J. William T. Youngs

American Realities

Volume 1

Fourth Edition

Historical Episodes

from First Settlements to the Civil War

AMERICAN REALITIES

HISTORICAL EPISODES

VOLUME I

From the First Settlements to the Civil War

Fourth Edition

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To my mother
and the memory of my father

Preface

American history is an epic composed of many events: colonists made their homes in a new world; soldiers fought for independence; capitalists built giant industries; civil rights activists struggled for equality. In such episodes we encounter the emotions, thoughts, and experiences that made up the distinct worlds of the past. In the two volumes of *American Realities* my goal has been to re-create some of those worlds, to capture the immediacy—the reality—of life as lived in other eras. I have not tried to reduce all these events to a single pattern, but in the aggregate the chapters trace the course of American history from the distant past to the present.

Each chapter is designed to lead the reader to a better understanding of major themes in United States history. Each volume can be read by itself or in tandem with a conventional American history textbook. The standard surveys present the general patterns of the past; this book reveals in greater depth the life beneath those patterns.

These stories reveal the broad contours of American history as well as the illustrative particulars. The death of Thomasine Winthrop leads us to know Puritanism better, and the flight of the *Enola Gay* to Hiroshima exhibits the harsh outlines of total war. The Lewis and Clark Expedition reveals the marvelous land upon which the nation developed, and Joseph McCarthy's career illuminates the turmoil of Cold War politics.

While writing *American Realities* I have often wished I had the novelist's poetic license to fill gaps not covered by the sources. But fortunately, facts can be as engaging as fiction. Documents are often colorful and evocative, allowing us to listen to the deathbed conversation of John and Thomasine Winthrop, to see the light of the South Pacific from a B-29, to enter imaginatively into the realities of other men and women.

Like ourselves the people of the past were immersed in their times. But even while living fully in their own worlds, they bequeathed us ours. We can find historical kinship in the ordinary circumstances of daily life. George Washington is comprehensible because he was stunned when his army in Manhattan collapsed. John Muir is like most of us because he was troubled once about choosing a career. My touchstone in choosing topics for *American*

Realities was that each should suggest our common humanity even while revealing worlds distinct from our own. More simply, I had to care about the subjects and believe others could care about them as well. Through such sympathy we come actually to live in history and feel our involvement with the past: his story and her story become our story.

The fourth edition of *American Realities* includes two new chapters and revisions in four others. In Volume I, I have added a passage from Thomas Jefferson's letters to the essay on the Cherokee removal, and I have included a description of Sante Fe before the American conquest. In Volume II, "The New Deal: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Politics of Compassion" tells the story of her contribution to American reform during and after the Great Depression. "Turmoil on the Campuses: Berkeley in the Sixties" describes a university and its students at the heart of the student movement and cultural revolution of the time.

The effort in these chapters to re-create history in words is supplemented by the imaginative drawings of Cecily Moon. Ms. Moon based her illustrations on careful reading of each chapter and on personal research in historical paintings and photographs. Each drawing highlights a major theme in the chapters.

For the instructor we have prepared a manual with chapter summaries, identification topics, multiple-choice and discussion questions, and suggested research projects.

American Realities and the World Wide Web

When I first began work on *American Realities*, I used a fountain pen, a modern version of the quill pen John Winthrop used 380 years ago when writing about the death of his wife Thomasine. I also used a typewriter, an instrument that would have been familiar to John Muir, Booker T. Washington, and Andrew Carnegie a century ago. When working on the second edition, I used a cranky word processor. As I complete the fourth edition—with a much better computer—I am beginning work on a Web site for the book. The site will include expanded bibliographies for each essay, photographs of places discussed in the book, links to related Web sites, and many other resources. The site will also allow interaction with students and teachers using *American Realities*. I plan, for example, to feature photographs of locales mentioned in the book. Some will be my pictures of places like Santa Fe, but I hope that other people may be interested in submitting their own pictures—in this case, perhaps, of Bent's Fort and other locales on the Santa Fe Trail. With the Web site, John Winthrop, Mary Antin, and other historical figures who never travelled more than a few miles per hour during their own lifetimes, will have the opportunity to travel at the speed of light to the computer screens of interested readers. I hope they benefit from this journey

into cyberspace—and that you do too. At this writing the address for the site has not been determined. But by the time you read this, the *American Realities* home page should be on-line. If you would like to learn the URL, contact me at the e-mail address listed below.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

