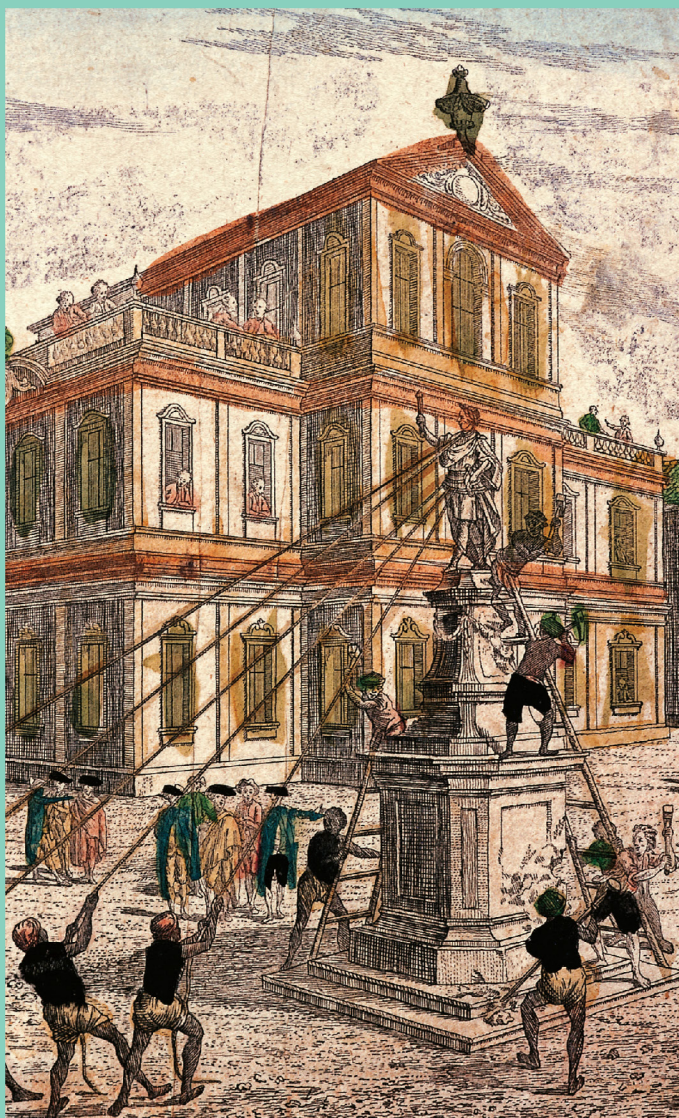


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# GIVE ME LIBERTY!

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AN  
**AMERICAN**  
HISTORY

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**ERIC  
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# GIVE ME LIBERTY!

AN AMERICAN HISTORY

SEAGULL FIFTH EDITION

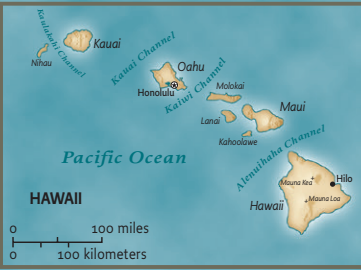
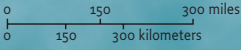
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★ ERIC FONER ★



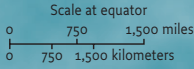
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**PHYSICAL/POLITICAL MAP  
OF THE  
UNITED STATES**





# POLITICAL MAP of the WORLD





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For my mother, Liza Foner (1909–2005),  
an accomplished artist who lived through most of  
the twentieth century and into the twenty-first





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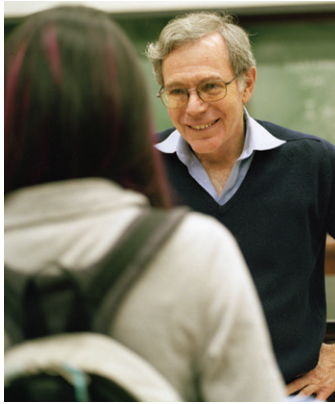
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## ★ ABOUT THE AUTHOR ★



**ERIC FONER** is DeWitt Clinton Professor of History at Columbia University, where he earned his B.A. and Ph.D. In his teaching and scholarship, he focuses on the Civil War and Reconstruction, slavery, and nineteenth-century America. Professor Foner's publications include *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War*; *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America*; *Nothing but Freedom: Emancipation and Its Legacy*; *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877*; *The Story of American Freedom*; and *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction*. His history of Reconstruction won the *Los Angeles Times* Book Award for History, the Bancroft Prize, and the Parkman Prize. He has served as president of the Organization of American Historians and the American Historical Association. In 2006 he received the Presidential Award for Outstanding Teaching from Columbia University. His most recent books are *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery*, winner of the Bancroft and Lincoln Prizes and the Pulitzer Prize for History, and *Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad*, winner of the New York Historical Society Book Prize.



