

# THE UNFINISHED NATION

A Concise  
History of the  
American  
People

VOLUME

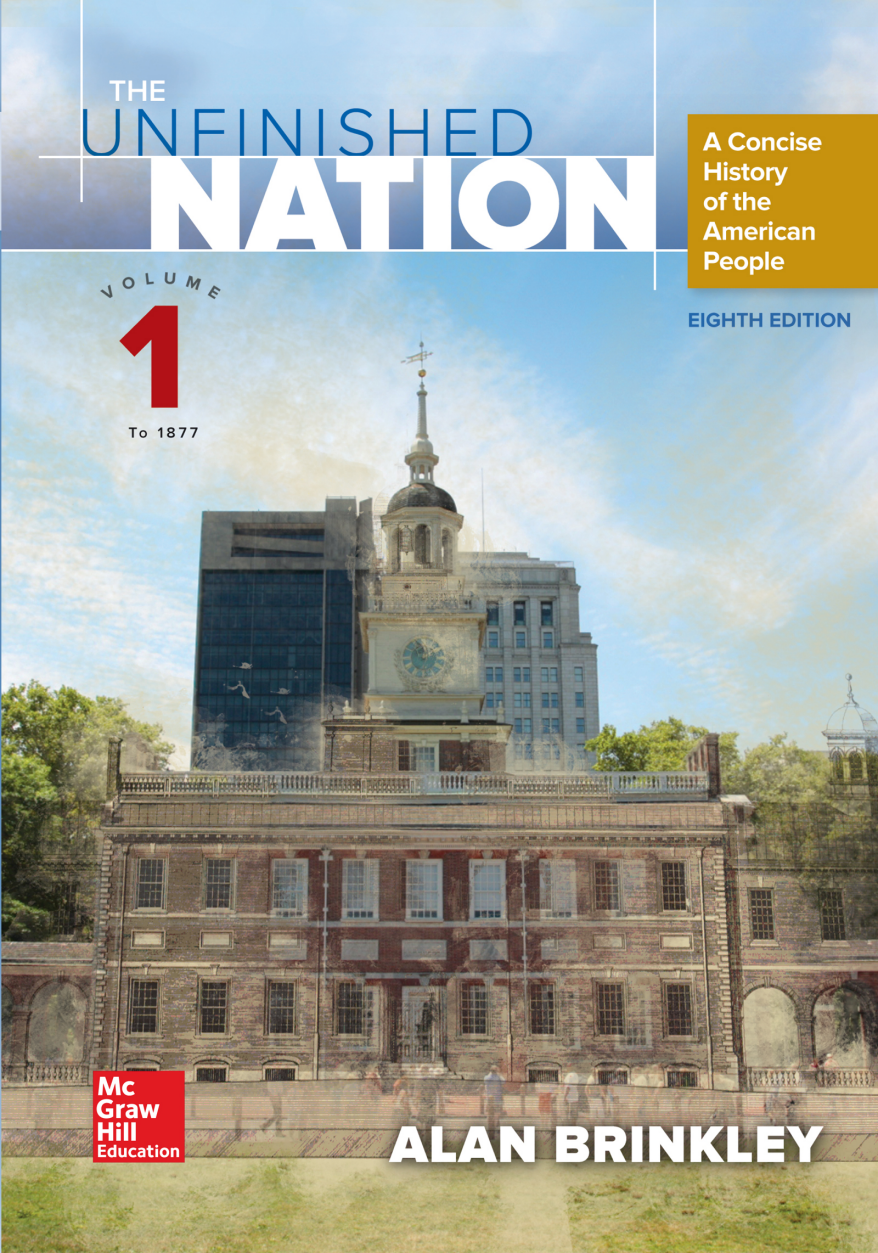
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To 1877

EIGHTH EDITION

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President Harry S. Truman



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WWII Territorial Changes and Battle Casualties

1942

- Conquered by Axis
- Conquered by Soviet Union
- Conquered by Axis powers
- Japanese-occupied areas
- Neutral or unoccupied

● Battle Sites

♣ 100K Allied soldiers killed

♣ 100K Axis soldiers killed

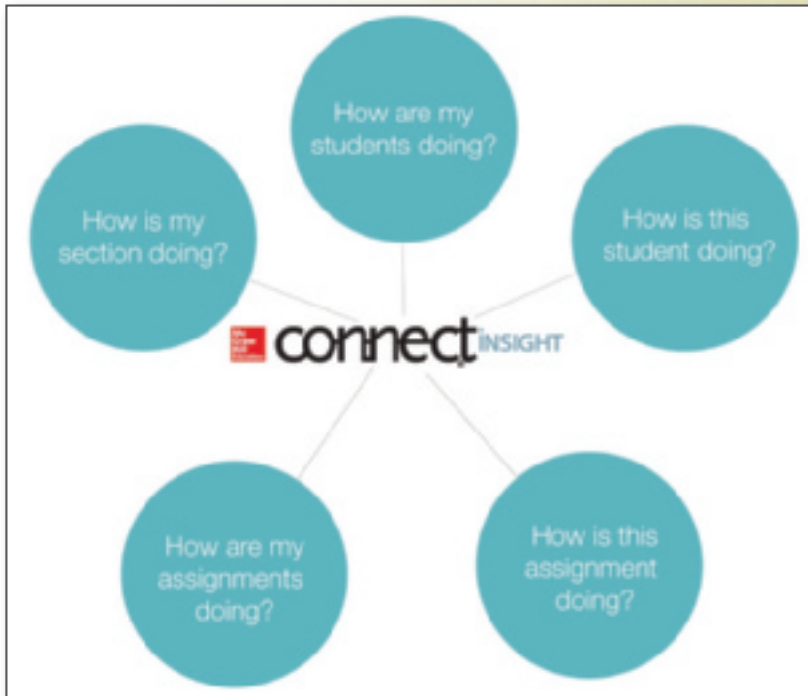
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# **THE UNFINISHED NATION**

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A Concise History of the  
American People  
Volume 1: To 1877

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# THE UNFINISHED NATION

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## A Concise History of the American People Volume 1: To 1877

Eighth Edition

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*Columbia University*

*with Contributions from*

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**THE** title *The Unfinished Nation* is meant to suggest several things. It is a reminder of America’s exceptional diversity—of the degree to which, despite all the many efforts to build a single, uniform definition of the meaning of American nationhood, that meaning remains contested. It is a reference to the centrality of change in American history—to the ways in which the nation has continually transformed itself and continues to do so in our own time. And it is also a description of the writing of American history itself—of the ways in which historians are engaged in a continuing, ever unfinished, process of asking new questions.

