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THE AMERICAN PAGEANT

FIFTEENTH EDITION

VOLUME I: TO 1877



DAVID M. KENNEDY • LIZABETH COHEN

CENGAGE ADVANTAGE EDITION

THE AMERICAN PAGEANT

A History of the American People

Volume 1: To 1877

FIFTEENTH EDITION

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A History of the American People

Volume 1: To 1877

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Brief Contents

1	New World Beginnings 33,000 B.C.E.–1769 C.E.	1
2	The Planting of English America 1500–1733	18
3	Settling the Northern Colonies 1619–1700	36
4	American Life in the Seventeenth Century 1607–1692	56
5	Colonial Society on the Eve of Revolution 1700–1775	72
6	The Duel for North America 1608–1763	94
7	The Road to Revolution 1763–1775	108
8	America Secedes from the Empire 1775–1783	128
9	The Confederation and the Constitution 1776–1790	150
10	Launching the New Ship of State 1789–1800	173
11	The Triumphs and Travails of the Jeffersonian Republic 1800–1812	199
12	The Second War for Independence and the Upsurge of Nationalism 1812–1824	220
13	The Rise of a Mass Democracy 1824–1840	241
14	Forging the National Economy 1790–1860	269
15	The Ferment of Reform and Culture 1790–1860	295
16	The South and the Slavery Controversy 1793–1860	321
17	Manifest Destiny and Its Legacy 1841–1848	341
18	Renewing the Sectional Struggle 1848–1854	361
19	Drifting Toward Disunion 1854–1861	383
20	Girding for War: The North and the South 1861–1865	405
21	The Furnace of Civil War 1861–1865	425
22	The Ordeal of Reconstruction 1865–1877	449

Contents

List of Maps xv
Preface xvii
About the Authors xxvii

1

NEW WORLD BEGINNINGS 33,000

B.C.E.–1769 C.E. 1

The Shaping of North America 1

Peopling the Americas 3

The Earliest Americans 4

Indirect Discoverers of the New
World 6

Europeans Enter Africa 6

Columbus Comes upon a New World 8

When Worlds Collide 8

The Spanish *Conquistadores* 10

The Conquest of Mexico 12

The Spread of Spanish America 13

[Chronology](#) 15

[To Learn More](#) 16

2

THE PLANTING OF ENGLISH AMERICA 1500–1733 18

England's Imperial Stirrings 18

Elizabeth Energizes England 19

England on the Eve of Empire 20

England Plants the Jamestown
Seedling 21

Cultural Clashes in the Chesapeake 23

The Indians' New World 25

Virginia: Child of Tobacco 26

Maryland: Catholic Haven 28

The West Indies: Way Station
to Mainland America 28

Colonizing the Carolinas 29

The Emergence of North Carolina 31

Late-Coming Georgia: The Buffer
Colony 32

The Plantation Colonies 33

[Chronology](#) 34

[To Learn More](#) 34

3

SETTLING THE NORTHERN COLONIES 1619–1700 36

The Protestant Reformation Produces
Puritanism 36

The Pilgrims End Their Pilgrimage
at Plymouth 37

The Bay Colony Bible Commonwealth 39

Building the Bay Colony 40

Trouble in the Bible Commonwealth 41

The Rhode Island “Sewer” 42

New England Spreads Out 42

Puritans versus Indians 44

Seeds of Colonial Unity and
Independence 45

Andros Promotes the First American
Revolution 46

Old Netherlanders at New Netherland 48

Friction with English and Swedish
Neighbors 49

Dutch Residues in New York 50

Penn's Holy Experiment in
Pennsylvania 51

Quaker Pennsylvania and Its Neighbors 52

The Middle Way in the Middle
Colonies 53

[Chronology](#) 54

[To Learn More](#) 55

4

AMERICAN LIFE IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY 1607–1692 56

The Unhealthy Chesapeake 56

The Tobacco Economy 57

- Frustrated Freemen and Bacon's
Rebellion 58
- Colonial Slavery 59
- THINKING GLOBALLY:** The Atlantic Slave
Trade, 1500–1860 60
- Africans in America 62
- Southern Society 63
- The New England Family 64
- Life in the New England Towns 65
- The Half-Way Covenant and the Salem
Witch Trials 66
- The New England Way of Life 68
- The Early Settlers' Days and Ways 69
- [Chronology](#) 70
- [To Learn More](#) 71

5

COLONIAL SOCIETY ON THE EVE OF REVOLUTION 1700–1775 72

- Conquest by the Cradle 72
- A Mingling of the Races 73
- The Structure of Colonial Society 75
- Clerics, Physicians, and Jurists 77
- Workaday America 77
- Horsepower and Sailpower 80
- Dominant Denominations 80
- The Great Awakening 82
- Schools and Colleges 84
- A Provincial Culture 86
- Pioneer Presses 88
- The Great Game of Politics 88
- Colonial Folkways 91
- [Chronology](#) 92
- [To Learn More](#) 92

6

THE DUEL FOR NORTH AMERICA 1608–1763 94

- France Finds a Foothold in Canada 94
- New France Fans Out 95
- The Clash of Empires 97
- George Washington Inaugurates
War with France 98
- Global War and Colonial Disunity 99

- Braddock's Blundering and Its
Aftermath 101
- Pitt's Palms of Victory 102
- Restless Colonists 103
- War's Fateful Aftermath 104
- [Chronology](#) 106
- [To Learn More](#) 106

7

THE ROAD TO REVOLUTION 1763–1775 108

- The Deep Roots of Revolution 108
- Mercantilism and Colonial
Grievances 109
- The Merits and Menace of
Mercantilism 110
- The Stamp Tax Uproar 111
- Forced Repeal of the Stamp Act 113
- The Townshend Tea Tax and the Boston
“Massacre” 114
- The Seditious Committees of
Correspondence 115
- Tea Brewing in Boston 116
- Parliament Passes the “Intolerable
Acts” 118
- Bloodshed 118
- Imperial Strength and Weakness 120
- American Pluses and Minuses 121
- THINKING GLOBALLY:** Imperial Rivalry and
Colonial Revolt 122
- A Thin Line of Heroes 124
- [Chronology](#) 126
- [To Learn More](#) 126

8

AMERICA SECEDES FROM THE EMPIRE 1775–1783 128

- Congress Drafts George Washington 128
- Bunker Hill and Hessian Hirelings 129
- The Abortive Conquest of Canada 130
- Thomas Paine Preaches Common
Sense 130
- Paine and the Idea of
“Republicanism” 132

Jefferson’s “Explanation” of Independence 133
 Patriots and Loyalists 135
 The Loyalist Exodus 136
 General Washington at Bay 137
 Burgoyne’s Blundering Invasion 138
 Revolution in Diplomacy? 139
 The Colonial War Becomes a Wider War 141
 Blow and Counterblow 142
 The Land Frontier and the Sea Frontier 144
 Yorktown and the Final Curtain 145
 Peace at Paris 146
 A New Nation Legitimized 147
[Chronology](#) 148
[To Learn More](#) 149

