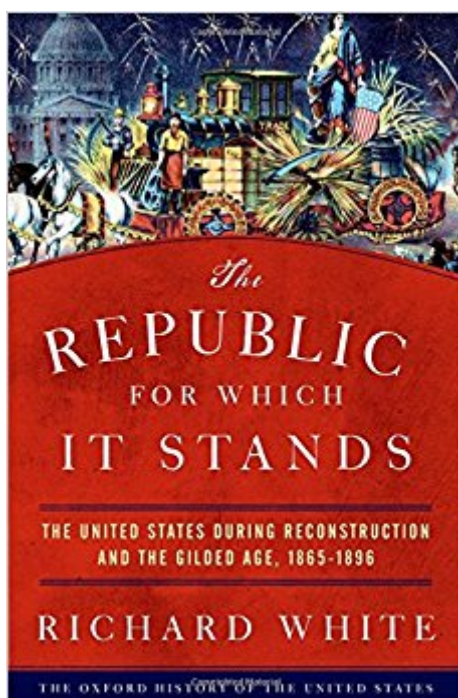


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# The Republic For Which It Stands: The United States During Reconstruction And The Gilded Age, 1865-1896 (Oxford History Of The United States)



## Synopsis

The Oxford History of the United States is the most respected multivolume history of the American nation. In the newest volume in the series, *The Republic for Which It Stands*, acclaimed historian Richard White offers a fresh and integrated interpretation of Reconstruction and the Gilded Age as the seedbed of modern America. At the end of the Civil War the leaders and citizens of the victorious North envisioned the country's future as a free-labor republic, with a homogenous citizenry, both black and white. The South and West were to be reconstructed in the image of the North. Thirty years later Americans occupied an unimagined world. The unity that the Civil War supposedly secured had proved ephemeral. The country was larger, richer, and more extensive, but also more diverse. Life spans were shorter, and physical well-being had diminished, due to disease and hazardous working conditions. Independent producers had become wage earners. The country was Catholic and Jewish as well as Protestant, and increasingly urban and industrial. The "dangerous" classes of the very rich and poor expanded, and deep differences -- ethnic, racial, religious, economic, and political -- divided society. The corruption that gave the Gilded Age its name was pervasive. These challenges also brought vigorous efforts to secure economic, moral, and cultural reforms. Real change -- technological, cultural, and political -- proliferated from below more than emerging from political leadership. Americans, mining their own traditions and borrowing ideas, produced creative possibilities for overcoming the crises that threatened their country. In a work as dramatic and colorful as the era it covers, White narrates the conflicts and paradoxes of these decades of disorienting change and mounting unrest, out of which emerged a modern nation whose characteristics resonate with the present day.

## Book Information

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"Fearless and peerless, Richard White leads us through a transformed and fragmented nation in turmoil, haunted by the slain Abraham Lincoln, where visions of freedom and equality were rapidly vanishing. In the rural South, in the urban North, and out West, from the terribly destitute to the stupendously wealthy, White brings together stories that historians have long told separately, untangling the anger and blame that grew so deeply entrenched in the Gilded Age. How did all this happen? Richard White explains everything." - Martha Hodes, author of *Mourning Lincoln* "Richard White has given us a brilliantly imagined narrative of astonishing breadth, thickly peopled with figures from familiar political lions to Lizzie Borden, Dorothy and Toto, that brings to vivid life one of the most challenging periods of American history. His is a twisting, often violent and above all ironic story of a nation finding its way from a time of both tragedy and optimism to one of prodigious wealth and colossal energy, of deepening divisions of class, blood, and ideas, of new meanings of everything from government to geographical space, and of a shaken, tempered faith in the century ahead. This is a masterful performance." -- Elliott West, author of *The Last Indian War* "Richard White offers a remarkable new synthesis of the decades following the Civil War, showing the myriad ways in which a period about which most modern Americans know too little in fact laid the foundations for the nation we know today. This book will change the ways we think not just about the past, but about the present as well." -- William Cronon, author of *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* "The Republic for Which It Stands illuminates every key aspect of the industrializing, expanding nation in the final third of the nineteenth century: racial, ecological, legal, political, economic, and cultural. In lucid, witty, and often dramatic prose, Richard White makes sense of them all in a way that powerfully echoes the inequalities and environmental degradation of our own day. Yet he also captures the mighty appeal of the developing capitalist economy that was becoming the envy of the world. This is the best book on the Gilded Age that has ever been written."

