FOREWORD

Americans have a pastime known as "reenacting." The journalist Tony Horowitz writes about Civil War reenactors in *Confederates in the Attic*. Every year, people meet across the country to re-create famous battles of the War Between the States. Americans reenact other wars too, from the War of Independence to the Wars of Empire: the American-Indian Wars, the War with Mexico, and the Spanish-American War. Battles draw the largest numbers, but many men and women also meet regularly for Old West reenactments, playing miners, settlers, trappers, gunslingers, cowboys, and Indians. Others play too. There are Old West reenactors in the Czech Republic, Vietnam War reenactors in Russia, and World War I and II reenactors everywhere, including in the United States, Australia, and England and elsewhere in Europe.

On February 14, 2005, the Saudi prince Abd al-Aziz Ibn Abdallah Ibn Abd al-Aziz took part in a reenactment. He played his own grandfather in a replay of a meeting that had taken place sixty years earlier between Abd al-Aziz, the first king of Saudi Arabia, known in America as Ibn Saud, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, known as FDR. The president's grandson Hall Delano Roosevelt, a former city councilman in Long Beach, played FDR. The summit sixty years earlier had taken place aboard a destroyer, the USS *Quincy*, in the middle of the Suez Canal. It was during World War II. The two descendents met on a stage at the Ritz Hotel in Coconut Grove, Florida. It might be fair to add, during the U.S. Global War on Terror.

A second American, Condit Eddy, joined the other two reenactors on stage. Eddy was playing his uncle Colonel William Alfred Eddy, the translator on board the *Quincy*. Colonel Eddy had fought in World War I, ran the English

Department at the American University in Cairo, where he wrote the first Arabic rulebook for basketball, and served as president of Hobart College in New York before giving up academic administration for spying. At age forty-five, he dusted off his commission and joined the new U.S. intelligence organization, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). As navel attaché in Tangier he ran resistance groups during the North African campaign. In 1944 FDR named Eddy America's first minister plenipotentiary to Saudi Arabia. Eddy spent the rest of his life involved in U.S.-Saudi affairs for the OSS's successor, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). His CIA cover was consultant to the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO). Eddy had indeed translated for the two heads of state—he had learned Arabic as a child of missionaries in Lebanon—but "translator" is also an over-modest description of the historical figure Condit played that day.

Hard-core reenactors elevate verisimilitude above all else. They wear period uniforms, eat the foods that real soldiers carried with them into battle, and so on, but the sponsor, a recently founded organization named the Friends of Saudi Arabia, had other objectives, and verisimilitude was sacrificed that day. Neil Bush, the brother of President George W. Bush, and Anthony Kennedy Shriver, a nephew of President John F. Kennedy, climbed on stage with the others. You may ask yourself, why? Americans are much more apt to commemorate fifty-year rather than sixty-year milestones, and what would have been the golden anniversary of the *Quincy* meeting had passed without much comment beyond an ad or two taken out by the Saudi embassy in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. Certainly no one had thought to organize a reenactment. Something extraordinary had happened in the interim to which the stiff piece of dinner theater was a response.

On September 11, 2001, at 8:46 AM, American Airlines Flight 11 burst through the upper floors of the North Tower of the World Trade Center in Manhattan. Seventeen minutes later United Flight 175 hit the South Tower. One hour later, a third plane, American Airlines Flight 77, tore into the Pentagon. The Towers collapsed about the time that United Airlines Flight 93 crashed in the Pennsylvania countryside. The best guess is that this fourth plane was aimed at some target in Washington too, but a group of passengers had stopped the hijackers. More than three thousand died that morning. Nineteen members of an organization called Al Qaeda had turned the airliners into weapons of mass destruction. Fifteen of the hijackers were Saudi subjects, warriors in a battle that is unlikely to be reenacted anytime soon. They served under another

Saudi-in-hiding somewhere in Afghanistan, Osama Bin Laden, the leader of Al Qaeda.

