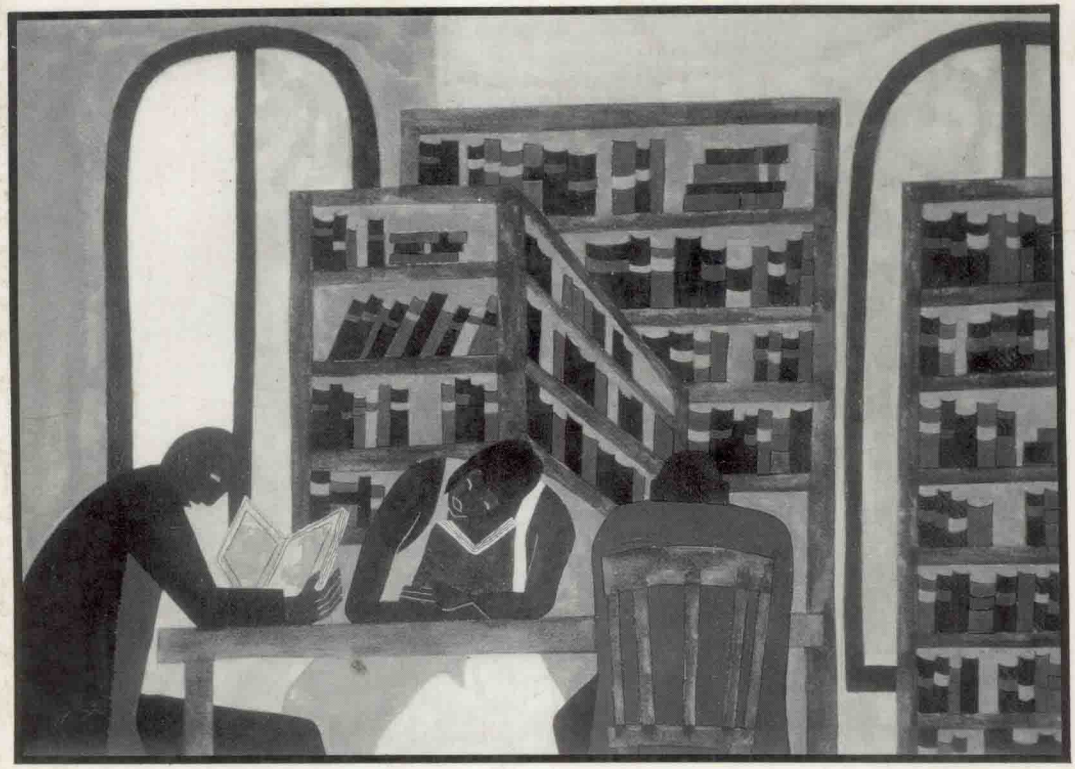
Robert D. Marcus & David Burner



AMERICA Firsthand

Volume II: From Reconstruction to the Present

Second Edition

READINGS IN AMERICAN HISTORY

AMERICA FIRSTHAND

Volume II *FROM RECONSTRUCTION TO THE PRESENT*

Second Edition

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ST. MARTIN'S PRESS
New York

Acquisitions Editor: Louise H. Waller
Project management: Sarah Troutt, Publication Services
Cover design: Judy Forster
Cover art: Jacob Lawrence, *The Libraries Are Appreciated*, 1943. The Philadelphia Museum of Art: The Louis E. Stern Collection.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 90-63550

Manufactured in the United States of America.
6543
fedc

For information, write:
St. Martin's Press, Inc.
175 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10010

ISBN: 0-312-04903-X

Preface

The second edition of *America Firsthand* is a response to the increasing difficulty of teaching and learning American history. In the four years since the publication of the first edition, the challenges of studying American history have continued to grow, as both historians and students have become more conscious of the voices that either have been silent or have remained outside the canon of the American past as it is studied in the present.

We believe that students need to find exemplars of themselves in the past. *America Firsthand* was written to help them discover how the diversities of past experience and recent scholarship can respond to that need. The focus is on people who speak directly of their own experiences. In this edition we have paid more attention to the voices of women, black and Native Americans, and those whose lifestyles have traditionally made them inaccessible to mainstream historians. Insofar as possible individuals are presented in their own words and in selections long enough to be memorable, personal, and immediate. The accounts of indentured servants, runaway slaves, cowboys, factory workers, civil rights activists, homeless people, and many others offer students opportunities to identify with a wide range of human experience.

