

Seventh Edition

# America NOW

Short  
Readings

*from Recent Periodicals*

Robert Atwan



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Short Readings from Recent Periodicals

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# America Now

## Short Readings from Recent Periodicals

Seventh Edition

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## About the Editor

Robert Atwan is director of The Blue Hills Writing Institute at Curry College and the series editor of the annual *Best American Essays*, which he founded in 1985. His essays, reviews, and critical articles have appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Iowa Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Kenyon Review*, *River Teeth*, and many other publications. For Bedford/St. Martin's, he has also edited *Ten on Ten: Major Essayists on Recurring Themes* (1992), *Our Times*, Fifth Edition (1998), and *Convergences*, Second Edition (2005). He has coedited (with Jon Roberts) *Left, Right, and Center: Voices from Across the Political Spectrum* (1996), and is coeditor with Donald McQuade of *The Writer's Presence*, Fifth Edition (2005).

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## Preface for Instructors

People write for many reasons, but one of the most compelling is to express their views on matters of current public interest. Browse any newsstand, library magazine rack, or Web page and you'll find an abundance of articles and opinion pieces responding to current issues and events. Too frequently, students see the writing they do in a composition class as having little connection with real-world problems and issues. *America Now*, with its provocative professional and student writing—all very current opinion essays drawn from a range of periodicals—shows students that by writing on the important issues of today, they can influence campus and public discourse and truly make a difference.

The seventh edition of *America Now* offers a generous sampling of timely and provocative material. *America Now* is designed to immerse introductory writing students in the give-and-take of public dialogue and to stimulate thinking, discussion, and composition. Its overriding instructional principle—which guides everything from the choice of readings and topics to the design of questions—is that participation in informed discussion will help generate and enrich student writing. The book systematically encourages its users to view reading, thinking, discussion, and writing as closely interrelated activities. It assumes that (1) attentive reading and reflection will lead to informed discussion; (2) participation in open and informed discussion will result in a broadening of viewpoints; (3) an awareness of different viewpoints will stimulate further reflection and renewed discussion; and (4) this process in turn will lead to thoughtful papers. The book's general introduction, "The Persuasive Writer," takes the student through the process and offers some useful guidelines for engaging in productive discussion and advice on forming and expressing opinions along with two annotated student essays that serve as models of effective opinion writing. Instructors may also find helpful my essay "Writing and the Art of Discussion," which can be found in the instructor's manual and at the book's companion Web site.

## *New to This Edition*

Following is a brief overview of the seventh edition of *America Now*. For a more in-depth description of the book, see “Using *America Now*” beginning on page ix of this preface.

**Forty-five readings and twenty-seven visual texts—all new and very current.** Drawn from more than forty recent periodicals, including seventeen student newspapers, each reading is not only new to this edition but has appeared within a year or two of the book’s publication. With over half of its selections published in 2006, *America Now* is the most current short essay reader available. Some of the readings you will find in the seventh edition are Jhumpa Lahiri and Henry Louis Gates Jr. on identity, Camille Paglia on plastic surgery, The Sims inventor Will Wright on video games and violence, and Senator John McCain on torture.

**Seven new issues of current interest.** Seven of the twelve thematic chapters have been updated to reflect the changing interests of students over the past two years. Sure to spark lively discussion and writing, these new topics are social networking online (Facebook), DNA and identity, language and technology, gaming and violence, consumerism and sweatshops, science and “intelligent design,” and torture.

**New advice on the visual expression of opinion.** Because we live in an increasingly visual culture, the book’s introduction now offers a section on expressing opinions visually—with striking examples from photojournalism, cartoons, and opinion advertisements.

**New annotations of student writing.** To highlight models of persuasive writing, I have annotated a section of a student paper in each chapter. My comments point out some of the most effective strategies of the student writers in the book and offer advice for structuring sentences, stating a main point, using analogies, shaping arguments, presenting examples and evidence, calling for action, and more.

**Even more “Student Writer at Work” interviews.** This edition includes ten brief, inspiring interviews in which student authors in the book explain how—and why—they express their opinions in writing. Body image, Muslim identity, and questions surrounding genetics and race are just a handful of the topics covered in this feature.

**An updated companion Web site** ([bedfordstmartins.com/americanow](http://bedfordstmartins.com/americanow)) provides students with access to the Read/Hear/See It Now links referenced throughout the book, annotated research links for each chapter, electronically scored *ESL and Developmental Quizzes* for each

chapter, and links to every online newspaper, magazine, and journal in *America Now*. The site also includes an online version of the book's instructor's manual.

