

These United States

The Questions of Our Past

SECOND EDITION



IRWIN UNGER

Volume I. To 1877

Second Edition

These United States

The Questions of Our Past

Volume I: To 1877

IRWIN UNGER

New York University

With the assistance of Debi Unger

FAMILY HISTORIES

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To the memory of
Samuel Weisstein (1902–1977)
Elias C. Unger (1890–1979)
Mary Unger (1894–1981)

Preface

THE FIRST EDITION OF *THESE UNITED STATES* WAS a successful text adopted by many instructors in universities, colleges, and secondary schools all over the country. Our success, we feel, was attributable to several elements. The book's question format gave coherence to each of the chapters and provided an interpretive framework that helped students understand and retain what they read. The family histories gave readers a sense of ordinary men and women leading their lives within the context of major national changes and reminded students that history was made up of what ordinary people did, felt, and said. The emphasis on social, cultural, and economic events, while not neglecting the framework of politics and the nation's role in world affairs, appealed to students newly alert to social and cultural interactions.

Yet the reader who compares the two editions will find many changes, each representing our own conclusions and those of many users and reviewers. In Volume I the chapters covering early settlement were generally recast to add material and refocus emphases. The first chapter has been changed from a Europe-centered discussion to one that sees the beginnings of the American community as a confrontation between existing societies in both the New World and the Old World. The new chapter 2 was reorganized to clarify the chronology of colonial settlement and to deal with such later immigrant groups as the Scotch-Irish and the Germans. Chapter 3 now treats a far wider range

of social, cultural, and economic change in the New World, including changes in language and the evolution and transformation of transplanted African customs and institutions. I have completely rewritten the chapters on America before the Civil War to take into account new research on families, women, and the impact of industrialization on different groups. Finally, wherever relevant (in the chapter on the American Revolution, for example) I have added material on the Indian role in major events.

I have also made many changes in Volume II. There are three completely new chapters: one on intellectual and cultural developments in the half-century following the Civil War, a second on the trans-Missouri West, and a third emphasizing the 1970s and bringing the political and social story up to 1981. I have also expanded the first edition's coverage of immigration and the effects of Gilded Age industrialization on the lives of ordinary people.

Besides these major structural and substantive changes, portions of every chapter of *These United States* have been rewritten to clarify and enliven the discussions. The brief critical bibliographies that follow each chapter have been updated and improved.

My publisher and I consider the family histories an important part of the book. We believe that by personalizing the past they engage students' interest and make them aware that they, too, are a part of their country's history. The family histories have also en-

abled instructors to explore broad themes in ways that make them relevant to their students. To improve the value of the family histories, we have added another one in each volume. In Volume I, besides the Alexanders of Georgia, we now have the Rosholts, a Norwegian family who settled in Wisconsin and became successful farmers, lumber mill operators, and bankers. In Volume II the first edition's Goulds of New York have been joined by the Jorquez family of the Southwest, a fascinating blend of Yankee, Indian, Spanish, and Mexican that brings back to life the concept of the "melting pot." In both cases our purpose was to broaden our view to include people of several backgrounds and to suggest the true heterogeneity of the American experience.

We have greatly improved (and increased the number of) the maps and illustrations for this new edition. We have added a new appendix on writing about history to help students consider all the issues and ask the right questions as they prepare to work on research papers. Finally, we have adopted a new design and chosen a more readable typeface.

All in all, then, this second edition of *These United States* represents a great deal more than mere cosmetic change, and I earnestly hope that readers will be even more pleased with the new version than they were with the old.