We have retained enough political and military documents to maintain the traditional markers of United States history; these continue to provide a useful narrative framework. In this second edition, however, we have emphasized social history in the belief that personal remembrances create a sense of identification with the past. Readings include viewpoints as varied as John White's pre-Jamestown history of the lost colony of Roanoke, Joseph Plumb Martin's soldier's view of the fight at Yorktown, Harriet Jacobs' account of sexual exploitation at the hands of her white master, and Dolly Sumner Burge's diary entry on Sherman's army passing through her Southern plantation, all in Volume I. Volume II includes a variety of letters to Franklin Roosevelt by the "forgotten men and women" of the Great Depression, Charity Adams Earley's experience as an Afro-American WAC officer during World War II, and interviews with "new" Americans from Latin American. While the readings convey the experiences and forces of specific personalities, they include observations on the American Revolution and the Civil War, on Reconstruction, the Great Depression, and the war in Vietnam.

All teachers and students must struggle with the problem of connecting traditional chronology with the new materials of social history,

and no formula for doing that is without its problems. We have offered a set of connections that, in combination with a good United States history textbook, will be workable for many courses. Careful headnotes and questions at the end of each section help make the essential links from the personalities to the times in which those personalities lived.

America Firsthand, second edition, explores in even greater concreteness than the preceding edition the many ways of being American and the multitudinous minds and characters that make up a diverse history and nation. We see the American experience through the perspective of many cultures and diverse people who have in common that, in some form, they have left behind a vivid record of the world they inhabited and the times they experienced. We hope these recollections serve as fertile ground in which students can begin to root their own interest in history, and their own perception of the times in which they live.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to thank the following individuals who reviewed the second edition of *America Firsthand* for St. Martin's Press: Holly Baggett, University of Delaware; Karel D. Bicha, Marquette University; W. Marvin Dulaney, University of Texas—Arlington; John d'Entremont, Randolph-Macon Women's College; Harold Ferguson, Montclair State College; Henry C. Ferrell, East Carolina University; David Fuchs, Lehman College; Gretchen Green, College of William and Mary; Daniel Horowitz, Smith College; Thomas W. Jodziewicz, University of Dallas; David M. Kennedy, Stanford University; Michael L. Krenn, University of Miami; Jessica Kross, University of South Carolina; Donna McCaffrey, Providence College; John F. McClymer, Assumption College; Richard Orst, Colgate University; David Pivar, Cal State—Fullerton; Norman L. Rosenberg, Macalester College; Emily Rosenberg, Macalester College; Neil Sapper, Amarillo College; Sara Lee Silberman, Connecticut College; Donna L. Van Razphorst, Cuyahoga Community College; Richard Toskin, North Adams State College; and Ralph Weber, Marquette University.

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PART I | RECONSTRUCTION AND THE WESTERN FRONTIER

The crisis provoked by slavery and sectionalism was resolved only by the Civil War. Much of the technology of the war was quite advanced, and it speeded the transformation of American life into something that we can recognize as modern.

Victory for the Union, though, did not resolve questions about the role of Afro-American men and women in American life. Three new amendments to the Constitution initiated a revolution that, more than a century later, is far from over. In the selections that follow, we see the first painful and difficult responses to these changes as black and white Southerners react to Reconstruction. We also witness how the revolution in race relations carried with it striking changes in the most important forms of property and economic relations: ownership of the land and the crops planted on it. By the 1880s, sharecropping, governed by instruments like the Grimes Sharecrop contract, had emerged as the principal replacement for slavery.

The completion of the first transcontinental railroad link in 1869, and the renewed movement westward that it generated, fundamentally altered the western United States. The destruction of western buffalo herds, as shown in the writings of W.S. Glenn, E.N. Andrews, and John R. Cook, meant the collapse of Native American culture on the plains, which was based on hunting the buffalo. The increasing number of white settlers delivered the final blow.

Industries such as buffalo hunting, the larger scale commercial raising of cattle, and mining—combined with the warfare between whites and Native Americans—made the late nineteenth century a legendary era of western violence. Nat Love's attitudes and adventures are representative of the more romantic views of the western cowboy. Famous as "Deadeye Dick," Love was one of the about 25 percent of cowboys who were black.

The main motive of cowboys, however, was less romantic violence popularized in Hollywood films than the pursuit of economic for-

tune, the search for new means of livelihood, or, simply a stable income. Bob Kennon's account of a cattle drive provides one example of the existence of routine in what was ordinarily thought of as an extraordinary, adventuresome life.

