

*Life in*  
***MODERN AMERICA***

**NEW EDITION**

*Peter Bromhead*

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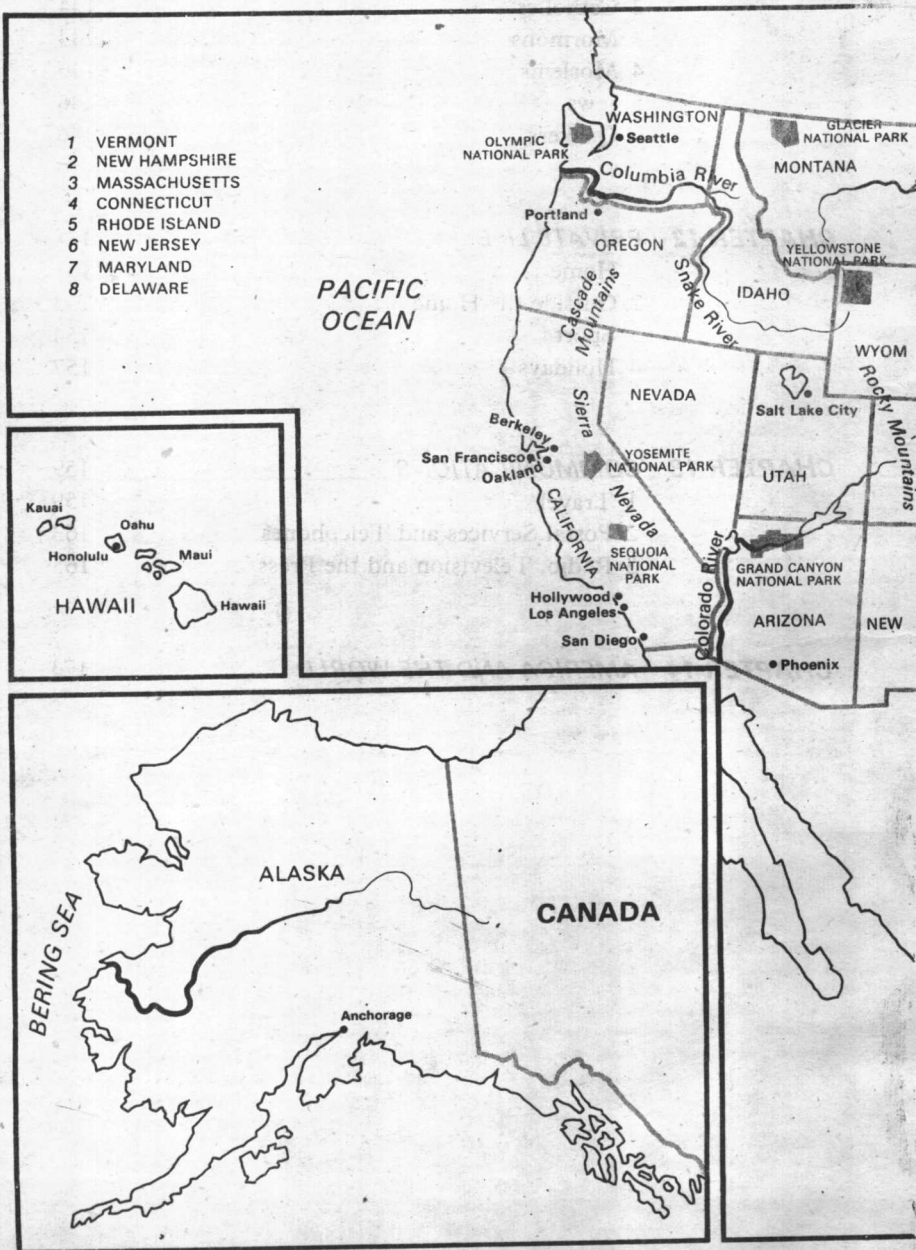
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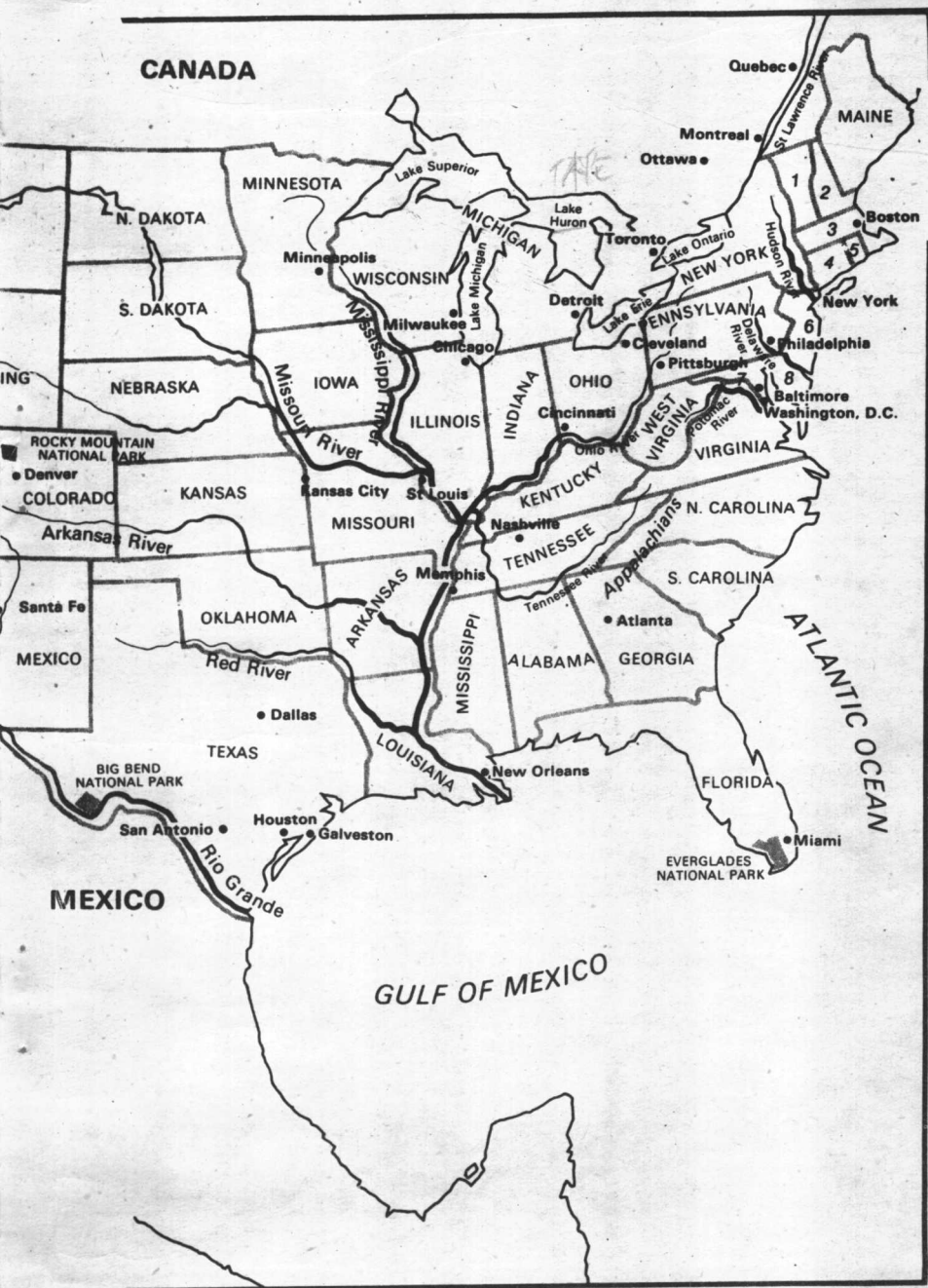
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- 2 NEW HAMPSHIRE
- 3 MASSACHUSETTS
- 4 CONNECTICUT
- 5 RHODE ISLAND
- 6 NEW JERSEY
- 7 MARYLAND
- 8 DELAWARE





# ***INTRODUCTION***

This book will try to present a picture of American society and life as it is in the late 1980s. It is hoped that it will be useful for students, mainly in Europe, but also in other parts of the world, who wish to acquaint themselves with the main problems that confront Americans at this time, and with the way in which they handle these problems.

