

## Preface



The past, of course, can never change. But our understanding of the past changes constantly; and as a result, so does the writing of history. Shifts in historical understanding occur for many reasons. They can be the results of discoveries of new evidence or new methods of interpreting familiar evidence. They can be products of new theories of history, or of human behavior. Most of all, they can be reflections of new questions, preoccupations, and concerns that emerge out of the events of the historian's own time.

Two such questions have led to significant changes in this new edition. Even before the terrible events of September 11, 2001, it was clear to most Americans that the recent history of the United States had become more embedded than ever before in the larger history of the world. The phenomenon of globalization—a central topic of modern public conversation—has become an invitation to historians to reconsider aspects of America's more distant past, where international forces also played an important role in the nation's history. The internationalization of the writing of American history is still in its infancy, and there are many areas of our past that have not yet been reconsidered in light of world events. Still, it is not too early to consider some of the ways we might draw new perspectives on our own past by looking at the histories of other societies. And so one of the goals of this new edition is to introduce some aspects of world history into the history of the United States.

Another aspect of our own time that has affected our understanding of the American past is the explosion of modern science and technology, and the tremendous impact of that explosion on many aspects of our society and culture. But while the specific advances in science and technology of our time may be new, the tremendous impact of science and technology on the development of the United States is not. Another goal of this new edition, therefore, is to incorporate a great deal more history of science and technology into the story of the American past.

Despite these and other changes, which are described in detail in the section immediately following this preface, I have tried to retain in this edition what I believe has long been the principal strength of this book: a balanced picture of the American past that connects the newer histories of society and culture that have emerged in the last several decades with the more traditional stories of politics, diplomacy, and great public events. The United States is a nation of extraordinary diversity, and we cannot hope to understand its history without understanding the experiences of the many different groups and cultures that have shaped it. But America is also a nation, whose people share a common political system, a connection to a na-

tional economy, and a familiarity with a shared and, in modern times, enormously powerful popular culture. To understand the American past, therefore, it is necessary to examine both the nation's considerable diversity and the powerful forces that have drawn it together and allowed it to survive and flourish.

As always, I am grateful to many people for their help in producing this new edition. I was particularly blessed to have the help of several gifted research assistants—James Delbourgo, Robert Lifset, Moshik Temkin, and Adrienne Sockwell—who contributed enormously to the new material in this edition as well as to the revision of existing sections. I appreciate the very helpful reviews of this book submitted by a group of talented scholars and teachers:

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