

American Doomsday Book,

Volumes I-V:

Editor's Introduction

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“In 1085,” John Burton, Bishop of Gassbury, writes, “William the Conqueror ordered a survey of all the counties of England, so that men were then dispatched all over..., to each shire, to find out what and how much each landowner had in land and livestock and what it was worth.”¹ What resulted was the great Norman Domesday Book,² a collection of population charts, tables, and lists that today effectively give the historian a remarkably detailed picture of Wil-

¹ Burton, John. “Hystory of Gasburyshire to the Present Day.” *The Mammoth Book of Medieval Historiography*. Philip Mackenzie and Sally Hobson, eds. Chapel Hill, NC: Braeburn Books, 1989. p. 355.

² The unconventional spelling, *Domesday*, is a result of a not-yet-standardized English employed by 13th century scholars who were the first to “rediscover” the manuscript, giving the name (which scholars today typically pronounce as *Doomsday*) to the previously untitled manuscript—it is due to the attributive nature of the title that it is generally not italicized either. The word *domesday*, as those 13th century scholars would have used it, meant something more along the lines of *millennial*—which itself was a word with its own historical connotations, calling to mind perhaps the millennial cults from just prior to William’s era

liam's island, almost exactly as it was at the dawn of the new millennium—a millennium that has just now passed into being the old millennium. The collection before you, *The American Doomsday³ Book, Volumes I-V*, is the result of a twenty-five-year undertaking, whose goal has been, not unlike William the Conqueror's, to present a picture of a great and powerful nation just as one millennium begins and another closes behind it.⁴

Much like William's Britain in the eleventh century, the United States was undergoing a series of radical shifts at the dawn of the twenty-first. The country as a whole was enjoying an unprecedented level of prosperity, and though much of the population lived as if such widespread wealth had officially become the new norm, some were beginning to wonder if, especially in light of China's ascendancy, that prosperity could really last.⁵

At the same time, staggering advances in technology meant that even the poorest Americans were becoming enmeshed in multiple media valence the average American household at the turn of the century typically containing more television sets than people, as well as at least two computers, with cellular and wireless technologies allowing the individual American to remain connected to an ever-expanding communications grid even if they were forced to spend hours away from their media platforms back home. All of which was beginning to change, on certain basic levels, what it meant to be human, what it meant to be a member of a society. Beyond the social realm even, technological advancements, particularly where gene technology and prosthesis were concerned, were

who, believing that the year 1000 would mark the Second Coming, didn't bother planting crops and so brought about various localized and minor apocalypses.

³ Cf. n. 2 above. For our project we have adopted the modern, standardized spelling. And accept the connotations that have attached themselves to that word, i.e., nuclear holocaust, technological meltdown, Y2K, etc.

⁴ As the last standing editor of the *ADB*, it has fallen on me to reconstruct these volumes for the (no doubt incomplete) Restored Edition. It is an eerie and uncanny experience to read these words again, considering all that has happened in the intervening years, considering the shitstorm that started a few months after we'd completed the final draft of this introduction. [Footnote to the Restored Edition]

⁵ For this reason, several editors suggested that we place *The American Doomsday Book's* "end" at April 15, 1989, the date of the Tiananmen Square massacre.

beginning to point to a time, perhaps not too far off, when what it meant to be physically human might undergo significant change as well.⁶

The Domesday Book in Time

The volumes before you are not intended to serve as a history of the United States, or a history of the United States in the twentieth century, or even as any kind of history at all. To borrow a terminology from the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, if history is diachronic (a study through time), then this project is synchronic (the study of the actions and interactions of a single moment). Like the Domesday Book, these volumes are intended to be something like a recording of the United States at a particular moment in time.

