

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES 1492 - 1938

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THIRD EDITION

Revised and Enlarged

by Richard H. Bassett



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PREFACE

THE present revised edition of the *Short History of the United States* has been prepared with two main purposes in mind: first to provide it with as complete an account of recent American history as space will allow and, second, to correct the original narrative as written by Professor Bassett, wherever new evidence suggests a different emphasis. Contemporary history is always open to this process of correction. A contemporary account has the undeniable merit of direct contact with the event, and a writer familiar with the patterns of history may do much in the way of interpreting what he has witnessed; he may connect the thread of the present with the past and predict that what was once significant may, under similar circumstances, become significant again. But sooner or later his judgments will be called up for closer scrutiny and if they are to serve the purposes of the student they must be constantly re-appraised.

In the present instance re-appraisal has brought changes, but considerable care has been taken not to alter the main character of the book which has proved a useful one. Recent years have seen a revolution in the study of history. New approaches have been opened up, entire new fields have been charted in the social studies, a wealth of detail and opinion has been amassed. In the face of this growing complication the need for a simple close-knit narrative of fact to guide the beginning student would seem to be greater than ever. And it is hardly less important as a source of reference to the advanced student, for in the last analysis all his study of detail, all his efforts to explain and relate the forces of American life must fall within the design of ordinary public happenings. Somewhere in their outward form must lurk a clue to every underlying current. The *Short History of the United States* has appeared to serve the purpose of presenting this framework of fact. Those who have liked the book in the past will wish it to continue in the same vein.

A wider survey than this would surely appear to be beyond the scope of a single volume. One may maintain a thread of social history in a history that is mainly political, or a thread of political history in a study devoted chiefly to social forces, but any attempt to balance the two methods of presentation evenly will result in a drastic shortening of both. Even in the present volume the story is necessarily extremely brief. If a supplementary study of other phases of American life is immediately required, a copious bibliography has been provided to direct the student according to his interests, general or special. It is

true that in the current revision a chapter has been added on the social history of the United States from 1865 to 1914, and a portion of a chapter on social life in the period since the World War. And in the revised discussion of events since 1918 economic forces have come up for examination more frequently than in earlier periods, but this does not mark a change in policy. It merely emphasizes the fact that the economic field of recent years has been a lively one.

The present work of modernization was undertaken with the encouragement and aid of Professor Charles A. Beard, Professor Harold U. Faulkner of Smith College and Professor Merle Curti of Columbia University. I am deeply indebted to them for reading the manuscript and for many helpful criticisms, but I do not wish them to be held accountable for errors or flaws in my text. Each of them remembers my father, Professor Bassett, as a sincere and careful historian and each has wished to contribute something toward preserving his work. I am grateful on his account as well as my own; I am also much indebted to my sister, Margaret B. Polachek, to Frank B. Polachek, and to Daniel Aaron for arduous work in the preparation of bibliographies, and to my wife, Henrietta Durant Bassett, who has patiently and ably furthered the progress of the work at every difficult point with criticism or research.

R. H. B.

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CHAPTER I

THE CONTINENT AND ITS EARLY INHABITANTS

PHYSICAL FACTORS IN AMERICAN HISTORY

THE history of the United States, like that of other countries, has been modified by physical environment. Nature has determined where man should begin to penetrate the continent, his routes of communication between the various portions of the country, and the resources out of which he has built up the national wealth. Climate has limited achievement, or aided it, the soil has determined the form of labor, and rainfall has marked out the area he inhabits. In some respects he has overcome natural conditions, but in most things he has had to conform his actions to them. Speaking generally, nature has been favorable to man in the United States. Says Shaler: "There is no area, in either of the Americas, or for that matter in the world outside of Europe, where it would have been possible to plant English colonies, that would have been found so suitable for the purpose."

The Influence of Nature.

The area of the United States, exclusive of Alaska and the island possessions, is 3,026,789 square miles, which is less than that of Europe by 725,000 square miles. Great irregularities mark the coast line of Europe and facilitate political subdivision. Our own coast line is relatively regular, and most of the interior is one vast river system. The Appalachian Mountains are not a formidable barrier between the coastal plain and the interior, since they are easily penetrated in Pennsylvania and fall away entirely in Georgia and New York. The Rockies are much higher, but they were not reached before the day of railroads, and through means of this invention most of their difficulties disappeared. It has therefore happened that the people from the Atlantic to the Pacific constitute one nation. They are relieved of the burdens which opposing interests lay upon the powers of Europe, and the size of the country has given it great influence in international affairs.

Effects of Territorial Unity.

Through this extent of territory there is a wide range of climate, but the mean temperature is mild. The fact that a great plain extends from the Gulf of Mexico to the Arctic Ocean without the interruption of a mountain chain accounts for a wide variation in temperature for a given point. Through this means mighty currents of heated atmosphere are carried far northward in

Climatic Variations.

summer and cold waves come far southward in winter. As a result, Arkansas, for example, has the winter climate of Edinburgh and the summer climate of Spain, while Minnesota has summers like those of Venice and winters as cold as those of Scotland. The Pacific coast, protected from the disturbing force of the currents in the interior of the continent, has a more stable climate; but the Appalachians are not high enough to shield in a similar way the Atlantic coast.

In all parts of the United States there is adequate rainfall except near the Rocky Mountains. An area beginning with the eastern slope of this range and extending westward to the Sierra Nevada range is deficient in this respect. A large part of it yields grass for ranches, but one fourth of it is entirely arid and makes a great desert with no vegetation except alkali plants and prickly shrubs. Much of this general region may be reclaimed by irrigation, and in 1902 Congress provided means of reclamation which will eventually bring these parts within the area of fertile production. Two ocean currents modify the climate of the United States. The Gulf Stream on the east exerts an influence on the coast as far north as Cape Hatteras; and the Japanese Current, sweeping down from Alaska, where its effects are marked, tempers the winters of all the Pacific slope north of Mexico.

Means of water transportation are adequate. Harbors are numerous on the Atlantic coast, and rivers suitable for the ships of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are so well distributed that if a line were drawn from Maine to Florida parallel with the coast and one hundred miles inland, there would hardly be a spot east of it which was more than a day's journey from water transportation. This rim of coast received the first colonies, and its natural advantages made easy the introduction of civilization. The plain west of it is traversed by several large rivers which by offering means of communication and an abundance of fertile bottom land marked out the lines of advance for future settlements. This took the frontier to the Alleghanies, to pass which three easy routes might be followed; one around the northern end of the range to the lakes, another around the southern end, and another through central Pennsylvania to the upper waters of the Ohio. The Iroquois Indians held back immigration by the northern passage for many years, and the Creeks and Cherokees did the same on the south, so that the first English advance across the barrier was by way of the central route.

The Mississippi basin, as the central portion of the continent is called, is entered from the sea by three great systems of water communication. One comes from the north by the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes and gives access to the very heart of the central north. Another is the Mississippi and its tributaries. Its northeastern branches approach within

Rainfall.

**The Atlantic
Drainage
System.**

**The Passage
into the
Mississippi
Basin.**

**Interior
Water
Courses.**