the book's "rich selection of contemporary sources, major historical documents, and sidebars," but implies that the book has a surfeit of "skill-building activities," such as "keeping a journal, taking tests, interpreting maps, charts, and cartoons." Among the strong points of the text, Keller comments, are its acknowledgment of the "less tasteful practices of the Aztecs" and its treatment of Columbus. It pays "reasonable attention" to the Pilgrims and the Massachusetts Bay Colony and gives a "solid" treatment of the Revolution and the Constitution. It gives a balanced treatment of the coming of the Civil War and a "reasonably comprehensive" account of political, diplomatic, and social history (though it "tends to dwell more on the negative consequences than the positive achievements of American economic development in the late nineteenth century"). The text is "unblinking in its readiness to take up unfavorable aspects of American life—racism, class and environmental exploitation, etc.," but "it is less inclined to explain to students what made the United States a lodestone for so many millions of immigrants, and an object of interest, attention, and admiration for so many others."

### ***Shortcomings of American Nation***

Keller does not like the "terribly busy format of each page," a criticism that applies in some degree to the other texts as well. The visual clutter on the pages suggests that the publishers or authors believe that children raised on television will not accept text unless it is highly decorated. The book reminds Keller of CNN Headline News, which (no surprise) has some sort of formal arrangement with the publisher of this text.

He complains that the questions throughout the text are "bland," "bureaucratized," and "unanswerable," such as, "What kind of leader does the painting suggest Bolivar was?" "What does this painting reveal about the slavery debate and the need to find a compromise?" "How do you think this dance number contrasted with the lives of the audience?"

In an effort to be inclusive of women and racial minorities, Keller writes, the book lavishes attention on people of relatively minor consequence, like the woman who established the first tennis

court, the Soviet cosmonaut who became the first woman in space, and six female biologists who spent two weeks underwater without surfacing. Similarly, the decision to give biographies of equal length to every president means that George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Franklin D. Roosevelt are given equal treatment with John Tyler, Millard Fillmore, and even with Olaudah Equiano, Liliuokalani, Madame C. J. Walker, and Norman Mineta. (Keller notes that Liliuokalani's bio is actually longer than Lincoln's.)

In its insistent emphasis on multiculturalism, Keller observes, Boyer's text distorts history, because ancient Rome and Greece (which are not mentioned) are "subordinated to China and Meso-America in terms of their significance for American history"; the discussion of King Phillip's War mentions "the Indian loss of life, but not the comparably significant colonial losses"; in discussing Andrew Jackson, more emphasis is placed on Indian removal than on the Bank of the United States; "mid-dling Americans," such as small farmers, shopkeepers, and lawyers, are neglected in the Middle Period of American history, and emphasis is placed on "the wealthy, slaves, the poor and the 'very poor.'" Relatively little attention is paid to European immigrants or to Catholicism, Judaism, or the major Protestant sects. Important immigrant figures are ignored. In general, the book emphasizes abuses, exploitation, corruption, and other negative features of American history. Its tone is "no-ene-mies-to-the-left."

Pyne observes that, when discussing the African slave trade, Boyer's textbook fails to mention the Arabs' significant role, thus giving students "the impression that only Europeans were involved in the slave trade." He is disappointed that Boyer downplays Columbus' savage treatment of Native Americans and does not discuss the Columbian Exchange. A number of other specific events in American history, he concludes, are not well explained, such as the Salem Witchcraft trials, slavery in the Southern Colonies, the Revolutionary War, and World War I and the failure of the peace. Also unsatisfactory is the treatment of the Cold War, which the author explains as the result of "economic, political, and philosophical differences" between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Rehnan praises the book's accuracy and graphics but also remarks on the absence of any "out-right statements saying in unequivocal terms that the United States of America is clearly a...noble endeavor. On the other hand, there is also no distinct negative slant to the volume...The unwavering tone throughout is distant, journalistic, and matter-of-fact. We have precision and completeness here...but little in the way of poetry or passion. And passion is sometimes called for, is it not? With regard to the abolitionist movement? With regard to the civil rights movement? With regard to the sacrifices and triumph of World War II? These are great, epic stories. They deserve great storytelling."

Mirel admires the book's apparent absence of ideological bias but finds fault with its relative inattention to the development of American democracy and the quality of its prose. He complains that the prose is sometimes tedious and dry and lacking in analysis. For example, Boyer summarizes the Declaration of Independence in a single page but provides virtually no analysis and never cites it again;

unlike some other texts, he includes the full Gettysburg Address but “offers no analysis of it.” Like so many other textbooks, Boyer’s includes some “striking examples of foolish questions”; a drawing of a grim-faced Andrew Johnson receiving a summons to appear at his impeachment trial is accompanied by the banal question “How does Johnson’s expression reflect his feelings about the trial?”

***America: Pathways to the Present,***

Andrew Cayton, Elizabeth Israels Perry, Linda Reed, and Alan W. Winkler, (Prentice Hall, 2003)

In third place among the American history textbooks is Cayton, et al.’s *America: Pathways to the Present*. One reviewer (Keller) selected it as his top-rated book. It received a cumulative total of 341 points (out of a possible 480). If the scores were converted to a grade, it would be 71 percent.

***Merits of Pathways to the Present***

Keller, who names this text as his first choice, describes it as “a superior text: generally well-written, frequently using apt specific/anecdotal material to sustain its readers’ interest, dealing with large and complex historical issues clearly and comprehensively, challenging its readers to stretch their historical comprehension rather than pandering to some low-level lowest common denominator.” He also praises the “breadth, reach, clarity, and balance of this text,” its relative freedom from political correctness, and its “relatively mature and sophisticated text.” He concludes that he would be pleased to have his own child use this text in an eleventh-grade American history course. The description of the country’s origins and colonial society is “well-written, balanced, and mature, conveying distinctly more of the texture and substance of the colonial past than do the other texts.” It contains good, interconnected treatments of the Revolution, the Constitution, early national society, the Jacksonian era, and the Civil War. In its discussion of early nineteenth century America, for example, it refers to demography, immigration, marriage, technological advances, manners, consumption, religion, reform, women’s rights, Noah Webster, the McGuffey readers, and Emerson. Drawing upon its tie-in with American Heritage publications, the text is exemplary in “its use of illustrative incidents, statements, and ancillary material.”

***Cayton, Pathways to the Present***  
 Overall Grade: 71 %  
**C-**  
 “Acceptable”

<b><i>Criterion</i></b>	<b><i>Average Rating (out of 10)</i></b>
<b><i>Accuracy</i></b>	<b><i>7.25</i></b>
<b><i>Context</i></b>	<b><i>8.25</i></b>
<b><i>Organization</i></b>	<b><i>6.75</i></b>
<b><i>Selection of Supporting Materials</i></b>	<b><i>6.75</i></b>
<b><i>Lack of Bias</i></b>	<b><i>7</i></b>
<b><i>Historical Logic</i></b>	<b><i>8</i></b>
<b><i>Literary Quality</i></b>	<b><i>6.5</i></b>
<b><i>Use of Primary Sources</i></b>	<b><i>6.5</i></b>
<b><i>Historical Soundness</i></b>	<b><i>8</i></b>
<b><i>Democratic Ideas</i></b>	<b><i>4.75</i></b>
<b><i>Interest Level</i></b>	<b><i>6.5</i></b>
<b><i>Graphics</i></b>	<b><i>9</i></b>
<b><i>Overall Average</i></b>	<b><i>7.1</i></b>

Keller also writes of this book: “In contrast to the Boyer and Nash texts, it gives due weight to the immigration of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, diagrams and describes the dumb-bell tenement...” It also describes the progress of education and takes note of circuses and amusement parks, thus surveying “the developing urban-industrial lifestyle of what was arguably a plurality of the American people.” Keller is impressed by the text’s treatment of the 1920s, especially on Hollywood and the Scopes trial, which he describes as “thoughtful, comprehensive, and fair.” The discussions of World War II, the Cold War, and McCarthyism are “excellent.”

Though Mirel does not give this book his highest score, he finds it to be “the best-written book in the group.” Unlike the other texts, the authors often “speak directly to the reader” and remind readers of ongoing themes. The book describes debates among historians about unsettled issues in history. It contains “the finest description of a battle that I found in any of the books. The three-page description of the Battle of Gettysburg, accompanied by a useful map of the deployment of the armies over the three days, was riveting.” Overall, Mirel judges, this text “tries hard to offer a fair and even-handed view of American history” and the authors do not have “an ideological axe to grind.” He also commends the book for its honest treatment of twentieth-century totalitarianism.

Renahan says this text “does a good job of placing the facts of our national history in the context of cultural movements and trends.” In particular, its “elegant” discussion of Emerson, Thoreau, and Transcendentalism puts their views in the context of the reform movement in New England and sets the stage for the later discussion of New England abolitionism.

Pyne finds more to criticize than to praise in this textbook but likes certain aspects, such as its treatment of slavery in the colonies, the French and Indian War, the debates about ratifying the Constitution, its analysis of the Constitution, immigration from 1880-1920, African American life under Jim Crow laws, the Progressive movement, the Cold War, and Reagan’s presidency.

### ***Shortcomings of *Pathways to the Present****

Pyne finds much to criticize in this text, including the paucity of primary documents from the nineteenth century. He repeatedly notes that the text has “too much breadth and not enough depth,” and that the authors “cover too many topics in insufficient detail.” Time and again, he says, “the coverage is too brief to elicit much student interest and few real details are offered.” He is critical of the treatment of slavery in Africa, because the authors “stress its overall benign qualities in comparison to western slavery. No mention is made of the Arab slave trade.” The book suffers from a lack of details, Pyne says, in its discussion of Spanish explorers and colonizers, English colonization, the Mayflower Compact, life in the American colonies, the Revolutionary War, the historical controversies surrounding Thomas Jefferson, competing plans for Reconstruction of the South, the undemocratic features of progressivism, the causes of World War I, and the failures of the peace conference after that war. Pyne is offended by the text’s characterization of Andrew Carnegie as a friend of labor unions.

Renahan takes exception to the text's description of Jay Gould as an unprincipled financial manipulator who knew and cared little about the management of railroads. This discussion, he says, is a cliché that is "out of step with contemporary scholarship." He faults the text for assuming "that all capitalists are evil, and indeed that capitalism itself is some sort of zero-sum game where the rich are rich because the poor are poor." Renahan is also critical of the text for "a certain editorial blandness...a somewhat dull, fact-by-fact recitation, with few bursts of enthusiasm and few literary surprises." He objects to its practice of excerpting primary sources: "The Emancipation Proclamation is not so long that it cannot be quoted in full. And what is the point of presenting just one stanza of Emerson's 'Concord Hymn'?"

Keller wonders about the length of the "study aids" section, which made a long book even longer. He finds the illustrations to be often too small and/or illegible. The book contains the same "inane question practice that seems to be endemic" among all textbooks, with questions like "What effect did Lange's photographs have on the general public?" Substantively, Keller faults the book's treatment of the antebellum Supreme Court, its lack of attention to Protestant missionaries of that time (an omission common to all the texts), and its treatment of the politics of the Gilded Age. Keller criticizes the book's exaggeration of the importance of imperialism, its failure to acknowledge FDR's stance in 1932 as a budget balancer, its description of Henry Wallace's followers as liberal Democrats, its uncritical treatment of JFK, and its timid reference to Ho Chi Minh as someone "who sympathized with Communist ideas."

Mirel finds the authors "skewing the story to appeal to more recent immigrants." In writing about the period from 1865 to 1920, twice as much space is devoted to Asian and Mexican immigrants even though their numbers were far smaller than those of European immigrants. He faults the book for its description of conflicts between Native Americans and whites (when whites kill Indians, it is a "massacre," but when Indians kill whites, it is not called a "massacre"). Mirel says: "Indian massacres of whites were no less horrible than white massacres of Indians and should be described as such."

## ***American Odyssey: The United States in the Twentieth Century,***

Gary B. Nash, (Glencoe, 2002)

The fourth-rated American history textbook was Gary B. Nash's *American Odyssey*. It earned 317 points of a possible 480, or 66 percent. This book sparked the greatest range of disagreement and most extensive commentary among the reviewers: One gave it his highest rating while another gave it his lowest rating. The disagreement centered on reviewers' differing reactions to the book's political bias.

### ***Merits of American Odyssey***

Pyne gives this book his highest rating, finding it crisply written, interesting, with well-chosen readings and excerpts that are sure to be of interest to teachers and students. He also likes the case studies that showed where historians have disagreed. He enjoys the discussion of political corruption and "a typical workday in the life of George Washington Plunkett of Tammany Hall," as well as good content about the expansion of big business and its success at avoiding government regulation and suppressing competition. He admires Nash's inclusion of details about topics that are often left out of high school history textbooks, such as mine owners' contemptuous treatment of striking miners, President Woodrow Wilson's support for racial segregation, the revival of the Ku Klux Klan, Progressives' "ambivalent relationship with labor unions" (especially radical unions like the Industrial Workers of the World), the Hollywood Ten, and the Rosenberg case. Pyne writes that Nash's book is "the most interesting and informative text" on the twentieth century of those that he reviewed.

Keller judges it "the best-written...of the group: a tribute to the fact that one able historian can produce a more readable text than can a cast of thousands. And it has the most imaginatively designed supplementary material." But he also maintains that this text is "the most biased and partisan of the texts reviewed here: unabashed in its politically (if not historically) correct definition of diversity, and in its adherence to a left-liberal view of modern America." Despite his distaste for Nash's political agenda, Keller acknowledges that the book's treatment of colonial and Revolutionary history is lively, well-written, and informed. Nash, he says, does a solid job of writing about technology and early industrialism, the rise of industrialism after the Civil War, urban growth at the open-

<b>Nash, <i>American Odyssey</i></b>	
Overall Grade: 66 %	
<b>D</b>	
"Weak"	
<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Average Rating (out of 10)</b>
<b>Accuracy</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Context</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Organization</b>	<b>5.75</b>
<b>Selection of Supporting Materials</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Lack of Bias</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Historical Logic</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Literary Quality</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Use of Primary Sources</b>	<b>7.25</b>
<b>Historical Soundness</b>	<b>6.75</b>
<b>Democratic Ideas</b>	<b>6.25</b>
<b>Interest Level</b>	<b>7.5</b>
<b>Graphics</b>	<b>8.75</b>
<b>Overall Average</b>	<b>6.6</b>

ing of the twentieth century, Theodore Roosevelt, Booker T. Washington, and William Howard Taft, as well as the popular culture of the twentieth century. His treatment of the civil rights movement is “comprehensive” and his presentation of affirmative action is “fair-minded.”

Renehan terms the book’s graphics “first-rate,” from Norman Rockwell illustrations to World War II posters to vintage news photographs. He also admires the selection of literary excerpts that accompany the historical narrative, such as a relevant piece from John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* along with Dorothea Lange photos from the same Depression era. Renehan also compliments the author for “a good job” explaining President Ronald Reagan’s coalition of neoconservatives and the religious right, as well as his economic policies.

Mirel commends Nash for the engaging, well-written vignettes that open each chapter or section. He also likes the selection of literary excerpts, such as a column by war correspondent Ernie Pyle written during World War II. The book, Mirel says, has “some of the most eye-catching and interesting graphics of all the books.”

### **Shortcomings of *American Odyssey***

The general tenor of the criticism of Nash’s book, even from those who admire its lively writing and attractive graphics, is that the author’s strong political and ideological views introduce bias into his interpretations. Mirel notes that all of the other books “appear to strive for a reasonably even-handed and fair representation of American history.” Nash, however, has a “deeply pessimistic” view, in which the nation’s failures consistently outweigh its commitment to its ideals. Mirel faults Nash for never making his interpretation explicit; the book “proceeds as if it is giving a fair and balanced picture of American history, but its tendency to accentuate the nation’s flaws belies that impression.”

Mirel criticizes Nash’s text for its extensive attention to McCarthyism and its relative neglect of the nature of the Soviet regime, which was an important contextual element in this era. Without this context, the controversies over spies and treason are incomprehensible. Nash even chides President Truman for painting “too harsh a picture” of life under Communist rule. Mirel concludes that “it is difficult to judge a book as even-handed and fair that devotes so much time to violations of people’s civil liberties [in the U.S.]...but does not even mention the millions of deaths under Soviet Communism.”

Mirel takes issue with Nash for his lack of attention to the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in the 1930s; his romanticizing of native peoples, for example, failing to mention the Aztec practice of human sacrifice; his implication that Lincoln was a hypocrite about slavery; his inordinate attention to Cesar Sandino, the Nicaraguan rebel who opposed the United States; and his lengthy treatment of the National Origins Act of 1924, coupled with his neglect of the contributions to American life of European immigrants who arrived in the U.S. prior to 1924.

Keller also criticizes Nash for seeing the American people through the lens of currently fashionable categories (women, African-Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos), but neglecting the 35 million people who “participated in the great migration from Western Europe during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,” whose experiences should be one of the major themes of American national history. Although Keller likes the book’s case studies of controversial issues, he believes that their selection reflects the author’s leftist political agenda (e.g., the Trial of Anne Hutchinson, the Cherokee Expulsion, Women’s Suffrage and the Seneca Falls Convention, the National Origins Act, Art and Politics at Rockefeller Center, Dropping the Bomb, the Hollywood Ten, the United Farm Workers and the Grape Boycott, the Attempted Impeachment of Nixon, and Affirmative Action).

Nash distorts American life up to about 1800, Keller writes, by emphasizing the experiences of Meso-Americans and Africans while neglecting the lives of white Americans. The reader learns that African slaves “began to Africanize America’s European culture” without learning much about that culture. Little attention is paid to the colonial economy unless it bears on slavery. His treatment of American history reflects his emphasis on multiculturalism and near-indifference to political events that do not involve these issues. His portrayals of party differences are simplistic, and the War of 1812 is dismissed with a mere two paragraphs. His treatment of antebellum westward expansion devotes four pages to settlers and seven pages to Native Americans. The battles of the Civil War rate only three pages, and there is “almost nothing on the war’s impact on American institutions and attitudes. Mention of the New York draft riots ignores the ethnic (Irish) factor.” After the Civil War, the West is “populated by Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, and cowhands (not cowboys). The white male farmers who settled in the western Prairie and the plains are people whose existence we have to take on faith.” In Nash’s *Gilded Age America*, the population consisted of the rich, the poor, and “minorities.” The small farmers, shopkeepers, townspeople, city-dwellers, and immigrants who do not fit into these categories are the forgotten people. The text’s neglect of immigrants and their contributions, Keller says, is “an unconscionable distortion/suppression, comparable to the slighting of blacks, Indians, and women in earlier texts.”

Keller also faults Nash’s treatment of post-World War II America. Nash, he says, “follows the left/revisionist emphasis on business interests and paranoid anti-Communism,” not noting that the nation’s Cold War policies were broadly popular. Keller criticizes Nash’s contempt for consumerism, showing no understanding that, “a car, a home, and the rest of it satisfied pent-up desires of a generation who had lived through the Great Depression and the Second World War.” Nor does he find credible Nash’s view that Republican electoral successes after the war were due entirely to “demagoguery, fear, and anti-Communism.”

Renehan complains about “gross generalizations” in the Nash text. He gives this example: “The deaths of King and Kennedy shattered the hopes of antiwar and civil rights activists who had sought to work within the political system.” In fact, as Renehan points out, many anti-war activists remained “fervently mobilized for [Senator Eugene] McCarthy—and later for [Senator George]

McGovern...only a small radical fringe embarked on extra-political guerrilla warfare of the Weather Underground variety after these murders of liberal leaders.”

Renehan objects to the “absolute absence of vital contextual information,” for example, the fact that Senator Robert Kennedy was assassinated by a Palestinian (his name is not even mentioned in the text) or that Martin Luther King, Jr., was murdered by a white supremacist. He finds Nash’s narrative marred by a consistent ideological slant, as when he writes about the trials of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, which he treats as an example of anti-Communist paranoia. Nash writes, “Arguments abound on both sides, but recently released Soviet documents seem to confirm the Rosenbergs’ guilt.” Renehan remarks: “In other words, while arguments might abound on both sides, proof abounds on just one.”

Pyne finds very little that he did not like about the Nash textbook. His major complaint is that it is weak in its coverage of major battle campaigns of World Wars I and II. He also notes that Nash ignores recent evidence indicating that Alger Hiss was guilty.

