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Table of Contents

[Cover](#)

[Table of Contents](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Introduction](#)

[About This Book](#)

[Foolish Assumptions](#)

[Icons Used in This Book](#)

[Beyond the Book](#)

[Where to Go from Here](#)

[Book 1: Shaping the USA](#)

[Chapter 1: You Say You Want a Revolution](#)

[Looking at America in 1700](#)

[Fighting the First True World Wars](#)

[The Great Awakening: Stirring Greater Religious Freedom](#)

[The French and Indian War](#)
[Growing like a Weed](#)
[Heading toward Divorce with Britain](#)
[Congressing for the First Time](#)
[Mr. Revere, Your Horse Is Ready](#)

Chapter 2: Blueprints and Birth Pains

[Making the Rules](#)
[Dishing Up Politics, American Style](#)
[Raising the Dough](#)
[Earning Respect](#)
[Finding Foreign Friction](#)
[Expanding America's Footprint](#)

Chapter 3: Stepping Up as a World Power

[Here Today, Guam Tomorrow: Colonizing Spain's Former Colonies](#)
[Making a Lot of Noise and Carrying a Big Stick: Roosevelt Takes Office](#)
[Progressing toward Political and Social Reform](#)
[Contracting Labor Pains](#)
[Transporting America](#)
[Suffering for Suffrage](#)
[Leaving the South: Black People Migrate to Northern Cities](#)
[The War to End All Wars](#)

Chapter 4: Uncle Sam's Depressed

[The Great Depression: Causes and Consequences](#)
[FDR: Making Alphabet Soup](#)
[Shoving Aside Racial Minorities](#)
[Developing Organized Labor](#)
[Critics, Crooks, and Crime Fighters](#)

Chapter 5: This New America

[The Techno Revolution](#)
[Surfing the "Silver Tsunami"](#)
[Immigration Ups and Downs](#)

[Redefining the American Family](#)

Book 2: Expanding America into Its Current Shape

Chapter 1: War, Gold, and a Gathering Storm

[Wrenching Land from Mexico](#)

[Rushing for Gold and Other Expansion Issues](#)

[The Beginning of the End](#)

[Sparking a Showdown: The Lincoln-Douglas Debate](#)

Chapter 2: Pulling Back Together after the Civil War

[A Southern-Fried Mess: Life in the South after the Civil War](#)

[Piecing the Union Back Together](#)

[The Tailor-Made President: Andrew Johnson](#)

[Growing Corruption in Politics](#)

Chapter 3: Growing Up in the Late 1800s

[Heading West in a Quest for Wealth](#)

[Ousting “Undesirables”](#)

[Inventing Big Business](#)

[The Rise of Populism](#)

[“A Splendid Little War”](#)

Chapter 4: Making Public Policy

[Studying Economic Theories](#)

[Coming Up with a Budget](#)

[Studying Public Policy](#)

[Making Social Policy](#)

[Spending the Taxpayers’ Money](#)

[Making International Economic Policy](#)

Chapter 5: Conducting Foreign Policy

[Studying U.S. Foreign Policy](#)

[Making Foreign Policy](#)

[Tracking U.S. Presidential Doctrines](#)

Chapter 6: Discovering Dissent, Equality, and Diversity

[Birthing the New Left](#)

[Exposing the Feminine Mystique](#)

[Looking to the Government with Mixed Results](#)

[Women Coming Together to Build a Movement](#)

[Getting It On: The Power of the Pill](#)

[Raising Awareness and Consciousness](#)

[Recognizing Other Movements](#)

Book 3: The Wars That Influenced the Shape

Chapter 1: A Revolutionary Story

[Setting the Stage for Independence](#)

[Divorcing the Mother Country](#)

[Key Events of the American Revolution](#)

[War's Over — Now Comes the Hard Part](#)

[Fighting the War at Home](#)

Chapter 2: Irreconcilable Differences: The American Civil War

[The Big Picture: War and Politics](#)

[Setting the Stage: Five Events Leading to War](#)

[Secession and the Confederacy](#)

[Reviewing the Troops, the Generals, and the Major Battles](#)

