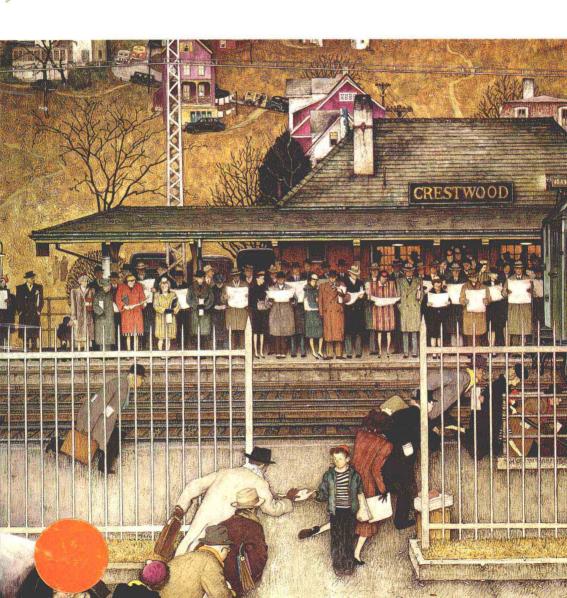
ALAN BRINKLEY

A Concise History of the American People

THIRD EDITION

THE UNFINISHED NATION



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A CONCISE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Volume II: From 1865

THIRD EDITION

ALAN BRINKLEY

Columbia University



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THE UNFINISHED NATION: A CONCISE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE, VOLUME TWO: FROM 1865, THIRD EDITION

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THE UNFINISHED NATION

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Volume II: From 1865

About the Author

lan Brinkley is the Allan Nevins Professor of History at Columbia University in New York. He is the author of Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression (which won the 1983 American Book Award); American History: A Survey; The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War; and Liberalism and Its Discontents. He was educated at Princeton and Harvard and has been a member of the faculties at M.I.T., Harvard (where he received the Joseph R. Levenson Memorial Teaching Prize), and the City University of New York Graduate School. He was the Harmsworth Professor of American History at Oxford University in 1998–1999, and has been a visiting professor at Princeton University, the Ecole des Haute Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris, and the University of Torino. His articles, essays, and reviews appear frequently in both scholarly and non-scholarly journals.

Preface

he story of the American past, which is the subject of this book, has undergone many transformations in recent decades. The past itself has not changed, of course, but the way Americans understand it has changed dramatically. And in the wake of those changes have come both new forms of presentation and bitter controversies.

In one sense, American history is thriving as almost never before through the workings of American popular culture. Historical museums and exhibitions have multiplied and have attracted large audiences. Popular writing on history—both nonfiction and novels—has grown in popularity. History is a continuing presence on television, in films, and increasingly on the Internet. The popular appetite for American history seems to be almost boundless. At the same time, however, historical scholarship has become the source of increasing debate—among historians themselves, among the various publics historians try to reach, and even among politicians, some of whom attack the historical profession for what they claim is an excessively critical view of the past.

Both the growing popularity of history and the growing controversies surrounding it reflect the character of our time. It is an era of rapid and bewildering change, which encourages people to look to the past for guidance and reassurance—for reminders of what many believe were simpler, stabler times. But the turbulence of our age has also encouraged historians to ask new questions of the past—and thus to reinterpret it—in an effort to understand the tensions and contests that preoccupy us today. As the population of the United States has become more diverse and as groups that once stood outside the view of scholarship have thrust themselves into its center, historians have labored to reveal the immense complexity of their country's past.

Historical narratives once recounted little beyond the experiences of great men and the unfolding of great public events. Today, they attempt to tell a more complicated story—one that includes private as well as public lives, ordinary people as well as celebrated ones, difference as well as

unity. This newer history seems fragmented at times, because it attempts to embrace so many more areas of human experience than the older narratives. It is often disturbing, because it reveals failures and injustices as well as triumphs. But it is also richer, fuller, and better suited to helping us understand our own diverse and contentious world.

