

The United States in World History

Edward J. Davies, II

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The United States in World History

In this short, accessible introductory survey of the history of the United States from 1790 to the present day, Edward J. Davies examines key themes in the evolution of America from colonial rule to international supremacy. Focusing particularly on those currents within U.S. history that have influenced the rest of the world, this study examines the key themes and concepts that have determined America's global influence. Offering a new way of examining the United States, this book reveals how concepts that originated in America's definition of itself as a nation – concepts such as capitalism, republicanism and race – have had supranational impact across the world.

Focusing on three areas, which examine the Atlantic world 1700–1800, the U.S. and the industrial world and the emergence of America as a global power, *The United States in World History* examines:

- the social and economic systems of the British Atlantic community
- the American Revolution and its international dimensions
- the impact of industrialization on U.S. trade and the emergence of the 'corporation' in the nineteenth century
- the expansion of U.S. consumer and cultural industries from the early twentieth century
- the Cold War and its implications for United States economic and political power throughout the globe.

This concise and readable text places the history of the United States in its broadest context and will be invaluable to those studying world history.

Edward J. Davies, II is an Associate Professor at the University of Utah. He has recently served on the Advisory Board for National Geographic's world history publication focusing on North America. He has also served on the Executive Committee for the World History Association.

Themes in World History

Series editor: Peter N. Stearns

The *Themes in World History* series offers focused treatment of a range of human experiences and institutions in the world history context. The purpose is to provide serious, if brief, discussions of important topics as additions to textbook coverage and document collections. The treatments will allow students to probe particular facets of the human story in greater depth than textbook coverage allows, and to gain a fuller sense of historians' analytical methods and debates in the process. Each topic is handled over time – allowing discussions of changes and continuities. Each topic is assessed in terms of a range of different societies and religions – allowing comparisons of relevant similarities and differences. Each book in the series helps readers deal with world history in action, evaluating global contexts as they work through some of the key components of human society and human life.

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Preface

In 1992 when I first introduced the United States in world history as a course, I never anticipated writing a book on the topic. Over the years as I read more and more in the various literatures that touched on the United States and its presence across the globe, I became ever more convinced of the worthiness of addressing the United States from a larger perspective. Several years ago Peter N. Stearns gave me the opportunity to write such a book for his series, *Themes in World History*. In researching and writing this book, I learned a great deal more about the participation of the United States in global processes such as migration and realized the need always to consider the ways what seem to be domestic issues are dramatically affected by distant locations and events.

I would like to thank my colleagues who helped me think through the topic of the United States in world history. Peter Von Sivers first encouraged me to participate in the World History group that introduced the field into our curriculum. Despite my initial misgivings on teaching world history, the decision to embrace it transformed my entire understanding of history as a discipline and certainly the place of the United States in the world. Anand Yang, now director of the Jackson School of International Studies at the University of Washington, remained a staunch supporter of my efforts to rethink United States history. He helped provide me with fiscal and material resources to learn world history and to develop the course, *The United States in world history*. He also included me in many trips to Asia that broadened my own perception of the world. Without his backing neither the course nor the book would have been possible. Eric Hinderaker, chair of the department, listened to many of my queries on the colonial period and provided many useful suggestions. Ray Gunn during his tenure as chair also gave financial support and flexibility in developing world history courses that created a very favourable atmosphere in which to write and teach. Of course what errors of fact or interpretation that exist in the book are solely mine.

On a more personal level, my daughters Mary Anne and Erin, contributed in many unseen ways to the completion of the book. Erin also proofread the entire manuscript. Both she and Mary Anne sustained me through some difficult moments. My mother, Mary, gave me her support and encouragement

as she has throughout my academic life. Neither the book nor my career would have been possible without her. My only wish is that my late father could be here for my mother and to see this project reach completion. Last, in 2005 I met the love of my life, Liliana, who brought joy and happiness back into my life. This book is dedicated to her and to my precious daughters.