<b>Danzer, <i>The Americans</i></b> Overall Grade: 56 % <b>F</b> “Unsatisfactory”	
<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Average Rating (out of 10)</i>
<i>Accuracy</i>	5.25
<i>Context</i>	4
<i>Organization</i>	7
<i>Selection of Supporting Materials</i>	4.5
<i>Lack of Bias</i>	4.25
<i>Historical Logic</i>	5.75
<i>Literary Quality</i>	5.25
<i>Use of Primary Sources</i>	5
<i>Historical Soundness</i>	6.75
<i>Democratic Ideas</i>	6
<i>Interest Level</i>	5.5
<i>Graphics</i>	8.5
<i>Overall Average</i>	5.6

***The Americans***, Gerald A. Danzer, J. Jorge Klor de Alva, Larry S. Krieger, Louise E. Wilson, Nancy Woloch, (McDougall Littell, 2003)

The fifth-rated American history textbook was Danzer’s *The Americans*, which received a cumulative rating of 271 points, or 56 percent. Keller’s general observations about this text are applicable to most of the others as well. He notes that it is a “corporate product,” which seems to have been authored by the publisher, not a living author: “It appears that a group of presumably human beings (Gerald A. Danzer, et al.) did, in some sense, author the text. But it is made clear to the reader that authorship in this case has only a tenuous claim to a privileged role in putting words on paper. The presumptive authors’ names appear at the head of a combined listing of ‘Authors and Consultants.’ The five authors are backstopped (overwhelmed would be more accurate) by a Constitution Consultant; a Contributing Writer; a six-person Multicultural Advisory Board; five ‘Content Consultants’; 36 Teacher Consultants; Teacher Panels from the key (in the adoption sense) states of Florida (11 strong), Illinois (8), California (9), and

Texas (9); 37 Manuscript Reviewers; and a 24-member Student Board. (There is as well a 34-page-long presentation of Strategies for Taking Standardized Tests.)” With this pedigree, the resulting book has “the literary and historical spontaneity of a Noh play, and prose distinguished by a committee-fabricated blandness.” And, much like the other texts, this one has “a strong commitment to the theme of diversity...and an ongoing effort to beguile its student consumers with a CNN Headline News-like pastiche of pictures, boxes, charts, extracts: anything to spare them the pain and suffering of being subjected to an extensive, substantive body of writing.”

### ***Merits of *The Americans****

Keller credits the book for its good treatment of architecture and economics. Although the sidebars are often better written than the core text, the book gives solid attention to Puritan New England, the Declaration of Independence, the Revolution, the Constitution, the Civil War, urban life, the Great Depression, and the origins of the Cold War. Its treatment of the civil rights movement and the Great Society programs, says Keller, is comprehensive but tends to be uncritically admiring. Its epilogue is a “generally well-balanced” presentation of major current controversies in American life.

Mirel calls this “a sturdy but uninspiring textbook.” It is “not dramatically skewed toward any particular ideology, but it shares the ‘soft,’ multicultural biases that show up in most of the others.” He asserts that it provides “one of the best descriptions of how black people lost their civil rights in the early 1870s and after Reconstruction.” And unlike the other texts, it includes a good two-page section on a landmark Supreme Court decision in 1937 that affirmed Congress’ power to regulate labor relations. It also contains a two-sentence acknowledgement of the brutality of Stalin’s regime.

Rehnan admires the graphics of this text, and Pyne praises the book’s single-column format, which improves its readability.

### ***Shortcomings of *The Americans****

Keller finds that the judgments and substance of this text are distorted by its insistent multiculturalism. In a discussion of the nation’s origins, for example, 10 pages are devoted to Indian cultures, six pages to the slaves’ West African backgrounds, but only five pages to the European background of white settlers. In discussing Virginia society, there is little sense of any population other than slaves and plantation owners. The suggestion that young colonists were troubled by inequalities of “wealth, gender, and race (slavery),” says Keller, is “presentism with a vengeance.” George Washington gets passing notice, but Tecumseh gets more attention than the War of 1812. The book claims that the enduring significance of the Age of Jackson is found in the persecution of Native Americans. Antebellum immigration is slighted, which stems from the text’s assumption that “diversity” applies only to those of non-European ancestry. In the same vein, the text minimizes the significance of the

Know-Nothing movement, as well as the Irish ethnicity of the Draft Rioters in New York City during the Civil War. The text's claim that business owners and bankers in the northeast in the 1890s were Republicans while farmers and laborers at that time were Democrats, is caricature, not history. Samuel Gompers is barely mentioned, while the "key players" of the labor movement are deemed to be Eugene Debs and Mother Jones. W.E.B. Du Bois is given more attention than Booker T. Washington, a judgment that "may suit current sensibilities, but distorts history."

Keller further complains that the text's discussion of immigration a century ago gives "more-or-less equal attention to European, Asian, and West Indian and Mexican immigrants," which is "a gross distortion of historical reality." Almost no mention is made of Jewish immigration, which was significant at this time. The book's discussion of American imperialism in Cuba makes no comparison to imperialism elsewhere. The text does not mention who killed Malcolm X, nor does it criticize the Black Panthers. Keller notes that the analysis of the last 45 years of American history—from John F. Kennedy to the present—has a strong pro-liberal Democrat tone. Rather than teaching students to weigh conflicting evidence, the book offers them a partisan interpretation of the recent past.

Pyne finds that the text has "a tendency to romanticize Native Americans as inherent environmentalists who lived in harmony with nature..." and tends to quote Native Americans speakers out of time contexts. Native Americans are presented as "innocent children of nature, rather than acknowledge[ing] the perspective from which many early European explorers and colonizers viewed them—as essentially uncivilized, un-Christian, and backward." The text fails to mention the Arab slave trade, the African-European slave trade, or the persistence of slavery in some Arab countries even today. Pyne also faults the text's treatment of the American Revolution, both its causes—treated all too briefly and perfunctorily—and the course of the war itself. Similarly, the text's discussion of the ideas held by the Founders—such as the difference between a democracy and a republic—is inadequate and superficial, as are the debates about the drafting of the Constitution. World War I and its aftermath are also treated sparsely.

Mirel finds that Danzer's book suffers from its obeisance to multiculturalism. So, for example, it does not discuss the Aztec practice of human sacrifice (*none* of the books even mentions that the Incans also practiced human sacrifice, though not to the same extent as the Aztecs). Danzer's text reserves the word "massacre" almost exclusively to describe actions taken by whites against people of color but refrains from using the word when describing comparable atrocities committed by people of color against whites.

Renahan takes strong exception to the Danzer textbook's description of Theodore Roosevelt. It does not mention that he was a Republican, and it wrongly asserts that he became a conservationist only after meeting John Muir. The book's description of Roosevelt's civil rights record, says Renahan, "borders on character assassination." Danzer says that TR invited Booker T. Washington to the White House "as a symbolic gesture," but Renahan points out that Washington was "the first black person

ever invited to a private dinner in the family quarters of the White House, sharing table with the white president’s wife and daughters.” Furthermore, the book fails to mention that Roosevelt was the first president to appoint a Jew to a cabinet post. Renehan finds that the Danzer textbook leans “greatly to the Left,” such as in its sympathetic references to the Rosenberg and Hiss cases. Worse, the book “offers next to no primary sources,” and its literary excerpts are too brief to be historically interesting.

***History of a Free Nation***, Henry W. Bragdon, Samuel P. McCutcheon, and Donald A. Ritchie, (Glencoe, 1998)

The sixth-rated American history textbook was Bragdon’s *History of a Free Nation*. It received 242 points (of a possible 480), or 50 percent.

**Merits of *History of a Free Nation***

Mirel describes this text as “another sturdy, middle-of-the-pack text,” whose descriptions are “accurate,” with no apparent ideological bias. The text, he says, does “a fine job explaining and analyzing the Declaration of Independence,” as well as providing a useful section on the Constitution and how the government works. Bragdon’s text, he writes, does “one of the best jobs of showing how perilous the situation was for the American revolutionaries in December of 1776 and how important the Battles of Trenton and Princeton were to the cause.” This book is also the only one that mentions that the Mexican government in 1845 planned to go to war to win back Texas.”

Keller admires that the authors are not academic historians and do not rely on the “casts of thousands” of consultants found in the work of their competitors. He says, “There is an endearingly modest, old-fashioned clunkiness to this textbook.” While it makes a number of requisite gestures toward inclusiveness, Keller believes the authors’ “true historical hearts lie in straightforward political history. Here their text displays a depth and authority that often is lacking elsewhere.” Keller admires the text’s treatment of the European medieval-Renaissance background, as compared to the other texts. Its traditionalism “pays off,” in his eyes, with its solid presentations of the period before the American Revolution, the Republic’s new political parties, Washington’s presidency, Hamilton’s economic pro-

<b>Bragdon, <i>History of a Free Nation</i></b>	
Overall Grade: 50 %	
<b>F</b>	
<i>“Unsatisfactory”</i>	
<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Average Rating (out of 10)</b>
<b>Accuracy</b>	4.75
<b>Context</b>	4
<b>Organization</b>	5
<b>Selection of Supporting Materials</b>	5.75
<b>Lack of Bias</b>	5.25
<b>Historical Logic</b>	5.5
<b>Literary Quality</b>	4.75
<b>Use of Primary Sources</b>	3.25
<b>Historical Soundness</b>	6.75
<b>Democratic Ideas</b>	4.75
<b>Interest Level</b>	4
<b>Graphics</b>	6.75
<b>Overall Average</b>	5.0

gram, Jacksonian politics, and the Civil War. Keller also admires the text's discussion of the ethno-cultural appeals of late-nineteenth-century political parties. In most other standard topics, like the Spanish-American war, progressivism, the Great Depression, and the New Deal, Keller finds the book accurate and balanced. Its discussion of post-World War II foreign policy reflects a "Cold War liberal (as opposed to a Left or Republican) perspective."

Pyne commends this text for its good explanation of the Declaration of Independence, but finds little else to praise.

Renahan praises the book's "great graphics," good supporting material (except for primary documents), and excellent selections from literature.

### ***Shortcomings of History of a Free Nation***

Mirel complains that this text is "among the weakest of all the books" in its lack of attention to Irish and German immigrants in the mid-nineteenth century. He faults its representation of Lincoln's views in the election of 1860, which makes it hard for readers to understand why the South opposed him, and for its allocation of only "one startlingly short paragraph" to the Gettysburg Address. Mirel identifies several inaccuracies, which he attributes to poor editorial fact checking and misrepresentation. He is especially disturbed by a caption on a famous photograph of German soldiers pointing their guns at a group of Jews, mostly women and children. The caption says, "Arresting Opponents. Hitler's secret police, the Gestapo, arrested Jews and other opponents of the government by the thousands." This caption, Mirel notes, implies that Jews were arrested because they were "opponents" of the government, rather than targets of a mass genocide unrelated to their views.

Though Keller likes Bragdon's emphasis on traditional political history, he complains that "there is throughout a blandness, an emphasis on narrative rather than analysis, and a lack of color and arresting detail that makes the text, for all its balance, dull and unengaging." Events that should pique student interest, like the rebellions during the colonial era, receive only cursory treatment. He also is bothered by the frequent use of illustrations that bear little relationship to the text or that were poorly explained. Keller, too, is startled by the photo caption that identified Polish Jewish women and children as "opponents" of the Nazi regime.

Pyne finds little to admire in the Bragdon text. Most of its prose, he complains, is bland and unappealing, and too many of its topics are briefly covered in a few short sentences or paragraphs. His major complaint is that the text tries "to cram as much information as possible into as few pages as possible," thus not having the space to develop ideas or characters or topics fully. Explanations are too brief and cursory, leaving students with little understanding of the significance of events. Pyne also objects to the text's "brief and superficial" coverage of African Americans, women, and Native

Americans. He believes that the text is weak on “coverage, detail and interest for students” and focuses “overwhelmingly on short-answer questions and identifications.”

Renahan complains that the Bragdon text describes historical events, especially in the 1960s, without regard to chronology, thus making it “devoid of a strong sequential narrative voice.” Primary sources, he says, are often paraphrased, so that the text’s authors tell the reader what Lincoln said rather than letting students read his words for themselves. Renahan also objects that the text reflects a leftist political bias (“The book’s section on HUAC, Senator Joseph McCarthy, etc. could easily have been written by Paul Robeson”). The text does not mention the Rosenberg case and briefly mentions the Hiss case, leaving open the possibility that Hiss might be innocent. The book’s representation of Ronald Reagan, Renahan finds, “uses enormous generalizations to wrap Reagan’s presidency in a damning cloak of misrepresentation.” Moreover, he holds that the book tells mundane stories that are laden with “dull facts and completely devoid of the type of human anecdotes by which the guts of real history are best conveyed.” To explain the grand drama of the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919, Renahan says, he misses any reference to “the visceral hatred between Clemenceau and Wilson: “Where is the dim-witted Wilson’s stupid plea to Clemenceau in the midst of negotiations: ‘I’m only trying to do what is best for my country.’ And where is Clemenceau’s immediate answer: ‘Then why don’t you hang yourself.’”

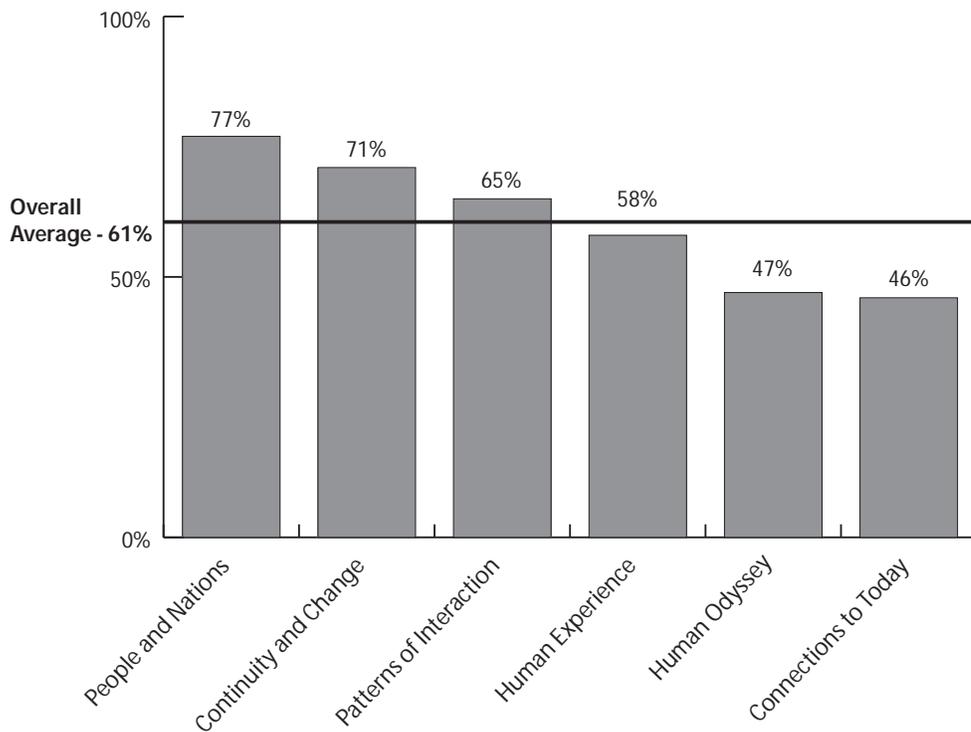


# World History

A summary of the reviewers' findings

## World History

Overall Results



\*\*For a breakdown of the above graph into Individual Reviewer Grades, see Appendix E\*\*

The winner in this category is *World History: People & Nations*, followed by *World History: Continuity and Change*. Two of the five reviewers gave their highest rating to *People & Nations* (Ellington and Jacob), and two others (Epstein and Rabb) gave their highest rating to *Continuity and Change*. Both books were published by Holt Rinehart; neither has a named author or authors.

**Miller, *People and Nations***  
 Overall Grade: 77 %  
**C+**  
 "Acceptable"

<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Average Rating (out of 10)</i>
<i>Accuracy</i>	<i>7.6</i>
<i>Context</i>	<i>8.2</i>
<i>Organization</i>	<i>8.2</i>
<i>Selection of Supporting Materials</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Lack of Bias</i>	<i>8.8</i>
<i>Historical Logic</i>	<i>8.2</i>
<i>Literary Quality</i>	<i>6.8</i>
<i>Use of Primary Sources</i>	<i>6.4</i>
<i>Historical Soundness</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Democratic Ideas</i>	<i>6.6</i>
<i>Interest Level</i>	<i>7.4</i>
<i>Graphics</i>	<i>7.6</i>
<i>Overall Average</i>	<i>7.7</i>

***World History: People & Nations***, Sue Miller, ed., (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 2000)

The first-place book, *World History: People & Nations*, received a cumulative score of 459 (of a possible 600 points). If the score were converted to a grade, it would be 77 percent.

**Merits of *People & Nations*:**

Ellington gives this book his top rating, saying, "I really like this book and if I still taught high school history I would very much enjoy using it. The book is well organized, interesting, uses supporting materials extremely well, comprehensive, and accurate." He finds it "strange" that there was no identifiable author or authors to claim credit for it. Unlike the other world history texts, this one has "a minimal amount of front matter and a really well-done section of Geography and World History in the introduction." Compared to the other texts, the peripherals are actually peripheral and the narrative—which is "detailed, nuanced, and comprehensive"—is "MUCH more central." He finds the

reading level to be higher than in other texts, but not too advanced for high school students.

Ellington is especially impressed with the book's use of maps and principles of geography to support the narrative; its attention to comparative religion; its judicious use of supporting materials, historical fiction, legends, and primary sources; and its thoughtful explanation of economic history. The key to engaging student interest, he holds, is to include "vivid descriptions of actual people," which this book does.

Jacob also gives this book her highest score. She is especially impressed by the text's incorporation of the latest scholarship about Africa (and wishes that the same level of sophistication had been applied to other civilizations). She likes the treatment of Greece and Rome, which "covers the terrain well and actually addresses multiple causation," and praises the treatment of the 1930s and 1940s, saying "This is an extremely difficult period to do well and justly, and on the whole the book succeeds, cutting a broad discussion from the rise of fascism in the west to Russian and Japanese events and the Americas." Although Jacob gives *People & Nations* her highest score, it is not so much because of enthusiasm for it as it is lack of enthusiasm for the others.

Epstein judges the book “very user-friendly and balanced.” He holds that the “charts, summaries, maps, [and] illustrations [are] all part of a cohesive effort that teacher and student alike” will appreciate. The integration of arts and fairy tales supports the narrative of history well. He likes the text’s occasional readiness to depart from a strictly chronological approach when dealing with civilizations in which the written record is limited or where there were long periods of time in which not much of historical significance happened. He also admires the text’s treatment of Ancient Greece and Rome.

Rabb likes *People & Nations* because “it does have the virtue of being what might be called an old-fashioned textbook, even in its layout (lots of pages filled with text). There are some teachers who will like that, as will the more serious students, but in the day of glitzy layout it may be hard going.” This book is the exception to the rule; in other texts, “the effort to entertain swamps the attempt to instruct.”

Mead applauds the editors for their efforts to incorporate cultural, social, and economic factors into the narrative, as well as their inclusion of architecture, music, and art as vital aspects of history and culture. He admires the section on building historical thinking skills and the “what if?” questions. Also valuable are the sections on the history of ideas, including material on Hobbes, Locke, Voltaire, Rousseau, Machiavelli, Marx, and Mill, though he would have preferred that the text cite primary sources instead of summaries of their ideas.

### ***Shortcomings of People and Nations***

Ellington does not like the “synthesis” that followed each chapter because he is concerned that lazy students could read the synthesis and skip the chapters; he urges the editors to eliminate the syntheses in their next edition. He also wonders if the book’s discussion of the American economy in the early 1980s is an example of political bias.

Epstein objects to the text’s using the Biblical narrative to describe the history of the Hebrews, then switching to other sources without informing the reader. He also notes that a caption confuses the Talmud with the Torah, and a passage confuses two different Jewish holidays. Epstein further identifies a number of details about Japanese history that are inaccurate.

