

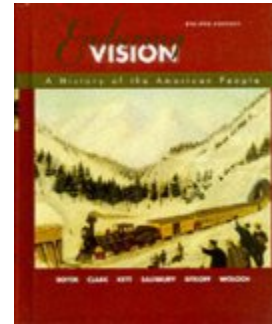
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Paul S. Boyer, Clifford E. Clark Jr., Joseph F. Kett, Neal Salisbury, Harvard Sitkoff, Nancy Woloch. *The Enduring Vision: A History of the American People*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000. xlv + 953 pp. \$73.96 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-395-96077-6.

Reviewed by James Funkhouser (Department of Humanities, Edison State Community College)

Published on H-Survey (July, 2000)



A Broader Vision

A Broader Vision

With the proliferation of fields in American history, a significant challenge in a survey course is to introduce students to the diversity and richness of the discipline. *The Enduring Vision* is a comprehensive textbook with a political and chronological framework, but with detailed coverage of other aspects of the nation's history. Social and cultural history, environmental history, economic history, and the history of technology are given significant space in this work. *The Enduring Vision* is exemplary in its integration of newer fields of research and the histories of minorities, enhancing rather than sacrificing or compromising the quality of traditional subjects.

The Enduring Vision is exceptionally well written. Its narrative is rich in detail that gives depth and dimension to its subjects and provides support for its themes. And it is strong on explanation. Students need guidance to see the people and events of history in their larger meaning, and Boyer et al. have woven the details into clear explanations that incorporate the results of recent scholarly studies. These writers' lively and well-crafted prose maintains the reader's interest in both narrative and explanation. The book is richly illustrated and contains excellent maps.

The Enduring Vision has a typical chapter organization, sixteen through Reconstruction and seventeen since, with typical periodization. Each chapter opens with an incident through which the authors present an

overview of the themes of the chapter. The subjects of these stories range from the famous (the Boston Massacre, the Donner Party) to the obscure (former slave Felix Heywood, grocer Sam Groipen who was driven out of business by chain stores). They provide a personal element and establish a link to some aspect of the broader story that follows.

The chapter openers are followed by three to five "focus questions" that call on students to gather and analyze information, explain, or evaluate. Occasionally a focus question leads students to the correct evaluation ("In what ways was the policy of the Truman administration the right policy ..." [p. 798]), but they are useful guides to the content of the chapter and should encourage students to think beyond the facts. A brief conclusion returns to the issues raised in the focus questions and pulls together the threads of the chapter. Chapters end with a short list of works for further reading. There is an extensive bibliography at end of the book.

The political emphasis of the appendices might disappoint instructors who are interested in having students use demographic and economic data. The appendices contain: the Declaration of Independence; the Articles of Confederation; the Constitution; the growth of U.S. territory and population; admission of states; presidential elections (but no data for the 1996 election, although the book carries a copyright date of 2000); vice presidents and cabinet officers; and Supreme Court justices. I'm not

sure what use freshmen will make of twenty-two pages of cabinet officers and justices, but I could see quite a bit of value in appendices containing data on immigration, the labor force, urban-suburban-rural populations, and regional population changes.

A two-page feature, "A Place in Time," appears in each chapter. In these the writers "delve into a single community's experience" (p. xxviii) to present a situation that illuminates one of the large issues or conditions from the chapter in which it appears, adding the detail that gives life to history. There are stories of creativity (Jefferson's Monticello, the music of New Orleans, the Harlem Renaissance); of disruption (the Trail of Tears, Homestead, the Dust Bowl); of new beginnings (the reconstruction of Atlanta, the creation of Levittown); of dreams of a better world (Oneida, Haight-Asbury, Martin Luther King); of the forming of a pluralistic society (Milwaukee's Polish immigrants, wartime Hawaii, twentieth-century Miami). Most are stories of conflict. To read these as a group is to see Americans in constant struggle with one another.

The broader vision encompassed by the political narrative of this textbook can be illustrated by examining its treatment of Indians, the environment, and immigrants. Indians figure prominently in the first third of this book. The opening chapter surveys the variety of cultures that developed in North America from about 9000 B. C. "A Place in Time" takes us to the civilization of Cahokia in A. D. 1200. (If, as I do, you prefer to begin the course later, the last section of this chapter contains an excellent survey of Indian cultures on the eve of contact that can be used without reference to the previous material.)

