

10	Second Wave Feminism: How Inclusive?	325
	William H. Chafe, <i>The Road to Equality, 1962–Today</i> [2000]	338
	Rosalyn Baxandall, <i>Re-Visioning the Women’s Liberation Movement’s Narrative</i> [2001]	352
11	The New Right: Rise . . . and Fall?	366
	Matthew D. Lassiter, <i>The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South</i> [2006]	381
	John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, <i>Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America</i> [1988]	396
	Index	409

Introduction to U.S. Historiography

1

These volumes reflect our understanding that history is an act of interpretation. They also reflect the dramatic changes in the practice of history over the last four decades. Fifty years ago, historians primarily interpreted politics, diplomacy, and war. Since then, the civil rights, antiwar, and women’s movements have dramatically opened up what historians and readers think of as history, while bringing into the profession women, African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans. Contemporary American historians write about nearly everything that has affected nearly everybody — from war to childbirth, agriculture to housework, illness to leisure, and banking systems to sewer systems. The expansive new history and the influx of new and diverse historians have linked the past more strongly to the present. Over a hundred years ago, the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce observed, “Every true history is contemporary history.”¹ He was trying to cast doubt on arguments of late-nineteenth-century historians (called “historicists” or “positivists”) that history was a science and could recover objective truths if properly practiced. Croce insisted that the past “in itself” is unknowable and that history represents our collective effort to make sense of the world. Inviting into the practice of history groups previously excluded from the profession has demonstrated the validity of Croce’s view in new ways. Views of the past vary not only with generations but also because of divergent experiences stemming from the historian’s gender, ethnicity, class, and race. This does not mean that we cannot find out anything solid about the past. But it does mean that no account of the past is free of the perspectives, prejudices, and priorities of its author and that the more varied the range of historians, the more likely their collective output will achieve a balanced totality.

When we read history, we are reading a particular historian’s encounter with the world. The historian is devoted to the “facts,” spends years of his or her life combing through the archives, and believes that the story she or he comes away with represents reality. But in writing, the historian renders this material into a story. The design of a narrative reflects its author’s

¹Benedetto Croce, *History: Its Theory and Practice* (New York, 1921), develops ideas he first articulated in 1893; for a sampling of the work of Croce and other philosophers of history in the first half of the twentieth century, see Hans Meyerhoff, ed., *The Philosophy of History in Our Time* (New York, 1959); and Patrick Gardiner, ed., *Theories of History* (Glencoe, Ill., 1959). See also Fritz Stern, ed., *Varieties of History: From Voltaire to the Present* (Cleveland and New York, 1956). An excellent guide through these philosophical thickets, designed especially for students, is Michael Stanford, *A Companion to the Study of History* (Oxford, 1994).

circumstances, values, ideology, nationality, school of thought, or theoretical and methodological preference. One historian is, we say, a Jeffersonian liberal, another a neo-Marxist, another a progressive or a conservative, still another a feminist or postmodernist. We note that Perry Miller's account of the Puritans reflects his alienation from twentieth-century American liberalism, John Hope Franklin's or Eric Foner's account of Reconstruction is shaped by his engagement with the civil rights movement, Oscar Handlin's or George Sanchez's history of immigration reflects his own ethnic experience, or Kathryn Sklar's ideas about Progressivism are informed by her feminism. In doing so, we acknowledge that personal perspective influences the angle of vision and the character of illumination that the historian brings to the historical landscape.

If history is partly craft and partly personal perspective, however, it is also partly science. An error as common as thinking history is "just the facts" is thinking it is "just your story." Whereas the nineteenth-century positivists thought that scientific method could guarantee objective truth in history just as it does in physics, some present-day postmodern theorists maintain that history is inescapably opinion. Postmodern criticism has encouraged historians to be more attentive to the possible layers of meaning in their documents, to their unacknowledged theoretical commitments, and to their use of language in writing history. But those postmodernists who assert that historians cannot arrive at truth, or that history is no different than fiction, err like the positivists but in the opposite direction. However parallel some of the techniques of ideologue, novelist, and historian, the historian is constrained by the record in a way the other two are not. One literary critic has written that, like other writers of nonfiction, the historian's "allegiance is to fact."² Historians willingly acknowledge that no account is absolutely true and is certainly never final, but they also insist that some histories are better than others. Something other than the historian's political, moral, or esthetic preferences comes into play in judging one history better than another, something, for want of a better term, objective.

While committed to a particular interpretation, the historian remains faithful to the evidence and determined to test the accuracy and the adequacy of every historical account. History succeeds when it tells us how things were, yet at the same time reminds us that the only access we have to the past is through the imagination of a finite and very contemporary human being. A historian reveals the contours of a landscape from a distinct perspective, but he or she does not invent the landscape.³ The British

²Sue Halpern, "The Awful Truth," *New York Review of Books* (September 25, 1997): 13.

³The most recent denial of history's truth claims is Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, 1988). Dorothy Ross, "Grand Narrative in American Historical Writing: From Romance to Uncertainty," *American Historical Review* 100 (June 1995): 651-77, offers brilliant critiques of historians' narrative strategies and somewhat elusive postmodernist suggestions about alternatives. Arguments for a middle ground between objectivism and Novick's relativism can be found in James T. Kloppenberg, "Objectivity and Historicism: A Century of American Historical Writing," *American*

historian Mary Fulbrook has recently affirmed convincingly that there are reasonable "criteria for preferring one historical approach or interpretation to another; and that these criteria need not be, as the postmodernists would have it, purely based on moral, political, or aesthetic considerations."⁴ Fulbrook insists that, when theoretically alert, historians can deploy "empirical evidence and inter-subjective professional dialogue" to produce "progress" in historical knowledge.⁵

In practical terms, historians make progress and get closer to the truth by arguing with one another. And so history relies on historiography, the study of history and its changing interpretations.⁶ Every historian begins work by immersing himself or herself in the subject and remains in dialogue with others interested in similar matters. Most books by serious historians include historiographical essays that locate the work within the context of related works. Historiography reminds us that history is not a closed book, not a collection of inarguable facts. There is always something to argue about in history, something that makes us think about the conduct of our contemporary lives. Thus, in a world of liberation movements and resurgent nationalism, it matters how we tell the story of the American Revolution or of the growth of America's overseas empire. In a society riven by conflicts over racism, sexual exploitation, and growing disparities between rich and poor, it matters how we narrate the history of labor, or the New Deal, or the rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Knowing that African American state governments during Reconstruction effectively delivered services while suffering only modest corruption makes it impossible to cast African American disfranchisement as a by-product of cleaning up government. It may also affect our judgments about contemporary liberals' confidence in elections as the road to equality and of conservatives' recent efforts to prevent "voter fraud." Similarly, knowing that some turn-of-the-century migrants to the United States returned to their homelands in great numbers might require us to adjust ideas about assimilation. It may also change the way we think about the dual loyalties of contemporary migrants.

Historical Review 94 (October 1989): 1011-30; Thomas L. Haskell, "Objectivity Is Not Neutrality: Rhetoric vs. Practice in Peter Novick's *That Noble Dream*," *History and Theory* 29 (1990): 129-57; David Hollinger, *In the American Province: Studies in the History and Historiography of Science* (Bloomington, Ind., 1985); and "AHRForum: Peter Novick's *That Noble Dream*: The Objectivity Question and the Future of the Historical Profession," *American Historical Review* 96 (June 1991): 675-708, with contributions from Hollinger and others and with a reply from Novick. See also Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacoby, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York, 1994); Alan B. Spitzer, *Historical Truth and Lies about the Past: Reflections on Dewey, Dreyfus, de Man, and Reagan* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1996); and Richard J. Evans, *In Defense of History* (New York, 1999). A more conservative and alarmist defense of objectivity is Keith Windschuttle, *The Killing of History: How Literary Critics and Social Theorists Are Murdering Our Past* (New York, 1997).

⁴Mary Fulbrook, *Historical Theory* (London, 2002), ix-x.