Though philosophers, phenomenologists, and students of perception have always debated and will continue to debate over the precise duration of a *moment*, most of us will agree that it is short, fleeting perhaps, while at the same time made up of several *layers* of perception—sense perception, “rational” or intellectual perception, emotional perception, to name a few—and always with the potential to be profound,⁷ or at the very least *memorable*.⁸

But nations do not experience time in the same way their individual citizens do. The lifespan of a nation is much longer than our own, for one thing. *Great* nations enjoy such long lifespans, but even the exceptions like the Soviet Union which are born and die in human time (eighty short years), are themselves transforma-

⁶ What the editors could not make note of in 2000/early 2001 as they were first writing this introduction, was the fact that, as a result of two long, simultaneous wars (and a short third one and even shorter fourth), advancements in medical technologies w/r/t limb replacement and neural corrective procedures resulted in the kinds of techno-physical interfacing technologies that gave birth to what would come to be called an “implant culture.” (Need to speak Farsi for the webinar you’re facilitating tomorrow? There’s an app for that.) We have to wonder, if the people who first compiled the *ADB* encountered the “average American” of thirty years later, would they even recognize him as “human”? [Footnote to the Restored Edition]

⁷ Consider that it is, after all, the root word of *momentous*.

⁸ Cognitive Phenomenologist Aaron Rudolph (1965-) once said that “the moment is the smallest unit of memory.” His definition is by no means universally accepted, but we like it quite a bit, so mention it here.

tive moments in the longer life of another nation, Russia in this case—and so the synchronic view cannot be limited to a handful of minutes, or a single day, or a year even.

The window we've agreed to look through for this project opens January 1st, 1981, and closes December 31st, 2000. Collectively, the editors agreed that these twenty years represented a moment of transition. Whatever it was, a change occurred between the 1970s and the 1980s, even if, for those of us who lived them, 1981 may not have felt a whole lot different from 1979. And now, as the millennium comes to its quiet close, quiet when compared to the panic and apprehension of this past year's turning over, one can't help but sense, even if only vaguely, that we are on the verge of yet another, perhaps more fundamental and existential change.

This of course is all still speculation. It is worth noting, though, when we first decided on the above beginning and end dates, we originally had no idea that these dates too would correspond roughly with two major crises of the American Presidency. January 1st, 1981, is roughly ninety days before the attempted assassination of President Ronald Reagan, a flash of violence (to use a terminology borrowed from Walter Benjamin) which would shake and reverberate throughout the decade to follow; and December 31st, 2000, is, of course, a mere eight days after the Supreme Court's decision to award the presidency to George W. Bush, the preceding few months representing a period of great anxiety and apprehension for the American electorate, and only time will tell us if they have the strength overcome it.⁹ All of this was, as we've said, mere coincidence, but not all coincidence is to be dismissed as insignificant. So we leave it to the reader to judge whether coincidence in this case is significant or not.

The Problem of Oklahoma

When the editors first conceived of the project almost twenty-five years ago, we imagined that, like the *Domesday Book*, the information we collected would be contained in a single, massive volume.

⁹ More than a few editors feel that George W. Bush occupying the Office of the President represents the true crisis, but time will have to decide that as well.

However, it soon became apparent that the project was much larger than we'd at first believed and impossible to contain in a single volume. It would instead be necessary to divide the book into a certain number of volumes; it would be necessary, in short, that our *book* become instead *books*. Once the enormity of all this had set in—and once the initial shock over just how much work was ahead of us had worn off—we began to consider questions of division and demarcation.

The first, most logical solution was to divide the country into a series of already available, easily recognizable, and generally accepted socio-cultural regions such as the South, the West, Midwest, Mid-Atlantic, and so on. All of us are used to deploying such distinctions, whether in written text or in everyday use, and such distinctions are not simply employed vernacularly either, but professionally as well—consider, for example, institutions which house entire departments devoted to the literatures and histories of the South, or the West. When we hear, for example, a speaker refer to the Midwest, we have a clear understanding of what that place is. But on closer inspection, we must recognize that though *we* may have a clear understanding of what it means to be “the Midwest,” that understanding cannot possibly be a shared one but is instead an understanding deeply personal and subjective. The Midwest as a place is entirely different for someone from South Dakota, for example, than for someone from western Ohio—or southern Maine for that matter.