American Realities arrived at its present form with the help of many other scholars, writers, and editors. I am particularly grateful to Marian Ferguson, Dave Lynch, and Katie Carlone for their help on the first edition and to Brad Gray, Barbara Breese, and Dave Lynch for their work on the second. A writer could not ask for more congenial and intelligent assistance in nurturing his ideas than these editors provided. The book also owes a great deal to the assistance of Clair Seng-Niemoeller and Frank Kirk; to Lois Banner, Ron Benson, Peter Carroll, Joseph H. Cartwright, David Coon, Doris Daniels, Emmett M. Essin, Don Glenn, James Hunt, Donald M. Jacobs, Maury Klein, Ralph Shaffer, and Julius Weinberg; and to Charles Baumann, Joseph Corn, James Gale, Richard Johnson, William Kidd, Nancy Millard, Sue Murphy, Robert Toll, Albert Tully, and my students in American History. For their help on the previous revisions I am particularly grateful to Linda Stowe, Jay Hart, Russ Tremayne, Madeleine Freidel, August W. Giebelhaus, Emmett M. Essin, Paul W. Wehr, James L. Gormly, Guy R. Breshears, Larry Cebula, Matthew A. Redinger, Jason Steele, Brenda Cooper, David Danbom, Paul Mertz, Carole Shelton, Bruce Borland, Michele DiBenedetto, Carol Einhorn, and David Nickol. In preparing the fourth edition, I have benefited from the advice and encouragement of other editors, scholars, and students, notably Bruce Borland, Matthew Kachur, Lily Eng, Margaret Rizzi, Jessica Bayne, Peter S. Field, Jim Hunt, Timothy Koerner, Jeffrey Roberts, Tom Russell, Laura White, Laura Loran, and Jim Keenan. In typesetting the fourth edition I am grateful to Dan Davie, who has taught me over the years that desktop publishing is an art as well as a science. The copyeditor, Jennifer Ahrend, brought to her work both a proofreader's sense of precision and a writer's taste for good prose.

My wife, Linda, gave me many valuable suggestions when I began writing the book while she was busy pursuing her own schedule as a mother and an attorney. Finally, in dedicating *American Realities* to my mother, Marguerite Youngs, and to the memory of my father, J. W. T. Youngs, I wish to recognize their part in helping me find my own place in history.

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NORTH AMERICA
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Timuquan
Tenochtitlán
Tulum
CUBA
Columbus's Route in 1492
HISPANIOLA
WEST INDIES
Tulum
GULF OF MEXICO
MAYA

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1

THE NATIVE AMERICANS

October 11, 1492

American history did not begin with Christopher Columbus in 1492 or with John Smith in 1607. Long before Europeans reached what they called the New World, Native Americans settled the whole of the Western Hemisphere and created hundreds of civilizations, many as large and complex as fifteenth-century European states. They made pottery, built cities, founded empires, wrote poetry, and plotted the course of the sun and the stars. Eventually their lives would be changed by massive invasions of European soldiers and immigrants, but they did not exist simply to interact with Europeans. They began the human story in America long before 1492, and the story of their lives constitutes the first chapter of American history.

On October 11, 1492, the people of Tulum on the eastern coast of Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula lived in an important coastal community, atop a high bluff overlooking the sea. On three sides stone walls marked the boundary between the town and the thick green bush beyond. On the fourth side limestone cliffs dropped away sharply to the white sands of a narrow beach and the warm turquoise waters of the Caribbean.

Compared with other Mayan cities, Tulum was built on a modest scale. Its *castillo,* or main temple, stood only forty feet high, less than one-fifth the height of the great castillo at Chichén Itzá in the interior. The city housed no more than five or six hundred people whereas tens of thousands had lived in the great Mayan cities of the past. These coastal Mayas were nonetheless the heirs of a proud tradition. Their ancestors had charted the sun and stars' courses from great stone "observatories" and developed the world's most accurate calendar. They employed a sophisticated numerical system, chronicled their history in hieroglyphs, and honored their gods with elaborate carvings and massive temples.

Most of the ancient centers had been abandoned several centuries before when the Mayan people had come under the sway of invading Toltecs, and in 1492 the Mayas were living in more than a dozen small states, their former glory long lost. But in a few places like Tulum, whose neatly plastered and painted stone walls and buildings stood out brightly from the sea, something of that ancient splendor endured. Statues carved on building facades as well as frescoes testified to Mayan piety. The most striking figure was the "diving god," a divine figure apparently plunging earthward from the sky.

Tulum was a convenient embarkation point for trips in long wood canoes to the offshore island of Cozumel where pilgrims made offerings to Izchel, the goddess of medicine, sought out particularly by expectant mothers. They came before a large pottery figure representing the deity and were addressed by priests hidden behind the shrine.

The people of Tulum subsisted on generous crops of land and sea by raising maize, beans, squash, and chili; by hunting deer and turkey; and by taking fish, lobster, clams, and conchs from the clear waters of the Caribbean. They traded in canoes along the populous coast, exchanging native honey and shells for cacao (beans used to make cocoa), feathers, and other exotic products.