To Lili, my sweet, sweet Love

And to my precious daughters, Erin and Mary Anne

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Introduction

The United States and world history

My first encounter with 'world history' actually began as an undergraduate when I enrolled in a world history course in the winter of 1966. I was reminded of that experience when a colleague suggested that I join a group of faculty who wanted to introduce world history. From a professional standpoint it made little sense, given the huge commitment of time and energy. From an intellectual position it seemed exciting and full of possibilities. Intimidating from the start, world history demanded an incredible effort in mastering the details and themes that addressed different time periods, human communities, and multiple polities. While engaged in this daunting task, the United States seemed a distraction at best.

Of course, the United States existed as part of the larger human community. The Atlantic migrations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries intimately connected the United States with Europeans. These migrations also joined other Atlantic states such as Argentina and Canada with Europe. The United States, then, relied on similar sources of inexpensive labor that fueled economic growth throughout the Western Hemisphere. United States corporations also created communities of professionals, managers and workers in states such as Mexico and Cuba. Clearly, the United States was intimately bound with larger human communities and processes.

United States' foreign policy also led to the establishment of financial protectorates in the Caribbean and Central America. In some ways, the British protectorate in Egypt inspired those who administered the United States' presence in the Caribbean. Yet, the United States also exported much. Its racial code moved with it to the Philippines, its one formal colony.

By the late twentieth century the United States had developed powerful economic and military institutions. These enabled the country to drive changes across the planet. The Cold War with the late Soviet Union signaled this new capacity, one that technology helped sustain and then expanded as the century came to close. United States corporations, including services companies such as McDonald's, appeared in every major region of the world. United States popular culture moved quickly through mass marketing, Hollywood movies and television programs.

The shift to a larger context in which the United States existed seems unavoidable. Yet, for many in the country, Exceptionalism remains its cornerstone. Its moral vision, its freedoms, its openness and its lack of fixed economic classes makes the United States the one nation in which all other states and peoples find inspiration. Scholarly work raised doubts about the claims to Exceptionalism. Arthur Schlesinger Sr. wrote pieces that called into question the Exceptionalist position. Others certainly followed his lead. Yet, the historical professional remained fixed on the United States until recently. Scholars such as Ian Tyrrell, John Dunlap, Lester Langley and others have revived Schlesinger's concerns. These historians have produced provocative pieces that cut across national boundaries. At the same time, world historians deliberately cast their nets across borders and even continents and oceans. They argue that national histories ignore the complexity of the past and often unmask what historians consider unique or even exceptional about their pasts. World historians have uncovered patterns of disease that proved fundamental in understanding the settlement of North and South America. Globalization, a new buzzword of the twenty-first century, describes the weakening of the nation and its borders as economic institutions, media, finance and a host of other transnational phenomena assume dominance in human affairs. The following chapters address the issue of the United States and its participation in larger human communities and processes that cut across national boundaries. The study argues that Exceptionalism masks patterns of human interaction that join the United States and its citizens to the world and its diverse peoples.

The Pan-British world in the late eighteenth century

Introduction

By the early eighteenth century, the English had established a series of colonies along the Atlantic coast of North America. These stretched from what became Massachusetts in the north to Georgia in the south. The English claimed land emptied by disease, war, or treaty from the indigenous and then settled in increasingly greater numbers. By the mid- and late 1700s, North American colonies formed a critical part of the commercial empire British merchants built over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The North American colonies contributed to the health of the British commercial system through the production of staple economies, the development of a vigorous shipbuilding industry and the fielding of an active fleet of ocean-going ships. The North American colonists also reaped important benefits from participating in this commercial empire. They drew the labor for their tobacco, rice and indigo plantations from Africa and they prospered by sustaining British sugar colonies in the Caribbean. They also depended on British laws to protect their economic interests and British warships for protection against hostile European ships. Of course the Atlantic Ocean and the rivers that flowed into it provided the means of moving people and goods across the great distances that separated departure points and destinations.