# ★ PREFACE ★

*Give Me Liberty! An American History* is a survey of American history from the earliest days of European exploration and conquest of the New World to the first decades of the twenty-first century. It offers students a clear, concise narrative whose central theme is the changing contours of American freedom.

I am extremely gratified by the response to the first four editions of *Give Me Liberty!*, which have been used in survey courses at many hundreds of two- and four-year colleges and universities throughout the country. The comments I have received from instructors and students encourage me to think that *Give Me Liberty!* has worked well in their classrooms. Their comments have also included many valuable suggestions for revisions, which I greatly appreciate. These have ranged from corrections of typographical and factual errors to thoughts about subjects that needed more extensive treatment. In making revisions for this Fifth Edition, I have tried to take these suggestions into account. I have also incorporated the findings and insights of new scholarship that has appeared since the original edition was written.

The most significant changes in this Fifth Edition reflect my desire to integrate the history of the American West and especially the regions known as borderlands more fully into the narrative. In recent years these aspects of American history have been thriving areas of research and scholarship. Of course earlier editions of *Give Me Liberty!* have discussed these subjects, but in this edition their treatment has been deepened and expanded. I have also added notable works in these areas to many chapter bibliographies and lists of websites.

The definition of the West has changed enormously in the course of American history. In the colonial period, the area beyond the Appalachians—present-day Kentucky, Tennessee, and western Pennsylvania and New York—constituted the West. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the term referred to Ohio, Michigan, Alabama, and Mississippi. After the Civil War, the West came to mean the area beyond the Mississippi River. Today, it is sometimes used to refer mainly to the Pacific coast. But whatever its geographic locale, the West has been as much an idea as a place—an area beyond the frontier of settlement that promised newcomers new kinds of freedom, sometimes at the expense of the freedom of others, such as native inhabitants and migrant laborers. In this edition we follow Americans as they constructed their Wests, and debated the kinds of freedom they would enjoy there.

Borderlands is a more complex idea that has influenced much recent historical scholarship. Borders are lines dividing one country, region, or state from another. Crossing them often means becoming subject to different laws and customs, and enjoying different degrees of freedom. Borderlands are regions that exist on both sides of borders. They are fluid areas where people of different cultural and social backgrounds converge. At various points in American history, shifting borders have opened new opportunities and closed off others in the borderlands. Families living for decades or centuries in a region have suddenly found themselves divided by a newly created border but still living in a borderland that transcends the new division. This happened to Mexicans in modern-day California, Arizona, and New Mexico, for example, in 1848, when the treaty ending the Mexican-American War transferred the land that would become those states from Mexico to the United States.

Borderlands exist within the United States as well as at the boundaries with other countries. For example, in the period before the Civil War, the region straddling the Ohio River contained cultural commonalities that in some ways overrode the division there between free and slave states. The borderlands idea also challenges simple accounts of national development in which empires and colonies pave the way for territorial expansion and a future transcontinental nation. It enables us, for example, to move beyond the categories of conquest and subjugation in understanding how Native Americans and Europeans interacted over the early centuries of contact. This approach also provides a way of understanding how the people of Mexico and the United States interact today in the borderland region of the American Southwest, where many families have members on both sides of the boundary between the two countries.

Small changes relating to these themes may be found throughout the book. The major additions seeking to illuminate the history of the West and of borderlands are as follows:

Chapter 1 now introduces the idea of borderlands with a discussion of the areas where European empires and Indian groups interacted and where authority was fluid and fragile. Chapter 4 contains expanded treatment of the part of the Spanish empire now comprising the borderlands United States (Arizona, California, New Mexico, Texas, and Florida) and how Spain endeavored, with limited success, to consolidate its authority in these regions. In Chapter 6, a new subsection, “The American Revolution as a Borderlands Conflict,” examines the impact on both Americans and Canadians of the creation, because of American independence, of a new national boundary separating what once had been two parts of the British empire. Chapter 8 continues this theme with a discussion of the borderlands aspects of the War of 1812. Chapter 9 discusses how a common culture came into being along the Ohio River

in the early nineteenth century despite the existence of slavery on one side and free labor on the other. Chapter 13 expands the treatment of Texan independence from Mexico by discussing its impact on both Anglo and Mexican residents of this borderland region. Chapter 14 contains a new examination of the Civil War in the American West.

