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Introduction

“Those who cannot remember the past,” said American philosopher George Santayana, “are condemned to repeat it.” You generally hear this in the 12th grade.

Some people think of learning about U.S. history as a punishment — a subject you have to take in school. You memorize a bewildering array of dates, absorb definitions of terms like *Manifest Destiny*, and wonder whether America really needed two presidents named Harrison. Historical figures appear as if they were characters in a junior high school costume pageant. Their blemishes are airbrushed out, and their personalities are drained away.

This book doesn’t airbrush the blemishes but rather strives to present a balanced, honest picture of the last 250 years (and more) of the history and development for the United States of America. As an amalgamation of content derived from the brilliant works of several Dummies authors (see the “Author’s Acknowledgments” at the back of the book), it tells a story of the people who founded, inhabited, led, influenced, defended, fought for, migrated to, protested against, and contributed to the rich heritage that turned a loose collection of (mostly) British colonies into a powerful, world-recognized nation.

Enjoy!

About This Book

This book is not a textbook, nor is it an exhaustive encyclopedia covering everything that ever happened in the United States. But it gives you a basic foundation of information about U.S. history, celebrates the vibrant people and events that make the U.S. what it is today, and offers a glimpse at all sides of this country’s development.

Because U.S. history hasn’t always been bright and shining — especially when it comes to topics such as slavery, immigration, and the treatment of Native Americans — this book doesn’t always deal with pleasant or uplifting subjects. Some of what you read may anger or sadden you. In that regard, America’s history shares something in common with just about every country that ever existed.

In this book, you can move around from topic to topic and use the book as a handy reference. Some typical conventions that you find in the book include the following:

- » Words that appear in *italics* may mean that you're about to find the definition for the italicized term.
- » Web addresses appear in monofont. If you're reading a digital version of this book on a device connected to the internet, you can click the web address to visit that website, like this one: www.dummies.com
- » Direct or adapted quotations from influential Americans or other authorities may appear as a separate, indented paragraph.

To make the content more accessible, we divided it into seven minibooks:

- » **Book 1: Shaping the USA.** Read Book 1 for an overview of the origin and development of America as it now exists.
- » **Book 2: Expanding America into Its Current Shape.** Book 2 gives you a bit more detail about the expansion of the U.S. across the North American continent, a crash course about the variety of governmental policies needed to run this large nation, and a look at important social issues.
- » **Book 3: The Wars That Influenced the Shape.** As is true for any nation on Earth, war has been and continues to be a fact of life. In Book 3, find out about major wars that directly influenced the American people and the development of domestic and foreign policies for the U.S. government.
- » **Book 4: The Hands That Guided the Shape.** In Book 4, meet the Founding Fathers, as well as some of the U.S. Presidents and First Ladies who lent their time and talents (with varying levels of success) to shaping America.
- » **Book 5: The People Who Infused the Shape.** The heritage of the American people is rich, and they come from all over the world. In Book 5, you can read about the people who infuse the U.S. with a wealth of cultures and traditions, as well as discover how their social and political ideas influenced the shape of America.
- » **Book 6: American Government and Politics.** No history of the U.S. would be complete without a look at its form of government and the political structures that support the government. Book 6 offers you a look at both.
- » **Book 7: American Society and the Economy.** In Book 7, you discover the emblems of America (the U.S. flag and the National Anthem, for example) that you may associate with the country. You also find out about how certain economic and societal developments have and still do influence life in America.

Foolish Assumptions

We assume that you picked up this book because you have some interest in U.S. history, especially during this special time of celebration — the America 250th anniversary. But whether you know a little or a lot about the subject, you can find topics to enjoy reading about, and you may even uncover some new insights into the history and development of the American nation.

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout this book, icons in the margins highlight certain types of valuable information that call out for your attention. Here are the icons you'll encounter and a brief description of each.



TIP

The Tip icon marks tips that we hope can offer an insight into the gist of the surrounding text.



REMEMBER

Remember icons mark the information that's especially important to know. To siphon off the most important information in each chapter, just skim through these icons.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

The Technical Stuff icon marks information of a more detailed or technical nature that you can normally skip over without losing the message of the related section.

Beyond the Book

In addition to the abundance of information and guidance related to U.S. history and the development of American life that we provide in this book, you get access to even more help and information online at *Dummies.com*. Check out this book's online Cheat Sheet. Just go to www.dummies.com and search for "America 250 All-in-One."

Also in this book, you find references and links to websites that contain more information about the U.S. and its government. Follow those links if you're interested in getting a bit more detail about content that's highlighted but not fully explained.

Where to Go from Here

Because this book is not a linear sequence of information about U.S. history or national development, you can feel free to skip around and start reading at any chapter in any mini-book that catches your eye. Take a look at the Table of Contents in the front of the book for a rundown of chapter titles and headings that describe the content.

If you have a particular topic that you're interested in, you can also check out the Index at the back of the book to find out whether that topic is covered, and where in the book to find it.

1

Shaping the USA

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IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Surveying the 1700s colonial landscape
- » Engaging in the first *true* world wars
- » Relaxing religious rigidity
- » Fighting the French and the American Indians — again
- » Alienating the colonists with annoying acts
- » Taking on the redcoats: The battle for independence begins

Chapter **1**

You Say You Want a Revolution

Long before it was a nation or even had a name, America was an idea, a dream. It didn't exist as anything but a blank slate waiting to be filled. Eventually it filled with people who came for all sorts of reasons and with myriad ideas on how to assemble a country. Sometimes the ideas and the people clashed. But out of the clashes and struggles grew a country founded on a system of government that made it unique in the world.

As it evolved, America was often lucky to have great leaders in bad times when it most needed them. It had abundant natural resources, generally peaceable neighbors, and plenty of room to grow. And boy, did it grow. But before all this

expansion could happen, someone had to transform it from a fantasy to a very real place. This chapter gives you the lowdown on how that transformation came about and directs you to the places in the book that give you the basics in more detail.

Looking at America in 1700

By the beginning of the 18th century, European powers had been alternately exploring the New World and sparring over what they found. Now it was time for the main event: a showdown for control of the American continent. Actually, it was time for a series of main events. This chapter describes how Europe engaged in a succession of wars in which America was not only a pawn but also a battleground. Britain ultimately came out on top, but its relationship with the American colonies had dramatically changed by the time that happened.

By 1700, the English colonies in America had filled in the gaps between the first two settlements in Virginia and Massachusetts and, in fact, had gone beyond them. The colonies now stretched from Maine to South Carolina. But they were a pretty skinny bunch, as colonies go. Few settlers lived more than 75 miles from the Atlantic coast, and vast stretches of land lay unsettled by any nation, although claimed by more than one.

The population had reached 275,000 to 300,000, which included 25,000 African slaves. Most people — as many as 90 percent — lived in small communities or farms. The population of New York City was about 5,000; Charles Towne (now Charleston) was about 2,000. Many of the newcomers weren't English but rather people from other Western European regions, such as Ireland, France, Scotland, and Germany, as well as the Scandinavian countries.

The colonies matured as they grew. Boston and Philadelphia were major publishing centers. Small manufacturing firms turned out goods such as furniture and iron products, which lessened the colonies' dependence on goods from England. Increasing secularism was loosening the hold of religious authority on everyday life. In fact, things were going along okay, except for all that fighting in Europe.

Britain viewed the colonies mainly as economic enterprises, whereas the colonists increasingly disliked being told what to do by a distant government. The differing perspectives clashed until, as described at the end of this chapter, Britain got popped in the snoot.

IMMIGRATION IS INTEGRAL

Sometimes when people think of immigration to the U.S., they jump directly to the 1800s (1840 to 1889, specifically), when populations from Northern or Western Europe, Germany, Ireland, and the U.K. made up what the Pew Research Center (at <https://www.pewresearch.org>) calls “The first large wave of immigration to the U.S . . .”

But draw your attention backward for millennia, to the time when (according to students of archaeology, among others) the first human beings to arrive in North America traversed a land bridge from Asia and Siberia to become the first North Americans (and DNA-matched ancestors of Native Americans). These peoples were collectively known as the Clovis people, and their journey occurred approximately 13,000 to 13,500 years ago. See a related article “The First Americans” at the National Endowment for the Humanities website (www.neh.gov/humanities/2014/marchapril/feature/the-first-americans).

Not only did immigrants arrive in North America in prehistoric times, but throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, thousands of people migrated to North America. Most came for greater economic opportunities than they could find in Europe; others came for religious freedom. The British Empire took interest in the American continent in the 16th century. In 1587, the first English settlement was set up at Roanoke Island in North Carolina. It was established by Sir Walter Raleigh and disappeared under mysterious circumstances.

In 1607, the English tried again, and this time established a colony in Jamestown, Virginia. The colony developed for almost a century but had to live under harsh conditions, constantly fighting the native population. Jamestown did leave the country an important legacy. The colonists established a representative assembly to govern their own affairs, a precedent the country later translated into the form of government that the U.S. has today (See Book 6, Chapter 1 for more information about the U.S. government.)

The idea of America as a *melting pot* — where new arrivals could, and should, blend into the existing culture — was popularized in 1908 by an otherwise forgettable play called, well, *The Melting Pot*. But the metaphor was challenged in the last part of the 20th century by those who thought a better image was America as a sort of recipe in which the ingredients kept their own identities but still worked together to produce something tasty.

America had plenty of ingredients to choose from. In 1980, about 6 percent of the U.S. population had been born in other countries. In 2023, it was 14.3 percent — about 48 million people. Federal statistics showed that from 2013 to 2022, nearly 8 million people became “naturalized” U.S. citizens.

Fighting the First True World Wars

Eighteenth-century royalty didn't need much of an excuse to start a war — they fought over everything from who should be the next king of Spain to the lopping off of a sea captain's ear. Their willingness to fight was based partly on greed for more territory and the wealth it could bring, and partly on their fear that other countries would beat them to it and become more powerful.



REMEMBER

These wars differed from their predecessors by being global in scope and fought all over Europe, India, North and South America, and the Caribbean. The main combatants were the French and English, although the Spanish, Dutch, and Austrians did their share of fighting.

Here's a highly condensed look at the first three true world wars:

- » **King William's War:** A revolution by Protestants in England tossed out James II, a Catholic. Protestant William III and his wife Mary came in from the Netherlands and took the throne in 1689. This situation didn't sit well with the French king, Louis XIV, a Catholic. After William III sided with other countries against France in a territorial dispute, a war was on in Europe that lasted until 1697 and spilled into America, with French-led American Indian raiding parties practicing a kind of warfare that was to become known as *guerrilla fighting*: ambushes and hit-and-run attacks. The war pretty much ended in a draw.
- » **Queen Anne's War:** After King William's War ended, Europe took all of four years to catch its breath. Then, in 1701, Louis XIV of France tried to put his grandson on the throne of Spain. Queen Anne, who had succeeded William in England, objected, and they were back at it again. This time, the English colonists found themselves fighting the Spanish in the South and the French in the North. As with the previous war, there were few big battles and lots of raids and counter-raids, with both sides employing American Indian allies. When the war finally ended in 1713, Louis XIV's grandson sat on the Spanish throne but England got Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and the Hudson River Valley.
- » **King George's War:** Most wars have more than one cause, but historians with a whimsical side like to start the story of King George's War with an English smuggler named Robert Jenkins. Spanish revenue agents caught Jenkins in 1731, and in the course of being interrogated, he involuntarily had one of his ears removed. "Take this back to the king, your master," a Spanish official was said to have said, "whom, if he were present, I would serve in the same fashion."

Jenkins did take his ear back to England, but he took his time about it and didn't actually tell his tale to Parliament until 1738. It didn't matter much, and a new war was on anyway. It eventually merged with a larger war that broke out in Europe. In America, the same kind of fighting that had taken place in the earlier wars was taking place again. The British colonists took a key port called Louisbourg, which commanded the Gulf of St. Lawrence, but they had to give it back as part of the 1748 treaty that settled the war.

The Great Awakening: Stirring Greater Religious Freedom

Despite the nagging presence of almost-continual war, the American colonies were doing pretty well in the early decades of the 1700s. As the colonists did better economically, they began to loosen up in terms of their religious beliefs, too. "Pennsylvania," said a German observer, by way of example, "is heaven for farmers, paradise for artisans, and hell for officials and preachers."

Americans weren't becoming less devout so much as less rigid and more likely to question the clergy's tendency to dictate exactly what they were to think and believe.

Being good with Jonathan Edwards

In the 1730s, a reaction to this shifting of religious attitudes resulted in what came to be known as the *Great Awakening*. Its catalyst was a genius named Jonathan Edwards, a brilliant theologian who also wrote papers on insects that are still respected in entomological circles. The fiery "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" sermonizer thundered memorably to mass audiences throughout New England that

"[the] God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you and is dreadfully provoked."

Beyond the fire-and-brimstone messaging, Edwards also believed that God was to be loved and not just feared and that internal goodness was the best way to be happy on this earth.



REMEMBER

Although the Great Awakening had run its course by the time of the American Revolution, its impact was deep and lasting. It sparked widespread discussions about religion that, in turn, led to the development of new denominations, which in turn helped lead to more religious tolerance among the colonists. Several of the new or revitalized denominations were encouraged to start colleges, including Brown, Princeton, Dartmouth, and Columbia, to ensure a steady stream of trained ministers.

Going wild for George Whitefield

A Georgia-based minister named George Whitefield eventually surpassed Jonathan Edwards on the revival circuit. Called the *Great Itinerant* because of his constant traveling, Whitefield drew crowds in the thousands. On one crusade, he traveled 800 miles in 75 days and gave 175 sermons. Equipped with an amazing voice and a flair for the melodramatic, Whitefield quite literally made members of his crowds wild. He made seven continental tours from 1740 to 1770, and it's safe to say he was America's first superstar.

The Great Awakening helped break down barriers among the colonies and unify them through their common experience with it. As the first spontaneous mass movement in America, it heightened the individual's sense of power when it was combined with that of others — and emboldened them to question the status quo.

The French and Indian War

Despite being filled with the divine spirit of the Great Awakening — or maybe because of it — American colonists were ready by 1750 to once more fight the French and American Indians. The first to do so were led by a tall, 22-year-old Virginia militia captain named George Washington.

This time, the world war, called the *Seven Years' War* in Europe and dubbed the *French and Indian War* in the New World, started in America. English speculators had secured the rights to 500,000 acres in the Ohio River valley. At about the same time, the French had built a series of forts in the same area as a way to keep lines of communication and supply open between Canada and Louisiana.

In 1754, a year after he had conducted a diplomat/spy mission, Washington was sent to the Ohio Country with 150 men. They ran into a French detachment, the Virginians fired, and the French fled. "I heard the bullets whistle," Washington wrote later, "and, believe me, there is something charming in the sound."

The French set out to “charm” Washington by counterattacking a fort the young Virginian had hastily put up (and aptly named *Fort Necessity*) and by forcing Washington to surrender — on July 4. Then, in a stroke of luck for a nation yet unborn, the French let Washington lead his men home.

Unifying the colonies

While Washington was savoring his first taste of battle, representatives of 8 of the 13 colonies were meeting in Albany, New York, at the request of the British government. The purpose was to see whether the colonies could be more unified. The British wanted more unity because they figured it would make it easier to fight the French and also to govern the colonies.

But a few far-seeing colonists — most notably a Philadelphia printer, inventor, scientist, and man-about-town named Benjamin Franklin — saw the meeting as an opportunity to increase the colonies’ economic and political clout.

Franklin engineered a sound plan for a colonial union, and the gathered representatives approved it. But the assemblies in the individual colonies rejected it, mostly because they felt they would give up too much of their independence.

Defeating British General Braddock

On the battlefield, meanwhile, the British had sent two of their worst regiments to the colonies and given command to a general named Edward Braddock. Though undeniably brave (he had five horses shot from under him in one battle), Braddock was arrogant and a plodding bozo when it came to military strategy. He was also contemptuous of the American militia under his command.

In 1755, Braddock and a force of about 1,400 men, including Washington, marched on French forts in the Ohio Country. A force of French and American Indians surprised the British force. Braddock was killed, along with almost a thousand of his men.

Braddock’s defeat was just one of a bunch of losses the British suffered over the next two years. The war in America merged with a war in Europe that involved all the major European powers. It went badly for the British in both theaters.

Outfighting the French

In 1757, however, things began looking up. An able administrator named William Pitt became head of the government in London. Pitt skillfully used the superior British navy and appointed good military leaders.



REMEMBER

Among them were James Wolfe and Jeffrey Amherst. Wolfe and Amherst led a British force against the French fortress city of Quebec in 1759. In one of the most important battles fought in North America, the British took the city. Montreal fell in the following year, and the French were finished in the New World.

The war was formally settled by the Treaty of Paris in 1763. The British got all of Canada, all of the U.S. east of the Mississippi and Florida, and some Caribbean islands.



TIP

The American colonists got rid of the decades-old threat from the French. More than in previous wars, men from different colonies fought alongside one another, lowering barriers among the colonies. Future leaders matured. And the animosity and friction that sprang up between British military leaders and the Americans lingered long after the war was over.

To see what land holdings Britain, France, and Spain maintained in the wake of the French and Indian War, take a look at Figure 1-1.



FIGURE 1-1: Map of North and Central America showing land that belonged to Britain, France, and Spain during the mid-18th century.

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Growing like a Weed

If there was one inarguable fact about the American colonies in the mid-to-late 18th century, it was that they were growing like crazy. In 1730, the population of the 13 colonies was about 655,000. Boston was the biggest city, with a population of about 13,000, while New York and Philadelphia were home to about 8,500 people each.

By 1760, the population had reached 1.6 million, not including enslaved Africans, and by 1775, the non-slave population stood at 2.5 million. Philadelphia was now the largest city, with a population of about 34,000.

Accounting for the population explosion

Two things caused the population explosion. One was the natural birthrate of the colonists. Partly because of the time-honored farm family tradition that large families meant more people to work (and maybe because there wasn't much else to do on those long winter nights in the country), the size of many American families was astounding. Benjamin Franklin wrote of a Philadelphia woman who had 14 children, 82 grandchildren, and 110 great-grandchildren by the time she died at the age of 100. The growth rate was even more astounding when you consider the high infant mortality rate. One woman was reported to have lost 20 children at birth or soon thereafter.

But the growth was by no means all from within the colonies. Immigration continued at a brisk pace, not only from England but also from other Western European countries. A 1909 population study estimated that at the time of the American Revolution, about 82 percent of the White population was from England and Wales, 5 percent from Scotland, 6 percent from the German states, and about 7 percent from Holland, Ireland, and other countries.



REMEMBER

Despite a postwar recession after the fighting with the French stopped in 1763, the colonies were on a fairly sound economic foundation. About 90 percent of the colonists were involved in agriculture, with tobacco, corn, rice, indigo, and wheat being the main crops. Fishing and whaling were big in New England. Timber was the top manufacturing product, and because trees were plentiful and cheap, ship-building boomed. By the time of the American Revolution, one-third of the British navy had been built in America.

THE INVOLUNTARY ARRIVALS

One of the fastest-growing segments of the 18th-century American population didn't grow voluntarily. In 1725, an estimated 75,000 enslaved Africans resided in the colonies. By 1790, the number was 700,000. The 1790 census reported that all but three states had slaves: Maine, Massachusetts, and Vermont. Forty-three percent of the people living in South Carolina belonged to other people; in Virginia, 39 percent were slaves.

More than a few colonists raised their voices in alarm at the increasing number of slaves. Some protested for humanitarian reasons. Benjamin Franklin argued the slave system didn't make sense from an economic perspective. Even the most ardent proslavery apostles had their doubts. Some were afraid of slave uprisings if the numbers continued to grow, while others wanted to stop the importation of slaves so the value of the ones already in America would increase. However, the British government refused to allow bans on slave importation by the colonies for fear of damaging the lucrative trade. This refusal became a sore spot between Britain and America. See Book 5, Chapter 4 for more information about the slave trade.

Living the good life

Although the colonists shared problems common to people all over the world in the 18th century, such as nasty epidemics, they generally ate better, lived longer, and were more prosperous than any of their European counterparts. Land was cheap and had to sustain fewer people because the population was smaller. Because labor was often in short supply, wages were higher, which raised the standard of living.

While enjoying the protections of the formidable British Empire's military, the average American colonist, if he paid any taxes at all, paid far less than his British cousin. The argument against British taxes, put forth by the eloquent Boston lawyer James Otis — that “taxation without representation is tyranny” — was a bit hypocritical. After all, more than a few Americans had to pay taxes to American local governments and still couldn't vote or didn't have a representative in the colonial assemblies.

Moreover, for the most part, Britain didn't interfere in the colonies' internal affairs. Mostly, the mother country concerned itself with defense and trade issues, and many of the trade laws were mutually beneficial to both sides of the water (unless you happened to be a big-time smuggler like John Hancock, who later became the first to sign the Declaration of Independence and was Public Enemy Number One as far as the British were concerned).

So, most Americans in the 1760s and early 1770s had no interest in independence from Britain. What they wanted was what they had: protection by the world's mightiest navy, generally cozy trade rules, and freedoms and rights unequaled in the rest of the world. Britain, however, couldn't — or thought it couldn't — afford to maintain the status quo.

Heading toward Divorce with Britain

After more than 60 years of almost continuous war, the British national debt soared, much of it owing to defending Americans from the French and American Indians in America. The British government decided that the Americans should pay for part of it. Also, the British and the Americans fundamentally disagreed about the role that Parliament, the British governing body, should play in the colonists' lives. For Britain, it was simple: Parliament made the rules for Britain and all its colonies. The American colonists, however, wanted to come up with their own rules in their own mini-parliaments and deal directly with the king.

In 1763, Britain and its American colonies began to irritate each other almost incessantly. Like a parent with a headstrong child, Britain tried different methods to instill discipline, but America wasn't such a kid anymore, or as Ben Franklin put it in verse:

“We have an old mother that peevish is grown
She snubs us like children that scarce walk alone
She forgets we're grown up and have a sense of our own.”

And as happens in family quarrels, incidents and issues that by themselves could be smoothed over began to pile up. In this case, the irritants helped lead to a revolution.

Here's a quick look at the big events that led to divorce between the two sides:

- » **The Proclamation of 1763:** Attempting to steer clear of more trouble with the American Indians, King George III decided that as of October 7, 1763, no colonists could settle beyond the crest of the Appalachian Mountains. However, a bunch of colonials already lived west of the dividing line and weren't about to move just because some potentate thousands of miles away said so. Worse, the decree was a slap in the face to those who had fought against the French and American Indians with the expectation that winning meant they could move west to vast tracts of free land. In the end, it was an unenforceable law that did nothing but anger the colonists and vex British officials when it wasn't obeyed.

- » **The Revenue Acts (1764):** Brits were peeved that their colonial cousins paid relatively little in taxes, especially because the British were among the highest-taxed people in the world. So British Prime Minister George Grenville pushed a bill through Parliament that was explicitly designed to raise money from the colonists to pay for their defense. The law actually lowered the tax on molasses but raised or imposed taxes on other things like sugar, wine, linen, and silk. Colonists objected, asserting that Parliament had no right to impose taxes on them without their assent. They also organized boycotts of the taxed goods and increased their already booming smuggling enterprises.
- » **The Stamp Act (1765):** Unsatisfied with the revenue from the Revenue Acts, Parliament imposed a new levy on 50 items, including just about every kind of legal document. Some of the taxes doubled the cost of the item. The items also had to be stamped or have a stamped receipt on them, showing that the tax had been paid. Although British citizens paid similar taxes at even higher rates, American colonists saw the Stamp Act taxes as only the beginning of being milked dry, and 27 delegates from 9 colonies drew up a petition.

When England ignored their petition, the colonies boycotted goods, which was not ignored. Groups calling themselves the *Sons of Liberty* encouraged and bullied their fellow colleagues to wear “homespun” clothing instead of British wool. They also tarred and feathered more than a few would-be tax collectors, and in 1766, under pressure from British manufacturers, Parliament repealed the taxes. But it also tried to save face by declaring that, henceforth, it had the right to pass any laws it wanted to govern the colonies. Americans rejoiced at the tax repeal. They praised “Good King George.” In New York, they even erected a statue of him in his honor. And they blithely ignored the warning from Parliament.

- » **The Townshend Act (1767):** British Prime Minister William Pitt was a capable leader, but after a mental breakdown in 1766, he handed over the government to one of his lieutenants, Charles Townshend. Known as *Champagne Charley* because of his drunken eloquence, Townshend vowed to squeeze some money out of the obstinate American colonies, and he got Parliament to impose taxes on a number of goods, including glass, paper, paint, and tea. The revenues would pay the salaries of royal judges and governors in the colonies. To be fair, Townshend also dropped import duties on some American products entering England, thus making their export more profitable for the colonies.

But the colonists were highly fond of tea and not keen on paying any tax on it. Nor did they like having their taxes pay judges and governors, whose salaries were controlled by colonial legislatures — giving the colonists a fair amount of influence over their policies. Eager to show he meant business, Townshend sent two regiments of red-coated British troops — sneeringly dubbed

lobsterbacks by the locals — to Boston in 1768. That situation set up the next confrontation.

- » **The Boston Massacre (1770):** Because the soldiers sent to Boston were poorly paid, some of them tried to find part-time work, a practice that didn't sit well with many Bostonians. So fights often broke out between soldiers and groups of colonists. On the night of March 5, a small mob of lowlifes began throwing rocks and snowballs at a British sentry outside the customs house. Another 20 British soldiers appeared with fixed bayonets. The crowd grew to as many as 300 boys and men, and after about 30 minutes of being taunted and pelted with rocks and sticks, one of the soldiers opened fire. A few minutes later, 11 members of the mob were dead or wounded.

At a subsequent trial, the soldiers were ably defended by a Boston lawyer named John Adams, and all but two were acquitted. The two soldiers found guilty were branded on the hand and then let go. But the radicals among the colonists milked the incident for all it was worth. A highly exaggerated engraving of the "massacre" was made by a silversmith named Paul Revere, and copies of it circulated all over the colonies. Ironically, on the day of the incident, the Townshend Acts were repealed by Parliament — except for the tax on tea.

- » **The Boston Tea Party (1773):** Despite the widespread publicity surrounding the tragedy in Boston, moderates on both sides of the Atlantic argued for compromises. But then the British government gave the vastly overstocked British East India Company a monopoly on the American tea business to dispense with its surplus. The company's prices were lower than the smuggled tea the colonists drank to avoid the British tax, but the colonists still disliked the tax on principle. They destroyed shipments of English tea or prevented them from being unloaded or sold and on December 16, 1773, colonists poorly disguised as American Indians boarded three ships in Boston Harbor, smashed in 342 chests of tea, and dumped the whole mess into the harbor, where, according to one eyewitness, "it piled up in the low tide like haystacks." No one was seriously hurt, although one colonist was reportedly roughed up a bit for trying to stuff some of the tea in his coat instead of throwing it overboard.

King George III wasn't amused. "The die is now cast," he wrote to his latest prime minister, Lord North, who had succeeded Townshend upon his sudden death. "The colonies must either submit or triumph."

- » **The "Intolerable" Acts (1774):** In response to the tea party, Parliament passed a series of laws designed to teach the upstarts a thing or two. They were called the *Repressive Acts* in England, but to Americans, they were *Intolerable*. The laws closed Boston Harbor until the colonists paid back the damage they had wrought, thus cutting the city off from sources of food, medical supplies, and other goods. The laws also installed a British general

as governor of Massachusetts and repealed such liberties as the right to hold town meetings.

At the same time, the Brits passed the Quebec Act, a law that gave more freedom to conquered French subjects in Canada, including the right to continue customs such as nonjury trials in civil cases. Though sensible from a British perspective, the Quebec Act incensed Americans, plus it pushed the borders of the Quebec province well into the Ohio River valley, infuriating colonials who had fought several wars to keep the French out of that valley.

The acts galvanized the colonies into a show of unity. Food and supplies poured in by land to Boston from all over America, and in Virginia, the colonial legislature brought representatives from all but one of the colonies together for a meeting.

Congressing for the First Time

On September 5, 1774, leaders from all the colonies but Georgia gathered in Philadelphia to discuss the “Intolerable” Acts imposed by Britain (see the preceding section). All 56 delegates were men, about half of them lawyers. Some, such as New York’s John Jay, were politically conservative; others, such as Virginia’s Patrick Henry, were fire-breathing radicals. Despite their differences, this First Continental Congress did reach an agreement on a number of issues, even though they had no real powers.

The Congress petitioned Parliament to rescind the offending laws and demanded all the same rights as other British subjects, such as to elect representatives to make the laws they were governed by. Also, all trade with Britain should cease until the repeal of the “Intolerable” Acts, and if any colony was attacked, all the others would defend it. They even agreed to abstain from tea and wine (but not rum) and to swear off recreational pursuits like horse racing and cock fighting until their British troubles ended.

The meeting drew the colonies closer together than ever before. “The distinctions between New Englanders and Virginians are no more,” declared Patrick Henry. “I am not a Virginian, but an American.” The Congress adjourned on October 26, pledging to come back in May if things didn’t get better by then. Things didn’t.

Mr. Revere, Your Horse Is Ready

The Congress's decision to boycott all trade with Britain was embraced with enthusiasm almost everywhere. Lists of suspected traitors who continued to trade were published, and tar and feathers were vigorously applied to those who ignored the boycott.

While businessmen in England fretted, the colonists' actions were met with disdain by a majority of the members of Parliament. Lord North, the prime minister, resolved to isolate the troublemakers in Massachusetts and thus stifle dissent in other areas. But some British knew better. Gen. Thomas Gage, the British commander in chief in America, reported that things were coming to a head.

"If you think ten thousand men are enough," Gage wrote to North, "send twenty; if a million [pounds] is thought to be enough, give two. You will save both blood and treasure in the end."

In April 1775, Gage decided to make a surprise march from his headquarters in Boston to nearby Concord, where he hoped to seize a storehouse of rebel guns and ammunition and maybe arrest some of the rebels' leaders. But the colonists knew he was coming, thanks to a network of spies and militia called the *minutemen*, aptly named because they were supposed to be ready to quickly spring into action. One of these was Paul Revere, the son of a French immigrant.

In addition to being a master silversmith, Revere made false teeth and surgical tools, and he was pretty good on a horse, too. So, when word came on the night of April 18 that the British were marching on Concord, Revere and two other men, William Dawes and Doctor Samuel Prescott, rode out to warn that the British were coming. After rousing the town of Lexington, Revere and Dawes were captured and briefly detained. But Prescott escaped and made it to Concord. (Revere became the most famous of the three, however, because a poet named Henry Wadsworth Longfellow made him the star of a wildly popular poem in 1863.)



REMEMBER

When the 700 British soldiers marched through Lexington on the morning of April 19 on their way to Concord, they encountered 77 colonials. "Don't fire unless fired upon," said the minutemen's leader, John Parker. "But if they mean to have a war, let it begin here."

Shots were fired, and eight of the minutemen were killed. By the time the British reached Concord, however, resistance had been better organized. At a bridge near one of the entrances to the town, British soldiers were attacked, and the fighting began in earnest. Now facing hundreds of colonists who prudently stood behind

trees and in houses and fired at the redcoats, the British soldiers beat a disorganized retreat to Boston. More than 250 British were dead, missing, or wounded, compared to about 90 Americans killed or wounded.

The war of words was over. The war of blood and death had begun. Go to Book 3 for a look at the American Revolutionary War.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Bringing order to the colonies
- » Electing the first president
- » Establishing an economy
- » Increasing troubles at home and overseas
- » Expanding the nation's territory

Chapter 2

Blueprints and Birth Pains

After winning its independence from Britain, America felt a little like a kid who had just moved out of his parent's house and wasn't sure what step came next in growing up. The country had no real government, no sound financing system, and no true foreign friends. Fortunately, it did have a group of extraordinary individuals — some of whom had helped lead it through the Revolution — who were willing to try to find a form of government that would fit. Putting aside most of their personal differences and aspirations (at least at first), they came up with a system of governing the new country that became a true wonder of the world.

Making the Rules

America limped through the Revolutionary War guided by the Continental Congress, a group of men selected by colonial legislatures. The Congress, in turn, came up with something called the Articles of Confederation. Drafted in 1777 but not ratified by all the states until 1781, Congress based the Articles on the idea that

the individual states would be friendly with one another and cooperate when it was in their mutual interest. Each state had one vote in Congress, and it took 9 of the 13 states to ratify any decision.

Congress ran matters of war and peace, operated the post office, coined money, and dealt with American Indians when the states didn't want to. It had no power to tax or to establish a federal judicial system, and it lacked any real power to make the individual states pay attention to its legal authority to make postal, coinage, or war-and-peace decisions.

It was a tedious, cautious system that guaranteed a continual stream of squabbles among the states. Making things worse were schemes by agents of Spain, France, and Britain. They tried to get Americans who lived in the western parts of the new country to break away. War hero Ethan Allen, for example, met with British agents to discuss making his beloved Vermont a British province and narrowly escaped being tried for treason.



REMEMBER

Still, at least two good bits of legislation came out of the loose-knit confederation:

- » **The Land Ordinance of 1785:** Determined how land owned by the federal government — which basically was territory won from Britain that wasn't claimed by one of the states — would be divided and sold. Land would be surveyed into square townships with multiple equal parcels and auctioned off, and could be even further subdivided by the owner into smaller parcels for sale if desired. Part of the revenue went to the establishment of public schools.
- » **The Northwest Ordinance:** Enacted in 1787, the ordinance made every new state admitted to the country equal in every way to the original 13. It also banned slavery in the new territories, although this aspect was later changed.

Both laws were good starts to stabilizing the new country, but regulating commerce among the states and raising revenue for the federal government still plagued the nation, especially because every state had its own currency and assigned it its own value.

Going back to Philly

By 1787, many leaders saw that the Articles of Confederation needed an overhaul or the union of states would eventually fall apart. So Congress called in delegates from each state. The first to arrive in Philadelphia in May 1787 was James Madison, a 36-year-old scholar and politician from Virginia who was so frail he couldn't serve in the army during the Revolution. Madison had many ideas on how to fix things, and he couldn't wait to get started.

Not everyone else was in such a hurry, but finally enough of the delegates showed up by May 25 to have a quorum (Rhode Island never did send anyone). Here are some facts regarding the delegates who did (or didn't) take part.

- » **Notable by their absence were some of the leading figures of the recent rebellion against England:** Thomas Jefferson was in France, Thomas Paine was in England, Sam Adams and John Hancock weren't selected to go, and Patrick Henry refused.
- » **But those who did show up were hardly second-stringers.** George Washington was there and was unanimously selected as the convention's president. Benjamin Franklin, the oldest delegate at 81, was there. But Madison and a handsome 32-year-old, self-made success story from New York named Alexander Hamilton were the true stars of the group.
- » **Half of the group's members were lawyers,** and 29 of the 55 delegates were college-educated. Many were wealthy and thus had a bigger-than-most stake in straightening out the country's financial mess. Their average age was 42.

Meeting in long and highly secret sessions, with armed guards at the doors to avoid leaks, the delegates studied various forms of government and debated among themselves. After 17 weeks, on September 17, 1787, they voted 39 to 3, with 13 absent, to approve a ten-page document that became the United States Constitution. Then most of them adjourned to a local tavern and hoisted a few.



REMEMBER

The document the delegates created was a masterpiece of compromises. Big states gained more clout when the delegates decided that representation in the House of Representatives would be based on population, whereas small states got protection from being bullied when the delegates decided that each state would have the same number of members (two) in the Senate. The South won the right to count slaves as three-fifths of a person when determining the population for representation in the House; the North got a promise that the slave trade would end for good in 1807. Actually, the South didn't mind this compromise all that much because it didn't mean that slavery itself would end — just the practice of importing more slaves from overseas. In fact, it ensured that the value of slaves already here would increase, thus making their owners richer.

The Constitution gave Congress the power to regulate commerce among states as well as with foreign nations and to pass laws with a simple majority of its members. It gave the presidency a powerful role. It created a federal judicial system, with the Supreme Court at the top. It also left the individual states with a fair amount of independence to make their own laws on most matters. No one thought it was perfect, but most of the delegates thought it was a pretty good blueprint from which to build.

While the last members of the convention were signing the document, Franklin pointed to a sun painted on the chair in which Washington was sitting.

"I have often . . . looked at that behind the president without being able to tell whether it was rising or setting," he said. "But now, at length, I have the happiness to know that it is a rising and not a setting sun."

But they still had to sell the blueprint to the rest of the country.

Selling the Constitution to the states

The convention submitted its work to the Congress that was still laboring under the old Articles of Confederation, and Congress accepted it after three days of sometimes intense debate. But Congress didn't want to be totally responsible if things went wrong, so it sent the proposal to the states for ratification. Each state had to elect delegates to consider the proposed Constitution. Nine approving states would make it the law of the land.



REMEMBER

Asking for state ratification of the Constitution was a gamble because the whole deal might fall apart — plus many people weren't sold on the idea of a central government. But a great deal of spirited debate occurred on the subject, and in a brilliant series of 85 newspaper essays that became known as the *Federalist Papers*, Hamilton, Madison, and John Jay argued eloquently for the adoption of the Constitution. Much more important was the public support of the two most popular men in America: Franklin and Washington.

The first five states to ratify did so by January 1788. The following month, Massachusetts agreed — but only on the condition that a list of specific individual rights be added to the Constitution as soon as possible. By July, all but North Carolina and Rhode Island had ratified it, and they fell in line by May 1790. "Our Constitution is in actual operation," Franklin wrote, "and everything appears to promise that it will last. But in this world, nothing can be certain but death and taxes."

Dishing Up Politics, American Style

Now that it had rules, America needed a president, and the choice was a no-brainer. George Washington was unanimously elected in April 1789 by the Electoral College, which had been established by the Constitution and was composed of men elected either by popular vote or by state legislatures. Washington set out from his home in Virginia for the temporary capital at New York (which soon moved

to Philadelphia, where it stayed until the federal district that is now Washington, D.C., was completed in 1800). Everywhere he went, Washington was greeted by parades and cheering crowds.

Washington, the politician

Washington wasn't a great politician, although he did know enough to buy 47 gallons of beer, 35 gallons of wine, and 3 barrels of rum for potential voters in his first campaign for the Virginia legislature. He wasn't a good public speaker, and he wasn't a great innovator.

But he was perfect for the new country. He was enormously popular with the public, even those who didn't like his policies. Because of that popularity, other political leaders were wise to defer to him. (At least publicly: Behind his back, John Adams referred to Washington as "Old Muttonhead," and Alexander Hamilton called him "the Great Booby.")

Washington was also good at assembling competent people around him and playing to their strengths while ignoring their faults. And he assembled a heck of a group: Adams was his vice president, Hamilton his treasurer, Thomas Jefferson his secretary of state, old Revolutionary War buddy Henry Knox his secretary of war, and sharp-tongued Edmund Randolph of Virginia his attorney general.

Family feuding: Jefferson versus Hamilton

Washington's cabinet wasn't exactly one big happy family. For example, Hamilton and Adams disliked each other even though they shared many of the same political views. Adams once referred to Hamilton as "the bastard brat of a Scotch peddler."

Jefferson and Hamilton not only disagreed politically but differed in a host of other ways as well. Hamilton was short but impeccable in his dress and manners. Jefferson was tall and often looked like an unmade bed. Hamilton grew up poor in New York and was illegitimate; Jefferson grew up wealthy in a leading family in Virginia. Hamilton had a deeply abiding distrust of the common person and a deep affection for wealth. Jefferson disliked the upper classes and professed that the farmer was nature's greatest creation. And although Jefferson was a relatively pleasant guy to be around, Hamilton could be arrogant and snotty.

The two men were at opposite ends of the political spectrum. Given their abilities and stature, people who thought the same way began to form political parties around them. At the time, most politicians repudiated the idea of political parties — at least publicly. "If I could not go to heaven but with a [political] party," Jefferson said, "I would not go at all."



REMEMBER

The Hamiltonians were called *Federalists*. In essence, they supported a strong central government, a powerful central bank, government support of business, a loose interpretation of the Constitution, and restrictions on public speech and the press. They opposed the expansion of democratic elections and were generally pro-British when it came to foreign affairs. “Those who own the country,” said Federalist John Jay, “ought to govern it.”

The Jeffersonians were first called *Democratic Republicans*, then just *Republicans*. They favored more power to individual states and state-chartered banks, no special favors for business, a strict reading of the Constitution, giving more people the vote and relatively free speech and a free press. They were generally pro-French.



REMEMBER

It’s too simplistic to say today’s Republicans are yesterday’s Federalists and today’s Democrats are descended from Jefferson’s party. Hamilton, for example, supported big federal government programs, which today would make him more of a Democrat, whereas Jefferson wanted to minimize government, which sounds like the modern Republican. But the dominance of just two parties, Federalists and Republicans, foreshadowed the two-party system that America has pretty much stuck with throughout its history.

By 1796, Washington had had enough of fathering a country. He declined a third term and went home to his plantation in Mount Vernon, Virginia. Hamilton, who was born in St. Croix and, therefore, under the Constitution, couldn’t be president, hoped someone he could control would be elected. He backed Thomas Pinckney of South Carolina, who was Washington’s minister to England, but Vice President John Adams — whom Hamilton disdained — won.

Jefferson was the Republican candidate, and because he came in second, he became vice president, per the Constitution. (It soon became clear that this wasn’t a great idea. So, in 1804, the states amended the Constitution to allow candidates to run for either president or vice president, but not both.)

Raising the Dough

Every successful country needs a sound financial plan, and it fell to Hamilton to devise one for America.

First, he had to establish the new nation’s credit. To do that, he needed to clean up its existing debts, such as the \$54 million the federal government owed foreign and domestic creditors. Hamilton proposed paying off the debt in full, rather than at a discount as creditors had feared. Hamilton argued that if America didn’t make good on what it already owed, no one would want to lend it money in the future.

In addition, he wanted the federal government to pay off about \$21 million in debts run up by the individual states. The old debts would be paid off by issuing bonds. But states like Virginia, which had paid off much of its Revolutionary War debts, were peeved at the thought of the federal government picking up other states' tabs and then sticking all U.S. residents with the bill. So they engaged in a little horse-trading. Virginia withdrew its objections to the plan, and in return, Hamilton and the Washington administration agreed to locate the new federal district next door to Virginia on the Potomac. (Whatever advantage Virginia thought that would give it has certainly evaporated by now.)

Many members of Congress supported Hamilton's plan to pay off the debts dollar for dollar, especially because many of them either held the old bonds or had snapped them up for next to nothing and stood to make enormous profits. Hamilton himself was accused of using his office to make money off the bonds, but if he was guilty, he didn't do a very good job because he died broke.

To raise money to pay off the bonds, the federal government established taxes, called *tariffs*, on goods imported into America. It also slapped a tax of 7 cents a gallon on whiskey, which was pretty steep considering that whiskey in many of the southern and western states sold for only 25 cents a gallon.

Finally, Hamilton proposed a nationally chartered bank that would print paper money backed by the federal government, in which the government would be the minority stockholder and deposit its revenues. To be located in Philadelphia, the bank would be chartered for 21 years. Jefferson howled that the whole idea would cripple state banks and was unconstitutional, but Hamilton, with the backing of Washington, prevailed. The bank's stock sold out within four hours after going on sale.

Hamilton's plan worked, in large part because the American economy kicked into high gear in the 1790s. Another war between France and England helped increase America's share of the world market; trade in the West Indies that had been stunted by the Revolutionary War was revived, and industry, particularly in the North, began to develop. America, the new kid on the block, now had some change in its pockets.

Earning Respect

A government is only as good as the respect it commands from its citizens, and respect for the new U.S. government wasn't universal. Whiskey makers, former soldiers, American Indians, and people who thought some politicians were jerks — and said so publicly — were among the groups whose respect the new government had to earn.

Shaking things up: Shays's Rebellion

Daniel Shays was a Massachusetts farmer and Revolutionary War veteran who, like many of his fellow vets, found himself broke and in debt after the war. Moreover, the Constitution adopted by Massachusetts in 1780, was drafted mostly by businessmen who lived along the coast, and the state's inland farmers got the short end of the stick when it came to things like paying taxes.

When taxes couldn't be paid, homes, farms, livestock, and personal possessions were seized, and debtors were sometimes thrown into prison. So, in 1786, Shays found himself at the head of an "army" of about 1,000 men who were fed up. They marched on Springfield, forced the state Supreme Court to flee, and paraded around town. In January 1787, Shays's group tried to take a military arsenal at Springfield. But the state militia routed them, and after a few weeks of skirmishing, they dispersed and abandoned the fight. Several of the group's members were hanged. Shays fled to Vermont and was eventually pardoned, but he died the next year.

The whole thing wasn't in vain, however. Some of the reforms they wanted — such as lower court costs, an exemption on workmen's tools from debt seizures, and changes in the tax laws — were adopted. Jefferson noted, "a little rebellion now and then is a good thing . . . the tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants." Washington, however, despaired that the rebellion illustrated how too much democracy would lead to anarchy.

But the biggest impact of Shays's Rebellion may have been that it helped convince some of the delegates to the Constitutional Convention that the country needed a strong central government to handle such things.

Taxing liquid corn: The Whiskey Rebellion

Here's how important whiskey was on the American frontier: Americans often used it in place of cash for commercial transactions. It was also the cheapest way to market some of the surplus corn crop. So it's easy to understand why people got upset when the new federal government announced that it was slapping what amounted to a 25 percent tax on the drink.

Distillers in western Pennsylvania organized a revolt in 1794, roughing up tax collectors and threatening distilleries that tried to pay the tax. When the state's governor refused to intervene for fear of losing votes, President Washington himself led a massive force of about 13,000 men — a larger army than he had during most of the Revolutionary War — and the rebels scattered.

The short-lived rebellion didn't amount to much, but it provided an early test of the federal government's willingness to enforce federal laws.

Going “mad” over the American Indians

Despite their loss in the Revolution and subsequent peace treaty, the British still had a string of forts in the American Northwest, which was then defined as the area northwest of the Ohio River, east of the Mississippi, and south of the Great Lakes. The Brits said they were there to protect their interests in Canada, but many Americans suspected they were there to stir up the American Indians. In 1791, a U.S. army of about 2,000 troops under Gen. Arthur St. Clair marched into what is now Indiana to counter the British/American Indian threat. But St. Clair was surprised and routed by an American Indian force, and he suffered nearly 50 percent casualties.

In 1793, another force of 2,000 U.S. troops tried again, this time led by Gen. “Mad Anthony” Wayne. A Revolutionary War hero, Wayne got his nickname not from being nuts but from being daring and a bit reckless in battle (which may be the same thing). Anyway, in August 1794, Wayne’s troops attacked an American Indian force of about the same size at a site called Fallen Timbers in Indiana. Wayne’s army rolled over the American Indians, burning their villages and destroying their crops. The victory ended the American Indian threat and restored much confidence in the U.S. Army.

Attempting to censor the press

American newspapers had been used as a political weapon for almost as long as there had been American newspapers. However, the rise of the two-party system in the 1790s greatly increased their use and their sting. Pro-Jefferson editors, such as Phillip Freneau and Benjamin Bache, squared off against pro-Hamilton scribes, such as John Fenno and William Cobbett.

These were nasty fellows with a quill in their hands. Bache once wrote that “if ever a nation was debauched by a man, the American nation has been debauched by Washington,” and Cobbett opined that America would be truly free only “when Jefferson’s head will be rotting cheek-to-jowl with that of some toil-killed Negro slave.”

By 1798, the Federalist-controlled Congress had had enough. It narrowly approved the Alien and Sedition Acts. The acts extended the naturalization period the waiting time required to become a U.S. citizen — from 5 to 14 years to keep out the foreign riff-raff. The acts also made it a crime to publish “any false, scandalous, and malicious writing” about the president, Congress, or the government in general.

Hundreds were indicted under the Sedition Act, but only ten — all of them Republicans — were convicted. Among them was Congressman Matthew Lyon of

Vermont, who had already gained notoriety by spitting in the face of Federalist Congressman Roger Griswold on the floor of Congress. Lyon was sentenced to four months in jail for writing about President Adams's "unbounded thirst for ridiculous pomp, foolish adulation and selfish avarice." Lyon was reelected to Congress while in jail.

Partly because its application was so one-sided, the Sedition Act's popularity quickly waned and, in the end, probably hurt the Federalist cause much more than it helped. The act expired on March 3, 1801, a day before Republican Jefferson assumed the presidency. It wasn't renewed, and American politicians in both camps decided it was generally better to develop a thick hide when it came to the press than to try to slap a muzzle on the First Amendment.

Finding Foreign Friction

Most Americans applauded when the French Revolution began in 1789. The Revolution eventually overthrew the French monarchy and did away with a feudalistic system of government ruled by an aristocracy. Americans even continued to support it after the Revolution was usurped by radical rebels, who turned it into the Reign of Terror. Thousands of French aristocrats, including King Louis XVI, had their heads lopped off by the guillotine. But many Americans shrugged off the excesses and focused on the French revolutionaries' goals of "liberté, égalité, fraternité" (French for "liberty, equality, brotherhood").



REMEMBER

But when the revolt spread to once again engulf Europe in war, more sober Americans started to worry. The Federalists, led by Hamilton, didn't want to take the French side against the British. For one thing, they detested the excesses of the French "mobocracy," or mob rule. For another, they realized that England was America's best customer, and most of the revenues from tariffs paid on imports came from English ships.

The Jefferson-led Republicans, on the other hand, didn't want to side with the British. They reasoned that the French had backed them in their Revolution, so they should do the same.

But America's first two presidents, Washington and Adams, didn't want to side with anyone. Both men saw that the longer America could stay out of the European mess, the stronger the country would become and, thus, the more able it would be to control its own destiny rather than rely on the fortunes of an alliance.

Staying neutral wasn't easy. British naval ships routinely stopped American merchant ships and forced American sailors into service aboard British ships, a practice called *impressments*. French ships also attacked American merchants with England-bound cargoes.

But luck and skillful negotiating kept America out of the Anglo-Franco fracas for a generation. In 1794, Washington sent diplomat John Jay to England. Jay eventually negotiated a treaty with the British in which the British agreed to give up their forts in the American Northwest and pay for damages caused by seizures of American ships. But the British didn't agree to stop impressing American sailors, and Jay agreed the United States would repay pre-Revolutionary War debts it still owed. The Jay treaty was greeted with widespread howls of rage in America, but it cooled things down with the British for more than a decade.

The Jay treaty also angered the French, who stepped up their attacks on U.S. ships. In 1797, President Adams sent U.S. envoys to Paris to meet with the French foreign minister, Charles Talleyrand. But upon their arrival, the Americans were met by three go-betweens known publicly only as "X, Y, and Z," who tried to get a \$250,000 bribe from the Americans just for the chance to meet with Talleyrand. The U.S. envoys told X, Y, and Z to stick it and returned home.

So, for about two years, France and the United States waged an undeclared war on the seas. The newly created U.S. Navy captured about 80 French ships, and the French continued to prey on American vessels. Then, Adams did a remarkable thing. Ignoring the fact that war fever was raging and declaring war on France could help him win a second term as president, Adams sent another peace team back to Paris in 1800. This time, the two countries made a deal. Adams kept the United States out of war, but he also lost reelection to the presidency and sealed the doom of the Federalist Party in doing so.

Expanding America's Footprint

Thomas Jefferson is a great example of America finding the right man at the right time. He helped the country make a smooth transition when one political party was elected to take over the reins from another. Plus, he had the imagination to pull off a pretty big land deal — the Louisiana Purchase. That transaction not only doubled the size of the country but also gave Lewis and Clark a good reason for an expedition. Meanwhile, the U.S. Supreme Court asserted itself as a co-equal branch of government. (See Book 6 for an overview of the branches of the American government.)

Nationalizing a nation

The War of 1812, sometimes called the second American Revolution, pitted the Americans against the British once again, and the end of that war also marked the fading of the Revolution generation. People increasingly began to identify themselves as Americans rather than New Yorkers or Virginians. But divergent issues between sections of the country included fights over banking, tariffs — and especially slavery.

The invention of the cotton gin made that crop, along with sugar, quite profitable, and the South became intensely dependent on slave labor. Many people in Northern states opposed slavery for a variety of moral, political, and economic reasons. A fight over the question of allowing slavery to spread was avoided, at least temporarily, with a fragile compromise in 1820.

Beyond its borders, the United States was increasingly alarmed by European nations who were thinking about grabbing former Spanish colonies in Latin America that had recently gained their independence. In 1823, President James Monroe formally warned Europe to keep its hands off the Americas.

In 1824, a crusty military-man-turned-politician, Andrew Jackson, lost a hotly contested and controversial election to John Quincy Adams. In 1828, Jackson avenged the loss after one of the sleaziest campaigns (by both sides) in U.S. history. As president, Jackson found himself confronted by a theory called *nullification*, which held that states could decide for themselves which federal laws they did and did not have to obey. The theory served to deepen the divide between North and South.

Despite a national recession brought on by speculation and shady financial dealings, Americans were busy coming up with ways to make life better. Improvements in equipment triggered a boom in railroad building. The development of steel plows and rolling harvesters greatly enhanced grain production, and the invention of the telegraph signaled the start of a national communications medium. Meanwhile, American expatriates in Texas led a successful revolt against Mexico and then waited for nine years to become part of the United States. The annexation of Texas, in turn, helped start another war.

Fighting with a neighbor and among ourselves

In 1844, America elected a *dark horse*, or surprise, presidential candidate who turned out to have a huge impact on the nation. James K. Polk was a hard worker with a yen to expand the country to the Pacific Ocean by acquiring territory from

Mexico (which didn't let it go without a fight). Polk saw this expansion as the nation's *Manifest Destiny*. Book 2 looks at this and other aspects of America's expansion in the 1800s.

In the 1850s, a movement to give women rights and opportunities equal to men's rights began to gather steam, but the slavery issue overshadowed it. Violence broke out in Kansas and Virginia. The 1857 Dred Scott decision by the Supreme Court held that slaves had no more rights than mules, infuriating slavery opponents. When the badly divided country gave a plurality of its votes in 1860 to a 51-year-old Illinois lawyer, Abraham Lincoln, this was the last straw for Southern states, which began leaving the Union. Book 3 delves into the Civil War that took four years and 600,000 American lives before the Northern forces prevailed.

Less than a week after the surrender of the South's main army, Lincoln was assassinated. With him went the nation's best chance of healing its wounds.

Making up is hard to do

The postwar South was a mess of wrecked infrastructure, an economy in shambles, and its best and brightest leaders gone. Millions of Black people were free — with no education, no place to work, and nowhere to go.

Andrew Johnson, Lincoln's successor, had few friends in Congress and fewer leadership skills. The North imposed draconian laws on the South, which led to economic and physically violent reprisals by White Southerners on Black Southerners. Reconstruction efforts suffered further when, following Johnson's term, the great Northern general Ulysses S. Grant turned out to be a not-so-great president. Political corruption infected every level of government. The corruption peaked — or bottomed out — with a sleazy deal that gave the 1876 presidential election to a former Ohio governor named Rutherford B. Hayes. Book 3 offers insight on how the Civil War and its aftermath affected the American people.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Winning colonies from Spain
- » Introducing Teddy Roosevelt
- » Improving conditions — or raking muck
- » Getting America in the air and on the road
- » Fighting for women's right to vote
- » Hunting for jobs in the North, African-American style
- » Joining World War I

Chapter 3

Stepping Up as a World Power

As the 1800s turned into the 1900s, America had just triumphed in a short and sloppily-fought-but-easily-won-war with Spain. As a result, the country found itself, for the first time in its history, with an overseas empire composed of former Spanish colonies.

This chapter covers how America reacted to its new role as a force to be reckoned with in the world and how Americans made changes in how they worked, got around, and governed themselves.

Here Today, Guam Tomorrow: Colonizing Spain's Former Colonies

At the end of the 19th century, the U.S. government suddenly had a lot more territory on its hands. There was Hawaii, which was formally annexed in 1898, and also Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, all of which America had won from Spain. Cuba was technically free, but because of restrictive treaties, it was, for all practical purposes, an American colony.

On February 6, 1899, the U.S. Senate ratified the treaty with Spain that gave the U.S. Guam and Puerto Rico. The Spanish threw in the Philippines, too, after American negotiators offered \$20 million for the islands. The Senate vote on the treaty was 57 to 27 — only two more than the two-thirds needed. The vote mirrored a sharp division of opinion about whether having colonies was a good idea for America.

Arguing about American imperialism

Imperialism is a political idea that sounds something like this: “We can run your country better than you can because we have a better system of government.” Imperialists also often view occupied territory as a sort of automatic teller machine for withdrawals of natural resources or as a great place for strategically located military bases.

In June 1898, opponents to the idea of American colonies formed the Anti-Imperialist League, a group of strange bedfellows that included author Mark Twain, steel tycoon Andrew Carnegie, and labor leader Samuel Gompers. The folks who opposed imperialism all had different reasons for their opposition. Some believed it was un-American to impose American culture or government on other people. Others feared “mingling” with “inferior” races. Laborers feared competition from poorly paid workers in other countries, and business leaders feared foreign entanglements would divert investment capital.

Proponents, led by Theodore Roosevelt, who was then the governor of New York, argued that annexation would open the Orient for U.S. business. He said it would also prevent other nations from seizing the former Spanish colonies and better position the United States as a world military power. President William McKinley opined it was America's duty to “educate the Filipinos and uplift and civilize and Christianize them,” conveniently ignoring the fact that most Filipinos were already Roman Catholic.

Fighting with the Filipinos

Such attitudes sparked a war with the newly liberated Filipinos. The war took several years and thousands of casualties on both sides before the United States prevailed.

After suffering under Spanish rule for 350 years, Filipinos weren't keen on a continuance of domination by a foreign country. But America wanted to hold on to the islands for their strategic value as a base for U.S. naval operations and to protect U.S. business interests there. The result was what is perhaps America's least-known war.

In 1899, led by Emilio Aguinaldo, Filipino *insurrectos* who had fought alongside U.S. troops against the Spanish now took up arms against their former allies. Aguinaldo commanded an army of about 80,000. Many of the *insurrectos* lacked weapons other than spears or machetes, so the Filipinos resorted to guerilla warfare and terrorism. American soldiers sometimes responded with a vengeance, torturing and executing prisoners and burning entire villages.

After four years of fighting, 4,230 Americans and more than 25,000 Filipinos had been killed. After Aguinaldo was captured and took an oath of allegiance to the United States, the fighting ended. A U.S. judge named William Howard Taft (who would later become the 27th president of the United States) took over as civilian governor of the islands. Taft gave the Filipinos wide latitude in governing themselves, but formal U.S. control didn't end until July 4, 1946, or after the Philippines had been liberated from Japanese control during World War II.

Keeping a high profile in international affairs

To a large extent, the nasty fight in the Philippines soured the American appetite for imperialism, but protecting U.S. business interests overseas remained a priority, and a strong feeling still existed that the country needed to maintain a high profile in international affairs. No one felt that way more strongly than McKinley's new vice president, Theodore Roosevelt. McKinley's original vice president, Garret Hobart, had died in late 1899, and Republican Party leaders added the headstrong Roosevelt to McKinley's ticket in 1900 mainly as a way to shut him up in the obscurity of the vice presidency.

But on September 6, 1901, while visiting the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York, McKinley was shot by a self-proclaimed anarchist. The president died a week later, and Roosevelt moved into the spotlight.

"Now look!" cried GOP political boss Mark Hanna after McKinley's death and Roosevelt's succession to the presidency. "That damned cowboy is President of the United States!"

Making a Lot of Noise and Carrying a Big Stick: Roosevelt Takes Office

Depending on whether you liked him or not, Theodore Roosevelt was either the energetic embodiment of the nation he led or a macho blowhard who really should have taken more cold showers.

A puny, asthmatic child, Roosevelt literally built himself into a human dynamo with strenuous exercise and a nonstop personal regimen. His walrus mustache, thick round spectacles, and outsized teeth made him a political cartoonist's dream (see Figure 3-1). His relative youth — at 42, he was the youngest president the country had ever had — his energy, his independence, and his unpredictability made him the bane of GOP political bosses.



FIGURE 3-1:
Political cartoonists had fun with Theodore Roosevelt's appearance and personality.

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Roosevelt was fond of repeating an old African proverb that suggested, “Speak softly, and carry a big stick; you will go far.” In practice, however, he was much fonder of the stick than of speaking softly. As a leading imperialist under McKinley, Roosevelt relished America’s role as the world’s police officer — and he took great advantage of his position as the top cop. For example,

- » In 1903, Roosevelt encouraged Panama to revolt against Colombia so the United States could secure rights from the Panamanians to build the Panama Canal.
- » In 1905, he brokered the treaty that settled a war between Russia and Japan, for which he won a Nobel Peace Prize.
- » In 2001, Roosevelt was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his service in the war with Spain — the only American to win top prizes for peace and war.



Roosevelt set the tone for presidents who followed him. Both William Howard Taft and Woodrow Wilson had their own versions of *gunboat diplomacy* (using force or threat of force to help negotiations along), particularly in Latin America.

Here are some examples of this “diplomatic” approach:

- » In 1912, Taft sent U.S. Marines to Nicaragua after a revolution there threatened American financial interests.
- » In 1915, when Wilson was commander in chief, U.S. troops went to Haiti when a revolution began to bubble; the troops stayed until 1934.
- » In 1916, Wilson sent U.S. Army troops into Mexico under Gen. John J. “Black Jack” Pershing. The troops were to chase Mexican revolutionary Francisco “Pancho” Villa, who had raided American territory.

This “punitive expedition” (as the War Department referred to it) almost triggered a war with Mexico and added to a widely held notion in the rest of the hemisphere that Uncle Sam was something of a bully.



The expeditions in this list are examples of a U.S. tendency to get involved in other countries’ affairs. The tendency, which sprang sometimes from idealism and sometimes from pure self-interest, would last the rest of the 20th century.

THE PANAMA CANAL

Roosevelt considered the construction of the Panama Canal to be his greatest accomplishment as president, as did a lot of ocean voyagers. After all, it cut 7,800 miles off the voyage from New York to San Francisco by eliminating the necessity to sail around the tip of South America. The canal took about 10 years to build and cost \$380 million. That cost broke down to about \$7.5 million for each of its 50.72 miles. At the height of construction in 1913, more than 43,400 people were working on the canal; approximately 75 percent of these laborers were from the British West Indies. Hundreds of workers died from disease or accidents. About 240 million cubic yards of earth were moved during construction.

Progressing toward Political and Social Reform

While America was busy reforming other countries, a burgeoning movement for reforms was in full swing at home, in virtually every business and social institution. At the core of the effort was a loose and diverse coalition of journalists, politicians, and single-cause crusaders who, because they sought progress, were called *Progressives*. These Progressives helped turn the first two decades of the century into what's known as the *Progressive Era*.

The “muckrakers” expose evil and initiate change

The first step in many of the causes undertaken by the Progressives was exposing specific evils. This was often done by reporters and writers who looked into everything from machine politics to child labor to the preparation of food. Roosevelt dubbed them “muckrakers,” after a character in the 17th-century allegorical novel *Pilgrim's Progress*, who constantly labored to clean up the moral filth around him.

While journalists had written exposés for years, the muckrakers' impact was magnified by the fact that they were often published in a fairly new medium: the popular (and cheap) magazine. The magazines included *McClure's*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, and the *Ladies' Home Journal*. The muckrakers included Ida Tarbell, who exposed the inner workings of the Standard Oil monopoly; Lincoln Steffens, who wrote about the corruption of many big-city governments; and Upton

Sinclair, whose novel on meatpacking practices in Chicago, called *The Jungle*, made the entire country queasy.

The muckrakers were joined in their quest for reforms by political figures at the local, state, and national levels, such as California Governor and later U.S. Senator Hiram Johnson, Mayor Tom Johnson of Cleveland, and Governor Robert LaFollette of Wisconsin.

When the Progressives couldn't prevail over entrenched corrupt political machines, they sought to change the political system itself, pushing through reforms such as

- » **Direct primary elections:** Voters — not bosses — picked party nominees
- » **The initiative:** Allowed voters to circumvent balky legislatures and propose laws directly
- » **The recall:** A means of removing officials before their terms expired
- » **The referendum:** Voters could repeal unpopular laws

Improving working conditions — And other people's drinking habits

Other groups, meanwhile, fought to improve working conditions for women and children, secure welfare assistance for widows, and get insurance for workers who were hurt in industrial accidents. Spurred mainly by fundamentalist religious groups in the South and Midwest and women's temperance groups, a decade-long effort to abolish the production and sale of alcoholic beverages gained momentum, culminating in the 18th Amendment — also referred to as "Prohibition" — which went into effect on January 16, 1920. (The 18th Amendment was repealed by the 21st Amendment in 1933.)

One of the Progressives' ideas was that people who made more money could afford to pay more taxes. A federal income tax had been tried before — once during the Civil War and once during the hard economic times of 1894 — but neither attempt was successful. In fact, the U.S. Supreme Court, on a 5 to 4 vote, struck down the 1894 effort as unconstitutional. The 16th Amendment, which was pushed by Progressives, was proposed in 1909 and ratified in 1913. This amendment gave Congress the power to slap a federal tax on income, which it promptly did. Congress required a 1 percent tax on annual income above \$4,000 and a 2 percent tax on income above \$20,000. The rates have gone up since then.

The result of all this progress was impressive and included:

- » **The Meat Inspection Act and Pure Food and Drug Act in 1906:** These acts created new rules and regulations for the preparation and handling of food and medicine.
- » **The breakup of monopolies:** The bank and beef monopolies ended in 1907, and the Standard Oil and Tobacco trusts came to a halt in 1911.
- » **The Federal Reserve Act of 1913:** This act divided the country into 12 districts, each with its own bank and board of directors. The idea was to better oversee banking practices and policies and prevent panics and bank failures.
- » **The 17th Amendment in 1913:** This amendment provided for the direct election of U.S. Senators instead of having them selected by state legislatures.

Contracting Labor Pains

While the nation generally prospered in the early 20th century, it was by no means a uniform prosperity. For every oil millionaire or steel tycoon in 1900, hundreds of thousands of people were making the average annual wage of \$400 to \$500 (\$15,400 to \$19,300 in 2025 dollars) for a workweek that averaged 60 hours. That was about \$100 (\$3,900) less than was needed to maintain what was deemed a “decent” standard of living. To make matters worse, the working conditions for these people were often miserable.

Struggling in a changing workforce



REMEMBER

A change was occurring in the U.S. workforce. As manufacturing expanded, jobs moved from the farm to the factory. In 1900, for example, there were about 10 million farm-related jobs as opposed to about 18 million nonfarm jobs. By 1920, there were still about 10 million farm-related jobs, but there were more than 30 million jobs not related to agriculture. Women held 20 percent of all manufacturing jobs, and 1.7 million children under the age of 16 had full-time jobs.

“Full-time” meant just that. In the Pittsburgh steel mills, for example, 10-year-old boys were paid 14 cents an hour to work 12 hours a day, six days a week. Factory conditions were often horrendous. Between July 1906 and June 1907, 195 people died in the steel mills of Pittsburgh — about one person every other day. In 1911, 146 workers, most of them women, were killed when a fire roared through the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York. Casualties were high because fire exits had been locked to keep workers from sneaking out for breaks.

Initiating improvements to working conditions

Eager to improve conditions, American workers increasingly tried to follow the example of the industrialists and combine into large groups — labor unions — to have strength through numbers. In 1904, the American Federation of Labor, which focused mainly on skilled workers, had 1.7 million members. The number grew to more than 4 million by 1920, but the unions often faced brutal reprisals from companies and law enforcement. In Ludlow, Colorado, a 1914 strike against the Colorado Fuel & Iron Company resulted in state militia and private police firing on strikers. Fourteen people were killed, 11 of whom were children.

Sometimes, the federal government intervened. In 1902, a strike of more than 800,000 coal miners dragged on for months when mine operators refused to negotiate. Fed up, President Roosevelt summoned both sides to Washington and threatened to send troops into the mines and appropriate the coal for the national good. Finally, a presidential commission granted the miners a raise and a shorter workday — one of the first times in U.S. history when the federal government did not directly side with business.

A more typical work stoppage was the 1912 textile mill strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts. It happened like this:

- » After a state law required mill owners to limit the weekly hours of women and children to 54, the owners responded by speeding up production paces and cutting wages by 32 cents a week — the price of eight loaves of bread.
- » The International Workers of the World organized a strike of more than 10,000 men and women. After 63 days that included beatings by police, the killing of a woman, the sending of strikers' children to other cities because strikers couldn't feed them, and a failed attempt to bomb one of the mills and frame the strike leaders, the owners gave in and granted the strikers all their demands.
- » Within a year, however, most of the concessions had been rescinded, and the pre-strike conditions returned. It would be at least another generation before unions became a national force.



REMEMBER

Transporting America

Unions weren't alone in their aspirations for improving the lives of working-class Americans. In Detroit, a generally unlikeable, self-taught engineer named Henry Ford decided that everyone should have an automobile and, thus, the right to go

where they wanted, when they wanted. So, Ford's company began making the Model T in 1908. Contrary to popular belief that it came painted only in black, it actually came in a choice of several colors.

Because of his innovative and highly efficient assembly-line approach to putting them together, Ford could afford to sell his cars at relatively affordable prices. The cost of a Model T dropped from \$850 in 1908 to \$290 by 1924. As prices dropped, sales went up from 10,000 in 1909 to just under a million in 1921.



REMEMBER

Within two decades, Ford and other carmakers had indelibly changed American life. The average family could now literally get away from it all, which created a new sense of independence and self-esteem. Because of the availability of the automobile, new industries and businesses — from tire production to roadside cafes and “motor courts” — sprang up. By the end of the 1920s, it could be persuasively argued that the automobile had become the single most dominant element in the U.S. economy.

When it came to getting from here to there, others were looking up to the skies. In December 1903, two brothers who owned a bicycle shop in Dayton, Ohio, went to Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. There, they pulled off the world's first powered, sustained, and controlled flights with a machine they had built. Fearful of losing their patent rights, Orville and Wilbur Wright didn't go public with their airplane until 1908, by which time other inventors and innovators were also making planes. Unlike the automobile, however, the airplane's popularity didn't really take off until after its usefulness was proven in World War I.

Suffering for Suffrage

By the time the 20th century arrived, American feminists had been seeking the right to vote for more than 50 years. Their desire was fanned even hotter in 1869 when Black males were given the right to vote through the 15th Amendment, while women of all races were still excluded.