Like any history, *The Unfinished Nation* is a product of its time and reflects the views of the past that historians of recent generations have developed. The writing of our nation’s history—like our nation itself—changes constantly. It is not, of course, the past that changes. Rather, historians adjust their perspectives and priorities, ask different kinds of questions, and uncover and incorporate new historical evidence. There are now, as there have always been, critics of changes in historical understanding who argue that history is a collection of facts and should not be subject to “interpretation” or “revision.” But historians insist that history is not simply a collection of facts. Names and dates and a record of events are only the beginning of historical understanding. Writers and readers of history interpret the evidence before them, and inevitably bring to the task their own questions, concerns, and experiences.

Our history requires us to examine the many different peoples and ideas that have shaped American society. But it also requires us to understand that the United States is a nation whose people share many things: a common political system, a connection to an integrated national (and now international) economy, and a familiarity with a powerful mass culture. To understand the American past, it is necessary to understand both the forces that divide Americans and the forces that draw them together.

It is a daunting task to attempt to convey the history of the United States in a single book, and the eighth edition of *The Unfinished Nation* has, as have all previous editions, been carefully written and edited to keep the book as concise and readable as possible.

In addition to the content and scholarship updates that are detailed on page xxix, we have strengthened the pedagogical features with an eye to the details. We added a glossary of historical terms and bolded those terms within the text where significantly discussed. These terms, along with key names, places, and events, are listed at the end of chapters to help students review. All of the Consider the Source features now include concise introductions that provide context for the documents. Every Consider the Source, Debating the Past, Patterns of Popular Culture, and America in the World feature is referenced within the narrative, for a clearer indication of how the different lines of inquiry work together to create a vivid and nuanced portrait of each period. Margin notes have been reinstated as well, at the request of reviewers who missed this feature from earlier editions.

It is not only the writing of history that changes with time—the tools and technologies through which information is delivered change as well. New learning resources include:

- **McGraw-Hill Connect®**—an integrated educational platform that seamlessly joins superior content with enhanced digital tools (including SmartBook®) to deliver a personalized learning experience that provides precisely what students need—when and how they need it. New visual analytics, coupled with powerful reporting, provide immediate performance perspectives. Connect makes it easy to keep students on track.



- **SmartBook®**—an adaptive eBook that makes study time as productive and efficient as possible. It identifies and closes knowledge gaps through a continually adapting reading experience that provides personalized learning resources such as narrated map videos; key point summaries; time lines; and labeling activities at the precise moment of need. This ensures that every minute spent with SmartBook is returned to the student as the most value-added minute possible.
- **Critical Missions**—an activity within Connect History that immerses students in pivotal moments in history. As students study primary sources and maps, they advise a key historical figure on an issue of vital importance—for example, should President Truman drop the atomic bomb on Japan?
- **Primary Source Primer**—a video exercise in Connect History with multiple-choice questions. The primer teaches students the importance of primary sources and how to analyze them. This online “Introduction to Primary Sources” is designed for use at the beginning of the course, to save valuable class time.
- **Create™**—a service that allows professors to create a customized version of *The Unfinished Nation* by selecting the chapters and additional primary source documents that best fit their course, while adding their own materials if desired. Register at [www.mcgrawhillcreate.com](http://www.mcgrawhillcreate.com) to build a complimentary review copy.
- **McGraw-Hill Campus**—a first-of-its-kind institutional service that provides faculty with true, single sign-on access to all of McGraw-Hill’s course content, digital tools, and other high-quality learning resources from any learning management system (LMS). This innovative offering allows secure, deep integration and seamless access to any of our course solutions, including McGraw-Hill Connect, McGraw-Hill LearnSmart, McGraw-Hill Create, and Tegrity. McGraw-Hill Campus covers our entire content library, including eBooks, assessment tools, presentation slides, and multimedia content, among other resources. This open and unlimited service allows faculty to quickly prepare for class, create tests or quizzes, develop lecture material, integrate interactive content, and much more.

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# A GUIDED TOUR OF THE UNFINISHED NATION

The *Unfinished Nation* makes history relevant to students through a series of engaging features:

## CONSIDER THE SOURCE FEATURES

In every chapter, Consider the Source features guide students through careful analysis of historical documents and prompt them to closely examine the ideas expressed, as well as the historical circumstances. Among the classic sources included are Benjamin Franklin's testimony against the Stamp Act, the Seneca Falls declaration, the Gettysburg Address, and a petition from African Americans to the federal government for protection during Reconstruction. Concise introductions provide context, and concluding questions prompt students to understand, analyze, and evaluate each source.

### CONSIDER THE SOURCE

#### BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS, "OF THE ISLAND OF HISPANIOLA" (1542)

Bartolomé de Las Casas, a Dominican friar from Spain, was an early European settler of the West Indies. He devoted much of his life to describing the culture of native peoples and denouncing the many abuses they suffered at the hands of their colonizers. This excerpt is from a letter he addressed to Spain's Prince Philip.