## Using America Now

### Professional and Student Writing from a Wide Variety of Sources

The book's selections by professional writers are drawn from recent periodicals, ranging from journals such as the *Columbia Journalism Review* to influential general magazines such as the *New Yorker*. As would be expected in a collection that focuses heavily on social trends and current events, *America Now* features several newspapers and news-oriented magazines: the *Boston Globe*, the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Newsweek*, and the *New York Times Magazine*. With its additional emphasis on public discourse, this collection also draws on some of America's leading political magazines, including *Reason*, the *New Republic*, *Townhall.com*, and the *Weekly Standard*. Also represented are magazines that appeal primarily to specialized audiences, such as the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Adbusters*, *DoubleTake*, and *Wired*. In general, the readings illustrate the variety of personal, informative, and persuasive writing read daily by millions of Americans. The readings are kept short (many under three pages, and some no longer than a page) to hold student interest and to serve as models for the student's own writing. To introduce a more in-depth approach to various topics, the book includes a few longer essays in the final chapters.

*America Now* also features eighteen published student selections—essays and cartoons—from online college newspapers. These recent works reveal student writers confronting in a public forum the same topics and issues that challenge some of our leading social critics and commentators, and they show how student writers can enter into and influence public discussion. In this way, the student selections in *America Now*—complemented by Student Writer at Work interviews—encourage students to see writing as a form of personal and public empowerment.

### Timely Topics for Discussion and Debate

Student essays not only make up a large percentage of the readings in this book, they also shape the volume's contents. As we monitored the broad spectrum of online college newspapers—and reviewed several

hundred student essays—we gradually found the most commonly discussed campus issues and topics. Issues such as those mentioned on page viii of this preface have provoked so much recent student response that they could have resulted in several single-topic collections. Many college papers do not restrict themselves to news items and editorial opinion but make room for personal essays as well. Some popular student topics are gender, cultural identity, and body image, all of which are reflected in the book's table of contents.

To facilitate group discussion and in-class work, *America Now* features twelve bite-sized units. These tightly focused chapters permit instructors to cover a broad range of themes and issues in a single semester. Each can be conveniently handled in one or two class periods. In general, the chapters move from accessible, personal topics (for example, body image, identity, and gender) to more public issues (science, religion, and torture), thus accommodating instructors who prefer to start with personal writing and gradually progress to exposition, analysis, and argument.

Since composition courses naturally emphasize issues revolving around language and the construction of meaning, *America Now* also includes two chapters designed to encourage students to examine the powerful influence of words and symbols. Language issues also surface in many readings throughout the book.

For instructors who want to concentrate on developing argumentation skills, the book arranges several controversial topics into **Paired Readings**, **Campus Debates**, and **Opposing Views**. Paired Readings offer linked perspectives on plastic surgery; a Campus Debate in the book's introduction presents two student opinions on how to approach the issue of date rape; and Opposing Views feature differing opinions on the ethics of sweatshop labor and on creationism and evolution.

### The Visual Expression of Opinion

*America Now* encourages students to pay close attention to the persuasive power of language and images. Reflecting the growing presence of advertising in public discussion, among the book's images are recent opinion advertisements (or "Op-Ads"). These pieces, which focus on racial profiling and cultural identity, encourage students to uncover the visual and verbal strategies of various advocacy groups trying to influence the consciousness and ideology of large audiences.

To demonstrate the persuasive power of the image, the book also features several other kinds of visual texts. Iconic photos include Joe

Rosenthal's World War II "Flag Raising at Iwo Jima" and Thomas E. Franklin's famous 9/11 image, "Three Firefighters Raising the Flag." Numerous cartoons comment on a variety of topics such as gender, politics, foreign policy, immigration, stem cell research, and creationism. Another assortment of visual selections, titled "America Then," provides students with historical perspectives on "America Now." These images show that many of the issues we deal with today have roots in the past. They include a 1904 automobile ad that illustrates a trend toward conspicuous consumption, a cluster of 1925 photos from the "Scopes Monkey Trial" documenting the trial of a Tennessee teacher who dared to teach evolution, a 1947 Charles Atlas ad offering a perspective on male body image, and a 1976 video game that sparked censorship and controversy on the relationship between gaming and violence.

### **The Instructional Apparatus: Before, During, and After Reading**

The apparatus of *America Now* supports both discussion-based instruction and more individualized approaches to reading and writing. Taking into account the increasing diversity of students (especially the growing number of nonnative speakers) in today's writing programs, the apparatus offers extensive help with college-level vocabulary and features a "Words to Learn" list preceding each selection. This vocabulary list with brief definitions will allow students to spot ahead of time some of the words they may find difficult; encountering the word later in context will help lock it in memory. It's unrealistic, however, to think students will acquire a fluent knowledge of new words by memorizing a list. Therefore, the apparatus following each selection includes additional exercises under the headings "Vocabulary/Using a Dictionary" and "Responding to Words in Context." These sets of questions introduce students to prefixes, suffixes, connotations, denotations, tone, and etymology.

