

斑斓阅读 · 外研社英汉双语百科书系

典藏版

通识读本

美国简史

American History

A Very Short Introduction

Paul S. Boyer 著

陈崛斌 译

外语教学与研究出版社

FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND RESEARCH PRESS

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Preface

Of the many challenges confronting anyone rash enough to set about writing an American history, perhaps the most formidable is simply to penetrate the dense clouds of myth, preconceptions, and ideological abstractions that sometimes seem to envelop the nation's history so completely that the unadorned reality disappears in the mists. From the earliest European discoveries of the lands that lay westward across the Atlantic, writers invested them with hopes, dreams, and wild imaginings. Although these vast continents were home to several million human beings and complex societies, Europeans envisioned them as enticingly empty and full of promise—literally a “New World.” In a book published in 1516, twenty-four years after Christopher Columbus made landfall in the Caribbean, the English philosopher and statesman Thomas More imagined an ideal society, which he called “Utopia,” situated on an island off present-day Brazil. In More's fictional New World, harmony, cooperation, and equality prevail; property is held in common; and the lust for gold is unknown. (In a nice touch, chamber pots in More's Utopia are made of gold—evidence of the prevailing contempt for the worthless metal.)

Centuries later, as tidal waves of immigrants poured into the United States, many carried in their mental baggage fond images of the promise of their future homeland, symbolized by the Statue

of Liberty in New York harbor. The 1883 poem by Emma Lazarus that is inscribed on its base ends:

Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses,
Yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

x For some, the dream came true; for others, it collapsed in bitter disappointment. For most, everyday reality, with its mix of achievements and setbacks, soon replaced idealized fantasies. (For the millions of enslaved Africans transported to the Americas by force, no preconceived illusions intruded on the grim reality of *their* immigrant experience.)

Others invested the New World with religious significance. Columbus became convinced in his later years that God had guided his voyages of discovery, fulfilling biblical prophecies of a future millennial age. Much later, the New England Puritans drew inspiration from the conviction that America would play a key role in an unfolding divine plan culminating in Christ's earthly kingdom. Even today, many American evangelical believers continue to envision a special place for the nation in God's cosmic scheme—or sadly conclude that the United States, corrupted by worldly pursuits, has forfeited the divine favor it once enjoyed.

In semi-secularized form, notions of American exceptionalism seeped into the work of historians and textbook writers who presented highly selective versions of the nation's history as a story of freedom, opportunity, and endless progress, blessedly free of the dark and exploitive features that defaced less-favored societies. Such self-serving interpretations gradually faded under the battering of events and the leaching of supernaturalist assumptions from historical scholarship. Yet as recently as the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan could still inspire many as he

evoked ancient images of America as “a shining city on a hill” enjoying a uniquely favored destiny.

For others, abstract conceptions of “America” and its meaning took more sinister forms. For Marxist ideologues and vociferous opponents of neo-colonialism and economic imperialism, the United States stands as the epitome of late capitalism, extending its corporate tentacles everywhere in the search for markets, cheap labor, and natural resources. Still others, treasuring indigenous folkways and regional cultures, have denounced America as the source of a debased and corrupting global mass culture. While not without merit, such stereotypes hardly convey the full story. For Islamist revolutionaries, gripped by the vision of a worldwide righteous order willed by Allah and set forth in the Qu’ran, the United States looms as a massive impediment, the Great Satan, blocking fulfillment of the dream.

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These varied mythologies, idealized abstractions, and ideological constructs, while fascinating to historians of ideas, stand in the way of understanding America’s actual history, stripped of preconceptions or extraneous agendas. Perfect objectivity is another illusion, of course, yet it remains a worthwhile goal. The reader will not find in these pages one over-arching procrustean interpretive thesis into which everything is forced to fit. Certain broad realities will structure much of the narrative—immigration, urbanization, slavery, continental expansion; the global projection of U.S. power, the centrality of religion, the progression from an agrarian to an industrial to a post-industrial economic order. Yet in delineating such large themes, the work also acknowledges the diversity of the American experience; the importance of individual actors; and the crucial role of race, ethnicity, gender, and social class in shaping the experience of specific groups within the larger tapestry of the nation’s history.