Changing roles for women

One place where women were increasingly included was in the workplace. As the country shifted away from a rural, agrarian society to an industrial, urban one, more and more women had jobs outside the home — eight million by 1910. Moreover, they were getting better jobs. In 1870, 60 percent of working women were in domestic service. By 1920, it was only 20 percent, and women made up 13 percent of the professional ranks.

NO VOTE AND NO BIRTH CONTROL

It was also during this period that public debate over *birth control* intensified. The term was popularized by the New York-born daughter of Irish immigrants. Margaret Sanger's mother was pregnant 18 times in 22 years before dying at the age of 49. Trained as a nurse and a frequent witness to the often-tragic results of illegal abortions, Sanger became an outspoken advocate for legalizing contraception (while remaining an abortion opponent) and founded the country's first birth control clinic in 1916.

"A woman's body belongs to herself alone," Sanger wrote. "It does not belong to the United States of America or any other government on the face of the earth."

Women were getting out of the house for more than just jobs, too. In 1892, membership in women's clubs was about 100,000. By 1917, it was more than one million. Women's increasing independence was reflected in the fact that the divorce rate rose from 1 in every 21 marriages in 1880 to 1 in 9 by 1916.

Because women had always had nontraditional roles in the West, it wasn't surprising that Western states and territories were the first to give females the right to vote: Wyoming in 1869, Utah in 1870, Washington in 1883, Colorado in 1893, and Idaho in 1896. By 1914, all the Western states except New Mexico had extended the voting franchise to women.

Getting the right to vote nationwide

By 1917, the suffrage movement was building momentum (see Figure 3-2). In July of that year, a score of suffragists who were picketing the White House were arrested and taken to the county workhouse. President Woodrow Wilson pardoned some of the picketers, but the protests continued despite women picketers sometimes being beaten by gangs of men. The next year, a constitutional amendment — the 19th — was submitted to the states. When ratified in 1920, it gave women the right to vote in every state.

Despite the significance of the 19th Amendment, many leaders of the women's movement recognized that the vote alone wouldn't give women equal standing with men when it came to educational, economic, or legal rights.

"Men are saying, perhaps, 'Thank God this everlasting women's fight is over,'" said feminist leader Crystal Eastman after the 19th Amendment was ratified. "But women, if I know them, are saying, 'Now at last we can begin.'"

FIGURE 3-2:
The program cover for the suffragettes' 1913 march on the capitol.



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Leaving the South: Black People Migrate to Northern Cities

Women weren't the only Americans on the move. Between 1914 and 1918, more than 500,000 Black Americans left the farms of the South for jobs in Northern cities. The movement was part of the "Great Migration," which stretched from the 1890s to the 1960s and eventually resulted in more than 6 million Black people leaving the South.

This migration was spurred first by the Jim Crow laws, the lynchings, and the poverty of the post-Civil War South. Then, as the war in Europe simultaneously sparked U.S. industrial expansion and cut off the flow of immigrant workers, Northern jobs opened up by the thousands. Henry Ford, for example, offered to pay the astronomical sum of \$5 a day in his plants, and despite his racist personal views, he hired Black workers. The Black populations of Northern cities swelled. In Chicago, for example, the Black community grew from 44,000 in 1910 to 110,000 by 1920.

But moving North didn't mean that Black Americans left racism behind. Many Northern White Americans resented their new neighbors. The resentment was fueled in 1915 when the wildly popular new movie *The Birth of a Nation* portrayed Black people as deranged and dangerous creatures who lorded their emancipation over White Southerners. There also wasn't much interest in Black issues among Progressive leaders. When a delegation of Black leaders met with Pres. Woodrow Wilson in 1914 to protest segregation in federal offices, he all but pushed them out the door.

Racial unrest led to race riots. In 1917, in East St. Louis, Illinois, White rioters went on a rampage in the Black community. When it was over, 39 Black people and 9 White people were dead. In the summer of 1919, more than 25 race riots broke out in cities across the country. The worst was in Chicago, where an incident at a segregated swimming beach sparked a six-day riot that resulted in 38 people dead and more than a thousand left homeless by riot-sparked fires. The beachfront riots didn't stop until federal troops were called in.



REMEMBER

Still, when President Wilson called on Americans to “help make the world safe for democracy” in 1917, more than 375,000 Black Americans entered the military. “If this is our country,” explained Black leader W.E.B. DuBois, “then this is our war.” (For more information, check out *African American History For Dummies* by Ronda Racha Penrice, published by John Wiley & Sons.)

The War to End All Wars

Theodore Roosevelt had been president for nearly eight years by the time of the 1908 election, having filled most of the assassinated McKinley's second term and winning his own term in 1904. Even though there were no term limits to stop him, Roosevelt decided not to run in 1908. Instead, he gave his blessing to William Howard Taft, a fellow Republican. Taft won, but in 1912, Roosevelt became restless and decided to run against Taft as the candidate of the Progressive, or “Bull Moose,” Party. Americans ended up choosing the Democrat in the race, a scholarly former president of Princeton University and son of the South named Thomas Woodrow Wilson.

Hesitating to get involved

Semi-progressive in his domestic policies (except when it came to women's rights and racial equality), Wilson was something of a cautious imperialist abroad. He subscribed to the idea that America had a leading role to play in world affairs; he just didn't want to fight about it. The country got embroiled in a few Latin

American skirmishes, and Wilson sent troops into Mexico in 1916 after Mexican revolutionaries led by Pancho Villa raided American soil. But as the European powers squared off in 1914 in what was to be four-plus years of mind-numbingly horrific war, America managed, at least initially, to stay officially neutral. Wilson, in fact, won reelection in 1916 using the phrase “he kept us out of war.”



REMEMBER

As time passed, however, the country began to side more often with Britain, France, and other countries that were fighting Germany. These events led to U.S. involvement in WWI:

- » **The sinking of the British passenger ship, *Lusitania*,** by a German submarine in 1915, which resulted in the deaths of 128 Americans, inflamed U.S. passions against “the Huns.” Despite German protests the ship was a legitimate target because it was carrying tons of munitions to England.
- » **Propagandistic portrayals of German atrocities** in the relatively new medium of motion pictures added to the heat.
- » **The revelation that German diplomats had approached Mexico about an alliance against the United States.** At this point, Wilson felt compelled to ask Congress for a resolution of war against Germany. He got it on April 6, 1917.

The U.S. military was ill-prepared for war on a massive scale. Only about 370,000 men were in the Army and National Guard combined. Through a draft and enlistments, however, that number swelled to 4.8 million in all the military branches by the end of World War I.

At home, about half of the war’s eventual \$33 billion price tag was met through taxes; the rest was funded through the issuance of war bonds. Organized labor, in return for concessions such as the right to collective bargaining, agreed to reduce the number of strikes. Labor shortages drove wages up, which in turn drove prices up. But demand for goods and services because of the war soared, and the economy hummed along despite government efforts to “organize” it.

Finally joining the Allied efforts

In Europe, however, no one was humming. American troops, like their European counterparts before them, found that modern warfare was anything but inspiring. The first U.S. troops were fed into the lines as much to shore up the morale of the Allies as anything else. But by the time the Germans launched their last desperate offensive in the spring of 1918, more than 300,000 American troops had landed in France. By the war’s end in November, the number of Yanks in combat or support areas grew to 1.4 million.

Led by Maj. Gen. John “Black Jack” Pershing, a celebrated veteran of the Spanish-American and Philippines wars, the U.S. forces, known as the American Expeditionary Force (AEF), fought off efforts by Allied commanders to push the AEF into a subordinate role as replacement troops.

Starting with the battles of Cantigny, Chateau-Thierry, and Belleau Wood in France, the AEF proved itself an able force. In September 1918, the Americans launched an attack on a German bulge in the lines near Verdun, France. U.S. and French troops captured more than 25,000 prisoners, and the German military’s back was all but broken. At the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918, Germany called it quits, and the fighting stopped.

American losses — 48,000 killed in battle, 56,000 lost to disease — seemed trifling compared to the staggering tolls paid by other countries. Germany lost 1.8 million people; Russia, 1.7 million; France, 1.4 million; Austria-Hungary, 1.2 million; and Britain, 950,000. “The War to End All Wars,” as it was called, turned out to be just another example of humans’ aptitude for killing other humans in large quantities.

THE GREAT “SPANISH” FLU OF 1918

Despite conflict and war, civilians and soldiers around the world had at least one thing in common in 1918 — a killer flu. Erroneously dubbed “Spanish influenza” because it was believed to have started in Spain, it quite possibly started in America at U.S. Army camps in Kansas and was quickly spread by the concentration of troops in military camps and hospitals in various countries.

Wherever it started, it was devastating. Unlike normal influenza outbreaks, whose victims were generally the elderly and children, the Spanish flu often targeted healthy young adults. By early summer, the disease had spread around the world. In New York City alone, 20,000 people died. Western Samoa lost 22 percent of its population, and entire Inuit villages in Alaska were wiped out. More than 675,000 Americans died, which was a greater total than all the Americans killed in all the wars of the 20th century. By the time it had run its course in 1921, the flu had killed more than 50 million people around the world, rivaling the deadly efficiency of the most horrific epidemics in history.

- » Enduring the Great Depression
- » Fashioning a “New Deal”
- » Failing minorities
- » Dealing with naysayers, crusaders, nuts, and desperadoes

Chapter 4

Uncle Sam’s Depressed

During one of his last speeches as president, in December 1928, Calvin Coolidge noted that America could “regard the present with satisfaction and anticipate the future with optimism.” Much of the country did both, but as the 1930s dawned, it became painfully apparent that Americans had been prematurely satisfied and overly optimistic.

This chapter takes a look at what triggered the Great Depression and what it meant. You also meet Franklin Roosevelt, another of those great men who seem to come along every now and then in U.S. history just when the country needs them.

The Great Depression: Causes and Consequences

America had gone through hard economic times before. Bank panics, recessions, and boom-and-bust cycles of varying degrees of severity and length had come and gone. They were variously triggered by political battles, the collapse of particular industries, or world events. But America never suffered an economic illness so deep and so long as the Great Depression of the 1930s. Economists have argued

over its causes ever since, but it's safe to say that a bunch of intertwined factors contributed, including

- » **Bank failures:** Many small banks, particularly in rural areas, had overextended credit to farmers who, for the most part, had not shared in the prosperity of the 1920s and often couldn't repay the loans. Big banks, meanwhile, had foolishly made huge loans to foreign countries. Why? So the foreign countries could repay their earlier debts from World War I. When times got tough and U.S. banks stopped lending, European nations simply defaulted on their outstanding loans. As a result, many banks went bankrupt. Others were forced out of business when depositors panicked and withdrew their money. The closings and panics almost completely shut down the country's banking system.
- » **Environmental disasters:** The vast production of crops during World War I and the decade that followed contributed to what already had been decades of overplowing much of America's farmland. The prairie grasses that held topsoil in place were stripped. Coupled with one of the worst droughts in recorded history, the unprotected soil turned the Great Plains into what would become known as the *Dust Bowl*. Dry winds picked up tons of topsoil and blew it across the prairies, creating huge, suffocating clouds of dirt that turned farms into deserts.
- » **Farm failures:** Even before the Depression and Dust Bowl disasters, farmers encountered hard times, mostly because they produced too much and drove product prices down. The situation was so bad in some areas that farmers burned corn for fuel rather than sell it.
- » **Government inaction:** Rather than try to jump-start the economy through public works programs or financial system reforms, President Herbert Hoover tried to handle the financial crisis by largely ignoring it. He insisted the U.S. economic system was fundamentally sound and would get better by itself. By the time the federal government began taking small, tentative actions, it was too little, too late.
- » **The stock market crash:** The stock market soared throughout most of the 1920s, and the more it grew, the more people eagerly poured money into it. Many bought *on margin*, which meant paying only part of a stock's price when they bought it and the rest when they sold it. That worked fine as long as stock prices kept going up. When the market crashed in late October 1929, they were forced to pay up on stocks that were worth far less than what they had paid for them. Many had borrowed to buy stock, and when the stock market went belly up, they couldn't repay their loans, leaving lenders to hold the empty bag.

» **Too many poor people:** That may sound goofy, but it's a real reason. Though the overall economy had soared in the 1920s, most of the wealth was enjoyed by relatively few Americans. In 1929, 40 percent of the families in the country still lived at or below the poverty level: too poor to buy goods and services or to pay their debts. Without markets for their goods, manufacturers laid off tens of thousands of workers, creating more poor people.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

If anything, the “Great Depression” label understates the case. More than 5,000 banks closed between 1930 and 1933. Nine million savings accounts were wiped out. The number of unemployed Americans soared from fewer than 1 million in 1929 to more than 12 million in 1933 — equal to about 25 percent of the U.S. workforce. Capital investment dropped from \$10 billion in 1929 to \$1 billion in 1932, and the stock market’s industrial index dropped from 452 in September 1929 to 58 in July 1932.

Beyond the numbing numbers were the staggering human consequences. In the cities, thousands of jobless men roamed the streets looking for work, with 2,000 or 3,000 applicants often showing up for one or two job openings. When not looking for work, they looked for food. Cities set up bread lines to prevent people from starving (see Figure 4-1). More than a million families who had lost their homes gathered in shantytowns made up of tents, packing crates, and the hulks of old cars. People called these “towns” *Hoovervilles*, a mocking reference to President Hoover, whom many blamed for the mess the country was in.



FIGURE 4-1:
Many wait hours
in line for bread.

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(b&w film copy neg. from file print)*

Americans weren't sure what to do. In the summer of 1932, about 20,000 desperate World War I veterans — dubbed the *Bonus Army* — marched on Washington, D.C., to claim \$1,000 bonuses they had been promised they would get, starting in 1946. When Congress refused to move up the payment schedules, several thousand members of the Bonus Army built a camp of tents and shacks on the banks of the Potomac River and refused to leave. Under orders of President Hoover, federal troops commanded by Gen. Douglas MacArthur used bayonets and gas bombs to rout the squatters and burn the camp. No one was killed, but the episode left a bad taste in the mouths of many Americans.

Thousands of farmers left their homes in states like Oklahoma and Arkansas and headed for the promise of better days in the West, especially California. What they found there, however, was often a backbreaking existence as migrant laborers, living in squalid camps and picking fruit for starvation wages.

FDR: Making Alphabet Soup

In 1932, Herbert Hoover was the U.S. president. In 1933, he was toast. Much of the country blamed Hoover for the economic mess, although the groundwork for it had been laid long before his election in 1928. Hoover's big mistake was to keep saying that things would get better if everyone was just a little patient — and things just got worse.

Electing a reformer

By the time of the 1932 presidential election, a dead dog probably could have beaten Hoover. Fortunately for the country, the Democrats nominated the governor of New York, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, known in newspaper headlines and the popular parlance as *FDR*.

A distant cousin of Theodore Roosevelt and the only son of a wealthy railroad executive, FDR attended the best private schools and graduated from Harvard. Trained as a lawyer, Roosevelt served in the state legislature, became assistant secretary of the Navy, and had a boundless future until polio struck in 1921 and he lost the use of his legs. But Roosevelt's indomitable spirit got him elected as New York's governor in 1928, where he earned a reputation as a reformer. The Democrats nominated him for the presidency in 1932 after some behind-the-scenes maneuvering by newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst and business tycoon Joseph Kennedy.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

She began her marriage to her distant cousin in his shadow — and became his “legs.” She also became one of the most beloved — and hated — First Ladies in U.S. history. Born into a wealthy New York family in 1884, Eleanor emerged from an unhappy childhood marked by the death of her parents and married Franklin in 1905. With six children and an unfaithful husband, she seemed destined for divorce or to be an inconspicuous wife of a politician. However, she broke tradition and held more than 350 press conferences of her own — but for female journalists only. She advocated tirelessly for civil rights and women’s issues, and often represented her husband around the country. Her activism earned her vitriolic hatred from people opposed to her husband, her politics, or her independence. After FDR’s death, Eleanor served as a U.S. delegate to the United Nations and as a roving ambassador-at-large. She died in 1962 at the age of 78.



FDR campaigned on a platform dubbed *The New Deal* and easily defeated Hoover. Despite his aristocratic background, Roosevelt was wildly popular with ordinary citizens, many of whom didn’t know he could walk only with leg braces and crutches. (News photographers and newsreel cameramen took care not to take shots of him in “awkward” poses.) But many conservatives and business leaders considered him a traitor to his class and hated him.

FDR may have been the perfect president for the time: friendly, approachable, and exuding sympathy and self-confidence. He knew how to compromise, and like Lincoln and Washington, how to get the best out of people. He wasn’t afraid to do something, even if it proved to be wrong, “Take a method,” he said, “and try it. If it fails, try another. But above all, do something.”

Creating hope through a New Deal

Roosevelt heeded his own advice and did something. He crafted his New Deal with the help of Frances Perkins, a trailblazer who served as the U.S. Secretary of Labor from 1933 to 1945 and improved the worklife of many Americans. Perkins was the first woman to hold a cabinet post, and she affected not only the New Deal policies, but also the establishment of programs such as the Social Security Act.

Supported by healthy Democratic majorities in Congress, FDR pushed through a dazzling array of programs in his first 100 days in office, many of them best known by their initials. The products of the first 100 days (and in some cases a bit longer) included the

» **Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA):** Basically, it paid farmers not to produce so much food. That bailed farmers out, at least a little, and increased farm prices to more profitable levels.

- » **Civil Works Administration (CWA):** The CWA provided about 4 million jobs in building roads, airports, schools, sewer systems, and other civic projects.
- » **Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC):** This created 1,300 camps around the country to give young men new jobs (at \$30 a month, with \$22 sent home to their families) in conserving natural resources. By 1941, the CCC employed 2.5 million men who planted more than 17 million trees and made improvements in scores of state and national parks.
- » **Emergency Banking Act:** Three days after he took office, FDR closed all banks. Then, on March 9, he pushed through Congress a bill that reopened the banks under close supervision. The bill, which took all of eight hours to go through, also authorized the Treasury to issue more currency.
- » **Federal Emergency Relief Act (FERA):** The FERA eventually provided a total of \$500 million in aid to state and local governments.
- » **Glass-Steagall Banking Act:** This act mandated that banks get out of the investment business and restricted the use of bank money on stock speculation. It also created federal guarantees for personal bank accounts.
- » **Homeowners Loan Act:** This provided funds to help keep homeowners from losing their homes to mortgage foreclosures.
- » **National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA):** This ambitious program was designed to get industries to cooperate in setting maximum hours, minimum wages, and price controls through an organization called the National Recovery Administration (NRA). The NIRA was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1935 for giving too much power to the program's nongovernment administrators.
- » **Tennessee Valley Authority Act (TVA):** One of the most innovative of the New Deal programs, the TVA created an independent public agency that oversaw the development of dams and other projects in the Tennessee River Valley. The TVA covered 40,000 square miles in seven states. It built 16 dams, took over 5 more, and provided electric power to 40,000 families who previously had none. The TVA also supplied fertilizer, provided flood control and better river navigation, and reforested vast areas.
- » **Truth in Securities Act:** This act required new stocks and bonds offered for sale to be registered with the new Securities Exchange Commission (SEC) and required brokers to fully disclose all background information.
- » **Work Projects Administration (WPA):** This organization created a host of federal projects that ranged from cleaning slums and providing electricity to rural areas to painting murals on the walls of public buildings and putting on plays for audiences who paid only what they could afford.



REMEMBER

In 1935, Roosevelt added to his alphabet soup of programs by getting Congress to pass the *Social Security Act*, which began a sweeping federal system of unemployment insurance and retirement pensions paid for by both employers and employees through payroll taxes. In 1938, he signed the *Fair Labor Standards Act*, which created a national minimum wage of 25 cents per hour and a maximum workweek of 44 hours.

By the 1936 elections, unemployment had dropped from 12 million to about 9 million, and average weekly earnings had increased from \$17 to \$22. So despite Republican warnings that the Democrats were creating a socialist state, FDR was easily reelected.

Packing the Supreme Court

The predominantly conservative U.S. Supreme Court had thwarted some of Roosevelt's first-term plans, so in February 1937, he proposed a plan to appoint a new federal judge for every judge who refused to retire within six months of turning age 70. This "court-packing" tactic would have raised the number of Supreme Court justices to 15. Roosevelt's ploy worked — sort of. Although Congress ultimately rejected it, the high court began making decisions more favorable to the New Deal. Within a few years, six justices retired, enabling Roosevelt to appoint liberals to the court. But the fight also weakened FDR politically because people widely viewed it as a presidential power play.

Assessing the New Deal

The New Deal's success is still widely debated. Many of the programs had big price tags. The national debt of \$22.5 billion when FDR took office had nearly doubled by 1940, as had the federal bureaucracy. After his 1936 reelection, FDR began scaling back federal spending to help keep inflation in check. Unemployment started climbing again, and industrial production slowed.

The New Deal greatly increased the role of the federal government in people's lives. It laid the foundation for a government "safety net" of services for Americans most in need, it fostered the development of the modern labor movement, and it made the federal government a key player in regulating the U.S. economy. Whether all that was a good or bad idea, most people felt much better in 1940 than they did in 1932. Americans were pleased enough with FDR's performance by 1940 to give him what they had given no other president — a third term.

Shoving Aside Racial Minorities

Most of America's minorities had never had it good, and unsurprisingly, the Depression made their lot even more miserable. More than half of Black people still lived in the South, most as *sharecroppers*, meaning they farmed someone else's land. Almost all other nonfarming Black people held menial jobs that White people hadn't wanted — until the Depression came along and shoved Black people out of their jobs. As many as 400,000 left the South for cities in the North, which didn't help much. Estimates have half of the Black U.S. population on some form of relief by 1932.



REMEMBER

Other minority groups suffered similarly to Black people during the 1930s. Mexico had been exempted from the immigration restrictions of the 1920s, and as a result, hundreds of thousands of Mexicans came to America, mostly to the Southwest. Prior to the Depression, they were at least tolerated as a ready source of cheap labor. In the 1930s, however, desperate White Americans pushed them out of jobs. America deported thousands of Latinos, even some who were U.S. citizens, and as many as 500,000 returned to Mexico. Those of Asian descent, mostly on the West Coast, were likewise forced from jobs or relegated to work only within their own communities.

The federal government had largely ignored American Indians for decades. The idea had been to have them gradually disappear into the American mainstream. In 1924, Congress made U.S. citizens of all American Indians, whether they wanted to be or not. However, preliminary studies done in the 1920s found that assimilation had failed. In 1934, Congress changed direction and passed laws that allowed American Indians to retain their cultural identity. That policy did little for their economic well-being, and they remained perhaps the worst off of America's minority groups.

KEEPING WOMEN AT HOME — OR WORK

With jobs scarce, a strong feeling prevailed that women should stay home and let men have the jobs. There was even a federal rule that two people in the same family couldn't both be on the government payroll. But two factors slightly increased the number of women in the workforce during the 1930s. The first was that women would work for lower pay — a fact that was not only allowed by federal law but followed by some federal government agencies. The second was that more women had no man to rely on as a breadwinner: U.S. marriage rates dropped for the first time since the early 1800s.

INVENTING A GAME AS AN ANTIDEPRESSANT

Charles B. Darrow had known better times. Broke and unemployed in 1933, the Germantown, Pennsylvania, heating engineer combined memories of a past family vacation to Atlantic City, New Jersey, with an existing board game called “The Landlord’s Game.” Darrow’s version used Atlantic City addresses like Marvin Gardens and Park Place. He called his get-rich-quick, real-estate board game “Monopoly.” Darrow took his idea to the folks at the Parker Brothers game company in 1934. They promptly kicked him out the door, calling the game too long, too dull, and burdened with at least 52 “fundamental play errors.” Undaunted, Darrow produced the game on his own and sold 5,000 sets to a Philadelphia department store. The sale changed the mind of Parker Brothers. It bought the game from Darrow in early 1936, bought the rights to “The Landlord’s Game” from its inventor, Elizabeth Magie, and soon was churning out 20,000 sets of Monopoly a week. People forgot their hard times for a few hours while rolling dice, buying railroads, and going directly to jail without passing “Go.”

By 2025, Monopoly was being sold in more than 100 countries, produced in 37 languages, and available in more than 300 variations — including a game made entirely of chocolate and one with 18-carat gold pieces and real U.S. currency. Darrow retired at 46 on his royalties. He lived to the age of 76, the first American millionaire to make his fortune by designing a game — and in the midst of the Great Depression!

Developing Organized Labor

If the sun peeked through the Depression’s clouds on anyone, it may have been organized labor. The 1930s saw captains of industry and business lose much of their political clout to unions, and new laws made organizing easier. The decade also saw a telling split in labor. The traditionalists who ran the American Federation of Labor (AFL) wanted to concentrate on organizing workers according to their specific skills or craft. But that left out thousands of workers who had no specific skills and also sometimes pitted workers for the same company against one another.

In 1936, John L. Lewis, the bombastic leader of the United Mine Workers, led a split from the AFL and formed the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). The CIO was more receptive to not only unskilled workers but also women and minorities. By 1938, it had 4 million members.

The United Auto Workers (UAW) also flexed its muscles in the decade. The UAW used sit-down strikes, during which workers would simply stop and sit down at their posts, making it much more difficult to use strikebreakers. In 1937, General Motors, the third-largest company in the country, recognized the UAW after a 44-day strike.

That same year, steelworkers won recognition of their union by U.S. Steel, the giant of the industry. Other steel companies, however, refused to go along, and confrontations were often violent. On Memorial Day, 1937, police opened fire on marching strikers and their families in South Chicago, killing 10 and wounding 90. The tragedy became known as the *Memorial Day Massacre* and served as a rallying cry for labor.

All told, more than 4,500 strikes occurred in 1937, and labor won more than three-quarters of them. By 1940, organized labor had more than 8 million members.

Critics, Crooks, and Crime Fighters

Not everyone was in love with FDR. Many Republicans refused to even say his name, referring to him as “that man in the White House.” The 1930s also spawned a gaggle of colorful critics and crusaders who made themselves heard above the hard times. Here are some of them:

- » **Huey Long:** Elected governor of Louisiana in 1928 on a populist platform, Long actually did some good things for the state, making school textbooks free and improving roads and highways. But the “Kingfish” ran his corrupt administration like a dictator, roughing up, blackmailing, or slandering his opposition. After winning a U.S. Senate seat, he refused to promptly vacate the governor’s office and held both jobs for a while. Long’s proposed “Share Our Wealth” program called for confiscating family fortunes of more than \$5 million and annual incomes over \$1 million and guaranteeing every family \$2,500 a year, a homestead, and a car. Long had a national following, and his third-party presidential candidacy might have helped Republicans defeat FDR in 1936, but he was shot to death in 1935 by a man whose family he had ruined.
- » **Francis E. Townsend:** This elderly California doctor and real estate salesman had an idea that he couldn’t help sharing: providing \$200 a month for life to everyone 60 or older. Sales taxes would finance the program, and every pensioner would have to spend their entire pension every month to stimulate the economy. Real economists showed its unfeasibility, but “Townsend Clubs” sprang up all over the country, with as many as 5 million members. The idea gradually died out after Roosevelt proposed the Social Security system.

» **Charles E. Coughlin:** A Roman Catholic priest, Charles Coughlin was, after Roosevelt himself, the best radio orator in America. Broadcasting from the Shrine of the Little Flower in Royal Oak, Michigan, super-patriot Coughlin ripped into Wall Street, big business, and oppressive bosses. He first supported FDR but soon became an ardent foe, advocating for the nationalization of banks and ripping into Roosevelt as a communist tool of Jewish bankers. Coughlin created the National Union for Social Justice, which quickly drew more than 5 million members. But his increasingly shrill attacks on Jews and Roosevelt created a backlash, quieting the bombastic cleric by mid-1940.

FDR's critics did put some pressure on him to continue to press for reform, especially during his first term. "I am fighting communism, Huey Longism, Coughlinism, Townsendism," FDR said with some exasperation. "I want to save our system, the capitalist system, [but] I want to equalize the distribution of wealth." Meanwhile, a guy named Hoover (J. Edgar) was fighting "outlawism."

Bad guys and G-men

While some people were coming up with political proposals to redistribute wealth, others had a more pragmatic approach: They stole it. The 1930s saw the rise of the modern outlaw. Instead of six-guns and horses, they used Tommy guns and Fords. Some became folk heroes, robbing banks that many people felt had robbed their customers. The bad guys included

- » **Charles "Pretty Boy" Floyd,** who reportedly robbed more than 30 banks and killed ten men before he was gunned down in 1934.
- » **Arizona "Ma" Barker,** whose gang consisted mainly of her four sons and who died in a shootout with the law.
- » **Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow,** a pair of Texas lovers-robbers-murderers who became folk heroes despite their fellow desperadoes regarding them as trigger-happy bunglers.
- » **John Dillinger,** an Indiana native caught for robbing a grocery store in 1924. After his nine-year prison term, he started a 14-month crime spree that made him one of the most famous, or infamous, men in America. Although Dillinger killed ten men, engineered three daring jailbreaks, escaped from two gun battles with the law, and stole as much as \$265,000, some saw him as a Robin Hood type. "Dillinger does not rob poor people," a fan wrote to the newspapers. "He robs those who became rich robbing poor people. I am for Johnnie." Federal agents killed Dillinger in 1934 as he left a movie theater in Chicago.

Fighting the bad guys were the *G-men*, a nickname given to Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents by gangster George “Machine Gun” Kelly. The G stood for government, and the head G-man was an owlish-looking, fiercely intense man named J. Edgar Hoover. As head of the FBI, Hoover combined a fanatical sense of duty and a flair for public relations to make his agency a beacon of heroism and integrity.

Serving as director from 1924 until his death in 1972, Hoover was one of the most powerful figures in 20th-century America. His almost pathological hatred of communism, his dictatorial manner, and his unethical and probably illegal use of the bureau against political and personal enemies eventually stained his name. But in the 1930s, millions of American boys wanted to be him.

THE PANIC OF A MARTIAN INVASION

Mercury Theater players had a dull story on their hands and a deadline looming for their live Halloween Eve performance on CBS radio in 1938. But writer Howard Koch did his best with H. G. Wells’s novel *The War of the Worlds*, bringing the Martian invasion into the 1930s and relocating it from England to New Jersey. And Mercury leader Orson Welles used all his considerable acting talent to make it as realistic as possible. In fact, he and the rest of the cast did too good a job. Despite several announcements that it was just a radio show, many in the show’s audience of several million thought a real Martian invasion was happening. Panic spread (although just how much is a subject of debate among historians). People called the police to ask what to do. In New Jersey, families hastily packed and took to the roads, and officials received several reports of attempted suicides.

It took two days to calm things down, and officials even considered criminal charges against Welles. In the end, however, the show got a big new sponsor, Campbell Soup, and Welles was invited to the White House. “You know, Orson,” President Roosevelt told him, “You and I are the two best actors in America.”

- » Making life more technical
- » Getting older
- » Changing America's faces
- » Redefining families

Chapter 5

This New America

Over the years, America's multicultural, multiethnic, multiracial populace has been described by playwrights, demographers, and other assorted deep thinkers as a "melting pot," a "mixed salad," a "fondue," and even "tomato soup." The common ingredient in those descriptions is the country has proved itself adaptable, even when change hasn't come easily.

In this chapter, we delve into how evolving technology changed the ways Americans got information, talked to each other, and entertained themselves. At the same time, immigration, changing cultural mores, and just plain living longer were altering how they lived and with whom.

The Techno Revolution

In 1965, a California physicist named Gordon Moore made a prediction. Moore was helping to develop semiconductor microchips made of silicon and, three years later, co-founded Intel, which became the world's largest microchip maker. Moore noted that the number of transistors that could be crammed onto a single chip had been doubling every two years. He thought they would probably continue to do so for some years into the future. He was right — and then some. In 1975, 5,000 transistors per chip was a pretty good ratio. By 2024, it was more than 50 billion. The microchip had become part of the foundation of nearly every aspect of American life, from buying socks to falling in love. But first, the news.

Getting the news — real and fake — from new news sources

Throughout most of U.S. history, Americans got most of their news from three kinds of media: newspapers, radio, and TV. In the 21st century, things changed — big time.

Newspapers nose-dive, and TV has troubles

In 2000, 56 percent of Americans surveyed said they had watched TV news the day before, 47 percent had read newspapers, and 43 percent had listened to radio news. By 2024, only 33 percent got daily news from TV, 26 percent from print sources, and only 11 percent from radio. The main daily news source for 86 percent of adult Americans came from *online* venues on their computers, cell phones, or other electronic devices, a news source not even tabulated in 2000.

Hardest hit by the advent of online news was print media. From 1990 to 2021, daily newspaper circulation dropped 61 percent, and print advertising revenue dropped more than 75 percent. America had an estimated 3,900 fewer newspapers in 2024 than it did in 2005, leaving many communities with no print source for local daily news. Many papers tried to recover by launching their own websites as adjuncts to their print products, with mixed success.

The rise of the World Wide Web as a news medium also created a host of new news competitors. Web-based news aggregators, such as the Huffington Post (launched in 2005), or specialized news-gathering organizations, such as Politico (launched in 2007), gave news seekers a cornucopia of choices. But many websites focused as much on spreading rumors, gossip, and propaganda as on journalism. Readers had more choices, but not all of them were good ones.

Although the web's immediate impact wasn't as great on TV news, the traditional Big Three of TV — NBC, CBS, and ABC — saw things get a lot more crowded on America's airwaves. In 1996, Congress approved the first sweeping reform of U.S. telecommunications law since 1934. One of the law's effects was to pave the way for hundreds of new TV channels and networks delivered via satellite and cable systems. By 2013, Americans could pick from the traditional three broadcast networks, CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, CNBC, PBS, Univision, and others. By 2024, cable- and satellite-based news networks drew more viewers than their broadcast counterparts. But as with web-based news sources, while the variety was a big plus for consumers, the quality of journalism sometimes wasn't.

"We've discovered many smart new voices out there," TV journalist Bob Schieffer observed in late 2013, "and excuse me for being blunt, a lot of people who have absolutely no idea what they are talking about."

Faking it

During President Trump's first term, he frequently referred to news he didn't like as "fake news." Although far from being the first president to disdain the news media, he was among the loudest ever to complain about it. Negative reports about him or his administration were, to him, deliberate lies meant to undermine his presidency. "The FAKE NEWS . . . is not my enemy. It is the enemy of the American People!" he said in 2017. After the November 2018 mid-term elections, Trump even banned one TV reporter from the White House after a heated press conference.

Trump's opponents — including many in the news media — responded that, in many cases, the president was merely blaming the messenger for bad news, or trying to deflect pervasive criticism that he played fast and loose with the facts (a not-uncommon trait among political figures). Several news organizations routinely ran "analyses" of Trump's remarks and speeches pointing out what they said were his exaggerations, half-truths, and outright lies.

But a lot of people agreed with the president. A 2018 Gallup Poll reported that 62 percent of Americans thought the news they saw or heard was biased, and 44 percent believed it to be inaccurate. The traditional news media's credibility gap, combined with the vast array of online news outlets and the rise of web-based social media, didn't only radically change how Americans got their news. It also led to more *tribalism* — people tending to gather information from sources that reinforced the views they already held — and that, in turn, deepened political and cultural divisions.

Calling all cells

On a brisk, clear day in April 1973, 44-year-old engineer Martin Cooper was crossing Sixth Avenue in New York City when he decided to call an engineer friend at a rival company and razz him about a device Cooper's company had just invented. To make that call, Cooper took out his newly invented cell phone. It measured 10 inches long, weighed 2.5 pounds, and, if it had been for sale, would have cost at least \$3,500 (more than \$25,000 in 2025 dollars).



REMEMBER

Improvements made cell phones much more affordable, and by 2002, an estimated 62 percent of American adults had a cell phone; by 2024, 97 percent did. As a result, whereas 95 percent of American households had landline phones in 2003, just 29 percent did in 2024. More than two-thirds of cell phones were *smartphones*, which are basically mini-computers with these demonstrated uses:

- » People could use them to navigate while walking or driving, take photos, check sports scores, read restaurant reviews, send text messages, and listen to music. Americans did all those things and more.

- » By 2024, research showed that the average adult American spent more than 4.5 hours a day — that's about 70 days per year — on the phone. People spent nearly 75 percent of that time using various features and programs referred to as *apps*, shorthand for “applications.”
- » Cell phones also came in handy in emergencies: an estimated 80 percent of the 240 million calls to the 911 emergency number in the country in 2023 came from cell phones.



REMEMBER

Americans not only were almost constantly in touch with one another and most of the rest of the world but also carried access to more information in their pockets than their grandparents could access in their entire lifetimes. Nearly every aspect of daily life was made easier. Of course, this development wasn't all good. Cell phone use was a key factor in an estimated 25 percent of U.S. traffic accidents, resulting in more than 420,000 injuries. By 2024, 48 states and the District of Columbia had laws prohibiting texting while driving, and 24 states banned the use of hand-held phones for *any* purpose while behind the wheel. Also, cell phones led to breaches of etiquette. In one survey, 82 percent of Americans said they had been irritated by “loud and annoying” cell phone users in public places, but only 8 percent admitted being scolded for making loud and annoying calls in public places.

Socializing and shopping on the web

If you got a busy signal on your cell phone, you could always message someone by email or text messaging. Like the cell phone, technology for sending electronic text improved considerably from the first attempt to send a message via the internet in 1969 by scientists at UCLA and Stanford University. (The system crashed as soon as the sender typed the “g” in “login.”)

By 2024, the world was sending out an estimated 347.3 billion emails each day, a 29 percent increase since 2017 — with about two-thirds of these emails likely being *spam*, the electronic version of junk mail. The average U.S. office worker received 121 emails per day. So ubiquitous was email that 50 percent of Americans acknowledged reading emails in bed — and 42 percent while using the toilet.

Emails and the web begat *blogging*, which emerged in the 1990s. Blogs (short for *web logs*) are essentially discussion sites usually focused on a particular subject or person and overseen by an individual, organization, or company. Blogs were joined by *vlogs* — blogs with a video component — and *podcasts* — a digital audio and/or video medium usually built around a specific topic or theme. Most blogs, vlogs, and podcasts allow people to contribute commentary and information. They also serve as marketing tools and foster a panoply of *social media*:

- » **Facebook:** Founded in 2004 and initially designed for college students, this social networking service lets friends, relatives, and sometimes perfect strangers exchange messages, share photos, recipes, and favorite books, and join common-interest groups. By 2025, Facebook had more than 3.07 billion *active monthly users* and 2.1 billion *active daily users* worldwide — those on the site at least once a month and/or once a day. *Meta*, its parent company that also operated the photo- and video-sharing platform *Instagram*, had an annual net income of more than \$58 billion through 2025.
- » **LinkedIn:** Launched in 2003, this site was designed for business people to find jobs and potential employees and keep track of other people in their industry or profession. It had more than 310 million active U.S. users in 2025 (and more than 1 billion around the world.) In 2016, the software giant Microsoft bought LinkedIn for \$26 billion.
- » **Twitter/X:** Created in 2006, Twitter was envisioned as a “micro-blogging” service that let users send text messages — as long as they kept it to 140 characters or fewer. In 2017, the company doubled the number of characters per tweet, and by 2024, its 611 million active monthly users posted 500 million “tweets” per day — that’s 6,000 per second. In October 2022, Elon Musk, one of the richest individuals on the planet, bought the company for \$44 billion and rebranded it X.

Doing business on the web

Email, texting, and the web in general were mostly a boon but partly a bane to U.S. business. Though email made staying in touch with customers, suppliers, information sources, and colleagues a snap, studies found that some workers spent up to 28 percent of their day sending electronic messages, thereby interrupting their focus and reducing productivity.

For American retailers, the web presented both peril and opportunity. Sales of goods via websites, called *e-commerce*, accounted for about 16 percent of total U.S. retail sales in mid-2024 — an astounding 1,900 percent increase since the beginning of 2000. Companies that were quick to set up websites as auxiliaries to their traditional brick-and-mortar stores were, in many cases, able to compete with companies that consisted mostly of www. addresses and distribution facilities. Those that were slow to embrace e-commerce or tried to sell a multitude of products rather than specializing sputtered or went out of business.

Creeping into currency

The increasingly web-based world brought about a web-based medium of exchange as well, in the form of Bitcoin, Ethereum, and Litecoin, among thousands

of others. These went into digital “wallets,” the contents of which were tracked by “blockchains.”

Collectively, these forms of exchange are called *cryptocurrency*, which is less a way to buy and sell goods and services and more a form of investment in which you buy digital units. These units exist nowhere in the touchable world and are worth only what someone is willing to pay for them. Although the idea of a web-based monetary system had been theorized about for years, cryptocurrency’s birth is usually traced to a 2009 guide published by “Satoshi Nakamoto.” That name’s in quotes because who Nakamoto really is remains a mystery.

Simplistically — very simplistically — this is the way cryptocurrency works:

1. You use traditional currency, such as U.S. dollars or Euros, to buy units of a cryptocurrency. You keep them in a wallet that exists only on your computer or cell phone.
2. The contents of the wallet are recorded in a *blockchain*, a public digital ledger designed to be extremely difficult to hack into or disrupt. You can even go to crypto kiosks that are set up like ATMs to buy and sell your holdings.
3. You might use your cryptocurrency to buy something like a car. But far more likely is that you simply wait until someone offers you more in traditional currency than you paid for it, just as you would for shares of stock.



REMEMBER

As sketchy as all that might sound, champions of cryptocurrency contend that it has inherent attributes that will eventually compete with, if not replace, traditional forms of money. For one thing, each kind of crypto unit has a defined limit, so the currency isn’t subject to the inflationary vagaries of currencies issued by governments that can add or subtract to their money supplies. Also, the absence of government and bank oversight makes crypto far easier to move around the world.

That lack of oversight, as well as of insurance of any kind, makes trading in crypto a risky business and rife with scams and the potential for scams. But 2025 saw it becoming mainstream as institutions like corporations, banks, and pension funds began adopting it.

Entertaining ourselves, by ourselves

Once upon a time, say around 1995, Americans who had a yen to see a movie could visit their neighborhood video store, plunk down a few bucks, and rent a VHS tape for a day or two. Of course, if they brought it back late, they had to pay another buck or two. But in the 2000s, popular streaming services like Netflix meant that for around \$15 a month, Americans could click a button and watch all the movies

they wanted without ever leaving the couch (sending most video stores, including the 9,000-store Blockbuster chain, into the dustbin of history by 2013).

The shift was emblematic of Americans moving to the internet for their entertainment. Netflix and then Hulu and others offered films and TV shows (most of the time sans commercials) on a monthly subscription basis. If you fancied something a bit less polished, you had the no-cost YouTube, a 2005-launched website on which people seeking publicity or profit could post videos. The subjects ranged from an infant biting his brother's finger (863 million people around the world watched it) to a South Korean children's song called "Baby Shark," which topped 10 billion views.

Americans also had online games to play. They played tennis, killed zombies, and stole cars, all from their desks or easy chairs. Opponents, often complete strangers, could come from anywhere in the world.



REMEMBER

Entertainment made up a good part of Americans' time online — and that was plenty of time. Consider these stats:

- » A 2024 study found that the average American adult spent about 7 hours a day online, compared to about 3 hours watching television and 15.6 minutes reading. In fact, the study reported the average American spent more time just surfing the web than volunteering, attending social events, or going to church.
- » A study by the National Bureau of Economic Research concluded that those extra minutes online weren't just coming out of reading or TV time: Americans were spending less time sleeping, eating, cleaning the house, traveling, and hanging with the family.

Some academic studies suggested that all that internet use was making many people unhappy and unsociable. But other studies reported that nearly 20 percent of newly married American couples met each other through internet dating sites. One thing everyone agreed on was that all this internet activity was being watched — and manipulated.

Using technology to spy, lie, and meddle

For all the information Americans got from the web, tech-savvy companies gathered loads of information in return. Retail businesses routinely monitored individuals' web-surfing habits and tailored ads for products and services to pop up when someone opened a web page. How pervasive — or invasive — web snooping could be was exemplified in 2018 by a cleaning supplies company that teamed with a technology firm that produced thermometers. The thermometers

could take a person's temperature and record and update it on a cell phone app. The collected data allowed the cleaning company to target specific geographic areas experiencing flu outbreaks and then ratchet up its advertising in the area for products like disinfectant wipes.

Spying on ourselves

Retail advertisers weren't the only groups using technology to ratchet up their stores of information. In the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the federal government had quietly expanded its security and surveillance efforts. In June 2013, Americans began finding out how much.

Almost simultaneously, the London-based *Guardian* newspaper and the *Washington Post* revealed that the FBI and the National Security Agency (NSA) were gathering information from emails, photos, phone calls, and documents of U.S. citizens. The government agencies secured this information from cell phone and internet companies under a secret order issued by the U.S. Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISC). The court was created by Congress in 1978 to oversee domestic surveillance by federal intelligence agencies. The program was code-named PRISM. The agencies cited antiterrorism laws that had been passed in 2008 as their authority for the operation.

The 200,000-plus documents on which the newspaper stories were based came from Edward Snowden, a 30-year-old former CIA employee who had also worked for the NSA as a contractor. Snowden said he leaked the information because the spy programs were an assault on Americans' civil liberties. But federal officials saw his acts as traitorous, and he was indicted for espionage shortly after the stories ran. Snowden fled to Russia and became a Russian citizen in 2022.

The revelations outraged civil liberties groups, who sued in federal courts. The surveillance also worried U.S. tech industry companies, who feared that foreign governments and businesses wouldn't trust U.S. firms with sensitive data because the U.S. government might be sifting through it.

These spying programs alarmed members of both parties in Congress, angered both by the spying and their ignorance of it. But despite introducing more than 20 bills to curb the authority of federal agencies to snoop on Americans, lawmakers passed nothing of substance into law. The large web-based companies such as Google and Apple did try to restrict unauthorized access to private data they collected on their customers and users.

Most of the country felt ambivalent about the spying — and about Snowden. Opinion surveys showed that although about half of Americans thought the revelations served the public interest, more than half thought Snowden deserved to be

prosecuted anyway. About half doubted the government's ability to protect online data. Or, as it turned out, to prevent foreign meddling in U.S. elections.

The Russian factor

In early September 2016, Secretary of Defense Ash Carter issued a public warning to the Russian government. "We will not ignore attempts to interfere with our democratic processes," he said. Carter's warning came as evidence piled up that Russian-backed computer manipulators, known as *hackers* and *trolls*, were working to undermine America's election system. The cyberattacks ranged from stealing and then publicizing private emails from the Democratic National Committee to creating fake websites and blogs designed to sow discord and division.

The Russians' goals, according to a January 2017 joint report by the CIA, FBI, and NSA, were "to undermine faith in the U.S. democratic process" and to help Donald Trump defeat Hillary Clinton in the presidential race. Russian President Vladimir Putin personally ordered the efforts, the report said, in part because he intensely disliked Clinton.

President-elect Trump at first wasn't buying it. Over the following 20 months, Trump variously expressed doubt there had been any interference, suggested it was someone other than the Russians, said he had no reason to doubt Putin's denial of involvement, and finally admitted that it was possible after all.

But the new president was consistent — and adamant — on one point: Any cyberattacking that took place did not affect the election outcome, and to suggest otherwise was merely sour grapes from sore-loser Democrats. Trump's no-election-effect assertion was backed up by U.S. intelligence agencies, who found no evidence that votes had been tampered with or results rigged in any state.

Trump's skepticism turned to rage when allegations surfaced that his campaign had colluded with the Russians. In March, FBI Director James Comey disclosed that the FBI was investigating possible "coordination" between Trump campaign officials and Russian operatives. Congressional intelligence committees also announced inquiries into the matter. The allegations and investigations set off a head-spinning chain of events. Attorney General Jeff Sessions recused himself from probes into the Trump campaign because he had played an active role in the campaign. Then, Trump fired Comey for "politicizing and grandstanding" the investigation. Deputy A.G. Rod Rosenstein, acting in Sessions' place, appointed Robert Mueller, a well-respected former FBI director, to head the investigation.

Mueller's probe eventually resulted in indictments of or guilty pleas by 4 Trump advisers, 26 Russian nationals, 3 Russian companies, a man from California, and a London-based lawyer. The day after the November 2018 election, the president

fired Sessions. Mueller’s report, issued in April 2019, concluded that Russia had interfered in the 2016 election, but it was uncertain whether the Trump campaign had taken part in any conspiracy. “If we had confidence after a thorough investigation of the facts that the President clearly did not commit obstruction of justice, we would so state,” the report said (see www.cnn.com/2019/04/18/politics/mueller-report-findings).

Outsourcing intelligence

The term *artificial intelligence* (AI) applies to technology that allows computers to interpret data rather than just regurgitate information fed into them. Computers can coalesce different sources and analyze them, make suggestions, and even learn. The term *artificial intelligence* was first coined in the mid-1950s and gained widespread notice in 1997 when an IBMRS/6000SP computer, christened “Deep Blue” by its designers, soundly thrashed world chess champion Garry Kasparov at his own game. Kasparov had defeated the machine only the year before, but its makers had considerably tweaked it since then, and Deep Blue was capable of running through 200 million possible moves a second before choosing one.

It wasn’t, however, a deep thinker. It was programmed merely to react and could not “learn” by linking its memory banks to new data fed into it. New iterations of Deep Blue were trained to function without explicit instructions. They could recognize faces, drive vehicles, write books, and compose music. And they played roles in everything from determining insurance premiums to delivering pizzas with the correct toppings.

But these *artificial narrow intelligence* computers could not do more than specific tasks — a computer that could drive could not guarantee that the pizza would not have anchovies. But with the emergence of a technology called *Agentic AI* (2024–2025), systems built on frameworks of AI agents have a broader capacity to act independently, connect with other systems and data sources, and produce results that appear to involve reasoning and decision-making. Still, as the 21st century enters its second quarter, scientists have been both predicting and warning that the next wave of thinking machines, based on something called *artificial general intelligence* is just around the corner. AGI would be able to use previously learned skills to branch out into multiple endeavors.

People disagree about whether the development of AGI is a good thing:

- » **Proponents foresee a future in which the mundane tasks of everyday life will be handled by machines**, freeing humanity to pursue loftier goals.
- » **Critics foresee a computer tyranny with microprocessed overlords outthinking humans** and determining the courses of everything from what jobs people have to how they are governed.

» **Philosophers think that human beings are misdirecting their concerns about AI.** “Before we work on artificial intelligence,” computer scientist Steve Polyak rhetorically asked, “why don’t we do something about natural stupidity?”

Surfing the “Silver Tsunami”

By 2020, America had nearly seven times as many people over the age of 65 as it had in 1940. The first wave of the 78-million-strong *Baby Boomer* generation (those born between 1946 and 1964) reached the ripe old age of 65 in 2011 — but 65 wasn’t as ripe as it once was. America’s life expectancy rate had grown from about 70 in 1960 to 79 in 2024 and was expected to climb to 84 by 2054.

As the Baby Boomers crested normal retirement age, they picked up the collective nickname *silver tsunami*, a reference to the impact the giant generation was having, and was likely to have, on many aspects of American life.

Seeing the social and economic impacts

Living longer is not necessarily synonymous with living better. Many Boomers who had counted on company pensions to pay for their retirement were knocked out of work prematurely in the Great Recession of 2007–2009 and saw their pensions shrink or disappear. Many were also hit by the housing bust and had a potentially large chunk of their retirement nest eggs melt away with the value of their home.



REMEMBER

The tough economic times kept many older Americans on the job longer. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2023 showed that the number of Americans still working past the age of 65 had climbed 43 percent since 2003. That meant fewer open jobs for younger people. From 2003 to 2023, the percentage of jobs held by those younger than 55 shrank by 7 percent.

As concerning to many demographers and economists as America got older was the country’s slowing population growth and its potential impact on America’s economic future. In 1964, the nation’s annual population growth rate was 1.4 percent; in 2024, it was 0.5 percent and was projected to be a microscopic 0.2 percent by 2050. Fewer Americans would mean fewer workers — and advances fueled by tools such as artificial intelligence weren’t likely to mow lawns or re-shingle roofs. Immigrants from other countries had historically filled those kinds of jobs, and immigration was one hot-button topic.

Straining Social Security and Medicare

But even with a lot of older Americans staying at work, the sheer size of the Boomer/tsunami generation helped put a severe strain on key federal social services programs, such as Medicare and Social Security. Federal officials estimated the number of Americans over the age of 65 would grow from 49 million in 2018 to more than 79 million in 2035. The number of Americans enrolled in Medicare (the federal program that provided subsidized healthcare to those 65 and over) was 44 million in 2018; it was expected to grow to 79 million by 2030.

Meanwhile, the number of working Americans whose payroll taxes supported the programs was shrinking, from 2.8 workers per Social Security recipient in 2018 to an expected 2.4 by 2035. Officials estimate that the primary trust fund that financed Medicare could be too depleted for full benefits by 2033 and likewise for the Social Security fund by 2033.

Among many proposed fixes to the looming crises are to *privatize* Social Security by allowing workers to invest their payroll taxes individually; increasing payroll taxes for the two funds; increasing the minimum age at which workers could become eligible for coverage; and lowering the annual increases in benefits. All the proposed solutions, however, are controversial and the subject of intense partisan debate in Congress.

Immigration Ups and Downs

Immigration was a key issue in the 2016, 2020, and 2024 presidential campaigns. In a speech announcing his first candidacy, Donald Trump promised to build “a great, great wall on our Southern border” and coerce Mexico into paying for it.

As president, Trump’s attempts during his first term to get anyone — either Mexico or Congress — to pay for the wall met with mixed success. By the time he left office in early 2021, about 52 miles of new barriers had been built along the 1,954-mile border, and an additional 450 miles of old barriers were replaced or reinforced.

Banning and limiting immigration and travel

Trump was more successful with a promised ban on immigration and travel from seven predominantly Muslim nations. His first two versions of the ban, which he insisted were based on security and not religious concerns, were struck down

by various courts as unconstitutional. But a third, trimmed-down version was upheld in June 2018 by the U.S. Supreme Court, on a 5–4 vote predictably divided along conservative/liberal lines. The president was equally successful in reducing the admission of refugees and increasing arrests of illegal immigrants in his first term; his controversial means of implementing those policies in his second term have met with intense criticism, protests, and court-ordered restraints. His administration also ended programs that had allowed refugees from several countries devastated by war and natural disasters to seek temporary shelter in America.



REMEMBER

Even more controversial was Trump’s decision to end a program known formally as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and informally as the Dreamers Act. Begun by President Obama in 2012, the program allowed about 800,000 unauthorized immigrants who came to America at an early age to receive renewable two-year deferrals from deportation, attend school, and apply for work permits.

In announcing in September 2017 that he would end the program, Trump agreed to delay its cancellation for six months in order to give Congress time to come up with a replacement plan. Not surprisingly, Congress failed. Although the program officially ended in March 2018, legal battles through 2025 left the act’s ultimate fate in limbo; current recipients could still renew their status, but no new applicants were being accepted as the legal challenges continued.

Equally as controversial as the decision to end DACA was the first Trump Administration’s announcement in April 2018 to implement a “zero tolerance” policy that called for criminal prosecution of everyone trying to cross U.S. borders illegally. The policy resulted in mass arrests. However, because of a 1997 court agreement, migrant children could not be detained for more than 20 days before being placed in foster homes or other protective programs. As a result, more than 3,000 children were taken from their parents and relatives and placed in temporary camps. The public backlash — and a federal court order — slowly ended the separation program.

Immigration policy ping-pong

Trump’s successor, President Joe Biden, halted work on the border wall, lifted the travel ban from several Muslim countries, and reaffirmed support of the DACA program. But with a record 2.5 million encounters between illegal migrants and U.S. Border Patrol agents in 2023, Biden announced a carrot-and-stick program that established a parole program for illegal migrants while cracking down on those who ignored it. In August 2024, he also issued an executive order to shut down the border whenever illegal crossings topped 2,500 a day.

Biden's successor, Trump, announced that he would go further, with mass roundups and deportations of those here illegally, raids on companies suspected of employing illegal immigrants, and even the de facto ousting of children who were U.S. citizens by dint of being born on U.S. soil, if their parents were here illegally. In 2025, federal law enforcement agents (sometimes Border Patrol deployments) increased efforts to locate and arrest immigrants beyond those with criminal records, primarily in big cities. They sought out, aggressively detained, and arrested immigrants where they live and work — a situation that has led to violent confrontations that involve not only the immigrants but also the surrounding crowds.

The tug of war over immigration had political implications as well as legal ones, although just what those were was unclear. The issue was traditionally of high importance to Hispanic voters, who just as traditionally voted Democrat. Yet Trump, whose immigration policies were inarguably more draconian than his Democratic opponents, won 42 percent of the Hispanic vote in 2024, the highest percentage by a Republican candidate in the 21st century.

What was both inarguable and clear was that Hispanic voters, with other minority groups, were a growing, if less predictable, political force. Minority voters accounted for about 25 percent of the electorate in the 2024 presidential race. Moreover, immigration and higher birth rates among minority groups suggested that voting patterns of the century's first 25 years were likely to continue. A 2012 Pew Research Center study projected that by 2050, the Hispanic share of the U.S. population would reach 29 percent. Coupled with projected 13 percent black and 9 percent Asian shares, that meant that slightly more Americans would be non-White than White by 2050.

Many Americans just weren't interested anymore in being racially categorized: In the 2020 census, almost 28 million people chose the catch-all classification "some other race" in describing themselves.

Redefining the American Family

If an observer from outer space had tried to figure out the typical American family by watching TV in the 1950s, they would most probably have deduced that it consisted of an employed father, a stay-at-home mother, and two or three children who were the center of their parents' universe.

Had the same extraterrestrial come back in the 2010s, they would doubtless have been a bit more confused by the array of choices: a gay father raising a single child, an extended family so dysfunctional they sometimes forgot the children's names,

and a cartoon family where the imbecile father routinely choked the incorrigible son. Clearly, there had been some changes. “There no longer is any such thing,” said Zhenchao Qian, chair of the Department of Sociology at Ohio State University, “as a typical American family.”

Changing with the times

A raft of studies by Qian (see the previous paragraph) and others revealed seismic shifts and variations in American family life in the last decades of the 20th century and the first decades of the 21st. More people got married later in life or not at all. Fewer people had children. American society had more mixed-race marriages, more people getting divorced and then remarrying, and more families composed of nonrelated friends or combinations of friends and relatives. It also had fewer families of any kind. Some numbers help illustrate the shifting patterns:

- » In 1970, only 11 percent of U.S. households consisted of a person living alone. In 2023, it was almost 30 percent.
- » In 1970, 85 percent of U.S. households with children under the age of 18 included a married couple. In 2023, it was 70 percent.
- » In 1980, about 18 percent of all births in America were to unmarried women. In 2023, it was 40 percent.

Legalizing gay marriage

Perhaps nothing marked the shifting landscape of family life as much as the issue of same-sex marriage. It came to the forefront in 1993 when the Hawaii Supreme Court ruled that state officials couldn’t bar gay marriages unless they could show that doing so was for the public good. Alarmed by the ruling, more than 40 states quickly passed laws expressly prohibiting same-sex marriages.

In 1996, Congress passed — and President Clinton signed into law — the *Defense of Marriage Act*, which defined marriage as a union between a man and a woman and asserted that no state could be forced to recognize a same-sex marriage ratified in another state.

The issue simmered for a few years. Then, in 2003, the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled that a gay marriage ban was unconstitutional in that state. The ruling led to another reaction by lawmakers when conservative members of Congress tried vainly in 2004 and 2006 to amend the U.S. Constitution to ban gay marriages throughout the country.

But in June 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the federal Defense of Marriage Act unconstitutionally denied same-sex married partners federal benefits to which they were entitled and refused to overturn a lower court's ruling that effectively allowed gay marriages in California.

Supporters of gay marriage were cheered by the two decisions and by polls that showed Americans were changing their minds about same-sex unions. In 2001, gay marriage was opposed by a 57—35 margin. In mid-2017, it was supported by a 62—32 margin.

In June 2015, the Supreme Court made the issue moot, at least legally, if not politically. In a 5–4 decision, the court ruled that states could not deny people who were gay or lesbian the same marriage rights afforded to heterosexual couples.

“They ask for equal dignity in the eyes of the law,” Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote. “The Constitution grants them that right.”

2

Expanding America into Its Current Shape

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Chapter 1

War, Gold, and a Gathering Storm

In the 1840s, America seemed to have an unscratchable itch for elbow room. It annexed Texas, quarreled with England over Oregon, and took half a million square miles of real estate from Mexico. A good part of the nation — and the world, for that matter — came down with gold fever, too. In the 1850s, however, much of the country focused on trying to cure the seemingly incurable disease of slavery without amputating part of the Union.

Wrenching Land from Mexico

James K. Polk was a hard worker with a thick hide — good traits in a U.S. president. As a goal-oriented man, he worked 18-hour days and didn't miss many days at the office. One of his goals was to buy California to fulfill America's *Manifest Destiny*, a term coined by a New York journalist in 1845 that referred to the idea that it was God's will that America spread across the continent.

But Mexico owned California, and Mexican leaders weren't in a selling mood. They were furious that Texas, which had been independent from Mexico for a decade, was admitted as an American state in 1845. So when Polk sent diplomat James Slidell to Mexico City with an offer to buy California for around \$25 million, Mexican leaders refused to even meet with Slidell.

Provoking a war

Polk then pushed America into its first war whose primary purpose was simply to gain territory. Polk gradually built up an army under the command of Gen. Zachary Taylor at the Rio Grande River, an area that Mexico considered its territory. A fight broke out (likely provoked by Taylor's soldiers) with Mexican troops, and the war was on.

As wars go, it wasn't much. The United States lost 13,000 men, 11,000 of them to disease, and won every major battle. The Mexican army was badly led, badly equipped, and badly trained. The American army, while sometimes short on supplies because Polk was a penny pincher, was very well led, chiefly by Taylor and Gen. Winfield Scott. Taylor, whose men called him "Old Rough and Ready" because he was tough (and something of a slob), was a career soldier. So was Scott, whose nickname was "Old Fuss and Feathers" because he had a taste for pomp and showy uniforms. Scott and Taylor were ably supported by West Point-trained officers such as a young Ulysses S. Grant and Capt. Robert E. Lee, as well as others to whom the Mexican War would prove a training ground for the Civil War 15 years later.

Grant called it "one of the most unjust [wars] ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation."

Capturing California and the Southwest

After the Mexican War, the United States turned its full attention to acquiring California, which was easily captured. Many Mexicans in California considered themselves "Californios" first and weren't too concerned about a U.S. takeover.

In Mexico, meanwhile, U.S. forces kept their undefeated streak going. Gen. Antonio López de Santa Anna of Alamo infamy now commanded the Mexican forces. Santa Anna, who had been in exile in Cuba after being ousted by his fellow citizens in late 1844, talked U.S. officials into helping him sneak back into Mexico, where he promised he would sell his country out. Once there, he promptly took over command of the army and vowed to crush the hated Yankees.

In September 1846, Taylor's troops took the city of Monterrey, Mexico. In March 1847, Scott captured the fortified seaport of Vera Cruz after a three-week siege. And in September 1847, his forces captured Mexico City, all but ending the war.

The formalities were contained in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. It gave America more than 500,000 square miles of Mexican territory (see Figure 1-1), including California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and parts of New Mexico, Wyoming,

and Colorado. Mexico dropped claims to Texas. Perhaps to soothe a guilty conscience, Polk agreed to pay Mexico \$18.25 million, about 80 percent of what he offered before the war.

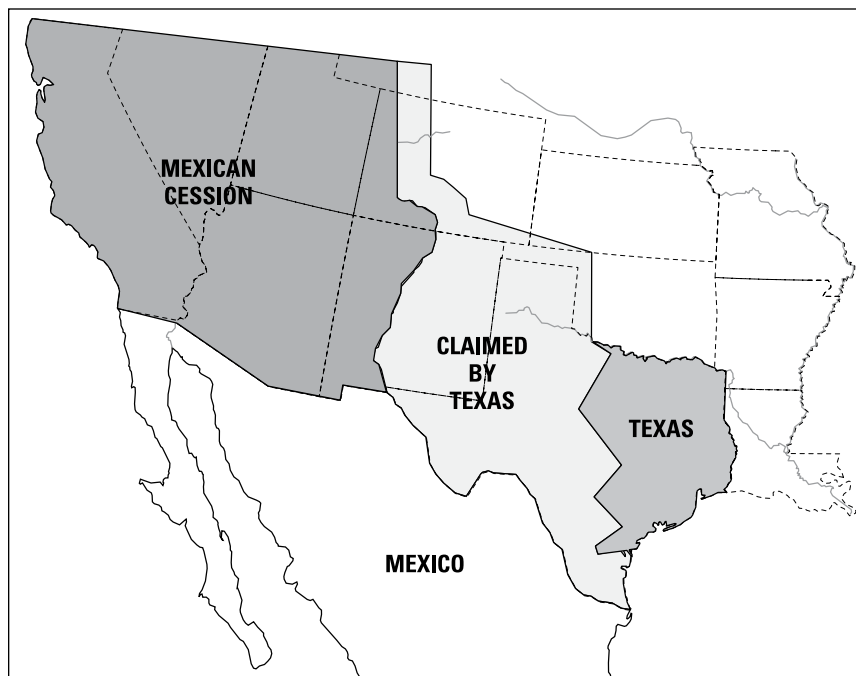


FIGURE 1-1:
Territory won
from Mexico.

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REMEMBER

Not everyone was thrilled. In Congress, a gangly representative from Illinois named Abe Lincoln attacked the war as unjust aggression. In Massachusetts, the iconoclastic writer Henry David Thoreau refused to pay his poll tax because the money might be used to support the war. His aunt paid it for him after he spent only one night in jail, but the essay that came out of it, “Civil Disobedience,” became a handbook for nonviolent protestors and passive resistance demonstrators around the world well into the next century. Much of the dissent stemmed not just from being uncomfortable about picking on Mexico but also from fears the war was designed to acquire more territory for the spread of slavery.

“They just want Californy / So’s to lug new slave states in / To abuse ye and to scorn ye / And to plunder ye like sin,” wrote poet James Russell Lowell in 1848.

But even as Lowell wrote, a richer reason was lying on the bottom of a California river.

Rushing for Gold and Other Expansion Issues

On the chilly morning of January 24, 1848, a man looked down into a sawmill ditch off the American River, about 40 miles east of Sacramento, California (or 120 miles east of Yerba Buena, which soon became known as San Francisco). The man, a dour carpenter from New Jersey named James Marshall, saw a pea-shaped dollop of yellow metal glinting in the gravel.

“Boys,” Marshall told the group of laborers who were helping build the sawmill, “by God, I believe I have found a gold mine.”

What he had really found was the ignition switch for one of the most massive migrations in human history: the California gold rush. It was quite literally a rush as soon as the news got out. That took a while. Although rumors of the find surfaced in the East not long after Marshall’s discovery, no one paid much attention. Then President Polk announced in December 1848 that there looked to be enough gold in California to pay for the costs of the Mexican War many times over. That made people sit up and take notice.

Risking life and limb to strike gold

More than 90,000 people made their way to California in the two years following the first discovery, and more than 300,000 by 1854 — or 1 of about every 90 people then living in the United States. The stampede ripped families apart and stripped towns of a large percentage of their young men. Not all the prospectors were American. An 1850 census found that 25 percent of those counted were from countries as far away as Australia and China.

It wasn’t easy getting to the gold in California. Here are the options:

- » From the East Coast, you could take a 15,000-mile, five-month voyage around the tip of South America. More than 500 ships made the voyage in 1849 alone.
- » You could also cut across the Isthmus of Panama and take two months off the trip if you were willing to risk cholera, malaria, and other diseases.
- » By land, the 2,200-mile journey from trailheads in Missouri or Iowa might take three or four months — with a lot of luck.



REMEMBER

History recalls these adventurers who made the trek to find gold as the 49ers because the first big year of the gold rush was 1849. They called themselves Argonauts after the mythical Greek heroes who sailed in the *Argo* with Jason to search for the Golden Fleece. Most of them found nothing but disappointment, and many found death.

With few women to add a touch of civilization and balance and no government, it was a pretty rough place. In just one July week in 1850, in a town called Sonora, two Massachusetts men had their throats slit, a Chilean was shot to death in a gunfight, and a Frenchman stabbed a Mexican to death. The town of Marysville had 17 murders in one week, and at the height of the gold rush, San Francisco averaged 2 murders a day.

A miner making \$8 a day (about \$337 in 2025 dollars) was doing eight times better than his coal-mining counterpart in the East. But prices were outrageous, too. A loaf of bread that cost 4 cents in New York cost 75 cents in the goldfields. All in all, most gold seekers weren't any better off than laborers in the rest of the country.

But there was gold, and plenty of it. During the Civil War alone, California produced more than \$170 million worth of bullion, which helped prop up wartime Union currency. And some fortunes were made or started in the state without too much digging. Among those "Argonauts" who struck it rich were fellows like Levi Strauss (clothing), Phillip Armour (meatpacking), and the duo of Henry Wells and William Fargo (banking).



TIP

The gold rush had other impacts as well. Although many of the 49ers came and left after a relatively short stay, many of them stuck around. From a non-American Indian population of about 18,000 in January 1848, California grew to a resident population of 165,000 within three years. San Francisco became a booming U.S. port and doorway to the Pacific. The growth and importance of the state also helped spur long-delayed congressional approval of the proposal for a transcontinental railroad.

Eventually, California became a magnet for different kinds of gold rushes. Movies, computers, the aerospace industry, and biotechnology all had California roots. But before all that could happen, it had to become a state.

Compromising on the slavery issue

Zachary Taylor was probably the least political of all American presidents. He served 40 years in the U.S. Army but never held any other office before being elected president. In fact, he had never even voted in a presidential election. But

the popularity of “Old Rough and Ready” carried him to the White House in the 1848 election after Polk lived up to his promise not to seek a second term.

Taylor had expressed no opinions during the campaign about the hottest issue of the time, slavery, and had no plans for what to do about all that land he had just helped take from Mexico. At the time, the country was equally, if uneasily, divided into 15 free and 15 slave states. So, when California asked to be admitted as a state, the debate raged on which side it should fall. Its own constitution banned slavery, mostly on the practical grounds that gold miners didn’t want to compete with slaves digging for their masters. Those aging giants of Congress, Henry Clay of Kentucky and Daniel Webster of Massachusetts, urged yet another compromise approach, which eventually became the *Compromise of 1850*.

But Taylor was adamant that California be admitted without delay as a free state. Southerners, led by their own aging giant, John C. Calhoun of South Carolina, were just as adamantly opposed. Representatives from nine southern states met in Nashville in June 1850 to consider leaving the Union if California was made a free state.

