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# THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

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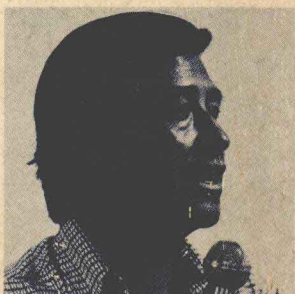
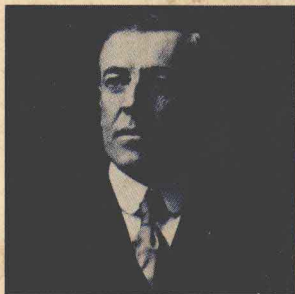
## A HISTORY

Volume 2 ■ Since 1865

Link  
Coben  
Remini  
Greenberg  
McMath

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# THE AMERICAN PEOPLE: A HISTORY

*Volume 2*  
*Since 1865*

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ARTHUR S. LINK

*Princeton University*

STANLEY COBEN

*University of California, Los Angeles*

ROBERT V. REMINI

*University of Illinois, Chicago Circle*

DOUGLAS GREENBERG

*Princeton University*

ROBERT C. MCMATH, JR.

*Georgia Institute of Technology*

*Harlan Davidson, Inc.*  
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## *PREFACE*

The shattering changes in our social, political, and cultural institutions of the past quarter of a century make the study of the history of the United States particularly imperative—and rewarding—for a generation of young people who face the problems of the 1980s. Americans are understandably concerned about the future of their country—its physical and spiritual resources, its ability to satisfy legitimate demands for racial, sexual, and civil justice and equality, and the role that the United States should play in helping to shape the destiny of all humankind. No people can meet the challenges of their own time successfully without a thorough knowledge of their past. It is impossible to know where we are going without knowing where we came from. We commend this simple homily to a generation who will soon be called upon to take command of the destiny of the United States. And we commend it in the deep conviction that history does teach lessons for the present and future if only we be wise enough to heed them.

We also deeply believe that history is a profoundly moral discipline and teaches moral lessons. We can be set free to deal with the problems of the present and future only if we confront the truth that our nation has been guilty of genocide, slavery, continuing racism and sexism, aggression, persecution, and other violations of our own best historic ideals. We have discussed these matters frankly and, we hope, without self-righteousness, because we believe that we cannot truly love our country unless we are willing to know the truth which alone can energize us to continue to strive for a government and society that our noblest women and men have sacrificed so much to achieve.



The history of the United States is also instructive for other reasons. The United States, in the Declaration of Independence, struck a blow for the liberty of all humankind. The American people did prove that people could govern themselves without kings and a hereditary aristocracy. The history of the United States (with the exception of the Civil War, which seems to have been necessary in order to create a united nation) has demonstrated that constructive change is possible without recourse to violence and totalitarian rule. Most remarkable of all, the history of the United States has proved that it is possible for diverse races, religions, and cultures to live peacefully together; not only that, it has also shown that the strongest nation is the one that treasures diversity.

We hope that readers will agree with us that the title of this book is truly descriptive of its contents. We have of course given due attention to the development of American political institutions, political history, and foreign policy. But we have also written in the deep conviction that it is just as important to record the significant contributions of women and all ethnic groups to the weaving of the rich social and cultural history which we have tried to relate. We have dealt with these groups throughout this book, not as isolated entities, but as integral participants and prime movers.

*The American People: A History* is the product of many minds and hands. We owe our greatest debt to the thousands of historians, both our forerunners and our contemporaries, whose work has made this book possible. We are especially indebted to the present generation of scholars who have so greatly expanded the frontiers of knowledge in economic, women's, family, demographic, labor, and other fields of history. Harlan Davidson, president of AHM Publishing Corporation, has helped in more ways than we can mention. Margaret D. Link edited the manuscript and saved us from many dangling participles, unclear antecedents, and passive constructions. Maureen Trobec, managing editor of AHM Publishing Corporation, also edited the manuscript, prepared the pictorial section on the struggle for women's rights, and oversaw the production of the book. Phyllis Marchand prepared the comprehensive index. Professor Ricardo Romo a member of the History Department at the University of Texas at Austin, prepared the pictorial section on Mexican Americans.

