Here is not merely a nation but
a teeming nation of nations

Walt Whitman
List of Maps and Charts  xviii
Preface to the Fourth Edition  xxi
Introduction  xxxi

Prologue

Settling and Civilizing the Americas  2

Peopling the Continents  2
  Cultures of Ancient Mexico  3
  Cultures of the Southwest  5
  Cultures of the Eastern Woodlands  6
Beyond the Mesoamerican Sphere  7
  Cultures of the Great Plains  7
  Cultures of the Great Basin  8
  Cultures of the Subarctic and Arctic  8
  Cultures of the Pacific Northwest  8
North America and the Caribbean on the Eve of European Invasion  9
  Enduring Cultures  9
  The Rise of the Aztec Empire  12
Prologue Summary  14
Significant Events  15
Additional Reading  14

Part One

The Creation of a New America  21

Chapter 1

Old World, New Worlds  26

Chapter 2

The First Century of Settlement in the Colonial South  52

After the Fact

Historians Reconstruct the Past:
Tracking the First Americans  16

Counterpoint: Changing Views of Columbus  32


Significant Events  49
Additional Reading  49

The Meeting of Europe and America  29
  The Portuguese Wave  29
  The Spanish and Columbus  30
The European Background of American Colonization  32
  Life and Death in Early Modern Europe  32
  The Conditions of Colonization  33
  Europeans, Chinese, and Aztecs on the Eve of Contact  34
Spain’s Empire in the New World  35
  Spanish Conquest  35
  Role of the Conquistadors  36
  Spanish Colonization  37
  The Effects of Colonial Growth  38
The Reformation in Europe  38
  Backdrop to Reform  38
  The Teachings of Martin Luther  39
  The Contribution of John Calvin  40
  The English Reformation  41
England’s Entry into America  41
  The English Colonization of Ireland  42
  Renewed Interest in the Americas  43
  The Failures of Frobisher and Gilbert  43
  Raleigh’s Roanoke Venture  45
  A Second Attempt  46
Chapter Summary  48

The Meeting of Europe and America  29
  The Portuguese Wave  29
  The Spanish and Columbus  30
The European Background of American Colonization  32
  Life and Death in Early Modern Europe  32
  The Conditions of Colonization  33
  Europeans, Chinese, and Aztecs on the Eve of Contact  34
Spain’s Empire in the New World  35
  Spanish Conquest  35
  Role of the Conquistadors  36
  Spanish Colonization  37
  The Effects of Colonial Growth  38
The Reformation in Europe  38
  Backdrop to Reform  38
  The Teachings of Martin Luther  39
  The Contribution of John Calvin  40
  The English Reformation  41
England’s Entry into America  41
  The English Colonization of Ireland  42
  Renewed Interest in the Americas  43
  The Failures of Frobisher and Gilbert  43
  Raleigh’s Roanoke Venture  45
  A Second Attempt  46
Chapter Summary  48

Significant Events  49
Additional Reading  49

Counterpoint: Changing Views of Columbus  32


Significant Events  49
Additional Reading  49

Chapter 2

The First Century of Settlement in the Colonial South  52

Preview  52
English Society on the Chesapeake  54
  The Mercantilist Impulse  55
  The Virginia Company  55
### Chapter 3
#### The First Century of Settlement in the Colonial North

**Preview**

- The Founding of New England 85
  - The Puritan Movement 85
  - The Pilgrim Settlement at Plymouth Colony 87
  - The Puritan Settlement at Massachusetts Bay 88
- New England Communities 89
  - Stability and Order in Early New England 90
  - Congregational Church Order 91
  - Colonial Governments 92
  - Communities in Conflict 92
  - Heretics 93
  - Goodwives and Witches 95
  - Whites and Indians in Early New England 97
- The Mid Atlantic Colonies 98
  - The Founding of New Netherland 98
  - Effect of Old World Diseases 98
  - English Rule in New York 99
  - The League of the Iroquois 99

**Chesapeake Society in Crisis** 61
- The Conditions of Unrest 61
- Bacon's Rebellion and Coode's Rebellion 61
- From Servitude to Slavery 62
- Africa and the Atlantic Slave Trade 63
- A Changing Chesapeake Society 65
- The Chesapeake Gentry 66
- From the Caribbean to the Carolinas 67
- Paradise Lost 68
- The Founding of the Carolinas 69
- Early Instability 73
- White, Red, and Black: The Search for Order 74
- The Founding of Georgia 74
- The Spanish Borderlands 76

**Chapter Summary** 80
**Significant Events** 81
**Additional Reading** 80
**Daily Lives:** A Taste for Sugar 70
**Counterpoint:** Beyond the Black Legend 79
Part Two

The Creation of a New Republic 139

Chapter 5

Toward the War for American Independence 144

Preview 144
The Seven Years’ War 145
The Years of Defeat 145
The Years of Victory 146
Postwar Expectations 147
The Imperial Crisis 148
New Troubles on the Frontier 148
George Grenville’s New Measures 151
The Beginning of Colonial Resistance 152
Riots and Resolves 153
Repeal of the Stamp Act 155
The Townshend Acts 155
The Resistance Organizes 156
The International Sons of Liberty 157
The Boston Massacre 160
Resistance Revived 160
The Empire Strikes Back 161
Toward the Revolution 163
The First Continental Congress 163
The Last Days of the British Empire in America 165
The Fighting Begins 165
Common Sense 167
Chapter Summary 168
Significant Events 169
Additional Reading 168

