

Volume I: To 1877

THESE UNITED STATES

The Questions of Our Past

Concise Edition



IRWIN UNGER

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**THESE
UNITED STATES**

The Questions of Our Past

Volume I to 1877

Irwin Unger

New York University



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*To Rita and Mickey, Libby and Arnie,
Phyllis and Jerry, and Norma and David—once more*



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Professor Unger's professional interests have ranged widely within American history. He has written on Reconstruction, the Progressive Era, and on the 1960s. His first book, *The Greenback Era*, won a Pulitzer Prize in 1965. Since then he has written *The Movement: The New Left* and (with Debi Unger) *The Vulnerable Years*, *Turning Point: 1968* and *The Best of Intentions* about the Great Society. He also teaches a wide range of courses, including the introductory U.S. history survey, the Civil War and Reconstruction Era, the Gilded Age, U.S. economic history, and the United States during the 1960s.

PREFACE

These United States, Concise Edition, represents a major change from the previous versions of the work. Most important it is a “concise” edition, about one-fourth shorter than its predecessor. Our goal here has been to survey American history for a college audience in a briefer format to facilitate readability and reduce the price of the work to students. The condensing process has not, I believe, sacrificed essential material. Rather, redundant examples, overextended treatment, and marginal topics have been eliminated, a process that drew on reviewers’ and adopters’ evaluations. We have also reduced the number of illustrations and maps to contain costs and removed the “Portraits” from the main body of the text and placed them in a separate booklet. One final change is chronological updating to include events since the last edition.

In most significant ways the book’s plan remains the same, however. First, unlike virtually every other introductory text, it still has a single author and speaks in a single voice. I hope readers will agree that a book by an individual has inherent advantages over one composed by a committee. Second, each chapter is still organized around significant questions, each designed to challenge students with the complexity of the past and to compel them to critically evaluate different viewpoints. This plan, I believe, makes the learning of history a quest, an exploration, rather than the mere absorption of a mass of facts. Yet, at the same time, “the facts” are made available. *These United States* provides the ample “coverage” of standard texts.

The word “standard” here does not mean old-fashioned. Though *These United States* discusses political, diplomatic, and military events, it also deals extensively with social, cultural, and economic matters. It concerns itself not only with “events,” moreover, but also with people, currents, and themes. It is not old-fashioned in another way: it expands the “canon” to include those who traditionally have been excluded from the American past and seeks to embrace the enormous diversity of the American people. The reader will find in *These United*

States women as well as men; people of color as well as those of European extraction; youths as well as adults; the poor as well as the rich; artists, writers and musicians as well as politicians and diplomats.

Here, then, is the Concise Edition of *These United States*. I hope that, like its precursors, it meets with favor among faculty and students and serves both as a successful teaching instrument and an absorbing introduction to the American past.

IRWIN UNGER
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Every author incurs debts in writing or revising a book such as this. I have been the beneficiary of particularly generous help and advice and I would like to acknowledge it here.

My thanks to my editor Todd Armstrong who came to Prentice Hall late in the revision process but helped greatly in expediting it. Susan Alkana's editorial advice and services were invaluable during the early and mid-phase of the revisions. I should also like to thank Charlyce Jones Owen for her valuable supervisory help, Darcy Betts for her marketing skills and Judy Winthrop for her expertise as production editor. A number of my fellow academics were generous enough to read and evaluate the manuscript for this Concise Edition. They include: William M. Leary, University of Georgia; Michael Haridopolos, Brevard Community College; Stephen L. Hardin, The Victoria College; David G. Hogan, Heidelberg College. My thanks also to the scholars and teachers who evaluated earlier editions: James F. Hilgenburg, Jr., of Glenville State College; Johanna Hume of Alvin Community College; Robert G. Fricke of West Valley College; Steve Schuster of Brookhaven College; Kenny Brown of the University of Central Oklahoma; Paul Lucas of Indiana University; and last, but assuredly not least, Irving Katz, also of Indiana University. Though I did not invariably follow their advice, I always took it seriously.

* ANCILLARY INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS *

These United States Concise Edition comes with an extensive package of ancillary materials.

