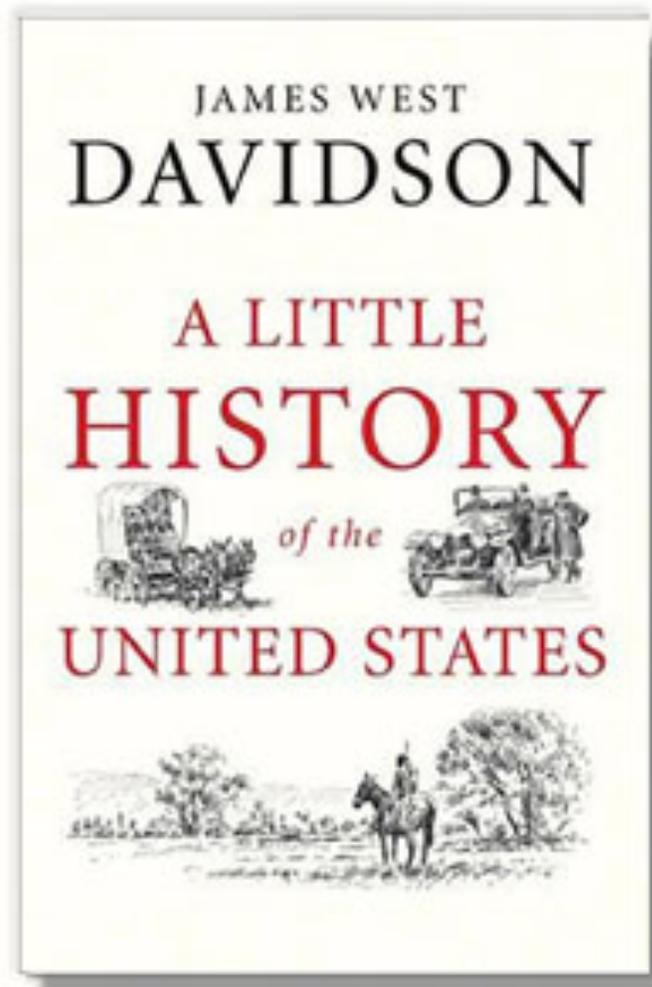


An Exploration Handbook

for



A chapter-by-chapter guide to getting more out of the book, including short essays on the key themes of each chapter, suggestions for additional reading, primary sources for further study and chapter questions to help master content.

A Little History of the United States

Exploration Handbook

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Introduction

Using this Handbook

Exploration Handbook? What's that about? Why not just call it a study guide?

Study guides are for textbooks, and *A Little History of the United States* is emphatically not a text. The philosophy behind its creation differs sharply from the textbook approach; and the distinction is important to understand.

Textbooks are meant to be comprehensive. Implicitly they're also prescriptive. What are the facts, dates and concepts that every reader should know? All of those items are included in the compendium. The student is required to master them. Indeed, the content of a textbook is generated from one or more curriculum standards. In American history, each state has a set. Some go on for dozens of pages. *These things thou shalt know! Master them!*

How well does this strategy succeed? Despite 800 to 1000-page tomes, buttressed by teachers' guides, student workbooks, map quizzes, test banks, websites, vocabulary lists, time lines and every imaginable study aid known to humankind, periodic surveys of student mastery indicate that for a vast majority, knowledge of American history remains astonishingly slim. There seems to be a radical disjunction between the curriculum standards that confidently proclaim the cornucopia of knowledge that *shall* be absorbed, and the sad reality encountered in everyday life. A current YouTube video making the rounds illustrates the point in depressingly broad strokes:
https://youtu.be/yRZZpk_9k8E

If the textbook approach is failing so miserably, what's to be done? *A Little History of the United States* uses a different strategy. It's *not* comprehensive—far from it. A pickup truck is probably not capacious enough to hold all the names, dates, bills, laws, proclamations and treaties that are *not* named therein. Not that these facts aren't important. Many of them are. But the textbooks crammed full of them don't seem to be doing the job of communicating them effectively.

The philosophy of *A Little History* can be summed up in an aphorism from the great modernist architect, Mies van der Rohe: *less is more*. As an architect, van der Rohe wanted his creations to reveal the purest, cleanest forms. He was born in the Victorian era, when living rooms were stuffed with bric-a-brac and

the ornamented facades of buildings hid the skeletons beneath. Van der Rohe dispensed with the decorations and curlicues, the frills and furbelows. He believed that the simple, clean lines of his modern buildings and furniture allowed the essential structure to stand out.

The same approach can work for American history. Students need to understand *why* they should care about American history; and a slow slog through 900 pages overwhelms with detail. The forest is impossible to discern for the trees. Three-hundred pages, on the other hand, is brief enough to make the larger themes—history’s shapes—stand out.

Hence the opposition here to the textbook philosophy of learning, which intends to make a thousand and one facts mandatory. The more one tries to be comprehensive, the less knowledge the overwhelmed student is likely to take away from the text. That’s not to say that the more detailed contexts of history are unimportant. It’s just that there’s no motivation to pursue those details if you don’t grasp the larger picture.

This Exploration Handbook is meant to provide a jumping-off point centered on the core narrative of *A Little History of the United States*. Beyond that core, *you* decide where you want to dive in, and how deeply. This handbook provides a chapter-by-chapter guide to learning more, in several different ways.

Mastering the core narrative. There’s something a bit slippery, even tricky, about reading a brief, readable history. Paradoxically, the more interesting a narrative becomes and the more smoothly the story is told, the easier it is for readers to glide along on the surface, missing important points. Most of us have experienced the effect of a page-turning thriller, where the tale is impossible to put down and is greedily devoured in one quick gulp. Yet within a week’s time, it becomes hard to remember anything but the largest plot details. The same problem can haunt a book like *A Little History*; and if that happens, van der Rohe’s maxim goes out the window. It’s no longer *less is more* but *less is less!*

Two elements of the Exploration Handbook help highlight key themes and details. First, the chapter review questions found at the end of the handbook point to the chapter’s key points. Second, the mini-essay for each chapter connects the chapter’s story with the wider themes of the book.

Exploring beyond *A Little History*. The handbook also suggests further readings for each chapter. Of course in digging deeper, it’s necessary to pick and choose. That’s the point of this approach: master the core, then explore areas that pique your interest. For those looking to build a reference shelf of books covering the span of American history, I’ve compiled a selective

list below. Obviously, owning such a reference shelf is optional. Most if not all of these books are available in a good public library.

I have also provided primary source excerpts or links to such sources on the web. Reading documents taken directly from the historical record is one way to begin to understand the skills historians use to make sense of participant testimonies and the kind of close reading they entail. Entire books have been written on the subject of how historians interpret history—indeed I’ve written one, along with my co-author Mark Hamilton Lytle, entitled *After the Fact: the Art of Historical Detection*. Due to the strange vagaries of textbook economics, volumes of the newest (sixth) edition sell for exorbitant sums. But earlier editions, used, are available at much more reasonable prices.

From time to time I expect to update this handbook, based on input from readers and upon further reflection on my own part. The date of the most recent revision will appear on the title page, so you can come back and download a more recent version if you like. Meanwhile, best of luck in your own explorations.

James West Davidson
January 2016

A List of Core Books

Alan Taylor, *The American Colonies: The Settling of North America*

Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*

Edmund S. Morgan, *Birth of the Republic, 1763-1789*

Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*

Gordon Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815*

Daniel Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*

James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*

Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*

Rebecca Edwards, *New Spirits: Americans in the Gilded Age, 1865-1905*

H. W. Brands, *American Colossus: The Triumph of American Capitalism, 1865-1900*

John Milton Cooper, Jr., *Pivotal Decades: the United States 1900-1920*

David Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945*

James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974*

Mark H. Lytle, *America's Uncivil Wars: The Sixties Era from Elvis to the Fall of Richard Nixon*

James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant: The United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore*

Mark Fiege, *Nature's Republic: An Environmental History of the United States*

Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America*

Nell Irvin Painter, *Creating Black Americans: African-American History and its Meanings, 1619 to the Present*

Ray Suarez, *Latino Americans: the 500-Year Legacy that Shaped a Nation*

Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore* (revised edition)

A Note about Internet links. This handbook contains numerous links to primary sources and resources on the Web. Unfortunately, the Web is a continuously evolving multiverse and sometimes these links are updated or become dead. It's impossible to continually keep current such links. If you find yourself at a dead end, a Google search will usually turn up the document in question if you look for the title and author.

1 Where the Birds Led

This is the shortest chapter in the book: a prologue for what's to come. Traditional textbooks explore many topics leading up to Columbus's voyage: European interest in the wider world sparked by the Crusades as well as by Marco Polo's account of his travels to the Far East (written around 1300); the gradual increase in geographic knowledge through navigation around Africa, encouraged by Prince Henry the Navigator. All subjects worth exploring.

Working with this chapter itself, what I'd be inclined to convey would be the excitement of a voyage of discovery—something not only Columbus is undertaking but also that this book is undertaking too. The extent of that voyage for both Columbus and for us can be made clearer by thinking about how much Europeans of 1492 *didn't* know about the other half of the world. What was out there to the west? Merely a larger ocean, with perhaps only a few islands? a large mass of land yet unreached? Even more, consider how much the people of that era didn't know about the way the world worked, period. As part of his research for the voyage, Columbus consulted *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*. Two excerpts are below and the entire book is available on the web. Mandeville's so-called travels are a collection of stories from a variety of travelogues, compiled during the 1370s by a Frenchman, most likely. They were a popular source about the world for several centuries. Reading the excerpts, you can see how much of what we now take for granted remained unknown to people of Columbus's day. Though the book assumes the world is round and scoffs at the ignorant for thinking otherwise, Mandeville still feels obligated to deal with the question of why the people on the "bottom" of the earth don't fall off. Isaac Newton's theory of gravity remains centuries in the future.

How little Columbus and other Europeans know! And what a strange and unexpected world lies waiting—for us as well as for him. The study of American history is, in its own way, a remarkable voyage of discovery.

Dozens upon dozens of books have been written about Columbus, many filled with inaccuracies or wild hypotheses. A reliable account is Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Columbus*. An older history by Samuel Eliot Morison, *Christopher Columbus, Mariner*, is short as well as strong on the details of sailing.

The Travels of Sir John Mandeville

<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/782>

But how it seemeth to simple men unlearned, that men ne may not go under the earth, and also that men should fall toward the heaven from under. But that may not be, upon less than we may fall toward heaven from the earth where we be. For from what part of the earth that men dwell, either above or beneath, it seemeth always to them that dwell that

they go more right than any other folk. And right as it seemeth to us that they be under us, right so it seemeth to them that we be under them. For if a man might fall from the earth unto the firmament, by greater, reason the earth and the sea that be so great and so heavy should fall to the firmament: but that may not be... (from Chapter 20)

* * *

At the deserts of Egypt was a worthy man, that was an holy hermit, and there met with him a monster (that is to say, a monster is a thing deformed against kind both of man or of beast or of anything else, and that is clept [called] a monster). And this monster, that met with this holy hermit, was as it had been a man, that had two horns trenchant on his forehead; and he had a body like a man unto the navel, and beneath he had the body like a goat. And the hermit asked him what he was. And the monster answered him, and said he was a deadly creature, such as God had formed, and dwelt in those deserts in purchasing his sustenance...

In Egypt is the city of Heliopolis, that is to say, the city of the Sun. In that city there is a temple, made round after the shape of the Temple of Jerusalem. The priests of that temple have all their writings, under the date of the fowl that is clept phoenix; and there is none but one in all the world. And he cometh to burn himself upon the altar of that temple at the end of five hundred year; for so long he liveth. And at the five hundred years' end, the priests array their altar honestly, and put thereupon spices and sulphur vif ["live sulphur"—a flammable substance] and other things that will burn lightly; and then the bird phoenix cometh and burneth himself to ashes. And the first day next after, men find in the ashes a worm; and the second day next after, men find a bird quick and perfect; and the third day next after, he flieth his way. And so there is no more birds of that kind in all the world, but it alone, and truly that is a great miracle of God. Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 1 - QUESTIONS

1. Why did Columbus follow the birds overhead? Why did his sailors distrust him?
2. What did the Great Silk Road have to do with Columbus's voyage?
3. What did Bartolomeu Dias's voyage around the southern tip of Africa have to do with Columbus's voyage?
4. Where are the Canary Islands? Why did Columbus sail south to them, when he really wanted to go west?
5. What is the modern name of Cipangu? Locate it on a map. Why was Columbus interested in Cipangu?

2 A Continent in Space and Time

This chapter is really about proportions: stepping back momentarily to place 500 years of history in its proper space and time. A perennial complaint from veterans of bad social studies classes focuses on the numbing succession of dates and places students are taxed to memorize. One reason these facts are so mind-numbing is that most people have only a hazy sense of the context: where the dates and places belong. This chapter sets out that context; and it can be deepened with further exploration.

Knowing the shape of North America, and how its geographic features act as funnels, makes it easier to remember the north-south axis of mountains. Instead of having a set of random names that need to be pinned to places (Appalachians, Sierras, and so forth), you now have a memory hook, about how North America's contours affect climate and history. It's also important to take time to look at the Caribbean Basin, an area less familiar to many Americans. Yet that region—which is bigger than we tend to imagine—becomes the staging ground for the first century of American history. The Caribbean is where Spain turns its interest haltingly toward North America. And of course the cultural heritage of the Mexica (Aztecs) and the Spanish are crucial to those hundred years.

As for the framework of time: in addition to the chapter's broad strokes, it would make good sense to spend time here laying out a timeline for the 500 years we're about to traverse. Perhaps make one on paper that stretches several feet...something to come back to and amplify as you go along. The details are not important at the moment; it's the broad strokes. You want to set out the big picture, so that a context is available as events begin to fill that timeline. Think in terms of five centuries. Watch how history unfolds a hundred years at a time.

First, it might be useful to set straight the often confusing way the centuries are named. Why should the 1500s be called the sixteenth century? or the 1900s the twentieth century? A comparison with birthdays is useful. Your second birthday occurs only after you *finish* your second year of life; all through that second year, if someone asks how old you are, the answer is one.

So: in broad strokes, how does the story go, from century to century?

Sixteenth century (the 1500s). The first hundred years of Europeans in the Americas centers on the Caribbean world and South America. Europeans only nibble at the edges of North America. As we'll see (*Little History*, page 34), the largest city in North or South America is high in the Andes Mountains, the silver mining settlement of Potosí. It takes a good chunk of 100 years for Spain expand outward from the island of Hispaniola into the other Caribbean islands and the mainland of Central and South America. And as events fall out, this

century contains one of the biggest catastrophes in human history (as we'll see in Chapter 6)—the depopulation of the Americas through epidemic disease.

Seventeenth century: the 1600s. Only during these years does England have any success at planting colonies in North America. It's worth underlining that by the time English settlements in Virginia and New England get their start, more than a hundred years have passed since the early voyages of Columbus. And it will take the rest of the seventeenth century before England's colonies are firmly established.

Eighteenth century: the 1700s. During these years European powers claim different portions of North America. Spain and France come to be the chief rivals of Great Britain. Wars between those nations break out periodically, but only in the middle of the century does Britain defeat France decisively. France loses all its North American possessions, except for its islands in the Caribbean where sugar cane is grown. But the big event from this book's point of view, comes three quarters of the way through the century, with the founding of the United States during the American Revolution.

Nineteenth century: the 1800s. During these years, the nation grows from a small republic of thirteen states along the Atlantic coast into a republic stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific. This leap takes place in little more than half a century. Surely a remarkable achievement—but ten years later, this continental nation experiences the biggest failure in its history. It breaks apart in a civil war beginning in 1861. Only after four bloody years does the United States reunite. And then there's the second half of the century, in which the nation becomes one of the biggest on the world stage.

Twentieth century: the 1900s. The history of the United States in this century of the tale can't be told without seeing it from a global perspective. It's a dangerous century, where stretches of prosperity are interrupted by immense wars. World War I, World War II and—very nearly—a World War III that could have brought an end to civilization. By the end of the century a different threat looms: the threat that human activity itself is warming the planet in ways that could threaten the quality of life for generations to come.

There are many timelines of American history on the web. One, assembled by historian Quintard Taylor, Jr., is available at <http://bit.ly/1QuLmNK>. One interesting exercise might be to compare entries from two or three different timelines for the same eras. On the face of it, timelines appear to be simple recitations of events, places and times. But as with any history, selection is important. Compare the timelines to see different emphases in how they were put together. And in the end, it's always better to do your own timeline because it forces you to think about what seems important yourself.

For now, though, details aren't the point. Don't get bogged down in dates and events. Just concentrate on seeing the changes that develop from century to century. It will make it easier, as we go along, to fit the details into the larger story.

And finally, if you want the really big picture—that is, the history of North America from the meteorite that crashed into the continent 65 million years ago up through the present, read a fascinating book, Tim Flannery, *The Eternal Frontier*.

CHAPTER 2 - QUESTIONS

1. How does the shape of a funnel affect the climate of North America? How are the shapes of Europe and Asia different?
2. Give several examples of the way that the climate and the geography of North America would shape the history of the United States.
3. Locate the Caribbean Sea. What are its three biggest islands? Why is it important to be familiar with the Caribbean region if it is not part of the United States?
4. When did the first humans reach North America? From where did they come?
5. How long ago did the age of dinosaurs end in North America? Why did it end?

3 Out of One, Many

The chapter title plays off the motto of the United States by turning it on its head. By 1492 the native peoples of North America had spread so widely that a diverse variety of cultures had grown up. If there's a single takeaway from these stories, it's to understand the factors contributing to this diversity. Why so many different peoples rather than one or two cultures? The chapter lays out two very broad answers.

One factor is *environmental*. The physical constraints of geography and climate inevitably push human societies to adapt to very different conditions. A dry, desert climate presses people to devise ways to irrigate their crops using canals. The wet climate of the present-day Northwest requires very different survival strategies. A second broad factor is *cultural*. Human ingenuity regularly solves similar problems in different ways, so that even though the climate and lands of the Northwest may be similar to that of the Northeast, peoples in those two areas develop different societies, customs and technologies to deal with life's inevitable challenges.

One way to examine these differences would be to take Indian cultures from different regions and research how they have been shaped by the environment. How does each group use the environment to stay warm and dry? How does each group provide food? How complex are their societies? The answers will differ greatly. There's not enough space in this chapter to catalog different cultural systems, but archaeologists broadly differentiate hunter-gatherer cultures—where people survive off of wild plants and animals—and agricultural societies, where crops are planted and tended in fields.

Two excellent and relatively short books that provide perspectives on these topics are Timothy R. Pauketat, *Cahokia* and William Cronon, *Changes in the Land*. *Cahokia* looks at how archaeologists have tried to make learn more about the only city built in the present-day United States before the coming of Europeans. Some customs may have been broadly influenced by the Mexica culture to the south. *Changes in the Land* looks at New England after the English settlers arrived, but is very good at showing the Indians' world and how it was shaped by the environment—as well as how the Indians shaped that environment themselves. A much wider-ranging study of human civilizations in North and South America before Indians arrived is Charles C. Mann, *1491*. It too is well written and engaging.

CHAPTER 3 - QUESTIONS

1. What animal common in North America today was not present before 1492? Why?
2. What was the population of North America in 1492, as estimated by scientists and historians?
3. List at least five different ways that Indians used fire.
4. What people dug some 600 miles of canals in North America? Where and when? What were the canals used for?
5. Give three examples of how the environment shaped the way Indians lived.
6. Before 1492, where was the most complex civilization in North America located? What name did the Spanish give these people? What did they call themselves?
7. Describe life in the capital city of Tenochtitlán.
8. Where was the only city located in present-day United States before 1492? What building forms were most striking about it? What is one guess archaeologists have made as to why these landmarks were created?
9. What are archaeologists? How do they study past civilizations?
10. What did Europeans like Columbus bring to North America that changed the way we learn about the history of North America after 1492?

4 A Golden Age and the Age of Gold

The story of Spain's entry into the Americas is one of transformation, in several senses. One transformation is from exploration to conquest. Columbus named himself Admiral of the Ocean Seas; and at bottom was more comfortable exploring than actually running or ruling the settlements he began on Hispaniola. The new generation of leaders used a different name: conquerors or (in Spanish) conquistadors.

Along with this shift comes a second transformation: from the early idealism that Columbus expresses, of living peacefully in the style of the ancients' "golden age" to an often ruthless conquest in search of gold, native treasures and the vast deposits of silver discovered in South and Central America. As this chapter concludes, "The sad truth is, the world in AD 1500 was a brutal place... The new age of gold turned out to be nothing like the legends of the golden age. The Indians of the Americas were no more innocent than the Spanish were gentle."

But the lure of a golden age is important for this book's larger themes. We will see in future centuries a continuing quest for a time of peace and prosperity, where all people live together in harmony. Sometimes hopes are expressed in the building of a religious commonwealth; in other cases there are dreams of establishing secular utopias. The dream is a persistent one and we will see that it is one way that Americans hope to create a lasting republic. So, right here in the early part of our story, it's important to remember Columbus's dream of a golden age.

A second theme that the book will return to is much less idealistic. The European discovery of the western hemisphere leads to a succession of boom economies—the chasing of all those riches that can be obtained out of these newly discovered lands. The Spanish drive for native treasures and mineral riches is only the first of many boom economies to come: in furs, sugar, coffee, tobacco, and cotton.

To read more about the ancients' golden age and early exploration, consult a fine essay by Edmund S. Morgan, "The Conquerors," in his book, *American Heroes*. Also, browse Columbus's journal of his first voyage, where he reveals his first impressions of the Caribbean and its peoples. *The Journal of Christopher Columbus*, published by the Hakluyt Society is available as a free ebook, from which the excerpt below is taken: <http://bit.ly/1h3jBLX>

Monday, 22nd of October. [1492]

All last night and to-day I was here, waiting to see if the king or other person would bring gold or anything of value. Many of these people

came, like those of the other islands, equally naked, and equally painted, some white, some red, some black, and others in many ways. They brought darts and skeins of cotton to barter, which they exchanged with the sailors for bits of glass, broken crockery, and pieces of earthenware. Some of them had pieces of gold fastened in their noses, which they willingly gave for a hawk's bell and glass beads. But there was so little that it counts for nothing. It is true that they looked upon any little thing that I gave them as a wonder, and they held our arrival to be a great marvel, believing that we came from heaven. We got water for the ships from a lagoon...In the said lagoon Martin Alonso Pinzon, captain of the *Pinta*, killed another serpent 7 *palmas* long, like the one we got yesterday...

Tuesday, 32rd of October.

I desired to set out to-day for the island of Cuba, which I think must be Cipango, according to the signs these people make, indicative of its size and riches, and I did not delay any more here nor...round this island to the residence of this King or Lord, and have speech with him, as I had intended. This would cause me much delay, and I see that there is no gold mine here...so I say that it is not reasonable to wait, but rather to continue the voyage and inspect much land, until some very profitable country is reached, my belief being that it will be rich in spices. That I have no personal knowledge of these products causes me the greatest sorrow in the world, for I see a thousand kinds of trees, each one with its own special fruit...as well as a thousand kinds of herbs with their flowers; yet I know none of them except this aloe, of which I ordered a quantity to be brought on board to bring to your Highnesses.

Postscript: Edward L. Dreyer, Zheng He, provides more information about the voyages of the Chinese admiral. A shorter magazine article, "1492: The Prequel," by Nicholas Kristof, is available at <http://nyti.ms/1QIR4HC>. I would not go quite as far as Kristof, who suggests that Zheng He could have easily reached America. In truth, it's not clear how well his ships would have fared crossing the Pacific Ocean, whose waters were considerably more treacherous than the seas Chinese ships usually traveled. Bigger is not necessarily better.

