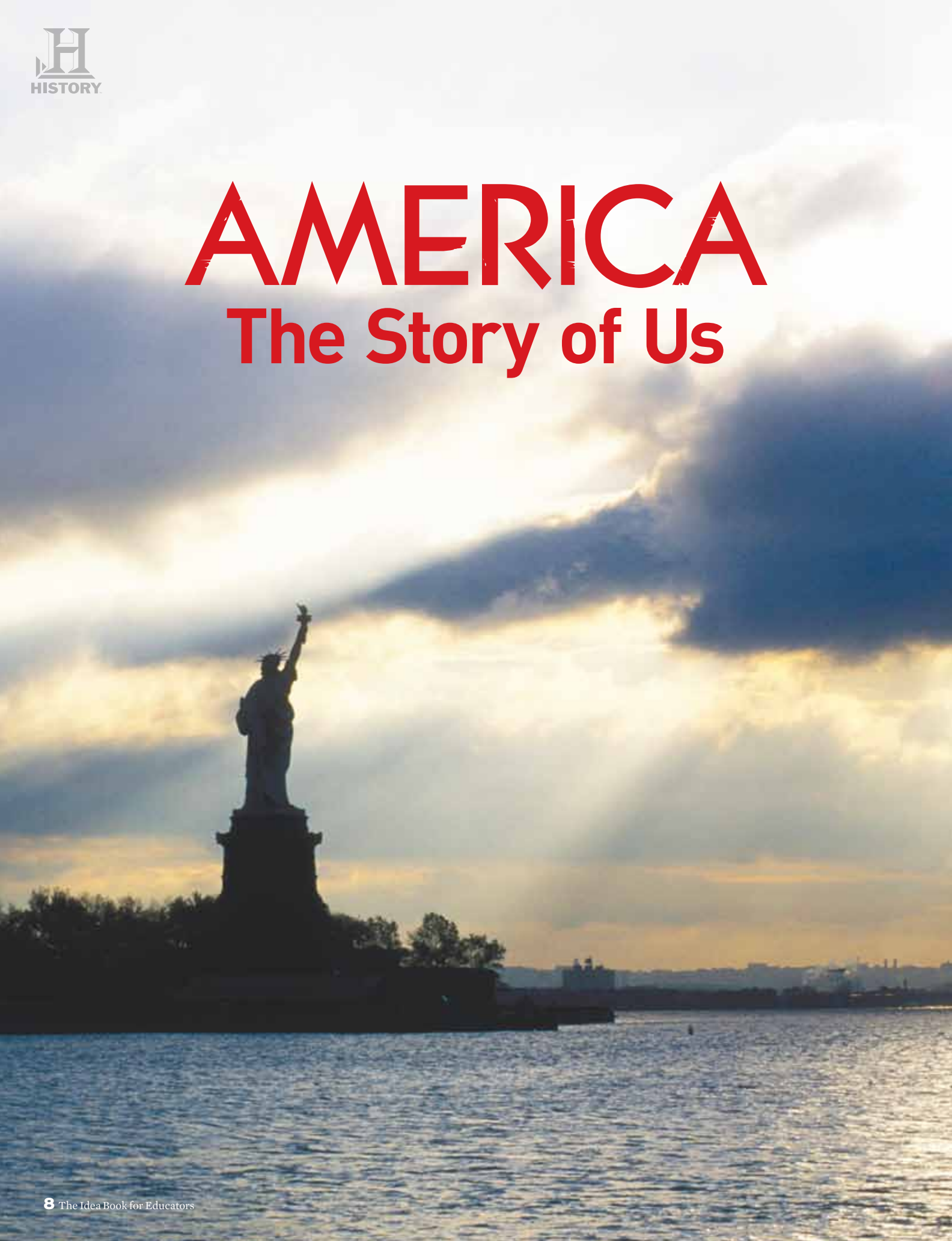
HISTORY

AMERICA
The Story of Us



How do we tell the story of the American nation? From the earliest days of European settlement in the New World, Americans from all backgrounds have recorded their stories and attempted to make sense of their place in history. Each generation craves its own definitive version of the story of the American past. *America The Story of Us* is a landmark television endeavor which captures the vast sweep of American history, connecting the vital people and events that forged the American nation. This exuberant 12-part series focuses on the extraordinary story of how the United States was invented, fashioned from technological prowess and an ongoing belief in the possibilities of innovation and experimentation.