For the Instructor

Test Item File prepared by James Sargent of Virginia Western Community College contains multiple choice questions, essay questions, identification questions, and matching questions.

Instructor's Manual prepared by John Soares includes chapter summaries, learning objectives, suggestions for lecture topics, essay or classroom discussion topics, and suggestions for projects or term papers.

Prentice Hall Custom Test, available in Windows, DOS, and Macintosh formats, provides questions from the printed test item file for generating multiple versions of tests.

For the Students

Study Guides, Volumes I and II, include commentary, definitions, identifications, map exercises, short-answer exercises, and essay questions.

Historical Documents and Portraits have been extracted from the unabridged version of the text and compiled as a separate supplement for students, available at no charge when shrinkwrapped (at the instructor's request) to the text. The Historical Portraits consist of biographical information about a representative figure from each chapter, while the Historical Documents are excerpts from primary source readings.

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1

THE NEW WORLD ENCOUNTERS THE OLD

Why 1492?

- c. 38,000BCE** America's first settlers begin to cross a land bridge connecting Siberia and Alaska
- 986CE** Norwegian merchant Bjarni Herjulfsson becomes the first European to sight the mainland of North America
- c. 1000** Leif Ericsson lands on "Vinland"
- c. 1010–13** Thorfinn Karlsefni and others attempt to colonize Vinland
- c. 1300** Venetian and Genoese merchants establish overland trade routes to the East
- c. 1400** The invention of printing, advances in navigation and naval architecture, and the introduction of gunpowder increase possibilities for worldwide exploration by Europeans
- 1488** Bartolomeu Dias rounds Africa's Cape of Good Hope for the Portuguese crown
- 1492** Christopher Columbus lands on San Salvador in the Bahamas
- 1497** Henry VII of England sends John Cabot to find a short route to the Indies: Cabot reaches Newfoundland
- 1498** Vasco da Gama, Portuguese navigator, becomes the first European to reach India by sea around Africa
- 1519–22** Ferdinand Magellan's circumnavigation of the world proves that the Americas are new lands, not the Indies
- 1521** Hernando Cortés conquers the Aztec empire in Mexico for Spain
- 1523–28** France sends Giovanni da Verrazano to find a short route to the Indies; he explores the east coast of North America
- 1532** Francisco Pizarro conquers the Inca empire in Peru for Spain
- 1534** Jacques Cartier attempts to find a "northwest passage" to the Indies for France
- 1609** Henry Hudson establishes Dutch claim to the Hudson River region in his search for a northwest passage

Every schoolchild knows that Columbus “discovered” America in 1492. It is a “fact” firmly established in our national consciousness. Yet Columbus did not discover America, if by that statement we mean he was the first person to encounter the two great continents that lie between Europe and Asia. At least two other groups stumbled on the Americas before Columbus. Sometime between 40,000 BCE and 12,000 BCE people from northeast Asia reached the “New World” from across the Pacific and gradually spread across the vast new lands. We call their descendants Indians, though many prefer to call them Native Americans. Then about 1000 CE, Scandinavians called Norsemen touched North America coming from northern Europe.

Given these earlier encounters, is there any special significance to that famous year 1492? Should we drop it from our list of crucial dates and substitute 40,000 BCE or 1000 CE? If we keep 1492, how do we justify it? Did Columbus’s landing in the Caribbean have a greater impact on the world than the two earlier events, or does our traditional emphasis simply mark our Europe-centered biases? What did Columbus’s discovery mean, both to those in the Old World of Europe, Asia, and Africa and to those already living in the Americas? To answer these questions let us look at the first discovery and its significance.

*** THE NATIVE AMERICANS ***

The first Americans were migrants from eastern Siberia on the northern portion of the Asian mainland. Physically, they belonged to the same human stock as the modern Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans. The migrants were people who depended on roots, berries, seeds, fish, and game for food. Decreasing rainfall in their Asian homeland, perhaps, forced them eastward to stay alive. Today their journey would be stopped by the Bering Sea, but in that distant era a land bridge joined Alaska to Siberia. Once in North America the migrants gradually moved southward, and within a thousand years had spread from just below the Arctic Ocean to the stormy southern tip of South America. They had also increased enormously in numbers. From perhaps a few hundred or a few thousand original immigrants, by 1492 the Indian population of the Americas had swelled to over 50 million, a figure about equal to that of contemporary Europe.

