Nicholas Guyatt offers a completely new understanding of a central question in American history: How did Americans come to think that God favored the United States above other nations? Tracing the story of American providentialism from the founding of Virginia to the collapse of Reconstruction, this book uncovers the British roots of American religious nationalism before the American Revolution and the extraordinary struggles of white Americans to reconcile their ideas of national mission with the racial diversity of the early republic. Making sense of previously diffuse debates on manifest destiny, millenarianism, and American mission, Providence and the Invention of the United States, 1607–1876, explains the origins and development of the idea that God has a special plan for America. This conviction supplied the United States with a powerful sense of national purpose, but it also prevented Americans from clearly understanding events and people that could not easily be fitted into the providential scheme.

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Providence and the Invention of the United States, 1607–1876

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