God has created all these numberless people to be quite the simplest, without malice or duplicity, most obedient, most faithful to their natural lords, and to the Christians whom they serve; the most humble, most patient, most peaceful and calm, without spite nor jealousy, not wrangling, nor quarrels, as free from spite, hate and desire of revenge as any in the world. Among these gentle sheeps, gifted by their Maker with the above qualities, the Spaniards entered as soon as they knew them, the wolves, tigers and lions which had been starving for many days, and since forty years they have done nothing but eat them up, torment and destroy them with straps and nails, and doors kinds of cruelty, never before seen nor heard of, nor read of.

The Christians, with their horses and swords and lances, began to slaughter and practice strange cruelty among them. They penetrated into the country and spent not their children nor the aged, nor pregnant women, nor those in child labor, all of whom they ran through the body and succeeded, as though they were assailing so many lambs, headed in their sleep. They made beds as to who would die a man in town, or cut off his head at one blow or they opened up his bowels.

against the rocks. Others they seized by the shoulders and threw into the rivers, laughing and joking, and when they fell into the water they exclaimed: "God's body of so and so!" They split the bodies of other laborers, together with their mothers and all who were before them, on their words.

They made a gallows tall high enough for the feet to nearly touch the ground, and by thirteen, in honor and reverence of our Redeemer and the twelve Apostles, they put wood underneath and, with fire, they burned the Indians alive.

They wrapped the bodies of others, already in dry straw, binding them in and setting fire to it; and so they burned them. They cut off the hands of all they wanted to take alive, made them carry them fastened on to them, and said: "Go and carry letters"; that is, take the news to those who have fled to the mountains.

They generally killed the lords and nobles in the following way. They made wooden gradations of salutes, bound them upon them, and made a slow fire beneath; thus the victims gave up the spirit by degrees, emitting cries of despair in their torture.

#### UNDERSTAND, ANALYZE, & EVALUATE

1. How did Bartolomé de Las Casas characterize the natives? How do you think they would have responded to this description?
2. What metaphor did Las Casas use to describe the natives and where does this metaphor come from?
3. What role did Las Casas expect the Christians to play on Hispaniola? What

## DEBATING THE PAST FEATURES

### DEBATING THE PAST

#### THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

The long-standing debate over the origin of the American Revolution has tended to reflect two broad schools of interpretation. One sees the Revolution largely as a political and intellectual event; the other, as a social and economic phenomenon.

The Revolutionary generation itself portrayed the conflict as a struggle over liberty, and this interpretation prevailed through most of the nineteenth century. But in the early twentieth century, historians influenced by the various currents of the progressivism began to identify social and economic forces that they believed had contributed to the rebellion. Carl Becker, for example, wrote in a 1909 study of New York that two questions had shaped the Revolution: "The first was the question of home rule; the second was the question of who should rule at home." The colonists were not only fighting the British, but also were engaged in a kind of civil war, a contest between radicals and conservatives.

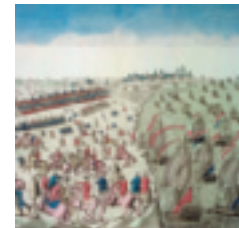
Other historians elaborated on Becker's thesis. J. Franklin Jameson, writing in 1936, argued, "Many economic distress, many social aspirations, were set free by the political struggle, many aspects of society profoundly altered by the forces that led home." Arthur M. Schlesinger mentioned in 1991 that colonial merchants, motivated by their own interest in expanding the mercantile policies of British mercantilism, aroused American resistance in the 1760s and 1770s.

Beginning in the 1950s, a new generation of scholars began to reemphasize the role of ideology and to emphasize the role of economic interests. Robert E. Brown (in 1952) and Edmund S. Morgan (in 1964)

both argued that most eighteenth-century Americans shared common political principles and that the social and economic conflicts other historians had identified were not severe. The rhetoric of the Revolution, they suggested, was not propaganda but a real reflection of the ideas of the colonists. Bernard Bailyn, in *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (1967), demonstrated the complex roots of the ideas behind the Revolution and argued that this generally restricted political stance was not a disguise for economic interests but a general ideology, rooted in deeply held convictions about rights and power. The Revolution, he explained, was "above all an ideological, constitutional, political struggle and not primarily a controversy between social groups vying for domination to force change in the organization of the society or the economy."

By the late 1960s, a new generation of historians—many influenced by the New Left—were reevaluating economic interpretations of the Revolution by exploring the social and economic tensions that they claimed shaped the Revolutionary struggle. Historians noted economic distress and the actions of mobs in colonial cities, the economic pressures on colonial merchants, and other changes in the character of American culture and society as critical prerequisites for the mercantile policies of British mercantilism, aroused American resistance in the 1760s and 1770s.

Beginning in the 1950s, a new generation of scholars began to reemphasize the role of ideology and to emphasize the role of economic interests. Robert E. Brown (in 1952) and Edmund S. Morgan (in 1964)



THE 18TH CENTURY: This contemporary illustration depicts the formal assembly of the British House of Commons on October 15, 1788. Colonies of American troops and ships from back to back, the scene is a remarkable example of the power of the British House of Commons.

ability to understand other. Also, as Linda Kerber and others have argued, the major social interpretations have focused increasing interest in the aspirations of workers, slaves, women, Native Americans, and other groups previously considered marginal to public life as part of the reevaluation of the Revolutionary struggle.

Finally, Gordon Wood, in *The Revolution and the American Mind* (1962), revised an idea once popular and recently untenable: that the Revolution was a genuinely radical event that led to the foundation of such long-standing characteristics of society

as deference, patriarchy, and traditional gender relations. Class conflict may not have caused the Revolution, he argued, but the Revolution had a profound, even radical, effect on society nevertheless.

#### UNDERSTAND, ANALYZE, & EVALUATE

1. In what way does the American Revolution fit ideological struggle?
2. In what way does the American Revolution fit social and economic conflict?

Debating the Past essays introduce students to the contested quality of much of the American past, and they provide a sense of the evolving nature of historical scholarship. From examining specific differences in historical understandings of the Constitution, to exploring Jacksonian Democracy and the causes of the Civil War, these essays familiarize students with the interpretive character of historical understanding.