From the earliest interactions between Europeans and Native Americans through the efforts to cultivate the frontier, from the harnessing of the Mississippi River to the moon landing, *America The Story of Us* reveals the connections and continuities that have shaped U.S. history. Featuring surprising detail and colorful CGI (computer generated imagery) each one-hour episode moves through a significant chapter in the American story. With roots in the physical world, the series captures the ways everyday people confronted and interacted with animals, unforeseen weather, and the power of rivers and the sea. There are also stories of conflict – wars with Native Americans, the scourge of slavery, the Revolutionary War that birthed the nation, and the Civil War that nearly pulverized it. At every turn, the series shows how Americans created new tools, structures, and machines to blaze forward and build towns, cities and eventually, a diverse and distinct national culture.

America The Story of Us offers educators and students an extraordinary opportunity to connect with the American past, learning about fascinating individual stories while envisioning a broad view of U.S. history. The 12 episodes in this series provide a roadmap for learning about U.S. history, with stories along the way that are engaging touchstones for students to delve deeper into their own studies of our nation's past. Rather than flat characters and actions on a page, people and events spring into action, showing students how the tough and thrilling adventure of American history transpired. The final episode brings the story of America up through today as some of our most revered leaders and artists reflect upon the nation's past, and challenge us to imagine the American stories that have yet to be told.

Renovation Work on Statue of Liberty. This picture was taken from the torch which she holds. Sept 26th 1938.
© Hulton-Deutsch Collection/CORBIS

Curriculum links

America The Story of Us would be useful for history, American culture, social studies, geography, journalism and ethnic studies courses. It is recommended for 6th-grade students and above. It connects with many state standards and curriculum benchmarks in history and social studies. Families are encouraged to watch this series together and discuss its meaning and relevance in relation to their own local and family histories.

EPISODE BREAKDOWNS

EPISODE 1: Rise of the Patriots
The founding of Jamestown and Plymouth, the hardships of the early colonies, the arrival of Africans and development of slavery, and interactions with Native Americans, are explored. As the colonies prevail, tensions with the British ignite.

EPISODE 2: Revolution!
The sparks of rebellion, the Declaration of Independence, and the drama of the American Revolution are examined in this episode. The triumph of General George Washington and his troops pave the way for a new nation; the United States is officially born.

EPISODE 3: Westward
As wagon trains and cattle barons headed westward, they confronted Native American Indians, the Spanish and the French. Westward migration, the discovery of gold and other resources, and the battles to dominate the American landscape are covered in this episode.

EPISODE 4: Seeds of War
America became a nation just as a revolution in commerce and industry swept the western world. This episode explores the economic growth of the U.S. in the context of rising divides between the North and South over slavery. After the election of Abraham Lincoln, Civil War became inevitable.

EPISODE 5: Civil War
In 1863, the Confederate Army seemed poised to overtake the Union forces. Following the bloody battle of Antietam, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. Former slaves joined the Union army in droves. With battlefield technology and steely resilience, the Union prevailed and America was perched to become a global superpower.

EPISODE 6: Conquering the Plains
In 1869, the Atlantic and Pacific coasts of America were linked by continuous metal rails. Railroads connected Americans in new ways and altered the entire ecology of the continent. The vast Plains, where buffalo and Native Americans had roamed, were remade by land speculators and industrialists. In less than a quarter of a century, the West was transformed.

EPISODE 7: City
In 1871 Chicago burned to the ground and from the ashes of the old a new kind of city rose. A flood of new immigration, resistance among workers to unfair conditions, and the expansion of mass transportation are covered. The innovative, entrepreneurial American spirit embodied by business leaders and everyday Americans come to life in this episode.