To help promote reflection and discussion, the book includes a prereading assignment for each main selection. The questions in "Before You Read" provide students with the opportunity to explore a few of the avenues that lead to fruitful discussion and interesting papers. A full description of the advantages gained by linking reading, writing, and classroom discussion can be found in my introduction to the instructor's manual.

Along with the discussion of vocabulary, incrementally structured questions follow individual selections. Picking up on the vocabulary lists preceding each selection, another question set, "Responding to

Words in Context,” supplements the “Vocabulary/Using a Dictionary” questions and asks students to use what they have learned from the dictionary exercises and vocabulary lists. Following the vocabulary questions, the “Discussing Main Point and Meaning” and “Examining Sentences, Paragraphs, and Organization” questions help to guide students step by step through the reading process, culminating in the set of “Thinking Critically” questions. As instructors well know, beginning students can sometimes be too trusting of what they see in print, especially in textbooks. Therefore, the “Thinking Critically” questions invite students to take a more skeptical attitude toward their reading and to form the habit of challenging a selection from both analytical and experiential points of view. The selection apparatus concludes with “In-Class Writing Activities,” which emphasize freewriting exercises and collaborative projects.

In addition to the selection apparatus, *America Now* contains end-of-chapter questions designed to stimulate further discussion and writing. The chapter apparatus approaches the reading material from topical and thematic angles, with an emphasis on group discussion. The introductory comments to each chapter highlight the main discussion points and the way selections are linked together. These points and linkages are then reintroduced at the end of the chapter through three sets of interlocking study questions and tasks: (1) a suggested topic for discussion, (2) questions and ideas to help students prepare for class discussion, and (3) several writing assignments that ask students to move from discussion to composition—that is, to develop papers out of the ideas and opinions expressed in class discussion and debate. Instructors with highly diverse writing classes may find “Topics for Cross-Cultural Discussion” a convenient way to encourage an exchange of perspectives and experiences that could also generate ideas for writing. Located on the book’s Web site ([bedfordstmartins.com/americanow](http://bedfordstmartins.com/americanow)) are **ESL and Developmental Quizzes** that test vocabulary and comprehension skills. Electronic scoring, which can be monitored by instructors, offers immediate feedback.

### *The Instructor’s Manual*

Maria Halovanic of Boston University, Timothy Walsh, and the late Andrew Michael Knoll of Boston University prepared the instructor’s manual, bringing to the task valuable classroom experience at all levels of composition instruction. The manual contains an essay for each chapter, offering suggestions for teaching the selections together and

separately, plus suggested answers and possible discussion topics based on every question posed in the text. Anyone using *America Now* should be sure to consult the manual before designing a syllabus, framing a discussion topic, or even assigning individual selections. Liz de-Beer of Rutgers University also contributed a helpful essay on designing student panels ("Forming Forums"), along with advice on using the book's apparatus in both developmental and mainstream composition classes that is available at the book's companion Web site.

## Acknowledgments

While putting together the seventh edition of *America Now*, I was fortunate to receive the assistance of many talented individuals. In addition to their work on the instructor's manual, Maria Halovanic, Timothy Walsh, and Andrew Michael Knoll offered many useful suggestions for the book's instructional apparatus.

To revise a text is to entertain numerous questions: What kind of selections work best in class? What types of questions are most helpful? How can reading, writing, and discussion be most effectively intertwined? This edition profited immensely from the following instructors who generously took the time to respond to the sixth edition: Kaye Falconer, Bakersfield College; Nancy Freiman, Milwaukee Area Technical College; Terry Meier, Bakersfield College; Marty Price, Mississippi State University; Ann Spurlock, Mississippi State University; and Frances Whitney, Bakersfield College.

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As always, it was a pleasure to work with the superb staff at Bedford/St. Martin's. Jane Betz, my editor on the first edition, shaped the book in lasting ways and helped with the planning of the revision. Of all the people acknowledged, I owe the most gratitude to this edition's senior developmental editor, Ellen Thibault. Her insightful suggestions, remarkable good sense, and uncanny ability to keep track of so many minute details made this collection a pleasure to work on from start to finish. Ellen is also responsible for the student interviews that are such an important feature of this edition. Christina Gerogiannis, associate editor, and Stephanie Naudin, editorial assistant, researched images and readings for the book, contacted the students profiled in the book, and worked energetically on the book's Web site and instructor's manual. Jason Reblando cleared text and art permissions under a tight schedule. Karen Baart guided the book through production with patience and care, staying on top of many details, and Elizabeth Schaaf managed the production process with great attentiveness. I was fortunate to receive the careful copyediting of Lisa Wehrle. In the advertising and promotion department, Tom Macy and Angela Dambrowski deserve warm thanks for their work, as does senior marketing manager Karita dos Santos.

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Robert Atwan

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