In textbook writing, as in life generally, no man is an island. A revision as extensive as this has indebted me even more than usual to a host of readers, experts, critics, editors, and friends. First, I would like to thank the many fine and perceptive scholars around the country who read portions of the work and made many valuable criticisms. These include: Forrest McDonald of the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa; Lois Banner of the University of Scranton; Glenn Barrett of Boise State University; Gil Belles of Western Illinois University; Frederick Blue of Youngstown State University; Peter Carroll of Belmont, California; Joseph Casino of Villanova University; Frank J. Cavaoli of SUNY at Farmington; Thomas L. Charlton of Baylor University; Merton Dillon of Ohio State University; David Edmunds of Texas Christian University; Tom Edwards of Whitman College; Sarah Elbert of SUNY at Binghamton; James C. Foster of Arizona State University; Robert J. Fridlington of Kean College of New Jersey; George Garlid of the University of Wisconsin, River Falls; Don C. Glenn of Diablo Valley

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The family histories are the contributions of others. Credit for them must go to the following fine scholars and writers: to Maury Klein of the University of Rhode Island who conceived and wrote the sections on the Alexanders and the Goulds for the first edition; to James C. Foster of Arizona State University, a labor historian whose interest in the Jorquez family came about through his research into local mining history; and to Joel Mickelson of the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point, whose work on the Rosholts was also based on research into local sources as well as on interviews with surviving family members. I would also like to thank Jane E. Aaron for her clear, compact, and lucid essay, "Writing about History."

Besides these many "outside" people, I wish to thank the "in-house" people at Little, Brown. My first editor, Marian Ferguson, helped me greatly in the revision's early phases. Her successor, Katherine Carlone, took up where Marian left off and also proved helpful. I owe a very large debt indeed to developmental editor Madelyn Leopold. Combining firmness with tact, she overcame typical author's egotism and inertia and pushed this revision through to completion. Another major contributor was Timothy J. Kenslea, who coordinated the production of the book, and whose fine eye for meaning and ear for sound helped to improve greatly the final copy. I would also like to acknowledge the excellent work of Claire Seng-Niemöeller, the book's designer, and of Kathy Field, its copyeditor.

I save my final acknowledgement for my wife, Debi. Her legwork, typing, and editorial and writing skills were invaluable and give her the right to be considered a virtual joint author.

These United States

The Questions of Our Past

Volume I

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1

The New World Encounters the Old

Why 1492?



c. 38,000 B.C. America's first settlers begin to cross a land bridge connecting Siberia and Alaska

986 Norwegian merchant Bjarni Herjulfsson becomes the first European to sight the mainland of North America

c. 1000 Leif Ericsson lands on "Vinland"

c. 1010–13 Thorfinn Karlsefni and others attempt to colonize Vinland

c. 1300 Venetian and Genoese merchants establish overland trade routes to the East

c. 1400 The invention of printing, advances in navigation and naval architecture, and the introduction of gunpowder increase possibilities for worldwide exploration by Europeans

1488 Bartolomeu Dias rounds Africa's Cape of Good Hope for the Portuguese crown

1492 Christopher Columbus lands on San Salvador in the Bahamas

1497 Henry VII of England sends John Cabot to find a

short route to the Indies; Cabot reaches Newfoundland

1498 Vasco da Gama, Portuguese navigator, becomes the first European to reach India by sea around Africa

1519–22 Ferdinand Magellan's circumnavigation of the world proves that the Americas are new lands, not the Indies

1521 Hernando Cortés conquers the Aztec empire in Mexico for Spain

1523–28 France sends Giovanni da Verrazano to find a short route to Indies; he explores the east coast of North America

1532 Francisco Pizarro conquers the Inca empire in Peru for Spain

1534 Jacques Cartier attempts to find a "northwest passage" to the Indies for France

1609 Henry Hudson establishes Dutch claim to the Hudson River region in his search for a northwest passage

EVERY SCHOOLCHILD HAS BEEN TOLD THAT Columbus discovered America in 1492. Yet Columbus was not the “discoverer” of America if by that we mean the first person to encounter the “New World.” At least two other groups of people stumbled on the Americas before Columbus. Sometime between 40,000 B.C. and 20,000 B.C., East Asians reached the New World from the west and settled the two great continents. We call their descendants Indians. Then about A.D. 1000, Norsemen from northern Europe came to North America from the east.