Chapter 3: The Great War and Its Aftermath

[The World War I Years](#)

[Gaining Worldwide Allies for the Conflict](#)

[The End of One War and the Roots of Another](#)

Chapter 4: World War II: Why It Matters

[The War's Beginnings](#)

[Who's Who of Combatants](#)

[U.S. Involvement in World War II](#)

[The Course of the War](#)

[Where World War II Battles Happened](#)

[The Effects of World War II](#)

Chapter 5: Welcome to Vietnam

[Enter America: The Last Chapter of the Long Vietnamese Struggle](#)

[Americanizing the War](#)

[Committing U.S. Troops: Shifting from Advisors to Combatants](#)

[The Tet Offensive of 1968](#)

Chapter 6: Terror Comes Home; America Goes to War(s)

[The 2000 Bush-Gore Squeaker](#)

[A Nation Stunned](#)

[That Damn Saddam](#)

[Elsewhere in the World ...](#)

[An Assault on the Capitol](#)

Book 4: The Hands That Guided the Shape

Chapter 1: Scoping Out the Founding Fathers

[Rising Up to Meet the Moment](#)

[Kicking the Slavery Issue Down the Road](#)

[Sorting Out Signers, Framers, and Founders](#)

[A Brief Look at Ten Top Founders](#)

Chapter 2: Presidents and the Presidency

[Establishing the First U.S. Government](#)

[Examining Presidential Influence](#)

[Shaping Public Opinion](#)

[Performing Many Roles](#)

Chapter 3: Presidential Rankings and Evaluations

[Evaluating the Presidents](#)

[Ranking U.S. Presidents](#)

[Highlighting Some of the Most Influential Presidents](#)

[Looking at Some of the Worst Presidents](#)

Chapter 4: The Changing Role of First Ladies

[Defining a First Lady](#)

[Evaluating the First Ladies](#)

[Ranking U.S. First Ladies](#)

[Highlighting Some Influential First Ladies](#)

Book 5: The People Who Infused the Shape

Chapter 1: Pilgrims' Progress: The English Colonies

[Settling in Jamestown](#)

[Instituting Slavery](#)

[Colonizing: Pilgrims and Puritans](#)

[Bringing Religious Freedom: Dissidents, Catholics, and Quakers](#)

[Dealings of the Dutch](#)

[Differing with the Locals](#)

Chapter 2: A Brief History of the American Indian

[In the Beginning ...](#)

[The Tribes of Then and Now](#)

[Unexpected Visitors](#)

[The Major Culture Areas of Early Native Americans](#)

[Meeting Famous Native Americans](#)

[Maintaining Tribal Identity and Culture](#)

[War Stories](#)

[Dysfunction Junction](#)

[Looking at Native American Society](#)

[Focusing on the Future](#)

Chapter 3: Native Americans: Today and Tomorrow

[An Indian By Any Other Name ...](#)

[Repatriation: Resting in Peace](#)

[Native American Stats](#)

[Alcoholism and the Native American](#)

[Observing Native American Economic Bright Spots](#)

[How Native Americans Ended Up in the Casino Business](#)

[The Ten Most Populous Tribes Today](#)

Chapter 4: From Empires to Bondage to Freedom

[Touring African Empires](#)

[Origins of the Transatlantic Slave Trade](#)

[From Servitude to Slavery](#)

[Black Americans and the Revolution](#)

[An End to Slavery via the Civil War](#)

[\(Re\)constructing Democracy](#)

[A Turn for the Worse: The End of Reconstruction](#)

Chapter 5: I, Too, Sing America: Civil Rights

[The Tide Turns: Brown v. Board of Education \(1954\)](#)

[Putting a Face to Racial Violence: Emmett Till](#)

[A New Twist in Leadership](#)

[Boycotts and Sit-Ins](#)

[Integrating Ole Miss and Increasing Federal Involvement](#)

[1963: A Significant Year](#)

[Murder in Mississippi: Medgar Evers](#)

[Suffering Tragic Blows](#)

[The Civil Rights Act of 1964](#)