⁵*Ibid.*, 188, 30.

⁶J. H. Hexter defines historiography as "the craft of writing history" or the "rhetoric of history" in "The Rhetoric of History," originally published in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. 6 (New York, 1968), 368-94, and republished in revised form in his *Doing History* (Bloomington, Ind., 1971), 15-76.

Historical scholarship is thus in continual flux. But for careful students of historiography, disagreement is more interesting than agreement could ever be, for it holds the key to a better understanding not just of the past but of the present and possibly the future as well.

What follows is a sketch of the evolution of American history as a discipline over the course of the last two centuries.⁷ As with all attempts to fit diverse strands of thought and experience into a single story, ambiguities haunt this narration or are suppressed in the interest of a continuous story line. As much as possible, the following overview tries to balance human complexity with narrative simplicity.

Broadly speaking, the writing of American history has passed through four stages: the providential, the rationalist, the nationalist, and the professional. The ministers and magistrates of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and most of the women who wrote history through the Civil War, wrote a form of providential history. The Puritan practitioners who originated this form wished to justify the ways of God to man, and vice versa. Their history was a holy chronicle, revealing his Providence toward his Chosen People and their efforts to build a New Canaan in the wilderness. The preeminent work in this tradition was William Bradford's *Of Plimoth Plantation*. Written during the 1630s and 1640s when Bradford was governor of the colony, the book recounts the fate of a tiny band of Puritans who fled England for Holland and then for the New World. They rested in the certainty that God's hand led them forward, that their disasters were his rebukes, their successes his merciful rewards. Governor John Winthrop of Massachusetts wrote such a history, as did Cotton Mather in the next century. Mary Rowlandson's eyewitness account of her own captivity employed the same providential themes. Well into the nineteenth century, male and female historians, including Mercy Otis Warren, Elizabeth Peabody, and Hannah Adams, viewed the story of America as an extension of the history of the Protestant Reformation. The Revolution became for them a triumph of reformed Christianity over paganism and Catholicism. And the United States as a whole took the place of New England as the model of Christian virtue for the corrupt Old World to emulate.⁸

In the late eighteenth century, as the European Enlightenment came to America, history took on a secular and naturalistic cast. A new class of intellectuals, influenced by Newton, Locke, and the French philosophes, had come to see history, like the physical universe, as subject to natural law. These rationalist historians flourished alongside and sometimes superseded the clerics who had once dominated the educated class in the colonies. The new story they told was of progress, reason — and, indeed, “the progress of reason” — in human affairs. Although a few Protestant ministers responded to the new intel-

⁷On the development of the historical profession in America, see John Higham, *History: Professional Scholarship in America* (New York, 1973). See also works cited in footnote 3.

⁸Nina Baym, *American Women Writers and the Work of History* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1995), particularly “History from a Divine Point of View,” 46–66.

lectual currents,⁹ most historians in the late eighteenth century were lawyer-politicians, planter-aristocrats, merchants, professionals, and, in the case of Judith Sargent Murray, the daughter and wife of a minister. Among the most prominent were Thomas Hutchinson, leading merchant and royal governor of Massachusetts; William Smith, physician, landowner, and prominent politician of New York; and Robert Beverley and William Byrd of Virginia, both planter-aristocrats and officeholders. These men possessed classical educations, fine private libraries, and the leisure time to use both. Their writing was more refined and allusive than the studiously plain prose of their Puritan predecessors. They wrote history for their own satisfaction, but also to explain to the enlightened world the success of men like themselves — free, bold, intelligent, and ambitious men who built fortunes and governed provinces that embodied a perfect balance between liberty and order.

Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (written in the midst of revolutionary turmoil and finally published in 1785) is a highly evolved product of this rationalist tradition. America is for Jefferson, as it was for the Puritans, a model for the world, but natural law takes the place of divine providence in directing its affairs. Self-interest, not piety, motivates men; reason, not faith, allows them to discover and pursue their destiny. The fruits of liberty include not only astonishing material prosperity and advances in knowledge but moral progress as well. The new nation is destined to open the way toward a new era in human history not only because its natural resources are vast but also because free people are virtuous and possessed of the moral energy to change the world. Some evangelical Protestants called Jefferson a “confirmed infidel” and a “howling atheist” for his emphasis on human as opposed to divine agency. But Jefferson's most potent enemies were political: in the 1790s, he led the Republican opposition to the Federalist Party of Washington, Hamilton, and Adams. During the brutal presidential election campaigns of 1800 and 1804, both of which Jefferson won, Federalist writers combed the *Notes* to find ammunition against Jefferson the infidel, the apologist for slavery, the lover of French revolutionary excess. Their charges reveal, among other things, that history had already become politicized. History was a story about how wealth, power, rights, and wrongs came to be in this world — how causes produced effects, and how human actions could change those effects. But the story for the rationalists was no more open-ended than it was for the providentialists: it still pointed toward improvement. Through most of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth, American history remained the story of the progress of the “Empire of Liberty.”

As the nineteenth century wore on, historians began to temper their Enlightenment assurance about human beings' capacity for rational improvement. They increasingly believed that races possessed different inherent capacities and viewed the rise of America as the triumph of Anglo-Saxon

⁹See Edmund S. Morgan, *The Gentle Puritan: A Life of Ezra Stiles, 1727–1795* (New Haven, Conn., 1962).

people over inferior races. Similar strains of thinking in Europe helped to justify colonization. George Bancroft, the most distinguished American historian of the mid-nineteenth century, organized the history of America around three themes: progress, liberty, and Anglo-Saxon destiny. Bancroft deviated from his own rationalist background after studying in Germany, where he absorbed the romantic emphasis on the inborn virtues of the "folk." The idea that Teutonic peoples (who included Anglo-Saxons) were racially destined to spread freedom across the globe was central to this romantic nationalism. In twelve volumes published between 1834 and 1882, Bancroft chronicled the spread of Anglo-Saxon ideas of political freedom, their perfection in American democratic institutions, and their realization in Jacksonian democracy.¹⁰

Even women historians such as Hannah Adams, Susanna Rowson, Elizabeth Peabody, and Emma Willard, whose evangelical commitments made them political enemies of the Jacksonian Democratic Party, manifested romantic nationalist thinking not unlike Bancroft's. In her *Pioneer Women of the West* (1852), Elizabeth Ellet focused on conflict between white settlers and indigenous people. As Nina Baym put it in 1995, Ellet "is as close to a genocidal writer as one is likely to find."¹¹ Some women, however, did break the barriers of gender and nationalist history. Helen Hunt Jackson explored white-Indian relations in both fiction and history. Her *Century of Dishonor* (1881) — which she sent to every member of Congress — documented the American nation's shameful dealings with Indians. Intent on reaching a wider popular audience, she then published a novel, *Ramona*, that dramatized white appropriation of Indian lands and other cruelties. At the same time, white and Indian anthropologists began studying native cultures, some because they thought Indians were disappearing, others because they wished to counteract racist myths by displaying the vigor and richness of Indian cultures.¹² Unfortunately, neither criticism nor ethnographic knowledge seriously affected the trajectory of mainstream history. Not until the arrival of the inclusionary politics of the late twentieth century would the work of anthropologists and ethnographers find its way into the pages of historical scholarship.

By the 1870s, Bancroft's self-congratulatory epic history had become conventional wisdom. But changes were afoot in the discipline. The first change was in leadership: amateur writers increasingly gave way to professional historians. As college education became more common among middle-class Americans and as industrialization reinforced the value of technical and scientific knowledge, historians increasingly concerned themselves with specialized training, research methodology, and educational credentials. History became a profession like any other. This meant, among other things,

¹⁰On Bancroft and other romantic historians, see David Levin, *History as Romantic Art* (New York, 1963).

¹¹Baym, *American Women Writers*, 219, 238; other enemies of Jackson, such as historians Francis Parkman and W. H. Prescott, wrote a similar kind of romantic-racial epic: see Levin, *History as Romantic Art*.