Daily Lives: Street Theater 158

Counterpoint: A Revolution within a Revolution? 163

Chapter 6

The American People and the American Revolution 170

Preview 170

The Decision for Independence 172
The Second Continental Congress 172
The Declaration 172
American Loyalists 175
The Fighting in the North 176
The Two Armies at Bay 176
Laying Strategies 177
The Campaigns in New York and New Jersey 180
Capturing Philadelphia 180
Disaster at Saratoga 182
The Turning Point 183
The American Revolution Becomes a Global War 183
Winding Down the War in the North 184
War in the West 185
The Home Front in the North 185
The Struggle in the South 186
The Siege of Charleston 186
The Partisan Struggle in the South 187
Greene Takes Command 187
African Americans in the Age of Revolution 189
The World Turned Upside Down 191
Surrender at Yorktown 191
The Significance of a Revolution 192
Chapter Summary 194
Significant Events 195
Additional Reading 194

Counterpoint: Contrasting Views of Loyalists 175

Daily Lives: Radical Chic and the Revolutionary Generation 178

Chapter 7

Crisis and Constitution 196

Preview 196
Republican Experiments 197
The State Constitutions 197
From Congress to Confederation 199
The Temptations of Peace 200
The Temptations of the West 200
Foreign Intrigues 200
Disputes among the States 202
The More Democratic West 203
The Northwest Territory 204
Slavery and Sectionalism 206
Wartime Economic Disruption 207
Republican Society 209
The New Men of the Revolution 209
The New Women of the Revolution 210
Chapter 8

The Republic Launched 228

Preview 228
1789: A Social Portrait 230
The Semisubsistence Economy of Crèvecoeur's America 231
The Commercial Economy of Franklin's America 232
The Constitution and Commerce 235
The New Government 235
Washington's Character 235
Organizing the Government 236
The Bill of Rights 237
Hamilton's Financial Program 237
Opposition to Hamilton’s Program 239
The Specter of Aristocracy 241
Expansion and Turmoil in the West 241
The Resistance of the Miamis 241
The Whiskey Rebellion 242
Pinckney's Treaty 242
The Emergence of Political Parties 243
Americans and the French Revolution 243
Washington's Neutral Course 244
The Federalists and Republicans Organize 245

After the Fact

Historians Reconstruct the Past:
White and Black Southerners Worshipping Together 223

Chapter 9

The Jeffersonian Republic 258

Preview 258
Jefferson in Power 260
The New Capital City 260
Jefferson's Character and Philosophy 261
Republican Principles 262
Jefferson's Economic Policies 262
John Marshall and Judicial Review 263
The Jeffersonian Attack on the Judiciary 264
Jefferson and Western Expansion 264
The Louisiana Purchase 265
Lewis and Clark 266
Whites and Indians on the Frontier 267
The Course of White Settlement 267
A Changing Environment 268
The Second Great Awakening 268
Pressure on Indian Lands and Culture 272
The Prophet, Tecumseh, and the Pan-Indian Movement 273
The Second War for American Independence 276
Neutral Rights 276
The Embargo 277
Madison and the Young Republicans 278
The Decision for War 278
National Unpreparedness 279
"A Chance Such as Will Never Occur Again“ 280
The British Invasion 281
The Hartford Convention 282
America Turns Inward 282
Monroe's Presidency 283
Improved Relations with Britain 284
Part Three

The Republic Transformed and Tested 289

Chapter 10

The Opening of America 294

Preview 294
The Market Revolution 296
The New Nationalism 296
The Cotton Trade 297
The Transportation Revolution 297
The Canal Age 297
Steamboats and Railroads 298
Agriculture in the Market Economy 299
John Marshall and the Promotion of Enterprise 300
General Incorporation Laws 304
A Restless Temper 304
A People in Motion 304
Population Growth 305
The Federal Land Rush 307
Geographic Mobility 307
Urbanization 308
The Rise of Factories 309
Technological Advances 309
The Postal System 310
Textile Factories 311
Lowell and the Environment 312
Industrial Work 313
The Shoe Industry 314
The Labor Movement 315
Social Structures of the Market Society 316
Economic Specialization 316
Materialism 317
The Emerging Middle Class 317
The Distribution of Wealth 318
Social Mobility 319

Chapter 11

The Rise of Democracy 328

Preview 328
Equality and Opportunity 330
The Tension between Equality and Opportunity 332
The New Political Culture of Democracy 332
The Election of 1824 333
Anti-Masonry and the Defense of Equality 333
Social Sources of the New Politics 334
Male Suffrage in Europe 335
The Acceptance of Parties 336
The Politics of the Common Man 336
Jackson's Rise to Power 338
John Quincy Adams's Presidency 338
President of the People 338
The Political Agenda in the Market Economy 339
Democracy and Race 340
Accommodate or Resist? 340
Trail of Tears 341
Free Blacks in the North 343
The African American Community 345
The Minstrel Show 345
The Nullification Crisis 346
The Growing Crisis in South Carolina 346
Calhoun's Theory of Nullification 347
The Nullifiers Nullified 348
The Bank War 349
The National Bank and the Panic of 1819 349
Biddle's Bank 349
The Clash between Jackson and Biddle 350
The Bank Destroyed 351
Jackson's Impact on the Presidency 352
Van Buren and Depression 352
"Van Ruin's" Depression 352
The Whigs' Triumph 354
Chapter 12