This brief introduction to the vast topic of U.S. history avoids either an excessively upbeat, rose-tinted approach or an unduly

negative one. To be sure, from a contemporary perspective, much in American history—like much in the history of many nations—tempts one to censure and moralizing judgment. The gap between historical reality and the lofty rhetoric of chauvinists, politicians, and flag-waving patriots even invites ridicule and irony. Yet such a stance involves its own distortions. Throughout, the aim has been to present the story in a critical yet balanced and reasonably non-ideological fashion, mostly leaving it to the reader to make such judgments as seem warranted. American history is the story of one society among many, distinctive in some ways, yet sharing in the common human condition. It comprises one brief, unfinished chapter in the great volume of world history, the cumulative record of what the philosopher Immanuel Kant called “the crooked timber of humanity.” This small book makes no pretense of being final or definitive. It represents the best efforts of one observer, himself a product of the society and a citizen of the nation whose history he is recording.

Anyone who undertakes a *brief* history of America, one that can be read in a single sitting, faces additional challenges. Much must be omitted, anecdotal digressions regretfully bypassed, and corroborating evidence for broad generalizations left to bulkier studies. Yet the discipline of brevity has its advantages. Such a concise format forces one to make tough judgments about what was truly significant, to focus on the main threads of the story, and to pinpoint the key turning points and themes of lasting significance. And this format also places a premium on clarity and readability, in fairness to readers willing to spend a few hours in the company of an unknown author. I hope this work at least in part meets these multiple challenges.

Madison, Wisconsin
January 2012

前言

对任何人而言，要写一部美国历史，都将遭遇各种挑战，无法轻易完成。其中，最艰难的莫过于突破由迷思、先入之见和意识形态抽象概念所构成的层层迷雾，因为这层层迷雾往往会遮蔽我们的视线，让我们无法看清美国历史的真相。从被欧洲航海者最初发现之时起，大西洋彼岸的这片土地在众人的笔下就被寄予了各种希望、梦想和疯狂的想象。尽管早在地理大发现之前，这块广袤的大陆就居住着好几百万原住民，衍生着复杂的社会体系，欧洲人还是一厢情愿地把它想象成一片诱人的、充满无限机遇的无主之地，并称之为“新世界”。在 1516 年，也就是克里斯托弗·哥伦布（Christopher Columbus）在加勒比海小岛登陆 24 年之后，英国哲学家、政治家托马斯·莫尔（Thomas More）出版过一本书。在这本书里，莫尔虚构了一个他称为“乌托邦”的理想社会，这个理想社会就位于今天巴西附近的小岛上。在这个虚构的新世界里，处处都是和谐、合作与平等的景象，人们共同拥有财产，对黄金嗤之以鼻。（书中有一个有趣的细节，在乌托邦里，人们使用的夜壶都是金子做的。莫尔以此证明在乌托邦人们的眼中金子是多么地不值一文。）

几个世纪之后，当移民像潮水般涌入美国时，很多人都怀揣着有关这片土地的美好梦想，而矗立于纽约港中的自由女神

像就是这些美好梦想的象征。在自由女神像的底座上，镌刻着埃玛·拉扎勒斯（Emma Lazarus）创作于 1883 年的诗，以下是该诗的结束语：

把你们拥挤土地上的不幸的“人渣”，
 穷困潦倒而渴望呼吸自由的芸芸众生，
 连同那些无家可归四处漂泊的人们送来，
 我高举明灯守候在这金色的大门！¹

最后，一些人实现了自己的梦想；另一些人的梦想却在痛苦与失望中崩塌。然而，对大多数人而言，交织着成功与失败的现实很快就取代了不切实际的幻想。（对于被迫来到美国的几百万受奴役的非洲人而言，他们甚至从未有过美好的幻想，他们的移民生活只有残酷的现实。）

在另一些人眼中，新世界被赋予了宗教的神圣色彩。哥伦布在晚年就坚信是上帝指引了他的发现之旅，从而实现了《圣经》中对新千禧年的预言。再后来，新英格兰地区的清教徒们则相信，美国在上帝的神圣计划中扮演着重要角色，最终将在地球上建立基督的国度。直到现在，很多美国福音派信徒仍相信，在上帝的宇宙蓝图中美国占有特殊位置——抑或是哀叹世俗的污垢造成了美国的堕落，使得美国丧失了曾经享有的天赐。