Jacob objects to the text’s evasion of the word “evolution” in its otherwise “perfectly adequate account of the emergence of humankind.” She calls this “another small triumph for the creationists.” She takes exception to the text’s discussion of the family in pre-historic times because “we know virtually nothing about women or men and their social roles” in those times. She suggests that the text should have included direct citations from the Qur’an when Islam is discussed, and that the discussion of the treatment of women in Islam is inadequate. (“One sentence does not do it.”) She wonders, “Why does every one of these books shy away from hard topics, like the place of women within the theology of Islam, or the consolidation of Christian power under the early bishops?” She also criticizes the text’s use of contemporary images to illustrate historical figures, commenting that “There is

nothing wrong with using such images but they should not be passed off as if they come from the period. They should be identified by date and artist” and used to demonstrate that the historic events continue to inspire artists even today. Most troublesome to Jacob was the treatment of the history of science, which she found poor. She writes: “What could this possibly mean, ‘Copernicus could not test and prove the heliocentric theory with the instruments or the mathematics available to him.’ What did Kepler and Galileo have? . . . Science appears like a genie out of a bottle.”

Rabb complains that there is too much “stuff” in *People & Nations*, and not enough explanation of why things are as they are. He says “There seems to be just one thing after another here. All these great figures but no attempt to compare them or synthesize their message. Why are all the powerful religious figures near contemporaries?” He finds irritating a number of details, such as the absence of a picture of the Parthenon, or any reference to Aristotle’s “Golden Mean,” or the patronizing phrase “Aristotle did little more...” to which he replied, “You try it!”

Rabb is also troubled by the recurrence of terms like “the rise of the Middle Ages...It’s like the middle class, which keeps rising.” He faults the inadequate explanation of Roman law (which is “always imposed from above”), Justinian’s code, and Common Law. Rabb further finds fault with the book’s treatment of the Renaissance, especially the lack of any political or economic context, and he disagrees with the “demonization” of Machiavelli. He wishes that the book had explained the appeal of Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism, or gave a good explication of capitalism. Overall, he finds that the reasons for events and the connections among them are drowned out by the sheer amount of names and information.

Mead complains that *People & Nations* “fails to communicate the material in a way that is both interesting and substantive.” The writing, he says, is “for the most part stale and dull and the text seems to drone on without any serious attempt to interest the reader.” The editors of this text, he believes, abandoned any hope of “reaching students through the written word” and concentrated instead on “fancy layout and illustrations.” Mead holds that the book is choppy and disconnected: “Chapters and sections lack any semblance of a central thematic thrust—a clear impression that a student can easily take away from a first reading. . . each section seems all too concerned with detail.” In short, the book attempts to cover too much, and the reader has trouble remembering the subject matter. Mead also dislikes the graphics; many, he says, are dated and the overall layout looks “crowded and cheesy—cluttered without being inviting.” Furthermore, he is disappointed by the text’s treatment of the early years of Christianity, especially its failure to describe the sources of Christian ideas in other cultures and religions.

***World History: Continuity and Change***, William Travis Hanes, III, ed., (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1999)

The second-place book is *World History: Continuity and Change*. Like the top-rated book, this text has no identified author; its general editor is William Travis Hanes, III. *Continuity and Change* received a cumulative score of 425 out of a possible 600, or 71 percent. Two reviewers gave it their highest ratings.

### **Merits of *Continuity and Change***

Epstein gives this book a perfect score of 10 on each of the 12 criteria. It is the only text to earn a perfect score from any reviewer. In general, he finds that the civilizational surveys are well written, brief, and easy for the student to understand and follow. The book, he says, also avoids the “information sensory overload” that is common to many history textbooks. Epstein likes the clear introductions at the beginning of each chapter, and he is impressed by the book’s presentation of Hellenistic civilization, Roman civilization, the Silk Road, and a comparison between western and Chinese historiography. In general, he admires the integration of illustrations, narrative, and maps.

Jacob likes *Continuity and Change’s* “emphasis on culture and geography,” as well as its sparing use of illustrations, which “gives the book a consistency” and makes it less “busy” than the other texts. She also commends the book’s incorporation of economic development and technological advantage in relation to military achievements. This, she observes, is a welcome contrast to the “idealism of many texts.” Also impressive, Jacob finds, is the discussion of early modern European history, especially the attention to scientific experimentation in the Middle Ages. This textbook’s clear and focused chapter on the scientific revolution is the best of all the textbooks reviewed. She adds, “Let the record show that it is the only book that does not reduce World War II to Hitler and his hatreds. The coverage of the origins of the war is deep and Hitler is given a long paragraph, no more. This is the best treatment I have seen of the war.”

Rabb was astonished to discover that the opening page of this text lists him as a member of its editorial advisory board. He recalled that he had advised the publisher of a world history text about a

<b>Hanes, <i>Continuity and Change</i></b>	
Overall Grade: 71 %	
<b>C-</b> “Acceptable”	
<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Average Rating (out of 10)</b>
<i>Accuracy</i>	7.2
<i>Context</i>	7.2
<i>Organization</i>	7.2
<i>Selection of Supporting Materials</i>	7
<i>Lack of Bias</i>	7.2
<i>Historical Logic</i>	6.6
<i>Literary Quality</i>	6.4
<i>Use of Primary Sources</i>	7.8
<i>Historical Soundness</i>	7.6
<i>Democratic Ideas</i>	6.4
<i>Interest Level</i>	6
<i>Graphics</i>	8.4
<b>Overall Average</b>	<b>7.1</b>

decade earlier, but thought it was a different publisher. He mentions this fact to notify readers that he might appear to have a conflict of interest, but that in reality he had been paid a consulting fee many years ago and had no financial interest in this book. Someone who was selecting or reviewing a textbook might assume that this distinguished historian was actively advising the textbook's editors, but his participation—such as it was—was long past.

Rabb applies the same criteria to this book as to the others. He thinks the book is lively, “not bad in coverage,” and balanced among different kinds of history. Although he finds many faults, he concludes that this is “about the best of the textbooks (which does not speak well for the genre). Its chief virtue is that it is pretty well organized, and integrates the rest of the world intelligently into what is (inevitably) a western narrative. That balance, not easy to achieve, is well calculated.”

Ellington expresses “frustration” in rating *Continuity and Change* because “in places it is simply superb” but it nonetheless has serious problems of content and organization. He is impressed by the text’s use of primary sources, maps, and illustrations to support the narrative. He also commends the text’s treatment of ancient Greece and Rome, early Christianity, Buddhism, the interactions between Graeco-Roman civilization and those of North Africa, and the early Middle Ages. Furthermore, Ellington praises the text’s discussion of the Industrial Revolution, the political theories of classical liberalism, European imperialism, and World War I. Particularly noteworthy is the text’s attention to Stalin’s atrocities and Mao’s purges; the text’s discussion of Japanese brutality in World War II is a subject that is usually “glossed over” by other world history textbooks. The book also contains a solid and realistic portrayal of the end of the Cold War, explaining the role of President Ronald Reagan and not lionizing Mikhail Gorbachev.

Mead acknowledges that the book would be “reasonably accessible” to students, which gives it “a significant edge over some of its competitors.” He likes the feature “Teenagers in History,” which enables readers to see the lives of their peers over history. He feels that, in some instances, the book’s effort to capture “the drama of historical moments (the death of Socrates, religious persecution during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation) works reasonably well.”

### **Shortcomings of *Continuity and Change***

Epstein wishes that *Continuity and Change* had paid more attention to Julius Caesar and the French Revolution.

Jacob, meanwhile, complains that this book—like the others—discusses human evolution but carefully avoids the “E” word. She finds the treatment of comparative religion to be anodyne, with little mention of Christianity’s desire to label others as heretics, or of Hinduism’s caste system, or the Aztecs’ brutality, or the status of women in Islamic societies. She is disappointed by the inadequate discussion of the English Bill of Rights.

Rabb complains that the review sections are “simple-minded” and might give teachers and students the sense that “history is a mechanical process, with single correct answers for all questions.” He objects to its scant treatment of Homer and the Trojan War, especially because it wrongly follows the discussion of the rise of Athens. Also, too little attention is paid to the centrality of law in the Roman Republic and Empire. “Why Christianity is so attractive is left unclear,” and without recognizing its appeal to the poor, the story is too abstract. The Vikings get the usual “bad rap,” and are not recognized as founders of great cities like Dublin and Kiev. Rabb is especially displeased that the text places exploration after “the development of the states, and then, having gone through Louis XIV, cutting the expansion short in the 1520s. The voyages and colonies are all so much a part of the ‘new monarchies’ that that is where they belong.” Although he thinks that this is, overall, the best of the textbooks, he concludes that it is the weakest on culture, that there is “too little space for art, literature, etc.”

Ellington generally likes *Continuity and Change* but points to some important problems. There are, he says, an overabundance of peripherals, and many teachers and students will skip a topic that is not included in the main narrative. He criticizes several instances that might be either bias or political correctness: Why, he asks, are there 16 pages devoted to Islam but only seven to Christianity? Why is more space devoted to Mary Wollstonecraft than to Adam Smith, when the latter was far more influential in world history than the former? He also criticizes errors of omission or commission, such as: ignoring the influence of Buddhism on the samurai of medieval Japan; citing no reason for the American Civil War other than slavery; failing to use phonetic pronunciations of Chinese names (which is important for students’ comfort level); giving short shrift to late-nineteenth-century Japan, an increasingly influential country in world affairs; and wrongly implying that Japan was a beneficiary of aid comparable to a Marshall Plan after the Second World War.

Mead considers this text to be “a strange mix of high and low expectations for students,” which “crams so much material between its ample covers that even very accomplished students would feel daunted at the prospect of studying the book.” At the same time, the writers seem to expect that students have a limited vocabulary. He writes that “Masses of detail about quite difficult and arcane historical subjects and cultures and civilizations remote from the daily lives of the students don’t become more memorable because they are written about in a simple vocabulary.” He also notes that “the book is riddled with phrases like ‘some scholars believe,’ ‘scientists find,’ ‘historians conclude,’ ‘people agree’—which opens the door to many questions that students have no choice but to guess the answers to. Who are these people and why do they think this way?”

Mead observes that “the book simply fails to deal effectively with the horror and drama that is such a major part of human history. The discussion of the horrors of Soviet life in the Civil War and under Stalin gives students no real basis for understanding what totalitarianism is all about. Similarly, in an attempt to be impartial when discussing the war in Yugoslavia, the details of such are sanitized so students cannot grasp the realities of what occurred...The text is not so much biased as lifeless and dry—much worse sins than bias from a pedagogical point of view.”

**Beck, *Patterns of Interaction***

Overall Grade: 65 %

**D**

“Weak”

<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Average Rating (out of 10)</i>
<i>Accuracy</i>	<i>4.6</i>
<i>Context</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Organization</i>	<i>6.4</i>
<i>Selection of Supporting Materials</i>	<i>7.8</i>
<i>Lack of Bias</i>	<i>5.8</i>
<i>Historical Logic</i>	<i>5.6</i>
<i>Literary Quality</i>	<i>5.6</i>
<i>Use of Primary Sources</i>	<i>7.2</i>
<i>Historical Soundness</i>	<i>7.8</i>
<i>Democratic Ideas</i>	<i>7.6</i>
<i>Interest Level</i>	<i>6.4</i>
<i>Graphics</i>	<i>6.6</i>
<i>Overall Average</i>	<i>6.5</i>

***Modern World History: Patterns of Interaction***, Roger B. Beck, Linda Black, Larry

S. Krieger, Phillip C. Naylor, Dahia Ibo Shabaka,

(McDougal Littell, 2003)

The reviewers selected Beck, *Modern World History: Patterns of Interaction* as their third-place world history textbook. Mead gave it his highest rating. Its cumulative score was 392; if converted to a grade, it would be 65 percent.

***Merits of Patterns of Interaction***

Mead awarded this book his highest rating, observing that it is “closest to the way high school text books should be. It is a coherent and readable account of modern world history that, unlike the other five books in this project, does not stray from the most important and defining currents in modern history; rather, it addresses those things of real importance and meaning concisely and skillfully.” Instead of addressing “every culture since the beginning of recorded history, this book starts with a section tracing the history of democratic ideas and...begins its more focused coverage in the fourteenth century.” Mead likes that the text “avoids the clumsy multicultural approach” of the other textbooks. While it is respectful of the contributions of other cultures, it is not “dogmatically committed to analyze every culture in depth. The result is a book that has some reasonable sense of progression that is able to convey an understandable path of development.” The prose is “clear, deliberate, and at times animated.” Throughout, the theme of the text is the development of democratic ideas and practices. He particularly admires its treatment of slavery, the European Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, the biographical sidebars, and the review sections at the end of each section.

Jacob likes the theme of interaction “presumably around the world.” She admires the book’s treatment of the printing press in China and the West and praises the linkage in the text between the past and democratic ideals, while noting the importance of updating the material with current events.

Epstein finds the illustrations, maps, and charts to be well integrated with the text. He praises specific features of the book, including its explanation of art in the Renaissance; the quality of its maps; the zeal of Catholic missionaries after the Protestant reformation; discussions of clothing through-

out the world; the treatment of the Thirty Years' War; the explanation of the Church's opposition to scientific theories that clashed with its teachings; and the coverage of the French Revolution.

Ellington, on the other hand, finds it "impossible to write much about what I liked about the book because I liked so little. The art is beautiful throughout the book. Art is used to both illustrate history—see the use of a Brueghel painting as a depiction of commoner life styles in the early modern period—and artistic movements are explained throughout the text." He also appreciates the book's attention to intellectual history and literary history. The excerpts, called "Voices from the Past," are a good way to integrate primary documents into the narrative.

Rabb likes the book's layout but nothing else.

### ***Shortcomings of *Patterns of Interaction****

Mead does not find any major weaknesses in this text.

Jacob writes that the book's treatment of the scientific revolution does not take into account the last generation of scholarship; it lacks adequate context, especially with reference to the Church's adoption of Biblical literalism against the Protestant threat. She believes the text would be far livelier if the writers had described the interaction between "the thinkers and artisans, e.g., Galileo's telescope and the blurred borders between science and magic, Newton as alchemist," to make the chapter "slightly more intellectually challenging and controversial." Also missing, she says, are the links between Hobbes's thinking and the new science, between the Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution: "Locke and Newton just appear and no mention is made of the crisis provoked in Europe by French absolutism and in England by the Revolution of 1688-89. The crisis element needs to be emphasized lest students think that ideas just pop up by chance or luck. They sometimes do but generally they have an historical context." She is equally critical of the "whole opening of the French Revolution," which is "about 30 years out of date and relies on the old Marxist line about the rising bourgeoisie."

Epstein does not like the suggestion that Rome spread Christianity, first through persecution, then through acceptance; he points out that the religion spread through the Greek-speaking portions of the empire "without Roman persecution or acceptance playing a role." The book's suggestion that the Iroquois Federation was crucial to America's founding is an example of political correctness. The summary of the causes of the French Revolution is inadequate, and it is "ludicrous" to say that Marie Antoinette was a major cause. The discussion of Ignatius of Loyola "ignores the impact his military career and training had on the formation of the Jesuits." The feature on Martin Luther called "Different Perspectives" is way above the heads of those who will read the book, and the discussion of smallpox brought to North America by Europeans is another example of political correctness. Furthermore, the text claims that the introduction of firearms into Japan "changed the time-honored tradition of the Japanese warrior, whose principal weapon had been the sword." But, Epstein says, this

“ignores one of the unique aspects of Japanese history. Contact with Spain and Portugal introduced firearms to the Japanese and made consolidation of the country possible, yet once the Tokugawa gained control and ushered in a period of peace they closed the country, eradicated Christianity, and gave up the gun!” A section is titled “France Battles Back,” but there is no evidence in the text of French fighting the Nazis. The text “views the Vietnam War as essentially an indigenous Viet Cong-run enterprise. There is no explanation of the Cambodian situation that a student would understand.” The text turns Gorbachev into a “reforming Democrat,” ignoring the fact that his reforms were intended to keep the Communist party in power; it simultaneously neglects Reagan’s role in ending the Cold War. The description of September 11, 2001, does not “hint who the terrorists were, or what they were trying to accomplish,” but includes a feature from “USA Today” on terrorism.

Ellington finds this text to be “extremely disorganized,” confusing, and replete with errors and ideological biases. He does not like its abundance of peripherals, such as the “connect history and geography” items, the “history makers,” the “section assessments,” the “interact with history” bits, the “spotlights on...” feature, and the “global impact” pieces. The profusion of these inserts and sidebars, he says, are a constant distraction. Much of this material, if relevant, should have been worked into the main narrative. He objects to the 33-page introduction, whose purpose is to help readers understand the “organization” of the text, and which is followed by another 33 pages of strategies for test-taking. The latter, Ellington writes, “is a sheer marketing strategy and in my opinion does not belong in a history text.” He identifies a number of specific historical inaccuracies, such as failing to note that Zen Buddhism “has always been a minority sect in Japan”; defining capitalism “as an economic system in which money is invested in business ventures with the goal of making a profit,” but not mentioning that the majority of assets are in private hands; incorrectly describing the pre-World War II emperor of Japan as “an absolute ruler whose divine will was law”; and failing to describe the totalitarian nature of the North Korean regime. Ellington also condemns ideological bias in such matters as the discussion of the Japanese internment camps in the United States during World War II, which gets more attention than the activities of the Japanese Army in the Pacific during that war.

Rabb terms this textbook “the worst of the lot. It’s full of glitz, presentism, and hot button topics. But it is bereft of real concern for history. The past is just a means of understanding cognitive skills, the present, anything but history. After a while, I simply resented having to spend time with it. It panders to the notion that history is useful only if trivially linked to the present; it seeks the lowest common denominator in student interest; and it is meretricious, full of bells and whistles but little substance.” Rabb complains that the text supplies 100 pages of pedagogy before getting to the Renaissance. “The history we’ve had hitherto is a Cliff Notes version of the subject: the Greeks, the rise of democracy, etc., are almost travesties of themselves... The howlers on the Renaissance merely heighten the sense of foreboding. The Renaissance began, we are told, because people wanted to enjoy life. Come on!” The fact that the text devotes nearly 200 pages to events since 1945, along with the introductory 100 pages, “merely confirms that this is a present-minded social studies text, which offers neither a sense of the past nor the treatment of the problems and developments of the past that we call history.”

***World History: The Human Experience***, Mounir A. Farah and Andrea Berens Karls, (Glencoe, 2001)

The fourth-place world-history textbook is Farah and Karls, *World History: The Human Experience*, which received a cumulative score of 350 points of a possible 600, or 58 percent. It received the highest rating from Ellington.

***Merits of The Human Experience***

Ellington says that Farah and Karls “did an excellent job succinctly summarizing the content while including enough detail and excerpts from primary source-related material to make the text interesting much of the time.” Also this text “distracts readers less than some of the other texts with useless peripherals.” The book has a tie-in with the National Geographic Society, which supplied an introductory section containing an excellent atlas and geography handbook. Some of the peripherals are questionable, however. For example, he asks, “Do we really need a full page on treatment of Japanese-Americans in a world history book?” Most, though, are informative and part of the narrative (he “learned quite a bit from the Lusitania Special Report”). He likes the “rich detail” on Sumer and the Babylonian Empire, on the Greeks’ respect for individuality, on relating this respect to characteristics of Greek mythology, and on explaining the lengths to which Sparta went to discourage foreign trade (using heavy bars for currency instead of coins). Opening each chapter with “Story Teller” sections works as a matter of style and interest. Ellington welcomes the text’s attention to economic history, its treatment of Japanese and Korean history, World War I, and Stalin’s regime.

Rabb concludes that this text is “the best of the group, though that is not saying a great deal.” The text “takes seriously the need to provide both content and coverage (e.g., Australia). Some of its chapters are easily the best in the group... Through the middle ages I was pretty impressed, but much less on the early modern world... Byzantium is well done. Islam gets good treatment,” despite a “very rose-colored view of the place of women under Islam.” The early modern era is a “shambles,” but the Industrial Revolution is well done, as are chapters on reform in Britain and France.

Mead says the text is “a well constructed, fairly accurate and engaging survey of human history.... The prose is easy to read and great effort is taken to explore various schools of historical analysis.”