EPISODE 8: Boom
Henry Ford's Model T and assembly line, together with the discovery of abundant oil reserves, opened up a new way of life in the 20th-century U.S. This episode traces the significance of WWI, African American migration to northern cities, prohibition, and the onset of the film industry.

EPISODE 9: Bust
On October 29, 1929 the boom time of the 1920s crashed on Wall Street. The dramatic effects of the Great Depression and New Deal are the topics of this episode. Despite economic collapse, major public works projects such as the Hoover Dam proved the might of the U.S. worker.

EPISODE 10: America at War
America was still mired in the Great Depression, but U.S. involvement in WWII revved the engines of the U.S. economy – and changed American society forever. This episode delves into the WWII era with attention to the role of women and African Americans, the use of new technologies of war, and the enormous effects of this era on the place of the U.S. in the world order.

EPISODES 11+12: Then and Now
America's most prominent leaders and personalities reflect on the defining moments of post-WWII America including the Cold War, the space race, the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War and Watergate. September 11th is memorialized and the significance of President Obama's election is analyzed. The series concludes with a look at what has endured – and what has changed – over 400 years of U.S. history.

Freight train passing through a field, North Dakota, USA. © Medioimages/Photodisc

Pre-viewing activities

1. This series explores the American landscape and the development of boundaries within the United States. Before viewing an episode, ask students to review a map depicting the United States during the time period covered in the episode or episodes they are watching.

2. The *America* series touches upon many specific stories in order to give perspective on the growth of the nation as a whole. Before watching the series or a single episode, ask students to make a list of 5-10 important events and people from the time period it covers. The class can review these lists together and discuss, before or after watching the series or episode.

3. *America The Story of Us* is an excellent video resource for year-long or semester-long courses or surveys in American history. Before showing the series to students, educators may want to choose a central question to pose throughout the series.

4. Before watching an episode, ask students to reflect upon what was happening where they live during the timeframe covered by the episode. For example, you might ask how the Civil War affected your community or how the invention of the car changed your city or town.

5. Many students are eager to learn more about an area of U.S. history that they find interesting. Before watching the *America* series, encourage students to make a list of U.S. history topics that interest them (inventions, transportation, the role of slavery, the definition of freedom, etc.). While watching, students can look for related sections in the series and think about avenues for additional research or topics for writing projects.

Extended activities

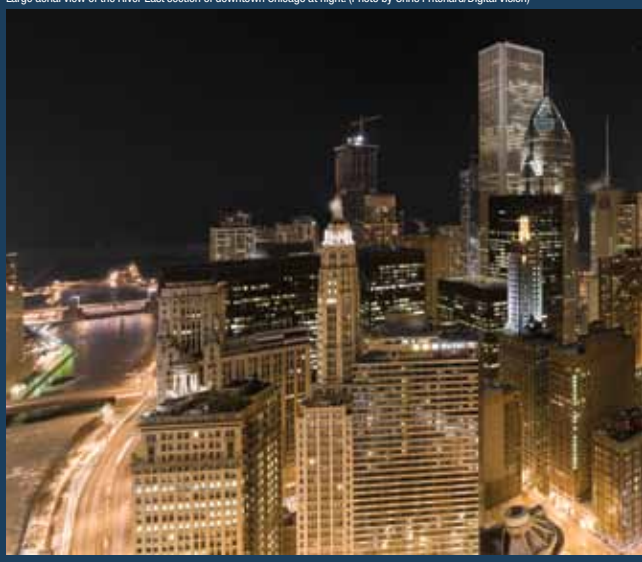
1. HISTORY™ has created a contest for educators connected with the *America The Story of Us* series. Learn about how to submit to this contest in this magazine or online at **www.history.com/classroom**. Get involved and share your innovative ideas!

2. Throughout *America The Story of Us*, viewers learn about many of the most important documents in the American past. While watching, ask students to write down a list of the primary source documents referenced in the series. Or, ask them to reflect after watching and choose a primary source related to the time period you are studying. Online or at the library, have students find an excerpt from this source and write a short 1-page paper about its context and significance. In addition to official documents, students can write about poems, songs, letters, or other sources they find interesting. The National Archives "Our Documents" site and the Library of Congress American Memory Project linked at the end of this guide are great starting places for this activity.