Stephen Rapley designed the book, and he and Peter Coveney managed many phases of production; Herb Gotsch drew the splendid maps. Alan Wendt laid out the pictorial sections. Timothy Taylor coordinated manufacture of the book, and Natalie Salat did much of the work involved with the acquisition of pictures. All these persons helped to make this a better book; we, alone, are responsible for whatever errors remain in it.

We know that errors remain, and we would be grateful if readers would be good enough to call our attention to them by writing to Arthur S. Link, Firestone Library, Princeton, N.J. 08544.

The Authors

Princeton, N.J.  
July 22, 1980

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*THE AMERICAN PEOPLE: A HISTORY*

*Volume 2: Since 1865*

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# CONTENTS

Volume 1: To 1877      vii–x  
Volume 2: Since 1865      x–xiv

---

---

## 1 THE OLD WORLD AND THE NEW: THE CONTEXT OF COLONIZATION

<i>The Contact of Cultures</i>	1
<i>The Expansion of Europe</i>	3
<i>The Americas when Columbus Arrived</i>	6
<i>Spain in America</i>	9
<i>Other Discoveries, Other Empires</i>	33
<i>The Sources of English Conquest and Colonization</i>	35

---

---

## 2 THE ENGLISH COLONIES IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

<i>Life in Seventeenth-Century Virginia</i>	42
<i>Pilgrims and Puritans</i>	46
<i>New Colonies, New Societies</i>	58

---

---

## 3 IMPERIAL REFORM, SOCIAL CHANGE, AND THE CRISIS OF SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY COLONIAL SOCIETY

<i>The Seventeenth-Century Economy</i>	87
<i>Social Change</i>	94
<i>The Crisis of Seventeenth-Century Society</i>	101

---

---

## 4 AMERICAN SOCIETY IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

<i>The Dimensions of Growth</i>	112
<i>Patterns of Community</i>	118

<i>Politics in Provincial America</i>	129
<i>Religion and Culture in Provincial America</i>	134

---

---

## 5 THE IMPERIAL CRISIS AND AMERICAN RESISTANCE

<i>The British Empire in the Eighteenth Century</i>	145
<i>The First Crisis of Empire</i>	153
<i>The Second Crisis of Empire</i>	165
<i>Toward Revolution</i>	170

---

---

## 6 AN AMERICAN REVOLUTION

<i>The Decision for Independence</i>	181
<i>The Revolutionary War</i>	189
<i>The Revolution Within</i>	202

---

---

## 7 AMERICAN STATES, AMERICAN NATION

<i>The Structure of Government in Revolutionary America</i>	210
<i>Politics in the 1780s</i>	214
<i>A Federal Constitution</i>	221

---

---

## 8 THE FEDERALIST ERA

<i>Problems under the Constitution</i>	236
<i>International Strife</i>	243
<i>John Adams and the End of Federalist Supremacy</i>	247

---

---

## 9 A NATIONAL SOCIETY TAKES SHAPE, 1790–1820

<i>People in Motion</i>	253
<i>Laying the Foundations of Economic Independence</i>	259
<i>The Egalitarian Moment</i>	261
<i>Shaping the Culture of Democratic America</i>	264

---

---

## 10 JEFFERSONIAN DEMOCRACY AND THE WAR OF 1812

<i>Jefferson in Power</i>	271
<i>The Louisiana Purchase</i>	274
<i>Exploration and Further Expansion</i>	277
<i>Jefferson Triumphant</i>	279
<i>Jefferson Tries to Preserve Peace</i>	282



<i>The Coming of War</i>	285
<i>The Second War for American Independence</i>	288
<i>The Completion of American Independence</i>	295