<b>Farah and Karls, <i>The Human Experience</i></b>	
Overall Grade: 58 %	
<b>F</b>	
<i>“Unsatisfactory”</i>	
<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Average Rating (out of 10)</b>
<i>Accuracy</i>	5
<i>Context</i>	5.4
<i>Organization</i>	6.2
<i>Selection of Supporting Materials</i>	6.6
<i>Lack of Bias</i>	5
<i>Historical Logic</i>	5.8
<i>Literary Quality</i>	5.4
<i>Use of Primary Sources</i>	6.6
<i>Historical Soundness</i>	6.4
<i>Democratic Ideas</i>	6.6
<i>Interest Level</i>	3.8
<i>Graphics</i>	7.2
<b>Overall Average</b>	<b>5.8</b>

The graphics, sidebars, photographs, and artifacts are interesting and relevant, and the maps are well placed. The book “takes great steps to stress critical thinking, writing and research skills.”

Epstein commends Farah and Karls for their discussions of Rome, good maps of the Crusades, a thorough description of Japanese contacts with the west and Christianity in the sixteenth century, even-handed treatment of China under Mao, and a solid chapter on the collapse of Communism in 1989, crediting Pope John Paul II for his role in these last events.

Jacob has nothing positive to say about this textbook.

### ***Shortcomings of The Human Experience***

Though Ellington gives this text a high score, he complains about “a surprisingly large” number of factual errors. He worries that the chapter summaries are “pointless” and would “probably encourage many students to not read the chapters.” He dislikes the authors’ meager inclusion of literature and compiled a long list of factual errors in connection with Northeast Asia, the region he knows best. Among them: Confucius was not born into a peasant family, as the text asserts; the authors do not mention that Lao Zi, the founder of Daoism, may not have been a real person; and the text claims that the Tokugawa shogunate was interrupted by the arrival of the first Europeans in 1545, but “the Tokugawa period in Japanese history didn’t even begin until 1600!” He faults the text’s superficial treatment of the Opium War, which fails to include important primary documents or to explain the economics of the trade or the British role in it. He is disappointed by the cursory reference to the Taiping Rebellion in the nineteenth century, in which more than 20 million people died. The section on Mao’s Great Leap Forward, says Ellington, lacks any explanatory passages to account for millions of deaths; this could easily have been fixed by including a reference to Mao’s “deliberate policy decision to shift massive amounts of labor from food to backyard steel manufacturing that ended up being economically useless.” Ellington suspects that political bias accounts for the disparate treatment of Reagan and Clinton, Thatcher and Blair.

Rabb gives this text his top score (shared with another book), but complains that the book displays “real shortcomings of organization and inadequate concern for what a student really needs to know.” The “little inserts,” like Stonehenge and the Celts, “come out of the blue, and strike me as a distraction.” Many of the usages, he thinks, are confusing or undefined, like “civil law,” “agora,” Plato’s “forms,” and “Makkah” (instead of Mecca); “Habsburgs” is misspelled, and there is a “pointless change of the Sung dynasty into Song.” The book is “weak on Plato” and bland on Aristotle; it fails to connect Aristotle with Muslim science, so as to “contextualize the later reference to Muslim transmission of Greek thought.” Rabb notes that it makes no sense to talk of the new monarchs at the end of the middle ages, “four chapters away from the overseas voyages they sponsored. . . . Renaissance art is confusing, and not even coherent. Where is Castiglione? And the Medici were kicked out *before* Savonarola

gained power.” When the book finally gets to the politics of the era, it “makes no mention of the central issue, state-building. Why *do* bureaucracies grow? Why do many nobles *like* absolutism (though you wouldn’t know it from this treatment)?” The treatment of England’s revolution is confusing: “What is it about? Where is law? Gentry assertiveness? The army did *not* try Charles I; Parliament did.”

Mead complains that the central flaw of this text, shared by most of the others, is that it “fails to excite students about history.” It tries to cover everything and is too long and superficial. “It fails to stress the most important currents and dimensions of history; rather, it gives two pages to this and two pages to that, a paragraph to Sri Lanka and three paragraphs to Colombia. The book is choppy, difficult to read, and it carries with it no sense of what parts of history matter more to most students than others and why.” Students are likely to put down this book and leave with the impression that, once they have passed their exams, there is “no point in thinking about this wearisome, complex and incomprehensible mess.” Mead also points out several errors of fact: a map asks students to identify the “one” German offensive that occurred in the last year of World War II, but there were more than one; it describes Nigeria’s problems as the result of government “mismanagement” but does not mention the word “corruption”; and it “credits the Castro regime’s poverty with having preserved the architectural riches of Havana,” but this was only because it lacked the resources to build “hideous socialist modernist architectural monstrosities.” Mead is dubious about the authors’ assertion that “‘fundamentalism’ is a single worldwide phenomenon and that the rise of conservative evangelical Christianity in Alabama and suburban Virginia is more or less the same phenomenon as the rise of militant Islam in the tribal regions of Pakistan.” The book is disabled, he concludes, not by carelessness or bias so much as the effort to pack “too much information about too many places in too few pages.”

Epstein gives the text low scores for many factual errors, a low level of interest, poor literary quality, and lack of organization. He notes a large number of specific errors of fact or interpretation or chronology. The text includes the Biblical narrative of the history of Israel and does not refer to historical evidence. It describes the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* but does not explain their significance in Greek culture. It does not explain the importance of Herodotus and Thucydides as historians, or that of Julius Caesar, and it wrongly asserts that all the Jews were exiled after the revolt against Rome. The description of knights and chivalry is based on literary, not historical, sources. “The Thirty Years’ War is incomprehensible.” Vietnam and the bombing of Cambodia are not explained; “no reason, for or against, is given for why Nixon ordered the bombing.” The phrase “imperial presidency” is inaccurately defined. The text fails to mention aggressive acts by North Korea against South Korea and the United States. When it describes the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it attributes lack of progress to Israel’s refusal to make concessions, without referring to Arafat’s history as a terrorist. The text describes the Saudi royal family’s support for modernization but does not mention problems with human rights and women’s status.

Jacob gives the book low marks because of “problems with causation and total lack of interest in issues of values and democracy.” She faults the text for its ambiguous treatment of evolution; it tells the familiar story of Lucy, a perennial among world history texts, and carefully balances what “many

religions claim” about the origin of life alongside “current scientific theories.” Jacob finds the peripherals annoying; at one point in the text, she notes, there is “a map study of Canaan, and a sundial, and they have been preceded on the previous page by time line and chart, and the following page by the assessment box which seems to get in the way. This sort of business adds little to a text, and is a distraction.” Overall, she finds the text to be presentist, posing questions to link the past to the present long before the reader knows any history. The treatment of the Scientific Revolution at least gives a “few nuggets of biography” to humanize the geniuses of this era, but there is no context. Little space is devoted to discussing the impact of new scientific theories, and “again we glide effortlessly into the Enlightenment and the triumph of reason.” The discussion of Rousseau is “woeful,” and the narrative returns to the English civil war, “having first covered the Enlightenment, etc. No one has told the writers that the English revolution is one of the key developments in making the Enlightenment possible. How can this be?” The reviewer is also bothered by the text’s lack of attention to causation: “The problem is endemic throughout the book.” The text, complains Jacob, does not mention the caste system in Hinduism or the treatment of women in Islam.

<b>Speilvogel, <i>The Human Odyssey</i></b>	
Overall Grade: 47 %	
<b>F</b>	
<i>“Unacceptable”</i>	
<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Average Rating (out of 10)</b>
<i>Accuracy</i>	<b>3.2</b>
<i>Context</i>	<b>4.4</b>
<i>Organization</i>	<b>4.8</b>
<i>Selection of Supporting Materials</i>	<b>4.2</b>
<i>Lack of Bias</i>	<b>5</b>
<i>Historical Logic</i>	<b>5.8</b>
<i>Literary Quality</i>	<b>4.2</b>
<i>Use of Primary Sources</i>	<b>5.4</b>
<i>Historical Soundness</i>	<b>4.4</b>
<i>Democratic Ideas</i>	<b>5.8</b>
<i>Interest Level</i>	<b>2.8</b>
<i>Graphics</i>	<b>5.8</b>
<b>Overall Average</b>	<b>4.7</b>

### ***World History: The Human Odyssey,***

Jackson S. Spielvogel, (National Textbook Company, 1999, Glencoe, 2003).

The fifth-rated world history textbook is Spielvogel’s *World History: The Human Odyssey*, which received 279 of a possible 600 points, or 47 percent.

### ***Merits of The Human Odyssey***

Epstein likes this textbook’s treatment of Greek art and architecture. He also commends its description of the Enlightenment and its explanation of the German-British naval rivalry before World War I.

Ellington praises the book for presenting its material without indulging in ahistorical condemnation of historical actors. He writes that “There were times when the writing was good, analysis was present, and rich detail was provided.” He likes the section on ancient Greece, although “the author could have done a better job explaining Athens’ political contributions to world history.” He admires the descriptions of everyday life in

Europe in the Middle Ages, as well as the account of Montesquieu's influence on the U.S. Constitution. A particularly good part of the text is its section about World War I, which "accurately and bluntly" describes "the slaughter and misery of war in the trenches." This section is complemented by good photos and literature, and consideration of the war's effect on intellectuals and the masses.

Mead terms the book "a reasonably straightforward and readable text which does a good job introducing basic facts of world history. It manages to cover the principal events throughout the world over the millennia with clarity and even at times grace." The book is generally even-handed, and though it is "one of the better books in this project," it suffers the common defect of failing to engage the reader in the study of history. "The narrative is rich in facts." The section on China is especially well done. "The greatest virtues of this book include its general, though not universal, accuracy and balance. It is also comprehensive, and the narrative thread is clear enough, I think, to enable most students to get some kind of grip on the flow of human history through time."

Jacob remarks that this text is generally balanced. It includes a clear discussion of the African role in the slave trade, for example, and the author is more attentive to context than some of the other texts, especially in his discussion of the Renaissance, the Scientific Revolution, and absolutism under Louis XIV.

Rabb identifies several specific areas where the text does a good job, such as the discussion of the role of monks, the medieval economy, and World War I.

### ***Shortcomings of *The Human Odyssey****

Epstein criticizes the text for containing many factual errors and having a low interest level. It appears to be "a 'dumbed-down' college text that was poorly pasted together. It makes frequent references to topics and personalities you would introduce in a college-level survey, yet it minimizes important historical figures such as Julius Caesar at the same time." Like other texts, it has an overabundance of graphics and over-emphasis on social issues in its primary source documents. Epstein "would find it very difficult to utilize this text in a global history high school setting." Some of its omissions and errors: It does not mention the genocidal nature of some Indian wars in North America or that the North American Indian was "essentially a Stone Age people without writing or the use of the wheel"; it says that Arabs organized as tribes to "help one another"; its description of African civilization is value-free; Japan is said to be located in a "temperate" climate, when in fact its climate ranges from sub-tropical to arctic; Buddhism was introduced to Japan from Korea, not China; British rule in India is presented as good for the British and bad for India with no balance or reference to "a degree of unity that India had never enjoyed before."

Ellington is critical of the book's layout because so many pages contain distracting and irrelevant peripherals. Where the material is relevant, he says, it should be incorporated into the narrative; where it is irrelevant, it should be removed. Ellington also identifies numerous errors, such as the

book's description of Japanese Buddhism; the only sect mentioned is Zen, which would be akin to "describing Christianity in the U.S. and simply mentioning the Episcopalian church." The book's treatment of economics is woeful, its discussion of Adam Smith is inadequate, and its description of the Industrial Revolution is almost completely negative. The shifting definition of capitalism "seems almost guaranteed to confuse young readers." The author seems ambivalent or unwilling to acknowledge "the connection between particular economic systems and human material improvement."

Mead complains that Spielvogel's text "fails to engage readers in the study of history," that it "lacks fascinating (horrible, noble, and picturesque) stories of human behavior—heroism of people in the past, love stories that affected politics—war stories, amazing adventures, mythological stories grippingly told, founding epics of great states, and legends...Making the people and the writings of the past come alive to engage students may be more important pedagogically than driving the students like cattle through every civilization and event of world history." He criticizes the book for "uncritically" accepting the Biblical narratives to describe early Hebrew history. He considers the treatment of Catholicism to be weak and inaccurate and finds the book's treatment of the Vietnam War to be "heavily airbrushed," leaving readers ignorant of why the war continues to evoke strong passions today. Mead says, "The author seems to have decided not to offend anyone and so he says virtually nothing." The book's "greatest flaw is the earnestly dull, depersonalized tone in which it is written. Rarely do individuals, ideas, or anything else come across as exciting. I would much rather have students read biased but engaging and entertaining works—H.G. Wells, for example—than doom them to slog through this kind of very long, very antiseptic tome." The reader of this text is likely to conclude "that a lot has happened in the world in the last three thousand years, but that most of it was dull."

Jacob notes that this book, too, opens with a discussion of human evolution without ever using the "E" word. She complains that the wealth of detail in the text "overwhelms the reader and the forest disappears among the trees." The English Revolution, for example, is "just lost" in this narrative, and witchcraft trials get more attention than the execution of Charles I. Although the text is generally balanced, the discussion of life in the Congo fails to mention the condition of women in Africa, the discussion of the Ottomans fails to mention "the unsavory aspects of their governmental system," and there is "no frank discussion of the position of women in early modern Islamic societies." Unfortunately, the text overlooks new work on the Scientific Revolution that demonstrates a blurring of the line between science and magic, thus missing a good opportunity to connect with students. It also fails to draw appropriate connections between the Scientific Revolution and the Renaissance. Although the author claims to pay attention to context, "the discussion of the origins of the Enlightenment never mentions the crisis provoked by the revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685) and thus makes the movement entirely the work of a handful of gifted thinkers." This suggests that the book is both idealist and individualist, implying that "historical change happens because a few great men have great ideas." This emphasis on individuals reaches its nadir in the treatment of the rise of the Nazis: "We learn nothing about the inflation of the early 1920s, the unemployment, the red scare, the Versailles Treaty, the French invasion, etc. It is all about Hitler. The teacher who would use this book would have a hard job filling in the blanks."

Rabb finds the book mainly given over to “glitz, treatments that are so brief that they trivialize, and vignettes without sustained narrative.” The peripherals called “Voices from the Past” are “a pure distraction... Very few of these ‘voices’ added anything.” Rabb is especially disappointed by “the lack of analytic bite. Why...do towns grow? What are the forces at work? Why does the Neolithic age draw ‘to a close’? Don’t just tell us; explain...Why not, instead, take on a *real* historical issue—e.g., why did civilization begin, almost simultaneously, in four great river basins? All we’re told (Chapter 2) is that ‘civilization began.’ OK, but what is ‘civilization?’” Rabb finds that so much space is set aside for distracting sidebars, for “bells and whistles,” that there is “no room for exposition.” The explanations are missing, as is a compelling narrative and vivid stories. Lacking a narrative, “things seem to happen in a vacuum. Thus we get Elizabeth’s Golden Speech at length, but no sense of why Parliament has become so important, the rise of the Commons, their disputes with monarchs, and the other issues that make the Golden Speech worth exploring.” The book does not make science comprehensible; the “impression that science moved steadily forward is totally wrong. And scientific ideas seem to come out of thin air.”

***World History: Connections to Today***, Elisabeth Gaynor Ellis and Anthony Esler, (Prentice Hall, 2003)

The sixth-place world history textbook is Ellis and Esler, *World History: Connections to Today*, which received the lowest score. One reviewer did not rate this book, which received a cumulative score of 220 (of a possible 480 points awarded by four reviewers). If its score were converted to a grade, it would get a 46 percent.

**Merits of *Connections to Today***

Epstein admires the book’s explanation of Roman law and of the evolving traditions of English law and institutions. Other features that he likes: early civilizations of Africa; Britain under George III, especially the changing role of Parliament; the phases of the French Revolution; Napoleon’s use of nepotism; the Industrial Revolution and Britain’s role in it; British working class movements; explanations of different economic theories; and the industrialization of Russia under the Czars, a feature often overlooked in other textbooks.

<b>Ellis, <i>Connections to Today</i></b>	
Overall Grade: 46 %	
<b>F</b>	
<i>“Unacceptable”</i>	
<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Average Rating (out of 10)</b>
<i>Accuracy</i>	2.8
<i>Context</i>	4.8
<i>Organization</i>	2.3
<i>Selection of Supporting Materials</i>	6
<i>Lack of Bias</i>	3.5
<i>Historical Logic</i>	3.8
<i>Literary Quality</i>	6.8
<i>Use of Primary Sources</i>	4
<i>Historical Soundness</i>	7.3
<i>Democratic Ideas</i>	6.3
<i>Interest Level</i>	2
<i>Graphics</i>	5.8
<b>Overall Average</b>	<b>4.6</b>

Ellington finds the text lively and engaging. It provides good geographical context when students are introduced to a new culture, and it relates geographic variables to dominant cultural beliefs. The treatment of comparative religions is well done, and the authors balance political, economic, military, and cultural history. Their examination of the status of women is consistently good. Their treatment of Korea is unusually well done, recognizing the importance of indigenous Korean accomplishments and cultural identity. In some cases, like their explanation of American Indians' lack of resistance to European viruses, they "go the extra mile" to explain and to avoid misconceptions by readers. They are "quite good" on the development of parliamentary democracy, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution. On many topics, the authors do a good job of "balancing different kinds of history, including analyses as well as facts, and not being excessively politically correct. They also engage in no overt presentism or moralizing."

Jacob praises the text's discussion of Weimar Germany and the rise of Hitler, which successfully integrates economic and political factors. The treatment of the period after 1945, she judges, is the best part of the book.

Mead describes this as a "comprehensive, thorough textbook that provides a solid overview of world history. The extensive, full color illustrations and maps help to liven the text, and a real effort is made to explain how various civilizations, cultures, and religions have been linked to one another and have developed over the ages." He praises the book for its description of the "many atrocities committed under Communist regimes, whether in Mao's China or Stalin's Soviet Union," but argues that this feature would be strengthened if the authors connected these crimes to those of other Communist regimes, including Pol Pot's Cambodia and Kim Il Sung's North Korea. Mead also praises the book for its recognition that slavery has existed in many cultures throughout human history, but faults it for not acknowledging that slavery still exists today in parts of Africa and the Indian subcontinent.

### ***Shortcomings of Connections to Today***

Epstein faults the text for several instances of presentism, i.e., judging the distant past by present-day standards. He criticizes it for using the Biblical narrative for ancient Jewish history instead of historical sources, and for offering a simplistic view of Thucydides, the Peloponnesian War, the conflict between Socrates and the Sophists, the Punic Wars, and other topics. The book mentions, but fails to explain, for example, Greek architecture, the division of Alexander's empire, Julius Caesar, the Crusades, the legacy of Napoleon, and the collapse of the Soviet Union. "There is no distinction made between civilizations that rely heavily on oral traditions as opposed to the written record," Epstein complains, which results in "a kind of leveling in the writing that makes all civilizations equal in the presentation."

Ellington concludes that this book is poorly organized and contains "simply too many errors." The organization and peripherals, he writes, "bury what at times is good narrative." The book opens with

53 pages of front matter before one gets to the first page of history. Most primary sources, instead of being integrated into or alongside the narrative, are gathered in the back of the book in a reference section, where they are unlikely to be used. Among the worst peripherals are “assignments,” including “note-taking” and “Make a concept web,” and “portfolio assignments.” Most of these assignments are vacuous, faddish, time-wasting, distracting, or reduce history to “a few words...placed in little bubbles.” Ellington writes that “If a teacher tried to assign only half the projects in this book, he/she would never get past the middle ages.” After noting specific errors of fact, he also identifies what he calls “slanted” judgments, such as the text’s claim that the word “jihad” has “often been mistakenly translated simply as ‘holy war.’ In fact, it may include acts of charity or an inner struggle to achieve spiritual peace, as well as any battle in defense of Islam.” The wording of the text seems to deny that “holy war” has historically been one meaning of the term “jihad.” Ellington is also bothered by the text’s “glowing rhetoric” to describe socialists and its negative references to capitalists.