The British North American colonies joined other British holdings in this larger economic world. Ireland and Scotland exported textile, linen and/or food to England while purchasing manufactured goods. Ireland and Scotland also developed economic ties with the North American colonies. Similarly, the North American colonies engaged in a series of thriving commercial exchanges with British sugar colonies in the Caribbean. In turn, the sugar colonies sold their valuable commodity to the North American colonies and other parts of the British trading system.

Migration also brought together disparate regions of the Atlantic world. Migration pushed streams of individuals across borders, oceans and forests to seek out land and new economic opportunities. Involuntary migration also created African mini worlds in the western Atlantic, constantly reinforced as

mortality or demand called for more and more shiploads of Africans destined for the slave pens of the Caribbean or North America. Few could escape the dependency on other regions and/or human communities to survive and prosper.

The North American colonists also existed as part of a broader social world. The leadership in North America looked to London and its fashionable style and behavior for their inspiration. They participated in a transatlantic literary culture anchored by the London publishing industry and the fashionable reading tastes of the city's upper strata. As part of a larger Atlantic world they shared many of the tastes and social distinctions that marked the gentry in Ireland and Scotland as well as England proper.

The middling sort occupied the middle ranks of North American colonial society. The members of the middling sort shared modest living standards and knew their place in the social hierarchy of the colonial world. Their counterparts in the British Isles also lived in modest conditions distinct from the upper strata.

The meaner sort, namely the slaves and the sailors, engaged in grueling and often dangerous labor. Sailors spent time in ports such as Boston and New York City that helped sustain the colonies along the western Atlantic shores. They provided the muscle that sustained the ships and moved the vital cargo that constituted the heart of commercial exchange. At the bottom of the social hierarchy, enslaved Africans or African Americans toiled away for white masters in the Carolinas and Chesapeake region and, especially, on the British sugar islands in the Caribbean. Few slaves lived in the British Isles yet their presence in the North American colonies and the Caribbean depended on the shipping, manufacturing and financial services provided by those in the eastern Atlantic. Interdependency marked all dimensions of the British North American colonies and the larger Pan-British world.

This chapter, then, focuses intensely on the economic, cultural, consumer, literary and labor connections that joined the British North American colonies to the Pan-British world. The chapter also compares the social dimensions of life in the North American colonies with Ireland, Scotland and England.

The dynamics of the Atlantic world: an overview

British colonists in the western Atlantic lived under a set of maritime policies established in London as early as the 1650s. Known as the Navigation Acts, these measures regulated the commercial world that determined so much of the material life in the British settlements in North America. Colonial merchants also depended on the Royal Navy that protected their commercial cargo and passengers alike. Under the umbrella of British protection and with access to distant markets, British settlers, including merchants, prospered in the decades before the revolution.

Colonial merchants relied on financial networks that sustained these Atlantic connections. Participants in these networks lent and borrowed money that sustained commercial exchanges, including the vast slave trade. Desperately short of money, British colonists relied on credit as the chief means of transferring goods from sellers to buyers. Once on land, goods moved inland via traders to smaller urban places. Auctions enabled merchants to sell off overstocked or slow-moving goods. For more distant locations not served by towns or local markets, peddlers brought the goods of the Atlantic world to farmers seemingly beyond its reach.

Merchants, whether in Boston or New York, relied on ships, the very heart of this vast mercantile system, to conduct this business. These ships moved products, information and people across the oceans to all ports. As the chief and most efficient means of transportation, ships stood at the top of the list of vital economic assets. Virtually nothing could be accomplished without them. They moved involuntary labor from the eastern Atlantic westward to plantations in North America and the Caribbean. They carried raw materials back from the Chesapeake to London, Glasgow, Liverpool and Bristol and took out finished products for colonial markets.

The ports in Britain's Northern American settlements stood as conduits that brought in the goods, services and personnel from the Atlantic world. They facilitated the introduction of European goods into colonial life and shipped out the exports that ultimately paid for these goods. The ports served as distributors for their large and, in some cases, dynamic hinterlands. Boston, Massachusetts, Newport, Rhode Island, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, New York City, New York and Charleston, and South Carolina constituted the major seaports in the western Atlantic. The North American shipbuilding industry sustained both this commerce and a substantial maritime construction industry. Ships also turned to ports for maintenance and repairs.