¹²See Volume One, Chapter 3.

that it would be practiced by the only people who had access to advanced education — white men. Many of them were trained in Germany, but in 1876 Johns Hopkins University became the first exclusively graduate research institution in the United States. Soon thereafter, graduate study spread to the midwestern land-grant universities and the Ivy League. The newly minted historians usually planned careers in the same university system that had trained them. They prided themselves on rigorous research and a capacity to distinguish scientifically verified truth from romantic notion. Reflecting on these developments in 1894, Henry Adams imagined this new professional historian "dreaming of the immortality that would be achieved by the man who should successfully apply Darwin's method to the facts of human history."¹³

Along with Frederick Jackson Turner, Adams exemplified the first generation of professional historians, which held sway from about 1870 to 1910. A scion of the great family that had produced presidents and statesmen, Adams might appear at first to be a throwback to the era of patrician amateurs. Politics was the career he had hoped for, while history seemed an avocation. But as his political hopes dimmed, his professional ambitions ignited. In 1870, he was invited to Harvard to teach the first seminar ever devoted to historical research at that institution. Adams taught the meticulous methods of German scholarship and insisted that history's goal was to develop knowledge every bit as sound as that in physics. His exhaustively researched nine-volume history of the Jefferson and Madison administrations represented the fruit of his commitment to the scientific method and remains a classic. Although he left Harvard after a few years, his career exemplified the new professionalism that would permanently transform the discipline.

Turner could not have been more different from Adams in background and personal circumstances. Born of modest means in a rural town in Wisconsin, he attended the University of Wisconsin, received a Ph.D. in history at Johns Hopkins, and went on to teach at Wisconsin and Harvard. While different from Adams in so many ways, Turner shared the belief that history should be a science. He fulfilled Adams's prophecy in using Darwin's evolutionary theory to explain the genesis of the American character. Just as one species surpassed another, he argued in his famous "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," so one frontier environment succeeded another in the course of American expansion. As successive frontiers grew more remote from European antecedents, they increasingly nurtured the distinctive American virtues of self-reliance, egalitarianism, tolerance, practicality, and realism.¹⁴ Although he embodied the new scientific history, Turner's sweeping generalizations and his assumptions about the "progress of the

¹³Henry Adams, "The Tendency of History," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1894* (Washington, D.C., 1895), 19.

¹⁴Turner's essay, originally delivered as his presidential address to the American Historical Association in 1893, can be found in *The Frontier in American History* (New York, 1920). For more on Turner, see John Higham, *Writing American History: Essays on Modern Scholarship* (Bloomington, Ind., 1970), 118–29.

race" linked him to his nationalist predecessors. He conflated America with capitalism, democracy, and the heroic deeds of the pioneers.

Between 1910 and 1945, a second generation of professional scholars — the Progressive historians — rose to prominence. They were identified with the Progressive movement in politics, which worked to combat corporate and political corruption and the suffering of working families in early-twentieth-century America.¹⁵ They observed that modernity — industrialization, urbanization, and class conflict — had fundamentally transformed the society. If democracy was to survive, people needed a materially based history of changing institutions and economic interests, not fables about the progress of liberty and justice. Progressives saw history as politics, not science or art. To be sure, science was needed to produce usable facts and art to persuade people to act on them, but Progressive historians wanted their history to provoke political action above all. Neither genteel amateurs nor morally neutral scientists, Progressives were muscular intellectuals — or, as they would have gladly called themselves, reformers.

In 1913, the most famous Progressive historian, Charles A. Beard, published *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution*, one of the most influential books ever written in American history. It argued that the Constitution was the product not of wise men intent on balancing liberty and order, but of a clique of wealthy merchants and landowners who wanted a central government strong enough to defend their privileges against the unruly masses. A series of books culminating in *The Rise of American Civilization* (1927), which Beard wrote with his wife, Mary Ritter Beard, elaborated the thesis that American history was a succession of conflicts between economic interest groups. Although critics found flaws with his economic determinism and faith in Progressive reform, Beard managed to inspire a generation to look to history for answers to the questions that pressed most insistently on the democratic citizenry.

With a literary flair that exceeded that of either Turner or Beard, Vernon L. Parrington brought the Progressive interpretation to intellectual history in *Main Currents in American Thought*. His story was arrestingly simple: all of American history was shaped by the contest between Jeffersonian and Hamiltonian ways of thinking. Jefferson, champion of the people, represented decentralized agrarian democracy; Hamilton, tribune of the privileged, stood for centralized commercial aristocracy. From the moment the Revolution ended, these two ideas fought for control of American minds. In whatever guise — Federalist versus Republican, Whig versus Jacksonian, Conservative versus Progressive — all these conflicts reflected a continuous economic dynamic that animated American history. The function of history was to uncover the economic basis of political ideas and thereby to educate the citizenry. Parrington wanted his fellow citizens to take on the task of fighting reaction and pushing reform.

¹⁵See Chapter 6.

Progressive history challenged the profession in another way: it insisted that historical knowledge is relative. In an essay published in 1935 entitled "That Noble Dream," Charles Beard observed that one bar to objectivity is that the historian's documentation is always partial. More important, like Croce he insisted that the historian is never neutral and therefore must write an interpretation, not a scientific re-creation, of the past. The dream of objectivity must be discarded by the serious and honest historian. Acknowledging one's politics and prejudices does not weaken the value of the historian's work, Beard insisted, but rather strengthens it. An interpretation — which he defined as an "overarching hypothesis or conception employed to give coherence and structure to past events" — should be measured not by whether it is correct or incorrect but by whether it is useful to people who are trying to improve their world.¹⁶ Carl L. Becker, a Progressive historian of early America, made the promotion of relativism one of the central purposes of his career. In his 1931 presidential address to the American Historical Association, "Everyman His Own Historian," and in other essays, Becker repeated that, however indispensable the scientific pursuit of facts, history meant nothing unless it was yoked to the political necessities of real people. History's obligation is not to the dead but to the living; its account of the past is "perhaps neither true nor false, but only the most convenient form of error."¹⁷

Female and African American scholars challenged the profession in still other ways, though historians were not yet ready to respond. Mary Ritter Beard, for example — who published many works with her husband and many books about women on her own, culminating in *Woman as a Force in History* in 1946 — achieved little or no recognition from the profession. She entered Columbia graduate school with her husband in 1902, but dropped out two years later and subsequently nurtured a hostility for academics and for college education for women. She chose to wear her amateur status like a crown in the face of a profession that refused to welcome her.¹⁸ Other women in the Progressive Era who chose to write women's history similarly saw their work ignored by their male colleagues.¹⁹

African American historians fared little better. At the American Historical Association meeting in 1909, W. E. B. Du Bois, having earned a Ph.D. from Harvard, offered a startling reinterpretation of Reconstruction that focused on the lives of poor blacks and whites. In the face of a daunting tradition condemning Reconstruction, he argued that it had briefly

¹⁶Charles A. Beard, "That Noble Dream," *American Historical Review* 41 (October 1935): 74–87.

¹⁷This and related essays may be found in *Everyman His Own Historian* (New York, 1935). See also Phil L. Snyder, ed., *Detachment and the Writing of History: Essays and Letters of Carl L. Becker* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1958). For more on historical relativism, see Higham, *History*; a neo-relativist argument can be found in Novick, *That Noble Dream*, and other works cited in note 3, above. Still very useful as a philosophical guide is Jack W. Mieland, *Scepticism and Historical Knowledge* (New York, 1965).

¹⁸Ann J. Lane, *Mary Ritter Beard, A Sourcebook* (New York, 1977), 33, 53–54.