Jacob describes the first chapter as “an unmitigated disaster,” not only because it avoids using the “E” word (evolution) but also because “nothing else makes much sense.” The text jumps from civilization to civilization, which we know because “the map and pictures change, not because of any thoughtful text.” The constant referrals to the present are distracting (“One wonders if all this activity contributes to attention deficit disorder”). In the treatment of Hinduism, “all attention to negative aspects of the caste system was avoided,” other than to suggest to students in a review question that the caste system “promotes order. What values are we trying to teach?” The chapter on the “High Middle Ages” crams too much into too little space, with no consistent principle of organization; worse, obscure figures like Duke Jagiello of Lithuania and Queen Jadwiga of Poland receive the same recognition as Ivan the Great. Then, in the treatment of Islam, the authors fail to raise the issue of the treatment of women, despite the fact that they “intrude contemporary issues into almost every chapter.” As for the discussion of the Scientific Revolution, in Jacob’s view it is the worst of all the textbooks reviewed—there is no context, no time line, no sense of development. “One wonders why the book even bothers to include it except the sheer weight of textbook conventions.” The discussion of women and the Enlightenment is “nonsense, leaving the impression that the philosophers actively argued that women did not have rights. Contrast this with the gentle treatment given to Islam and the issue of women’s rights.”

Mead gives this text its lowest score, describing it as “sterile and censored,” employing a double standard to judge western and non-western civilizations. He complains that the authors’ efforts to avoid offending “any one culture or civilization and their insistence on promoting the idea of ‘cultural relativism’ diminish the reader’s ability to engage in serious reading of history.” In trying to avoid ethnocentrism, the text “attempts to redress prior imbalances in civilizational coverage by at times inflating or elevating one culture or civilization’s achievements at the expense of European or Western accomplishments.” Its goal is to accord the same degree of respect and attention to all cultures and civilizations, past or present. For example, credit for Columbus’ voyages to the New World

is attributed not to European advances in ship-building and navigation, but to the knowledge that Europeans gained from Islamic culture (“The world of Muslim astronomers and navigators helped pave the way for later explorers like Christopher Columbus”).

Mead also finds that the effort to portray all cultures and events as equally important is as misguided as textbooks that portray world history through an exclusively western perspective. Like most of the books reviewed for this project, this text fails to establish that “certain events are more important than others.” As one example of a double standard, the text criticizes the medieval Catholic Church for its sexism, but skirts the unequal treatment of women in Islamic societies. Mead says, “The kid-gloves treatment of one religion and the harsh judgment of another is a deplorable instance of bias. The authors should be embarrassed and ashamed.” He equally deplores the book’s failure to mention the brutality of the Japanese in the period before World War II: “I found no mention of the comfort women, sex slaves numbering in the hundreds of thousands found not only in Korea but also in China, the Philippines, and Taiwan; nor did I find reference to the ‘Rape of Nanking’ and the brutal atrocities committed there. There is an international outcry when Japanese textbooks gloss over these events; shouldn’t American students also be exposed to them?”

# Conclusions and Recommendations

We began this evaluation expecting to identify the strengths and weaknesses of particular history textbooks and to supply this information to those buying or using the books. We also wanted to demonstrate the value of obtaining independent reviews to help illustrate the need for such appraisals on a regular basis. We believe these goals have been achieved. This review should undermine the widespread belief, shared by students, teachers, and parents alike, that textbooks are a disembodied voice of authority whose facts and interpretations are beyond quibble.

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It is not, our reviewers find, errors of fact or interpretation that are so disturbing. Worse, one comes away from reading these reviews, as well as from reading the books themselves, with a sense that they make history dull. There seems to be something in the very nature of today's textbooks that blunts the edges of events and strips from the narrative whatever is lively, adventurous, and exciting. In part, this

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**There seems to be something in the very nature of today's textbooks that blunts the edges of events and strips from the narrative whatever is lively, adventurous, and exciting.**

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happens because so much needs to be covered and compressed in the texts; in part, it is due to the lack of an authorial voice and the ability to express wonderment, humor, outrage, or elation. Consequently, it is hard to imagine anyone turning to a textbook for pleasurable

reading. If one were asked to read five history books, written, say, by the likes of David McCullough, C. Vann Woodward, Gordon Wood or any other well-known historian, it would be a stimulating and enlightening assignment. Based on our reviewers' comments, however, one would not have the same reaction if asked to sit down with a stack of textbooks in American or world history. Instead, one would view such an assignment as a chore, a task that one would not willingly undertake or relish other than as a scholarly exploration of cultural phenomena.

One thing seems clear: If history textbooks are not consistently interesting and enlightening, they won't do a good job of teaching history to their readers. If the prose is choppy and incoherent, students won't understand what the texts are trying to teach. This review, we hope, helps to explain why students are not learning much history—and not liking the subject much, either. Whatever their

other faults, these books' most grievous defect is their failure to bring to the student of history a sense of wonder, intrigue, and fascination with the events of the past.

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**Oddball publishers that defy the demands of the big states and produce a really different product for teaching history end up competing for a small sliver of the market.**

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Although the reviewers rate some texts as better or worse than others, on the whole they find striking similarities among them. The books are of identical size and heft. They are graphically gorgeous. They have beautiful multi-colored images on every page. (Some actually seem to allot more space to graphics than to text.) With only relatively minor variations, all relate a similar narrative about the development of the United States or the world.

These similarities are not surprising, since all the publishers are responding to the demands of a small number of large states that dominate the textbook-buying marketplace, notably California, Texas, and Florida. These are among 22 states that purchase textbooks en masse for their public

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**World history textbooks simply attempt too much. They resort to an approach that may be described as “if this is Tuesday, we must be studying the Hittites.”**

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schools. No mass-market publisher dares to ignore their specific demands related to curriculum, format, illustrations, content, binding, and issues of race, ethnicity, and gender. As a result of this political process for purchasing

textbooks, those that succeed in the marketplace end up looking like peas in a pod. Oddball publishers that defy the demands of the big states and produce a really different product for teaching history end up competing for a small sliver of the market.

The reviewers repeatedly complain that the textbook authors tried to cover far too much material in the space available. Important events are compressed into a few paragraphs, even a few sentences; this condensation tends to eliminate not only the interesting details about events and personalities, but also the context of events that might make them meaningful to the reader. Further, in the pressure to cover everything, most of the textbooks sacrifice any sense of what is important to learn about history. The student who is presented with a flood of names, dates, and happenings needs to know why these things matter, why they should be remembered and discussed.

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**The shallowness of the textbooks reveals a far more serious problem that the schools must grapple with: the rise and dominance of the “world history paradigm.”**

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Nowhere is the problem of coverage more acute than in the world history textbooks. They simply attempt too much; they must cover too many civilizations and eras. All resort to an approach that may be described as “if this is Tuesday, we must be studying the Hittites.” There is no time for in-depth study of any particular civilization. Yet surely world history is best learned after a student has first learned

about one or more major civilizations in depth. The shallowness of the textbooks reveals a far more serious problem that the schools must grapple with: the rise and dominance of the “world history paradigm” and the correlative shriveling of intensive studies of a single region. We really must stop and think about the nature of the course that is now called “world history.” If we continue to teach world history as a mad rush through time and space, we should not be surprised when students remember little of what they have studied.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

The present system of statewide textbook purchasing has warped the writing, editing, and production of textbooks. *It should be abolished.* States like California, Texas, and a score of others should not dictate the content of textbooks through their power to pre-select books en masse for almost all pupils in their state’s public schools. This power is too easily compromised by pressure groups and by bureaucratic demands. The states should set their academic standards, align their tests to those standards, and leave teachers free to select the books, anthologies, histories, biographies, software and other materials that will help students meet the standards.

Textbooks should regularly be reviewed by independent agencies and publications, just as trade books are. Those selecting them should have access to a goodly number of diverse evaluations. In the present situation, where there is no marketplace of consumers for textbooks, there is no marketplace for textbook reviewing. If history textbooks were purchased by hundreds of thousands of teachers, there would indeed be a marketplace for reviews of them. This would be a true gain that would result from opening up the competition among publishers and allowing teachers to choose their own materials.

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**Textbooks should regularly be reviewed by independent agencies and publications, just as trade books are.**

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Certainly we need better-educated teachers, who are well prepared to select materials for their students. Licensing teachers is a responsibility of the states; if they did a better job of setting qualifications for history teachers, those who were preparing to teach would take more courses in history. This is a problem that can be solved, without additional costs or delays, by state action.

States should create alternatives to current requirements in world history. In particular, states should encourage teachers and schools to give students opportunities to spend a semester or a year engaged in the study of single cultures, regions, or civilizations. If ever there was a course in which students have no idea why they are studying this or that civilization, it is world history as presently organized. The current pattern should not be the only way to learn about other cultures. Few teach-

ers are prepared to teach it, and few students are likely to emerge from so hurried a survey with anything more than a clutter of unrelated factoids about the world. Yet the current matrix of textbooks, state requirements, and assessments now bids fair to establish this omnibus approach as the only one

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**Now is the time for publishers, teachers, state officials, and concerned citizens to think about what will replace the present generation of history textbooks**

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permitted. The College Board recently began a world history advanced placement exam, and the National Assessment Governing Board is slated to assess world history in a few years. The survey approach is becoming institutionalized at state and national levels.

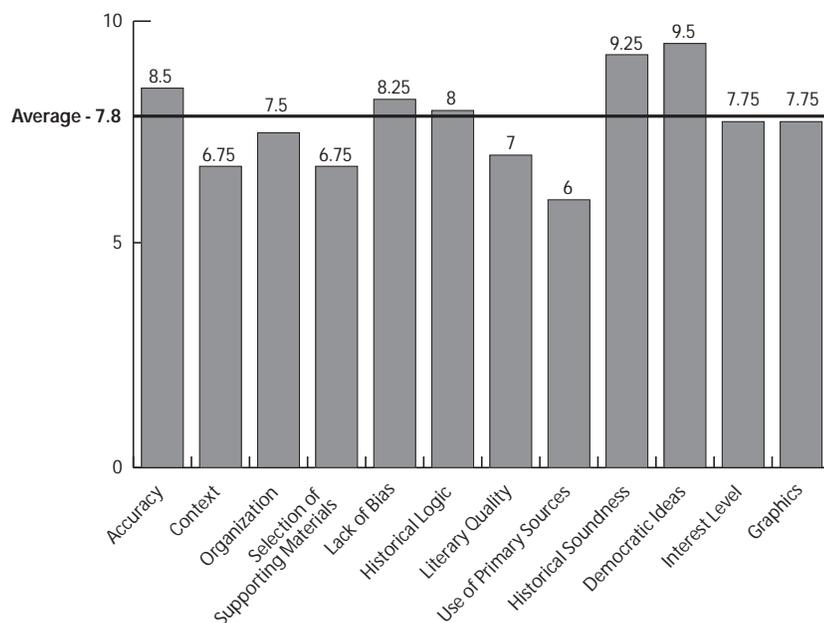
Students would surely learn more, remember more, and be better prepared to understand world history if they had engaged in a semester-long or yearlong study of Aztecs, Africa, China, France, India, England, or any other nation or region. Our education system would be foolish to exclude or discourage such intensive studies by assessing and acknowledging only the survey approach.

In thinking about textbooks today, one cannot escape the possibility that they are dinosaurs. The rapid advance of technology is likely to make the present system of producing textbooks obsolete. It is hard to imagine that the textbook in its current form will survive another generation. Now is the time for publishers, teachers, state officials, and concerned citizens to think about what will replace the present generation of history textbooks. History will continue to be an important subject in the school curriculum. Wisdom suggests that we begin thinking about better ways to kindle students' interest in learning and understanding.

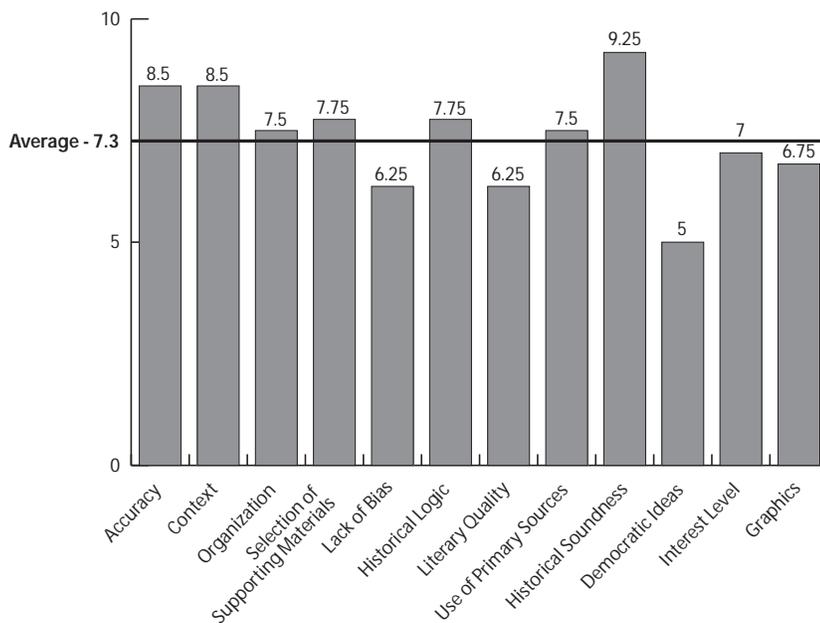
# Appendix A

## American History Criteria by Textbook

**Graph 1: Appleby, *American Journey***  
(Rating per Criterion)

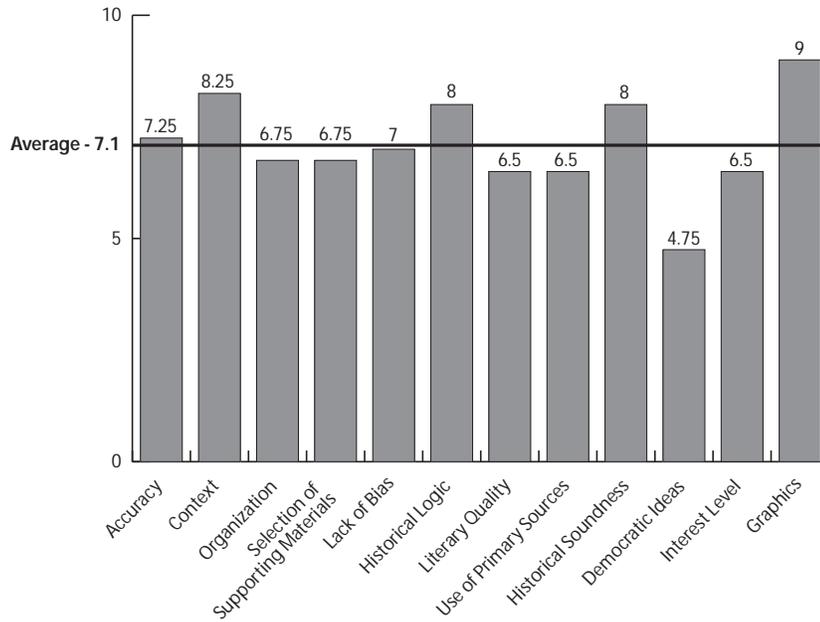


**Graph 2: Boyer, *American Nation***  
(Rating per Criterion)

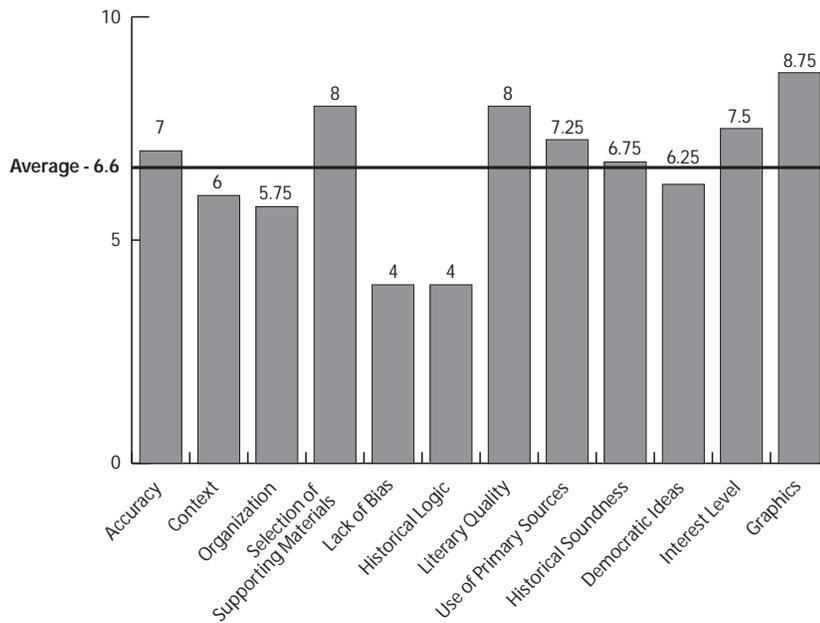


See page 16 for full textbook citations, and page 17 for a definition of each criterion.

**Graph 3: Cayton, *Pathways to the Present***  
(Rating per Criterion)

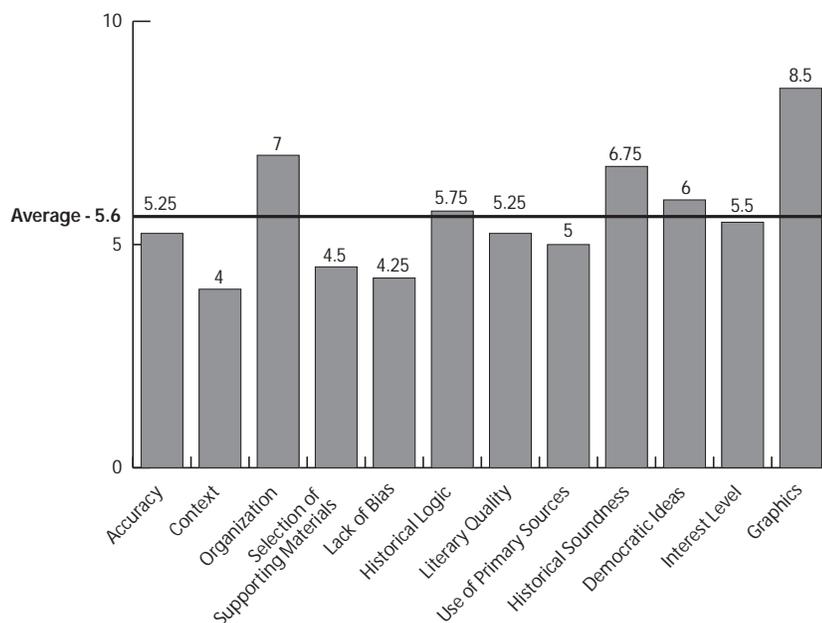


**Graph 4: Nash, *American Odyssey***  
(Rating per Criterion)

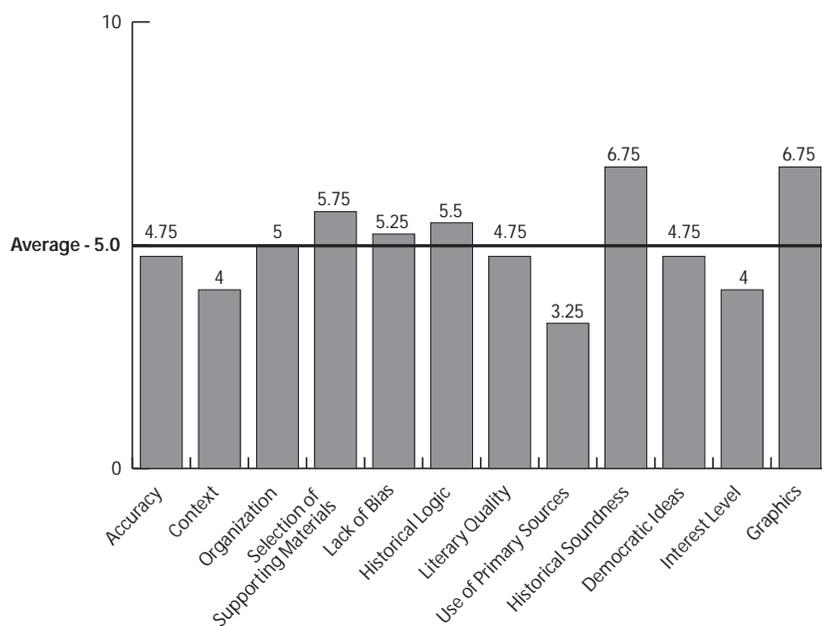


See page 16 for full textbook citations, and page 17 for a definition of each criterion.

