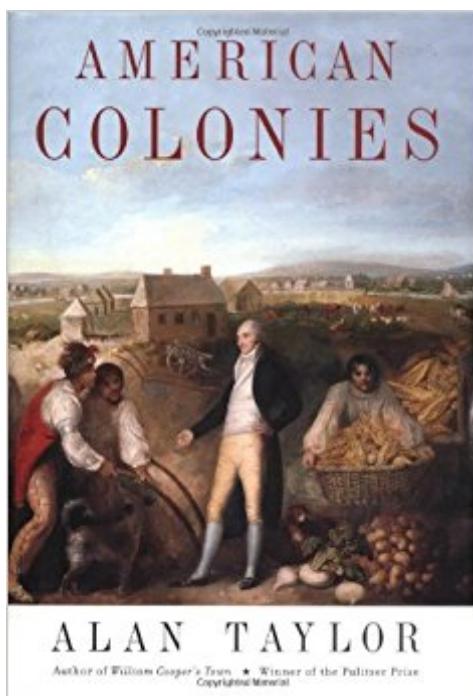


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# American Colonies (Penguin History Of The United States)



## Synopsis

In *American Colonies* award-winning historian Alan Taylor challenges the traditional Anglocentric focus of colonial history by exploring the multitude of cultural influences out of which "America" ultimately emerged. From the Siberian migrations across the Bering Strait fifteen thousand years ago and the European expeditions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries through the nineteenth-century exploration and occupation of the Hawaiian Islands, Taylor traces the complex ecological, ethnic, and economic history and colonization of the New World from coast to coast, from the Canadian north to the Pacific rim. Examining the repeatedly overlooked influence of the continent's natives upon the colonists and the resulting mutual dependence of the two, Taylor presents a unique and revelatory view of colonial North America. European colonists, African slaves, and native peoples met one another and interacted at a pace and intensity unparalleled in global history. The effects of this staggering confluence of cultural, ecological, military, diplomatic, and economic interests are still being felt in America today. This fascinating and involving history of the origins of the United States will provoke and appeal to all readers of American history. Series Editor: Eric Foner

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

First in Viking's new five-volume series the *Penguin History of the United States*, edited by noted Columbia historian Eric Foner (Reconstruction), this book by Pulitzer Prize-winner Taylor (William Cooper's Town) challenges traditional Anglocentric interpretations of colonial history by focusing

more evenly on the myriad influences on North America's development. Beginning with the Siberian migrations across the Bering Straits 15 millennia ago, Taylor lays out the complicated road map of ownership, occupation and competition involving the Native Americans, African slaves and Spanish, Dutch, French and English colonists. He covers settlement and conquest from Canada to Mexico, and from the West Indies and mainland colonies to the Pacific islands. "The colonial intermingling of peoples and of microbes, plants, and animals from different continents was unparalleled in speed and volume in global history," he writes. Taylor delves deeply into topics given scant mention in most histories: the crucial role of the West Indies in the 17th-century economy and the particular brand of brutality that supported it; cultural disparities among the many Native peoples that influenced their mutually dependent relations with the various colonizers. An extensive, chapter-by-chapter bibliography lists further reading. Even the serious student of history will find a great deal of previously obscure information, for instance that in the 18th century the Russian fur traders went much farther on North America's Pacific Coast than the explorers sent by the Russian crown. The book offers a balanced understanding of the diverse peoples and forces that converged on this continent early on and influenced the course of American history. Illus. (Nov. 12) Forecast: This bold new view of early America should be widely and well reviewed, and will attract a broad range of students of American history. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

In this first book in the "Penguin History of the United States" series, Taylor (history, Univ. of California, Davis; *William Cooper's Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic*) examines American colonial history from a wide-ranging perspective. Instead of offering the traditional story of the English colonies and "American exceptionalism," Taylor examines the complex mix of peoples, events, and influences that shaped the New World. He notes that the intermingling of cultures, people, plants, and animals from different parts of the world was unparalleled in speed and volume and had devastating consequences for the environment and most of the participants. Only a very select few prospered during the 17th and 18th centuries, a period in which North America actually lost population owing to diseases, wars, and early deaths. He vividly describes the harsh realities of colonial life and examines the important roles played by French, Dutch, Spanish, Russian, and English colonists as well as Native Americans and African slaves. Well written and documented, this is recommended for academic and large public libraries. Robert Flatley, Frostburg State Univ., MD Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Alan Taylor surveys the history of settling of North America from its earliest inhabitants (scholarship

as of 2000, could use an update) to the formation of the United States in a very thoughtful, non-partisan manner. This work is full of fascinating details. For example, in its earliest forms in North America, slavery was not initially based on race but turned into racial chattel slavery in a very particular manner for a very particular reason. The Native Americans in California had a very sophisticated way of managing and shaping the "natural" environment. Taylor gives an excellent treatment of subjects that are not commonly treated in surveys, such as the differences between French, Spanish, and English settlements the causes and consequences of the Pueblo revolt, and how different Native American groups had cleverly managed to achieve a modicum of coexistence and balance with the colonial powers...until the Seven Years War, which then eventually led to the near total destruction of Native societies.