¹⁹Helen Sumner's *Women and Industry in the U.S.* and Edith Abbott's *Women in Industry*, both published in 1910, were barely noticed by the male profession.

provided the South with democratic government, public schools, and other needed social programs. Like other Progressives, Du Bois found economic causes underlying political events; unlike them, however, he included black people as legitimate historical subjects. This simple act of inclusion irrevocably altered his assessment of Reconstruction. Published in 1935, his book attracted many favorable reviews, but most historians ignored it. Du Bois's views did not enter the mainstream of the profession until John Hope Franklin's and Kenneth Stampp's revisionist interpretations appeared in the 1960s.²⁰

The Progressives' economic determinism and their relativism both had an enormous impact on the history profession, but neither Beard nor Becker held the center stage exclusively or for long. Critics of both progressive and relativist assertions began to multiply. In part, the critics were responding to the rise of totalitarianism, which made faith in progress seem naive and relativism seem cowardly. The fact that Charles Beard quite conspicuously continued to oppose American involvement in World War II, at a time when most left-wing intellectuals were rapidly shifting from pacifism to intervention, seemed to many intellectuals to emphasize the narrow-mindedness of the Progressive point of view. In the face of Hitler and Stalin, and especially after the horrors of Auschwitz, Dresden, and Hiroshima, American historians asked themselves if Progressive history had ill-prepared them and their fellow citizens for the harrowing obligations of the twentieth century. But it was not just the weight of tragic events that shifted the historiographical terrain.

In the 1930s and into the 1950s, younger historians increasingly found the Progressive historians' psychology shallow, their social analysis predictable, and their moral judgments superficial. Like the philosophers and theologians who were criticizing liberalism for its facile optimism and obtuseness in the face of human tragedy, these critics charged that Progressive historians underestimated humankind's propensity for evil, overestimated its capacity for good, and turned history into a simple morality play. More important, they found the Progressive insistence on explaining most events as the product of conflict between rich and poor, East and West, reactionaries and reformers, and the like to be more hindrance than help in making sense of specific historical problems. More and more historians were insisting that, for better *and* worse, consensus rather than conflict marked American political history, that the absence of European-style class conflict had indelibly shaped American institutions and ideas. In Europe, the crises of depression and war led many historians in radical directions; here, under the influence of the Cold War, it led toward what came to be called "consensus history."

The caricature of consensus historians is that they asserted the unity and homogeneity of America's past, the stability of basic institutions, and the existence of a homogeneous national character. When they did acknowl-

²⁰W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880* (New York, 1992), vii–viii, xvi. For more on the historiography of Reconstruction, see Chapter 2.

edge that conflict occurred between sections, classes, and groups, the consensus historians insisted that contestants fought within a common liberal framework and never really disagreed over fundamentals. Moreover, this caricature continues, consensus historians doubted the value of social change and, having observed a world brutalized by fascism and communism, feared mass movements of any kind. In this reading, consensus historians trimmed the sails of history to the conservative and anti-Communist winds of the McCarthy era. In fact, so-called consensus historians were remarkably diverse, and many were liberals. Some were indeed "Cold War liberals" who believed that a defense of American values and institutions was more important than social criticism at a moment when totalitarianism threatened to take over the world. However, there was no simple correlation between Cold War attitudes and consensus historiography. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., who never departed from the Progressive camp, was the leading Cold War liberal in the history profession. On the other hand, the distinguished Columbia University historian Richard Hofstadter, who was called a consensus historian and was a sharp critic of Progressive historiography, was equally if not more critical of the consensus he found in American history.

Some consensus history did prove useful to cold warriors. In his influential *The Liberal Tradition in America*, Louis Hartz argued that because America lacked a feudal tradition, it escaped the struggles between reactionaries, liberals, and socialists that characterized the history of most European countries. The United States instead had a three-century-long tradition of liberal consensus, wherein all Americans subscribed to the Lockean tenets of individualism, private property, natural rights, and popular sovereignty. The differences among Americans, Hartz maintained, were over means rather than ends. And thus America had very little class conflict and little ground for the breeding of class-based ideologies. Socialism could mean little in America because nearly everyone had access to a middle-class way of life. Conservatism, too, could mean little because the only thing to conserve — the only continuous tradition — was liberalism.²¹

Another postwar consensus historian, Daniel Boorstin, wrote a three-volume epic story of settlement, westward migration, and community building. Although he echoed the Progressive Turner in many ways, Boorstin described characters who were largely uninterested in politics and ideology. Most of them were pragmatic, energetic, healthy-minded "Versatiles," ready to conquer a continent, invent the balloon-frame house, experiment with popular democracy, and in the process develop the freest and most prosperous society on earth. Boorstin's approach was social-historical. Like the more radical social historians who would soon transform the discipline,

²¹Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution* (New York, 1955). A brilliant critique (and also appreciation) of Hartz can be found in James T. Kloppenberg, "From Hartz to Tocqueville: Shifting the Focus from Liberalism to Democracy in America," in Meg Jacobs, William J. Novak, and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *The Democratic Experiment: New Directions in American Political History* (Princeton, N.J., 2003), 350–80.

Boorstin insisted that American society and culture were decisively shaped by millions of ordinary people, not by elites. But for Boorstin, those anonymous masses were middle class at heart and yearned for nothing so much as a house with a picket fence and a little room to breathe. Distinct from most of the other consensus historians, Boorstin preached a political message that might be called conservative populism.

If Hartz's insistence on ideological homogeneity and Boorstin's populist social history seemed to affirm a Cold War consensus, the political tonality of Richard Hofstadter's work proved harder to gauge. Beginning in 1948 with the publication of *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It*, Hofstadter argued that the liberal tradition had failed to escape the acquisitive and individualistic assumptions that had shaped it. Supposed reformers such as the Populists and Progressives looked back with nostalgia to an era of self-made men, rather than facing up to the fundamental problems of an industrialized and corporate America. Even Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who did not share the nostalgia common to the Progressive tradition, was primarily a pragmatist whose strength lay in the force of his personality rather than in any consistent ideology or philosophy. In *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.*, Hofstadter exposed what he saw as the curious blend of racism, nativism, and provincialism that shaped the Populists and would later manifest itself in paranoid scares such as McCarthyism in the 1950s. All such movements meant "to restore the conditions prevailing before the development of industrialism and the commercialization of agriculture."²² Hofstadter maintained that American political conflict reflected not the clash of economic interests but the search by different ethnic and religious groups for a secure status in society. By the latter third of the nineteenth century, the middle-class offspring of Anglo-Saxon Protestant families found themselves displaced from traditional positions of leadership by a nouveau-riche plutocracy, on the one hand, and urban immigrant political machines, on the other. Responding to this displacement, the elite launched a moral crusade to resuscitate older Protestant and individualistic values — the Progressive movement. In this campaign "to maintain a homogeneous Yankee civilization," Hofstadter wrote, "I have found much that was retrograde and delusive, a little that was vicious, and a good deal that was comic."²³

Hofstadter emerged from within the Progressive historiographical tradition, briefly flirted with Marxism in the 1930s, and thereafter, though his sympathies remained on the left, considered himself effectively nonpolitical.²⁴ In a sense, his entire career can be seen as a lover's quarrel with liberalism, in the course of which he recognized its promise but relentlessly

²²Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York, 1955), 62.

²³*Ibid.*, 11.

²⁴For a brief assessment of the historian, see Eric Foner, "The Education of Richard Hofstadter," in *Who Owns History? Rethinking the Past in a Changing World* (New York, 2002), 25–46; other assessments are cited in his footnotes. For a fuller picture, see Richard S. Brown's fine biography, *Richard Hofstadter* (Chicago, 2006).

exposed its inadequacies, delusions, and failures. Despite his own leftist tendencies, Hofstadter resisted completely the temptation to find heroic victories for the people in what he saw as a depressing chronicle of consensus based on common cupidity. America was more illiberal than the Progressive historians would prefer; they wrote history that fostered the illusion of liberal reform, but he would not.