9

THE CONFEDERATION AND THE CONSTITUTION 1776–1790 150
 The Pursuit of Equality 150
 Constitution Making in the States 152
 Economic Crosscurrents 153
 A Shaky Start toward Union 154
 Creating a Confederation 155
 The Articles of Confederation: America’s First Constitution 156
 Landmarks in Land Laws 157
 The World’s Ugly Duckling 158
 The Horrid Specter of Anarchy 159
 A Convention of “Demigods” 160
 Patriots in Philadelphia 162
 Hammering Out a Bundle of Compromises 162
 Safeguards for Conservatism 164
 The Clash of Federalists and Antifederalists 165
 The Great Debate in the States 168
 The Four Laggard States 169
 A Conservative Triumph 170
[Chronology](#) 171
[To Learn More](#) 171

10

LAUNCHING THE NEW SHIP OF STATE 1789–1800 173
 Growing Pains 174
 Washington for President 174
 The Bill of Rights 175
 Hamilton Revives the Corpse of Public Credit 176
 Customs Duties and Excise Taxes 177
 Hamilton Battles Jefferson for a Bank 179
 Mutinous Moonshiners in Pennsylvania 180
 The Emergence of Political Parties 181
 The Impact of the French Revolution 182
 Washington’s Neutrality Proclamation 183
THINKING GLOBALLY: Two Revolutions 184
 Embroilments with Britain 186
 Jay’s Treaty and Washington’s Farewell 188
 John Adams Becomes President 189
 Unofficial Fighting with France 190
 Adams Puts Patriotism above Party 191
 The Federalist Witch Hunt 192
 The Virginia (Madison) and Kentucky (Jefferson) Resolutions 193
 Federalists versus Democratic-Republicans 195
[Chronology](#) 197
[To Learn More](#) 198

11

THE TRIUMPHS AND TRAVAIS OF THE JEFFERSONIAN REPUBLIC 1800–1812 199
 Federalist and Republican Mudslingers 199
 The Jeffersonian “Revolution of 1800” 201
 Responsibility Breeds Moderation 202
 Jeffersonian Restraint 203
 The “Dead Clutch” of the Judiciary 204

Jefferson, a Reluctant Warrior 206
 The Louisiana Godsend 207
 Louisiana in the Long View 209
 The Aaron Burr Conspiracies 211
 A Precarious Neutrality 212
 The Hated Embargo 213
 Madison’s Gamble 214
 Tecumseh and the Prophet 216
 Mr. Madison’s War 217
[Chronology](#) 218
[To Learn More](#) 219

12

THE SECOND WAR FOR INDEPENDENCE AND THE UPSURGE OF NATIONALISM 1812–1824 220
 On to Canada over Land and Lakes 220
 Washington Burned and New Orleans Defended 222
 The Treaty of Ghent 223
 Federalist Grievances and the Hartford Convention 223
 The Second War for American Independence 224
 Nascent Nationalism 226
 “The American System” 227
 The So-Called Era of Good Feelings 228
 The Panic of 1819 and the Curse of Hard Times 229
 Growing Pains of the West 229
 Slavery and the Sectional Balance 230
 The Uneasy Missouri Compromise 231
 John Marshall and Judicial Nationalism 233
 Judicial Dikes against Democratic Excesses 233
 Sharing Oregon and Acquiring Florida 235
 The Menace of Monarchy in America 236
 Monroe and His Doctrine 237
 Monroe’s Doctrine Appraised 238
[Chronology](#) 239
[To Learn More](#) 240

13

THE RISE OF A MASS DEMOCRACY 1824–1840 241
 The “Corrupt Bargain” of 1824 242
 A Yankee Misfit in the White House 243
 Going “Whole Hog” for Jackson in 1828 244
 “Old Hickory” as President 245
 The Spoils System 246
 The Tricky “Tariff of Abominations” 247
THINKING GLOBALLY: Alexis de Tocqueville on Democracy in America and Europe 248
 “Nullies” in South Carolina 250
 The Trail of Tears 252
 The Bank War 255
 “Old Hickory” Wallops Clay in 1832 256
 Burying Biddle’s Bank 257
 The Birth of the Whigs 258
 The Election of 1836 259
 Big Woes for the “Little Magician” 259
 Depression Doldrums and the Independent Treasury 260
 Gone to Texas 261
 The Lone Star Rebellion 262
 Log Cabins and Hard Cider of 1840 263
 Politics for the People 265
 The Two-Party System 266
[Chronology](#) 266
[To Learn More](#) 267

14

FORGING THE NATIONAL ECONOMY 1790–1860 269
 The Westward Movement 269
 Shaping the Western Landscape 270
 The March of the Millions 271
 The Emerald Isle Moves West 273
 The German Forty-Eighters 274

Flare-ups of Antiforeignism 275
 Creeping Mechanization 276
 Whitney Ends the Fiber Famine 277
 Marvels in Manufacturing 278
 Workers and “Wage Slaves” 281
 Women and the Economy 282
 Western Farmers Reap a Revolution in
 the Fields 284
 Highways and Steamboats 285
 “Clinton’s Big Ditch” in New York 287
 The Iron Horse 289
 Cables, Clippers, and Pony Riders 289
 The Transport Web Binds the
 Union 290
 The Market Revolution 291
[Chronology](#) 293
[To Learn More](#) 294

15

**THE FERMENT OF REFORM AND
 CULTURE 1790–1860 295**
 Reviving Religion 295
 Denominational Diversity 298
 A Desert Zion in Utah 299
 Free Schools for a Free People 300
 Higher Goals for Higher Learning 301
 An Age of Reform 302
 Demon Rum—The “Old
 Deluder” 303
 Women in Revolt 304
 Wilderness Utopias 307
 The Dawn of Scientific
 Achievement 307
 Artistic Achievements 309
 The Blossoming of a National
 Literature 311
 Trumpeters of Transcendentalism 312
 Glowing Literary Lights 315
 Literary Individualists and
 Dissenters 316
 Portrayers of the Past 318
[Chronology](#) 318
[To Learn More](#) 319

16

**THE SOUTH AND THE SLAVERY
 CONTROVERSY 1793–1860 321**
 “Cotton Is King!” 321
 The Planter “Aristocracy” 322
 Slaves of the Slave System 323
 The White Majority 324
 Free Blacks: Slaves without Masters 327
 Plantation Slavery 327
 Life under the Lash 329
 The Burdens of Bondage 331
 Early Abolitionism 332
 Radical Abolitionism 333
 The South Lashes Back 335
**THINKING GLOBALLY: The Struggle to
 Abolish Slavery 336**
 The Abolitionist Impact in the North 339
[Chronology](#) 339
[To Learn More](#) 340