Fortunately for everyone but himself, Taylor helped solve the impasse by suddenly dying. His vice president and successor, a pliable fellow from New York named Millard Fillmore, was more agreeable to compromise. Pushed by the last great speeches by Clay and Webster — and with the help of a U.S. Senate newcomer from Illinois named Stephen Douglas — a deal was reached.



REMEMBER

The Compromise of 1850 consisted of a series of five bills.

- »» California was admitted as a free state.
- »» New Mexico and Utah were admitted as territories, with the slavery question to be settled later.
- »» Texas received \$10 million for land it gave the new territory of New Mexico.
- »» The slave trade was abolished in Washington, D.C.
- »» A fugitive slave law was approved that made it much easier for slave owners to recapture escaped slaves by getting federal help.

The *Fugitive Slave Law* put all Black people at risk because all a slave owner had to do was sign a paper saying the person was an escaped slave, show it to a federal magistrate, and slap the chains on. Although only a few hundred Black people were victims of the law, it outraged many Northerners, and anti-slavery resentment grew. But talk of dissolving the Union died down. For the last time, a compromise worked. Clay, Calhoun, and Webster would all be dead before it fell apart.

Making waves: The Mormons

Although Roman Catholics were one of the chief targets of the *Know-Nothings* (a short-lived political party that opposed immigration and had other biased opinions), Americans in the mid-19th century were generally a pretty tolerant bunch when it came to religion. About three-fourths of them were regular churchgoers, and there were so many denominations that no one church dominated. By 1860, almost every state had repealed laws against Jews or Catholics holding public office, and the question “What can you do?” was more prevalent than “How do you worship?”

But try telling that to a Mormon in 1846. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints began in 1830 with the publication of the Book of Mormon by a New York man named Joseph Smith. To escape persecution, Smith moved his headquarters to Ohio, then Missouri, and then to Nauvoo, Illinois, on the banks of the Mississippi. Nauvoo became one of the most thriving cities in the state.

But the Mormons’ habits of working hard, sticking to themselves, and having more than one wife at a time seemed to continually irk outsiders, and the persecutions began again. This time, Smith and his brother were killed by a mob, and Mormon leaders decided they needed some distance between themselves and the rest of America.

Led by Brigham Young, a capable if dictatorial lieutenant of Smith’s, the Mormons moved west, many of them pushing two-wheeled carts for hundreds of miles. Finally, they settled in the Great Salt Lake Basin, a forbidding region in Utah that most people thought uninhabitable. Establishing rigidly run societal and economic systems, the Mormons thrived. By 1848, there were 5,000 living in the area, many of them Europeans who had been converted by Mormon missionaries.

Many of the Mormons fought in the Mexican War as a way of “earning” what had been Mexican territory. In 1850, Utah became a territory. But its statehood was delayed for almost 50 years, in part because of the Mormons’ refusal until then to drop their practice of having multiple wives, or *polygamy*.

Wagons ho!

It’s often attributed to Horace Greeley, but it was actually Indiana journalist John B. Soule who advised in 1850, “Go west, young man, go west!”

He was a little late. Even before the gold rush, Americans in large numbers were heading in that direction. Despite the awesome dangers and hardships, settlers piled their belongings into fortified farm wagons and started out, mostly from St. Joseph or Independence in Missouri.

Some of them stopped on the Great Plains of Kansas and Nebraska, while others pushed on to the West Coast. By 1846, 5,000 Americans had settled in the Willamette Valley in the Oregon Territory, and by 1859, the territory had become a state. America's *Manifest Destiny* was being achieved.

Becoming aware of women's rights (or the lack thereof)

As more and more women got involved in the fight over slavery, many of them came to resent how in many ways they were also second-class Americans. Like slaves, women couldn't vote, couldn't retain their property when they got married, and could legally be beaten by their husbands.

Leaders such as Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony began to publicly demand more rights. In 1848, feminists met at Seneca Falls, New York, at a women's rights convention. Stanton read a *declaration of sentiments* that paraphrased the declaration Thomas Jefferson had written 72 years before: "All men *and women* are created equal."



TIP

Although some states began allowing women to keep their own property after marriage and some colleges began admitting women in the 1840s, the feminist crusade was overshadowed by the fight over slavery. For many of their rights, women would have to wait.

The Beginning of the End

The issue of slavery not only overshadowed the women's movement, it overshadowed virtually every part of American life. The Methodist and Baptist churches split into North and South factions because of it. Families with branches in the North and South stopped speaking to each other. It even strained business relations in a country where hardly anything got in the way of making a dollar.

And it was showing no signs of going away by itself. Despite a federal ban on importing enslaved people, the slave population grew from 3.2 million in 1850 to almost 4 million in 1860, almost all of it through childbirths. Adult slaves who could put in a full day's work had become so expensive that some Southerners began calling for lifting the ban on bringing in more enslaved Africans.



REMEMBER

Factoring a slave's life

Actually, about 75 percent of Southern families didn't even own slaves, although in many cases, it was because they couldn't afford them rather than because they opposed slavery. But even non-slave-owners defended slavery. Slaves, they said, received the benefits of being exposed to the Christian religion, of having cradle-to-grave shelter and food, and of being a contributing part of Southern society. That was more, they said, than many Northern factory workers could say. (Of course, that ignored the fact that even the most miserable factory worker could still make their own choices as to where they worked, didn't have to submit to beatings from their employer, and weren't likely to see their wives and children taken from them and sold off to some other company.)

Having no credible moral grounds to stand on, proponents tried economic arguments. "Negroes are too high [priced] in proportion to the price of cotton," explained a slave owner in 1849, "and it behooves those who own them to make them last as long as possible." And, slavery's defenders said, what would the nation do with them if all the slaves were freed?

That was a question that stumped many Northerners who opposed slavery but did not agree with abolitionists' demand for an immediate end to it. In 1854, Abraham Lincoln, who was then in private practice as a lawyer, admitted, "If all earthly power were given me, I should not know what to do as to the existing situation." But Lincoln and others balked at the idea of slavery being allowed to spread, and that's what the fighting was about.

Battling in Kansas

The South wanted a railroad, Kansas and Nebraska wanted to be states, and the combination of wants caused even more trouble. Spurred by the California gold rush and westward expansion, Congress was getting ready to decide on a route for a transcontinental railroad.

The route that made the most sense, and the route the South wanted, started in New Orleans and moved across Texas before ending up in San Diego. It was the shortest route and went most of the way through already organized states or territories. But Sen. Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois was pressing hard for a central route, starting in Chicago. Douglas' motives weren't altogether altruistic: He owned a lot of real estate in the area and stood to make a sizeable chunk of cash if the trains ran through his property. The trouble was his route went through land that had been given to the American Indians.

So, Douglas pushed a bill through Congress that organized the area into the Kansas and Nebraska territories. To win Southern support, his bill also repealed the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which prevented slavery in the new territories. Instead, it said people in Kansas and Nebraska should decide for themselves, a process he called *popular sovereignty*. Douglas argued that allowing the region's inhabitants to decide the issue was the purest form of democracy. But to many, the idea smacked of just passing the buck. And rather than calm things down, it stirred things up.

The North seethed with anger. Douglas was burned in effigy all around the North and ripped in the press. Pro-slavery interests in the South were disappointed because Douglas's support of slavery's spread wasn't stronger. As a practical matter, Nebraska proved to be too far north for crops that would attract much pro-slavery interest. But what became known as "Bleeding Kansas" became a warmup for the Civil War. Pro- and anti-slavery factions poured into the area, destroying any notion that the question would be decided locally. Both sides resorted to bloody acts of terrorism and guerilla warfare.

One of the effects of Douglas's bill was to kill the Whig Party, whose leaders were wishy-washy on the subject. In its place came the Republican Party, which was strongly against the spread of slavery. In 1856, the Republicans ran John C. Fremont, a famous explorer and soldier, against the Democrats' James Buchanan, a former Pennsylvania congressman and secretary of state, who had Southern sympathies. Buchanan, a heavy man with tiny feet and almost no backbone, won. He proved to be a worthless president.

Making a "dredful" decision

Dred Scott was a slave who was temporarily taken by his master to the free state of Illinois. When they returned to Missouri, Scott sued for his freedom, claiming that his time in Illinois, on free soil, made him an ex-slave.



REMEMBER

But the seven Southern members of the U.S. Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice Roger Taney, found against Scott in 1857. The court decided that as an African American, Scott wasn't a U.S. citizen and, thus, had no right to sue; that as a Missouri resident, Illinois laws didn't apply to him; and that as a slave, he was property, just like a mule, and the government had no right to deprive his master of property without a good reason. The decision absolutely infuriated people in the North. The court's contention that Scott had no more rights than a mule caused many moderate Northerners to take a harder look at the true injustice of slavery.

The decision, along with the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, also added greatly to business on the *Underground Railroad*, the name given to a network of abolitionists

in the North and South who worked together to get escaped slaves to freedom, often in Canada. It's estimated that the system, which involved "conductors" and "stations," or hiding places, helped from 50,000 to 100,000 people with their escape.

Sparking a Showdown: The Lincoln–Douglas Debate

In 1858, Lincoln challenged Douglas to a series of seven debates as part of their race for a U.S. Senate seat in Illinois. It was a classic confrontation. Douglas, the incumbent, was barely 5 feet tall, with a big head made larger by his pompadour hairstyle. He was resplendent in finely tailored suits and arrived for the debates in a private railroad car. Lincoln was 6 feet 4 inches, with a homely face topped by a shock of unruly hair. He wore ill-fitting suits that stopped well short of his wrists and ankles and arrived for the debates on whatever passenger train was available.

Their debate strategies were simple. Douglas tried to make Lincoln look like an abolitionist, which he wasn't, and Lincoln tried to make Douglas look like he was pro-slavery, which he wasn't. They did have a fundamental disagreement on the likely outcome of slavery. Douglas favored letting each state decide; Lincoln opposed any spread of slavery, although he did not advocate abolishing it in existing slave states.

Douglas won the election (Senate races then were decided by state legislatures, not voters), but Lincoln won a national reputation. Meanwhile, the country edged closer to a final showdown, needing only a spark to set off the firestorm. It got two.

Spark number 1: John Brown

John Brown was an Ohio abolitionist who was crazier than an outhouse rat. He believed God had commanded him to free the slaves, and he went about it by killing people in the Kansas fighting. On October 16, 1859, Brown led a group of 18 White and Black men on a raid on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. After killing the mayor and taking some hostages, Brown's gang was surrounded by militia and U.S. troops under the command of Capt. Robert E. Lee. Brown and five others were captured, and the rest were killed. After a trial, Brown was hanged. Many Southerners were convinced that Brown had done what a lot of Northerners wanted to do; many Northerners considered him a martyr to a noble cause.

Spark number 2: Lincoln's election

Lincoln, now a national figure, was nominated by the young Republican Party as its 1860 presidential candidate, mostly because they thought he would appeal to the North and the West. However, the Democrats were split by the slavery issue. Douglas was the official nominee, but a splinter group supported Buchanan's vice president, John Breckenridge of Tennessee. A fourth group of moderates, called the Union Party, supported John Bell of Kentucky.

When the votes were counted, Lincoln had won less than a majority of the popular vote but easily won the electoral vote and was the new president. Before he could take office, however, seven Southern states had already pulled out of the Union. President Buchanan did nothing to try to stop them, and once the fighting started, they were followed by four more.

As the sun rose on April 12, 1861, secessionist guns fired on Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina. America's Civil War had begun.

- » Surveying the damage to the South after the Civil War
- » Reconstructing the South — and the Union
- » Examining Johnson's road to impeachment and Grant's corrupted administration

Chapter 2

Pulling Back Together after the Civil War

The bullet that killed Abraham Lincoln at the end of the Civil War may also have killed any chance of devising a practical solution for reassembling the country — and assisting the nearly four million former slaves who had won their freedom but not much else. (See Book 3 for coverage of the Civil War.)

In this chapter, a defiant South, a wrathful and power-mad Congress, and a stubborn and nasty-tempered president combine to make a mess of what's known as the *Reconstruction* period. Additionally, you also see how a very good military leader became a very bad political leader and how one political party managed to steal a presidential election.

A Southern-Fried Mess: Life in the South after the Civil War

The 11 Southern states that left the Union in 1860 and 1861 were basket cases by 1865. Only Texas, which hadn't seen much fighting, was in relatively decent shape. Major Southern cities such as Atlanta, Charleston, and Richmond were in

ruins. Few businesses of any kind still operated; little capital was available to start new businesses; and few outsiders wanted to risk investing in the area. For example, 7,000 miles of railroad tracks were laid in the South between 1865 and 1879. In the rest of the country, 45,000 miles were laid.

Before the war, the South's economy was based almost strictly on agriculture, mainly cotton, tobacco, and sugar. After the war, all these industries suffered, especially cotton, which in 1870 was half what it was in 1860. The education system in the South had virtually disappeared, along with the old plantation system. More than 250,000 of the South's young men were gone, too.

"Pretty much the whole of life has been merely not dying," wrote the Southern poet Sidney Lanier about the Reconstruction period.

Starting a new life

The estimated 3.9 million postwar Black Americans had their freedom but not a clear path to enjoying it. Few former slaves had any education or training. Some thought freedom meant freedom from work; others feared that working for White people would enslave them again. Many believed a widespread rumor about a federal government giveaway to each slave of "40 acres and a mule" to start their own farms.

Such a plan never existed, but in 1865, the federal government organized the *Freedman's Bureau*, an agency designed to help freed slaves during their transition from slavery to freedom by providing food, education, and other support. From 1865 to 1868, the bureau helped as many as 200,000 former slaves learn to read. About 10,000 Black families were settled by the bureau on land that Union troops had confiscated, although many, if not most of them, were eventually forced off the land by White people who swindled them out of it or used dubious legal means.

Becoming sharecroppers



REMEMBER

Most Black and many White people couldn't afford to buy land of their own, so a new form of farming became the basis for the Southern agricultural economy: *sharecropping*. Under sharecropping, the farmer farmed land owned by someone else, and the two shared the profits.

At least, that was the ideal. In most cases, the sharecropper had to borrow money to make ends meet until the next crop was harvested. This borrowing left him with so little when the crop was harvested that he had to borrow on the next crop. Thus, many sharecroppers, both Black and White, became virtual slaves

to debt. Many former plantation owners, meanwhile, actually did better with sharecropping than slavery because they didn't have to feed or clothe the "free" sharecroppers.

The sharecropping system dominated many parts of the South, replacing the plantation system. In 1868, perhaps one-third of the area's farms were tended by renters. By 1900, that percentage grew to about 70 percent. The system, coupled with low cotton prices and the ravages of an insect pest called the boll weevil, virtually guaranteed that few farmers could become successful, no matter how hard they worked.

Piecing the Union Back Together

American historians like to speculate about what might have happened if Lincoln hadn't been assassinated. Would he have come up with a widely accepted plan to reunite the states and give the former slaves their rightful place in society? Would that have led to better race relations sooner in America?

Probably not. Lincoln, like most mid-19th century White Americans, felt that merely freeing the enslaved would make them socially equal. "There is an unwillingness on the part of our [White] people, harsh as it may be, for you free colored people to remain with us," he told a group of Black people during the war. Lincoln hoped to resettle the freed slaves somewhere else, either in Africa or the Caribbean. But most Black Americans had no firsthand experience with any country except the United States — the country in which they were born — and they had no desire to leave.

Lincoln did insist, however, that the former slaves be treated as equals when it came to the law. In 1864 and early 1865, he prodded Congress into passing the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, which barred slavery. He also set out a general plan for reuniting the country when the fighting was done (assuming the North won). Under this plan, most Southerners could become U.S. citizens again simply by taking a loyalty oath. Those who couldn't take the oath — mostly high-ranking Confederate officials — could apply for the reinstatement of their citizenship on a case-by-case basis. After Lincoln was killed, his vice president, Andrew Johnson, adopted practically the same plan.

Demanding loyalty; legislating equality

When 10 percent of a state's population had taken an oath of loyalty to the Union, the state could set up a new government and apply for readmission to the Union,

as long as it agreed to give up slavery and provide an education system for Black people. By the time Congress convened in December 1865, all the Southern states had organized new governments, ratified the 13th Amendment, and elected new representatives and senators for Congress.

But Congress, dominated by *Radical Republicans* — those who sought harsh reprisals against the South for the war and immediate equal rights for freed slaves — didn't like the deal. For one thing, many of the men elected to represent the Southern states in Washington, D.C., were the same people who'd run the Confederacy — including Alexander Stephens, the ex-Confederate vice president who was in federal prison awaiting trial on treason charges. That kind of in-your-face attitude irritated the Radical Republicans, who felt that Southerners weren't sorry enough for causing the war.



REMEMBER

Even more infuriating were the *Black Codes*. Southern state legislatures established these codes to keep the former slaves “under control.” They varied from state to state and did give Blacks some rights they hadn't had, such as the power to sue in court, own certain kinds of property, and legally marry. But the Black Codes also prohibited Black people from bearing arms, working in most occupations other than farming or manual labor, and leaving their jobs without permission. They restricted Black people's right to travel and fined them if they broke any of the codes. To the Radical Republicans and even many moderate Northerners, the Black Codes were simply a substitute form of slavery.

To combat the Black Codes, Congress passed a series of bills designed to strengthen the rights of Black folks — and President Johnson vetoed them either as unconstitutional interference in states' rights or as infringing on the powers of the presidency. One thing he couldn't veto, though, was the 14th Amendment because the Constitution required that proposed amendments go directly to the states for approval. The amendment was ratified in 1868 and entitled all people born or naturalized in the United States — including those who had been enslaved — to U.S. citizenship and equal protection under the law.

Using violence to keep Black people down

The 14th Amendment enraged many White people in the South, particularly poorer White folks who already felt that they were competing with ex-slaves for jobs. Groups such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), Knights of the White Camellia, and Pale Faces sprang up. They used weird costumes and bizarre rituals to intimidate Black people from exercising their rights. When intimidation failed, they and other White mobs and paramilitary groups resorted to violence. Hundreds of Black people were beaten, driven from their homes, or brutally murdered as a result of these groups' actions.

The terrorist activities of the White supremacist groups were very effective for, in their words, “keeping Blacks in their place.” And the groups had de facto, if unwitting, allies in President Andrew Johnson, who seemed more intent on squabbling with Congress than solving the woes of ex-slaves, and in many Northerners who were losing interest in reforming the South.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Black people weren't the only targets of the KKK and similar groups; these groups also terrorized carpetbaggers and scalawags. *Carpetbaggers* were Northerners who came to the South to participate in the Reconstruction — and, in some cases, make a lot of money in the process. *Scalawags* were Southerners who worked in concert with the carpetbaggers. Although some of these people were basically just vultures feeding off the defeated Southern corpse, many of both groups actually did a lot of good, reviving the school system, helping to rebuild the railroads, and so on.

The Tailor-Made President: Andrew Johnson

Andrew Johnson may have been the poorest president ever, at least in terms of his humble beginnings. He was born in North Carolina to impoverished parents, and his father died when Johnson was just 3 years old. He never went to school and instead became a tailor's apprentice at the age of 14.

Johnson taught himself to read and became involved in politics at the age of 17. When the Civil War broke out, he became the military governor of Tennessee. In 1864, the Republican Lincoln picked the Democrat Johnson to be his vice-presidential running mate, thinking that a pro-Union Democrat would balance the ticket and attract more votes. But Lincoln's assassination left the country with a stubborn and ill-tempered president who had none of Lincoln's gift of leadership. Johnson didn't like Black people, rich Southerners, or the Republican-controlled Congress. In 1866, Johnson took what was called a “Swing Around the Circle,” traveling around the Northern states to campaign for Democrats running for Congress and *against* the 14th Amendment, which would give Black people full citizenship.



REMEMBER

Johnson's “Swing Around the Circle” was a disaster. The president was booed and jeered by Northern crowds who viewed him as a pro-South bozo. The Republicans dominated the election, and their overwhelming majorities in Congress let them easily pass any bill they wanted — and then just as easily override Johnson's vetoes.

Acting on Reconstruction

Pushed by Radical Republicans, such as Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania and Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, Congress passed a series of Reconstruction acts designed to force the South into line. One such act, in 1867, divided the South into five military districts, each governed by a general and policed by the army. To get to reenter the Union without military rule, Southern states had to agree to ratify the 14th Amendment and modify their state constitutions to enfranchise Black people, a particularly galling stipulation because many Northern states didn't yet allow the Black vote.

Adding salt to the Southern wound, Congress also approved and sent to the states the 15th Amendment, which guaranteed all adult males everywhere the right to vote — a measure meant to keep the Southern states from reneging on Black enfranchisement. (Also, the Radical Republicans were embarrassed to be from Northern states that didn't let Blacks vote.)

Enough Southern state legislatures were dominated by carpetbaggers, former slaves, and other people loyal to the Radical Republicans to ensure the amendment's ratification. However, Southern states gradually got around the law anyway by requiring Black people to pass difficult "literacy" and "citizenship" tests before they could vote. One example was making them recite the preamble to the U.S. Constitution — word for word.

The 15th Amendment also greatly angered many American women, who found that they were now second-class citizens to Black males as well as White ones when it came to voting.

One result of giving newly freed slaves the right to vote was the election of some former slaves to state legislatures. The resulting Black-White governments in some states created relatively fair tax and education systems, built roads and levees, and gave property rights to women. Some other state governments were dominated by leeches and thieves of both races, although White politicians were by far the worst offenders. One carpetbagger governor managed to "save" more than \$4 million on an annual salary of \$8,000.

Ousting the despised president

Radical Republicans weren't satisfied with being able to overturn Johnson's vetoes. They wanted him out of the White House, which, according to the Constitution, would then fall to the leader of the Senate, Ohio's Benjamin Wade. To get what they wanted, the Radicals laid a trap. Congress passed a bill that required Senate approval before the president could fire any of his appointees. Believing the act to

be unconstitutional, Johnson promptly took the bait and fired his secretary of war, Edwin Stanton, whom he considered a Radical Republican stooge.



REMEMBER

Following Stanton's dismissal, Congress impeached Johnson in late February 1868 for violating the law, and the Senate put him on trial — the first such trial in U.S. history. The country regarded the whole situation as a great melodrama: Tickets to the Senate gallery were the toughest buy in town. On May 16, 1868, Congress took the first of three votes to remove Johnson from office. All three were 35 to 19 — one short of the two-thirds needed. Seven Republican senators voted against removing Johnson from office.



TIP

Although modern historians debate whether the seven Republicans voted no out of conscience or for financial incentives from Johnson's supporters, they may very well have preserved the U.S. government. Removing Johnson solely on political grounds could have created the basis for a congressional dictatorship, whereby Congress could dominate the presidency by threatening to dump any president who didn't go along with its wishes.

The trial may also have marked the beginning of the end of Northern interest in Reconstruction. Many Northerners were as prejudiced against Black people as many Southerners. They were sick of the issue and wanted to put the war and its aftermath behind them.

"The whole public are tired out with these autumnal outbreaks in the South," wrote a federal official to a Southern governor when refusing to provide military aid when the KKK interfered in local elections. "Preserve the peace by the forces of your own state."

Growing Corruption in Politics

When Americans elected Ulysses S. Grant president in 1868, they expected him to be the same kind of chief executive as he was a general — brave, tenacious, and inspiring. But neither Grant nor his cabinet advisors and aides had much political experience or philosophy. Grant's greatest political asset was his personal honesty. Unfortunately, relatively few of the people around him shared that asset.

Almost immediately, Grant's administration was awash in corruption. Scandal after scandal broke over the White House like waves. Cornering the gold market, attempting to annex the Caribbean island of Santo Domingo, speculating on railroads, ripping off the American Indians, and stealing liquor tax revenues were all grist for the corruption mill. Grant's administration became known as the "Great Barbecue" because everyone helped himself.

Despite the stench of corruption from his first term, Grant was reelected in 1872, easily defeating Democratic candidate Horace Greeley, the longtime editor of the *New York Tribune*. But by 1874, the scandals and the mess of Reconstruction — which ruined Republicans' chances of winning anything in the South — combined to let the Democrats take control of the House of Representatives for the first time since the start of the Civil War. The shift added an ingredient of bitter partisan divisiveness to the stinky stew of corruption, but it didn't make it any more palatable.

Noting the rise of robber barons

Political corruption wasn't limited to Grant's administration. Scandal tainted state and local governments as well, and the country was soon caught up in what writer Mark Twain labeled *The Gilded Age*. It seemed everyone (including, as it turned out, Mark Twain) was in a fever to make money, and the most money-hungry individuals became known — sometimes with admiration — as *robber barons*. The robber barons personified the axiom that the ends justify the means. Examples include the following:

- » In California, Colis P. Huntington and others bribed legislators and members of Congress to get concessions for their railroad.
- » In Pennsylvania, John D. Rockefeller bought and bullied lawmakers to aid his Standard Oil Company.
- » The worst situation of all may very well have been in New York City, where a political boss named William M. Tweed created a web of elected officeholders, bureaucrats, and contractors and looted more than \$100 million from the city treasury.
- » "What do I care about law," rhetorically asked Cornelius Vanderbilt, the richest man in America, in 1876. "Hain't I got the power?"

Riding the railroads to economic ruin

A boom in railroad construction drove America's post-Civil War economy. Between 1866 and 1873, the country laid 35,000 miles of new track, and railroads trailed only agriculture in their importance to the economic well-being of the nation. For many Americans with a little money to invest, railroads seemed like a can't-miss proposition. Their enthusiasm drove up stock prices far beyond what the stocks were really worth. One such deal involved a major New York-based bank called Jay Cooke & Company.

Cooke, who had become wealthy marketing Union bonds during the war and was known as “the nation’s financier,” was trying to build a second transcontinental railroad and sought investors to pay for it. Sadly for Cooke (and more sadly for his bank’s customers), his efforts coincided with a confluence of unfortunate events. Banks in Great Britain raised interest rates, which meant that fewer Brits were borrowing to invest in U.S. railroad schemes. At the same time, Congress decided to henceforth back U.S. currency with gold only. The U.S. Treasury quit buying silver; silver coins and paper “greenbacks” were devalued; the money supply shrank, and interest rates in America rose.

The economy’s tailspin meant Cooke’s bank couldn’t attract enough cash to keep its vast railroad scheme going. On September 18, 1873, the bank went under. (The bank’s collapse was so stunning that a disbelieving cop arrested a newsboy in Philadelphia for shouting out the news on a street corner.) The failure triggered a flood of panicked selling on the New York Stock Exchange, which actually closed down for ten days.

The stock market collapse, in turn, touched off a deep economic recession that lasted into 1879 — the worst recession in U.S. history up to the Great Depression of the 1930s. Scores of banks failed, about a quarter of all U.S. railroads went belly up, thousands of auxiliary businesses closed, and unemployment rose to 14 percent by 1876. The country desperately needed strong, honest, and calm political leadership. What it got was the most tainted presidential race in its history — at least to that point.

Fixing a presidency (and not in a good way)

With all the corruption — and the public’s growing disgust — it wasn’t surprising that in 1876, both political parties nominated presidential candidates known for their integrity. The Republicans put up Rutherford B. Hayes, a former Union general who had been governor of Ohio for three terms. The Democrats countered with New York Governor Samuel B. Tilden, who had gained admiration for helping bring down the Boss Tweed Ring in New York City.



REMEMBER

When the returns came in, Tilden had beaten Hayes by more than 250,000 votes and appeared to have captured 203 of the 369 electoral votes. But Republican Party leaders, who bribed or otherwise controlled the people who oversaw the elections in several contested states, arranged to invalidate thousands of Democratic votes in Florida, South Carolina, Oregon, and Louisiana. That malfeasance changed the electoral vote count to 184–165, with 20 votes in dispute.

Naturally, the Democrats challenged the new results, and a special commission was eventually created to look into the matter. The commission consisted of

ten members of Congress, five from each party, as well as five members of the Supreme Court (three Republicans and two Democrats). In early February 1877 — some 13 weeks after Election Day — the commission voted 8–7, not surprisingly along party lines, to give all 20 disputed votes — and the election — to Hayes.

Northern Democrats were outraged, but Southern Democrats saw an opportunity and offered a deal: They agreed to drop any challenge to the commission's vote if Hayes promised to remove the last of the federal troops from Southern states and let the states run their own affairs. The Republicans agreed, and Hayes became president. As a result, the Reconstruction period came to an ignominious end. The federal government largely abandoned Black people, and White Americans outside the South turned their attention elsewhere, mostly to the West.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Cashing in on minerals, animals, and vegetables
- » Pushing out non-White people
- » Watching big business boom while labor unrest grows
- » Remembering some forgettable presidents
- » Battling with Spain for some islands

Chapter 3

Growing Up in the Late 1800s

Americans have always been restless, and in 1876, they were hungry, too — for success. America seemed to offer many ways and places to be successful, and success seemed highly important to a whole lot of people.

In this chapter, the country starts its final push toward filling in the gaps between the coasts — and its final pushing aside of the original Americans. Railroads help do both, as well as usher in the birth of truly huge businesses. A string of mediocre presidents don't do much of anything, and a war with Spain launches America on the road to becoming an empire.

Heading West in a Quest for Wealth

When settlers in America first started moving west (about ten minutes after they got here), they generally did so because of the lure of free land and the chance to put down roots. After the Civil War, however, Americans moved west as much to

make a buck as to settle into a new life. Many viewed the West as a bottomless treasure chest of resources to exploit.

Making money from minerals

Some of the resources 1800s America wanted to exploit were minerals. Starting with the California Gold Rush of 1849, the West saw a steady stream of gold, silver, and copper discoveries touch off other “rushes” as hordes of miners careened like pinballs from strike to strike. In 1859, thousands descended on Pike’s Peak in Colorado, looking for gold. Later that year, it was the Comstock silver lode in Nevada. In 1861, it was Idaho; in 1863, Montana; in 1874, the Black Hills of Dakota; and in 1876, it was back to Colorado.

Towns with 5,000 inhabitants or more sprang up virtually overnight, composed of miners who would be millionaires and the gamblers, thieves, swindlers, prostitutes, and liquor sellers who accompanied them. They formed violent societies. Justice often took the form of vigilance committees or *vigilantes*, who set themselves up as the law and sometimes didn’t bother with a trial before stretching a defendant’s neck.

Where most of the mining money went reflected nationwide trends. Big corporations, financed by stockholders from the East as well as Europe, had the capital to buy the necessary mining equipment on a large scale, and they reaped most of the profits. Most miners made little, and many of them ended up going to work as laborers for large companies.



REMEMBER

But mining had some positive impact on the West besides the wealth it created for the relatively few. The miners were the first to open much of the West, and they helped encourage the railroads to come. Some of those who came for the booms stayed on after the inevitable busts that followed. The instant towns needed governments, and political organizations took root. Coupled with the mineral wealth, these organizations gave the mining areas clout in Congress, which helped speed the admission of new states, such as Nevada. By the dawn of the new century, the big, fever-producing mineral strikes were over in the West, replaced by the rush to extract oil — “black gold” — beneath western lands, particularly in Texas and Oklahoma.

Making money from animals

Texas soldiers returning from the Civil War found as many as five million cattle roaming around the state — descendants of animals brought hundreds of years earlier by Spanish explorers. A hardy breed, they had plenty of grazing land and enough water.

Cattle worth \$3 to \$4 a head in Texas could sell for ten times that in Eastern states if you could get them there. Cattle drives to the East and even to California had been tried before. But many of the cattle died before the drives were over, and the survivors were worn thin by the effort. But after the war, someone thought of driving cattle shorter distances to the westward-expanding railroads and then shipping them east by rail. Rail met cows at “trailheads” in Abilene and Dodge City in Kansas, Ogallala in Nebraska, and Cheyenne in Wyoming. By 1871, 750,000 head of cattle were moving through Abilene alone. By 1875, the advent of the refrigerated car allowed cattle to be slaughtered and butchered in Midwest cities like Kansas City and Chicago before being shipped east.

The rise of the cattle industry birthed an American icon: the cowboy, which Hollywood romanticized into a whiskey-drinking, poker-playing figure, quick on the draw with a six-shooter and always with a dance-hall girl hovering at his shoulder.



TIP

In truth, the cowboy was more likely an ex-Confederate soldier or former slave who spent most of his life on the back of a short-legged cow pony, hundreds of miles from the nearest bar or woman. Brave and tough, he was more likely to use his pistol on rattlesnakes than his fellow man. He was likely in his late teens or early 20s, and about one in five was Black. He worked for \$25 a month and ate beans, bacon, and black coffee day after day.

Inventions such as barbed wire and investments by Easterners and Europeans turned ranching into big business, and turned on-the-range cowboys into caretakers on large fenced ranches by the early 1890s. A far less glamorous — but much more numerous — type of Westerner emerged: the “sodbuster.”

Making money from vegetables

In the wake of the miner and the cowboy came the farmer. The railroads eagerly colonized the areas they controlled with potential customers and offered land near their tracks through giant advertising efforts in the East and Europe. The federal government also tried various ways to sell public lands, many of them badly managed. Regardless, the settlers rushed in.

- » The populations of Minnesota, Kansas, and Nebraska doubled or tripled.
- » The Dakotas went from 14,000 residents after the Civil War to 500,000 in 20 years.
- » In 1889, American Indians sold the “Cherokee Strip” in northern Oklahoma — opening it to settlement — and by 1900, the Oklahoma Territory’s population soared to about 800,000.

Farmers faced a blizzard of hardships: drought, grasshopper invasions, prairie fires, and, well, blizzards. Foreign competition also threatened. Whereas crop failures in 1870s Europe helped drive up prices and open markets for American farmers, the 1880s saw their crop prices fall due to new producers in Australia and India. Western farmers increasingly found themselves in the same plight as those in the Civil War-torn South, with steadily rising numbers of mortgaged farms and tenant farmers in the final 20 years of the century. Still, between 1870 and 1900, the number of American acres under cultivation more than doubled, from 407 million to 841 million acres. The frontier had been mined, ranched, and farmed into submission.

Ousting “Undesirables”

Gen. Philip Sheridan never said, “The only good Indian is a dead Indian.” What he did say, however (according to some sources), was just as bad: In a conversation with a Comanche chief, he reportedly said “The only good Indians I ever saw were dead.”

When Columbus arrived on the American continent, probably 1 million to 1.9 million American Indians lived in what is now the United States. By the Civil War, only about 300,000 remained, with two-thirds of them living on the Great Plains.

The Plains Indians generally tolerated the White man crossing their territory on the way to California and Oregon — as long as they kept moving. But when the newcomers began to settle in, tensions grew, and both sides resorted to violence.

In 1862, several bands of Dakota went on the offensive in Minnesota against encroaching settlers, killing more than 700 before the militia defeated them and hanged 38 of the tribe’s leaders. In 1864, John Chivington, a Colorado militia colonel, attacked a band of Cheyenne at Sand Creek, Colorado, and killed 133 people, most of them women and children. Many White Americans were appalled at Chivington’s brutality. Others shrugged it off as an inevitable result of Manifest Destiny. (Remember that? If not, see Chapter 1 of this book.)

Breaking promises

The Civil War’s end began a debate over solving “the Indian Problem.” Ideas ranged from genocide — seriously — to confinement on reservations to ending tribal customs and forcing American Indians to adopt White lifestyles, a process known as *acculturation*. America tried all these ideas to varying degrees. Between 1859 and 1876, soldiers and American Indians fought at least 200 pitched battles and signed 370 treaties.

“They made us promises more than I can remember,” noted one Sioux leader about the white Americans’ treaties, “but they never kept but one. They promised to take our land, and they did.”

They also all but wiped out the American bison — more popularly known as “buffalo” — which to the Plains Indian was a walking department store. The tribes not only ate bison but also wore clothes and made blankets from it, and used its bones for tools and its dried dung for fire fuel. In 1840, an estimated 40 million of the animals roamed the Plains.



REMEMBER

But bison were generally dumber than rocks when it came to being hunted, often placidly grazing while hunters with long-range rifles picked them off one by one for their hides, their meat, or just for the heck of it. By 1875, only a million were left; by 1893, less than 1,000. The Plains Indians were starved into submission far more than they were outfought.

In 1868, after a series of indecisive battles, both sides agreed to the creation of two large reservations, one in Oklahoma and one that took in all of western South Dakota. That included the Black Hills, which were sacred to the Sioux, a confederation of American Indian tribes that included the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota groups.

Putting up a fight

Six years after the South Dakota land treaty, Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer’s expedition discovered gold in the Black Hills. White prospectors poured into the area. The federal government, which ineffectually tried to stop them, then offered to buy the land. The tribes refused. Thus, the last great war against the American Indians began, and for the first time, the Plains tribes united into a formidable fighting force.

On June 25, 1876, the U.S. 7th Cavalry regiment, led by Custer, rashly attacked an American Indian encampment populated by 2,500 warriors at the Little Bighorn River in Montana. Custer and nearly 40 percent of his men were killed. “Custer’s Last Stand” stunned people in the East as well as the West and greatly diminished sympathy for the American Indians’ situation. The battle proved to be the beginning of the end for the Plains Indians. Over the next decade, tribe after tribe was gradually worn down by hunger and continual pursuit by the army. What happened to the Plains tribes was repeated throughout the West. The Apache in Arizona, the Crow and Blackfoot in Montana, the Ute in Colorado, and the Nez Percé in Idaho — all were decimated by hunger, disease, and the army.

In 1887, Congress passed a law called the *Dawes Act* that divided land into individual allotments for American Indians as part of an effort to turn them into small

farmers. It also provided for an education system and eventual U.S. citizenship. However well-intentioned the law may have been, it didn't work. Most American Indians didn't want to be farmers or U.S. citizens, and the education system never amounted to much. Many American Indians eventually signed away their land for a few cents an acre to speculators, who promptly resold it to settlers for a few dollars an acre.



REMEMBER

In 1890, a misunderstanding led to a cavalry attack on a group of Miniconjou and Hunkpapa Lakota who were under military escort near a creek called Wounded Knee in South Dakota. The soldiers killed more than 200 men, women, and children and then left their bodies in the snow for three days before burying them in a mass grave. It was the last major violence between the American Indians and White people and a tragic and horrifyingly typical response to America's "Indian Problem."

Book 5, Chapter 3 looks at the state of Native Americans in current American life.

Legalizing discrimination

While White America was pushing the American Indians to adopt White ways and become part of White culture, it was pushing to keep Black people out. Reconstruction had failed to give Blacks equal rights, and a conservative U.S. Supreme Court ensured that the failure would last well into the next century.



REMEMBER

In 1883, the Court ruled the federal government had no right to interfere with discrimination by private enterprises or individuals. In 1896, in a case called *Plessy v Ferguson*, it decided states had the right to legally segregate public facilities, from schools to trains, as long as the separate facilities were equal in quality. Of course, equality rarely, if ever, occurred. In 1899, the Court went a step further by ruling that states could erect new schools for White kids only, even if schools for Black kids weren't available.

Encouraged by the decisions, Southern states passed what were called *Jim Crow laws* (named after a popular song that depicted Black people as shiftless children), which tried not only to completely separate the races but also to take away most of the rights they had been accorded by the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments. Black people couldn't serve on juries, represent themselves in court, or drink from the same public drinking fountains that White people drank from. If they quit a job, they could be arrested for vagrancy. They also established elaborate tests that Black would-be voters had to take to get a ballot. Black voting levels dropped like a boulder off a bridge.

In addition to the Jim Crow laws, the South also averaged 130 lynchings a year in the 1890s. Lynchings were so commonplace that they were sometimes advertised in advance in newspapers. The North generally shrugged at the Jim Crow laws and

ignored the lynchings. “The Negro’s day is over,” Yale Professor William Graham Sumner observed dismissively. “He is out of fashion.”

Even the best-known Black leader of the day was not ready to challenge the injustices. Born into slavery, Booker T. Washington had become a schoolteacher, the founder of a major vocational school in Alabama called the Tuskegee Institute, and an eloquent advocate of Black people improving themselves economically.

To improve their economic situations, Washington urged Black people to “accommodate” White people when it came to demands for segregation in return for White help in obtaining Black schools and economic opportunities. “The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremest of folly,” he argued.

Inventing Big Business

As America reached young adulthood in the last part of the 19th century, it began to shake off its rural roots and become an industrial city slicker. From 1859 to 1899, the value of the country’s manufactured products rose 622 percent, from \$1.8 billion to \$13 billion, and America became the world’s leading manufacturer. It rode its way to the top of the train.

Building the railroads

The railroad system was America’s first truly big business, and its growth and impact were enormous. In the 41 years from 1830 to 1870, about 40,000 miles of track were laid in the country. But in the 20 years from 1871 to 1890, more than 110,000 miles were laid. In 1869, the first transcontinental line linking the East and West coasts was opened, and by 1900 four more existed.



REMEMBER

By 1890, annual railroad freight revenues totaled \$1 billion — more than twice the federal government’s. In addition to transporting goods and people, railroads dictated where towns would grow and businesses would be located. They employed more than one million people by 1900. They pushed Congress to create four standard time zones across the country so that train schedules could be worked out.

The railroads created or greatly expanded other industries with their demands for materials like steel for rails and passenger and freight cars. They also helped speed the development of America’s telegraph system, because where the rails went, the wires went. With telegraph stations at most train stations, the Western Union Company was sending 40 million messages a year by 1883, over 400,000 miles of wire.

Still, the railroad boom wasn't exactly a shining example of American private free enterprise at its best. The rails were laid mostly on public land given to the railroads by the federal government — more than 240,000 square miles, or an area the size of Germany — along with more than \$60 million in taxpayer-financed grants or loans. The federal government avoided direct involvement in the railroad business and used the land as incentive to attract private investment. Railroad companies could then sell land near their tracks until railroad operations could turn a profit.

As noted in Chapter 2 of this minibook, the system was ripe for corruption and scandals abounded. The Union Pacific line, for example, was built by the Credit Mobilier Construction Company, which was owned by the same people who owned the railroad. The owners took fat federal grants and awarded themselves exorbitant construction contracts — and bribed members of Congress with heavily discounted railroad stock.

The business attracted titans of industry (or robber barons, depending on how you viewed them). They were Cornelius Vanderbilt in the East, Thomas A. Scott in the Midwest, James J. Hill in the Northwest, and Jay Gould in the Southwest. Each had his fiefdom and battled with the others for government favors. But not all the country's big wheels concentrated on trains — there were fortunes to be made in other fields, too.

Manufacturing steel more efficiently

Before the Civil War, steel was a rare and expensive building material, mainly because of the lengthy process of making it from iron ore. Then a method used in the early 1870s greatly shortened the process and increased output. In America, steel-making became synonymous with one man: Andrew Carnegie. Born in Scotland, Carnegie came to America at the age of 13 and got a job working in a Pennsylvania factory for \$1.50 a week. He moved on to jobs with Western Union and the Pennsylvania Railroad, made smart investments, and, by the time he was 28, was making \$50,000 a year.

Focusing on steel, Carnegie hired chemists to perfect the production process, developed markets for steel, reinvested his profits, and expanded. He cornered the supply of raw materials, and by 1890, when America was producing 4 million tons of steel per year, Carnegie's steel plants near Pittsburgh made 70 percent of it.

In 1901, Carnegie sold out to financier J. P. Morgan for the staggering sum of \$447 million (about \$17 billion in 2025). He ultimately gave away more than \$300 million of his fortune through philanthropies that included building 2,811 public libraries and donating 8,000 organs to churches.

Refining (and controlling) oil

In the 1850s, kerosene made from refined petroleum began replacing whale oil as fuel for light. The most famous oil man was John D. Rockefeller, who formed the Standard Oil Company from five of his companies. Rockefeller was a ruthless and brilliant businessman as well as being adept with political bribery: One critic noted that Rockefeller “had done everything to the Pennsylvania legislature except refine it.” By 1879, Standard Oil controlled 90 percent of the nation’s refining capacity, and Rockefeller’s fortune was \$800 million (about \$28.5 billion in 2025).

Getting wired for sound and light

New industries also sprang up around new inventions. In 1876, a teacher of deaf people, Alexander Graham Bell, invented the telephone. By 1880, 85 cities and towns had phone networks, and by 1900, more than 800,000 telephones were in place throughout the country. In 1879, inventor Thomas A. Edison came up with a practical electric light bulb. Over the next 20 years, America began to wire up. At first, direct current (DC) was used, but DC didn’t work over distances of more than a few miles. Then, a man named George Westinghouse began using alternating current (AC), which allowed high voltage to be sent long distances through transformers and then reduced to safer levels as it entered buildings. Switching from steam engines to electricity made factories safer and more efficient, too.

Forming trusts and striking against them

In 1882, Standard Oil organized the first of the nation’s trusts. A *trust* oversaw virtually all of an industry’s operations, from production to price-setting to distribution and sales. It was supposedly run not by a single company but by trustees of a corporation. A trust issued certificates to stockholders and paid dividends. Monopolies like Standard Oil could then argue that they didn’t control an industry; the trust’s shareholders did.

Monopolies weren’t all bad. Because of the economies of doing business on a large scale, costs could be kept down and prices lowered. The price of kerosene, for example, dropped a fair amount after Standard Oil dominated the market. Of course, with no competition, prices were at the mercy of the monopolies and could — and often did — swing up again. In addition, the political power of the monopolies worried some Americans.

Carnegie and other giants of capitalism immodestly preached the “Gospel of Wealth,” arguing that it was natural for a few people to have most of the wealth, a sort of economic “survival of the fittest.” As long as they used their fortunes to benefit society, they contended that nothing was wrong with it.



REMEMBER

But opening libraries and donating church organs, à la Carnegie, didn't put bread on the table of the average working guy. So labor unions began to try to do that after the Civil War by organizing on a large scale. Most notable were the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor (AFL), using the following strikes:

- » In 1877, America faced its first national labor strike when railroad workers walked off the job after wages were cut. State and federal troops were called in; hundreds of strikers were killed or wounded, and service was restored at the point of a gun.
- » In May 1886, an AFL strike for an eight-hour day for workers led to a clash at Chicago's Haymarket Square between police and strikers. A bomb killed 7 cops and injured 67 others. The police, who had killed four strikers the day before, fired into the crowd and killed four more. Seven strike leaders were eventually convicted of inciting the violence, and four were hanged. Anti-union forces condemned the incident as an example of how the labor movement was controlled by "anarchists" and "radicals."
- » In 1894, a strike against the Pullman railroad car company spread over 27 states and paralyzed the country's railroads. Federal troops were called out, and a court order ended the strike.



TIP

The Haymarket Square riot and Pullman strike dealt severe blows to the chances of things getting better for the average working stiff through labor unions. America was progressing, but not all of its citizens were.

The Rise of Populism

Times were tough on the farm in the 1890s. Crop prices fell as production rose. Credit was hard to get, and interest rates were high. Many of the rural areas' best and brightest had taken off to seek their fortunes in the cities.



REMEMBER

These hard times triggered a political movement called *Populism*. Populists sought higher crop prices and lower interest rates. They wanted a system in which farmers could deposit crops in storage facilities and use them as collateral for low-interest government loans. They also wanted more money put into circulation and more silver coins made. The idea was that more money in circulation would raise crop prices while their mortgage payments would stay the same. But it was also risky. Money based on the amount of gold reserves the country had was more stable than money based on silver because the amount of silver reserves was increasing and, therefore, could "cheapen" the value of money as the price of silver dropped.

Republicans generally opposed the Populist ideas, while Democrats generally lined up with the Populists. The Democrats nominated 36-year-old Nebraska Congressman William Jennings Bryan as their 1896 presidential candidate. Bryan, an outstanding orator, gave a rousing speech at the Democratic convention in favor of “free silver” by exclaiming, “You shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold.” But Bryan lost to Republican William McKinley anyway, in large part because McKinley’s supporters raised and spent a then-staggering \$3 million on his campaign.

ELECTING A STRING OF FORGETTABLE PRESIDENTS

It’s doubtful America ever had as many mediocre presidents in a row as it did between 1876 and 1900. It wasn’t a case of boring elections. Party splits and the fact that winners got to milk the government for jobs made for intense and nasty campaigns. There were plenty of big issues, too, from tariffs to bank panics to civil service reform. But the men elected to deal with them were largely a forgettable bunch. Here they are, before I forget them:

- **Rutherford B. Hayes** (Republican, 1877–1881): Hayes was a Civil War hero who hated making tough decisions, so he avoided them. The Democrats controlled Congress most of the time he was president, so he accomplished little. He chose not to run for a second term and may not have been nominated anyway.
- **James A. Garfield** (Republican, 1881): Garfield was assassinated by a disgruntled office seeker four months after taking office. He was also the last president to be born in a log cabin.
- **Chester A. Arthur** (Republican, 1881–1885): Arthur was a lifelong and moderately corrupt political boss who never won an election, except as Garfield’s running mate, before succeeding Garfield. He was a fairly dignified and businesslike president, but he accomplished little. Arthur only half-heartedly ran for reelection because of ill health and was not re-nominated by the GOP.
- **Grover Cleveland** (Democrat, 1885–1889 and 1893–1897): Cleveland was the first president to serve two non-consecutive terms and the only one to have personally hanged a man. He accomplished the latter feat as sheriff in Buffalo, New York. He managed the former by losing his reelection bid in 1888 to Benjamin Harrison and then defeating Harrison in 1892. An economic depression marked his second term. He didn’t win the nomination for a chance at a third term.

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- **Benjamin Harrison** (Republican, 1889–1893): Harrison was the grandson of Pres. William Henry Harrison. Six new states — Washington, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota, and South Dakota — were admitted during his administration. That was pretty much it.
- **William McKinley** (Republican, 1897–1901): By most accounts, McKinley was a nice guy. He was an Ohio congressman and governor and very devoted to his invalid wife. He also had friends in high places, especially political boss Mark Hanna. Hanna and others helped elect McKinley as president. He defeated Democrat-Populist William Jennings Bryan in 1896 and again in 1900. He was assassinated by a crazy anarchist named Leon Czolgosz in 1901. As he lay wounded, McKinley urged that his killer not be harmed. But Czolgosz was executed in the electric chair anyway.

“A Splendid Little War”

When Cuba revolted against Spain in 1868, most Americans weren’t very interested. But in 1898, when the Caribbean island rebelled again, the United States was Cuba’s best customer for its sugar and tobacco crops, and its biggest investor. So, when the fighting destroyed American property in Cuba, the country’s interest was aroused. Some Americans wanted to free Cuba from Spanish oppression. Some wanted to protect U.S. economic interests, and others just saw it as a chance to pick off some of Spain’s colonies for America.

The anti-Spain flames were fanned by New York newspapers that tried to outdo each other in reporting about Spain’s “atrocities.” “You furnish the pictures,” New York publisher William Randolph Hearst was said to have told an illustrator for his *New York Journal*, “and I’ll furnish the war.” In January 1898, the U.S. battleship *Maine* was sent to Havana when it was reported that American lives were in danger. On February 15, the *Maine* mysteriously exploded, killing 268 U.S. sailors and officers. Possible — and still unexplained — causes ranged from a Spanish mine to an internal coal fire. It didn’t matter. By April, America and Spain were at war.

It was, in the words of one American official, “a splendid little war.” In the Philippines, a U.S. fleet commanded by Commodore George Dewey blasted a Spanish fleet, and U.S. soldiers easily took the islands. Cuba took a little longer to conquer, but the Spanish forces there also fell. The four-month war cost 5,642 American lives, all but 379 to disease. And a grown-up America now had the makings of an empire on its hands.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Studying economic theories
- » Making a budget
- » Analyzing public policy
- » Making social policy
- » Spending money
- » Conducting international trade

Chapter 4

Making Public Policy

Public policy comes in various forms. It includes fiscal policy, monetary policy, social policy, and foreign policy (which we talk about in Chapter 5 of this minibook).

Policymaking, a long process with many actors, includes making laws, passing regulations, and even conducting military actions. The entities involved in making U.S. public policy include Congress, the president, and the bureaucracy that implements it. The power to implement policy also comes with the power to shape it. When conflicts arise, the judiciary gets involved.

Interest groups, think tanks, and the media take part in the early stages of policymaking. The media highlights certain policy issues and responds to public concern. As soon as the public is involved, political parties and politicians begin to take note.

Studying Economic Theories

The role of the government in the economy has been an ongoing discussion in U.S. politics. As early as the founding of the republic in 1789, politicians clashed over the government's proper role in the economy. Most Founding Fathers followed the ideas of Adam Smith, shown in Figure 4-1, from his seminal work *The Wealth*

of Nations, in which he argued for a small government with a limited role in the economy. The free market, not the government, should run the economy. Smith gave the government only three major roles to perform in the economy:

- » **Provide for the defense of the country:** The free market cannot perform a country's defense, so the government needs to set up a military.
- » **Enact laws to allow the free market to function freely:** Economic transactions need laws to protect from theft and violence.
- » **Provide an infrastructure for economic transactions to take place:** A working economy needs roads, canals, and other parts of an infrastructure by which goods can be shipped to markets and people can travel to buy and sell.

Smith's prohibition against government interference with the market is called *laissez-faire liberalism*, or *classical liberalism*.

Applying Smith's ideas to international economics leads to increased wealth for participating nations, according to Smith, and the free market, not governments, determines international trade. A government therefore shouldn't implement barriers to free trade such as tariffs or other trade barriers.

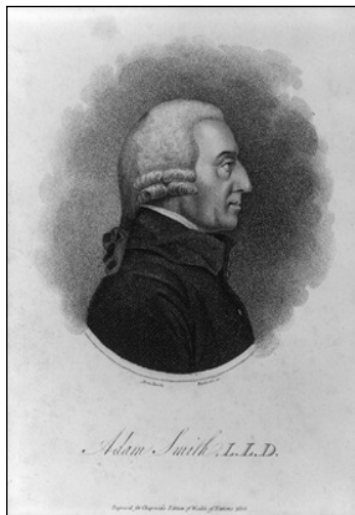


FIGURE 4-1:
Adam Smith.

Source: Library of Congress

Believing in mercantilism

Mercantilism is one of the oldest economic theories in the world and was pre-dominant from the 15th until the 18th century. In contrast to economic liberalism,

mercantilism says that politics and economics are related and indeed dependent on each other. Economics is a tool to serve the government. It can help countries become wealthier and more powerful. All economic actions are designed to enhance the power of a country, which in turn guarantees security in the world today.

For a mercantilist, economic dependence on another country is unacceptable because it undermines a country's power. For example, a great country cannot be dependent on another country for an important commodity such as steel, which is necessary for the defense industry. Tariffs are needed to protect vital industries, and the domestic market needs to be protected to shelter some of these vital industries. Government intervention to protect the economy is necessary for the survival of the country. Many of President Trump's economic policies are quite mercantilist in nature.

Bringing about state capitalism

A variant of mercantilism is *state capitalism*. Also called *etatism*, which means *statism* in French, this economic theory has staged quite a comeback in recent years. Countries such as Hungary, France, and even the U.S. under President Trump have started to apply parts of it. This economic theory believes that the government has the right to intervene in the domestic economy for the good of the country. The state, meaning the country, matters most, and private industry should do what is best for the country. Profit should not be the ultimate decision-maker; industry and the government should do what is good for a people. For example,

- » Producing automobile parts in Mexico might be more profitable for the U.S. auto industry, but the production needs to happen in the U.S. to allow for American workers to benefit.
- » If domestic industries are threatened by foreign competition, which is often unfair, the U.S. government cannot just sit by; it has to protect native industries by using tariffs and other voluntary trade restrictions.



REMEMBER

The government, however, does not outright own property, except for a few select industries. Making a profit is legal in state capitalism, even though on occasion country trumps profits.

Implementing Keynesianism

Keynesianism is an economic theory named for British economist Lord Maynard Keynes, seen in Figure 4-2. It is also called *demand-side economics*

because it focuses on the demand side in an economy. For Keynesians, demand determines whether an economy is growing or declining and whether government intervention is needed.

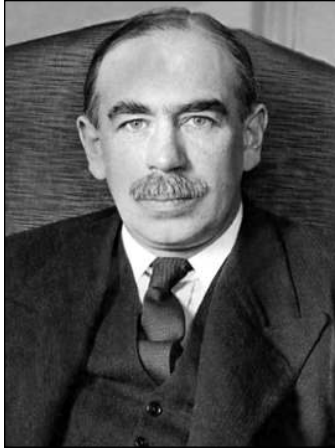


FIGURE 4-2:
Lord Maynard
Keynes.

*Source: John Maynard Keynes/Public domain/
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/
File:John_Maynard_Keynes_\(1929\).jpg/](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:John_Maynard_Keynes_(1929).jpg/)
last accessed on Jan 14, 2026*

During the Great Depression, demand for goods collapsed in the U.S., so Keynes advocated for governmental focus on stimulating demand by implementing the welfare state and public works programs. Suddenly, Social Security and unemployment benefits meant that the older people and the unemployed had money to spend, as did workers employed by public works programs. Consumer spending increased demand for goods and services, stimulating more production by industry. Producing more required hiring more workers, so unemployment went down. Keynes also advocated for tax cuts and low interest rates to provide the public with more spending money. All these policies stimulated demand.

Eventually, businesses could not keep up with demand, resulting in inflation and higher prices of goods. People could afford less, and production of goods declined. As a result, people got laid off and unemployment rose, which meant even less demand. Now the government had to come in again and stimulate demand.

Keynes never advocated continuous government spending to prop up demand; he knew that doing so would increase government deficits. Instead, during boom times when the danger of inflation rears its ugly head, government should step in to take money from the people by raising taxes and interest rates, accruing more in revenue to pay off its debt.

Taking a look at supply-side economics

Supply-side economics is an alternative to Keynesianism that became popular in the 1980s during the Reagan administration. Rather than increase government spending to combat economic problems, government should stop spending to increase demand for goods and focus on supply in the economy. Supply-side economics advocates for cutting taxes to have more money in the economy. High taxes take money out of the economy, according to this theory, and cutting taxes puts more money in — spurring investment, production, new jobs, and lower unemployment — thereby stimulating the economy even more. Cutting taxes and spending will also balance the budget in the long run. Both Presidents Reagan and Trump ran on cutting taxes and actually implemented tax cuts while in office.

Coming Up with a Budget

In 1789, Congress passed its first revenue-generating bill. Income taxes did not exist; the whole federal government's revenue came from tariffs. *Tariffs* are taxes on foreign goods. Over time, the federal government started charging payroll and corporate taxes. Then the 16th Amendment was passed in 1913, which legalized federal income taxes.

The 16th Amendment authorized Congress to tax a person's increase in wealth whether it comes from wages, benefits, bonuses, or any other form of income. Today, the federal income tax is the major source of income for the federal government. The U.S. uses *progressive income taxation*, which increases the tax rate on higher income tiers. A *regressive tax* charges everybody the same rate regardless of income, which has the poorest and the richest paying the same tax rate. A sales tax is considered a regressive tax.

In 2024, the federal government spent 6.74 trillion on Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid, as well as on lesser-known programs. This spending also included the defense budget, infrastructure such as bridges and highways, and endowments for the arts and humanities. Not surprisingly, the debate over the federal budget is often bitter and partisan.

Analyzing the history of the federal budget

Scholars divide the history of budgeting in the U.S. into three different eras since 1789:

- » **Legislative dominance:** This era lasted from 1789 until 1921 and saw Congress being in control over the budget.

- » **Presidential control of the budget:** This era lasted from 1921 until 1974.
- » **Congress challenging the president for budget control:** This ongoing era is one of constant infighting between the executive and legislative branches over the budget.

Seeing legislative dominance

The Constitution of the U.S. gives Congress the power to raise funds through taxation and the power to appropriate, or spend, money. Congress took full advantage of this power until 1921. The Constitution is very vague about how the budgeting process should work. It states that all money Congress intends to spend must come from appropriations bills and that Congress must account for the money it spends. Further, the Constitution mentions that all expenditures must be made for the general welfare of the U.S. and that military appropriations expire in two years. That's about it.

In case you wonder why the Constitution is so vague on budgeting, the reason is actually quite simple: The practice of budgeting had not been invented yet. Conceived in Europe in the 19th century, the process wasn't imported into the U.S. until the 20th century.

The Constitution does require that all spending bills originate in the House of Representatives and then be sent to the Senate. Also, all spending must be put into one bill with the objective — but not requirement — of a balanced budget. After the Civil War, Congress established appropriations committees in both houses; the president stayed out of financial affairs.

Taking over

After WWI, Congressional spending skyrocketed, and the annual budget went from \$725 million annually to \$19 billion by 1920. Suddenly, Congress had accrued a debt of over \$26 billion. In response, Congress decided to bring the president into the budgeting fold. In 1921, it passed the Budget and Accounting Act, which created a presidential budgeting process. Now it is the president who has to submit an annual budget to Congress. Congress now reacts to the presidential budget instead of creating its own, as before.

With this newfound power, presidents began to slowly set the agenda for the country. FDR used it to shape policy and set budget priorities, spending enormously on programs such as his New Deal agenda items, including Social Security, and later WWII. By the time he died in office in 1945, the country was in massive debt. In the 1960s, Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs, including Medicare and Medicaid, took the country even further into debt.

Creating the Office of Management and Budget (OMB)

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) both creates the president's desired budget and monitors Congressional spending and spending proposals. The OMB consists of about 500 employees and is housed in the executive office of the president. Employees are a mix of political appointees, mostly at the top-executive level, and career nonpartisan civil servants.

Having conflict

After President Johnson's Great Society programs and the Vietnam War greatly hiked the country's debt, Congress passed the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Act of 1974, which brought Congress back into the budgetary process. Congress could now set its own budget resolutions as well as spending and revenue goals. It also established the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) to provide Congress with both an economic analysis and budget recommendations. Congress no longer had to rely on the president's office for budget estimates, and both legislative and executive branches had a say in budgeting. The result? Infighting, bargaining, and extreme partisanship.

Making a budget

The budgetary process starts in early February when the President hands Congress a budget for the upcoming fiscal year, which begins October 1 and ends September 30 of the following year. The presidential budget contains spending proposals for thousands of programs that are typically delineated in 12 spending bills (from the 12 subcommittees of the Appropriations Committees in House and Senate). The OMB puts the proposal together after receiving financial requests from all federal agencies. Congress can pass or change the proposal.

Both houses of Congress also come up with a budget resolution, which both houses then must pass after bargaining and compromising in the House and Senate. If they agree on a resolution, both the House and Senate must pass it. This joint resolution, which outlines Congressional targets for spending and revenue creation, is not binding but shows Congressional budgetary expectations. The joint resolution is supposed to be passed by April 15, which rarely happens.

Congress then has until September 30 to enact all 12 spending (appropriation) bills, which also rarely happens. If they don't pass on time, Congress combines them into one giant spending bill, which, if not passed, gets replaced with a *continuing resolution* that extends spending at the current level for a prescribed period of time. The last time Congress passed all 12 spending bills on time was in 1995.



REMEMBER

A government shutdown occurs when Congress fails to pass funding legislation before a fiscal year begins. All government activities and services not deemed essential stop. The first government shutdown happened in 1980, and by 2024, nine more had occurred. Before 2025, the longest government shutdown occurred in 2018–2019 during the first Trump administration, when the Congress and the president could not agree on building more barriers on the U.S.–Mexico border. The government was shut down for 35 days. In the second Trump administration, the government shut down again — this time for 43 days.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Budget reconciliation is a parliamentary procedure that lawmakers use to expedite the passage of federal budget legislation in the Senate. It was created in 1974 in the Congressional Budget Act, and the procedure overrides the filibuster in the Senate. Instead of requiring 60 votes, the Senate can pass reconciliation bills with a simple majority of 51 votes. Although the reconciliation procedure also applies to the House of Representatives, it has less meaning there because the House does not use the filibuster. Because of more partisan fighting in Congress, budget reconciliation has assumed a greater meaning today. Famous recent bills using budget reconciliation include President Biden’s American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 and President Trump’s One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025.

Studying Public Policy

The student of public policy focuses on fiscal policy, monetary policy, social policy, and foreign policy. Government policy regarding spending and taxing is referred to as *fiscal policy*. Policy in regard to unemployment and inflation is termed *monetary policy*, and policy helping the public is referred to as *social policy*.

Today, citizens of a country tend to judge their government by economic performance. The better the economy, the more likely the government gets reelected. If the economy takes a nosedive, angry voters vote the government out of office. Bill Clinton and Barack Obama’s presidencies are considered successful because the economy did well, while Joe Biden saw his economy hit with high inflation, which doomed the presidential run of his successor, Vice-President Kamala Harris. For this reason, public policy can make or break a presidency.

Dabbling with fiscal policy

In the early years of this country, presidents and especially Congress believed in a small, limited government with a *laissez-faire* attitude (see the section “Studying Economic Theories” earlier in the chapter). Government’s functions were few, and they mostly left the economy alone. The Great Depression in the 1930s, followed by WWII and the Cold War, changed this approach:

- » A larger military and economic disaster required more revenue, so tax collections went up. New Deal programs such as Social Security and unemployment benefits as well as public works projects cost billions.
- » As government began to spend and even borrow money, fiscal policy became a policy tool. After WWII, U.S. policy leaders employed tax-and-spend policies to guide the economy.
- » Democratic politicians advocated for spending to stimulate the economy, usually on social programs, whereas Republican politicians advocated for lowering taxes to stimulate the economy.



REMEMBER

Fiscal policy refers to tax-and-spend policies undertaken by the government to affect a country's national economic development.

Using monetary policy

Monetary policy differs from fiscal policy. It refers to the government manipulating the national money supply. Being able to control the supply and price of money allows the government to deal with both inflation and unemployment. The government can control the money supply through the *Federal Reserve System*, established in 1913, which consists of 12 banks around the country and is headed by the Federal Reserve Board. This independent agency acts as the central bank of the U.S. and sets the discount rate at which all other banks can borrow short-term funds. A high discount rate means that banks can borrow more cheaply and lend money to customers at a lower rate. The Federal Reserve thereby controls interest rates in the U.S. and sets the rate of how much money banks have to retain — that is, the liquid assets each bank must keep in hand and how much banks can lend to customers.

By releasing more money into an economy, the government can stimulate the economy but also cause inflation. To combat inflation, the government takes money out of circulation by charging higher interest rates.



REMEMBER

Monetary policy refers to the government's central bank, the Federal Reserve, manipulating the money supply, in turn stimulating or cooling down an economy.

Making Social Policy

Social policy refers to public policies designed to help with individual and societal well-being. In the early years of the republic, no social safety net existed. You had no doctors or hospitals available unless you could pay for them, and older people

without money or family went to a poor house to live in miserable conditions while waiting to die. The unemployed were forced to work or went to jail. The term *poor relief* was a common phrase in the U.S. into the 20th century.

A *welfare state* is a social system in which government assumes responsibility for its citizens in the areas of healthcare, education, and retirement, guaranteeing people a safety net and subsistence survival. All modern democracies and even some nondemocratic systems have welfare states in place. Some are better than others.

FDR's New Deal programs, such as Social Security and unemployment benefits, gave the U.S. its first welfare state, but unlike the democracies in Europe, the U.S. has never implemented public health insurance. In the U.S., people get private health insurance and then pick doctors without government interference. This approach changed a bit in 2010 when the Congress passed the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA), discussed in the section "Passing the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010," later in the chapter.



REMEMBER

Also known as the ACA or Obamacare, the PPACA mandated that all uninsured Americans bought health insurance or pay a fine. They could just buy insurance from private companies, or they could buy it from an insurance marketplace provided by the federal government. This individual mandate was later dropped.

Getting Social Security

When the Great Depression struck in 1929, millions of Americans were suddenly unemployed, families were starving, and older people could not take care of themselves anymore. To relieve the suffering, the incoming administration of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) implemented extensive federal social welfare policies as a part of the administration's New Deal agenda. The most important policy was the Social Security Act (see FDR signing the act in Figure 4-3). It was designed for older people to receive monthly paychecks so that they would not starve after retirement.

The program was implemented in 1935 and provided Americans aged 65 and older who had lived in the U.S. for at least five years a monthly living stipend. A reduced Social Security stipend could be had if a person retired at age 62, and a larger stipend was available if the person worked until 70.

Social Security is financed through a payroll tax on both employees and employers, and the Social Security tax has a maximum income amount beyond which no additional Social Security tax is collected by the government. The Social Security Act further provided for unemployment insurance, paid benefits to disabled workers and their families, and provided assistance to low-income families with children.



FIGURE 4-3:
President
Roosevelt
signing the Social
Security Act.

Source: Social Security Online/Public domain/https://ast.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fichier:Signing_Of_The_Social_Security_Act.jpg/last accessed on Jan 14, 2026



WARNING

The Social Security program has become the largest federal program today. It is rapidly approaching a level where the program cannot function as-is. Too many people are retiring, and not enough young workers are contributing funds anymore. In addition, people are living longer, so they take out more money than they contributed into the Social Security fund, resulting in deficits.



REMEMBER

For 27–40 percent of retired people (depending on the source of statistics), Social Security is their only source of income.

Creating Medicare

In the early 1960s, the U.S. was the wealthiest country in the world, but half of all senior citizens had no health insurance. Many could not afford treatment and medicines and lived in poverty because of medical expenses. To remedy this situation, the Democratic-controlled Congress passed the Medicare Act of 1965 as an amendment to the Social Security Act of 1935. As with Social Security and unemployment benefits, Medicare is financed through payroll deductions. Implemented in 1966, the program grew rapidly. Almost 67.3 million people receive Medicare benefits today, and the costs have risen to almost 1.2 trillion annually.

Adding Medicaid

A companion program to Medicare is Medicaid, which was also created by the Social Security Amendments of 1965 and designed for low-income and disabled

citizens who cannot afford to pay into Medicare. States partner with the federal government's Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) to administer joint programs by paying varying percentages of the programs' costs. Although the ACA expanded healthcare assistance through Medicaid, the Supreme Court ruled that it was up to the states to decide whether to participate in the expansion.

Passing the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010

In 2010, under the leadership of President Obama, shown in Figure 4-4, Congress passed the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, also commonly called Obamacare. Passed in Congress without one Republican vote, the bill set up a bitter partisan debate for more than a decade and still generates Republican criticism.

Obamacare made several important changes to the U.S. healthcare system: mandating health insurance, expanding Medicaid, creating health insurance exchanges that offer discounted insurance premiums partly subsidized by the government. Children could remain on their parents' insurance until age 26, required insurance to offer preventative screenings and procedures were free, and no one could be denied health insurance coverage for preexisting conditions.



FIGURE 4-4:
President Obama
signing the
Patient Protection
and Affordable
Care Act in 2010.