In the colonial and revolutionary periods, Indians are not merely victims of Europeans or obstacles to European expansion. They sought to preserve their traditional ways of life while incorporating aspects of European material culture. They were engaged in the economic, diplomatic, and military activities that reshaped the American continent. Indians contributed to the survival of Jamestown and Plymouth and were pushed out by the multiplying English. The Iroquois accommodated the English while consolidating their own position by relocating other tribes from Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Maryland, made an important contribution to the British success in the Seven Years' War, and fought on the side of Britain in the Revolution. Indians struggled against the advance of white settlement, against the Spanish at Taos and the French in Louisiana as well as against Anglo-Americans along the Appalachian frontier.

This last theme is extended in the early national period as land cessions through treaty, efforts to convert Indians to white civilization, and warfare culminated in removal beyond the Mississippi. As Indians are being removed, the art of the American romantics is illustrated with three paintings by George Catlin, who depicted a "romantic view of Indians as noble savages ... 'doomed' to oblivion by the march of progress" (p. 318). In the chapters on the colonial, revolutionary, and early national periods there are four "places in time" where the histories of Indians and whites intersect.

Indians reappear in the narrative on the trans-Mississippi West. So do the themes of the earlier periods: the diversity of Indian cultures; the accommodation of some to European intrusions and efforts to maintain traditional life; the disruption of Indian life by disease, warfare, settlement, and civilization, now in the guise of reformers who sought to "save" and "uplift" Indians. This last is the subject of "A Place in Time" feature on the Carlisle, Pennsylvania, Indian School.

As Indians become marginal to the development of the United States after 1890, their presence correspondingly declines in the narrative. There are sections on the Indian policy of the New Deal and Indians' response to it and on Indian participation in the Second World War, including the Navajo "code talkers." Scattered references to discrimination, poverty, alcoholism, Indian activism, and casinos appear in the chapters on the last half of the twentieth century. These could be more effective if combined, perhaps in a larger section on minority rights and activism since the 1960s.

The Enduring Vision contains strong environmental sections. Its Prologue explores the natural environment of North America, and the first four chapters include discussions of the interactions of Indians with the land, the Columbian exchange, and the use of the land by the English colonists and the effects of their farming practices. In the chapters on the late nineteenth century we find the beginnings of the conservation movement and the shaping of the urban environment. We read of the environmental effects of the increase in energy consumption in the 1920s and the mixed environmental record of the New Deal. "A Place in Time" features the controversy over the Hetch Hetchy dam and the Dust Bowl in Cimarron County, Oklahoma. In the post-World War II era, the discussion becomes more fragmented. Scattered over several chapters are references to the effect of economic and technological changes and national legislation and about half a page on the "growing awareness of en-

vironmental dangers” (p. 950) in the 1990s. While the text contains two sentences on efforts to roll back environmental protections in the Reagan administration and a reference to “corporate calls for a go-slow policy” (p. 921) in Bush’s, there is little on recent challenges to environmentalism. It would be helpful to students’ understanding of recent political and legal controversy over environmental goals if these were put in the context of the concerns that were generated by the economic changes of the 1970s and 1980s and by the anti-government sentiment of the past quarter century.

There is extensive coverage of immigration in *The Enduring Vision*, one of the best among the textbooks I have looked at recently. African and European immigrants in the eighteenth century are discussed in the context of the economic and territorial expansion of British America. An excellent map on settlement patterns and a chart on the proportion of national groups in the populations of 1700 and 1755 illustrate this section. Sections on nineteenth-century immigrants, early and late, examine the immigrants’ origins, motivations, distribution in the United States, and the conditions they found here, as well as anti-Catholicism and nativism in the antebellum era and adjustment to life in industrial cities and repatriation late in the century. There are discussions of the growing demand for restriction in the progressive era and its accomplishment in the 1920s and of Jewish immigration in the 1930s. There is valuable material, too, on recent immigration, but it is divided between two chapters and would be more effective if these sections were combined.

The graphs that illustrate immigration could be more useful. A good line graph on the period 1870 to 1930 relates the magnitude of immigration to depressions, the First World War, and restriction in the 1920s. A line graph charts annual immigration by places of origin from 1865 to 1920, but for the period 1830 to 1860, a bar graph represents only the number of immigrants for each of the four decennial years covered by that graph and is not comparable to the 1865-1920 information. No graph illustrates the effects of the changes in the immigration law in 1965. For late twentieth-century immigrants, there are no overall numbers, either absolute or in proportion to the host population, which would provide a useful comparison with the immigration of the nineteenth century.