**Graph 5: Danzer, *The Americans***  
(Rating per Criterion)



**Graph 6: Bragdon, *History of a Free Nation***  
(Rating per Criterion)

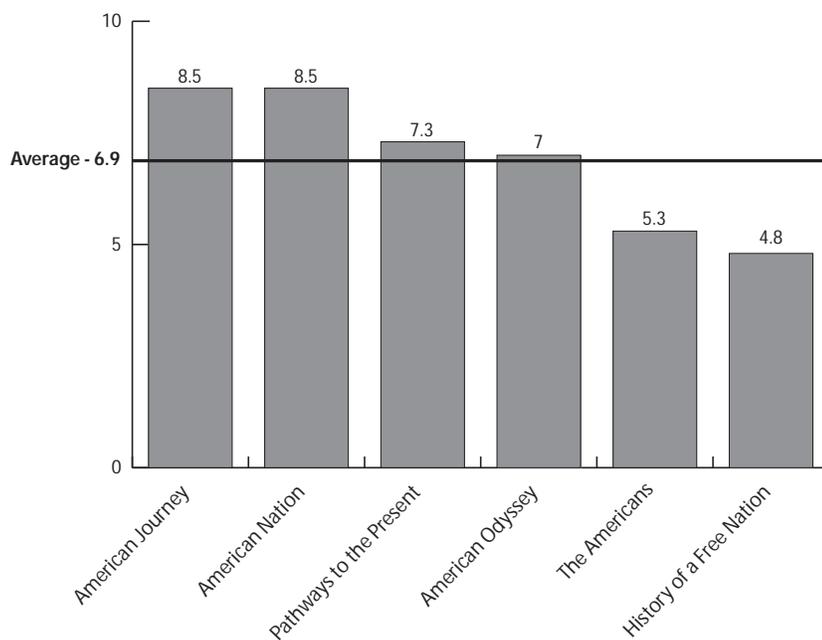


See page 16 for full textbook citations, and page 17 for a definition of each criterion.

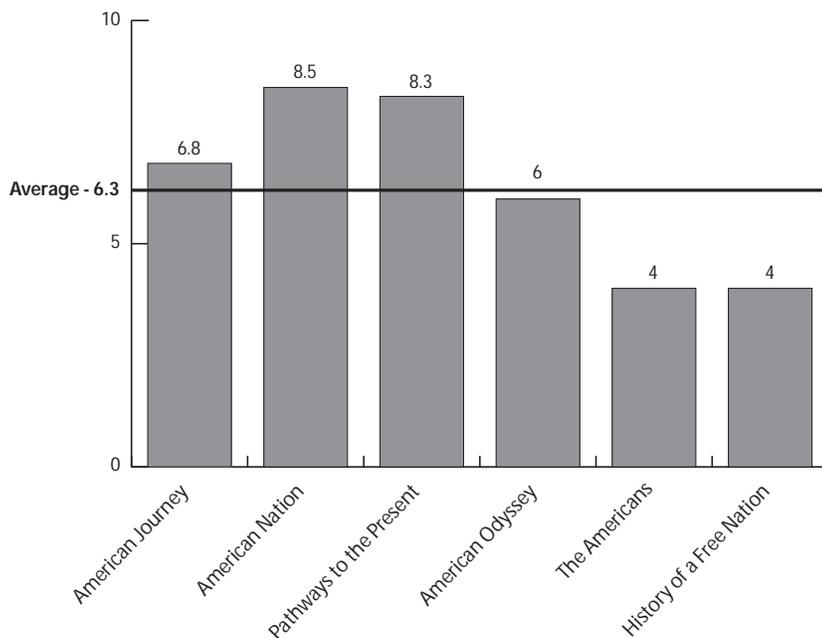
# Appendix B

American History Textbooks by Criterion

**Graph 7: Accuracy**  
(Combined Reviewer Ratings)

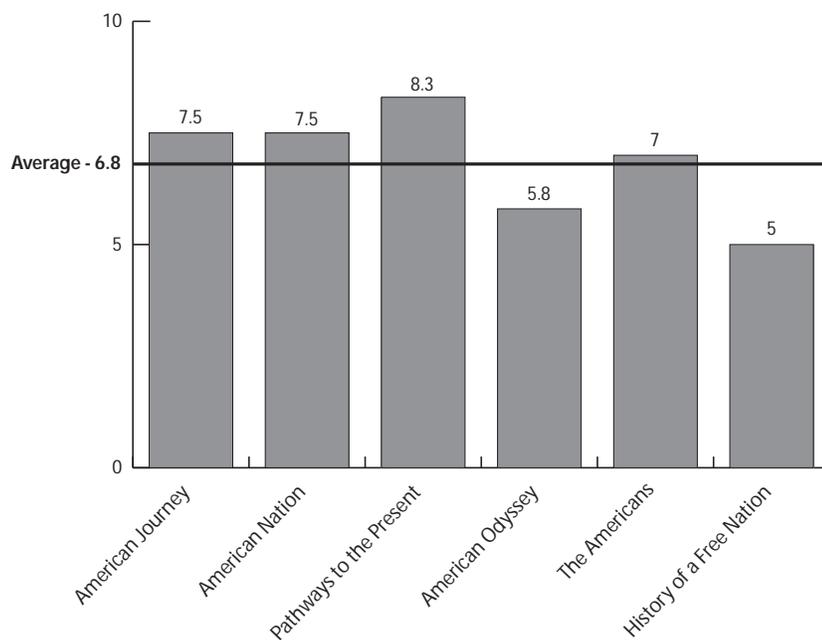


**Graph 8: Context**  
(Combined Reviewer Ratings)

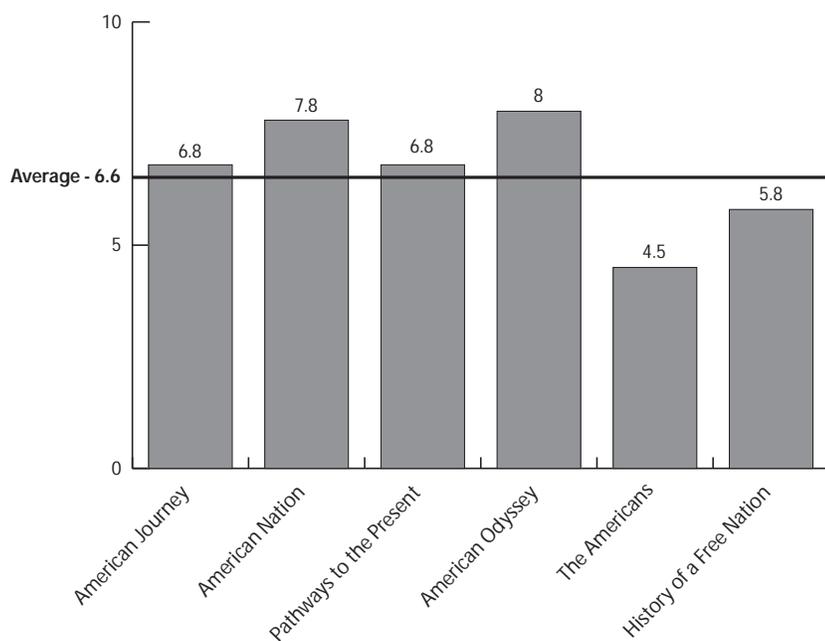


See page 16 for full textbook citations, and page 17 for a definition of each criterion.

**Graph 9: Organization**  
(Combined Reviewer Ratings)

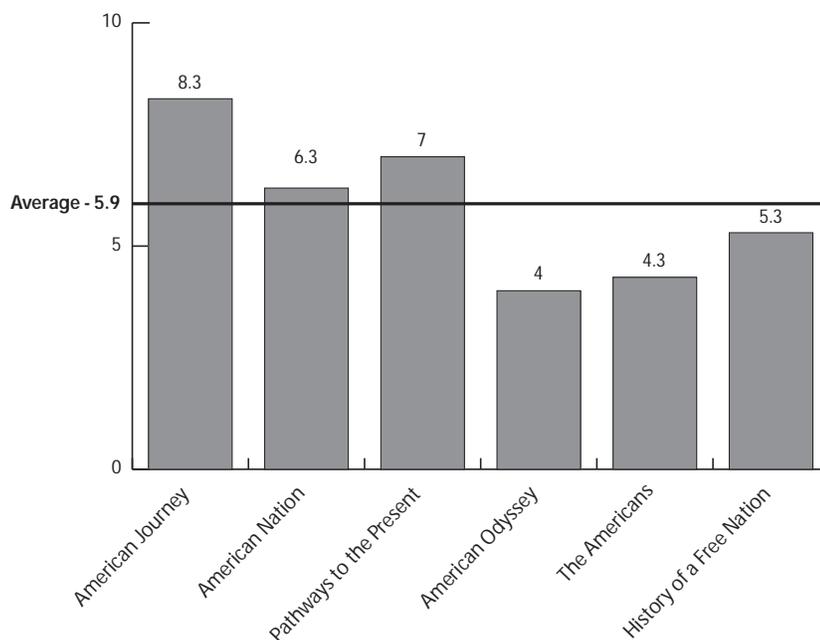


**Graph 10: Selection of Supporting Materials**  
(Combined Reviewer Ratings)

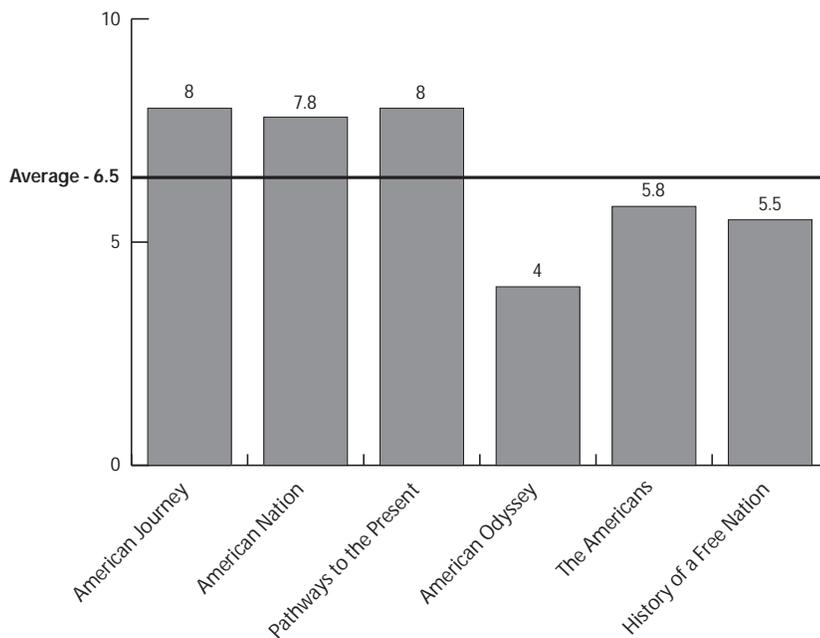


See page 16 for full textbook citations, and page 17 for a definition of each criterion.

**Graph 11: Lack of Bias**  
(Combined Reviewer Ratings)

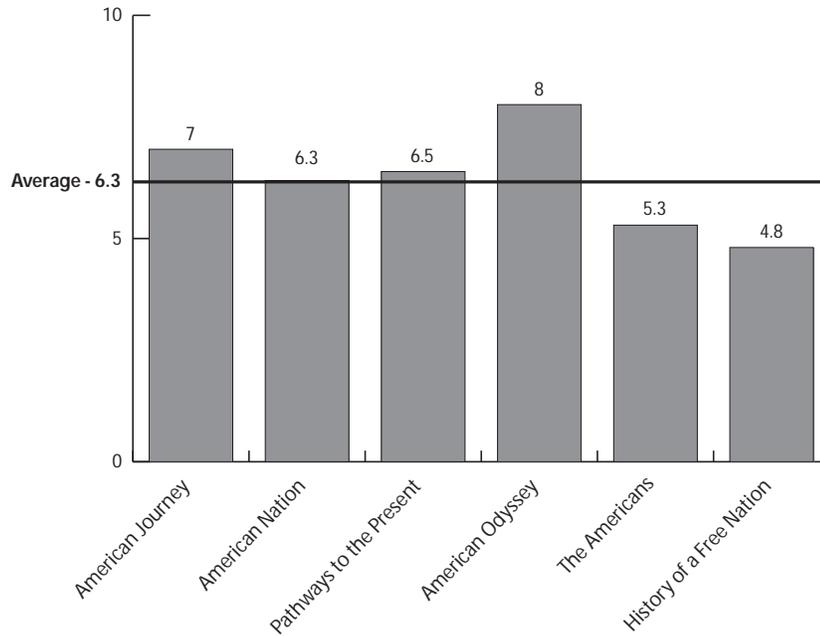


**Graph 12: Historical Logic**  
(Combined Reviewer Ratings)

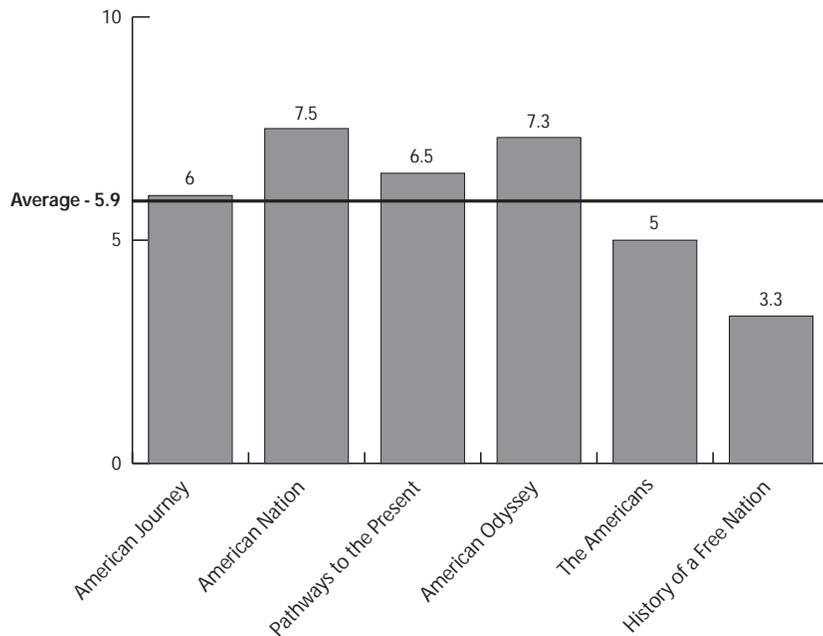


See page 16 for full textbook citations, and page 17 for a definition of each criterion.

**Graph 13: Literary Quality**  
(Combined Reviewer Ratings)

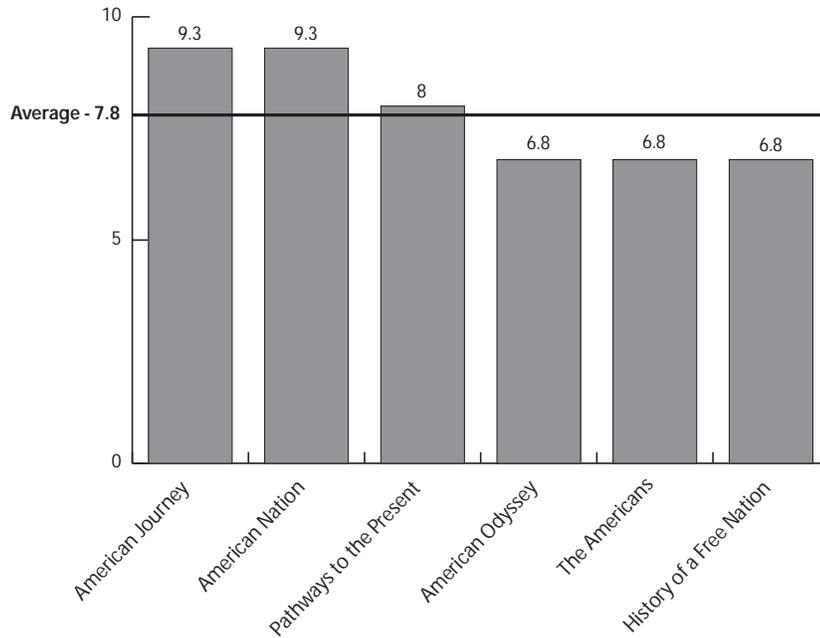


**Graph 14: Use of Primary Sources**  
(Combined Reviewer Ratings)

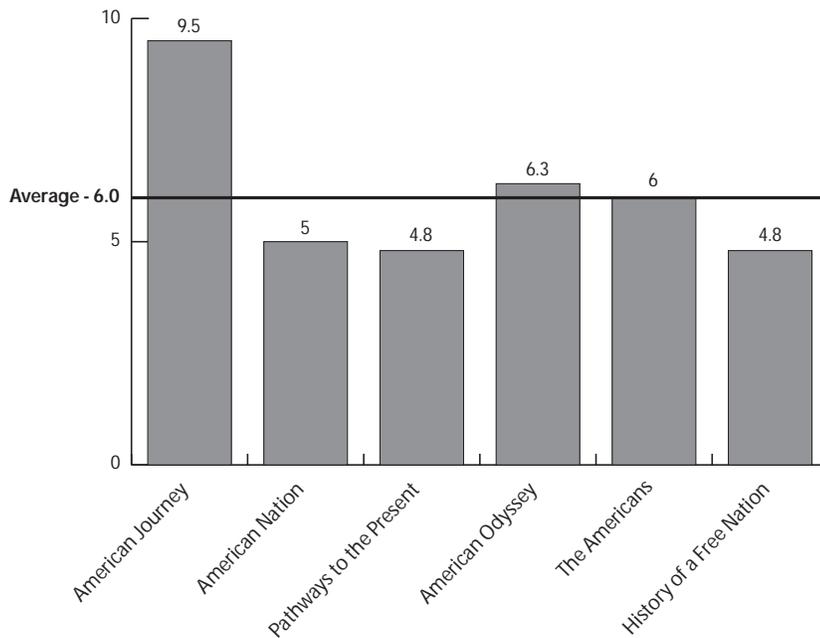


See page 16 for full textbook citations, and page 17 for a definition of each criterion.

**Graph 15: Historical Soundness**  
(Combined Reviewer Ratings)

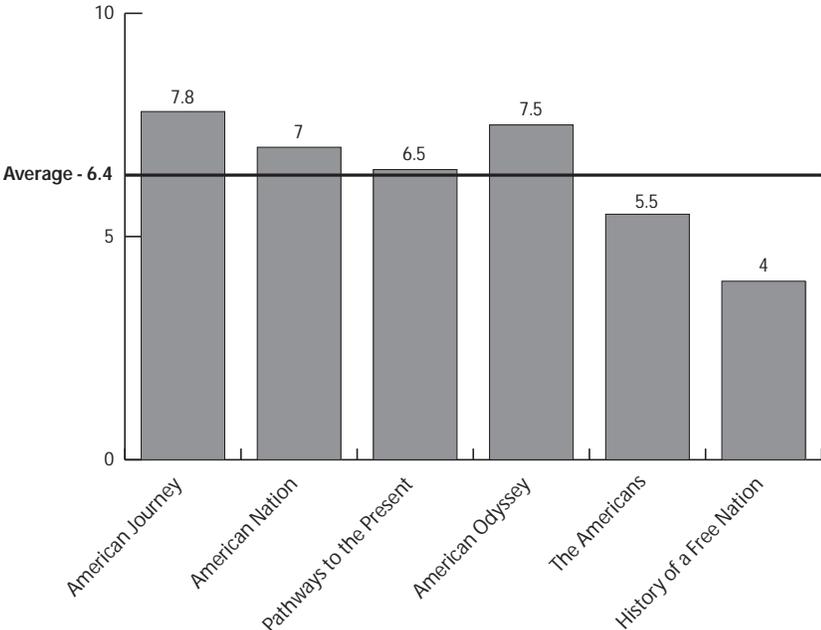


**Graph 16: Democratic Ideas**  
(Combined Reviewer Ratings)

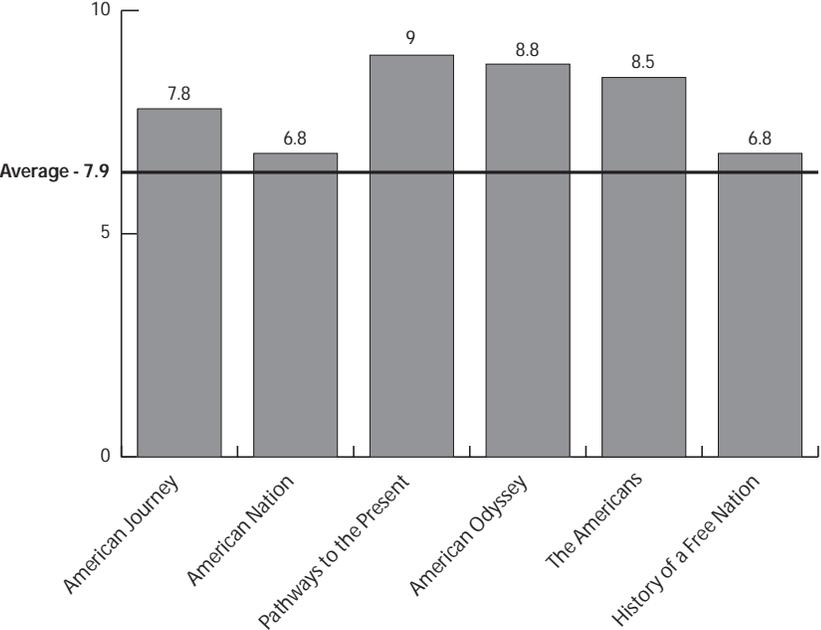


See page 16 for full textbook citations, and page 17 for a definition of each criterion.