Boston, New York City and other colonial ports looked to London, which stood at the center of the British Atlantic world. Straddling the River Thames, London housed extensive shipyards, numerable wet and dry docks, customs houses, and one of the largest communities of seamen and maritime workers in the world. The country's port facilities sustained fleets of British warships that constantly needed upgrading, and built new ships. The city's mercantile and financial people accumulated the huge amounts of currency to handle the enormous costs of maintaining these fleets. Its merchants ranked as the "most internationally minded traders" in the world. The city stood as the epicenter of the global British economy. As her fleets and merchants expanded so did London, where 25 percent of its large and ever-growing population engaged in some aspect of maritime commerce.

An explosion in population during the eighteenth century galvanized the developing Atlantic economy. The North American colonies saw a jump of almost two million people during the 1700s while Great Britain and Ireland both saw their own populations grow dramatically in these decades. Drops in

mortality, increased life expectancy and the absence of famine accelerated the increasing numbers of people. Such widespread growth also accounted for the expanding markets in North America and across the Atlantic where colonial merchants conducted so much of their business.

The British North American settlements reaped tremendous benefits because of their connections with distant markets. In particular, New England ship owners joined the British slavers in the profitable, if inhumane, trafficking of humans from West Africa to the colonial south and the Caribbean. New England ships, principally from Newport, Rhode Island and Boston, Massachusetts, vigorously participated in the business of trafficking human cargo. Smaller ocean-side ports such as Savannah, Georgia depended on New England ships for their supply of Africans destined for rice and indigo plantations.

New England slave ships also picked up naval stores from North Carolina and shipped them along with molasses from the Caribbean to New England ports. There molasses served as the basis for rum making, a major export of New England, while naval stores supplied shipbuilders with essential products for ship construction, the central business in New England's maritime world. African slaves in the Caribbean produced the molasses so important for New England's economy. Ironically, Africans as human cargo gave New England ships a vital source of profits.

The slave trade greatly contributed to the health of the New England economy. By the late eighteenth century some 49 percent of the Africans shipped to the Western Atlantic shores rode in the New England-built ships that also accounted for almost 70 percent of the freight. New England ships also helped sustain the growing carrying trade between the northern colonies and the Caribbean sugar islands. New England slavers also picked up bills of exchange and hard currency that later helped pay for manufactured goods imported from Great Britain. New England ships actually imported food from the middle colonies to makeup for their own grain deficits, created by a growing population and unproductive farms.

The plantation settlements along the North American coast and in the Caribbean also capitalized on this waterborne trade. Tobacco, long a staple of the Chesapeake, had achieved mass consumption status in England by the end of the seventeenth century. By the 1750s it enjoyed a legion of buyers in the expanding markets of urban consumers in Europe and especially in France, the largest buyer of North American tobacco. Europeans preferred the scent of tobacco in snuff. Scottish users, mostly men, also embraced tobacco, and by the end of the eighteenth century Scottish working women also took up the habit. As European and Scottish demand for tobacco rose so did the pressure on tobacco producers. They faced the challenge of expanding the amount of land under cultivation and bringing more African Americans to be slave laborers on their plantations.

Rice, too, depended on water transport for its vitality. Rice emerged as a central export along the Carolina and Georgia coasts during the eighteenth

century. Ships hauled rice to European and Caribbean markets and they brought African labor to the Carolina and Georgia coasts. The African labor provided the muscle for the rice plantations. Even more important, labor from West Africa incorporated their own rich knowledge of rice production into their management of the rice fields. Long experience in rice production gave these Africans a keen understanding of soil, rainfall needs, the employment of immersion in farming and the mechanics of using tidal water in rice production. West Africans also used their knowledge of processing rice for European and Caribbean markets. Planters knew which ethnic groups from West Africa held this knowledge and when possible they purchased men and women from Gambia and the Windward Coast where rice sustained dense human populations.