---

## 11 AMERICAN NATIONALISM AND THE REVIVAL OF SECTIONALISM

<i>Nationalism Triumphant</i>	298
<i>The Revival of Sectionalism</i>	306
<i>The Slavery Question</i>	310
<i>The Monroe Doctrine</i>	314
<i>The Republican Party Divides: Adams Versus Jackson</i>	315

---

## 12 THE JACKSONIAN ERA

<i>The New Democracy</i>	322
<i>The New Administration Begins</i>	329
<i>The Nullification Crisis, 1830–1833</i>	332
<i>Jackson and the Bank War</i>	335
<i>Toils and Troubles under Van Buren</i>	339

---

## 13 MANIFEST DESTINY AND THE MEXICAN WAR

<i>Far New Horizons</i>	344
<i>The Problem of Texas</i>	348
<i>John Tyler as President</i>	349
<i>Manifest Destiny Rampant</i>	352
<i>The Mexican War</i>	356
<i>The Problem of Slavery in the New Territories</i>	359
<i>The Compromise of 1850</i>	362

---

## 14 LIFE IN THE ANTEBELLUM PERIOD

<i>Modernizing America: Population and Economic Growth</i>	366
<i>Social Institutions in a Modernizing Age</i>	376
<i>The Southern Plantation, Slavery, and the “Other South”</i>	387

---

## 15 A HOUSE DIVIDED

<i>Nationalism Unlimited</i>	413
<i>The Kansas-Nebraska Act and the Renewal of Sectional Controversy</i>	416
<i>The Emergence of Lincoln</i>	423
<i>The Secession of the South</i>	430

---

16 THE CIVIL WAR

<i>The War in the East</i>	437
<i>Stalemate</i>	445
<i>Emancipation and Continued Stalemate</i>	447
<i>The War Reaches a Climax in the East and in the West</i>	464
<i>The Road to Appomattox</i>	466

---

17 THE ERA OF RECONSTRUCTION

<i>Struggles over Reconstruction Policies</i>	473
<i>Radical Reconstruction</i>	476
<i>National Politics and Problems</i>	482
<i>The Eagle Screams</i>	485
<i>A Nadir of National Politics</i>	489

---

18 THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION, 1850–1900

<i>The Industrial Revolution in the United States</i>	497
<i>Workers in Industrial America</i>	506
<i>The South and West in the Age of Industrialization</i>	514

---

19 POLITICS AND DIPLOMACY IN  
THE GILDED AGE

<i>The Hayes Administration</i>	522
<i>The Election of 1880 and the Triumph of Civil Service Reform</i>	526
<i>The Democrats Return to Power</i>	529
<i>Harrison, the Antitrust Law, and the McKinley Tariff</i>	533
<i>Expanding Horizons, 1880–1893</i>	537

---

20 POLITICAL UPHEAVALS OF THE 1890s

<i>The Agrarian Revolt</i>	541
<i>Grover Cleveland and the Perils of the Presidency</i>	548
<i>The Realignment of the Party System</i>	556

---

21 THE WAR WITH SPAIN AND AN  
EMPIRE OVERSEAS

<i>The War with Spain</i>	563
<i>The United States Becomes a Colonial Power</i>	569
<i>Prosperity and the Death of McKinley</i>	576