17

**MANIFEST DESTINY AND ITS LEGACY
 1841–1848 341**
 The Accession of “Tyler Too” 341
 John Tyler: A President without a
 Party 342
 A War of Words with Britain 343
 Manipulating the Maine Maps 345
 The Lone Star of Texas Shines
 Alone 346
 The Belated Texas Nuptials 347
 Oregon Fever Populates Oregon 348
 A Mandate (?) for Manifest Destiny 349
 Polk the Purposeful 350
 Misunderstandings with Mexico 352
 American Blood on American (?)
 Soil 353
 The Mastering of Mexico 354
 Fighting Mexico for Peace 356
 Profit and Loss in Mexico 357
[Chronology](#) 359
[To Learn More](#) 359

18

- RENEWING THE SECTIONAL STRUGGLE 1848–1854 361**
- The Popular Sovereignty Panacea 361
 - Political Triumphs for General Taylor 362
 - “Californy Gold” 363
 - Sectional Balance and the Underground Railroad 364
 - Twilight of the Senatorial Giants 366
 - Deadlock and Danger on Capitol Hill 368
 - Breaking the Congressional Logjam 369
 - Balancing the Compromise Scales 370
 - Defeat and Doom for the Whigs 372
 - Expansionist Stirrings South of the Border 373
 - The Allure of Asia 375
 - Pacific Railroad Promoters and the Gadsden Purchase 377
 - Douglas’s Kansas-Nebraska Scheme 378
 - Congress Legislates a Civil War 380
 - [Chronology 381](#)
 - [To Learn More 381](#)

19

- DRIFTING TOWARD DISUNION 1854–1861 383**
- Stowe and Helper: Literary Incendiaries 383
 - The North-South Contest for Kansas 385
 - Kansas in Convulsion 386
 - “Bully” Brooks and His Bludgeon 387
 - “Old Buck” versus “The Pathfinder” 388
 - The Electoral Fruits of 1856 389
 - The Dred Scott Bombshell 391
 - The Financial Crash of 1857 392
 - An Illinois Rail-Splitter Emerges 393
 - The Great Debate: Lincoln versus Douglas 394
 - John Brown: Murderer or Martyr? 395
 - The Disruption of the Democrats 397

- A Rail-Splitter Splits the Union 398
- The Electoral Upheaval of 1860 399
- The Secessionist Exodus 400
- The Collapse of Compromise 401
- Farewell to Union 402
- [Chronology 403](#)
- [To Learn More 404](#)

20

- GIRDING FOR WAR: THE NORTH AND THE SOUTH 1861–1865 405**
- The Menace of Secession 405
 - South Carolina Assails Fort Sumter 406
 - Brothers’ Blood and Border Blood 408
 - The Balance of Forces 409
 - Dethroning King Cotton 412
 - The Decisiveness of Diplomacy 413
 - Foreign Flare-Ups 414
 - President Davis versus President Lincoln 415
 - Limitations on Wartime Liberties 417
 - Volunteers and Draftees: North and South 418
 - The Economic Stresses of War 419
 - The North’s Economic Boom 420
 - A Crushed Cotton Kingdom 422
 - [Chronology 423](#)
 - [To Learn More 423](#)

21

- THE FURNACE OF CIVIL WAR 1861–1865 425**
- Bull Run Ends the “Ninety-Day War” 425
 - “Tardy George” McClellan and the Peninsula Campaign 426
 - The War at Sea 428
 - The Pivotal Point: Antietam 429
 - A Proclamation without Emancipation 431
 - Blacks Battle Bondage 432
 - Lee’s Last Lunge at Gettysburg 433
 - The War in the West 434

Sherman Scorches Georgia 436
 The Politics of War 437
 The Election of 1864 438
 Grant Outlasts Lee 440
 The Martyrdom of Lincoln 442
 The Aftermath of the Nightmare 443
THINKING GLOBALLY: The Era of
 Nationalism 444
 Chronology 447
 To Learn More 448

22

**THE ORDEAL OF RECONSTRUCTION
 1865–1877 449**
 The Problems of Peace 449
 Freedmen Define Freedom 450
 The Freedmen’s Bureau 452
 Johnson: The Tailor President 452
 Presidential Reconstruction 453
 The Baleful Black Codes 454

Congressional Reconstruction 455
 Johnson Clashes with Congress 456
 Swinging ’round the Circle with
 Johnson 456
 Republican Principles and Programs 457
 Reconstruction by the Sword 457
 No Women Voters 459
 The Realities of Radical Reconstruction
 in the South 460
 The Ku Klux Klan 461
 Johnson Walks the Impeachment
 Plank 461
 A Not-Guilty Verdict for Johnson 462
 The Purchase of Alaska 462
 The Heritage of Reconstruction 463
 Chronology 464
 To Learn More 464

APPENDIX

Documents **D-1**
 Index **I-1**

List of Maps

- 1.1** Principal Voyages of Discovery 10
- 2.1** Virginia and Maryland, Circa 1675 22
- 3.1** The Anglo-American Colonies in the Early Eighteenth Century 43
- 4.1** African Origins of North American Slaves, 1690–1807 60
- 5.1** Atlantic Trade Routes 79
- 6.1** The Seven Years' War in North America, 1754–1760 100
- 8.1** Northern Campaigns, 1776–1778 131
- 8.2** Southern Campaigns, 1778–1781 143
- 9.1** Ratification of the Constitution 167
- 10.1** The West, 1790–1796 187
- 11.1** The Louisiana Purchase and the Exploration of the West 210
- 12.1** The Missouri Compromise and Slavery, 1820–1821 232
- 13.1** Indian Removals, 1830–1846 254
- 14.1** Major Rivers, Roads, and Canals, 1825–1860 288
- 16.1** Southern Cotton Production and Population Increase, 1821–1859 326
- 17.1** War with Mexico, 1846–1847 355
- 18.1** The Compromise of 1850 370
- 18.2** Kansas-Nebraska and Slavery 379
- 19.1** Presidential Election of 1856 390
- 20.1** Seceding States (with order of secession) 407
- 21.1** Presidential Election of 1864 (showing popular vote by county) 440
- 21.2** Grant against Lee in Virginia 441
- 22.1** The Reconstruction of the South 458

Preface

This fifteenth edition of *The American Pageant* reflects our continuing collaboration to bring the most recent scholarship about American history to the broadest possible student audience, while preserving the readability that has long been the *Pageant*'s hallmark. We are often told that the *Pageant* stands out as the only American history text with a distinctive personality. We define its leading characteristics as clarity, concreteness, a strong emphasis on major themes, integration of a broad range of historical topics into a coherent and clutter-free narrative, attention to a variety of interpretive perspectives, and a colorful writing style leavened, as appropriate, with wit. That personality, we strongly believe, is what has made the *Pageant* both appealing and useful to countless students for more than five decades.