In Chapter 16, I have expanded the section on the industrial west with new discussions of logging and mining, and added a new subsection on the dissemination of a mythical image of the Wild West in the late nineteenth century. Chapter 17 contains an expanded discussion of Chinese immigrants in the West and the battle over exclusion and citizenship, a debate that centered on what kind of population should be allowed to inhabit the West and enjoy the opportunities the region offered. Chapter 18 examines Progressivism, countering conventional narratives that emphasize the origins of Progressive political reforms in eastern cities by relating how many, from woman suffrage to the initiative, referendum, and recall, emerged in Oregon, California, and other western states. Chapter 20 expands the treatment of western agriculture in the 1920s by highlighting the acceleration of agricultural mechanization in the region and the agricultural depression that preceded the general economic collapse of 1929 and after. In Chapter 22 we see the new employment opportunities for Mexican-American women in the war production factories that opened in the West. In Chapter 26, there is a new subsection on conservatism in the West and the Sagebrush Rebellion of the 1970s and 1980s. Chapter 27 returns to the borderlands theme by discussing the consequences of the creation, in the 1990s, of a free trade zone connecting the two sides of the Mexican-American border. And Chapters 27 and 28 now include expanded discussions of the southwestern borderland as a site of an acrimonious battle over immigration—legal and undocumented—involving the federal and state governments, private vigilantes, and continuing waves of people trying to cross into the United States. The contested borderland now extends many miles into the United States north of the boundary between the two nations, and southward well into Mexico and even Central America.

I have also added a number of new selections to *Voices of Freedom*, the paired excerpts from primary documents in each chapter. Some of the new documents reflect the stronger emphasis on the West and borderlands; others seek to sharpen the juxtaposition of divergent concepts of freedom at particular moments in American history. And this edition contains many new images—paintings, broadsides, photographs, and others—related to these themes, brought to life in a vibrant, full-color design.

Americans have always had a divided attitude toward history. On the one hand, they tend to be remarkably future-oriented, dismissing events of even

the recent past as “ancient history” and sometimes seeing history as a burden to be overcome, a prison from which to escape. On the other hand, like many other peoples, Americans have always looked to history for a sense of personal or group identity and of national cohesiveness. This is why so many Americans devote time and energy to tracing their family trees and why they visit historical museums and National Park Service historical sites in ever-increasing numbers. My hope is that this book will convince readers with all degrees of interest that history does matter to them.

The novelist and essayist James Baldwin once observed that history “does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, [that] history is literally present in all that we do.” As Baldwin recognized, the force of history is evident in our own world. Especially in a political democracy like the United States, whose government is designed to rest on the consent of informed citizens, knowledge of the past is essential—not only for those of us whose profession is the teaching and writing of history, but for everyone. History, to be sure, does not offer simple lessons or immediate answers to current questions. Knowing the history of immigration to the United States, and all of the tensions, turmoil, and aspirations associated with it, for example, does not tell us what current immigration policy ought to be. But without that knowledge, we have no way of understanding which approaches have worked and which have not—essential information for the formulation of future public policy.

History, it has been said, is what the present chooses to remember about the past. Rather than a fixed collection of facts, or a group of interpretations that cannot be challenged, our understanding of history is constantly changing. There is nothing unusual in the fact that each generation rewrites history to meet its own needs, or that scholars disagree among themselves on basic questions like the causes of the Civil War or the reasons for the Great Depression. Precisely because each generation asks different questions of the past, each generation formulates different answers. The past thirty years have witnessed a remarkable expansion of the scope of historical study. The experiences of groups neglected by earlier scholars, including women, African-Americans, working people, and others, have received unprecedented attention from historians. New subfields—social history, cultural history, and family history among them—have taken their place alongside traditional political and diplomatic history.

*Give Me Liberty!* draws on this voluminous historical literature to present an up-to-date and inclusive account of the American past, paying due attention to the experience of diverse groups of Americans while in no way neglecting the events and processes Americans have experienced in common. It devotes serious attention to political, social, cultural, and economic history,

and to their interconnections. The narrative brings together major events and prominent leaders with the many groups of ordinary people who make up American society. *Give Me Liberty!* has a rich cast of characters, from Thomas Jefferson to campaigners for woman suffrage, from Franklin D. Roosevelt to former slaves seeking to breathe meaning into emancipation during and after the Civil War.

Aimed at an audience of undergraduate students with little or no detailed knowledge of American history, *Give Me Liberty!* guides readers through the complexities of the subject without overwhelming them with excessive detail. The unifying theme of freedom that runs through the text gives shape to the narrative and integrates the numerous strands that make up the American experience. This approach builds on that of my earlier book, *The Story of American Freedom* (1998), although *Give Me Liberty!* places events and personalities in the foreground and is more geared to the structure of the introductory survey course.

Freedom, and the battles to define its meaning, have long been central to my own scholarship and undergraduate teaching, which focuses on the nineteenth century and especially the era of the Civil War and Reconstruction (1850–1877). This was a time when the future of slavery tore the nation apart and emancipation produced a national debate over what rights the former slaves, and all Americans, should enjoy as free citizens. I have found that attention to clashing definitions of freedom and the struggles of different groups to achieve freedom as they understood it offers a way of making sense of the bitter battles and vast transformations of that pivotal era. I believe that the same is true for American history as a whole.