The Jacksonian Party System 355
Democrats, Whigs, and the Market 355
The Social Bases of the Two Parties 356
The Triumph of the Market 357
Chapter Summary 357
Significant Events 359
Additional Reading 358

Daily Lives: The Plain Dark Democracy of Broadcloth 330

Counterpoint: How Democratic Was Jacksonian Democracy? 337

Chapter 13

The Old South 390

Preview 390
The Social Structure of the Cotton Kingdom 392
The Boom Country Economy 392
The Upper South's New Orientation 394
The Rural South 395
Distribution of Slavery 396
Slavery as a Labor System 397
Class Structure of the White South 398
The Slaveowners 399
Tidewater and Frontier 399
The Master at Home 401
The Plantation Mistress 402
Yeoman Farmers 403
Poor Whites 404
The Peculiar Institution 405
Work and Discipline 405
Slave Maintenance 406
Resistance 407
Slave Revolts in Latin America 407
Slave Culture 408
The Slave Family 409
Slave Songs and Stories 410
Steal Away to Jesus 411
The Slave Community 414
Free Black Southerners 415
Southern Society and the Defense of Slavery 416
The Virginia Debate of 1832 416
The Proslavery Argument 416
Closing Ranks 417
Sections and the Nation 418

Chapter Summary 419
Significant Events 420
Additional Reading 421

Daily Lives: A Slave's Daily Bread 412

Counterpoint: The Role of Religion in the Lives of Slaves 414
Chapter 14

Western Expansion and the Rise of the Slavery Issue 422

Preview 422
Manifest (and Not So Manifest) Destinies 425
The Roots of the Doctrine 425
The Mexican Borderlands 426
The Texas Revolution 427
The Texas Republic 428
The Trek West 429
The Overland Trail 429
Women on the Overland Trail 430
Indians and the Trail Experience 433
The Political Origins of Expansion 434
Tyler’s Texas Ploy 434
Van Overboard 435
To the Pacific 436
The Mexican War 436
Opposition to the War 437
The Price of Victory 438
The Rise of the Slavery Issue 439
New Societies in the West 440
Farming in the West 440
The Gold Rush 440
Instant City: San Francisco 442
The Migration from China 442
The Mormons in Utah 444
Temple City: Salt Lake City 446
Shadows on the Moving Frontier 446
Escape from Crisis 447
A Two-Faced Campaign 448
The Compromise of 1850 448
Away from the Brink 451
Chapter Summary 452
Significant Events 453
Additional Reading 454
Daily Lives: Seeing the Elephant on the Overland Trail 432
Counterpoint: Women in the West 431

Chapter 15

The Union Broken 456
Preview 456
Sectional Changes in American Society 459
The Growth of a Railroad Economy 459
Railroads and the Prairie Environment 461
Railroads and the Urban Environment 462
Rising Industrialization 462
Immigration 463
The Revolutions of 1848 463
Southern Complaints 465
The Political Realignment of the 1850s 466
The Kansas-Nebraska Act 466
The Collapse of the Second American Party System 467
The Know-Nothings 468
The Republicans and Bleeding Kansas 469
The Caning of Charles Sumner 470
The Election of 1856 471
The Worsening Crisis 472
The Dred Scott Decision 473
The Panic of 1857 473
The Lecompton Constitution 474
The Lincoln-Douglas Debates 474
The Beleaguered South 476
The Road to War 477
A Sectional Election 478
Secession 480
The Outbreak of War 481
The Roots of a Divided Society 483
Chapter Summary 484
Significant Events 485
Additional Reading 486
Daily Lives: Uncle Tom by Footlights 478
Counterpoint: Lincoln’s Motives in the Fort Sumter Crisis 482

Chapter 16

Total War and the Republic 488
Preview 488
The Demands of Total War 490
Political Leadership 491
The Border States 492
Opening Moves 492
Blockade and Isolate 493
Grant in the West 493
Eastern Stalemate 495
Emancipation 497
The Logic of Events 497
The Emancipation Proclamation 498
African Americans’ Civil War 499
Black Soldiers 499
The Confederate Home Front 501
The New Economy 501
New Opportunities for Southern Women 502
Confederate Finance and Government 503
Hardship and Suffering 504
The Union Home Front 504
Government Finances and the Economy 504
A Rich Man’s War 506
Women and the Workforce 507
Civil Liberties and Dissent 508
Gone to Be a Soldier 509
Camp Life 512
Southern Individualism 413
The Changing Face of Battle 514
The Union’s Triumph 516
Confederate High Tide 516
Lincoln Finds His General 516
War in the Balance 518
Abolition as a Global Movement 519
The Twilight of the Confederacy 520
The Impact of War 522
Chapter Summary 524
Significant Events 525
Additional Reading 525
Counterpoint: Who Freed the Slaves? 500
Daily Lives: Hardtack, Salt Horse, and Coffee 510