Our collaboration on the *Pageant* reflects our respective scholarly interests, which are complementary to a remarkable degree. David Kennedy is primarily a political and economic historian, while Lizabeth Cohen's work emphasizes social and cultural history. Together, we have once again revised the *Pageant* chapter by chapter, even paragraph by paragraph, guided by our shared commitment to tell the story of the American past as vividly and clearly as possible, without sacrificing a sense of the often sobering seriousness of history and of its sometimes challenging complexity.

GOALS OF *THE AMERICAN PAGEANT*

Like its predecessors, this edition of *The American Pageant* seeks to cultivate in its readers the capacity for balanced judgment and informed understanding about American society by holding up to the present the mirror and measuring rod that is the past.

While the narrative propels the story, we bring in voices from the past to encourage critical thinking. Boxed quotes throughout help students hear the language of real people who experienced historical events.

The book's goal is not to teach the art of prophecy but the much subtler and more difficult arts of seeing things in context, of understanding the roots and direction and pace of change, and of distinguishing what is truly new under the sun from what is not. The study of history, it has been rightly said, does not make one smart for the next time, but wise forever.

We hope that the *Pageant* will help to develop the art of critical thinking in its readers, and that those who use the book will take from it both a fresh appreciation of what has gone before and a seasoned perspective on what is to come. We hope, too, that readers will take as much pleasure in reading *The American Pageant* as we have had in writing it.

CHANGES IN THE FIFTEENTH EDITION

As in past revisions, we have updated and streamlined the text narrative, with some reorganization of content and expansion of the discussion of social and economic history.

Cultural History

This edition also offers markedly deeper explorations of the cultural innovations, artistic movements, and intellectual doctrines that have engaged and inspired Americans and shaped the course of American history. We believe that works of the imagination are an organic part of the larger historical picture, and that they both reflect and mold the society that gives rise to them. Readers will accordingly find substantially enhanced treatment of transcendentalism in Chapter 15, post-Civil War literature and art in Chapter 25, the transnational spread of artistic “modernism” in Chapter 31, and late-twentieth-century letters, art, and architecture in Chapters 37 and 42. We have also added a new “Thinking Globally” essay on twentieth-century modernism. In all cases we have closely tied the discussion of these cultural and intellectual developments to the broader social and political contexts of which they were integral parts.

Global Context

We have also further expanded the *Pageant's* treatment of the global context of American history. Today, political leaders, capital investment, consumer products, rock bands, the Internet, and much else constantly traverse the globe. But even before sophisticated technology and mass communication, complex exchanges among peoples and nations around the world deeply shaped the course of American history. Students will frequently encounter in these pages the people, ideas, and events that crossed national borders to influence the experience of the United States. They will also be invited to compare salient aspects of American history with developments elsewhere in the world. We believe that a full understanding of what makes America exceptional requires knowing about other societies, and knowing when and why America's path followed or departed from that taken by other nations.

Within each chapter, both text and graphics help students compare American developments to developments around the world. Railroad building, cotton production, city size and urban reform strategies, immigration, automobile ownership, the economic effects of the Great Depression, women's participation in voting and the work force, the cultural and artistic phenomena of modernism and postmodernism, and much more should now be understood as part of world trends, not just as isolated American experiences. New boxed quotes bring more international voices to the events chronicled in the *Pageant's* historical narrative.

We have revised and expanded the “Thinking Globally” essays. Two such essays within each of the *Pageant's* six parts present different aspects of the American experience contextualized within world history. Readers learn how developments in North America were part of worldwide phenomena, be it the challenge to empire in the eighteenth century, the rise of socialist ideology in the nineteenth century, or the globalization that followed World War II. Students also see how key aspects of American history—such as participating in the slave trade and its abolition, making a revolution for independence, creating a more united modern state in the mid-nineteenth century, and struggling to survive the Great Depression and World War II—were encountered by other nations but resolved in distinctive ways

according to each country’s history, cultural traditions, and political and economic structures.

This edition also gives renewed attention to teaching strategies and pedagogical materials aimed at helping students deepen their comprehension of American history. New visual materials—documentary images, graphs, and tables—illuminate complex and important historical ideas. Key terms are printed in bold in each chapter and defined in a glossary available on the student Web site. Every chapter concludes with an expanded chronology and a list of readable books to consult in order “To Learn More.” (A fuller, chapter-by-chapter annotated bibliography suitable for deeper research is also provided on the student Web site.) A revised Appendix contains annotated copies of the Declaration of Independence and Constitution and key historical events and dates such as admission of the states and presidential elections. On the Web site, students will also find an extensive visual profile of the United States with charts and graphs illustrating many aspects of the American historical experience as well as comparisons to other nations.

We remind students to take advantage of the many interactive study materials found on the *American Pageant* Web site (located at www.cengagebrain.com). See the following Supplements section for a complete description of the many materials found there. It is our hope that readers will view our Web site as an exploratory laboratory enhancing *The American Pageant*’s text.

Notes on Content Revisions

Chapter 4: Expanded Thinking Globally essay on “Atlantic Slave Trade, 1500–1860”

Chapter 7: New material on women’s role in the Revolutionary War

Chapter 10: New material on conflicts over government powers

Chapter 15: New material on art and architecture in “Artistic Achievements” section; new material on romanticism and Margaret Fuller

Chapter 16: Expanded Thinking Globally essay on “The Struggle to Abolish Slavery”

Chapter 25: New material on realism, naturalism, and regionalism, including Henry James, Edith Wharton, Theodore Dreiser, Kate Chopin, and Henry Adams in “Literary Landmarks” section; under “Artistic Triumphs” new brief discussions of Thomas Eakins, Winslow Homer, and Frederick Law Olmsted

Chapter 31: New material on Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Robert Frost, Carl Sandburg, Sinclair Lewis, Faulkner, and Eugene O’Neill; new Thinking Globally essay on “Modernism”

Chapter 37: New material in “A Cultural Renaissance” section on abstract expressionism, Frank Lloyd Wright, Louis Kahn, John Updike, John Cheever, Gore Vidal, J. D. Salinger, Richard Wright, Harper Lee, Ralph Ellison, Robert Penn Warren, and Flannery O’Connor

Chapter 41: New discussion of the Great Recession, the election of 2010, and the troubled Obama presidency

Chapter 42: New material on postmodernist thought, architecture, music, visual arts, literature, and film

SUPPLEMENTS AVAILABLE WITH *THE AMERICAN PAGEANT*, FIFTEENTH EDITION

Instructor Resources

Everything you need to teach the U.S. History survey course with *The American Pageant* can be found on a single Web site, using one single sign-on (SSO). Register at <http://login.cengage.com> and add *The American Pageant* 15e to your bookshelf to get instant access to most of the resources described below.