22	THE AMERICAN PEOPLE AT THE END OF THE CENTURY	
	<i>People in Motion, Values in Transition</i>	579
	<i>Immigration, Ethnicity, and Ethnic Conflict</i>	584
	<i>Cultural Change in the Age of Industrialization</i>	591
23	THE PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT	
	<i>Background of Revolt</i>	598
	<i>The Municipal Reform Movement</i>	601
	<i>The Struggle for Self-Government in the States</i>	603
	<i>Socialism and the Spread of Labor Unrest</i>	610
24	THE ERA OF THEODORE ROOSEVELT	
	<i>Theodore Roosevelt and Big Business</i>	614
	<i>The Big Stick in Diplomacy</i>	617
	<i>Roosevelt and Conservation</i>	621
	<i>A New Tribune Emerges</i>	623
	<i>Imperial Diplomacy</i>	626
	<i>Republican Troubles under Taft</i>	628
25	WOODROW WILSON AND THE TRIUMPH OF PROGRESSIVISM	
	<i>Revolt at High Tide, 1910–1912</i>	634
	<i>The New Freedom</i>	639
	<i>The New Freedom Abroad</i>	644
	<i>The Triumph of the New Nationalism</i>	651
26	THE UNITED STATES AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR	
	<i>The Struggle for Neutrality</i>	654
	<i>The American People at War</i>	666
	<i>The Versailles Treaty, the League of Nations, and a Separate Peace</i>	671
	<i>The Aftermath of War</i>	678
27	THE 1920s: ACCELERATED ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHANGE	
	<i>Prosperity Decade</i>	684
	<i>Social Tensions of the 1920s</i>	690
	<i>The Maturing of American Culture</i>	696

28	THE POLITICS OF THE 1920s	
	<i>The Republican Restoration</i>	701
	<i>Problems of the 1920s</i>	708
	<i>The United States and World Affairs in the 1920s</i>	716
29	HERBERT HOOVER AND THE GREAT DEPRESSION	
	<i>Sunny Days of High Prosperity</i>	726
	<i>The Great Depression</i>	731
	<i>Hoover and the Crisis</i>	750
	<i>Change of Command</i>	753
30	FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT AND THE NEW DEAL	
	<i>Launching the New Deal</i>	758
	<i>The First New Deal</i>	762
	<i>Launching the Second New Deal</i>	771
	<i>The Election of 1936 and the Court Controversy</i>	774
	<i>Strengthening the Second New Deal</i>	777
	<i>The Passing of the New Deal</i>	779
31	THE UNITED STATES AND THE SECOND ROAD TO WORLD WAR	
	<i>Japanese Expansion</i>	783
	<i>The Collapse of European Stability</i>	785
	<i>The Good Neighbor</i>	790
	<i>The Second World War, 1939–1941</i>	793
32	THE UNITED STATES IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR	
	<i>The Attack on Pearl Harbor Unites the Nation</i>	802
	<i>Fighting a War on Two Fronts</i>	809
	<i>The United Nations</i>	821
33	POLITICS AND PROBLEMS OF THE TRUMAN ERA	
	<i>The New President</i>	825
	<i>Problems of Demobilization and Reconversion</i>	827
	<i>The Beginnings of the Cold War</i>	832

<i>The Election of 1948 and the Fair Deal</i>	837
<i>The Fall of Nationalist China, the Second Red Scare, and the Korean War</i>	842
<i>The Election of 1952</i>	849

---

### 34 THE AMERICAN PEOPLE SINCE THE SECOND WORLD WAR

<i>Social Trends</i>	854
<i>Affluence and Uncertainty in the American Economy</i>	858
<i>An Age of Social Protest</i>	867
<i>The Search for Identity in a Mass Society</i>	892

---

### 35 THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD UNDER EISENHOWER

<i>The Middle Road</i>	898
<i>The "New Look" in Foreign Policy</i>	907
<i>Politics Still in Moderation</i>	912
<i>To the Second Summit and Back Again</i>	916
<i>The Election of 1960</i>	922

---

### 36 NEW FRONTIERS, THE GREAT SOCIETY, AND THE VIETNAM WAR

<i>The Kennedy Era Begins</i>	927
<i>The Cold War Continues</i>	934
<i>A New President Moves toward the Great Society</i>	942
<i>The Election of 1968</i>	969

---

### 37 THE PRESIDENCY ON TRIAL

<i>The Nixon Administration Begins</i>	975
<i>Nixon's Vietnam War</i>	983
<i>New Initiatives in Foreign Policy</i>	991
<i>Watergate and the Downfall</i>	992
<i>The Heritage of the "Imperial Presidency"</i>	1000