Hofstadter's powerful critique of American liberalism was shaped not only by his evolving political views, but also by his reading of twentieth-century social science research. Based on that reading, he began to address in new ways a familiar set of questions about American society. Who were American reformers, and what did they want? Hofstadter used the findings of social scientists to explain the significance of status in shaping social behavior. If abolitionists, Populists, and Progressives had not in fact democratized America, just what had they accomplished? Hofstadter looked to the sociology of bureaucracy and complex organizations, as well as research into the modernization of societies in the European and non-European world, to illuminate an era in which Americans were moving from small towns to big cities, from simple and homogeneous to complex and pluralistic social structures. To explain the reformers' passions, he employed social-psychological concepts such as projection, displacement, scapegoating, and the authoritarian personality.

If Hofstadter derived critical insights from social science, another consensus historian, Edmund S. Morgan, looked elsewhere. A student of Perry Miller, the distinguished Harvard historian of early American religion and culture, Morgan echoed his mentor's distrust of Progressive history and of liberalism generally. Liberalism, Miller had believed, possessed few intellectual resources with which to criticize the modern pursuit of individualism, self-expression, and material success. In the premodern and therefore preliberal Puritan world, Morgan (like Miller) found depths of wisdom that seemed lacking in the twentieth century. Wary of those who applied present-day assumptions to the task of understanding the past, Morgan refused to see Puritans as sexually repressed and obsessed with sin. And he refused to see colonial dissidents as anticipators or forerunners of latter-day democratic liberalism. Thus, in his earliest works, he portrayed Anne Hutchinson and Roger Williams not as progressive critics of Puritan oligarchy, but as self-righteous zealots, nihilists even. In contrast, Governor John Winthrop was not a repressive Puritan oligarch but a man striving to live responsibly in a deeply imperfect world that required order more than individual freedom for visionaries.²⁵

If Progressives and Marxists insisted that economic interests and material forces shaped history, Morgan would follow his mentor Perry Miller in insisting that ideas mattered. Winthrop and his adversaries were obsessed with ideas, led by them, willing to suffer and even die for them. In 1967, in a striking demonstration of this belief, Morgan admitted that he had been wrong

²⁵See especially Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop* (Boston, 1958).

about Roger Williams. In *Roger Williams: The Church and the State*, Morgan now acknowledged that Williams's ideas were momentous. Williams had understood that conscientious protest was an act "not so much of defiance as of discovery." What Williams discovered — what John Winthrop could not — was that separation of church and state was absolutely necessary, first, to preserve religion from being corrupted by the state and, second, to protect the state from becoming the engine of religious intolerance. Thus, the historian who began his career by rebuking modern liberals for misrepresenting the strange world of seventeenth-century Puritanism found himself in the 1960s affirming the connection between Puritanism and the tradition of civil-libertarian protest that became a hallmark of the later democratic republic.²⁶ Perhaps the America he and his students encountered in the 1960s forced this most scrupulous of historians to reflect on what Croce called the contemporaneous character of history.

Morgan's work spanned a great variety of subjects from Puritan thought, to the Revolution, to slavery. Although he never abandoned his faith in the power of ideas, by the late 1960s his research into the origins of slavery had plunged him deeply into social history, that is, into the realm of group experience and collective fate that seemed very far away from the world of intellectuals and political leaders that had once so occupied him. Executing a dazzling intellectual pirouette, Morgan came to insist that there was nothing incompatible between asserting that consensus dominated mainstream American political and intellectual history and insisting that the most egregious form of oppression — slavery — lay at the heart of the American social experience. Indeed, he claimed, it was precisely because white America relied on slavery to keep the lowest of the low under control, thereby minimizing class conflict among the free, that liberal democracy was able to flower in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Morgan's *American Slavery, American Freedom* is the book named "most admired" more frequently than any other in a 1994 poll of American historians.²⁷ Morgan's complex argument cannot be summarized here, but its power can be attributed to its capacity to span the historiography wars that marked the history profession in the 1960s and for several decades thereafter. What historian John Higham called the "Cult of American Consensus" had made American history tame and predictable.²⁸ Within that consensus perspective, eighteenth-century America appeared to be the spawning ground for middle-class democracy; the Revolution was a largely intellectual movement; radicals, abolitionists, Reconstructionists, and socialists were maladjusted sufferers of status anxiety; and the Cold War was a noble (if reluctant) effort to save the world from totalitarianism. In the face of this antiseptic treatment of the past, dissenters predictably arose. A new

²⁶Edmund S. Morgan, *Roger Williams: The Church and the State* (New York, 1967).

²⁷Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975); the historians' poll and commentary on it can be found in *Journal of American History* 81 (December 1994).

²⁸John Higham, "The Cult of 'American Consensus': Homogenizing Our History," *Commentary* 27 (February 1959): 93–100.

generation of neo-Progressives began to insist that conflict, not consensus, marked the American past.

The assault on consensus history reflected the erosion of political consensus in 1960s America. Already in the late 1950s, the emergence of the civil rights movement signaled the reemergence of the African American struggle against inequality and racism in American society. For a time, the movement could be subsumed under the rubric of liberal reform, welcomed as a perfection of liberal democracy rather than a fundamental challenge to it. But by the mid-1960s, the racial animosity and poverty that had once been invisible to whites, and for a time appeared readily curable, came to seem more endemic and intractable. Radical inequality would require radical measures — at least, some insisted, measures more radical than integration or voting rights. When New Left critics of American society looked for radical antecedents in prominent historical accounts, they found chronicles of consensus — but not for long. Increasingly, younger historians found in older Progressive historical works and in neo-Marxist scholarship from Europe the inspiration to rewrite American history as a chronicle of struggle — for working-class power, for racial equality, for women's rights, for ethnic identity, and for all forms of social justice. The Vietnam War added immense energy to this endeavor. As college campuses became centers of protest against the war, historians absorbed the growing suspicion that the U.S. foreign policy establishment served interests quite distinct from the national interest. They condemned all forms of concentrated power — corporations, political parties, government bureaucracies, professional organizations, and the like — that seemed to profit from inequality and promote injustice in the United States and around the world.

Methodological innovation involving the increased interaction of history with social science, comparative history, and quantitative methods only reinforced tendencies toward radical critique. While Hofstadter, Hartz, and other historians had already begun to pay attention to social science research and comparative approaches, the move to quantification was new. With the exception of economic historians, most historians had no acquaintance with the use of scientifically measurable historical data. One of the attractions of quantitative techniques was quite old-fashioned: like the positivists of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, modern-day quantifiers sought the authority of science. They also wanted to strengthen their claim to the growing pools of research money available in the postwar United States from both government and private funders of social science research. At the same time, the urge to quantify drew energy from a democratic urge to capture the reality of ordinary lives through social history. Peasants, workers, slaves, migrants — whole categories of human beings — were invisible because they had been "inarticulate," that is, illiterate and ignored by those who left written documents. Quantitative history suggested a way to make them speak: through records that traced collective behavior and from which ideas, values, intentions, and beliefs might be inferred. Thus John Demos surprisingly could bring in view the interior lives of the earliest settlers of Plymouth colony through the analysis of wills, deeds, contracts, and

probate records.²⁹ On a broader canvas, Paul Kleppner's quantitative analysis of voting records revealed the ethnic motives of voters in the nineteenth-century Midwest; and as a result of computer analysis of manuscript censuses and other data, Stephen Thernstrom discovered the astounding geographical (and limited social) mobility of working-class New Englanders in the industrial era.³⁰

Quantitative historians drew inspiration not only from the social and behavioral sciences but also from the work of historians associated with the French journal *Annales*. Led by Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch, who had begun using quantitative techniques in the 1930s and 1940s, these French historians strove for "total history" — a history that recorded the myriad experiences of masses of people, not just the dramatic events that featured prominent actors. In the hands of a leading figure in the *Annales* school, Fernand Braudel, history became a slow, majestic procession of material change — change in population, agricultural production, prices, trade, and so on — that created, unbeknownst to any individual, the true conditions of life in medieval and early modern Europe. This version of social history was "history with the politics left out," indeed, history with all the usual markers of individual consciousness left out.³¹