CHAPTER 4 - QUESTIONS

1. Who was Admiral Zheng He? Why does the chapter compare him with Columbus?
2. What was the legend of "the golden age" spoken of by ancient writers? What reminded Columbus and other European explorers of that legend?
3. What did Columbus want Indians to do in return for his red caps and beads?

4. Did Columbus deserve credit for the discovery of America? Why or why not?
5. Who was the first conquistador? What does *conquistador* mean in English? What did Balboa discover while making his conquests?
6. What did Magellan accomplish?
7. What part did Indian allies play in helping Balboa and Cortés conquer Indian kingdoms? Why would such allies want to work with the conquistadors?
8. How did Cortés try to conquer Tenochtitlán, a city of hundreds of thousands, with only several hundred soldiers?
9. How did the Mexica justify their practice of human sacrifice? How did the Spanish justify conquering and enslaving Indians?
10. The chapter concludes that “the new age of gold turned out to be nothing like the legends of the golden age.” What does that mean? Why wasn’t a golden age possible?

5 When Worlds Collide

A lot goes on in this chapter, and the larger part of it is really environmental history. It may be worth thinking about that explicitly. Traditional histories—that is to say, most of those written fifty to a hundred years ago—used a story line that was mainly about people and politics. Which nation claimed what lands? which explorers went where? who discovered what? But historians of the present generation have taken a broader view of what should be included in the tale.

And looking at the environment as part of history seems pretty important if you see this early story as not simply Who Sailed for Spain but rather how two halves of the world began to make sustained contact with one another. That's not a matter of merely who fought whom or where colonies were planted. "The Columbian exchange" is the name that has been given to the process of intentional and unintentional mixing that took place between the plants and animals of the eastern and western hemispheres. The transformations worked both ways, as Chapter 6 points out. And it was a lot more complicated than the chapter has space to lay out.

For example, Bartolomé de las Casas, a Spanish friar, wrote in the sixteenth century about a "plague" of "an infinite number of ants" on the island of Hispaniola. Known as fire ants, they

could not be stopped in any way nor by any human means...in their fierceness, as they bit and caused greater pain than wasps that bit and hurt men. [The Spanish] could not defend themselves from these ants at night in their beds, nor could they survive if the beds were not placed on four small troughs filled with water. The ants on this island began to eat the trees from the root up, and as though fire had fallen down from the sky and burned them, they stood all scorched and dried out. They also attacked the orange and pomegranate trees, of which there were many groves...and they left none without burning them out completely...I believe they devastated over one hundred million trees that were planted for profit. [quoted in *The Oxford Book of Latin American Short Stories*, an excerpt from Las Casas' *History of the Indies*, first published only in 1875.]

These fire ants did huge damage to some of the plants Europeans brought to the Americas. That would seem to be a case of American ants attacking the eastern hemisphere newcomers. But the American fire ants may well have grown more numerous than they ever had been before European contact, thanks to another import to America: scale insects. These tiny creatures came along by accident, hitching a ride nestled in plantains that Europeans imported from Africa. Biologist Edward O. Wilson has suggested that these insects had no natural enemies in the Americas, so they soon reproduced in huge numbers.

Why should that matter? Well, as it turned out, fire ants loved to eat the feces of scale insects. So the coming of scale insects may well have led to the increase of fire ants in the Caribbean...which led to the destruction of orange and pomegranate trees. That's only one example of many environmental changes. More can be explored Alfred Crosby's classic study, *The Columbian Exchange*. Also highly recommended is Charles C. Mann, *1493*, which, like its companion and predecessor, *1491*, is available in an edition for younger readers, *1493 for Young People*.

The story of Cabeza de Vaca and his band makes a useful counterpoint to the much more brutal tales of European conquest. A dramatic yet historically responsible recounting of it can be found in Andrés Bésendez, *A Land So Strange*. And for a detailed retelling of Hernando de Soto's expedition, consult Charles Hudson, *Knights of Spain, Warriors of the Sun*. The two tales make for very different stories, especially regarding interactions with the native Indians. Why? Was Cabeza de Vaca's approach doomed to fail?

CHAPTER 5 - QUESTIONS

1. Why would it matter if a European colonist shook out a blanket after she arrived in the Americas?
2. Give three examples of animals or plants from the Americas that had not appeared in Europe before 1492. Give three examples of animals or plants that Europeans brought to the Americas.
3. In your opinion, which European plant or animal changed the face of the Americas the most? Why? Which American plant or animal changed Europe and Asia the most?
4. Why was smallpox more dangerous to Indians than to Europeans or Africans?
5. How did smallpox influence the struggles between the Mexica and Cortés?
6. About how many different epidemics swept through Central and South America during the 1500s? About how many Indians died? Why is it hard to know the exact numbers of those who died?
7. What parts of North America did Francisco Vázquez Coronado explore? Juan Ponce de León? Hernando de Soto?
8. Why were the journeys of Cabeza de Vaca different from the explorations of most conquistadors?
9. Why does the chapter argue that it may be important to think about what happened in America between the death of de Soto and the journey of La Salle?
10. What role in these big changes may have been played by pigs?

6 How Can I Be Saved?

We come now to a new major influence in American history, the Protestant Reformation. Spain, a Catholic nation, builds the first expansive European empire in the Americas and dominates the first century of contact between the world's two hemispheres. But even as Spain is conquering the Aztec and Inca empires in the years after 1519, Protestantism is beginning to divide Europe and plunge it into a century and more of religious wars. By the end of the sixteenth century, Spain is confronting new Protestant European rivals in North America.

The Reformation begins with Martin Luther; and even though the English Puritans play a greater role in colonizing New England and follow the teachings of John Calvin more closely, Luther is the place to start to understand Protestant thought. Roland Bainton's biography *Here I Stand* is hard to beat for accessibility, clarity and warmth. For that matter, his book on the wider movement is good too: *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*. Bainton has long ago gone to his rest, but his empathetic, humane approach continues to shine through. As a graduate student I knew him slightly. He still rode his bicycle to the library at the age of eighty: a gentle, elfin figure who dragged his book bag behind him to his office in the stacks. "When he would lecture on Luther," another student commented, "he would quote long passages orally, as if by memory, and it seemed he almost became Luther, he was so immersed in the material." (Luther, however, was neither so elfin nor so consistently gentle!)

The century's religious wars were not gentle either. The certitude of conviction on both sides, when combined with the rising power of nation states during these same years, produced immense bloodshed and cruelty in Europe and fierce rivalries in the Americas. Spain's annual treasure fleets were the envy of other European monarchs. For a time, Spain was successful in batting down the French and English attempts to pick off its treasure. But English pirates like Drake, Raleigh and John Hawkins raised the stakes in this contest and prepared the way for the troubled English colony at Roanoke. The early chapters of Edmund Morgan's *American Slavery, American Freedom* are excellent on these matters; as is Alan Taylor's *American Colonies*.

The hunt for the vanished settlers of Roanoke has made some progress. See James Horn's book on early Virginia, *A Land As God Made It*, and news of recent excavations in the New York Times: <http://nyti.ms/1J608Y5>.

CHAPTER 6 - QUESTIONS

1. What rituals of the Catholic Church helped believers in their efforts to be saved? Give examples of how Martin Luther followed Catholic teachings.
2. How did the Bible verse, “The just shall live by faith,” lead Luther to dispute Catholic teaching? Why did Luther put the Bible at the center of true faith?
3. How was John Calvin different from Martin Luther? Where did Calvin gather his followers?
4. What was Calvin’s idea of a holy commonwealth? Why would it be important for American history?
5. Why were there “established” churches in European nations? How did the Protestant Reformation affect this situation?
6. How did religious wars affect Spain’s colonies in America?
7. What was the biggest settlement in North and South America in 1600? Why was it so big?
8. Who was Francis Drake and what was he doing in the Americas?
9. What was the most likely reason that Sir Walter Raleigh sent English folk to begin a colony at Roanoke?
10. Why couldn’t the English bring new supplies to Roanoke for several years? What did the English find when they returned?

7 Saints and Strangers

From a chronological standpoint, the founding of Virginia precedes that of New England by more than a decade, but the story of New England is naturally linked with the Reformation. When the two chapters are read together, they lay out one of the book's major themes, the urge to found a "holy commonwealth" united by the beliefs of the community. John Calvin's Geneva provided an example for many Reformed believers; and of course the Puritan colony of Massachusetts Bay was the prime working out of that vision across the Atlantic. (The Pilgrims, who got there earlier, were equally devout but less ambitious about enlarging their settlement at Plymouth.)

William Bradford used the appropriate name, "strangers," to characterize the non-Pilgrim majority who came over on the Mayflower; and my chapter title, "Saints and Strangers," presents a contrast and hints at an enduring problem for the vision of a holy commonwealth. For even in pious New England, the region remained quite diverse. Indians still populated much of New England despite the devastations of smallpox and other European diseases. The "strangers" among the Pilgrims and Puritans cared little for holy commonwealths, to say nothing of the disdain demonstrated by the wholly secular, often rollicking settlement at Merrymount.

More to the point: even among devout Puritans and Pilgrims, differences arose about the form a religious "city on a hill" should take. As the chapter notes, different factions within Massachusetts Bay hived off to form new colonies in Connecticut. And the spiritual journey of Roger Williams hints at an alternate view of how a commonwealth might unite. Williams arrives in America determined to take the traditional Separatist approach: purify the church and community so that essentially, all of its residents think and worship alike. But Williams' standards are so high, he keeps making that pure community smaller and smaller...until at one point he suggests that you can't even pray with your wife and children if they're not converted and pure enough! Finally he makes a complete about-face and suggests that the state should not assume the job of enforcing and promoting the church and its definitions of holiness. Make no mistake: Williams remains a devout Christian. But he sees that a different way has to be followed in uniting a political polity.

A good recent biography of Roger Williams is John M. Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul*. Williams own writings are extremely difficult to work through, but reading about him is useful not only for learning about Puritans and New England, but also because Williams, unlike many English immigrants, found the Indians of the region fascinating and treated them as equals. (And don't forget William Cronon's *Changes in the Land*, mentioned in my notes to Chapter 3, for a fresh ecological perspective on Puritans and Indians.

As always, Edmund S. Morgan supplies a short, elegant and readable view of the Puritan impulse in his biography of John Winthrop, *The Puritan Dilemma*. The Pilgrims have had many chroniclers; a recent retelling is by Nathaniel Philbrick, *Mayflower*.

As for primary sources, John Winthrop's iconic sermon, "A Model of Christian Charity," available at http://winthropsociety.com/doc_charity.php. A point and counterpoint for the Pilgrims and Thomas Morton of Merrymount can be found at <http://bit.ly/1OcVILm>.

CHAPTER 7 - QUESTIONS

1. When did the Pilgrims first reach America? Where did they first land? Where did the Pilgrims eventually settle?
2. Why were there no Indian villages in the area around Plymouth Plantation?
3. Why was Squanto already able to speak English when he met the Pilgrims?
4. How did the religious beliefs of the Puritans and Pilgrims differ?
5. Who were the "strangers" on the *Mayflower*? Why was the Mayflower Compact such an unusual agreement?
6. Why did the Puritan leader John Winthrop speak of a "city on a hill"?
7. Did a greater proportion of New Englanders know how to read than people in England? If so, why?
8. Why did New Englanders find it hard to hold their "holy commonwealth" together?
9. How did Roger Williams first try to keep himself and his church pure? In what way did he eventually change his mind about the government and the church?
10. What does it mean to draw a line between the church and the state? How did the Pilgrims and Puritans draw that line? How did Thomas Morton of Merrymount? How did Roger Williams?

8 Boom Country

This chapter charts the early years of Virginia, with a brief nod to Maryland, its sister colony on Chesapeake Bay. As noted above, Virginia's founding precedes New England's by more than a decade, but in terms of this book's themes, Virginia's history leads more naturally into Chapter 9, a discussion of equality and inequality. "Boom Country," the chapter title, is key here. In fact, the concept of a boom economy is central to understanding American history from its early origins all the way to the present. To quote one of the chapter's key sentences, "It's not too much to say that the age of discovery, which brought together the two halves of the world, created boom countries everywhere." (46)

For Virginia, the commodity that set the colony booming was tobacco. But this chapter mentions some of the other commodities we've already seen and a few new ones. Sugar becomes extremely important and, even though it plays only a minor economic role in the agriculture of the United States, it is important indirectly because the plantation system and the use of slave labor are deeply intertwined with the rise of sugar. It might be useful to begin a list of the boom economies we've seen so far and then add to it as the story progresses. Which geographic areas provide which commodities? What systems of labor are involved? How are the commodities processed in order to bring them to market? How does each commodity affect the environment around it? How does it change the lives of the people who use it?

In Virginia's early years, Captain John Smith cut the most swashbuckling figure, especially since he tooted his own horn by writing a history of the young colony which featured his own considerable exploits. As early as the nineteenth century, some historians have questioned whether Smith made up the story of his rescue by Pocahontas, but modern scholars tend to give him the benefit of the doubt. I discuss the issue in *After the Fact* (the chapter "Serving Time in Virginia"). But whether you credit that story or not, Smith's observations are pungent and very much worth reading. The Library of Congress has a digital edition of his *The General History of Virginia* (<http://1.usa.gov/1S4DpPg>), from which this account of the Pocahontas encounter is taken. To be clear, this is written in the third person but Smith is the author. He refers to himself as "he." The excerpt also provides a taste of Elizabethan English and spelling. Can you figure out what a Rarowcun is?

At last they brought him to Meronocomo, where was Powhatan their Emperor. Here more then two hundred of those grim Courtiers stood wondering at him, as he had beene a monster; till Powhatan and his trayne had put themselves in their greatest braveries. Before a fire upon a seat like a bedsted, he sat covered with a great robe, made of Rarowcun skinnes, and all the tayles hanging by. On either hand did sit a young wench of 16 or 18 yeares, and along on each side the house, two rowes of

men, and behind them as many women, with all their heads and shoulders painted red; many of their heads bedecked with the white downe of Birds; but every one with something: and a great chayne of white beads about their necks. At his entrance before the King, all the people gave a great shout. The Queene of Appamatuck was appointed to bring him water to wash his hands, and another brought him a bunch of feathers, in stead of a Towell to dry them: having feasted him after their best barbarous manner they could, a long consultation was held, but the conclusion was, two great stones were brought before Powhatan: then as many as could layd hands on him, dragged him to them, and thereon laid his head, and being ready with their clubs, to beate out his braines, Pocahontas the Kings dearest daughter, when no intreaty could prevaile, got his head in her armes, and laid her owne upon his to save him from death: whereat the Emperour was contented he should live to make him hatchets, and her bells, beads, and copper; for they thought him aswell of all occupations as themselves. For the King himselfe will make his owne robes, shooes, bowes, arrowes, pots; plant, hunt, or doe any thing so well as the rest.

As for modern historians, Edmund S. Morgan's chapters on early Virginia in *American Slavery, American Freedom* are brilliant and a model of how to ask questions of historical evidence. More recently James Horn's *A Land As God Made It* is a fine introduction. To learn more about sugar as a boom commodity, see Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*. And a marvelous little book, Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise*, looks at the spread of coffee drinking, among other things.

CHAPTER 8 - QUESTIONS

1. What do you need to make a country boom? Give at least three examples of products produced in a boom economy.
2. What did the first Virginians hope would make their new colony boom? When that plan didn't work out, what finally did turn the colony into a boom country?
3. How did John Smith bring order to the failing colony?
4. How was tobacco grown? Describe the way it was planted and harvested.
5. For newcomers to Virginia, what was "the seasoning"? How did it make the colony a dangerous place?
6. How did conditions in Virginia affect children there?
7. How were the settlers in Virginia different from those in New England? How did the patterns of settlement differ?
8. Why was Court Day important in Virginia?
9. What were indentured servants? Why were they important to those who hoped to get rich?
10. What part did Africans play in the early colony's life?

9 Equal and Unequal

The introduction to *A Little History* spoke of “the ideals of freedom, equality and unity” as key touchstones in American history. This chapter begins a discussion on the growth of equality, first through a look at the diverse middle colonies. Although there is no space to enlarge on the point, this very diversity of peoples, especially in New York and Pennsylvania, suggests a model that contrasts with the Puritans’ holy commonwealth, where the goal was harmony through a unity of belief. In the “holy experiment” begun in “Penn’s Woods,” a true unity of thought was even less possible than in Puritan New England. And in terms of a growing conception of equality, the Quaker beliefs that flourished in the middle colonies played an important part. In a world where inequality was taken for granted, Quakers pushed the edge of the envelope, suggesting more egalitarian ways of behaving that shocked and often angered their fellow citizens in both England and in America. But the implication of treating diverse peoples and customs equally began to be spread earlier in the middle colonies.

Once again, the essential point of the chapter is embedded in its title. It’s not “The Growth of Equality.” Decades, even centuries of teaching American history have celebrated the idea of steady progress in the rise of equality and freedom. Those notions were indeed spreading—all well and good. But it’s equally important to understand why that growth was not inevitable: why inequality was such an ingrained part of life. This is often harder for young people to grasp, because for years they have had the maxims of American history drummed into them. “All men are created equal” sometimes seems almost a truism not worth discussing. Gordon Wood’s *Radicalism of the American Revolution* is excellent at laying out the traditional views of inequality and how new ideas would culminate in the Revolution

Finally, and most importantly, it’s not just that inequality is a prevailing mindset during these early centuries. That would still suggest that we could diagram the progress of inequality and equality with two contrasting lines on a graph. The line for equality, would start low on the chart and gradually rise over the decades; while the second, inequality, would begin high on the graph and gradually sink over the years. In fact, a chart drawn like that would be misleading, because slavery—the most extreme example of inequality—is by no means fading away. During the eighteenth century the institution was booming, increasing slavery’s reach and power.

For me, this is one of the key points to grasp in mastering the broad sweep of American history. If the ideals of freedom and equality are most central to the nation’s identity—as surely they must be—then it’s crucial to understand that the path to achieving those ideals has not been a gradual but steady upward rise. The fight for freedom and equality can be truly understood only if we

understand that realizing those two goals is becoming harder, not easier, over the years.

Readings: while this brief chapter has mentioned the inequality between women and men in colonial societies, much more could be said. Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty*, provides two chapters on the colonial and Revolutionary eras. To probe more deeply, consult Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives*, for a well-written panorama of women's lives in New England. Alice Morse Earle, a nineteenth-century antiquarian, wrote a number of books about the customs of colonial America. Some are still available, including *Home Life in Colonial Days* (free as an eBook here <http://bit.ly/1NOPSTo>). One useful exercise might be to read the book with an eye to seeing the tug between customs reinforcing either equality or inequality. George Washington's notes on etiquette are a fascinating source for exploring the different gradations of inequality. They can be found at <http://bit.ly/1KLpepG>.

CHAPTER 9 - QUESTIONS

1. What four southern colonies did Great Britain found in addition to Virginia?
2. What three colonies did Britain plant in New England in addition to Massachusetts? Why do the state boundaries look different from today?
3. What were the three original Middle Colonies established by Britain? What colonies existed before Britain took control of the land?
4. How did a small nation like the Netherlands become so powerful in the 1600s?
5. In what ways were the colonies of New Netherlands (later New York) and Pennsylvania more diverse than most British colonies?
6. How did the Quakers' belief in equality affect the way they behaved?
7. How was the colonial world filled with inequality? Give examples for each of the following: at meals, in church, at school, with clothing, in conversation, in relations between men and women.
8. What does the chapter mean when it says, "during the colonies' early years, most slaves were made not born"? In these years, how and where were they made?
9. What was "the Middle Passage"? During the several centuries when slavery was most active, how many Africans experienced the Middle Passage? Of those, how many died?
10. Where did most slaves go that were imported into the Americas? In what colony were there twice as many enslaved African Americans than British colonists? How did New Englanders help slavery expand?

10 Enlightened and Awakened

Here are two intellectual and cultural movements that will each have profound effects on American history. One is the Enlightenment, the other the Great Awakening (or first Great Awakening, as others followed in the nineteenth century and beyond). Two contrasting qualities are commonly attached to the movements: reason to the Enlightenment and faith to the Awakening. The contrast is workable enough in a rough-and-ready way, but “rough-and-ready” can slide all too easily into stereotypes. Reason could be used by Enlightenment thinkers with arrogance as well as humility; while faith could be either blind—the sort disdained so thoroughly by rationalists—or informed by an interest in science (or “natural philosophy,” as it was more commonly called then).

In this chapter I’ve spoken less of faith versus reason than of belief versus doubt, because the Enlightenment precept of doubt—of skepticism, of not taking too much for granted—is a quality which has continued to resonate in cultural debates and also integral to the development of a scientific method. In political affairs, Enlightenment doubters like James Madison or Tom Paine used rational inquiry to question truisms, long taken on faith, about the role of kings and Parliament in the American political system. And the Enlightenment’s more secular attitude toward knowledge continued to broaden over the coming centuries. As for the certainties of faith, awakenings (or “revivals” as they came to be called) would recur as well, giving birth to reform movements such as the campaigns against alcohol abuse and slavery as well as in favor of women’s rights.

The takeaway from this chapter, in other words, is not merely some knowledge of Franklin, Whitefield and Edwards, useful as that may be. Readers should realize that the Enlightenment and the Awakening represent two major strands in American life and culture, whose values continue to reverberate, sometimes clashing (the Great Awakening was controversial, remember, among religious figures as well as among Enlightenment doubters); but sometimes complementing one another, as reflected in the friendship between Whitefield and Franklin.

The stereotypical view of Edwards is reflected in his sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God;” and that is certainly worth reading (<http://bit.ly/1mXCHiN>). That piece should be contrasted with Edwards’ more gentle views of holiness, expressed nicely in his “Personal Narrative” of his conversion (<http://bit.ly/1QJcggO>). Franklin’s classic expression of practical rationalism is his Autobiography (<http://bit.ly/1Rqfqs3>), fun to read and, indeed, something I was assigned in my eleventh grade English class.

CHAPTER 10 - QUESTIONS

1. What are the names of the two movements that greatly affected American life in the 1700s? Which two American figures are used as examples of each movement?
2. Who were the deists? How did they differ in their beliefs from traditional Christians?
3. What were some of the experiments Benjamin Franklin performed in hopes of letting “light into the nature of things”?
4. Why were Enlightenment thinkers interested in the science of government?
5. What was the idea behind the doctrine of the “divine right of kings”? How did John Locke criticize the idea?
6. During the Great Awakening, what was involved in experiencing a “new birth”? How did Jonathan Edwards encourage the “awakenings” in Northampton?
7. Why does the chapter call George Whitefield “America’s first true celebrity”?
8. When Benjamin Franklin came to hear George Whitefield preach, how did his behavior reflect the approach of an Enlightenment figure?
9. How did the supporters of the Great Awakening hope to perfect the world? What was the millennium and how was it a central part of this plan?
10. How did Enlightenment figures differ in their approach to perfecting the world?

11 Be Careful What You Wish For

The set piece of this chapter is the Seven Years War, itself the prequel to those quarrels leading to American independence. Two big stories. But attention should also be paid to the situation in North America before the war began; how continental affairs had evolved by the middle of the eighteenth century. To be perfectly frank, this book can only hint at these developments in its plunge through 500 years of history. The history of colonial society in eighteenth-century North America will bear a good deal more exploration, if the time and interest are there.