Given these “discoveries,” is there any special significance to 1492? Should we throw 1492 off our list of crucial dates and substitute 40,000 B.C. or A.D. 1000? How did Columbus’s landing in 1492 make a difference to the peoples of the world, both those who lived in the “Old World” and those already living in the “New”? To answer these questions, let’s first look at the East Asians’ “discovery” and its significance.

The First Americans

The very first Americans were migrants from eastern Siberia, in Asia. Physically, they belonged to the same human stock as the modern Chinese and Japanese—a relationship suggested by the straight black hair, broad faces, and high cheekbones of modern American Indians. They were a hunting, fishing, and gathering people, depending on roots, berries, fruits, and game for food. As decreasing rainfall dried up these food sources in Siberia, the native peoples were gradually driven eastward. Scientists speculate that where today Asia is separated from North America by the Bering Strait, these migrants found a land bridge joining Siberia to Alaska. Crossing this bridge into North America, they found a climate milder than that of their homeland and a land with plentiful fruit and game. By the time the Europeans arrived thousands of years later, the Indian descendants of these first immigrants numbered in the millions—perhaps 75 million, the population of Europe at the time—and were scattered across the two western continents from Alaska to the southern tip of South America, from ocean to ocean.

As their population grew over generations, the descendants of the Asian immigrants diversified into many groups with distinct languages, cultures, political and economic systems, and beliefs. By about 3000

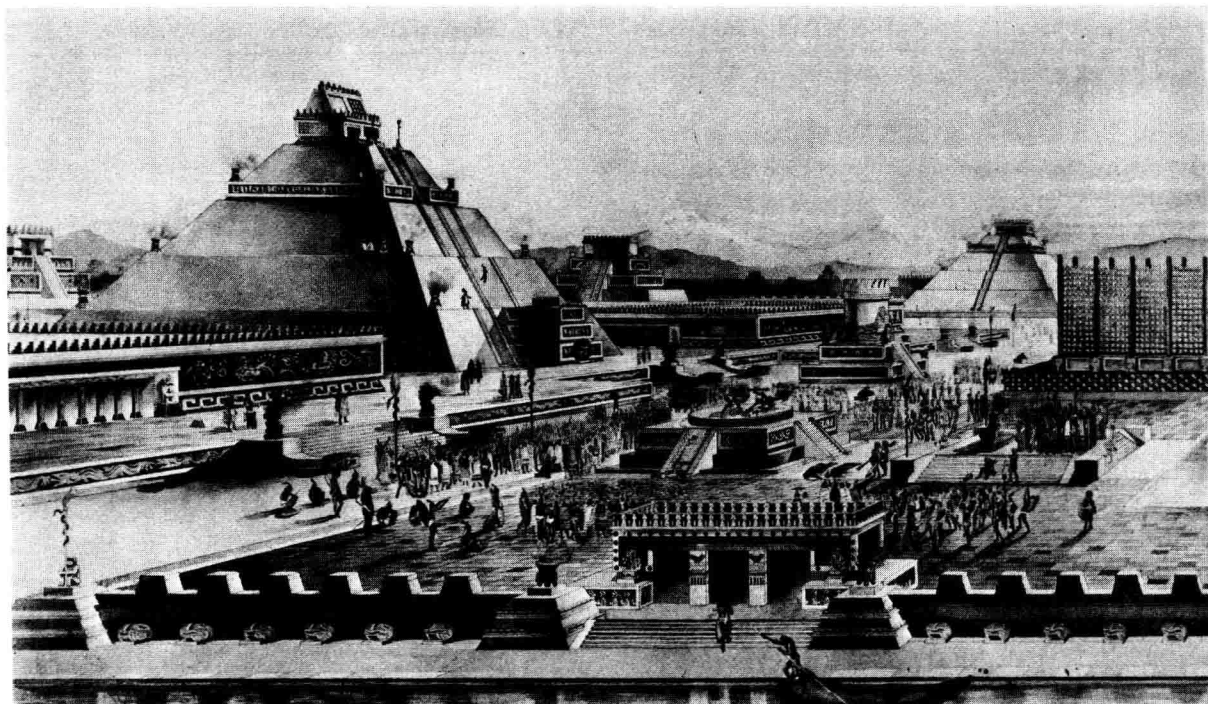
B.C. they had begun to practice agriculture with “maize” (corn), first developed from a grasslike native plant, the major crop. Food surpluses from agriculture transformed Indian societies. While some raised the community’s crops, others could take on different roles, as priests, warriors, artisans, and chiefs. In the major agricultural regions of the Americas, great civilizations arose, with impressive artistic and technical achievements and a political complexity comparable to those of contemporary Europe and Asia.