宗教色彩不那么浓厚的表现是美国例外论，这种观点渗透进诸多历史学作品和教科书中。这些书籍总是有选择性地对美国历史进行解读。自然地，这个国家的历史也就变成了有关自由、机遇和无限发展的历史，而那些不受上帝眷顾的社会中存在的阴暗和剥削从未在美国出现过。后来，随着历史事实不断

¹ 该诗名为《现代巨人》（*The New Colossus*），译文来自美国驻华大使馆官网，译者不详。——译者注，下同

被挖掘出来以及超自然主义假设的逐渐失势，这些自利偏颇的解读逐渐淡出视线。尽管如此，直到 20 世纪 80 年代，当里根总统再次提起作为“光芒万丈的山巅之城”的美国如何独享上帝眷顾时，很多美国人仍为之一振。

还有一些人则认为，“美国”在内涵和外延上都代表着不祥。对于马克思主义思想家以及新殖民主义和经济帝国主义的强烈反对者而言，美国是后期资本主义的缩影，为了攫取市场、廉价劳动力和自然资源而将自己的触手伸向世界各地。而在那些珍视民俗传统和地区文化的人们口中，美国则变成了劣质的、腐化的全球大众文化的源头。尽管不无可取之处，这些成见却远非美国历史的全貌。伊斯兰革命者则只相信《古兰经》中安拉所说的正义秩序，在他们眼中美国甚至变成了大撒旦，是阻碍梦想的巨大障碍。

虽然思想史学家对此颇感兴趣，但这纷繁复杂的各种迷思、理想化的抽象概念和意识形态框架却让我们难以摒除偏见和排除外设议题的限制，进而阻碍我们正确理解真正的美国历史。虽然绝对的历史客观性并不存在，但它仍是值得追求的目标。本书没有一个支配一切细节的论点，也就不会生搬硬套地用历史事件来支持这一论点，而是采用宽泛的历史事实来构建叙事框架，包括移民、城镇化、奴隶制、大陆扩张、美国的全球实力、宗教的中心性，以及美国从农业文明向工业文明、后工业文明的逐步发展。在详述美国这些重大历史议题的同时，本书也将涵盖美国历史的多样性、历史人物的重要性，以及在美国历史大背景下种族、族裔、性别和社会阶层对塑造特定群体历史经验的重要作用。

在阐释美国历史这个宏大议题时，本书尽量避免或美化拔高或全面否定的处理方式。诚然，从当代的角度看，和许多国家的历史一样，美国历史的很多方面会招致批判和说教，而

历史事实与沙文主义者、政客和狂热的爱国主义者的高调言论间存在的差距甚至让人觉得荒谬和讽刺。但是，这样的一种立场本身就包含着曲解。自始至终，本书的目的都是用一种批判的、平衡的、尽量免除意识形态影响的方式来讲述美国的历史，让读者可以在必要时自己作出评判。尽管美国历史具有自己的某些特点，它仍是人类历史的一部分，具有人类历史的共性，是世界历史巨著中尚未完成的一个小篇章，而世界历史本身就是哲学家伊曼努尔·康德（Immanuel Kant）所谓的“扭曲的人性之材”的积累和汇集。本书绝不是要对美国历史作结或定性，它只是作者本人尽己所能观察和记录美国历史的一些成果，而作者本人也是美国社会的产物和这个国家的一员。

相比一般的美国通史，写一本能够在很短时间内读完的美国简史还要面临更多挑战：很多历史事件不得被省略，众多历史掌故很遗憾地无法顾及，大量有助于得出一般化结论的关联史实也只能留给大部头作品。但是，简史也有自己的长处。简洁的形式促使作者慎重地选择真正重要的历史内容，专注于主要的历史线索，重点描述关键历史转折点和具有深远意义的主题。此外，简史更加注重内容的清晰度和可读性，这样才对得起那些愿意花几个小时读一位不知名作者作品的读者。唯盼我的这本小书不至令读者太过失望。

于威斯康星州麦迪逊市

2012年1月

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