Americans channeled their outrage in various ways. Some enlisted in President George W. Bush's wars. The United States attacked and occupied Afghanistan in 2002 and Iraq in 2003. Filmmaker Michael Moore released what became the largest-grossing documentary film ever, *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Publishers rushed new books into print: biographies of Bin Laden, and studies of terror networks and of Saudi Arabia. Some without footnotes, others with. Some more sober, some less. Books with titles like *Hatred's Kingdom* and *Sleeping with the Devil*. The men and women who wrote in this vein viewed themselves as the nation's conscience, intent on exposing the ways in which interests and organizations beholden to the Al Saud (the "house of Saud"), as the ruling family is known, were undermining America's security. Not everyone agreed.

For the many defenders of the special relationship in Washington and New York—career Saudi watchers, ex-ambassadors, bankers, contractors, oil industry consultants, and geo-strategists—the days and months following 9/11 were dark and increasingly ominous. Different, they liked to imagine, from the days when Ibn Saud and FDR met on the USS *Quincy*. They feared that the tragedy of September 11, 2001, was in danger of being hijacked by ranks of misguided visionaries, neoconservatives, pro-Israel politicians, Christian fundamentalists, and other assorted "Saudi bashers" who were exploiting popular outrage by trying to steer U.S. policy in ways that were doing serious, perhaps fatal damage to the national interest. The unidentified board of directors of the Friends of Saudi Arabia may fit this category. The National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations most definitely does. Even older and more august organizations, such as the Middle East Institute in Washington and the Council of Foreign Relations in New York, weighed in, less ham-handedly, as is their style, through assisting the publication of books designed to instruct us anew on the history of U.S.-Saudi relations, *Inside the Mirage* and *Thicker Than Oil*.

America's Kingdom is not like all these other books, and is certainly not one rushed into print in response to the events of September 11. Professors generally operate on a time line different from those of commercial publishers, journalists, or think tanks. I first started thinking about a project on ARAMCO in 1989, when I was still finishing a first book on business in Egypt. I wrote the initial grants for the project in the early 1990s, and only began serious work on it in 1995. I have been working on it more or less steadily since.

Owned first by two and then four of the world's largest oil corporations, ARAMCO pioneered what was in the 1930s and 1940s a frontier of the world mineral market. *America's Kingdom* tells the story of its workers, assembled by the firm from a dozen countries in order to erect and operate the rigs and build the refinery, stores, and housing for the white American managers and their families. It is ARAMCO's massive investment in oil-producing technology, in the infrastructure to get the oil to market, and in its workers, beginning with the thousands of coolies, as the company's most famous geologist and future executive Tom Barger described the Saudis in his first letters home, that led the U.S. state to follow American capital to the kingdom, sending Colonel Eddy there in 1944.

The summer of '44 was the start of what the Friends call the special relationship and what others call, less reverently, "the deal," oil for security. Back then, the *New York Times* called it moving backward to the "old imperialism" and the era of "dollar diplomacy," as Eddy negotiated with Ibn Saud to build an airfield for the oil firm at taxpayers' expense. The *Times* came around about the time that the Harry Truman administration committed the United States to preserve the Al Saud in power. And when Truman's successors followed through on the pledge—Dwight Eisenhower agreed to train Ibn Saud's army, John Kennedy sent jets to defend the kingdom, and Lyndon Johnson sold missiles to the Saudis—the interagency correspondence returned routinely to reminding generals in the Joint Chiefs of Staff to remember oil and ARAMCO, "our largest single overseas private enterprise."

I am not the first to write on the U.S. relationship with the world's most famous family state, but, as we will see, the history of the oil settlement is little known and, as *America's Kingdom* shows, significantly, perhaps tragically, misunderstood. Two myths form the core of the standard account of the American experience in Saudi Arabia. The first is a familiar one, told about many places. ARAMCO is believed to have acted more generously and less exploitatively than enterprises of other nations, say, British plantations or mining firms in Africa. It is essentially the claim any firm that writes its history will pay to tell about itself. This book dismantles this idea piece by piece through careful use of ARAMCO's own records and its analysts' observations about competitors in the Persian Gulf and elsewhere.