One difficulty for students of American society today is that they are confronted by a mass of literature so vast that it cannot be comprehended. Never has any society been engaged in so much inquiry about itself. The mass of information about attitudes, beliefs, values, the economic situation and feelings towards money is so immense that almost any question about the people can be answered by reference to the results of some survey or report. The government itself produces a marvellous stream of statistical information. The modern writer's task is to try to make a fair selection from the mass of facts which have been discovered, analysed and presented. One difficulty arising from this mass of literature is that it is becoming more and more technical, and less and less easily understood by the ordinary untrained reader. The approach to the subject in this book is based on an assumption that readers are unfamiliar with the technical language which has been developed by sociologists as they talk to one another, and it may suffer somewhat in precise accuracy because of this.

The approach is first to look at the background of the country and at the people – where they came from, how they went to America and what they have done since they went there. Much attention is paid to immigration and to movement within the United States, to the form of government and to the shape of political life. From this we move to an attempt to understand the current social and economic

## Introduction

problems, with special attention to the difficulties that arise from relations between the different races.

The study of education concentrates in particular on the advanced stages at universities and similar institutions, which are now influencing the whole economic and social structure to an extent never seen before. Religion too is a subject which is peculiar in its American setting; in Europe scientific progress and economic advance have in general been accompanied by a decline in the influence of religion, but in America there is little sign of any such development. Religion is only one aspect of private life, and other aspects are dealt with too. In such a big country communications need special attention. Finally a chapter about America in its relation to the world sums up the whole of the political and social system as it sees itself, as it is seen by others, and as it looks outwards on the world outside.

For this third edition more than half of the book has been rewritten, and the whole plan has been changed. Some factual information is presented in the form of statistical tables or diagrams, and topics for discussion have been suggested, in the form of questions, at the ends of the chapters. Most of the statistics are from 1985 or earlier, because it takes a long time to collate them and to prepare them for publication. In some cases figures for earlier years are given, so that trends can be observed. In order to bring the text up to date for the late 80s a great deal of the material relating to the 1960s and 1970s has been compressed, and many new topics have been introduced.

The new edition is based on study of published materials – books, periodicals and newspapers – as well as several recent visits to the United States – mainly Washington, D.C., but also other parts, North, South and West, as well as Canada and Mexico which are both involved with the United States, in very different ways, as neighbours. In one short book it seems best not to try to cover every aspect of the nation's life and culture. So there is nothing here about American literature or music, painting or even architecture. There are no details about industry or coal or oil production, or about the military forces. In restricting itself to a study of the people and of the environment, political and social, which they have built and in which they live, it has even so to cover a wide range of subjects.

One of the book's aims is to present these subjects in non-specialised language, and to avoid the private and exclusive jargon which is often used by bureaucrats and professionals. The few words that are used to present facts or ideas outside everyday usage are

mostly used also in the same sense in most other European languages, and in each case the context should make the meaning clear. Another problem with the use of words arises from differences between American and British usage. In some cases the American word is used in this book with explanation of it if it seems necessary, though sometimes explanations are avoided, so as not to interrupt the flow of argument. At one point the word 'student' is used in the American way, to describe any person from the age of six receiving education, though the British normally say 'pupils' for those not yet of college or university age. Another difficulty arises from the lack of any singular pronoun for both masculine and feminine usage. Many languages have a similar deficiency, and most have other difficulties of the same nature, but with different details. As the English plural 'they' does cover masculine and feminine, I have put many statements in the plural.