No idea is more fundamental to Americans' sense of themselves as individuals and as a nation than freedom. The central term in our political language, freedom—or liberty, with which it is almost always used interchangeably—is deeply embedded in the record of our history and the language of everyday life. The Declaration of Independence lists liberty among mankind's inalienable rights; the Constitution announces its purpose as securing liberty's blessings. The United States fought the Civil War to bring about a new birth of freedom, World War II for the Four Freedoms, and the Cold War to defend the Free World. Americans' love of liberty has been represented by liberty poles, liberty caps, and statues of liberty, and acted out by burning stamps and burning draft cards, by running away from slavery, and by demonstrating for the right to vote. "Every man in the street, white, black, red, or yellow," wrote the educator and statesman Ralph Bunche in 1940, "knows that this is 'the land of the free' . . . 'the cradle of liberty.'"

The very universality of the idea of freedom, however, can be misleading. Freedom is not a fixed, timeless category with a single unchanging definition.

Indeed, the history of the United States is, in part, a story of debates, disagreements, and struggles over freedom. Crises like the American Revolution, the Civil War, and the Cold War have permanently transformed the idea of freedom. So too have demands by various groups of Americans to enjoy greater freedom. The meaning of freedom has been constructed not only in congressional debates and political treatises, but on plantations and picket lines, in parlors and even bedrooms.

Over the course of our history, American freedom has been both a reality and a mythic ideal—a living truth for millions of Americans, a cruel mockery for others. For some, freedom has been what some scholars call a “habit of the heart,” an ideal so taken for granted that it is lived out but rarely analyzed. For others, freedom is not a birthright but a distant goal that has inspired great sacrifice.

*Give Me Liberty!* draws attention to three dimensions of freedom that have been critical in American history: (1) the *meanings* of freedom; (2) the *social conditions* that make freedom possible; and (3) the *boundaries* of freedom that determine who is entitled to enjoy freedom and who is not. All have changed over time.

In the era of the American Revolution, for example, freedom was primarily a set of rights enjoyed in public activity—the right of a community to be governed by laws to which its representatives had consented and of individuals to engage in religious worship without governmental interference. In the nineteenth century, freedom came to be closely identified with each person’s opportunity to develop to the fullest his or her innate talents. In the twentieth, the “ability to choose,” in both public and private life, became perhaps the dominant understanding of freedom. This development was encouraged by the explosive growth of the consumer marketplace (a development that receives considerable attention in *Give Me Liberty!*), which offered Americans an unprecedented array of goods with which to satisfy their needs and desires. During the 1960s, a crucial chapter in the history of American freedom, the idea of personal freedom was extended into virtually every realm, from attire and “lifestyle” to relations between the sexes. Thus, over time, more and more areas of life have been drawn into Americans’ debates about the meaning of freedom.

A second important dimension of freedom focuses on the social conditions necessary to allow freedom to flourish. What kinds of economic institutions and relationships best encourage individual freedom? In the colonial era and for more than a century after independence, the answer centered on economic autonomy, enshrined in the glorification of the independent small producer—the farmer, skilled craftsman, or shopkeeper—who did not have to depend on another person for his livelihood. As the industrial economy matured, new

conceptions of economic freedom came to the fore: “liberty of contract” in the Gilded Age, “industrial freedom” (a say in corporate decision-making) in the Progressive era, economic security during the New Deal, and, more recently, the ability to enjoy mass consumption within a market economy.

The boundaries of freedom, the third dimension of this theme, have inspired some of the most intense struggles in American history. Although founded on the premise that liberty is an entitlement of all humanity, the United States for much of its history deprived many of its own people of freedom. Non-whites have rarely enjoyed the same access to freedom as white Americans. The belief in equal opportunity as the birthright of all Americans has coexisted with persistent efforts to limit freedom by race, gender, and class and in other ways.

Less obvious, perhaps, is the fact that one person’s freedom has frequently been linked to another’s servitude. In the colonial era and nineteenth century, expanding freedom for many Americans rested on the lack of freedom—slavery, indentured servitude, the subordinate position of women—for others. By the same token, it has been through battles at the boundaries—the efforts of racial minorities, women, and others to secure greater freedom—that the meaning and experience of freedom have been deepened and the concept extended into new realms.

Time and again in American history, freedom has been transformed by the demands of excluded groups for inclusion. The idea of freedom as a universal birthright owes much both to abolitionists who sought to extend the blessings of liberty to blacks and to immigrant groups who insisted on full recognition as American citizens. The principle of equal protection of the law without regard to race, which became a central element of American freedom, arose from the antislavery struggle and the Civil War and was reinvigorated by the civil rights revolution of the 1960s, which called itself the “freedom movement.” The battle for the right of free speech by labor radicals and birth-control advocates in the first part of the twentieth century helped to make civil liberties an essential element of freedom for all Americans.