The map on pages 68-69 shows in outline European penetration of North America. Spanish settlements there constituted the northern edge of Spain's empire in Central and South America. And we've seen how British settlements have been slowly taking root in the regions east of the Appalachians, mostly along the coast. This chapter outlines France's entry into the continent from both north and south, via the St. Lawrence River and the Great Lakes, as well as from New Orleans moving up the Mississippi. But a map's lines sometimes conceal as much as they reveal. The lands claimed by European powers are shown between seemingly solid lines, whereas actual control was far from settled. Shadowed areas on the map indicate the overlap of European claims, but even this ambiguity fails to reflect the diversity of Indian peoples still in control of much of these European "claimed" lands.

Because wars are political events and loudly disruptive, they call attention to themselves in many historical narratives. Indeed, the Seven Years War was only the culminating conflict in a series of wars between France, Great Britain and various allied Indian nations. But focusing on these intermittent conflicts misses the interesting interaction between Indians and Europeans during more peaceful years along the borderlands of their respective settlements. The history of this "middle ground," as historians have come to call it, reveals that Indians and whites were not constantly fighting. North America in the eighteenth century reflected a more complex world of shifting borders and interactions.

For further detail, see Taylor's *American Colonies*. David J. Weber's *The Spanish Frontier in North America* provides a thorough account of Spanish settlements, while French activity is recounted in Allan Greer, *The People of New France*. The definitive history of the Seven Years War is Robert Anderson, *Crucible of War*. It's a big, fat volume—not for the faint-hearted if read from cover to cover, yet balanced and perceptive in its treatment of Europeans and Indians. For an interesting exploration of "the middle ground," see James M. Merrell's *Into the American Woods*.

Reconstructing the events that took place in Jumonville Glen, where Washington and Tanaghrisson met the French, is not an easy task, but it provides an excellent example of the kind of detective work that historians undertake. For this reason alone the twenty or so pages in Robert Anderson's *Crucible of War* (Chapters 4 and 5) are very much worth reading. The original sources of the account have been collected (<http://bit.ly/1KO6Tbu>) along with guidance and a lesson plan here: <http://bit.ly/1GexopC>.

CHAPTER 11 - QUESTIONS

1. Why does the chapter refer to the Seven Years War as “the first true world war”?
2. In 1750 what were the names of the two Spanish territories in North America? What were their settlements like?
3. How did France enter North America “through a northern back door”? What did French traders seek and how did they get it?
4. What were the Beaver Wars? Which European and Indian nations were involved in them?
5. Why were Britain and France rivals in North America? How did geography play a role?
6. How did George Washington play a part in beginning the Seven Years War? Who were his allies along with him?
7. Why did Tanaghrisson surprise Washington after the French had surrendered?
8. Why did General Braddock meet defeat near Fort Duquesne?
9. How did William Pitt turn around the course of the war against France? What battle marked the decisive victory over France in North America?
10. Why were the results of the peace treaty a great victory for Britain? What problems did that victory present?

12 More than a Quarrel

We now reach the American Revolution—a point in the story that is not only pivotal to the nation’s history but is also taught more thoroughly in American schools than just about any other topic. Understandably so: this is our creation story. Condensing it into two chapters was extremely difficult. Many books cover the ground, but for simple clarity and brevity, see Edmund S. Morgan’s *Birth of the Republic*. A very different point of view is the remarkably brief account of the Revolution given in Alan Taylor’s *American Colonies*. Taylor deliberately does not want to put the Revolution at the center of the solar system, so to speak, but rather to see it within a continental framework of what was going on throughout North America. For that reason alone, it provides a refreshingly different point of view.

In the brief space available in Chapter 12, the focus is on the intellectual process of getting to revolution. We have heard the stories so often, the events involved seem virtually inevitable. Of course we rebelled: we’re for liberty and equality, aren’t we? But revolution signifies a turning over; and that doesn’t happen easily. Recounting the steps that led to the overturning is important—not simply the events, but why the events changed the views of American colonials who, by and large, were enthusiastic about victory in the Seven Years War and proud of being a part of the British empire.

Breaking down the steps of separation—making a list—may help here. And not just a timeline of events, though they are important. But we also need to understand (to borrow the chapter’s metaphor) how and why a mere quarrel led to a rebellion and then to a revolution. What’s the difference between a quarrel and a rebellion? Between a rebellion and a revolution? Saying you want to be represented if you’re going to be taxed is not the same as saying you want to be independent of Britain. Saying you’re for liberty is not the same as rejecting the notion that a king should play a part in governing the colonies. That last notion comes very late to the game, with Thomas Paine’s incendiary *Common Sense*; whereas the notion of no taxation without representation appears almost immediately. Compare the resolutions of the Stamp Act Congress, in 1765 (<http://bit.ly/1QMlIFY>) with *Common Sense*, ten years later (<http://bit.ly/1uKRfXC>), to see how a quarrel had turned into a revolution.

CHAPTER 12 - QUESTIONS

1. Why did British officials issue the Proclamation of 1763
2. Why did George Grenville believe that it was necessary and fair to set new taxes on Americans?
3. How did the Sugar Act and the Stamp Act work to raise money for Great Britain?

4. How did merchants avoid the tax on molasses? Name three different ways that colonists protested the Stamp Act.
5. The Stamp Act Congress declared that Americans couldn't be taxed without being represented in the legislature that taxed them. But it allowed that Parliament had a right to pass laws regulating their trade. How did Parliament use this loophole to pass new taxes?
6. How did colonists in Boston protest the tax on tea? Who organized the protests?
7. What were the Coercive Acts? How did the colonies respond to them?
8. What were the colonial militias? The Minutemen? How did the first conflict of the Revolution begin?
9. As Americans began to "think their way to a revolution," they denied that Parliament had any authority over them. What connection remained?
10. Who was the thinker who broke America's final connection with Britain? What were the arguments made by *Common Sense*?

13 Equal and Independent

Once again, the title points to the chapter's dual themes—and the chapter's final two sentences echo its dual nature: "...these Continentals had come to think themselves anyone's *equal*. And they had fought long and hard enough to make themselves, and their new nation, thoroughly *independent*." The first half of the chapter looks at the notion of equality, as the Declaration expresses it. The second half looks at the war for independence: the fighting that allowed a nation based on these ideals to exist.

Obviously, many volumes have been written on the Declaration and its notions of equality. For a briefer (that is, chapter-long) discussion, consult "Declaring Independence," in Davidson and Lytle, *After the Fact: the Art of Historical Detection* (fifth or sixth edition). It deals with such questions as how the Declaration came to be written (not just by Jefferson, who did the first rough draft) as well as the various influences on the drafters, such as the writings of Locke and other Enlightenment figures. The chapter also treats another topic worth considering: the degree to which the Founders realized they were on shaky ground in terms of the issue of slavery and women's rights, as I've briefly mentioned in *Little History*. The complete text of the Declaration, of course, can be found here on the Web: <http://1.usa.gov/1gpivYT>.

The second half of the chapter looks at the war for independence, with Washington as the focus—and deservedly so. Dozens of biographies relate his story; I recommend those by Ron Chernow and Joseph J. Ellis. And Robert Middlekauff's account of the war, *The Glorious Cause*, is another useful place to start. But don't neglect participant accounts as a valuable "bottoms up" view of how the war was fought. George F. Scheer and Hugh Rankin weave together an excellent collection of primary sources in *Rebels and Redcoats: The American Revolution Through the Eyes of Those that Fought and Lived It*.

For a different participant point of view, consider the vivid diary of a teen-aged girl from Philadelphia, Sarah (or Sally) Wister. It provides a voluble mix of emotions, for Sally records, over the course of two years, the comings and goings of British and American soldiers in the contested lands of Pennsylvania. Her Quaker family's pacifist beliefs make it difficult to deal with dashing young soldiers who proved all too attractive. Sally was particularly struck by Alexander Spotswood Dandridge from far-off Virginia. "His person is more elegantly form'd than any I ever saw; tall and commanding," she noted. "His forehead is very white, tho' the lower part of his face is much sunburn'd; his features are extremely pleasing; an even, white set of teeth, dark hair and eyes. I can't better describe him than by saying he is the handsomest man I ever beheld." But this Quaker girl also found some of his habits more dubious. "Dandridge is sensible (and, divest'd of some freedoms, which might be call'd gallant in the fashionable

world), he is polite and agreeable. His greatest fault is a propensity to swearing, which throws a shade over his accomplishments. I ask'd him why he did so. 'It is a favorite vice, Miss Sally.'" The full diary is available, with annotations, at Albert Cook Myers, ed., *Sally Wister's Journal* (<http://bit.ly/1M0HNXN>)

Finally, it's an interesting exercise to think about how people who were farthest from the center of the Revolutionary government affected the Revolution. African American slaves, and even free blacks, had no direct control over what the Continental Congress did. *Little History* speaks briefly of Britain's missed opportunity to recruit black soldiers and the part played by some black soldiers in the Continental army. But slaves played an indirect yet important role by pursuing freedom on their own. A good account of this side of the story is Sylvia R. Frey, *Water From the Rock*.

CHAPTER 13 - QUESTIONS

1. Who was the principal author of the Declaration of Independence? Describe this delegate to the Second Continental Congress.
2. How was Enlightenment thinking reflected in the ideas of the Declaration? Why was it revolutionary to talk about natural rights instead of the rights of Britons?
3. In what ways did conditions in America demonstrate that not all people were created equal? How did Jefferson and John Adams face those questions in their personal lives?
4. Do you feel the Founders should be condemned for being "two-faced" in proclaiming liberty and equality? Why or why not?
5. What made Washington's task difficult as he tried to keep the British army bottled up in Boston?
6. What were the strengths and the weakness of using local militias to fight the British?
7. As the war moved to the middle states, how did Washington turn the tables on the British after his retreat through New Jersey and into Pennsylvania?
8. How did the turning point of the war come in Europe rather than in the United States? What event in America led to that change in Europe?
9. When the war moved to the Southern colonies, how was the fighting particularly brutal?
10. Why was the French navy crucial to American victory? Why was Washington's Continental Army important?

14 More Perfect Union

Like the previous chapter, here is one that covers less than a decade but travels a large distance in terms of national identity. The distance is large indeed between the original confederation of thirteen states and the national government forged by the Constitution. The Articles of Confederation never once talk about a *nation*. This is a confederation, a league of friendship. Think of the ways that the Confederation resembled today's United Nations...and think of how loose a confederation that is. Patrick Henry's famous speech at the Continental Congress is often quoted as an example of national unity. "The distinctions between Virginians, Pennsylvanians, New Yorkers, and New Englanders are no more. I am not a Virginian, but an American." But the show of national unity here is extremely misleading. Henry was being a sly fox. The truth is, he made the speech in hopes of giving his own state, Virginia, more power. If state delegations had only one vote, then puny Rhode Island would have as much power as mighty Virginia! Henry wanted representation based on population, which would give Virginia more weight in Congress—which Henry believed it deserved. So really, "I am not a Virginian, but an American," was meant to strengthen the power of Virginia!

Furthermore, the so-called "lessons of history" argued against creating a strong central government. Americans had just rejected the notion of a king ruling over them. For years the colonial legislatures had been fighting with royal governors, trying to rein in their powers. For colonials, the heroes in these battles were their legislatures. Why would you want to give any real power some executive—be it king, president or governor? Better to let Congress, the confederation's legislature, lead the country! The confederation government did achieve some national goals. It dealt with western lands that more than one state claimed, and with the ordinances of 1785 and 1787, laid out a peaceful way for the republic to expand over the coming years. But the Constitution was a significant step toward the creation of a stronger, national authority.

The Constitutional Convention, of course, is the place where the stronger union was worked out. For a full account, see Christopher Collier and James Lincoln Collier, *Decision in Philadelphia*. On the web, the National Constitution Center has a full site with discussions and essays on everything from the convention itself to the Bill of Rights and later amendments (<http://constitutioncenter.org/>). In particular, consult the materials provided as educational resources, <http://bit.ly/1PJW9iw>). Also extremely valuable is Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*.

I end the chapter in *Little History* with Franklin's eloquent speech on compromise because I think it's important to understand how much the Constitution is the product of any number of compromises. It has proved a

remarkable instrument of government that has endured for well over two centuries. But it was not handed down like the Ten Commandments to Moses! “For when you assemble a number of men to have the advantage of their joint wisdom,” as Franklin noted, “you inevitably assemble with those men, all their prejudices, their passions, their errors of opinion, their local interests, and their selfish views. From such an assembly can a perfect production be expected?” As we will see in later chapters, even quite a few of the Founders saw the dangers slavery posed to the Union.

CHAPTER 14 - QUESTIONS

1. How was the United States under the Articles of Confederation like the present-day United Nations
2. What powers did the national government lack that we have today under the Constitution?
3. Why did Virginia and Maryland not trust each other? How did western lands enter into that distrust?
4. What protest against state government led many Americans to feel that the Articles of Confederation needed to be revised?
5. What is proportional representation? Why did Madison’s Virginia Plan favor it? Why did smaller states oppose it? What small state proposed a different plan?
6. How did slavery become tangled up in the argument over proportional representation?
7. How did the large and small states compromise over representation?
8. How did the North and South compromise over slavery?
9. Why was the question of sovereignty a problem for the Constitutional Convention? How did they solve it?
10. What did the Federalists and Anti-Federalists stand for? How did a bill of rights make it possible for the new Constitution to be ratified?

15 Washington's Fear

This is probably a good time to consider *contingency* in history. In setting out their stories, historians are constantly having to deal with change. And there are two very different ways of understanding it. One way is to look at the deeds of individuals, who choose this path or that, and through their actions alter the course of history. An alternate approach examines the general structure of a society to make sense of why things happen. This structural point of view suggests that large and social movements and the way society is put together have a large role in determining the course of events, regardless of what individuals do. In Chapter 4 (page 17) I comment that because there were so many enterprising sailors pushing the boundaries of geographic knowledge in the age of discovery, even if Columbus had sailed off and drowned in a storm, some other European would have reached the Americas. That's a kind of structural way of looking at history— noticing that large economic and social conditions are shaping what individuals do.

(Science fiction writer Isaac Asimov wrote a trilogy that imagined a similar method of thinking had developed, in some future eon when billions of humans had peopled the universe. In that distant future, as he imagined it, psychohistorians (his term) could predict future history not by looking at what individuals did, but understanding the large-scale forces determining how billions of people would behave in the aggregate. *Foundation* is the first of the three books, if you're interested in this jaunty ride...)

In contrast, historians sometimes emphasize the way individual events change the course of history. An outcome is *contingent*—that is, it depends upon—how a person decides to act. The classic proverb about a small event changing large-scale history is the proverb, *For want of a nail the shoe was lost. For want of a shoe the horse was lost. For want of a horse the rider was lost. For want of a rider the message was lost. For want of a message the battle was lost. For want of a battle the kingdom was lost. And all for the want of a horseshoe nail.*

Although different historians may gravitate toward one end or the other of this interpretive spectrum, most grant that both ways of looking at outcomes have value. But in beginning this chapter by looking at Washington's fear, I'm asking readers to think about contingency—about what might have been if individuals acted differently. It's all too easy to assume that events were naturally destined to happen the way they did, that the United States would survive and prosper. But we should take Washington's worries seriously. For a time—especially in the late 1790s when the Republic was fragile—the course of history might have gone differently.

One path into the uncertainties of the era and its political violence would be a research project on the career of Matthew Lyon (“the spitting Lyon”) Lyon was caught up by the Sedition Act; and his time in Congress included the brawl with Federalist Roger Griswold. The expression *going at it “hammer and tongs”* was appropriately portrayed in this engraving from the Library of Congress:



The caption reads, “He in a trice, struck Lyon thrice, / Upon his head, enrag’d, sir, / Who seiz’d the tongs to ease his wrongs, / and Griswold thus engag’d, sir.”

For a deeper look at events discussed in this chapter, see James Roger Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic* as well as the relevant sections of Gordon Wood’s *Empire of Liberty*.

CHAPTER 15 - QUESTIONS

1. Why was Washington so uneasy at his inauguration? What “lessons” of history led him to be anxious?
2. Why did the framers of the Constitution choose to have an Electoral College to choose a president? Does it make sense to still have one today?
3. What did the Founders think about political parties? Why did they like or dislike them?

4. During Washington's presidency, how did Alexander Hamilton disagree with Thomas Jefferson and James Madison over issues of finance?
5. How did events in Europe contribute to the formation of the Federalist and Democratic Republican parties in the United States?
6. What sorts of people supported the Federalists? Who favored the Republicans?
7. In the election of 1796, why was a president chosen from one party and the vice-president from a rival party?
8. What did the Sedition Act do? Which party supported it and why? What made the act so dangerous?
9. Why did Jefferson have to depend on the support of his rival, Alexander Hamilton, to win the election of 1800?
10. Write an alternate history of the election of 1800, in which Washington's worst fears might have come true.

16 Empire of Liberty

The first half of the chapter focuses on Republican beliefs and mindsets, contrasting them with those of the Federalists. (Gordon Wood is very good on this in *Empire of Liberty*.) By chance, those differences were heightened as the nation's capital moved to Washington. The first two capitols, New York and Philadelphia, were commercial and cosmopolitan, befitting the Federalist point of view, while the new seat of government had been barely hacked out of the woods in the new District of Columbia, something that bothered Jefferson not a whit. This is where Hamilton's complaint becomes pertinent: that the national government should *not* govern "at a distance and out of sight." For those who would like to investigate the history of early, rustic Washington, James Sterling Young's *The Washington Community, 1800-1829* is an excellent resource. A good primary source on the same topic is Margaret Bayard Smith, *The First Forty Years of Washington Society*, available on Google Books (<http://bit.ly/1jzdu4f>). Smith's description of early Washington as she knew it reveals a sensitivity to the environment:

Conrad's boarding house was on the south side of Capitol hill and commanded an extensive and beautiful view. It was on the top of the hill, the precipitous sides of which were covered with grass, shrubs and trees in their wild uncultivated state. Between the foot of the hill and the broad Potomac extended a wide plain, through which the Tiber wound its way. The romantic beauty of this little stream was not then deformed by wharves or other works of art. Its banks were shaded with tall and umbrageous forest trees of every variety, among which the superb Tulip-Poplar rose conspicuous; the magnolia, the azalea, the hawthorn, the wild-rose and many other indigenous shrubs grew beneath their shade, while violets, anemonies and a thousand other sweet wood-flowers found shelter among their roots... Those trees, those shrubs, those flowers are gone. Man and his works have displaced the charms of nature... Such [vegetation] as grew on the public grounds ought to have been preserved, but in a government such as ours, where the people are sovereign, this could not be done. *The people*, the poorer inhabitants cut down these noble and beautiful trees for fuel. In one single night seventy tulip-Poplars were *girdled*, by which process life is destroyed and afterwards cut up at their leisure by the people. Nothing afflicted Mr. Jefferson like this wanton destruction of the fine trees scattered over the city-grounds. I remember on one occasion (it was after he was President) his exclaiming "How I wish that I possessed the power of a despot." The company at table stared at a declaration so opposed to his disposition and principles. "Yes," continued he, in reply to their inquiring looks, "I wish I was a despot that I might save the noble, the beautiful trees that are daily falling sacrifices to the cupidity of their owners, or the necessity of the poor." (pages 10-11)

One housekeeping point. Because of the way the chapter's themes are organized, I discuss the War of 1812 and the decline of the Federalists *before* considering the Lewis and Clark expedition, which set out in 1803, nearly a decade earlier. Although the book makes clear this chronological switch, I wave a flag of caution again here. I reversed the order of discussion because I wanted to end the chapter by returning to one of the book's central themes, which is suggested by the expedition: namely, the diversity of the American republic, and how it posed a long-term problem for Jefferson's Republicans.

On the one hand, Jefferson wanted to keep the national government simple and small. He cut back the navy, a decision that came to haunt Madison in the War of 1812. Jefferson also viewed agrarian life as central to the nation's identity, much more so than the diverse and commercially oriented urban culture. Yet that diversity multiplied when the United States acquired the Louisiana Purchase, with its diverse patchwork of peoples. In the end his dreams of a republican "empire of liberty" suppressed any reservations he had over whether a diverse republic of continental size could hold together. But as the upcoming chapters will relate, the acquisition of territory and the spread of slavery into it ultimately brought the Union to the breaking point.

CHAPTER 16 - QUESTIONS

1. What point was Jefferson trying to make by walking to his inauguration and eating dinner at the "bottom" of the table at his boarding house?
2. Government should not "operate at a distance and out of sight." Which political party agreed with this statement, the Federalists or the Republicans? Why?
3. Why did the Federalist party decline in strength and eventually fade away?
4. Which two European powers fought a series of wars that climaxed in the early 1800s? Which nation did the Federalists tend to favor? The Republicans?
5. Who were the War Hawks?
6. What battle gave Americans their greatest victory in the War of 1812? Why didn't that victory make a big difference, in the end?
7. Why did Great Britain's defeat of Napoleon and the end of the War of 1812 change American concerns at home and abroad?
8. How many years did Lewis and Clark take to cross the continent and return home? What river systems did they use to accomplish the journey?
9. Why was it odd for Jefferson, a Republican who believed in small government, to agree to make the Louisiana Purchase?
10. What was Jefferson's vision of an "empire of liberty"? How did he think such an empire might differ from earlier empires in history?

17 Man of the People

The chapter title, of course, refers to the redoubtable Andrew Jackson, who is seen as an emblem of his era. As indeed he was. But the trick is understanding the many different dimensions and ways that Jackson is that emblem—for better and, it must also be said, for worse.

The era is indeed remarkable for the spread of a more democratic culture; as *Little History* notes, Europeans flocked to visit and write about this remarkable and strange young nation. Exploring the new democratic traits through the eyes of travelers is one good way to go deeper into the era. There are scores of accounts, fascinating to read. Among many are Harriet Martineau, *Society in America* (<http://bit.ly/1MbebgE>) and Basil Hall, *Travels in North America, in the Years 1827 and 1828* (<http://bit.ly/1MbeUOQ>). Here's a description Hall gives of a "grand cattle show," sponsored by the Agricultural Society at Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Given what we've seen earlier in *Little History* about customs suggesting either equality or inequality, how does Hall's account include elements of both?

Dinner, as I have often said before, is a brief affair in America, a mere business to be got over, not a rational pleasure to be enjoyed; and we were soon called away, by sound of drum, to join the procession to the church, where an oration, suitable to the day, was to be delivered. The company walked two and two, with the most formal and funereal solemnity, the women being kept carefully separated from the men. I was rather surprised when the gentleman with whom I was appointed to walk, took me to the very last, the tail of the line, which, at first, looked odd enough, as it was obvious, from a hundred other things, that they wished to treat strangers with all distinction. But in the rear I found also the clergyman and several other principal persons of the village. This arrangement...I found was a device for giving us the first entry into the church, and consequently the choice of seats; for when the head of the column reached the church-door, a general halt took place, and a lane being formed by the gentlemen who had been walking side by side now facing one another, the two clergymen took off their hats, and advanced from the end of the line up the avenue formed by the double row of people.

