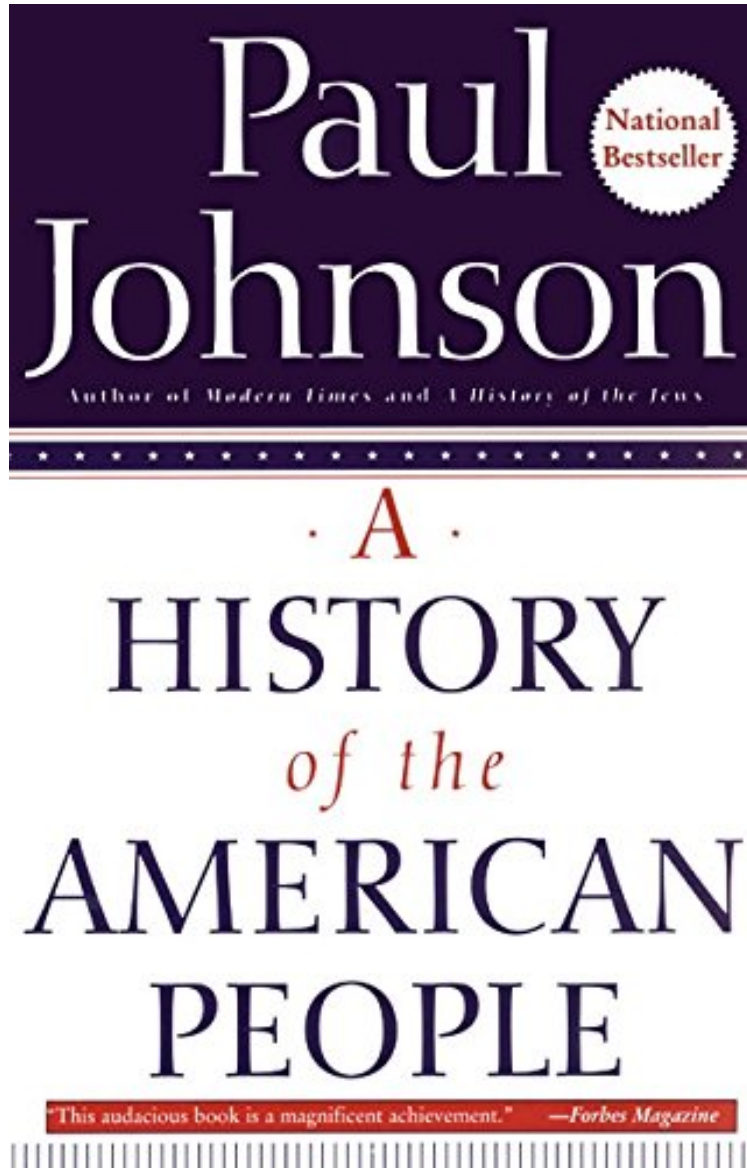


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## A History of the American People

Paul Johnson

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The prize winning classic work on the post Civil War period which wrenched American society, now with a new introduction by the author. "The creation of the United States of America is the greatest of all human adventures," begins Paul Johnson's remarkable new American history. "No other national story holds such tremendous lessons, for the American people themselves and for the rest of mankind." Johnson's history is a reinterpretation of American history from the first settlements to the Clinton administration. It covers every aspect of U.S. history: politics; business and economics; art, literature and science; society and customs; complex traditions and religious beliefs. The story is told in terms of the men and women who shaped and led the nation and the ordinary people who collectively created its unique character. Wherever possible, letters, diaries, and recorded conversations are used to ensure a sense of actuality. "The book has new and often trenchant things to say about every aspect and period of America's past," says Johnson, "and I do not seek, as some historians do, to conceal my opinions." This is an in-depth portrait of a great people, from their fragile origins through their struggles for independence and nationhood, their heroic efforts and sacrifices to deal with the 'organic sin of slavery and the preservation of the Union to its explosive economic growth and emergence as a world power and its sole superpower. Johnson discusses such contemporary topics as the politics of racism, education, Vietnam, the power of the press, political correctness, the growth of litigation, and the rising influence of women. He sees Americans as a problem-solving people and the story of America as "essentially one of difficulties being overcome by intelligence and skill, by faith and strength of purpose, by courage and persistence... Looking back on its past, and forward to its future, the auguries are that it will not disappoint humanity." This challenging narrative and interpretation of American history by the author of many distinguished historical works is sometimes controversial and always provocative. Johnson's views of individuals, events, themes, and issues are original, critical, and admiring, for he is, above all, a strong believer in the history and the destiny of the American people.

.com Paul Johnson, whose previous works include the distinguished *Modern Times* and *A History of the Jews*, has produced an epic that spans the history of the American people over the past 400 years. The prolific narrative covers every aspect of U.S. history, from science, customs, religion, and politics to the individual men and women who have helped shape the nation. His detailed, provocative examinations of political and social icons, from Lyndon Johnson to Norman Rockwell, are especially strong. Johnson's text is intelligent and rich with detail, and yet extremely accessible for anyone interested in a reinterpretive analysis of America's past. What makes this book unique is Johnson's approach to this self-professed Herculean task. The prevalent tone throughout is optimism. Whether he's discussing race relations, industrialization, the history of women, immigrants, Vietnam, or political correctness, Johnson--a staunch conservative who was born, bred, and educated in England--is openly enamored with America's past, particularly the hardships and tribulations that the nation has had to overcome. He sees this story as a series of important lessons, not just for Americans but for the whole of mankind as well. At a time when other contemporary scholars find it easier to bemoan the past, Johnson offers the reader "a compelling antidote to those who regard the future with pessimism." From *Library Journal* Johnson (*Intellectuals*, LJ 3/1/89; *Modern Times*, LJ 5/1/83) is used to tackling grand themes in his books, and this one is no exception. Even for the comparatively short period of American history, it is a daunting task. Still, Johnson does a good job of weaving together the story of American history. He takes more of a "social history" approach?including presentation of a background for each period and discussion of the various social issues involved in each. The author also uses quotations from personal diaries and other historical documents, providing a refreshing change from the usual "battle general" technique in retelling the American story. Recommended for all persons interested in American history. Also useful as a college-level introductory text.?Mark Ellis, Albany State Univ., Ga. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. From *Booklist* At midcentury, Oxford don A. J. P. Taylor was the most readable of serious historians, suitably left wing for his times; Johnson (a former attendee of Taylor tutorials) has few competitors for the contemporary readability mantle and is suitably right wing for these times, as shown in his influential *Modern Times* (1982). So expectations arise for a memorable, pleasurable, and instructive reading experience, and they are magnificently met. No dull pages occupy the space between the Puritans' "Citty upon a Hill" and superpower America. Although he warns of his "ruthless selection and rejection of material," he compensates with long, perceptive analyses of political personalities (he estimates Truman as one of the greatest presidents and Harding as the recipient of bad press), parallel with astute analyses of such sociopolitical problems as

slavery, economic episodes such as the Depression, or cultural matters such as jazz and painting, rendering about the latter the curious conclusion that Norman Rockwell and Andrew Wyeth are great painters. Whatever their aesthetic merit, those two are indeed "characteristically American," a phrase Johnson regularly deploys throughout this outstanding narrative interpretation, whether underscoring either the costs and injustices attending this country's creation or emphasizing admirable aspects of its democratic, constitutional achievement. A work one can't begin to disagree with even partially without reading it wholly, which legions will eagerly do. Gilbert Taylor