Finally, I should like to thank the students, not only in British universities, but also in other European and American universities, with whom I have had the opportunity of discussing problems over many years.



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# 1

## ATLANTIC TO PACIFIC

### ■ 1 A SINGLE CULTURE

In its vast area the United States comprehends most of the physical conditions known to human beings; heat and cold, forest and desert, tropical swamp and Arctic waste, mountains and endless plains, empty spaces and megalopolis, and the world's largest river system, in a spread as great as from Paris to Karachi in Pakistan. Life in the hot southern sub-tropical forests is evidently very different from life in the North, where the winters are colder than anywhere in Western Europe.

It would not be easy to talk in general terms about Europe as a unit, with its differences of climate and culture, its mountains, plains and coasts. In the far bigger area of the United States, with far greater diversity of climate, there are also contrasts: there are too many characteristics to be described in a single generalisation. And the diversity of the people themselves is immense. It is not only that some came originally from Britain, others from Italy, Germany, Ireland or Poland; first-generation immigrants are still close to their diverse origins, while most long-established Americans are wholly assimilated; first-generation Italians differ not only from the long-established Dutch, but also from fourth-generation Italians – and even they differ according to the degree of intermarriage. Yet there is at the same time a lack of cultural difference among the regions, because all these varied peoples are scattered everywhere, with only minor local ethnic concentrations.

The great Republic of the United States is not the same country, even in area, as it was at the time of its foundation in the 1780s. The original Union consisted of thirteen states along the eastern seaboard. The thirty-five continental states which have been added since independence occupy an area eight times as great as the original

thirteen, and more than two-thirds of all Americans now live in these thirty-five states, in an area which 200 years ago was partly Spanish and mainly unexplored and undeveloped. But the founders of the Constitution foresaw that, as settlement spread westwards and new areas were developed by stable populations capable of self-government, so new states would be allowed to join the Union. The process began almost at once. Kentucky and Tennessee, southwards and across the mountains from Virginia, were added in 1792 and 1796, and further north the admission of states west of Pennsylvania began with Ohio in 1803. The story of the addition of new states in the nineteenth century is also the story of the conquest of the West, with the wagons and then the railroads, the cowboys and the sheriffs and that piece of human experience which the Western movie constantly revives. The last block of northwestern states was not incorporated until after 1890. With Arizona in 1912 the list of forty-eight continental states was at last complete, and in 1959 the first separate territories were granted statehood – Hawaii in the Pacific Ocean, and the great northern pioneers' land of Alaska.

Although the country is so big and its people have so many different ethnic backgrounds, it is in some ways less varied than Europe. The national origins of the people are by now fairly well mixed all over the country, though there are exceptions on small and large scales. The English language is virtually universal in its American form. The American way of speaking has developed independently of England and is on the whole closer to what can be heard in Ireland than to the speech of any other part of the British Isles; but the lack of real regional or class variety in speech or usage is one of the characteristics that tend to make the whole country very obviously one.

Another instance of uniformity is in habits and ways of living. From east to west there are five time zones; Atlantic, Eastern, Central, Mountain and Pacific (with an hour's advance, nearly but not quite everywhere, to Daylight Time in summer); but everywhere people get up and go to bed at about the same clock time, eat the same kind of food which is bought in the same kind of shops, work and rest at the same times of the day and have the same pattern of holidays. In general they share the same ideas, ideals and objectives. In most of the things that matter there is less difference between rich people and ordinary people, or between town and country, than in any single European nation. It is fairly easy to imagine a typical American; most individuals deviate from this 'type' in some ways,



but are fairly near to it in others. It is not that this personal uniformity is boring. It is after all superimposed on original diversity, and where the single pattern involves much friendly informality in personal relations there is little cause to feel oppressed.