I was invited to follow next, and, accompanied by my friend, moved along cap in hand. I observed, that as the clergymen passed, about one in ten of those who were in the line touched their hats. There did not seem to be an intentional rudeness on the part of the other nine, as the omission evidently arose from want of habitual politeness in such matters. In fact, the whole affair was a most amusing though rather clumsy compromise between the natural consequence which arises from wealth and station, and the nominal rights and privileges of that much talked of

equality which belongs to a democracy. The dignity of the sovereign people, it will be observed, was duly maintained on this occasion by their being allowed the precedence in the line of march; while their subjects, or rather the subordinate sovereigns,—the rich or influential villagers—by means of the device I had described, were allowed the more solid advantage of good situations in the church. The ladies, still kept apart, had already occupied one side, while the other was allotted to the men.

What a wonderful example in miniature of so many customs of equality and inequality mixed together! And this British observer, finely attuned to signs of both, is the perfect observer to report them.

It's in this chapter that we first encounter the concept of *equality of opportunity*, an important aspect of democratic ideology in the age of Jackson, a concept contrasted with *equality of condition*, which most Americans rejected as a goal. The contrast is important because, as we'll see in future chapters, American notions will evolve over time regarding what it means to possess an equal opportunity.

Furthermore, it's important to understand that Jackson exemplified the limits of what was celebrated as Jacksonian democracy. This “man of the people” was also one of the nation's richest plantation owners, who owned more than a hundred slaves. This leader of the Democratic party, popularly nicknamed “the Democracy” during these years, believed in no democratic rights for Indians; and indeed Jackson himself was directly responsible for annexing millions of acres of Indian land for the United States; and later, as president, for putting in place the program of Indian removal, so that white Americans could swarm onto the land to carve out settlements and cotton plantations. In doing so, Jackson was a leader larger than life; but he reflected the feelings and attitudes of many ordinary Americans of the day, who were pleased to vote for “Old Hickory.”

The result reinforced one of the greatest ironies in American history, one that this book repeatedly discusses. To wit, even as the ideals of equality are spreading and political reforms are giving more ordinary (white male) citizens the right to vote and run for office, the power of inequality—of a society dependent on the labor of slaves and on the land of Indians—is entrenching itself.

And this is not only true for the South but also the North, for reasons that become clearer in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 17 - QUESTIONS

1. How were the customs of Americans changing as the era of the Founders passed away? Give several examples.
2. How did Martin Van Buren's attitude toward political parties differ from the views of the Founders?
3. How did the style of campaigning for political office change? How did the qualifications for voting or running for office change?
4. Why did Andrew Jackson run for president a second time, in 1828, after being defeated in 1824?
5. What did 'equality of opportunity' mean to most Americans of Jackson's time?
6. Why did Jackson launch a campaign against the "monster" Bank of the United States?
7. What are the advantages of a democracy, even if the people running it make mistakes?
8. How did the situation of Indians in the United States demonstrate that equality of opportunity had not spread to all Americans?
9. What role did Jackson play in U.S. relations with Indians? What was the Trail of Tears?
10. How did Jackson and the national government clash with the state of South Carolina? What was the doctrine of nullification? Why was it rejected? Why did Jackson also reject the idea of secession?

18 Cotton Kingdoms

The last letter of the chapter title is an *s*. That's important.

Textbooks traditionally talk about “the Cotton Kingdom” of the South. They often quote Senator James Hammond of South Carolina, who dared the North to challenge the might of the South: “As large as Great Britain, France, Austria, Prussia and Spain. Is not that territory enough to make an empire that shall rule the world?” Would the North and South come to blows? asked Hammond in 1858. “No, you dare not make war on cotton. No power on earth dares to make war upon it. Cotton is king.” But as the chapter points out, the primary industry of the North was the textile industry. It too depended on cotton to power its economy. And American consumers were buying cotton. So these developments affected both North and South, though in different ways. One recent book makes this case in more detail, Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*. It is not short, but even reading the Introduction would provide a useful orientation.

As for “Cotton Kingdoms,” the first half of the chapter looks at the land rush fueling the spread of cotton and slavery into lands newly taken from Indians. Though there is little space to describe the immense diversity of the South, I've tried to show that the stereotype of the large plantation was only one sort of agricultural system. Many plantations were smaller, grew different crops, and had fewer slaves. There were many yeoman farmers and even a relatively small number of free African Americans (less than 300,000 in 1860) living mostly in the Upper South. But the institution of slavery—the South's “Peculiar Institution,” as it was called—shaped its life and culture. I've tried to suggest the variety of ways slavery was ever-present, by looking at the different decisions individuals had to make, day in, day out.

Similarly, the second half of the chapter moves north, to show how the industrial revolution provided ways not only to process cotton more efficiently (Whitney's engine or “gin,” but to process cotton into threads and cloth for ready-made clothing. For a look into the culture of working girls at Lowell, try looking at the newspaper produced by the young workers there, *The Lowell Offering*. Excerpts can be found on the Web (<http://bit.ly/1jD6xzc> and <http://bit.ly/1GtII6J>) and the subject is also explored in David A. Zonderman, *Aspirations and Anxieties*.

CHAPTER 18 - QUESTIONS

1. What was the Natchez Trace? Find a map showing its route. Why is it important for the events in this chapter? What are “stands”?
2. What is a cotton gin? What is the “Black Belt”? How did both change the economy of the United States?
3. Roughly what percent of whites living in the South owned plantations with more than 100 slaves? (The information is in the chapter, but you’ll have to use math to get the number.)
4. Roughly what percentage of the South’s population were slaves?
5. If so few southern whites owned many slaves, why slavery have such a large effect on the South? Describe its effects on slaves, plantation owners and ordinary whites.
6. “Even a master who wanted to treat his slaves kindly could never fully trust them, just as slaves could never trust their masters to ‘do right’ by them.” Why was that so?
7. How did southern slaves and cotton plantations affect the northern states? How did American consumers benefit from the cotton economy?
8. What products were manufactured at the Lowell Mills? How were the mills powered?
9. Describe the life of a mill girl. What did the girls think were the positive and negative aspects of their jobs?
10. What were George Washington’s feelings about slavery in the years before he died?

19 Burned Over

I grew up in Rochester, at the center of the Burned Over District, so I have a particular fondness for this chapter's material. Though not entirely relevant, I can't resist including an excerpt from Charles Grandison Finney's *Memoirs* (<http://bit.ly/1W9fZWI>) which shows what life in a booming canal town could be like:

On one occasion I had an appointment in the First church... The house was filled in every part. Dr. Penny had introduced the services and was engaged in the first prayer, when I heard something which I supposed to be the report of a gun, and the jingling of glass, as if a window had been broken. My thought was that some careless person from the military parade on the outside, had fired so near the window as to break a pane of glass. But before I had time to think again, Dr. Penny leaped from the pulpit almost over me, for I was kneeling by the sofa behind him. The pulpit was in front of the church, between the two doors. The rear wall of the church stood upon the brink of the [Erie] canal. The congregation, in a moment, fell into a perfect panic, and rushed for the doors and the windows, as if they were all distracted. One elderly woman held up a window in the rear of the church, where several, as I was informed, leaped out into the canal. The rush was terrific. Some jumped over the galleries into the aisles below; they ran over each other in the aisles.

I stood up in the pulpit, and not knowing what had happened, put up my hands, and cried at the top of my voice, "Be quiet! Be quiet!" Directly a couple of women rushing up into the pulpit, one on the one side, and the other on the other side, caught hold of me, in a state of distraction. Dr. Penny ran out into the streets, and they were getting out in every direction, as fast as possible. As I did not know that there was any danger, the scene looked so ludicrous to me, that I could scarcely refrain from laughing. They rushed over each other in the aisles, so that in several instances I observed men that had been crushed down, rising up and throwing off others that had rushed upon them. All at length got out. Several were considerably hurt, but no one killed. But the house was strewn with all sorts of women's apparel. Bonnets, shawls, gloves, handkerchiefs, and parts of dresses, were scattered in every direction. The men had very generally gone out without their hats, I believe; and many persons had been seriously bruised in the awful rush.

I afterwards learned that the walls of the church had been settling for some time, the ground being very damp from its proximity to the canal. It had been spoken of, in the congregation, as not in a satisfactory state; and some were afraid that either the tower would fall, or the roof, or the walls of the building would come down. Of this I had heard nothing

myself. The original alarm was created by a timber from the roof, falling end downwards, and breaking through the ceiling, above the lamp in front of the organ.

The church didn't collapse, though its walls did continue to spread, so the revival was moved to the nearby "Brick" church—which, as it happened, was where my family worshiped over a century later.

But the story does give a sense of the bustling, unsettled, booming nation that served as a backdrop to the reform movements this chapter discusses. One should remember that the years covered here overlap with the previous two chapters and even the next, a period stretching from the 1820s through the 1840s. So the new and rowdy democratic politics of Andrew Jackson are going on during these years, as is the land rush into new cotton fields and the spinning and weaving machines of the industrial revolution. The chapter opening makes the link by highlighting Charles Finney's visit to one of the many textile mills springing up along northern rivers and streams; and Rochester is actually the nation's first inland boomtown. Many business leaders there believed that the unruly workers were desperately in need of reform, by which they meant *order* as well as *piety*. Historian Paul Johnson makes clear the connection between religion and middle-class order, in addition to the link between religion and reform, in his study of the Rochester revivals, *Shopkeeper's Millennium*.

Daniel Walker Howe's chapter in *What Hath God Wrought*, titled "Pursuing the Millennium," clearly lays out the religious impulse of many reform movements during these years. The "burned over" metaphor is particularly appropriate, not only because fire burns with a fierce heat, but also because a conflagration often spreads in unexpected directions. Certainly, some revivalists remained focused only on saving individual souls: if you converted enough people, they argued, society would reform itself naturally. But other preachers and lay folk championed specific social reforms. The chapter is too short to include the full panoply, but they included reform of prisons, schools, insane asylums and debtor laws, temperance reform, feminism, and abolitionism. In addition to such problem-oriented movements, more ambitious dreamers and thinkers looked to reorder society from the bottom up, embarking on a variety of utopian schemes. (Some of these, it should be noted, were secular in outlook.) In many ways, the sheer diversity of reform projects gave the 1830s and 1840s a feel much like the experiments and movements of the 1960s.

Many avenues lead into a deeper study of these enthusiasms. One, of course, is through biographies and autobiographies. Sometimes even comparing the two genres makes for a valuable contrast. Elizabeth Cady Stanton's *Eighty Years and More* is engaging (<http://bit.ly/2042XPd>), but the brief biography of her by Lori D. Ginzburg (*Elizabeth Cady Stanton: An American Life*) provides a useful critical contrast. A different comparison worth examining is between a major reformer,

Frederick Douglass, and another giant of the era, Abraham Lincoln. James Oakes does this in his worthwhile *The Radical and the Republican*.

CHAPTER 19 - QUESTIONS

1. Why was the Erie Canal important for trade as well as travel? What product was Rochester, NY involved in making that was shipped by boats on the canal?
2. What were the goals of Charles Grandison Finney's Rochester revival? (Name several.)
3. Why was the region around the Erie Canal called the "Burned Over District"? Name two other religious movements (besides Finney's) that got their start there.
4. What is a utopia? What are "utopian" social movements? Give an example of a religious and a non-religious utopian community.
5. How are religious revivals and social reform connected to each other? Could you have religious revivals without social reform?
6. What was temperance reform? The chapter says that drinking alcoholic beverages rose sharply as the Industrial Revolution spread, but doesn't say why. Can you suggest a reason why there might have been a connection? Why did men drink more than women?
7. How did David Walker spread his belief in abolition of slavery? How was William Lloyd Garrison's version of abolition different from more moderate solutions?
8. Was the abolition of slavery widely accepted in the North? Give examples of how it was or was not.
9. How did Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott work for women's rights? How were their ideas received by other reformers?
10. What were some of the rights Stanton and other reformers wished to gain?

20 Frontiers

Like the chapter title “Cotton Kingdoms,” the final *s* in “Frontiers” is important. The format of *Little History* avoids any discussion of historical interpretations and how they’ve changed over time, but one of the hoariest and persistent theories of western history was launched by historian Frederick Jackson Turner in his 1893 article (presented at the Columbian Exposition in 1893) titled “The Significance of the Frontier in American History.” The stereotypes arising out of that school of thinking viewed the frontier as essentially one-dimensional: a steady movement westward, from civilization and hierarchical society into “wilderness” and “free land,” which pioneers tamed, but also were affected by, as it broke down old habits and replaced them with more democratic ones.

The historians of my generation spent several decades trying to take apart that one-sided point of view. There is, to begin with, the notion of a largely empty “wilderness” that we have already seen was misleading in Chapter 3. When I went to graduate school, the prevailing estimate of Indian population in North America was only a million, not the 8 million we now estimate were here. As for the concept of “free land,” the territory was wrested from Indian peoples by force. Historian Patricia Limerick was in the vanguard of revisionists breaking down these stereotypes of western history, with her seminal work, *The Legacy of Conquest*, a book still very much worth reading.

In short, understanding this chapter depends on recognizing that there were multiple moving frontiers during these decades: Spanish, Indian, French, and British-American. It would make a fascinating research project—the significant frontiers *between* Indian nations, for those frontiers were shifting too. Richard White has a ground-breaking article, “The Winning of the West: The Expansion of the Sioux in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” available on the Web at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1894083> (a bit pricey, but accessible free at any college library that subscribes to the JSTOR scholarly database in which it is found.)

The history of this period is multidimensional also thanks to the wave of environmental historians, who view the movements of peoples and cultures as only part of a larger story involving a frontier of things, such as guns and trade goods, which moved in advance of white settlement; and a frontier of animals, in which bison and horses play important roles. Readers should understand that my brief references to these frontiers are only the tip of a very fascinating iceberg. One good place to start are two books by Elliott West, *The Way of the West* and *The Contested Plains*.

I have concentrated on the bigger picture in this discussion, but of course the major events described in his chapter all have books written about them. Again, *What Hath God Wrought* is a good synthesis of the period. As for primary sources, perennial favorites are accounts of passage on the Overland trails. On the one hand, reading a specific diary or recollection provides the graphic details that make the journey come alive. At the same time, realize that each diary comes with its own specific perspective and bias. A good way to counter that is by reading an account of the migration as a whole, such as John D. Unruh, Jr., *The Plains Across*, which quotes many different crossings. Even the simple difference between men's and women's perspectives can be striking. On this point, see John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (revised edition). For a guide to emigrant journals and links on the Web, see <http://www.oregonpioneers.com/diaries.htm>.

CHAPTER 20 - QUESTIONS

1. Look at a map of North America. (Two in this book include those on pages 144-145 and on page 7, but a full color map showing relief would be even better.) What are some of the major geographic obstacles outlined in Chapter 2 that settlers from the United States would encounter?
2. Where did the fur traders of the 1820s and 1830s hunt? How did they deal with the hardships they encountered? When and why did the fur trade decline?
3. How would you define a frontier? Give examples of more than one frontier, depending on the point of view of the people involved.
4. The chapter also speaks of a “frontier of *things*” and “not only people.” Give examples of such moving frontiers.
5. What were the two principal frontier areas where clashes erupted between the United States and Mexico?
6. What was Sam Houston's strategy for defeating Santa Anna? Did it involve the Alamo?
7. What country ruled jointly over Oregon Country with the United States? Which American president pushed to end this joint occupation?
8. What is the doctrine of “Manifest Destiny”? What advances in technology helped convince many Americans that their nation might become continental? Why had they doubted before?
9. What territory did the United States conquer in the U.S.-Mexican War?
10. What new “frontier line” would become more important because the United States gained so much territory?

21 Crossing the Line

This chapter is the longest in the book; and probably also the most difficult. It's worth spending some time on it. Its difficulty arises for a number of reasons: first, because it circles back to cover events stretching all the way from the drafting of the Constitution to the beginning of the Civil War. Second, because it pulls together major themes that have been building at least since Chapter 8, on boom-country Virginia.

The largest question, of course, is why the Civil War? How did it come to happen? And the match that lit the fuse was the acquisition of new territory after the U.S. Mexican War. Should it be incorporated into the Union as slave territory or free?

But to understand why that question is so inflammatory, we need to recognize that slavery has been a political issue and dividing line even at the drafting of the Constitution in 1787—as Madison himself recognizes. In the six decades to follow, there are repeated attempts made by white Americans to balance the interests and political power of the defenders of slavery against those of northerners in the free states. (African American slaves had no direct say in the matter, as only a few free blacks could vote during these years.) The imagery the chapter uses to tell the tale involves drawing various lines between free and slave territory as a way of preserving the Union. Over the decades, those lines were redrawn and readjusted in repeated attempts to keep the peace. Those lines included:

- The Three-Fifths Compromise in the Constitution
- Moving the capital from Philadelphia to Washington, DC
- The Missouri Compromise
- Zachary Taylor's proposal for the territory acquired from Mexico
- The Compromise of 1850
- The Kansas-Nebraska Act
- The Dred Scott Decision

But as the chapter indicates, all these lines were repeatedly ignored, protested or crossed, by both northerners and southerners, and especially by African Americans, who lacked political power but could vote with their feet. A list of those “line crossings” could also be made, wherein the North and the South “invaded” each other's territory:

- Slaves ran away to the North by the thousands
- Northern abolitionists entered the South to help steal away slaves
- Southern planters traveled to free states to capture runaway slaves
- Northerners lobbied to outlaw slavery in the nation's capital

Southerners worked to keep slavery legal there
Southerners led mobs into Kansas to vote in slavery
Northerners organized emigration into Kansas to keep slavery out

These two lists account for much of the chapter's narrative. But much of the earlier chapters also frame the issue, because they chart what I've referred to as the strange dance of equality and inequality. We are used to thinking, instinctively, of a kind of progressive rise in equality. As a belief in equality makes strides and spreads, it seems only common sense that inequality is losing ground. If you put these two attributes on a graph, you would expect to see equality rising over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, while inequality was declining. Two mirror images.

But that's not what's happening, as the first half of this book shows. Equality is rising gradually (with setbacks of course here and there); but inequality is rising too. Over the eighteenth century, as we begin to hear more and more about equal rights, slavery is also spreading by leaps and bounds. (Remember that in seventeenth-century Virginia, slavery plays less of a role. Laws codifying a system of slavery come into being only later during those years.) And in the nineteenth century, as Jacksonian democracy gives American political life a distinctly more rough-and-tumble democratic hue, the institution of slavery is also increasing its power, becoming more entrenched, thanks to the huge boom in cotton and the industrial revolution.

These larger factors are an important part of understanding why attempts at compromise fail and a civil war breaks out. If inequality had been receding as equality rose, the transition might have been less violent. But slavery was a central part of making the economy thrive, in both the North and South; the conflict could not be resolved by the drawing of lines. "And the war came." So spoke Lincoln in his second inaugural.

James McPherson's *Battle Cry of Freedom* provides one succinct discussion of the coming of secession and war. (*Ordeal by Fire* is a similar history but also includes an account of Reconstruction.) And two other books are especially good at laying out the roots of the slavery issue from the Constitution to the Civil War: Garry Wills, *Negro President: Jefferson and the Slave Power*; and Leonard Richards, *The Slave Power*.

The question of slavery's role in causing the Civil War is sometimes debated. My own feelings are made clear enough in the pages of *Little History*. The question is adroitly explored in Charles B. Dew's brief book, *Disunion*, an account of the commissioners appointed by Confederate states to make the case for secession to other undecided Southerners. The debate can also be followed in two contrasting primary sources: one by Jefferson Davis, who became president of the Confederacy and the other by Alexander Stephens, its vice

president. Davis's comments are on pages 77-80 of *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Nation*, Chapter 10 (<http://bit.ly/1OYP4Oz>) while Stephens' address, known as the "Corner Stone" speech, can be found at <http://bit.ly/1deFCoK>. Do the dates when these opinions were given make a difference? (Davis's work was published in 1882 and Stephens' in 1861.)

CHAPTER 21 - QUESTIONS

1. Explain what Emerson meant when he said, "The United States will conquer Mexico, but it will be as the man who swallows the arsenic which brings him down in turn. Mexico will poison us."
2. What was the Missouri Compromise? Why did the North and South care how many states came into the Union from each side?
3. The line between slave states and free states was meant to be a compromise, keeping the two regions apart, but still a part of the Union. Yet that line was crossed many times, in both directions. Give examples of how that line was crossed.
4. Why did it matter whether slavery should be allowed in the nation's capital? Why was slavery one reason the nation's capital was moved from Philadelphia to Washington?
5. What were the "gag rules" passed by Congress?
6. What were the compromises made by the North and South in the Compromise of 1850? What was the idea of popular sovereignty and how was it a compromise?
7. How did Kansas Territory spark a new fight over slavery? How did the compromise achieved in Congress overturn the Missouri Compromise?
8. How did the debate over slavery tear apart the political parties? What new party arose out of these conflicts?
9. How did the Supreme Court decision over Dred Scott overturn earlier compromises made by Congress?
10. How did the actions of John Brown bring the crisis of the Union to a head?
11. Why did the election of Abraham Lincoln seem like such a fateful blow to many white southerners?

22 What Was Coming

Thousands of books have been written about the Civil War. For a thorough one-volume narrative, see James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*. With space so limited in *A Little History*, my strategy has been to concentrate on the war's larger framework, slighting all but a few pivotal battles, and to focus on Lincoln as leader of the Union cause.

It's worth noting that the two sides arrayed against each other, North and South, were hardly monolithic entities. The chapter begins by discussing the course of secession, for it took time for the Confederacy to reach its full extent. Even once the final lines were drawn, and the Upper South followed the Lower South's exit, the land of the "Secesh" was divided. Stephanie McCurry's *Confederate Reckoning* shows the ways in which the Confederacy was hampered by opposition from within, not least by its slaves. As for the Union, its home front was often divided. One interesting research topic might be an investigation of the New York City draft riots—the largest civil disturbance in American history—which took place at the same time as the battle of Gettysburg. Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, is excellent..

Lincoln endured a long learning curve coming to grips with how to win the war and find the generals to fight it. As this chapter notes, he first chose George McClellan, hoping to achieve victory through a limited war. That strategy would allow white Southerners to more easily reenter the Union once the Union was restored. Then too, Lincoln's first task was to avoid antagonizing the border states enough to turn them toward secession. It was only as the war progressed that the president became convinced that all-out war was needed to subdue the South. Finding Grant, whose stubborn determination mirrored that philosophy, allowed that approach to go forward.

Emancipation should be seen at least partly in that light—the rejection of a limited war leaving slavery intact—though as the war progressed, Lincoln also embraced the justice of freeing the slaves. But black Southerners played a pivotal role both in freeing themselves ("voting with their feet," as I like to put it) and through countless other measures of resistance and subversion. (McCurry is excellent on making this clear.) Confederate forces found it increasingly hard to secure their human "property" on the home front while simultaneously fighting off a northern invasion.

Lincoln's second inaugural is perhaps the greatest presidential address ever given, for its humility, magnanimity and yet clear-eyed analysis of the forces that brought the nation to civil war. Though superbly written, it's not always easy going. It deserves line by line study. And of course the Gettysburg Address (touched on in Chapter 22, *How Do You Reconstruct?*) is also an oratorical classic. Memorizing some or all of either is not amiss.

Primary sources also provide a wonderfully pungent window into the war as experienced by ordinary folk. There are many accounts available. Here are two, the first a letter from a soldier under Grant, who had helped capture Vicksburg; the second, excerpts from a fervent Confederate woman in the Shenandoah Valley who found Union raiders at her door.

Letter of William G. Christie at Vicksburg, Mississippi

Minnesota Historical Society

(Full version at <http://bit.ly/1NBCjGh>)

July 19th [1863] Dear Brother I once more resume my pen, to scribe a few lines to you. We are much Pleased here with the Prospects in Tenn: and Penn, and are well satisfied with our own achievements. . . . The Mississippi River is oppen and the Southern Confedracy is cut in twain, it will be out of the question to think that the Pesky critter can live without the tail, and if Meade only gives the Head a scrunch with his heel we will soon make away with the Body.