In 1492 trade and piety connected the people of Tulum with a wide area of Caribbean coastline and Yucatán interior. But their world was limited to the tropical skies of Meso-America. They were only one of hundreds of peoples who occupied the American continents. A thousand miles from the Mayan lands lay another world, impressive beyond what they could have imagined. Here, in the Valley of Mexico, the Aztec Empire was

at its height; in contrast to its grand capital, a place such as Tulum was a mere village.

Travelers who approached the great Aztec city of Tenochtitlán for the first time must have been struck with wonder. Before them across a long causeway in the middle of Lake Texcoco lay a city of incredible size, home of some three hundred thousand people. On its fringes lay hundreds of small, man-made islands called *chinampas,* whose rich soil provided much of the city's maize.

Thousands of neat houses, made of adobe or stone and stucco, lined the streets, their whitewashed walls reflecting the bright sun and their flower-dense interior gardens filling the air with incense. Beyond these modest houses were larger buildings where the great lords and high priests lived. The greatest of these dignitaries was the emperor, a man elected from among the members of the royal family by the council of noblemen. He was venerated, almost isolated, by worshipful ceremony — riding from place to place in a litter carried by noblemen or walking on cloths cast before him to keep his feet from touching the ground. He ate his meals behind a gilded screen, shielded from the prying eyes of lesser mortals.

Near the palaces were temples dedicated to some forty major deities worshiped in Tenochtitlán. Some were traditional Aztec gods; others came from peoples conquered in the empire's endless wars. The greatest temple belonged to Huitzilopochtli, Left-handed Hummingbird, whose pacific name seems ill suited to his stern character.

The history of Huitzilopochtli was inextricable from the history of the Aztecs. Long before being honored by a stone monument more than a hundred feet tall, he had been represented by a wooden image carried by four priests in the company of a wandering band of nomads. These were the original Aztecs who, with their foremost god, had come to the Valley of Mexico several centuries before. Poor and despised, they were forced into a small section of desert by their more prosperous neighbors, then driven even from this land into the marshes of Lake Texcoco. Here the god Huitzilopochtli told the priests to find an eagle perched on a cactus with a rattlesnake in its mouth and to build a city at that place. The foretold apparition was discovered on an island in Lake Texcoco, and in 1325 the Aztecs began to construct their great city.

It proved an admirable seat for the new empire. The lake was shallow, allowing the Aztecs to build up arable land from the silt and rocks of the lake bottom. Its waters discouraged attack by enemy tribes while enabling their own armies to set out and make war. As their power grew, warriors from other tribes joined them, swelling their numbers and augmenting their power. By 1492, Aztec armies had marched hundreds of miles to the seas on the east

and the west and into the interior both north and south, demanding and receiving tribute from dozens of neighboring states.

Throughout this period of remarkable growth, Huitzilopochtli, once the frail image of a wandering people, grew into a mighty god, with an insatiable need for human sacrifice. The Aztecs believed their god would make them victorious in battle if they offered him the hearts of captives. Hardly a week passed in Tenochtitlán without such a sacrifice. At the crest of the temple pyramid each victim was held over a sacrificial stone by four priests while a fifth cut the heart from the body with an obsidian knife.

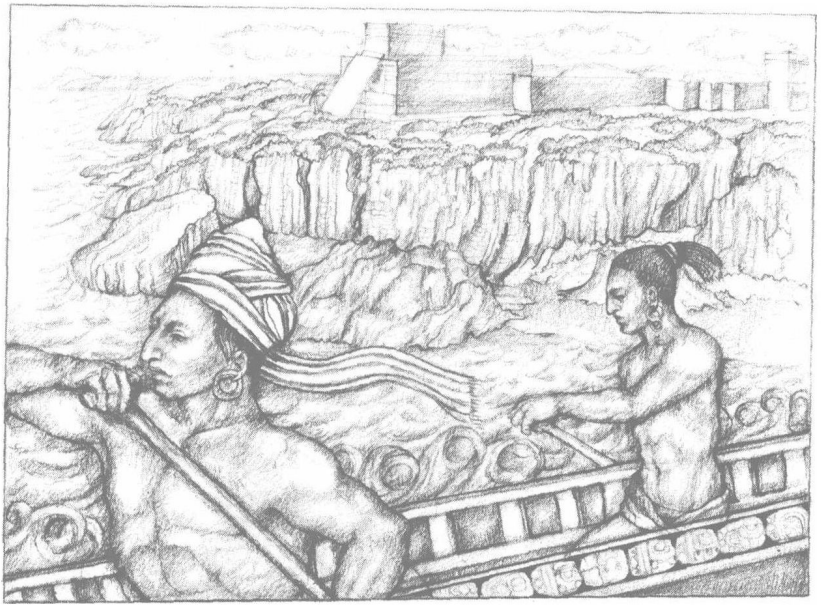
Often the Aztecs made multiple sacrifices, and only a few years before 1492, at the dedication of the great temple, long lines of captives had gone one by one to the sacrificial stone in rites lasting four days and consuming between twenty and eighty thousand lives. Often the victims accepted their fate with religious resolve, believing that their blood would feed the sun and unite them with the gods. Some even preferred death and refused the chance to live an honorable life among their captors. But many must have trembled as they began the long ascent up the stone steps of the pyramid on the way to the sacrificial stone.