[On to Selma: Back in Alabama](#)

[The Voting Rights Act of 1965](#)

[Black Power Rising](#)

[Death of a King](#)

Book 6: American Government and Politics

Chapter 1: Designing a New Country

[Announcing the Birth of a New Nation](#)

[The Supreme Law of the Land: The Constitution](#)

[How the U.S. Government Works](#)

Chapter 2: Elections, Political Parties, and Interest Groups

[Studying Elections](#)

[Political Parties — Necessary for Democracy](#)

[Seeing How Parties Function within a Democracy](#)

[Interest Groups: Influencing the Government](#)

Chapter 3: Be a Part of the Solution — Vote!

[Should You Register to Vote?](#)

[Why Vote in Primaries?](#)

[In Case You Doubt That Elected Officials Care What You Think ...](#)

[Understanding Politics on the Internet](#)

Chapter 4: Electoral College Election Controversies

[Explaining How the Electoral College Affected the 2000 and 2016 Elections](#)

[Examining the Electoral College's Messy History](#)

[Changing the Electoral College](#)

Book 7: American Society and the Economy

Chapter 1: Emblems of America and Civic Responsibility

[The Flag: Old Glory](#)

[The Pledge of Allegiance](#)

[The National \(and Other\) Anthems](#)

[Investigating American Icons](#)

[American Monuments](#)

[The Rights and Duties of Everyone Living in the United States](#)

Chapter 2: Major Changes as America Grew

[Embracing Nationalism ... Sort Of](#)

[Nullify This](#)

[Inventing a Better Life](#)

[Staking Out New Land](#)

[Fast Forwarding into the 1900s](#)

[Chapter 3: The Great Depression: An Economic Disaster](#)

[Riding the Economic Cycle](#)

[Getting Richer, or Staying Poor](#)

[Crashing with the Market](#)

[Lessons Learned](#)

[Recessions after the Great Depression](#)

[Chapter 4: Recessions Can Be Really Depressing](#)

[Ouch! The Economy Stubs Its Toe](#)

[Brother, Can You Spare a Job?](#)

[“We’re from the Government; We’re Here to Help ...”](#)

[Unspreading the Wealth](#)

[Chapter 5: Historic Firsts, Reforms, and Challenges](#)

[The Great Presidential Race of 2008](#)

[Going to a Tea Party](#)

[Lurching toward Healthcare](#)

[And The Decision Is ...](#)

[Meanwhile, Back at the Budget ...](#)

[Guns, Drugs, and #MeToo](#)

[Catching COVID-19](#)

[Index](#)

[About the Authors](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Author’s Acknowledgments](#)

[Connect with Dummies](#)

[End User License Agreement](#)

List of Tables

Book 4 Chapter 3

[TABLE 3-1 Highest and Lowest Ranking Presidents](#)

Book 4 Chapter 4

[TABLE 4-1 Highest- and Lowest-Ranking First Ladies](#)

Book 5 Chapter 2

[TABLE 2-1 European Explorers to the New World](#)

Book 5Chapter 3

[TABLE 3-1 TheTen Largest Tribes in the U.S.](#)

Book 7 Chapter 3

[TABLE 3-1 U.S. Recessions after 1945](#)

List of Illustrations

Book 1 Chapter 1

[FIGURE 1-1: Map of North and Central America showing land that belonged to Brit...](#)

Book 1 Chapter 3

[FIGURE 3-1: Political cartoonists had fun with Theodore Roosevelt's appearance ...](#)

[FIGURE 3-2: The program cover for the suffragettes' 1913 march on the capitol.](#)

Book 1 Chapter 4

[FIGURE 4-1: Many wait hours in line for bread.](#)

Book 2 Chapter 1

[FIGURE 1-1: Territory won from Mexico.](#)

Book 2 Chapter 4

[FIGURE 4-1: Adam Smith.](#)

[FIGURE 4-2: Lord Maynard Keynes.](#)

[FIGURE 4-3: President Roosevelt signing the Social Security Act.](#)

[FIGURE 4-4: President Obama signing the Patient Protection and Affordable Care ...](#)