AFTER THE FACT
Historians Reconstruct the Past:
What Caused the New York Draft Riots? 527

Chapter 17
Reconstructing the Union 532
Preview 532
Presidential Reconstruction 533
Lincoln’s 10 Percent Plan 534
The Mood of the South 534
Johnson’s Program of Reconstruction 535
The Failure of Johnson’s Program 536
Johnson’s Break with Congress 537
The Fourteenth Amendment 538
The Elections of 1866 538
Congressional Reconstruction 539
Post-Emancipation Societies in the Americas 540
The Land Issue 540
Impeachment 541
Reconstruction in the South 542
Black Officeholding 542
White Republicans in the South 543
The New State Governments 544
Economic Issues and Corruption 545
Black Aspirations 545
Experiencing Freedom 545
The Black Family 547
The Schoolhouse and the Church 548
New Working Conditions 549
The Freedmen’s Bureau 550
Planters and a New Way of Life 551
The Abandonment of Reconstruction 552
The Election of Grant 552
The Grant Administration 553
Growing Northern Disillusionment 554
The Triumph of White Supremacy 555
The Disputed Election of 1876 556
Racism and the Failure of Reconstruction 557
Chapter Summary 558
Significant Events 559
Additional Reading 560
Counterpoint: Should Johnson Have Been Removed from Office? 542
Daily Lives: The Black Sharecropper’s Cabin 546

Part Four
The United States in an Industrial Age 561

Chapter 18
The New South and the Trans-Mississippi West 566
Preview 566
The Southern Burden 568
Agriculture in the New South 568
Tenancy and Sharecropping 569
Southern Industry 570
Timber and Steel 571
The Sources of Southern Poverty 573
Life in the New South 573
Rural Life 574
The Church 575
Segregation 576
Western Frontiers 578
Western Landscapes 579
Indian Peoples and the Western Environment 580
Chapter 19

The New Industrial Order 608

Preview 608
The Development of Industrial Systems 610
Natural Resources and Industrial Technology 610
Systematic Invention 611
Transportation and Communication 612
Finance Capital 613
The Corporation 615
An International Pool of Labor 616
Global Labor Network 616
Railroads: America’s First Big Business 618
A Managerial Revolution 618
Competition and Consolidation 619
The Challenge of Finance 620
The Growth of Big Business 621

Chapter 20

The Rise of an Urban Order 640

Preview 640
A New Urban Age 641
The Urban Explosion 642
The Great Global Migration 642
The Shape of the City 645
Urban Transport 646
Bridges and Skyscrapers 647
Slum and Tenement 648
Running and Reforming the City 649
Boss Rule 649
Rewards, Costs, and Accomplishments 650
Nativism, Revivals, and the Social Gospel 651
The Social Settlement Movement 652
City Life 652
The Immigrant in the City 652
Urban Middle-Class Life 655
Victorianism and the Pursuit of Virtue 656
Challenges to Convention 657
## Chapter 21
### The Political System under Strain 668

- **Preview** 668
  - The Politics of Paralysis 670
    - Political Stalemate 670
  - The Parties 671
  - The Issues 672
  - The White House from Hayes to Harrison 674
  - Ferment in the States and Cities 676
  - The Revolt of the Farmers 676
  - The Harvest of Discontent 677
  - The Origins of the Farmers’ Alliance 677
  - The Alliance Peaks 678
  - The Election of 1892 679
  - The New Realignment 680
    - The Depression of 1893 680
    - The Rumblings of Unrest 681
    - The Battle of the Standards 681
    - The Rise of Jim Crow Politics 684
    - The African American Response 685
    - McKinley in the White House 687
  - Visions of Empire 687
    - European Expansion Worldwide 688
    - The Shapers of American Imperialism 688
    - Dreams of a Commercial Empire 693
    - Prelude in the Pacific 694
  - The Imperial Moment 694
    - Mounting Tensions 695
    - The Imperial War 696
    - War in Cuba 697
    - Peace and Debate over Empire 698
    - America’s First Asian War 700
    - An Open Door in China 701

## Chapter 22
### The Progressive Era 706

- **Preview** 706
- **Chapter Summary** 703
- **Significant Events** 704
- **Additional Reading** 703
  - **Counterpoint:** Origins of the Welfare State 672
  - **Daily Lives:** The New Navy 690

### Chapter 22
#### The Progressive Era 706

- The Roots of Progressive Reform 708
  - The Progressive System of Beliefs 709
  - The Pragmatic Approach 709
  - The Progressive Method 710
- The Search for the Good Society 711
  - Poverty in a New Light 712
  - Expanding the “Woman’s Sphere” 712
  - Social Welfare 714
  - Woman Suffrage 714
  - Militant Suffragettes 715
- Controlling the Masses 716
  - Stemming the Immigrant Tide 717
  - The Curse of Demon Rum 718
  - Prostitution 720
- The Politics of Municipal and State Reform 720
  - The Reformation of the Cities 721
  - Progressivism in the States 721
  - Progressivism Goes to Washington 723
  - TR 723
  - A Square Deal 724
  - Bad Foods and Pristine Wilds 727
  - The Troubled Taft 728
  - Roosevelt Returns 729
  - The Election of 1912 730
- Woodrow Wilson and the Politics of Morality 731
  - Early Career 731
  - The Reforms of the New Freedom 732
  - Labor and Social Reform 733
  - The Limits of Progressive Reform 734
- **Chapter Summary** 734
- **Significant Events** 736
- **Additional Reading** 735
  - **Counterpoint:** What Was Progressivism? 709
  - **Daily Lives:** “Amusing the Million” 718
Chapter 23
The United States and the Old World Order 738