Under the shadow of the temples one might think that life in Tenochtitlán had a ghostly pallor, that the proximity of so much death would distort the whole of life. But the city's daily routine does not appear to have had a morbid flavor. The people moved along the narrow sidewalks or through the smooth canals in brightly colored garments and gathered in huge marketplaces to exchange their wares. Aztecs engaged in dozens of professions — working as administrators, merchants, priests, goldsmiths, feather workers, painters, messengers, and teachers.

At the nearby island of Tlaltelolco, as many as sixty thousand merchants and customers assembled on a single day. Here one could obtain corn, beans, venison, robes and other cloth, jewelry, swords, and spears. Because cacao beans, cloth, and gold dust were the only forms of currency, much of the trade was done by barter, and almost everyone was a merchant as well as a customer.

Although most of the citizens worked in such material occupations as raising crops or making jewelry, there was also an intellectual class in Tenochtitlán. The Aztecs possessed a considerable body of philosophy and theology, passed down from generation to generation in an oral tradition of poetry, song, and story. The priests taught the people rules by which to guide their lives and furnished the ideological framework for an orderly world.

Aztecs kept their streets clean and conducted their transactions in the markets with decorum. They punished thievery, drunkenness, and adultery with death and raised their progeny in a strong home environment. When children were three years old, they received toys such as looms and grind-



Mayan boatmen in the Caribbean near Tulum. Along hundreds of miles of Yucatán coastline, they traded and visited religious sanctuaries.

stones to familiarize them with the tools of adult life. Their parents encouraged them to choose their vocations carefully and taught them a code of social conduct. One Aztec rule stressed the need to value goodness more than pride:

> Not with envy,
> not with a twisted heart,
> shall you feel superior,
> shall you go about boasting.
>
> Rather in goodness shall you make true
> your song and your word.
> And thus you shall be highly regarded,
> and you shall be able to live with others.

One of the most important social arrangements was marriage. Parents usually chose their children's spouses and taught young people to wait patiently for the proper moment for marriage. The priests declared:

> This is how you must act:
> before you know woman

you must grow to be a complete man.
And then you will be ready for marriage;
you will beget children of good stature,
healthy, agile, and comely.

Postponement was not a tremendous hardship, however, because most marriages took place when men were about twenty and women about sixteen.

On the evening of October 11, 1492, many wedding ceremonies must have been in progress during the twilight hours in Tenochtitlán. Each bride was carried to her groom's house; there she stood with him before the hearth, and friends tied his shirt to her dress as a sign of their union. After the ceremony the bride and groom burned incense to the gods for four days before being allowed to consummate their marriage.

We may imagine such a couple on this night, alone together, contemplating their lives and their gods, glad of each other's company in the crisp night air, anticipating with pleasure the time when they would "beget children of good stature, healthy, agile, and comely."

Several thousand miles away, in Florida, a region unknown even to the far-traveling Aztecs, the Timuquan Indians lived along what was later named the Saint Johns River. They inhabited small circular villages surrounded by simple log fortifications. Their houses were made of wood and thatch, and they wore simple loincloths. The Timuquans may seem at first to have been a simpler people than the Mayas or the Aztecs. They did not build great stone cities, paint hieroglyphs, or accurately calculate the length of the year. Their culture had a richness of its own, however, reflected in their economy, recreation, and ceremonies.

Timuquans tilled the soil with hoes made of heavy fishbones attached to wood handles; the men hoed and the women planted beans and maize. They gathered fruit from the islands at the mouth of the Saint Johns and hunted the abundant wildlife of the region, including snakes, deer, and alligators. Pursuit of the alligator required the coordinated efforts of many men. First some of the hunters skewered the alligator through the mouth with a long, pointed log; then they flipped it over and other Indians shot arrows into its soft belly. These beasts, along with fish and other game, were carefully smoked over fires to preserve them through the winter. The smoked flesh was stored along with fruit and grain in large round buildings owned by the tribe or cooked in large earthenware vessels that could be set directly on a fire like an iron kettle.

A council of state assembled periodically on a long, curved wood bench with the chief at the center. The councilors approached ceremoniously in order of age, and the chief listened to their advice. The council probably decided when crops should be planted, whether alliances should