

Preface

American Horizons is a new text for the course in American history.

For more than 400 years, North America has been part of a global network centered upon the exchange of peoples, goods, and ideas. Human migrations—sometimes freely, sometimes forced—have continued over the centuries, along with the evolution of commerce in commodities as varied as tobacco, sugar, and computer chips. Europeans and Africans came or were brought to the continent, where they met, traded with, fought among, and intermarried with native peoples. Some of these migrants stayed, while others returned to their home countries. Still others came and went periodically. This initial circulation of people across the oceans foreshadowed the continuous movement of people, goods, and ideas that made the United States. These are the forces that have shaped American history, both dividing and unifying the nation. American “horizons” truly stretch beyond our nation’s borders, embracing the trading networks established during and after the colonial era to the digital social networks connecting people globally today.

American Horizons tells the story of the United States by exploring this exchange on a global scale and placing it at the center of that story. By doing so, we provide a different perspective on the history of the United States, one that we hope broadens the horizons of those who read our work and are ever mindful of the global forces that increasingly and profoundly shape our lives. At the same time, *American Horizons* considers those ways in which U.S. influence reshaped the lives and experiences of people of other nations.

U.S. history is increasingly perceived, interpreted, and taught as part of a global historical experience. The mutual influence of change—of global forces entering the U.S. and of American ideas, goods, and people moving out through the world—has been a consistent feature since the 16th century. While most Americans today are aware that their influence is felt abroad and are increasingly aware of the influence of events abroad on their own lives, they tend to think of these as recent developments. In fact, those earliest exchanges of beliefs and products some 500 years ago established a pattern of interaction that continues today.

We have written a narrative that encourages readers to consider the variety of pressures that spurred historical change. Some of these pressures arose within America and some came from outside its borders. In the 1820s, the global market for whale oil shaped labor conditions throughout New England. At the same time, the American political system was transformed by the unique inheritance of the American Revolution and the relative abundance of land in North America. In the 1940s and 1950s, the federal government designed a unique set of policies to help World War II veterans readjust to civilian life, while the Civil Rights Movement unfolded within a global context of decolonization in Africa and Asia. Topics such as these help us ask the reader to consider the relationship between local and global forces that shaped American history.

This book was conceived as an opportunity to present the nation’s history as more than a mere sequence of events for the student to memorize. The approach of *American Horizons* reflects this. Although adhering to the familiar chronological organization of this course, our narrative style and structure provide the flexibility of shifting emphasis from time to time to the global aspects of American history. While the story of the United States is always at the center of the story, that story is told through the movement of people, goods, and ideas into, within, or out of the United States.