Book 2 Chapter 5

[FIGURE 5-1: James Monroe.](#)

[FIGURE 5-2: Theodore Roosevelt.](#)

[FIGURE 5-3: Harry Truman.](#)

[FIGURE 5-4: Dwight D. Eisenhower.](#)

[FIGURE 5-5: Richard M. Nixon.](#)

[FIGURE 5-6: Jimmy Carter.](#)

[FIGURE 5-7: Ronald Reagan.](#)

[FIGURE 5-8: Bill Clinton.](#)

[FIGURE 5-9: George W. Bush.](#)

[FIGURE 5-10: Donald J. Trump.](#)

Book 2 Chapter 6

[FIGURE 6-1: Mario Savio rouses the free speech demonstrators.](#)

[FIGURE 6-2: Feminists rise up against the 1968 Miss America Pageant.](#)

[FIGURE 6-3: Cesar Chavez, one of the most influential Latino leaders in the U.S...](#)

[FIGURE 6-4: American Indians take back Alcatraz.](#)

Book 3 Chapter 1

[FIGURE 1-1: A French engraving showing an American Patriot and Loyalist fightin...](#)

[FIGURE 1-2: Captioned "The savages let loose, or The cruel fate of the Loyalist..."](#)

Book 3 Chapter 2

[FIGURE 2-1: Abraham Lincoln, Republican Party spokesman and future presidential...](#)

[FIGURE 2-2: The firing on Fort Sumter.](#)

[FIGURE 2-3: Key Civil War battles and campaigns.](#)

Book 3 Chapter 3

[FIGURE 3-1: Europe, 1914.](#)

[FIGURE 3-2: Mao Tse-tung.](#)

[FIGURE 3-3: Europe after the Treaty of Versailles, 1919.](#)

Book 3 Chapter 5

[FIGURE 5-1: Vietnam after the Geneva Conference.](#)

[FIGURE 5-2: Ngo Dinh Diem \(center\), paternalistic leader of South Vietnam.](#)

[FIGURE 5-3: Ho Chi Minh \(third from right\) was a Vietnamese leader for most of ...](#)

[FIGURE 5-4: U.S. troops wade through a stream in Vietnam.](#)

Book 4 Chapter 1

[FIGURE 1-1: Samuel Adams.](#)

[FIGURE 1-2: John Jay.](#)

[FIGURE 1-3: Thomas Jefferson.](#)

[FIGURE 1-4: James Madison.](#)

[FIGURE 1-5: Thomas Paine.](#)

Book 5 Chapter 1

[FIGURE 1-1: The arrival of slaves in Jamestown: One of the key elements in Amer...](#)

[FIGURE 1-2: The original 13 colonies and their dates of establishment.](#)

Book 5 Chapter 4

[FIGURE 4-1: Ghana, Mali, and Songhai Empires.](#)

[FIGURE 4-2: Slave deck of the *Wildfire*.](#)

[FIGURE 4-3: Poster announcing the new slave arrivals.](#)

[FIGURE 4-4 Freed slaves.](#)

Book 5 Chapter 5

[FIGURE 5-1: Martin Luther King Jr. speaking in Cleveland.](#)

[FIGURE 5-2: Rosa Parks.](#)

[FIGURE 5-3: Malcolm X.](#)

Book 6 Chapter 1

[FIGURE 1-1: Signing of the Declaration of Independence.](#)

Book 6 Chapter 3

[FIGURE 3-1: What would election outcomes be if every eligible citizen voted?](#)

Book 7 Chapter 1

[FIGURE 1-1: The Great Seal of the United States.](#)

Book 7 Chapter 2

[FIGURE 2-1: An antique radio.](#)

[FIGURE 2-2: Flappers took a different perspective on morality during the Roarin...](#)

[FIGURE 2-3: Everybody loved the Babe.](#)

Book 7 Chapter 3

[FIGURE 3-1: Workers flood New York City streets in a panic following the Black ...](#)



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Introduction

“Those who cannot remember the past,” said American philosopher George Santayana, “are condemned to repeat it.” You generally hear this in the 12th grade.