**Graph 17: Interest Level**  
(Combined Reviewer Ratings)



**Graph 18: Graphics**  
(Combined Reviewer Ratings)



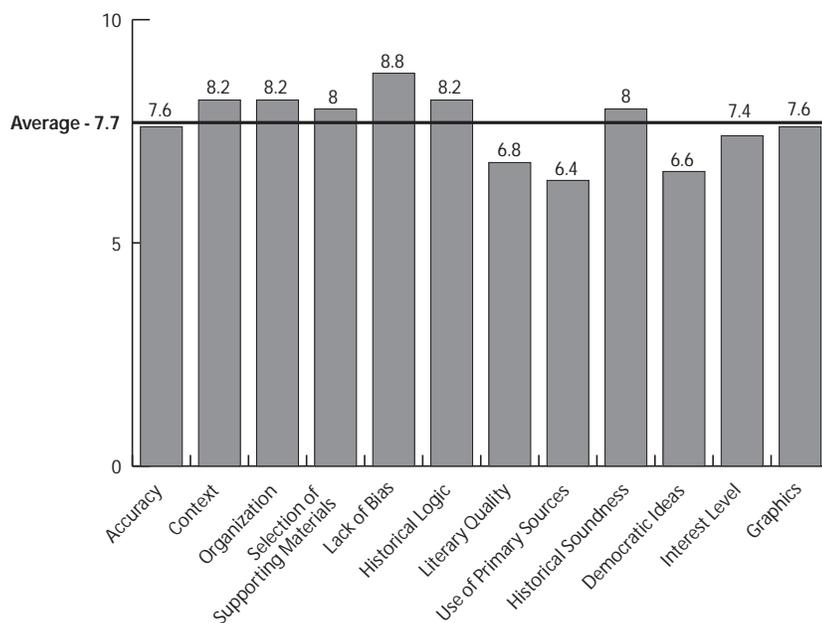
See page 16 for full textbook citations, and page 17 for a definition of each criterion.



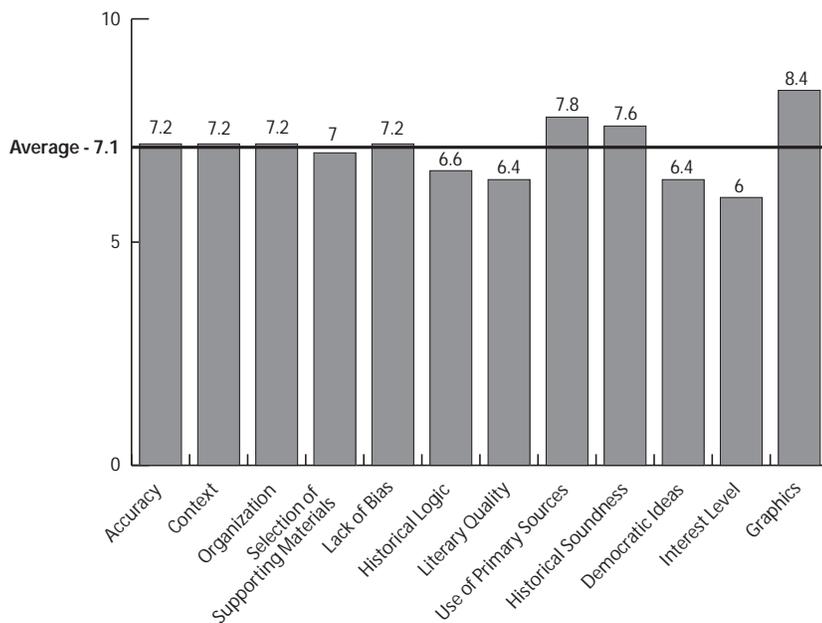
# Appendix C

World History Criteria by Textbook

**Graph 19: Miller, *People and Nations***  
(Rating per Criterion)

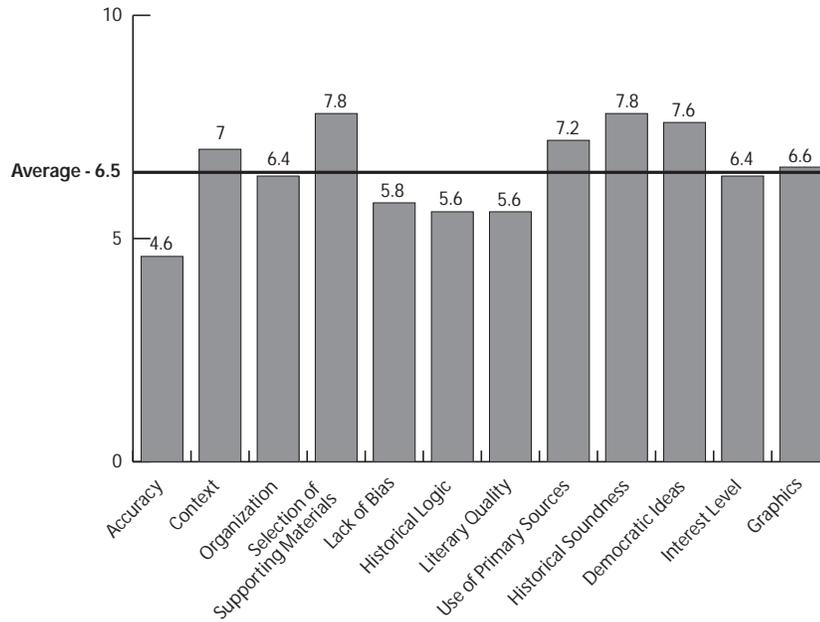


**Graph 20: Hanes, *Continuity and Change***  
(Rating per Criterion)

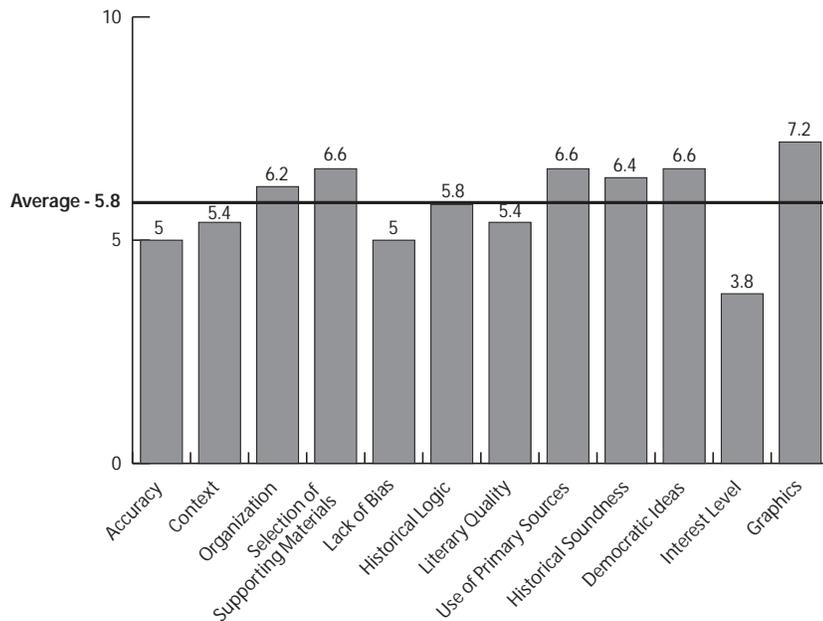


See page 16 for full textbook citations, and page 17 for a definition of each criterion.

**Graph 21: Beck, *Patterns of Interaction***  
(Rating per Criterion)

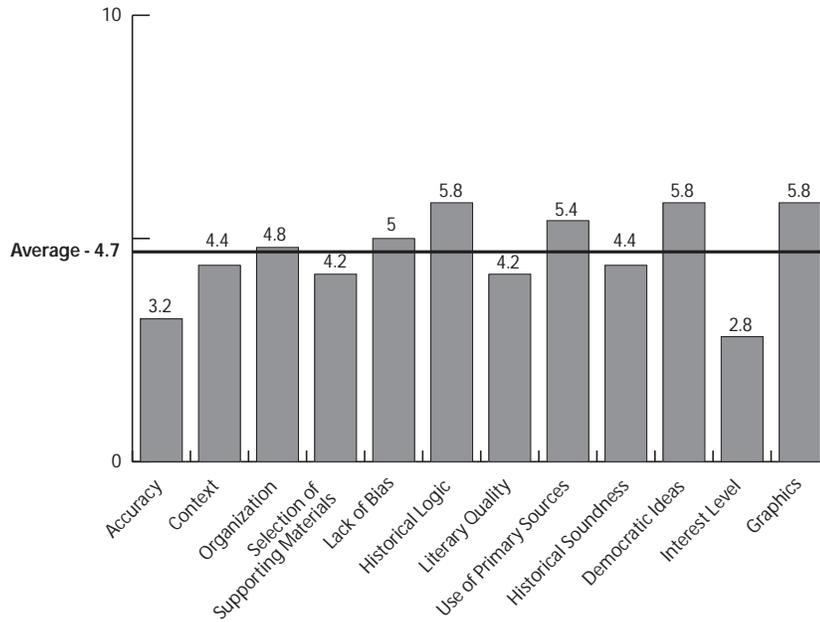


**Graph 22: Farah, *The Human Experience***  
(Rating per Criterion)

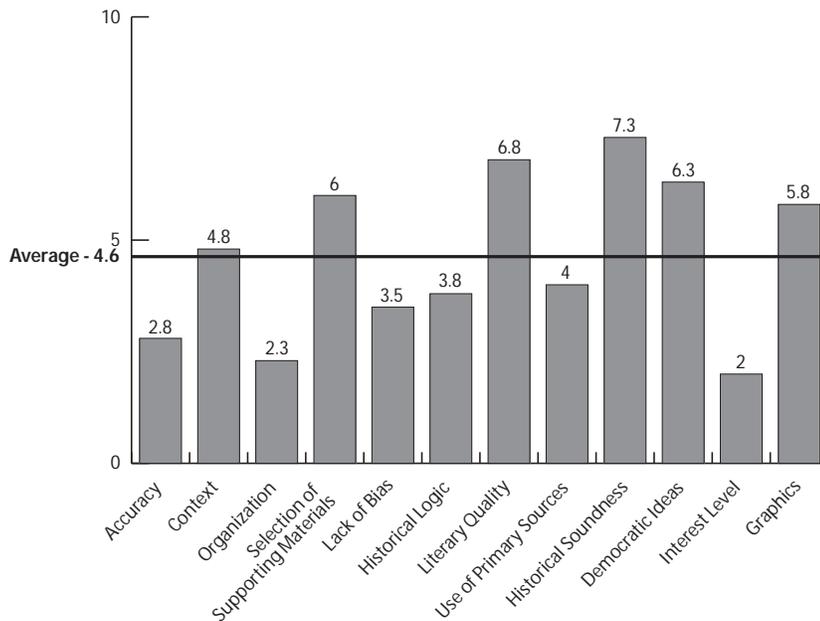


See page 16 for full textbook citations, and page 17 for a definition of each criterion.

**Graph 23: Spielvogel, *The Human Odyssey***  
(Rating per Criterion)



**Graph 24: Ellis, *Connections to Today***  
(Rating per Criterion)

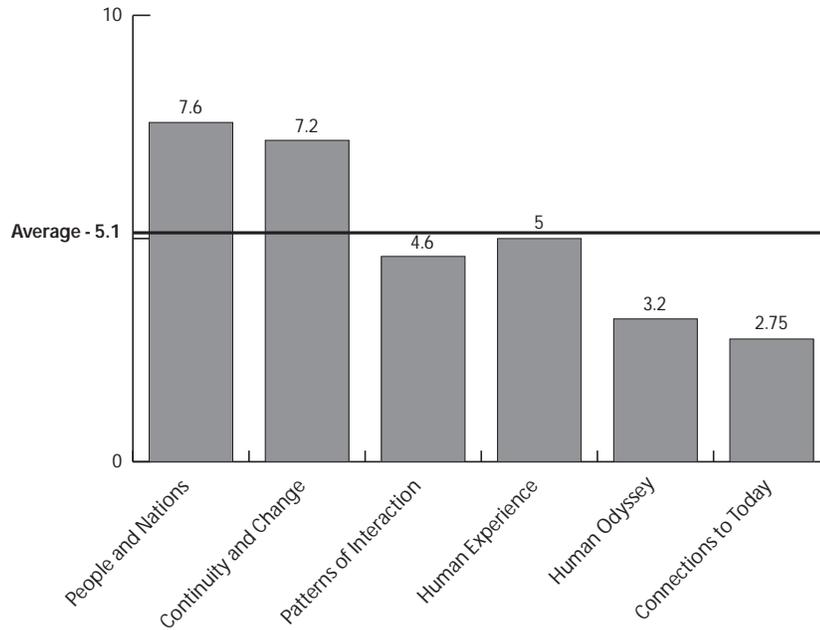


See page 16 for full textbook citations, and page 17 for a definition of each criterion.

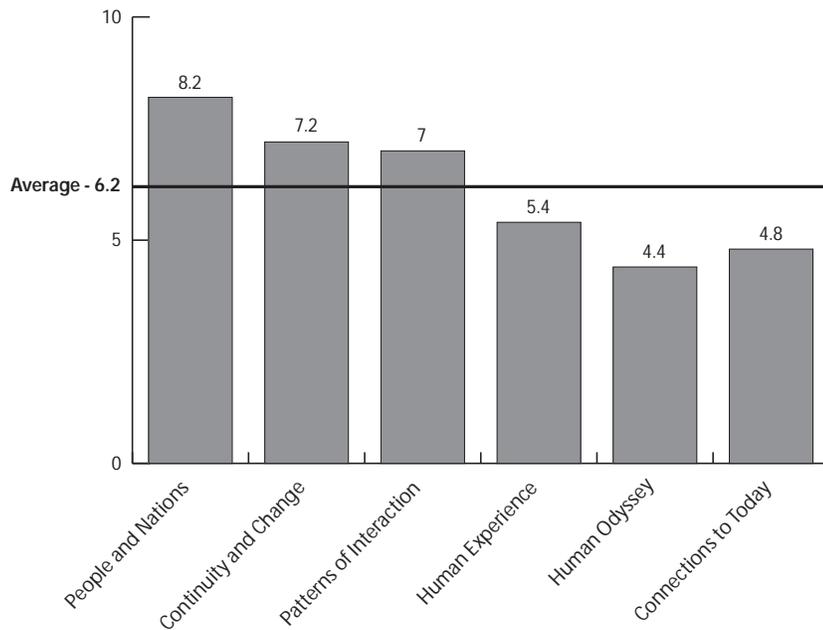
# Appendix D

World History Textbooks by Criterion

**Graph 25: Accuracy**  
(Combined Reviewer Ratings)

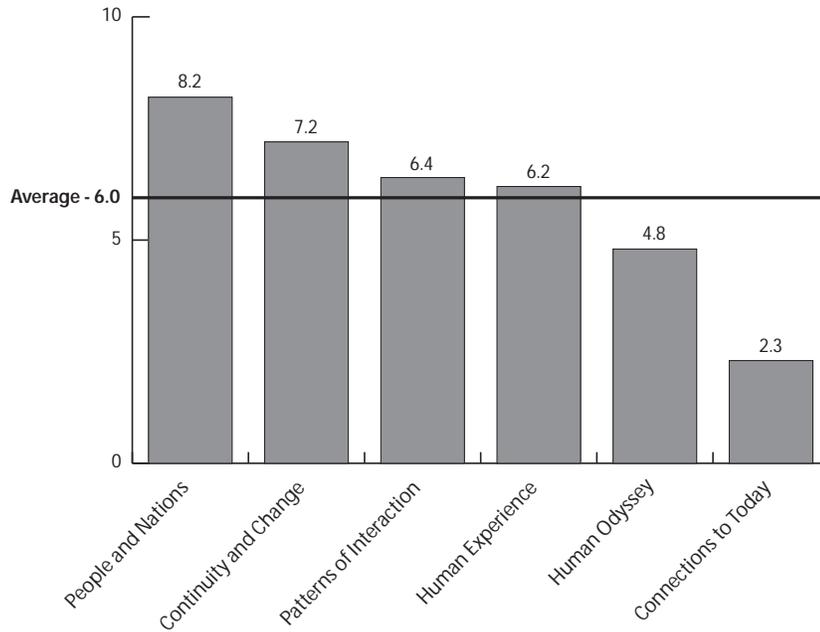


**Graph 26: Context**  
(Combined Reviewer Ratings)

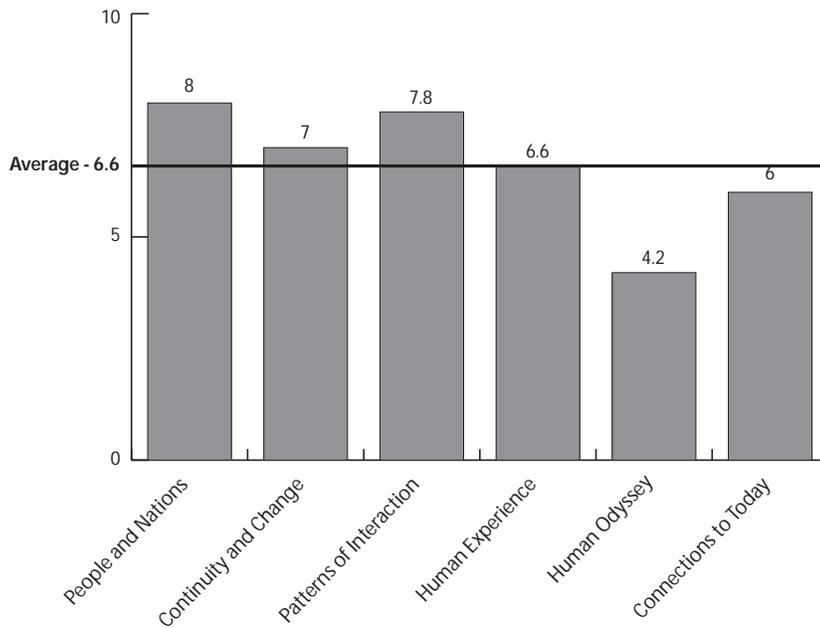


See page 16 for full textbook citations, and page 17 for a definition of each criterion.