Using the same method, it is even easier to expose to light the second myth about the kingdom, the idea that Saudi Arabia represents an unusual or exceptional case when compared to most other late-developing countries. The

myth goes that market and state making there took place under conditions of relative international isolation. Oil company executives and other Americans engaged in all the most basic material and symbolic practices of nation-state formation, from drawing organizational charts and construction plans to building entire new cities, bureaucracies, and traditions.

Mythmakers will have to work harder on their stories about ARAMCO being magical, honorable, selfless, enlightened, and the like. The archival records tell a story that differs markedly from the drama of pioneering geologists and multinational managers in the wilderness, which, in the absence of serious and critical scholarship, has gradually come to be canonized in, for instance, novelist Wallace Stegner's *Discovery!*, the PBS documentary adapted from Daniel Yergin's *The Prize*, and now Thomas Lippman's *Inside the Mirage*.

ARAMCO's operations in the oil town, Dhahran, rested on a set of exclusionary practices and norms that were themselves legacies of earlier mining booms and market formation in the American West and Southwest. This was a system of privilege and inequality, which we know as Jim Crow in the United States, as Apartheid in South Africa, and as racism more generally. The "laws" that ARAMCO officials imposed on its employees against crossing the color line in its segregated Jim Crow compounds, forbidding Saudis from living with their families, and deporting Americans who pursued contacts with nearby Arab families, the compound's model of justice, and its labor problems generally, have not been documented and analyzed anywhere to my knowledge. Nor has anyone tried to document the movement that emerged to challenge this hierarchy in the oil camps, beginning with the first strike by Saudi workers in 1945. Doing so means having to excavate through multiple strata of company public relations campaigns and two or three generations of scholarship that rest on these foundations.

Most researchers though have constructed their stories about the U.S.-Saudi relationship without ever considering the encounter between Saudis and Americans on the ground. They write as if the history of mining enterprises elsewhere has nothing to teach us, as if there is nothing to compare. Some, who know better, continue to dissemble. And there are those who ignore rather than wrestle with arguments that don't fit the story they want to believe. Still, there are problems beyond naïve rehearsals of a firm's propaganda in response to Saudi workers striking and the rise of a state-building class that sought to limit ARAMCO's power and extract a greater share of the

rents from its monopoly—a word that the firm insisted didn't apply to its, well, monopoly. There are more systematic problems or blind spots that affect our understanding of ARAMCO's or any other firm's role in the long history of empire, of which the moment forms a part.

One is the problem of exceptionalism—a way of viewing or narrating or thinking about the American experience generally. American exceptionalism assumes the deep structural autonomy of that experience, that American history is unlike and unconnected with all others. Exceptionalism grounds, shapes, frames, all the varieties of accounts purporting to prove American enterprise to be anything but agents of empire, of America being empire's antithesis, about the United States acquiring an empire late, or in a fit of absentmindedness, "learning early" to be good citizens, and the like.

The second blind spot is, to be blunt, the rich tradition of racism in American life. Although gender, ethnicity, nationality, and even religion have served in the United States as grounds for exclusion at the polls, in the workplace, in schools, and in neighborhoods, no identity has mattered more than race in determining and justifying hierarchy. ARAMCO, like all other large U.S. mining firms, organized life inside the camps on the basis of the then-ruling ideas about the superiority of whites and the inferiority of all others. Critics of the elaborate hierarchies built on the basis of skin color or facial features and on the alleged inferior and superior abilities of these differently marked bodies coined a term in the 1930s to characterize such practices. They called it racism.

Racism is exceptionalism's Achilles' heel, the contradiction at the heart of the "storybook truth about America," as Louis Hartz once described the country he called "eternally different from everyone else."[1] The problem is the same for the storybook history of ARAMCO. Illiberal institutions inside the United States were a "puzzle" for Hartz and a "dilemma" for the much more widely known Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal, whose study of race relations influenced idea makers in post–World War II America. Myrdal said racism was really just a kind of irrational prejudice found mainly in the traditions of lower-educated whites of the backward areas of the South, and as such it was destined to disappear with time.

