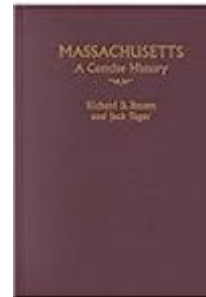




Richard D. Brown, Jack Tager. *Massachusetts: A Concise History.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000. vii + 361 pp. \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-55849-248-6.



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Massachusetts History

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Massachusetts is a small, heavily urbanized state with a large history. Indeed, one can tell the whole history of the United States while remaining within the narrative bounds of Massachusetts. The first encounters between Europeans and native peoples, the development of colonial governments and international systems of trade in sugar, slaves, and codfish, resistance to British authority and the heroic acts of Revolution, the beginnings of Constitutional government, the development of American industries and the arrival of immigrants, the nascent movement to abolish slavery, the cataclysmic Civil War, the rise of the welfare state, and the economic transition from agriculture to commerce to manufacturing to service and high-tech industries, all either trace their origins or find their most dramatic examples in Massachusetts.

Richard Brown's *Massachusetts: A Bicentennial History* was part of an ambitious series of fifty state histories written in the 1970s to commemorate two hundred years of national existence. Brown's book, like the others in the series, was a concise, elegant introduction to the history and culture of Massachusetts, from the arrival of

Pilgrims and Puritans, to political and economic trends of the late twentieth century. Complementing the two hundred thirty six pages was an evocative photo essay by Ted Polumbaum, showing mist rising over the Berkshires, the dunes of Provincetown, New Bedford's waterfront, and a bean supper in Danvers. Text and image set a tone. Brown, a professor of history at the University of Connecticut, and author of books on colonial, revolutionary, and early nineteenth century New England, set a standard in this volume by which all others will be judged.

Why revise such a good book? Brown and Jack Tager, professor of history at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and author of several books on Massachusetts history, have set themselves to the task of revision at an opportune moment. In the past decade, scholars have turned their attention to areas little explored in the 1970s. Brown's book has a scant paragraph each on the Pequot War (1637-1638) and King Philip or Metacom's War (1675-6), two conflicts between English colonists and native Americans, and nothing at all on either slavery in colonial and revolutionary Massachusetts, or Massachusetts' role in the sugar and slave trades. Since

Brown wrote, much scholarship has focused on the role of Native Americans, with books such as Jill Lepore's *The Name of War* (New York, 1999), Alfred Cave's *The Pequot War* (Amherst, 1996), Russell Bourne's *The Red King's Rebellion* (New York, 1991), and Daniel Mandell's *Behind the Frontier: Indians in Eighteenth-Century Eastern Massachusetts* (Lincoln, 1996) putting Native Americans rightfully at the center of Massachusetts colonial history. It would be inconceivable today for a scholar to spend as much time as Brown did on the Puritans "Half-way Covenant" or the theological dispute between John Winthrop and Roger Williams, and so little on the bloody conflicts between the English and the Pequots, or the break-down of relations with the Wompanoags. While the revised version mentions the new scholarship in a bibliographical essay, the authors have not incorporated any of these new interpretations into the text, leaving it exactly as Brown wrote it more than twenty years ago.

African-Americans and Native-Americans are not the only ones left out. Is it possible to imagine a history of Massachusetts which leaves out Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, and Herman Melville? Emily Dickinson appears only because she was mentored by Thomas Wentworth Higginson and there are three pages on him. There are biographical sketches of Louise Day Hicks and Kevin White, but nothing on John McCormack, Joseph Martin, Thomas P. O'Neill, Michael Dukakis, Paul Tsongas, Leverett Saltonstall or Edward M. Kennedy. These men may be relieved at the omission: while the biographical sketches in Brown's version were models of clarity and precision, the sketches in the revised version rarely rise above the perfunctory. The authors use ethnicity to explain virtually everything, at one point even calling the urban leaders of the early century, Martin Lomasney, David Walsh, John Fitzgerald, and James Michael Curley "Feuding Irish chieftains" (269). Omitted from this is any explanation of the transformation from a Yankee Republican bastion, which produced Calvin Coolidge and two twentieth century Republican speakers of the House, to a solidly-Democratic enclave, even as the state was transforming from urban to suburban. How did this happen? There is no discussion of 1948, when Thomas P. O'Neill became the first Democratic speaker of the state house of representatives, though the authors do devote an entire paragraph to the Democratic Presidential primary of 1976.

The authors have added additional material, expanding the text from a slim two hundred thirty six pages to a hefty three hundred twenty. Some of the new material is essential—the discussion of the 1912 Lawrence strike, for

example, or a look at Springfield's response to school integration. But other additions are quirky, and at times at odds with the original text, which remains buried in the new edition. For example, Brown's chapter, "Hive of Industry," which celebrated the merchant princes who used their capital to finance Massachusetts industrial transformation in the early nineteenth century, now is called "Hive of Industry and Elite Paternalism," and to the celebration of the industrial triumph is added material blasting their exploitative greed. The two interpretations do not seem to go hand in hand. The new text explains, "Men like Lowell, Jackson, Appleton, and the Dwight brothers, the successors to the maritime patriciate of eighteenth-century New England, had constructed an ethos—a set of ideas, attitudes, and institutions dominated by economic needs—that gave them control over the banking, politics, and professions of Massachusetts" (126). Though how an ethos would give one control over banks is not explained.

Brown's concluding chapter, "New Industrial Commonwealth," is now expanded and renamed "Reinventing Massachusetts". It tries to carry the story forward from the 1970s, adding material to Brown's concise conclusion. But the authors have not rethought the original organization, but have merely tried to add things that have happened since (such as the 1976 Democratic presidential primary). Brown's book had two concluding pages which looked to the future, and in fact anticipated some of the economic and social trends of the 1980s and 1990s. Substantively, though, Brown's book pretty much ended with the rise of the Kennedy family, with a strong focus on the 1952 senatorial election in which John F. Kennedy defeated Henry Cabot Lodge, forming a conclusion to an earlier episode in which the senior Lodge defeated John Fitzgerald. The new edition does not add anything to the Kennedy discussion, neglecting an opportunity to appraise the long career of Edward M. Kennedy, who has served in the Senate for a decade longer than the public careers of his brothers and grandfather combined, and has perhaps done more for the Commonwealth than any other public figure of the twentieth century. The Kennedy discussion, alas, remains as it was in 1976.

Curiously, the discussion of the Kennedys now comes after a discussion of Boston's busing crisis in the 1970s. The discussion of this still-radioactive issue is disappointingly one-sided, with the authors demonizing Louise Day Hicks (we are told that she used her father's reputation "to amass several real estate holdings" and that she is "the only woman ever to run for mayor of Boston" [296]; the first statement is strange, the second is wrong: Rosaria Salerno ran for mayor in 1993, and asserting: "The result

was that by the 1990s Boston had desegregated schools, but they were located in neighborhoods that remained, for the most part, as segregated as they had been in the 1970s” (304). Both parts of this statement are simply wrong. Boston’s neighborhoods, even South Boston and Charlestown, have significant minority populations today. But in a city slightly more than fifty percent white, more than ninety percent of the children in the public schools are minority. The authors could have found this out relatively easily.

Brown’s *Massachusetts* is still a marvelous introduc-

tion to the fascinating history of Massachusetts. Imagine the understated elegance of a Bulfinch mansion, improved in our day with a glass and concrete addition, and you will have a sense of this new version. One is left looking at the original, looking at what has been added, and asking, why? Why?

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