Threading one's way through the many, conflicting demands of contemporary scholars and contemporary readers is no easy task. But I have tried in this book to consider both the diversity and the unity that have characterized the American experience. The United States is, and has always been, a nation of many cultures. To understand its history, we must understand the experiences of the many groups who have shaped American society—the many worlds that have developed within it based on region, religion, class, ideology, race, gender, and ethnicity.

But the United States is not simply a collection of different cultures. It is also a great nation. And as important as understanding its diversity is understanding the forces that have drawn it together and allowed it to survive and flourish despite division. The United States has constructed a remarkably stable and enduring political system, which touches the lives of all Americans. It has developed an immense and highly productive national economy that affects the working and consuming lives of virtually everyone. It has created a mass popular culture that colors the experiences and assumptions of almost all Americans, and of the people of much of the rest of the world as well. One can admire these unifying forces for their contributions to America's considerable success as a nation, or condemn them for creating or failing to address injustices. But no one proposing to understand the history of the United States can afford to ignore them.

This third edition of *The Unfinished Nation*, like its predecessors, tries to tell the complicated and endlessly fascinating story of America for students of history and for general readers. Those familiar with earlier editions will notice some significant changes. Perhaps the most important is considerably expanded attention throughout the book to the history of science and technology, whose importance to American history has been incalculable. For example, chapter 17 contains new material on steamboat technology and the creation of the automobile engine; a major new section on developments in medical science, computers, missile technology, and the space program has been added to chapter 30; and chapter 34 examines the digital revolution and new genetic research. I want to express my appreciation to the scholarly reviewers who helped to determine

which science and technology topics the book should include: Edward J. Larson, University of Georgia; Sarah K. A. Pfatteicher, University of Wisconsin; Carroll Pursell, Case Western Reserve University; Bruce E. Seely, Michigan Technological University; Howard Segal, University of Maine; and Steven W. Usselman, Georgia Institute of Technology.

There is also a great deal of new material on the history of American culture, and on popular culture in particular. There are three new "Debating the Past" essays, exploring significant controversies among scholars; they appear in chapters 25, 28, and 32. There is a substantially revised and expanded final chapter, which recounts very recent events and examines recent social, economic, and cultural trends. There is a new summary conclusion at the end of each chapter, and new annotated bibliographies, which include references to relevant films and Internet sites.

The result of these and many other changes is, I hope, a book that will introduce readers to enough different approaches to and areas of American history to make them aware of its extraordinary richness and complexity. But I hope, too, that it will give readers some sense of the shared experiences of Americans and of the forces that have sustained the United States as a nation.

I am grateful to many people for their help on this book: Lyn Uhl, Kristen Mellitt, Suzanne Daghlian, and Jayne Klein at McGraw-Hill; Deborah Bull, for her expert photo research; and John Stoner and Thad Russell for their indispensable help with research. I also want to thank the various scholars who reviewed the second edition and its supplements, and offered suggestions and comments: Guy Alchon, University of Delaware; Paul Bethel, American River College; Thomas J. Brown, University of South Carolina; William R. Cario, Concordia University Wisconsin; Paul N. Chardoul, Grand Rapids Community College; J. H. DeBerry, Somerset Community College; David DiLeo, Saddleback Community College; William Dofflemyer, San Joaquin Delta College; Don Fisher, Niagara County Community College; Stephen E. Gooch, Richland College; Elizabeth A. Hachten, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater; Roger H. Hall, Allan Hancock College; Michael Haridopolos, Brevard Community College; Michael Mini, Montgomery County Community College; Ronald Petrin, Oklahoma State University; Jody Suhanek, Lane Community College; Roger Tate, Somerset Community College; Michael Welsh, University of Northern Colorado; and Nelson E.

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Woodard, California State University-Fullerton. I am also grateful to those readers of the book who have offered me unsolicited comments, criticisms, and corrections. I hope they will continue to do so. Suggestions can be sent to me at the Department of History, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027, or by E-mail at ab65@columbia.edu.

Alan Brinkley

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