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## Preface

*Voices of Freedom* is a documentary history of American freedom from the earliest days of European exploration and settlement of the Western Hemisphere to the present. It was prepared as a companion volume to *Give Me Liberty!*, my survey textbook of the history of the United States centered on the theme of freedom. *Voices of Freedom* is organized in chapters that correspond to those in the textbook. But it can also stand independently as a documentary introduction to the history of American freedom.

No idea is more fundamental to Americans' sense of themselves as individuals and as a nation than freedom, or liberty, with which it is almost always used interchangeably. The Declaration of Independence lists liberty among mankind's inalienable rights; the Constitution announces as its purpose to secure liberty's blessings. "Every man in the street, white, black, red or yellow," wrote the educator and statesman Ralph Bunche in 1940, "knows that this is 'the land of the free' . . . 'the cradle of liberty.'"

The very universality of the idea of freedom, however, can be misleading. Freedom is not a fixed, timeless category with a single unchanging definition. Rather, the history of the United States is, in part, a story of debates, disagreements, and struggles over freedom. Crises like the American Revolution, the Civil War, and the Cold War have permanently transformed the idea of freedom. So too have demands by various groups of Americans for greater freedom as they understood it.