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David M. Kennedy
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*Sail, sail thy best, ship of Democracy,
Of value is thy freight, 'tis not the Present only,
The Past is also stored in thee,
Thou holdest not the venture of thyself alone, not of
the Western continent alone,
Earth's résumé entire floats on thy keel, O ship, is
steadied by thy spars,
With thee Time voyages in trust, the antecedent
nations sink or swim with thee,
With all their ancient struggles, martyrs, heroes, epics,
wars, thou bear'st the other continents,
Theirs, theirs as much as thine, the destination-port
triumphant....*

Walt Whitman

“Thou Mother with Thy Equal Brood,” 1872

About the Authors



David M. Kennedy is the Donald J. McLachlan Professor of History Emeritus and Co-Director of The Bill Lane Center for the Study of the North American West at Stanford University, where he has taught for four decades. Born and raised in Seattle, he received his undergraduate education at Stanford and did his graduate training at Yale in American Studies, combining the fields of history, economics, and literature. His first book, *Birth Control in America: The Career of Margaret Sanger* (1970), was honored with both the Bancroft Prize and the John Gilmary Shea Prize. His study of the World War I era, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (1980; rev. ed., 2005), was a

Pulitzer Prize finalist. In 1999 he published *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929–1945*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for History, as well as the Francis Parkman Prize, the English-Speaking Union’s Ambassador’s Prize, and the Commonwealth Club of California’s Gold Medal for Literature. At Stanford he teaches both undergraduate and graduate courses in American political, diplomatic, intellectual, and social history, as well as in American literature. He has received several teaching awards, including the Dean’s Award for Distinguished Teaching and the Hoagland Prize for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching. He has been a visiting professor at the University of Florence, Italy, and in 1995–1996 served as the Harmsworth Professor of American History at Oxford University. He has also served on the Advisory Board for the PBS television series *The American Experience*, and as a consultant to several documentary films, including *The Great War*, *Cadillac Desert*, and *Woodrow Wilson*. From 1990 to 1995 he chaired the Test Development Committee for the Advanced Placement United States History examination. He is an elected Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and of the American Philosophical Society and served from 2002 to 2011 on the board of the Pulitzer Prizes. Married and the father of two sons and a daughter, in his leisure time he enjoys hiking, bicycling, river-rafting, flying, sea-kayaking, and fly-fishing. He is currently writing a book on the American national character.



Lizabeth Cohen is the Howard Mumford Jones Professor of American Studies in the history department of Harvard University. In 2007–2008 she was the Harmsworth Professor of American History at Oxford University. Previously she taught at New York University (1992–1997) and Carnegie Mellon University (1986–1992). Born and raised in the New York metropolitan area, she received her A.B. from Princeton University and her M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley. Her first book, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (1990), won the Bancroft Prize in American History and the Philip Taft Labor History Award, and was a finalist for the Pulitzer

Prize. In 2008 it was reissued in a second edition with a new introduction. Her article “Encountering Mass Culture at the Grassroots: The Experience of Chicago Workers in the 1920s” (1989) was awarded the Constance Roarke Prize of the American Studies Association. Her most recent book, *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (2003), explored how an economy and culture built around mass consumption shaped social life and politics in post–World War II America. An article related to this book, “From Town Center to Shopping Center: The Reconfiguration of Community Marketplaces in Postwar America” (1996), was honored as the best article in urban history by the Urban History Association and received the ABC-CLIO, America: History and Life Award for the journal article that most advances previously unconsidered topics. She is currently writing a book, *Saving America’s Cities: Ed Logue and the Struggle to Renew Urban America in the Suburban Age*, on urban renewal in American cities after World War II. At Harvard, she teaches courses in twentieth-century American history, with particular attention to the intersection of social and cultural life and politics, and in 2011 she was named the Interim Dean of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. Before attending graduate school, she taught history at the secondary level and worked in history and art museums. She continues to help develop public history programs for general audiences through museums and documentary films. She is married to an historian of modern France, with whom she has two daughters. For leisure, she enjoys swimming and bicycling with her family, watching films, and reading fiction.

Thomas A. Bailey (1903–1983) was the original author of *The American Pageant* and saw it through its first seven editions. He taught history for nearly forty years at Stanford University, his alma mater. Long regarded as one of the nation's leading historians of American diplomacy, he was honored by his colleagues in 1968 with election to the presidencies of both the Organization of American Historians and the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations. He was the author, editor, or co-editor of some twenty books, but the work in which he took most pride was *The American Pageant*, through which, he liked to say, he had taught American history to several million students.

CENGAGE ADVANTAGE EDITION

THE AMERICAN PAGEANT

A History of the American People

Volume 1: To 1877

FIFTEENTH EDITION

1

NEW WORLD BEGINNINGS

33,000 B.C.E.—1769 C.E.

I have come to believe that this is a mighty continent which was hitherto unknown. ... Your Highnesses have an Other World here.

Christopher Columbus, 1498

Several billion years ago, that whirling speck of dust known as the earth, fifth in size among the planets, came into being.

About six thousand years ago—only a minute in geological time—recorded history of the Western world began. Certain peoples of the Middle East, developing a written culture, gradually emerged from the haze of the past.

Five hundred years ago—only a few seconds figuratively speaking—European explorers stumbled on the Americas. This dramatic accident forever altered the future of both the Old World and the New, and of Africa and Asia as well (see Figure 1.1 on the next page).

THE SHAPING OF NORTH AMERICA

Planet earth took on its present form slowly. Some 225 million years ago, a single supercontinent contained all the world's dry land. Then enormous chunks of terrain began to drift away from this colossal landmass, opening the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, narrowing the Pacific Ocean, and forming the great continents of Eurasia, Africa, Australia, Antarctica, and the Americas. The existence of a single original continent has been proved in part by the discovery of nearly identical species of fish that swim today in long-separated freshwater lakes throughout the world.

Continued shifting and folding of the earth's crust thrust up mountain ranges. The Appalachians were probably formed even before continental separation, perhaps 350 million years ago. The majestic ranges of western North America—the Rockies, the Sierra Nevada, the Cascades, and the Coast Ranges—arose much more recently, geologically speaking, some 135 million to 25 million years ago. They are truly “American” mountains, born after the continent took on its own separate geological identity.

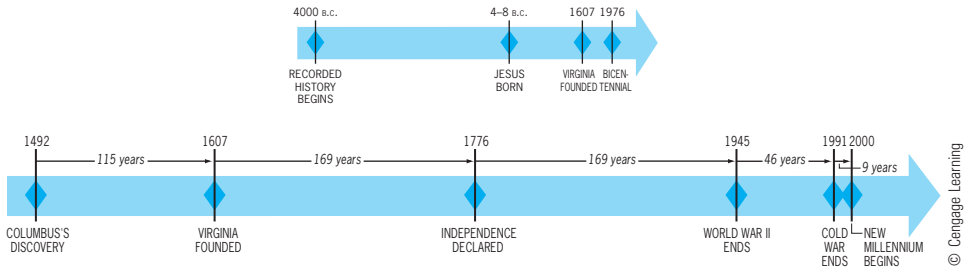


FIGURE 1.1 The Arc of Time

By about 10 million years ago, nature had sculpted the basic geological shape of North America. The continent was anchored in its northeastern corner by the massive **Canadian Shield**—a zone undergirded by ancient rock, probably the first part of what became the North American landmass to have emerged above sea level. A narrow eastern coastal plain, or “tidewater” region, creased by many river valleys, sloped gently upward to the timeworn ridges of the Appalachians. Those ancient mountains slanted away on their western side into the huge midcontinental basin that rolled downward to the Mississippi Valley bottom and then rose relentlessly to the towering peaks of the Rockies. From the Rocky Mountain crest—the “roof of America”—the land fell off jaggedly into the intermountain Great Basin, bounded by the Rockies on the east and the Sierra and Cascade ranges on the west. The valleys of the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers and the Willamette–Puget Sound trough seamed the interiors of present-day California, Oregon, and Washington. The land at last met the foaming Pacific, where the Coast Ranges rose steeply from the sea.