The fact that the United States has always been a single economic unit, with no tariffs to restrict trade, has contributed to uniformity. Modern industry favours large organisations, and it is no accident that most of the world's biggest commercial firms are American. Mass-markets are efficient; the constituent pieces are interchangeable. The people are interchangeable too. They can choose between the products of competing manufacturers, but the products are all much alike. The air-conditioners and the machines for washing clothes and dishes, the smooth-running automatic comfortable car, the one-storey house in its pleasant piece of land, with its plate-glass windows and its swimming pool – all these things are good, but each has many others like it, just as there are too many car parks and garages and signs about things for sale. The different parts and communities of the United States are like one another in the same way as big airports all over the world are like one another – and after all mass air travel developed in America before it did anywhere else. Except, up to a point, in the South, there is not much really distinctive regional architecture or cookery, music or literature. This is why Americans are so impressed by a Mediterranean fishing port or hilltop town.

## ■ 2 THE MAIN REGIONS

The thirteen original states of two hundred years ago, strung out along the Atlantic coast, are still the most densely populated, with about a quarter of the American people living there. Beginning at the Canadian border in the North, the six 'New England' states are the most 'English' – and today are more prosperous and agreeable than the rest of the American northeast. The city of Boston and its surrounding towns in Massachusetts have replaced their old textile industry by a development of new technology so successful that unemployment is very low. People come from far away to enjoy the old villages with their wooden churches, and the surviving unspoiled streets of Boston, with its strong reputation as a cultural centre. There is good coastal scenery as well, and to the north there are the shores of Maine and the lakes and mountains of Vermont with their fast-developing ski resorts. Both these states, originally colonised by the French from Canada, joined the Union in 1789. Now they have a

modest prosperity from tourism which thrives on the lack of more obvious modern development.

The southern end of New England merges into the suburbs of New York City. Manhattan Island includes everything that most people think of when they say 'New York': Wall Street and the office skyscrapers clustered around it; Fifth Avenue running up the centre of the island, with Broadway slanting from it; the Empire State Building; the Rockefeller Centre; the United Nations Building; the museums and central shops; Central Park (where at times it is dangerous to walk alone); but Manhattan has only around two million residents. New York City is composed of five boroughs: Manhattan, Brooklyn (on the south of Long Island), the Bronx, Richmond and Queen's. Immense bridges join the boroughs with each other and with the suburbs in New Jersey across the Hudson. The city population of nearly eight million has not changed much for a long time, but the area of continuous town adds to this about two million people in New York State and southern Connecticut and five million more across the Hudson River in New Jersey.

Eastern New York State includes the whole valley of the Hudson River, but the state extends 500 kilometres to the west to Lakes Ontario and Erie, with Niagara Falls between them. The state is as big as England. Half of its seventeen million people live in or near New York City, while the rest are mainly concentrated in the line of Hudson valley towns near the Great Lakes, leaving much of the hill and lake country empty.

To the south, Philadelphia, well up the Delaware River, is the metropolis of Pennsylvania, with five million people in its 'metropolitan area', or city plus suburbs. In the western part of the state the steel area around Pittsburgh is already across the mountains and on the Ohio River; water flows south to the Gulf of Mexico. Pennsylvania is the main part of the mid-Atlantic area, which includes New Jersey and Maryland, bounded at the south by the Potomac River. It was on this border that the founding fathers chose the site for the national capital city of Washington. They set apart for it a square territory which they called the District of Columbia, taken out of the state of Maryland to form the national capital territory, outside the jurisdiction of any state and subject only to the control of the Federal Congress.

