

Gary B. Nash, Julie Roy Jeffrey, et al., *The American People: Creating a Nation and a Society*. New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1996. Brief second edition. Pp. xxii, 744. Paper, \$23.00. ISBN 0-673-99526-7.

With the canons of the revisionists booming across the landscapes of American history, it is especially challenging these days to prepare a textbook that joins the old interpretations with the more recent emphasis on social history without compromising the integrity of the discipline. Written for the college market for the introductory course, this "brief" account provides a fair, balanced, and comprehensive account of how the United States came to be. The authors bring a stylish verve to their writing and provide the reader with anecdotes that are both engaging and memorable. Their purpose is to personalize the American experience by showing how it has been shaped by ordinary as well as extraordinary people.

The authors' goal is to affirm the usefulness of history by emphasizing its "humanness" as revealed in the everyday lives of people. To that end, they present the rich mosaics of cultures, religions, and skin shades that constitute the diversity characteristic of the country at the end of the twentieth century.

Structured to address a set of focal questions ranging from inquiries about the adaptability of the American political system to the changing nature of American beliefs and values over the centuries, the book's thirty chapters are grouped under six organizing units arranged chronologically. Each unit addresses the key political, economic, social, and technological events of the era under study. Chapters end with a conclusion of several paragraphs that briefly summarize the main concepts elaborated in the narrative and serve as a bridge to the chapter that follows. There is also a set of recommended readings for further study or research, plus a time line highlighting key events and personages.

This "brief edition" is a significantly shorter version (about half the size) of the third edition of *The American People*. Even though modest in length, the book covers all the essentials. It will be particularly useful in single-semester courses and in those courses where students are assigned a significant amount of ancillary reading. In addition, it is accompanied by all the supplements of the larger edition. These include a teaching guide, a collection of primary sources (plus a separate volume of sources in African American history), and a set of transparencies including cartographic and pictorial maps, urban plans, works of art, and building diagrams. There is also a CD-ROM component organized in a topical and thematic framework as well as a computerized testing program. For students, there is a study guide, sets of practice tests, and computerized tutorial and atlas programs.

If this text has a shortcoming, it is in ignoring the use of geography as an instrument for interpreting the past. There is little evidence in these pages of the spatial dynamic essential for a full understanding of the American national experience. A significant deficiency, for example, is the quality of the maps in each chapter. While well titled and graphically compelling in their shaded grays and contrasting sepia colors, they miss the mark in having neither scale nor directional compasses. Those that use symbols do not

always include identifying keys and some maps are without dates. Thus, they leave the reader in a mild state of ambiguity. Neither is there any descriptive evidence of the places that define our past and serve as prolog to our present. What results is a text that takes the locational context of history for granted by ignoring or underestimating the power of geography in interpreting the past.

But on the balance, this is an effective and useful United States history college text. Indeed it is reflective of the responsible revisionism acceptable to current American historiography.

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Carol Berkin, Christopher L. Miller, Robert W. Cherney, and James L. Gormly. *Making America: A History of the United States.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1995. Vol. I: To 1877. Pp. xxiii, 472. Paper, \$33.57. ISBN 0-395-50252-7. Vol. II: Since 1865. Pp. xxiii, 582. Paper, \$33.57. ISBN 0-395-50253-5.

The authors of any United States history text all face similar issues as they begin to develop their books. What approach should we use--chronological, episodic, literature-based, for example. What kind of writing style should we employ--academic and pop literature are two that come to mind. Should we just emphasize a historiographic approach or are there concepts from the other social sciences such as geography and sociology that we might intersperse in the text? The types of answers the authors and their editors pursue in putting a text together not only determine the usefulness of the finished product, but also if the book will sell--the ultimate bottom line. In reviewing both volumes of *Making America: A History of the United States*, one is struck by the fact that the authors of these texts carefully looked at these questions and came up with a set of books that should prove quite popular and pedagogically sound with U.S. history classrooms at the advanced high school and entering collegiate levels.

Taking a chronological approach, the authors have divided the history of the country into manageable bits while maintaining a continuity throughout the texts. The threads that tie the sections together are the structure of the chapters that include identification of key figures and concepts as they appear and the use of maps, charts, and other geographic tools that put the discussion of both domestic and foreign affairs in context.

Organizationally, the authors have decided to assist students by providing a chapter-opening feature that puts forthcoming events in a historical context. They follow this up with an end of the chapter feature that includes an extended bibliography and suggested study aids.

In addition, the authors have also included both literary selections and point counterpoint sections throughout. These allow students the opportunity to work with original documents in a decision-making mode. This is especially important as both high school and college classrooms are increasingly being asked to redirect students towards higher level thinking and interdisciplinary efforts.