This city is very nicely sittuated, and has been very handsome Before the war. I have been over the whole Place and I have changed my mind in regard to its appearance. Tis very filthy and although large gangs of Negroes have been employed in cleaning the streets, there has been But little, apparently, (comparitvly speaking) done the Rebels have been very filthy [during the siege], and it has just been here as every where else. We have been driven to a great Deal of work for healths sake. There are waggon loads of old rags of clothing, full of vermin and disgusting to Behold, there are one or two Rebel hospitals in town, and you can tell long before you come near them By the odorous stench, where they are, and let me assure you that they as a general thing have a Peculiar odor, belong[ing] to their camps and hospitals, and you can tell when Passing through a country, where troops of Both sides have been camped the difference, between each camp By the smell even before you see a scrap of clothing or anything else to tell the difference by. . .

You complain of having nothing to write about, what do you suppose we Poor Devils have to write about, nothing only drumming here: and drumming there, drumming everywhere, and fiffing [fife-ing] for the same. . . . Next we might tell of transport hot weather, then of the daily arrivals of Contraband [slaves], from the cane brakes, where they have been hid away by there masters, untill so near dead with exposure and want, poisoned by vines of various kinds, and in such horrid Plight, that numbers drop Dead in the streets, or lie down in some unoccupied house, and die. Is this war too much for the Nation, that has had such a system in it that bears such fruits. No, and untill this accursed thing is Put from among us there will be no end to the war. . .

My letters are wearisome, I know. But there is only one excuse for me writing and that is it lets you know I am well, I am also light in weight, (not to say or imply anything else) Being, only 140 lbs. By the scales so you see I am But a bunch of Bones: But lively and well. . . Be Patient in all things, is my advice to you and if I had only written so at the head of this letter you would have been profitably warned and spared you self the trouble of reading such a jumble of nonsense, Read and forgive, and Remember me to all,

Believe me your affectionate Brother

Wm G. Christie

Diary of Nancy Emerson – Excerpts

Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library
University of Virginia
(Full entries at <http://bit.ly/20aVo9f>)

[July 9, 1864] Our friends at the North have probably been thinking some about us of late, hearing that the Yankees have taken Staunton, though *what* they have thought is beyond my power to divine, ignorant as we are of each others feelings. Sister C. & I very often talk of them, wonder how they fare & what they think of us, whether they set us down for incorrigible rebels against “the best government in the world,” always winding up however by arguing that we do not & cannot believe they favor this unjust & abominable war, though such strange things happen these days that nothing ought to astonish us. . .

The first day, they came in from the West, across the mountain. A party of 40 or 50 perhaps, came riding up, dismounted & rushed in. “Have you got any whiskey?” said they, “got any flour? got any bacon?” with plenty of oaths “Come on boys,” says one, “we’ll find it all” With that, they pushed rudely by Sister C. who was terribly alarmed, & had been from the first news of their coming, & spread them selves nearly all over the house. Finding their way to a fine barrel of flour which a neighbor had given us, they proceeded to fill their sacks & pillow cases, scattering a large percent on the floor, till it was nearly exhausted. . . Some went upstairs, opened every trunk & drawer & tossed things upside down or on the floor, even my nice bonnets, pretending to be looking for arms. . . . We did not say anything to provoke them, but did not disguise our sentiments. They went peeping under the beds, looking for rebels as they said. Baxter told them there were no rebels here (meaning rebel soldiers) Cate spoke & said *We are all rebels*. Ellen spoke & said “Yes Baxter, I am a rebel.” The Yankee looked up from her drawer, which he was searching just then, & said “That’s right.” Cate then said, “I am a rebel too & I *glory* in it.” . . .

[July 13] At one of our neighbors, they took every thing they had to eat, all the pillow cases & sheets but what were on the beds, & the towels & some of the ladies stockings. . . At another neighbors, they took all of their meat (some 30 pieces of bacon) & nearly everything else they had to eat, all their horses (4) & persuaded off their two negro men. One of these was afterwards seen by one of our men crying to come back, but was watched so closely that he could not escape. No wonder he cried. He has been twice on the brink of the grave with pneumonia, & was nursed by his mistress as tenderly as if he had been a brother, & she was always kind to him, his master also. He will not find such treatment anywhere else. . .

[July 15] Some hid their things & had them discovered but we were more fortunate. (Some were betrayed by their servants) Some hid nothing, thinking they would not be disturbed but found themselves woefully mistaken. Others thought they might be worse dealt with if they hid anything. A lady near Staunton a little time since had two Yankee officers come to take tea with her. She was strong “secesh,” but she got them a good supper. It was served up in very plain dishes. They perceived that she was wealthy, & inquired if she had not hid her plate &c. She told them she had. They asked *where*. She told them in the ash heap. They said “That is not a good place. It is the first place searched.” They then very kindly & politely showed her a good place (in their opinion). She followed their advice & saved her things. In another instance, some Yankee officers politely showed a lady where to hide her silver &c. The soldiers came & searched in vain. Just as they were going away, a little black chap who had followed them around says to them in a tone of triumph, “Ah you did not find Missis things hid inside the _____.” They went & found & took them.

CHAPTER 22 - QUESTIONS

1. Which southern states seceded from the Union first? Why did other southern states wait? What convinced them to join the Confederacy?
2. Who did Lincoln consider appointing to lead the Union armies? Who was his final choice? What was the North’s original strategy in fighting the war?
3. What caused Lincoln to consider fighting more than a limited war?
4. Why would it be too simple to say “Lincoln freed the slaves by issuing the Emancipation Proclamation”? How did it prove too simple for Confederates to think that their slave population would be “a tower of strength” in the war?
5. Which two battles in the summer of 1863 turned the tide for the Union? Why was each one important?
6. Why did Grant send General Sherman into Georgia?

7. Why did Lincoln's defeat in the election of 1864 seem certain? How did the situation turn around? Who were among Lincoln's strongest supporters?
8. What did the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution do?
9. What strategy did Grant use to defeat Lee's army?
10. In discussing the war in his second inaugural address, how did Lincoln show "malice toward none and charity for all"?

23 How Do You Reconstruct?

For me, the key to understanding Reconstruction and appreciating the magnitude of the task is connecting the standard political history and associated fireworks in Washington with Reconstruction as it went forward on the ground. On both levels, Eric Foner's *Reconstruction* is the standard work, providing more detail. For those who wish less, use his abridgment in *A Short History of Reconstruction*. Also useful is Michael W. Fitzgerald's *Splendid Failure*, an even briefer.

A word is in order about historians' changing interpretations of this period. For no other era of American history has the understanding of a period undergone so much change. In this case, the revolution in attitudes was sparked by the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, which prompted a whole generation of young historians to reconsider earlier judgments. This brief guide is no place to explore these changes, but be aware: a great many books on Reconstruction published before the 1960s, and still on library shelves, provide accounts that are often partial at best, blinkered and biased at worst.

Chapter 23 divides roughly in two, providing the political history of Reconstruction first; and then exploring the deeper achievements and challenges as they appeared on the ground, in everyday life. The pivot point between the two stories brings us back to the question historians so often debate, how much change can be shaped by an individual in history versus the structural factors limiting change. In this era, the question intrudes because of the brutal fact of Lincoln's assassination and the *what ifs* that naturally follow from the act. I readily admit to no originality in choosing Lincoln as my favorite president: for his achievements, his temperament, and his superb grasp of the human condition. In those respects he stood head and shoulders over the stubborn and inflexible Andrew Johnson. The two men were largely self-taught, but what they taught themselves couldn't have been more different!

I would very much like to believe that had Lincoln survived, he would have been able to sagely direct Reconstruction toward an eventual safe harbor. But hard as I try, I can't convince myself that this would have happened. The second half of the chapter is designed to illustrate some of the reasons why, by considering the immense hurdles, encountered day in and day out, which made Reconstruction so difficult.

The chapter discusses how such things as sidewalks, schools, churches, and even the night was "reconstructed," as African Americans sought to carve out lives as equal citizens. One way to feel the force of the argument is to read more about the details of these newfound freedoms. One study, grounded in example after example, is Leon Litwack's superb *Been In the Storm So Long: the Aftermath of*

Slavery. Though the book gains from being read cover to cover, it can be nourishing even dipping in for five or ten pages here and there. Employing a different approach, I have used a single person, Ida B. Wells, to show how these currents affected one family during Reconstruction, in the first chapter of *‘They Say’: Ida B. Wells and the Reconstruction of Race*.

Primary sources provide yet another avenue into these themes. One massive source available now on the web is the *Slave Narrative Collection* compiled during the Great Depression by the Federal Writers Project. These oral histories contain recollections of former slaves, and include information about life after slavery as well. The collection’s home page can be found at <http://1.usa.gov/1cpJjFM>. One interview from Arkansas, chosen nearly at random (I searched for the term “sidewalk”) gives several good examples of how reconstruction proceeded on a daily basis. (<http://1.usa.gov/1MlbVgD>) In sharp contrast, see a contrasting account of Reconstruction in Marshall County, Mississippi, by a white southerner, Ruth Watkins, in the *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society*, 1913, 155-213 (<http://bit.ly/1inhjId>). Written in 1912, the author’s point of view shows how much reconstruction on the ground had not been allowed to succeed. The material on political leaders (160-172) and on the Freedmen’s Bureau, the Loyal League, and the Ku Klux Klan (175-181) are especially revealing.

CHAPTER 23 - QUESTIONS

1. What did Congress mean by the term *Reconstruction*?
2. What was Andrew Johnson’s program of Reconstruction? How did southern governments react?
3. What were the black codes? How were their provisions similar to or different from slavery?
4. What approach did Congress take to Reconstruction? What part did the Fourteenth Amendment play?
5. Why did Congress impeach President Johnson? At his trial, why did the Senate fail to convict him?
6. The chapter suggests that there were deeper difficulties with Reconstruction than the fighting in Washington. What were they?
7. What were the difficulties involved with “reconstructing” the way Southerners went about their work?
8. What were the changes made in reconstructing houses, schools and churches? In what way was there a battle to reconstruct the night?
9. What were the positive achievements of Reconstruction governments?
10. How did Reconstruction end in Washington? How and why did Reconstruction fail more generally? List the major causes.

24 The Next Big Thing

The chapter title signals the beginning of another large theme that will weave its way through the remainder of the book. Yet the title is perhaps deceptive in its simplicity. In the most obvious sense, the scale of American society is becoming sharply larger in the decades after the Civil War. The comparison between the biggest company in 1860—Pepperell Cotton Mills—and the immense Pennsylvania Railroad Corporation only 25 years later makes the point: 800 people versus 50,000. Next Big Thing indeed!

But it's important to understand that the process of becoming big is not a mere matter of size, but also of complexity. As it becomes a truly continental, industrial nation, the United States is amassing a array of complex *systems* required to make bigness possible. A system of transportation, for one. Railroads provided real advantages over the older systems of roads and rivers. Northern rivers froze in the winter, limiting shipping. Railroads could run year round. And one locomotive could pull hugely larger loads than a single cart of wagon. But the rail companies needed systems to function on a large scale: a national network of tracks; an infrastructure of stations, engine houses, storage facilities, switch yards, freight and passenger cars, as well as systems of management to keep 50,000 people working in an orderly, reliable fashion. Railroads needed a unified system of time rather than a hundred different local “noons” determined by the height of the sun overhead.

The industrial transformation depended on technological innovation. Thomas Edison became the symbol of the tinkering genius, the individual entrepreneur came up with a new ideas seemingly every other week. But Edison himself led the way toward systematizing invention: pioneering the research lab, where inventors worked collectively to produce new devices. Furthermore, many of the new inventions required systems to provide their benefits. They were not just nifty “gadgets” that could be enjoyed in and of themselves. Think about electricity and the light bulb. Wondrous by itself, but to spread light throughout the countryside, a whole new system of generators and wires needed to connect houses and businesses. The telegraph and telephone were of little use without their own network systems.

And there were even systems of finance: innovations like the modern stock market and bankers who helped money find its way to big corporations undertaking big projects. One way to explore the details of industrial expansion would be to take an invention or an inventor to study in more detail. In doing so, remember to examine the systems required to make those inventions valuable.

Systems, of course, were necessary to extract the raw materials used to build the modern industrial world. Steel and oil are key here. Steel rails were necessary for the rail system as well as for building skyscrapers (discussed in Chapter 26). And petroleum from the ground needed to be refined to provide products, especially as engines were developed that depended on gasoline.

Biographies as always provide a way into understand the details of putting these industrial systems in place. For the railroads, try T. J. Stiles, *Tycoon: The Epic Life of Cornelius Vanderbilt*; for steel, see David Nasaw, *Andrew Carnegie*; for finance, Jean Strouse, *Morgan: American Financier*; and for oil Ron Chernow's *Titan: The Life of John D. Rockefeller*. Forewarned: none of these are short books! But they make fascinating reading.

Two primary sources show contrasting sides of Rockefeller, the first, his own recollection (<http://bit.ly/1l6kKVL>) of dealing with a reluctant business partner:

One of my partners, who had successfully built up a large and prosperous business, was resisting with all his force a plan that some of us favoured, to make some large improvements. The cost of extending the operations of this enterprise was estimated at quite a sum—three million dollars, I think it was. We had talked it over and over again... [but] our old partner was obdurate, he had made up his mind not to yield, and I can see him standing up in his vigorous protest, with his hands in his pockets, his head thrown back, as he shouted “No.”

It's a pity to get a man into a place in an argument where he is defending a position instead of considering the evidence. His calm judgment is apt to leave him, and his mind for the time being closed, and only obstinacy remains... [So] we resolved to try another line of argument... I had thought of a new way to approach it. I said:

“I'll take it, and supply this capital myself. If the expenditure turns out to be profitable the company can repay me; and, if it goes wrong, I'll stand the loss.”

That was the argument that touched him. All his reserve disappeared and the matter was settled when he said:

“If that's the way you feel about it, we'll go it together. I guess I can take the risk if you can.” (pages 7-9)

Contrast that with the description of another business rival, recorded in Ida Tarbell's classic *History of the Standard Oil Company* (<http://bit.ly/1SLlf8j>), when he attended a meeting with Rockefeller.

One day several of us met at the office of one of the refiners, who, I felt pretty sure, was being persuaded to go into the scheme which they were talking up. Everybody talked except Mr. Rockefeller. He sat in a rocking chair, softly swinging back and forth, his hands over his face. I got pretty excited when I saw how those South Improvement men were pulling the wool over our men's eyes, and making them believe we were all going to the dogs if there wasn't an immediate combination to put up the price of refined and prevent new people coming into the business, and I made a speech which, I guess, was pretty warlike. Well, right in the middle of it John Rockefeller stopped rocking and took down his hands and looked at me. You never saw such eyes. He took me all in, saw just how much fight he could expect from me, and I knew it, and then up went his hands and back and forth went his chair.

CHAPTER 24 - QUESTIONS

1. Why bother to mention a conquistador's motto in a chapter about the growth of modern industry? What are some of the economic booms in American history up to this point?
2. How many people were employed by the biggest business in America before the Civil War? How many people did the Pennsylvania Railroad employ twenty-five years later?
3. What were some of the problems railroads faced in trying to become big?
4. What was the biggest railroad project of the era? How was it financed and built?
5. What were some of Thomas Edison's inventions? Of the ones mentioned, which do you think changed American society the most?
6. Why was the idea of an "invention factory" important?
7. In what ways did the competition between railroads and other big industries become cutthroat? What are rebates? monopolies?
8. Why did the oil industry first become important in the later decades of the nineteenth century?
9. As corporations became bigger, how did the financial system become big too?
10. How did J. Pierpont Morgan use his position as banker to change American industry?

25 The Color of Your Collar

Chapters 24 through 27 can be considered a four-part unit examining the immense changes that reshaped the United States over roughly four decades, from the end of the Civil War through the early 1890s. Each chapter examines a different aspect of the process. “The Next Big Thing” set out the major alterations brought about by increasing industrialization: systems of transportation, production of steel and oil under Carnegie and Rockefeller, a climate of innovation and invention, and the systems of finance that helped underwrite such large-scale projects. “The Color of Your Collar” shifts focus, to look at the laborers who worked to carry out the transformation, and their particular problems adjusting to the new industrial world.

With railroads so much the center of industrial change, the chapter jumps in there. And what we see is a sharp contrast: between the somewhat glamorous view of riding the rails in the 1880s, compared with actually working on those roads, a much more dangerous business. Both sides of the story are fascinating, and worth additional exploration. Just as travelers from Europe during the 1820s and 1830s wrote accounts of the emerging democratic republic (see Chapter 17), Europeans flocked to the United States in the prosperous 1880s as well, and this time the train, not the steamboat, was at the center of their accounts. For a useful selection of British accounts, see <http://bit.ly/1NZpRSO>. Two enjoyable cross-country journeys are available on Google Books on the web, one in 1884 by William Hardman, *A Trip to America* (<http://bit.ly/1Q5PDX4>); and a second, two years earlier, by T. S. Hudson, *A Scamper Through America*, (<http://bit.ly/1ktJg2w>). Both visit many of the obligatory sights including Niagara Falls, bustling Chicago (which we’ll visit ourselves in the next chapter), and then cross the northern Plains to the Rockies. Hardman visits Yellowstone and meets up with President Chester Arthur, out roughing it on vacation. T. S. Hudson supplies a good breakfast menu and complains about the convoluted schedules and clocks in rail depots (he traveled a few years before time zones were established). Both men exhibit the prejudices of their day about “darkies” and “the Heathen Chinees,” which are revealing too.

But neither account by these tourists makes much mention of the workers on the railroad. One engaging book that does is Larry Tye, *Rising from the Rails*, which catalogs the history of Pullman porters. Tye depends on oral recollections and interviews as well as printed sources; his account continues into the twentieth century, but is well worth reading. For some sobering numbers on rail accidents, browse the Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics at <http://bit.ly/1Pnpf9j>.

Railroads, of course, were only the leading edge of the new world of industrial labor. The chapter looks at other changes. Increasingly harsh working

conditions are perhaps the most obvious, to which women and children as well as men were subjected. But again—to step back and look at industrial systems—it’s important to see how division and specialization—tends to break manufacturing tasks into the smallest component parts, in order to employ unskilled rather than skilled labor. Placing tungsten filaments into lamps, breaking up the process of making shoes: such changes made labor less satisfying, but also changed the way labor itself was ordered. If the systems of finance needed by capitalism were shaped by titans like J. P. Morgan, striding across the world creating colossal corporations, that same system at the level of ordinary workers put in place hourly wage as a method of payment.

Increasing specialization created thousands of new *sorts* of jobs, from railroad car oilers to female “type-writers” (the job was named after the machine), which were characterized as either blue-collar or white-collar jobs, the latter category including skills that often required college or technical school training. Rebecca Edwards, *New Spirits*, is good on all these developments, as is Sara Evans in the relevant chapter in *Born for Liberty*, treating the challenges for women specifically.

Finally, the chapter ends with the question of how laborers, faced with the “next big thing,” tried to get big themselves. There were, of course, the protests and explosions that arose when economic pressures became overwhelming: informal walkouts, strikes, violence, many of them loosely organized. For an example of extralegal responses on the mining frontier, see Kevin Kenny, *Making of the Molly McGuires*. But as business attempted to reorder the routines of labor, labor tried to organize itself through unions. The American Social History Project’s survey of labor, *Who Built America?* is a good overview and entry point for further study. (Because it is used as a text, new copies are pricey, but used volumes, especially of earlier editions, are more affordable.) Labor historian David Montgomery provides a wide-ranging, useful approach to the working class in *The Fall of the House of Labor*:

CHAPTER 25 - QUESTIONS

1. What were some of the glamorous features of train travel in the late nineteenth century? How were the railroads dangerous?
2. Why was the term *blue collar* used? Name some blue-collar occupations.
3. How did the work performed by blue-collar workers change with the coming of large industries? How did the new ways affect being paid?
4. What were conditions and pay like for blue-collar working women? For children?
5. What was a white-collar job? Give examples. How did the training for white-collar jobs change during these years?
6. What were so-called “Panics” that Americans experienced? How many panics does the chapter mention which occurred during the nineteenth century?

7. What ways did ordinary workers deal with hard times during these years?
8. What organizations did workers create in order to help them get big, as businesses did? What were some of labor's demands?
9. What strategies did the Knights of Labor use to gain followers? How did the approach of Samuel Gompers differ?
10. If working conditions were so often harsh, why was it hard to organize labor unions?

26 A Tale of Two Cities

Following the previous two chapters, which dealt with the systems of industry and the ordinary folk who worked in them, the present chapter seeks a wider view of these transformations, centered on the city. The key sentence is the final one of the first paragraph: “In fact, we can think of cities themselves as giant systems—living and breathing, groaning and straining—as they brought together people and markets and industries.” The growing pains of city life are contrasted comparing New York, adjusting to the new tides of the 1840s and 1850s, with Chicago, growing from out of nearly nothing as it became a pivotal force in the American economy in the second half of the nineteenth century.

I use Walt Whitman in the first half of the chapter because Whitman, aside from being one of the nation’s literary giants, also exemplifies a number of themes that are central both to cities and to Americans’ national identity. Cities have always represented diversity, partly through the variety gained by the simple presence of greater numbers of people, but also because they are the inevitable meeting-places of various cultures. We’ve already seen hints of this culture of diversity in Chapter 9, *Equal and Unequal*, where the Middle colonies exhibit a wider variety of peoples than did the New England and Southern settlements. Whitman’s expansive poems celebrate that diversity, not simply in cities (much as he loved them) but also in a “nation of nation,” to use his felicitous phrase. Reading the full poem (which he was constantly updating and adjusting over the years) is definitely worth the time. All versions are available at the Whitman Archive online: <http://bit.ly/1Mfj9Y>.

As Whitman himself, the authoritative “life and times” biography is David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman’s America*. Daniel Walker Howe’s *What Hath God Wrought* has briefer sections on city life (Chapter 10) and the sharp increase in immigration in Chapter 20. The influx of newcomers in the 1840s added to the strains already pressing on cities like New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. This brief account does not chart the political fallout during these years, but it was reflected by the swift rise (and equally swift fall) of the American, or Know-Nothing Party, a nativist organization whose influence peaked in the early 1850s, along with the new immigration. Whitman was not unaffected by these tides. Though he largely maintained his sunny, welcoming disposition, at times he too became querulous about the swarm of Irish newcomers. David Reynolds’ even-handed account takes his measure.

Chicago’s growth was astounding; to see it unfold from a bold and majestic perspective, look to William Cronon’s masterpiece, *Nature’s Metropolis*. Cronon is an environmental historian and he lays out the interlocking natural and man-made systems for which Chicago stood at the pivotal center. Timber, grain, cattle, hogs—all made their way through Chicago, where all underwent

transformations. Cronon describes the processes in engrossing detail, which here are briefly sketched in the discussion of *In and out*. A much more traditional account, but still worth reading for its pungent portraits of Chicago, is Ray Ginger, *Altgeld's America*. Ginger's narrative frame is the depression of the 1890s but to understand that era, the backdrop of the previous decade is indispensable.