The Great Indian Civilizations. The earliest of these Indian civilizations built great ceremonial and administrative cities in the dense rain forests of Central America. This Maya empire had no single head; instead, each center was ruled by a group of priests. Mayan society was very stratified with sharp divisions of class and status among the people. It was also a culture of great sophistication: the Mayas alone among the Indian peoples had books, and their mathematicians and astronomers used zero as a number place long before Europeans. They could calculate the cycles of the seasons and the times of astronomical events as accurately as any contemporary people.

A more warlike group, the Aztecs, borrowed much from Mayan culture and around A.D. 1200 established their capital on the site of what is now Mexico City. From here they expanded their empire over all of central Mexico. By the early 1500s the Aztec state consisted of some 5 million inhabitants.

Like the Mayas, the Aztecs had a hierarchy of classes, but their society had one ruler, a chief priest. His powerful central authority enabled the Aztecs to conquer their neighbors, taking booty and prisoners. Each year the Aztecs sacrificed thousands of these prisoners to appease their war god; the captured booty contributed to the Aztecs’ immense wealth. When the Spaniards entered the Valley of Mexico in 1519, they were awestruck by the splendor derived from Aztec conquest:

... When we saw so many cities and villages built in the water and other great towns on dry land and that straight level causeway going towards Mexico, we were amazed and said that it was like the enchantments they tell of in the legend of Amadis, on account of the great towers and pyramids and buildings rising from the water and all built of masonry. And some of our soldiers



This is a reconstruction of what Cortés and his men saw when they arrived at “the great City of Mexico.” The structure in the center of the plaza is the altar where prisoners were sacrificed to appease the Aztec gods. (Courtesy of the American Museum of Natural History)

even asked whether the things that we saw were not a dream?

Gazing on such wonderful sights we did not know what to say or whether what appeared before us was real; for on one side on the land, there were great cities and in the lake ever so many more, and the lake itself was crowded with canoes, and in the causeway there were many bridges at intervals, and in front of us stood the great City of Mexico, and we—we did not number four hundred soldiers.

The Incas of Peru, in the coastal mountains of South America, produced an empire even larger than that of the Aztecs—including 7 million people at its height. Strong rulers like the Aztec chiefs to the north, the Inca emperors built fortresses on the mountain sides and a network of roads that held their far-flung domain together. The Inca people were among the most adept metallurgists of the time, making weapons,

tools, and ornaments of gold, silver, copper, and even bronze. The privileged classes lived very comfortably, but the sick and handicapped were provided for, too, by the government.

The Indians of North America. North of the great Indian civilizations were cultures and peoples of very diverse attainments and characteristics. By 1492 there was a fairly dense population in what is now the United States. Scholars in the past estimated that only a million Indians occupied the region, but there may well have been as many as 9 million. This population was anything but uniform. There were, for instance, at least twelve different language groups, each embracing numerous tribes. There were tribes that were primarily hunters and food gatherers, and tribes that skillfully cultivated maize, beans, squash, melons, and