

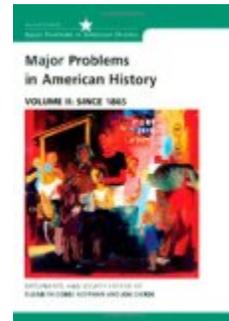
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman, Jon Gjerde, eds. *Major Problems in American History, Vol. II: Since 1865*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002. xxiv + 464 pp. \$33.96 (paper), ISBN 978-0-618-06134-1.

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A Solution for the U.S. History Survey

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Historians in a variety of fields are familiar with and have come to appreciate the many excellent volumes in Houghton Mifflin's *Major Problems* series published under the general editorship of Thomas Patterson. With this volume and its antecedent, the series has added a reader for the United States history survey to its already strong list of specialized subject area readers.

Not merely a selection of chapters from previous volumes of the series, this volume is handsomely edited and contains new materials. The themes and topics chosen for the volume nicely run parallel to the thematic and chapter divisions of most U.S. survey textbooks. Topics covered include Reconstruction, Western settlement, industrialization, U.S. expansion, the Progressive Era, World War I, the 1920s, the Great Depression and New Deal, World War II, the Cold War, the 1950s, the Civil Rights Movements, the 1960s, Vietnam, and the conservative resurgence of the 1980s and 1990s. As a result, the volume will easily fit most U.S. history survey course designs.

Like other volumes in the series, this reader seeks to expose students to the methods and problems of historical analysis. To all those who have seen and used volumes in the series, the format is familiar: each chapter contains a selection of primary sources, along with two secondary readings, allowing students to arrive at their own interpretations and to test them against the argu-

ments and conclusions of historians. Different from several of the other volumes in the series, the chapter introductions tend to be longer. As a result, the reader can be assigned not only to accompany a textbook, or a brief edition text, but even could be assigned in place of a textbook. That choice will largely depend on the instructor's goals and preferences, the student population, and how large a book bill one feels comfortable to inflict upon one's students.

Different from many other *Major Problems* readers, this volume contains more documents per chapter (8-10), exposing students to a considerable array of historical voices to consider. Each chapter is nicely framed as the essays offer students two different interpretive positions to examine, compare, and test against a selection of sources that will enable them to understand and practice the work of a historian without falling into a simplistic pro/con scheme. For example, students will get to examine Jan Wilhelm Schulte-Nordholt and Tony Smith on Woodrow Wilson, David M. Kennedy and Barton Bernstein on the New Deal, Walter LaFeber and John Lewis Gaddis on the Cold War, Kenneth Cmiel and Dan Carter on the 1960s, and Robert McNamara and Michael Lind on Vietnam.

By consciously pairing documents with essays in the course design, instructors can easily raise important questions without overburdening students. For example, Ray Billington's frontier democracy argument will

generate good discussion alongside the Dawes Act or along a document on an attack on a Chinese settlement in Wyoming. Having observed the obvious contradiction between Billington's argument and the sources will enhance students' understanding of Limerick's argument on the "legacy of conquest." In short, instructors may use this volume not only to expose students to primary sources and how to interpret them, but also to the many historiographical issues that this entails.

As with any such volume, everybody will find an essay missing that he or she might have liked to see included. This reviewer, for example, would have liked to see Daniel Rodgers's 1983 essay on the languages of Progressivism included, which would have enabled students to integrate the sources in the chapter into a larger interpretive framework, after juxtaposing them against an older view of the Progressives by Richard Hofstadter.

Having worked with such volumes in the past in a

variety of courses, I have noticed how students tend to respond well—and often better—to visual rather than textual material. This volume offers no visual materials at all. Other comparable volumes in the market do a better job, offering statistics, posters, advertisements, or comic strips. Granted, the format of these Major Problems volumes, pairing primary and secondary sources, does not easily lend itself to the inclusion of such materials, which would most likely lengthen the book (and make it more expensive) with the same range of material.

With the reservation in mind that no such volume will ever please everybody, Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman and Jon Gjerde have done a fine job putting together a volume that will easily complement and may even be used to substitute a survey text. Certainly, instructors who wish to design a writing and discussion intensive U.S. history survey course should give the volume their careful consideration.

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