Others trying to write a new social history took a very different tack. For them, social history meant history from the bottom up. Though sometimes inspired by the quantifiers' capacity to occupy a distant perch and from there comprehend a vast historical terrain, these new social historians more closely observed institutional change and group action. They refused to believe that the masses were inaccessible to creative historical research. In fact, social historians began to find copious evidence of conscious thought and action among the lower orders. Slave narratives, diaries of farm wives and artisan workers, letters and articles in obscure newspapers, broadsides and pamphlets, court and police records, institutional memoranda and reports — these and many other sources began to give up their secrets. The new social historians were neo-progressives, in a way, but far more radical than Beard and Becker. Piecemeal political reform would not easily remake a society hideously distorted by racism and sexism, dominated by immense corporations, regulated by "therapeutic" bureaucracies, and dedicated to the systematic exploitation of the third world. Not Progressive reformers, but militant, even revolutionary activists — like the artisan revolutionaries in the 1770s, the abolitionists and radical Reconstructionists in the nineteenth

²⁹John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New York, 1970). See also Kenneth A. Lockridge, *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years* (New York, 1970); a later community study focusing on the Chesapeake is Darrett B. and Anita H. Rutman, *A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia, 1650-1750* (New York, 1984).

³⁰Paul Kleppner, *The Third Electoral System: 1853-1892: Parties, Voters, and Political Cultures* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1979); Stephen Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth-Century City* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), and *The Other Bostonians: Poverty and Progress in an American Metropolis* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973).

³¹Of Braudel's many works, perhaps the most accessible is *Capitalism and Material Life, 1400-1800* (New York, 1967).

century, and the most combative unionists in the 1930s — became models for latter-day radicals in the 1960s and 1970s.³²

As Chapter 3 makes clear, among the first subjects to respond to this approach was labor history or, as it came increasingly to be called, working-class history. Inspired especially by the English neo-Marxist E. P. Thompson, new labor historians rewrote the history of unions and unionization but, more importantly, of working-class families and communities, working-class politics and culture. The people whom they studied, far from seeming to be either aspirants to middle-class status or alien radicals, came to seem at once both more militantly class-conscious and more deeply rooted in American society and culture. Other fields, such as immigration history, African American history, and women's history, similarly experienced a dramatic renaissance. Both white and black scholars helped turn the history of slavery into one of the most exciting and fruitful fields of history. Recovering the seminal scholarship of African American historians such as W. E. B. Du Bois and Eric Williams, and plunging into previously ignored archival sources, the historians of the 1960s found not passivity but agency among slaves, not imitation of white culture but cultural resistance and the endurance of African traditions and practices. They insisted that the Civil War had been fought to abolish slavery, that African Americans played a crucial part in its conduct and success, and that only force and betrayal — not the alleged cultural deprivation or political immaturity of blacks — had led to the failure of Reconstruction.³³

Women's historians began to effect a similarly profound change in the standard narrative of American history. If women had been excluded from the conventionally male realms of power and privilege, they had no less been excluded from the pages of American history. Inspired by the women's liberation movement and the simultaneous arrival of history from the bottom up in the 1960s and 1970s, male and especially female historians began to hear the voices of women and transfer them to the pages of

³²See, for example, Alfred F. Young, ed., *The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism* (DeKalb, Ill., 1976); John Hope Franklin, *Reconstruction: After the Civil War* (Chicago, 1961); Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction, 1865-1877* (New York, 1965); and Daniel J. Leab, ed., *The Labor History Reader* (Urbana, Ill., 1980), which includes classic essays published over a twenty-year period. A sweeping narrative (and celebration) of the rise of radical history can be found in Jonathan M. Wiener, "Radical Historians and the Crisis in American History, 1959-1980," *Journal of American History* 76 (September 1989): 399-434, part of a roundtable that includes criticism and commentary from a variety of historians and a response from Wiener.

³³On slavery, see John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York, 1972); George P. Rawick, *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community* (Westport, Conn., 1972); and Leslie Howard Owens, *This Species of Property: Slave Life and Culture in the Old South* (New York, 1976). On African Americans in the Civil War, the classic study is Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the Civil War* (Boston, 1953), which James M. McPherson built upon in *The Negro's Civil War: How American Negroes Felt and Acted during the War for the Union* (New York, 1965). On Reconstruction, the epic work is C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South* (Baton Rouge, La., 1951); see also works by Franklin and Stampp cited in footnote 32 and others cited in Volume One, Chapters 4 and 9.

history.³⁴ In the suffrage movement and the labor movement; in the records of settlement houses and women's academies and colleges; in the records of births and marriages, of prostitution arrests and temperance campaigns; in the copious records of literary and moral reform publications, in which women argued both for equality and for recognition of their distinctive feminine gifts; and in many other sources, historians of women rewrote the story of America from its very beginnings up to the recent past. They did not merely give women a place in the existing narratives; rather, they reconceived whole fields of history. Thus, for example, the culture of slavery appears to be a realm not simply of *either* accommodation *or* resistance, but — when women are brought centrally into its historical reconstruction — a realm of endurance and cultural creativity.³⁵ Likewise, the history of progressive reform becomes the story of women, denied direct access to political office, asserting their rights to set the public agenda and to demand maternalist state action in the interest of reforming the social household.³⁶

In these and many other ways, historians of women and of African Americans joined a broader wave of socially critical scholarship that had moved very far away from even the history of the most progressive men of earlier generations. Today it seems that every man and woman has become his and her own historian in a way even Carl Becker would have found surprising (and cheering). Considerable success in democratizing the academy in the wake of civil rights and women's rights movements has unseated dominant perspectives and opened the way for more diverse and more politically critical schools of interpretation in history and other disciplines. So unsettling have these developments been that by the 1980s many historians complained that both interpretive coherence and objectivity had vanished from the profession. They feared that fragmentation threatened to consign scholars to increasingly microscopic and specialized enclaves, making it impossible to communicate with one another, let alone with a broader public. To others, this lack of coherence seemed a healthy state of ferment and pluralistic openness: "Maybe drift and uncertainty," one such historian remarked, ". . . are preconditions for creativity."³⁷ It is probably true that coherence and fragmentation, harmony and polytonality, the pursuit of

³⁴A few early works include Gerda Lerner, *The Woman in American History* (Menlo Park, Calif., 1971); William H. Chafe, *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic and Political Roles, 1920–1970* (New York, 1972); and Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780–1835* (New Haven, Conn., 1977). See also classic essays in Linda K. Kerber and Jane DeHart Matthews, eds., *Women's America: Refocusing the Past* (New York, 1982), and other works cited in Chapter 10.

³⁵See Volume One, Chapter 9.

³⁶See Chapter 6, and also Chapter 8 in Volume One.

³⁷On the perils of fragmentation, see Thomas Bender, "Wholes and Parts: The Need for Synthesis in American History," *Journal of American History* 73 (June 1986): 120–36; see the ensuing debate on Bender's essay in "A Round Table: Synthesis in American History," *Journal of American History* 74 (June 1987): 107–30. See also John Higham, "The Future of American History," *Journal of American History* 80 (March 1994): 1289–1309. The quotation is from Jackson Lears, "Mastery and Drift," *Journal of American History* 84 (December 1997): 979–88.

the microscopic and the synthetic are parallel rather than alternative practices within the history profession. In the end, moreover, diversity of perspectives does not rule out a broadly synthetic multicultural history. The ambition to make sense of a complex past — to narrate a big story — should not be confused with an urge to drown difference in a wave of false or oppressive homogeneity.