Some people think of learning about U.S. history as a punishment — a subject you have to take in school. You memorize a bewildering array of dates, absorb definitions of terms like *Manifest Destiny*, and wonder whether America really needed two presidents named Harrison. Historical figures appear as if they were characters in a junior high school costume pageant. Their blemishes are airbrushed out, and their personalities are drained away.

This book doesn’t airbrush the blemishes but rather strives to present a balanced, honest picture of the last 250 years (and more) of the history and development for the United States of America. As an amalgamation of content derived from the brilliant works of several Dummies authors (see the “Author’s Acknowledgments” at the back of the book), it tells a story of the people who founded, inhabited, led, influenced, defended, fought for, migrated to, protested against, and contributed to the rich heritage that turned a loose collection of (mostly) British colonies into a powerful, world-recognized nation.

Enjoy!

About This Book

This book is not a textbook, nor is it an exhaustive encyclopedia covering everything that ever happened in the United States. But it gives you a basic foundation of information about U.S. history, celebrates the vibrant

people and events that make the U.S. what it is today, and offers a glimpse at all sides of this country's development.

Because U.S. history hasn't always been bright and shining — especially when it comes to topics such as slavery, immigration, and the treatment of Native Americans — this book doesn't always deal with pleasant or uplifting subjects. Some of what you read may anger or sadden you. In that regard, America's history shares something in common with just about every country that ever existed.

In this book, you can move around from topic to topic and use the book as a handy reference. Some typical conventions that you find in the book include the following:

- » Words that appear in *italics* may mean that you're about to find the definition for the italicized term.
- » Web addresses appear in monofont. If you're reading a digital version of this book on a device connected to the internet, you can click the web address to visit that website, like this one: www.dummies.com
- » Direct or adapted quotations from influential Americans or other authorities may appear as a separate, indented paragraph.

To make the content more accessible, we divided it into seven minibooks:

- » **[Book 1: Shaping the USA.](#)** Read [Book 1](#) for an overview of the origin and development of America as it now exists.
- » **[Book 2: Expanding America into Its Current Shape.](#)** [Book 2](#) gives you a bit more detail about the

expansion of the U.S. across the North American continent, a crash course about the variety of governmental policies needed to run this large nation, and a look at important social issues.

- » **[Book 3: The Wars That Influenced the Shape.](#)** As is true for any nation on Earth, war has been and continues to be a fact of life. In [Book 3](#), find out about major wars that directly influenced the American people and the development of domestic and foreign policies for the U.S. government.
- » **[Book 4: The Hands That Guided the Shape.](#)** In [Book 4](#), meet the Founding Fathers, as well as some of the U.S. Presidents and First Ladies who lent their time and talents (with varying levels of success) to shaping America.
- » **[Book 5: The People Who Infused the Shape.](#)** The heritage of the American people is rich, and they come from all over the world. In [Book 5](#), you can read about the people who infuse the U.S. with a wealth of cultures and traditions, as well as discover how their social and political ideas influenced the shape of America.
- » **[Book 6: American Government and Politics.](#)** No history of the U.S. would be complete without a look at its form of government and the political structures that support the government. [Book 6](#) offers you a look at both.
- » **[Book 7: American Society and the Economy.](#)** In [Book 7](#), you discover the emblems of America (the U.S. flag and the National Anthem, for example) that you may associate with the country. You also find out about how certain economic and societal developments have and still do influence life in America.

Foolish Assumptions

We assume that you picked up this book because you have some interest in U.S. history, especially during this special time of celebration — the America 250th anniversary. But whether you know a little or a lot about the subject, you can find topics to enjoy reading about, and you may even uncover some new insights into the history and development of the American nation.

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout this book, icons in the margins highlight certain types of valuable information that call out for your attention. Here are the icons you'll encounter and a brief description of each.



TIP

The Tip icon marks tips that we hope can offer an insight into the gist of the surrounding text.



REMEMBER

Remember icons mark the information that's especially important to know. To siphon off the most important information in each chapter, just skim through these icons.