The political and chronological framework of this text is flexible, interspersing political chapters with social and cultural chapters in some eras, integrating these topics within chapters in other eras. Within the chronological divisions there is room for choice in the arrangement of

topics. We will not all agree on those choices, but Boyer et al. have usually chosen well. For example, the development of the seventeenth-century English colonies is treated in one chapter. I find this preferable to the practice in some texts of separate chapters on northern and southern colonies that anticipates the later sectional division instead of fostering understanding of the distinctive regions that existed in colonial America. (While the focus is on the English colonies, the same chapter explores the colonies of the Dutch, Swedes, French, and Spanish in North America. Subsequent chapters include the areas under French and Spanish or Mexican control in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These provide a well-rounded discussion of developments across the regions that became the United States.) In this text the political and religious developments and social reforms of the Age of Jackson are combined in one chapter that emphasizes the reshaping of American institutions in that era. In the previous chapter, the Indian removals of the 1830s are discussed in the context of the westward expansion and economic development of the early nineteenth century, an effective placement and a more appropriate one than their usual place among the battles over political philosophy and economic policy in Jackson’s presidency.

The most rigorous political and chronological organization, and the least successful, is in the chapters on the second half of the twentieth century. Here the organizing principle is largely presidential administrations—a chapter organized around Truman, one for Eisenhower, the usual Kennedy-Johnson combination, and a section each for Ford, Carter, Reagan, and Bush in a shared chapter. One chapter, oddly, pairs Nixon with the youth culture of the 1960s and early 1970s. The final chapter is Bill Clinton’s and gives disproportionate emphasis to the Clinton presidency. Because it fragments broad patterns, I question whether this organization is the most appropriate for aiding students’ understanding of recent history.

In the chapters on the nineteenth century, population movements and economic and social changes establish the backgrounds for the political reforms of the Jackson era, for the sectional conflict, and for late-nineteenth century politics and progressive reform: economic, social, or cultural forces shaped a political response, which in turn helped to reshape economic, social, and cultural conditions. The emphasis on politics and, in particular, on presidents in the last half-dozen chapters would appear to make politics and presidents the dominant force in American life. I doubt that this is so. Recent politics and presidents have been shaped by economic, social, and cultural factors as were politics and presidents in the

earlier years.

Several important themes are fragmented by this organization. For example, chapter 32 opens with the story of Sam Walton and Wal-Mart and the opener for chapter 33 introduces the phenomena of part-time employment, downsizing, and anxiety about jobs. These point the way to the economic transition of the 1970s-1990s, but one has to pull pieces from three chapters, including five sections of the Ford-to- Bush chapter, to make sense of these changes. In these three chapters, one focus question refers to the economy and then only to the trends of the 1990s. Excellent material on civil rights is dispersed over three chapters, the Vietnam War over four.

The writers of this text certainly are not alone in this approach. Faragher's *Out of Many* has a unified treatment of the civil rights movement and the third edition of Henretta's *America's History* had a unified chapter on Vietnam, but few textbook writers have chosen to treat the late twentieth century as they do the late nineteenth. Obviously government has a larger effect on American life in the late twentieth century than it did in the nine-

teenth and we focus most of our political attention on presidents. Nonetheless, the early period of the Cold War from Truman to Kennedy, the economy of the 1950s and 1960s and associated social developments, the civil rights movement and subsequent activism by minorities and women, the Vietnam War, and the economic transition of the past thirty years are as deserving of unified treatments as are the patterns of the nineteenth century.

We live chronologically and life is one thing after another. Long-term developments and patterns are hard to see, and students, if they give any thought to the matter at all, are impressed by the randomness of events. One value of the survey course is to develop students' perspectives on the past and to provide a context for their own lives and times. Pattern making by historians is important in helping students to achieve this. While producing a textbook that is stylistically excellent and outstanding in its presentation of the breadth of American history, the authors of *The Enduring Vision*, like the writers of other textbooks, have missed the opportunity to bring coherence to the patterns of the past fifty years.

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

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

Citation: James Funkhouser. Review of Boyer, Paul S.; Jr., Clifford E. Clark; Kett, Joseph F.; Salisbury, Neal; Sitkoff, Harvard; Woloch, Nancy, *The Enduring Vision: A History of the American People*. H-Survey, H-Net Reviews. July, 2000.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=4388>

Copyright © 2000 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.