Although concentrating on events within the United States, *Give Me Liberty!* also situates American history in the context of developments in other parts of the world. Many of the forces that shaped American history, including the international migration of peoples, the development of slavery, the spread of democracy, and the expansion of capitalism, were worldwide processes not confined to the United States. Today, American ideas, culture, and economic and military power exert unprecedented influence throughout the world. But beginning with the earliest days of settlement, when European empires competed to colonize North America and enrich themselves from its trade, American history cannot be understood in isolation from its global setting.

Freedom is the oldest of clichés and the most modern of aspirations. At various times in our history, it has served as the rallying cry of the powerless and as a justification of the status quo. Freedom helps to bind our culture together and exposes the contradictions between what America claims to be and what it sometimes has been. American history is not a narrative of continual progress toward greater and greater freedom. As the abolitionist Thomas Wentworth Higginson noted after the Civil War, “revolutions may go backward.” Though freedom can be achieved, it may also be taken away. This happened, for example, when the equal rights granted to former slaves immediately after the Civil War were essentially nullified during the era of segregation. As was said in the eighteenth century, the price of freedom is eternal vigilance.

In the early twenty-first century, freedom continues to play a central role in American political and social life and thought. It is invoked by individuals and groups of all kinds, from critics of economic globalization to those who seek to secure American freedom at home and export it abroad. I hope that *Give Me Liberty!* will offer beginning students a clear account of the course of American history, and of its central theme, freedom, which today remains as varied, contentious, and ever-changing as America itself.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Many students may have heard stories of how publishing companies alter the language and content of textbooks in an attempt to maximize sales and avoid alienating any potential reader. In this case, I can honestly say that W. W. Norton allowed me a free hand in writing the book and, apart from the usual editorial corrections, did not try to influence its content at all. For this I thank them, while I accept full responsibility for the interpretations presented and for any errors the book may contain. Since no book of this length can be entirely free of mistakes, I welcome readers to send me corrections at [ef17@columbia.edu](mailto:ef17@columbia.edu).

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Eric Foner  
New York City  
July 2016

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**INQUIZITIVE**  
Chapter 1: A New World

Page 28 1.4 What happened when the people of the Americas came into contact with Europeans?

Question Confidence  
**I know I know it!**  
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Activity Score  
**975**

Current Grade  
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Analyze the image below.

Identify the statements that describe what the *Florentine Codex* reveals about Cortes's attack on the Aztecs.

Correct Answer(s)  
Aztec men, women, and children were willing to fight against the Spanish

Aztec men, women and children fled from the attacks of the Spanish ❌  
Aztecs had no defense against the Spanish ❌  
The Spanish had superior weapons ❌

Incorrect Answer(s)

**Correct**

Indians who allied with Cortes helped build vessels and carry the cannons and weapons over the mountains to the city.

Drag the rest of the items into the "Correct Answer(s)" or "Incorrect Answer(s)" areas to complete the question.

OK

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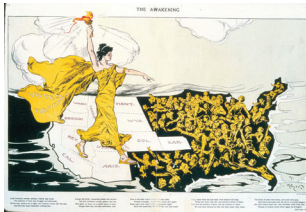
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**The Right to Vote: American Women's Suffrage, 1600 - 1920**

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**The Right to Vote: American Women's Suffrage, 1600-1920**

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The right to vote in the United States was not guaranteed to all men, even all white men, following the revolution in 1776. White men who did not own land or a business were the right to vote by changes in state constitutions during the 1820s and 1830s. African American men won the right to vote with the 15th Amendment in 1870 following their military participation in the Civil War. Women's right to vote the 19th Amendment in 1920, therefore, was not only a long time coming, it was the result of a multitude of changes similar to (but not exactly the same as) those that granted suffrage to poor white men and to male ex-slaves; changes in political theory, religious beliefs, morality, and scientific understandings of gender and biology. In the United States, the idea that citizenship did not necessarily confer the right to vote was historically rooted in the relationship between democracy and the concept especially in terms of expected gender roles. The expected role for women as child-bearers, as nurturers of family morality, as community mothers, and perhaps most importantly, as the symbol of what every soldier was fighting to protect during the Great War (World War I) resulted in even most women arguing against women's suffrage. For many Americans, male and female, the polling place was no place for a woman.

What changed? How did a few women convince not only the U.S. Congress but also three-fourths of the states to change the U.S. Constitution so that all women could vote? Take the tour to see how.

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# A NEW WORLD

## FOCUS QUESTIONS

- *What were the major patterns of Native American life in North America before Europeans arrived?*
- *How did Indian and European ideas of freedom differ on the eve of contact?*
- *What impelled European explorers to look west across the Atlantic?*
- *What happened when the peoples of the Americas came in contact with Europeans?*
- *What were the chief features of the Spanish empire in America?*
- *What were the chief features of the French and Dutch empires in North America?*

“The discovery of America,” the British writer Adam Smith announced in his celebrated work *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), was one of “the two greatest and most important events recorded in the history of mankind.” Historians no longer use the word “discovery” to describe the European exploration, conquest, and colonization of a hemisphere already home to millions of people. But there can be no doubt that when Christopher Columbus made landfall in the West Indian islands in 1492, he set in motion some of the most pivotal developments in human history. Immense changes soon followed in both the Old and New Worlds; the consequences of these changes are still with us today.