The charge that history had descended into political partisanship gained more energy from forces outside the academy than from within. To be sure, historians as different as the Marxists Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, the liberals Arthur Schlesinger Jr. and Diane Ravitch, and the conservative Gertrude Himmelfarb, to name a few, pilloried the profession for allowing social history to descend into what they considered tendentious, multiculturalist special pleading. Several of them helped organize a new professional organization, the Historical Society, which published a new journal designed to avoid the pitfalls of the "balkanized" history and restore dispassion and breadth of view to the profession.³⁸ Its founding manifesto announced the aim of "reorienting the historical profession toward an accessible, integrated history free from fragmentation and over-specialization." For the most part, however, despite manifestos, the new journal features articles that are mostly indistinguishable from those published in mainstream journals.³⁹ Moreover, the vigor of debate in professional journals and meetings belies the charge that conformity on ideological or methodological matters has stifled free inquiry.

In the realm of public history, however, the highly politicized claims about leftist bias in history have sparked real rancor. The controversy over the National History Standards in the mid-1990s generated much heat and throws a little light on the "history wars."⁴⁰ In 1994, spurred by Lynne Cheney, who headed the National Endowment for the Humanities under the first President Bush, and directed by the eminent historian of early America, Gary Nash, the project — after years of discussion, preparation,

³⁸The *Journal of the Historical Society* began publication in 2000. On the Historical Society, see Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn, eds., *Reconstructing History: The Emergence of a New Historical Society* (New York, 1999); it should be noted that the Historical Society's founders included liberals such as Sean Wilentz, who shared very few of his cofounders' views other than an allegiance to publicly accessible narrative history.

³⁹See Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, "The Political Crisis of Social History: A Marxist Perspective," in Peter N. Stearns, ed., *Expanding the Past* (New York, 1988): 16–32; Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Disuniting of America* (New York, 1992); Diane Ravitch's views have appeared mostly in occasional essays and articles, several of which are cited, along with a host of other works representing many views, in a special issue of the *Journal of Social History* 29 (1995) entitled "Social History and the American Political Climate — Problems and Strategies"; Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The New History and the Old: Critical Essays and Reappraisals* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987). See also "AHR Forum: The Old History and the New," *American Historical Review* 94 (June 1989), with contributions from Himmelfarb along with other historians of various persuasions.

⁴⁰See Gary B. Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross E. Dunn, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York, 1997), and Diane Ravitch, "The Controversy over the National History Standards," in Fox-Genovese and Lasch-Quinn, *Reconstructing History*, 242–52.

and consultation — published preliminary guidelines for the teaching of history in public schools. Critics exploded with outrage. Diane Ravitch and Arthur Schlesinger Jr. leveled measured critiques of the pedagogical strategies recommended by the drafters, but less temperate right-wing pundits blasted the standards as anti-American. Cheney herself, now “in opposition” to the Clinton administration, turned on the project she had helped spawn; and in early 1995 the U.S. Senate voted ninety-nine to one to condemn the standards. Although revised standards eventually won broad support, other battles in the history wars erupted around the same time and in similar ways. Most notoriously, several exhibitions at the Smithsonian Institution museums in Washington, D.C., evoked cries of anti-Americanism from conservative critics. In response to such criticism, the National History Museum removed “excessive” references to genocide from its exhibition “The American West,” and the Air and Space Museum abandoned its Enola Gay exhibition when it could not find a way to both celebrate the patriotic struggle against Japan and take note of the horrors of nuclear destruction.⁴¹

The most important challenge to American historians in the twenty-first century comes not from those demanding more patriotic narratives but from those advocating the “internationalization” of American history. Sometimes advocating “global” or “transnational” or “postnational” history, these critics insist that Americans’ “exceptionalism” distorts both the national record and the reality of historical change. In the modern and postmodern world, almost none of the important forces shaping events are nation-based, they argue. Wars and revolutions, racial hierarchies and forms of economic dominance and subordination, markets, migrations, and media, among other phenomena, all emerge and develop in response to forces well beyond state boundaries. Most historians seem to welcome the new effort, although disagreements arise as soon as they try to clarify what it means.

In a collection of essays entitled *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*, Thomas Bender celebrates the urge to “deprovincialize” and “defamiliarize” American history.⁴² Another contributor to that volume, the eminent diplomatic historian Akira Iriye, proposes that international history means comparative history, an immersion into more than one national archive, usually requiring skill in more than one language. But he also insists that comparison must incorporate peoples, cultures, and non-state movements, not just states. The character and outlines of such an approach remain elusive, but Iriye believes that a more international approach will one day generate a truly global or transnational history of human affairs.⁴³ For other diplomatic historians, internationalizing means turning the tables on U.S.-centered,

⁴¹See Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, eds., *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past* (New York, 1996). See also Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia, 1996).

⁴²Thomas Bender, “Introduction: Historians, Nations, and the Plenitude of Narratives,” in Bender, ed., *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley, Calif., 2002).

⁴³Akira Iriye, “Internationalizing International History,” in Bender, *Rethinking*, 47–62.

hegemonic renderings of history. While Louis A. Perez Jr. finds many of the goals of transnational history admirable, he spots a worm in the global apple. “A new historiography that celebrates the promise of borderlessness seems entirely congruent with the larger assumptions through which to validate the assumptions of globalization. Is the new international history the handmaiden to globalization?” He insists that the nation that sponsors and reaps the most immense rewards from globalization — the United States — must remain clearly in the historian’s focus. Similarly, Marilyn Young warns historians to distinguish between “de-centering” U.S. history and creating “a world free of [America’s] overwhelming military power”; she continues, “it is crucial to remember the difference” and to make sure that “the effort to de-center American history” does not “run the danger of obscuring what it means to illuminate.”⁴⁴

A different view of transnational history emerges from the work of historians of migration, gender, and race. For them, “diasporic” approaches offer the opportunity to comprehend the meaning of lives in motion, not primarily defined by nations but by the spaces created by capitalist markets, international political movements, and mass communication. Such approaches sometimes begin with the subnational — family economies, local religious cultures, regional environments — but proceed to link them to phenomena of the largest scale — capitalism, imperialism, patriarchy, and the like. When grounded in exhaustive archival and oral research, as in the work of Dirk Hoerder and Donna Gabaccia, such studies succeed in reframing what once seemed a simple story of immigrants reaching and assimilating into the Promised Land into a far more complex tale of migration, reverse migration, and the simultaneous construction of national, racial, and ethnic identities among both settlers and sojourners within many different national contexts.⁴⁵

Felipe Fernandez-Armesto takes another approach to the challenge of transnational history, writing a history of the continent that highlights the starkly different fates of North America and America south of the Rio Grande. He treats the rise and fall of indigenous societies and colonization comparatively and then asks, Why did these two regions, similar for so long, diverge so dramatically in the nineteenth century? The south had conspicuously provided much of the wealth for the development of Western capitalism, but in the nineteenth century, Canada and the United States began exploiting their resources with unparalleled success while maintaining political stability. The reverse was true for the south. In light of this comparison,

⁴⁴Louis A. Perez Jr., “We Are the World: Internationalizing the National, Nationalizing the International,” *Journal of American History* 89 (September 2002): 564; Marilyn B. Young, “The Age of Global Power,” in Bender, *Rethinking*, 291.

⁴⁵See Dirk Hoerder, “From Euro- and Afro-Atlantic to Pacific Migration System: A Comparative Migration Approach to North American History,” in Bender, *Rethinking*, 195–235; Donna R. Gabaccia, “When the Migrants Are Men: Italy’s Women and Transnationalism as a Working-Class Way of Life,” in Gabaccia and Vicki L. Ruiz, eds., *American Dreaming, Global Realities: Rethinking U.S. Immigration History* (Urbana, Ill., 2006), and other works cited therein and in Chapter 5.