# AMERICA IN THE WORLD FEATURES

## AMERICA IN THE WORLD

### THE FIRST GLOBAL WAR

The French and Indian War in North America was only a small part of a much larger conflict. Known in Europe as the Seven Years' War, it was one of the longest, most widespread, and most important wars in modern history. The war thrust Great Britain into conflicts across Europe and North America. Winston Churchill once wrote of it as the first "world war."

In North America, the war was a result of tensions along the frontiers of the British Empire. But it arose more broadly from larger conflicts among the great powers in Europe. It began in the 1750s with what historians have called a "diplomatic revolution." Well-established alliances between Britain and the Austro-Hungarian Empire and between France and Prussia collapsed, replaced by a new set of alliances between Britain and Prussia against France and Austria. The instability that these changing alliances produced helped speed the European nations toward war.

The Austro-British alliance collapsed because Austria suffered a series of significant defeats at the hands of the Prussians. To the British government, these failures suggested that the Austro-Hungarian Empire was now too weak to help Britain balance French power. As a result, England launched a search for new partnerships with the rising powers of northern Germany, Austria's enemies. In response, the Austrians sought an alliance with France to help protect them from the power of their former British allies. (One later result of this new alliance was the 1770 marriage of the future French king Louis XVI to the Austrian princess Maria Antoinette.) In the aftermath of these realignments, Austria sought again to defeat the Prussian-Hanover forces in Germany. In the process, Russia became concerned about the Austro-Hungarian

Empire's possible dominance in central Europe and allied itself with the British and the Prussians. These complicated realignments eventually led to the Seven Years' War, which soon spread across much of the world. The war engaged not only most of the great powers in Europe, from England to Russia, but also the emerging colonial worlds—India, West Africa, the Caribbean, and the Philippines—as the powerful British navy worked to strip France, and eventually Spain, of its valuable colonial holdings.

Like most modern conflicts, the Seven Years' War was at least a struggle for economic power. Colonial possessions, many European nations believed, were critical to their future wealth and well-being. The war's outcome affected not only the future of America but also the distribution of power throughout much of the world. It destroyed the French navy and much of the French Empire, and it elevated Great Britain to undisputed preeminence among the colonizing powers—especially when, at the conclusion of the war, India and all of eastern North America fell firmly under English control. The war also reorganized the balance of power in Europe with Britain now preeminent among the great powers and Prussia (later to become the core of modern Germany) rapidly rising in wealth and military power.

The Seven Years' War was not only one of the first great colonial wars but also one of the last great wars of religion, and it extended the dominance of Protestantism in Europe. In what is now Canada, the war replaced French with British rule and the reformed Catholic with Protestant dominance. The Vatican, on the other hand, lost a major military power ally, but had an on-again, off-again ally in Spain. France and Austria-Hungary—as bearers of its power and influence—the shift of power toward Protestant



CELEBRATING THE BLACK FLAG AT PARIS The ending shows a French display in Paris on February 10, 1763, to mark the end of the Seven Years' War. (© Corbis, LLC—All Rights Reserved.)

governments in Europe and North America weakened the Catholic Church and reduced its geopolitical influence.

The conclusion of the Seven Years' War strengthened Britain and Germany and weakened France. But it did not provide any lasting solution to the rivalries among the great colonial powers. In North America, a dozen years after the end of the conflict, the American Revolution—the origins of which were in many ways a direct result of the Seven Years' War—stripped the British Empire of one of its most important and valuable colonial appendages. By the time the American Revolution came to an end,

the French Revolution had sparked another lengthy period of war, culminating in the Napoleonic Wars of the early nineteenth century, which once again redraw the map of Europe and, for a while, the world. ♦

#### UNDERSTAND, ANALYZE, EVALUATE

1. How did the Seven Years' War change the balance of power among the nations of Europe? Who gained and who lost in the war?
2. Why is the Seven Years' War described as one of the "most important wars in modern history?"

fell without a fight. The next year, at the end of a siege of Quebec, the army of General Wolfe struggled up a hidden ravine under cover of darkness, surprised the larger forces of the Marquis de Montcalm, and defeated them in a battle in which both commanders were killed. The dramatic fall of Quebec on September 13, 1759, marked the beginning of the end of the American phase of the war. A year later, in September 1760, the French army formally surrendered to Amherst in Montreal. Peace finally came in 1763, with the

America in the World essays focus on specific parallels between American history and those of other nations and demonstrate the importance of the many global influences on the American story. Topics such as the age of revolutions, the global Industrial Revolution, and the abolition of slavery provide concrete examples of the connections between the history of the United States and the history of other nations.

# PATTERNS OF POPULAR CULTURE FEATURES

## PATTERNS OF POPULAR CULTURE

### THE MINSTREL SHOW

The minstrel show was one of the most popular forms of entertainment in America in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was also a testament to the high awareness of race (and the high level of racism) in American society both before and after the Civil War. Minstrel performers were mostly white, usually disguised as black. But African American performers also formed their own minstrel shows and transformed them into vehicles for training black entertainers and developing new forms of music and dance.

Before and during the Civil War, when minstrel shows consisted almost entirely of

white performers, performers blackened their faces with cork and powdered grotesque stereotypes of the slave culture of the American South. Among the most popular of these stereotypes, ridiculed as ignorant characters invented for these shows were such figures as "Zip Coon" and "Jim Crow" (whose name later resurfaced as a label for late-nineteenth-century segregation laws). A typical minstrel show presented a group of seven or more men seated in a semicircle facing the audience. The man in the center ran the show, played the straight man for the jokes of others, and led the music—livey

and sentimental ballads played on banjos, cassettes, and other instruments and sung by soloists or the entire group. After the Civil War, white minstrel bands began to expand their repertoire. Drawing from the famous and successful vaudeville show of P. T. Barnum and other entertainment entrepreneurs, some began to include Samoan tennis, banjoed lullies, and even a supposedly 8-foot 2-inch "Chinese giant" in their shows. They also incorporated, both by including women in some shows and, even more popularly, by recruiting female impersonators. One of the most successful minstrel performers of the 1870s was Francis Leon, who delighted crowds with his female portrayal of a flamboyant "prima donna."