**TECHNICAL
STUFF**

The Technical Stuff icon marks information of a more detailed or technical nature that you can normally skip over without losing the message of the related section.

Beyond the Book

In addition to the abundance of information and guidance related to U.S. history and the development of American life that we provide in this book, you get access to even more help and information online at Dummies.com. Check out this book's online Cheat Sheet. Just go to www.dummies.com and search for "America 250 All-in-One."

Also in this book, you find references and links to websites that contain more information about the U.S. and its government. Follow those links if you're interested in getting a bit more detail about content that's highlighted but not fully explained.

Where to Go from Here

Because this book is not a linear sequence of information about U.S. history or national development, you can feel free to skip around and start reading at any chapter in any mini-book that catches your eye. Take a look at the Table of Contents in the front of the book for a rundown of chapter titles and headings that describe the content.

If you have a particular topic that you're interested in, you can also check out the Index at the back of the book to find out whether that topic is covered, and where in the book to find it.

Book 1

Shaping the USA

Contents at a Glance

Chapter 1: You Say You Want a Revolution

[Looking at America in 1700](#)

[Fighting the First True World Wars](#)

[The Great Awakening: Stirring Greater Religious Freedom](#)

[The French and Indian War](#)

[Growing like a Weed](#)

[Heading toward Divorce with Britain](#)

[Congressing for the First Time](#)

[Mr. Revere, Your Horse Is Ready](#)

Chapter 2: Blueprints and Birth Pains

[Making the Rules](#)

[Dishing Up Politics, American Style](#)

[Raising the Dough](#)

[Earning Respect](#)

[Finding Foreign Friction](#)

[Expanding America's Footprint](#)

Chapter 3: Stepping Up as a World Power

[Here Today, Guam Tomorrow: Colonizing Spain's Former Colonies](#)

[Making a Lot of Noise and Carrying a Big Stick: Roosevelt Takes Office](#)

[Progressing toward Political and Social Reform](#)

[Contracting Labor Pains](#)

[Transporting America](#)

[Suffering for Suffrage](#)

[Leaving the South: Black People Migrate to Northern Cities](#)

[The War to End All Wars](#)

Chapter 4: Uncle Sam's Depressed

[The Great Depression: Causes and Consequences](#)

[FDR: Making Alphabet Soup](#)

[Shoving Aside Racial Minorities](#)

[Developing Organized Labor](#)

[Critics, Crooks, and Crime Fighters](#)

Chapter 5: This New America

[The Techno Revolution](#)

[Surfing the "Silver Tsunami"](#)

[Immigration Ups and Downs](#)

[Redefining the American Family](#)

Chapter 1

You Say You Want a Revolution

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Surveying the 1700s colonial landscape
 - » Engaging in the first *true* world wars
 - » Relaxing religious rigidity
 - » Fighting the French and the American Indians — again
 - » Alienating the colonists with annoying acts
 - » Taking on the redcoats: The battle for independence begins
-

Long before it was a nation or even had a name, America was an idea, a dream. It didn't exist as anything but a blank slate waiting to be filled. Eventually it filled with people who came for all sorts of reasons and with myriad ideas on how to assemble a country. Sometimes the ideas and the people clashed. But out of the clashes and struggles grew a country founded on a system of government that made it unique in the world.

As it evolved, America was often lucky to have great leaders in bad times when it most needed them. It had abundant natural resources, generally peaceable neighbors, and plenty of room to grow. And boy, did it grow. But before all this expansion could happen, someone had to transform it from a fantasy to a very real place. This chapter gives you the lowdown on how that

Author's Acknowledgments

I want to begin by thanking Lindsay Berg for reaching out with the idea of this All-In-One book to celebrate the America 250 anniversary. This project has been a joy to work on, and I especially thank my “everything” editor, Susan Christophersen, for her wonderful ideas and help with wrangling the volume of source content into what we hope is a delightful synopsis of U.S. history and the American experience. Also, many thanks to all the editorial assistants and other Wiley employees and contractors who make completing a book like this possible. And, of course, thank you to the IDG Books Worldwide managers who gave me a chance in 1995.

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