The peoples of the American continents and Europe, previously unaware of each other’s existence, were thrown into continuous interaction. Crops new to each hemisphere crossed the Atlantic, reshaping diets and transforming the natural environment. Because of their long isolation, the inhabitants of North

## • CHRONOLOGY •

- 7000 BC** Agriculture developed in Mexico and Andes
- 900–1200 AD** Hopi and Zuni tribes build planned towns
- 1200** Cahokia city-empire along the Mississippi
- 1400s** Iroquois League established
- 1434** Portuguese explore sub-Saharan African Coast
- 1487** Bartolomeu Dias reaches the Cape of Good Hope
- 1492** *Reconquista* of Spain  
Columbus's first voyage to the Americas
- 1498** Vasco da Gama sails to the Indian Ocean
- 1500** Pedro Cabral claims Brazil for Portugal
- 1502** First African slaves transported to Caribbean islands
- 1517** Martin Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses*
- 1519** Hernán Cortés arrives in Mexico
- 1528** Las Casas's *History of the Indies*
- 1530s** Pizarro's conquest of Peru
- 1542** Spain promulgates the New Laws
- 1608** Champlain establishes Quebec
- 1609** Hudson claims New Netherland
- 1610** Santa Fe established
- 1680** Pueblo Revolt

and South America had developed no immunity to the germs that also accompanied the colonizers. As a result, they suffered a series of devastating epidemics, the greatest population catastrophe in human history. Within a decade of Columbus's voyage, a fourth continent—Africa—found itself drawn into the new Atlantic system of trade and population movement. In Africa, Europeans found a supply of unfree labor that enabled them to exploit the fertile lands of the Western Hemisphere. Indeed, of approximately 10 million men, women, and children who crossed from the Old World to the New between 1492 and 1820, the vast majority, about 7.7 million, were African slaves.

From the vantage point of 1776, the year the United States declared itself an independent nation, it seemed to Adam Smith that the “discovery” of America had produced both great “benefits” and great “misfortunes.” To the nations of western Europe, the development of American colonies brought an era of “splendor and glory.” The emergence of the Atlantic as the world's major avenue for trade and population movement, Smith noted, enabled millions of Europeans to increase the “enjoyments” of life. To the “natives” of the Americas, however, Smith went on, the years since 1492 had been ones of “dreadful misfortunes” and “every sort of injustice.” And for millions of Africans, the settlement of America meant a descent into the abyss of slavery.

Long before Columbus sailed, Europeans had dreamed of a land of abundance, riches, and ease beyond the western horizon. Once the “discovery” of this New World had taken place, they invented an America of the imagination, projecting onto it their hopes for a better life. Here, many believed, would arise unparalleled opportunities for riches, or at

least liberation from poverty. Europeans envisioned America as a religious refuge, a society of equals, a source of power and glory. They searched the New World for golden cities and fountains of eternal youth. Some sought to establish ideal communities based on the lives of the early Christian saints or other blueprints for social justice.

Some of these dreams of riches and opportunity would indeed be fulfilled. To many European settlers, America offered a far greater chance to own land and worship as they pleased than existed in Europe, with its rigid, unequal social order and official churches. Yet the conditions that enabled millions of settlers to take control of their own destinies were made possible by the debasement of millions of others. The New World became the site of many forms of unfree labor, including indentured servitude, forced labor, and one of the most brutal and unjust systems ever devised by man, plantation slavery. The conquest and settlement of the Western Hemisphere opened new chapters in the long histories of both freedom and slavery.

There was a vast human diversity among the peoples thrown into contact with one another in the New World. Exploration and settlement took place in an era of almost constant warfare among European nations, each racked by internal religious, political, and regional conflicts. Native Americans and Africans consisted of numerous groups with their own languages and cultures. They were as likely to fight one another as to unite against the European newcomers. All these peoples were changed by their integration into the new Atlantic economy. The complex interactions of Europeans, American Indians, and Africans would shape American history during the colonial era.

## THE FIRST AMERICANS

### The Settling of the Americas

The residents of the Americas were no more a single group than Europeans or Africans. They spoke hundreds of different languages and lived in numerous kinds of societies. Most, however, were descended from bands of hunters and fishers who had crossed the Bering Strait via a land bridge at various times between 15,000 and 60,000 years ago—the exact dates are hotly debated by archaeologists. Others may have arrived by sea from Asia or Pacific islands. Around 14,000 years ago, when glaciers began to melt at the end of the last Ice Age, the land link became submerged under water, separating the Western Hemisphere from Asia.