One reason white minstrel bands began to move in these new directions was that they were now facing competition from black performers, who could provide more authentic versions of black music, dance, and humor. They usually brought more talent to the task than white performers. The Georgia Minstrels, organized in 1865, was one of the first all-black minstrel troupes, and it had great success in attracting white audiences in the Northeast for several years. By the 1870s, touring African American minstrel groups were numerous. The black minstrel shows used many of the conventions of the white shows. There were dances, music, comic routines, and sentimental recitations. Some black performers even chalked their faces to make themselves look as dark as the white blackface performers with whom they were competing. Black minstrels sometimes denounced slavery (at least indirectly) and did not often speak demeaningly of the capacities of their race. But they could not entirely escape caricaturing African American life as they struggled to meet the expectations of their white audiences.

The black minstrel shows had low openly political aims. They did help develop some important forms of African American entertainment and transform them into a part of

the national culture. Black minstrels introduced new forms of dance, derived from the informal traditions of slavery and black community life. They showed the "back and wing," the "stop time," and the "Virginia essence," which established the foundations for the tap and jazz dancing of the early twentieth century. They also improved musically and began experimenting with forms that over time contributed to the growth of ragtime, jazz, and rhythm and blues. Eventually, black minstrel—like its white counterpart—moved into other forms of theater, including the beginnings of serious black drama. At Ambrose Park in Brooklyn in the 1890s, for example, the celebrated black comedian Sam Lucas (a veteran of the minstrel circuit) starred in the play *Destiny*. In the social games, including the minor football game, in the minstrel show did not die altogether. In 1927, Hollywood released *The Jazz Singer*, the first feature film with sound. It was about the career of a white minstrel performer, and its star was one of the most popular singers of the twentieth century, Al Jolson, whose career had begun before. ♦

#### UNDERSTAND, ANALYZE, EVALUATE

1. How did minstrel shows performed by white minstrel troupes prevailing attitudes toward African Americans?
2. Minstrel shows performed by black minstrel troupes often conformed to existing stereotypes of African Americans. Why?
3. Can you think of any popular entertainments today that carry remnants of the minstrel shows of the nineteenth century?

MINSTRELS AT THEIR BEST The Princeton & New York minstrel troupes—a black and a white—entertainers that drew large crowds in the 1850s—make use of primary costumes to offer this kind of entertainment to large audiences of white and black. Although minstrel shows were popular among both white and black audiences, the popularity of real African American minstrel troupes increased as the pressure of the troupes to include groups of white and black performers waned. (The Library of Congress)

Patterns of Popular Culture essays bring fads, crazes, hangouts, hobbies, and entertainment into the story of American history, encouraging students to expand their definition of what constitutes history and gain a new understanding of what popular culture reveals about a society.

# WHAT'S NEW TO THE UNFINISHED NATION, EIGHTH EDITION

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We have revised the narrative and the features throughout this eighth edition for clarity and currency. On a chapter-by-chapter basis, major changes include:

## Chapter 1, The Collision of Cultures

- New Debating the Past: “Why Do Historians So Often Differ?”

## Chapter 2, Transplantations and Borderlands

- New portrait and information about early colonist Anne Pollard.
- New illustration of the early Savannah colony.

## Chapter 3, Society and Culture in Provincial America

- New map of African population density in the colonies.

## Chapter 6, The Constitution and the New Republic

- New illustration of the Jeffersonian vision of an agrarian republic.

## Chapter 7, The Jeffersonian Era

- New political cartoon about the effects of the Embargo Act.

## Chapter 8, Varieties of American Nationalism

- New portrait and information about Sequoyah.

## Chapter 9, Jacksonian America

- Additional text and chapter question on the Native American response to U.S. expansion.
- New image satirizing financial policies associated with the depression of the late 1830s.

## Chapter 10, America's Economic Revolution

- New Consider the Source: “*Handbook to Lowell*, 1848.”

## Chapter 11, Cotton, Slavery, and the Old South

- New photograph and information about Harriet Tubman.

## Chapter 12, Antebellum Culture and Reform

- New Patterns of Popular Culture: “Sentimental Novels,” including a discussion of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

- New section—“Struggles of Radical Black Women”—on preachers Jarena Lee and Rebecca Cox Jackson.
- New text connecting Thoreau's idea of civil disobedience with later abolitionist and civil rights protests.
- New text explaining why free blacks resisted the ACS's plan for populating Liberia.
- New photograph and information about Margaret Fuller.
- New painting depicting the Mormon trek to Utah.

## Chapter 13, The Impending Crisis

- Revised accounts of how the Compromise of 1850 and the Lincoln-Nebraska Act were achieved.
- New Lone Star flag picture and information on Texas's years as an independent republic.
- New photograph of a multiethnic group of California gold miners.
- New cartoon illustrating a pro-slavery argument.

## Chapter 14, The Civil War

- New section—“Billy Yank and Johnny Reb”—describing the motivations and outfitting of Northern and Southern recruits at the start of the Civil War.
- Revised discussion of the North's strategy for winning the war and Lincoln's search for a commander.

## Chapter 15, Reconstruction and the New South

- New Patterns of Popular Culture: “The Minstrel Show.”
- Expanded discussion of plans to give land to freed slaves as a first step in Reconstruction.
- New editorial cartoon on critics' view of Reconstruction.

