



## Restless Giant: The United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore (Oxford History of the United States)

By James T. Patterson

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In *Restless Giant*, acclaimed historical author James Patterson provides a crisp, concise assessment of the twenty-seven years between the resignation of Richard Nixon and the election of George W. Bush in a sweeping narrative that seamlessly weaves together social, cultural, political, economic, and international developments. We meet the era's many memorable figures and explore the "culture wars" between liberals and conservatives that appeared to split the country in two.

Patterson describes how America began facing bewildering developments in places such as Panama, Somalia, Bosnia, and Iraq, and discovered that it was far from easy to direct the outcome of global events, and at times even harder for political parties to reach a consensus over what attempts should be made. At the same time, domestic issues such as the persistence of racial tensions, high divorce rates, alarm over crime, and urban decay led many in the media to portray the era as one of decline. Patterson offers a more positive perspective, arguing that, despite our often unmet expectations, we were in many ways better off than we thought. By 2000, most Americans lived more comfortably than they had in the 1970s, and though bigotry and discrimination were far from extinct, a powerful rights consciousness insured that these were less pervasive in American life than at any time in the past.

With insightful analyses and engaging prose, *Restless Giant* captures this period of American history in a way that no other book has, illuminating the road that the United States traveled from the dismal days of the mid-1970s through the hotly contested election of 2000.

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historical inquiry and knowledge into one literally state-of-the-art book." Conceived under the general editorship of C. Vann Woodward and Richard Hofstadter, and now under the editorship of David M. Kennedy, this renowned series blends social, political, economic, cultural, diplomatic, and military history into coherent and vividly written narrative.

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## **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. The Brown University historian seamlessly melds the complexities of politics, economics, society and culture into a vibrant and accessible account of late twentieth century America. Patterson's analyses of standard historical fare, interwoven with nuanced observations on diverse issues such as family life, the personal computer revolution, the media and gay activism give this book its singular dynamism. Picking up where his last volume, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974*, left off, Patterson opens with Richard Nixon's resignation and plunges into a detailed discussion of "the nation's number one problem," race. Contemporary commentators viewed racial tensions, along with relaxed sexual mores, agitation for women's rights and burgeoning consumerism as symptomatic of the country's "moral decline," spurring organizations like Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority to advocate "pro-life, pro-family pro-morality, pro-American" views. By the late 1990s, media-exaggerated accounts of these "culture wars," had abated, Patterson says. Pop culture icons from Bill Cosby to Madonna and Jerry Seinfeld also populate these pages, but, predictably, Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton tower over all. Patterson credits Reagan with "facilitating" the end of the Cold War, but diplomatically sidesteps whether he or Mikhail Gorbachev deserve the ultimate accolades. Although international conflicts distracted Clinton from the domestic policy-making he preferred, a sexual "tryst" led to his impeachment, threatening the "transcendent position in United States history" he sought. The author also touches on terrorism, beginning with the Iranian hostage crisis and culminating in the American intelligence community's knowledge that, by late 1998, radical Muslim terrorists "were considering... hijacking commercial airliners and crashing them into buildings." Rich in period details from the somber to frivolous, this is an invaluable guide to the end of an era.

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## **Review**

"First-rate history by a first-rate historian... A splendid book that will come to be regarded as indispensable to everyone who cares about the history of this country."--Charles Peters, *The New York Times Book Review*

"This splendid and readable new book is the latest volume in that ambitious series, 'The Oxford History of the United States...' Patterson has risen magnificently to the task of describing and analyzing this rich and confused period... *Restless Giant* is extraordinarily sharp in its repeated references to and use of American popular culture... He is excellent in his coverage of the rise of the ultra-conservative right."--Paul Kennedy, *Washington Post Book World*

"Patterson is at his best in recreating the spirit and feel of presidential elections and the legislative and diplomatic achievements--as well as the scandals--of our nation's chief executives.... Patterson is a careful historian. Bending over backward to offer his readers a range of perspectives on the phenomena he explores, he appears to be a genuinely fair and balanced scholar.... For its thorough and reliable recounting of the period's main developments, 'Restless Giant' is well worth reading."--Eric Arnesen, *Chicago Tribune*

"Dazzling and erudite, the book thrums with the buzz of ideas coming together.... Detached, dispassionate, and drawn to detail, Patterson writes in taut, vivid language, and with illustrative examples on every page. He keeps his judgments terse and defensible."--David Greenberg, *American Prospect*

"Patterson is a fine historian.... Continuing where he ended his prior contribution to the series (*Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974*), Patterson again combines narrative and analysis in his assessment of an important era in U.S. history. The result is a good survey of the political, economic, foreign policy, social, and cultural trends and events during the presidencies of Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush, and Clinton.... For all libraries." --*Library Journal*

"A worthy addition to the highly acclaimed *Oxford History of the United States* series. A crisp, engaging narrative for readers seeking an easy grasp of the key developments at home and abroad during the last quarter of the 20th century. Patterson's balanced analysis of contending interpretations of these developments will be most useful to readers as they think critically about this recent era in American history."--*Parameters*

#### About the Author

**James T. Patterson** is Ford Foundation Professor of History Emeritus at Brown University. One of the most highly respected historians of contemporary America, he is the author of *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974*, which won a Bancroft Prize, and *Brown v Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy*.

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