The argument though had been made many times before, and Myrdal was no more successful than others in reconciling it either with the history and sociology of racial science, a product not of working class whites of course but of the country's leading scholars and public intellectuals, or with the reality of

the hierarchies that states and, as I explore here, firms had built. In the 1960s, ARAMCO's managers would try to rewrite their own past using the same Myrdalian idea, imagining a dwindling cohort of Texans whose prejudices may have been a problem "in the past," and they were successful because it is the story that writers still tell today. If only the firm had devoted the same energy to dismantling the institutions of hierarchy.

I made my first and only trip to the kingdom in December 1996. To get there, I dissembled, which gained me a visa and a two-week, subsidized tour. My benefactor was the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations, one of those organizations convinced that the national interest is best served by a continued close relationship with the Al Saud, and pretty clearly in the royals' pay. Individuals or organizations inside the kingdom ultimately underwrote the study tour. The dozen Fellows sponsored by the National Council, including me, flew business class, on Saudia, courtesy of the chamber of commerce in Riyadh, I was told.

We were mostly educators, including two professors I have known a long while, and administrators from small colleges across the country. Two other Fellows though were undercover military intelligence officers, one from the Army and the other from the Air Force. The National Council told us that Saudis liked to receive little gifts from the States. A coffee mug from our college, say. It was the custom. I did not bring any. I hoped I paid back my hosts at the chamber by letting a friend there know that the National Council was providing this little extra service to the government. I also tried while I was there to look for a sponsor—the only way to gain a visa to the kingdom—that would allow me to continue my research on the workers who had organized the strikes that ultimately forced the dismantling of at least some of the Jim Crow institutions that the Americans had brought to the kingdom. Friends in Riyadh and Dhahran just laughed, as if it were a joke. The archivist at Saudi ARAMCO, which, as the name change indicates, is now a wholly Saudi-owned company, cancelled my appointment after she heard what I was after. We did meet Saudi journalists, academics, businessmen, and government officials, including the foreign minister, another grandson of Ibn Saud, and a son of the man who did most to crush the movement for reform in the 1960s. The Fellows from the National Council also were treated to briefings at the U.S. embassy in Riyadh and the consulate in Jidda. The best by far was by one of the embassy's economic officers.[2]

Nearly ten years later, in 2004, I participated in a Saudi succession-crisis game run by a firm known as Centra Technologies, which had been founded by ex-CIA agents. Centra does contract work mostly for the agency or at least that is what others who knew the business better had told me. We were a mix of academics, business people, oil consultants, retired diplomats, and men and women in the agency itself, the latter identifiable by tags listing first names only. Gaming the future is not like reenacting, although some of us were playing men who were young boys at the time of FDR's meeting with Ibn Saud. A man named Bob headed my team, the senior princes. He played Abdallah, then the crown prince and now the king. I played Salman, governor of Riyadh. Bob looked familiar. He was the economic officer in Riyadh, his cover during a short tour, he admitted. It is a small world.

America's Kingdom has taken a long time to write. Part of that time is accounted for by the vicissitudes of life, the classroom, love and love's loss, illness. I had heart surgery. I went through a divorce. I have tried to keep in mind that all the men and women in the book are human too, even those in the house of Saud who have been so cavalier about the people they have had killed and the lives they have destroyed in the course of hanging on to power. More of that time though is accounted for by my doing what was necessary to get the story right, which is about the best that we can expect from social science. Professors have a fancy word for what we do when we try to get the story right: method.