Fernandez-Armesto identifies crucial conditions and resources that facilitated the remarkable economic growth and political stability of the north. He sees a constellation of these opportunities presently taking shape in the south and wonders if that region will be able to take advantage of them.⁴⁶

In *The Theft of History*, Jack Goody radically reappraises most histories of the Western world since the sixteenth century, in which Europe and the United States were the measure of all other civilizations. This “provincial” perspective obviated careful studies of societies marked by significantly different forms of land tenure, market activity, and communal traditions. If provincialism deprived historians of models of social and cultural difference, it also blinded them to similarities. Thus, Goody asserts, abundant evidence shows that romantic love, freedom, and humanism, usually characterized as essentially European values, appeared elsewhere.⁴⁷ Thomas Bender’s *A Nation among Nations* offers a different worldwide perspective on U.S. history. He sees in the age of discovery the beginning of global history, which, he emphasizes, began with the importation and exploitation of millions of Africans. He treats the American Revolution as one event in the long war between England and France that began in 1689 and continued until 1815. He connects the Civil War with the Europeans’ revolutions of 1848, the failure of Reconstruction with European failures to realize the ideals of its revolutions. Similarly, for Bender the Spanish-American War makes sense only in the larger context of European imperialism; progressive reform only as one of many global responses to industrial capitalism. Although Bender uses comparative history explicitly to explain American developments, *A Nation among Nations* never becomes a triumphant tale of economic progress or political virtue.⁴⁸

Despite the benefits of transnational history, some historians have raised cautionary flags. They worry that transnational insights claimed by American historians suggest an ironic reverse imperialism. Just as the United States appropriates resources, labor, and cultural space around the world, these critics imply, American historians appropriate the right to tell everybody’s story.⁴⁹ In a very different way, some scholars qualify their endorsement of transnational approaches with reminders about the enduring significance of the nation as an idea and a reality in human history.⁵⁰ Ian Tyrell applauds the exploitation of “new, non-national records” to “suggest models of transnational processes,” but insists that historians have long transcended narrow nationalism. He notes that nation-focused and transnational approaches will together be required to account adequately for the overwhelming power of the United States within the world. Recalling the com-

⁴⁶Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, *The Americas, A Hemispheric History* (New York, 2003).

⁴⁷Jack Goody, *The Theft of History* (New York, 2006), 1–8, 240, 246, 286.

⁴⁸Thomas Bender, *A Nation among Nations: America’s Place in World History* (New York, 2006), 3–9, 290–301.

⁴⁹Doubts of this sort surface in essays by Ron Robin and a few others in Bender’s *Rethinking*.

⁵⁰See John Higham, “The Future of American History,” *Journal of American History* 80 (March 1994): 1289–1307.

parative and global tendencies of historians often thought to be avatars of “American exceptionalism,” from Frederick Jackson Turner to Louis Hartz, Tyrell, like Bender, advocates the enrichment and complication of American history, not its dissolution into the sea of transnationalism.⁵¹

However one reads the opportunities and challenges of the transnational turn in historiography, that turn cannot be ignored. This edition of *Interpretations of American History* pays greater attention to the global dimensions of the transatlantic economy, slave trade, and abolitionist movements. It addresses transnational approaches to the study of migration, to state-making and Progressive reform, to the role of multiple states and non-state actors, not just great powers, in shaping international relations during and after the Cold War, and to many other subjects. Yet it also heeds the words of several of the participants in the *Journal of American History*’s recent “Interchange,” cited above, who affirm history’s intense empirical focus and openness to different approaches and who warn that some kinds of “interdisciplinarity . . . narrow rather than widen inquiries.” History’s “eclecticism” has, as David Hollinger notes, always made it “easier for us to absorb and use a variety of theories and methods . . . without being captured by any.” History’s “methodological integrity,” he goes on, remains a solid bottom on which to navigate the shifting seas of transnational and other approaches to the study of human affairs. As Joyce Appleby and others have noted, moreover, if people desire “to chart their lives by what they believe to be true,” then they will turn to history, which “offers a variety of tools for effecting liberation from intrusive authority, outworn creeds, and counsels of despair.”⁵² In responding to that demand, historians will continue to write narratives both broad and narrow and to argue about them strenuously in the decades to come.

A final note about the way these chapters present competing interpretations of historical phenomena. While interpretive argument undoubtedly remains among the most common and necessary practices in the discipline, it is equally true that the either-or format can distort the true nature of historians’ arguments. Indeed, burlesquing this format is a happy pastime common in graduate student lounges all over the country (Fat-Free Mozzarella: Noble Experiment or Tragic Error?). We have, in fact, tried wherever possible to offer differences in interpretation that are not polar or mutually exclusive, but rather partially overlapping and complementary.

⁵¹Ian Tyrell, “Making Nations/Making States: American Historians in the Context of Empire,” *Journal of American History* 80 (March 1994): 1015–44; see also Richard White, “The Nationalization of Nature,” *Journal of American History* 80 (March 1994): 976–86. On a more theoretical level, see Craig Calhoun, *Nations Matter: Culture, History, and the Cosmopolitan Dream* (London, 2007). On both traditional comparative approaches and the recent “transnational turn” (as well as cultural studies, subaltern studies, and approaches that focus on religion, gender, and race), see the enlightening “Interchange: The Practice of History,” *Journal of American History* 90 (September 2003): 576–611. See also Michael Adas, “From Settler Colony to Global Hegemon: Integrating the Exceptionalist Narrative of the American Experience into World History,” *American Historical Review* 106 (December 2001): 1692–1720.

⁵²Appleby et al., *Telling the Truth about History*, 301, 308.

Sharp differences there are, and sometimes hot debate produces light. But historians usually do not differ by excluding each other's evidence or utterly demolishing each other's arguments. More often, they try to incorporate as much of the former and recast as much of the latter as possible in order to better explain a historical phenomenon. Thus, for example, whereas Progressive historians might have once portrayed the New Deal as a radical advance in liberal reform, and New Left historians as a triumph of corporate hegemony, the liberal William Leuchtenberg and the radical Alan Dawley in their essays in this volume acknowledge a good deal of common ground, even while clearly disagreeing over important points. Whether the New Deal was "radical within limits" or "conservative with radical implications" remains truly a matter of opinion, but the common ground shared by these two historians makes clear the cumulative and "objective" quality of scholarship on the subject. In coming to a judgment on this and other questions posed in the following chapters, we hope that students will find in the debates, and the historiographical essays that precede them, a pathway to understanding the world in which they live and an encouragement to change that world for the better.

The Reconstruction Era: How Large Its Scope?

2

To students of American history, the Civil War years stand in sharp contrast to those of the Reconstruction era. The war years represented a period of heroism and idealism; out of the travail of conflict, there emerged a new American nation. Although the cost in lives and money was frightful, the divisions that had plagued Americans for over half a century were eliminated in the ordeal. Henceforth America would stand as a united country, cleansed of slavery, destined to take its rightful place as one of the leading nations in the world.

Reconstruction, on the other hand, had to address the problems of putting the nation back together again. The federal government had to bring back the South into the Union on terms that permitted reconciliation, protect newly freed slaves from the wrath of angry whites, and construct a biracial society of free people. The era was marked by conflict, brutality, and corruption, and historians have not agreed in evaluating the results. Three schools of thought about Reconstruction succeeded one another: the Dunning school, the Progressives, and the revisionists. A fourth that sees Reconstruction exceeding its traditional geographic and temporal boundaries is emerging.

The first dominant view of Reconstruction, called the Dunning school after its founder, emerged from the widespread racism of both North and South in the years after the Civil War. It was reinforced by the worldwide European imperialism of the late nineteenth century and the racist ideology that intensified to justify it. These historians saw Reconstruction as a disaster, giving rights to freed people who were unprepared for them and were vulnerable to corruption. The best thing about it was that it ended, and whites reestablished political control of the South.¹

By the 1920s, American historiography had come under the influence of the Progressive, or new history, school. Growing out of the dissatisfaction with the older scientific school of historians that emphasized the collection of impartial empirical data and eschewed "subjective" interpretations, this school borrowed heavily from the new social sciences. These historians sought to explain historical change by isolating underlying economic and social forces that transformed institutions and structures. In place of tradition and stability, it emphasized change and conflict. Liberal and democratic in their

¹For example, William A. Dunning, *Reconstruction: Political and Economic, 1865–1877* (New York, 1907), and John W. Burgess, *Reconstruction and the Constitution, 1866–1876* (New York, 1902).