So dividing the country regionally presented us with two basic problems. The first involved deciding which regions, put together, made up these United States. Certain decisions were obvious: the South, the West, the Midwest. Our problems began in considering the eastern part of the United States. Was “the East” one geographical area stretching from the Atlantic Coast to western Pennsylvania, from the northernmost tip of Maine to Key West? Or should we divide the region into two smaller sub-regions: the Northeast and the Mid-Atlantic—as several professional organizations, of which the editors were members, had done? There were even suggestions by some on the editorial staff (not surprisingly, members who originally hailed from the eastern United States) that we might divide the region further still. New England, the Rust Belt, the Southern Coast, and so on. Now consider this same, infinite regression taking

place all across the map. Was the West separate from the Pacific Northwest? Were we going to consider the Great Plains a region? What about the Rockies?

And here we were already encountering our second problem. Even once we'd established which regions we might consider significant enough to be given their own volumes, we were still no better prepared to assign certain states, or cities even, to those regions. Is Florida part of the South? (Probably.) What about Texas? Did it belong to the South, or to the West? (Most of us agreed it belonged with the West.) Where the editors became irreparably stymied, however, was over the question of Oklahoma. Part of this had to do with the original editors' collective ignorance with regard to that state¹⁰—which to our minds represented a blank, white, frying pan-shaped void at the center of the map. Part of this too had to do with the fact that a good case could be made for Oklahoma's inclusion in at least three major socio-geographical regions: the South, the Midwest, and/or the Southwest—not to mention the larger regional distinction “the West.”

One solution to the problem of Oklahoma would have been to divide the state three ways and include the three resulting pieces in three different volumes. The areas along the Texas border, including the panhandle, would be grouped with Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona in the Southwest; the northern part, along the Kansas and Missouri borders, with the Midwest; and the regions along the Arkansas border with the South. But for obvious reasons, this solution proved unsatisfying. To do such a thing to Oklahoma would mean similar divisions for any number of other states—nearly half of them according to one count—and in the end, and this was what we found to be the most problematic, those divisions would be entirely arbitrary, based as they were not on some objective understanding of what it meant to be, say, Midwestern, or Southwestern, but rather on *our own* understanding of what those distinctions might actually mean.

Our decision, finally, was to rely on existing time zones as the determining factor for dividing the volumes, with *Volume I* cover-

¹⁰ Who cannot now be aware of Oklahoma, home to the Islamophobe/Climate Change-denying United States Senator who would become the last person to hold the Office of President of the United States, as Empire finally crumbled and fell and descended into Chaos? [Footnote to the Restored Edition]

ing the Eastern Time Zone, *Volume II* covering the Central Time Zone, *Volume III* covering the Mountain Time Zone, *Volume IV* covering the Pacific Time Zone, with Hawaii, Alaska and the US Territories appearing in *Volume V: Alaska, Hawaii, US Territories and Appendices*. Dividing along such lines represents by no means a perfect solution. Continentally, our strategy separates the country into four neat, roughly equal spaces, resulting in four somewhat neat and roughly equal volumes, though it ends up with Hawaii and Alaska basically left out—and several of the editors have voiced serious concern over the fact that Hawaii and Alaska (and the US Territories) have been relegated to a fifth volume, along with the Appendices, as though these places were after-thoughts. Furthermore, dividing along such lines means confronting yet another “problem of Oklahoma”—though here Oklahoma is spared the kind of merciless division discussed above—since there are several states which straddle two time zones.

But we eventually reconciled ourselves to this fact, for though such a strategy effectively breaks many states in two (though none are divided by more than two), it does so in a way that most readers already recognize, so that most will be coming to the project with a certain familiarity. And though such a strategy is no less arbitrary than any other, one might say that its arbitrariness is an objective¹¹ kind of arbitrariness—that is, its arbitrariness is one that results not from the editors’ own regional and cultural biases, but from a larger and collectively agreed upon arbitrary division.