Source: Pete Souza/Public domain/https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Obama_signs_health_care-20100323.jpg/last accessed on Jan 14, 2026

Spending the Taxpayers' Money

In 2024, government spending equaled \$6.75 trillion whereas GDP sat at 28.83 trillion. *Gross domestic product*, or *GDP*, is an estimate of the total monetary value of all goods and services produced in the U.S. in a one-year period. In March 2025, the GDP of the U.S. was estimated to hit \$30.5 trillion — the largest GDP in the world. China ranks second with a GDP of about 19.2 trillion and Germany ranks third with a GDP of about 5 trillion.

On the negative side, the current national debt in September of 2025 is \$37.45 trillion. In 2025, government was expected to top \$7 trillion in annual spending. With this kind of spending, the debt ceiling imposed by Congress will soon be reached.

The *debt ceiling* is a law established by the Public Debt Acts of 1939 and 1941, which limit how much the federal government can borrow. The laws have been amended multiple times to increase the debt ceiling. Since 2002, the federal government has been running budget deficits and had to consistently borrow more money. When the debt ceiling is reached, the government must stop borrowing, possibly defaulting on financial obligations. This could put the country into an economic recession.

In June of 2023, President Biden suspended the debt ceiling temporarily until December 31, 2024. Currently, President Trump is asking to eliminate the debt ceiling permanently. The debt ceiling stood at 36.1 trillion in January 2025 and was raised to 41.1 trillion by President Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill Act.

The U.S. Constitution gives Congress the ability to create a federal budget, by which it determines how much money the government can spend over the course of the upcoming fiscal year. In the budget, Congress decides how much discretionary spending and how much mandatory spending occurs.

Federal money comes from tax collections and borrowing. The federal government spends money on programs and goods that support both the U.S. economy and the U.S. public. In addition, the U.S. also must spend money on interest on borrowed monies; the more debt the government gets into, the more it has to spend paying interest on it. To make matters worse, the federal government spends more annually than it collects in revenue, so the debt increases over time.



REMEMBER

A budget deficit is the amount of money spent annually over what the government collects in revenue every year. In 2024, the budget deficit was \$1.8 trillion, and the deficit forecast for 2025 was \$1.9 trillion.

The federal government spends its money on three types of spending: mandatory, discretionary, and supplemental:



REMEMBER

- » **Mandatory:** Represents about two-thirds of federal government spending and does not need an annual vote by Congress on the money being spent because it has been previously allocated. Mandatory spending is also known as *direct spending*, and as the term implies it is mandated by existing law. It includes programs such as Social Security and Medicare and payments to state and local governments.
- » **Discretionary:** This type of spending is money formally approved annually by Congress and the president during the annual appropriations process. Congress has the power to modify or even eliminate this type of spending. The battles over the budget occur over this one-third of the budget; the other two-thirds are untouchable. Examples of discretionary spending include defense spending and the funding of federal agencies.

The leading sources of federal revenue are personal income taxes and payroll taxes. Payroll taxes are monies people pay out of their paycheck for Social Security and Medicare. Combined, these two make up 85 percent of federal revenue.

- » **Supplemental:** *Supplemental spending* occurs after Congress passes the budget and allocates monies. Occasionally, programs suddenly run out of money or emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic arise, forcing government to spend money fast without waiting until the next appropriations bill is passed. In 2020, for example, Congress passed four supplemental appropriations bills dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Making International Economic Policy

The current international economic order was established by the U.S. after World War II. It was based on the concept of *economic liberalism*, referring to free trade between nations, increasing the wealth of those nations. *Free trade* means unrestricted commerce between nations, without trade restrictions such as tariffs or import taxes.

To implement this new liberal international economic order, the U.S. put in place three international organizations to guide the system and facilitate international free trade:

- » **The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), more commonly referred to as the World Bank.** It was designed to rebuild

the war-torn economies after WWII and to help third-world countries develop. Today, the World Bank has become the major source of low-interest loans for third-world countries to develop. The World Bank funds more than 12,000 projects, which include supplying safe drinking water, building schools, and increasing agricultural productivity in third-world countries.

- » **The International Monetary fund (IMF)**, created in 1945. It had a dual purpose. First, it acted like a savings account. Richer countries could put money into it during times of economic booms. Then, when economic downturns hit, these countries could take the money back to spend and stimulate their ailing home economies. In addition, the IMF is a bank, and members can take out loans with an interest rate attached to them. Countries have to repay their loans and pay interest on them.
- » **The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)**, which was set up in 1948. It was designed to lower trade barriers such as tariffs and other import taxes between member countries. GATT, however, did approve exceptions, so certain tariffs such as agricultural subsidies were considered acceptable. GATT was replaced in 1995 by the World Trade Organization (WTO) which is based on the same principle and is designed to stimulate free trade.

The World Trade Organization (WTO), unlike GATT, has an institutional structure headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland. The WTO negotiates trade agreements and resolves trade disputes between its members. It has the power to fine and impose sanctions on member states that violate trade agreements. Currently, the WTO has 166 members.

Trading with foreign countries

A country's trade balance concerns the amount of goods it exports and imports. When it imports more than it exports, a negative trade balance, or trade deficit, exists. Conversely, if it exports more goods than it imports, it has a trade surplus. The trade deficit in 2024 was \$1.2 trillion. The last time the U.S. had a trade surplus was in 1975.

Congress and the president are responsible for making foreign trade policy.

Businesses that can easily sell their products abroad want free trade with no trade barriers, but those that face stiff foreign competition *do* want barriers. These differences often lead to conflicting demands by business groups and result in political decisions that go against accepted policy. For example, George W. Bush, a free-trade president, imposed tariffs on imported steel when he was up for reelection in 2004. U.S. Steel was located in Ohio and Pennsylvania, two states important to his campaign. To avoid alienating voters, he imposed steel tariffs and later removed them after reelection.



TIP

Then there is the U.S. consumer, who wants cheap foreign goods to keep up their lifestyles (so they want no or low tariffs on foreign goods). But consumers who worry about their jobs and foreign competition *do* support tariffs. A good politician has to find the middle ground between the two — not an easy task.

Going global

Globalization refers to the integration of countries through increasing trade and contact in all aspects. economics, Although a form of globalization existed in Europe in the 19th century, it's now a worldwide phenomenon, and most countries have close ties with other countries, making them interdependent.

Social scientists measure globalization by looking at a country's sum of exports and imports and then dividing the total by the country's gross domestic product (GDP). The higher the score, the more interconnected the country is with the world economy. The U.S. has a score of 81. The highest possible score is a 100, which is a perfect interconnectedness score. The highest score of any country belongs to Switzerland, with a score of 91. American allies Great Britain and France have scores of 88 and 87, respectively.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Analyzing U.S. foreign policy
- » Studying two theories behind American foreign policy
- » Making foreign policy
- » Taking a look at presidential doctrines

Chapter 5

Conducting Foreign Policy

Foreign policy refers to a country's relations with external nations, groups, and organizations. U.S. foreign policy has three main objectives:

- » **Security for the country:** *Security* refers to a country's ability to protect and defend itself. This requires a strong military. The U.S. currently spends more than any other country globally on its military. It spends six times as much on its military as the other top six military spenders combined. President Trump's budget for 2025/2026 actually increases this amount and the new defense budget will for first time hit \$1 trillion.
- » **Economic prosperity:** The U.S. is not just a military but also an economic superpower. Back in the 1960s, the U.S. economy accounted for 40 percent of the world's economy, but this has shrunk to 26 percent today. Although the U.S. still has the world's largest economy, economies in Asia and Europe are catching up.

Despite this decline, the U.S. still has an economy that is 40 percent larger than China's, and the U.S. dollar is still the world largest reserve currency. (For a discussion of economic policies such as free trade and tariffs please see



Chapter 4 of this book). The American government has used foreign policy for decades to achieve economic prosperity. A good example is the creation of the international economic order after WWII which enshrined the concepts of economic liberalism and capitalism into the international order.

Although the U.S. remains the world's largest economy by nominal GDP, which measures the total market value of a country's goods and services produced in a given period, China has narrowed the gap significantly. But, in purchasing power parity terms (which adjust for cost of living), China's economy is already larger than the U.S. economy, which reflects the increasing challenge China poses to U.S. global economic leadership.

» **Spreading democracy and American values:** Often, foreign policy decisions in the U.S. are (sometimes questionably) justified as promoting democracy and American values such as liberty and individual freedoms throughout the world. The invasion and subsequent occupation of Afghanistan was promoted as freeing a people, especially Afghani women, from a brutal regime. And we saw how that turned out.

At times, these three objectives can be complimentary, and at other times, they conflict. This chapter looks at the basis of U.S. foreign policy and how it has developed over time.

Studying U.S. Foreign Policy

The U.S. has based its foreign policy on two worldviews: realism and idealism.

Realism

Realism can be traced back to the ancient Greeks but became the dominant foreign-policy school in the U.S. after WWII. The core assumption of realism is that world politics is all about struggle and survival in the international system. Only power, mainly military power, can guarantee the survival of the nation in the long run. The more powerful a country is, the more secure it is in the international system. Conflict among nations is common, because there is no global authority to prevent conflict in the international system. Security necessitates a strong, powerful military and a good economic foundation.



The term *international system* refers to a network of states, international organizations, and individuals that interact globally.

Political power is the ability to get others to do what you want. Power is not just based upon a country's resources, such as size of military or the status of the economy, but includes geography, political culture, and a willingness to use the power a country has. Power must be converted into actuality for it to make a difference in the international arena.

Power is the ability to prevail in conflict or to prevent a certain outcome. Power is actually more effective if it is used as a veto measure. A truly powerful country does not use its power to force other countries to engage in certain activities but instead uses it to prevent other nation-states from engaging in certain acts.

Idealism

The second worldview on which U.S. foreign policy is based is idealism. Similar to realism, idealism is also not a new school of thought. It goes back to the writings of great philosophers and economists such as John Locke and Adam Smith. Idealism believes that conflict does not have to arise in the international system. People by nature are good, can be educated, and convinced to do what is best for their nations.

Idealists believe that democracy is the best form of government. It is peaceful by nature, because good people elect good leaders, and in a world of democracies, fewer wars occur. Thus, democracy must be spread throughout the world. Human rights, especially individual rights should be the cornerstone of a foreign policy. These rights are guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution and should be disseminated throughout the world.

Although a military is necessary for any nation to survive, a country should use peaceful measures to settle conflicts with other countries before going to war. These include using international organizations such as the United Nations to mediate conflict and non-military measures such as economic sanctions. War is only a last measure.

Since the end of WWII, both schools have impacted American foreign policy. All presidents have relied on both worldviews when making their foreign policy. One of the two schools might dominate at times, but this does not mean that it continuously dominates. During the Carter administration, idealism often prevailed, such as in the area of human rights. However, after the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in 1979, a shift occurred, and realism began to ascend. Similarly, Ronald Reagan's foreign policy was based mostly on realism. At the same time, Reagan's foreign policy was quite idealistic when it came to spreading democracy and individual rights globally.

Making Foreign Policy

Foreign policy is an area where Congress and the president share power. The Constitution gives Congress the power to declare war, raise armies, punish maritime crimes, and regulate foreign commerce, and the Senate has to ratify every treaty negotiated with a foreign power and every ambassador nominated by the president. So, on paper, Congress should make U.S. foreign policy. Based upon the Constitution, the president has only one power, being the commander in chief of the U.S. armed forces.



REMEMBER

However, if the American public is asked who makes foreign policy, the answer is clear: the president, and the public is right. Since the creation of the U.S., presidents have committed American troops 125 times into a conflict without congressional support. Congress has declared war only five times since the founding of the republic. What happened?

Tracking the foreign policy power shift

Since the founding of the U.S., power shifted from Congress to the president in the area of foreign policy. Although Congress dominated early, the president took over by the 20th century. With the U.S. becoming involved in international affairs, two world wars, and a cold war, the American public looked to the president to lead them. With Congress being a deliberative body that can't respond quickly to international challenges, the president came to the forefront of foreign policymaking. Today, the American public expects the president to act swiftly and decisively in foreign affairs.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Although the Senate actively engages in confirming U.S. ambassadors and has confirmed over a 1,000 since 1789, as well as approving treaties, the president can make foreign policy through executive agreements (an international agreement made by the president), which have the force of law and do not have to be ratified by the Senate. Presidents have issued around 7,000 of these executive agreements since 1789.



REMEMBER

If Congress disapproves of an executive agreement, it can vote to cancel or refuse to fund the agreement. Future Presidents can also cancel executive agreements.

Sources of U.S. foreign policy

Foreign policy is made in the U.S. by not just the president and Congress but by several other structures. Sources of foreign policy include:

- » **The Congress:** The U.S. Constitution creates a system of checks and balances when it comes to foreign policymaking. Although Congress has the power to declare war and finance the U.S. military, the president is the commander in chief of the armed forces. Over time, however, the responsibility of Congress to declare war and fund the military has shifted toward the president. Congress has not declared war since 1941, even though major conflicts were fought in Korea and Vietnam. The major reason is that Congress is slow to react, internally divided, and focused on constant reelection.

Only once since WWII has Congress tried to reassert itself, and that was in 1973 with the War Powers Act, which required the president to get Congressional approval for military action. However, the Act has been ignored or declared unconstitutional by every president since, Republican or Democrat alike.

- » **The president:** The president commands the U.S. military, negotiates treaties and appoints ambassadors. The president also oversees relations with the rest of the world. Recent presidents have had enormous powers making foreign policy while they have not had a lot of experience with foreign policy issues. The last president with extensive foreign policy experience was George Herbert Walker Bush, who was president from 1989 until 1993 and used to oversee the CIA. To be successful in foreign policy, the president must rely on an extensive bureaucracy.

- » **The Department of State:** The Department of State is headed by the secretary of state, who is nominated by the president and then confirmed in a simple majority vote in the Senate. The State Department manages diplomatic relations with almost 200 nations and many international organizations, such as the United Nations. The State Department oversees many foreign policy programs, such as foreign aid, and oversees the many foreign embassies and consulates the U.S. has all over the world.

The secretary of state today has become the major spokesperson for American foreign policy.

In the beginning of the republic, the position of secretary of state was the major stepping stone toward the presidency. Being secretary of state would usually give you the presidential nomination for your party.

- » **The Department of Defense:** The Department of Defense (DOD) is in charge of the U.S. military. In other words, it manages the country's armed forces. It is also the largest organization in the U.S. government and the biggest employer within the government. The DOD employs over two million military personnel and seven hundred thousand civilian employees. It is responsible for U.S. soldiers currently deployed in 177 nations.

The secretary of defense, a civilian, oversees the department. The secretary is also a primary advisor to the president. For military advice, however, the president turns to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which consists of six generals



TIP

representing the military's six branches (Air Force, Navy, Marines, Space Force, National Guard, and Army).

Whereas the State Department deals with diplomacy, the Department of Defense deals with military matters. It comes up with military strategy, makes risk calculations, and plans future wars.

- » **The National Security Council:** The National Security Council was established in 1947 to advise the president on foreign, military, and economic matters that affect national security. It consists of the most important foreign policy officials in an administration. This includes the president, the vice-president, the secretaries of state, homeland security and defense, the director of national intelligence, the head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the national security advisor. The president can also invite others to the meetings at his discretion.
- » **Department of Homeland Security:** The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was established in the aftermath of the terror attacks on September 11, 2001. The DHS includes various security organizations to combat terrorism and protect the American public with a unified security structure. Today, the Secret Service, the Coast Guard, The Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services are under the control of the DHS.
- » **Other intelligence organizations:** The U.S. has more than one intelligence organization. There are actually fifteen of them. The best known is the Central Intelligence Agency, or CIA. The CIA was created in 1947 as a part of the National Security Act and only deals with foreign intelligence. All branches of the military and the Departments of State, Treasury, and Defense also have their own intelligence officers. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in turn deals only with domestic intelligence. All these agencies are slow to coordinate with each other and have overlapping jurisdictions. This can result in intelligence failures and drawn-out reactions.
- » **Interest groups:** One would not suspect that interest groups could impact foreign policymaking, but they do. A good example is the war between Greece and Turkey over the island of Cyprus in 1974. The U.S. has millions of Greek- and Turkish-Americans. Both ethnic groups are organized into interest groups. However, Greek Americans are among the best organized groups in the U.S. Turkish Americans are not so well organized. So, Greek Americans pushed for Congress to cut off aid to Turkey while increasing aid to Greece. Congress responded to organized interest group pressure and agreed to do so. Ironically, the U.S. cut off aid to a democracy, Turkey, and gave aid to a military dictatorship, Greece, because of interest group pressure. President Ford later on restored the balance and gave aid to both countries. The war was settled, and today, Greece dominates two-thirds of Cyprus and Turkey one-third.
- » **Public opinion and the media:** Foreign policy is not something the American public is concerned about often. The media is most responsible for bringing

foreign policy issues to the forefront of the American public's mind. The media sets the agenda, playing up certain foreign policy issues, while ignoring others. Suddenly, the American public becomes aware of an issue, gets concerned about it, and wants action on it. Now, with the public demanding action, the Congress and the president begin to react. This is the reason why some foreign events get dealt with by our office holders, whereas others do not.

For example, everybody knows about the conflict in Gaza (current as of this writing), which the media covers in detail. Not too many people know about the conflict in South Sudan, so the public demands no action and our politicians, in turn, do not react.

Tracking U.S. Presidential Doctrines

Beginning with the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 and lasting up to the Trump Doctrine of 2025, presidential doctrines impact American foreign policy. Some of the U.S. major foreign policy successes or disasters can be explained by studying the doctrines of sitting or previous presidents. After a presidential doctrine has been established, it achieves a life of its own and future presidents feel compelled to abide by it.

For this reason, presidential doctrines outlive their creators, and some affect American foreign policy for centuries to come. A good example is the Monroe Doctrine, which still impacts American foreign policy toward Latin America. This section examines all the presidential doctrines in U.S. history and analyzes their impact on American foreign policy.

Presidential doctrines in American foreign policy

A *doctrine* is a body of teachings or instructions, and although the term is most common in the study of religion or the law, it also refers to the foundation upon which a country builds its foreign policy. Foreign policy doctrines can lead to a consistency in foreign policy, allowing us and our enemies to predict what will happen if certain political circumstances arise. Foreign policy doctrines can be beneficial because they provide the international environment with some predictability, overcoming the anarchy that still dominates the international system today.

Doctrines are usually named after the political leaders who promulgated them, whether American presidents or Soviet premiers.

The Monroe Doctrine

Presidential foreign policy doctrines began in the United States in 1823. The sitting president was James Monroe, shown in Figure 5-1, and his secretary of state was future president John Quincy Adams. The period of 1815 to 1825 was a tumultuous decade in the Americas, especially South America. Former colonies of the Spanish empire were rebelling against their colonial master, Spain, and were striving for independence. Between 1815 and 1822 alone, Argentina, Chile, Venezuela, Peru, and Mexico became independent. Although the United States was supportive of these colonies gaining independence, it feared that other European powers would attempt to take control over them.

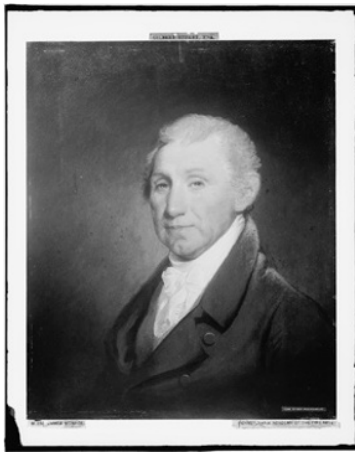


FIGURE 5-1:
James Monroe.

Source: Library of Congress

In the beginning, Monroe and Adams feared that Great Britain, which had become Latin America's biggest trading partner, would intervene and take control of the new countries. By 1823, this changed. France became an absolute monarchy one more time after the fall of the Napoleonic Empire and expressed interest in acquiring colonies. The United States government was now more afraid that France would help Spain to regain control of Latin America and establish a colonial foothold in the Americas. The last thing Monroe and Adams wanted to see was the French empire moving into the Americas.



**TECHNICAL
STUFF**

Monroe and Adams were rightfully afraid of the French attempting to acquire a colonial Empire. By 1830, the French had conquered Algeria in North Africa and Indochina in Asia.

For this reason, John Quincy Adams came up with what would be called the Monroe Doctrine. President Monroe presented the new policy to Congress on December 2, 1823. In his address, Monroe stated:

“... as a principle in which the rights and interests of the United States are involved, that the American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers . . .

“... With the existing colonies or dependencies of any European power we have not interfered and shall not interfere. But with the Governments who have declared their independence and maintain it, and whose independence we have, on great consideration and on just principles, acknowledged, we could not view any interposition for the purpose of oppressing them, or controlling in any other manner their destiny, by any European power in any other light than as the manifestation of an unfriendly disposition toward the United States . . .”



TECHNICAL
STUFF

In plain English, the Monroe Doctrine stated the following:

The American continents . . . are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers.”

Effectively, the doctrine states that the Americas are free from European interference. In turn, the United States would remain neutral in future European wars and wars of European powers with their colonies outside of Latin America. Any interference with the new independent countries in Latin America would be seen as a hostile act toward the United States.

The U.S. didn’t use the Monroe Doctrine forcefully for decades until James Polk became president in 1845, when Polk announced that he would enforce the Monroe Doctrine against European encroachment in the Americas. He especially targeted British interests in the Oregon territory and French attempts to prevent Texas from joining the union. Polk further argued that the United States as a part of the doctrine should expand to reach its manifest destiny to stretch from sea to sea.

After Polk oversaw (and perhaps deliberately provoked) the conflict with Mexico that led to the U.S. acquisition of more than 500,000 square miles of land, including the future states of California, Nevada, Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona, the Monroe Doctrine became the cornerstone of American foreign policy toward Latin America and its effects are still felt today.

Roosevelt Corollary

In 1904 in an address to Congress, President Theodore Roosevelt (see Figure 5-2) proclaimed the Roosevelt Corollary as an extension to the Monroe Doctrine. According to Roosevelt:

“Chronic wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society, may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require

intervention by some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrongdoing or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power."



FIGURE 5-2:
Theodore
Roosevelt.

Source: Library of Congress



**TECHNICAL
STUFF**

Roosevelt's doctrine meant that the United States gave itself the right to interfere in the affairs of the Americas to protect not just American investments, but to also ensure that European powers stay out of Latin America.

Even if a Latin American country wronged a European power, it had no right to interfere in Latin America. However, in this case, the United States would take up the European power's complaint and resolve the problem. Finally, any European power that interfered in Latin America, despite the United States' warning, would have to expect action against it.

The purpose of the Roosevelt Corollary was to keep European powers out of Latin America as well as ensure American hegemony over the continent. For the next three decades, the United States enforced the Roosevelt Corollary religiously by intervening militarily in Cuba, Nicaragua, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic.

After renouncing the Roosevelt Corollary in the 1930s, the United States did not become active again in Latin America until the end of World War II. With the beginning of the Cold War around 1946, the Monroe Doctrine assumed an even greater importance than ever before in American foreign policy. How could the United States justify the establishment of communist regimes closely tied to a European power, the Soviet Union, in its backyard? Wasn't this a clear violation of the Monroe Doctrine stipulating European powers to stay outside the Americas?

For this reason, the United States intervened in Guatemala in 1954, overthrowing a socialist government, and more importantly initiated the Bay of Pigs invasion of communist Cuba in 1961. In addition, non-communist regimes in Latin America, even if they were fascist or military dictatorships, received military and economic aid.



TIP

The Bay of Pigs was an attempt to aid Cuban exiles after the country fell to communism in 1959. The U.S. provided training, weapons, and logistical support to Cubans to defeat communism. The invasion failed in 1961, and Cuba now asked the Soviet Union for help against the U.S.

The impact of the Monroe Doctrine can still be felt in Latin America today.

- » In 1965 President Johnson ordered the invasion of the Dominican Republic to prevent a pro-Soviet government coming to power. Johnson further stated that domestic revolution in Latin America with the objective of establishing a communist government was not a local matter.
- » In the 1980s President Reagan supported the Contras trying to overthrow the communist government in Nicaragua, and, more recently, both President Clinton and President Bush intervened in the Caribbean Island nation of Haiti.
- » In 2025, President Trump pressured the nation of Panama, even threatening to take the Panama Canal back by force, unless Panama curbed Chinese influence in the country. It did, and Trump walked back his threats.

The Truman Doctrine

The end of WWII in 1945 created a power vacuum in Europe. The former great powers on the continent, Germany, France, and Great Britain were in shambles. An opportunity for domination of the European continent arose, and the Soviet Union under the leadership of Joseph Stalin decided to take it. The Soviet Union quickly expanded aggressively, and by 1946, it controlled most of Eastern Europe. Stalin decided to break the Yalta and Potsdam agreements, which called for the holding of free elections and the establishment of democracy in Eastern Europe; instead, he imposed communist dictatorships onto Eastern Europe.

This wasn't good enough for Stalin. He now sought to expand into Southern Europe. The Soviet Union began to actively support communist uprisings in Turkey and Greece. President Truman, shown in Figure 5-3, decided that he had to act and oppose Soviet expansionism, resulting in the beginnings of the Cold War and the end of the wartime friendship between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.



FIGURE 5-3:
Harry Truman.

Source: Library of Congress

On March 22, 1947, President Truman addressed Congress and called for the U.S. to support “free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation . . .” to avoid endangering the peace of the world as well as the U.S. Truman wanted military and economic aid for Greece and Turkey to save the countries from communism. Congress agreed and approved \$400 million to help them, and U.S. military advisors were sent to both countries to help train the native forces against communist rebels. By 1950, \$600 million in aid had been sent to Greece and Turkey, saving the two countries from communism. From this point on, official U.S. foreign policy called for a containment of communism by providing non-communist governments with U.S. aid in their fight against communism. Any government threatened by communism could now rely upon aid from the U.S. Existing communist governments were, however, not targeted.

The Eisenhower Doctrine

The Eisenhower Doctrine is a direct extension of the Truman Doctrine. When President Eisenhower (see Figure 5-4) came to power in 1953, his major foreign policy goals were not only to contain the spread of communism but also to roll back communism by liberating communist countries. Although this new doctrine of rolling back communism was mostly rhetorical in nature, with the U.S., for example, refusing to help Hungary in its uprising against Soviet domination in 1956, the containment of communism was put to the test with the Suez Canal crisis.



FIGURE 5-4:
Dwight
D. Eisenhower.

Source: Library of Congress

Great Britain and France had jointly owned the Suez Canal, located in Egypt, since 1875. In 1956, a new nationalist government headed by President Nasser nationalized the canal. Great Britain and France reacted by invading Egypt and taking back the canal. Nasser was closely aligned with the Soviet Union, which now threatened Britain and France. Both close NATO allies turned to Eisenhower for help. He, however, refused, fearing that Great Britain and France would attempt to recolonize the Middle East. At the same time, to keep from encouraging Soviet expansionism in the Middle East, Eisenhower proclaimed the purpose of this doctrine:

“... It would, first of all, authorize the United States to cooperate with and assist any nation or group of nations in the general area of the Middle East in the development of economic strength dedicated to the maintenance of national independence.”

“It would, in the second place, authorize the Executive to undertake in the same region programs of military assistance and cooperation with any nation or group of nations, which desires such aid.”

“It would, in the third place, authorize such assistance and cooperation to include the employment of the armed forces of the United States to secure and protect the territorial integrity and political independence of such nations, requesting such aid, against overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by International Communism.”

Eisenhower further pledged to assist militarily any nation, or even groups of nations, in the Middle East, requesting assistance against communist aggression. Any nation with an anti-communist government could from now on expect U.S. economic aid.

The Eisenhower Doctrine was soon put to test. In April of 1957, militant left-wing groups threatened King Hussein of Jordan, a close American ally. Eisenhower immediately provided military and economic aid. In 1958, President Chamoun of Lebanon faced an uprising by Muslim extremists. He asked President Eisenhower for help. Eisenhower decided to show the world that the Eisenhower Doctrine was not just rhetoric and sent 10,000 marines to Lebanon to maintain the Chamoun government in power.

The Nixon Doctrine

By 1967, more than 200,000 American troops were fighting in South Vietnam. Casualties began to rise, reaching 15,000, and the war had cost the U.S. economy \$25 billion. During the presidential election campaign of 1968, when American troop strength in South Vietnam suddenly reached 500,000, Republican candidate Richard Nixon (see Figure 5-5) proclaimed that he would cut back American troop strength. After becoming president in 1969, Nixon established the Nixon Doctrine to justify and accomplish his goals of withdrawing American troops from South Vietnam and asking Asian countries fighting communist aggression to rely more heavily on their own manpower instead of American troops. Nixon stated that instead of sending troops to countries facing communist aggression, the U.S. would supply these countries with military advisors and military hardware, but not with troops.



FIGURE 5-5:
Richard M. Nixon.

Source: Library of Congress

In an address to the nation on November 3, 1969, Nixon polished up his new doctrine, directly relating it to the situation in South Vietnam. According to President Nixon:

“First, the United States will keep all of its treaty commitments.”

“Second, we shall provide a shield if a nuclear power threatens the freedom of a nation allied with us or of a nation whose survival we consider vital to our security.

“Third, in cases involving other types of aggression, we shall furnish military and economic assistance when requested in accordance with our treaty commitments. But we shall look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defense.”

Using the Nixon Doctrine, President Nixon recalled 90,000 troops by the end of 1969. By 1972, only 30,000 American troops remained in South Vietnam.



REMEMBER

The Nixon Doctrine still affects American foreign policy today. It was most recently used by Presidents Bush and Obama and President Biden. President Obama pulled out most American troops from Iraq after rebuilding an Iraqi military, and President Biden did the same in Afghanistan.

The Bush and Obama administration’s goals in Iraq were exactly what the Nixon Doctrine advocates: Build up a country’s forces militarily so that it can defend itself against foreign or domestic aggression. Only then will you be able to withdraw your own troops.

The Carter Doctrine

The Carter Doctrine of 1980 was a direct response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. After the fall of the monarchy in 1973, Afghanistan had been taken over by a communist party, which established a pro-Soviet government. By 1979, the ruling communist leadership in Afghanistan had a change of heart and tried to move away from the Soviet sphere of influence, leading to the Soviet invasion of the country in late 1979.

President Carter, shown in Figure 5–6, responded by boycotting the 1980 Olympic games in Moscow, imposing a grain embargo against the Soviet Union, and adopting a new policy toward the Middle East. The U.S. especially feared that the Soviet Union would use Afghanistan as a springboard into Iran where the pro-American government of the Shah had just been replaced with a hostile Islamic fundamentalist government.



FIGURE 5-6:
Jimmy Carter.

Source: Library of Congress

In his state of the union address on January 23, 1980, President Carter stated what would be termed the Carter Doctrine:

“An attempt by an outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.”

President Reagan later on added the Reagan Corollary to the Carter Doctrine, proclaiming that the U.S. would also use military force to protect Saudi Arabia if threatened.

The Reagan Doctrine

By the time President Reagan took over, U.S. prestige and power worldwide had suffered greatly. The Soviet Union had used the Ford and Carter years to expand and rearm, while the U.S. stood idly by. By 1981, the Soviet Union had penetrated Africa; communists were in power in Angola, Mozambique, and Ethiopia. A second country in Latin America, Nicaragua, became communist and was destabilizing its neighbor El Salvador. In Europe, the Soviets were installing new nuclear missiles targeting Western Europe. The world perceived the U.S. as weak, whereas Soviet power was growing. Reagan was especially concerned with growing Soviet power in Latin America, to counteract this growing Soviet expansion, President Reagan (see Figure 5-7) announced what was to become the Reagan Doctrine in his State of the Union address in February 1985, stating:

"We must not break faith with those who are risking their lives . . . on every continent, from Afghanistan to Nicaragua . . . to defy Soviet aggression and secure rights which have been ours from birth. Support for freedom fighters is self-defense."



FIGURE 5-7:
Ronald Reagan.

Source: Library of Congress

The Reagan Doctrine sought to undermine communist governments and groups by supporting anti-communist movements around the globe. Military and economic aid flowed to many groups opposing communist governments, including the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan, UNITA fighting the communist government in Angola, and the Contras fighting the communist government in Nicaragua.

The Clinton Doctrine

The Clinton Doctrine was created to justify the American intervention in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999. Beginning in 1998, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was committing genocide against its Albanian minority in the province of Kosovo. Under American leadership, NATO acted, and President Clinton, shown in Figure 5-8, ordered air strikes against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. By the summer of 1999, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia agreed to stop committing mass murder and even allowed UN peacekeepers into Kosovo. In 2000, the people rose up and toppled their long-time communist dictator, and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia joined the ranks of democratic nations in the world. Since 2006, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is known as just Serbia.



FIGURE 5-8:
Bill Clinton.

Source: Library of Congress

The Clinton Doctrine was best enunciated in a speech Clinton gave in February 1999, stating the following:

“It’s easy . . . to say that we really have no interests in who lives in this or that valley in Bosnia, or who owns a strip of brushland in the Horn of Africa, or some piece of parched earth by the Jordan River. But the true measure of our interests lies not in how small or distant these places are, or in whether we have trouble pronouncing their names. The question we must ask is, what are the consequences to our security of letting conflicts fester and spread. We cannot, indeed, we should not, do everything or be everywhere. But where our values and our interests are at stake, and where we can make a difference, we must be prepared to do so.”

Later, after the successful resolution of the Kosovo conflict, President Clinton added the following:

“We can say to the people of the world, whether you live in Africa, or Central Europe, or any other place, if somebody comes after innocent civilians and tries to kill them *en masse* because of their race, their ethnic background, or their religion, and it’s within our power to stop it, we will stop it.”



TIP

According to President Clinton, the U.S. will from now on use military force not only to prevent genocide, but also to settle conflicts creating political instability throughout the world. The reasoning behind the doctrine is to settle international conflicts before they can threaten the U.S. What may seem remote and irrelevant right now could become a major problem for the U.S. in the future. The president, however, only selectively enforced the Clinton Doctrine. A major conflict in Liberia in 2000, for example, was ignored.

The Bush Doctrine

The Bush Doctrine is a result of the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001. The public got a first glimpse of the new doctrine in the president's address to Congress on September 20, 2001. For the following 18 months, the Bush administration put together a set of responses to the new terrorist threats, which became the Bush Doctrine. President Bush (see Figure 5-9) unveiled the new policies in a speech given to the graduating class at West Point on June 1, 2002.



FIGURE 5-9:
George W. Bush.

Source: Library of Congress

The Bush Doctrine states that the U.S. will make no distinction between terrorists and states that harbor them. Furthermore, the doctrine proclaims that the U.S. will destroy any terrorist threat to it and its population before it can reach the U.S. While preferring to act with the international community to eliminate any such threats, the U.S. will not be afraid to act alone if necessary. According to President Bush:

"Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists."

The Bush Doctrine advocated preventive measures, such as war to protect the American public from any terrorist threat. The administration's new foreign policy in regard to terrorism was anticipatory in nature and not reactive, as American foreign policy used to be.

The U.S. first used the Bush Doctrine in the attack on Afghanistan in October 2001, which removed the Taliban regime from power, because it had sponsored terrorism and harbored Osama Bin Laden.

The 2003 invasion of Iraq was heavily influenced by the Bush Doctrine's emphasis on preemptive self-defense and the global war on terror. However, the decision to go to war was driven by a mix of motivations, including disputed claims that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction and had ties to terrorist groups. In addition, longstanding U.S. policy favoring regime change in Iraq, and broader strategic goals in the Middle East played a role. Although the Bush Doctrine provided the framework for unilateral action, the justification and execution of the Iraq War remain deeply controversial and were based on intelligence later found to be inaccurate.



Ironically, after finding no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, a better doctrine to justify the invasion of the country would have been the Clinton Doctrine, which protects people from genocide.

The Trump Doctrine

The Trump doctrine, as outlined in speeches by President Trump (see Figure 5-10) and Secretary of State Marco Rubio in Trump's second term, represents a step back in time.



FIGURE 5-10:
Donald J. Trump.

Source: Library of Congress

As Secretary of State Marco Rubio said:

"The postwar global order is not just obsolete; it is now a weapon being used against us."

The doctrine rejects the old post-WWII bipolar system of two great powers, the U.S. and the Soviet Union, and returns the U.S. to the multipolar world of the 19th century. The doctrine states that the U.S. has overextended itself by being the world's policeman. According to this doctrine, the U.S. cannot afford to police the world anymore and its allies need to do their fair share to protect themselves.

When it comes to Europe and Russia, the Trump Doctrine states that Europe needs to be able to defend itself and, if not, it will fall under the dominance of Russia. Europe cannot just expect the U.S. to protect it for free anymore. It has to contribute and learn how to protect itself.

The Trump Doctrine further reemphasizes the Monroe Doctrine claiming that the Western Hemisphere (Latin America) is a zone of U.S. interests, and the U.S. will intervene and protect its interests. A good example is the pressure put on Panama, threatening to take the canal back, unless Panama reduces Chinese presence in the country.

Finally, the Trump Doctrine targets China. For the Trump administration, China, not Russia, has become the major threat. For that reason, most of U.S. foreign policy will be designed to contain China and to stop Chinese influence globally.

- » Starting a new left-leaning movement
- » Raising awareness for women's freedoms
- » Seeking acknowledgment nationwide

Chapter 6

Discovering Dissent, Equality, and Diversity

American college campuses were a focal point and launching pad of efforts to institute change during the 1960s. However, the '60s weren't the beginning of *left-wing* politics (those embracing Socialist or liberal principles) in 20th-century America. Beginning with the struggle for decent wages and working conditions, labor unions were among the pioneers using direct action, such as strikes, to achieve their aims. People and organizations were also working for peace and integration before the '60s.

Prompted by recognition of social injustices, support for the civil rights struggle, and the struggle against the Vietnam War, students throughout the United States organized in the 1960s to further their causes. The two core organizations of the New Left were the free speech movement (FSM) in Berkeley and the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), which had chapters all over the country. This chapter looks at the ideas, goals, tactics, and battlegrounds of this left-wing movement.

In this chapter, you also find out about the powerful feminism movement and how women's lives began to change during the '60s. The publication of a landmark work, *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan; the participation of young women in the civil rights and antiwar movements; and the introduction of a new birth control method, "the Pill," combined with other factors to make women question their traditional place in this land of the free.

Although the civil rights and antiwar movements were at the forefront of the fight for economic, social, and political change during the 1960s, other individuals and groups mobilized against the status quo, pressing for more rights and freedom on their terms. Buoyed by the efforts and successes of other groups, Latinos, Native Americans, and gay and lesbian Americans refused to be ignored by the rest of the nation. Although these movements didn't reach their heights until the 1970s, their roots are firmly planted in the fertile soil of the 1960s and the powerful prevailing mood that encouraged people across the United States to believe that change was possible. You see just a bit of their grit in this chapter.

Birthing the New Left



REMEMBER

The New Left was a politically radical youth movement centered on college campuses that sought to correct social injustice in the United States. Although they were largely White and middle class, the students eagerly joined the civil rights movement, calling attention to the injustices of segregation and the plight of Black people and the poor. They also opposed the power of the *military industrial complex* (the cooperation of corporate and military interests) in the United States, but eventually the movement's main focus became the end of the Vietnam War.



REMEMBER

Red-diaper babies, who were children of progressive, politically active parents in the 1940s and 1950s, became some of the leaders of the New Left in the 1960s. Although many New Left activists had liberal parents, their methods still created a "generation gap." Most parents favored traditional methods of changing unjust laws (and worried about their kids' safety, as well as their futures).

GETTING CLEAN FOR GENE

The New Left adopted some of the more traditional methods of forwarding their agenda in 1968 and 1972, when Eugene McCarthy was vying for the Democratic nomination for president. To promote their antiwar candidate, many antiwar protesters cut their hair and rid their preppy duds of mothballs to "Get Clean for Gene." However, McCarthy was too liberal for most traditional Democrats and never received the nomination.



TIP

The New Left was “new” in that it wasn’t allied with the traditional labor movements as a means of creating change within society. Instead, these activists saw social activism as the agent of transformation of society. Though still leftists, liberals, and even radicals, they were less theory driven than the earlier liberals. Further, they avoided traditional methods of political persuasion, such as lobbying and petitioning congressional members, in favor of more active protests. They did actively campaign for candidates that backed their causes, however, both locally and nationally.

Also, the New Left embraced several points of view. Though some were alienated and cynical, others believed that American society was worth transforming and were willing to risk their education, future careers, and even personal freedom, in some cases going to jail to work for peace and justice.

Besides being inspired by the civil rights movement and its nonviolent protests (see Book 5, Chapter 5), student radicals were inspired by books and films that criticized conventional, middle-class life. More politically astute students were attracted to works of social criticism by people such as leftist writers Herbert Marcuse, Michael Harrington, and C. Wright Mills, who worked to expose economic and social injustices in the United States.

What were they fighting for?

Throughout the ’60s, New Left causes became larger and more intense. They ranged from the personal to the political, from the local to the national, and eventually, to the global concern for world peace.

Student issues

At first, student protests focused on issues that directly impacted their lives on campus. They demonstrated against and objected to a wide variety of issues, including

- » Dress codes
- » *In loco parentis* (in place of the parent) rules that imposed curfews
- » Limited dorm visits by the opposite sex (mainly in girls’ dorms)
- » Religious and racial discrimination in sororities and fraternities
- » Required courses that they considered irrelevant to real life
- » The rigid grading system
- » Same-sex dormitories

The military-industrial complex

Some of the more politically aware students also protested against university involvement with the military, especially as the Vietnam War escalated. Many campuses had large-scale demonstrations against military recruitment on campus and the presence of the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC). Across the country, New Left students also fought against university involvement in research that benefited the military-industrial complex and furthered the tensions in the Cold War. Though the student protest was aimed at the military, it created a rift between students and university administrators who looked favorably upon such research because it brought funding to the university.

Civil rights

At many northern, largely White campuses, many liberal students joined in the struggle for civil rights in the South. They went south to participate in voter registration drives, desegregation protests, and sit-ins at lunch counters. They were arrested and beaten, and some were killed. They marched on Washington, D.C., with Martin Luther King Jr. to show solidarity with Black Americans. In the segregated South, they witnessed poverty, discrimination, and violence firsthand for the first time.

An end to the war

The Vietnam War was also a personal issue for many of the student protesters. Besides being appalled at the undeclared war waged by their country, most young men in college were of draft age. Although many avoided recruitment with student *deferments* (which delayed military service while a person was a full-time student) and enlistment in the National Guard (and in some cases alleged medical problems), they were aware of and sometimes embarrassed by the fact that poor and minority groups were often bearing more than their proportionate share of the war burden. However, when the Johnson administration ended student deferments in 1966, opposition to the war and the draft became even more personal, and student anger over the war's escalation intensified.

Protesting with direct action

The New Left wasn't subtle. Using overt, public displays, they attracted press coverage, which made people aware of their concerns. Because New Left students believed that the establishment was corrupt, for the most part they ignored indirect actions, such as lobbying and working to elect favorable candidates. Instead, protesters during the '60s used direct action, which not only demanded immediate remedies for the problems they saw but also had the advantage of calling attention to their cause. Protest by direct action started with the labor

movement in the late 19th century, but throughout the 20th century, activists promoting various causes used direct action to advance women's suffrage, protest the treatment of veterans, and promote environmental issues.

- » **Protest marches:** One of the most visible methods of demanding change was massive protest marches and rallies with speeches and music. Marchers shouted, sang, carried signs, and talked to the crowd to convert others to their cause.
- » **Sit-ins:** During *sit-ins*, protesters occupied a building or public area to nonviolently protest an injustice or demand change, holding their ground until they were either forced out or their demands were met. During the civil rights movement, protesters often sat in at segregated, southern lunch counters and refused to leave. A variation of a sit-in was a lie-in, wherein demonstrators blocked public access by lying prone across a road or doorway.
- » **Civil disobedience:** *Civil disobedience* took protest up a notch, because protesters usually broke laws (normally ones that didn't threaten life and limb) to form a blockade or occupy a business or agency. Protesters were arrested if they refused to leave, and they learned how to react to arrest and resist attack.

PROTEST THROUGH THE NEW MILLENNIUM

The popular protest methods of the '60s have been used to promote various causes throughout the rest of the 20th century and into the new millennium. Almost every group — gays and lesbians, feminists, the religious right, pro-choice and pro-life activists, environmentalists, vegetarians, animal activists, and antiwar activists — has staged demonstrations at some time or another; they've all marched, rallied, sang, and spoke.

One of the largest 1960s-style demonstrations was the protest against the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle, Washington, in late 1999. The protesters came from all over the world and, representing a variety of causes, successfully disrupted the WTO meetings despite the Seattle rain and the police crack downs. The protests were largely peaceful, but a violent minority caused the Seattle police and National Guard to declare a state of emergency and use curfews, arrests, and tear gas. The news media coverage disproportionately covered the violent minority (to sell more papers), portraying the protesters as unkempt weirdos, but most were simply concerned citizens trying to keep environmental concerns and human rights in view in the rush toward a worldwide economy.

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More recently, in New York City, the Occupy Wall Street movement — which lasted from September to November of 2011 — protested against economic inequality, corporate greed, and the influence of corporations on government. The movement spread internationally, and their slogan “We are the 99 percent” referred to the disparity between the wealthy 1 percent and the rest of the population.

Fighting for free speech



REMEMBER

Although Berkeley has the reputation of being a haven for student radicals in the 1960s, most of their early protests were orderly and peaceful. Campus photographs at the beginning of the decade show students sporting crew cuts, ponytails (only on the girls), Oxford shirts, and penny loafers. Students were not only some of the best and the brightest but also the epitome of middle-class California. The free speech movement (FSM) arose as a reaction against Berkeley officials, who were pressured by some government and business leaders to stop students from actively working for civil rights and protesting the involvement of the military-industrial complex on campus. Perhaps if the officials hadn’t reacted so strongly to relatively mild student resistance, the massive demonstrations, sit-ins, and the occupation of the university administration building never would have happened.

Striking for civil rights

In 1963, Berkeley students banded together with Black activists to form a committee to protest hiring discrimination in the San Francisco hotel industry, where Black people were rarely employed as anything other than maids or janitors. The action’s objective was to create an intolerable situation for the hotels, forcing them to respond. Mario Savio, later one of the leaders of the FSM, was arrested in a sit-in at San Francisco’s Palace Hotel.



TIP

Willie Brown, who later became mayor of San Francisco from 1996 to 2004, was the lawyer for protesters who were arrested during the sit-in. The demonstrations were successful, resulting in an agreement guaranteeing greater opportunities for Black Americans. This success spurred students on to further political activity. They believed that by banding together for a just cause they could accomplish anything.

Exercising freedom of speech

Berkeley students used strikes in San Francisco to protest against the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). In response, the Berkeley administration

curtailed any political activity that might threaten the business community or jeopardize research money, including shutting down tables and booths where students distributed political literature. Even conservative students objected, and diverse student groups rallied on the basis of their First Amendment rights to protest the ban. The struggle escalated into civil disobedience, stirring speeches (see the sidebar “Mario Savio: Free speech leader”), arrests, and student suspensions.

The sit-in at Sproul

Berkeley students participated in a massive sit-in in and around Sproul Hall, the university’s administrative center, on December 2, 1964. They wouldn’t leave when the university chancellor and even the California governor ordered them to, and the police wound up arresting and carrying out 814 students to end the sit-in. The FSM leader Mario Savio called for a general strike, which virtually disabled the campus (see Figure 6-1).



FIGURE 6-1:
Mario Savio
rouses the
free speech
demonstrators.

Bettmann/Getty Images

JOAN BAEZ — THE VOICE OF FREE SPEECH

Folksinger Joan Baez was committed to social change, and her music reflected her concern with civil rights, equality for workers, freedom of speech and expression, and opposition to an unjust war. In 1964, she withheld 60 percent of her income tax from the Internal Revenue Service to protest military spending. Baez participated in the birth of the free speech movement at UC Berkeley and sang at several of the protests, including Stop the Draft Week in Oakland, where she was arrested.

MARIO SAVIO: FREE SPEECH LEADER

Mario Savio was one of the most recognizable leaders of the student protest movement. Savio's activism began during the summer of 1964, when he joined the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to register Black voters in Mississippi. On the Berkeley campus, he became a true activist leader, inspiring students and faculty to join the free speech movement (FSM). He became a media darling when his picture, standing on top of a police car and addressing thousands of students, hit the newspapers and the small screen.

In Savio's speech before the takeover of Sproul Hall, he said his most famous words: "There is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart that you can't take part, you can't even tacitly take part, and you've got to put your bodies upon the gears, and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus." This speech was a rallying cry for the FSM and for activism as a whole.

Eventually the administration and students came to terms that reversed student suspensions and limited the administration's power over political activity on campus. Yet the student protests at Berkeley were far from over as new issues gathered students' attention; by this time, Vietnam had begun to occupy student thoughts and efforts.

Berkeley meets the Haight

While Berkeley students protested on campus, the hippie counterculture teemed in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury neighborhood. Although they were against the Vietnam War and for civil rights, hippies were more interested in free love and drugs and a life free of materialism and middle-class values. Disagreeing with the strikes, sit-ins, and other methods of the Berkeley students about how to stop the war, they believed that music, love, "flower power," and a little bit of weed would be more effective. Eventually, however, the hippies joined with antiwar groups from all over the country to protest at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

... and Oakland

The Vietnam War also brought the Berkeley protesters into Oakland. In May 1965, protestors organized by the Vietnam Day Committee (VDC) marched to the Oakland army terminal to stop the trains taking soldiers on the first leg of their journey to Vietnam. The city of Oakland refused to give them a permit, but the VDC held the march anyway.

In October 1967, Berkeley again met Oakland during Stop the Draft Week, a nationwide effort to protest the continuing war in Vietnam. On October 16, Stop the Draft Week organizers led 3,000 protesters to the Oakland Induction Center to try to prevent new recruits from entering the building. Police formed a human barricade to enable inductees to pass and then arrested the demonstrators. However, the results were mostly symbolic. Protesters didn't stop one inductee from going to Vietnam.

At this point, the FSM went from protest to active resistance, because their protests hadn't had much effect — the war just kept escalating. Because the protesters had become more alienated from society as a whole, they were willing to be more militant. One of their objectives was to raise the cost of the war on the home front by creating civil unrest. Their position was that if the war continued, they would cause chaos in the streets at home.

People's Park

Despite the long-standing conflict between the administration and students at UC Berkeley, a dirt parking lot at Telegraph Avenue and Haste Street finally created an all-out war.

Turning a parking lot into paradise

Originally, People's Park was a piece of property that the university bought in 1968 in order to build new dorms. The university demolished some dilapidated houses that were there, but the dorms were never built. By sheer coincidence (accidentally on purpose?) the old wood houses were home to student radicals that were thorns in the administration's side.

By 1969, the Berkeley community, including UC Berkeley students, decided to make the old parking lot into a community park. Building the park was truly a joint effort by students, hippies, street people, activists, and ordinary citizens. They laid sod, planted trees, and built a playground. It was an ideal example of people working together to create something that could benefit everyone in the community.

Unfortunately, the park didn't please everyone. The university decided that because it legally owned the land, only it could decide what to do with the land. For about three weeks after the park was finished, the builders negotiated with the university, hopeful that they could reach a settlement that would please everyone. However, the administration abruptly stopped negotiations, sent in the police, and built a fence. Those who built People's Park were furious. They wondered why the authorities waited until all the hard work was finished before telling them they couldn't have their park. The battle was on.

Calling out the troops — Tragedy strikes

On May 15, Berkeley students quickly organized a rally at Sproul Plaza (in front of Sproul Hall, the university administration building) on the Berkeley campus to protest the fence. When a student leader said, “Let’s go down and take the park,” police turned off the sound system. Then, 6,000 people marched down Telegraph Avenue toward the park, but the police were waiting, armed with rifles and tear gas. Fire hydrants were opened, rocks were thrown, and the day descended into chaos and violence. When sheriffs’ deputies fired into the crowd, about 120 people were hospitalized, and a bystander, James Rector, died of gunshot wounds.

Eventually, supporters of People’s Park were the losers. The day after the shootings, Governor Reagan called out the National Guard and was reported to have said, “If there has to be a bloodbath, then let’s get it over with.” (See the sidebar “Death and Major Unrest on Campus Elsewhere in the U.S.” for a look at tragedies involving student protests and the National Guard.)

Helicopters sprayed tear gas on the protesters, and the Guard barricaded and occupied the city for several weeks, imposing a curfew and a ban on public assembly at the park. But mass demonstrations continued. Two weeks after the fence went up, a peaceful group of 30,000 marched to the park, but to no avail — the fence stayed up, and for the moment, active rebellion ended.

DEATH AND MAJOR UNREST ON CAMPUS ELSEWHERE IN THE U.S.

President Nixon had campaigned on a promise to bring the troops home, but after only a year and a half, the results were that the Vietnam War had expanded. On April 30, 1970, the previously secret bombing of Cambodia shifted into a ground-force invasion designed to stop the North Vietnamese supply lines. Nixon’s announcement of the invasion and *The New York Times* revelation of the earlier secret bombing campaign prompted national antiwar leaders to organize a national student strike. As the strikes occurred at campuses across the nation, some turned into tragic events.

At Kent State University in Ohio, protesters focused their wrath on the campus R.O.T.C. building, prompting the governor to dispatch National Guard troops. On May 4, 1970, Guard troops confronting a hostile crowd fired on the students, killing four. Of the four killed, two had been a part of the protest, and the other two had been walking by on their way to class. The killing of unarmed protesters sparked further protests across the country. More than 400 universities and colleges shut down. One hundred thousand protesters marched in Washington, circling the Capitol and the White House.

Shortly after the Kent State Massacre, another group of National Guardsmen stormed a college dormitory on the Jackson State College campus. Two unarmed young Black students were killed, and another 11 were wounded.

Over the next few months, hundreds of college campuses closed because of student strikes and demonstrations. Eighty percent of all college campuses reported some kind of protest in the wake of the massacres of unarmed students. A Gallup poll after the Kent State Massacre showed that campus unrest was one of the most important issues for many Americans.

Exposing the Feminine Mystique

The beginning of the '60s showcased women in frilly white aprons, spatula in hand and crying child on hip. But during World War II (1941–45), women left the sphere of house and home and adopted what had been considered male roles in society. They worked in factories and kept America running as the country's young men headed off to war. The famous image of Rosie the Riveter comes from this period. Other women joined the armed forces, and although they didn't have combat roles, they made great contributions to the war effort as nurses, motor mechanics, weather forecasters, air traffic controllers, and radio/telephone operators.

Women's lives in the '50s

However, when the war ended and the GIs returned home, many women were forced to leave their jobs to make room for the returning soldiers. Fast-forward a few years to the 1950s, when

- » **The World War II (male) veterans**, many of whom had been to college on the GI Bill, were earning good salaries. To accommodate these upwardly mobile families, suburban housing developments sprang up to provide safe and affordable housing.
- » **Middle-class White women**, lured by white picket fences, new labor-saving appliances, advertising and marketing messages, and the ideals presented on television, adopted the roles of mother, helpmate, and homemaker to the exclusion of almost everything else. In fact, this view of the proper role of middle-class women in society became so pervasive that society looked on a woman choosing to remain single or to successfully pursue a career as either a pathetic spinster or a cold dragon lady.



REMEMBER

The idyllic script for women's roles in society, of course, didn't apply to all women. Working-class and poor women of all races did just what they always did — worked to survive and provide their families with the necessities. Often the work was backbreaking, demeaning, or mundane, and the pay was much less than a man would receive for the same job. Sometimes working conditions were brutal and unsafe, and often treated as less than professional, thereby justifying the employers' desire to pay low wages and offer few benefits. For example, in the 1950s, Black women often worked as cleaning ladies for more well-to-do families. Though the work was difficult and demanding, the families they worked for didn't even have to provide social security contributions for them.

Early in the 1960s, suburban White middle-class women supposedly had it all. They didn't have to work, had lovely homes, beautiful children, attentive husbands, new cars, and an increasingly prosperous lifestyle. But even though life seemed heavenly, underneath it all, many of these women had vague feelings of uneasiness and boredom. They couldn't quite put their finger on it, but they had a sense that life must have more to offer than marriage, babies, and a well-ordered house.

Putting feelings into writing



REMEMBER

In 1963 Betty Friedan put those unspoken feelings in print with the publication of her book *The Feminine Mystique*, bringing to light the dark side of the domestic dream. After the book hit shelves nationwide, nothing was ever the same. According to Friedan, the *feminine mystique* was the mistaken theory that marriage, homemaking, and childbearing were the ways that women could fulfill themselves. She contended that the media and advertising were the creators and purveyors of that vision as a way of maintaining demand for consumer goods.

Friedan interviewed thousands of women for her book, many of whom spoke of something being missing from their lives. Friedan conveyed this feeling in her book's first chapter, titled "The Problem That Has No Name." Millions of women recognized themselves in its pages. They remembered who they were in college and in their short-lived careers and wondered where their bright, stimulated, and interesting selves had gone. *The Feminine Mystique* led women to examine their lives, and the results changed American society. When women reconnected with their less domesticated selves and demanded gender equality in the family, workplace, and government, they instigated social changes that continue into the next millennium.

Looking to the Government with Mixed Results

In the early 1960s, the federal government took steps to evaluate and eliminate sexual discrimination, particularly in the areas of employment. However, in spite of commissions and legislation, women's employment opportunities and pay lagged behind that of men.

Establishing a commission and legislating equal pay

In 1961, Esther Peterson, the highest-ranking woman in President John F. Kennedy's government as the assistant secretary of labor for women's affairs, recommended that the president create a commission to study discrimination against women and ways to eliminate it. That same year, Kennedy established the President's Commission on the Status of Women. The commission's 26 members were politically and professionally diverse and included educators, writers, leaders of women's organizations, union leaders, cabinet secretaries, and members of Congress. Under Kennedy's orders, federal departments and agencies provided the commission with the information it needed.

Eleanor Roosevelt, the former first lady, chaired the bipartisan President's Commission on the Status of Women. The commission focused on ways to eliminate discrimination and suggesting legislation and services to help women achieve equality. The group achieved some important objectives:

- » An executive order requiring equal employment opportunities for women in companies working under federal contracts.
- » Recommendations for changes in state laws that excluded women from jury duty and owning property or businesses, as well as laws limiting their legal control of their earnings.

In the early 1960s, a married woman's status was largely determined by what state she lived in. In some states, women could own property, start and run a business, and have complete power to manage their finances. But in other states, married women couldn't make contracts, buy or sell property, manage their money, or make wills without approval from their husbands.

- » A commission on the status of women in every state in the union.
- » Recommendations on issues concerning the availability of affordable day care, access to education, and wages.



REMEMBER

Passing the Equal Pay Act

By far the most important change for women during the Kennedy administration was the Equal Pay Act that President Kennedy signed in 1963. This legislation made it illegal to pay women less than men based on sex and put enforcement under the supervision of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Although the Equal Pay Act made it illegal for employers to pay less for the same work based on gender, they could still pay different wages based on experience, seniority, education, or merit. These differences, though valid for determining pay, also provided loopholes that made proving gender discrimination difficult.



REMEMBER

At the time Kennedy signed the Equal Pay Act in 1963, women's average income was far lower than men's, even for the same work. Management justified this discrepancy because

- » Historically, most women worked for a few years and then left their jobs to raise children. Therefore, employers were unwilling to invest time in training and developing women for high-level careers. They preferred to employ women in lower-paying occupations and usually didn't want to promote them out of the secretarial pool.
- » The conventional wisdom was that women didn't "need" the money — one day, they'd have a man to take care of them. So as the rationalization went, when a woman held a high-paying job, she was taking the position away from a man who needed the money to support his family.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Even today, women earn less than men in the same jobs. Sadly, in 2023 women earned only 84 cents to every dollar that men earned.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT

Though many people believe that the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), prohibiting sex discrimination, was a recent development, Alice Paul introduced the constitutional amendment, named the "Lucretia Mott Amendment" in 1923, stipulating that men and women should be treated equally. At that time, opposition to the amendment was mainly based on labor laws that were designed to protect women and children.

The women's movement of the 1960s revived interest in the ERA, which was supported by organized labor and other mainstream groups. In 1972, Congress passed the amendment, but only 35 states ratified the ERA (38 were required to pass the amendment).

As the 1979 deadline for ratification approached, NOW lobbied for a three-year extension, which Congress granted, but the amendment still didn't pass. The Equal Rights Amendment was reintroduced in Congress in 1982 and has been introduced in every session of Congress since then. Enough states finally ratified it by 2020, and on January 17, 2025, President Biden affirmed that the ERA is the 28th Amendment and the law of the land. As of this writing, however, the national archivists have not certified and published the ERA, and people opposed to it continue to argue against it on various grounds, such as that the time limit for ratification had already passed. The League of Women Voters blog at www.lwv.org/blog/equal-rights-amendment-law-land-0 has more details on what is preventing this amendment from appearing in the Constitution.

Women Coming Together to Build a Movement

As more women in the 1960s left the home and entered the world of jobs and professional careers, they discovered how legal and social structures worked against them. As women were confronted with discrimination in the workplace, education, government, and the military, the following factors came together and lit the spark for the women's movement in the mid-1960s:

- » **More women encountering workplace obstacles:** In 1950, about 31 percent of women were in the workforce; in 1960, about 35 percent were working; but by 1970, 42 percent of women worked outside the home.
- » **Expanding minds in college:** By the early 1960s, large numbers of women attended college, and the numbers were growing. Women were increasingly exposed to higher education and the accompanying professional expectations as well as the civil rights and student movements of the time (see the upcoming "Getting Radical" section in this chapter).

Organizing to take a stand — NOW

By 1966, frustrated that laws didn't change minds, women became more politically active. Some women decided that they needed to take their destinies into their own hands, so they formed the National Organization for Women (NOW) in order to take action on issues that were important to women. The organization was largely made up of educated, professional women who knew how to work inside the system in order to create change. Friedan, author of *The Feminine Mystique*, was one of the 30 original co-founders of NOW and was its first president. In the

beginning, the organization's main focus was ending discrimination and unequal pay in the workplace. However, their original statement of purpose also included other issues that were (and still are) important to women, such as

- » Full civil rights for women
- » Increased role in government
- » Equal educational opportunities
- » Society's recognition of the value of homemaking and childcare
- » Improving popular images of women in the media

Reflecting the professional status of its members, who were accustomed to working in corporations and functioning in committees, NOW was organized along traditional lines. It had elected, salaried officers, established local dues-paying chapters, and held national conferences. To create change, NOW lobbied legislatures, signed petitions, and filed discrimination lawsuits.

Getting radical

As the women's movement progressed, some women felt that changes weren't happening fast enough. NOW seemed too slow and conservative for some. Much of their dissatisfaction arose during the late '60s as an outgrowth of women's participation in the civil rights, free speech, and antiwar movements. While working with the associated groups, women came to distrust working within the "establishment" (through courts or legislation) and also learned methods of nonviolent protest and gained experience organizing rallies. This experience would serve them well through the 1960s and beyond when fighting for economic equality and reproductive rights.



TIP

In spite of their contributions, however, women who participated in these social and political movements realized that although they were on the front lines — often being arrested and sometimes beaten along with the men — they were still regarded as peripheral and were disregarded when important decisions were being made. They felt that they were still treated as second-class citizens by their male comrades-in-arms, often relegated to fetching coffee and making copies while men did the "important" work. It was obvious that the men of the New Left and sectors of the civil rights movement believed, quite literally, in the proclamation, "All *men* are created equal."

One concept that women took away from their years in the civil rights movement was that "the personal is political," which means that their personal lives reflected not only their own decisions but were highly influenced by society and the political climate. For example, radical feminists

- » **Worked toward overthrowing some of the institutions that they felt were oppressive**, forgoing NOW's view that women could achieve equality by bringing lawsuits, and lobbying for legislation.
- » **Tended to be more outspoken than the conventional activists** relying on petitions and lawsuits. They staged sit-ins and poetry readings, sang songs, and performed street theater to publicize their concerns.
- » **Spoke publicly about their private lives**, revealing information about their sexual preferences and activities. Some even went public about their illegal abortions. Although such actions turned off many traditionalists, they effectively brought feminism to the front of public consciousness.



REMEMBER

Radical feminism also changed the common language, bringing new terms such as “sexism,” “Ms.,” and “male chauvinist” (with or without pig) into common usage. They criticized the ideals of femininity that were portrayed in the media, believing that they were degrading to women, and also protested that women were regarded for their looks alone, rather than for their accomplishments. They were suspicious of marriage, believing that it was just a form of involuntary servitude, and some envisioned a society almost completely without men. As part of this feminist ideal, they felt that lesbianism was just as valid as a heterosexual partnership.

Using the “L” words: Liberation, love, and lesbianism

In looking at the problems of women in society, many feminists determined that Western patriarchal society was the cause of most social problems, such as violence, discrimination, and oppression against women. Some radical feminists came to the conclusion that men weren’t just a necessary evil but were, in fact, completely unnecessary.

A popular saying attributed to Gloria Steinem, writer, feminist, and founder of *Ms. Magazine*, goes, “A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle.”

Another concept that grew out of ’60s feminism was free love (actually, this idea wasn’t new at all, but feminists rejected the double standard and claimed the same sexual rights that men had). Due to the idea that women could enjoy sex without fearing unwanted pregnancy, there was no reason, other than patriarchal principles, why women couldn’t love whomever, whenever, and wherever they pleased.



REMEMBER

Along with sleeping with men, women also claimed the right to love other women. In time, the movement's acceptance of lesbianism fed the new gay liberation movement that began at the end of the '60s and is still active today. Some radical feminists, however, not only accepted the lesbian lifestyle but also embraced it as a political statement. They felt that any relationship with a man was "sleeping with the enemy" and consciously made the choice to have only lesbian relationships.

In NOW's early years, some leaders were afraid that backing lesbian rights would lose support for feminism, so lesbians were asked to stay in the closet. However, by 1968, Ti-Grace Atkinson, head of the New York City chapter, left the organization to protest its stand on lesbianism, and within a year, others followed. By 1971, NOW changed its position to support lesbian rights and after 1975, made it one of their main priorities to eliminate discrimination against gays and lesbians — currently NOW supports same-sex marriage.

Getting It On: The Power of the Pill

Historically, no matter how educated, hardworking, rich, or poor women were, pregnancy defined their lives. Unplanned pregnancies could interrupt educations, stall careers, and throw economically marginal families into poverty. As of May 9, 1960, the times began to change. On that date, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the use of a female oral contraceptive — called the *Pill*. Taken every day for three weeks followed by a one-week hiatus, the Pill completely stopped ovulation while a woman took it, which all but eliminated unplanned pregnancies. For the first time, preventing pregnancy was completely under a woman's control.



TIP

The term *women's liberation* was first used in March 1968 in a feminist newsletter; it was later abbreviated to women's lib.

Embracing planned pregnancy

After the Pill was approved in 1960, women quickly accepted it. In 1963, about 2.3 million American women were on the Pill. Fast-forward to 1967, and 12.5 million women around the world were using it.



REMEMBER

For married women, the decision of whether to use contraception was no longer up to their husbands or subject to error. Single women no longer had to fear becoming pregnant out of wedlock. Suddenly, women — married and single — had the opportunity to plan their own futures. They were able to pursue their careers without worrying about unexpected surprises.

Unleashing female sexuality

In one fell swoop, the Pill separated the physical aspects of birth control from lovemaking. Though both men and women felt the effects, the Pill psychologically helped women enjoy sex more when they could be sure that they wouldn't have unwanted pregnancies.

Many foresaw the "side effect" of the Pill and worried that without the fear of pregnancy, unmarried women would be more promiscuous — and in many ways, they were right. As more women took advantage of the freedom that effective contraception gave them, even respectable unmarried women were open about having sex, and in time, female sexuality lost the negative connotation it once had. Eventually, this new freedom gave rise to unmarried couples living together, later marriages, no-fault divorce, and single parenthood by choice, concepts that are quite commonplace today but were virtually unknown in 1960.



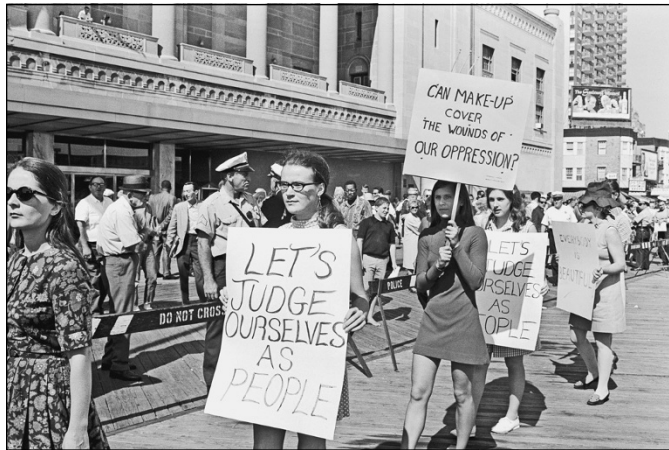
Although the sexual revolution wasn't in full swing until the 1970s, women's awareness of their sexuality, the availability of effective contraceptives, and the notions of personal freedom embraced by the hippies and the New Left encouraged people to explore new lifestyles. Also, censorship against sexually explicit material in books, films, and magazines was gradually easing. This revolution, which continued into the next millennium, was as much a willingness to flout convention and be open about sex as it was about having more premarital sex.

Raising Awareness and Consciousness

One of the most important results of women's demonstrations — such as picketing the 1968 Miss America Pageant to protest its emphasis on physical beauty as the most important feminine quality, as shown in Figure 6-2 — was nationwide awareness. This awareness came about thanks to the media coverage. Although much of it was negative and played on the most outrageous aspects of the demonstration (also featuring women that the press considered unattractive), it made people aware of women's lib.

The idea that women weren't sex objects had some far-reaching effects. As women became more common and powerful in the workplace, they refused to be pressured for sexual favors, sometimes at the expense of their jobs. Eventually, sexual harassment legislation was passed in almost every state, making it illegal to make unwanted sexual advances toward women.

FIGURE 6-2:
Feminists rise up
against the 1968
Miss America
Pageant.



Bettmann/Getty Images

To help women become more aware of their own feelings and enhance their relationship to other women, consciousness-raising groups sprang up all over the United States. At first, they were mostly a vehicle for exploring “the problem that has no name.” Meeting and talking with other women made women realize that they weren’t quite so alone in feeling isolated and overwhelmed.



