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Sixty years ago, an encyclopedia devoted to U.S. social history would have been unthinkable. The term "social history" was not even in common use. By the 1960s, however, scholars had begun to reject the notion that what was solely important about the past were the actions of political and military leaders and the ideas of elite intellectuals. These historians insisted upon the value of the experiences of ordinary people. Often called "history from the bottom up," social history includes the study of marginalized people whose voices had been largely missing from the history books, and covers a wide span of activities embracing the whole range of ordinary people's life experience. Social structures and the environment that shaped American life, including family, work, leisure, social movements, and patterns of mobility and settlements, are central to the work, as are themes of race, gender, ethnicity, and class. Sensitive to transnational developments, the volume draws extensively on new literature on slavery, health and disease, sexuality, women's activism, and technology's impact on everyday life.

With over 450 articles by expert scholars, each signed entry features numerous cross references and discussion of social history as well as additional sources for further study in this two-volume A-to-Z compendium. The encyclopedia is a reference work of unparalleled depth and scope and will introduce a new generation of readers to the complexities of this dynamic field of study. It also features key biographies of leaders in social history, a topical outline, and subject index.

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