Nature laid a chill hand over much of this terrain in the Great Ice Age, beginning about 2 million years ago. Two-mile-thick ice sheets crept from the polar regions to blanket parts of Europe, Asia, and the Americas. In North America the great glaciers carpeted most of present-day Canada and the United States as far southward as a line stretching from Pennsylvania through the Ohio Country and the Dakotas to the Pacific Northwest.

When the glaciers finally retreated about 10,000 years ago, they left the North American landscape transformed, and much as we know it today. The weight of the gargantuan ice mantle had depressed the level of the Canadian Shield. The grinding and flushing action of the moving and melting ice had scoured away the shield’s topsoil, pitting its rocky surface with thousands of shallow depressions into which the melting glaciers flowed to form lakes. The same glacial action scooped out and filled the Great Lakes. They originally drained southward through the Mississippi River system to the Gulf of Mexico. When the melting ice unblocked the Gulf of St. Lawrence, the lake water sought the St. Lawrence River outlet to the Atlantic Ocean, lowering the Great Lakes’ level and leaving the Missouri–Mississippi–Ohio system to drain the enormous midcontinental basin between the Appalachians and the Rockies. Similarly, in the West, water from the melting glaciers filled sprawling Lake Bonneville, covering much of present-day Utah, Nevada, and Idaho. It drained

to the Pacific Ocean through the Snake and Columbia River systems until diminishing rainfall from the ebbing ice cap lowered the water level, cutting off access to the Snake River outlet. Deprived of both inflow and drainage, the giant lake became a gradually shrinking inland sea. It grew increasingly saline, slowly evaporated, and left an arid, mineral-rich desert. Only the Great Salt Lake remained as a relic of Bonneville's former vastness. Today Lake Bonneville's ancient beaches are visible on mountainsides up to 1,000 feet above the dry floor of the Great Basin.

PEOPLING THE AMERICAS

The Great Ice Age shaped more than the geological history of North America. It also contributed to the origins of the continent's human history. Though recent (and still highly controversial) evidence suggests that some early peoples may have reached the Americas in crude boats, most probably came by land. Some 35,000 years ago, the Ice Age congealed much of the world's oceans into massive ice-pack glaciers, lowering the level of the sea. As the sea level dropped, it exposed a land bridge connecting Eurasia with North America in the area of the present-day Bering Sea between Siberia and Alaska. Across that bridge, probably following migratory herds of game, ventured small bands of nomadic Asian hunters—the “immigrant” ancestors of the Native Americans. They continued to trek across the Bering isthmus for some 250 centuries, slowly peopling the American continents.

As the Ice Age ended and the glaciers melted, the sea level rose again, inundating the land bridge about 10,000 years ago. Nature thus barred the door to further immigration for many thousands of years, leaving this part of the human family marooned for millennia on the now-isolated American continents.

Time did not stand still for these original Americans. The same climatic warming that melted the ice and drowned the bridge to Eurasia gradually opened ice-free valleys through which vanguard bands groped their way southward and eastward across the Americas. Roaming slowly through this awesome wilderness, they eventually reached the far tip of South America, some 15,000 miles from Siberia. By the time Europeans arrived in America in 1492, perhaps 54 million people inhabited the two American continents.* Over the centuries they split into countless tribes, evolved more than 2,000 separate languages, and developed many diverse religions, cultures, and ways of life.

Incas in Peru, **Mayans** in Central America, and **Aztecs** in Mexico shaped stunningly sophisticated civilizations. Their advanced agricultural practices, based primarily on the cultivation of maize, which is Indian corn, fed large populations, perhaps as many as 20 million in Mexico alone. Although without large draft animals such as horses and oxen, and lacking even the simple technology of the wheel, these peoples built elaborate cities and carried on far-flung commerce. Talented mathematicians, they made strikingly accurate astronomical observations. The Aztecs also routinely sought the favor of their gods by offering human sacrifices, cutting the hearts out of the chests of living victims, who were often captives

*Much controversy surrounds estimates of the pre-Columbian Native American population. The figures here are from William M. Denevan, ed., *The Native Population of the Americas in 1492*, rev. ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992).

conquered in battle. By some accounts more than five thousand people were ritually slaughtered to celebrate the crowning of one Aztec chieftain.

THE EARLIEST AMERICANS

Agriculture, especially corn growing, accounted for the size and sophistication of the Native American civilizations in Mexico and South America. About 5000 B.C.E. hunter-gatherers in highland Mexico developed a wild grass into the staple crop of corn, which became their staff of life and the foundation of the complex, large-scale, centralized Aztec and Incan civilizations that eventually emerged. Cultivation of corn spread across the Americas from the Mexican heartland. Everywhere it was planted, corn began to transform nomadic hunting bands into settled agricultural villagers, but this process went forward slowly and unevenly.

Corn planting reached the present-day American Southwest as early as 2000 B.C.E. and powerfully molded Pueblo culture. The Pueblo peoples in the Rio Grande valley constructed intricate irrigation systems to water their cornfields. They were dwelling in villages of multistoried, terraced buildings when Spanish explorers made contact with them in the sixteenth century. (*Pueblo* means “village” in Spanish.)

Corn cultivation reached other parts of North America considerably later. The timing of its arrival in different localities explains much about the relative rates of development of different Native American peoples. Throughout the continent to the north and east of the land of the Pueblos, social life was less elaborately developed—indeed “societies” in the modern sense of the word scarcely existed. No dense concentrations of population or complex **nation-states** comparable to the Aztec empire existed in North America outside of Mexico at the time of the Europeans’ arrival—one of the reasons for the relative ease with which the European colonizers subdued the native North Americans.

The Mound Builders of the Ohio River valley, the Mississippian culture of the lower Midwest, and the desert-dwelling Anasazi peoples of the Southwest did sustain some large settlements after the incorporation of corn planting into their ways of life during the first millennium C.E. The Mississippian settlement at **Cahokia**, near present-day East St. Louis, was at one time home to as many as twenty-five thousand people. The Anasazis built an elaborate pueblo of more than six hundred interconnected rooms at Chaco Canyon in modern-day New Mexico. But mysteriously, perhaps due to prolonged drought, all those ancient cultures fell into decline by about 1300 C.E.