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# **THE UNFINISHED NATION**

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A Concise History of the  
American People  
Volume 1: To 1877



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# 1 THE COLLISION OF CULTURES

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## LOOKING AHEAD

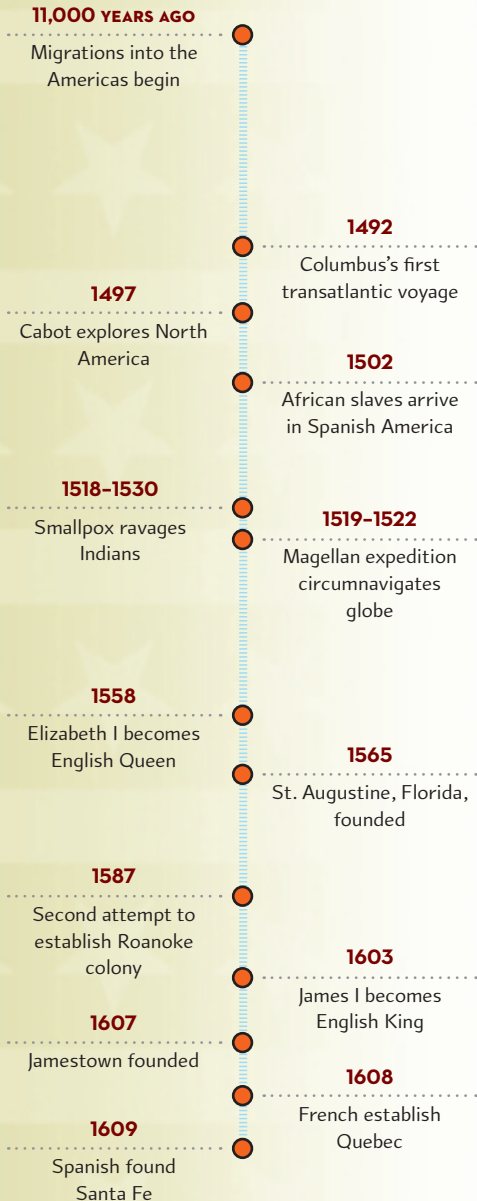
1. How did the societies of native people in the South differ from those in the North in the precontact period (before the arrival of the Europeans)?
2. What effects did the arrival of Europeans have on the native peoples of the Americas?
3. How did patterns of settlement differ among the Spanish, English, French, and Dutch immigrants to the Americas?

**THE DISCOVERY OF THE AMERICAS** did not begin with Christopher Columbus. It began many thousands of years earlier, when human beings first crossed into the new continents and began to people them. By the end of the fifteenth century A.D., when the first important contact with Europeans occurred, the Americas were home to millions of men and women.

These ancient civilizations had experienced many changes and many catastrophes during their long history. But it is likely that none of these experiences was as tragically transforming as the arrival of Europeans. In the first violent years of Spanish and Portuguese exploration and conquest, the impact of the new arrivals was profound. Europeans brought with them diseases (most notably smallpox) to which natives, unlike the invaders, had no immunity. The result was a great demographic catastrophe that killed millions of people, weakened existing societies, and greatly aided the Spanish and Portuguese in their rapid and devastating takeover of the existing American empires.

But the European immigrants were never able to eliminate the influence of the indigenous peoples (whom they came to call “Indians”). In their many interactions, whether beneficial or ruinous, these very different civilizations shaped one another, learned from one another, and changed one another permanently and profoundly.

## TIME LINE



## AMERICA BEFORE COLUMBUS

We know relatively little about the first peoples in the Americas, but archaeologists have uncovered new evidence from artifacts that have survived over many millennia. We continue to learn more about the earliest Americans.

### THE PEOPLES OF THE PRECONTACT AMERICAS

For many decades, scholars believed that all early migrations into the Americas came from humans crossing an ancient land bridge over the Bering Strait into what is now Alaska, approximately 11,000 years ago. The migrations were probably a result of the development of new stone tools—spears and other hunting implements—used to pursue the large animals that crossed between Asia and North America. All of these land-based migrants are thought to have come from a Mongolian stock related to that of modern-day Siberia. Scholars refer to these migrants as the “Clovis” people, so named for a town in New Mexico where archaeologists first discovered evidence of their tools and weapons in the 1930s.

More recent archaeological evidence suggests that not all the early migrants to the Americas came across the Bering Strait. Some migrants from Asia appear to have settled as far south as Chile and Peru even before people began moving into North America by land. These first South Americans may have come not by land but by sea, using boats.

This new evidence suggests that the early population of the Americas was more diverse and more scattered than scholars used to believe. Recent DNA evidence has identified a possible early population group that does not seem to have Asian characteristics. This suggests that thousands of years before Columbus, there may have been some migration from Europe.



**NORTH AMERICAN MIGRATIONS** This map tracks some of the very early migrations into, and within, North America in the centuries preceding contact with Europe. The map shows the now-vanished land bridge between Siberia and Alaska over which thousands, perhaps millions, of migrating people passed into the Americas. It also shows the locations of some of the earliest settlements in North America. • *What role did the extended glacial field in what is now Canada play in residential patterns in the ancient American world?*

The *Archaic period* is a scholarly term for the early history of humans in America, beginning around 8000 B.C. In the first part of this period, most humans supported themselves through hunting and gathering, using the same stone tools that earlier Americans had brought with them from Asia. **The Archaic Period**

Later in the Archaic period, population groups began to expand their activities and to develop new tools, such as nets and hooks for fishing, traps for smaller animals, and baskets for gathering berries, nuts, seeds, and other plants. Still later, some groups began to farm. Farming, of course, requires people to stay in one place. In agricultural areas, the first sedentary settlements slowly began to form, creating the basis for larger civilizations.

## THE GROWTH OF CIVILIZATIONS: THE SOUTH

The most elaborate early civilizations emerged in South and Central America and in Mexico. In Peru, the Incas created the largest empire in the Americas, stretching almost **The Inca in Peru** 2,000 miles along western South America. The Incas developed a complex administrative system and a large network of paved roads that welded together the populations of many tribes under a single government.