Preview 738
Progressive Diplomacy 740
   Big Stick in the Caribbean 741
   A “Diplomatist of the Highest Rank” 741
   Dollar Diplomacy 742
Woodrow Wilson and Moral Diplomacy 743
   Missionary Diplomacy 743
   Intervention in Mexico 744
The Road to War 746
   The Guns of August 747
   Neutral but Not Impartial 748
   The Diplomacy of Neutrality 749
   Peace, Preparedness, and the Election of 1916 750
   Wilson’s Final Peace Offering 751
War and Society 752
   The Slaughter of Stalemate 752
   “You’re in the Army Now” 753
   Mobilizing the Economy 755
   War Work 756
   Great Migrations 757
   Propaganda and Civil Liberties 757
   Over There 759
   The Influenza Pandemic of 1918–1919 760
The Lost Peace 762
   The Treaty of Versailles 762
   The Battle for the Treaty 763
   Red Scare 766
Chapter Summary 769
Significant Events 770
Additional Reading 769

Counterpoint: Why Did the United States Go to War? 752

Daily Lives: The Doughboys Abroad 764

Part Five
The Perils of Democracy 771

Chapter 24
The New Era 776

Preview 776
The Roaring Economy 778
   Technology and Consumer Spending 778
   The Booming Construction Industry 779
   The Automobile 779
   The Business of America 782
   Welfare Capitalism 782
   The Consumer Culture 783
A Mass Society 784
   The New Woman 784
   Mass Media 787
   A Youth Culture 789
   “Ain’t We Got Fun?” 790
   The Art of Alienation 791
   A “New Negro” 791
Defenders of the Faith 792
   Nativism and Immigration Restriction 793
   The “Noble Experiment” 794
   Fundamentalism versus Darwinism 795
   KKK 796
Republicans Ascendant 797
   The Politics of “Normalcy” 798
   The Policies of Mellon and Hoover 798
   Distress Signals at Home and Abroad 800
   The Election of 1928 801
   The Great Bull Market 803
   The Rampaging Bull 803
   The Great Crash 804
   The Sickening Slide in Global Perspective 804
   The Causes of the Great Depression 805
Chapter Summary 807
Significant Events 808
Additional Reading 807

Daily Lives: The Beauty Contest 786

Counterpoint: Were the 1920s a Sharp Break with the Past? 802

Chapter 25
The Great Depression and the New Deal, 1929–1939 810

Preview 810
The Human Impact of the Great Depression 811
   Hard Times 812
   The Golden Age of Radio and Film 813
   “Dirty Thirties”: An Ecological Disaster 814
   Mexican Americans and Repatriation 815
   African Americans in the Depression 816
   The Tragedy of Herbert Hoover 817
   The Failure of Relief 818
   The Hoover Depression Program 819
   Stirrings of Discontent 820
   The Bonus Army 821
   The Election of 1932 822
Chapter 32
The Conservative Challenge 1068
Preview 1068
The Conservative Rebellion 1070
The Conservative Tide Worldwide 1071
Born Again 1071
The Catholic Conscience 1072
The Media as Battleground 1073
The Election of 1980 1074
Prime Time with Ronald Reagan 1075
The Great Communicator 1075
The Reagan Agenda 1076
The Reagan Revolution in Practice 1077
The Supply-Side Scorecard 1077
The Military Buildup 1079
Standing Tall in a Chaotic World 1080
Terrorism in the Middle East 1080
Mounting Frustrations in Central America 1081
The Iran-Contra Connection 1081
Cover Blown 1083
From Cold War to Glasnost 1084
The Election of 1988 1085
An End to the Cold War 1085
A Post–Cold War Foreign Policy 1086
The Gulf War 1086
Domestic Doldrums 1088
The Conservative Court 1088
Disillusionment and Anger 1090
The Election of 1992 1092
Chapter Summary 1094
Significant Events 1095
Additional Reading 1094
Counterpoint: Defining the New Conservatism 1073
Daily Lives: Life in the Underclass 1090

Chapter 33
Nation of Nations in a Global Community 1096
Preview 1096
The New Immigration 1098
The New Look of America—Asian Americans 1099
The New Look of America—Latinos 1102
Illegal Immigration 1103
Links with the Home Country 1103
Religious Diversity 1104

The Clinton Presidency: Managing a New Global Order 1105
Clinton: Ambitions and Character 1105
The New World Disorder 1106
Yugoslavian Turmoil 1107
Middle East Peace 1108
Global Financial Disorder 1109
The Clinton Presidency on Trial 1110
Recovery without Reform 1110
The Conservative Revolution Reborn 1111
Conservatives and the Feminist Agenda 1113
Scandal 1114
The Politics of Surplus 1115
The United States in a Networked World 1116
The Internet Revolution 1116
American Workers in a Two-Tiered Economy 1118
Multiculturalism and Contested American Identity 1120
African Americans in a Full-Employment Economy 1121
Global Pressures in a Multicultural America 1123
Chapter Summary 1125
Significant Events 1127
Additional Reading 1126
Daily Lives: Motels as an Ethnic Niche 1100
Counterpoint: The Significance of Impeachment 1115

