

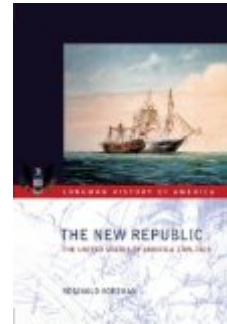
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Reginald Horsman. *The New Republic: The United States of America, 1789-1815*. London & New York: Longman, 2000. ix + 275 pp. \$24.33 (paper), ISBN 978-0-582-29287-1.

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Teaching the Early Republic

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Reginald Horsman's *The New Republic* is the first in a new ten-volume history of the United States, published by Longman. Reviewing the book for H-Survey appears to be highly appropriate as the volume (and others in the series to follow) are designed for classroom use. Indeed, the book, which falls into fifteen chapters, is certainly nicely designed for courses on the New Republic. And with each chapter being about fifteen to twenty pages in length, instructors can still assign supplementary readings without overburdening the student.

The series, according to the editor's preface, pursues an ambitious goal. As series editor Mark J. White puts it, "Rarely has the gap between traditional history and the 'New History' been bridged. This series seeks to do that." This statement is followed immediately by a significant qualifier: "Naturally, the balance between political and socio-cultural history will vary from volume to volume, depending on the period covered and, to some extent, the author's specialty" (p. v). Any instructor considering this volume should take this advice and consider his or her needs carefully. Which is not to say that this is a bad book. Not at all.

Horsman's synthesis, accessibly written, does not disregard the so-called "New History," but, as a quick look at the table of contents will immediately reveal, the text places stronger emphasis on political history, followed closely by economic and military history: "The United States in 1789," "The Shaping of Government,"

"Neutral Rights," "The Rise of Political Parties," "The Adams Administration," "The Economy," "The Advance of Settlement," "Jefferson in Power," "Race and Slavery," "Louisiana and the Politics of Expansion," "Foreign Trials," "The Failure of Economic Coercion," "The Coming of War," "The Invasion of Canada," and "Crisis." Horsman's choice of emphasis, then, is not much different from most U.S. history survey texts that come to mind.

With regard to argument, Horsman's text does not appear to offer any fundamentally new insights—nor is it intended to. The text emphasizes the tenuousness of politics in the New Republic and provides crisp synopses of crucial debates. It is based on both secondary and primary research, and the author supports his arguments with well-chosen, evocative quotes. All in all, the chapters are well-crafted, though some appear clearly better than others. Horsman's introductory chapter, "The United States in 1789," broadly summarizing the state of affairs and developments in the "New Republic," appears to suffer from a slight organizational problem: a well-crafted paragraph on the Confederation's problems in ensuring commercial growth is followed without a transition by a paragraph on demographic data (p. 9) and an ensuing discussion of domestic economic and social issues. A student, or lay reader not sufficiently familiar with the period, will have difficulties following the author here. Possibly, a discussion of "the arrival of a liberal, commercial, capitalistic America" (p. 17) might have made for a better transition. Other chapters are clearly excellent and easy to follow. For example, "The

Rise of Political Parties” is among the most crisp, lucid explanations on the intersections between U.S. foreign relations, economic development, and the rise of parties, while at the same time linking the events “to the more general argument about the timing of the emergence of a modern, liberal, capitalistic United States” (p. 53), that I have seen on the level of a survey text. The same holds true for “The Advance of Settlement,” in which Horsman heavily draws on his own work.

Slight disappointments in the volume’s design include the plates, many of which, such as the Rembrandt Peale portrait of Thomas Jefferson and the Trumbull painting of Alexander Hamilton, are standard fare in U.S. history survey texts and, placed together roughly in the middle of the book, do not add much to the usefulness of the book. Instructors and students who hope for maps, especially in the chapters on the War of 1812, will be disappointed; there are none.

A potentially more critical disappointment is the extent to which Horsman has integrated the “new” history with the “old.” While the chapter on “Race and Slavery” is quite effective along these lines, integrating Horsman’s own work on the Dartmoor prison, which held black and white U.S. POWs during the War of 1812, as a case study, elsewhere the text falls short of the series’s declared goal. The text’s coverage of women’s history in the early republic—a somewhat disappointing four pages in a volume that devotes about fifteen pages to the U.S. invasion of Canada—is merely on par with some U.S. survey texts. The same holds true for the history of workers

and labor relations.

The decision on classroom adoption and use, then, will, as always, depend on the instructor’s needs and preferences: Horsman’s book will make a nice fit for courses that deal with or emphasize the political, diplomatic, and economic aspects of the time period. Instructors who emphasize social and cultural history in lectures and class room discussions may find Horsman’s text quite useful, for it will free them to a large extent from covering the political and diplomatic history of the era. Indeed, such instructors are well advised to pay close attention to the author’s footnotes: a one-paragraph summary of the ways in which the war between Great Britain and France “deeply intensified existing divisions” (p. 56) in U.S. politics cites Simon Newman’s *Parades and Politics* and David Waldstreicher’s *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*. An instructor could easily use Horsman’s references to supplement the chapter with a lecture on grassroots political culture. Instructors who are not experts on the time period also will be well-advised to consult Horsman’s brief, chapter-by-chapter bibliographies, either for directions to other works for lecture material, or to direct students to literature for additional research. Those who seek a text with a strong emphasis on social and cultural history, however, will have to go elsewhere.

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