REMEMBER

However, as consciousness raising began to spread beyond the middle-class suburbs, other issues emerged, such as the uneasy feelings that women experienced when men made rude remarks on the street, either critiquing their bodies or making unwanted sexual advances. They began to examine their feelings about their bodies and their sexuality. By talking together, women also began to realize that they weren’t valued for their minds or abilities.

In consciousness-raising groups, women also began to study their own history and realized that they had a far larger role in the progress of this country and the world than they had previously believed, in areas of labor, education, literature, and other fields.

- » By the mid-1970s, in response to demands to make curriculum more reflective of society and therefore more relevant, many campuses instituted women’s studies programs that not only explored women’s issues but also studied and celebrated women’s contributions to the arts, the sciences, and government.
- » Even at the elementary and high school levels, text books were rewritten to include a more balanced view of the role of women. Women’s studies were part of the same drive that created Black Studies programs — an effort to recognize the contribution of minorities to American history and culture.

Recognizing Other Movements

Although Latinos represented a substantial segment of the American population, especially in the western states, but they were paid substandard wages and were often exploited by their bosses and felt powerless to change their lot. However, inspired by the successes of the civil rights movement and led by Chavez, Latinos found their voice and began to demand fair treatment.

Another minority group inspired by the civil rights movement was that of American Indians. More than any other group, they believed that they had history on their side. These people weren't dragged to the United States as slaves nor did they immigrate, fleeing persecution or looking for a better life. They were on North American soil first, and the European conquerors stole their land and destroyed their way of life.

Gays and lesbians have also had an unhappy history of persecution in Western society. At best, gay and lesbian people were tolerated, as long as they didn't overtly show that they were gay. The 1960s witnessed an increased drive to publicly assert their sexual identity, and events at the end of the decade helped forge a full-fledged movement.

¡Sí, Se Puede! Cesar Chavez and Latino Activism



REMEMBER

During the 1960s, under the leadership and inspiration of Mexican American labor activist and leader of the United Farm Workers, Cesar Chavez (see Figure 6-3), Latinos united to claim the right to equality and dignity. *Si, se puede* — yes, you can — became the catchphrase for the times.

Moving from the fields to the picket line

Cesar Chavez, one of the most important Latino leaders in U.S. history, grew up knowing injustice after his family was swindled out of their Arizona home by unscrupulous Anglos. In 1938 California, the entire family worked the fields of the state before settling in the *Sal Si Puedes* (Get Out if You Can) barrio in San Jose, California. As a child, Chavez disliked school because his English was poor and he was forbidden to speak Spanish in class. He also didn't see how a formal education related to the life of a migrant worker, so he left school after the eighth grade.

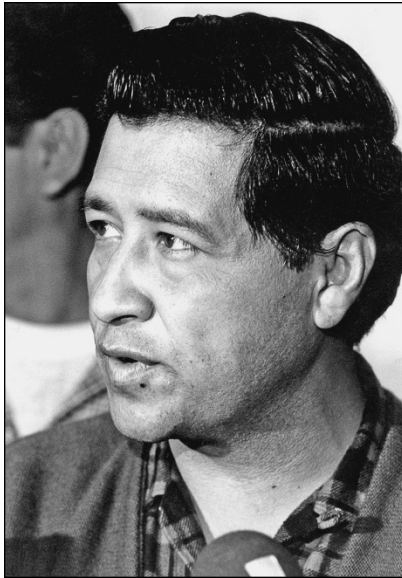


FIGURE 6-3:
Cesar Chavez,
one of the most
influential Latino
leaders in the U.S.

©Jason Laure/The Image Works

Later in life, Chavez came to believe that education provided a way for Latinos to get out of the fields and into mainstream American life. He educated himself by becoming an avid reader of everything from biography to philosophy and believed in using education to further the cause of humanity. One of Chavez's most famous quotes was,

"The end of all education should surely be service to others."

Influenced by Father Donald McDonnell and Fred Ross, community activists and organizers, Chavez learned about organizing strikes and nonviolent protests and realized that he could use this new knowledge to help his people. In 1952, Chavez joined the Community Service Organization (CSO), a Latino civil rights group that worked to register Mexican Americans to vote and also to fight discrimination. Eventually, he became the national director of the CSO and remained with the organization until 1962. Although he had successes in registering voters, getting farmworkers to stand up for their rights was a tough task — they were always afraid of losing their jobs.



REMEMBER

Before they unionized, agricultural workers barely earned a subsistence wage. Perhaps even worse, their working and living conditions were deplorable. Many of the farmworkers were migrant workers, who moved to follow the crops; after they harvested the crop in one location, they moved somewhere else to work another crop. Usually, migrants lived in camps with primitive living conditions — a lack of clean facilities, poor (if any) schools for their children, and no medical care.

Although some migrants were undocumented migrants, many were citizens. But regardless of their status, it was difficult to organize migrant workers in protest, first because they were on the move, but just as importantly because no matter how rough their lives got, migrants were unwilling to rock the boat and possibly lose the only jobs they had.

Brandishing the boycott

In 1962, Chavez founded the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA), the first farmworkers' union in the United States. At first, the union struggled to stay alive, because most migrant workers could barely put food on the table, much less pay union dues. However, Chavez persevered, organizing the farmworkers to fight for better working conditions and a living wage as well as bringing the problems of farmworkers to the public.

In 1965, the NFWA supported the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC), a Filipino farmworkers union, in a strike against grape growers. In March 1966, together with Dolores Huerta, another labor organizer, Chavez planned and led a march from Delano, California, to Sacramento to press for state laws allowing farmworkers to unionize and engage in collective bargaining. By the time they arrived in Sacramento, Schenley, one of the largest growers, signed an agreement allowing farmworkers to engage in collective bargaining. On August 22, 1966, the NFWA and AWOC merged to become the United Farm Workers (UFW), with the support of the American Federation of Labor–Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL–CIO).

One target of the UFW was the grape industry because labor conditions were particularly bad for workers in the vineyards and because grapes were a popular consumer product. The first grape boycott, which started in 1967 and lasted until 1971, encouraged people not to buy table grapes. The boycott gained the support of prominent labor leaders and unions, such as the United Auto Workers. In 1970, the UFW signed its first contract with a major grape grower.

Finding political support

Senator Bobby Kennedy was sympathetic to the farmworkers' cause and called for fair treatment for Hispanic agricultural workers. In 1968, Kennedy joined Chavez at a mass that ended his hunger strike, calling Chavez “one of the heroic figures of our time.”

For the rest of his life, Chavez worked to improve the lives of farmworkers, insisting that growers live up to and improve agreements with the union. Chavez and the UFW organized strikes and boycotts against grape and lettuce growers whenever contracts were violated and continually pressed for better wages and

working conditions for farmworkers. Chavez died on April 23, 1993, and almost 40,000 mourners marched behind the casket.

By using nonviolent methods of protest, Chavez and the UFW were able to organize tens of thousands of farmworkers and negotiate contracts giving them higher pay, family health coverage, pensions, and union hiring halls, which effectively ended discrimination in hiring. Amidst the turmoil of the sixties and the numerous civil rights and antiwar protests that had mixed results, Chavez and the farmworkers' unions had some impressive victories — due in part to the economic hardships that the boycotts and strikes imposed on the growers as well as the awareness and moral outrage that the peaceful protests aroused in ordinary citizens.

Leaving the reservation

Another minority group inspired by the civil rights movement was that of American Indians. European conquerors stole their land and, in essence, destroyed their way of life.

In 1969, the occupation of Alcatraz by American Indians pushed the history — and plight — of the group squarely in front of the rest of the American public. As a result, the move for American Indian self-determination gained wider support. The occupation of Alcatraz was the beginning of a political movement that is still going strong today.

Breaking into Alcatraz

Alcatraz was famous in American society as a prison for the worst of the worst. The last stop for such career criminals as Scarface Al Capone, Machine Gun Kelly, and Robert Stroud, the Birdman of Alcatraz, the small island on San Francisco Bay was the last place that anyone wanted to call home. The greatest Alcatraz legends are about inmates who tried to escape from “the rock” and brave the currents of the bay to swim to freedom. Officially, none ever succeeded (but some were never heard of again, so no one knows for sure).

After the prison closed in 1963, American Indians returned to Alcatraz to symbolically reclaim the island for the native people:

» In the first occupation in March 1964, five Sioux demanded to use the island as a cultural and educational center. The initial justification for this occupation was the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie, which promised to return surplus federal land to the American Indians who originally occupied it. The occupation lasted only a few hours, however, and United States marshals escorted them off the island.

- » The next occupation began on November 9, 1969, when a group of American Indians chartered a boat and returned to Alcatraz. Because many different tribes were represented in the occupation, they named themselves “Indians of All Tribes,” claiming the island for all American Indians.

Although the initial group left the island the same evening, they realized that they had begun a movement. During the next two weeks, Richard Oakes, the leader of the occupation, visited the University of California in Los Angeles and recruited approximately 100 American Indian students and others to join the Indians of All Tribes.

- » On November 20, the Indians of All Tribes returned to Alcatraz, where they stayed for more than 18 months. Richard Oakes, an articulate leader, was often identified as the chief of the Indians of All Tribes and was sometimes called the mayor of Alcatraz.

The protest became much more than a giant sit-in. The occupation forces actually established a viable community on the island. They elected a council to govern themselves, although all decisions were made by consensus. The council ran their community effectively, administering security, sanitation, day care, school, and housing.

Of course, the federal government had no intention of ceding the island to the “invaders” and insisted that the American Indians leave, but the tribes weren’t ready to give up. Although the U.S. government agreed to formal negotiations, they found the tribes’ demands intolerable — the American Indians wanted the deed to the island and planned to establish a university, cultural center, and museum on the site.

Building a fluid society

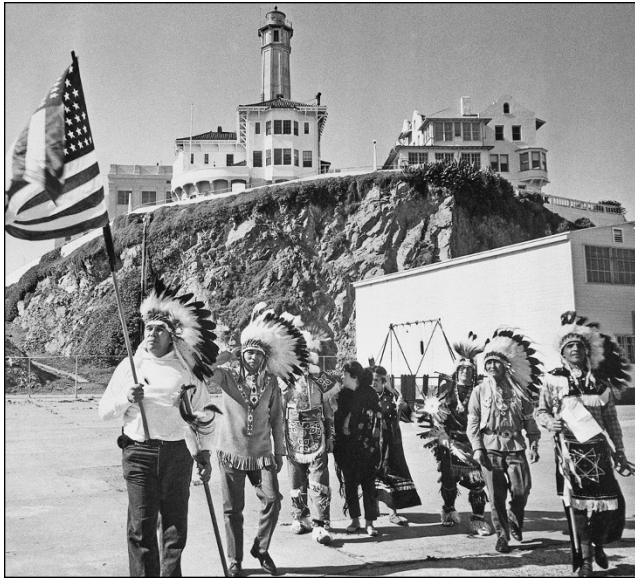
At the beginning, the American Indian society on the island was almost Utopian. When federal officials tried to blockade the island, sympathizers managed to get supplies to the protesters. However, by early 1970 the organization began to fall apart. Students left to return to school, and Indians from reservations and urban areas arrived to take their place. Attracted by the communal nature of life on the island, the hippies also arrived, bringing alcohol and drugs to Alcatraz. Then, when Oakes finally left the island after the death of his stepdaughter, the tribes had no effective leadership.



TIP

The community on Alcatraz (see Figure 6-4) began to reflect all the problems of society everywhere, and although the settlement lasted for another year and a half, it never recaptured its earlier idealism. During this period, the population was fluid — people came and stayed for several months, and others simply visited for a few days.

FIGURE 6-4:
American
Indians take
back Alcatraz.



Bettmann/Getty Images

Opening the Closet Door

As a result of the women's movement and the increasing overt nature of sexuality in the country, as well as the high visibility of the civil rights and antiwar movements, gay and lesbian people began to feel more comfortable about asserting who they were and demanding the right to be treated equally with other Americans. When women began exploring and enjoying their sexuality, they fostered a freer atmosphere for others to explore individual sexuality as well. And when gay people saw that other groups could press their agendas, they began to believe that they, too, could advocate for their rights. They were tired of being “in the closet,” pretending to be heterosexual in order to keep their jobs, families, and friends.

Gay people became less willing to be considered social outcasts, and by the late 1960s they began to demand equal treatment with heterosexual people. At that time, the main focus was on ending discrimination, decriminalizing sodomy and repealing other repressive laws, and changing the public view that being gay or lesbian is a sin. Today, however, the scope of gay activism has expanded to include freedom from hate crimes against gay people, equal employment and housing opportunity, the right to serve in the military, and official recognition of domestic partnerships and, most recently, gay marriage.

Rioting at the Stonewall bar

Before 1965, raids on gay bars were fairly routine. However, that year a politically involved gay activist — Dick Leitsch of the Mattachine society, a gay rights organization dedicated to improving the lives of gay people and working for equality — challenged the New York State Liquor Authority (SLA), which had a policy of taking away the liquor license of any bar serving three or more gay people at one time.

In 1966, after alerting the media, Leitsch held a “sip-in,” intending to have a drink with two other gay men at a bar. When the bartender turned them away, they complained to the city’s human rights commission. Embarrassed by press coverage of the event and its aftermath, the chairman of the SLA denied that the department prohibited selling liquor to gay people. The following year, the courts determined that the SLA couldn’t revoke a liquor license without evidence of violations (which didn’t include serving gay people).

However, on June 27, 1969, police thought they had a good reason to raid the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in Greenwich Village. The bar didn’t have a valid liquor license, had ties with organized crime, offered scantily clad boys as entertainment, and brought an unruly element to Sheridan Square. So that night, after 1 a.m., police raided the bar. Although many patrons escaped arrest, the cops nailed anyone without an ID or anyone who was cross-dressed.

The patrons were incensed, and the riot was on. Competing accounts of the chaotic event make it difficult to determine whether the riot was started by a drag queen clubbed by a policeman or a lesbian crowded into a squad car, but whatever the cause, the anger was contagious, and the crowd moved to overtake the police. The police tried to retreat into the bar, but when they grabbed and beat an innocent bystander, the violence escalated. Some rioters set the bar on fire, and others ripped parking meters from the sidewalk to use as weapons. Soon, not only were the patrons of the Stonewall lashing out but the entire neighborhood got involved in the melee. Even a tactical force sent in to quell the riot was unable to control the angry mob, who protested throughout the night.

The crowd returned for the next few nights. Although the violence lessened as the nights wore on, the protesters kept chanting “Gay power!” and were no less outraged at the way police had treated gays for years. After the Stonewall Riots ended, the gay community decided to turn their anger to positive change. By the end of July, the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) was formed in New York. The Stonewall Riots mobilized the gay community, who were no longer content to hide at the margins of American society and started newspapers, formed community organizations, and became politically active.



By 1970, the GLF had chapters across the country. In June, they held a march to commemorate the Stonewall Riots. Between 5,000 and 10,000 men and women marched from Greenwich Village to Central Park, which inaugurated the tradition of the gay pride celebration. Today, in many American cities, Pride parades are normally held on the last weekend in June to honor the Stonewall Riots and celebrate the gay lifestyle. Although most major legislation wasn't passed until the 1970s and later, the progress of gay rights started in the 1960s.

The battle over gay rights today

By the end of the 20th century, most states had repealed their sodomy laws, and the remaining states declared these laws unconstitutional in 2003. Today, many companies and local governments prohibit hiring or housing discrimination based on sexual orientation and ban sexual harassment. Several states have passed domestic partners legislation, which extends health benefits to unmarried partners and protects their rights in case of illness or death.

The Respect for Marriage Act (2022) legally requires the federal government and all states to recognize valid same-sex marriages. Another important piece of legislation enacted by several states categorizes gay bashing as a hate crime, and the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act (2009) allows the prosecution of crimes motivated by prejudice against the victim's (real or perceived) race, color, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability.

Despite the progress of gay rights, the fight is far from over. Today shows more widespread acceptance of gay rights, but they're still opposed by a number of religious and politically conservative groups who believe that the Bible considers same-sex unions a sin and that marriage should only be between a man and a woman.

3 The Wars That Influenced the Shape

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IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Laying a foundation for freedom
- » Fighting for independence from Britain
- » Reviewing important events of the war
- » Getting new rules and new leaders
- » Recognizing the war's impact on the American people

Chapter **1**

A Revolutionary Story

Before the Europeans could visit the American continents, form colonies there, and eventually create the United States of America, they had to make it through a whole lot of changes. These changes ran the gamut from new ways of looking at religion to different kinds of governing. The two issues rarely stayed out of each other's way. And the forces of economics, politics, and varying methods of worship combined to push Europeans, particularly those from England, Spain, and France, into a fierce competition to dominate the New World.

In this chapter, you discover how the American colonists became the Americans of a new country — the United States of America. You see their frustrations and the preparations that led to the call for independence from Britain, get an overview of the strategic events that ended in a victory for the colonists, and discover the effects that all this *revolutionary* change had on the people who lived in America.

Setting the Stage for Independence

The following three characteristics of life in the New World laid the foundation for a society that was ready to take the reins of government, religion, and economy:

- » **Escaping persecution and finding profits:** As England came to dominate the portion of the North American continent now recognized as the United States, settlers took different approaches to settling. Some came to escape religious persecution in the Old World and establish their own little pieces of heaven on earth. Others came for money — or at least the profits that might be made in the new land.
- » **Fighting the New World natives and the Old World folks:** Given the fact that Europeans in the 17th and 18th centuries were almost always fighting with each other, it was probably dismally inevitable they would end up at war with the people already in America when they arrived. Also, early efforts by the various colonies to form alliances — and early rebellions against authorities representing the home country — led to an inevitable need to break away from Europe.
- » **Growing up fast:** Britain's American colonies exploded during the first half of the 18th century, in more ways than one. There were spurts in population, economic prosperity, and political clout, all of which were positive signs that things were going well for the colonists.



REMEMBER

But negative growth occurred as well: The population of kidnapped and enslaved Africans soared. A series of world wars, some of them (such as King William's War) directly involving America, took place. When the final war ended (the French and Indian War), British America had rid itself of the threat posed by the French Empire and was ready to confront a new threat — posed by Britain.

Divorcing the Mother Country

The American colonies generally came out of the French and Indian War (1754–1763) in great shape. Millions of acres of virgin land had been won from the French and were ripe for settling. The mother country, Great Britain, was the most powerful nation on earth.

But lurking below the façade of Britain's greatness were enormous war debts that had to be paid. Because the colonies benefitted from Britain's protective cloak, British officials expected the colonists to help pick up part of the bills.

The colonists thought otherwise. A series of taxing efforts by Parliament resulted in a series of downright surly responses from Americans:

» **Warming up for war:** For five-plus years, America and Britain had managed to confine their differences to rhetorical battles and bloodless economic boycotts. But the conflict took a decided turn toward violence: a massacre in Boston (March 5, 1770), followed a few years later by a tea party (December 16, 1773). See the section “Key Events of the American Revolution,” later in the chapter.

Then a group of Americans from 12 of the 13 colonies got together in Philadelphia to compare notes and ask the king to knock it off. But tensions grew, until on a crisp clear morning in April 19, 1775, a shot was fired — and heard ‘round the world — as the battles of Lexington and Concord began the American Revolution.

» **Declaring independence:** Even after the shooting began at Lexington and Concord, many Americans and Britons held out hope that some kind of reconciliation could be reached before too much more blood was shed. But the American leaders hedged their bets by setting up an army and picking the best general they could find to lead it — even if no one realized they were making such a good pick at the time.

More battles blazed, and the chances of reconciliation between the colonies and Britain dimmed. A scuffling writer newly arrived from England named Thomas Jefferson fanned the flames for a complete break from Britain. In July 1776, America declared its independence in what is one of the most important political documents in human history.

Winning a war . . .

The opposing sides of the American Revolution certainly looked like a mismatch: the most powerful country on earth (Britain), with one of the most experienced and professional military organizations, versus a collection of 13 disorganized colonies that had to basically start from scratch to build an army and navy — and had very few raw materials to start with.

America did have at least one thing going for it, in the person of a military leader who had limited military skills but seemingly unlimited determination. George Washington would need every bit of that determination to win a war against Great Britain.



TIP

The American Revolutionary War didn't occur just in America but was actually a world war, involving at least a half-dozen nations fighting on several continents, from India to the Caribbean. Being required to fight on fronts all over the globe greatly hampered Britain's efforts to hold on to its American colonies.

... While fighting among themselves

Although the Revolutionary War was a worldwide conflict, it was also a domestic civil war. Many Americans opposed independence from Britain, for a wide variety of reasons. The difference of opinions had tragic consequences, pitting neighbor against neighbor and even splitting families. The section "Fighting the War at Home," later in this chapter, tells about the effects of the war on the new Americans.

The war and the struggle for independence affected various groups of Americans, including women, African Americans, and Native Americans, and each group had roles to play in the fight and its aftermath. Some Americans actually exploited the war effort for financial gain, which nurtured resentment among the men fighting the war — but they continued to fight.

Key Events of the American Revolution

Offering a comprehensive look at the American Revolutionary War is beyond the scope of this chapter, but this list gives you a chronological look at relevant events that took place before, during, and after the conflict that created a new nation:

- » **July 10, 1754: First efforts at uniting the colonies.** Delegates from several colonies meeting at Albany New York agree to the formation of a permanent union for purposes of mutual defense, expansion to the west, and dealing with Native Americans. Colonial assemblies, however, reject the plan.
- » **Feb. 10, 1763: The Treaty of Paris** goes into effect, ending the French and Indian War. Britain gets all of Canada, all of America east of the Mississippi River, Florida, and some Caribbean islands. It cements Britain's place as the most powerful nation in the world.
- » **March 22, 1765: Parliament passes the Stamp Act**, requiring government-issued paper stamps or prestamped paper for almost all legal documents as well as everything printed on paper. The act is bitterly resented and all but ignored in the American colonies.

- » **Nov. 1, 1768: British troops arrive** in Boston in an effort to quell civil disturbances.
- » **March 5, 1770: The Boston Massacre** occurs when British troops fire on a crowd in a Boston street. Five citizens are killed and six wounded. The incident inflames resentment among Americans about the presence of British troops.
- » **Dec. 16, 1773: The Boston Tea Party** takes place when men wearing Native American disguises board three British ships in Boston Harbor and dump hundreds of pounds of tea into the water, as a protest to British duties imposed on the tea. The action outrages British officials, who retaliate by closing Boston Harbor to all shipping.
- » **Sept. 5, 1774: The First Continental Congress** begins meeting in Philadelphia. Delegates endorse a boycott of British goods and agree to meet again in May 1775 if things aren't better.
- » **April 19, 1775: The war begins.** American militia clash with British troops at the Massachusetts towns of Lexington and Concord, marking the beginning of the American Revolutionary War.
- » **May 10, 1775: The Second Continental Congress** convenes at Philadelphia.
- » **Jan. 10, 1776: Thomas Paine publishes *Common Sense*,** a pamphlet urging the colonies to break free from British dominance. The pamphlet becomes a huge best-seller.
- » **July 4, 1776: The *Declaration of Independence*** is approved by the Second Continental Congress.
- » **Aug. 27, 1776: The Battle of Long Island** takes place, and American forces under Gen. George Washington are routed. Washington narrowly escapes capture and is eventually forced to retreat into Pennsylvania.
- » **Dec. 25–26, 1776: Washington crosses the Delaware River;** it's a daring move across the ice-choked water on Christmas night. He surprises a force of German mercenary soldiers at Trenton, New Jersey. The victory, along with another win a few days later at Princeton, are huge boosts to flagging American morale.
- » **Oct. 17, 1777: More than 5,000 British troops surrender** at Saratoga, New York. The U.S. victory sparks Congress to pass the Articles of Confederation, creating a new U.S. government.
- » **Feb. 6, 1778: France formally recognizes the United States of America** after being impressed by their victory at Saratoga. France accompanies this recognition of the U.S. as an independent nation by agreeing to join forces against Britain.
- » **Jan. 17, 1781: The Battle of Cowpens in South Carolina** ends with American troops smashing a British force thanks to a clever ruse by Gen. Daniel Morgan.

- » **Oct. 19, 1781: A large British force surrenders at Yorktown, Virginia.** The troops, under the command of Gen. Charles Cornwallis, are hemmed in by U.S. and French forces. The U.S. victory effectively ends the American Revolutionary War, in America anyway.
- » **Sept. 3, 1783: Spain, France, and America sign separate peace treaties** with Britain in Paris. Final ratification of the treaties is completed by May 1784.
- » **Dec. 23, 1783: George Washington resigns his commission** as commander in chief of the American army, giving up the opportunity to assume any role as a de facto U.S. monarch.
- » **Sept. 17, 1787: A new constitution for the United States** is approved by a convention of delegates. In July 1788, New Hampshire becomes the ninth state to ratify the document, which goes into effect March 4, 1789.
- » **Feb. 4, 1789: George Washington becomes the first U.S. president.**
- » **Dec. 15, 1791:** Virginia ratifies the Bill of Rights, thus putting the first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution into effect.
- » **July 7, 1798: America begins an undeclared, or *quasi*, war with France,** over unpaid Revolutionary War debts and what amounted to the solicitation of a bribe by French officials to open negotiations. The “war” ends in September 1800.
- » **July 14, 1798: Congress passes the Sedition Act,** which makes it a crime to print or voice remarks about the federal government or federal officials that are deemed “malicious.” Fourteen individuals, all of them members of the Democratic-Republican Party and most of them journalists, are jailed under the act. The act becomes a major issue in the presidential election of 1800 and helps lead to the election of Thomas Jefferson. The new president pardons those convicted under the act.
- » **March 4, 1801: Thomas Jefferson, the Democratic-Republican Party candidate, becomes the third U.S. president,** succeeding Federalist Party presidents Washington and John Adams. Jefferson’s assumption of office is significant, among other reasons, for marking a peaceful transition of power from one political party to another.

War’s Over — Now Comes the Hard Part

Winning the war was only part of the American Revolution. Now a collection of 13 once-dependent colonies had to form some kind of independent nation. An awkward period existed between the Battle of Yorktown, which ended the major

fighting, and the gathering in Philadelphia to create a government system Americans could live with. Steps toward an American government included

- » **Sorting out the Founding Fathers:** Before getting to Philadelphia and the Constitutional Convention, you should know that a controversy exists among historians as to who deserves the title Founding Fathers or whether the term is meaningful. But the historians can seem to agree that these men would deserve the title (if anyone does): George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, Benjamin Franklin, John Jay, James Madison, and John Adams.
- » **Drafting new rules — and selling them:** It was a long, hot summer of debating, arguing, writing, rewriting, and re-rewriting. The result was the U.S. Constitution, a blueprint for a new system of government. But coming up with the document was only half the battle. The other half involved selling the idea to the American people and then drafting a Bill of Rights to sweeten the deal.
- » **Getting government off the ground:** The men who drafted the Constitution were reasonably thorough about establishing the legislative branch of the new government. But they left some sizeable blanks to fill in when it came to the executive and judicial branches. George Washington (the first president) wanted to make sure that the president's office as chief executive was one that people respected, but didn't worship. And the Senate took the reins to begin working to establish the judiciary branch (under the Supreme Court) in July of 1789.
- » **Picking fights over presidents and parties:** Choosing George Washington for president was easy; choosing his first two successors (John Adams and Thomas Jefferson) was pretty messy, mostly because of the convoluted process established by the Constitution. During this time, the beginning of the two-party political system also took place.

Fighting the War at Home

America's independence was ultimately won not by the actions of a few extraordinary individuals, but by the efforts and sacrifices of hundreds of thousands of "ordinary" people. The impact of the struggle on various groups within the country, however, and their reactions to it, varied widely.

This section takes a closer look at how the war affected, and was affected by, women, African Americans, Native Americans, and those who stayed loyal to Britain (the Loyalists). It also examines how greed, indifference, and political incompetence made a difficult time much more difficult for the common soldier.

Remembering the ladies

It is an inescapable fact that there were no “Founding Mothers,” at least not in the sense the term “Founding Fathers” is used to describe the male leaders of the American Revolution. No women served in Congress, signed the Declaration of Independence, or helped draft the Articles of Confederation or U.S. Constitution.

Although specifics varied from state to state and sometimes from community to community, women during this period generally had little legal standing. So tiny was their role in politics that even to suggest having a larger one was a subject of great humor — at least to men.

When Abigail Adams wrote her husband John in 1776 to “remember the ladies” while drafting the fledgling country’s new government, he replied, “I cannot help but laugh . . . Depend upon it. We know better than to repeal our Masculine systems.”

To a colleague, however, John took a more serious, if just as chauvinistic, tone. Extending the right to vote too widely under the new government would open a Pandora’s box of universal demands: “There will be no End to It. New Claims will arise. Women will demand a Vote.”

Women laboring on the home front

Women could and did enter the political arena insofar as writing letters, circulars, and tracts, and helping to operate lines of communication and information. And as in all great wars, it fell to women to do everything but fight to keep things going. When Americans quit buying machine-made cloth from England, for example, American women had to make it by hand.

“I rise with the sun and all through the long day I have no time for aught but my work,” wrote a Connecticut farmer’s wife whose husband was off to the war. Even during family prayer time, she admitted, her mind was on “whether Polly remembered to set the sponge for the bread, or put water in the leach tub or to turn the cloth in the dyeing vat . . .”



REMEMBER

Less specific but more important, women were expected, at least in Patriot families, to infuse the children with the spirit of representative democracy and the value of individual liberty. It was a task that historian Linda Kerber labeled “republican motherhood,” and political leaders urged Revolutionary-era men to remind their spouses of its importance. “Let their husbands point out the necessity of such conduct,” wrote Christopher Gadsden of South Carolina, “that it is the only thing that can save them and their children from distresses, slavery and disgrace. . .”

And making efforts beyond politics

Other contributions by the women during the American Revolution include:

- » **Bearing the brunt of wartime shortages and other hardships.** It also fell to women to bear the losses of men who would not come home from the fighting, as well as steel themselves to send off their husbands and sons to war — or go themselves.
- » **Serving as nurses, cooks, seamstresses, and laundresses to the various militias and Continental Army.** General Washington wasn't keen on the practice because the women had to be fed precious rations. They also often hitched rides in supply wagons, slowing things down. But his own wife, Martha, often traveled with him, so Washington did not order his commanders to ban women entirely from the army camps.
- » **Raising funds for the troops.** One group of three dozen Philadelphia residents were so persistent in raising funds for the army, a Loyalist complained that “people were obliged to give them something to get rid of them.” They ultimately raised the staggering modern-day equivalent of \$300,000.

Tampering with the slaves

One of many ironies of the American Revolution was its fight for personal liberties while continuing to embrace the institution of slavery. The Founding Fathers were well aware of this knotty problem but incapable of untying it.

A stark and telling example of the hypocrisy in the situation was Thomas Jefferson. A slaveowner, Jefferson had blasted King George in the original draft of the Declaration of Independence for waging “cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life & liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery,” and for not allowing the colonies to end the slave trade.

The section was deleted, however, at the insistence of Southern states' representatives. And two years later, as governor of Virginia, Jefferson signed a bill offering land, money, and “a healthy sound Negro” for anyone enlisting in the Virginia militia for the duration of the war. Even antislavery figures, such as John Adams, privately counseled that the abolition issue should be sidestepped for fear of driving Southern states out of the colonies' shaky coalition.

Fighting for freedom on the American side

The half-million Black slaves knew what the fight raging around them was all about: Of 289 slaves and former slaves who enlisted in the Connecticut militia,

23 gave surnames of Liberty, Freeman, or Freedom. In applying for a military pension years after the war, Private John Grant wrote that “when [he] saw Liberty Poles and the people all engaged for the support of freedom, [he] could not but like and be pleased with such things . . .” (He did not get his pension, Congress deeming that since he was a fugitive slave at the time, he did not merit one.)



REMEMBER

George Washington initially banned the enlistment of any more African Americans in the Continental Army, not wanting to arm them, but the simple fact was that the Americans needed every man they could get to fight, and Washington soon rescinded his ban and let free Black men serve. By the end of 1777, slaves were also allowed to enlist. In fact, some slaveowners facing their state’s draft sent slaves in their place.

Washington’s change of heart was spurred by another reality: The British were openly inviting slaves to join up and fight for the king — and their own freedom.

Luring slaves to the Loyalist side

The royal governor of Virginia, John Murray, Lord Dunmore, issued a proclamation in November 1775, offering freedom to every slave who agreed to enlist in what Dunmore called his “Ethiopian Brigade.” As many as 800 slaves took Dunmore up on his offer, including a 35-year-old native of the African nation of Gambia. His name was Harry Washington, and he had fled from a plantation, where he worked in the stables. The plantation was called Mount Vernon.

“There is not a man among them (the slaves) here but would not leave us, if they believ’d they could make their Escape,” Mount Vernon’s manager, Lund Washington, wrote to his cousin, the plantation’s owner George Washington.

Dunmore’s proclamation sent shudders throughout the South. In “tampering with the Slaves,” James Madison wrote a friend, Dunmore had hit on the Southern states’ greatest weakness, “and if we shall be subdued, we shall fall like Achilles, by the hand of one that knows the secret.”



REMEMBER

Actually, the British had no intention of freeing slaves to any great degree. Dunmore’s proclamation applied only to the slaves of those who supported the Rebel cause. Slaves who ran away from Loyalist masters were returned to their owners. While as many as 20,000 slaves took the opportunity to flee to British “protection” during the war, relatively few found freedom.

“Tis only changing one master for another,” wrote John Cruden, a North Carolina Loyalist official who oversaw the confiscated estates of plantation owners on the American side. “Let it be clearly understood that they (slaves) are to serve the King for ever, and that those slaves who are not taken for his Majesty’s service are to remain on the plantations, and perform, as usual, the labors of the field.”

Those who were taken for “his Majesty’s service” worked as valets for British officers, dug latrines, took care of livestock, and generally performed many of the same tasks they had as slaves. Many were abandoned when the British army moved on, and many of those died of recurring smallpox epidemics or starved to death.

In the end, perhaps as many as 5,000 African Americans served in the American forces, while perhaps 20,000 served on the British side.

Fleeing to freedom

As the war ground to an end, thousands of slaves who had fled their bondage wound up in British-held New York City, including George Washington’s slave Harry. As slave owners descended on the city to claim their “property” in the summer of 1783, British clerks entered the names of 2,775 African Americans in what was called The Book of Negroes.

The slaves whose names were in the book were among those who had, with the aid of the British government, escaped to Canada, England, or elsewhere. Washington later ordered the book seized so that owners of slaves listed in it could petition Congress for compensation.

Harry Washington went first to Nova Scotia and then to an area in what is now the African country of Sierra Leone, established by the British as the “Province of Freedom.” About 1,200 former Black slaves settled there. As if to bring the saga full circle, Harry Washington led a rebellion against the British over unfair taxation and was eventually banished to another section of Sierra Leone.



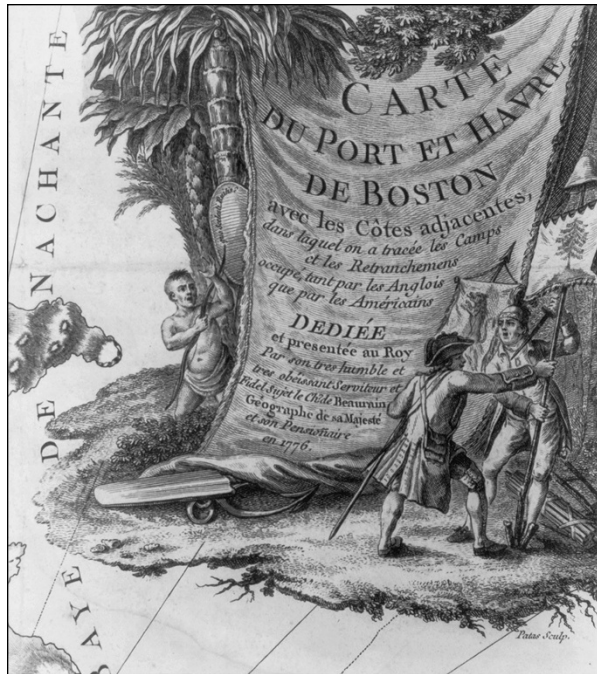
REMEMBER

Despite the exodus of thousands of former slaves, America actually had more people in chains at the end of the war than at the beginning, mostly because of a high birth rate among slaves. By 1807, when Congress outlawed the importation of slaves, there were more than four million already in the United States.

Watching strange Englishmen kill each other

One group that was destined to lose no matter how the American Revolutionary War came out was Native Americans. The British were no more likely to keep the colonists from encroaching on lands promised to the tribes than they had been before the war. Americans’ push west would only be accelerated if they won. As Figure 1-1 depicts, all the Indian nations could do was watch the two sides fight over land that didn’t belong to them.

FIGURE 1-1:
A French engraving showing an American Patriot and Loyalist fighting over the deed to America, while a Native American looks on.



Library of Congress

"O, strange Englishmen kill each other," a baffled Seneca chief observed. "I think the world is coming to an end."

Getting pressure from both sides

At the time of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, an estimated 200,000 Native Americans lived east of the Mississippi River, in about 85 nations. The instinct for many of the nations was to stay out of the fighting between the whites. "We are unwilling to join on either side," an Iroquois chief smoothly told the Patriot governor of Connecticut, "... for we love you both — Old England and New."



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Indian neutrality was fine for the Americans. In 1775, the First Continental Congress had sent representatives to meet with the powerful six-tribe Iroquois Confederacy, at Western Pennsylvania's Fort Pitt. The congressional delegates told the tribes that while King George was a good guy, his counselors were "proud and wicked men" who "tell us they will slip their hand into our pockets without asking." After a second meeting, the Iroquois nations agreed "not to take any part; but as it is a family affair, to sit still and see you fight it out."

But pressures mounted to forgo neutrality and side with the British. The U.S. cause wasn't helped by language in the Declaration of Independence that described Indians as "merciless savages, whose known rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions."

In late 1775, a Mohawk leader, Thayendanegea, who dressed in English clothes and was better known by the name Joseph Brant, went to England to meet with war minister Lord Germain and enlist British logistical support and supplies. Germain was happy to oblige: "The dread the people of New England and company have of a war with the savages proves the expediency of holding that scourge over them," Germain wrote.

Ignoring Native American independence

What neither the British nor the Americans fully grasped was that the structure of the Iroquois Confederacy was such that individual tribes, and even individual members within tribes, were free to fight on either side, or not. Americans and Britons, used to government by consensus and not pure democracy, didn't get it.

As a result, some of the Six Nations fought for the British while others fought alongside the Americans, and at least one tribe, the Onondaga, tried unsuccessfully to stay out of it.

In the South, the situation was much the same. British agents, such as the half-Creek Alexander McGillivray, convinced some tribes to fight on the British side, whereas other tribes tried to avoid the war or fought only when attacked by American forces who failed or refused to differentiate among the Indian nations.

Absorbing the aftermath

The American victory and subsequent peace treaty that the British agreed to basically hung the Native Americans out to dry. Lands that the British had once guaranteed to the tribes were given to the Americans, with no guarantees that the Americans would give any of them back. The new British prime minister, William Petty, the Earl of Shelburne, tried to put a veneer of concern on the sell-out, saying the tribes "were not abandoned to their enemies," but "they were remitted to the care of (their American) neighbors, whose interest it was as much as ours to cultivate friendship with them" But the tribes didn't buy it, and a tribal leader told British officials, "Pretending to give up (our) country to the Americans without our consent . . . was an Act of Cruelty and Injustice that only the Christians were capable of doing."

In the fall of 1783, tribal representatives met twice with an American delegation led by the young Frenchman Marquis de Lafayette. Lafayette had been chosen by Washington to lead the delegation because the French had historically enjoyed good relations with many of the tribes.

Lafayette, however, reminded them they had been warned not to fight Americans, and that the “great General Washington” (whom the Iroquois had named Town Destroyer for the many villages burned under his orders) had won the war, and therefore didn’t have to bargain. The tribes agreed to cede sizeable tracts of land in return for promises of fair treatment in the future and profitable trade agreements. The reality turned out to be something far different — and far more tragic — for most tribes.

Ratcheting up the persecution of Tories

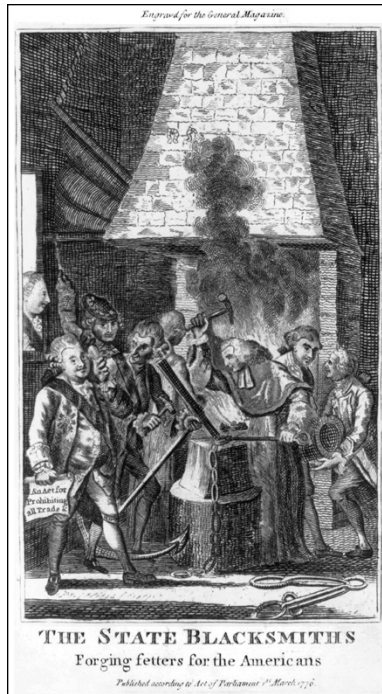
In the early stages of the Revolution, differences between Patriots and Loyalists (also called Tories) generally ranged from social ostracism and bullying to beatings and vandalism. But by the time of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, *Tory-hunting* became a more serious pastime.

Neighbors forced neighbors to sign loyalty oaths to the cause of independence. Houses were searched to see whether their occupants were abiding by the boycotts of British goods. Longtime grudges within communities were settled, with patriotism as the excuse, paranoia about loyalty ran so deep that at the Second Continental Congress, some delegates, including James Madison, suspected Benjamin Franklin of being a British spy.

States passed various laws to formalize ill treatment of Loyalists. Wishing good things for the king became a crime in Virginia. In Connecticut, public allegiance to the crown could get you hanged. By the end of the war, New York had proclaimed that Loyalists weren’t entitled to collect legally owed debts from Patriots.

The seeming contradiction of a fight for freedom that embraced repressive civil and government actions was not lost on British newspapers, as shown in Figure 1-2. Or as a Maryland congressman mused with no little irony, “It is a strange freedom that is confined always to one side of the question.”

FIGURE 1-2:
Captioned “The
savages let
loose, or The
cruel fate of the
Loyalists,” this
British cartoon
shows American
“natives”
murdering
their Loyalist
countrymen.



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IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Taking a look at the big picture
- » Discovering the events that led to civil war
- » Examining secession and the Confederacy
- » Looking at the war's military side

Chapter 2

Irreconcilable Differences: The American Civil War

Since the founding of the United States, different sections of the country had interests and priorities that competed with the interests and priorities of other sections. These conflicts had always been resolved through politics (usually some form of congressional dealmaking).

However, beginning in the 1850s, the political process for resolving these disputes became less and less effective. The differences between sections of the country were so great at that time that the survival of the union of states was in danger. Peace depended upon compromise and conciliation between congressional leaders representing each section. This chapter examines the sectional differences between the North and South that led to such a dangerous situation and provides some background to the controversies that led to the Civil War. The chapter also presents a brief look at the military leadership and major battles of the Civil War.

The Big Picture: War and Politics

Wars have many causes. No one should ever forget that wars are fought for political reasons and objectives. Essentially, people or nations go to war to protect a vital interest, to defend territory from an aggressor, or to achieve a moral purpose (such as defending the innocent and punishing an evil). The Civil War included all these rationales. Each side used all three justifications for fighting the other during the four years of war. Each side also had a strong, compelling, substantial reason for doing so.



TECHNICAL
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You hear the word *civil* in such terms as *civil rights*, *civilian*, and *civil liberty*, and they all relate to the concept of a common citizen, a member of society, and a state. A *civil war* occurs between citizens representing different groups or sections of the same country. Civil wars are unique in the history of war and usually are quite difficult to start. People have to be pretty angry and threatened to take this kind of drastic step. But when issues of survival are at stake between the opposing groups, violence can escalate quickly. After it does start, though, a civil war is quite bloody, often extreme, and very hard to end.

STATES OF THE NORTH AND SOUTH

To keep things clear, here is what this book means when speaking of the North and South sides of the conflict in regional or sectional terms:

- **The North:** The North consists of states from the Midwest, Middle America, and New England. Specifically, Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan are from the Midwest. The Middle states are Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York, and the New England states are Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. In 1860 the population of the North was a little over 18 million people.
- **The South:** The South consists of the six states of the upper South: North Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky, Maryland, and Delaware, and the eight states of the lower South (Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, Florida, Louisiana, Missouri, Texas, and Arkansas). In 1860 the total White population slightly exceeded 8 million, with more than 3.9 million slaves.

To understand the causes of the Civil War, you must be aware of some important events in American history — from roughly 1850 (the Missouri Compromise) to 1860 (the election of Abraham Lincoln) — that culminated in the secession of seven Southern states. These milestones illustrate how specific events during this decade raised fears and created perceptions that made Americans so angry at their countrymen that they were willing to kill each other as a result.

The North and South: Two different worlds

Until America's population expanded into the rich lands of the lower South in the first decade of the 19th century, slavery had been a dying institution. The North had slaves but freed most of them (except New Jersey) because the institution was too expensive and too inefficient to maintain. The South also viewed slavery as an institution that had no future.

But the industrial revolution that swept Europe and the states of the North changed these perceptions. Textiles were the dominant product of new factories, which depended on enormous quantities of a raw material — cotton. As the demand for cotton rose on the world market, Americans looked for opportunities to profit, which meant putting as much land into cotton production as possible. The lower South and region across the Mississippi River offered rich soil and ideal weather for growing cotton, luring many Americans there to fulfill the American dream of independence and wealth.

Labor in the South

The invention of the cotton gin, a ridiculously simple machine that easily separated seeds from the cotton boll, allowed raw cotton to be processed in unlimited quantities. But cotton growing and harvesting required a large pool of year-round labor. Slaves became that essential labor in the rapidly expanding cotton economy and were imported from coastal areas into the interior to work in the cotton fields.

By the 1850s, cotton was the raw material that powered the world economy and slavery was the engine. Slave owning became the road to status and success for all ambitious Southerners, including free Black people and Indians. Wealthy slave owners held high social status and political power, running the state legislatures and electing men of their kind to Congress. They enjoyed great influence over Southern society and their attachment to, and defense of, slavery represented a broad consensus.

Technology in the North

During the 1820–1840 timeframe, the North was setting the stage for the industrial revolution that would transform the nation in the next hundred years. Technology harnessed to both agriculture and industry, plus a huge influx of immigrants to serve as a ready labor force, created a new dynamic economy. Textile mills (run on Southern cotton), steam engines, railroads and canals, and iron and steel factories came to dominate the landscape of New England, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. In 1860, the North held about 140,000 factories, which employed nearly a million and a half workers, who produced almost \$2 billion worth of goods.

New cities in the northwest such as Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Chicago, Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit, and Milwaukee served as the engines of change in the national economy. St. Louis and New Orleans became the centers of a dynamic inter-regional trade. Within this atmosphere of economic change and readjustment between 1850 and 1860, the North and South were confidently moving in two disparate directions, it seemed.

The opposing opinions

The North and the South agreed on one thing: the future of America lay in the vast open territory of the West. The troubling question was which section of the country would determine the nation's destiny? America had won most of this territory from Mexico after the Mexican-American War in 1846, and Northerners and Southerners disagreed over the future organization of this territory into states.

The road to war began with a political struggle between the North and the South over how the western territories would be organized into states and enter the Union. This political struggle originated in the extensive social changes influencing the North after 1830, with these foundations:

- » **A religious revival known as the Second Great Awakening arose.** This “awakening” swept from New England into the new states of the Midwest with a message of moral revival and striving for individual perfection. Adherents believed that not only should men and women seek spiritual and personal purity through hard work and personal rectitude, but the whole of society must also be purged of unwholesome elements. Two of the most prominent threats to achieving this perfection in society were the moral evils of liquor and of slavery.
- » **The powerful notion of free labor.** The future of America was a land of free White men who would move west and build happy and prosperous lives from their own efforts. This powerful vision also gained influence within Northern



REMEMBER

political circles, even to the extent of creating a new sectional political party, the Free Soil Party. Increasingly, people perceived the South as a barrier to the limitless potential that a morally perfect country of free individuals could enjoy.

Free labor became the catchphrase that heightened political divisions in the country. Only free (not enslaved) men could ensure a golden future for America. Slave labor was therefore neither legitimate nor welcome in the great West, and slavery had to be limited and eventually destroyed if America was to fulfill its destiny.

For Southerners, the view of westward expansion relied on these two tenets:

- » **The prosperity of the cotton economy.** In the Southerners' vision of the future of America, the prosperity of the cotton economy would naturally expand westward. Cotton depleted the soil, requiring expansion westward to put more land into production. Without this expansion, the Southern economy would be condemned to a slow death.
- » **The reliance on slavery to ensure the prosperous cotton economy.** Of course, the westward expansion of the cotton economy meant that Southerners expected to bring slaves into the new territories.

Wilmot's Proviso in 1846 drew the political battle lines (see the related sidebar), which reflected the increasingly dominant opinions of Northerners who desired to bring about their vision of the future.

WILMOT'S PROVISIO

The Wilmot Proviso was a resolution made by an obscure Pennsylvania Congressman, David Wilmot, who, in 1846, attached the *proviso* (a conditional clause inserted into legislation or a contract) to an appropriations bill. Wilmot's proviso stated that any territory acquired in the war with Mexico would not be open to slavery. The bill passed the House of Representatives, where the North had a majority, but it died in the Senate, where the South held the balance of power. The controversy over the Wilmot Proviso illustrated to both North and South factions how important political control in Congress was to furthering their interests. The proviso became the basis of the increasingly bitter political struggle throughout the 1850s.

Amassing states: The political stakes involved

The political stakes were high for both sides (something like the end of a Monopoly game): Whoever had the most states at the end of the contest would have a majority of representatives in the House of Representatives *and* the Senate. Whichever side could achieve this majority could dictate the agenda for the country and determine the nation's future:

- » For the South, political power meant ironclad protection for slavery and the agrarian way of life.
- » For the North, gaining control of the country meant securing progress and prosperity through an urban-industrial-agricultural alliance based on free labor (see the description of free labor in the preceding section).

As the differences between the North and South sharpened, neither side believed it could afford to give up power or control.



REMEMBER

As long as the number of states in the Union remained the same, there would always be a relative balance between slave and non-slave (free) states. As the population of the United States moved westward and unsettled territories filled with people, however, new states were being created and admitted into the Union. The existence of these new states raised the political stakes. The focus of sectional conflict soon rested on determining which new states would be admitted as either a slave or a free state, while also maintaining the equal balance between slave and free states. It was a daunting political problem.

Setting the Stage: Five Events Leading to War

When you examine the nature of the political struggle between 1850 and 1860, you can identify five separate events, each having a distinct effect on the nation. When viewed separately, they don't seem to amount to much, but in the climate of the times, each event had a cumulative effect on the other, building a sense of nearly unbearable crisis and tension within the population that could not find release. The threat of open conflict, unthinkable in the country in 1850, became almost a predetermined conclusion by 1860.

Struggling for Kansas

As settlers continued to move into new territory, Congress had to maintain a balance of power between the Northern and Southern states. One approach had worked fairly well since 1820: Drawing a geographical boundary line that extended to the Pacific. This imaginary line, known as the Missouri Compromise, meant having no slaves north of 36 degrees, 30 minutes latitude — basically forming the border between Missouri and Arkansas. It worked because states could enter the Union in pairs: one above and one below the line (Maine–Missouri; Arkansas–Michigan; Florida and Texas; Iowa and Wisconsin).

But soon the future of the Kansas–Nebraska territory posed another threat because all that territory was above the 1820 geographical boundary and technically non-slave territory. The South couldn't allow that situation unless two new slave states could also be added to balance power, which didn't look likely to happen in the near future. The territory north of the Missouri Compromise line was attractive farmland; in contrast, the arid high desert territory south and west of Texas below the compromise line had little attraction for farmers, whether they owned slaves or not.

Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois introduced the Kansas–Nebraska Act in 1854 in an attempt to bypass the issue of slavery altogether in favor of westward expansion. Under this act's logic was the idea of *popular sovereignty*, which allowed the territorial citizens to decide the issue of slavery. The Kansas–Nebraska Act became law, legally opening all territory to slavery, and the compromise boundary line of 1820 no longer held.

Between 1855 and 1856, Kansas experienced the horror of irregular warfare, serving as the first battleground of pro-slavery and antislavery forces. Northern abolitionist supporters sponsored settlers to move to Kansas and establish a non-slaveholding voting majority that would ban slavery in the new state. Pro-slavery groups from Missouri, called Border Ruffians, entered the state to stuff ballot boxes and intimidate non-slave owners. As lawlessness took control, the country stood by as Kansas tumbled into anarchy, bleeding from a thousand wounds.

The rising of the Republican party

The struggle for political power was reflected in the birth and death of a number of political parties between 1850 and 1860. To understand the rise of the Republican Party requires understanding the collapse of the national party system, which occurred between 1854 and 1858. For more than a decade, two political parties, the Whigs and the Democrats, dominated American politics:

» **The Democrats** supported the traditional view of maintaining limits to federal power and upholding *states' rights*, with states holding the dominant power.

» **The Whigs** believed in progress and modernization, supporting a strong central government and the expansion of federal power to provide internal improvements to strengthen the national economy.

Until 1850, the Whigs and the Democrats maintained balanced constituencies in both the North and South. This balance was essential to the political health of the nation. As long as both parties could rely on both Northern and Southern voters, the system of representative government worked. When the parties could no longer build support across sectional lines, the system was doomed.

By 1856, a new coalition of antislavery Whigs, *Free Soil Party* (that supported the Wilmot Proviso and its endorsement of no expansion of slavery) members, and *Know-Nothings* (a group biased against Catholics and immigrants) had formed to become the Republican Party. The catalyst for forming the new party was the Kansas-Nebraska Act. To many observers, the South had won a clear political victory. To forestall any further advances, this new party would base its support on one issue — to keep slavery out of Kansas and all other territories.

One of the most powerful spokesmen for this new party was a former Whig congressman from Illinois, Abraham Lincoln (shown in Figure 2-1). In the midst of political turmoil, with parties shifting support bases and other political parties disappearing, Lincoln masterfully expressed the thoughts and feelings of many moderate Northerners, regardless of party. He soon became the leading spokesman for the Republican Party, traveling throughout the North addressing huge, enthusiastic crowds. By 1856, the year of the presidential election, the Republican Party already dominated most legislatures in the North.

The Dred Scott Decision

Dred Scott, a slave belonging to an army doctor, had been taken from Missouri, which allowed slavery, to two non-slaveholding states, Illinois and Wisconsin, in the 1830s. After the doctor's death, Scott claimed he was no longer a slave because he had resided in free states. The case wound its way through the lower courts until it came to the Supreme Court in 1856.

The Court ruled seven to two against Scott's claim. On the basic issue of Scott's freedom, the Court agreed with the lower court's determination that Scott was not a citizen of either a state or the United States, and therefore could not bring a suit before a court. The judges could have stopped there, but they went on to find that Scott was still a slave because neither Congress nor any territorial legislature had the authority to restrict slavery *anywhere*.

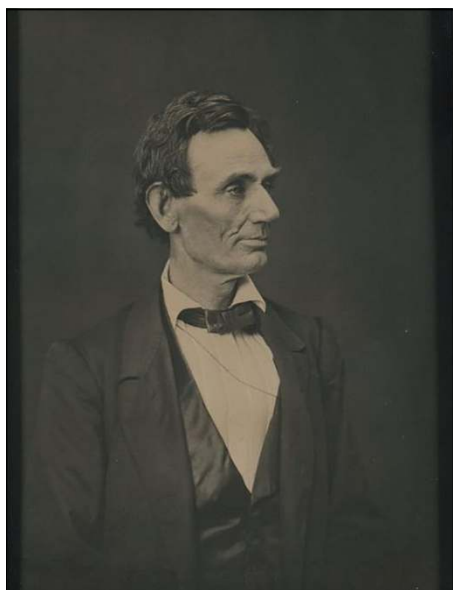


FIGURE 2-1:
Abraham Lincoln,
Republican Party
spokesman
and future
presidential
candidate.

Hesler, Alexander / The Library of Congress / Public Domain

The Dred Scott decision was a disaster for the South. Rather than protecting slavery, it brought many Northerners to the Republican Party, who now saw the party as the only bulwark against a Southern legal and political conspiracy to open the entire nation to slavery. The Court's decision also unwittingly dealt a deathblow to the Democratic Party's chances to maintain an intersectional political organization. Stephen Douglas's popular sovereignty, whatever its merits, was the one issue that brought Northern and Southern Democrats together. Now that the Dred Scott decision declared popular sovereignty invalid, the party had no hope of winning the 1860 presidential election against a united and powerful Republican Party.

John Brown's Raid

John Brown and his followers had murdered several suspected pro-slavery Kansas settlers in the violence discussed in the section "Struggling for Kansas" earlier in the chapter. After the attack, Brown and his group spent some time in Canada until the heat was off. By 1859, he had concocted a new and more ambitious scheme than simple nighttime murder and terror. He had become impatient with the lack of action in the country over slavery.



TIP

John Brown's fanatical dedication to ending slavery led him to believe that he could be a one-man instrument of its destruction. His plan called for nothing less than instigating and leading a nationwide slave revolt and race war. Supported with money and arms from wealthy, anonymous antislavery sponsors, Brown selected

Harpers Ferry, Virginia — the site of a federal arsenal located at the junction of a key transportation intersection only a few miles from Washington, D.C. — as his target. After he captured the arsenal and its weapons, he planned to

- » Use the town as his base of operations to receive the thousands upon thousands of slaves who would escape and join him
- » Arm the slaves as they arrived and create a stronghold
- » Expand the area under his control through violent action until he had created a free Black nation

On the night of October 16, Brown and his 18 followers entered Harpers Ferry and had no trouble gaining control of the arsenal and its production facility. But the Marines arrived and John Brown was wounded, captured, tried, and executed. He became either a martyr (according to the Northerners) or a murderer and tool of abolitionists (according to the Southerners). By now, both sides were ready to jump at the least provocation, if only to release those long pent-up emotions in some grand violent act of retribution against the perceived enemy.

The election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860

Almost a year after Brown's death, Americans voted in a presidential election. Abraham Lincoln, whose voice over the past three years had become the voice of the Republican Party, was nominated for president. Lincoln had made speeches in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, Kansas, and New York, proclaiming as eloquently as anyone of his century that slavery was a moral wrong, "founded on both injustice and bad policy" as he put it. He dissected the Southern defense of slavery, exposing it in a way that the average person could understand.

Quoting the Bible, the source of his most inspired speeches, Lincoln told his audiences that the country was "a house divided against itself." "I believe," he said, "this government cannot endure, permanently half *slave* and half *free*."

Division in the existing parties caused the election of 1860 to have four candidates. The Democrats spent a great deal of effort attacking each other. The well-financed Republicans spent their money on large and enthusiastic demonstrations on behalf of their candidate. The Republican strategy worked. Lincoln won every state in the North except New Jersey. Oregon and California joined to give the Republicans 180 electoral votes and the presidency.

Here's how the South analyzed the results of the election.

- » The Republicans won 180 electoral votes. This meant that even if only one candidate had opposed Lincoln, with the entire South united in support, Lincoln would still have won the election. The South simply lacked the electoral votes to offset the advantage of the Northern states.
- » Southern political power had disappeared, and the Republican Party now could dominate the House and the presidency at will. There would be no congressional guarantees of slavery or protection of Southern rights coming from a House of Representatives dominated by the North.

Without any words of conciliation coming from the Republicans, many Southerners in the cotton South feared the worst and began to contemplate the last option they believed they had left — leaving the Union.

Secession and the Confederacy

On December 20, 1860, 169 delegates of the state of South Carolina met in Charleston to consider leaving the Union. The convention was organized to mimic the first state convention that assembled for voting to join the United States in 1788. The logic of secession went like this:

- » Each state was sovereign after independence from Great Britain. In 1788, the states entered into a federal union under the Constitution voluntarily.
- » The Constitution was thus a compact, an agreement of sovereign, independent, and self-governing states allowing the central government to have specific powers as outlined in the Constitution.
- » According to the Tenth Amendment, all other power resided with the states. Therefore, any state, if it so desired, could voluntarily leave the Union (secede) and could become a sovereign state again.

This was not a rebellion, the South Carolina delegates insisted, but a legal act. Given the climate after the election of 1860, and the growing fear of what the Republican Party would do to the South after taking control of the government in March when the new president was inaugurated, South Carolina took the first drastic step to dissolve its fraternal bonds with the United States. To the surprise of many Southerners, no immediate response came forth from the new administration. After all the emotionalism, the threats, and the sense of high purpose enmeshed in their world-shaking event, *nothing happened*.

More states seceding

The now separate South Carolina awaited help from her sister states in the lower South, or some indication from Washington. That help came quickly and raised morale higher.

- » Mississippi voted on January 9, 1861, to secede.
- » Two more days passed with two more states, Florida and Alabama, leaving the Union.
- » By the first of February, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas had also voted themselves out.

The rationale for secession can be summed up in one sentence taken from the Mississippi ordinance of secession: *“Our position is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery — the greatest material interest of the world.”* The key words here are “material interest.” Slavery was the basis of the cotton economy, the greatest generator of wealth in the world. These seven states were not willing to risk their wealth, economic security, and social dominance on the Republican-dominated government.



TIP

This material interest is highlighted by the fact that White people in these states made up only 32 percent of the South’s total population. Slaves in these states made up 47 percent of the total population. In fact, in Mississippi and South Carolina (the first two states to secede), the enslaved population actually exceeded the White population.

Building the Confederacy and starting a war

These newly independent states decided to unite in another compact, one more to their liking. A new Constitution was quickly adopted, very much like the original (except for ironclad guarantees of slavery, a six-year term for the president, and increased power to the sovereign states). On February 18, a new nation, the Confederate States of America, was established in Montgomery, Alabama.

Jefferson Davis, former Mississippi senator, heroic Mexican-American War veteran, one-time secretary of war, and strong supporter of Southern rights, became the first president. One of Davis’s first acts as president was to call for 100,000 volunteers to serve the new Confederacy as soldiers for a period of 12 months. Davis didn’t anticipate trouble, but he wasn’t going to take any chances.

Taking U.S. federal property

As a matter of course, the new Confederacy began taking control of all federal property within its territory. Military installations, post offices, and customs houses came routinely under control of the Confederate government. All but the two most important pieces of federal property, Fort Pickens at Pensacola and Fort Sumter at Charleston, fell under Confederate control. A few days earlier, the delegates who had formed the new government met in session as the first Confederate Congress and authorized the use of force, if necessary, to remove U.S. troops from Fort Sumter and Fort Pickens. For the new Confederacy, Sumter was a bone in its throat. As long as Sumter remained in the hands of the United States, the new government had little claim to legitimacy as an independent country.

After much behind-the-scenes communication between the U.S. and Major Anderson at Fort Sumter as well as worry on the part of Jefferson Davis, on April 11, three Confederate officers, one a former senator with the new rank of colonel, made a visit to Fort Sumter. With proper military courtesy, the group presented Major Anderson with the formal surrender demand. Anderson refused to surrender but made it clear that by April 15 there would be no more food, and he would give up the fort. Yet they both knew that some of the ships of the relief expedition had arrived that night but without the tugboats necessary to transfer supplies. The Confederate officers returned to Sumter at 12:45 a.m. for Anderson's final answer. Again he refused to surrender until his food ran out. Given this reply, the Confederate officers responded that the fort would be fired on in one hour.

At 4:30 a.m. on April 12, the signal gun fired, its shell exploding 100 feet squarely above the fort (see Figure 2-2). A furious artillery barrage began and lasted for 34 hours. Although exploding shells caused widespread fires within the fort, neither side did any serious damage, nor was anyone killed or injured. On the 14th of April, with no food and little gunpowder left to fire his cannons, Anderson surrendered Fort Sumter. His garrison fired a salute to the flag (in the process killing one soldier and wounding five accidentally) and was picked up by the ineffectual relief expedition.

Being declared in rebellion

The day following the surrender of Sumter, April 15, Lincoln declared the seven states of the Confederacy in rebellion and issued an order for 75,000 volunteers to serve 90 days. This call went to every state still in the Union. Upon receipt of this order, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas seceded and began efforts to join the Confederacy. Soon after Lincoln's election, most of these states had opened conventions like the other Southern states but had refused to make any decision on secession. The delegates to these conventions held long and rancorous debates over whether secession was justified. Many placed all hope on several attempts at a last-minute compromise or any indication that the Republicans would ease their position on slavery.

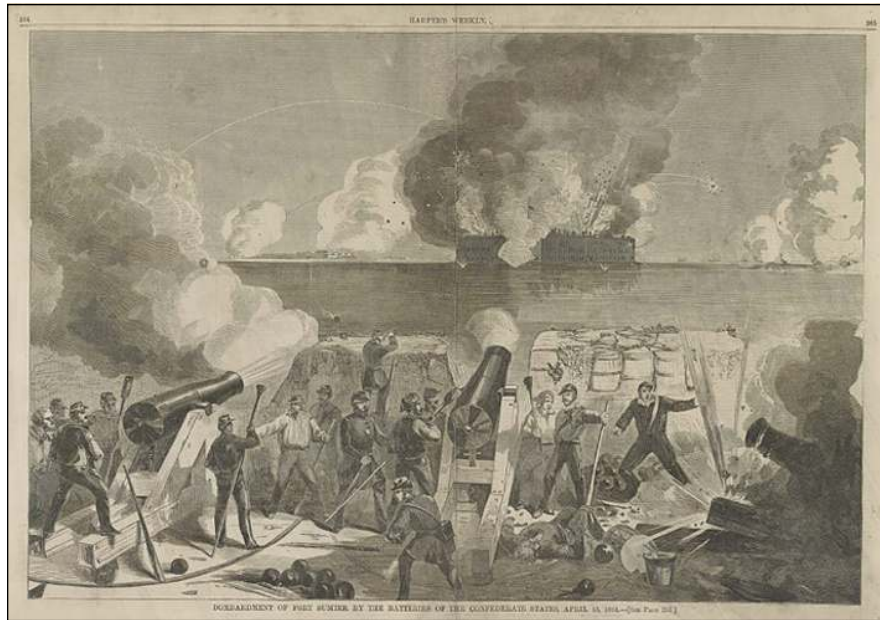


FIGURE 2-2:
The firing on
Fort Sumter.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division [LC-DIG-ppmsca-35361]

But Lincoln's call for the 75,000 troops changed minds quickly and dramatically. It was one thing to debate whether the Constitution was a compact of voluntary association or an insoluble bond, but quite another for the federal government to use force against the states to enforce its will. None of these states would allow troops to be sent against fellow Southerners.



REMEMBER

Thus, when Lincoln declared the states in rebellion and intended to use coercive military force, the states of the upper South issued their own ordinances of secession. But these were different. None mentioned slavery; instead, they asserted their rights as sovereign states to leave the Union voluntarily.

To top it off, Maryland, Missouri, and Kentucky, all slaveholding states, threatened to leave the Union as well. A large and powerful group of angry people now confronted the U.S. government. Lincoln suddenly found himself with double the problem that he had before the fall of Fort Sumter.

The bloodless battle that opened the war unleashed the torrent of long-held pent-up emotions. In both the North and the South, people laughed, cried, danced for joy, sang, and prayed at finally reaching a resolution to the tensions. Young men from all over America ran eagerly to join volunteer units forming to fight. The excitement of adventure and glory was almost overwhelming. The North responded to Lincoln's call for 75,000 men with more than 100,000 volunteers.

Reviewing the Troops, the Generals, and the Major Battles

The Civil War was mostly a young man's fight. Most of the enlisted men were under the age of 21, and more than a few were in their early teens. The Civil War was also truly "a brothers' war," with families and friends divided by their allegiances. Mary Lincoln, the president's wife, lost three brothers in the war — all of whom fought for the South. The Confederacy's leading general, Robert E. Lee, had a nephew who was an officer in the Union Navy.

Because of the fraternal flavor of the two armies, it wasn't unusual for them to engage in friendly banter between battles, sometimes even getting together for a game of baseball or trading tobacco for coffee during truces.



REMEMBER

The between-battles friendliness didn't reduce the carnage: More than 600,000 American soldiers died during the Civil War. That's more than the number of Americans who died in World War I, World War II, and the Korean War combined. About two-thirds of that number died from diseases rather than battle wounds, and historians estimate that the average soldier ended up in the hospital at least once or twice a year. If the soldier ever left the hospital, he was lucky. Sanitary conditions were awful, and 75 percent of the operations consisted of amputations, many of them needless.

Northern forces almost always outnumbered their Southern opponents. At the end of the war, the Union Army had about 960,000 men in uniform compared to the Confederates' 445,000. In addition to having a larger population to draw from, the North's forces also included thousands of European immigrants who took up a rifle almost as soon as they got off the boat. Additionally, thousands of Black soldiers fought for the North after being allowed to join the army in 1863. They were paid \$7 a month (about a third of what White soldiers got), and they fought well, albeit always under White officers, earning the grudging respect of those they fought against and alongside.

The generals

What each side did have, at least by the close of the war, was a great general at the head of its army. In the South, that man was Robert E. Lee, the son of a Revolutionary War general. Lincoln asked Lee, a West Point graduate, to lead the Union Army before the war began. But Lee's loyalties were to his native state of Virginia. He was honorable, courteous, skillful, and not afraid to take a chance. He was also a slave owner who wrote that slavery was "a moral and political evil" but occasionally countenanced beatings of his slaves as "necessary discipline."

Lee's Northern counterpart was Ulysses S. Grant, the shy and disheveled son of a storekeeper. Grant was also a West Point grad, but he resigned his commission to avoid a court-martial for drunkenness. He rejoined the army and rose through the ranks to command mainly because, unlike some of his contemporaries, he wasn't afraid to get into a fight. Grant was highly intelligent, determined, compassionate — and a cold-eyed killer if that's what it took to win.

The war at sea

The North's first objective was to blockade the Southern coast and cut off the South's ability to trade its cotton in Europe for arms and supplies. The Union Navy already had ships and guns, but the South somehow managed to scrounge up a navy of its own from refitted private ships or ships built for the South in England, as well as scores of captured Union merchant ships.



REMEMBER

One of the Confederacy's ships was a Union vessel called the *Merrimac*, which had been sunk. Southern ship fitters raised it, covered it with iron plates, and renamed it the *Virginia*. For a few days, it terrorized the Union fleet off Hampton Roads, Virginia, sinking two Union ships and threatening to decimate the entire group. But the North's own hastily constructed ironclad ship, the *Monitor*, showed up in the nick of time. On March 9, 1862, the two met in a four-hour battle that basically ended in a tie. The *Virginia* was eventually burned and the *Monitor* sunk, but their battle was significant in that it was the first battle between two ironclad ships — ultimately spelling the doom of wooden warships. The North overcame a slow start with what became its highly effective sea blockade.