Appendix A-2
The Declaration of Independence A-2
Presidential Elections A-15
Presidential Administrations A-19
Justices of the Supreme Court A-30
A Social Profile of the American Republic A-32
Population A-32
Vital Statistics A-32
Life Expectancy A-33
The Changing Age Structure A-33
Regional Origin of Immigrants A-34
Recent Trends in Immigration A-34
American Workers and Farmers A-35
The Economy and Federal Spending A-36
American Wars A-36
Bibliography B-1
Photo Credits P-1
Index I-1
list of maps & charts

Early Peoples of North America  4
Indians of North America, ca. 1490  11
Principal Routes of European Exploration  28
Spanish America, ca. 1600  36
European Exploration: Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries  47
Colonies of the Chesapeake  60
African Transatlantic Slave Trade, 1450–1760  64
The Carolinas and the Caribbean  72
Spanish Missions in North America, ca. 1675  78
Early New England  88
Patterns of Settlement in the Eighteenth Century  116
Estimated Population of Colonial Cities, 1720–1770  119
Estimated Population by Region, 1720–1760  120
Distribution of the American Population, 1775  122
Overseas Trade Networks  134
The Seven Years’ War in America  146
European Claims in North America, 1750 and 1763  149
The Appalachian Frontier, 1750–1775  150
Patterns of Allegiance  174
The Fighting in the North, 1775–1777  182
The Fighting in the South, 1780–1781  188
Western Land Claims, 1782–1802  202
The Ordinance of 1785  205
Ratification of the Constitution  220
Semisubsistence and Commercial America, 1790  234
Hamilton’s Financial System  238
Election of 1800  253
Exploration and Expansion: The Louisiana Purchase  265
The Indian Response to White Encroachment  274
American Imports and Exports, 1790–1820  278
The War of 1812  281
Time of Travel, 1800 and 1830  300
The Transportation Network of a Market Economy, 1840  301
Western Land Sales and the Price of Corn and Wheat  306
Development of the Lowell Mills  313
The Missouri Compromise and the Union’s Boundaries in 1820  324
Election of 1824  333
Indian Removal  342
The Spread of White Manhood Suffrage  344
Election of 1840  355
Annual Consumption of Distilled Spirits, per Capita, 1710–1920  376
The Diverse South  392
Cotton and Other Crops of the South  396
The Spread of Slavery, 1820–1860  397
Southern Population, 1860  398
A Plantation Layout  400
Sioux Expansion and the Horse and Gun Frontier  424
The Mexican Borderlands  428
The Overland Trail  430
Election of 1844  435
The Mexican War  437
Territorial Growth and the Compromise of 1850  450
Proportion of Western Exports Shipped via New Orleans, 1835–1860  459
Railroads, 1850 and 1860, with Track Gauges  460
Prices of Cotton and Slaves  465
The Kansas-Nebraska Act  467
Election of 1860  480
The Pattern of Secession  481
Resources of the Union and the Confederacy, 1861  490
The War in the West, 1861–1862  494
The War in the East, 1861–1862  496
The Changing Magnitude of Battle  515
The War in the East, 1863–1865  517
The War in the West, 1863–1865  521
The Attrition of War: Company D, 7th Virginia Infantry, Army of Northern Virginia  523
The Southern States during Reconstruction  540
A Georgia Plantation after the War  550
Election of 1876  556
Tenant Farmers, 1900  570
Spending on Education in the South before and after Disfranchisement 578
Natural Environment of the West 581
The Indian Frontier 585
The Mining and Cattle Frontiers 590
Steel Production, 1880 and 1914 611
Occupational Distribution, 1880 and 1920 617
Railroads, 1870–1890 620
Boom and Bust Business Cycle, 1865–1900 627
Immigration and Population, 1860–1920 643
Growth of New Orleans to 1900 646
The Voting Public, 1860–1912 670
Election of 1896 684
Balance of U.S. Imports and Exports, 1870–1910 688
Imperialist Expansion, 1900 689
The Spanish-American War 698
The United States in the Pacific 699
Woman Suffrage 716
Republican and Democratic Parties’ Share of Popular Vote, 1860–1912 730
Election of 1912 731
Panama Canal—Old and New Transoceanic Routes 739
American Interventions in the Caribbean, 1898–1930 743
The Course of War in Europe, 1914–1917 748
Election of 1916 750
The Final German Offensive and Allied Counterattack, 1918 758
Areas of Population Growth 793
Election of 1928 801
Declining World Trade, 1929–1933 805
Election of 1932 822
Unemployment Relief, 1934 825
The Tennessee Valley Authority 826
Unemployment, 1925–1945 831
Federal Budget and Surplus/Deficit, 1920–1940 845