In terms of *high and low* in the new cities, two primary sources make a striking contrast. Jacob Riis's classic account, *How the Other Half Lives*, includes Chapter 4, "The Down Town Back Alleys" (<http://bit.ly/1PdEByQ>) while the 1905 issues of *House Beautiful* (<http://bit.ly/1NvoJ9r>) include a series of articles entitled "The Poor Taste of the Rich," showcasing some of the era's excesses. One article begins on page 18 of the February issue and another on page 26 of the March, but there are plenty of other examples within these pages, whether in poor taste or not, of what wealth could buy in the way of a "house beautiful," in the modern city or in the country.

CHAPTER 26 - QUESTIONS

1. In what ways are cities systems? Systems to accomplish what?
2. What sorts of growing pains was New York City experiencing in 1840, when Walt Whitman was a journalist there?
3. How did immigration affect the city in the 1840s and 1850s? What nationalities were many of the new arrivals? Why did they come to the United States?
4. What was Whitman's attitude toward cities? How did his attitude contrast with Thomas Jefferson's?
5. Over Whitman's lifetime, how did cities play a bigger part in American life?
6. In the mid-nineteenth century, what small settlement became the fastest growing city in the world? What was its population in 1890?
7. How did cities expand both upward and downward? What new systems were needed to make this expansion possible?
8. How did systems of urban transportation change? What were they transporting besides people? How did electricity play a part in the transportation changes?
9. How did immigration change in the 1880s? What jobs did the new arrivals often take?
10. How did cities increase the distance between the upper, middle and lower classes of Americans? Give an example of how the lives of each class changed in modern cities?

27 The New West

The chapter begins by recalling the vast changes that North America underwent with the coming of Europeans in the sixteenth century, and suggests that a similar transformation of the trans-Mississippi West came about in the second half of the nineteenth century. In both cases, advances in environmental history over the past generation have made it possible to view the history of the West from a grander perspective. The West's transformation was not merely political, nor even social, but involved a huge change in the environment itself. Again, it's worth remembering that this chapter covers the same time period as the previous three. The systems of industrialization may seem a distant and unrelated development when standing on the vast and open Great Plains, but those systems were part of the transformation of the West. The transcontinental railroad brought settlers as well as hunters of bison, whose hides were shipped east. Even the bleached bones of fallen animals became commercially valuable after being pulverized in the East and used for fertilizer. Railroads transported not only people but the raw materials of the Plains: livestock, grain and also timber from northern forests. Systems of finance provided the capital to create large-scale cattle ranches and the equipment for industrial-scale mining. As the end of the chapter makes clear, city and country, industry and agriculture depended on each other to survive and prosper.

Repeating a story we've seen over and over in earlier chapters, the West became a region of booms. Just as the Spanish extracted gold and silver from Central and South America in the sixteenth century, the gold rush of 1849 was followed by numerous other strikes of other precious minerals. Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) joined the rush and his *Roughing It* makes a humorous and vivid read. Many editions are available, including this one on the Web: <http://bit.ly/1MnXJo2>. For the coming of the cattle empires, Andy Adams, *The Log of a Cowboy*, is a memoir of the long drives (<http://bit.ly/1YVUwC5>). Here is his account of his first, when he and his outfit, led by Jim Flood, picked up their cattle from Mexican hands, crossed the Rio Grande, and began the trek north:

When the herd was within a mile of the river, Fox and I shed our saddles, boots, and surplus clothing and started to meet it. The water was chilly, but we struck it with a shout, and with the cheers of our outfit behind us, swam like smugglers. A swimming horse needs freedom, and we scarcely touched the reins, but with one hand buried in a mane hold, and giving gentle slaps on the neck with the other, we guided our horses for the other shore. I was proving out my black [horse], Fox had a gray of equal barrel displacement,—both good swimmers; and on reaching the Mexican shore, we dismounted and allowed them to roll in the warm sand.

Flood had given us general instructions, and we halted the herd about half a mile from the river. The Mexican corporal was only too glad to have us assume charge, and assured us that he and his outfit were ours to command. I at once proclaimed Fox Quarternight, whose years and experience outranked mine, the *gringo* corporal for the day, at which the vaqueros smiled, but I noticed they never used the word. On Fox's suggestion the Mexican corporal brought up his wagon and corralled his horses as we had done, when his cook, to our delight, invited all to have coffee before starting. That cook won our everlasting regards, for his coffee was delicious. We praised it highly, whereupon the corporal ordered the cook to have it at hand for the men in the intervals between crossing the different bunches of cattle. A March day on the Rio Grand with wet clothing is not summer, and the vaqueros hesitated a bit before following the example of Quarternight and myself and dispensing with saddles and boots. Five men were then detailed to hold the herd as compact as possible, and the remainder, twenty-seven all told, cut off about three hundred head and started for the river...

For further exploration, begin with Richard White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own: A New History of the American West*. Dan Flores provides an environmental perspective in *The Natural West*. Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire*, focuses on water, the West's scarce resource. And again, William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, is superb at tracing the connections between the open West and crowded industrial America. For two challenging accounts of white movement into Indian territory, see Patricia Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest* and, more recently, Elliott West, *The Contested Plains: Indians, Goldseekers, and the Rush to Colorado*.

CHAPTER 27 - QUESTIONS

1. How were buffalo affected in three different ways by Americans in the eastern United States?
2. How did the West change due to a boom in valuable minerals? Can you think of a similar boom that occurred during the colonial period, elsewhere in the western hemisphere?
3. What did Samuel Clemens do in the West? What did he eventually write under another name?
4. What factors caused the Indian population to drop in the late nineteenth century? Have you seen earlier examples of these same problems?
5. What was the American name of the man Indians called "Long Hair"? Why is he remembered today?
6. As the buffalo nearly died out, what were they replaced by? How did this replacement come about?
7. What is the English word for *vaquero*? What tools did the *vaquero* use in his line of work?
8. Why was barbed wire important on the Great Plains? Who appreciated it? Who disliked it? Why?

9. The chapter begins by saying that “in the lands beyond the Mississippi, another new world came into being.” (page 198) Why does it say *another* new world? Make a list of the ways in which the West had become a new world.
10. How are the vast spaces of the West connected to the crowded world of cities? How did the cities and the western settlements depend on each other?

28 Luck or Pluck?

Having described the vast changes taking place in the late nineteenth century, this chapter turns to the question of the government during these turbulent years. The chapter begins by outlining what might be called two “master narratives” of the popular culture describing how government was supposed to work (or perhaps more accurately, not work). Both narratives supported the political notion of *laissez-faire*.

The first narrative, meant for children but reflecting attitudes more generally, was expressed in the novels of Horatio Alger, whose uplifting stories suggested that enterprise and hard work (pluck, with a dash of luck for good measure) would bring success to deserving individuals. It might be fun to read one of the stories, such as *Ragged Dick, or Street Life in New York with the Boot-Blacks* (<http://bit.ly/1M7uIPA>). Horatio Alger’s own story is less uplifting and more puzzling, as explored in Gary Scharnhorst, *The Lost Life of Horatio Alger, Jr.* Alger had his sister burn all his letters and papers upon his death, and a biography published in 1928 was a hoax, filled with inventions. Scharnhorst discovers that though Alger began his career as a minister, he soon left the profession after being accused of pedophilia.

The second overarching narrative of the era was for adults, derived from Darwin’s revolutionary theory of evolution, and then applied by Herbert Spencer and others to political philosophy. Alger’s narrative supported *laissez-faire* by assuming that there was no need for the government to act aggressively. Hard work brought success to those who truly deserved it. *Strive and Succeed*, as one of Alger’s story titles put it. For adults, evolution framed the story a bit more harshly: the natural order was a constant war, tooth and claw, for survival; and that competition allowed the fittest to rise to the top. By assuming that this process was natural, even a kind of law of nature, those who succeeded were all too happy to believe that Darwin’s theory explained and justified their success. Should government meddle with these natural processes? No—*laissez-faire!* Let us alone! Let nature take its course.

Both of these narratives, Social Darwinism and “Horatio Algerism,” contained contradictions within their own frameworks. The title *Luck and Pluck* suggested one. What role did chance play in success and failure? Alger’s young heroes experience more than a few lucky breaks, just as many ordinary workers fell on hard times through accident (look at the list of railway accidents and fatalities in Chapter 24). What role should the government have in dealing with such factors? Likewise, for Social Darwinism, if mere “success” and “survival” defined what was right and proper in society, and government should play little or no role in setting up rules of fair play, then even the most ruthless and cutthroat tactics of business seemed to be warranted.

“Daft Andrew” Carnegie seems to illustrate both of the era’s master narratives. His own biography sounds like something out of Horatio Alger. And his admiration and near-worship for Spencer illustrates the lure of Social Darwinism. The encounter of the two men is both humorous and sobering. For in truth, even Spencer was not prepared to take Darwin quite so far as it seemed to have been taken in industrial Pittsburgh. Carnegie was by no means the most ruthless of the industrial barons of the era. In many ways he is a sympathetic character, who sees and acknowledges the flaws of the system. But living in comfortable conditions, traveling the world, dining well and escaping the smog of Homestead, he was blind to the impression Pittsburgh was likely to make on his neurasthenic idol Spencer. And though he was perhaps not as hard-nosed and ruthless as his assistant Henry Frick, he was willing to let Frick be quite ruthless in locking out the workers at Homestead and calling in the Pinkertons to do battle with them. (Carnegie was in Scotland when the crisis erupted.)

To learn more of Carnegie, consult David Nasaw’s readable (though long) biography, *Andrew Carnegie*. For Coxe’s Army, Edwards’ *New Spirits* has a useful brief description; so does Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon*, another survey of the late nineteenth century. As we’ll see in the following chapter, both the Populists and Progressives mark a sea-change in attitudes toward *laissez-faire*.

CHAPTER 28 - QUESTIONS

1. This chapter points out that the previous four chapters have shown the United States being “made over” in almost a revolutionary way. Make a list of your “top five” biggest changes described in those chapters.
2. Those four chapters have said almost nothing about politics during these years. What was one important reason why government seemed so unimportant?
3. What is the moral lesson that Horatio Alger’s stories seem to be teaching? How does that lesson fit comfortably with the idea of *laissez-faire*?
4. What was Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution? How did the idea of “survival of the fittest” fit into his theory?
5. How did philosophers like Herbert Spencer and business people like John D. Rockefeller use the idea of “survival of the fittest”? How did that idea fit comfortably with the philosophy of *laissez-faire*?
6. How did Andrew Carnegie’s career resemble that of a Horatio Alger story? What did Carnegie think of Herbert Spencer and his teachings about evolution?
7. What was the problem with the idea that people would always be rewarded for striving and succeeding? Or that the “fittest” would always survive and prosper?
8. Why did the Homestead steelworkers go on strike? What did the government do about the dispute? Do you think it followed a policy of *laissez-faire*?

9. The Homestead strike took place in July 1892. Six months later, what happened to make matters worse for ordinary folk?
10. Why did Jacob Coxey march on Washington? What was the response he and his followers received from Congress?

29 The Progressives

Democratic republics are generally slow-moving beasts. They need a cataclysmic event, like war, to mobilize the public and warring legislatures. Absent that, changes in society that are more gradual usually have to attain a kind of critical mass before the political system takes notice and grapples with them. The previous chapter called the changes to American society in the late nineteenth century truly revolutionary—but all the same, they were unfolding over a matter of decades; and in the broadest terms, it was not until the depression of the 1890s that two political movements arose to address the increasing imbalances in American society that *laissez-faire* ideology had ignored.

That, in essence, is what this chapter is about. Coxey's Army—or more properly, the “Commonwealth of Christ,” supplies the transition from the previous chapter; and it underscores just how much has changed since the years when John Winthrop talked about a holy commonwealth. Political leaders like Grover Cleveland (a Democrat) was quite plainspoken in lecturing people that it was not the government's responsibility to do anything about economic hard times. Citizens just had to bear up! But the term *commonwealth* reminds us of the Puritans' vision of a holy commonwealth in which it was deemed proper for the government to act in the common good. Society amounted to more than just a minimalist compact among individuals, who succeeded or perished on their own “merits”. This updated vision of a commonwealth had not lost its religious overtones, as Coxey's own name for his band made clear. Nevertheless, Coxey's commonwealth was a good deal more secular in orientation than John Winthrop's, to say nothing of John Calvin's. And it was a response to the increasing complexity of a modern industrial society, where the gap between the richest and poorest had widened dramatically and the problems that needed solving had become more complex.

The Populists were the first to revolt against these developments. Given the space available, Chapter 29 discusses them only briefly, for the movement failed to bring about sustained change. Yet the farmers faced undoubted hardships and had legitimate grievances. Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* and Robert McMath, *American Populism* are two accounts that provide much more detail. Progressive reformers had a much greater influence. Like the Populists, they wanted government to take a more active role. Chapter 26, “A Tale of Two Cities,” spoke of the growing white-collar middle class, people who could speak of a career and whose jobs increasingly depended on professional training in graduate schools. It was no accident that Progressive reformers, arising from this middle class, put their trust in expertise as a cure for society's ills. They supported commissions made up of experts to prescribe remedies. They condemned the political “bosses” of cities—ward leaders who were no strangers to bribes and “boodle”—money made from crooked contracts, even though

these same bosses often acted to dole out charity to the urban poor in need. Ray Ginger's classic account of the era, *Altgeld's America*, provides a vivid portrait of these contrasts. *Little History* briefly touches on Progressive reforms at the local level, such as settlement houses. Jane Addams memoir, *Twenty Years at Hull-House* is available on the Web (<http://bit.ly/1OcfPMt>) for an up-close look at Progressivism from the bottom up. At the state level, women's suffrage made its first inroads before winning its national victory. And the career of Theodore Roosevelt also showcases the transition from state to national progressivism. Historians are quick to note that Teddy was no wild and radical reformer, as Mark Hanna and other Republican pols worried. But he did set down Progressive ideals especially in his speech at Osawatimie, Kansas, in 1910 (<http://bit.ly/1WWspqN>). It bears reading.

In addition to the progressive support for the conception of the United States as a commonwealth, a second theme that the chapter underlines is progressive thinking about *equality of opportunity*, introduced in Chapter 17, as a key element of Jacksonian democracy. Progressives argued that opportunity could hardly be claimed "equal" when the environment of a wealthy American or child was so different from the conditions experienced by the working poor or the homeless. That perception did not lead progressives to reject equality of opportunity; rather, they called for government action that would effectively make the range of opportunities more truly equal.

Finally, although Populists and Progressives are treated as reformers increasing the amount of freedom and equality in American life, there is no way to avoid the plain fact that the turn of the century witnessed a rise in segregation, anti-nativist sentiment and lynchings. Lamentably all classes were tainted with this condition, and Populist and Progressive reformers could be counted among those campaigning for "purity" in American life. Michael McGerr, *Fierce Discontent*, discusses how progressivism shared in these developments; and Eric Rauchway, *Murdering McKinley* also throws useful light on the subject.

CHAPTER 29 - QUESTIONS

1. How did the idea of a commonwealth link Jacob Coxey and Puritan John Winthrop, even though the two men lived some 300 years apart?
2. How did Populists work to improve conditions for farmers? Why did they call for greater action by the government?
3. How did segregation increase during the 1890s? What conditions contributed to its increase?
4. What ruling came out of the Supreme Court decision *Plessy v. Ferguson*?
5. What did it mean to be a Progressive? How did their views about "equality of opportunity" differ from older ways of thinking?
6. Why did Progressives sponsor settlement houses like Hull House? Who was its founder and what were some of its activities?

7. What did the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution provide? What areas of the country moved first to enact women's suffrage?
8. What were trusts? What were some features of Theodore Roosevelt's "Square Deal"?
9. Who wrote *The Jungle*? Why were readers shocked by the book? What was Roosevelt's response?
10. What did Roosevelt mean when he said "Property shall be the servant and not the master of the commonwealth"?

30 Smashup

In many ways, Chapters 24-30 stand together as a thematic unit all exploring different meanings of “the Next Big Thing.” The phrase itself is deceptively simple if we take it to mean only that everything in society is getting bigger. But it suggests also that civilization has become increasingly interrelated and complex. The industrial revolution, which had its beginnings in the late eighteenth century, accelerated decade by decade, transforming ways of living across the globe. We saw first how systems of transport, invention, finance, labor and management were all remaking an industrial society. “The Color of Your Collar” showed how diversification and specialization affected ordinary laborers. On an even larger scale, industrial growth transformed the city, which in many ways could be seen as a kind of megasystem where raw materials were processed and shipped across the world; a place where more Americans and immigrants came to live. The West too was transformed by industry and eventually so was the political system, which had remained relatively static for decades. The traditional political ways were brought up short by the depression of the 1890s, and then transformed by Populist and Progressive reform.

So now we come to “Smashup,” a chapter in which I argue that World War I was itself a logical extension of the forces transforming the United States and the world. In other words, the war should not be seen as some conflict that more or less blows in from afar, rather like the dark clouds that suddenly loom before an isolated thunderstorm. The war can’t be explained merely as a quarrel between jealous nations of Europe that eventually pulls in the United States. The war, too, was an outcome of the Next Big Thing. The ideology of imperialism is really the same sort of consolidation that large corporations were already engaged in, as when Carnegie tried to vertically integrate steel. He looked to control every step in the manufacturing process, from digging the ore out of the ground to shipping that ore by rail to refining it in steel mills. European nations too were trying to extend political control to colonies where raw materials are extracted. Americans had less need for colonies because it had annexed a territory extending from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

And as imperial nations extended their spheres of influence, as they bent the inventions of industry toward larger and more sophisticated and deadly armaments and newer steel-plated battleships, the chance for bigger conflicts grew. Americans backed into imperialism, somewhat, given their preoccupation with bringing the West into their new industrial order. But the 1890s began the process, with the Spanish-American War, the annexation of the Philippines as a “protectorate,” the building of the Panama Canal, and a policy of active intervention in the Caribbean Basin by the United States.

For more detail on American imperialism, see Walter Nugent, *Habits of Empire*, a survey which begins with Jefferson's "empire of liberty" and the early Republic and takes the story up through the present-day. And for a humorous but incisive view on the American empire, it's worth reading the essays of Finley Peter Dunne, a journalist who created a fictional character, Martin Dooley, an Irish American bartender from Chicago. Dooley's dialogues skewer the pretensions of political figures in the era, including a hilarious "book review" of Theodore Roosevelt's Cuban memoirs, *The Rough Riders*. Dunne's columns can be accessed on the web (<http://bit.ly/1Qt2pz3>). Read "A Book Review," in *Mr. Dooley's Philosophy*. The opening lines:

"Well, sir," said Mr. Dooley, "I jus' got hold iv a book, Hinnissy, that suits me up to th' handle, a gran' book, th' grandest iver seen. Ye know I'm not much throubled be lithrachoer, havin' manny worries iv me own, but I'm not prejudiced again' books. I am not. Whin a rale good book comes along I'm as quick as anny wan to say it isn't so bad, an' this here book is fine. I tell ye 'tis fine."

"What is it?" Mr. Hennessy asked languidly.

"'Tis 'Th' Biography iv a Hero be Wan who Knows.' 'Tis 'Th' Darin' Exploits iv a Brave Man be an Actual Eye Witness.' 'Tis 'Th' Account iv th' Destruction iv Spanish Power in th' Ant Hills,' as it fell fr'm th' lips iv Tiddy Rosenfelt an' was took down be his own hands.

Finally, given the emphasis in this chapter on the broad sweep of imperialism and the coming of the war, the actual fighting of World War I is sketched quite lightly. For a readable account of the entire war, try G. J. Meyer, *A World Undone*. For a gritty primary source relating life in the trenches, see *Poilu*. It's by a French soldier rather than an American (and only recently translated into English), but it's one of the best first-person records of the fighting.

CHAPTER 30 - QUESTIONS

1. How was William Howard Taft a more successful progressive than Teddy Roosevelt?
2. What were some of Woodrow Wilson's progressive achievements? Why was the income tax a progressive measure?
3. What is imperialism? How did European nations become more powerful through imperialism? How did industrialization help make imperialism possible?
4. Americans in the late nineteenth century didn't think of themselves as imperialists. But in what ways were they accomplishing the same goals as European nations?
5. How did the Spanish-American War lead the United States toward a more open policy of imperialism?

6. Why did President Theodore Roosevelt push to build a canal in Panama? On a map, locate the canal. Why would the United States care about building a canal in distant Panama?
7. What was the problem with so-called “big powers” having “spheres of influence”? How did it lead to the Great War (World War I)? What part did the system of alliances play in bringing war?
8. How did the contributions of industry make the Great War “the next Big Thing”?
9. Why did the United States enter the war despite President Wilson’s wish to stay out of it? How did American troops help win the war?
10. Why did the United States refuse to sign the Versailles Peace Treaty, despite President Wilson’s determination to see it ratified by Congress?

31 The Masses

Warren Gamaliel Harding was elected president for a reason. Even though Americans had entered World War I relatively late, that conflict had exhausted the nation, as well as the inflexible Woodrow Wilson himself, driven to his stroke by the pressures of trying to “make the world safe for democracy.” Harding understood such fatigue and the lure of a “return to normalcy,” though like the word itself, Harding’s prose was anything but normal. It’s fun to read more of the speech, which couldn’t fit in the chapter. It gives a sense of Harding’s verbiage, which one Democrat complained, seemed like “an army of pompous phrases moving over the landscape in search of an idea.”

America’s present need is not heroics, but healing; not nostrums, but normalcy; not revolution, but restoration; not agitation, but adjustment; not surgery, but serenity; not the dramatic, but the dispassionate; not experiment, but equipoise; not submergence in internationality, but sustainment in triumphant nationality.

But between the adjectives, the speech also showed a rejection of Wilson’s progressive goals.

This republic has its ample tasks. If we put an end to false economics which lure humanity to utter chaos, ours will be the commanding example of world leadership today. If we can prove a representative popular government under which a citizenship seeks what it may do for the government rather than what the government may do for individuals, we shall do more to make democracy safe for the world than all armed conflict ever recorded.

The world needs to be reminded that all human ills are not curable by legislation, and that quantity of statutory enactment and excess of government offer no substitute for quality of citizenship.

Note, by the way, the same rhetorical construction John F. Kennedy would use in his inaugural address in 1961. In this context it is issued as an alternative to progressive programs and a rejection of wars to preserve democracy.

The chapter, though, suggests that a return to normalcy is hardly possible. Certainly the actions of women made it clear that the new generation was not about to give up the vote. Middle-class women had career aspirations and, increasingly, a college education in their sights. Blue-collar women were often working whether they wished to or not, out of economic necessity.

The chapter’s main theme highlights a new mass culture and mass society that were developing. To be sure, the era’s political leaders, including Harding,

Coolidge and Hoover, championed a government free of progressive planners, one that allowed business to lead the way toward everlasting prosperity. But in many ways, the new mass society was yet another step toward a new Next Big Thing. Two major elements of mass culture discussed in the chapter are movies and radio; and one way to dig deeper into the subject is to examine how each innovation contributed to the new mass society.

For radio, a good place to begin is Anthony Rudel, *Hello Everybody!* YouTube has clips of many early radio programs. As for motion pictures, it might be interesting to compare how films were viewed with the theater culture of the nineteenth century. Chapter 10, “Enlightened and Awakened,” traces popular mass events back even to the eighteenth century, with the tour of George Whitefield through the British colonies. Many celebrities toured the nation during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including (earlier) Jenny Lind and (later, at the turn of the century) Lily Langtry and Houdini. Digging into this history of popular culture shows that the arrival of movies was by no means an overnight appearance of mass culture, but a gradual and growing trend. A good jumping-off point on the web, which includes links to both early short films and audio recordings of vaudeville routines, is at <http://bit.ly/1MVx2Gs>. For a vivid picture of mass society envisioned by contemporaries, see the opening clip of a film made in 1928, *The Crowd*, by King Vidor (<https://youtu.be/Er7kOfPGbmQ>).