History in North and South America did not begin with the coming of Europeans. The New World was new to Europeans but an ancient homeland to those who already lived there. The hemisphere had witnessed many changes during its

## THE FIRST AMERICANS



A map illustrating the probable routes by which the first Americans settled the Western Hemisphere at various times between 15,000 and 60,000 years ago.

human history. First, the early inhabitants and their descendants spread across the two continents, reaching the tip of South America perhaps 11,000 years ago. As the climate warmed, they faced a food crisis as the immense animals they hunted, including woolly mammoths and giant bison, became extinct. Around 9,000 years ago, at the same time that agriculture was being developed in the Near East, it also emerged in modern-day Mexico and the Andes, and then spread to other parts of the Americas, making settled civilizations possible. Throughout the hemisphere, maize (corn), squash, and beans formed the basis of agriculture. The absence of livestock in the Western Hemisphere, however, limited farming by preventing the plowing of fields and the application of natural fertilizer.

## Indian Societies of the Americas

North and South America were hardly an empty wilderness when Europeans arrived. The hemisphere contained cities, roads, irrigation systems, extensive trade networks, and large structures such as pyramid-temples, whose beauty still inspires wonder. With a population close to 250,000, **Tenochtitlán**, the capital of the **Aztec** empire in what is now Mexico, was one of the world's largest cities. Its great temple, splendid royal palace, and a central market comparable to that of European capitals made the city seem "like an enchanted vision," according to one of the first Europeans to encounter it. Farther south lay the Inca kingdom, centered in modern-day Peru. Its population of perhaps 12 million was linked by a complex system of roads and bridges that extended 2,000 miles along the Andes mountain chain.

When Europeans arrived, a wide variety of native peoples lived within the present borders of the United States. Indian civilizations in North America had not developed the scale, grandeur, or centralized organization of the Aztec and Inca societies to their south. North American Indians lacked the technologies Europeans had mastered, such as metal tools and machines, gunpowder, and the scientific knowledge necessary for long-distance navigation. No society north of Mexico had achieved literacy (although some made maps on bark and animal hides). They also lacked wheeled vehicles, since they had no domestic animals like horses or oxen to pull them. Their "backwardness" became a central justification for European conquest. But, over time, Indian societies had perfected techniques of farming, hunting, and fishing, developed structures of political power and religious belief, and engaged in far-reaching networks of trade and communication.

## Mound Builders of the Mississippi River Valley

Remarkable physical remains still exist from some of the early civilizations in North America. Around 3,500 years ago, before Egyptians built the pyramids, Native Americans constructed a large community centered on a series of giant semicircular mounds on a bluff overlooking the Mississippi River in present-day Louisiana. Known today as Poverty Point, it was a commercial and governmental center whose residents established trade routes throughout the Mississippi and Ohio River valleys. Archaeologists have found there copper from present-day Minnesota and Canada, and flint mined in Indiana.

More than a thousand years before Columbus sailed, Indians of the Ohio River valley, called "mound builders" by eighteenth-century settlers who encountered the large earthen burial mounds they created, had traded across half the continent. After their decline, another culture flourished in the



A modern aerial photograph of the ruins of Pueblo Bonita, in Chaco Canyon in present-day New Mexico. The rectangular structures are the foundations of dwellings, and the circular ones are *kivas*, or places of religious worship.

Mississippi River valley, centered on the city of Cahokia near present-day St. Louis, a fortified community with between 10,000 and 30,000 inhabitants in the year 1200. Its residents, too, built giant mounds, the largest of which stood 100 feet high and was topped by a temple. Little is known of Cahokia's political and economic structure. But it stood as the largest settled community in what is now the United States until surpassed in population by New York and Philadelphia around 1800.

## Western Indians

In the arid northeastern area of present-day Arizona, the Hopi and Zuni and their ancestors engaged in settled village life for over 3,000 years. During the peak of the region's culture, between the years 900 and 1200, these peoples built great planned towns with large multiple-family dwellings in local canyons, constructed dams and canals to gather and distribute water, and conducted trade with groups as far away as central Mexico and the Mississippi River valley. The largest of their structures, Pueblo Bonita, in Chaco Canyon, New Mexico, stood five stories high and had more than 600 rooms. Not until the 1880s was a dwelling of comparable size constructed in the United States.

After the decline of these communities, probably because of drought, survivors moved to the south and east, where they established villages and perfected the techniques of desert farming, complete with irrigation systems to provide water for crops of corn, beans, and cotton. These were the people Spanish explorers called the Pueblo Indians (because they lived in small villages, or *pueblos*, when the Spanish first encountered them in the sixteenth century).

On the Pacific coast, another densely populated region, hundreds of distinct groups resided in independent villages and lived primarily by fishing, hunting sea mammals, and gathering wild plants and nuts. As many as 25 million salmon swam up the Columbia River each year, providing Indians with abundant food. On the Great Plains, with its herds of buffalo—descendants of the prehistoric giant bison—many Indians were hunters (who tracked animals on foot before the arrival of horses with the Spanish), but others lived in agricultural communities.