The war on land

When it came to the ground war, the North's strategy included capturing the city of New Orleans and gaining control of the mouth of the Mississippi River. Starting in 1862, largely under Grant's command, the Union Army began taking Tennessee and slowly moving up and down the Mississippi River, cutting the South in half just as Gen. Winfield Scott had suggested.

On the Confederate side, Lee twice took the war to the North, but both times, he was forced to return to Southern territory when he was outnumbered and faced uncertain supply lines. In late 1863, the North began grinding down Lee's army in Virginia while another Union Army under Gen. William T. Sherman marched diagonally across Georgia and then up into the Carolinas, destroying everything in its path. "We have devoured the land," Sherman wrote to his wife. "All the people retreat before us, and desolation is behind."

Here are ten of the key battles or campaigns of the war (check out Figure 2-3 for a visual of the various locations):

» **Fort Sumter:** After the first Southern states seceded, they began seizing federal forts and shipyards inside their borders. As noted earlier in the chapter, Maj. Robert Anderson, commander of the fort in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina, had agreed to surrender as soon as the food ran out, but Southern forces wouldn't wait. At dawn on April 12, 1861, they fired the first shots of the Civil War. Anderson surrendered when he ran out of ammunition. But the fact that the South fired first helped recruiting efforts in the North.

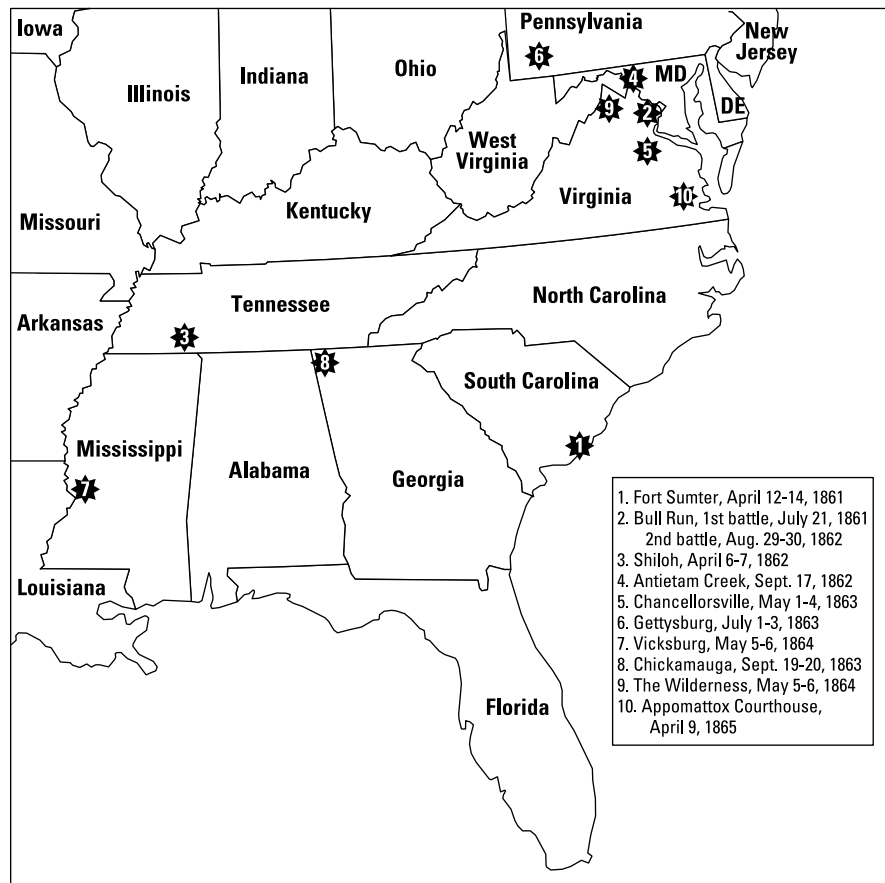


FIGURE 2-3:
Key Civil War
battles and
campaigns.

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- » **Bull Run:** The first large fight of the war took place near Manassas Junction, Virginia, on July 21, 1861. Despite the brutally hot day, hundreds of residents from nearby Washington, D.C., came out to picnic and watch the fight, thinking it might be the highlight of what many expected to be a 90-day war. Neither army was trained or prepared, and for most of the day, utter confusion reigned. Confederate forces got the upper hand, and Union forces panicked and ran. The rebel army was too tired to chase them.
- » **Shiloh:** Grant's army was caught napping on April 6, 1862, near this Tennessee church that gave the Battle of Shiloh its name. Grant's army was on the brink of being routed when Grant launched a counterattack the next day that pushed the Confederate Army back. The battle solidified the Union Army's dominance in the West.
- » **Antietam:** Lee's first push into Northern territory took place near Antietam Creek in Maryland on September 17, 1862. The battle was fought in a narrow field between the creek and the Potomac River. It was one of the bloodiest battles of the war, with 22,000 killed or wounded. Lee was forced to return across the Potomac, providing Lincoln the "victory" he'd been waiting for to announce his Emancipation Proclamation.
- » **Chancellorsville:** The Union Army, under Gen. Joseph Hooker, tried to surround Lee's forces in Virginia from May 1–3, 1863. But Lee took a brilliant gamble, divided his smaller army, and attacked first. It was a complete Confederate victory but a costly one. Lee's top general, Thomas Jackson, who was nicknamed *Stonewall* for his courage and tenacity, was mistakenly shot by his own troops. He died a week later, creating a leadership hole the South was never quite able to fill.
- » **Gettysburg:** Lee again pushed into Northern territory in early June 1863, this time into Pennsylvania. In a massive battle (a total of more than 50,000 casualties) from July 1 to July 3, Lee's army hurled itself at Union forces led by Gen. George Meade. But the South's effort failed, and Lee was once again forced to withdraw. Considered one of the most important battles in world history, Gettysburg is also regarded by many as the most pivotal fight in the Civil War.
- » **Vicksburg:** This Mississippi town was a major Confederate stronghold on the Mississippi River. Coordinating with Union naval forces moving up from New Orleans, Grant masterfully moved his outnumbered army around the city and laid siege to it. Vicksburg surrendered on July 4, 1863, giving the North control of the Mississippi River. Coming within a day or two of the defeat at Gettysburg, the loss of Vicksburg was a devastating blow to the South.
- » **Chickamauga and Chattanooga:** These confrontations, which ran from August to November 1863, led to Sherman's march across Georgia.

At Chickamauga, Union Gen. George H. Thomas withstood a furious attack and saved the Union Army from a rout. After the Union Army was surrounded at Chattanooga, Grant led a rescue effort and drove off the Confederate forces.

- » **The Wilderness:** This was a series of battles in Virginia starting in May 1864 in which Grant used his superior numbers to wear down Lee's army. The carnage was terrible, and Grant's critics accused him of being a butcher. But the strategy worked. Lee's army couldn't break off to try to stop Sherman's march through the heart of the South.
- » **Appomattox Courthouse:** This wasn't a battle, but it was the site in Virginia where, on April 12, 1865, Lee formally surrendered to Grant. The Southern Army was exhausted, outnumbered, and half-starved. Grant generously fed the defeated Southerners and allowed them to go home, taking their horses and mules with them. Although some units fought on for a few more weeks, the Civil War, for all intents and purposes, was finally over.

- » Making any excuse to start a war
- » Spreading the conflict across the globe
- » Growing problems in the aftermath of the Great War

Chapter 3

The Great War and Its Aftermath

After surviving the hardships of the Civil War, industry was thriving in the United States, attracting thousands of immigrants seeking better opportunities and more freedom.

But trouble was brewing in Europe. Wars between European nations began to break out. True to the Constitution, the United States tried to remain neutral in the battles raging among many European countries. Most Americans believed that the complicated political alliances between the various battling nations caused the war. A period of neutrality, known as *isolationism*, continued for more than 100 years — from the end of the War of 1812 until the United States declared war against Germany in 1917.

In this chapter, you get a look at the alliances of World War I — the Great War — and its dear costs in terms of lives, economic distress, and a revengeful treaty that almost guaranteed no lasting world peace.

The World War I Years

The circumstances that led to World War I (1914–1918) had been building for quite some time, with various European nations making enemies of some countries while forming *alliances*, or friendships, with others. National rivalries and conflicts over control of colonies, along with economic competition and an arms race, all contributed to the world going to war.

The causes behind World War I

Conflicts and territory disputes raged in Europe for years before the Great War. In central Europe, the dual monarchy (a government ruled by a king or queen, and in this case one for each country) of Austria–Hungary controlled a large, fractious empire, populated by people of many nationalities: Austrians, Hungarians, Croats, Czechs, Romanians, Serbs, Slovaks, and Slovenians. Despite the empire’s ethnic diversity, only Austrians and Hungarians had the right to rule. Of course, the other groups desired political independence from such an unfair rule.

The area of Serbia particularly gave the monarchy trouble because it served as the heart of an independence movement. The Austrian–Hungarian empire believed that if it could gain control over the Balkans, and thereby Serbia, its political control problems would be over.

Declaring an ultimatum and then war

On June 28, 1914, while on a visit to Sarajevo, Bosnia, the Black Hand, a Serbian political group, assassinated Archduke Ferdinand, an heir to the Austria–Hungary throne. This single incident set the wheels of World War I in motion. The resulting chain of events forever changed the course of history.

Austria–Hungary carefully considered its reaction to the killing. Looking for an excuse to go to war and squash the rebellious Serbs, the Austrian–Hungarians decided, three weeks later, to issue an official ultimatum to Serbia. The document blamed the Serbian government itself for the assassination and accused them of trying to undermine the Austrian–Hungarian government. The ultimatum to Serbia challenged Serbia’s *sovereignty*, or governmental authority.



REMEMBER

Austria–Hungary expected Serbia to reject the ultimatum’s harsh terms, thereby giving them a reason to launch a war against the small country. Although Austria–Hungary was aware of Serbia’s alliance with Russia, they never expected the larger country to get involved in so small a conflict. They were wrong. By enforcing the

ultimatum, Austria-Hungary began the unlikely chain of events that drew the entire world into the war.

Dissatisfied with Serbia's response to the ultimatum, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia on July 28, 1914. A month later, Russia sent troops to help her ally, Serbia.

Gaining Worldwide Allies for the Conflict

Germany saw the Russian involvement as an act of war against its ally Austria-Hungary. It declared war on Russia on August 1, 1914. France responded by declaring war against Germany and, therefore, against Austria-Hungary. Germany, looking for the quickest route to France's capital city, Paris, invaded neutral Belgium. On the same day, Britain, to uphold an old treaty to defend Belgium and to aid its ally France, declared war on Germany. Britain's colonies, including Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand, and the Union of South Africa, also offered financial and military support to the cause. Although Italy was technically allied with Germany and Austria-Hungary, Italy initially declared its neutrality but then allied with France, England, and Russia.

Mapping the conflict area

On one side of the conflict were Great Britain, France, Imperial Russia (Russia before the revolution that got rid of the Tsar and put the Communists in power), and Italy (which entered later). On the other side were Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire (see Figure 3-1).

In 1914, President Woodrow Wilson officially declared the United States neutral in the conflicts in Europe, and the U.S. continued trade with all sides. The United States finally entered the war on April 6, 1917, as a result of Germany's submarine warfare, which threatened America's commercial shipping industry. Before long, countries the world over from Asia to South America were involved in the conflict.

U.S. participation in the Great War

The United States managed to stay neutral in the European war from 1914 until 1917, but remaining neutral eventually became impossible. Germany's use of its new submarines to attack both military and merchant-marine ships angered Americans. Although the United States didn't necessarily want to enter a war, they would if they felt it could help the greater good of the world.



FIGURE 3-1:
Europe, 1914.



TIP

Most Americans already sympathized with the Allies — England, France, Italy, and Russia. Germany’s aggressive acts of unrestricted warfare on nonmilitary ships were the final straw — the United States felt they had a moral obligation to help.

Before the United States entered the war, Germany had the upper hand. State-of-the-art war machinery like rockets, tanks, airplanes, and submarines created a new way of fighting, and the Allies were losing the long, hard struggle. U.S. involvement brought fresh troops and more supplies — enough to turn things around and for the Allies to triumph. After they entered the war, Americans did so with commitment and enthusiasm. Their actions included

- » Congress authorizing the Selective Service Act of 1917 to begin drafting young men for battle.
- » People buying savings bonds in order to raise funds for the war effort.
- » Industry changing its focus from producing items for consumers to making items needed for war — weapons, ammunition, uniforms, and military supplies.
- » Ordinary citizens pitching in by conserving resources such as oil and gasoline and by giving up items they normally enjoyed. For instance, each week had a “meatless” day. On this day, people were asked to give up meat so that more food could be sent to the troops.



REMEMBER

The combined military and civilian efforts paid off. Germany signed an *armistice* (a treaty to stop fighting) on November 11, 1918. This day is now celebrated as Veterans Day.

Knowing the real causes of the Great War

Although the war supposedly started because of the assassination of Franz Ferdinand (the heir to the Austrian throne), the allied nations really fought to determine status and power in the world. Each alliance wanted to establish its position as the dominant colonial or military power.

Not long into the war, a stalemate developed along a line of entrenched defensive positions stretching from the North Sea, through Belgium and France, to the Swiss border. Neither side could get the upper hand. After three years of what came to be called *trench warfare* (where one side lobbed highly explosive shells, poison gas, and so on into the trenches of the other side, and then attacked with waves of infantrymen), the result was the needless slaughter of hundreds of thousands of soldiers.

In 1917, Russia, embroiled in a revolution at home, left the war, and the United States entered the war on the side of Britain and France. The U.S. involvement came partly in response to Germany’s harassment of American ships and the sinking of the *Lusitania* by a German submarine, and partly in an idealistic crusade “to make the world safe for democracy” — the words that President Woodrow Wilson used in his war message to Congress. By the time the war ended on November 11, 1918, four agonizing years had seen the use of poison gas, submarines, and airplanes. More than 10 million soldiers and civilians died in the war. Europe — the dominant economic, political, and cultural force in the world — had exhausted all its material and human resources.

The End of One War and the Roots of Another

To understand how and why World War II started, you have to look at how World War I ended and the crucial years that followed it. In this section, you find out about the war's aftermath and effects on the world economy and how resulting conditions compelled democratic nations (such as Italy and Germany) to turn to totalitarian principles to solve their problems.



TIP

World War I destroyed empires, created new states based on national or ethnic identity, saw a new communist revolutionary state in Russia, and put the United States in a position to control the agenda that would shape the postwar world.

The victors and the spoils: The Treaty of Versailles

The peace conference associated with the end of World War I (November 11, 1918) opened in January 1919. The only important attendees were the four nations on the winning side: Italy, France, Great Britain, and the United States. (Russia, which had left the war in 1917, was in the midst of a civil war and was not represented.) The nations that lost were not invited because the winners didn't think their presence was necessary. The terms of the peace would be dictated to them.

But I thought I knew you! — Disagreement among friends

Woodrow Wilson, the U.S. President, wanted to build a world that would allow nations to live in peace with one another. His ideas were embodied in his famous *Fourteen Points*, literally fourteen points that he set as goals for the peace negotiations. One of the most famous of these goals was the creation of what he called “a general association of nations” to guarantee the “political independence and territorial integrity” of all states. (This association would later become the *League of Nations*, a forerunner to the United Nations.)

When the war ended, everyone agreed to base the postwar settlement on the Fourteen Points. After the negotiations actually started, however, Wilson's agenda was rapidly shelved while Italy, France, and Britain wrangled over their own objectives:

- » France, whose homeland had served as the battleground for most of the war, wanted to make sure that Germany would never pose a military threat again.
- » Britain wanted to establish a balance of power on the continent and increase the size of its empire by taking the colonial possessions of Germany in Africa and the former Ottoman Empire's possessions in the Middle East.
- » Italy wanted its participation in the war to be compensated with land — and a lot of it — at the expense of the Austro-Hungarian empire, which had collapsed by the end of the war.

After much disagreement, which included Italy leaving the conference in a huff over its lack of spoils, the *Versailles Treaty* was finally complete.

Message to the losers: Deal with it

The Versailles Treaty was presented to the German delegation for their signature — without discussion — in June 1919. In this Treaty:

- » Germany lost about ten percent of its territory and population, including territories in the east to create the new states of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Lithuania.

The territories that had made up Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire were redistributed as independent states (such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia) or as quasi-colonies (called *mandates*) under the supervision and control of France or Great Britain. Much of the Middle East was divided up this way, too.
- » France got Alsace-Lorraine (a territory taken from them in 1870 by Germany); Belgium and Denmark also received German territory.
- » The French occupied parts of Germany for fifteen years: the Saar Basin, an important industrial region, and the Rhineland, a strategic territory on the west bank of the Rhine River bordering France.
- » Germany lost all its colonial possessions in Africa and Asia.
- » Germany was forced to accept full responsibility for the war. This guilt clause made Germany pay the victors for the costs of the war, estimated at 33 billion dollars. Germany was to pay this money in installments over a period of years.
- » To add insult to injury, Germany was disarmed, limited to no more than 100,000 ground troops and allowed no tanks or aircraft.

Woodrow Wilson's last card: The League of Nations

As Woodrow Wilson's dream of a new world order faded in compromise at Versailles, he doggedly held to the most important principle from the Fourteen Points. This principle was the *League of Nations*, an international organization dedicated to guaranteeing cooperation among nations and preserving peace and security by settling disputes peacefully. Wilson believed that even if the Versailles Treaty were flawed, the League of Nations could eventually correct the problems and prevent another war.

Beginning operations in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1920, the League of Nations actually had little chance of success:

- » The League suffered a severe blow to its prestige when the United States Senate refused to *ratify* (approve) the Versailles Treaty, therefore keeping the United States out of the international organization. In other words, the country that created the organization refused to join it.
- » *Article X* of the treaty, which committed each League member to preserve the independence of every other member, was a big problem for most nations. It implied that if one League nation was threatened, the other member nations had to go to war to defend it, and most nations were not willing to go that far.
- » Relations between League members were hardly cordial enough to rule out future military conflict. The last thing some nations wanted was their foreign policy co-opted by the League of Nations. Nations were willing to play along as League members only if membership did not interfere with their own interests.

Thus, the League of Nations, with little power beyond moral indignation, couldn't control the growing threat of war in the 1930s.

The world in the 1920s

The Great War changed the diplomatic and economic face of the world, creating instability and mistrust. The balance of power in Europe had changed completely, and the economies of Europe had been completely disrupted. Europe feared the spread of communism (led by the Russian Bolsheviks). The Treaty of Versailles had created more problems than it solved, leaving many nations and people dissatisfied and the victors holding empty promises of reparations and territory as rewards for all their sacrifices. You didn't have to be a fortune-teller to know that trouble was brewing.

The U.S. — In denial

Believing that peace was based on revenge, Americans lost interest in Europe's problems and wanted no part of the quarrels that could lead to involvement in another war. America rejected forming alliances with other nations and spent much of the decade attempting to collect war debts totaling about 7 billion dollars from its former wartime allies.

America also signed a number of disarmament treaties to limit the size of naval fleets among Britain, France, Italy, Japan, and the United States. The idea was to prevent an arms race that could lead to war. In 1928, this spirit of harmony climaxed with the signing of the *Kellog-Briand Treaty*, which outlawed war as an instrument of national policy. The United States and 61 other nations signed the treaty. Comforted by the illusion of security and permanent peace, America enjoyed prosperity at home and maintained a cautious, nationalistic approach to preserve its own interests.

Germany — In flux

The monarchy that led Germany during the war had disappeared, and a democratic republic took its place. But the German Republic was crippled from its very beginning in 1919:

- » Saddled with the Versailles Treaty and its 33-billion-dollar reparations bill, the government had weak support among many Germans.
- » The German economy, disrupted by the war and the occupation of the Saar, Germany's critical industrial region, suffered incredible inflation (in 1923, 4.2 trillion German marks to the American dollar) that drove lower and middle classes into financial ruin.
- » Politically, the nation was deeply divided between Left and Right. The German people, who displayed a general hostility to the new government, were reluctant to trade an authoritarian leader (the monarch, for example) for the ideals of democracy. Only American loans stabilized the economy and allowed a moderate coalition government to be elected.

Despite these problems, Germany was able to regain some economic stability and reclaim its place among the European nations. It signed the *Locarno Treaty*, in which it pledged to respect the borders of France and Belgium. It was admitted into the League of Nations and given a permanent seat on the Council in 1926. During the last years of the 1920s, it made a moderate, but steady economic recovery and established a measure of trust among the international community.

Still, Germany tried to avoid or repeal the terms of the Versailles Treaty, especially those terms dealing with the war debt and the restrictions on how much it could rearm.

Great Britain — In a funk

Britain spent the decade of the 1920s dealing with rebellion and civil war in Ireland and unrest in India. It suffered a downturn in its economy as a result of changes in postwar trading and production patterns. Britain's inability to export products profitably from its traditional domestic industries combined with a general fall in the worldwide demand for goods after the war really accentuated this economic nightmare, which included high unemployment and frequent, large-scale labor strikes. The Labour party became the main proponent of social welfare measures to support working-class Britons.

Like the United States, Great Britain looked warily at events in Europe. Ever mistrustful of France, Britain continued to pursue a narrowly defined foreign policy.

France — In trouble

With much of its land and industry destroyed and many of its working-age men dead, France faced a bleak future. Alsace-Lorraine and the Saar (German regions that France regained and occupied, respectively, at the end of the war) served as a slight buffer in stabilizing the economy, but to recover fully, France depended on German war payments. As a result, France took a hard-line policy — which included occupying German territory with military forces to ensure compliance — when Germany could not meet its obligations.

France also feared another war with Germany and considered the Versailles Treaty the only guarantee of security. More than any other nation, France tried to gain international support to force Germany to abide by the treaty. Despite Germany's signing of the Locarno Treaty, in which it promised to respect the French border, France made alliances with Poland and Czechoslovakia in an attempt to offset Germany.

Although economically troubled early in the decade, by 1926, France (like Germany) enjoyed a period of economic recovery and stability in the last years of the decade.

Italy — In a snit

At the end of the war, Italy felt cheated. It had wanted to expand into the Balkans in the wake of the collapsed Austro-Hungarian Empire. Instead, it gained little additional territory for its 600,000 casualties. Postwar Italy was also hampered

by a series of weak coalition governments that never stayed in power long enough to deal with increasing unemployment, a heavy national debt, and rising costs.

A *constitutional monarchy* (in which the ruler's power is limited by law or by elected representatives), Italy in the early 1920s teetered on the brink of chaos. A new nationalist party, the Fascists, led by war veteran Benito Mussolini, legally took power in 1922. As Prime Minister, Mussolini gradually consolidated power and established a dictatorship. His goal was to build a state in which every Italian would serve the nation. Intensely patriotic, Mussolini began to revitalize the Italian economy while looking for opportunities to make Italy one of the great powers of Europe.

Russia — In revolt

The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 ended the Russian monarchy and plunged Russia into a five-year nightmare of civil war. Led by Vladimir Lenin, the Bolsheviks dreamed of spreading communist revolution by force of arms into Europe. Lenin consolidated control over the new *Union of Soviet Socialist Republics* (USSR) by force and terror. Millions of Russians died in a famine from 1921 to 1922 because of the Bolsheviks' failed attempts to create a pure socialist state. The United States alleviated the famine by sending massive food relief. Then Lenin restored limited private ownership of the economy, allowing the USSR to experience a limited recovery.

After Lenin's death in 1924, Josef Stalin created a totalitarian state and embarked on a program to transform Russia into a modern industrial state. Diplomatically isolated, Russia sought out Germany in the mid-1920s and made a secret treaty that allowed (against the provisions in the Versailles Treaty) the German army to train in Russia with tanks and aircraft in exchange for increased trade.

Japan — In China

Economically and militarily, Japan was a major power in Asia before the Great War. Japan declared war on Germany in August 1914 and immediately occupied German bases on China's coast. Japan also sought to gain concessions from a weak and divided China concerning control of *Manchuria* (a large province in northeastern China rich in natural resources). Much to the anger of Chinese nationalists, the Japanese were allowed to keep major sections of former German-controlled Chinese territory. Japanese troops moved into Russian territory and did not leave until 1925.

The Versailles Treaty gave the Japanese some former German island possessions in the Pacific (the Marianas, the Marshalls, and the Carolines) as mandates. However, they began fortifying the islands in violation of the agreement. Japan also

built highly capable modern warships despite treaty limitations to keep its navy proportionally smaller than those of France, the United States, and Great Britain.

Throughout the 1920s, Japan enjoyed a dynamic economic expansion. Although nominally a parliamentary democracy, the civilian government leadership did not control the Japanese military. Thus, a rift continued to grow between the military and the government over expansion into Manchuria. Japan had an army controlling the strategic railway in southern Manchuria, supporting Japan's long-term territorial ambitions in China. The Chinese protests over what amounted to an illegal occupation of their territory by armed force were ignored.

China — In reform

The Chinese Republic led by Sun Yat-sen had only been in existence since 1911, but it was threatened by warlords who controlled large sections of territory with their private armies. After Sun's death in 1925, Chiang Kai-shek, a professional soldier, took control. By 1928, Chiang unified China under his Nationalist party, the Kuomintang. The government sought to build autonomy from European control through a program of legal reform, education, and economic modernization. These reforms benefited mostly upper-class Chinese, leaving the vast majority of the peasants of China untouched.

BENITO MUSSOLINI: THE FIRST FASCIST

Benito Mussolini (1883–1945) was the son of a blacksmith. Despite little formal education, he became a schoolteacher. Although he is often associated with intense patriotism, anti-Bolshevism, and militarism, Mussolini had been a pacifist and a socialist early in his life. In 1911, he was jailed for opposing Italy's annexation of Libya in its war against Turkey. Freed in 1912, he became editor of the socialist newspaper in Milan but was expelled from the party in 1914 when he supported Italy's entrance into World War I. He founded his own newspaper with heavy emphasis on patriotic themes.

In 1915, Mussolini entered the army. Promoted to sergeant in 1917, he was later wounded. After the war, Mussolini and other war veterans founded an organization called *Fasci di Combattimento* (a group or association of fighters) in March of 1919. He opposed democracy and the rule of parliament but had no definite political attachments. Instead, he associated himself with activities and ideas that would provide him access to political power. Arrogant and pugnacious, but not without certain intellectual gifts, Mussolini had no practical experience with government or diplomacy. Even so, he was able to convince much of the world community for many years that he was a reasonable and responsible leader, a new kind of man who would do great things for Italy.

In the midst of this reform and modernization effort, the Nationalist party faced internal and external threats. The Chinese Communist party led by Mao Tse-tung, shown in Figure 3-2, who sought to win support among the peasants, represented the greatest internal threat to the Nationalist government.

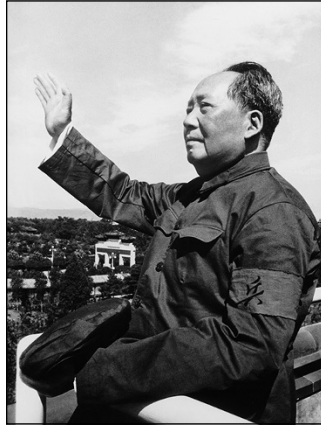


FIGURE 3-2:
Mao Tse-tung.

Lü Xiangyou/Public domain/<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MaoZedong19660818.jpg/>
last accessed on Jan 14, 2026

Eastern Europe — In place but unhappily

The Treaty of Versailles created several new states from the wreckage of the Austro-Hungarian Empire:

- » The Czechs and Slovaks were consolidated into one nation called *Czechoslovakia*.
- » The south Slavs in the Balkans were consolidated into an artificial state called *Yugoslavia*.
- » The traditional homeland of Poles was consolidated from territory once owned by Germany and Russia to become Poland, with a jury-rigged corridor giving it access to the Baltic Sea (see Figure 3-3).

These nations, with borders largely drawn out on a map in Paris, had little in the way of an economy and no tradition of self-government. Ethnic minorities within these new states were marginalized by the dominant ethnic majority, or the minorities refused to cooperate with the new governments. Many new states looked jealously at the territory of their neighbors, each nursing real or imagined fears that some other nation had gained more than it did.

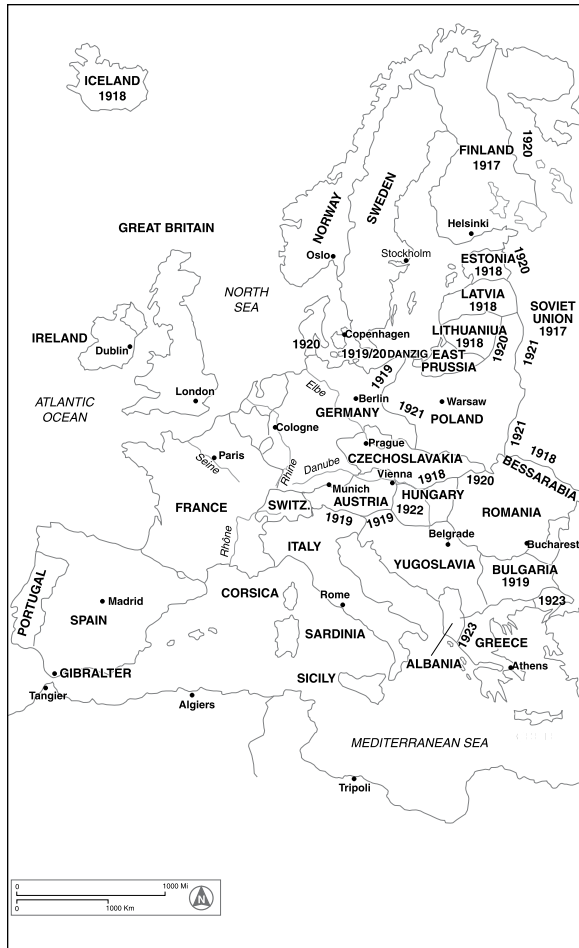


FIGURE 3-3:
Europe after
the Treaty of
Versailles, 1919.

Hulton-Deutsch Collection

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Knowing what led to WWII
- » Seeing the major players
- » Reviewing U.S. involvement
- » Understanding the chronology and battlegrounds
- » Looking at WWII lasting effects

Chapter 4

World War II: Why It Matters

To see what true evil is, study the German concentration and death camps or think about the 6 million Jewish men, women, and children who were murdered. For a glimpse of heroism, look at the stoicism the British displayed when London was bombed for 42 nights straight, or remember the ordinary soldiers from any nation who fought against overwhelming odds toward what seemed to be inevitable defeat. To understand sacrifice, consider the 25 million dead from the Soviet Union alone, or the resistance fighters who gave up everything to free their countries from Nazism. To understand power, fanaticism, devotion to duty, political maneuvering, selflessness, selfishness, and persevering in the face of unimaginable terror, look at events that led to and occurred during World War II.

World War II affected everything about the world we live in today: national borders, political loyalties, strategic and military alliances, international trouble spots, the beginning and end of the Cold War, the birth and death of superpowers, the role of peacekeeping forces, and more. In short, our ways of life and how we conduct ourselves as nations have been largely shaped by events that happened 80 years ago.

The War's Beginnings

Officially, World War II began when Nazi Germany invaded Poland in September 1939 and the French and English declared war against Germany as a result of that invasion. But the war's beginnings came long before this invasion. World War II was the product of a lot of things coming together in just the wrong way at just the wrong time.

The World War I peace agreement

When the Great War ended, the winners (Britain, France, the United States, and Italy) wanted the losers (Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the Ottoman Empire) to pay. Because the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires no longer existed, that left Germany to bear the brunt of the victors' vindictive peace agreement. Humiliated and broke, Germany began nursing a big-time grudge. The victors themselves weren't even happy with the outcome. Some (Italy) felt cheated; some (France) felt that Germany hadn't been punished enough, and some (the U.S.) just wanted the heck out of Dodge.

In addition, the peace agreement created new nations (Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia) in Eastern Europe from the wrecked Austro-Hungarian Empire and other pieces of land from here (Germany) and there (the Soviet Union). Think that didn't tick everybody off?

The global economy

All nations experienced financial troubles following World War I. The European nations (especially Germany, with the war debt hanging over its head) were practically destitute. Slowly, each made an economic recovery — just in time for the world economy to spiral downward. The U.S. stock market crashed in 1929, and the economies in Europe tanked pretty soon after that. Weakened by the war, no European nation could stop the economic downturn, and many saw it as proof that capitalism and democracy had failed.

The rise of totalitarianism

With the world in such a mess, folks looked toward their governments to solve their problems, and those countries without a strong tradition of democratic rule were susceptible to promises made by future tyrants who claimed that by consolidating power in one party and one man, they could provide stability and order.

As a result, in Germany specifically (and in Italy earlier), the fledgling democracies gave way to dictatorships and eventual totalitarian rule (that is, all aspects of life are controlled by the dictator). In Italy, this dictator was Benito Mussolini; in Germany, it was Adolf Hitler.

The birth of Fascism and Nazism

Fascism is a political ideology in which the state is exalted above all else. All effort and resources are committed to glorifying the state. Individual freedom doesn't exist; there is only the freedom to serve the state. Fascists believe that people reach their potential only through service to their nation. If the nation is great, the people are great, and the best representation of the nation's greatness is through war. Italy was Fascist, as was Spain after the Spanish Civil War.

Nazism is fascism with a significant difference: the race issue. The Nazis believed that race is the fundamental trait and therefore the *defining* characteristic of a people. Just as dogs are genetically predisposed to certain roles (some hunt and others herd, for example), each race is genetically predisposed to certain roles. Some are leaders; others (the "inferior" ones) are meant to be mastered. The Aryan race is, according to Nazis, the Master Race. Then, in descending order, are non-Aryan Caucasians, Asians, Africans, and finally Jews. The Jewish people occupied a special place at the bottom of the Nazi racial hierarchy for the following reasons:

- » They "corrupted" the other inferior races and the weak minded of the Master Race with what Hitler thought of as Jewish ideas: equality among people and individual freedom.
- » They wanted to take over the world and thus posed a specific threat to the Master Race who, as the Master Race, deserved to rule the world.
- » They were "parasites" who betrayed Germany during World War I.

The rise of Hitler

Tyrants and people who abuse power have always existed, and in many ways, Hitler was no different than any other dictator. He consolidated power by eliminating anyone who could oppose him. He targeted and abused groups he didn't like. He used propaganda as a tool to lull the German people into believing that what he told them was true.

In other ways, Hitler was different. He had the power of an industrialized nation behind him. He had the capability to export his policies all over Europe through

diplomatic trickery and lies and then through war. He had the certainty of his fanatical vision of a Jew-free Europe. And, maybe most frightening of all, he had the ability to make the German people as a whole believe that by following him down the path to hell, they were fulfilling their destiny for greatness.

The British and French fear of another war

The British and French, having just been through one horrific world war (although they didn't call it a world war at the time), were willing to do just about anything to make sure that they didn't find themselves in another horrific war. For both countries, this determination to avoid conflict resulted in their policy of appeasement. By giving in to the demands of aggressors, such as Hitler, they hoped to avert another crisis that would lead to war. Obviously, this strategy didn't work.

The isolationism of the United States

The United States, separated from Europe by an ocean, wanted to remain separated from Europe. Like the French and British, the Americans had seen enough of war. They learned as much about European politics and intrigue and blood feuds as they wanted to during the Great War, and they had no intention of getting mixed up in that mess again. So they developed an isolationist policy and naively insisted that what went on in Europe — or anywhere else in the world, for that matter — was not their concern.

The empire building of Japan

Japan, long a key player in Asia, wanted to consolidate its power there. Japan still held the German bases that it had occupied in China during World War I, and as one of the victors, Japan got to keep large sections of Chinese territory that had once been controlled by the Germans, in addition to being given control of islands that had belonged to Germany. Japan also sought to increase its holdings in China, which, in addition to being a problem for the Chinese, was also a problem for the United States, who had interests there, too.

Who's Who of Combatants

Americans may find this hard to believe, but U.S. soldiers weren't the only ones fighting the Nazis and the Japanese. (In fact, they weren't even the first ones to fight the Nazis.) A whole lot of other people from a whole lot of other places fought on one side or the other.

The Allies

On the Allied side (the side that fought against Germany and Japan) were the following nations:

Great Britain	Australia
United States	China
France*	New Zealand
Soviet Union	India
Italy (after 1943)	South Africa
Canada	

**After the fall of France to the Germans, Free French, led by Charles de Gaulle*

Other Allied forces included resistance fighters from the German-occupied nations, such as Poland, France, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Czechoslovakia. Nations from South America also joined in the Allied cause.

The Axis

On the Axis side (the side that fought to dominate Europe and Asia) were the following:

Germany	Italy (before 1943)
Japan	

Other Axis forces included nations that were sympathetic to or occupied by Germany, or that felt particularly threatened by the Soviet Union, such as Bulgaria, Hungary, Finland, and Romania.

U.S. Involvement in World War II

When war actually did break out in 1939, Congress passed yet another Neutrality Act. This one allowed the United States to sell war goods to countries involved in the conflict, providing those countries paid cash and picked up the goods themselves. Congress knew that the only countries who were in the position to

take advantage of the arrangement were France and England. The Neutrality Act allowed the United States to unofficially help the Allies, while technically remaining neutral.

As the war went on, American sympathy for the Allies grew, and by 1940 most people in the United States favored some sort of intervention. Congress passed the Selective Service Act of 1940, which allowed the government to start drafting men to enter the military. The United States also suspended trade with Japan, making it clear to the world that Americans clearly sided with the Allies, even though they had not officially entered the war.

The United States under attack: Pearl Harbor

On Sunday, December 7, 1941, a day that President Roosevelt said would “live in infamy,” the Japanese unexpectedly attacked the United States military base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii.

The United States declared war on Japan the next day. Within a few days, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States. The Allies had gained another powerful partner and the Axis countries a formidable enemy. General Dwight D. Eisenhower commanded American forces in North Africa and was promoted to the Supreme Allied Commander for the invasion and liberation of Europe.

At first, the Axis countries prevailed in the war in the Pacific, with Japan conquering the Philippines, Burma, the Netherlands East Indies, and many other Pacific islands. The United States lacked significant military forces in the area, although Australia and China helped.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

The Allies scored the first naval successes against Japan in the battles of the Coral Sea and Midway. U.S. bombers forced Japan into retreat, eliminating a big part of Japan’s carrier fleet in the process.

“Relocating” citizens: Japanese internment in World War II

Compelled by a Congress caught in the grips of anti-Japanese hysteria, President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, effectively suspending the civil liberties of both American citizens of Japanese ancestry and legal resident aliens from Japan. Japanese Americans found themselves, on the government’s orders, being rounded up and sent to internment camps, officially called *relocation camps*.

In the name of national defense, Roosevelt's order permitted the military to bypass constitutional safeguards guaranteed to American citizens.

Executive Order 9066 never specifically mentioned people of Japanese ancestry. Instead, its broad wording could also be taken to include those of German or Italian descent. In reality, though, only a few thousand "enemy aliens" of German or Italian descent were ever arrested, most immediately after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. And although no German or Italian citizens were rounded up and herded into internment camps, more than 100,000 people of Japanese ancestry were.

The camps were overcrowded and provided poor living conditions. People lived in simple barracks-style buildings, without heat, plumbing, and cooking facilities. Because food was short during the war, it was strictly rationed in the camps. Fortunately, families were generally kept together. Eventually, the government agreed to allow internees to leave the camps if they enlisted in the U.S. military. Not surprisingly, the offer wasn't met with much enthusiasm, and only about 1,000 internees enlisted.

Two and a half years after signing Executive Order 9066, Roosevelt rescinded the order during his second term in office. The last internment camp was closed by the end of 1945. Today, the sad history of the Japanese internment camps reminds us that no citizen should ever be denied the basic rights guaranteed by the Constitution, regardless of how unusual the circumstances.

Fighting Germany and Japan

France, although fighting valiantly, was quickly overpowered by Germany and signed an *armistice*, or peace agreement, with Germany in June 1940. Under the leadership of Winston Churchill, Britain resisted, despite constant German bombing attacks that left many of England's important cities devastated.

When Germany had the bad sense to invade the Soviet Union in June 1941, England gained a powerful ally. The 1943 German defeat at Stalingrad allowed the allied Soviet army to advance from the east. Germany remained on the retreat for the remainder of the war, and Italy unconditionally surrendered in September 1943.

By 1944, the Allies had developed their air warfare skills, destroying many German cities and undermining industry and transportation throughout the German-controlled portions of Europe. The efforts of the Air Force also allowed allied ground forces to regain control of most of France and Belgium. The famous D-Day invasion of Normandy, France, in June 1944, began a massive effort to regain Europe's German-occupied territory and led to the ultimate defeat of Adolf Hitler. Germany surrendered by May 1945.

Despite substantial Allied military victories in the Pacific, the Japanese refused to unconditionally surrender. Harry S. Truman, who succeeded to the presidency after the death of Franklin Roosevelt, made the difficult decision to use the new atomic bomb. On August 6, 1945, the United States dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan. An estimated 70,000 people were killed, but still the Japanese would not surrender. The United States dropped a second bomb on Nagasaki on August 9, 1945. Unable to sustain further losses, Japan surrendered on August 10, 1945, on the condition that Emperor Hirohito retain at least nominal power. World War II was officially over.

The Course of the War

Here is a very brief rundown of the highlights of World War II:

- » **On September 1, 1939**, Germany invaded Poland. On September 3, Britain and France (and other nations) declared war on Germany.
- » **On September 17, 1939**, the Soviet Union invaded Poland, having struck a secret deal with the Nazis regarding Poland's fate.
- » **On March 18, 1940**, Italy joined the war on Germany's side.
- » **In May through June 1940**, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Luxembourg, and France fell to the Germans, and the Battle of Britain began.
- » **In March 1941, the U.S.**, still isolationist, implemented its lend-lease policy, which enabled America to lend supplies, including war supplies, to the Allies.
- » **In June 1941**, Hitler turned on Stalin, and Germany invaded the Soviet Union, at which point Stalin saw the light and joined with the Allies to declare war on Germany.
- » **On December 7, 1941**, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and the United States entered the war. Shortly after that, Germany and Italy declared war on the U.S.
- » **In 1942**, Japanese troops captured numerous Pacific islands and places in Asia, including the Philippines, Singapore, Burma, and Malaya. America struck back with limited success but stemmed the Japanese advance permanently at Guadalcanal and New Guinea. The pivotal naval battle of Midway also took place that year.
- » **Also in 1942**, the fighting in North Africa began in earnest. The Germans were defeated at Stalingrad — the decisive land battle of World War II. British forces defeated German and Italian forces at the decisive Battle of El Alamein. The Allies began their advance against Germany with an invasion of North Africa.

- » **In 1943**, the tide of the war turned in the Allies' favor. The Soviet troops began to drive Germany from the USSR, the German troops in North Africa surrendered, and the U.S. made progress against the Japanese in the Pacific, capturing key island strongholds and outflanking the Japanese defenses in New Guinea.
- » **On June 6, 1944**, the Allied invasion of Normandy (D-Day) marked the beginning of the end for Nazi Germany. Germany's last-ditch effort (the Battle of the Bulge in December of 1944) failed to stop the Allied advance into Germany.
- » **By early 1945**, the U.S. made significant progress in the Pacific. Despite the difficulty of the task, U.S. forces managed to conquer the Philippines.
- » **By April 1945**, Germany had lost the war in Europe. Hitler committed suicide on April 30, and on May 7, Germany surrendered unconditionally.
- » **By mid-summer of 1945**, U.S. soldiers had broken the Japanese Navy and captured Okinawa and Iwo Jima in the Pacific in preparation for an invasion of the Japanese Home Islands.
- » **On August 6**, the U.S. dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima; on August 8, it dropped the second atomic bomb on Nagasaki.
- » **On August 14, 1945**, Japan surrendered.

Where World War II Battles Happened

"World War" was not just a grandiose name for what happened between September 1939 and August 1945. It literally was a *world* war. In fact, if you were to stick a pin in a spinning globe, chances are you'd end up stuck in some place that was in some way connected to the war. Maybe it was a supply station or a battleground, or maybe it just had an airfield that pilots could land on en route to or from somewhere else.

The battles in Europe

World War II affected every country in Europe. Most of the nations were directly involved in the war (Germany, France, Italy, Poland, Luxembourg, Czechoslovakia, to name a few). Other places tried like heck to stay out of it — think Switzerland (which was successful in remaining neutral) or Belgium (which wasn't).

The battles in the Soviet Union

Given the state of the Soviet military in 1940 and Hitler's arrogance in thinking that the German army was unbeatable, it's no wonder that he thought Germany could do what no army has yet been able to do: Beat the Russians in their own snowy, cold, forbidding backyard.

When Germany invaded the Soviet Union, Hitler figured five months was all it would take for the superior German army to bring the Soviet bear to its knees. He was wrong, and the Germans ended up in Russia through two Russian winters. It was a different war, one that meant the complete destruction of either Nazism or communism.

The battles in North Africa

North Africa was another major battleground. It was important for a couple of reasons and saw two of the most respected generals in the war (Montgomery for the British and Rommel for the Germans) battle it out there:

- » The Allies needed to protect access to the Suez Canal, without which they would be unable to supply their troops.
- » Capturing North Africa would enable the Allies to launch an attack across the Mediterranean into Italy.

The battles in the Pacific and in Southeast Asia

The battles in the Pacific and Southeast Asia were brutal. The terrain was a nightmare. Thick jungles, rocky cliffs, deep ravines, and networks of caves posed obvious disadvantages for those who had the unpleasant job of attacking a position. Not only was the terrain difficult to fight on, but the rains, when they came, were unrelenting. Add to this the presence of a determined foe who would rather die than surrender, and you have a miserable and deadly situation. Taking the Pacific islands often meant yard-by-yard advances in hand-to-hand combat. The battles in Southeast Asia were little better.

The battle in the Atlantic

The Battle of the Atlantic centered on protecting the essential movement of men and supplies to Britain and the Soviet Union from German *U-boats* (submarines).

Initially the terror of the seas, the U-boats used what was called the *wolf-pack tactic*: If a German submarine spotted a convoy, it radioed its location and tracked the ships while waiting for other U-boats to assemble. Usually under the cover of darkness, the U-boats attacked the most vulnerable ships — in the same way that a pack of wolves pursues its prey and kills the weakest.

It wasn't until 1943, when the Allies were able to produce more ships than the U-boats could sink and sink more U-boats than the Germans could build, that the U-boats stopped being a threat in the Atlantic.

The Effects of World War II

World War II changed the world, creating and destroying nations and shifting the balance of world power and influence from Europe to the Soviet Union and the United States. It ushered in the atomic age and opened a new war — the Cold War — in which a former partner became a mortal enemy. Although World War II ended the global threat of Nazism, it didn't end hatred or eliminate genocide as a tool for war (think “ethnic cleansing”). The Second World War also brought colonialism to an end, and it created new states with all kinds of problems that are prevalent every day in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia.

World War II was one of those rare instances in history that exposed an obvious threat as it was occurring. The enemy was well defined and allowed a clear distinction between good and evil. Nations with no other common cause faced this threat together. Think of the democracies joining with Josef Stalin, the Soviet dictator of the same ilk as Hitler. Many thought that in the end, a new, more peaceful world would emerge, but instead we live every day with the aftershocks of World War II.

Dealing with destruction

After the war, Europe and Japan had to deal with bombed-out cities that were formerly populous centers of industry. The Axis countries of Germany, Italy, and Japan suffered nearly complete devastation. Even England and France lost large parts of their former empires.

The losses motivated countries to work together to overcome their hardships. The idea of an international organization again gained favor, with Allied forces working to set up the United Nations (UN) even before the war was over. Still in existence today, the UN works to promote peace by providing a forum where countries can come together to discuss peaceful solutions to problems and conflicts. It also provides educational and economic aid to countries in need.

The Allies also recognized the importance of free trade in order to avoid a depression like the one that followed World War I. They made tariff agreements that kept the flow of goods open between international communities.

Entering the Cold War Years

With countries like England, France, Germany, and China sustaining devastating losses of people, property, and progress after World War II, the world was left with two main superpowers:

- » The United States of America, which had a democratic government and capitalist economy
- » The Soviet Union, which had a communist government and state-planned economy

Dominance in the arms race (by the 1950s, both superpower countries had nuclear bombs) and economic struggle for world power created these two superpowers.



The Soviet Union emerged as a superpower after World War II despite sustaining the highest losses of any country involved in the war — 7.5 million military personnel and 15 million civilians.

The United States and the Soviet Union both believed that their system of government worked best. Despite unifying efforts in Europe and the work of the United Nations, the world began to take sides. The United States *allied*, or joined forces with, Western Europe, whereas the Soviet Union maintained control over much of Eastern Europe.

The Cold War (1947–1991) between the United States and the Soviet Union was not a war in the traditional sense. No guns or ammunition were used, and no actual battles were fought. Instead, the two sides used money and trade as the weapons to win their victories.

Dismissing neutral foreign policy

The Cold War years represent the United States' further distancing from neutral foreign policy — a change that exists to this day. The 1947 Truman Doctrine declared that the United States would support any nation threatened by communism. In addition, under the Marshall Plan, the United States provided massive economic aid to Europe to help revitalize the failing European economies and to help prevent the spread of communism. The United States also helped to found and fund the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank — both of

which lend money to developing nations in order to help them avoid communist influence.

In 1949, the alliance between the United States and Western Europe became formal with the forming of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). NATO's policy was to limit, or *contain*, the Soviet Union to the areas where it already had influence. Members in the organization also vowed to defend each other if ever attacked.

To counter NATO, the Soviets enacted the Warsaw Pact, which formed a military organization with the nations of Eastern Europe. The Warsaw Pact sought to promote a peaceful coexistence of the world's powers, but also to defend member nations if necessary. The Warsaw Pact was dissolved in 1991 with the reunification of Germany and NATO membership of several formerly Soviet countries, most notably Poland and the Baltic and Balkan countries.



REMEMBER

As of this writing, Ukraine is in its fourth year of fighting off Russia's invasion of February 2022 over potential NATO membership and territorial disputes. Russian aggression inspired the neutral countries Finland and Sweden to join NATO in 2023 and 2024, respectively. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, and Ukraine have formally requested to join. Although Ireland and Moldova voice neutrality and are not formally seeking to join, they cooperate with NATO through partnership programs such as Partnership for Peace.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Leaving Indochina: The defeat of the French and infighting in Vietnam
- » Coming to Vietnam: Americans take a stand
- » Escalating military involvement
- » Experiencing defeat after the Tet Offensive

Chapter 5

Welcome to Vietnam

When American ground forces entered Vietnam in large numbers in March 1965, few Americans knew much about this small Southeast Asian country or the reasons American troops were there. Throughout the 1960s, as the U.S. military increased its involvement, Vietnam became a central concern for many Americans, increasingly dividing them as a military and political issue. In this chapter, you see how Cold War fears led America into a long and divisive war.

Enter America: The Last Chapter of the Long Vietnamese Struggle

What the Vietnamese refer to as the “American War” that took place in the 1960s and ’70s was just the last chapter in a 2000-year-long struggle for independence, first from its dominant neighbor China and then from the French, who colonized the country in the 20th century. The decline and collapse of the French colonial empire in French Indochina (Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia) in the 1950s, the United States became the primary foreign nation involved in Vietnam until 1975, when the last U.S. troops were withdrawn.

U.S. military forces were first in Vietnam during World War II to counter the presence of Japanese occupiers (who were allied with Nazi Germany). The U.S. formed the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in 1941 as part of the war effort. (The OSS later evolved into the Central Intelligence Agency, or CIA.) In Vietnam, the OSS forged informal alliances with the Viet Minh and supplied arms, ammunition, and radio equipment to them in exchange for intelligence on the Japanese and assistance in rescuing downed pilots.



REMEMBER

The Viet Minh, led by Ho Chi Minh, was a coalition of nationalist and communist groups formed in May 1941 during the Japanese occupation of Vietnam. This coalition came together to take advantage of the opportunity to organize and prepare to take over in the power vacuum expected after the Japanese withdrawal. By the end of World War II, the Viet Minh forces expected the United States to support Vietnamese independence. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) had often expressed strong anticolonial views. When the Cold War became America's greatest concern after the war, U.S. policy changed to allow France back into Vietnam. The U.S. worked with the communist Viet Minh during the war because they had the common goal of forcing the Japanese out of Vietnam. After that was accomplished, the desired goals began to diverge. The Viet Minh felt betrayed and fought the French, defeating them in 1954. They would later fight their former allies, the United States, in the 1960s.

Continuing the colonial effort: The French in Indochina

Though the Viet Minh declared Vietnam's independence soon after the Japanese surrender in August 1945, the French wanted to hold on to their former colonial possession as a means to help rebuild France, which had been devastated by World War II.



REMEMBER

The U.S. based its decision to support French aspirations on the *domino theory*, which assumed that the fall of Vietnam — or any country in Southeast Asia — to communism would act as the first domino in a line, building communist momentum and causing subsequent countries to fall, until all of Southeast Asia was communist. This theory was part of the larger *containment policy* that the United States had adopted to check the advance of communism anywhere on the globe. The theory was based upon the belief that the communist system contained flaws that would create its own demise; thus the U.S. strategy was to stop the spread of communism and wait for it to implode of its own natural problems.

Though the French enjoyed superior firepower and air superiority, they were unable to control the war, as the Viet Minh held indigenous support and could choose where and when to engage the French. As the French lost ground, they repeatedly asked the United States for more aid, and by 1954, the U.S. was funding 80 percent of the war effort.

In an attempt to reverse their fortunes in 1953, the French formulated a strategy to lure the Viet Minh into a decisive battle, at Dien Bien Phu, where the superior French forces could finally break the back of the resistance. However, the French grossly underestimated the strength and determination of the Viet Minh while overestimating their own strength and logistical abilities, and their defeat signaled the end of French rule in Vietnam.

Creating two Vietnams: The Geneva Conference

At the Geneva Conference of 1954, the French had to negotiate from a weakened position after their loss at Dien Bien Phu. Both sides accepted these provisions:

- » Vietnam was divided at the 17th parallel to allow both sides to withdraw in an orderly manner.
- » The French would leave Vietnam.
- » The Vietnamese could organize elections to be held in 1956 to elect a new government and reunify the country.

Though the peace terms were unfavorable to U.S. Cold War strategies (which didn't include a communist victory), the Eisenhower administration could do little about the situation. The French and the Viet Minh, under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh, signed the agreement on July 20, 1954.



REMEMBER

The northern half of the country formed the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), which emerged as a communist government under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh. In the south, the Republic of Vietnam, under the leadership of Ngo Dinh Diem, ran its democratic government modeled after the United States. The plan for national elections in 1956 was designed to give the Vietnamese people a choice between the two governments. Figure 5-1 shows a map of the divided Vietnam and neighboring Laos and Cambodia.



FIGURE 5-1:
Vietnam after
the Geneva
Conference.

Courtesy of the Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University

Building a nation: The developing quagmire



REMEMBER

Given the split between North and South Vietnam, the United States began to assume some control in South Vietnam where the communists had less control. Fearful that an election would allow all of Vietnam to become communist under the popular Ho Chi Minh, U.S. policy focused on perpetuating the north-south division. By supporting a strong anti-communist government in the South, policymakers believed they could balance the communist threat from the North and contain the spread of communism worldwide.

The caustic leadership of Ngo Dinh Diem

Ngo Dinh Diem, the nationalist leader of South Vietnam (see Figure 5-2), was not a popular leader, but U.S. officials saw him as the strongest possible one. But Diem was difficult to work with because he was inflexible, uncompromising, blindly loyal to his family, and paternalistic toward his people.

Diem fears of losing the national elections of 1956, and of the perceived threat that communist Viet Minh would undermine any idea of a free election, Diem shifted his focus to building his economy and military, anticipating an invasion from the North.

FIGURE 5-2:
Ngo Dinh
Diem (center),
paternalistic
leader of South
Vietnam.



Courtesy of the Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University



Between 1954 and 1960, the U.S. spent \$1.2 billion to assist South Vietnam, supplying 80 percent of Diem's military costs and about 50 percent of the nonmilitary expenses. About three-fourths of the funds went to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN).

The easy flow of U.S. dollars into South Vietnam fueled corruption and greed, further alienating the rich citizens from the rest of the population. Even Diem's attempts to address the problems of corruption created further separation.

The North Vietnamese strategy

In the North, Ho Chi Minh (see Figure 5-3) struggled with transforming the DRV from a colonial structure to a socialist system. Diem had announced that South Vietnam wouldn't participate in the 1956 national elections, and DRV leaders recognized that they would have to either abandon the South or reunify Vietnam by force. Though some leaders favored a negotiated settlement, the hardliners convinced Ho that they would have to take the struggle to the South.

Drawing the battle lines

North Vietnamese leaders kept a careful eye on the effects of corruption and the resulting alienation of the South Vietnamese peasants, capitalizing on the peasants' discontent as part of their strategy for victory. The Viet Minh conducted political assassinations against the more honest and successful government officials in the South, leaving the corrupt ones alone to further sow the seeds of discontent among the peasants. In the early 1960s, the North stepped up its assassinations of village chiefs in order to destabilize the South and ensure the cooperation of peasants against a government that seemed unwilling or unable to protect them.

FIGURE 5-3:
Ho Chi Minh
(third from right)
was a Vietnamese
leader for most of
the 20th century.



Courtesy of the Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University



REMEMBER

In the aftermath of the war with the French, part of the treaty terms included allowing the French to withdraw south and the Viet Minh to pull back north to separate the combatants. The plan was that after national elections were held in 1956, the French would leave the country, and the Viet Minh soldiers who lived in the South but had withdrawn to the North could return to their land, families, and villages. When Diem refused to participate in the national elections (see the “The caustic leadership of Ngo Dinh Diem” section earlier in the chapter), the Viet Minh leaders saw that reunification would have to come by force. Many of these men began secretly returning to their villages in the South where they became the *Viet Cong*, fighting to destabilize the South Vietnamese government. Natives of the North would fight for the same goals as part of the *North Vietnamese Army* (NVA).

The Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) forces of South Vietnam fought back against these tactics by trying to deny the Viet Cong opportunity to control the countryside. As these two forces began to clash more openly, it was often the peasants who were caught in the middle. Both sides sought to punish villagers who collaborated with the enemy.

Facing a crisis of leadership in the South: The Coup of 1963

Following a failed assassination attempt in November 1960, Diem began to distrust his American advisors, believing that they had sanctioned the plot on his life. Distancing himself from the Americans, he turned instead to close relatives such as his younger brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu. Diem’s inability to stop the insurgency in the South, his alienation from the U.S. advisors, and his failure to gain

international acceptance for South Vietnam severely undermined his leadership. Tough U.S. advisors urged him to initiate reforms, but Diem refused, allowing himself to become further isolated. This development proved fatal for Diem in October 1963.



REMEMBER

Recognizing the growing crisis, two South Vietnamese generals secretly approached the United States through a CIA contact to suggest the ouster of Diem. After receiving reassurance that U.S. aid would continue after Diem and that the coup would have no repercussions, South Vietnamese troops captured and executed Diem and his brother on November 2, 1963. A 12-man military council took over the government, paving the way for deeper U.S. commitment.

Americanizing the War

Though the number of U.S. personnel in South Vietnam had grown to about 700 advisors during the Eisenhower administration, American commitment to South Vietnam grew exponentially under President John F. Kennedy, reaching more than 16,000 by late 1963. Further, the role of the American personnel shifted from advisement to direct military support of the South Vietnamese military.

Inheriting the conflict: JFK's legacy to LBJ

In 1960, Kennedy campaigned with the pledge to take a firm stand against the spread of communism. In the first three years of his administration, he faced a variety of challenges regarding the worldwide advance of communism, including the Bay of Pigs fiasco and the Cuban Missile Crisis (for more on these subjects, see Chapter 2). Kennedy based his Vietnam policy on his conviction that the United States must stand firm in the face of communist aggression.

In 1961, South Vietnam President Ngo Dinh Diem requested a substantial increase in U.S. assistance, Kennedy's military advisers believed that increasing American troops in South Vietnam would secure the country and prevent the dominos from falling, and Kennedy complied. His escalation emphasized using Special Forces, often called the *Green Berets*. Trained in guerilla warfare, these troops worked in small groups to train the Vietnamese to defend themselves. By living in close proximity to the people, the Special Forces troops built solid relationships with the Vietnamese. Though quite successful, particularly with the mountain people of Vietnam (called *Montagnards*), over time U.S. forces began to shift away from these tactics in favor of more conventional military tactics, which are much less effective for winning the hearts and minds of the people.

When JFK was assassinated in November 1963, Vice President Lyndon Johnson (LBJ) inherited the presidency and Kennedy's foreign policy. Because LBJ made no significant changes in his cabinet, little would change.

Dealing with the conflict: The presidential campaign of 1964

Almost immediately after taking office, LBJ began campaigning for the 1964 elections, which were only a year away. The Republicans nominated Barry Goldwater, who campaigned as a “hawk,” calling for more troops and a bombing campaign against North Vietnam. Johnson campaigned as a “dove,” focusing on his domestic agenda designed to create the “Great Society.” During his campaign, Johnson called for limited American commitment in Vietnam, stating that he had no intention of sending “American boys to fight a war that [he thinks] ought to be fought by the boys of Asia.”



REMEMBER

Though Johnson, running on a peace platform, won the election by a landslide, he couldn't keep his election promises because the course in Vietnam had already been set in motion. Looking back at the fall of China to the communists in 1950 and the severe political repercussions the loss created for Truman, Johnson couldn't afford to lose Vietnam to the communists.

Wading in deep: The Tonkin Gulf incident

As part of the preparations for a larger role in the war, the U.S. Navy began sending ships deep into the Tonkin Gulf to gather electronic intelligence (ELINT) and plot the coordinates of North Vietnamese radar installations, which would give the United States vital information needed to strike effectively against North Vietnam, if necessary. Called *DeSoto patrols*, these missions also placed U.S. destroyers in position to support South Vietnamese patrol boats during their attacks on Northern positions.



REMEMBER

A confrontation between American ships and North Vietnamese patrol boats in international waters could be — and eventually was — used to justify direct American intervention in the war against North Vietnam.

On July 30, as a part of the South Vietnamese efforts to agitate the North Vietnamese, South Vietnamese commandos raided two small islands off the North Vietnamese coast. The U.S. destroyer, the *Maddox*, cruised nearby to use its special ELINT equipment to monitor North Vietnamese radar positions and radio traffic during the raid. Over the next few days:

» **August 2:** The *Maddox* encountered three North Vietnamese patrol boats investigating its presence. According to reports, the patrol boats pursued and fired three torpedoes on the *Maddox*. Although the torpedoes scored no hits, jets were scrambled from the nearby aircraft carrier *Ticonderoga*, hitting three torpedo boats and sinking one.

Although U.S. officials immediately sought details on the 20-minute encounter, the only physical evidence found was one bullet that had hit the *Maddox*. Johnson needed stronger evidence, so he ordered the *Maddox* to return to the area accompanied by a newer destroyer, the *C. Turner Joy*.

» **August 4:** The two warships reported that they were under attack by North Vietnamese torpedo boats. It was a dark night and the battle raged for more than two hours, with reports of 22 torpedoes fired. Yet neither ship took any hits. The aircraft carriers *Ticonderoga* and *Constellation* sent jets to pound each target identified by the warships, and initial reports claimed that three North Vietnamese vessels had been sunk.

Almost immediately after the attacks, Captain Herrick of the *Maddox* had second thoughts about the whole event. He quizzed his crew and searched the seas for evidence to prove the attacks, yet no physical evidence existed of sunken enemy ships, and his crew was now unsure about the whole attack. They speculated that the storm created phantom sonar signals, and they may have fired at nothing.

Johnson pressed the navy for positive verification of the attacks, but even before receiving proof, he told the American people about the attacks and unleashed a 64-plane retaliatory strike against North Vietnamese radar stations. He then asked Congress for the authority to react to what was described as unprovoked aggression by the North Vietnamese. Congressmen were told that U.S. destroyers had been conducting routine patrols, and the House of Representatives and Senate voted overwhelmingly in favor of the *Tonkin Gulf Resolution*, giving the president broad powers to respond to aggression with the force he deemed appropriate and necessary. Johnson now had all the authority he needed to significantly escalate the war.

Committing U.S. Troops: Shifting from Advisors to Combatants

In February 1965, Viet Cong forces overran a U.S. airbase in Pleiku in the central highlands, killing nine Americans and wounding 130. They also did extensive damage to U.S. aircraft. Johnson immediately ordered retaliatory strikes on targets in

North Vietnam. These strikes evolved into a sustained bombing campaign named Operation Rolling Thunder.

With increased air activity, General Westmoreland requested combat troops to protect U.S. airbases, and Johnson immediately sent two battalions (more than 1,400 men) of Marines who landed at Danang on March 8, 1965. Within weeks, Westmoreland requested more troops to begin offensive operations. After a debate, many of the same advisors that Kennedy had relied on four years before favored escalation, claiming that they needed to act quickly to avoid a larger disaster. Johnson authorized the deployment of an additional 40,000 troops, and as the U.S. combat role expanded, Westmoreland called for even greater numbers of troops. Thus, the Pleiku incident was the beginning of major U.S. escalation.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

By the end of 1965, the U.S. had some 200,000 troops in Vietnam. In 1966, the number would balloon to more than 360,000 and hit 475,000 in 1967. The United States hit the high point in the war in 1968 with more than 530,000 troops in Vietnam.



REMEMBER

The U.S. was winning battles, yet failing at its mission to win people's hearts and minds. The massive forces sent to save South Vietnam were destroying the country militarily, environmentally, socially, and economically.

Relying on air superiority: Rolling Thunder

Operation Rolling Thunder was the Johnson administration's first major sustained bombing campaign. It began in March 1965 and continued intermittently until October 1968. It had three objectives:

- » **Strategic:** Destroy North Vietnam's industrial capacity for war and disrupt its lines of communication with the South.
- » **Coercive:** Intimidate the North Vietnamese.
- » **Political:** Boost the morale of the ARVN forces by demonstrating American strength and resolve.

Although the U.S. Air Force was allowed to select targets in North Vietnam from an authorized list, Johnson and his senior White House officials created this list. These men were primarily concerned about world perceptions of the bombing campaign and the possibility of reaction from the Soviet Union or China. Though successful in controlling the campaign, the system also created resentment among military planners who felt that the Johnson administration was hampering the war effort by micromanaging it.

Bombing in the South in support of ground troops fighting the Viet Cong was much less restricted. Although much attention has been placed on the bombing of North Vietnam, more bombs were dropped on South Vietnam. Between 1965 and 1967, the U.S. and South Vietnamese Air Forces dropped more than 1 million tons of bombs in the South, more than twice the number dropped on the North in the same period.

Periodically, Johnson halted the bombing campaign to offer the North Vietnamese a chance to discuss peace, yet the Northern leaders often viewed this as a sign of weakening resolve and a chance to rebuild their facilities during the talks. When Johnson realized they were using the talks to stall for time, he resumed the bombing. Though the campaign in Vietnam dwarfed the tonnage used in World War II, there were definite limits to the use of air power in a country that had so few industrial targets of value.

Fighting a different kind of war



REMEMBER

From the beginning, the war in Vietnam was different from previous wars, with these specific characteristics:

- » **U.S. troops couldn't easily distinguish their enemy from their allies.** The enemy easily blended in with the population and struck at U.S. forces from within. Though the U.S. worked hard to define the enemy as an invading force trying to destabilize South Vietnam, this claim was only true of the NVA forces. The Viet Cong was the group who engaged U.S. forces most aggressively up until 1968, and these people can't be considered an invading force because they were originally from the area now known as South Vietnam.
- » **The war in Vietnam lacked a geographic goal.** That is, the war had started as a war of independence from the French and had evolved into a civil war after the split between the North and South. In a conventional war, two sides struggle to advance their armies, but the U.S. Army wasn't trying to push the enemy from the field of battle except at the northern border. Instead, they were sent to quell a civil conflict by stabilizing the South.
- » **The military strategy turned to body counts.** The United States adopted a strategy of attrition and erosion. Recognizing its superior firepower and air dominance over South Vietnam, the U.S. used these strengths to find and kill VC and NVA soldiers in South Vietnam. The U.S. success was measured with the body count, "theirs" versus "ours." The erosion strategy tried to weaken North Vietnam's ability to wage war. By bombing military and industrial targets in the North, as well as supply lines along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the U.S. strategy was to destroy the enemy's ability to supply its troops and inhibit the southern insurgents' ability to fight.

Check out U.S. troops in the field in Figure 5-4.

FIGURE 5-4:
U.S. troops wade through a stream in Vietnam.



Courtesy of the Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University

Understanding the Cold War concerns of maintaining a limited war

Throughout the Vietnam War, the Cold War struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union tended to define the conflict. The powerful belief in the domino theory was a driving force behind America's decision to take a stand in Vietnam.



REMEMBER

Even while fighting in Vietnam, Cold War fears shaped strategies and decisions. The United States feared that the struggle could escalate into a worldwide war with the Soviet Union or China. The lessons of pushing too far in the Korean War, where the Chinese sent one million troops into North Korea to push back U.S. forces when the U.S. ignored their warnings, were a constant brake on U.S. decisions to escalate. Although the U.S. knew that the Soviets and later the Chinese were supplying the North Vietnamese, it wanted to win in Vietnam without escalating into a war that could become a nuclear conflict.



TIP

Although many people even today complain that the United States was forced to fight the war “with one hand tied behind its back,” the fear of escalation into worldwide nuclear war was a very real concern that required caution.

Failing to win hearts and minds

One major objective was for the U.S. to pacify and stabilize South Vietnam in order to claim victory. This goal had two components. The first was to find and defeat the enemy; the second was to gain support and cooperation from the people so that South Vietnam could become self-sustaining. The idea was to convince them that living under a capitalist republic was far superior to living under communism. This approach has often been referred to as “winning their hearts and minds.”



REMEMBER

Unfortunately, the U.S. military was far better at the first goal than the second, and leaders like General Westmoreland believed that defeating the enemy was top priority; they could worry about the rest after vanquishing the enemy.

The relationship between the U.S. involvement in the war effort and the South Vietnamese people didn't always represent a positive influence, and the results included

» **Creating a nation of refugees.** Though part of the U.S. program included building roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, and irrigation projects, the military mission undermined much of the goodwill created by these improvements. The massive firepower and the liberal use of chemical defoliants drove many peasants from their villages into the cities. American military operations created 4 million South Vietnamese refugees, representing a full 25 percent of the South Vietnamese population. These refugees lived in squalid conditions, rife with disease. Their suffering made them targets for Viet Cong recruitment.