Finally, two overviews of the 1920s: William Leuchtenberg, *The Perils of Prosperity*, an older work but engaging and well written; and Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper*, a more recent assessment.

CHAPTER 31 - QUESTIONS

1. What did President Warren Harding mean when he called for a “return to normalcy”? What was the normal he was seeking to return to?
2. In what ways did many women not wish to return to the old ways?
3. What does the chapter mean by talking about “mass culture”? Write a one-sentence definition of the term.
4. What were two inventions that became popular in the 1920s that also helped make mass culture possible? How did each one do that?
5. Quite a few companies made automobiles in the years after World War I. Why did Henry Ford’s Model T become so popular? What were the new methods that made his success possible?
6. How were ordinary workers affected both positively and negatively by Henry Ford’s new system?
7. What political beliefs were shared by Calvin Coolidge, Warren Harding and Herbert Hoover? How did those ideas differ from the views of Woodrow Wilson, William Howard Taft, and Theodore Roosevelt?
8. What was the “bull market” on the New York Stock Exchange?

9. What did it mean to buy stocks “on margin”? Why was that practice so popular? Why did it prove so dangerous?
10. A speculative question: why was it easier to have a bull market in the new “mass society” than, let’s say, than during colonial days? How did mass society help create the stock market crash?

32 A New Deal

The cause of the Great Depression was not simply the stock market crash. Though the buying frenzy attracted many investors ready to speculate during the late 1920s, only about 4 million Americans actually owned stocks at the time. But the economy was weak in other ways. Even before the crash occurred, some 2 million Americans were out of work and a number of industries were already hurting, including railroads, coal mining, lumbering and farming. What is important to understand, in the larger scheme of things, is why the economy spiraled steadily downward, given these weaknesses and the panic set off by the stock market crash. The chapter talks about “common sense” reactions to the downturn: to cut back on spending, become more frugal, keep your budget balanced. This was the reaction, quite naturally, of individuals and families as well as businesses. But when virtually everyone followed the common-sense strategy, the downward spiral accelerated. A worker laid off from his job meant that his family bought fewer groceries, to make ends meet. Multiply that thousands of times, and grocers everywhere are selling less food. So *they* cut back. People travel less, so railroads make less money, fewer automobiles are bought. Then automobile factories lay off workers...and now these people too are spending less. Businesses put off routine maintenance like painting factories or train cars. Instead, they laid off painters to save money. It’s important to understand this process, this spiral toward disaster.

Combatting the spiral meant going against the grain of common sense. As the British economist John Maynard Keynes argued, to turn around the economy, people had to start spending again; and to help them do that, the government had to prime the economy’s pump by providing relief to people with no money to spend. Hoover actually tried this course at first, cutting taxes, which put more income in people’s pockets. But that left the federal budget unbalanced, and “common sense” kicked in and Hoover supported tax increases. Franklin Roosevelt was more ready to experiment. He was not a committed Keynesian, but his vigorous program of relief, recovery and reform did begin to turn the economy around. It did not do enough to end the depression completely—indeed, the economy slid downward again (in what became known as the “Roosevelt recession” of 1937) when FDR cut back on government relief efforts before the economy had revived sufficiently. Some people point out—correctly—that the Great Depression came to an end only with the onset of World War II. Indeed—the war was in effect a vast stimulus plan more far-reaching than anything put in place by the New Deal. And it involved far more government regulation and control than earlier New Deal measures.

The distinction between relief, recovery and reform is important to understand Roosevelt’s longer-term contributions to the political system. The

short term aid—relief—won him the immense gratitude of the destitute and unemployed, though the program did not reach minority groups like African Americans and Latinos as well as it did other Americans. But the longer-term measures like Social Security and a reform of the banking system continued to have a salutary effect on the economy. It put in place a safety net which would help prevent new downward spirals from occurring anew when the economy weakened in the decades to come.

For a good one-volume portrait of the era, see Robert S. McElvaine, *The Great Depression*; David Kennedy provides another survey in *Freedom from Fear*, (which continues the story through World War II). For the human impact of the Depression, Caroline Bird's *The Invisible Scar* is worth reading. Photography played a large role in capturing hard times of the thirties. Hundreds of unemployed photographers—as well as writers, artists and musicians—were hired by the federal government. The voluminous Farm Security Administration photograph collection can be viewed at <http://1.usa.gov/1x5vAPY> and also a smaller collection of color transparencies <http://1.usa.gov/1ILcGEP>. For the contrast between the Depression in color and black-and-white, see my note at <http://bit.ly/216uboP>.



Faro and Doris Caudill, homesteaders, Pie Town, New Mexico
Russell Lee, October 1940

CHAPTER 32 - QUESTIONS

1. How did the stock market crash of 1929 contribute to a downturn in the economy?
2. Although many more Americans bought stocks in the 1920s, most did not. How were the people who didn't own stocks affected?
3. How did problems with banks contribute to the falling economy?
4. What was the Dust Bowl? How were farmers affected by it? Who were the "Okies"?
5. How did Herbert Hoover try to head off a depression?
6. How did Franklin Roosevelt deal with the bank crisis?
7. Historians speak of the "three R's" of Roosevelt's New Deal. What were they?
8. What was wrong with the "common sense" idea that in hard times, the government should cut its spending like everyone else?
9. What New Deal programs provided relief for Americans out of work? What longer term programs helped the economy to recover? What reforms did the New Deal put in place to try to make future economic downturns less severe?
10. Did Roosevelt and his New Dealers have more in common with Harding, Coolidge and Hoover or with Teddy Roosevelt, Taft and Wilson? Explain.

33 Global War

Max Hastings, in the introduction to his history of World War II, *Inferno*, points out that the war was the single biggest event in human history. To provide a sense of scale, I compare the casualties from World War I—already a conflict like none other in history—with the casualties of World War II. In many ways, compressing a history of the war into a single chapter in *Little History* seemed the most difficult task of the book. If it was an audacious undertaking to present the Civil War in eight pages, at least the run-up to the war received a separate chapter. Here, a little over eight pages must serve to encompass not only the tortuous road to war but also the fighting and winning of it! For those who want to delve more deeply, Hastings' book is a good place to start. And for a focus on the American portion of the story, David Kennedy's *Freedom from Fear* does the job.

In a way, of course, the previous chapter does cover the run-up to the war years. It's just that the Great Depression is an event large enough to demand its own narrative, and not as intimately connected to events in Europe that are going on at the same time. But note that in terms of chronology, this chapter begins with Hitler coming to power at the same time as FDR does. The events leading toward war are unfolding at the same time as the nation is struggling with its worst depression. Recognizing that makes it easier to understand the isolationists better. Hindsight has tended to judge them harshly: that they were blind or willfully ignorant of what was going on in Europe and in Asia. Yet their attitudes were shaped by longstanding American habits of thought. Washington and Jefferson's aversion to "entangling" alliances was repeated forcefully by Warren Harding. After the Great War, Americans rightly wanted as little entanglement with Europe as possible. For over a century, the sheer size of the oceans had made it easier to follow such a policy.

But the process of entanglement, to borrow a foreign policy term, continued to work its will. It was impossible to return to a "normalcy" in which industries and commerce were not linked across the globe, or one where big powers did not continue to project their influence around the world. As the chapter notes, World War II was in effect yet another manifestation of the Next Big Thing. It was made possible because the world had become increasingly interconnected. Isolation was not simply a matter of turning back the clock.

Oral histories provide one way into the experiences of the war. There are quite a few on the web, for instance at the National WWII Museum site (<http://bit.ly/1O81sL1>). Interesting material is available here—video recordings made relatively recently—but I found it only partially satisfying. First, the video is in many cases (though by no means all) head-and-shoulders shots of the speaker, who at the time of the recording was fifty or so years older.

With that image of them onscreen, it's harder to imagine the younger version of the same person. Then too, oral interviews are necessarily a bit diffuse because of the conversational patterns of speech. Sometimes it takes a lot of ground to cover not that much of substance. I found it much more satisfying to read a book of oral recollections such as Studs Terkel's classic, *The Good War*. Ironically, the case could be made that despite the immediacy of video and audio recordings, the printed word does a better job of taking one back to the occurrences described!

One of the most debated topics of the war centered on the use of two atomic bombs to bring the conflict to a close. Richard Rhodes, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*, provides a history of bomb's development. But the question has been repeatedly asked: Should the bombs have been dropped? If so, why not one rather than two? Would the Japanese have surrendered anyway? Would a demonstration of the bomb's power, to a Japanese delegation, have made the same point without loss of life? How many casualties would American forces have incurred if they had been forced to invade Japan instead of using the bomb? Many books have addressed these and other questions. My coauthor Mark Hamilton Lytle discusses the subject in one chapter of *After the Fact: the Art of Historical Detection*.

CHAPTER 33 - QUESTIONS

1. When Adolph Hitler became chancellor of the German nation, what was happening in the United States?
2. Why were Germany, Italy and Japan unhappy with the Treaty of Versailles? How did the democracies of Britain and France feel about the chance of a new war?
3. In the United States, who were the isolationists and what did they believe?
4. What series of actions by Germany led the Allies to declare war against the Axis powers?
5. What brought the United States into the war on the side of the Allies?
6. Why were aircraft carriers important to the war in the Pacific?
7. What was the Holocaust? What beliefs on Hitler's part led the Nazis to carry out their program?
8. Why were the battles of Stalingrad and the invasion of Normandy turning points in the war?
9. What was "the gadget"? How was it used to bring an end to the war?
10. Why does the chapter refer to World War II as "quite simply, the biggest event in human history"? Give examples to support that claim.

34 Superpower

To speak of an era of world superpowers is necessarily to take a more global view of American history. It's a gross misconception that, because we've now reached the mid-twentieth century, we have to begin thinking globally. From its earliest origins, the story of the United States is global. It begins with the first sustained contact between the two halves of the world and global events and movements have been important throughout its history, including the slave trade, the industrial revolution, immigration and much more. But World War II put an end to the isolationist vision of the United States as best-served by avoiding entanglement with the wider world. At the same time, it was the very isolation of the Americas from the direct effects of the world war that played a key role in making the United States a superpower. During the war, Americans at home largely escaped the destruction and death inflicted by the war in Europe, Africa and Asia and the Pacific. When peace came at last, it left the United States in a clear position of superiority. And yet the evolving technology of long-range bombers and intercontinental missiles made it impossible to go back to ignoring events in the other hemisphere.

For more details about the dramatic shift from hot war to cold, from the Soviets as allies to superpower rivals, see Campbell Craig and Frederik Logevall, *America's Cold War*. This chapter of *Little History* sketches the change in American attitudes toward nuclear weapons, for it took some time for the implications of atomic radiation and the weapon's destructive power to penetrate the popular imagination. Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light*, provides many examples of this shift over time. As for primary sources, there are at least a few used copies available at this writing of Richard Gerstell's striking *How to Survive an Atomic Bomb*. To read the entire tract is to immerse oneself in the eerie currents of the era. On the one hand, it's meant to be comforting about the chance of surviving an attack; it constantly minimizes the dangers of radiation and talks about laughably ineffective personal defenses: the advice to wear hats with a good brim and more tightly woven clothing, as if that would make any difference! Clearly the book's purpose is to help avoid mass hysteria in the case of atomic war. On the other hand, even with such reassurances, the descriptions of strategies to avoid the frightening dangers are enough to provoke a case of the fantods, to borrow Huckleberry Finn's pungent phrase. Similarly, a visit to the film prepared for elementary school children on the same subject, "Duck and Cover," is worth watching, available on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/IKqXu-5jw60>.

Due to *Little History's* limitations of space, the hard choice was made to scant the ample and fascinating cultural history of the 1950s with the growth of the suburbs. Much of that story can be found in David Halberstam's readable volume, *The Fifties*. Even better, get a copy of a wonderful book on the era by

Thomas Hine, *Populuxe*. The illustrations and format are of the coffee-table variety, but the commentary is incisive and informed, showing how the cold war influenced the design of large-finned automobiles, California dip at cocktail parties and much more.

CHAPTER 34 - QUESTIONS

1. In what ways did the end of World War II bring large changes in the world of politics and nations?
2. In what ways did the expansion of the Russian empire parallel the expansion of the United States in the 1800s?
3. What system of government did the Soviet Union adopt? How were its beliefs in equality different from the beliefs of the American democratic system?
4. If the Soviet and American systems of government were so opposed, why did they become allies in World War II?
5. How did the Cold War begin? What was Truman's policy of containment?
6. Look at the map on page 257. How many hot spots are listed? Which does the map suggest were the most serious?
7. What were Harry Truman's greatest successes as president?
8. How did the feelings of Americans about atomic weapons change from the end of World War II through the Cold War?
9. Why did atomic weapons increase the risks involved with keeping the peace? Were atomic weapons used during the Korean War? Why or why not?
10. What were fallout shelters? Do they seem to you to be a realistic method of protecting against atomic war?

35 The End of the World

The period of time covered in this chapter is only thirteen days, a far briefer span than any other chapter in the book. The reason may be obvious, but perhaps it bears a little enlargement. When opinion surveys ask the public to rank the presidents, John F. Kennedy does extremely well. A swirl of positive images crowd in on his biography: the nation's youngest president, touch football games on the White House lawn, the comparison to King Arthur's Camelot. No doubt the tragedy of his assassination lends further sympathy. Historians have been harder on Kennedy, judging his accomplishments as relatively meager. They cite his reluctance to support the civil rights movement for fear of alienating white Democrats in the segregated South (a key component of FDR's Democratic coalition); and they debate whether Kennedy's willingness to become involved in anti-Communist "wars of liberation" led to the American quagmire in Vietnam, though it was Lyndon Johnson who sharply escalated the conflict.

These demerits certainly dim the president's luster. Yet I rank Kennedy more highly than many historians do, simply because of those thirteen days in October 1962. The Cuban missile crisis is hardly ignored in histories of the era, but its peaceful resolution perhaps softens the realization of what almost occurred. In one of his most famous cases, Sherlock Holmes calls attention to "the curious incident of the dog in the night-time." When Scotland Yard's Inspector Gregory responds that "the dog did nothing in the night-time," Holmes rejoins, "That was the curious incident." Because the missile crisis ended well, the implications of the near miss fail to sink in. Surely World War III would have followed if events had fallen out slightly differently, and the world's civilizations would not have recovered even today. In the tense face-off, Kennedy as well as Khrushchev compromised, despite Dean Rusk's famous boast that "the other fellow blinked."

Robert Kennedy, the president's brother and attorney general, wrote a brief and readable account of the crisis, *Thirteen Days*. Many other books covering the same ground have followed. Our knowledge of the crisis has deepened considerably once the end of the Cold War opened Soviet archives to scholars. Michael Dobbs, *One Minute to Midnight*, provides a gripping narrative. Especially insightful on Soviet perspectives is Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*. But for those interested in the intricate details, I highly recommend Ernest R. May and Philip D. Zelikow, eds., *The Kennedy Tapes*. These are transcripts of the secret recordings made of the ExComm committee meetings Kennedy convened to hammer out a response to the Soviets.

For a flavor of the intense back and forth, consider the following excerpt from the first ExComm meeting, held on Tuesday October 16, 1962. Secretary of State Dean Rusk outlined two possibilities for dealing with the Soviet missiles. The first was military: to make a surprise “quick strike” to take out the nuclear missile sites in Cuba without announcing American intentions in advance. The second alternative charted more of a diplomatic route, first announcing knowledge of the bases, then consulting with American allies and calling upon the Organization of American States (OAS) to assemble and demand that the Soviets remove their missiles.

Secretary of the Treasury Douglas Dillon: I think that the chance of getting through this thing without a Russian reaction is greater under a quick strike than building the whole thing up to a [diplomatic] climax, then going through with what will be a lot of debate on it.

Dean Rusk: That is, of course, a possibility, but...

National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy: The difficulties. I share the Secretary of the Treasury’s feeling a little. The difficulties of organizing the OAS and NATO. The amount of noise we would get from our allies, saying that they can live with Soviet MRBMs [medium-range ballistic missiles located within range of their nations], why can’t we? The division in the alliance. The certainty that the Germans would feel that we were jeopardizing Berlin because of our concern over Cuba. The prospect of that pattern is not an appetizing one.

Rusk: Yes, but you see—everything turns crucially on what happens.

Bundy: I agree, Mr. Secretary.

Rusk: And if we go with a quick strike, then, in fact, [if] they do back it up [that is, retaliate]. Then you have exposed all of your allies and ourselves to all these great dangers without the slightest consultation, or warning, or preparation.

Bundy: You get all these noises again.

President Kennedy: But, of course, warning them, it seems to me, is warning everybody. And I—obviously you can’t sort of announce that in 4 days from now you’re going to take them out. They may announce within 3 days that they’re going to have warheads on them. If we come and attack, they’re going to fire them. So then what’ll we do? Then we don’t take them out. Of course, we then announce: “Well, if they do that, then we’re going to attack with nuclear weapons.”...

How effective can the take-out [of Soviet missile sites] be, do they [military advisers] think?

General Maxwell Taylor: It'll never be 100 percent, Mr. President, we know. We hope to take out a vast majority in the first strike, but this is not just one thing—one strike, one day—but continuous air attack for whenever necessary, whenever we discover a target.

Bundy: They're now talking about taking out the [Cuban] air force as well.

Why bomb the Cuban air force? Well, it was impossible to discount the possibility that the Soviets had loaded a few nuclear bombs onto Cuban planes, which would be able to reach at least some coastal areas of the United States. But then—if you included the Cuban air force bases in the bombing campaign, the “quick strikes” became a much larger project and, as Deputy Defense Secretary Roswell Gilpatric noted, the Russians and Cubans could logically assume that a strike that large signaled the preparation of a full U.S. invasion of Cuba: “and it would seem to me that if you're talking about a general air-attack program, you might as well think about whether we can eradicate the whole problem by an invasion just as simply, with as little chance of reaction.” So—literally within minutes—the discussion has moved from the notion of a quick, surgical air strike to a full-blown invasion of Cuba, with the knowledge that nuclear retaliation by the Soviets remained a strong possibility.

Kennedy saw this, though that first day he still assumed that somehow, the United States would have to launch a military strike to take out the missiles. By the climax of the crisis, however, he had changed his views—unlike the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who to the very end recommended a large air strike. It was Kennedy's finest hour that he stood up to that pressure to launch an attack that would almost certainly have ended civilization as we know it. And so, in the depths of one dark Saturday night, the dog did not bark.

CHAPTER 35 - QUESTIONS

1. What was MAD: the doctrine of Mutual Assured Destruction?
2. What did President Dwight Eisenhower's secretary of state mean when he said, “If you are scared to go to the brink, you are lost”? Bonus points: If you *aren't* scared to go to the brink, does that present a problem for the idea of MAD?
3. Why did Khrushchev want to place nuclear missiles in Cuba?
4. What was the baby boom? What was the boom in suburbs? How did the boom in automobiles lead Eisenhower to improve American roads?
5. Why did the United States regard Fidel Castro as a threat?
6. When the U-2 spy planes discovered Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba, what was President Kennedy's first plan to respond? What prevented him from following that plan?
7. What U.S. action caused Kennedy's secretary of state to boast, “the other fellow blinked”? Why was the missile crisis still not solved?

8. What event over Cuba nearly took the United States and Soviet Union to war?
9. What deal did President Kennedy propose to Nikita Khrushchev to end the crisis?
10. This chapter covers only 13 days in history, the shortest time frame of any in the book. Why does the chapter spend so much time on so short a period?

36 You or You or You

One of the challenges of writing a book of 40 short chapters is that the structure encourages focus on contained, major events. The Cuban missile crisis is the extreme example of this; but so are the chapters on the Revolutionary War, the Civil War and here, the civil rights movement. With limited space, it's hard to convey that much has been going on in terms of civil rights between the last time such matters were center stage (Chapter 23, "How Do You Reconstruct?") and the present one. Chapter 29, The Progressives, did note that even while political reforms were being championed by both Populists and Progressives, segregation was on the rise, both as a legal system and as a means of attaining cultural and racial purity. Woodrow Wilson, who led the country during Progressivism's high tide, also led the way in bringing segregation to the White House and to government employment. (He praised the Ku Klux Klan and lauded the early racist film, *Birth of a Nation*.)

So in turning now to civil rights, it's important to recognize that the movement did not suddenly arise out of thin air in the 1950s. The opening of the chapter acknowledges the point in broad strokes, highlighting the efforts of Ida B. Wells and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), including the inimitable Thurgood Marshall. Wells was particularly active from the late 1880s through the early twentieth century, only one of many voices raised during those years. W.E.B. DuBois led the NAACP in its early career. A good brief overview of these decades can be found in Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality*, which concentrates primarily on the movement after 1954. The first milestone in the expanding movement was the pivotal Supreme Court decision in 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education*. It is one of three key decisions on African American rights that bear reviewing. The first two were setbacks: the Dred Scott decision of 1857 (page 155) and *Plessy v. Ferguson*, in 1896 (page 215), which established the legal fiction of "separate but equal." Until *Brown v. Board*, the legal efforts of Marshall and other advocates at the NAACP had used the gradualist tactic of accepting *Plessy* as law of the land, and trying to prove that individual cases of "separate" were not actually equal. But the *Brown* decision struck down the very notion of separate but equal.

Martin Luther King, Jr. was the civil rights leader who towered above the others, and for those who wish to trace his life in full, the three-volume trilogy by Taylor Branch does the job: *Parting the Waters*, *Pillar of Fire* and *At Canaan's Edge*. A good short biography is Marshall Frady, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Life*. Understanding King's work includes understanding his nonviolent philosophy. King, of course, was a Baptist minister and familiar with the teachings of Jesus; but he also drew upon thinkers like Henry David Thoreau (civil disobedience) and Mohandas K. Gandhi (nonviolence). It may be worth noting that King did not follow Gandhi so far as to undertake hunger strikes to achieve his goals.

When someone pointed out that difference to King, he replied, “I guess he’s never tasted barbecue.”

But the campaign for civil rights was a diverse movement with many streams and philosophies. After Rosa Parks’ arrest in Montgomery, efforts on her behalf were launched by other women activists calling for a boycott. The students who decided to sit in at a lunch counter in Greensboro made the decision on their own, though they were familiar with King’s work. Interestingly they were encouraged by a local Greensboro business owner, Ralph Johns, a Syrian American and member of the local NAACP. The NAACP, the Congress of Racial Equality and its Freedom Riders, King’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee all shared the larger goal of racial equality, but differed and even competed at times with one another on how to achieve that end.

Still, King’s words and the even the cadence of his speeches left the most lasting mark. An excerpt from “I Have a Dream,” given at the March on Washington, can be seen on the web at <https://youtu.be/3vDWWy4CMhE>. And the price to be paid for eloquence of the rhetoric can be grasped in *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, especially in Chapter 8, “The Violence of Desperate Men,” where King recalls the threats made against him and his response during the Montgomery bus boycott: <http://stanford.io/1T1zjon>.