The late nineteenth century marked the final shunting of Native Americans to reservations often far distant from their ancestral homes. The struggles of Zitkala-Sä, a Dakota Sioux, to find her place in both the Native American and the white world indicates the complexity lurking behind the stereotypes of cowboys and Native Americans.

1 | Blacks' Reactions to Reconstruction

The Reconstruction period remains a subject of intense historical debate. The Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution decreed an equality between the races that was not realized in fact. At first the federal government vigorously supported the Freedmen's Bureau and the efforts of Reconstruction governments in Southern states to help the freed slaves, but within about a decade those efforts were abandoned as the Northern public lost interest.

The social revolution brought about by emancipation caused severe problems for both Afro-Americans and whites. Just as the slaves' experiences had varied widely, so the newly freed Afro-Americans responded to their new situation in many different ways. Their needs were rarely understood by whites ill-prepared to accept Afro-Americans as equals or to support the long-term federal intervention that was required to make freedom an economic and social reality.

The interviews below were collected in the 1930s. Historians have found such accounts valuable sources for the history of slaves and Reconstruction.

FELIX HAYWOOD From San Antonio, Texas, Born in Raleigh, North Carolina. Age at Interview: 88.

The end of the war, it come just like that—like you snap your fingers. . . . How did we know it! Hallelujah broke out—

Abe Lincoln freed the nigger
With the gun and the trigger;
And I ain't going to get whipped any more.
I got my ticket,
Leaving the thicket,
And I'm a-heading for the Golden Shore!

Soldiers, all of a sudden, was everywhere—coming in bunches, crossing and walking and riding. Everyone was a-singing. We was all walking on golden clouds. Hallelujah!

Botkin, B.A. (editor), Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery. *(Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1945), pp. 65–70, 223–224, 241–242, 246–247.*

Union forever,
Hurrah, boys, hurrah!
Although I may be poor,
I'll never be a slave—
Shouting the battle cry of freedom.

Everybody went wild. We felt like heroes, and nobody had made us that way but ourselves. We was free. Just like that, we was free. It didn't seem to make the whites mad, either. They went right on giving us food just the same. Nobody took our homes away, but right off colored folks started on the move. They seemed to want to get closer to freedom, so they'd know what it was—like it was a place or a city. Me and my father stuck, stuck close as a lean tick to a sick kitten. The Gudlows started us out on a ranch. My father, he'd round up cattle—unbranded cattle—for the whites. They was cattle that they belonged to, all right; they had gone to find water 'long the San Antonio River and the Guadalupe. Then the whites gave me and my father some cattle for our own. My father had his own brand—7 B)—and we had a herd to start out with of seventy.

We knowed freedom was on us, but we didn't know what was to come with it. We thought we was going to get rich like the white folks. We thought we was going to be richer than the white folks, 'cause we was stronger and knowed how to work, and the whites didn't, and they didn't have us to work for them any more. But it didn't turn out that way. We soon found out that freedom could make folks proud, but it didn't make 'em rich.

Did you ever stop to think that thinking don't do any good when you do it too late? Well, that's how it was with us. If every mother's son of a black had thrown 'way his hoe and took up a gun to fight for his own freedom along with the Yankees, the war'd been over before it began. But we didn't do it. We couldn't help stick to our masters. We couldn't no more shoot 'em than we could fly. My father and me used to talk 'bout it. We decided we was too soft and freedom wasn't going to be much to our good even if we had a education.

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WARREN MCKINNEY, From Hazen, Akansas. Born in South Carolina. Age at Interview: 85.

I was born in Edgefield County, South Carolina. I am eighty-five years old. I was born a slave of George Strauter. I remembers hearing them say, "Thank God, I's free as a jay bird." My ma was a slave in the field. I was eleven years old when freedom was declared. When I was little, Mr. Strauter whipped my ma. It hurt me bad as it did her. I hated him. She was crying. I chunked him with rocks. He run after me, but he didn't catch me. There was twenty-five or thirty hands that worked in the field. They raised wheat, corn, oats, barley, and cotton. All the chil-

dren that couldn't work stayed at one house. Aunt Mat kept the babies and small children that couldn't go to the field. He had a gin and a shop. The shop was at the fork of the roads. When the war come on, my papa went to built forts. He quit Ma and took another woman. When the war close, Ma took her four children, bundled 'em up and went to Augusta. The government give out rations there. My ma washed and ironed. People died in piles. I don't know till yet what was the matter. They said it was the change of living. I seen five or six wooden, painted coffins piled up on wagons pass by our house. Loads passed every day like you see cotton pass here. Some said it was cholera and some took consumption. Lots of the colored people nearly starved. Not much to get to do and not much houseroom. Several families had to live in one house. Lots of the colored folks went up North and froze to death. They couldn't stand the cold. They wrote back about them dying. No, they never sent them back. I heard some sent for money to come back. I heard plenty 'bout the Ku Klux. They scared the folks to death. People left Augusta in droves. About a thousand would all meet and walk going to hunt work and new homes. Some of them died. I had a sister and brother lost that way. I had another sister come to Louisiana that way. She wrote back.