Southwards from Washington, along the Atlantic coastal area east of the Appalachians, are the four main former slave states of the original thirteen (though Maryland had slavery too). Virginia is

sometimes said to be more 'English' than New England, partly because it is well-known for fox-hunting in the English manner, and for its old country estates. It had more people than any other state until 1810, but after the Civil War it and (more still) the Carolinas and Georgia were depressed. Since the Second World War this area has found a new prosperity, with industrial and cultural development encouraged by low taxes, weak trade unions and relatively agreeable climate and coastal and hill scenery. Rather different from the rest of the South is its most extreme part, the state of Florida, with its swamps and pine forests, its orange plantations, its beaches, inland springs and waterways in a Caribbean climate. Thousands of retired northerners live in southern Florida, enjoying the warm winter climate and hoping not to see their homes destroyed in a hurricane in the fall. The Miami area, with its long row of huge holiday hotels, is now not only a holiday resort, but also a great centre of prosperous new industries, as well as being the home of half a million refugees from Cuba.

Behind and through the eastern states runs the range of the Appalachian Mountains, beginning far south in Georgia and continuing, with slight interruptions, northwards to Vermont and Canada. Sections of the range have different names, but they have much in common. Rounded hills and forests are the main feature. The highest point is only 2,000 metres above the sea. The mountains were a barrier to early movement westwards for the early generations, but beyond the mountains the vast central plain stretches all the way to the Rocky Mountains, with the water from the Ohio and Missouri Rivers joining the Mississippi to flow down to New Orleans and the Gulf of Mexico. Half the area of the United States lies in this vast basin bounded by the Appalachians on the east and the Rocky Mountains to the west, with, to the north, the nearly flat, low-lying watershed which divides the Mississippi waters from those that flow north into the Great Lakes and St Lawrence River.

The northeastern part of this great basin is known as the Midwest. The term is confusing because in fact it describes the northeastern quarter of the United States except for the states close to the Atlantic. But in 1776 all this area was still west of the fully-settled territory of the original states. The great midwestern plain was first developed for farming, and Chicago, with its navigable water routes east across the Great Lakes to the St Lawrence River, and its central position, soon became its chief town. Now Chicago is an industrial and commercial city comparable with Paris or London,

dominating the five industrial midwestern states east of the Mississippi. Each of these five states, Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin and Ohio, includes huge, sparsely-populated open spaces. Together they have a total area slightly greater than France, but more than half of their forty million people live in a dozen industrial cities with their suburbs. The biggest of these (next to Chicago) is Detroit, Michigan, home of the great, but now somewhat diminished American gods, Ford, General Motors and Chrysler. By the standards even of the Atlantic states these great midwestern inner cities may be new, but parts of their central areas already suffer from decay, in spite of the new technology in the business districts and suburbs.

Further west still, the great plain which occupies the middle of the United States from Canada down to Texas is empty, featureless country, where one can drive for hours with little change of scene, and where the vastness of America is palpable. Few places in the world can compare with these great plains for uniformity and monotony, and they are only part of a continuous system which goes northwards to the barren lands of the Arctic. The eastern part has a moderate rainfall, but in general the rainfall declines towards the mountain barrier of the Rockies in the West. Although there are great extremes of cold in winter and of heat in summer the plains are more favourably placed than those of the Soviet Union. Running from thirty to forty-nine degrees north, they can produce wheat in large quantities, and the endless space is good for the use of mechanisation on a huge scale. One can well imagine the sense of isolation of the early settlers in this region, but the new developments of road transport have changed all this for the modern farmer. The four states forming the heart of the plains, North and South Dakota, Nebraska and Kansas, have a combined area nearly as great as France and Italy together, and only five million inhabitants.

Between Kansas and the Gulf of Mexico, the vast flat open spaces of Oklahoma and Texas rear cattle but have grown rich through oil and its associated industries. Except for Alaska, Texas is the biggest state in the Union, and if recent trends continue it may soon overtake New York State to become the second in population. Though scenically dull it has sunshine, and it has prospered through brash and individualistic exploitation of its natural resources. Nearly half of its people live in the metropolitan areas of Dallas-Fort Worth and Houston, where millionaires have built themselves mansions and gardens to match their material ambitions. With low taxes and poor