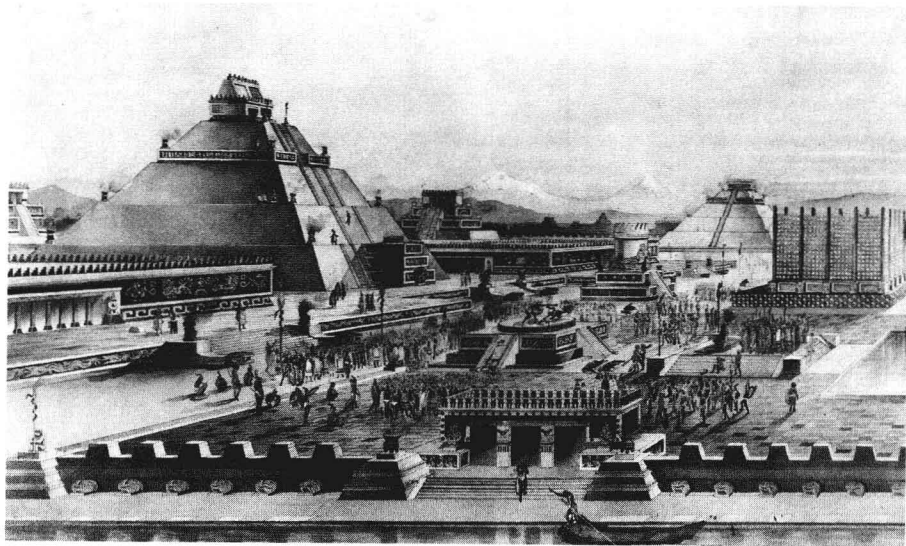
As their numbers grew over the centuries the descendants of these Asian people diversified into many groups with distinct languages, cultures, and political and economic systems. By about 3000 BCE some had begun to practice agriculture, with “maize” (corn) as their chief crop and the staple of their diet. They also grew tomatoes, squash, various kinds of beans, and, in South America, potatoes. Surpluses from agriculture transformed Indian life. Abundant food led to larger populations and also to more diverse societies. Classes of priests, warriors, artisans, and chiefs appeared. In the most fertile agricultural regions great civilizations arose with a technological prowess, artistic sophistication, and political complexity comparable to the civilizations of Asia and Europe.

THE GREAT INDIAN CIVILIZATIONS. One of these Indian civilizations, that of the Mayas, built great ceremonial and administrative cities in the dense rain

forests of Yucatan and Central America. Mayan society was composed of many separate urban centers, each independent and governed by a group of priests. It also developed a culture of great sophistication: The Mayas alone among the American Indian peoples had a written language and books, and their mathematicians developed the idea of zero as a number place long before Europeans did.

The Aztecs to the north, in central Mexico, were a more warlike people than the Mayans. Around 1300 CE they settled on the site of what is now Mexico City. Led by powerful rulers, the Aztecs conquered virtually all their neighbors, creating a great empire of 5 million inhabitants in central Mexico. In the course of their many wars the Aztec rulers took thousands of prisoners and enormous quantities of feathered headdresses, jade jewelry, and beautiful gold and silver ornaments. The treasure went into the coffers of the rulers and their nobles; the prisoners, by the thousands, had their hearts cut out in public ceremonies to appease the Aztec war god.

In the coastal mountains of South America, the Incas created an empire that paralleled the Aztec domain to the north. At its height, 7 million people lived within its borders. Strong rulers like the Aztec chiefs, the Inca emperors built fortresses on the Andes mountainsides and a network of roads that held their far-flung state together. The Inca people were among the most skilled metallurgists of the time, making weapons, tools, and ornaments of gold, silver, copper, and bronze. The Inca privileged classes lived comfortably, but the sick and handicapped were also provided for by the government. Inca society has sometimes been compared to a modern social welfare state.



This is a reconstruction of what Cortés and his men saw when they arrived at “the great city of Mexico.” The structure at the center of the plaza is the altar where prisoners were sacrificed to the Aztec gods.