CHAPTER 36 - QUESTIONS

1. How did the custom of segregation replace the line drawn between *slave* and *free* before the civil war?
2. When were Ida B. Wells and the NAACP active in protesting the policies of segregation? What were their strategies for doing so?
3. What did the Supreme Court rule in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*? When was the case decided? What policy did it overturn?
4. How did Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr. work to overturn segregation in Montgomery, Alabama?
5. What was King’s philosophy of nonviolence? What other leaders influenced his thinking and how?
6. What were “sit-ins”? Who were the Freedom Riders? How did these campaigns help desegregate the South?
7. What actions were taken to desegregate schools in the South? What happened in Little Rock, Arkansas?
8. Why did the Kennedy administration encourage civil rights leaders to focus on gaining voting rights? What response did the volunteers of SNCC meet?
9. Why did Martin Luther King and the SCLC choose to protest in Birmingham, Alabama? What was their strategy there?
10. When did the March on Washington take place? What was Martin Luther King’s message at the rally?

37 The Avalanche

The design of the “Little History” series is explicit on one matter: no heavy discussion of theory. This book follows that plan, but does smuggle a few light theoretical discussions under the cover of an analogy or two. Chapter 37 begins with one: the comparison of a snowball rolling down hill to an avalanche. By using the avalanche as a metaphor for the decade, I am suggesting that structural factors in society play a significant role in explaining the outbreak of reform, ferment and revolution in the decade. By implication, I’m also leaning less on the “great person” as an explanation for change. To do so doesn’t denigrate the actions of individuals. But Ida Wells in the 1880s and 1890s showed every bit as much determination as Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr. in the 1960s.

The difference in outcomes can be ascribed to large-scale changes in society. Wells and others like her were fighting against a current of increasing segregation; and as the chapter notes, the great majority of African Americans in the 1890s were working in more isolated, rural occupations, making it more difficult to plan, organize and make collective efforts felt. Only a sentence or two in the book is devoted to what historians refer to as “the Great Migration” of the early and mid-twentieth century, of African Americans out of the rural South and into cities, some in the South (like Montgomery) but many in the North. Whole books have described this migration, including Isobel Wilkerson’s excellent *The Warmth of Other Suns*. (Her title is taken from a poem by black writer Richard Wright: “I was leaving the South / To fling myself into the unknown,” bringing a part of the South with him “To see if it could grow differently, / If it could drink of new and cool rains.... Respond to the warmth of other suns / And, perhaps, to bloom.”) In addition, a younger generation of African Americans (and Latinos too) fought in World War II and returned from the service determined not to accept their previous positions of subservience after having served their country, often in combat.

So it’s worth remembering that while the actions of individuals loom large in both the previous chapter and the present one, larger social forces are at play. The takeaway from the ‘avalanche’ metaphor is that social pressures have been slowly building until a tipping point is reached, whereupon they burst suddenly, sending shocks through American society. For a narrative approach that conveys the chaotic nature of the avalanche, year by year, try Mark Hamilton Lytle, *America’s Uncivil Wars*.

As we’ve seen, *Brown v. Board of Education* was one major tipping point, and perceived so at the time. This chapter also looks at a similar less-noticed decision, *Texas v. Hernandez*, heard by the Court two weeks earlier. Many Mexican Americans had been active in the preceding decades, as African

Americans had. But just as King came to be viewed as the leader of his cause, César Chávez took the lead in pushing for bargaining rights for agricultural workers in California and elsewhere. Miriam Pawel covers the careers of Chávez and his comrades in two detailed volumes, *The Union of their Dreams* and *The Crusades of Cesar Chavez*. The narrative does not hesitate to point out the failings of Chávez, especially in his later years, as well as his genuine dedication and heroism.

The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told to Alex Haley provides a riveting path into the divisions that increasingly beset the civil rights movement as the decade continued. Malcolm was assassinated in 1965, but Harvard Sitkoff's *Struggle for Black Equality* charts the movement's later splintering. For the changes launched by women, Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open* provides a narrative written by a historian who also lived through the turbulent years. As for cultural ferment, no primary source is better at showing the spreading avalanche in all its chaotic glory than Stewart Brand, *The Last Whole Earth Catalog*. The large-format book is not strictly a catalog, in that one did not order directly from it. It was more catalog to a lifestyle, to use a word that became increasingly popular. *The Whole Earth Catalog* brought together everything from a primer on how to build geodesic domes to gardening to the use of hallucinogenic drugs. It pointed to how-to books on wilderness living, it listed sources for Swiss Army knives, looms, sewing machines, concrete boat-building manuals, chain saws and windmills. It even contained a novel, *Divine Right's Trip*, which threaded its way through the catalog, a paragraph or two on every page. Used copies of the catalog are available on the Web, but be warned: the paper is likely to be faded and the binding iffy. There are also eBook editions at <http://www.wholeearth.com/back-issues.php>. (The most popular was the "Last" version, issued in 1971.) For a sample of the catalog's spirit, see the following entries. How do the passages reflect the themes and interests of the era? What has endured in today's culture?

Shelter

Evolution and Design in the Plant Kingdom

Live dwellings—how soon? Hopes of living vegetable tissue. The walls take up your CO₂ and return oxygen. They grow or diminish to accommodate your family changes. Add a piece of the kitchen wall to the stewpot. House is friend. Dweller and dwelling domesticate each other. Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Structures.

Engineering lately has been inspired by bionics, the analysis of living systems for their immunological accomplishments that might be borrowed by us. So far, plants have been overlooked.

Hey! Plants.

Start with this systems lovely book and the nearest seed pod.

—SB [Stewart Brand]

Evolution and Design in the Plant Kingdom

C. L. Duddington

1969, 258 pp.

\$7.95 *postpaid*

Survival

Survival Arts of the Primitive Paiutes

This book is about people living in equilibrium with their environment. They probably had no words for garbage or waste because they used everything—cattail, tule, willow, rabbit pelts buckskin, sagebrush bark, bones, rocks. Somehow the story of how they did it, which is told with simple words and ungimmicky photographs, reflects the expanse and serenity of the Great Basin environment and is beautiful.

[Reviewed by Tony Mindling]

Survival Arts of the Primitive Paiutes

Margaret M. Wheat

1967, 177 pp.

\$10.00 *postpaid*

CHAPTER 37 - QUESTIONS

1. Why does the chapter consider events of the 1960s to be more like an avalanche than a snowball that gains speed as it rolls down hill?
2. What was one long-term change in American society that made it easier for the civil rights movement to achieve success in the 1960s than in Ida Wells's day?
3. How did the supporters of Black Power differ in their views from Martin Luther King, Jr.?
4. Why did civil rights protests and riots spread to northern and western states?
5. How did Gus Garcia work for civil rights on behalf of Mexican Americans? How did César Chávez and Dolores Huerta?
6. How did the civil rights movement spread change to colleges and young people more generally?

7. What were hippie communes? Why does the chapter compare them with reformers of the 1840s, who lived over a century earlier?
8. What conditions made women form their own reform movement in the 1960s and 1970s? What tactics did feminists use to spread their views?
9. What was President Lyndon Johnson's first piece of legislation that made history? Why was it so important?
10. Name three other programs that Johnson included as part of his vision of a Great Society? If you were comparing Johnson's efforts with those of earlier decades of American history, which decades would they be?

38 A Conservative Turn

The closer this narrative approaches the present, the greater the number of readers who may have lived through the years dealt with by a chapter. Especially for older Americans (the author, of course, is among that number!) it may seem that events are flying by in a breathtakingly quick way. This is partly a matter of relative perception. Someone who lived through the Carter years, for example, may marvel at how little is said about a tumultuous series of events: the oil crisis which began under Nixon with the rise in economic clout of the OPEC nations, the gas lines, the hostage crisis, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan... But no one reading the book will similarly remark on how little we do with the administration of Chester Arthur, who took office after the assassination of President Garfield. Or the two separate terms of Grover Cleveland, to take two examples at random. In terms of equal time across 500 years, virtually no one notices the huge silence about most of the sixteenth century.

We will return to this issue at the beginning of the following chapter, but for now it is worth saying that in a book of this length, it is more profitable to concentrate on the broader swings of American history. Chapter 38 is titled “A Conservative Turn” and the meaning is obvious enough. We’re moving from a period of reform, experimentation, protest—a new surge of progressive reform—into an era where more conservative politics and values reigned. How should we think about the relation of these two chapters?

Begin with the previous chapter’s metaphor: the avalanche. A lot of kinetic energy is let loose as snow cascades down a mountain and that energy can’t be sustained indefinitely. At the bottom of the avalanche there will remain a huge outwash of debris. Similarly, the reform energies of the Sixties would be hard to sustain for too long either. Just as the utopian communities of Brook Farm or Fruitlands or the Mormon’s Nauvoo lost momentum, likewise the spirit of cooperation and energy broke down in hippie communes and among those seeking alternative life styles. The joyous anarchy of the Woodstock Music Festival of 1969, where 400,000 people listened to rock bands, gave way to an uglier “vibe” at Altamont in 1969, where a concert by the Rolling Stones was marred by violence and four deaths. There is a natural rhythm to such movements and Altamont was only one manifestation of the violence and excesses of the era. But in other ways the innovations of the 1960s have made lasting contributions to American life. The two excerpts from *The Last Whole Earth Catalog* presented above hint at the environmentalist strand of the counterculture that has become mainstream over the years. There are many more examples.

As for the political system, Vietnam is surely the pivot point in the changing balance. In terms of the larger arc of the 50-year Cold War, the Cuban missile crisis signaled the end of brinkmanship confrontation. Vietnam and (for the Soviets) Afghanistan marked the second phase, where both superpowers were exhausted by their involvement in “wars of liberation.” Vietnam torpedoed the ambitions of Lyndon Johnson, who gambled that he could manage a policy of both “guns and butter”—turning back communism in Southeast Asia while still spending lavishly on Great Society programs. Vietnam became not only a moral quagmire and a military defeat but a major cause of an economy saddled by high inflation. Richard Nixon provided a fig leaf of victory by bombing his way toward retreat but few were fooled, especially after the forced evacuation of Vietnam under Gerald Ford.

That was the outwash of the avalanche. But this chapter stresses that the rise of a conservative era, championed and led by Ronald Reagan, was not an overnight phenomenon. Nixon’s election as a Republican marked a turning point. But in comparison to his more conservative successors, he was remarkably liberal in his approach to some areas of government, founding the Environmental Protection Agency and the Occupational Health and Safety Administration, as well as being willing to experiment with price controls to halt inflation. Similarly, in foreign policy, Nixon lay aside the strong anticommunism of his party to reach an easing of tensions (“détente”) with both Communist China and the Soviet Union. Even Ronald Reagan showed some flexibility after his tax cuts failed to produce the revenue predicted by his supply side economists.

In short, the shape of this new “conservative turn” is one that is less like the avalanche that tumbled into the 1950s. Rather, it was a movement that slowly gained power during the 1970s as the reformist impulses of the previous decade lost energy.

The relevant chapters in James T. Patterson’s two volumes in the Oxford History of the United States cover this period: *Grand Expectations* and *Restless Giant*. For the Vietnam War, that pivot point, George Herring provides a tight, clear narrative in *America’s Longest War*. (Alas, it is another book that suffers from textbook price inflation: try used editions.) For getting a feel for the war on the ground, read Al Santoli, *Everything We Had*, an oral history recalled by the soldiers who fought there. The Watergate scandals have been exhaustively covered by Stanley I. Kutler in *The Wars of Watergate*, but a more gripping account is the classic *All the President’s Men* by Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein—particularly interesting because it includes the *Washington Post* reporters’ own account of the detective work that went into chasing Nixon and his accomplices. (*The Final Days*, though breathless enough, is perhaps less useful, though it does finish the story.) For Ronald Reagan, see John Ehrman, *The Eighties: America in the Age of Reagan* for a balanced view.

Ronald Reagan's first inaugural address set the tone for the new conservative era. It is available in full here: <http://bit.ly/1C7aQbC>.

CHAPTER 38 - QUESTIONS

1. What nation did Ho Chi Minh defeat to win independence for Vietnam in 1954? Why did he not gain control of the southern half of Vietnam?
2. Which four presidents sent American troops to Vietnam? Who "escalated" the war the most?
3. What conditions made it so hard for the United States to achieve victory in Vietnam?
4. Who were the hawks and the doves in the war? What positions did they take? What acts of violence took place in the spring and summer of 1968?
5. How did Richard Nixon's election mark a more conservative turn in American politics? In what ways was Nixon not so conservative?
6. Why did a burglary at the Watergate plaza lead President Nixon to resign?
7. How did Ronald Reagan's election mark a significant turn toward conservative government? What sorts of Americans supported him?
8. What did President Reagan do to reduce the role of government in American life?
9. How was Reagan's foreign policy different from Nixon, Ford and Carter's?
10. How did the fall of the Soviet Union come about?

39 Connected

Having been involved in writing a number of college and high school texts, I've found that the last chapter or so of the book is the one that is rewritten the most. As this chapter notes, when you're in the middle of history, current events often seem more important than they prove to be. Sometimes, of course, the impression of importance is valid—as it surely was for those living through World War II. I remember the Cuban missile crisis, even as a teenager, and it remains a pivotal moment, in my view. On the other hand, I can also recall putting a text to bed around the time of the Falklands War between Great Britain and Argentina, and having editors wonder if somehow that should be included in their world history. On another occasion, a coauthor and I were being interviewed by a journalist writing an article promoting the idea that history didn't spend enough time on current events. Our reaction was to disagree, because present events were so hard to sort out. "Just think," we told him, "of how important the Mayaguez incident seemed at the time it happened." "What is the Mayaguez incident?" he asked. "You just proved our point," we replied. If you have not heard of the Mayaguez incident either—and there is no reason you should have, particularly—you can find out more by Googling it. But at the time, it produced quite a few headlines.

So this chapter, instead of trying to list the most recent presidents and major bills and crises, looks at three individuals in relation to the growing interconnection of the nation with the world.

The first individual, Osama bin Laden, demonstrates the difficulties of understanding current events. If bin Laden had been mentioned in a text in the late 1980s, he would almost certainly be looked upon as a brave Mujahideen rebel fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan, with the tacit support of American intelligence agencies. Indeed, that story line is a common thread of more than one Hollywood thriller of the era. In *The Living Daylights* (1987), James Bond rides to the rescue with Mujahideen cavalry. *Rambo III* (1988) finds Sylvester Stallone allied with the same forces, and even ends the film with a banner title, "This film is dedicated to the brave Mujahideen fighters of Afghanistan." But the events of 9/11 provided a sobering new perspective. Later prints of the film ended with "This film is dedicated to the gallant people of Afghanistan." (<http://bit.ly/1HVlnvL>) As President Carter's secretary of defense later remarked, what seemed more important "in the world view of history? A few stirred-up Muslims or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the Cold War?" For an insightful discussion of bin Laden's career, see Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars*.

As for the interconnectedness of the world, the chapter notes not only the influence bin Laden exerted from his remote post in Afghanistan, but it notes

that bin Laden's target, the World Trade Center, was also a symbol of interconnection, where so many nationalities worked in service to an commerce that spanned the globe. That very quality attracted bin Laden to the target.

More details about Juan Chanax and his own very different travels can be found in Roberto Suro's excellent study, *Strangers Among Us*. It seemed to me fitting that the end of this *Little History* should feature someone whose forbears figured prominently at the beginning of the 500-year saga. It is worth noting that the pattern of immigration has shifted over the past few decades, with greater numbers coming from Central America, in addition to those from Mexico; and larger numbers of arrivals from South Asia as well as Southeast Asia.

And finally, Rachel Carson's story helps show how the interconnectedness of the world extends beyond people and nations to the environment itself. The definitive biography of Carson is Linda Lear, *Rachel Carson: Witness for Nature*, but a briefer account, also good, is Mark H. Lytle's aptly titled *The Gentle Subversive*. As for a primary source, Carson's own *Silent Spring* is still available, and very much worth reading. The brief excerpt below, about the attempt to kill off gnats living in California's Clear Lake near San Francisco, illustrates a number of facets of Carson's approach and style. It shows her concern for how animal life cycles concentrated DDD as the chemical was passed up through the food chain. The example also takes us back to the heady days of the 1950s, when "can-do" applied science plunged in confidently to alter a portion of the environment with little knowledge of what its related effects might be.

Water must also be thought of in terms of the chains of life it supports—from the small-as-dust green cells of the drifting plant plankton, through the minute water fleas to the fishers that strain plankton from the water and are in turn eaten by other fishes or by birds, mink, raccoons—in an endless cyclic transfer of materials from life to life. We know that the necessary minerals in the water are so passed from link to link of the food chains. Can we suppose that poisons we introduce into water will not also enter into these cycles of nature?...

The new control measures undertaken in 1949 were carefully planned and few people would have supposed any harm could result. The lake was surveyed, its volume determined, and the insecticide applied in such great dilution that for every part of chemical there would be 70 million parts of water. Control of the gnats was at first good, but by 1954 the treatment had to be repeated, this time at the rate of 1 part of insecticide in 50 million parts of water. The destruction of the gnats was thought to be virtually complete.

The following winter months brought the first intimation that other life was affected: the western grebes on the lake began to die, and soon

more than a hundred of them were reported dead...Following a third assault on the ever-resilient gnat population, in 1957, more grebes died. As had been true in 1954, no evidence of infectious disease could be discovered on examination of the dead birds. But when someone thought to analyze the fatty tissues of the grebes, they were found to be loaded with DDD in the extraordinary concentration of 1600 parts per million...

Here again we are reminded that in nature nothing exists alone.

CHAPTER 39 - QUESTIONS

1. Why is it sometimes hard to tell what's going to be an important part of history while you're living through the events?
2. Give some examples that would support the chapter's statement that "in one sense, all of American history can be seen as the story of increasing connections."
3. Why did the United States secretly help Osama bin Laden in the 1980s? Why did bin Laden turn away from the United States?
4. How were the caves of Afghanistan connected to the Twin Towers of New York? Why did these two towers themselves represent the connections of the world?
5. Where did Juan Chanax live before he journeyed to the United States? Locate that nation on a map.
6. What is a migration chain? How was Chanax an example of how such chains work?
7. Why did the number of immigrants coming into the United States increase in the decades after the 1960s?
8. What did Rachel Carson mean when she said, "In nature, nothing exists alone?"
9. Why was Carson suspicious of the DuPont chemical company's slogan, "Better things for better living...through chemistry"?
10. When scientists say that humans "are now the primary cause of recent and projected future change" in the world's climate, what are they referring to? What have humans done to cause these changes?

40 The Past Asks More

There is not much point in a guide to the final chapter. The chapter itself is a guide to the book, a summing up of its major themes.

Why do we care about the past? One should not breeze too quickly by the first answer: because it is fascinating and fun, in and of itself. If you have reached this far in the book, I am probably preaching to the converted. But working with younger people learning about the past, it's important to keep the principle in mind. Asking questions about the past, making sense of it, is a

riveting occupation worth pursuing for its own sake. Do that, and it will be difficult not to ask the larger questions that suggest themselves the deeper you get into history.

But here we return to three thematic touchstones, encapsulated in a simple credo. *We are free, we are equal, we are one.* What do those ideas signify, looking over the past 500 years? I suggest that diversity within unity is the key to making any claim to being an exceptional nation. Yet that notion runs counter to a longstanding dream of Americans—a dream of human beings in general—that if only affairs were rightly arranged, we would all agree on what is important: in religion, in government, in politics, in cultural customs. The dream of unity through consensus, through purity, through singleness of purpose, through salvation to the one true God, has been a recurring strand of this book, whether speaking of Columbus’s “Golden Age” where people’s wants were simple and all could live happily together to the Puritan dreams of a holy commonwealth or Charles Finney’s hope for a millennium of peace and prosperity.

James Madison’s Tenth Federalist essay, one of the Federalist Papers supporting the adoption of the Constitution when it was put before the states for ratification, suggests a harder truth. Human nature and the diverse circumstances of life make it impossible that we will all ever agree on everything. We are divided by different interests, and the purpose of republican government is to provide a way to debate and resolve these differences. But they will always exist; and therefore Walt Whitman’s celebration of difference and diversity is more central to the notion of national unity than any dreams that we can be made one by becoming purer, sharing the same beliefs, customs and creeds.

That’s the book’s message in terms of understanding *E pluribus unum*. It is not always an easy message to digest or to put into practice. But perhaps the lessons regarding freedom and equality are even more sobering. It would be easy to assume that we could chart the growth of liberty and equality as a rising line over the past few centuries. The idea of equality had to be created, we said in Chapter 9. And it would be only natural to think that, as that line of equality and freedom rose, a counterpoint could be drawn through a decreasing line of inequality. Surely there are ups and downs, but for each of these lines, the common-sense conclusion would be that, as one line rises, its opposite diminishes.

That’s not so. As we’ve seen, the spread of slavery contradicted that hopeful view. During the same years that some people pushed to extend equality in American society, slavery also spread, taking root more deeply in the eighteenth century, a full hundred years after the first English colonies were planted. And the booming cotton economy insinuated slavery into the fabric of the American economy, in both the North and the South, even as the democratic reforms of

the Jacksonian era pushed notions of equality to new heights. It took a civil war to resolve these unyielding contradictions.

The abolition of slavery was a huge step forward. But it didn't sweep away the barriers of inequality, especially not for African Americans, who continued to be treated unequally even after emancipation. And the process of industrialization—the Next Big Thing—created disparities of wealth and inequality that were addressed only by periodic eras of reform led by Populists, Progressives, New Dealers and Great Society policymakers. To say nothing of the protests of ordinary Americans who insisted that reform was needed, from Ida B. Wells and Jacob Coxey on through Rosa Parks and César Chávez.

Over the decades, The Next Big Thing has sometimes seemed a bit like a mighty steamroller, growing bigger with each new swing of ups and downs. As society has become more interconnected and complex, the swings between prosperity and peril have grown greater. But even if we manage to avoid the peril of nuclear war—no foregone conclusion—the more gradual threat of global warming may prove harder to address.

An early review of this book wondered whether I was being too much of a Pollyanna in my discussion of American exceptionalism. That response, I confess, surprised me. If our nation is exceptional, it seems to me that it is so in its ability, as a continental republic, to provide a democratic framework for an increasingly diverse population who prize their freedoms and aspire to be treated as equals. Given the challenges to equality and the threats of an interconnected world, I don't assume that the nation will inevitably grow and prosper. I embrace no "Whig" view of history, that progress is inevitable. As someone who must now be counted a member of the older generation, I intended the final two paragraphs, addressed implicitly to those much younger, with the utmost sincerity. The past asks more of us because the future deserves more. Will we discover new ways to remain free and equal and one? "You tell me." Because there's nothing inevitable about the answer; and the future is in your hands.

CHAPTER 40 - QUESTIONS

1. What episode in American history did you find the most interesting? Why? What would you like to know more about it?
2. What would you consider the most important turning point in American history? Why? Your top five most important people in American history? Why?
3. Why does the American motto *E pluribus unum* seem to be a sham or a fairy tale? Give examples from the past and the present.
4. How does the idea of a holy commonwealth suggest a way to provide unity? Why do the ideas of James Madison suggest that such solutions not work well?

5. How does Madison's idea of a constitutional government solve the problem of diversity in a different way?
6. What part do political parties play in a constitutional government?
7. How did the tug between equality and inequality in American life lead to the biggest failure of the American constitutional system? How was that failure resolved?
8. How did the growth of industry make it harder for equality to spread after the Civil War? How did the ideas of laissez-faire and "Luck and Pluck" make it harder?
9. Why were the two world wars part of the unfolding tale of the Next Big Thing? Why is the challenge of global warming part of it?
10. Is the United States an exceptional nation? In what ways? (Careful! If this seems like an easy question, perhaps you need to reread some chapters!)