

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Tindall/Shi, America: A Narrative History Web Site. W.W. Norton & Company.

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Steve Hoge and his staff offer faculty and students a potentially useful study, research, and organizational tool. This web site incorporates elements of the printed guide. It also supplements the guide. The web page has two main areas common to all such web sites known to this reviewer: the standard student area for review and research, and the professor's area for composing syllabi and setting up a class web page. But professors may find part of this web site—mainly set aside for students—useful for their in-class lectures. <p> The student area of the Tindall/Shi web site includes four sections: Review, Resource, Research, and Reference. Two different avenues allow the student to gain access to the first three sections. One may begin with the key Contents section and choose a dated Resource: to 1600, 1750, 1780, 1800. . .1800, 1890, 1900, 1920. . . . Or the student may choose a Review by chapter number. Finally, one may go to the Research section. For example, a student may choose from a limited selection of topics such as "Witchcraft" or "the Suffrage Movement." Alternatively, students may want to browse through the chronology. Unlike its complement in the printed guide, the chronology at this web site serves as a link among the Review, Resource, and Research sections. Once inside one of the three major sections, the surfer can then access the Resource section. <p> The Review section looks very much like the printed guide. Here, one finds study questions, primary sources, reading quizzes, map quizzes, and a portion called "People, Places, Events" (a glorified chronology). This section would prove more useful if it incorporated an idea used by Prentice-Hall's <cite>American Journey</cite> web site. At the latter site, students can submit essays to web staff, get feedback, and improve their responses. Students can then forward refined responses to their professors for further evaluation. <p> Another idea wandering around the internet involves the use of JAVA. As students write essays, they get pop-up suggestions along the way. That is, if a

student writes a problematic statement, a short, thought-provoking question pops up to encourage the student to think about their answer more carefully. Incorporating either approach would greatly improve the Tindall/Shi Review section. <p> The Resource section includes a vast array of written documents, maps, and visual arts useful to both student and professor. Professors can benefit from this section if they have "wired" classrooms, i.e., classroom access to the internet. Students and professors can search for individual Resources by author, title, or chapter. The best part of this section includes the visual arts. Among the standard fare of kings, queens, presidents, and male political leaders, we find advertisements, commemorations of key events (yes, including the Boston Massacre), and political cartoons. Though strong in visual representations and written evidence covering political figures and economic enterprises, the Resource section remains weak in telling the story of more typical people and their everyday lives. The map portion likewise needs improvement. <p> This web site shares the difficulties of all such web sites known to this reviewer. Web site mapmaking at this and other web sites has not advanced far from the primitive stage. A limited color palate and difficulties in making type size and line adjustments plague all web site mapmakers. The result often leads professors to reverting to overhead transparencies in lieu of relying on internet maps. One exception appears in the Tindall/Shi site: their depiction of the Mormon Trek, 1830-1851. The visually pleasing generalization of that trek plus the accurate depiction of the State of Deseret (Utah Territory) yield a map worth class room access. <p> The Research section offers a very mixed bag of possibilities. A colleague looked at the Salem project. According to her, the sources available for that project reveal both the weakness of this part of the web site (gossip and unresearched folklore) and its power. The chronology of the Salem witch trials is ac-

tually a link to the Salem Visitor's Bureau site. It gives total credit to Thomas Brattle for convincing Governor Phipps to stop allowing spectral evidence. In reality, the clergy also issued a statement advising against its use. We also find links to current directories of witches and a not very useful "tour" of Salem. To its credit, the Salem project material does provide some very important documents on witchcraft in Europe. Another site—one that is reviewer checked—yielded disappointing results: Remember the Alamo? 1836-1848. That project proposes to show Anglo and Mexican views of the annexation of Texas and the Mexican War. In reality, we find Anglo (mainly male) views of the 1830s Texas War for Independence and the Mexican view of the post-1845 Mexican War. Because the web links give stories about two different events, students cannot answer project questions. Such questions act as if the student were reading two views of the same event. In this project's case, then, the documents are excellent but disconnected. The Research section does ask for Professor feedback. Hopefully, professors will work with the site editor and his staff to sol-

der defective links. <p> The Reference section provides access to the chronology, chapter, and primary source indices mentioned throughout this review. <p> The exclusively professor area of the Tindall/Shi web site is called "On Course." This part of the site offers a web-based service to organize on-line and hard copy course materials. "On Course" converts text to html format and allows professors to create and update course links. With this tool, professors can offer guidance in student web site investigations. As with any such html tool, students can also download lecture notes and other handouts. As a tool, this section looks no different from other textbook web sites with which this reviewer has familiarity. <p> In sum, Hoge and company offer a competitive web site that involves more than a guide alone. Much of the site is standard fare for textbook-oriented web pages. Problem areas should improve over time with faculty feedback. <p> To sample chapters firsthand, simply go to the web site and scroll down to the "Examination/Demonstration" chapters. <p>

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-survey>

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