---

### 38 SINCE WATERGATE

<i>The Ford Presidency</i>	1003
<i>The New President</i>	1010
<i>The Presidential Campaign and Election of 1980</i>	1030

---

PICTORIAL SECTIONS

<i>The First Americans</i>	17
<i>Colonial Society</i>	67
<i>Black Bondage</i>	389
<i>Americans Divided: Total War</i>	449
<i>The Great Depression</i>	733
<i>Black Americans in the Twentieth Century</i>	869
<i>The Mexican-American Experience</i>	943
<i>American Women: Toward Equal Rights</i>	1013

---

APPENDICES

<i>The Declaration of Independence</i>	A-1
<i>The Constitution of the United States</i>	A-3
<i>Presidents of the United States and Terms of Office</i>	A-12
<i>Presidential Elections/1789-1980</i>	A-13
<i>The Vice Presidency and the Cabinet/1789-1980</i>	A-16
<i>The States, Territorial Expansion, Population 1790-1980</i>	A-19
<i>The Congress/1789-1981</i>	A-20

---

INDEX	I-1
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## CHAPTER 17

### THE ERA OF RECONSTRUCTION

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#### 1. STRUGGLES OVER RECONSTRUCTION POLICIES

##### **The Status of the Southern States**

The Civil War settled several old problems—forever. It determined that secession by one or more states from the United States was not only unconstitutional but also militarily impossible. The American people would rather go to war than permit the nation to be broken apart. It also ended the old debate about the nature of the Union and established the ultimate sovereignty of the federal government over the states. Finally, the Union victory put an end forever to slavery in North America. The Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished slavery, was approved by Congress, sent to the states before Lee's surrender, and ratified on December 18, 1865. On the other hand, the northern victory also raised difficult questions, many of which the nation was not yet prepared to answer. For example, what should be done about the former slaves? What was their status? How would they be integrated into American society? And the South? How were the seceded states to be handled? Were they states or not? These complex problems came before the nation during a period when minds—both in the North and in the South—were still affected by the searing emotions released during a brutal civil war.

The most immediate political question at the end of the war concerned the status of the former Confederate states. Had they become territories, as some congressmen argued, to be readmitted as states sometime in the future on conditions imposed by the federal govern-



ment? Or was the South merely a conquered province, like New Mexico in 1848, for example, to be disposed of according to the will of the conquerors? Or were the former Confederate states still states of the Union, in spite of their desperate and bloody struggle to break away from it? If so, were they free to accept or reject the Thirteenth Amendment? Or had their defeat deprived them of that right?

Furthermore, who was immediately responsible for dealing with the South? If the war had been only a rebellion of numerous individuals against the United States, then the President, who had the power of pardon, was the person to act. If, however, the southern states had really separated themselves from the Union, their readmission became the business of Congress, which under the Constitution had the right, subject to the President's veto, to admit states to the Union.

Lincoln, from the beginning of the conflict, claimed that the war had been a rebellion of individual citizens and that the states, irrespective of their resolutions of secession, had never left the Union. Although Lincoln was not committed to any single plan by which to restore the Union, he proclaimed in December 1863 that, when at least 10 per cent of those persons who had voted in the election of 1860 in any of the seceded states took an oath of loyalty to the United States, these persons might then form a government without slavery, which he would recognize. Governments actually were established during the war under the so-called 10 per cent plan in Tennessee, Arkansas, and Louisiana.

But Congress rejected Lincoln's plan in 1864 and substituted its own conditions for readmission in the Wade-Davis bill. This measure provided that 50 per cent of the voters in rebellious states had to take the oath of loyalty. Moreover, it excluded Confederate leaders, officers, and soldiers from voting, and Confederate army officers and civilian officials above certain ranks from holding office. It also abolished slavery in the states affected. Lincoln killed the bill with a pocket veto and said that he thought that the measure was unwise and unconstitutional. This drew a fierce public rebuke in a "Manifesto" by Senator Benjamin F. Wade of Ohio and Representative Henry Winter Davis of Maryland, authors of the bill. Lincoln had to understand, they warned, that "the authority of Congress is paramount and must be respected; that the whole body of the Union men of Congress will not submit to be impeached by him of rash and unconstitutional legislation."