3. This series depicts pivotal moments in U.S. history both locally and nationally. What are some of the key moments or changes your community has experienced? You can explore this topic through photography. Locate a photograph that captures your community; this photo can be of any interesting or compelling person, place, or scene from the past. Then, find a photo that depicts a related scene from today. Compare and contrast these photos in a short essay, describing what links them and what they reveal about change over time locally.

4. Rivers, trees, wildlife, and oceans have played unforgettable roles in the making of America. Many of these features are explored in *America The Story of Us*. This series provides the chance for students to investigate the waters, animals, flora and fauna that have been part of their local histories. Ask students to choose a feature of their own city or state landscape and write a short report of two pages or less on a topic of their choice, including changes over time. (Examples: students can write about the role/decline of buffalo in their area, the use of a local river as a means to transport goods in the 19th century, the rise of railroads or the construction of a key building/architectural style.)

Large aerial view of the River East section of downtown Chicago at night. (Photo by Chris Pritchard/Digital Vision)



Triumph Insurance Co. Advertisement: A vivid fire insurance advertisement from 1890 Chicago shows the city burning during the Great Fire of 1871. In the huge cloud of smoke a fierce winged figure personifies the terror of fire in contrast to the protection offered by Triumph Insurance. © CORBIS

Engraving shows the Chicago Chamber of Commerce building on fire as people stream past it to escape the flames, Chicago, Illinois, October 9, 1871. (Photo by Stock Montage/Getty Images)

This is the famous mirrored sculpture in Millennium Park in Chicago, commonly called 'The Bean'. (Photo by Kevin Lau Photography)

Vintage car moving on the road, Mulholland Drive, Hollywood, Los Angeles, California, USA, 1924

Giant letters on Mount Lee spell out Hollywood. © Christophe d'Yvoire/Sygma/Corbis

Multimedia activities

Louis Armstrong plays his trumpet during a performance in Baltimore. © Bettmann/CORBIS

1. Music has always been a component of American society, from folk songs and slave spirituals to jazz, rhythm and blues. Online or at the library, ask students to find a historic song or a few songs from a historic genre of American music. Students can either write short reports about the history of the songs they chose or, if possible, the class can perform these songs to the larger school or at a community event.

2. The Voice Thread (**http://voicethread.com**) software offers a great way for students to capture images and voices from American history based on a theme. Working in small groups, ask students to pick a topic based on something they learned by watching this series and create a Voice Thread. They can use images and photos they take or find online, and interviews with community members, local historians, or family members. (Example: students could create a Voice Thread about a historical era such as the civil rights movement or the moon landing, the history of their town or school, etc. These topics should be historically relevant and if possible, include interviews with community members who remember the event or era they are focusing on for their projects.)

3. The National Endowment for the Humanities created the Picturing America project to educate the public about the importance of visual art throughout U.S. history. The project focuses on several iconic American artworks, many of which touch upon themes and places covered in *America The Story of Us*. Individually or in small groups, ask students to pick one piece of art from the Picturing America collection, which can be found at **http://picturingamerica.neh.gov**. Students should create PowerPoint presentations or write short essays about the piece they chose and its relevance in the context of U.S. history.

4. Today's classrooms are full of budding filmmakers who are already making short films about American history topics. This series presents a great way for students to think about how the United States is represented visually, on television and in film. After watching the America series, ask students to pick a topic and create their own short video or "vodcast" about some aspect of U.S. history. National History Day (**www.nhd.org**) has excellent tips for making a documentary. Visit them online and submit your project to your local and state History Day contest!

Primary source document:

Excerpt from "What is an American?: Letters from an American Farmer, Letter III (1782)" by J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur.

