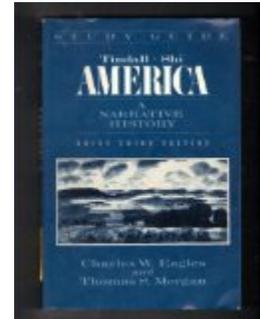


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Charles W. Eagles, Thomas S. Morgan. *Study Guide for Tindall and Shi's America: A Narrative History*. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996. \$13.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-393-96420-2.

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Charles Eagles and Thomas Morgan's study guide to the fourth edition of Tindall and Shi's *America: A Narrative History, Vol. II* offers students a brief, self-guided journey through the most important factual information and basic ideas of the textbook. For each of the text's nineteen chapters, covering Reconstruction to the Cultural Politics of the 1990s, the authors have constructed nine segments designed to teach students how to hone the often overwhelming information in the meaty narrative to a manageable size focused on the central ideas of each chapter. Following "Chapter Objectives," which list the five key concepts of each chapter, the authors offer a detailed outline of the most pertinent information. A listing of "Key Items of Chronology" instructs students in the key dates necessary for a sound understanding of the era and useful in preparing a well-rounded and detailed answer on essay exams. The *Study Guide* then offers a list of important terms to define and identify, as well as a vocabulary-building section defining words with which students may be unfamiliar. A section entitled "Exercises for Understanding" includes multiple-choice and true-false questions recommended as a check on the student's reading. After testing a student's knowledge of the facts, the authors offer several essay questions that test a student's understanding of the meaning of what they have read. These questions, Eagles and Morgan assert, should lead the student "to think about the material in the chapter in different ways" (p. vii). Finally, the authors follow each chapter with their own choice of primary documents or readings. Documents cast light on some aspect of the time period while Readings illustrate historians' often contrasting interpretations of the event or era. Finally, in the Introduction to the guide, the authors offer tips for reading a textbook, suggesting that highlighting

material as they do in sample paragraphs will encourage active, critical, and retentive reading.

Instructors using the Tindall-Shi narrative who want an aid in teaching students how to learn "what happened" in American history from Reconstruction to the present will find in the Eagles-Morgan study guide a useful tool. If students follow the authors' recommendations in using the guide by actually studying the outline, answering the factual and essay questions, etc., they should end up with a solid foundation in the facts of the era. One thing to consider in deciding whether to use any study guide is the possibility that a number of students may substitute the chapter outlines and questions offered in the guide for reading the textbook itself. Moreover, this study guide is less useful in teaching students how to draw their own meaning from the historical events they are studying.

The authors follow readings with "Questions for Reflection" that encourage students to draw conclusions about historians' differing interpretations of an event or era. These conceptual questions, however, generally are not incorporated into the essay questions which are supposed to lead students to think about the material "in different ways" (p. vii). In the readings for the chapter on Reconstruction, for example, the authors offer an interesting and important contrast between the Dunning school interpretation and revisions of the era by La Wanda Cox and Eric Foner. However, they make no mention of any of these approaches in the essay questions testing students' understanding of the meaning of Reconstruction. The same problem attends the use of the excellent primary documents chosen by the authors. Interpretation of the documents is not integrated into the sample

essay questions. This approach misses a golden opportunity to teach students how to incorporate actual historical analysis into writing an above average and even superb essay exam. For example, following the chapter and exercises on “Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal,” the authors offer some excellent excerpts from the Federal Writers’ Project interviews with Depression-era participants. The “Questions for Reflection” then ask students to assess these interviews and what they reveal about the Great Depression and the New Deal. This effort, however, is not incorporated into answering the sample essay questions which offer a fairly pedestrian analysis of the era. Thus, despite choosing important and interesting documents and readings to stimulate students’ interest in historical interpretation, Eagles and Morgan do not offer a practical application for the extra reading they are asking the students to do. As a result,

the Study Guide encourages students to write essays that lean towards a solid but not particularly analytical understanding of American history from Reconstruction to the present.

Nonetheless, the Eagles-Morgan volume is a useful, concise, and clear guide for students to the text of *America: A Narrative History*. If used as recommended, students should find it helpful as an instruction in the “how to’s” of reading a textbook, learning and retaining historical information, and distilling large amounts of information down to the key concepts and facts.

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