The war ended without any decision on basic reconstruction policies, except, of course, on the abolition of slavery and the restoration of national sovereignty throughout the former Confederacy. Lincoln, had he lived to finish his second term, might have had to fight tumultuous battles with members of his own party. However, Lincoln was a masterful politician and might well have maintained a congressional majority behind a fairly moderate program by strategic concessions. Certainly he would not have allowed himself to fall so far out of touch with the wishes of Congress and the electorate that his policies would be overwhelmingly repudiated at the polls, his vetoes overridden, and he, himself, nearly removed from office by Congress, which is what happened to his successor.

### **Andrew Johnson and the Radicals**

Andrew Johnson of Tennessee succeeded Lincoln. Johnson, born in Raleigh, North Carolina, on December 29, 1808, was of humble origin and had scant

formal education, like Lincoln. But Johnson lacked Lincoln's tact, sympathy, and political skill. Although a Southerner and a former slaveowner himself, Johnson hated the great planters who, he believed, had dragged the poor people of the South into a senseless war. And, although he was a state-rights Democrat, he was intensely devoted to the Union. In fact, he had been the only senator from the seceded states to remain in his seat in Washington in 1861. Lincoln had appointed him military governor of Tennessee and had put him on the Union ticket for the vice-presidency in 1864. This was done partly to reward him for his loyalty. It also helped to answer charges that the Republican party (renamed the Union party in 1864) was purely sectional.

Although no one has made a detailed survey of northern public opinion in the spring of 1865, there does appear to have been a high degree of unity within the dominant Republican party in support of a policy that would bring the defeated South back into the Union fairly quickly. This basic policy included a constitutional amendment affirming the sovereignty of the national government over the states and a guarantee of at least basic civil rights for the freed blacks. The most extreme element in the Republican party—the so-called Radicals—demanded a somewhat more thoroughgoing reconstruction of southern politics and society by the elimination of secessionist leaders from politics and by economic assistance, especially the grant of lands, to black people. A second Republican group—the so-called Moderates—perhaps more numerous within the party than the Radicals, did not want to go as far as the Radicals in social and economic reconstruction. Yet these Moderates, too, wanted to protect the civil and to some degree the political rights of the recently freed slaves.

The new President enjoyed a reputation as an extreme Radical and, during the first days of his tenure, indicated that he favored stern measures toward former Confederates. "I can only say you can judge of my policy by the past," he told a congressional delegation that visited the White House. "Everybody knows what that is. I hold this: Robbery is a crime; murder is a crime; *treason* is a crime; and *crime* must be punished. . . . Treason must be made infamous and traitors must be impoverished." And yet Johnson soon made it clear that he would follow a moderate, even a mild program of reconstruction. No one has ever satisfactorily explained his change of policy. Perhaps the presidential office itself sobered him; perhaps he thought that he was implementing Lincoln's program—to preserve the Union and Constitution in all their purity. Some cynical Republican politicians believed that he was trying to lay the basis for a coalition of moderate Republicans and Democrats, which he would lead. Others said that Johnson, a person of humble birth, was beguiled by southern aristocrats.

For whatever reasons, Johnson proceeded during the summer and autumn of 1865—when Congress was not in session—to carry out his own plan. On May 29, 1865, he issued a proclamation of amnesty, or pardon, to all persons who had engaged in rebellion against the United States, except Confederate officers and persons with property worth more than \$20,000. Even the exempted groups were invited to apply to the President for individual pardons, which would be "liberally extended." Next, Johnson appointed provisional civilian governors, after Lincoln's pattern, in the Carolinas, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Texas. He stipulated that constitutional conventions should be elected which had to repeal the ordinances of secession, frame new constitutions, and ratify the Thirteenth Amendment. Most of the southern states followed Johnson's instructions at once.