

The background of the cover is a painting of a city street. American flags are hanging from the buildings on both sides of the street. A crowd of people is visible in the distance, and a person wearing a white hat is in the foreground. The painting is done in a style that uses visible brushstrokes and a rich color palette.

Alan Brinkley • Ellen Fitzpatrick

AMERICA IN MODERN TIMES

Since 1890

America in Modern Times

SINCE 1890



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OVERTURE
BOOKS

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America in Modern Times: Since 1890

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This book is printed on acid-free paper.

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 FGR FGR 9 0 9 8 7

ISBN 0-07-007933-1

This book was set in Janson Text by Graphic World.
The editor was Lyn Uhl;
the production supervisor was Leroy A. Young.
The cover was designed by Karen K. Quigley.
Cover art: Bill Jacklin, *Fifth Avenue East Side* (1986)
The photo editor was Kathy Bendo.
Project supervision was done by Graphic World Publishing Services.
Quebecor Printing/Fairfield was printer and binder.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Brinkley, Alan.

America in modern times : since 1890 / Alan Brinkley, Ellen Fitzpatrick.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-07-007933-1

1. United States—History—20th century. I. Fitzpatrick, Ellen F. (Ellen
Frances) II. Title.

E741.B69 1997

973.9—dc20

96-34842

<http://www.mhcollege.com>

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Preface

As we approach the end of the twentieth century, it seems appropriate to consider as a whole the historical experiences of the American people in the last hundred years—years that may have seen greater changes and more turbulence than any other era in human history. Historians have already begun, with considerable justification, to periodize the twentieth century—to divide it into a number of relatively distinct “eras.” But it is also possible to see the period since the 1890s—the period in which the United States experienced the rise and transformation of modern industrial capitalism, the emergence of America as a great world power and its often troubled efforts to adapt to that role, the growth of a powerful national government and the emergence of powerful challenges to it, the creation of a vast and pervasive national culture and the rise of searing social controversies over the place of different groups within that culture—as an era with continuing themes and consistent patterns. This book is an effort to convey both the many changes and the important continuities that have characterized American history in this extraordinary century.

Americans today look toward a new century with both considerable hope and deep anxiety. Americans in the 1890s did the same. The world of the late nineteenth century was, of course, very different from our own. Still, many of the problems that afflicted the United States then remain with us today. Earlier generations worried, as we do today, about crime; about economic instability; about immigration, pluralism, and diversity; about the costs to society (and to values) of technological and scientific progress; about changing gender roles; about the persistence of poverty and disease and homelessness; about the quality of education, the plight of children, and the condition of families; about the future of the environment; about the many divisions within the nation along lines of race, ethnicity, religion, class, and region; about the survival of freedom in the face of great centers of power; and about the question of America’s identity as a nation.

At the same time, no one can look at the past century without marveling at the extraordinary accomplishments of twentieth-century Americans and the dramatic change they wrought on their society. If the men and women who tried to forecast the future at the dawn of the twentieth century could see the United States at its close, they would, to be sure, find much that would be familiar to

them. But they would also likely look with incredulity at the vast wealth and power Americans have accumulated in this century; the great medical, scientific, and technological advances they have made; the remarkable expansion of personal freedom they have struggled successfully, if often controversial, to achieve.

In recounting the history of America in the twentieth century, we have sought to balance the many stories of frustration, injustice, conflict, and failure of those years with the equally important stories of generosity, progress, and success. We have tried to explain the many forces that have divided Americans, but we have tried as well to describe the equally powerful forces that have united them and made them part of a nation. We have tried to combine the “traditional” story of our nation’s history—the story of politics, government, diplomacy, and war—with the “newer” stories of society and culture that explore the experiences of ordinary men and women and the broad demographic and economic changes that have shaped our world. The result, we hope, is an account of enough different approaches to and areas of American history in the last hundred years to make readers aware of its remarkable diversity. There is much drama in the history of American society over the last one hundred years, much pain, loss, triumph, and above all, determination. The record is there for all Americans to ponder and to learn from as we approach the next century.



Many people have contributed to the making of this book. We wish to thank the scholars and friends who read and commented on various versions of this manuscript, among them Theda Skocpol, Richard White, George Sanchez, Sonya Michel, William Gienapp, Dennis Skiotis, Charles Poser, Morton Keller, Jacqueline Jones, Martin Nolan, and the members of the women’s writing group of which Ellen Fitzpatrick is a part. We wish to thank Thaddeus Russell, Yanek Mieczkowski, and Charles Forcey for their expert assistance with research. We acknowledge the helpful comments of the following reviewers: Ruth Alexander, Colorado State University; Robert Sellen, Georgia State University; Victor Triay, Middlesex Community Technical College; Bruce Schulman, Boston University; Paula Fass, University of California, Berkeley; Ross Evans Poulson, Augustana College; Kevin Byrne, Gustavus Adolphus College; Ira Leonard, Southern Connecticut State University; Francis Kraljic, CUNY-Kingsborough Community College; David Bernstein, California State University, Long Beach; Ronald Tobey, University of California, Riverside. And we are grateful to Peter Labella, Lyn Uhl, Monica Freedman, and Marcia Craig for supporting this project and shepherding it through the editing and publication process at McGraw-Hill.

We hope that readers of this book will feel free to write to us with comments, suggestions, and corrections (either by sending them directly to us or in care of the College Division, McGraw-Hill, 1221 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020).

Alan Brinkley
Ellen Fitzpatrick

America in Modern Times

SINCE 1890

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