And in the end, from all this has come a somewhat happy and unforeseen consequence. What has resulted from our decision to demarcate along existing time zones is a kind of pan-regionalism, since, just as many states cover two time zones, so too many cultural and geographic regions spread across two and sometimes three of them. So the reader picking up *Volume I*, for example, instead of getting a picture of the Northeast, or New England, or the Mid-Atlantic at the close of William’s millennium, will be getting glimpses into all of these places, along with parts of the South and the Midwest, as well as any number of sub-regions such as the Rust Belt and Appalachia and so on. Our solution to the problem of Oklahoma is not perfect, which we do recognize. But after twenty-five

¹¹ I have long felt the word “institutional” better suited here. [Footnote to the Restored Edition]

years of debating the issue, we believe it is the best solution, and we stand by it.

A Few Words on Method

The reader who has spent any time with the Domesday Book surely caught on quickly to the book's elegant uniformity. The chroniclers and compilers of that book, however they might have come to it, had a clearly defined methodology. Each entry is collected under a specific county and represents a certain share of land owned by a specific family or individual landowner. Given after are the number of hides of land (one hide equals 20 acres), how much of that land is cleared and how much wooded (and who has hunting rights to these spaces), head of cattle, hogs and various game, horses in stable, fishing ponds, serfs working the land, annual bushels of wheat and other crops produced, gold in store, and what percentage of all of this belongs to the church and to the king. No doubt something is lost in such uniformity, but such a methodology does provide a remarkably complete picture of each county and the island as a whole. Obviously, a methodology like the one found in the Domesday Book would not work for the United States. At the risk of over-simplifying, the social structure in eleventh century England *lent itself* more to the Domesday Book's uniform sort of methodology, in a way that our nation currently does not.

Readers of *The American Doomsday Book* are sure to notice, then, its rather patchwork construction, especially when compared to the uniformity of its predecessor. Though collected encyclopedically, the information contained within these pages is by no means uniform. While certain entries will be recognizable, stylistically and formally, as belonging to the generic family of "Entry from a Reference Book," others will strike the reader as far more narrative or essayistic.¹² This polyglot style represents an organic evolution in the

¹² This decision, to break with convention in service of a greater truth, nearly tore the editors apart. On more than one occasion it seemed as if the *ABD* had no chance of ever being completed. We write as if we were all wholly satisfied with the decision, but that was never actually the case (cf. n. 14 below). Contentious or not though, the decision was necessary if the project was ever to work—but of course I may be more than a little biased on this issue. [Footnote to the Restored Edition]

form. Increasingly, we began to encounter entries the editors felt could not fully be told without making use of fictive and other various narrative techniques, but after much discussion we began to see that such a form was wholly germane¹³ to our goal; if we'd set out on the task of capturing a nation as it was at this specific moment in time, of *singing America* as the poet might have said, then it was essential that we did so in many voices and across many styles and genres.

The next thing that the reader will notice is the focus, for much of the first two volumes at least, on the arts, the visual and literary arts in particular. It is still a bit curious to the editors how it was that this particular focus emerged. Considering all that was happening in the realm of information technology and in computing, it would seem that if we'd set out to capture that place where things changed—to borrow from Virginia Woolf's wonderfully vague and yet entirely spot-on assessment of the modernist era, wherein she claims that “something changed somewhere around December 1910”—then surely much of this study should be given over to, say, a detailed history of the personal computer from the Commodore 64 to the Smartbook. But all of that has been done elsewhere.¹⁴ Perhaps this peculiar focus has something to do with the prescient nature of art and literature—think, for example, of the early novels of William Gibson, coiner of the word “cyberspace,” whose work is covered at length in Volumes II and IV—or maybe with the way that art and literature are typically positioned between the theories that drive innovation and the individual directly affected by that innovation. Perhaps it was both of these things, along with something else that we are still not seeing or understanding—and maybe it was none of these things at all. As we've said, it had the editors scratching their heads, but we also recognized that our picture would be incomplete without such a focus.