-- Michael Kazin, author of *War Against War: The American Fight for Peace, 1914-1918* "This is a marvelous achievement of narrative history by a great historian. Written with immense learning, wit, indignation, fearless judgments, and imagination, the book will stand up for a long time as a new vision of two eras with reputation problems. White masterfully weaves the metaphor of the 'vanished twin' through the book and persuasively makes 'home' a central theme binding all Americans of every class or race: as dream, as reality, as racial and gendered place, and as politics. This is not your granddaddy's Gilded Age, although corruption - lots of it - oozes from the story. It is powerful and readable history that exudes all the 'hallmarks of modernity' we have claimed and soberingly invokes our own grave political moment. What 'vanished' is nothing less than the meaning of Union victory and the world the first Republican party struggled to achieve. White is our Mark Twain with archival authority and footnotes." -- David W. Blight, Yale University

"The Oxford History of the United States continues to surpass expectations with this latest contribution. For many Americans, Reconstruction is still remembered as a period of racial anarchy, political failure, and the humiliation of the defeated South. This volume presents detailed knowledge of what actually happened in the South between 1865 and 1876 and the years that followed. It is sometimes an inspiring but more often deeply shocking story that reveals a nation at its best and worst, when newly freed slaves and idealists, both black and white, struggled to preserve the rights Union armies had won on the battlefield and that Republican members of Congress affirmed in the years after the Civil War." -- Frank J. Williams, President of The Ulysses S. Grant Presidential Library and Association

Richard White is Margaret Byrne Professor of American History at Stanford University. He is the author of numerous prize-winning books, including *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America*, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*, and *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A New History of the American West*. He is a recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and a Mellon Distinguished Scholar Award, among other awards.

I've read quite a number of books and as a matter of fact own quite a number of them covering the period of reconstruction and the immediate aftermath. Of all the books I have read, even though some go into minute detail, this one is the most comprehensive and most easily read of the bunch. This Oxford series is a wonderful thing and all should be on the shelves of anyone interested in history. This book is no exception. While this book may appear to be quite lengthy and at about 1,000 pages it is indeed a mammoth thing, it most certainly does not read like

a typical history book. You cannot really classify this one as *popular history* as it has quite an academic bent to it but it reads smooth. The book is well footnoted and the pictures are quite a nice addition. It was interesting to me that as our nation gradually worked into what we now refer to as the *Gilded Age*, that there are so many parallels as to what is happening to our country this day. This is NOT a political book by any means but for those of you who love and are interested in history the fact that we may not be going in the right direction (depending upon how you view things) becomes quite apparent quite quickly. That though is something each must evaluate for themselves. All in all this was an excellent read and a great addition to a wonderful series.

The Republic for Which It Stands is a wonderful addition to the Oxford History of the United States series. Richard White, Professor of History at Stanford, has written an incredibly well researched, and fastidiously documented, work on the Reconstruction and the Gilded Age (1865-1896). I have been a lover of this series since the volumes first began coming out in 1982 under the stewardship of Vann Woodward and now David Kennedy. The rather frustrating wait for each book has been well worth the wait. White covers the Reconstruction and the Gilded Age with equal ability. I marveled at the work that had to go into this writing. As I knew less about the former than the latter, I found the Reconstruction writing to be a rougher go than the second half on the Gilded Age, where the pace seemed to quicken. To the best of my recollection, I would say this volume felt more “academic” and less of a narrative than other editions in the series. In no way should that be interpreted as meaning I feel this isn’t a book that should be read by all those with more than a passing interest in American history. It is truly a must read. I commend Professor White for this volume and its real worthiness to be included by the Oxford University Press in this enlightening and fascinating series. I would imagine that all of these books will line the shelves of historians for many decades to come.

Although the book only covers a few decades, from the end of the Civil War to roughly the turn of the twentieth century, it packs a ton of history in its nearly 900 pages of text. Normally with a volume this bog, I would skim several sections, zeroing in on the pieces of history that grab me and going back to fill in the blanks -- not a very straightforward process, but it keeps me from getting bogged down in detail. I could not do that with this book, because every time I thought about skimming ahead, I got caught up in more interesting details. I loved the way the author interspersed the political narrative with fascinating episodes of social history, such as Horatio Alger’s books, the

business of cattle drives (which is more thoroughly examined in the new book *Cattle Kingdom* by Christopher Knowlton), the life of a soldier in late 19th century America and who was likely to become a soldier. Great history!

I leave to others the worthy task of limning the superb display of historical scholarship which Richard White presents in *The Republic for Which It Stands*. Much superlative work has been done in the last two decades on this period, not least by Eric Foner. White gathers it all for us in pages that not only are compulsively readable but, I would stress, constitute absolutely essential reading at the present juncture in our nation's history, not to mention after the horrid events of the past week. And no, by no means as this book shows, can the confederate monuments now under question survive free of the historical context provided here: they belong, properly, in a museum, with cautionary annotations attached.

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