Organized societies of Mesoamericans emerged around 10,000 B.C. They created a **Mesoamerican Civilizations** civilization in what is now Mexico and much of Central America. They were known as the Olmec people. The first truly complex society in the region began in approximately 1000 B.C. A more sophisticated culture grew up around A.D. 800 in parts of Central America and in the Yucatán peninsula of Mexico, in an area known as Maya. Mayan civilization developed a written language, a numerical system similar to the Arabic, an accurate calendar, an advanced agricultural system, and important trade routes into other areas of the continents.

Gradually, the societies of the Maya region were superseded by other Mesoamerican tribes, who have become known collectively (and somewhat inaccurately) as the Aztec. They called themselves Mexica. In about A.D. 1300, the Mexica built the city of Tenochtitlán on a large island in a lake in central Mexico, the site of present-day Mexico City. With a population as high as 100,000 by 1500, Tenochtitlán featured large and impressive public buildings, schools that all male children attended, an organized military, a medical system, and a slave workforce drawn from conquered tribes. A warlike people, the Mexica gradually established their dominance over almost all of central Mexico.

Like other Mesoamerican societies, the Mexica developed a religion that included a belief that the gods could be satisfied only by being fed the living hearts of humans. The Mexica sacrificed people—largely prisoners captured in combat—on a scale unknown in other American civilizations. The Mesoamerican civilizations were for many centuries the center of civilized life in North and Central America—the hub of culture and trade.

## THE CIVILIZATIONS OF THE NORTH

The peoples north of Mexico developed less elaborate but still substantial civilizations. Inhabitants of the northern regions of the continent subsisted on combinations of hunting, **Hunting, Gathering, and Fishing** gathering, and fishing. They included the Eskimo (or Inuit) of the Arctic Circle, who fished and hunted seals; big-game hunters of the northern forests, who led nomadic lives based on the pursuit of moose and caribou; tribes of the Pacific Northwest, whose principal occupation was salmon fishing and who created substantial permanent settlements along the coast; and a group of tribes spread through relatively arid regions of the Far West, who developed successful communities based on fishing, hunting small game, and gathering edible plants.

Other societies in North America were agricultural. Among the most developed were **Agricultural Societies** those in the Southwest. The people of that arid region built large irrigation systems, and they constructed towns of stone and adobe. In the Great Plains region, too, most tribes were engaged in sedentary farming (corn and other grains). They lived in large permanent settlements.

The eastern third of what is now the United States—much of it covered with forests and inhabited by the Woodland Indians—had the greatest food resources of any area of the continent. Most of the many tribes of the region engaged in farming, hunting, gathering,



**HOW THE EARLY NORTH AMERICANS LIVED** This map shows the various ways in which the native tribes of North America supported themselves before the arrival of European civilization. Like most precommercial peoples, the Native Americans survived largely on the resources available in their immediate surroundings. Note, for example, the reliance on the products of the sea of the tribes along the northern coastlines of the continent, and the way in which tribes in relatively inhospitable climates in the North—where agriculture was difficult—relied on hunting large game. Most Native Americans were farmers. • *What different kinds of farming would have emerged in the very different climates of the agricultural regions shown on this map?*

and fishing simultaneously. In the South there were permanent settlements and large trading networks based on the corn and other grains grown in the rich lands of the Mississippi River valley. Cahokia, a trading center located near present-day St. Louis, had a **Cahokia** population of 40,000 at its peak in A.D. 1200.

The agricultural societies of the Northeast were more mobile. Farming techniques there were designed to exploit the land quickly rather than to develop permanent settlements. Many of the tribes living east of the Mississippi River were linked together loosely by common linguistic roots. The largest of these language groups consisted of the Algonquian tribes, who lived along the Atlantic seaboard from Canada to Virginia; the Iroquois Confederacy, which was centered in what is now upstate New York; and the Muskogean



**PUEBLO VILLAGE OF THE SOUTHWEST**

(© C. McIntyre/PhotoLink/Getty Images)

tribes, which consisted of the tribes in the southernmost regions of the eastern seaboard.

Religion was usually closely linked with the natural world on which the tribes depended for sustenance. Native Americans worshiped many gods, whom they associated variously with crops, game, forests, rivers, and other elements of nature.

All tribes assigned women the jobs of caring for children, preparing meals, and gathering certain foods. But the allocation of other tasks varied from one society to

another. Some tribal groups reserved farming tasks almost entirely for men. Among other

**Gender Relations** groups, women tended the fields, whereas men engaged in hunting, warfare, or clearing land. Because women and children were often left alone for extended periods while men were away hunting or fighting, women in some tribes controlled the social and economic organization of the settlements.

## EUROPE LOOKS WESTWARD

Europeans were almost entirely unaware of the existence of the Americas before the fifteenth century. A few early wanderers—Leif Eriksson, an eleventh-century Norse seaman, and others—had glimpsed parts of the eastern Atlantic on their voyages. But even if their discoveries had become common knowledge (and they did not), there would have been little incentive for others to follow. Europe in the Middle Ages (roughly A.D. 500–1500) was too weak, divided, and decentralized to inspire many great ventures. By the end of the fifteenth century, however, conditions in Europe had changed and the incentive for overseas exploration had grown.

### COMMERCE AND SEA TRAVEL

Two important changes encouraged Europeans to look toward new lands. One was the significant growth in Europe's population in the fifteenth century. The Black Death, a catastrophic epidemic of the bubonic plague that began in Constantinople in 1347, had killed more than a third of the people on the Continent (according to some estimates). But a century and **European Population Growth** a half later, the population had rebounded. With that growth came a reawakening of commerce. A new merchant class was emerging to meet the rising demand for goods from abroad. As trade increased, and as advances in navigation made long-distance sea travel more feasible, interest in expanding trade grew even more quickly.

The second change was the emergence of new governments that were more united and **Strong Monarchies** powerful than the feeble political entities of the feudal past. In the western areas of Europe in particular, strong new monarchs were eager to enhance the commercial development of their nations.