No doubt the reader will recognize a number of recurring figures within these pages, persons who pop up again and again across all five volumes of *The American Doomsday Book*, and beyond that,

¹³ Ha! (cf. n. 12 above). [Footnote to the Restored Edition]

¹⁴ And besides, such a history *can* be found, partially at least, in Volume IV, along with a number of in-depth if somewhat arcane studies of the technological advancements of the 80s and 90s which can be found in the Appendices in Volume V.

certain figures who might gain prominence in certain volumes only to fade again into the background in others. Some are historical figures whose acquaintance here is expected. It should be no surprise, for example, that Ronald Reagan would make numerous appearances—his presence in fact haunts every single page of these books, even those on which he is not explicitly mentioned—and the Bush dynasty never seems to be too far away either. There are minor historical figures, like the suspected mob boss Whitey Bulger, who for whatever reason play a significant role in these pages.¹⁵ Then there are the semi-fictitious players in our drama, “characters” like Bertrand Arp, Andrea Bergson, Philippe Cortez, Rocco Calabrese, Denis Evenson, Tina Andrews and Bill Clay,¹⁶ who are something like composites, or essences, of a number of “regular people” whom the editors have many times returned to or made use of in order to underscore or better illustrate certain ideological, aesthetic, or intellectual trajectories or connectivities that might otherwise have gone unseen.¹⁷

Finally, though these pages have been organized encyclopedically—that is, according to the somewhat arbitrary ordering of the English alphabet—this is, of course, not the only way for one to read *The American Doomsday Book*. A reader could sit down, open Volume I to page 1, begin reading straight through to the end, and that would be fine. But some readers might instead choose to jump around, from one entry to another, alighting magpie-like on

¹⁵ Though the height of Bulger’s criminal activity saw him in Boston, in the Eastern Time Zone, the role he has to play in the narrative of *The American Doomsday Book* seems to come most significantly from the time that he was in exile, in the Florida panhandle, so we see him most prominently in Volume II: The Central Time Zone.

¹⁶ The observant reader will recognize, we are sure, the fact that each of the above surnames fall within the A-E range. This was, of course, intentional; given the encyclopedic nature of *The American Doomsday Book*, this allowed each to “get on the page” early in the unfolding narrative.

¹⁷ Such a methodology is no doubt controversial, but not unprecedented. In Steven Mithen’s study of prehistoric human societies, *After the Ice* (his book spans 20,000–5,000 BC), he makes use of a fictitious time traveler, whose person is based loosely on a “real life” 19th century polymath named John Lubbock, enabling readers to “visit and observe communities and landscapes, experiencing prehistoric life” (from the promotional text on the back cover). Still, we have no doubt readers will take certain umbrage at the very idea of such an approach.

whatever entries might pique their interest; other readers might forge ahead, following a specific narrative path across all five volumes,¹⁸ but a path of their own choosing, and that is fine as well. Still other readers may seek out certain direct relational sequences between entries, may choose to follow certain historical or aesthetic or subject-specific narrative pathways. To aid in such journeys, the editors have included signposts and suggestions, pointing the way to entries of similar or relational interest—the “See Also” familiar to readers of most dictionaries. Such aids and signposts are merely suggestions, and the editors strongly encourage readers to browse, plow, forge, jump, and skim their way through these volumes in whatever ways they see fit.

¹⁸ Due to unforeseen bit-degeneration, plus the effects of several stratospheric and sub-stratospheric nuclear detonations and the resulting EMPs, electronically archived versions of the *ADB* are now hopelessly lost. I have been able to find a complete physical copy of Volume II: The Central Time Zone, as well as a few fragmented entries from the other four volumes. I travel the earth in hopes of finding still more—would that I could come across another volume in its entirety—while in the evenings trying to reconstruct the rest from memory. I have completed nearly one-third of Volume I, but I am old and fearful that, once I am gone, the *ADB* will be forever lost. [Footnote to the Restored Edition]

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