In 1755, a French man named Michel-Guillaume Jean de Crevecoeur arrived in the United States as a soldier during the French and Indian War. After the conclusion of the war, he decided to settle in the United States, moving to a farm in New York. Years later, he reflected on what it meant to be an American, and what he saw as the essential characteristics Americans shared. Writing under the pen name J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, he wrote a series of letters about the essence of America:

"America is not composed, as in Europe, of great lords who possess every thing, and of a herd of people who have nothing. Here are no aristocratical families, no courts, no kings, no bishops, no ecclesiastical dominion, no invisible power giving to a few a very visible one; no great manufacturers employing thousands, no great refinements of luxury. The rich and the poor are not so far removed from each other as they are in Europe....

Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great change in the world. Americans are the western pilgrims, who are carrying along with them that great mass of arts, sciences, vigour, and industry, which began long since in the East; they will finish the great circle. The Americans were once scattered all over Europe; here they are incorporated into one of the finest systems of population which have ever appeared, and which will hereafter become distinct by the power of the different climates they inhabit....

The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas, and form new opinions. From involuntary idleness, servile dependence, penury, and useless labour, he has passed to toils of a very different nature, rewarded by ample subsistence. This is an American."

HISTORY

1. What are some of the characteristics of an American, according to Crevecoeur? How do you think this definition would be different if he were writing in the 17th or the 19th century?

2. When he describes what it means to be an American, which Americans do you think Crevecoeur is referring to, and which people in America do you think are not included in his definition?

3. Many other Americans have attempted to define the United States and what it means to be an American. What are some examples of other definitions of the American character from throughout U.S. history?

Illustration showing E. Frank Farrington, master mechanic of the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge, sitting in a boatswain's chair secured to a traveller rope, August 25, 1876. ©Stefano Bianchetti/Corbis

Websites & books

WEBSITES

Milestone documents from the National Archives, with teaching tools: **www.ourdocuments.gov**

American Treasures of the Library of Congress: **www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures**

The American Memory Project from the Library of Congress, with a searchable database of documents and images: **www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html**

Smithsonian National Museum of American History, with timelines and background info on a wide range of U.S. history topics: **http://americanhistory.si.edu/**

National History Day, get engaged with history projects: **http://www.nhd.org**

National History Education Clearinghouse, resources for teachers with lesson plan ideas: **http://teachinghistory.org/**

BOOKS

Foner, Eric. *Give Me Liberty!: An American History*, Volumes 1, 2, and Sourcebook (WW Norton, 2006).

Franklin, John Hope and Alfred Moss Jr. *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans* (Knopf, 2000).

