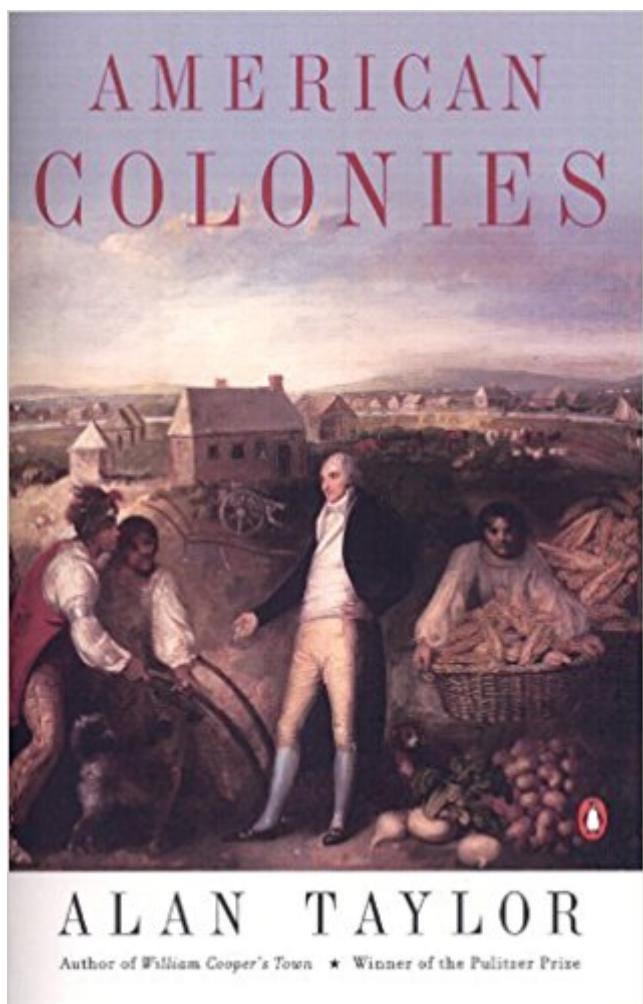


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American Colonies: The Settling Of North America (The Penguin History Of The United States, Volume 1)



Synopsis

A multicultural, multinational history of colonial America from the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Internal Enemy* and *American Revolutions* In the first volume in the Penguin History of the United States, edited by Eric Foner, Alan Taylor challenges the traditional story of colonial history by examining the many cultures that helped make America, from the native inhabitants from millennia past, through the decades of Western colonization and conquest, and across the entire continent, all the way to the Pacific coast. Transcending the usual Anglocentric version of our colonial past, he recovers the importance of Native American tribes, African slaves, and the rival empires of France, Spain, the Netherlands, and even Russia in the colonization of North America. Moving beyond the Atlantic seaboard to examine the entire continent, *American Colonies* reveals a pivotal period in the global interaction of peoples, cultures, plants, animals, and microbes. In a vivid narrative, Taylor draws upon cutting-edge scholarship to create a timely picture of the colonial world characterized by an interplay of freedom and slavery, opportunity and loss. "Formidable . . . provokes us to contemplate the ways in which residents of North America have dealt with diversity." -The New York Times Book Review From the Trade Paperback edition.

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Customer Reviews

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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