» **Changing family life and fortunes.** Because children abandoned filial piety to pursue easy money and Western lifestyles, bars and brothels clogged the streets of the cities, luring young people into servicing the soldiers and shattering traditional values and social structures. A young girl could make more money per week working as a prostitute for U.S. soldiers than her father could make in a year. Young Vietnamese boys were forced into the South Vietnamese army and separated from their families.

The vast influx of American dollars fueled inflation, causing further hardship on the already hard-pressed poor. Between 1965 and 1967, Vietnamese prices increased an average of 170 percent.

» **Forcing rural Vietnamese into contrived enclaves.** Started under Diem's regime, the *Agroville* and *Strategic Hamlet* programs were designed to prevent the VC from gaining supplies from the rural villages. To protect the villagers and deny the VC access to supplies, villagers were forced to move to South Vietnamese-established enclaves. As the U.S. involvement deepened, these programs were expanded. The problems were that



TECHNICAL
STUFF



REMEMBER

- Villagers had to build and live in the settlements. Americans ignored the deep multigenerational attachment of the rural folk to the land, which was their chief source of security and held the ancestral shrines, which they had tended and worshipped on a daily basis for generations.
- Strategic Hamlets were fenced-in settlements with gates and razor wire, allowing American forces to confine the villagers, particularly at night when the VC were most active. Inhabitants viewed the camps more as prisons than villages, driving many into supporting the VC.

» **Designating “free-fire zones.”** Anything that moved in a free-fire zone was considered a target of opportunity. Jets could unload unused ordnance to avoid the dangers of landing with live bombs aboard. This indiscriminate killing further alienated the peasants. One example was the establishment of two Special Forces camps in the central highlands. After the camps were established, villagers were forced to live there, and the surrounding areas were declared free-fire zones. As a result, villagers had to either work in the Special Forces camps or go over to the VC.



REMEMBER

SEGREGATING THE LINES IN COMBAT

For every one combat troop on the front line, there were at least seven in the rear. Though the rear didn't offer complete safety, when compared to the risk faced by a combat grunt, it was a much safer place to be. This was the basis of many complaints about racism in the war, especially from civil rights leaders. Even Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. asserted that Blacks represented a disproportionate number of draftees and combat troops.

Selective Service rules allowed deferments for college attendance and a variety of civilian occupations deemed essential. Deferments tended to favor white, middle- and upper-class groups. Also, Blacks were underrepresented on the draft boards themselves. In 1966 Blacks accounted for just about 1 percent of all draft board members, with seven states having no Blacks at all.

Blacks did supply a disproportionate number of combat soldiers. Although they made up less than 10 percent of the U.S. armed services between 1961 and 1966, they accounted for just fewer than 20 percent of all combat-related deaths in the same period. In 1965 alone, Blacks represented almost 20 percent of the army's forces killed in action. Military commanders worked to lessen these numbers, and by the end of the war, combat deaths of Black soldiers amounted to about 12.5 percent. Yet U.S. census records for 1970 place their percent of the population at about 10.5 percent.

Black soldiers were aware of these disparities, yet the combat grunt could do little about it. The situation strengthened the feeling of community among Blacks, who bonded together as “bloods.” The North Vietnamese were aware of racial tensions within the U.S. military and worked hard to disseminate propaganda designed to increase these tensions.

The Tet Offensive of 1968

By 1967, the Vietnam War had hit a stalemate. Although the United States successfully kept the NVA and VC from toppling the South Vietnamese government, they failed to stop the insurgency in the South. The drawn-out struggle benefited the North Vietnamese, whose leaders calculated that a major offensive might force Johnson to end the bombing and come to the negotiating table in a weakened position based upon growing U.S. public discontent with the war’s costs and losses. Success in a major offensive might also demonstrate the limits of U.S. power and undermine South Vietnamese confidence in U.S. power. This, in turn, could cause the people of South Vietnam to lose confidence in their own government, paving the way for overthrow or the possibility of a coalition government.



REMEMBER

The *Tet Offensive* was a carefully planned series of simultaneous attacks by the North throughout South Vietnam. It was set for the end of January to take advantage of the lull in the action created by the annual Tet (lunar New Year) festivities. The assaults weren’t aimed at perceived weak points in the U.S. and South Vietnamese defenses, but at the perceived strongholds. As a precursor to the plan, the North Vietnamese took two important steps:

- » As a conciliatory gesture, they offered to come to the negotiating table if the United States would stop the bombing campaign.
- » They launched a series of diversionary attacks on U.S. posts along the Laos and Cambodian borders and near the demilitarized zone (DMZ) to draw U.S. strength to the area to allow for the real offensive in the cities of the South.

Diverting attention at Khe Sanh

An important part of the North Vietnamese Tet Offensive strategy was to make the American leaders think that they were trying to gain control of the northernmost part of South Vietnam. The initial assaults were followed by a buildup of North Vietnamese troops in the area of Khe Sanh, in the northwest corner of the country. To American leaders, the situation began to look much like the great siege of the French forces at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, which finally broke the French will to

continue fighting (see the section “Enter America: The Last Chapter of the Long Vietnamese Struggle,” earlier in this chapter). President Johnson, buying the North Vietnamese ruse, ordered General Westmoreland to hold Khe Sanh so that the United States could avoid a repeat of the French debacle some 14 years before.

By the time the siege of Khe Sanh began on January 21, 1968, Westmoreland was prepared to hold his position by committing more than 50,000 U.S. troops. As the two-month battle ensued, the U.S. unleashed withering firepower, including artillery, air strikes, and napalm on a scale previously unseen. Though the U.S. won the battle at Khe Sanh, this victory was all part of the North Vietnamese strategy of diversion from the main assault they were about to unleash on the cities of South Vietnam.

Surprising the U.S. with the real attacks

While the preparations for the siege of Khe Sanh were going on in the North, the NVA and VC were quietly moving their troops and weapons into position in the South. Their journey carefully planned for the Tet holiday, most of the NVA and VC forces moved with the migration to the cities that always accompanied the Tet celebrations.

The attacks began just after midnight on January 31, 1968. The well-coordinated attacks by 84,000 NVA and VC troops hit six major cities, 36 of the 44 provinces, and more than 50 hamlets. Attacking from the DMZ all the way to the southern tip of the country, the assault was rapid and brutal, catching U.S. forces by surprise. The assaults in the capital of Saigon and the old imperial city of Hue were cleverly delayed by one day to create the illusion that the offensive wouldn’t include these cities. As Tet celebrations continued the next day in the two cities, the U.S. forces, already reeling from the previous day’s action, were surprised once again.

In Saigon the VC pulled off a daring raid on the brand new U.S. embassy compound. Twenty VC commandos drove through the city in a truck and a taxi, arriving at the embassy at 3 a.m. They quickly blew a hole in the outer wall and raced inside, killing five U.S. guards. Though reinforcements quickly arrived, the compound wasn’t secured until the last commando was killed nearly four hours later. The commandos lost, but they accomplished one of the most important psychological objectives of the whole offensive — they had breached the walls of the very symbol of U.S. power, demonstrating American weakness.

The highly respected nightly newscaster Walter Cronkite reacted to the images of the overrun U.S. embassy, asking live on air, “What the hell is going on? I thought we were winning the war.”

Across South Vietnam, battles raged in the cities and hamlets. The U.S. and ARVN forces had the advantage of mobility and firepower and, in most places, were able to repel the insurgents within days. A fierce battle developed in Hue as the NVA and VC forces uncharacteristically tried to hold the city. The communist forces finally withdrew on February 23; the Tet Offensive was over, and the U.S. and ARVN forces had repelled the insurgents. Yet the city was in ruins, and thousands of officials, teachers, and perceived collaborators had been executed. The impact of what had been accomplished was yet to be seen.

Assessing the aftermath: A military victory and a political defeat



REMEMBER

The Tet Offensive stunned many Americans, even those who initially supported the war. The chaos and carnage created by the attacks were recorded by international news services and broadcast into the homes of millions of Americans. Vietnam was the nation's first televised war. For the first time, both the heroic and horrific images of the U.S. streamed into America's living rooms every night. No longer was war a something you read about or watched once a week in a news-reel at the movies before the feature film. And perhaps nothing demonstrated the power of television in Vietnam as forcefully as Tet.

Prior to Tet, LBJ had cultivated a picture of steady, careful progress in Vietnam. General Westmoreland had repeatedly announced the fine progress of the war and told the American people just months before that the enemy was on the verge of defeat. The daily tally of body counts and kill ratios convinced many Americans that the U.S. military had the situation totally under control, and that it was merely a matter of time before the U.S. finished and brought the victorious boys home. The effects of seeing the attacks across the country and even in the U.S. Embassy were devastating. The president's claims came under steady fire after Tet, causing many to wonder what the truth really was.



REMEMBER

The irony was that Tet really was a U.S. military victory. The U.S. and ARVN forces were successful in driving back the enemy in every province. Viet Cong losses were staggering. Tet had shattered the Viet Cong movement, shifting the burden of the fighting in the future to the NVA. The administration persistently called Tet a military victory for the U.S., yet the fact that it could have happened at all raised serious doubts regarding the veracity of the government's claims.

Other televised scenes also shocked American viewers. Camera crews filmed Saigon's chief of police placing a gun to the head of a captured young Vietnamese man and pulling the trigger. The man slowly crumpled to his knees and fell backwards, blood spurting from his head. In another shocking image, you could clearly see the bodies in the streets and the gutted building in the background as the press

interviewed General Westmoreland, who was trying to reassure Americans that the situation was well in hand.

And while Westmoreland and LBJ proclaimed the Tet Offensive a U.S. victory, Walter Cronkite, who had just returned from Vietnam, told his TV audience that it seemed “more certain than ever that the bloody experience of Vietnam is to end in a stalemate.”

Tet dramatically increased U.S. discontent with the war, as public opinion polls showed a sharp increase in opposition. In the aftermath of Tet, American momentum was severely depleted:

- » As the U.S. entered a period of deescalation and negotiation, opposition to the war gathered momentum. What started as a small group of concerned individuals was now turning into a major movement.
- » The soldiers themselves felt this shift as they began to think beyond the war. Gung-ho patriotism, although not totally gone from all the troops, was increasingly replaced by skepticism spawned by events such as the victory and abandonment of Khe Sanh.
- » As troops learned more about the antiwar movement at home, they began to wonder what their own futures held beyond the war. The growing sense of stalemate and futility nurtured fears of being the last to die in a dying cause.

THE TELLING END TO THE SIEGE OF KHE SANH

A few days after Johnson spoke to the American people about deescalating in Vietnam, the siege of Khe Sanh finally ended as a complete victory for the U.S. Marines. Having dropped more than 115,000 tons of bombs and napalm, the area around Khe Sanh looked like a lunar landscape, yet the North Vietnamese, having suffered heavy casualties, were forced to withdraw. The irony was that almost immediately after announcing the U.S. victory, the troops were ordered to abandon the place in order to pull back to a more secure position. To those who had fought and suffered, enduring the loss of friends and innocence to hold Khe Sanh at all costs, this move seemed almost incomprehensible. Yet in a war fought on the basis of body counts, such moves were common.

- » Winning ugly in 2000
- » Going to war with terrorism
- » Dealing with Saddam
- » Attacking the Capitol

Chapter 6

Terror Comes Home; America Goes to War(s)

As the 21st century began, the United States found itself the Big Kahuna on an increasingly shrinking planet. Technological innovations occurred at a geometric pace and jumped national boundary lines, in turn helping to create an even more tightly knit global economy. Environmental and political problems also crossed borders, all of which meant that the world's troubles were inescapably America's, and vice versa.

This chapter looks at one of the closest presidential elections ever, two wars, the most horrific terrorist attack in modern history, and an assault by Americans against their home turf. It was a bumpy start for the new century.

The 2000 Bush-Gore Squeaker

One was the son of a former president, and the other son of a former U.S. senator. By the time the 2000 presidential election campaign was over, George W. Bush and Al Gore had staged a race that was a son of a gun.

Gore, the offspring of former Tennessee Sen. Al Gore, Sr. and a former senator himself, had served dutifully, if a bit distantly, for eight years as vice president to Bill Clinton and was the obvious choice to succeed Clinton as the Democratic Party's standard-bearer.

Bush, the governor of Texas and the son of the 41st president, George H.W. Bush, was a former oil man and Major League Baseball executive. The younger Bush parlayed his familiar name and financial backing from much of the Republican establishment to win the GOP nomination after beating back a challenge from Arizona Sen. John McCain.

The roller-coaster campaign had Gore trying to run on the positive aspects of the Clinton administration while taking pains not to be too closely associated with Clinton himself (damaged political goods because of the Lewinsky scandal and his subsequent impeachment). Meanwhile, Bush ran as a "compassionate conservative" who wanted a "new morality" in the White House and objected to the Clinton administration's military intervention in the Balkans and Somalia. As of Election Day, polls showed the two were neck and neck.

Hanging chads and butterfly ballots

It all came down to Florida. Outside the Sunshine State, Gore had captured (or would capture) 266 of the 270 electoral votes needed to win the White House. Bush had 246. It appeared at first that Gore had won Florida's 25 electoral votes, giving him the presidency. But as the night of November 7 turned into the morning of November 8, it looked like Bush had won. Television networks that had originally projected Gore as the winner reversed themselves and declared Bush the winner, and then backtracked again. Around 2 a.m., Gore called Bush to concede. Around 4 a.m., he called back to withdraw his concession.

And the confusion was just getting warmed up. Over the next 35 days, both sides engaged in a titanic legal struggle over whether recounts should occur and, if so, which votes should be recounted. Ballots where voters had failed to completely punch out the little cardboard squares — and therefore left *hanging chads* — were challenged.

Butterfly ballots that had candidates' names on one page and punch holes on another led to voter confusion and also were challenged. A post-election study of ballots in Palm Beach County found that more than 8,000 voters had punched holes for Gore *and* for one of two minor party candidates.



REMEMBER

The whole mess eventually went to the U.S. Supreme Court. On December 12, the court voted 5–4 to reverse a decision by the Florida Supreme Court that would have continued the recounts. The next day, Gore conceded.

COUNT 'EM ALL — AND BE A GOOD LOSER

“An election is not over until all the votes are counted. If the U.S. Supreme Court does not come down on the side of this most revered principle of democracy, then this presidential election will be forever tainted.” — U.S. Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-CA, two days before the court’s decision.

“There’s an important responsibility for the loser to lose with grace.” — U.S. Sen. Mitch McConnell, R-KY, on the same day.

Post-election scrutinizing

Gore’s concession ended an election filled with ironies and what-ifs. Gore had won the popular vote by about 500,000 votes out of about 100 million cast. It was only the fourth time in U.S. history that the popular vote winner didn’t win the White House (1824, 1876, and 1888 were the others up until then; the fifth would occur in 2016). If Gore had only won his home state of Tennessee or Clinton’s home state of Arkansas, he would have won. If Green Party candidate Ralph Nader hadn’t been on the Florida ballot, most of his 97,000 votes may well have gone to Gore.

Post-election studies by several major newspapers found that if the recount had been limited to only the counties in which Gore had sought recounts, Bush still would have won. But if all the disputed ballots throughout the state had been recounted, Gore would have won.



REMEMBER

As something of a consolation prize, Gore won the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize for his work in bringing attention to the role of humans in global warming. A film that he narrated on the same topic also won an Academy Award for Best Documentary. Bush, meanwhile, got the job his dad had held eight years before — and some of the same headaches.

Bush came into office with slightly more than half of the voters preferring someone else and with polls showing that more than half the country thought the Supreme Court’s decision was politically motivated. That’s hardly anyone’s idea of a good way to start an administration.

But Americans don’t hold a grudge for long. By April 2001, polls showed that though only 50 percent thought Bush had won fair and square, 59 percent said they supported him, and 62 percent approved of the way he was handling the job. (Of course, it didn’t hurt that Bush had started his tenure by proposing a \$1.6 trillion tax-cut package.) The new president also unveiled an ambitious

energy program that called for relaxing environmental protections in favor of aggressively expanding fossil-fuel development.

But less than nine months into his administration, Bush faced a crisis that would put most domestic programs on the back burner, largely define his presidency, and change the way many Americans thought about their own security.

A Nation Stunned

At 8:46 (EDT) on the morning of September 11, 2001, a hijacked commercial jet crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York City. Seventeen minutes later, a second hijacked passenger jet flew into the center's South Tower. Both towers soon collapsed, pulling down or heavily damaging surrounding buildings.

At 9:37, a third jet plowed into the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., followed 26 minutes later by the crash of a fourth flight into a field about 70 miles south-east of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Passengers aboard the fourth plane learned of the fate of the other three through cell phone calls and fought back against the hijackers before the plane could reach its intended target, which was believed to have been the Capitol in Washington, D.C.



REMEMBER

The United States had suffered the worst attack on its soil in its history, and the country plunged into a war against terrorism.

Al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden

The attacks, carried out by 19 members of a fundamentalist Islamist group called *Al-Qaeda* ("the base"), killed a total of about 3,000 people, including 415 New York City police and firefighters who responded to the disaster at the World Trade Center. More than 6,000 people were injured.

Americans — and much of the rest of the world — were shocked. Millions had watched horrified as TV cameras that had been focusing on the North Tower after the first attack captured the second plane hitting the South Tower. The subsequent collapse of the towers was also carried live. National, state, and local officials scrambled to prepare for more attacks. Air travel was shut down, and stock markets in the United States and around the world were badly shaken and posted severe losses.

On September 17, President Bush formally identified Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden as the mastermind behind the attacks. A wealthy member of a prominent Saudi Arabian family, bin Laden had operated out of Afghanistan since the mid-1990s under the protection of a group called the Taliban. The *Taliban* (which means “student”) followed an extreme version of Islamic law and seized control in Afghanistan in 1998.

Taking on the Taliban

Speaking to a joint session of Congress on September 20, Bush demanded that the Taliban hand over bin Laden and other Al-Qaeda leaders and dismantle terrorist training camps within Afghanistan. “They will hand over the terrorists or share their fate,” Bush warned.

On October 7, after Taliban leaders had rejected Bush’s demands, U.S. and British aircraft unleashed a massive bombing attack on major Afghan cities. By mid-November, the Afghan capital of Kabul had fallen. By mid-December, air attacks coupled with allied nations’ ground forces that included about 30,000 troops from the United States and anti-Taliban Afghan militia had toppled the Taliban regime.

Although out of power, the Taliban was not out of business. After a year of licking their wounds, Taliban forces began what would become a 20-year insurgency. Their efforts were fueled by funds from control of much of Afghanistan’s vast production of poppies from which opium was manufactured. It was the nation’s largest cash crop, providing most of the world’s opium and 400,000 Afghans with work. The enemy also took advantage of safe havens in mountainous areas along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border by scampering into Pakistan, where it was logistically and politically difficult for U.S. troops to follow.

President Barack Obama, Bush’s successor, countered in 2009 by gradually building U.S. forces to more than 100,000 while warning that “our troop commitment in Afghanistan cannot be open-ended.” By mid-2013, U.S. forces were down to 65,000, and by the end of 2016, 8,400. The number climbed to 14,000 by mid-2018 under President Donald Trump. But in February 2020, the Trump Administration reached a deal with the Taliban. In return for a cessation of terrorist activities, U.S. troops would be withdrawn. The last American soldiers left in late August 2021, under the administration of Trump’s successor, Joe Biden.

Navy SEALs killed bin Laden in his Pakistan hiding place in May 2011, and Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar died two years later, apparently of tuberculosis. The “non-war” war cost about 2,500 American military lives, 21,000 injured and wounded, and nearly \$1 trillion, and it lasted four times longer than World War II. At the end of 2024, the Taliban were firmly in control of Afghanistan.

Fighting terrorism on the home front

The Bush administration never formally declared war on Afghanistan (which allowed it to claim it didn't have to treat those captured as prisoners of war). But it did declare war on terrorism, and Bush proclaimed that the war would continue and be fought on every front "until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated."



REMEMBER

A month after the 9/11 attacks, as they came to be known, Bush proposed something called the "*Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act*" — or the *USA Patriot Act*.

The far-reaching "temporary" act (most of which was made permanent by Congress in 2006) greatly expanded the authority of the FBI and other law enforcement agencies to conduct searches, look at medical and other personal records (such as what materials an individual took out from public libraries), and spy without court approval on those suspected of potential terrorist acts. It also allowed foreigners to be held for up to seven days without charges or deportation proceedings. The act was approved 357–66 in the House of Representatives. In the Senate, the vote was 98–1, with only Sen. Russell Feingold, D-WI, opposed.

In July 2002, Bush secretly authorized the National Security Agency (NSA) to listen in on phone calls American citizens made to other countries and to monitor emails. The order wasn't made public until 2005, and Congress didn't sanction the actions until 2008. In November, Bush signed a bill creating the Department of Homeland Security, consolidating dozens of government agencies, from the Secret Service to the Coast Guard, into one super-agency.

Imprisoning "non-POWs" at Guantanamo Bay

Because America had not actually declared war against Afghanistan, it didn't treat captured Al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters as prisoners of war (POWs). Instead, they were taken to a prison erected on the U.S. Naval base at Guantanamo Bay on the island of Cuba. Administration officials contended that because the prison wasn't on U.S. soil, the prisoners had no rights and could be held indefinitely as "enemy combatants" without trial or even formal charges being filed.

In 2004, international observers reported that some of the detainees at Guantanamo had been subjected to what the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) referred to as "enhanced interrogation techniques," which the observers characterized as "tantamount to torture." One such technique, called *waterboarding*, consisted of covering a person's face with a towel and then pouring water over it, creating a sensation like drowning. It was also revealed that the CIA had abducted suspected terrorists and held them in secret prisons in Europe.

Defending controversial tactics

Civil libertarians complained that such actions were counter to American ideals and violated basic human rights. But administration officials, notably Vice President Dick Cheney, defended the practices as justifiable and necessary to fight terrorism. They also pointed out that no terrorist attacks had occurred on U.S. soil since September 11, whereas several terrorist plots had been sniffed out and stopped.

In 2008, Congress approved a bill to ban some of the interrogation methods used, but Bush vetoed it. Of the 780 people held at the detention camp, most were eventually released without charges being filed or were repatriated to other countries. When Bush left office, an estimated 242 prisoners were still at Guantanamo.

His successor, Barack Obama, had promised during his campaign to close the base and repeated variations of that pledge in subsequent years. Shortly after taking office in January 2009, he signed an executive order closing down the CIA's secret prisons in other countries, but Congress repeatedly blocked efforts to completely close Guantanamo. As of late 2025, 15 prisoners still remained there.

That Damn Saddam

With his approval ratings as high as 90 percent in some polls after the 9/11 attacks and U.S. retaliation in Afghanistan, Bush made the war on terror the centerpiece of his administration's efforts. With the overthrow of the Taliban at least temporarily accomplished, the administration turned its attention to an old nemesis: Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein.

The United States, under the first President Bush, had decided in 1991 not to prolong the Gulf War by seeking Saddam's ouster. However, it did persuade the United Nations to impose economic sanctions against Iraq, as well as to monitor the country's clandestine development of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, known collectively as *weapons of mass destruction* (WMD).

In 1998, after Iraqi officials had consistently interfered with UN inspectors, President Clinton ordered the bombing of several Iraqi military installations. Iraq countered by banning the UN inspectors. Moreover, the impact of economic sanctions had waned as some countries quietly resumed trading goods for Iraqi oil.

Toughening the stance against Iraq

In 2002, the second President Bush demanded the UN toughen its dealings with Iraq. Bush argued the Iraqis had, or were close to having, weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). Further, he said, they were harboring members of the Al-Qaeda terrorist group that had engineered the 9/11 attacks. On October 10 and 11, Congress approved a resolution authorizing the use of military force against Iraq. The vote was 297–133 in the House and 77–23 in the Senate.

On February 5, 2003, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell went before the UN Security Council to restate American claims about WMDs, displaying aerial photographs of purported chemical weapons sites and mobile nerve gas labs. “Ladies and gentlemen, these are sophisticated facilities,” Powell said. “For example, they can produce anthrax and botulinum toxin — in fact, they can produce enough dry biological agent to kill thousands upon thousands of people.” Powell’s assertions were disputed by UN inspectors who said they were again making progress with Iraq and had found no evidence of WMDs.

On March 17, 2003 — despite the objections of U.S. allies, such as France and Germany, but with the backing of most of Congress — an undeterred Bush issued an ultimatum that gave Saddam 48 hours to resign and get out of Iraq. When he didn’t, U.S. and British forces on March 20 launched air attacks on Iraqi targets, including a bunker in which Saddam was thought to be meeting with aides.

The U.S. invasion

Within days, U.S. forces invaded from neighboring Kuwait. By April 9, the Iraqi capital of Baghdad had fallen. The attack killed Saddam’s sons and sent Saddam into hiding. U.S. forces captured him in December and turned over to Iraqi authorities. On December 30, 2006, he was executed for crimes against humanity.

The ongoing war

On May 1, Bush landed on a U.S. aircraft carrier off the coast of San Diego and declared an end to major combat. Standing in front of a large banner proclaiming “Mission Accomplished,” Bush told the crew that “because of you, the target has fallen, and Iraq is free. The war on terror is not over, yet it is not endless. We do not know the day of final victory, but we have seen the turning of the tide.”

But if the tide had turned, it seemed to have turned the wrong way. The United States lacked a comprehensive postwar plan for rebuilding the country. Looting and riots dismantled much of Iraq’s infrastructure and damaged public buildings. U.S. occupation leaders barred members of Saddam’s Baath Party from serving in the provisional government and largely disbanded the Iraqi army,

resulting in a dearth of experienced political leaders and military officers to help with the country's reconstruction.



REMEMBER

In the aftermath, guerrilla warfare caused far more casualties than the brief war had, and fighting between militias of the rival Islamic Sunni and Shiite sects threatened to plunge the country into civil war. Worse for Bush, an intensive search failed to turn up any weapons of mass destruction, and it became clear that Saddam had almost no connection with Al-Qaeda.

Losing popularity at home

At home, the war had quickly lost popularity after its initial successes had given way to a protracted fight. In 2004, Bush won reelection over U.S. Sen. John Kerry of Massachusetts by the narrowest margin of any incumbent president since Woodrow Wilson in 1916. In 2006, public dissatisfaction with the progress of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq helped Democrats wrest control of both houses of Congress for the first time since 1994.

In January 2007, with no light visible at the end of the dark Iraqi tunnel, Bush announced he was sending in 21,500 more U.S. troops, for a total of 170,000, in an effort to quell the almost ceaseless violence in the country. In what was called “the Surge” strategy, he also announced renewed U.S. efforts to rebuild Iraq’s infrastructure and economy.

Although U.S. military deaths reached 907 in 2007, the highest of any single year, they dropped to 284 in the first 10 months of 2008. Although administration officials claimed that the decline was proof of the Surge working, critics contended that it resulted more from the Shiite militia having largely defeated the Sunni and to insurgent forces adopting a strategy of waiting until U.S. forces began withdrawing.

In February 2009, the new president, Barack Obama, announced the pullout of U.S. combat troops from Iraq by the end of August 2010, which did occur. Thousands of American military “advisers,” however, remained for another year. On December 15, 2011, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta officially declared the war over.

The eight-year war had cost the United States about 4,400 military personnel killed, more than 32,000 wounded, and at least \$1 trillion. And the “investment” was by no means complete.

By mid-2014, large areas of Iraq were under attack by a radical group calling itself the Islamic State. Also known as ISIS, the group used the guise of religious fundamentalism as an excuse to murder, rape, loot, vandalize, enslave, and terrorize

much of the Middle East. At least 5,000 U.S. troops were redeployed to Iraq and helped Iraqi forces drive most ISIS fighters out of the country by the end of 2017. As of late 2025, the U.S. was aiming to draw down the number of military personnel still in Iraq from 2,500 to under 2,000.

Elsewhere in the World . . .

As the physical wars in Afghanistan and Iraq continued, America waged wars of words with other countries. In 2002, Bush had labeled Iran and North Korea, along with Iraq, as parts of an “Axis of Evil.”

The primary beef with North Korea was the country’s defiant insistence on developing its nuclear weapons program. After several years of public posturing and private negotiating, North Korea formally agreed in June 2008 to halt its program in return for the easing of economic sanctions against it.

However, the agreement didn’t last. In April 2009, North Korea launched a rocket believed to be part of a test of the country’s nuclear missile capabilities. Later that year, and again in 2013, North Korean leaders announced that they had conducted successful nuclear tests. A flurry of bellicose threats of war against the United States and South Korea surrounded the announcements. At the center of the country’s bellicosity was its dictator, 30-year-old Kim Jong-un, who assumed power after his father, Kim Jong-il, died in December 2011. The younger Kim, a ruthless despot who loved American basketball and routinely had people killed when they crossed him — including a brother and an uncle — would prove to be every bit as much of a problem for the United States and the rest of the world as his father had.

Iran was another thorny problem. Bush administration officials insisted Iran was aiding the insurgency in neighboring Iraq by arming the insurgents and was developing a nuclear weapons program that further threatened the already unstable region. Although evidence as to the exact status of the Iranian nuclear program was conflicting, the administration viewed Iran as a real threat to the region’s stability — and so did much of the rest of the world.

In 2015, representatives of the United States, France, Britain, Russia, China, Germany, and the European Union negotiated a deal with Iranian leaders. If Iran would give up its nuclear aspirations, the other countries would ease financial sanctions against Iran that had crippled that nation’s economy.

Critics warned that Iranian leaders could not be trusted to follow through on their end of the deal and that “sunset” clauses in the agreement meant certain parts of the deal would expire in future years, which would, at best, only postpone, not end, Iran’s nuclear aspirations.

An Assault on the Capitol

Certain dates in U.S. history resonate: *July 4, 1776* (Independence Day); *December 7, 1941* (the attack on Pearl Harbor and U.S. entrance into World War II); *September 11, 2001* (the Al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon). On *January 6, 2021*, another event deeply etched a date into America’s calendar.

Around noon on what was the 62nd day after the presidential election in 2020, President Trump addressed a crowd of more than 10,000 in a park south of the White House. The crowd had gathered to protest the looming and traditionally ho-hum certification of the election results by Congress at the Capitol, a 30-minute walk away. In a series of posts on social media platforms in the days before the rally, the president had urged people to come: “Big protest in D.C. on Jan. 6th. Be there, will be wild!”

“After this, we’re going to walk down, and I’ll be there with you,” Trump said during his hour-long remarks. “. . . I know that everyone here will soon be marching over to the Capitol building to peacefully and patriotically make your voices heard . . . if you don’t fight like Hell, you’re not going to have a country anymore.”

Trump didn’t walk down, and his Secret Service security detail prevented him from going at all. But several thousand of the protestors did, and many of them weren’t peaceful when they got there. Among the group were members of extremist para military groups such as the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers.

The protest quickly turned into a rioting mob. Hundreds of people broke through police barricades and stormed into the Capitol, smashing windows and doors, vandalizing offices, and doing more than \$2.7 million in damage. The rioters managed to occupy the empty Senate chamber briefly but failed to breach the House. The attack succeeded in stopping the certification process, and congressional members and Vice President Pence were either evacuated or hustled into “safe rooms.”

The Capitol was finally deemed secure by 8 p.m., about eight hours after Trump’s speech at the protest rally. Despite delaying tactics by some Republican members, Congress ratified the 2020 presidential election results in the wee morning

hours of January 7. Some hours later, Trump agreed to an “orderly transition” of authority but did not concede.

No elected official was injured during the riot, but four protestors and one police officer died at the scene or the next day. Several hundred more were injured, including 174 law enforcement officers. And many Americans who watched the riot on television shuddered at images they had heretofore associated only with other countries. “This was much more than an attack on this building or this body,” said House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. “This was an assault on America.”

4

The Hands That Guided the Shape

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IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Examining what constitutes a Founding Father — if there is such a thing
- » Running down their demographics and résumés
- » Profiling ten who contributed to the revolutionary cause

Chapter 1

Scoping Out the Founding Fathers

Some historians find the term *Founding Fathers* misleading, or insulting, or both. Misleading because it implies a finite and easily identified group of people; insulting because it denigrates the contributions of “ordinary” people — the common soldier who fought the war, the women who kept things going at home — and ignores the situations of unrepresented and victimized segments of the era’s population, such as Native Americans and African American slaves.

Identifying America’s Founding Fathers is not an exact science. No list at the time tallied up who did and didn’t contribute and therefore qualified as a Founding Father. No one in the late 18th century is likely to have used the term, and that group did not represent the American population at the time. They were all male and all White. Many, but not all, were better off financially than the average American. Some, but by no means all, stood to profit handsomely if a strong and stable central government could be established.



REMEMBER

Still, an extraordinary blend of temperaments, backgrounds, and great personal effort came together to do (mostly) the right thing at the right time.

"I know of only two occasions when the people in power did what needed to be done as well as you can imagine its being possible," the 20th century British philosopher Alfred North Whitehead observed. One, he said, was Rome under Caesar Augustus. The other was the American Revolution.

Rising Up to Meet the Moment

Just how the right people came together at the right time to found the American nation became a topic for speculation almost as soon as it occurred. George Washington thought the sheer difficulty of creating a new and different nation "called forth abilities which would otherwise have not perhaps been exercised." David Ramsay, a South Carolina physician who published a two-volume history of the Revolutionary War in 1789, wrote that when America "*needed* the ability of all its sons, a vast expansion of the human mind speedily formed. It seemed that the war not only required, but *created* talents."

Those talents, and the varied perspectives of these Americans, complemented one another almost perfectly in the masterful writers Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine; the liberal firebrands Patrick Henry and Sam Adams; and the conservative contrarians John Dickinson and John Jay. John Adams was the resident sourpuss and Ben Franklin the resident humorist. The group had the towering political intellects of James Madison and Alexander Hamilton, and a figure who towered over the others in leadership ability (and even literally, at 6'2"): George Washington.

Why the founders bothered

Eighteenth-century political leaders felt a strong sense of "*noblesse oblige*" — the obligation of privileged people to act nobly and serve in leadership roles. The Founding Fathers weren't all so noble or well-off that they didn't occasionally grumble about taking on the job. Washington noted that public service was expected to come "with a certain Expense and trouble without the least prospect of Gain." Jefferson complained that "public service and private misery (are) inseparably linked together."



REMEMBER

But these leaders were by nature generally optimistic, believing that well-intentioned and capable leaders — in Madison's words, "men who possess wisdom to discern and virtue to pursue the common good of society" — would inspire confidence in government and lead people to continue to select more well-intentioned and capable leaders in the future. There was also a confidence, bordering on arrogance, that somehow America would be different, that it would rise above the pettiness and avarice of the Old World.

In *Common Sense*, Tom Paine asked rhetorically whether America could be happy, and he answered himself: “. . . as happy as she pleases; she hath a blank sheet to write upon . . .” and, signifying a break from old ways of thinking, he declared that “we see with other eyes; we hear with other ears; and think with other thoughts.”

What the founders accomplished

Bucking very long odds, the Founding Fathers and their supporters won a war against the world’s most powerful nation. They created the first large-scale republic in the history of the human race. They removed the possibility of any single, powerful religious group having dominant influence over the affairs of a secular government.

They crafted a masterful document, the United States Constitution. Through it, they created an overlapping, multilayered system, designed to prevent any one segment of government from dominance over the others, as well as balancing the rights of individual states with the overall welfare of the country as a whole. And they did it with a clear-eyed view that a nation governed by laws would do much better than a nation governed by men.

“If men were angels, no government would be necessary,” Madison wryly noted. “If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: You must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.”

Kicking the Slavery Issue Down the Road

The single biggest failure, particularly in hindsight, of the Founding Fathers was their refusal to come to grips with slavery and what it portended for the country’s future. Most, if not all, of them knew it was a morally wrong and indefensibly evil practice. But none knew or offered up a politically and economically practical solution to end it.



REMEMBER

Abolition almost certainly would have meant a dissolution of the Union, with southern states such as South Carolina and Georgia on record as threatening to go off on their own if that happened. With the ink still drying on the documents binding the states together, that might have been much easier for those states to do than it was later, in 1861. Moreover, it would have set an early precedent for other states to pack up and leave the Union whenever they didn’t like something done by the federal government.

Even if abolition had been accomplished, the question remained — as it did after the Civil War — as to how to assimilate into free society more than half a million impoverished, uneducated African Americans, who many White Americans, both in the North and South, regarded as other than human.

Recognizing slavery as a problem

In the 157 years between the arrival of the first African slaves at Jamestown and the Declaration of Independence, no groundswell of opposition to the practice existed in America. People generally accepted slavery as a part of American life in all the colonies, along with indentured servitude and tenant farming.

“Prior to the great Revolution,” noted John Jay, the New Yorker who would become America’s first U.S. Supreme Court chief justice, “the great majority . . . of our people had been so long accustomed to the practice and convenience of having slaves that very few among them even pondered the propriety and rectitude of it.”

But as talk of liberty, equality, and freedom grew, the glaring contradiction that slavery presented to such conversations became both obvious and discomfiting. More Americans began to think about the issue, and some began to take action. Benjamin Franklin, for example, helped establish America’s first abolition society, in Philadelphia, and John Jay did likewise in New York. Both, however, continued to own slaves themselves.



REMEMBER

John Adams, Alexander Hamilton, and New York’s Gouverneur Morris opposed slavery and had never owned slaves. George Washington was the only one of America’s nine slave-owning presidents who freed his slaves — but only after he died. Thomas Jefferson continually decried slavery as an evil institution, yet had a slave as his mistress and was convinced that as “naturally inferior” and “untrustworthy,” freed slaves could never successfully integrate into American society. And Patrick Henry frankly admitted he didn’t think that abolition was worth the trouble: “I am drawn along by the general inconvenience of living without them (slaves),” he admitted. “I will not — I cannot justify it (abolition), however culpable my conduct.”

Taking small antislavery steps

Some of the Founding Fathers, Jefferson included, hoped the problem would solve itself if slavery could be confined to the South. There it might gradually die out as the tobacco industry waned and it became too expensive to own slaves. Many Northern states, where slaves were not an integral part of the economic system,

had already taken steps to gradually prohibit it. It had been banned from the vast territory covered by the Northwest Ordinance of 1787.



REMEMBER

The invention of the cotton gin in 1793, however, made cotton the king of America's economy. It was a labor-intensive crop that was especially profitable with unpaid labor. The result was an explosion in the number of slaves — from 900,000 in 1800 to 4 million in 1860. The number of "slave states" went from 6 in 1790 to 15 in 1860.

In the meantime, the founders nibbled at the edges of the issue. In 1794, the U.S. Congress enacted the Slave Trade Act of 1794, which banned the export of enslaved people from America to sell in other countries. In 1800, the government prohibited U.S. citizens from engaging in the slave trade within other countries and forbade importing slaves in 1808. In 1820, importing slaves became a capital offense. Could the founders have done more and still kept the newly born United States of America alive and whole? Another fellow who wrestled with the same issue put it this way:

"Necessity drove them so far, and farther they would not go," said Abraham Lincoln in 1854. "Thus we see, the plain unmistakable spirit of that age, towards slavery, was hostility to the principle, and toleration only by necessity."

Sorting Out Signers, Framers, and Founders

A convenient way for historians to sort out who qualifies as a Founding Father revolves around a list of those who signed the *Continental Association*, which established a formal boycott of British goods, in 1774; the *Declaration of Independence* in 1776; the *Articles of Confederation*, which served as America's first constitution, in 1777; and the *U.S. Constitution*, in 1787.



REMEMBER

Historians' sorting-out list is not a comprehensive collection of Founding Father names. For example, neither Thomas Paine nor Patrick Henry signed any of the documents, yet both played key roles in the American Revolution. Neither did George Mason, who refused to sign the Constitution as a delegate at the constitutional convention, but is considered the "father of the Bill of Rights." Nor did Edmund Randolph, who also refused to sign the Constitution, yet is credited with helping to establish the three-branch system of the federal government and served as America's first attorney general and second secretary of state. Historians often include Mason and Randolph in a broader group of *framers* of the Constitution.

In fact, only one man, Roger Sherman, a Connecticut lawyer, signed all four documents, and only six signed three of the four. Of the 194 individuals who signed at least one of the documents, 104 signed only one.

Still, it is a starting point from which to compile some facts and figures:

- » Of the 145 men who lived through the period from the Continental Association's signing in 1774 and the U.S. Constitution's signing in 1787, 67 were lawyers, which probably isn't surprising. But only 9 actually made a living as a full-time politician, although many had held some political office. The rest were merchants, farmers or plantation owners, doctors, teachers, ministers, soldiers, and other occupations.
- » Of the first four American presidents, none signed both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. George Washington was running the army when the Declaration was signed and James Madison was not yet a member of Congress. Both signed the Constitution. When the Constitution was signed, Thomas Jefferson was serving as U.S. ambassador to France, and John Adams was the ambassador to Britain. Both signed the Declaration.
- » Six of those men who signed one or more of the four documents became U.S. Supreme Court justices; 19 became U.S. senators; and 32 became governors. Forty-eight had college degrees; 16 were born in foreign countries; 3 were later killed in duels; and 2 were lost at sea. Only 4 were lifelong bachelors.

HOISTING A FEW

If there was one thing many of the Founding Fathers were good at besides putting together new nations, it was bending their elbows. In other words, they drank. A lot. John Adams, for example, reportedly started each day with a large tankard of hard cider. George Washington owned his own whiskey distillery. And Thomas Jefferson spent an estimated \$10,000 on wine (that's \$223,000 in 2019 dollars) during his eight years in the White House. He even had a 16-foot-deep, clay brick-lined wine cellar built next to the presidential mansion, with bottles on racks above a bed of ice that was replenished monthly.

When the founders gathered in groups, they also put away the sauce. A gathering of delegates to the Constitutional Convention in 1787 consumed 54 bottles of Madeira; 60 bottles of claret; 8 bottles of whiskey; 22 of porter (a kind of beer); 8 of hard cider; 12 of beer; and 7 bowls of punch. But not all Founding Fathers drank. Dr. Benjamin

Rush, for one, frowned mightily on the habit. “A people corrupted by strong drink cannot long be a free people,” he wrote in a 1790 tract entitled “An Enquiry into the Effects of Spirituous Liquors Upon the Human Body.” To get off the booze, Rush departed from his usual cure-all of bleeding. Instead, he recommended drinking lots of bitter tea, “or a few glasses of sound old wine every day.”

A Brief Look at Ten Top Founders

Some of the Founding Fathers’ contributions were so great and so varied that there is almost no argument they deserve the term (if the term is deserved by anyone). The following sections offer (in alphabetical order) some factoids and tidbits about ten influential Founding Fathers.

John Adams

Résumé: *First U.S. vice president; second U.S. president; first U.S. minister to United Kingdom and the Netherlands; chief author of Massachusetts Constitution; chief U.S. negotiator for the 1783 Paris Peace Treaty with Great Britain; and delegate to First and Second Continental Congress.*

Massachusetts-born and raised, John Adams didn’t much care if people liked him — and many didn’t. He was acerbic, grouchy, and sometimes mean-spirited: He refused to go to the inauguration of Thomas Jefferson after Jefferson defeated him in his bid for reelection as president. But Adams was a tireless worker for the American cause before, during, and after the Revolutionary War — and so outspoken that he was one of a handful of Americans marked for execution if the British had won the war.

Adams spent years in Europe as a U.S. envoy, separated from his beloved wife Abigail, to whom he wrote hundreds of romantic letters over their 54-year marriage. In his old age (he lived to be 90), Adams even became pen pals with Jefferson, his longtime political foe. Adams’s last words before he died — on July 4, 1826 — were “Jefferson survives.” He was wrong, however, since Jefferson had died a few hours before.

John Adams was one of only two presidents whose son also became president. (George H.W. Bush was the other.) He was the first president to live in the White House (for the last four months of his one term in office). He thought the president should be addressed as “His Highness” (so critics referred to the overweight Adams as “His Rotundity”). He was instrumental in forming the U.S. Marine Band and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. No monument to John Adams

exists in Washington, D.C., but one of the four buildings at the Library of Congress is named after him.

Samuel Adams

Résumé: *Governor of Massachusetts; President of Massachusetts Senate; delegate to First and Second Continental Congress; and signer of Declaration of Independence.*

According to Dr. Benjamin Rush, Samuel Adams (shown in Figure 1-1) once told Rush that “if it were revealed that 999 out of 1,000 would perish in a war for liberty, he would vote for that war, rather than see his country enslaved. The survivors in such a war, though few, would propagate a nation of freemen.”

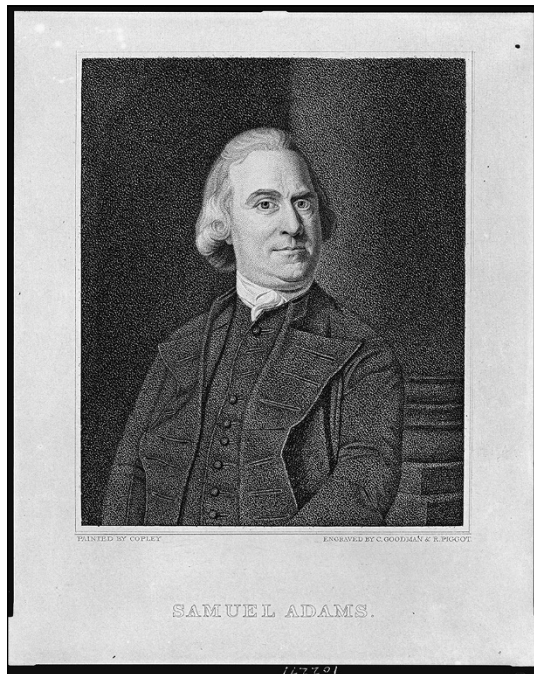


FIGURE 1-1:
Samuel Adams.

Library of Congress

Sam Adams is often overlooked as a key player in the American Revolution, but he was an early and ardent advocate of independence from Britain — so much so that he overlooked other aspects of life, such as making a living. Fortunately, he was, unlike his cousin, a very well-liked fellow, and while he organized resistance to various British acts and churned out eloquent and persuasive pamphlets to help the Patriot cause, friends rebuilt his barn and house and provided him

with a wardrobe deemed suitable for a leader. Although something of a flop at business, Adams's efforts in such pre-war groups as the Sons of Liberty and the Minutemen helped keep the early flame of independence alive. By the time of his death at age 81, he had dropped from prominence.

Adams attended the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia, and his instructions to Boston's legislative representatives on how to react to the Sugar Act in 1764 are regarded as the first written public protest to British policy in America.

Benjamin Franklin

Résumé: *First U.S. postmaster; U.S. minister to France; U.S. minister to Sweden; Speaker of Pennsylvania Assembly; President of Pennsylvania; Continental Congress representative to France; U.S. negotiator of 1783 Paris Peace Treaty with Britain.*

When at the age of 70 Benjamin Franklin was unanimously selected by Congress to represent America in France, he accepted with his signature humor: "I am like the remnant of a piece of unsaleable cloth. You may have it, as the shopkeepers say, for what you please." That's a pretty modest self-description for a man who has been labeled by eminent historians as "the First American" and "the most accomplished American of his age." Other than possibly George Washington, Franklin was also the best-known American in the 18th century. Not bad for someone who'd once been a 17-year-old runaway printer's apprentice with just two years of education.



REMEMBER

Franklin was primarily responsible for securing the indispensable support of France for the American cause, and his editing of Jefferson's Declaration of Independence was invaluable. His humor and diplomatic skills helped smooth over tensions among his fellow founders on more than one occasion. Franklin was so well-loved that when he died at the age of 84, more than 20,000 people attended his funeral.

Despite inventing many useful objects, from bifocal glasses to the lightning rod, Franklin never patented anything, deeming the inventions gifts to the public.

Alexander Hamilton

Résumé: *First U.S. secretary of the treasury; Senior Officer of the U.S. Army; delegate to Congress; chief author of the Federalist Papers; considered founder of the U.S. Coast Guard; and first Founding Father to be title subject of a smash Broadway musical.*

Alexander Hamilton wasn't your average Founding Father; he was a Caribbean-born orphan of an unwed mother who became a war hero and then a lawyer who

helped his chief political enemy become president and, ultimately, died in a duel. Coming to America as a teenager, he attended Kings College (now Columbia University) and then enlisted in the Patriot cause, rising to be a top aide to George Washington and leading a bayonet charge at the Battle of Yorktown.

Hamilton served briefly in Congress and then became a lawyer. As a delegate to the convention drafting the U.S. Constitution, Hamilton contributed little. But he was enormously valuable in helping to get it ratified by the states and by serving as the chief writer of a series of pro-Constitution newspaper essays, known as *The Federalist Papers*. He also served as Washington's treasury secretary and contributed greatly to establishing a firm financial foundation for the infant U.S. government.

Hamilton found himself in the unenviable position in the 1800 presidential election of having to choose to support Thomas Jefferson, his chief political rival, or Aaron Burr, a bitter personal enemy, whom Hamilton regarded as amoral and corrupt. Hamilton chose Jefferson — and was killed in duel with Burr in 1804, at the age of 47, or 49.

Hamilton founded the *New York Evening Post* newspaper, which is still publishing. He served as a co-counsel on the first U.S. murder trial for which there is still a record. One of his two co-counsels later became a U.S. Supreme Court justice. The other was Aaron Burr.

John Jay

Résumé: *First chief justice of the United States Supreme Court; first Secretary of Foreign Affairs; governor of New York; U.S. minister to Spain; U.S. negotiator of 1783 Paris Peace Treaty with Great Britain; and delegate to First and Second Continental Congress.*

Of all the key Founding Fathers, the quiet and reserved John Jay is probably the least well-known (see Figure 1-2), partly because he spent less time than others in publicizing himself, plus his own papers and other historical documents concerning him were not made public until the first decade of the 21st century.

Born into a wealthy family of New York merchants, Jay graduated from King's College (later Columbia University) and set up a law practice in New York. At first he tended toward reconciliation with the mother country but ended up becoming an ardent Patriot. Jay's career included serving as a diplomat, a congressman, a jurist — and something of a propagandist. With Alexander Hamilton and James Madison, he wrote a series of newspaper essays extolling the virtues of the newly drafted U.S. Constitution, which became known as the *Federalist Papers*. Although an unwavering conservative, Jay leaders across the political spectrum valued Jay for his intelligence, integrity, and willingness to take the heat for unpopular decisions.

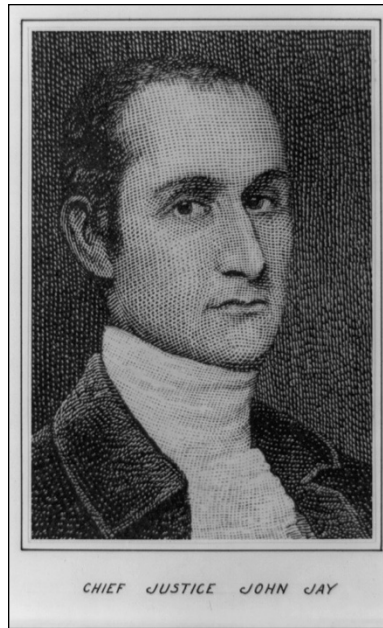


FIGURE 1-2:
John Jay.

Library of Congress

Thomas Jefferson

Résumé: *Third U.S. president; second U.S. vice-president; first U.S. secretary of state; U.S. minister to France; Governor of Virginia; chief author of the Declaration of Independence; founder of University of Virginia; and delegate to First and Second Continental Congress.*

President John F. Kennedy once hosted a White House dinner with a guest list so impressive that he quipped it was the most impressive group of genius and talent to gather there “since Thomas Jefferson dined alone.”

But Jefferson, shown in Figure 1-3, was not only multitalented; he was a bundle of contradictions. He hated slavery, but owned slaves; regarded African Americans as inferior, but had an African-American mistress; preached frugality but died deeply in debt; and believed in sticking closely to the Constitution but bent it to the breaking point at a crucial time in his presidency.

“He possessed a genius of the first order,” noted Dr. Benjamin Rush. “It was universal in its objects. He was not less distinguished for his political, than his mathematical and philosophical knowledge.”

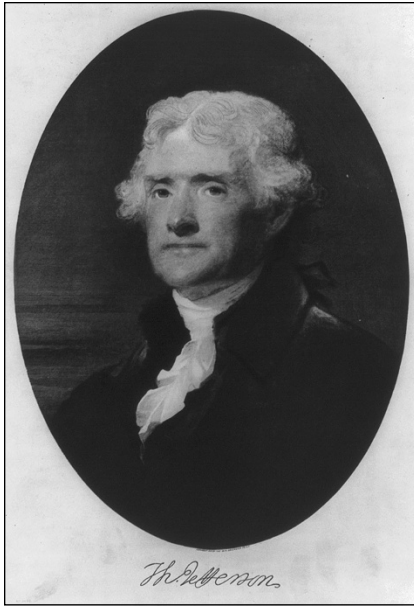


FIGURE 1-3:
Thomas Jefferson.

Library of Congress

The son of a wealthy Virginia plantation owner, Jefferson went to the College of William and Mary and became a lawyer, several times representing slaves seeking freedom through the courts. He authored a landmark Virginia law guaranteeing religious freedom (although he despised organized religion). As a member of Congress, Jefferson was chosen to write the Declaration of Independence. He missed the drafting of the U.S. Constitution because he was serving as U.S. minister to France, but sent crates of books to James Madison to aid Madison's research into drafting the document.

James Madison

Résumé: *Fourth U.S. president (and also the shortest); U.S. secretary of state; member of Congress; member of Virginia legislature; considered chief architect of the U.S. Constitution; and coauthor of The Federalist Papers.*

It was easy to underestimate James Madison, and people did (see Figure 1-4). A Massachusetts politician said Madison was “a little too much of a book politician and too timid.” A journalist remarked, “There appears to be a mixture of timidity in his disposition.” Alexander Hamilton suggested he “was very little acquainted with the world.” It was also easy to understand why people viewed Madison in that light. He was slight, frail, and shy and an awkward public speaker. But although it was easy to underestimate Madison, it was also a mistake.

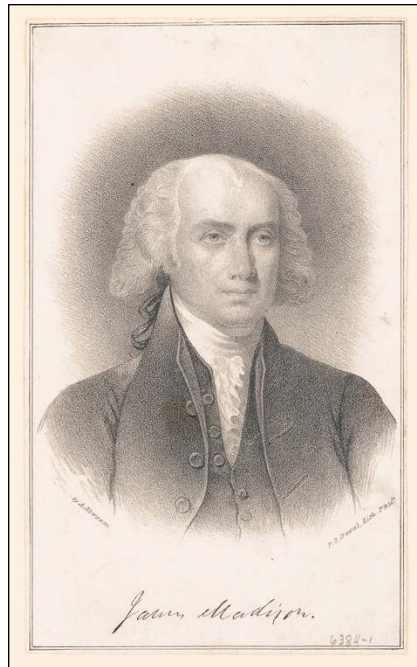


FIGURE 1-4:
James Madison.

Library of Congress

Perhaps none of the Founding Fathers put as much effort into preparing for the job of, well, founding, as did Madison. For months before the convention to draft a new U.S. constitution, he spent days and weeks reading dozens of books, making lists of the pros and cons of virtually every republican form of government that had ever existed. As a result, in the words of fellow convention delegate William Pierce of Virginia, “In the management of every great question he took the lead . . . From a spirit of industry and application which he possesses in a most eminent degree, he always comes forward the best-informed Man of any point in debate.”

Born in Virginia to a wealthy tobacco planter, Madison was a sickly child. He was a Princeton University graduate, but was one of the rare founders who never had a job outside politics. His quiet, bookish personality actually served him well in an era where hammy theatrics by politicians often irritated rather than convinced. Madison, according to Pierce, had “a remarkable sweet temper. He is easy and unreserved among his acquaintance, and has a most agreeable style of conversation.”

Thomas Paine

Résumé: *Journalist, political theorist, and propagandist.*

Thomas Paine, shown in Figure 1-5, signed no momentous documents, cast votes on no significant proposals, won no military battles, and held no political office, elected or appointed. He had no formal training as a writer, philosopher, or political scientist. In fact, he was pretty much a failure at almost everything he tried. But Thomas Paine qualifies as a Founding Father all the same.

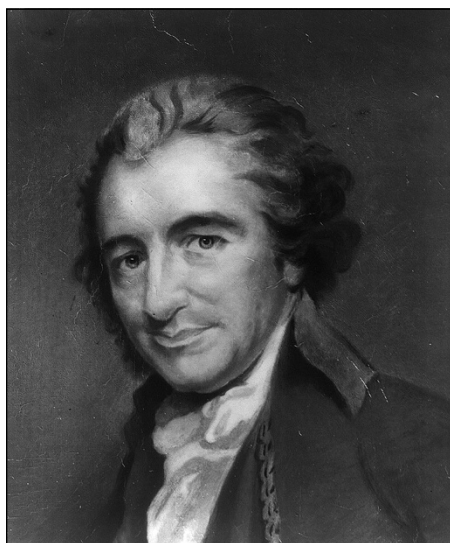


FIGURE 1-5:
Thomas Paine.

Library of Congress

Paine's essays, *Common Sense* and *The Crisis*, electrified Americans at a time when many of them were wary of separating from Great Britain and weary of a political conflict they could not fathom had anything to do with them. His direct, simple, and yet passionate writing style was hugely popular and widely credited with providing an easily understandable explanation of what the American Revolution was all about. "I never tire of reading Tom Paine," an admirer named Abraham Lincoln said, a half century later.

Paine left America for Europe in 1787, where he wrote a brilliant tract, *The Rights of Man*, supporting the French Revolution. The French lionized him, right up until the revolution turned into the Reign of Terror, whereupon he was imprisoned and narrowly escaped the guillotine. In his later years, he bitterly and publicly criticized George Washington and others who he said had failed to support him. He died, almost friendless, in New York in 1809.

Paine advocated for a form of social security as early as 1795. He was widely scorned in the late 19th century as an atheist (although Mark Twain praised him), but a 2002 BBC poll ranked him No. 34 among the 100 greatest Britons of all time.

Roger Sherman

Résumé: *U.S. senator; member of Congress; first mayor of New Haven, Ct.; only signer of all “Big Four” American historical documents; lawyer, professor of religion; and cobbler.*

For a Founding Father most people have never heard of, Roger Sherman got a lot done in his 72 years of life. He made shoes. He became a lawyer, with a formal education that stopped at grammar school. He served as a mayor, a judge, and a member of both houses of Congress, along with teaching religion at Yale University. And he still had time to have 15 children.

Born in Massachusetts in 1721, Sherman moved to Connecticut in 1743. An avid reader with a natural aptitude for math, he gave up shoemaking to become surveyor for New Haven County and gravitated to politics. After passing the bar and becoming a lawyer, Sherman served as a Connecticut delegate to nearly every major convention and conference in America. He is the only person to have signed the Continental Association (the formal boycott of British goods), the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and the U.S. Constitution. At the constitutional convention, Sherman was an extremely active delegate, making or seconding 160 motions on the proposed plan (compared to James Madison’s 177). He was a key player in crafting major components of the document, including establishing the structure of the legislative branch and banning the issuance of paper money without a solid backing of gold or silver.

Although one of his colleagues described him as “awkward, unmeaning and unaccountably strange in his manner,” Thomas Jefferson said Sherman “never said a foolish thing in his life.”

Sherman was one of five men selected to draft the Declaration of Independence. One of his descendants, Henry L. Stimson, served in the cabinets of four different presidents. Another, Archibald Cox, was a federal special prosecutor and helped topple Richard Nixon from the presidency.

George Washington

Résumé: *First U.S. president; Commander-in-chief of Continental Army; president of Constitutional Convention; member of Second Continental Congress; “Father of His Country;” and guy on the one-dollar bill.*



TIP

George Washington is such a mythical figure in U.S. history that his importance may seem overrated — but it isn’t. Along with Abraham Lincoln and perhaps Franklin D. Roosevelt, Washington is an American leader whose presence at a key period in the nation’s history was invaluable.

Despite his scant education, Washington became a graceful writer and talented surveyor. Before he was 16, he had memorized 116 maxims on how to behave correctly in public (“don’t puff out your cheeks,” “don’t rub your hands together”), and he religiously adhered to them — except when his fearsome temper erupted into swearing. He bowed, rather than shook hands, but was so charming with women that they sometimes literally swooned in his presence. He kept his powdered hair (no wig) neatly coiffed and seldom smiled because of his terrible teeth. Obsessed with correctness, he sometimes laboriously recopied even a casual letter to fix mistakes. He declined to go to France to be honored because it embarrassed him to rely on an interpreter. Contrary to legend, his dentures were not made of wood but rather from metal alloy, hippopotamus ivory, and human teeth, at least some of which were likely purchased from slaves.

“He is polite with dignity, affable without formality, distant without haughtiness, grave without austerity; modest, wise and good,” said John Adams’s wife Abigail. “More than all, and above all,” said Adams’s grandson, Charles Frances, Sr., “Washington was master of himself.”

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Setting up a government for the United States
- » Understanding the influence of the president
- » Seeing how the president shapes public opinion
- » Looking at the president's many roles

Chapter 2

Presidents and the Presidency

This chapter looks at the U.S. presidency. It talks about how the U.S. system of government was established. It also discusses the Constitution and the evolution of the presidency from a weak ceremonial post, such as the presidency of James Madison, to the imperial presidency of FDR. Today we find a stalemate between the presidency and Congress, resulting in much bargaining and compromising and the occasional government shutdown.

In addition, the chapter covers formal powers the president possesses, such as the power to cast a veto. Finally, the president has been granted or assumed some special, informal powers, especially the power to manipulate public opinion. The discussion of these informal powers rounds out the chapter.

Establishing the First U.S. Government

In 1774, 12 colonies (Georgia refused to attend) agreed to get together and set up a united legislature, or *Continental Congress*, to speak with one voice against British oppression. The Continental Congress turned into a national legislature during the Revolutionary War and stuck around after independence was declared, assuming the functions of a new national government.

In 1781, the Congress passed the *Articles of Confederation*, creating a confederation between the 13 former colonies. After the states agreed on the Articles of Confederation, the Congress renamed itself the *Congress of the Confederation* and became a weak federal legislature — it was without real powers, including the power to tax or the power to create a national army. The real power remained within the 13 states.

The Congress survived until the Constitution created a new form of government in 1789, and the Congress of the United States replaced the Congress of the Confederation.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

A *confederation* is a form of government where power rests at the state level and not at the national level.

Facing problems

The confederation system caused immediate problems for the new country:

- » **Without the power to tax, the Congress could not support a large military.** This situation was dangerous with the British, Russian, and Spanish empires still active in North America.
- » **The war bonds sold to finance the war against Britain represented financial loss.** With the war over and the national government unable to tax, nobody redeemed the bonds. Many patriotic people who bought war bonds to support the war for independence lost their life savings when they couldn't redeem the bonds. Not surprisingly, people complained.
- » **Trade became a problem, with the states treating each other like they were foreign countries.** How can a united country be established when its members impose trade restrictions against each other?

Writing a constitution

By 1785, many prominent politicians in the United States were worried. They felt that the new country was in serious trouble and that the new government, created by the Articles of Confederation, was not working. For this purpose, a national meeting in Philadelphia was called to change or revise the Articles of Confederation. This meeting, also referred to as the *Constitutional Convention*, began in May 1787. Its original purpose was just to change the Articles of Confederation, not to write a new Constitution. The convention lasted until September 1787, when the delegates actually overstepped their authority and voted to approve a new constitution for the country.

Instead of revising the Articles of Confederation, the delegates created a brand-new document — the Constitution of the United States. They felt that a revision of the Articles of Confederation would not accomplish the task of creating a strong, united country. So they wrote a brand-new document instead, abolishing the Articles of Confederation and setting up a new form of government. The Constitution called for the following:

- » The creation of a federal republic, where the states and the national/federal government shared powers
- » A bicameral Congress with two chambers — the House of Representatives (selected by the people) and the Senate (equally represented by the states, with each state sending two senators)
- » An executive, or president, elected by an Electoral College every four years
- » A Supreme Court nominated by the president and ratified by the Senate

Drawing up the presidency

During the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787, the hottest topic was what kind of executive to have. Some wanted a strong executive, even a king. Others wanted a weak executive at the mercy of Congress. Some even proposed multiple executives, with more than one president serving in the various areas of government.



REMEMBER

James Wilson, a delegate from Pennsylvania, was responsible for the presidency we have today. During the debate, he based the modern presidency on the New York and Massachusetts state constitutions.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

One of the big questions at the Constitutional Convention was whether to create a parliamentary system or a presidential republic. In a *parliamentary system*, the legislature, not the citizens, selects the executive. Chosen by the majority, the executive's party always controls the legislature. In a *presidential republic*, voters choose the president. This can result in a divided government, with one party controlling the legislature and the other the presidency.

A presidential system, such as the form the United States adopted, creates moderate policies, involving lots of compromise, because the executive and Congress have to bargain with each other to be successful. In a parliamentary system, the executive always gets what they want, because the executive's party controls the legislature.

Being unique

The system of checks and balances is a feature unique to the United States. The delegates at the convention wanted to make sure that the president wouldn't dominate the new government. So they implemented many checks on his power. Congress and the Supreme Court can check the president in the areas the delegates considered the most important, resulting in this system of checks and balances. These areas included treaty-making, war-making and especially the power to declare war, which was given to Congress. Congress and the Supreme Court further received the power to override a president's veto and to remove him from office if necessary.

THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE

The Electoral College, established by the Constitution, consists of electors who have the power to choose the president and vice president.

The first Electoral College, which met in 1789, consisted of representatives from all the states that ratified the Constitution. Depending on the state, either the people or the state legislatures chose the respective delegates for the Electoral College. In the Electoral College, each delegate cast two ballots. Whoever won the most votes became the president of the United States; the runner-up was named the vice president.

This system led to confusion. In 1800, Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr received the same number of votes, even though most electors favored Jefferson for president and Burr for vice president. The electors had to cast two ballots without being able to differentiate between president and vice president. The 12th Amendment fixed the system in 1804 by mandating separate ballots for the president and vice president.

In 1961, the 23rd Amendment allowed the District of Columbia to cast three votes in the Electoral College, even though it doesn't have statehood. Today, the electors in the Electoral College represent all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The electors, in turn, are chosen by their respective state legislatures. (Each party, Democrats and Republicans, draws up a list of electors. Whichever party wins the state in the presidential election gets to use its list in the Electoral College. The only exceptions to this rule are found in Maine and Nebraska, where one electoral vote goes to the winner of each Congressional district in the state and two votes go to the winner of the state itself.) The number of electors representing each state equals the number of members of Congress (members of the House of Representatives plus the two senators) for each state. Today, there are 538 total votes in the Electoral College, and a candidate has to win 270 to become president. If nobody has a majority in the Electoral College, the vote goes into the House of Representatives.

Today, the president is the most powerful politician on earth, but he has to share a lot of his powers with Congress. Over the next two centuries, the power and influence of the presidency developed and changed.

Granting formal presidential powers

The Constitution, even though a brief document, sets aside Article II to discuss the presidency. Article II outlines the Electoral College (see Book 6, Chapter 4 for how the Electoral College can affect elections) and the powers of the president. The Constitution formally mentions the following powers in Section 2 and Section 3 of Article II of the Constitution. The powers are listed in the order found in the Constitution:

- » **Commander in chief of the armed forces:** This power has caused much controversy. Many presidents have interpreted it to mean that they have the power to make war. Congress, on the other hand, has the constitutional power to declare war. The War Powers Act of 1973 (discussed in section “Dethroning the imperial presidency: Richard Nixon” later in this chapter) further contributes to the controversy surrounding this power.
- » **Granting reprieves and pardons:** The president has the power to pardon anyone for federal offenses. The only exception is impeachment. The president cannot pardon someone who has been impeached.
- » **Making treaties:** The president has the power to negotiate treaties with foreign countries. All treaties have to be approved by the Senate with a two-thirds majority.
- » **Appointing Supreme Court Justices and ambassadors:** The president has the power to appoint justices of the U.S. Supreme Court and ambassadors. In both instances, the Senate has to approve his choices.
- » **Convening Congress to special sessions:** In emergency situations, the president has the power to call Congress into a special session.
- » **Receiving ambassadors:** The president has the right to receive foreign ambassadors and other foreign dignitaries to discuss policy with them.
- » **Ensuring that the laws are faithfully executed:** That’s all the Constitution says about this power. Today, presidents interpret it as the power to make policy, as outlined in the annual budget the president submits to Congress.

Vetoing legislation

Additional powers of the president are found in Article I, Section 7. Even though Article I deals mainly with Congressional powers, it does discuss the veto power

of the president. According to Section 7, the president possesses the power to veto legislation passed by Congress. He has ten days to veto a bill and has to explain to Congress why he cast the veto. Congress then has the option to override a president's veto. This requires a two-thirds majority in both houses of Congress.

If Congress passes a bill within ten days of adjourning, the president can cast a *pocket veto*. All he has to do is let the bill sit on his desk until Congress adjourns, and the bill has been vetoed. Pocket vetoes cannot be overridden, because Congress has no chance to vote on the veto. Most vetoes stand, or are not overridden by Congress. Less than 4 percent of all vetoes in U.S. history have been overridden.

Interpreting presidential powers

The Constitution is not very specific on presidential powers. Many are vague and open to broad interpretation. For example, does to “faithfully execute the laws” mean that a president just observes Congress and then makes Congressional legislation law? Or can the president make laws himself? As commander in chief, is the president just some kind of super-general reacting to Congress, which has the power to declare war, or is he the supreme war maker in the United States? It is thus left up to the president to define his role.

Different men who have held the office have interpreted their powers differently. For example, in 1861, after President Lincoln took office and before Congress reconvened, Lincoln unilaterally reacted to the attack on Fort Sumter by the Confederacy. He defined the role of commander in chief by taking over the war effort himself. In addition, he single-handedly freed the slaves in the Confederacy with the Emancipation Proclamation. He felt his actions were justified by the emergency of the Civil War. Lincoln's predecessor, James Buchanan, however, believed that his powers did not extend to preventing the Southern states from leaving the Union. So he refused to act when the first Southern states left the Union and created the Confederacy.

Examining Presidential Influence

Just as the president is a living, breathing person, the presidency is a living, breathing institution. The men who have so far filled the office have put their own unique stamp on the office, for better or worse. The following sections give you some examples.