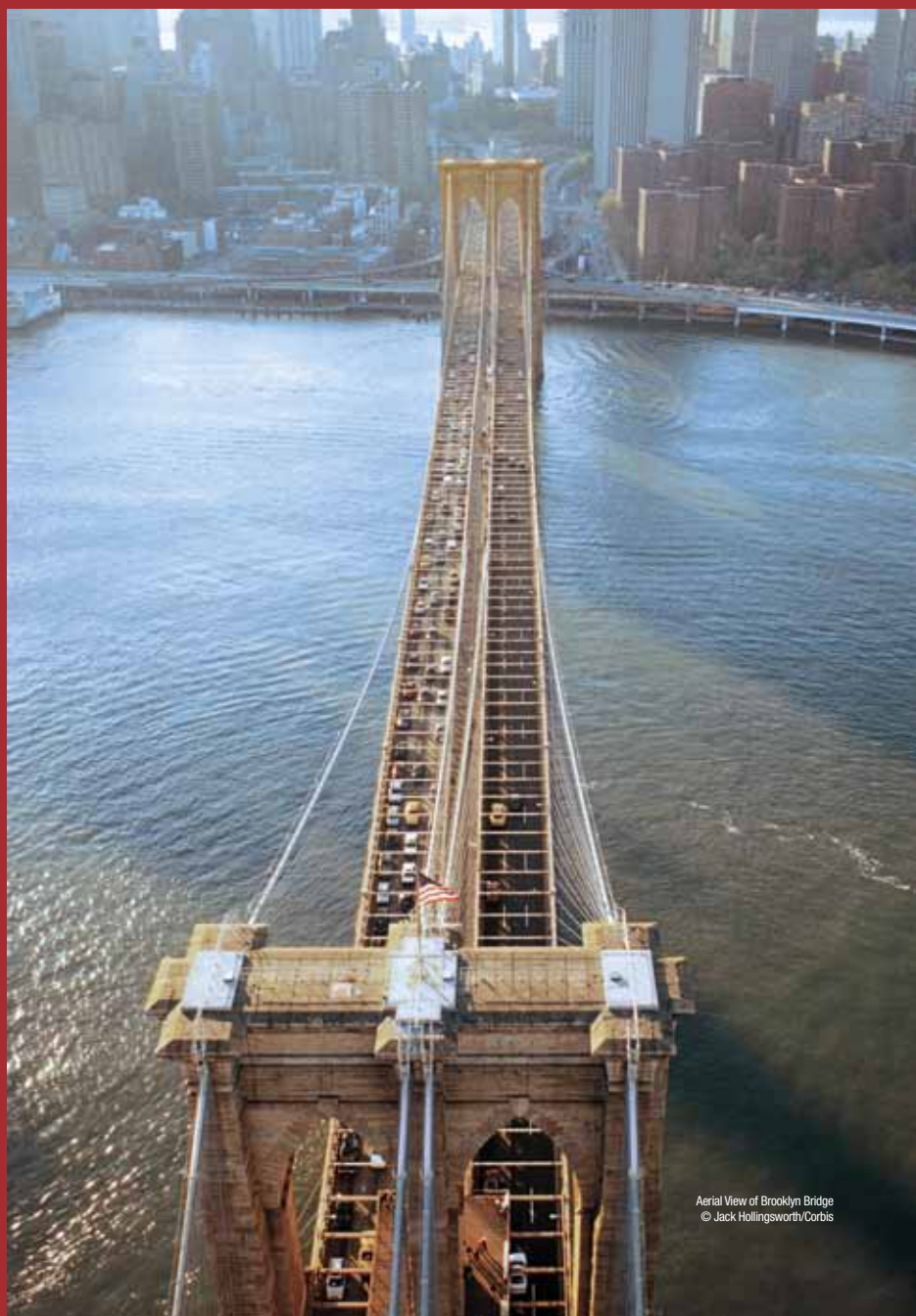
Garraty, John. *The Young Reader's Companion to American History* (Houghton Mifflin, 1994).

Gonzalez, Juan. *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America* (Penguin, 2001).

Johnson, Michael. *Encyclopedia o f the Native Tribes of North America* (Firefly Books, 2007).

Nash, Gary and Carter Smith, editors. *Atlas of American History* (Facts on File, 2006).

Okihiro, Gary. *The Columbia Guide to Asian American History* (Columbia University Press, 2001).



Aerial View of Brooklyn Bridge
© Jack Hollingsworth/Corbis

NATIONWIDE HISTORY TEACHER CONTEST

ARE YOU AN INNOVATOR IN THE CLASSROOM?

HISTORY™ encourages educators to revitalize American history in their classrooms by watching *America The Story of Us* and getting involved with this programming event! This series opens up a national conversation about the American past, and presents opportunities for teachers to take new approaches to core U.S. history themes and topics through this challenge.

For full contest information and rules, and a wealth of curriculum resources, visit us online at **www.history.com/classroom**.

TEACHER CHALLENGE: INNOVATION IN HISTORY EDUCATION

- Create an innovative American history lesson plan
- Incorporation of video and/or new technology in lesson plan required (examples: video clips, podcasts, PowerPoint, games, etc.)
- Each submission must link with a theme in one episode of *America The Story of Us*
- Use of primary sources recommended
- Educators may be associated with a school, college, library, museum or other educational institution or organization
- Links with state standards/curriculum benchmarks encouraged
- Team teaching applications are accepted
- Age level categories: middle school (7th-9th grades), high school (10th-12th grades), and college students

ENTER TO WIN $25,000 IN GRANTS AND RESOURCES