What the New Deal Did . . . 846
World War II in Europe and North Africa 859
The U-Boat War 864
The Impact of World War II on Government Spending 881
The Pacific Campaigns of World War II 884
Cold War Europe 911
Election of 1948 920
The Korean War 926
The United States Birthrate, 1900–1989 937
Average Annual Regional Migration, 1947–1960 939
Asian Trouble Spots 953
Election of 1960 958
The World of the Superpowers 962
The Spontaneous Spread of Sit-ins, February 1960 980
Civil Rights: Patterns of Protest and Unrest 985
The War in Vietnam 1008
Levels of U.S. Troops in Vietnam (at Year End) 1013
Election of 1968 1018
Oil and Conflict in the Middle East, 1948–1988 1051
OPEC Oil Prices, 1973–1987 1054
Election of 1980 1075
Poverty in America, 1970–1993 1078
The Federal Budget and Surplus/Deficit, 1945–1995 1079
Central American Conflicts, 1974–1990 1082
War with Iraq: Operation Desert Storm 1087
Election of 1992 1093
Projected Population Shifts, 1980–2050 1099
Election of 1996 1112
Map of the World
Map of the United States
Ill good history begins with a good story: that has been the touchstone of Nation of Nations. Narrative is embedded in the way we understand the past; hence it will not do simply to compile an encyclopedia of American history and pass it off as a survey.

Yet the narrative keeps changing. As we constantly revalue the past, searching for more revealing ways to connect then and there with here and now, the story shifts, sometimes in subtle ways and other times more boldly. The fourth edition of this text has been significantly revised.

Changes to the Fourth Edition

Most broadly, the changes in this edition arise from our conviction that it is difficult to understand the American past without linking its story to events worldwide. Half a millennium ago, the societies of Europe, Africa, and Asia first began a sustained interaction with the civilizations of the Americas, and the interplay between newcomers and natives, between old cultures and new, continues to this day. We still introduce each of the book's six parts with Global Essays and Global Timelines. But for this edition we have also woven into the text of every chapter additional shorter narratives underscoring the global links. These narratives are not separate special features. Sometimes only a paragraph in length, sometimes an entire section, they integrate an international perspective whether we are discussing the trans-Atlantic culture of the early slave trade, the rise of postal networks, the influenza pandemic of 1918–1919, or international influences on the student rebellions of the 1960s. As the title of the book's new final chapter makes clear, we have become a "Nation of Nations in a Global Community.” This narrative of the 1990s views events through twin engines of social change: the recent wave of immigration, whose upsurge rivals the influx at the beginning of the century; and the global culture being wrought by the communications revolution of the Internet and the World Wide Web.

In addition, a number of structural changes help the narrative flow as well as reflect recent scholarship.

- A new prologue, “Settling and Civilizing the Americas,” is devoted to the Pre-Columbian Americas. It highlights all major regional cultures of North America by focusing on the influence of Mesoamerican classical civilizations on North American societies.
- Part 4 employs a new chapter order. Chapter 18, following our treatment of Reconstruction, now covers the New South and the trans-Mississippi West. The chapter's narrative opening (on the Exodusters) provides a useful bridge between the two chapters. Chapter 19 is now “The New Industrial Order” and Chapter 20 is “The Rise of an Urban Order.”
- The coverage of the 1920s and 1930s has been consolidated into two chapters, down from three. Chapter 24, “The New Era,” takes the narrative through the Great Crash, and Chapter 25 has become “The Great Depression and the New Deal, 1929–1939.”
- Part 6 (the post–World War II material) has been thoroughly revised to create a more coherent, thematic story—always a challenge in narrating the most recent years of the American survey.
- Chapter 28, “The Suburban Era,” extends its political and foreign policy narrative through the Kennedy administration, ending with (and incorporating new scholarship about) the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. This approach delineates more clearly the arc of the first half of the cold war, culminating in the confrontation that brought the world the closest it has yet come to a full-scale nuclear war.
- Chapter 29—now titled “Civil Rights and the Crisis of Liberalism”—is more strongly focused on the civil rights crusade as the era's defining social movement. Coverage begins with the social and economic background of the 1950s.
and is followed by Brown v. Board of Education, the Montgomery bus boycott, and the crisis at Little Rock—materials originally treated in “The Suburban Era.” New material emphasizes the grassroots elements of the crusade and provides coverage of Hernandez v. Texas, the 1954 Supreme Court decision that proved as pivotal for Latino civil rights as was Brown v. Board of Education for African Americans. Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society and the counterculture remain in this chapter, as does the material on the Warren Court.

- Chapter 30, “The Vietnam Era,” reorients its coverage of minority activism by focusing on the theme of identity group politics. Coverage of the feminist movement, the Equal Rights Amendment, and abortion rights has been moved to this chapter to join expanded coverage of Latino protests (Chavez and the farm-workers, Mexican American student activists) as well as the campaigns of Native Americans, Asian Americans, and gay activists.

- Chapter 32 now focuses, as its new name suggests, on the conservative rebellion. It covers the years from 1980 to 1992.

- And, as already indicated, Chapter 33 examines the renewed immigration of the 1980s and 1990s, the rise of the Internet and its social implications, and the influence of multiculturalism on the contested nature of American identity. Of course, the chapter also recounts the turbulent events of the Clinton administration, both foreign and domestic.

**New Pedagogy**

Significant pedagogical changes appear in this edition. Building on the popularity of our marginal headings, we now include a succinct preview of each chapter’s themes as well as bulleted summaries, which make student review easier. These and other features of the text are described on page xxvii.