I did two things differently from those who worked on ARAMCO before me. First, I found and used more sources than the others typically have. In the early 1990s Georgetown University acquired the papers of William Mulligan, a career employee of ARAMCO, who took copies of many records from the Government Relations Organization (the company's Arabists and diplomats, in effect) with him to New Hampshire when he retired. It is an amazing collection. After all, firms are not like states in that they do not ordinarily preserve their records or, where they do, they do not ordinarily let just any researcher into the archive (if you don't believe me, then try). The Mulligan papers were not available when I began this project (unless you knew Mulligan), but since then I have read virtually every document in them. Journalists also conventionally insist on two independent sources to confirm any controversial claim before it can be reported as fact. If you check, though, you will find that the convention has generally gone by the wayside, and many treat Mulligan's

ARAMCO papers a bit too authoritatively. Other sources—the fifty-year-old memories of retirees, the published and, it turns out, redacted letters of the legendary executive Tom Barger—are treated the same way, unfortunately.

I believe I am the only researcher working on ARAMCO to have read, in addition, every page of the declassified State Department records for the same period—over 3,000 pages. Work like this takes time and money. So, although Lippman writes about the "lost" manuscript by the great Western American novelist, biographer, and historian-for-hire Wallace Stegner accepting an ARAMCO functionary's account of what its faults were, I read the original, as well as the writer's correspondence with the company, which tell a markedly different story from the one the firm invented and that the journalist simply reports as true. There are many such examples to be found in the next few hundred pages.

It takes time to resolve the many incommensurable truth claims and to go beyond pointing out the failures of logic and investigative powers by one or another writer. It is necessary—again, the norms of social science matter here—to offer a better, more convincing account than one that insists the Americans built a segregated enclave because the Saudis ordered them to or that American oilmen picked up their bad habits from British officials in Bahrain or that Crown Prince Faisal was a modernizer whose nonexistent reforms somehow saved the kingdom.

The second difference between this work and others about ARAMCO is its commitment to taking the problem of exceptionalism seriously. It takes time to develop the expertise necessary to write a better history, one that crosses all those boundaries that create the effect of a country unconnected with others and a past that doesn't matter. While it would be wrong to argue that the organization of knowledge in the American academy and the juggernaut of academic specialization are consequences of exceptionalism, it is easy to see how disciplines and specialization reinforce the effect.

I read American Western historians. I raised funds to retrain in African American studies in the course of writing this book. I began to teach on W. E. B. Du Bois. And I also taught courses on America's global frontiers. As a result, *America's Kingdom* brings together the history of America and the Middle East but not as if it is a story that begins in February 1945, with the meeting between Ibn Saud and FDR, as it does in too many accounts. *America's Kingdom* shows why it is imperative that we tear down the wall between the 1940s and all that came before, and that we topple that other, more formidable wall,

once understood as dividing races and now as dividing nations or cultures, which protects the myth of an isolated and autonomous history of the United States of America.

I did not start out to write a book against exceptionalism. I had no argument to begin with, only the knowledge that the ancestors hadn't treated the history of ARAMCO very seriously, and that I had developed some usable skills with archives while writing my first book. When I started this project, I described myself as a political economist, and I thought of political economy as a kind of excavation project of material lying beneath the surface of ideology and culture. Now, at the end of a decade-long endeavor, I tend to use a different metaphor, and think of my work more in terms of reverse engineering of particular processes of mythmaking.

I have written a book that is eight chapters long, and have written it in an accessible style, but one that nonetheless advances the kind of historical synthesis and "strong, even heretical personal judgments" that Bernard DeVoto, a life-long friend of Stegner's, said "professionals had abandoned."[3] I have tried to tell a story. It is a complex one. There is no way around that fact. I have included a cast of characters to help readers keep all the actors straight. And I have chosen to do without the parenthetical or in-text references that somehow have crept into professors' writing since I joined the profession, which we use to convince ourselves that what we do is science and not art.

Those impatient for the argument, as I teach in my classes, and those who think the only question worth asking about a work is how it matters for something called theory, which is the question we ask constantly in graduate seminars, academic job talks, and, sadly, even after we've left the seminar room and reconvened at the White Dog or the Standard Tap, prepare for a rough time. The first chapter, "Captive Narratives," is written with Yuengling-drinking graduate students and Pinot Noir–drinking professors in mind, but the rest of the book is going to make your hangovers worse. The story unfolds at a relaxed pace. I am hoping that readers take this book with them to the shore.