**Graph 27: Organization**  
(Combined Reviewer Ratings)

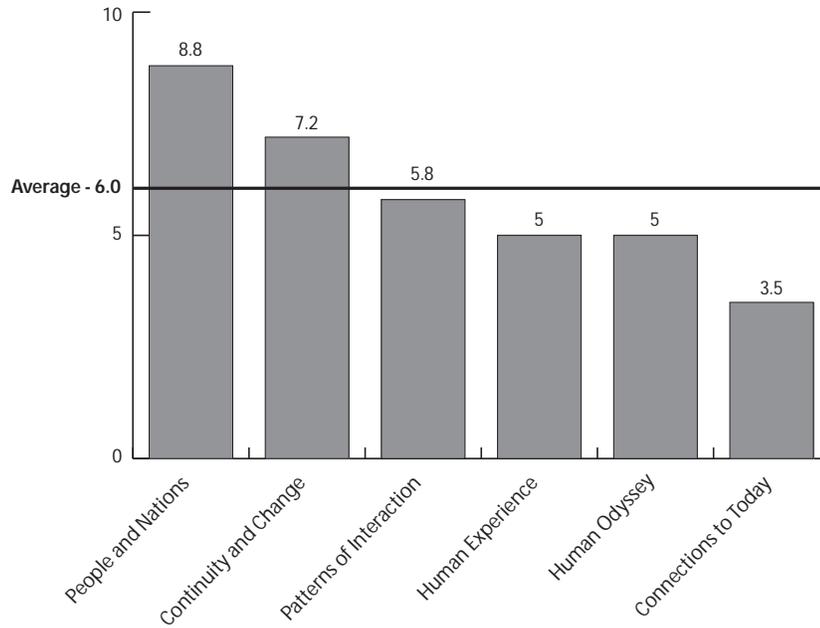


**Graph 28: Selection of Supporting Materials**  
(Combined Reviewer Ratings)

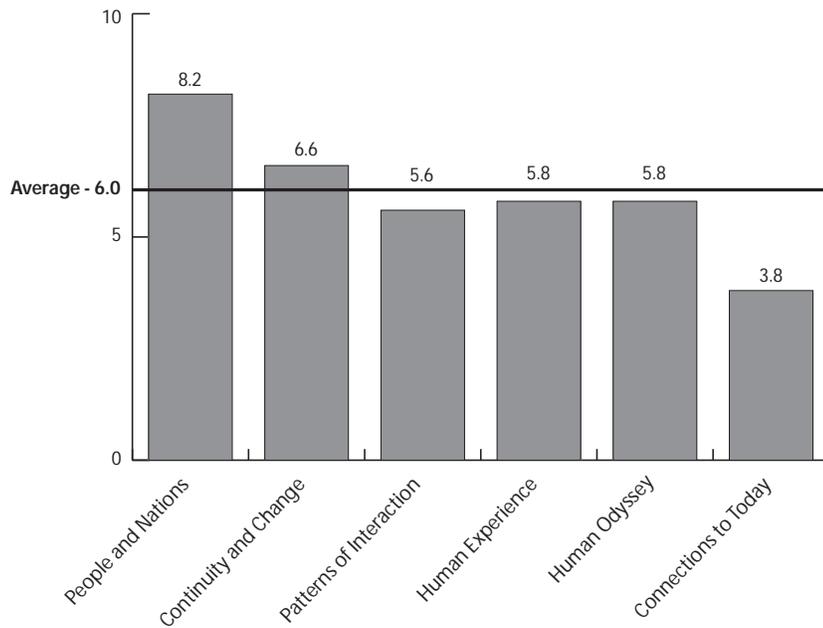


See page 16 for full textbook citations, and page 17 for a definition of each criterion.

**Graph 29: Lack of Bias**  
(Combined Reviewer Ratings)

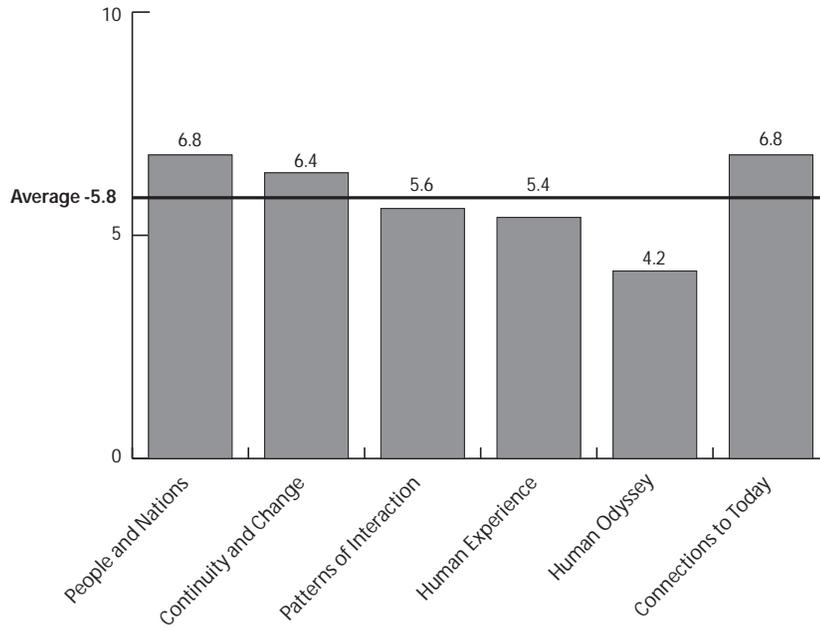


**Graph 30: Historical Logic**  
(Combined Reviewer Ratings)

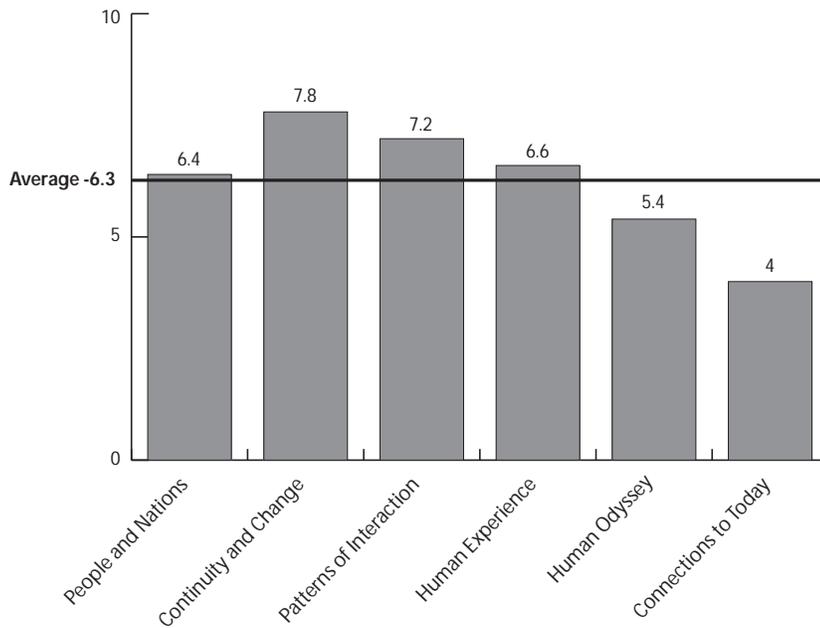


See page 16 for full textbook citations, and page 17 for a definition of each criterion.

**Graph 31: Literary Quality**  
(Combined Reviewer Ratings)

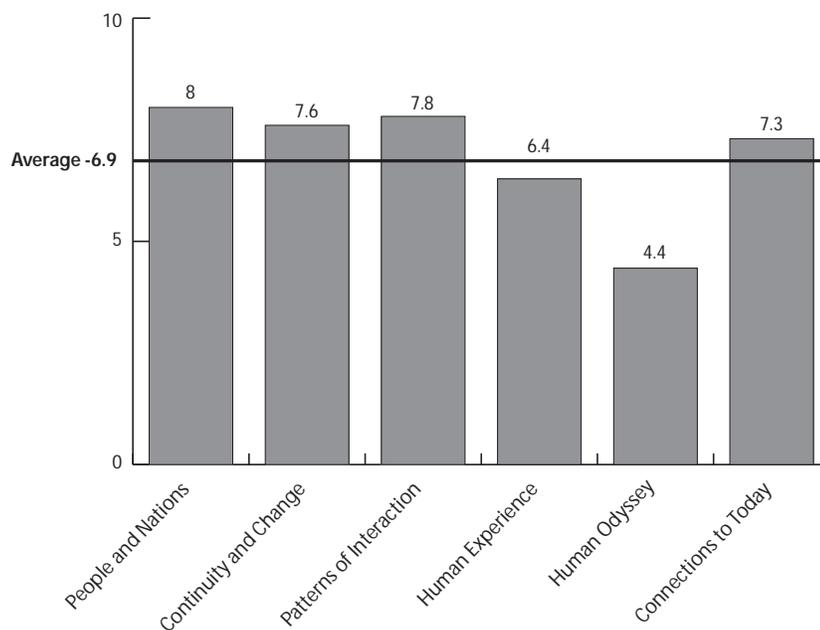


**Graph 32: Use of Primary Sources**  
(Combined Reviewer Ratings)

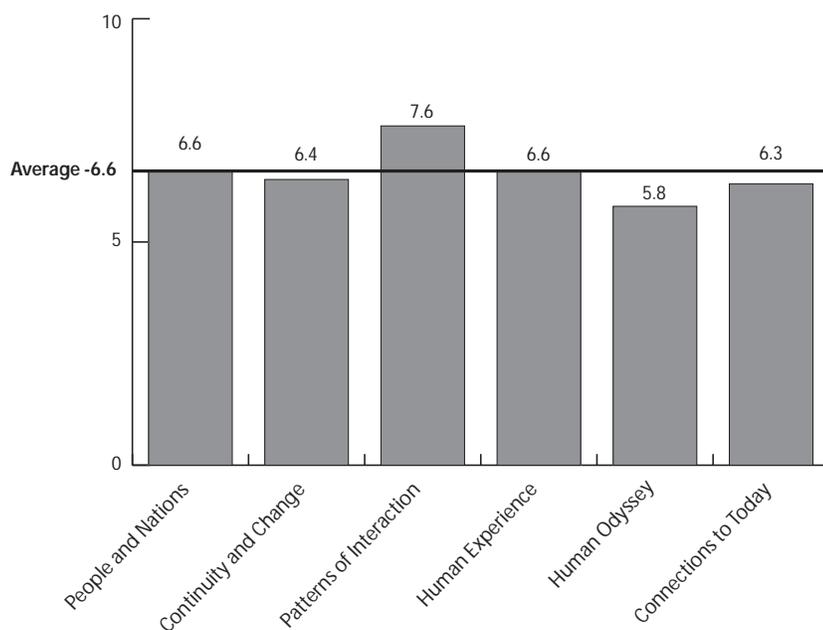


See page 16 for full textbook citations, and page 17 for a definition of each criterion.

**Graph 33: Historical Soundness**  
(Combined Reviewer Ratings)

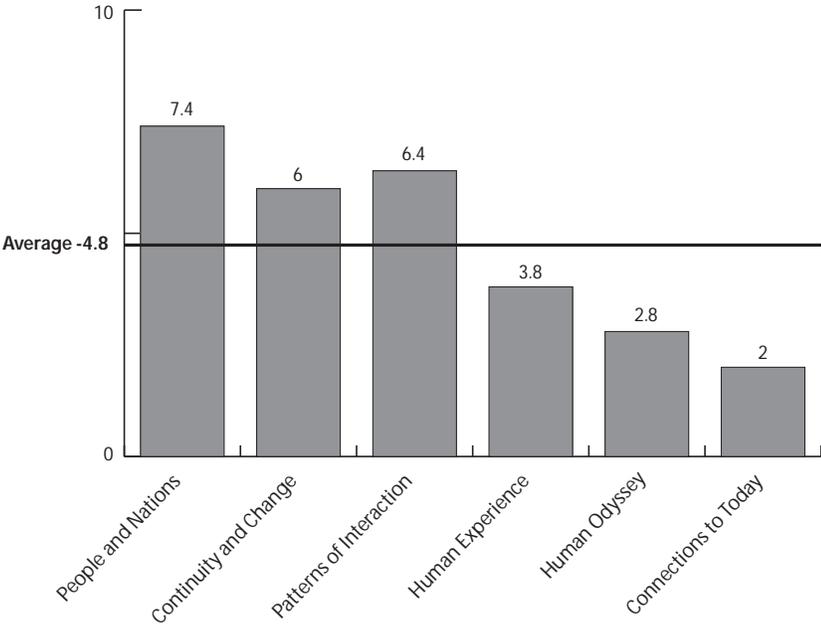


**Graph 34: Democratic Ideas**  
(Combined Reviewer Ratings)

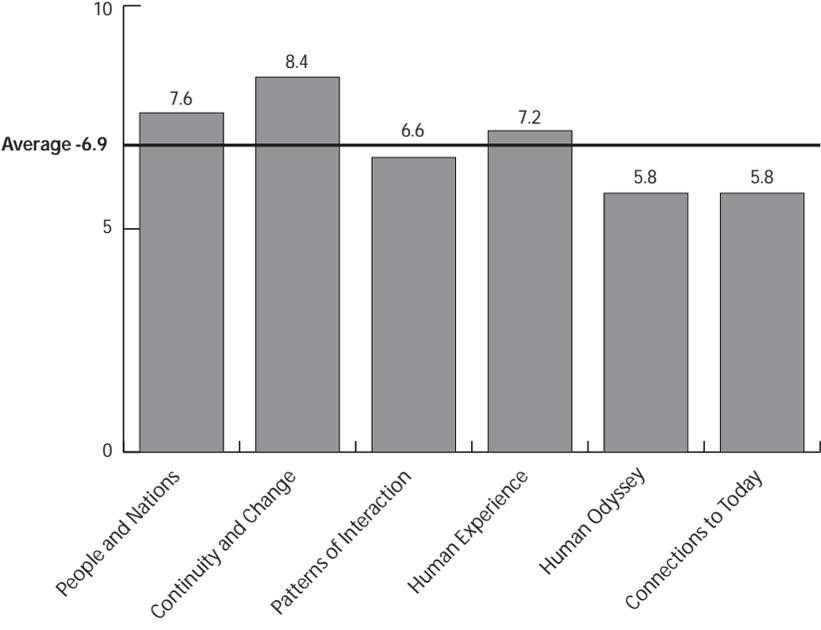


See page 16 for full textbook citations, and page 17 for a definition of each criterion.

**Graph 35: Interest Level**  
(Combined Reviewer Ratings)



**Graph 36: Graphics**  
(Combined Reviewer Ratings)



See page 16 for full textbook citations, and page 17 for a definition of each criterion.

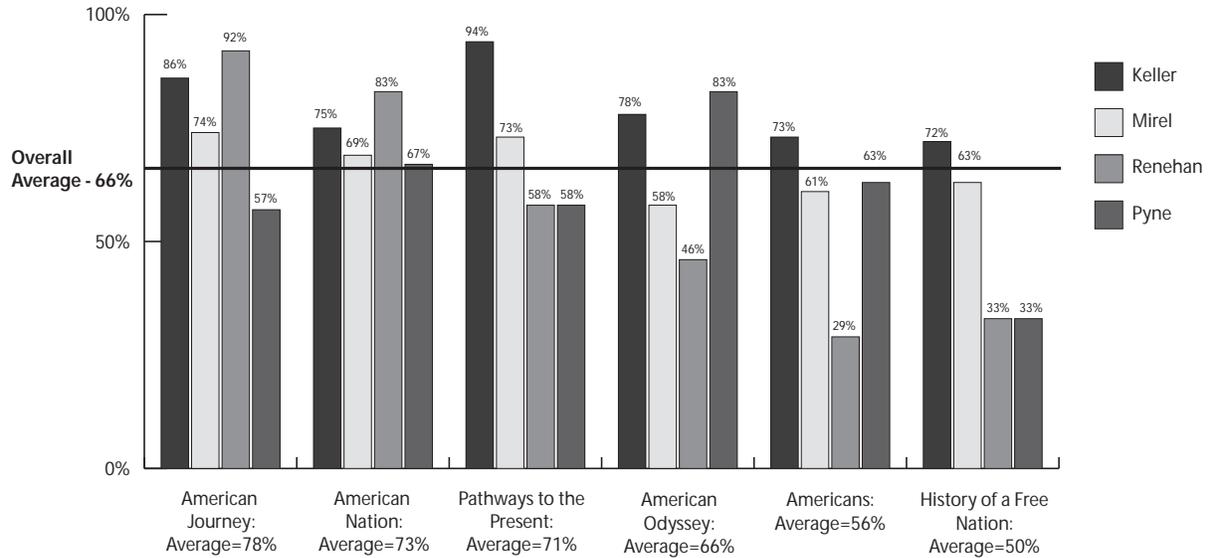


# Appendix E

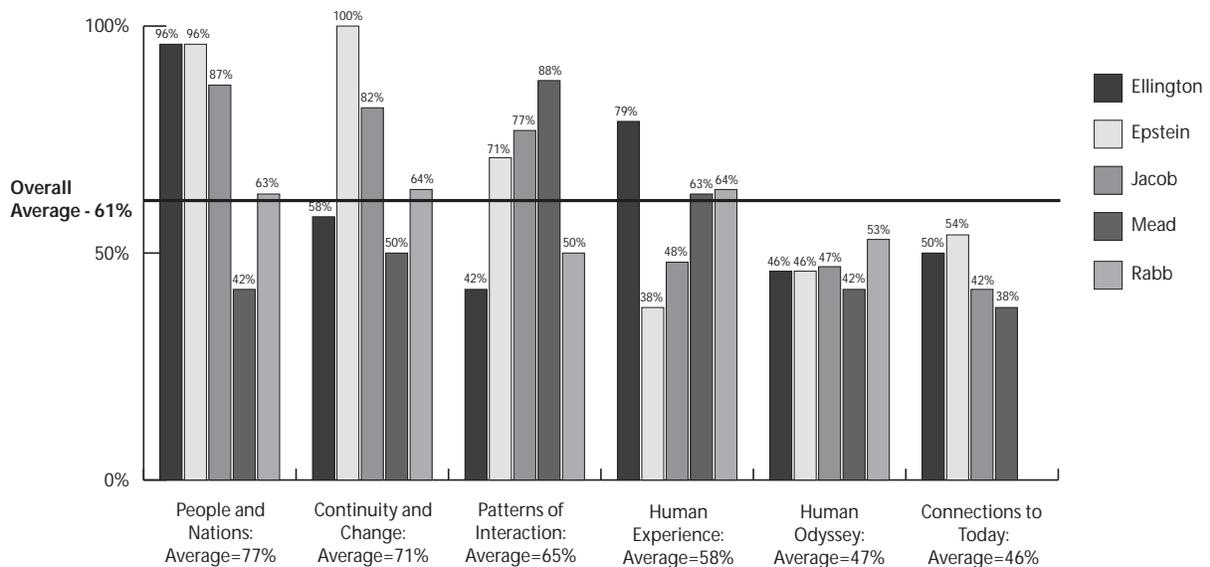
Overall Textbook Grades by Reviewer

## Appendix E: Overall Textbook Grades by Reviewer

### Graph 37: American History



### Graph 38: World History



See page 16 for full textbook citations, and page 17 for a definition of each criterion.

## WHY THIS REPORT?

Within days of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, major textbook publishers began scrambling to revise their high school history texts to include information about 9/11. An understandable, even commendable impulse, but it went badly. Because textbook publishers bend over backwards not to offend anybody or upset special interest groups, the 9/11 information, like so much else in today's history texts, was simplified and sanitized. The reader would scarcely learn that anybody in particular had organized these savage attacks on innocent Americans and citizens of 80 other nations, much less why. No judgments need be made. The result: fat, dull, boring books that mention everything but explain practically nothing; plenty of information but no sorting, prioritizing or evaluating; and a collective loss of American memory.

*Chester E. Finn, Jr., from the foreword*

Even teachers who had a good history education cannot be expected to know everything in American or world history. They, too, rely on textbooks to fill in the gaps in their own knowledge. Sometimes a teacher with a major or minor in American history is assigned to teach world history, or someone who has a major in Chinese studies is assigned to teach U.S. history. Few teachers, no matter how many credits they earned in history as undergraduate or graduate students, are truly prepared to teach the history of the entire world. That is where textbooks come to the rescue. They seek to be encyclopedic, to cover everything that any state or locality might possibly expect children to learn. Depending on grade level, between 80 and 90 percent of students read from their history textbook in class daily or weekly. For most American students, the history textbook is a very significant instructional tool. Thus, the purpose of this report is to put before the public, in particular those members of the public who purchase textbooks, an objective report on the strengths and weaknesses of a representative group of widely used textbooks.

*Diane Ravitch, from the introduction*

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