As of the date of writing this review, Alan Taylor has won two Pulitzer Prizes. I was fairly shocked to learn that this book was not a Pulitzer Prize winner. With Alan Taylor as the author and Eric Foner as the editor, this book packs a devastating one-two punch. It is used in many institutions as a textbook or main secondary source of the era before the American Revolution. It is relatively easy to read. Any freshman college student should have no difficulty with American Colonies. Neither should anyone else who reads it. This is supposed to be the first volume of a five volume series entitled *The Penguin History of the United States*. Unfortunately, it appears that only one other volume in the series was completed. This entry stands alone easily and for many is the definitive one volume work on the American colonies from their establishment to the Revolution. However, do not be fooled into thinking it is the quintessential work on the era. Taylor's book was made for a wide audience and did not dive as deep into the era as a much larger work would have. What Taylor did do was explore the colonization of North America from a much wider perspective than just the traditional Anglo-American centric view which has dominated American historical thought until recently. In doing this Taylor explored new directions of historiography into various subfields of history. The result is a book that shows just how complex history actually is. *American Colonies* seeks to answer the why questions of history. Taylor weaves the multiple themes historians explore in each era together to form a narrative that conveys what occurred in the past and why these events happened. I was particularly interested to see how he would treat the development of chattel slavery in the colonies. He condensed much of Edmund Morgan's great exploration of the subject into seven pages which while not an in depth expose of slavery itself, managed to explain to the reader how slavery got its start in the colonies. The excerpt is quite useful for instructing students in American history survey courses where time is short and depth is needed. This is just

one example of the utilities involved in the making of this book. It is full of sections like this one on slavery which can be used in the classroom when an instructor is making a point. It is also very useful for instructors to have as support for their textbooks. In some cases, the book is the textbook. Taylor's credentials as a master historian are beyond dispute. The result is an outstanding book written by a master historian, edited by another master historian, and presented to a wide audience for their learning pleasure. Books like this are rare and should be savored. I for one enjoyed reading this book and recommend it for others interested in American history, especially in the colonial era.

This historical accounting by Alan Taylor of the settling of the Americas is superbly researched and written, well deserving of its Pulitzer Prize; and includes a much broader view of the peoples who make up the American whole than if it had simply describing the first white settlers themselves. In one book, one place, we are given the backgrounds almost as far as written history takes us - and of everyone - the differences in people, the lifestyles, the beginnings of trade and industries, farming, religions, slave labor. This life in the America of New Beginning began long before the "age of reason", (is it yet?) and it is intriguing and a little frightening to imagine living in those narrow times, at least it is for me each time I read of such things as the Salem Witch Trials, which also are given page space in this book. It also subtly underscores the ambiguous idea that the Puritans and other sects fled the old countries because of religious persecution, but continued to keep the practice partially alive once they arrived on the new shores. In striving to make the New Beginning, it would seem that not much of the Old was left behind. It covers the eras encompassing "The Natives" of 13,000 B.C., the New England and Chesapeake settlements, the Revolutions, on through the 1820's - and the "why" of all of it. The author manages to hit all the scholarly highs without sacrificing interest for the reader; none of it is dry because it is peppered throughout with sensible explanations. If one thing is taken away each time a work like this is read, it is that there has never been any real peace or tranquility for anyone. Life is what it is, whether primitive or enlightened; breaking free of tyrannical chains for some begat more chains for others in the quest. I found it an excellent addition to the Historical collection, and while the internet is an excellent source of instant reference, nothing will take the place of the concentrated effort of a well written book. Other American History titles I found excellent in the quest for up-dating and renewing my knowledge of nation:  
\*\* "Miracle at Philadelphia" by Catherine Drinker Bowen  
\*\* "Three men of Boston" by John r. galvin  
\*\* "The Adams-Jefferson Letters"  
\*\* "Jefferson" by Thomas Jefferson (Library of America)  
\*\* "American Colonies" by Alan Taylor  
\*\* "The First American" (Franklin) by H.W.

Brands (Library of America)\*\* "1776" by David McCullough\*\* "John Adams" by David McCullough\*\* "Defiance of the Patriots - the Boston Tea Party" - Benjamin L. Carp\*\* "American Speeches" Political Oratory (Library of America) Nothing boring between these pages - the bravest and brightest intellects of our nation were available and hard at work speaking the minds of the rest of us - so that we might understand ourselves.

Well written, a bit short for such a large topic, but full of interesting tidbits and a quite convincing thesis about the workings of colonialism and their interaction with the native population. This book should be of interest to all but a specialist, but even the latter might enjoy the spin that Taylor puts on his topic. Besides, this book had high entertainment value.

I am not a historian, however, this book seemed to cover a huge amount of ground in reasonable depth primarily from the perspective of the affected natives while providing a good amount of information about the pressures that led to colonialism.

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