

Nation of Nations

A Narrative History of the American Republic

Fourth Edition

James West Davidson

William E. Gienapp

Harvard University

Christine Leigh Heyrman

University of Delaware

Mark H. Lytle

Bard College

Michael B. Stoff

University of Texas, Austin

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

Walt Whitman



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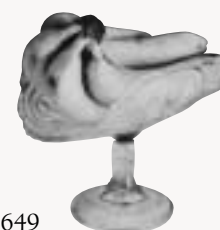
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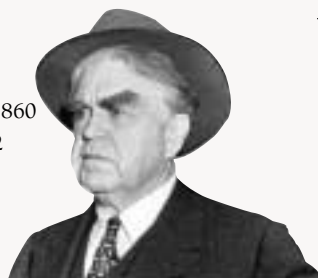


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preface to the fourth edition

All good history begins with a good story: that has been the touchstone of *Nation of Nations*. Narrative is embedded in the way we understand the past; hence it will not do simply to compile an encyclopedia of American history and pass it off as a survey.

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

Changes to the Fourth Edition

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

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

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

and is followed by *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Montgomery bus boycott, and the crisis at Little Rock—materials originally treated in “The Suburban Era.” New material emphasizes the grassroots elements of the crusade and provides coverage of *Hernandez v. Texas*, the 1954 Supreme Court decision that proved as pivotal for Latino civil rights as was *Brown v. Board of Education* for African Americans. Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society and the counterculture remain in this chapter, as does the material on the Warren Court.

- Chapter 30, “The Vietnam Era,” reorients its coverage of minority activism by focusing on the theme of identity group politics. Coverage of the feminist movement, the Equal Rights Amendment, and abortion rights has been moved to this chapter to join expanded coverage of Latino protests (Chavez and the farmworkers, Mexican American student activists) as well as the campaigns of Native Americans, Asian Americans, and gay activists.
- Chapter 32 now focuses, as its new name suggests, on the conservative rebellion. It covers the years from 1980 to 1992.
- And, as already indicated, Chapter 33 examines the renewed immigration of the 1980s and 1990s, the rise of the Internet and its social implications, and the influence of multiculturalism on the contested nature of American identity. Of course, the chapter also recounts the turbulent events of the Clinton administration, both foreign and domestic.

New Pedagogy

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

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

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The division of labor for this book was determined by our respective fields of scholarship: Christine Heyrman, the colonial era, in which Europeans, Africans, and Indians participated in the making of both a new America and a new republic; William Gienapp, the 90 years in which the young nation first flourished, then foundered on the issues of section and slavery; Michael Stoff, the post–Civil War era, in which industrialization and urbanization brought the nation more centrally into an international system regularly disrupted

by depression and war; and Mark Lytle, the modern era, in which Americans finally faced the reality that even the boldest dreams of national greatness are bounded by the finite nature of power and resources both natural and human. Finally, because the need to specialize inevitably imposes limits on any project as broad as this one, our fifth author, James Davidson, served as a general editor and writer, with the intent of fitting individual parts to the whole as well as providing a measure of continuity, style, and overarching purpose. In producing this collaborative effort, all of us have shared the conviction that the best history speaks to a larger audience.

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

about the authors

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

William E. Gienapp has a Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley. He taught at the University of Wyoming before going to Harvard University, where he is Professor of History. In 1988 he received the Avery O. Craven Award for his book *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852–1856*. His essay on “The Antebellum Era” appeared in the *Encyclopedia of Social History* (1992). Currently he is at work on *Abraham Lincoln and Civil War America*.

Christine Leigh Heyrman is Professor of History at the University of Delaware. She received a Ph.D. in American Studies from Yale University and is the author of *Commerce and Culture: The Maritime Communities of Colonial Massachusetts, 1690–1750*. Her book *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* was awarded the Bancroft Prize in 1998.

Mark H. Lytle, who received a Ph.D. from Yale University, is Professor of History and Environmental Studies and Chair of the American Studies Program at Bard College. He was recently appointed a Fulbright Scholar to teach at University College, Dublin, in Ireland. His publications include *The Origins of the Iranian-American Alliance, 1941–1953* and *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection* (with James West Davidson) and “An Environmental Approach to American Diplomatic History,” in *Diplomatic History*. He is at work on *The Uncivil War: America in the Vietnam Era*.

Michael B. Stoff is Associate Professor of History at the University of Texas at Austin. The recipient of a Ph.D. from Yale University, he has received many teaching awards, most recently the Friars’ Centennial Teaching Excellence Award. He is the author of *Oil, War, and American Security: The Search for a National Policy on Foreign Oil, 1941–1947* and coeditor (with Jonathan Fanton and R. Hal Williams) of *The Manhattan Project: A Documentary Introduction to the Atomic Age*.

introduction

History is both a discipline of rigor, bound by rules and scholarly methods, and something more: the unique, compelling, even strange way in which we humans define ourselves. We are all the sum of the tales of thousands of people, great and small, whose actions have etched their lines upon us. History supplies our very identity—a sense of the social groups to which we belong, whether family, ethnic group, race, class, or gender. It reveals to us the foundations of our deepest religious beliefs and traces the roots of our economic and political systems. It explores how we celebrate and grieve, how we sing the songs we sing, how we weather the illnesses to which time and chance subject us. It commands our attention for all these good reasons and for no good reason at all, other than a fascination with the way the myriad tales play out. Strange that we should come to care about a host of men and women so many centuries gone, some with names eminent and familiar, others unknown but for a chance scrap of information left behind in an obscure letter.

Yet we do care. We care about Sir Humphrey Gilbert, “devoured and swallowed up of the Sea” one black Atlantic night in 1583; we care about George Washington at Kips Bay, red with fury as he takes a riding crop to his retreating soldiers. We care about Octave Johnson, a slave fleeing through Louisiana swamps trying to decide whether to stand and fight the approaching hounds or take his chances with the bayou alligators; we care about Clara Barton, her nurse’s skirts so heavy with blood from the wounded, that she must wring them out before tending to the next soldier. We are drawn to the fate of Chinese laborers, chipping away at the Sierras’ looming granite; of a Georgian named Tom Watson seeking to forge a colorblind political alliance; and of desperate immigrant mothers, kerosene lamps in hand, storming Brooklyn butcher shops that had again raised prices. We follow, with a mix of awe and amusement, the fortunes of the quirky Henry Ford (“Everybody wants to be somewhere he ain’t”), turning out identical automobiles, insisting his factory workers wear identical expressions (“Fordization of the Face”).

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

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

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

In some ways, surveys such as this text are the natural antithesis of narrative history. They strive, by definition, to be comprehensive: to furnish a broad, orderly exposition of their chosen field. Yet to cover so much ground in so limited a space necessarily deprives readers of the context of more detailed accounts. Then, too, the resurgence of social history—with its concern for class and race, patterns of rural and urban life, the

spread of market and industrial economies—lends itself to more analytic, less chronological treatments. The challenge facing historians is to incorporate these areas of research without losing the story's narrative drive or the chronological flow that orients readers to the more familiar events of our past.

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

It goes without saying that Americans have not always produced wisely or well. The insistent drive toward material plenty has levied a heavy tax on the

global environment. Too often quantity has substituted for quality, whether we talk of cars, education, or culture. When markets flourish, the nation abounds with confidence that any problem, no matter how intractable, can be solved. When markets fail, however, the fault lines of our political and social systems become all too evident.

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