In the early fourteenth century, Marco Polo and other adventurers had returned from Asia bearing exotic spices, cloths, and dyes and even more exotic tales. Europeans who

craved commercial glory had dreamed above all of trade with the East. For two centuries, that trade had been limited by the difficulties of the long overland journey to the Asian courts. But in the fourteenth century, talk of finding a faster, safer sea route to East Asia began.

The Portuguese were the preeminent maritime power in the fifteenth century, largely because of Prince Henry the Navigator, who devoted much of his life to the promotion of exploration. In 1486, after Henry's death, the Portuguese explorer *Portuguese Exploration* Bartholomeu Dias rounded the southern tip of Africa (the Cape of Good Hope). In 1497–1498, Vasco da Gama proceeded all the way around the cape to India. But the Spanish, not the Portuguese, were the first to encounter the *New World*, the term Europeans applied to the ancient lands previously unknown to them.

## CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

Christopher Columbus was born and reared in Genoa, Italy. He spent his early seafaring years in the service of the Portuguese. By the time he was a young man, he had developed great ambitions. He believed he could reach East Asia by sailing west, across the Atlantic, rather than east, around Africa. Columbus thought the world was far smaller than it actually is. He also believed that the Asian continent extended farther eastward than it actually does. Most important, he did not realize that anything lay to the west between Europe and the lands of Asia.

Columbus failed to enlist the leaders of Portugal to back his plan, so he turned instead to Spain. The marriage of Spain's two most powerful regional rulers, Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, had produced the strongest and most ambitious monarchy in Europe. Columbus appealed to Queen Isabella for support for his proposed westward voyage, and in 1492, she agreed. Commanding ninety men and three *Columbus's First Voyage* ships—the *Niña*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa María*—Columbus left Spain in August 1492 and sailed west into the Atlantic. Ten weeks later, he sighted land and assumed he had reached an island off Asia. In fact, he had landed in the Bahamas. When he pushed on and encountered Cuba, he assumed he had reached China. He returned to Spain, bringing with him several captured natives as evidence of his achievement. (He called the natives “Indians” because he believed they were from the East Indies in the Pacific.)

But Columbus did not, of course, bring back news of the great khan's court in China or any samples of the fabled wealth of the Indies. And so a year later, he tried again, this time with a much larger expedition. As before, he headed into the Caribbean, discovering several other islands and leaving a small and short-lived **colony** on Hispaniola. On a third voyage, in 1498, he finally reached the mainland and cruised along the northern coast of South America. He then realized, for the first time, that he had encountered not a part of Asia but a separate continent.

Columbus ended his life in obscurity. Ultimately, he was even unable to give his name to the land he had revealed to the Europeans. That distinction went instead to a Florentine merchant, Amerigo Vespucci, who wrote a series of vivid descriptions of the lands he visited on a later expedition to the New World and helped popularize the idea that the Americas were new continents.

Partly as a result of Columbus's initiative, Spain began to devote greater resources and energy to maritime exploration. In 1513, the Spaniard Vasco de Balboa crossed the Isthmus of Panama and became the first known European to gaze westward upon the great ocean that separated America from China. Seeking access to that ocean, Ferdinand Magellan, a Portuguese





**EUROPEAN EXPLORATION AND CONQUEST, 1492–1583** This map shows the many voyages of exploration to and conquest of North America launched by Europeans in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Note how Columbus and the Spanish explorers who followed him tended to move quickly into the lands of Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America, while the English and French explored the northern territories of North America. • *What factors might have led these various nations to explore and colonize different areas of the New World?*

in Spanish employ, found the strait that now bears his name at the southern end of South America, struggled through the stormy narrows and into the ocean (so calm by contrast that he christened it the *Pacific*), and then proceeded to the Philippines. There Magellan died in a **Circumnavigation of the Globe** conflict with natives, but his expedition went on to complete the

first known circumnavigation of the globe (1519–1522). By 1550, Spaniards had explored the coasts of North America as far north as Oregon in the west and Labrador in the east.

## THE SPANISH EMPIRE

In time, Spanish explorers in the New World stopped thinking of America simply as an obstacle to their search for a route to Asia and began instead to consider it a possible source of wealth in itself. The Spanish claimed for themselves the whole of the New World, except for a large part of the east coast of South America (today's Brazil) that was reserved by a papal decree for the Portuguese.

In 1518, Hernando Cortés, who had been an unsuccessful Spanish government official in Cuba for fourteen years, led a small military expedition (about 600 men) against the Aztecs in Mexico and their powerful emperor, Montezuma, after hearing stories of great treasures there. His first assault on Tenochtitlán, the Aztec capital, failed. But Cortés and his army had unwittingly exposed the natives to smallpox, to which the natives, unlike the Europeans, had developed no immunity. The epidemic decimated the Aztec population and made it possible for the Spanish to triumph in their second attempt at conquest. Through his ruthless suppression of the surviving natives, Cortés established himself as one of the most brutal of the Spanish **conquistadores** (conquerors). Twenty years later, Francisco Pizarro conquered **Conquistadores** the Incas in Peru and opened the way for other Spanish advances into South America.

The first Spanish settlers in America were interested only in exploiting the American stores of gold and silver, and they were fabulously successful. For 300 years, beginning in the sixteenth century, the mines of Spanish America yielded more than ten times as much gold and silver as all the rest of the world's mines combined. Before long, however, most Spanish settlers in America traveled to the New World for other reasons. Many went in hopes of profiting from agriculture. They helped establish elements of European



**THE MEXICANS STRIKE BACK** In this vivid scene from the Durán Codex, Mexican artists illustrate a rare moment in which Mexican warriors gained the upper hand over the Spanish invaders. Driven back by native fighters, the Spanish have taken refuge in a room in the royal palace in Tenochtitlán while brightly attired Mexican warriors besiege them. Although the Mexicans gained a temporary advantage in this battle, the drawing illustrates one of the reasons for their inability to withstand the Spanish in the longer term. The Spanish soldiers are armed with rifles and crossbows, while the Indians carry only spears and shields. (© Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid, Spain/Bridgeman Images)