The cultivation of maize, as well as of high-yielding strains of beans and squash, reached the southeastern Atlantic seaboard region of North America about 1000 C.E. These plants made possible **three-sister farming**, with beans growing on the trellis of the cornstalks and squash covering the planting mounds to retain moisture in the soil. The rich diet provided by this environmentally clever farming technique produced some of the highest population densities on the continent, among them the Creek, Choctaw, and Cherokee peoples.

The Iroquois in the northeastern woodlands, inspired by a legendary leader named Hiawatha, created in the sixteenth century perhaps the closest North American approximation to the great empires of Mexico and Peru. The Iroquois



Cahokia Mounds Historic Site

Cahokia *This artist's rendering of Cahokia, based on archaeological excavations, shows the huge central square and the imposing Monk's Mound, which rivaled in size the pyramids of Egypt.*

Confederacy developed the political and organizational skills to sustain a robust military alliance that menaced its neighbors, Native American and European alike, for well over a century.

But for the most part, the native peoples of North America were living in small, scattered, and impermanent settlements on the eve of the Europeans' arrival. In more settled agricultural groups, women tended the crops while men hunted, fished, gathered fuel, and cleared fields for planting. This pattern of life frequently conferred substantial authority on women, and many North American native peoples, including the Iroquois, developed matrilineal cultures, in which power and possessions passed down the female side of the family line.

Unlike the Europeans, who would soon arrive with the presumption that humans had dominion over the earth and with the technologies to alter the very face of the land, the Native Americans had neither the desire nor the means to manipulate nature aggressively. They revered the physical world and endowed nature with spiritual properties. Yet they did sometimes ignite massive forest fires, deliberately torching thousands of acres of trees to create better hunting habitats, especially for deer. This practice accounted for the open, parklike appearance of the eastern woodlands that so amazed early European explorers.

But in a broad sense, the land did not feel the hand of the Native Americans heavy upon it, partly because they were so few in number. They were so thinly spread across the continent that vast areas were virtually untouched by a human presence. In the fateful year 1492, probably no more than 4 million Native Americans padded through the whispering, primeval forests and paddled across the sparkling, virgin waters of the continent north of Mexico. They were blissfully unaware that the historic isolation of the Americas was about to end forever, as the land and the native peoples alike felt the full shock of the European "discovery."

INDIRECT DISCOVERERS OF THE NEW WORLD

Europeans, for their part, were equally unaware of the existence of the Americas. Blond-bearded Norse seafarers from Scandinavia had chanced upon the northeastern shoulder of North America about 1000 C.E. They landed at a place near L'Anse aux Meadows in present-day Newfoundland that abounded in wild grapes, which led them to name the spot Vinland. But no strong nation-state, yearning to expand, supported these venturesome voyagers. Their flimsy settlements consequently were soon abandoned, and their discovery was forgotten, except in Scandinavian saga and song.

For several centuries thereafter, other restless Europeans, with the growing power of ambitious governments behind them, sought contact with a wider world, whether for conquest or trade. They thus set in motion the chain of events that led to a drive toward Asia, the penetration of Africa, and the completely accidental discovery of the New World.

Christian crusaders must rank high among America's indirect discoverers. Clad in shining armor, tens of thousands of these European warriors tried from the eleventh to the fourteenth century to wrest the Holy Land from Muslim control. Foiled in their military assaults, the crusaders nevertheless acquired a taste for the exotic delights of Asia. Goods that had been virtually unknown in Europe now were craved—silk for clothing, drugs for aching flesh, perfumes for unbathed bodies, colorful draperies for gloomy castles, and spices—especially sugar, a rare luxury in Europe before the crusades—for preserving and flavoring food. Europe's developing sweet tooth would have momentous implications for world history.

The luxuries of the East were prohibitively expensive in Europe. They had to be transported enormous distances from the Spice Islands (Indonesia), China, and India, in creaking ships and on swaying camel back. The journey led across the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf, and the Red Sea or along the tortuous caravan routes of Asia or the Arabian Peninsula, ending at the ports of the eastern Mediterranean. Muslim **middlemen** exacted a heavy toll en route. By the time the strange-smelling goods reached Italian merchants at Venice and Genoa, they were so costly that purchasers and profits alike were narrowly limited. European consumers and distributors were naturally eager to find a less expensive route to the riches of Asia or to develop alternate sources of supply.

EUROPEANS ENTER AFRICA

European appetites were further whetted when footloose Marco Polo, an Italian adventurer, returned to Europe in 1295 and began telling tales of his nearly twenty-year sojourn in China. Though he may in fact never have seen China (legend to the contrary, the hard evidence is sketchy), he must be regarded as an indirect discoverer of the New World, for his book, with its descriptions of rose-tinted pearls and golden pagodas, stimulated European desires for a cheaper route to the treasures of the East.

These accumulating pressures eventually brought a breakthrough for European expansion. Before the middle of the fifteenth century, European sailors refused to sail southward along the coast of West Africa because they could not

beat their way home against the prevailing northerly winds and south-flowing currents. About 1450, Portuguese mariners overcame those obstacles. Not only had they developed the *caravel*, a ship that could sail more closely into the wind, but they had discovered that they could return to Europe by sailing northwesterly from the African coast toward the Azores, where the prevailing westward breezes would carry them home.

The new world of sub-Saharan Africa now came within the grasp of questing Europeans. The northern shore of Africa, as part of the Mediterranean world, had been known to Europe since antiquity. But because sea travel down the African coast had been virtually impossible, Africa south of the forbidding Sahara Desert barrier had remained remote and mysterious. African gold, perhaps two-thirds of Europe's supply, crossed the Sahara on camelback, and shadowy tales may have reached Europe about the flourishing West African kingdom of Mali in the Niger River valley, with its impressive Islamic university at Timbuktu. But Europeans had no direct access to sub-Saharan Africa until the Portuguese navigators began to creep down the West African coast in the middle of the fifteenth century.

The Portuguese promptly set up trading posts along the African shore for the purchase of gold—and slaves. Arab flesh merchants and Africans themselves had traded slaves for centuries before the Europeans arrived. The slavers routinely charged higher prices for captives from distant sources, because they could not easily flee to their native villages or be easily rescued by their kin. Slave brokers also deliberately separated persons from the same tribes and mixed unlike people together to frustrate organized resistance. Thus from its earliest days, slavery by its very nature inhibited the expression of regional African cultures and tribal identities.