Taken together, these revisions are substantial; indeed, they entailed a good deal of elbow grease to put into place. But we believe that a text is unlikely to remain useful to its readers unless it strives continually to rethink the ways in which history is presented. For all that, we trust that the essential character of Nation of Nations remains.

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xxii
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The division of labor for this book was determined by our respective fields of scholarship: Christine Heyrman, the colonial era, in which Europeans, Africans, and Indians participated in the making of both a new America and a new republic; William Gienapp, the 90 years in which the young nation first flourished, then foundered on the issues of section and slavery; Michael Stoff, the post–Civil War era, in which industrialization and urbanization brought the nation more centrally into an international system regularly disrupted by depression and war; and Mark Lytle, the modern era, in which Americans finally faced the reality that even the boldest dreams of national greatness are bounded by the finite nature of power and resources both natural and human. Finally, because the need to specialize inevitably imposes limits on any project as broad as this one, our fifth author, James Davidson, served as a general editor and writer, with the intent of fitting individual parts to the whole as well as providing a measure of continuity, style, and overarching purpose. In producing this collaborative effort, all of us have shared the conviction that the best history speaks to a larger audience.

James West Davidson
William E. Gienapp
Christine Leigh Heyrman
Mark H. Lytle
Michael B. Stoff
about the authors

**James West Davidson** received his Ph.D. from Yale University. A historian who has pursued a full-time writing career, he is the author of numerous books, among them *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection* (with Mark H. Lytle), *The Logic of Millennial Thought: Eighteenth-Century New England*, and *Great Heart: The History of a Labrador Adventure* (with John Rugge).

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We trace the career of young Thurgood Marshall, crisscrossing the South in his own “little old beat-up ’29 Ford,” typing legal briefs in the back seat, trying to get black teachers to sue for equal pay, hoping to get his people somewhere they weren’t. The list could go on and on, spilling out as it did in Walt Whitman’s Leaves of Grass: “A southerner soon as a northerner, a planter nonchalant and hospitable, / A Yankee bound my own way . . . a Hoosier, a Badger, a Buckeye, a Louisianian or Georgian . . . .” Whitman embraced and celebrated them all, inseparable strands of what made him an American and what made him human:

In all people I see myself, none more and not one a barleycorn less, And the good or bad I say of myself I say of them.

To encompass so expansive an America, Whitman turned to poetry; historians have traditionally chosen narrative as their means of giving life to the past. That mode of explanation permits them to interweave the strands of economic, political, and social history in a coherent chronological framework. By choosing narrative, historians affirm the multicausal nature of historical explanation—the insistence that events be portrayed in context. By choosing narrative, they are also acknowledging that, although long-term economic and social trends shape societies in significant ways, events often take on a logic (or an illogic) of their own, jostling one another, being deflected by unpredictable personal decisions, sudden deaths, natural catastrophes, and chance. There are literary reasons, too, for preferring a narrative approach, because it supplies a dramatic force usually missing from more structural analyses of the past.

In some ways, surveys such as this text are the natural antithesis of narrative history. They strive, by definition, to be comprehensive: to furnish a broad, orderly exposition of their chosen field. Yet to cover so much ground in so limited a space necessarily deprives readers of the context of more detailed accounts. Then, too, the resurgence of social history—with its concern for class and race, patterns of rural and urban life, the
spread of market and industrial economies—lends itself to more analytic, less chronological treatments. The challenge facing historians is to incorporate these areas of research without losing the story's narrative drive or the chronological flow that orients readers to the more familiar events of our past.

With the cold war of the past half-century at an end, there has been increased attention to the worldwide breakdown of so many nonmarket economies and, by inference, to the greater success of the market societies of the United States and other capitalist nations. As our own narrative makes clear, American society and politics have indeed come together centrally in the marketplace. What Americans produce, how and where they produce it, and the desire to buy cheap and sell dear have been defining elements in every era. That market orientation has created unparalleled abundance and reinforced striking inequalities, not the least a society in which, for two centuries, human beings themselves were bought and sold. It has made Americans powerfully provincial in protecting local interests and internationally adventurous in seeking to expand wealth and opportunity.

It goes without saying that Americans have not always produced wisely or well. The insistent drive toward material plenty has levied a heavy tax on the global environment. Too often quantity has substituted for quality, whether we talk of cars, education, or culture. When markets flourish, the nation abounds with confidence that any problem, no matter how intractable, can be solved. When markets fail, however, the fault lines of our political and social systems become all too evident.

In the end, then, it is impossible to separate the marketplace of boom and bust and the world of ordinary Americans from the corridors of political maneuvering or the ceremonial pomp of an inauguration. To treat political and social history as distinct spheres is counterproductive. The primary question of this narrative—how the fledgling, often tumultuous confederation of "these United States" managed to transform itself into an enduring republic—is not only political but necessarily social. In order to survive, a republic must resolve conflicts between citizens of different geographic regions and economic classes, of diverse racial and ethnic origins, of competing religions and ideologies. The resolution of these conflicts has produced tragic consequences, perhaps, as often as noble ones. But tragic or noble, the destiny of these states cannot be understood without comprehending both the social and the political dimensions of the story.