As much as the Chesapeake, the Caribbean depended on its connections to other parts of the Atlantic commercial empire to survive. The British islands in this sea embodied the singular dedication to one crop, sugar. This commitment made the Caribbean sugar islands critically dependent on the North American colonies for food and white-collar services and on Great Britain for investments, plantation managers and naval protection. The islands could have existed in no other way once they committed to sugar as their main export.

The sugar islands contributed to the growing prosperity of the British settlements in New York and Pennsylvania. Like their counterparts in New England, middle colony merchants, farmers and artisans, especially those from Philadelphia and its prosperous agricultural hinterland, provided the white-collar services, grains, mostly wheat, beef and pork as well as fish that maintained the caloric and protein needs of the Africans. The export of wheat from Pennsylvania also produced cash for local farmers who sold their grains to merchant mills. These produced high quality flour, some 40,000 barrels annually, for distant markets. Philadelphia made Southeastern Pennsylvania affluent with its huge demand for local services and food as well as the profits its overseas trade generated for merchants, farmers, agents and creditors.

Maryland and Virginia joined in capitalizing on the booming markets for foodstuffs. After 1750, Baltimore, Maryland developed into an important maritime stop because of the flourishing grain trade in the region and the major flour mills that appeared in the city to process the grains. These thrived for most of the eighteenth century because of their participation in the larger British commercial world. Norfolk, Virginia also grew into a substantial port because of its proximity to the Caribbean and the port's growing hinterland that produced goods for the Caribbean islands. Merchants in Maryland and Virginia also began to build their own ocean-going fleets after 1750. These carried grain and timber to the Caribbean.

Slave owners in North America were inextricably bound to the slave trade. Yet, the plantation operators simply lacked the funds to conduct long-term business operations. These funds remained in short supply in the Atlantic

world. The colonials depended on British lenders in London to support the slave trade. Financial figures in the British capital provided the resources that held together the slaving enterprise so central in the economic life of planters in the western Atlantic. These lenders generously awarded credit to slave traders, such as those from New England, whose voyages took months before any profit appeared on the ledgers. Just collecting a full complement of slaves for their ships also took a significant amount of time. For the lender, such exchanges produced a steady profit, but only on a delayed basis. Slavers had to dedicate substantial amounts of time to purchasing Africans from indigenous sellers even before the long crossing and final sales. A financial bridge from England to the North American colonies sustained the capture and movement of human beings from Africa to the western Atlantic for sale.

The demand for slaves also had indirect consequences for politics in West Africa. The Dahomean, Oyo and Ashanti states fought bitter wars for control of the slave trade and access to European goods. In part, they relied on European weapons and gunpowder purchased via the slave trade to conduct these wars. European flintlocks and gunpowder flowed into these coastal states. By the eighteenth century, the Oyo state, situated along the Bight of Benin, gathered power and wealth because of its slaving activities. The state covered a substantial area including present-day western Nigeria and the inland Yoruba states in West Africa. Oyo slave dealers sold Africans captured in war and raids to North American buyers through Gold Coast ports such as Lagos and Porto Novo.

Scottish and Scottish-Irish migration

The British colonies in North America participated in a massive reordering of the populations on both sides of the Atlantic. By the mid- and late eighteenth century human ties and interaction greatly enhanced the cohesiveness of the British commercial empire and bound the thousands who migrated to North America with their families and friends resident in the British Isles. These ties facilitated further migration as well as a steady flow of information eastward across the Atlantic.

The British Isles sent thousands of migrants to North America. For example, Scotland and Ireland witnessed substantial loss of people, beginning in the 1750s. These migrants usually ended in North America. They left their homes for many reasons. Significant population growth placed great pressure on resources in the countryside, which made migration the only viable choice for thousands. More than just a growing population, changes in farm methods and new means of production transformed relationships between landowners and tenants and between artisans and the market. These changes diminished the need for rural and artisan labor.

In Ireland the booming port of Belfast created an avenue of escape for many caught in these economic and social changes. Thousands of Ulster Scots left