The Portuguese adopted these Arab and African practices. They built up their own systematic traffic in slaves to work the sugar plantations that Portugal, and later Spain, established on the African coastal islands of Madeira, the Canaries, São Tomé, and Príncipe. The Portuguese appetite for slaves was enormous and dwarfed the modest scale of the pre-European traffic. Slave trading became a big business. Some forty thousand Africans were carried away to the Atlantic sugar islands in the last half of the fifteenth century. Millions more were to be wrenched from their home continent after the discovery of the Americas. In these fifteenth-century Portuguese adventures in Africa were to be found the origins of the modern **plantation** system, based on large-scale commercial agriculture and the wholesale exploitation of slave labor. This kind of plantation economy would shape the destiny of much of the New World.

The seafaring Portuguese pushed still farther southward in search of the water route to Asia. Edging cautiously down the African coast, Bartholomeu Dias rounded the southernmost tip of the “Dark Continent” in 1488. Ten years later Vasco da Gama finally reached India (hence the name “Indies,” given by Europeans to all the mysterious lands of the Orient) and returned home with a small but tantalizing cargo of jewels and spices.

Meanwhile, the kingdom of Spain became united—an event pregnant with destiny—in the late fifteenth century. This new unity resulted primarily from the marriage of two sovereigns, Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, and from the brutal expulsion of the “infidel” Muslim Moors from Spain after centuries of Christian-Islamic warfare. Glorifying in their sudden strength, the Spaniards were

eager to outstrip their Portuguese rivals in the race to tap the wealth of the Indies. To the south and east, Portugal controlled the African coast and thus controlled the gateway to the round-Africa water route to India. Of necessity, therefore, Spain looked westward.

COLUMBUS COMES UPON A NEW WORLD

The stage was now set for a cataclysmic shift in the course of history—the history not only of Europe but of all the world. Europeans clamored for more and cheaper products from the lands beyond the Mediterranean. Africa had been established as a source of cheap slave labor for plantation agriculture. The Portuguese voyages had demonstrated the feasibility of long-range ocean navigation. In Spain a modern national state was taking shape, with the unity, wealth, and power to shoulder the formidable tasks of discovery, conquest, and colonization. The dawn of the Renaissance in the fourteenth century nurtured an ambitious spirit of optimism and adventure. Printing presses, introduced about 1450, facilitated the spread of scientific knowledge. The mariner’s compass, possibly borrowed from the Arabs, eliminated some of the uncertainties of sea travel. Meanwhile, across the ocean, the unsuspecting New World innocently awaited its European “discoverers.”

Onto this stage stepped Christopher Columbus. This skilled Italian seafarer persuaded the Spanish monarchs to outfit him with three tiny but seaworthy ships, manned by a motley crew. Daringly, he unfurled the sails of his cockleshell craft and headed westward. His superstitious sailors, fearful of venturing into the oceanic unknown, grew increasingly mutinous. After six weeks at sea, failure loomed until, on October 12, 1492, the crew sighted an island in the Bahamas. A new world thus swam within the vision of Europeans.

Columbus’s sensational achievement obscures the fact that he was one of the most successful failures in history. Seeking a new water route to the fabled Indies, he in fact had bumped into an enormous land barrier blocking the ocean pathway. For decades thereafter explorers strove to get through it or around it. The truth gradually dawned that sprawling new continents had been discovered. Yet Columbus was at first so certain that he had skirted the rim of the “Indies” that he called the native peoples Indians, a gross geographical misnomer that somehow stuck.

Columbus’s discovery would eventually convulse four continents—Europe, Africa, and the two Americas. Thanks to his epochal voyage, an interdependent global economic system emerged on a scale undreamed-of before he set sail. Its workings touched every shore washed by the Atlantic Ocean. Europe provided the markets, the capital, and the technology; Africa furnished the labor; and the New World offered its raw materials, especially its precious metals and its soil for the cultivation of sugar cane. For Europeans as well as for Africans and Native Americans, the world after 1492 would never be the same, for better or worse.

WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE

Two ecosystems—the fragile, naturally evolved networks of relations among organisms in a stable environment—commingled and clashed when Columbus waded ashore. The reverberations from that historic encounter—often called the

Columbian exchange—echoed for centuries after 1492. The flora and fauna of the Old and New Worlds had been separated for thousands of years. European explorers marveled at the strange sights that greeted them, including exotic beasts such as iguanas and “snakes with castanets” (rattlesnakes). Native New World plants such as tobacco, maize, beans, tomatoes, and especially the lowly potato eventually revolutionized the international economy as well as the European diet, feeding the rapid population growth of the Old World. These foodstuffs were among the most important Indian gifts to the Europeans and to the rest of the world. Perhaps three-fifths of the crops cultivated around the globe today originated in the Americas. Ironically, the introduction into Africa of New World foodstuffs like maize, manioc, and sweet potatoes may have fed an African population boom that numerically, though not morally, more than offset the losses inflicted by the slave trade.

In exchange the Europeans introduced Old World crops and animals to the Americas. Columbus returned to the Caribbean island of Hispaniola (present-day Haiti and the Dominican Republic) in 1493 with seventeen ships that unloaded twelve hundred men and a virtual Noah’s Ark of cattle, swine, and horses. The horses soon reached the North American mainland through Mexico and in less than two centuries had spread as far as Canada. North American Indian tribes like the Apaches, Sioux, and Blackfeet swiftly adopted the horse, transforming their cultures into highly mobile, wide-ranging hunter societies that roamed the grassy Great Plains in pursuit of the shaggy buffalo. Columbus also brought seedlings of sugarcane, which thrived in the warm Caribbean climate. A “sugar revolution” consequently took place in the European diet, fueled by the forced migration of millions of Africans to work the canefields and sugar mills of the New World.

Unwittingly, the Europeans also brought other organisms in the dirt on their boots and the dust on their clothes, such as the seeds of Kentucky bluegrass, dandelions, and daisies. Most ominous of all, in their bodies they carried the germs that caused smallpox, yellow fever, and malaria. Indeed, Old World diseases would quickly devastate the Native Americans. During the Indians’ millennia of isolation in the Americas, most of the Old World’s killer maladies had disappeared from among them. But generations of freedom from those illnesses had also wiped out protective antibodies. Devoid of natural resistance to Old World sicknesses, Indians died in droves. Within fifty years of the Spanish arrival, the population of the Taino natives in Hispaniola dwindled from some 1 million people to about two hundred. Enslavement and armed aggression took their toll, but the deadliest killers were microbes, not muskets. The lethal germs spread among the New World peoples with the speed and force of a hurricane, swiftly sweeping far ahead of the human invaders; most of those afflicted never laid eyes on a European. In the centuries after Columbus’s landfall, as many as 90 percent of the Native Americans perished, a demographic catastrophe without parallel in human history. This depopulation was surely not intended by the Spanish, but it was nevertheless so severe that entire cultures and ancient ways of life were extinguished forever. Baffled, enraged, and vengeful, Indian slaves sometimes kneaded tainted blood into their masters’ bread, to little effect. Perhaps it was poetic justice that the Indians unintentionally did take a kind of revenge by infecting the early explorers with syphilis, injecting that lethal sexually transmitted disease for the first time into Europe.