



33. Non-Fiction – History

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA – A SHORT HISTORY by Alfred Desbiens

Albert Desbiens covers the sweep of American history, from early encounters of European explorers and native peoples and the competition for empire, to the George W. Bush presidency and the war in Iraq.

He recounts the establishment of the British colonies, the beginnings of slavery, relations with the native peoples and the rise of a distinct American society. He describes the difficulties with England that led to the Revolutionary War. The new republic was based on a constitution and concepts of individual rights that were revolutionary at the time and became the model for democratic movements everywhere. Following the break with England came the relentless expansion of American territory across the continent, and the Civil War, over slavery and other issues that set South against North.

The author charts the enormous economic expansion of the United States through the later 19th and 20th centuries, with successive booms and busts, as well as its increasing desire to project its power overseas. Desbiens recounts the growing power of the U.S.A in world affairs through the two world wars. Even as America championed human rights in the Cold War with the Soviet Union, profound questions about the form of its own society led to the civil rights movement and internal dissension over the war in Vietnam. The narrative comes up to the recent past, with the trauma of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Albert Desbiens's history of the United States is clear, concise and at times opinionated. It will appeal to general readers who desire a history written from a sympathetic but independent perspective, as well as to students.

Albert Desbiens is a retired professor of history at UQAM (Université du Québec à Montréal). After studying in Quebec and the United States, he taught American history for more than thirty years and continues active in American studies. He lives in Montreal.

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