## Indians of Eastern North America

In eastern North America, hundreds of tribes inhabited towns and villages scattered from the Gulf of Mexico to present-day Canada. They lived on corn, squash, and beans, supplemented by fishing and hunting deer, turkeys, and other animals. Indian trade routes crisscrossed the eastern part of the continent. Tribes frequently warred with one another to obtain goods, seize captives, or take revenge for the killing of relatives. They conducted diplomacy and made peace. Little in the way of centralized authority existed until, in the fifteenth century, various leagues or confederations emerged in an effort to bring



The native population of North America at the time of first contact with Europeans consisted of numerous tribes with their own languages, religious beliefs, and economic and social structures. This map suggests the numerous ways of life existing at the time.





The Village of Secoton, by John White, an English artist who spent a year on the Outer Banks of North Carolina in 1585–1586 as part of an expedition sponsored by Sir Walter Raleigh. A central street links houses surrounded by fields of corn. In the lower part, dancing Indians take part in a religious ceremony.

order to local regions. In the Southeast, the Choctaw, Cherokee, and Chickasaw each united dozens of towns in loose alliances. In present-day New York and Pennsylvania, five Iroquois peoples—the Mohawk, Oneida, Cayuga, Seneca, and Onondaga—formed a **Great League of Peace**, bringing a period of stability to the area. Each year a Great Council, with representatives from the five groupings, met to coordinate behavior toward outsiders.

The most striking feature of Native American society at the time Europeans arrived was its sheer diversity. Each group had its own political system and set of religious beliefs, and North America was home to literally hundreds of mutually unintelligible languages. Indians had no sense of “America” as a continent or hemisphere. They did not think of themselves as a single unified people, an idea invented by Europeans and only many years later adopted by Indians themselves. Indian identity centered on the immediate social group—a tribe, vil-

lage, chiefdom, or confederacy. When Europeans first arrived, many Indians saw them as simply one group among many. Their first thought was how to use the newcomers to enhance their standing in relation to other native peoples, rather than to unite against them. The sharp dichotomy between Indians and “white” persons did not emerge until later in the colonial era.

## Native American Religion

Nonetheless, the diverse Indian societies of North America did share certain common characteristics. Their lives were steeped in religious ceremonies often directly related to farming and hunting. Spiritual power, they believed, suffused the world, and sacred spirits could be found in all kinds of living and inanimate things—animals, plants, trees, water, and wind—an idea known as “animism.” Through religious ceremonies, they aimed to harness the aid of powerful supernatural forces to serve the interests of man. In some tribes, hunters performed

rituals to placate the spirits of animals they had killed. Other religious ceremonies sought to engage the spiritual power of nature to secure abundant crops or fend off evil spirits. Indian villages also held elaborate religious rites, participation in which helped to define the boundaries of community membership. In all Indian societies, those who seemed to possess special abilities to invoke supernatural powers—shamans, medicine men, and other religious leaders—held positions of respect and authority.

Indian religion did not pose a sharp distinction between the natural and the supernatural, or secular and religious activities. In some respects, however, Indian religion was not that different from popular spiritual beliefs in Europe. Most Indians held that a single Creator stood atop the spiritual hierarchy. Nonetheless, nearly all Europeans arriving in the New World quickly concluded that Indians were in dire need of being converted to a true, Christian faith.

## Land and Property

Equally alien in European eyes were Indian attitudes toward property. Numerous land systems existed among Native Americans. Generally, however, village leaders assigned plots of land to individual families to use for a season or more, and tribes claimed specific areas for hunting. Unclaimed land remained free for anyone to use. Families “owned” the right to use land, but they did not own the land itself. Indians saw land, the basis of economic life for both hunting and farming societies, as a common resource, not an economic commodity. In the nineteenth century, the Indian leader Black Hawk would explain why, in his view, land could not be bought and sold: “The Great Spirit gave it to his children to live upon, and cultivate as far as necessary for their subsistence; and so long as they occupy and cultivate it, they have a right to the soil.” Few if any Indian societies were familiar with the idea of a fenced-off piece of land belonging forever to a single individual or family. There was no market in real estate before the coming of Europeans.

Nor were Indians devoted to the accumulation of wealth and material goods. Especially east of the Mississippi River, where villages moved every few years when soil or game became depleted, acquiring numerous possessions made little sense. However, status certainly mattered in Indian societies. Tribal leaders tended to come from a small number of families, and chiefs lived more splendidly than average members of society. But their reputation often rested on their willingness to share goods with others rather than hoarding them for themselves.

A few Indian societies had rigid social distinctions. Among the Natchez, descendants of the mound-building Mississippian culture, a chief, or “Great Sun,” occupied the top of the social order, with nobles, or “lesser suns,” below