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Preface

As an academic doctor, books about history are the only thing I can legally prescribe. Over the past decade, I have written almost three thousand prescriptions. But not all patients/students have taken their medicine. A few years ago, I decided that I needed to reconsider exactly what I was prescribing. Was the \$80 textbook I used at a community college based on a proper diagnosis of the needs of my students? Was the textbook that was even more expensive (but mostly full of pictures) the right book for my students at a research institution? Clearly not. But where could I find better medicine that would address my patients' chief complaint—overpriced textbooks that failed to address their needs?

This search led to the creation of this textbook. We constructed *A History of the United States* by reading and experimenting with each of the textbooks that are on the market. We already knew that many students approach college as if it is a quest to figure out what material is likely to be on an exam. We were surprised to see how savvy students were when they applied this model to textbook reading—many of them simply skip through about a third of a typical US history textbook. It was clear that we could eliminate lengthy opening vignettes, extended block quotes, and special sections that students assumed were placed in shaded boxes to indicate that they were not going to be on the exam.

We also found that students are allergic to textbooks that only have a few pictures, and they really do learn from images that are presented in a way that teaches an important lesson. However, these same students also admitted that they were easily distracted when they read. When there are too many pictures and when all these images disrupt the flow of the text, they admitted, they catch themselves “browsing” their textbooks as if they were catalogs or popular magazines.

This information led to the creation of a book that has just as many pictures and maps as any other book on the market, but one that is careful to place these images in ways that do not disrupt the narrative. The team of photo researchers and map-makers at Unnamed Publisher worked with historians and reviewers to only select images that had a compelling message. They were also careful to avoid the trap of overloading pages with images that distracted students and turned reading into browsing.

Here's the best part: this allowed the author freedom to include a lot more content and essential background information without making the book any longer than other textbooks. We found that key concepts that are important to understanding

history—such as the difference between Socialism, Capitalism, and Communism—could be incorporated into the text. We were able to include examples from labor history beyond Homestead, Haymarket, and Pullman. In so doing, we hope our book communicates the simple truth that the historic conflict between labor and capital was not limited to Chicago and Pennsylvania.

This inclusive approach was applied to every aspect of the book. For example, each section on the Cold War includes examples from Africa and Latin America in addition to Europe and Asia. The civil rights movement includes examples from the Great Plains, the Pacific Northwest, Appalachia, and the Northeast in addition to the Deep South. Women's history, Latino/Latina history, Asian American history, LGBT history, and other important but often-marginalized topics have also been incorporated throughout most of the chapters. And because every book is customizable, instructors can add local and thematic history wherever they believe it is needed.

Because no single prescription can fit every patient, the book can even be customized, abridged, or enlarged. One of the great things about this book is that it can be revised and improved by myself and others. In this regard, I would love to hear from instructors and students alike. I am interested to find the ways this book worked for you and hear your ideas about ways to improve it. All ideas are welcome, as are stories about how this book has made a difference in your experiences as teachers and students.

I have been extremely fortunate to work with so many supportive colleagues who have generously given their time and talents to help shape this book. Thank you to those at the University of Kansas, the University of Illinois, Marshall University, and a host of other institutions who have suggested books and articles and reviewed portions of the manuscript. I would especially like to thank each of the historians who served in a formal capacity as the reviewers of the manuscript. Your counsel and kindly written criticism helped me through each step of the writing and editing process.

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WARNING. Instructors who have adopted this textbook have experienced the following side-effects: increased student participation, better grades on exams, and an increased likelihood that students will try to hug their professors for saving them so much money. Students who arrive to class with questions inspired by their reading are advised to consult their doctors of history, as this may be an indication of a rare condition known as curiosity about the past.