That said, the structure of the book is a simple one. I have divided the story into two parts. Part 1 documents the setting up of the Jim Crow system in Dhahran in the 1930s and 1940s. The history though doesn't begin on the day the Chevron lawyer arrived in Riyadh to cut a deal with the king or when the first geologists put ashore near Jubail, the way all the other histories of ARAMCO begin. Unlike these other works, the goal is not to bury the

parts that firms and their friends prefer that you not see. So Chapter 2 steals a device from ARAMCO's feature-length film, *Island of Allah* (1955), and any number of other films before and since. Think of the chapter as a flashback. Imagine yourself sitting around a desert campfire, listening to a tale of the rise of a large-scale mining enterprise and of work and life inside the various camps for whites or Anglos, for Mexicans, Chinese, and others. It opens with an image of Dhahran and what was then known as American Camp on a day in 1947, but then moves backward to the Western territories of North America and northern Mexico in the late nineteenth century through World War I, and from there to Venezuela and Colombia in the 1920s, and then on to Bahrain in the 1930s, before eventually reaching the east coast of Saudi Arabia once more. You will see why soon enough. Time runs one way only for the rest of the book, and Part 1 ends with the firm piecing together a response to the first workers' strikes in Dhahran.

Part 2 tells the story of the workers' challenge to the hierarchy of the ARAMCO camps in the 1950s and the parallel challenge by a small cadre of progressive Saudis in government in the late 1950s and early 1960s to the hierarchy of the international oil market. It was an extraordinary moment, and its details are mostly unknown or at least unpublished, but it was also short-lived. The final chapters trace the defeat of these forces by 1962–63 and the consolidation of America's kingdom under the third king Faisal and those of his brothers known as the Al al-Fahd or house of Fahd, the royal faction that rules even now.

If you can't wait, and need to know in advance what it all means, then read out of order. Start with the last subsection of Chapter 1, where you will find the argument summarized. Then read the subsection at the very end of Chapter 4 titled "Reprise: Dusk at Dawn," and section three of Chapter 8, through the subsection titled "Ayyam Jamila (Beautiful Days)." It is where you will find compact summaries of Parts 1 and 2. Maybe, like graduate students, you won't have much more time to spare than it will take to read those fifteen or so pages. If you do have the time and are willing to wrestle with a little bit of abstraction in trade for some background information, then read the book from front to back. And if you just want the story, skip the first chapter and begin with Part 1, "The Nearest Faraway Place," a title lifted from a now out of print biography of the Beach Boys.

Needless to say, I have left myself open for some criticism. I look forward to it, as anyone should who has come to care passionately about a work or

about what the work tries to accomplish. Let me try to save some time and energy by answering two obvious and, sorry, not very compelling criticisms in advance. Maybe we can start from some higher ground.

For you who want a comprehensive history of ARAMCO, treating issues of technology, finance, administration, and above all American triumph over adversity, *America's Kingdom* is not the book you are looking for, not least because it is not intended as a history of the firm. Let me be clear once more. It is most basically an account of the building of a Jim Crow enclave on the eastern shore of Saudi Arabia at the end of World War II, an explanation for, if not the final word on, why the labor process was organized in this way, and what explains the start of its demise. The challenge for future researchers is to test and if necessary revise my claim about ARAMCO lagging behind its competitors in Iran and Iraq and its owners' own venture in Venezuela, in areas such as education, training, and promotion to management positions. The task for the future will be to falsify my theory of what accounts for the lag.

Then there will be those who will be more or less untroubled by what I have to say about ARAMCO but will worry about my failure to capture the Saudi experience in enough depth or to understand the so-called authentic character of the Saudis or to include enough and varied Saudi voices. These kinds of criticism miss the mark. I look forward to the possibility of a different and better world to come where some who live in the kingdom might finally start to do the kind of research and publishing that many have long wanted to see. My book, though, is not about Saudi Arabia. It is about America. It just takes place and tells you more than others have about somewhere else.