I don't think the colored folks looked for a share of land. They never got nothing 'cause the white folks didn't have nothing but barren hills left. About all the mules was wore out hauling provisions in the army. Some folks say they ought to done more for the colored folks when they left, but they say they was broke. Freeing all the slaves left 'em broke.

That reconstruction was a mighty hard pull. Me and Ma couldn't live. A man paid our ways to Carlisle, Arkansas, and we come. We started working for Mr. Emenson. He had a big store, teams, and land. We liked it fine, and I been here fifty-six years now. There was so much wild game, living was not so hard. If a fellow could get a little bread and a place to stay, he was all right. After I come to this state, I voted some. I have farmed and worked at odd jobs. I farmed mostly. Ma went back to her old master. He persuaded her to come back home. Me and her went back and run a farm four or five years before she died. Then I come back here.

/ / /

LEE GUIDON, From South Carolina. Born in South Carolina. Age at Interview: 89.

Yes, ma'am, I sure was in the Civil War. I plowed all day, and me and my sister helped take care of the baby at night. It would cry, and me bumping it [in a straight chair, rocking.] Time I git it to the bed where its mama was, it wake up and start crying all over again. I be so sleepy. It was a puny sort of baby. Its papa was off at war. His name was Jim Cowan, and his wife Miss Margaret Brown 'fore she married him.

Miss Lucy Smith give me and my sister to them. Then she married Mr. Abe Moore. Jim Smith was Miss Lucy's boy. He lay out in the woods all time. He say no need in him gitting shot up and killed. He say let the slaves be free. We lived, seemed like, on 'bout the line of York and Union counties. He lay out in the woods over in York County. Mr. Jim say all the fighting 'bout was jealousy. They caught him several times, but every time he got away from 'em. After they come home Mr. Jim say they never win no war. They stole and starved out the South. . . .

After freedom a heap of people say they was going to name theirselves over. They named theirselves big names, then went roaming round like wild, hunting cities. They changed up so it was hard to tell who or where anybody was. Heap of 'em died, and you didn't know when you hear about it if he was your folks hardly. Some of the names was Abraham, and some called theirselves Lincum. Any big name 'cepting their master's name. It was the fashion. I heard 'em talking 'bout it one evening, and my pa say, "Fine folks raise us and we gonna hold to our own names." That settled it with all of us. . . .

I reckon I do know 'bout the Ku Kluck. I knowed a man named Alfred Owens. He seemed all right, but he was a Republican. He said he was not afraid. He run a tanyard and kept a heap of guns in a big room. They all loaded. He married a Southern woman. Her husband either died or was killed. She had a son living with them. The Ku Kluck was called Upper League. They get this boy to unload all the guns. Then the white men went there. The white man give up and said, "I ain't got no gun to defend myself with. The guns all unloaded, and I ain't got no powder and shot." But the Ku Kluck shot in the houses and shot him up like lacework. He sold fine harness, saddles, bridles—all sorts of leather things. The Ku Kluck sure run them outen their country. They say they not going to have them round, and they sure run them out, back where they came from. . . .

For them what stayed on like they were, Reconstruction times 'bout like times before that 'cepting the Yankee stole out and tore up a scandalous heap. They tell the black folks to do something, and then come white folks you live with and say Ku Kluck whup you. They say leave, and white folks say better not listen to them old Yankees. They'll git you too far off to come back, and you freeze. They done give you all the use they got for you. How they do? All sorts of ways. Some stayed at their cabins glad to have one to live in and farmed on. Some running round begging, some hunting work for money, and nobody had no money 'cepting the Yankees, and they had no homes or land and mighty little work for you to do. No work to live on. Some going every day to the city. That winter I heard 'bout them starving and freezing by the wagon loads. I never heard nothing 'bout voting till freedom. I don't think I ever voted till I come to Mississippi. I votes Republican. That's the party of my color, and I stick to them as long as they do right. I don't dabble in white folks' business, and that white folks' voting is their business. If I vote, I go do it and go on home.