Winds of Hope, Storms of Discord

In brisk and engaging prose, this comprehensive introductory textbook traverses the broad sweep of US history since 1945. Winds of Hope, Storms of Discord explores how Americans of all walks of life – political leaders, businesspeople, public intellectuals, workers, students, activists, migrants, and others – struggled to define the nation’s political, economic, geopolitical, demographic, and social character. It chronicles the nation’s ceaseless ferment, from the rocky conversion to peacetime in the early aftermath of World War II; to the frightening emergence of the cold war and repeated US military adventures abroad; to the struggles of African Americans and other minorities to claim a share of the American dream; to the striking transformations in social attitudes catalyzed by the women’s movement and struggles for gay and lesbian liberation; to the dynamic force of political, economic, and social conservatism. Carrying the story to the spring of 2022, Winds of Hope also shows how dizzying technological changes at times threatened to upend the nation’s civic and political life.

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To my students
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Preface

This book is a general, synthetic history of the United States since 1945. Its coverage is comprehensive, surveying politics, economics, culture, political and social movements, foreign relations, demographic change, technological transformation, and other topics. The volume is pitched to upper-division undergraduates and thus is accessible to educated general readers as well. Its treatment features the verve and “attitude” of an engaged individual author, while striving throughout for fairness and empathy.

The themes of the book are key to understanding the unfolding of US history since 1945 and remain vitally important today. They include: differing, and at times sharply clashing, visions of the national government’s proper role in the domestic economy and society; constantly changing understandings of gender, sexuality, and family; the struggles of traditionally marginalized groups to share more fully in the benefits of citizenship; the dynamic, disruptive, and sometimes corrosive impact of rapid technological, social, and economic change; and the unending and often bitter debate over the United States’ appropriate role in the world.

Four qualities set this book apart from most others in the genre. The first, as suggested above, is its comprehensiveness. The second is its newness: the manuscript takes the narrative up to mid-March 2022. It thus covers all of the Donald Trump years and the first fourteen months of Joseph Biden’s administration, along with recent societal events that have transcended official politics and governance, such as the “Me Too” movement, the Covid-19 pandemic, and responses to the 2020 murder of George Floyd. It also includes the early weeks of the Russian invasion of Ukraine launched in February 2022. The third quality of the book is relative concision; it consists of fifteen chapters, most of them ranging in length from 12,000 to 15,000 words. The combination of comprehensiveness and brevity makes, I hope, for a special kind of reading experience. Because the typical chapter contains a wide range of subjects, the connections between different realms of American experience come readily to the fore. We see, for example, how struggles for racial justice at home dovetailed with the drive for decolonization abroad, and how both phenomena, in turn, transformed the cold war. Similarly, we trace the impact of US military and diplomatic intervention abroad on changing patterns of immigration to the United States, and the profound influence of immigration debates on domestic American politics.

The fourth feature is a diversity of narrative approach. Although most of the chapters proceed in a generally chronological fashion, some, like the chapters on the 1950s, the 1970s, and the 1980s, present a range of patterns and vignettes in a more synchronic manner. A few chapters, such as the one on the revival and end of the cold war, feature a relatively narrow range of topics, whereas most of the others present several subjects whose interrelation
Preface

constitutes the main theme. I have opted for such variety partly because I believe it will be more interesting to readers than a more uniform approach would be. But I also want to expose them to different ways of understanding and representing the past. Grasping a causal sequence is one form of historical knowledge; taking in a panorama constitutes another.

To carry the readers across such wide and varied terrain, I have striven for a prose style that is brisk and authoritative, blending narrative with analysis, illustrative detail with digestible statistics. Here, a key objective is to convey the significance, vitality, poignancy, diversity, and contemporary relevance of modern US history – to arouse the curiosity of readers and encourage them to delve more deeply into the many topics featured in the book. Each chapter is followed by a list of suggested readings highlighting up-to-date scholarship on the subjects at hand, along with older historical works that remain indispensable. The book offers a distinct perspective but is, as well, an invitation to further exploration.

The volume features a substantial number of illustrations – mostly photographs, but also maps and a political cartoon. Instead of serving as deliberate detours from the primary text (as textbook illustrations often do), these visual materials are integral to the main narrative and designed to keep the reader’s attention focused on it.

Most instructors assigning the book will probably wish to have their students read it all the way through, in order. Its organization easily lends itself to a one-chapter-per-week reading schedule in a semester-long course. Yet the chapters are sufficiently thematic that each can stand on its own. Instructors may alter their sequence within a course, or assign a smaller selection of them. A set of reading questions at the end of each chapter underscores its themes and encourages critical reflection on some of the author’s claims. Instructors, students, and other interested readers may visit www.cambridge.org/yaqub to find relevant documents that further illuminate the book’s contents.
Acknowledgments

I did not set out to write this book. Between projects, I received an email from Deborah Gershenowitz, then a senior editor at Cambridge University Press, urging me to consider authoring a post-1945 history of the United States. At first it seemed out of the question that I would undertake such a daunting assignment, for which I felt so unqualified and unprepared. But Debbie’s vision and enthusiasm won me over, and I agreed to give it a try. Debbie has since moved on to another press, but I remain indebted to her for launching me on this unexpected, challenging, and rewarding journey.

Unlike my previous book projects, this one has drawn almost entirely on secondary literature. So I must acknowledge the scores of historians, journalists, social scientists, memoirists, and others (only some of them listed in the short bibliographies following the book’s chapters) who produced the vivid, detailed, textured, and insightful accounts that I have synthesized here. I am also grateful to the librarians at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and other institutions who made these published works available to me so quickly and efficiently. Covid-19 struck midway through the project. Overall, the pandemic’s impact on me and my family has been tiny compared with the trauma, disruption, misery, and heartbreak inflicted on millions around the globe. But the crisis did significantly alter my work on this book, requiring me to rely much more heavily on digital materials. I am thankful to the countless archivists and technicians who digitized and posted so many of the books, journals, newspapers, and other printed materials on which this account is based.

UC Santa Barbara and its extraordinary Department of History furnished a highly congenial environment for pursuing this project: brilliant and supportive colleagues, sharp and inquisitive students, humane teaching loads, survivable committee assignments, and a leave of absence in the fall of 2020. A post-World-War-I US history survey course I developed at UCSB allowed me to cobble together the preliminary framing for many of the book’s chapters.

At Cambridge University Press, Cecelia Cancellaro, Maggie Jeffers, and Rachel Norridge have served as the main overseers of the project, and working with them has been a delight. Joe LeMonnier, Mike Richardson, Peter Buckles, and many others at Cambridge whose names I don’t know have labored with skill, dedication, and professionalism to bring out this volume. The anonymous outside readers caught many errors and offered invaluable suggestions for improving the book. Generous colleagues and friends – especially Mark Bradley, Miroslava Chávez-Garcia, Nathan Citino, Ann Gordon, Laura Kalman, Douglas Rossinow, Kelly Shannon, and Elizabeth Teare – discussed the project with me, read portions of the manuscript, or otherwise helped to make it better.

Brief portions of this manuscript appeared in my 2016 book Imperfect Strangers: Americans, Arabs, and US–Middle East Relations in the 1970s. I am grateful to Cornell University Press for granting permission to reprint those passages.
xvi Acknowledgments

For nearly six decades, my parents and siblings have extended unconditional love and support. Over a shorter span of time – and, for me, an undeservedly happy one – my wife, Elizabeth Teare, and my daughter, Dorothy Teare Yaqub, have sustained me in ways I cannot begin to recount.