During the period from 1789 to 1824, most U.S. presidents were prominent men known to most U.S. citizens. They included many of our Founding Fathers and others who had served their country valiantly in the Revolutionary War. With the exception of John Adams, each of the first five presidents served two terms, bringing a measure of stability to the young country.

They legitimized the new government, or in other words, they created public support for the new form of government. Even if one disagreed with the new form of government created by the Constitution, how could one oppose George Washington as president? These presidents set the foundation for the United States. However, during this time period, Congress dominated and made most decisions for the United States. The president was considered to be a caretaker, and his job was to implement policies passed by Congress.

Challenging Congress: Andrew Jackson

When Andrew Jackson assumed office in 1829, he believed that he had a mandate from the people and that it was his job to not only implement policies passed by Congress but to make his own. He saw himself as a guardian of the people, with a mission to protect them from the excesses of Congress. He challenged Congress and vetoed major congressional legislation. Jackson actually vetoed more legislation than all of his predecessors combined.

Jackson's interpretation of a powerful president disappeared with him. His successors perceived their role as one of reacting to Congress.

With the exception of Abraham Lincoln, Teddy Roosevelt, and Woodrow Wilson, all presidents for the next century subordinated themselves to Congress. Congress made policy for the United States, and the presidents passively endorsed it.

Creating the imperial presidency: Franklin Roosevelt

With the Great Depression hitting the country hard in 1929 and World War II (WWII) starting in Europe in 1939, the U.S. public looked for strong leadership.



REMEMBER

They found it in Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Starting with his election in 1932, FDR single-handedly created the imperial presidency. The term *imperial presidency* was the title of a book by historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., published in 1973. In the book, Schlesinger argues that the presidency has become too powerful and has usurped powers from Congress. The term stuck and is still used today.

FDR was responsible for the New Deal programs (find out more about the New Deal in Book 1, Chapter 4), which greatly enhanced the powers of the presidency by establishing a large federal bureaucracy over which the president presides. Roosevelt put a massive welfare state in place and had government take an active role in the economy. FDR made it the business of the president to take care of the U.S. public.

Foreign policy also came to the forefront when FDR took over in 1933. He moved the United States to support the Allies during WWII. During the war, he met with Allied leaders and hammered out major agreements. The subsequent Cold War further involved the United States in global affairs.

The trend of the president dominating foreign policy continued, and presidents today are the foreign policy leaders in the United States. By the time Lyndon Johnson assumed the presidency in 1963, Congress was reacting to the president, who now made both domestic and foreign policy for the country.

Dethroning the imperial presidency: Richard Nixon

In 1974, Richard Nixon destroyed the imperial presidency with the Watergate scandal and its aftermath. Congress saw the executive position weakened and took this chance to restore some of the power it had lost to the president. The most visible changes Congress imposed were in the areas of foreign policy and budget policies, when Congress passed the War Powers Act in 1973 over President Nixon's veto and the Budget Reform Act in 1974. These acts brought Congress back into the realms of war-making and budgeting.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

The War Powers Act of 1973 was a direct challenge to the president and the president's powers to commit U.S. troops into combat. The act severely restricted the president by calling for the following:

- » The president has to inform Congress in writing within 48 hours after he commits troops into a hostile situation.
- » Within 60 days after committing troops into a hostile situation, Congress has to declare war or authorize continuous commitment. This gives Congress the power to recall the troops.
- » Congress, at any time, can pass a *concurrent resolution* (a resolution passed by both houses of Congress) to recall the troops. The president cannot veto this resolution.

Suddenly Congress had the power to recall troops that a president committed into a hostile situation. It didn't have to stand idly by while a president fought a war. Both institutions, Congress and the president, again shared war-making powers.



REMEMBER

Ironically, every president affected by the act — beginning with Nixon and including Presidents Obama and Trump — has claimed that the War Powers Act is unconstitutional and has refused to be bound by its terms. The Supreme Court has so far refused to rule on the constitutionality of the act.

The Budget Reform Act of 1974 is another example of how Congress reasserted itself. Presidents had given themselves the power to refuse to spend money appropriated by Congress for certain programs. Most presidents, beginning with Jefferson, used it frequently.

This power was absolute until the Nixon era. In 1974, Congress passed the Budget Reform Act, which stated that the president can refuse to spend or delay the spending of money, but he has to tell Congress about it. Congress then has the option to pass a resolution calling for the spending of the money. After the resolution passes, the president has to spend the money. Suddenly, Congress could force a president to spend money allocated for programs the president opposed.

Restoring the imperial presidency: George W. Bush

George W. Bush was able to restore the imperial presidency after the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001. With the country in shock, he acted swiftly and with bipartisan congressional support launched attacks on Afghanistan in 2001 and then Iraq in 2003. In the name of fighting terrorism, the Bush administration authorized warrantless wiretaps, the kidnappings of suspected terrorists, and interrogation techniques such as waterboarding. These measures were explained to the public as necessary to keep the country safe. Congress stayed quiet, and Bush's successor, Barack Obama, would enjoy similar discretion in foreign policy when it came to the fight against terrorism.

Bush's successors, Presidents Obama and Trump, continue the imperial presidency. A good example of the imperial presidency today is the frequent use of executive orders. Executive orders are a nice way to circumvent Congress and can only be repealed by a president.


TECHNICAL
STUFF

The power to issue executive orders has been used by all presidents with the exception of William Henry Harrison (1841). An executive order is a directive by the president ordering the federal government to carry out a certain task. A president can modify executive orders or even make exceptions to them. And, only

a president can cancel an executive order. Some of the more infamous executive orders issued by presidents include executive order 9066 issued by President Roosevelt, which resulted in the internment of Japanese Americans during WWII, and the more recent executive order 13769 issued by President Trump, which prohibited entry to the United States to citizens of seven Muslim countries.

President Roosevelt issued the most executive orders, 3,522. President Trump so far has issued 437 executive orders.

Shaping Public Opinion

The greatest power a U.S. president has is not found in the Constitution. It is the power to persuade and convince the U.S. public. When presidents can get the public behind them, they become unstoppable. Congress cannot and will not oppose presidents who can show public support on a certain issue. For this reason, the power to shape public opinion is a great one.

Persuading the people

Theodore Roosevelt was the first U.S. president to take advantage of the power of public opinion. He used the presidency as a *bully pulpit* — a forum to use his influence to promote his causes — and preached to the U.S. public in an attempt to gather public support. When Congress began to stifle his progressive reforms, he toured the United States and attempted to convince the public of the integrity of his programs. With the public behind him, Congress had a tough time not agreeing to his agenda.

Woodrow Wilson, a political scientist, recognized this power and continued in Roosevelt's tradition. He, too, traveled around the country to rally support for his policies. In addition, Wilson established the tradition of holding regular press conferences, and addressed Congress directly by giving his State of the Union address in person to Congress. Wilson transformed the State of the Union address into the public spectacle it still is today. He set the precedent of using the media to disseminate his speeches to the U.S. public.

Making use of the media

With the invention of the radio, and later television, the power to persuade, or shape public opinion, gained new importance. Radio made it possible to reach

the U.S. public easily, without ever leaving the White House. The first president to take advantage of this was Franklin Roosevelt in the 1930s. A week after presenting his first inaugural address, FDR began addressing the U.S. public directly over the radio with his famous fireside chats, which he used to explain his policies and foster trust and confidence in the public. Roosevelt continued this practice throughout his presidency, delivering a total of 27 fireside chats.

Exploiting TV time

John F. Kennedy used television for similar purposes. He became our first television president. Kennedy and his advisors had figured that the best way to reach the public was through television appearances heavily laden with political messages. Nothing was more successful in gaining the support of the U.S. public than a well-timed, well-written, and well-delivered speech.

Kennedy was also the first president to allow his press conferences to be covered on live television. (Eisenhower had his press conferences taped and reserved the right to edit them before they were broadcast.) Kennedy delivered 64 live press conferences before he was assassinated.

Today, using television to reach the public is common. Inaugural addresses, State of the Union addresses, and press conferences are all designed to reach out to the U.S. public and convince people that the president's policies merit their support. Clearly, a well-written and well-delivered speech can sway public opinion in a president's favor. This in turn facilitates his dealings with Congress.

Saying it on social media

While television is still the major tool to communicate with a majority of Americans, social media has become more prevalent. It was first widely used by President Obama, who started an AMA (ask me anything) thread on Reddit to target young and minority voters. The strategy was so successful in both the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections that it has been copied by every candidate running for higher office. Who could imagine President Trump not using Twitter (X)? Today, campaigns use social media to target specific groups of voters. Studies have shown that the use of social media can increase voter turnout and impact political opinions, especially for millennials (18 to 24). Older voters are more immune to social media messages.

Performing Many Roles

Today the president performs many roles in society. The president has become the preeminent politician in the United States. Some of a president's roles include the following:

- » **Head of state:** The president symbolizes the United States. Other countries judge the United States by what kind of president the U.S. public elects.
- » **Commander in chief:** Presidents head the U.S. military, and the public looks to them to commit troops into combat. The public also holds them, accountable for the successes or failures of military operations.
- » **Chief foreign policy maker:** Presidents are expected to make foreign policy, meet foreign leaders, and negotiate treaties. The public holds them responsible for successes and failures in foreign policy.
- » **Chief executive:** Presidents are in charge of the federal bureaucracy, which includes the cabinet departments, the Office of Management and Budget, and the military — more than 4 million people altogether.
- » **Chief legislator:** Today, presidents are responsible for most major legislation. They propose the budget and use their veto power to shape policy. Presidents act, and Congress usually reacts to their policies.
- » **Crisis manager:** Whenever crisis strikes the country, the U.S. public looks to the president to act. After the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001, the public expected the president, not Congress, to react. It was George W. Bush and his advisors who explained to the public and Congress what had happened, as well as what measures the government would take.
- » **Leader of their party:** The public, as well as party supporters, look at the president as the leader of his party. If the president does well, the public will usually reward their party in the elections. If the president performs poorly, the public will usually punish their party, especially in *off-year* (nonpresidential) elections.

Today, presidents are the chief politicians in the United States. However, they still have to share their powers with Congress on many occasions, and Congress can keep their power in check, if necessary.

- » Seeing how presidents are evaluated
- » Reviewing two presidential rankings

Chapter 3

Presidential Rankings and Evaluations

This chapter looks at how U.S. presidents are ranked by experts, such as academics, and includes one survey that asked historians to rank the presidents. Note that presidential rankings can fluctuate over time.

Also, academic surveys differ from public surveys of our presidents. The public knows about the Founding Fathers and major presidents who served during crises, such as Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. This knowledge comes mostly from school and the emphasis that the media places on these important presidents. But you may be hard pressed to remember much about Rutherford Hayes or Millard Fillmore.

Polls show that most U.S. citizens know about the presidents in office during their lifetime but don't know much about the presidents of the past, especially the lesser-known executives. The public naturally ranks current presidents and famous presidents higher than lesser-known presidents, whereas academics who study presidents have a better historical perspective, and not too many recent presidents rank high on their scale.

Over time, the standing of a past president may change within the rankings of the U.S. public and academics. Some presidents are highly regarded after they leave office, only to end up being considered disappointments in the long run. Andrew

Johnson had this fate. Other presidents, such as Harry Truman, may be considered failures shortly after the end of their administrations and then become popular heroes later. This chapter looks at the academic rankings of U.S. presidents as well as the personal picks of one of this book's authors concerning the most influential — as well as some of the worst — presidents in U.S. history.

Evaluating the Presidents

This section looks briefly at the major characteristics polls typically use to evaluate the U.S. presidents.



REMEMBER

Keep in mind that times change and presidential rankings reflect this. Early in U.S. history, the United States was isolationist, so foreign policy wasn't a factor in presidential evaluations. Foreign policy became much more important in the 20th century. Also, media scrutiny is a recent phenomenon. During most of the 19th and 20th centuries, the media did not delve into presidents' lives. It was considered taboo to report on private presidential scandals, and a president's private indiscretions didn't factor into how they were judged as president. This code of silence held well into the 20th century.

The Watergate scandal in the 1970s changed things. Suddenly the media took on a watchdog role over the presidents, enabling journalists to report not only on presidents' public mistakes and policy failures but also private wrongdoings. This role for the media won't change as long as juicy scandals continue to garner large audiences. Future presidents have to expect to have their lives scrutinized and any minor wrongdoing reported. In the 2000 election, George W. Bush figured they didn't expect a 20-year-old conviction for drunk driving to be a big deal. Boy, was he wrong. When the story came out days before the election, it almost cost him the presidency.

Policy leadership

A president has to make policy, domestic and foreign, for the country. The president outlines their policies in their inaugural address, their annual State of the Union addresses, and especially their budget. The president must mobilize public opinion to gain the upper hand with Congress. As Andrew Johnson and Richard Nixon discovered, being too pushy with Congress inspires resentment and limits success. Conversely, a willingness to lobby and bargain with Congressional members can lead to high success. George H. W. Bush saw most of his legislation pass, even though the opposition, Democrats, controlled both houses of Congress. Leadership skills are necessary for the president to succeed, and a high success rate with Congress increases a president's ranking.



TIP

In modern times, a president's legislation has been judged according to the impact his policies have on social equality in U.S. society. Policies that benefit minorities and the poor enhance a president's ranking in the polls.

Crisis management

The U.S. public holds the president responsible for the political and economic climate, whether times are good or bad. A successful president must have a program ready to stimulate the economy if necessary, and the president also must be able to pass it. If that effort fails, the president won't be reelected. Jimmy Carter and George H. W. Bush are recent presidents who lost their bids for reelection due to economic decline. At the same time, a booming economy can get a president reelected even if he is facing personal scandals, as Bill Clinton demonstrated in 1996.

Crisis management also refers to a presidents' handling of international crises such as a war or a terrorist attack and greatly impacts the president's standing with the public. Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt always rank in the top five of presidents mainly because of their crisis-management skills. Lincoln reacted forcefully during the Civil War and kept the Union intact. Franklin Roosevelt guided the United States through World War II and turned the country into a superpower. Conversely, Lyndon Johnson dealt poorly with the conflict in Vietnam, which lowers his ranking despite his major domestic accomplishments. President George W. Bush wasn't doing well in the polls but turned himself into a great crisis manager after the terrorist attacks in September 2001, bringing new life to his presidency as a result.

Presidential appointments

Presidents are also measured by the people they appoint to public office, including appointments to the Supreme Court and the presidential cabinet. Presidents Harding and Grant destroyed their presidencies with inept, corrupt appointments, and their rankings reflect this fact. Appointing good, skilled people reflects positively on a president. George C. Marshall and Henry Kissinger, both Secretaries of State, reflected positively on the presidents who appointed them, increasing Truman's and Nixon's standings, respectively.

Today, diversity has become an issue. Presidential appointments should reflect the ethnic composition of the country. The more minorities, including women, that a president appoints to high-level positions, the higher the president's ranking. Presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and especially Barack Obama did well in this area; their cabinets contained a fair number of minorities. President

Trump so far has scored very low in this area. His cabinet appointments have been consistently less racially and ethnically diverse than those of his recent predecessors, and his administration has worked actively to remove diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives across the federal government.

Foreign standing



REMEMBER

Most 19th-century presidents can't be ranked on the foreign policy issue because the United States was isolationist at that time and didn't get involved in world affairs. But from Theodore Roosevelt onward, foreign policy has been a major part of the presidency. Today, how a president deals with and is perceived by many other nations contributes to that president's ranking.

Major foreign policy success can make up for domestic failure. President Nixon ranks low on many lists, but his major foreign-policy accomplishments elevate him into the middle of the presidential pack. During President George H. W. Bush's term, the Soviet Union collapsed, the Gulf War was won, and major arms control was achieved — accomplishments that pushed him into the top 20 of U.S. presidents.

Respect from foreign nations is very important. President Nixon was widely respected by foreign nations. After his resignation, he continued to be treated as a successful president by most of the world, which led to a rise in his rankings.

Character and integrity

The attributes of character and integrity are important when judging presidents. A president who promotes corruption, lies to the public, or is involved in scandals will obviously be ranked lower than an honest president. President Nixon single-handedly destroyed his presidency and his place in history with the Watergate scandal. President Clinton undermined a successful presidency with many personal scandals, including lying to the public. President Harding destroyed what was left of his presidency with continuous political scandals, such as the Teapot Dome Scandal.

At the same time, a president who wasn't very successful in office, such as Jimmy Carter, can restore his reputation and rise in the rankings for being a true humanitarian and an honest person. James Polk made it into my top ten list of presidents in this book for being an honest, dedicated individual. He worked so hard that it cost him his life. His presidency had no scandals, and he even kept his campaign promise not to run for reelection.

Public persuasion

The ability to persuade the public to their point of view is one of the most powerful weapons a president possesses. It's also one they most need to succeed. How a president uses this power, and how successful they are with it, impacts their standing in the ranks of presidents. Some of the experts at public persuasion were Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt, and Ronald Reagan. Conversely, Jimmy Carter had a tough time connecting with the public, so much of his presidential agenda never made it through Congress even though his own party controlled Congress. Richard Nixon failed in similar fashion. He couldn't relate to the public. By the time the Watergate scandal came around, it was too late to gather public support for his presidency.

Presidential vision

Some presidents come into office without a vision of what they want to accomplish as president, which usually results in a failed presidency. Without an overarching plan, a president is at the mercy of Congress, which can then take over and make policy for the country.

More successful presidents have a vision. Franklin Roosevelt wanted to protect the average citizen from the brutal effects of the Great Depression. Ronald Reagan wanted to restore the United States to greatness and decrease the size of the federal government. Presidents guided by a vision actively try to implement it, and even when unsuccessful, they get credit for having it. Without a vision, a presidency results in failure.



TIP

The most successful presidents in U.S. history all had a vision of how they wanted the country to look and act. By the time they served out their terms, they had made a difference and changed the United States according to their plan.

Ranking U.S. Presidents

One of the best academic evaluations of U.S. presidents was released in 2021. C-SPAN (National Cable Satellite Corporation), a network created to show public affairs programming, conducted the Presidential Historians Survey that involved 142 historians and other experts on the presidency in the United States. The survey asked participants to rank the presidents in order from 1 to 44, with 1 being the highest ranking. (President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. is not ranked because he hadn't completed his term at the time of the survey. President Trump's second term is

also not included.) You can find the 2021 CSPAN survey and details about the ten characteristics for effectiveness it used to rank the presidents at www.c-span.org/presidentsurvey2021/?page=overall.

In the C-SPAN survey, the 44 U.S. presidents (as of 2021) were ranked for effectiveness on ten different characteristics and then put in order. The ten criteria included public persuasion, crisis leadership, economic management, moral authority, international relations, administrative skills, relations with congress, vision/setting agenda, pursuance of justice for all, and performance within contexts of times. Table 3-1 shows the highest- and lowest-ranking presidents from the 2021 C-SPAN survey (ten each).

TABLE 3-1 **Highest and Lowest Ranking Presidents**

Highest Ranking Presidents		Lowest Ranking Presidents	
1. Abraham Lincoln	6. Harry S. Truman	35. Zachary Taylor	40. William Henry Harrison
2. George Washington	7. Thomas Jefferson	36. Herbert Hoover	41. Donald J. Trump
3. Franklin D. Roosevelt	8. John F. Kennedy	37. Warren G. Harding	42. Frankline Pierce
4. Theodore Roosevelt	9. Ronald Reagan	38. Millard Fillmore	43. Andrew Johnson
5. Dwight D. Eisenhower	10. Barack Obama	39. John Tyler	44. James Buchanan

To this day, the C-SPAN surveys are the most comprehensive surveys available to the public.

Highlighting Some of the Most Influential Presidents

This section’s names and order don’t align strictly with list of the top ten presidents listed in the C-SPAN survey described in the previous section, but they are all worthy of being considered among the best.

Abraham Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln not only saved the Union but also issued the Emancipation Proclamation, declaring the slaves in the Confederacy free, and pushed for the 13th

Amendment that outlawed slavery in the United States. He expanded the war-making powers of the president, and he was a founding father of the Republican Party. If Lincoln had lived longer, the reintegration of the Confederate states into the Union would have proceeded differently, leading to less controversy.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) is the only president to have been elected to four terms. He assumed the presidency during the Great Depression and provided practical help to the people affected by it. His New Deal programs provided help and hope to millions of U.S. citizens and set the foundation for the modern welfare state. FDR saved democracy in Europe by aiding Great Britain early on in its struggle with Nazi Germany, and turned the U.S. economy into a wartime economy capable of winning World War II. During the war, he became one of the founding fathers of the United Nations, committing the United States to an active interventionist foreign policy.

Theodore Roosevelt

Theodore Roosevelt broke the longstanding isolationist tradition that kept the United States deliberately uninvolved in world affairs. By getting involved in world affairs, he set the foundation for the United States to become a world power in the 20th century.

Theodore Roosevelt gave the world the Panama Canal, and he was the first U.S. citizen to receive the Nobel Peace Prize for settling the war between Japan and Russia in 1906.

Roosevelt further protected average citizens from business excesses by regulating industries.

George Washington

As the first president, George Washington kept the new country together. He legitimized the new form of government and set the foundation for democracy in the United States. Washington also established many traditions, some of which are still around today. From the ceremony and protocols surrounding inaugural addresses to the isolationist foreign policy in place until the early 20th century, Washington's ideas stuck around.

Harry Truman

Harry Truman is one of the most unappreciated presidents in U.S. history. He made the difficult choice of dropping two atomic bombs on Japan, which ended World War II. In the opinion of many scholars, Truman's decision saved untold lives that would have been lost if the United States had been forced to invade Japan.

Truman single-handedly saved Western and Southern Europe from communism with the Truman Doctrine, extending military aid to countries fighting communist uprisings, and the Marshall Plan, which helped to rebuild the economies of postwar Europe. He was the first president to realize the Soviet threat. He acted to stop communism from expanding, establishing organizations such as NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) to contain Soviet expansionism.

Ronald Reagan

Ronald Reagan was elected president in a time of crisis, as U.S. power was declining internationally. He restored U.S. power and prestige throughout the world. His military spending led to the destruction of the Soviet economy — which wasn't able to keep up with U.S. spending — and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet empire. Without Reagan, the United States may not have won the Cold War in 1991.

Reagan's economic policies, while increasing the U.S. debt, provided for years of unheard-of growth for the U.S. economy. When he left office in 1989, he was one of the most idolized and admired presidents in U.S. history.

Thomas Jefferson

Thomas Jefferson was the most intellectual president in U.S. history. He enjoyed a worldwide reputation for his writings, and he was the chief author of the Declaration of Independence.

As president, Jefferson doubled the size of the country with the Louisiana Purchase, and he kept the country from going to war with major European powers.

Woodrow Wilson

Woodrow Wilson saved democracy in Europe. He made the decision to enter World War I on the side of the democratic allies in Europe. Wilson's decision provided for the difference in WWI, as democracy emerged victorious over the authoritarian

German and Austro-Hungarian empires. The League of Nations, the predecessor to the United Nations, was his brainchild. Even though the U.S. Senate refused to join the League of Nations, the foundation for the United Nations was set.

Domestically, Wilson was a reformer who gave women the right to vote in 1920. He also oversaw the newly established way to elect U.S. senators, which put the selection in the hands of voters instead of the state legislatures.

Dwight D. Eisenhower

Dwight D. Eisenhower accomplished much in a very quiet way. He ended the war in Korea and managed to contain the Soviet Union for the eight years he held office. He gave the United States eight years of peace. During his tenure in office, not one U.S. soldier was lost in combat.

Eisenhower passed the first civil rights legislation since the end of the Civil War. He stood up to several Southern governors who refused to implement the Supreme Court's decision to integrate public schools. Finally, Eisenhower also gave us our present-day interstate highway system.

James Polk

James Polk may be one of the most underrated presidents in U.S. history. He arranged a dramatic expansion of the country by acquiring most of what today is the southwestern United States.

Polk was a hardworking, honest man who worked himself into an early grave. Polk's administration had no scandals involving him or his cabinet.

This president stuck to his promise to serve only one term, and he put the good of the country before his own interests, earning the right to be listed as one of the top ten U.S. presidents.

Looking at Some of the Worst Presidents

Once again, the following list of low-ranked presidents doesn't strictly align with those on the C-SPAN survey. Donald Trump's first term, for example, is ranked at 41 out of 44 on that 2021 survey, but we refrained from including Trump while his second term is ongoing. Zachary Taylor is missing from this section as well.

We do include Ulysses S. Grant here, although the survey puts him more in the middle of the rankings at 20th place. Read on for a sampling of what makes for a bad president.

» **Andrew Johnson:** Andrew Johnson became president only because President Lincoln was assassinated, and Johnson is widely considered one of the worst. His Reconstruction plan for the Southern states after the Civil War was lenient for the former Confederate states, and it didn't benefit former slaves at all. He pushed Congress to the point of impeaching him by the House of Representatives for violating the Tenure of Office Act — though he was not convicted.

In addition, Johnson was an unpleasant, bigoted fellow with a bad temper. Had it been up to him, African Americans would have never received citizenship or any civil rights.

» **Warren G. Harding:** President Warren G. Harding's administration was a massive failure. He appointed friends to high-level government positions, and they repaid him by creating many financial scandals. His administration accomplished nothing of value, and his years as president are utterly forgettable.

Harding was a hypocrite and womanizer. He supported Prohibition and drank in secret. He married his wife for her money, and then he cheated on her in a White House closet (just off the Oval Office) while she slept in her bedroom. Harding put it best himself: "I am not fit for this office [the presidency] and never should have been here."

» **Franklin Pierce:** Franklin Pierce was a Northern Democrat with a Southern soul. He supported slavery throughout his career because he believed that the Constitution allowed the states to decide whether to be slave states or free states.

Pierce laid the foundation for the Civil War by not opposing the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854. The act overturned the Missouri Compromise of 1820 and allowed new states to choose whether to allow slavery. Pierce drank heavily as he ignored the conflict that tore Kansas apart. He didn't even run for reelection in 1856. He retired and drank himself to death instead.

» **James Buchanan:** James Buchanan served his country loyally and faithfully until he became president. As a Northern Democrat, he personally opposed slavery, but because he believed that the Constitution allowed it, he refused to do anything about the issue. Instead, he supported the Supreme Court's Dred Scott decision in 1857, which declared that slaves were not people or citizens.

When most Southern states seceded after Lincoln's victory in 1860, Buchanan stood by and did nothing, just waiting for his term to end. When Lincoln arrived in the White House, Buchanan hurriedly left and disappeared into oblivion.

- » **John Tyler:** John Tyler became president by default when President Harrison died in office in 1841. He wasn't a Whig like Harrison, but he had been selected because he could appeal to Southern voters. He alienated his own party to the point where its members threatened to impeach him.

Tyler accomplished almost nothing while in office, with the exception of bringing Texas into the Union. Without this one accomplishment, Tyler would rank even lower on the presidential scale.

- » **Millard Fillmore:** Millard Fillmore was another vice president who became president by default. He took over after President Zachary Taylor died one year into his term.

Shortly after taking office, Fillmore destroyed his own party by backing the Compromise of 1850, which many Whigs considered pro-slavery. To make matters worse, Fillmore ran for the presidency in 1856 as a candidate for the racist American Party, which advocated against Black, Jewish, and Catholic people.

In 1864, Fillmore turned against Lincoln by backing Lincoln's opponent, General George McClellan. As an example of one bad president trying to help out another bad president, Fillmore later backed Andrew Johnson in his fight with Congress.

- » **Ulysses S. Grant:** Ulysses S. Grant was one of the most capable soldiers in U.S. history — and for this he deserves much credit. As president, however, he was the opposite of capable.

Grant filled cabinet positions with his friends and relatives, resulting in rampant corruption and many scandals. Grant was an honest man, but he didn't have many honest friends. To make matters worse, he defended his corrupt friends, undermining his own credibility in the eyes of the public. Grant's trust in people was so high that he lost all his money when his son invested it improperly. He retired a pauper and wrote his memoirs to help feed his family.

- » **William Henry Harrison:** It's not fair to judge William Henry Harrison on his term in office. He served only a little over a month, most of it on his deathbed. It is justified, however, to rank him on his campaign and his agenda. Well, there was no agenda, because Harrison stood for nothing and ran without a platform.

Harrison's campaign portrayed him as a hard-drinking man of the people who was born in a log cabin. He did drink hard cider, but he grew up wealthy on a large estate in Virginia. His campaign was based on a lie, but it got him elected.

- » **Martin Van Buren:** One of the best politicians in U.S. history, Martin Van Buren knew how to play the political game. He helped to create the

Democratic Party on Andrew Jackson's behalf. He served his country well until he reached the presidency. Suddenly, his accomplishments stopped. How could such a great politician be such a bad president?

Van Buren wasn't responsible for the depression of 1837, but he also didn't do anything about it, which undermined his chances for reelection. He refused to address slurs against him in the 1840 election and lost badly. In 1848, he took the presidency away from his own Democratic Party by running as a third-party candidate.

» **Herbert Hoover:** Herbert Hoover was a self-made man and a great humanitarian who was responsible for saving millions of Europeans from starving to death after both world wars. How could such a great human being be such a bad president?

Although he can't be blamed for causing the Great Depression of the 1920s and early 1930s, Hoover is a classic example of doing too little, too late about it. Hoover shows that being a great person and being a great president don't necessarily go hand in hand.

- » Seeing the changing role of First Ladies
- » Understanding the powers of the First Lady
- » Evaluating and ranking First Ladies
- » Recognizing their influence in shaping the United States

Chapter 4

The Changing Role of First Ladies

The story of the First Ladies of the United States is one of drama, personal struggle, and both great successes and failures. It's a story of ambition, joy, disappointment, and most often, a total loss of privacy. In the early years of the republic, becoming First Lady imposed considerable dangers, both social and economic, on First Ladies and their families. The White House was open to just about everyone, and it had no security yet.

Today, First Ladies have professional roles and often aid in policy development. They work together with Congress and have become active policy makers. However, every First Lady decides how active they'll be. Hillary Clinton was one of the most active First Ladies in recent history, whereas Melania Trump (referring only to her husband's first term; the second isn't covered here) was less active and played the role of a more traditional First Lady.

A First Lady's temperament, family situation, character, and even relationship with the president determine how she engages in her role. First Ladies with big political ambitions can use their office as a stepping stone to future offices. Eleanor Roosevelt did so by working for the United Nations after leaving her role as First Lady in 1945, and Hillary Clinton ran and served as a U.S. Senator followed by U.S. Secretary of State after serving two terms as First Lady.

The role of First Lady has seen significant changes over the years. Women have made progress in society and are found at the highest levels of government, including the vice presidency. Women today serve in Congress, as the Speaker of the House of Representatives, on the Supreme Court, and as state governors. It's only a question of time before a woman becomes president and the U.S. will have its first "First Gentleman."

Defining a First Lady

Most First Ladies are famous because of the men they married. However, most First Ladies also impacted their husband's lives and both directly and indirectly made significant contributions to U.S. history. From Martha Washington traveling with the Continental Army and improving soldiers' morale to Mary Todd Lincoln encouraging her husband to run for political office, in turn saving the Union, to Helen Taft pushing her husband to become president, American history wouldn't have been the same without the country's First Ladies.

Here are some of the direct contributions many First Ladies throughout U.S. history have made to enable the office of the presidency:

- » They helped out with finances, managing family farms, teaching school, or working after getting married so that their husband could enter politics.

FINANCIAL RAMIFICATIONS OF BEING FIRST LADY

Early on, the President and First Lady experienced financial hardships because they had to use their own resources to furnish the White House and to host dinners and parties. Congress didn't appropriate enough money for these functions. The job of President wasn't compensated well, and the First Lady received no compensation at all. After retirement, neither the president nor First Lady received a pension. Pensions for ex-presidents weren't approved until the 1950s, and they didn't receive a comfortable salary until 1969, when President Nixon's was \$200,000. Today, presidents and their wives make millions after they retire, usually by writing their memoirs, giving speeches, or both. But early presidents and First Ladies often left the White House poorer than when they entered it. Dolley Madison, for example, was broke at the end of her life, and people left money in her house whenever she invited them over.

- » Many First Ladies came from social and economic backgrounds superior to the men they married. Without their contributions, their husbands couldn't have become presidents.
- » Many First Ladies were familiar with politics and had early exposure to politics through a father, a grandfather, or an uncle. Helen Taft, for example, decided to pursue a career in politics through her husband. Her father and grandfather had served in Congress, and she enjoyed the campaign for political office. These experiences allowed her to give advice and help advance her husband's political career. Without her, there would have been no President Taft.



REMEMBER

It took quite some time to discover how important First Ladies actually were in the history of the U.S. because most early First Ladies, such as Martha Washington, left little information for historians to study. Many burned all their correspondence with their husbands and friends. The few who didn't, like Abigail Adams, left historians with a plethora of information and provided a picture of the time they lived in and how they contributed to their husband's career and successes.

After the Civil War, First Ladies such as Julia Grant, Helen Taft, and Edith Wilson wrote their memoirs, providing many more details about the role of First Lady and the gradual changes the office undertook.

Most First Ladies accomplished great things or faced hardships and challenges, often before becoming First Lady. Here are some examples:

- » Elizabeth Monroe single-handedly saved the wife of the American war hero the Marquis de Lafayette in Paris during the French Revolution.
- » Louisa Adams traveled by herself with a young child during the wintertime from Russia to France during the Napoleonic wars.
- » Lou Hoover, who was in China during the Boxer Rebellion, carried a gun and got involved in shoot-outs.

Powers of the First Lady

The position of First Lady doesn't come with a job description and isn't mentioned in the Constitution; rather, it has been defined by changing American culture. In the 19th century, an active First Lady campaigning for her husband and trying to impact policy making publicly wouldn't have been tolerated, but today, the American public expects First Ladies to be educated, to campaign for their husbands, and to even run for office themselves.

For this reason, the First Lady has become one of the most powerful persons in Washington, D.C. From Betty Ford, who encouraged her husband to pardon President Nixon, to Hillary Clinton, who was put in charge of reforming healthcare in the United States, First Ladies can greatly impact policy making.

Assuming head of state roles

The Constitution provides a president with two jobs: serving as the head of state and the head of government. The first is ceremonial and doesn't matter that much; therefore, presidents have given ceremonial powers to First Ladies. Martha Washington attended church on her husband's behalf; Nancy Reagan was the president's stand-in after the assassination attempt on her husband; and Lady Bird Johnson campaigned for her husband in the South.

Having unseen powers

In the first years of the republic, First Ladies mostly concerned themselves with their hostess role and arranging social events. They further oversaw renovations of the White House. Although many people dismiss these functions as irrelevant, they had very political undertones. Every teatime, soiree, and formal dinner can be used politically, as Louisa Adams showed in 1825 when, during a soiree the night before Congress picked her husband as the new president, she convinced several Congressmen to vote for him.

Dolley Madison organized weekly Wednesday evening get-togethers where she invited Congressmen from both parties and often took the place of her husband, discussing politics with her guests. Soon she became one of the most powerful political brokers in the capital.

Getting into the limelight

Some First Ladies have made an imprint quietly, whereas others have gone public. Abigail Adams persuaded her husband on political issues in more than a thousand letters written to him. Other First Ladies have used media, such as the radio or television, to make or even change policy. Both Betty Ford and Rosalynn Carter went public on issues such as the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), abortion, and mental health.

With the New Deal and WWII, more government power became centralized in the office of the president in the 1930s and 1940s. Not surprisingly, the media began to focus more on Washington, D.C., and the office of the president. Increased focus on the president also led to increased attention on the First Lady, with the advance

of television enhancing it even further. Suddenly, people could see the First Ladies in action and listen to them speak. By 1960, half of all Americans owned a television set, which added immensely to the coverage of First Ladies.

Achieving institutional status

With Edith Roosevelt, at the turn of the 20th century, the office of the First Lady became more institutionalized. She started the ball rolling and other First Ladies followed suit:

- » **Edith Roosevelt** hired highly paid and educated professional staffers, and suddenly staff weren't just helpers in the kitchen but full-time professional advisors. These advisors attended morning briefings with the First Lady and on occasion worked closely with the president's staff.
- » **Lady Bird Johnson** took the professional aspect a step further; she turned the East Wing of the White House into a business organization and ran it as such.
- » **Rosalynn Carter** completed the process of institutionalization by moving her office to the East Wing and creating a formal Office of the First Lady.

Evaluating the First Ladies

Unlike U.S. presidents, academics and the American public rarely evaluate First Ladies. It wasn't until the 1980s that the Siena College Research Institute in New York established an academic survey to rate and rank First Ladies. The survey continues but isn't taken often, usually only about once a decade. To this date, it has been conducted only five times since its inception in 1982. The most recent survey was taken in 2020. (See more about this survey in the upcoming "Ranking U.S. First Ladies" section.)



REMEMBER

Keep in mind that times change and First Lady rankings reflect this fact. Early in U.S. history, First Ladies were mainly hostesses in and caretakers of the White House. Some even refused to perform those duties and had their daughters step into their place. In those early years, only a few First Ladies mattered when it came to impacting policy making: Sarah Polk, Dolley Madison, and Abigail Adams. Not surprisingly, many First Ladies of the 19th century don't rank very high in the survey. They just didn't do much besides serve as a great White House hostess, if that. That role was all that was expected of them, and if they had been more engaged, the American public may not have stood for it.

Stronger First Ladies emerged in the 20th. They suddenly took their place next to the president and influenced policy making. Some were even quite public about it. Eleanor Roosevelt was the first First Lady to become publicly involved in policy making, and she openly conversed with the America public about her political stands and preferences.



TIP

Media scrutiny of First Ladies is also a more recent phenomenon. During most of the 19th and 20th centuries, the media didn't delve into the lives of First Ladies. Much of what we know about the earlier First Ladies comes from letters written by them, their husbands, and their acquaintances, and even that isn't much because often First Ladies would burn their correspondence when leaving office. It was considered taboo to report on the private lives of First Ladies; the public didn't know much, if anything, about Eleanor Roosevelt's live-in girlfriend or Helen Taft smoking cigarettes and playing cards with the boys. A president's or First Lady's private indiscretions were kept secret. This code of silence held well into the 20th century.

The Watergate scandal in the 1970s changed things. Here's how:

» **Suddenly, the media believed that it had an obligation to be a watchdog over the presidents and First Ladies.** This new role allowed the media not only to check presidents for public mistakes and policy failures but also to report on First Ladies and their activities.

» **This watchdog role for the media won't change as long as juicy scandals continue to garner large audiences.** Future First Ladies have to expect to have their lives scrutinized and any minor wrongdoing reported.

Hillary Clinton found out this truth the hard way in 1993 with the Whitewater scandal, when the Clintons were accused of financial wrongdoings, and again in 2015, after her term as First Lady had ended in 2001. At that time, the media reported on her using her private server for classified emails, resulting in ongoing controversy.

Today, scrutiny of First Ladies does not even end after their terms have ended. Melania Trump ran into a similar problem when her nude photoshoot of 2000 was revealed during the 2016 campaign.

Ranking U.S. First Ladies

One of the best academic evaluations of U.S. First Ladies was released in 2020, in a joint effort by both the Siena College Research Institute and C-SPAN (National Cable Satellite Corporation), a network created to show public affairs programming. The

survey was conducted in 2019, and its results were released in 2020. A total of 242 experts on First Ladies in the United States were asked to rank the First Ladies based on ten criteria. Rankings of all the First Ladies are rare, time-consuming, and expensive, and not much demand exists for them.

Note: Because the study was done in 2019–2020, it doesn’t include Dr. Jill Biden, who became First Lady in 2021. It further excludes Harriet Lane, who was President Buchanan’s niece and became his First Lady because he was a lifelong bachelor. Many academics do count her as a First Lady, however, and she’s included in the “Highlighting Some Influential First Ladies” section near the end of this chapter. Finally, the Siena study excludes the four First Ladies who died before their husbands became president, as well as Anna Harrison, who never had a chance to become First Lady after her husband died a month into office.



REMEMBER

The Siena Research Institute Survey was the first survey on First Ladies in the United States. It’s conducted about every ten years, and it asks history and political science professors at American universities, as well as other experts on First Ladies, to rank the U.S. First Ladies on a scale of one to five based on ten separate categories. Unlike surveys on American presidents, there were no other surveys to compare results to and thus the Siena College Research Institutes findings are the only comprehensive survey on U.S. First Ladies, establishing a benchmark for First Lady studies.

You can find the past and most current First Lady study rankings and other interesting tidbits about some of them and their initiatives at <https://scri.siena.edu/first-ladies-study/>. Table 4-1 shows the highest- and lowest-ranking First Ladies (ten each) from the study.

TABLE 4-1 Highest- and Lowest-Ranking First Ladies

Highest Ranking First Ladies		Lowest Ranking First Ladies	
1. Eleanor Roosevelt	6. Betty Ford	31. Julie Tyler	36. Eliza Johnson
2. Abigail Adams	7. Lady Bird Johnson	32. Abigail Fillmore	37. Letitia Tyler
3. Michelle Obama	8. Hillary Clinton	33. Elizabeth Monroe	38. Margaret Taylor
4. Jacqueline Kennedy	9. Rosalynn Carter	34. Ida McKinley	39. Jane Pierce
5. Dolley Madison	10. Martha Washington	35. Florence Harding	40. Melania Trump*

*Only first term for Melania Trump

If you compare the results from the first survey taken in 1982 to the last one, conducted in 2019 (and published in 2020), the top ten and bottom ten First Ladies have been fairly consistent. Some explanations for the bottom-category ranking include:

- » Jane Pierce is considered a neurotic woman whose behavior and attitude made her husband's life more difficult. Instead of being helpful during their husbands' presidencies, she did the exact opposite, undermining her husband's reputation and proving to be a handicap for effective policy making.
- » Florence Harding is often blamed for being too ambitious and pushing her unqualified husband to become president. He turned out to be one of the worst presidents in American history.
- » Letitia Tyler and Eliza Johnson, on the other hand, had no interest in being First Lady. Both claimed to be ill and made their daughters surrogate First Ladies for their husbands.



REMEMBER

At the same time, Eleanor Roosevelt has held the top spot in all surveys taken since 1982. She was an exceptionally active First Lady who became a copresident to her husband. She clearly changed the role of First Ladies in U.S. history, and for this she is still admired and rewarded with the number one spot in all surveys on First Ladies.

Highlighting Some Influential First Ladies

For any First Lady to appear high on a list of notable First Ladies, she has to have shown superior abilities in all the following ten categories: background (previous accomplishments); value to country; integrity; leadership; White House steward; is her own woman; accomplishments as First Lady; courage; public image; and value to president. This section provides highlights of some of the most influential and accomplished First Ladies:

- » **Eleanor Roosevelt:** Eleanor Roosevelt served as First Lady for 12 years (1933–1945) and was one of the most influential figures in American politics during the Great Depression and WWII. She supported socioeconomic causes that she believed in and completely changed the role of the First Lady. She was active in advising her husband and was the first First Lady to hold her own press conferences.

Eleanor Roosevelt wrote articles for newspapers and magazines and even hosted a radio broadcast. A fighter her whole life for civil rights, racial justice, and gender equality, she remained active after her tenure as First Lady,

serving on the board of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and as Chair of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. Without her, there would have been no Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 by the United Nations.

- » **Abigail Adams:** Abigail Adams has the distinction of being the first Second Lady (1789–1797) and also the second First Lady (1797–1801). (Read that again.) She was a prolific letter writer, so we know much about not only her political views but also life in the late 18th and early 19th centuries in the U.S. She was the first First Lady in what is now called the White House, and although a wonderful hostess, she was also outspoken. She influenced her husband's decision-making and was frequently called Mrs. President because she discussed important problems with him and helped him draft official letters.

Abigail Adams supported women's rights early — many call her the first American feminist — and opposed slavery. She was one of two First Ladies who was both married to a president and gave birth to a future president. (The other one was Barbara Bush.)

- » **Dolley Madison:** One of the most famous and popular First Ladies in U.S. history (1809–1817), Dolley Madison possessed negotiating skills and interacted with Congress, which even gave her her own chair to use on the floor of Congress for her frequent visits. She was the first to host an inaugural ball, and she supported her husband's political career using her social charm and extensive social networks.

Dolley Madison secured money from Congress to hire a chef and increase the number of guests invited to White House events such as foreign diplomats and well-known artists, writers, and even newsmakers. In 1814, she single-handedly saved not only a famous portrait of George Washington from the British, who attacked Washington, D.C., and burned down the White House, but she also saved notes from the Constitutional Convention and the White House silver. This act made her a heroine among Americans, and she was celebrated for it for the rest of her life. **Note:** The term *First Lady* was actually coined by President Taylor in his eulogy to honor Dolley.

- » **Hillary Clinton:** Hillary Clinton was one of the most active and powerful First Ladies in our history (1993–2001) and one of the best-known female politicians in the world. Hillary Clinton built a career as one of the leading attorneys in the United States before entering politics, and in both 1988 and 1991 was named one of the top 100 attorneys in the United States by the *National Law Review*.

As First Lady, Clinton advocated for healthcare reform, child welfare, and women's rights. After her tenure in the White House, she went on to become the first First Lady to run for political office. She became a two-term New York

U.S. senator as well as the Secretary of State during the Obama administration. In addition, she became the first woman ever to be nominated for president on a major party's ticket in 2016. She ended up narrowly losing the election, but she changed the way we perceive First Ladies forever.

- » **Betty Ford:** With her honesty and openness about breast cancer and substance abuse, Betty Ford saved thousands of lives. Betty was not only the most openly political First Lady — discussing and supporting abortion and the Equal Rights Amendment, opposing her own husband on these issues — but she also connected with millions of Americans through her own battle with breast cancer, which she shared with the American public. She discussed her mastectomy publicly and spoke about cancer awareness.

Because of Betty Ford, people started to actually talk about breast cancer in the U.S., and millions of women decided to have mammograms to detect possible disease earlier. After serving her term as First Lady (1974–1977), she faced a second health battle: substance abuse. Again, she made her fight public and afterward founded the Betty Ford Center in California, which has since expanded to other states and has treated thousands for addiction-related issues.

- » **Claudia “Lady Bird” Johnson:** Claudia Johnson, more commonly known as “Lady Bird,” was an invaluable partner to her husband, President Lyndon Johnson, and pursued many initiatives of her own from 1963–1969. She was the first American First Lady to work for environmental protection, public conservation, and the beautification of American highways and inner-city areas. Considered to be one of the founders of the American environmental movement, she also established the tradition of First Ladies selecting specific causes or projects to pursue while in office.

For her dedication to beautification projects and wildlife preservation, Lady Bird received the Medal of Freedom from President Ford in 1977. Lady Bird ran the White House similarly to her own business — a media empire she had created in the 1940s and 1950s, which had turned her into a millionaire. She documented all day-to-day activities, bequeathing us with some of the best documentation we have today of the Johnson administration and its activities.

- » **Sarah Polk:** The well-educated and politically engaged Sarah Polk told her future husband, James Polk, that she would marry him only if he entered politics. During Polk's presidency (1845–1849), Sarah crafted speeches for her husband and wrote and answered letters for him in their shared office. The two shared an office, and Sarah wasn't afraid to express her political opinions publicly, which was unheard of at the time.

Like her husband, Sarah believed in Manifest Destiny, the view that the U.S. had the God-given right to expand, and the Polk administration implemented

that policy. Sarah learned the skill of being a White House hostess from none other than Dolley Madison and soon became famous for entertaining. She was nonpartisan and well-respected throughout the capital. In fact, she was so well-liked that during the Civil War, her estate in Tennessee, Polk Place, was considered sacred ground and neutral territory, and Sarah entertained both Northern and Southern military leaders there during the war.

- » **Rosalynn Carter:** Rosalynn Carter followed in the footsteps of her idol Eleanor Roosevelt. She was politically and socially active and tried to become intimately involved in her husband's campaigns and later in his White House politics. She did become his right-hand woman and considered herself and her husband full partners in politics. She was a clear equal to him, she sat in Cabinet meetings, and she became one of his closest advisors. She even traveled as his official envoy to Latin America in 1977. As First Lady, she was an ardent supporter of the Equal Rights Amendment and became an advocate for mental health issues.

After leaving office, Rosalynn Carter became a vocal advocate of human rights throughout the world and traveled extensively, monitoring elections in many countries. Both Carters worked with Habitat for Humanity, helping to build low-income housing and advocating on behalf of the mentally ill. Rosalynn Carter also cofounded Every Child by Two, a program that provides for early childhood immunization. In 1999, President Clinton awarded Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter the Presidential Medal of Freedom for their humanitarian service. Rosalynn Carter is considered one of the most successful former First Lady and was one of the most respected individuals throughout the United States and the world.

- » **Harriet Lane:** As Ambassador to England, future president James Buchanan took the orphaned niece he had raised to England with him, where she developed social and diplomatic skills and became a favorite in Queen Victoria's court. When he became president, lifelong bachelor Buchanan asked his niece to run the White House for him (1857–1861), and in that role, Harriet Lane became admired in both the U.S. and Europe. Her diplomatic skills came in handy at the White House when she hosted the Prince of Wales — the future King Edward — thereby ending English-American hostilities in 1860.

As First Lady, Harriet advocated for prison reform, public education, and healthcare for Native Americans. Native Americans appreciated her help and referred to her as the “Great Mother of the Indians.” She also donated her collection of art, which became the foundation for what is today the National Collection of Fine Arts at the Smithsonian.

- » **Michelle Obama:** In 2009, Michelle Obama became the first Black First Lady in U.S. history, and she served the country along with her husband through two terms. She focused on her role as mother and family-related issues such

as childhood obesity and empowering women and girls in the United States and globally. As a lawyer and hospital administration executive in Chicago, she had always been involved in community affairs.

As First Lady, Michelle Obama worked to reduce childhood obesity in the United States and successfully lobbied for the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act to set new nutritional standards for all food in schools. She started an organic garden in the White House with the help of local fifth graders, and she later published a book, *American Grown*, which chronicles the story of the White House Garden and includes recipes from White House chefs using items grown in the garden.

Together with Second Lady Jill Biden, Michelle Obama started a program called Joining Forces to help military families by matching employers with returning veterans and their family members. Finally, she and former First Lady Laura Bush promoted women's issues in Africa, culminating in a U.S.-Africa summit in 2014 sponsored by the Obama White House and the Bush Institute.

5 **The People Who Infused the Shape**

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- » Settling and colonizing: Different strokes for different folks
- » Setting slavery in motion
- » Relating to the American Indians, mostly negatively

Chapter 1

Pilgrims' Progress: The English Colonies

It's pretty safe to say that the first permanent English colony in America (Jamestown) was put together about as well as a soup sandwich. Those who set out to establish the colony weren't sure where they were going or what to do when they got there.

You can find coverage of American colonial development from 1700 up to the American Revolutionary War (1776) in Book 1, Chapter 1, but in this chapter, you find out about the struggles of the original colonists who arrived in America before the 1700s. Specifically, you discover the diverse nature and effects of the first American colonies, as well as the colonists, immigrants, and native peoples who comprised and interacted within them.

Settling in Jamestown

King James I of England gave a charter to a group of investors known as the Virginia Company of London; the charter allowed them to establish a settlement somewhere in the southern part of a large area of New World area called Virginia. After a voyage on which roughly 27 percent of the original 144 settlers died, three

ships arrived at the mouth of a river they ingratiatingly named the *James*, after the king. On May 14, 1607, they began the settlement of Jamestown.

Early troubles

Some of the settlers were indentured servants who had traded seven years of their labor for passage to America. Most of the others were far more interested in finding gold than creating a colony, and they lacked the skills, such as hunting or farming, that might actually be useful in the wilderness. As one historian put it, “It was a colony of people who wouldn’t work, or couldn’t.”

Worse, the site they had chosen for a settlement was in a malaria-ridden swamp, and the local inhabitants were both suspicious and unfriendly. In fact, the American Indians launched their first attack against the newcomers within two weeks of their arrival. Within six months, half of the 105 settlers who had survived the trip were dead of disease or starvation.

Making American Indian friends

Those who survived did so largely because of a character named John Smith. An experienced and courageous adventurer, Smith was also a shameless self-promoter and a world-class liar with a knack for getting into trouble. On the voyage over, for example, he was charged with mutiny, although he was eventually acquitted.

Despite his faults, the gutsy and diplomatic Smith made friends with Powhatan, the chief of the local American Indians, and the tribe provided the colonists with enough food to hold on. Thanks to Smith’s leadership, the colony managed to survive, although in the winter of 1609, conditions got so bad that the colonists resorted to eating anything they could get — including each other. One man was executed after eating the body of his dead wife. In 1610, the survivors were actually on a ship and ready to head home when a military relief expedition showed up and took charge.

Finding a cash crop

The colonists needed to come up with a product that people in England wanted and which could form the basis of a profitable economy. In 1613, a fellow named John Rolfe developed a variety of tobacco that was a huge hit in the mother country. Within a few years, Jamestown had a thriving cash crop.



REMEMBER

Three developments in 1619 had a large impact on the British in America:

- » **The arrival of 90 women**, who became the brides of settlers who paid for their passage at a cost of 120 pounds of tobacco each.
- » **The meeting of the first legislative body of colonists.** Known as the House of Burgesses, it passed laws against gambling and idleness and decreed that all colonists must attend two church services each Sunday — and bring their weapons with them. Then, the legislators adjourned because it was too hot to keep meeting.
- » **A Dutch ship carrying 20 human beings from Africa**, brought by settlers to work in the tobacco fields (see Figure 1-1).



FIGURE 1-1:
The arrival
of slaves in
Jamestown:
One of the key
elements in
America's history.

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Instituting Slavery

Although a Dutch ship brought the first slaves to Virginia, no European nation had a monopoly on the practice. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to raid the African coast for slaves in the mid-15th century. They were quickly followed

by the Spanish, who used Africans to supplant the New World Indians, who had either been killed or died of diseases. By the mid-16th century, the English sea dog John Hawkins was operating a thriving slave trade between Africa and the Caribbean. (See Chapter 4 in this book for more information about the slave trade.)

Most enslaved people were seized from tribes in the continent's interior and sold from West African ports to the New World. Some were hunted down by European and Arab slave traders. Many were sold by rival tribes after being captured in wars or on raids. And some were sold by their own tribes when they got into debt or ran afoul of tribal leaders.

Although the use of African slaves in the tobacco fields proved successful, and more slaves were gradually imported, slavery was by no means a strictly Southern colony phenomenon. The Northern colonies had less use for slaves as agricultural workers but put Africans to work as domestic servants or unpaid laborers in various trades. Slaves represented permanent labor, *indentured servants* — people who traded five to seven years of work in return for passage to the New World — would eventually have to be freed.



REMEMBER

Not everyone in the colonies was enamored with slavery. In 1688, a radical Protestant group in Pennsylvania known as the Mennonites became the first American religious group to formally oppose the practice. In 1700, a New England judge named Samuel Sewall published a three-page tract called "The Selling of Joseph," in which he compared slavery to what Joseph's brothers did to him in the biblical story and called for the abolition of slavery in the colonies.

But voices such as Sewall's were few and far between. Although the total population of slaves was relatively low through most of the 1600s, colonial governments took steps to institutionalize slavery. In 1662, Virginia passed a law that automatically made slaves of slaves' children. In 1664, Maryland's assembly declared that all Black people in the colony were slaves for life, whether they converted to Christianity or not. And in 1684, New York's legislators recognized slavery as a legitimate practice.

As the 17th century ended, African slaves were clearly a much better bargain than European servants and their numbers swelled. Virginia's population of about 2,000 slaves in 1670 had grown to 12,000 by 1708.

Colonizing: Pilgrims and Puritans

While Virginia was being settled by gentlemen farmers, servants, slaves, and some people you wouldn't trust with your car keys, a very different kind of people were putting together England's second colony in America. These people, who settled

New England, came to America for wealth of another type. They were spurred by their deep religious beliefs and their zeal to find a haven for the freedom to practice their faith — although not necessarily for anyone else to practice theirs.

The Mayflower Compact: A Dutch pilgrimage

The Pilgrims (actually they called themselves “the Saints” and everyone else “the Strangers”; they weren’t dubbed *Pilgrims* until much later by one of their leaders) were mostly lower-class farmers and craftsmen who had separated from the Church of England because they found it too Catholic-like. Displeased, King James I suggested rather forcefully that these “Separatists” rejoin or else separate themselves from England. The Separatists did just that, settling in Holland in 1608. But after a decade of watching their children become “Dutchified,” the English expatriates longed for someplace they could live as English subjects and still worship the way they wanted. The answer was America.

Making the trek to America

After going back to England and negotiating a charter to establish a colony, taking out a few loans, and forming a company, a group of 102 men, women, and children left England on September 16, 1620, on a ship called the *Mayflower*. (A second ship, the *Speedwell*, also started out but sprang a leak and had to turn back.) The *Mayflower* was usually used for shipping wine between France and England. Its cargo for this trip was decidedly more varied than usual. Although the Pilgrims didn’t really pack any smarter than the Jamestown colonists, they did show some imagination. Among the things they took to the wilderness of North America were musical instruments, all kinds of furniture, and even books on the history of Turkey (the country, not the bird). One guy even brought 139 pairs of shoes and boots.

Despite a rough crossing that took 65 days, only one passenger and four crewmen died, and one child was born. After some preliminary scouting, they dropped anchor in a broad, shallow bay now known as Plymouth. (No evidence exists to indicate that they landed on any kind of rock.)



REMEMBER

Two important things happened on the Pilgrims’ arrival in America:

- » They missed their turnoff and failed to land within the borders laid out by their charter. That meant they were essentially squatters and didn’t fall under the direct governance of anyone in England.
- » Concerned by mutterings from some members of the group that they should go home, the colony’s leaders drew up a *compact*, or set of rules, by which they all agreed to abide. This became known as the Mayflower Compact.



TIP

The Mayflower Compact was remarkable in that it was drawn up by people who were essentially equal to one another and were looking for a way to establish laws they could all live under. Although it certainly left out equal rights for women, slaves, American Indians, and indentured servants, it was still a key early step in the colonists' journey toward self-rule and independence from England.

Surviving and combining

The Plymouth colony had a very rough first winter, with half the settlers dying in the first six months. But unlike many of the Jamestown colonists (see the section “Settling in Jamestown” earlier in the chapter), the Pilgrims were hard workers. They had an extremely able leader in William Bradford, who was to be governor of the colony for more than 30 years, and an able, although diminutive, military leader in Miles Standish (his nickname was “Captain Shrimpe”). They were also extremely lucky because the local American Indians proved not only to be great neighbors but also had one among them who spoke English.

The locals showed the newcomers some planting techniques and then traded the colonists' furs for corn, which gave the Pilgrims something to send back to England. By the fall of 1621, the Plymouth colonists had much to be thankful for. In fact, Gov. Bradford invited the helpful Wampanoag tribe to a feast that lasted a few days — sometime between September 21 and November 9 — and included wild fowl, venison, leeks, plums, berries, eels, oysters, cornbread, and “popped corn.” (In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln made the remembrance of this event into a national holiday known as “Thanksgiving.”)

The Plymouth colony was absorbed by the larger Puritans' colony of Massachusetts Bay in 1619, but the impact of its approach to government and its effect on the American psyche far outstripped its size or longevity. Ever since (greatly aided by countless elementary school Thanksgiving pageants), the Pilgrims have dominated most Americans' images of the country's earliest settlers.

The Massachusetts Bay colony: A pure haven

People easily confuse the Pilgrims and the Puritans. Both groups journeyed to America for religious reasons. Both were remarkably intolerant of other people's beliefs. And neither was much fun at parties.

But they had differences. The Puritans were less radical and less interested in leaving the Church of England than in “purifying” it. Their leader was a well-to-do lawyer named John Winthrop. He had some qualities that came to be part of the stereotypical New England Yankee. He was deeply religious but a practical

businessman. He advocated — and put into practice — such egalitarian principles as trial by jury, yet regarded democracy as “the meanest and worst” of all forms of government.

Armed with a charter that gave the colonists extraordinary independence in making their own rules, Winthrop led about 500 Puritans to the Massachusetts Bay colony in New England in 1630, establishing the city of Boston later that year. An even larger group of Puritans had settled at Salem, in another part of the colony, the year before, and by 1642, as many as 20,000 Puritans had left England for America.

The Puritans established fur, fishing, and shipbuilding industries. They set up a system of compulsory free education, institutions of higher learning, and a model for what would eventually become a typical two-house state government in America. They developed crafts such as silversmithing and printed their own books.

They were also pretty puritanical. Religious dissidents, especially Quakers, were routinely beaten, banished, and sometimes hanged.

“If they beat the gospel black and blue,” one Puritan minister said in explaining this treatment, “it is but just to beat them black and blue.”

Adultery was punishable by death until 1632 when the penalty was reduced to a public whipping and the forced wearing of the letters “AD” sewn onto the adulterer’s clothing.



The impact of the Puritan society of New England was huge. In it were the roots of the modern corporate system, the representative form of state and federal government, the American legal system, and the moral conflict between wanting the freedom to think and act as you please and the authority to control how others think and act.

Bringing Religious Freedom: Dissidents, Catholics, and Quakers

The Massachusetts and Jamestown colonists were only the beginning. Throughout the rest of the 17th century, English settlers of all kinds moved to America. Some of those didn’t like where they landed — or the place they landed didn’t like them. But it was a big country, so they began the American tradition of moving on.

Some of the colonies — Maine, New Hampshire, Connecticut, and North and South Carolina — were either privately founded or were offshoots of the Massachusetts and Virginia colonies (see Figure 1-2). But three of them had very different beginnings.

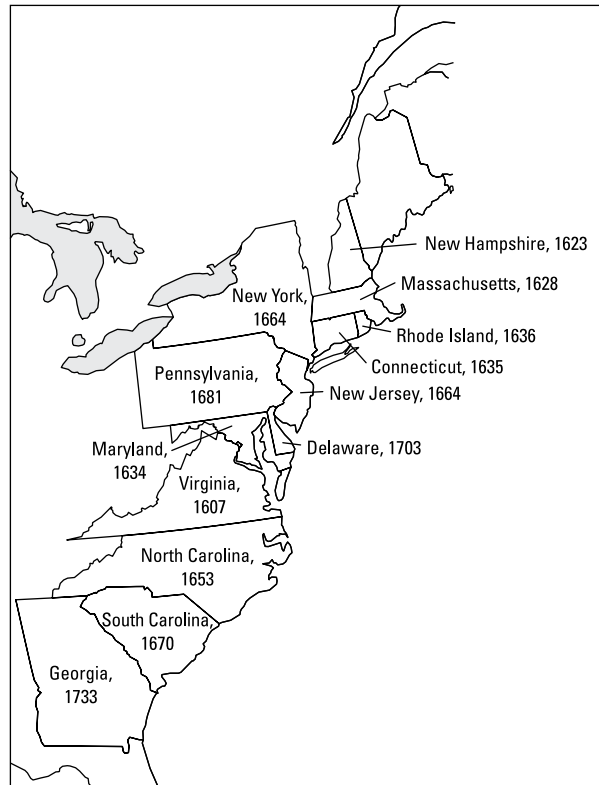


FIGURE 1-2:
The original 13
colonies and
their dates of
establishment.

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Sneaking off to Rhode Island

In 1633, a smart and sociable guy named Roger Williams became a minister in Salem, Massachusetts. He also became an expert in American Indian languages and was troubled by the way his fellow settlers treated the natives. His fellow settlers, meanwhile, were troubled by Williams's insistence that land shouldn't be stolen from the American Indians and that there should be a separation between the institutions of church and state. So troubling was this latter idea to Puritan leaders that they decided to ship the troublemaker back to England.

But Williams was tipped off to the plan by John Winthrop, and with the help of friendly American Indians, Williams and his family slipped off in 1636 to an unsettled area. By 1644, it had become the colony of Rhode Island. Small and disliked by its neighbors, Rhode Island became a haven for those seeking religious freedom — or those who just plain didn't like life in the rest of Puritan New England.

"No person in this country shall be molested or questioned for the matters of his conscience to God, so he be loyal and keep the civil peace," Williams said. "Forced worship stinks in God's nostrils."

Collecting Catholics in Maryland

Although the Puritans may have had some religious differences among themselves, they did agree on one thing: They didn't like Roman Catholics. Undaunted, Catholics established a colony north of Virginia in 1634. Called Maryland, it was the result of a grant given by King James I to his former secretary, George Calvert, who had converted to Catholicism.

The colony prospered as a tobacco exporter. But so many Protestants were allowed in that its Catholic founders were threatened with the prospect of being persecuted in their own colony. So, they struck a compromise in 1649, which recognized all Christian religions — but decreed the death penalty for Jews and atheists.

Promoting tolerance in Pennsylvania

If Puritans didn't like Catholics, they really didn't like Quakers. Quakers (who referred to themselves as "Friends") were steadfast pacifists who had no paid clergy, refused to use titles or take oaths of allegiance, and were said to "quake" from deep religious emotion.

In 1681, a wealthy Quaker named William Penn got a charter to start a colony in America. He advertised it exhaustively, attracted a diverse group of settlers, and founded Pennsylvania. Penn treated the American Indians fairly, set up a relatively liberal system of laws, and made it easy for most people to settle in his colony. By 1700, Pennsylvania's greatest city, Philadelphia was second only to Boston as the colonies' leading cultural center.



REMEMBER

More than any other colony, Pennsylvania was truly tolerant of differing religions, cultures, and national backgrounds.

Dealings of the Dutch

As the English, French, and Spanish noisily tromped all over the New World, the Dutch established themselves as the most successful maritime traders in the Old World. Intent on getting their share of the American trade, they formed the Dutch West India Company and, in 1626, set up a colony called New Amsterdam in the New World at the mouth of the Hudson River. Three other settlements added up to a colony the Dutch called New Netherland.



TIP

New Amsterdam differed from the New England settlements in that it wasn't founded for religious reasons. Its attitude was more relaxed when it came to activities like drinking and gambling. Land for the colonists wasn't an issue because New Amsterdam was basically a company town run for the benefit of the Dutch West India stockholders — a situation that chafed on the settlers in time. So in 1664, when English ships and troops showed up to attack the settlement, it surrendered without firing a shot. New Amsterdam became New York, named after its new owner, James, the Duke of York. The duke gave some of his new colony to a couple of friends, who thus began the colony of New Jersey. Despite its new English ownership, New York kept much of its Dutch flavor for decades.

Differing with the Locals

When it came to American Indians, English colonists had varying opinions and few of them were good. Some thought that the Native Americans could be “trained” to accept Western European cultural norms and mores. Others viewed them as pests. Some thought American Indians should be treated with respect. Others thought they should be exterminated, and still others thought they should be tricked out of their lands and then exterminated.

Early skirmishes all over the colonies

In the Southern colonies, trouble between the settlers and the American Indians started almost as soon as the English got off the ships. In 1642, American Indians under Chief Opechencanough attacked settlers over a large area of the Virginia colony and killed about 350 of them. The settlers counterattacked a few months later and killed hundreds of American Indians. In New Netherland, the Dutch settlers murdered nearly 100 American Indians in their sleep, cut off their heads, and kicked them around the streets of New Amsterdam. Those actions launched a nasty war that ended when 150 Dutch soldiers killed about 700 American Indians at a battle near present-day Stamford, Connecticut.

In New England, thanks in part to the good initial relations between the Pilgrims and local tribes, war was averted until 1634 when a rowdy pirate named John Stone and seven of his crew were murdered by American Indians. The settlers decided they were from a tribe called the Pequot. After an uneasy two-year truce, Puritan soldiers and their American Indian allies attacked a Pequot fort near Mystic River, Connecticut. In about an hour, they burned the village and slaughtered 600 men, women, and children.

In September 1638, the Pequots surrendered. As many as 2,000 of them were sold as slaves in the West Indies or given to rival tribes. The Pequots were all but exterminated, and the American Indian wars in New England were over for nearly 40 years. (The Pequots got a small measure of justice in 1992 when surviving tribal members opened Foxwoods, one of the largest casinos in the world.)

The colonists almost lost their foothold

In 1675, an American Indian chief named Metacom (called King Philip by the settlers because he liked English customs) decided to push the White invaders out once and for all. The result was King Philip's War.

This time, the American Indians used guns and attacked everywhere. By the time the two-year war was over, half the settlements in New England had been destroyed, and the English were on the edge of being driven into the sea.



TIP

Finally, however, the colonies united while the American Indians did not, and the tide began to turn. King Philip was killed in August 1676, and the war finally ended. It would be 40 years before the area recovered enough to begin expanding its boundaries into the frontier again.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Checking out Native Americans' ancient beginnings
- » Of tribes and uninvited Europeans
- » Noting cultural areas and significant Native American individuals
- » Sorting through struggles and successes
- » Looking at Native American society

Chapter 2

A Brief History of the American Indian

All Americans need to know the undeniably wonderful, oftentimes troublesome, commonly awe-inspiring, sometimes regrettable history of our country. Economic miracle and global influence? Great. Slavery and the near-extinction of the Native American peoples? Not so great.

The “American identity” is multifaceted and has been forged in a cauldron of countless influences, one of the most important being the fact that the Indians were here first. That’s important for the same reason that many states have passed resolutions apologizing for slavery. The Indians were here when European explorers arrived and claimed the land as their own, using authority they believed was given to them by God himself.

That rationalization helps explain how European settlers had zero qualms about taking what they wanted and eliminating Native peoples at will. They believed they were doing God’s work.

But the Native American people had already built their own lives in various areas of the North American continent. Their different culture areas had developed

based on the natural resources of the area in which the tribes found themselves, or to which they migrated. It's reasonable to say that the indigenous cultural evolutionary model consisted of *environment equaled adaptation*, or at the very least, environment *directed* said adaptation.

In this chapter, you explore North American native tribes, as well as important people and events that affected the placement and displacement of Native Americans.

In the Beginning . . .



TIP

The history of the American Indian is the story of ancient civilizations, ancient cultures, glorious rites and rituals, and evolved societies that were fully developed and functional when they first met the European explorers and settlers.

Historians have put forth many theories to explain how the Native peoples who were in America when the first Europeans arrived got here. Some say by land, some say by sea, but the bottom line and the undeniable historical and scientific fact is that certainly hundreds of thousands — and more likely millions — of indigenous people already inhabited the North American landmass when it was “discovered.”

A few theories as to how this huge native population came into being in North America include

- » The migration across the Bering Sea via the Beringia land bridge
- » The arrival along the western coast by boat
- » The theory that the Chinese may have been here first
- » A similar theory that the Celts may have stopped by earlier

Here's why you should care about how the people we now know as Indians, Inuits, and Aleuts got here in the first place.



REMEMBER

Their history is *your* history, and it is critically important for science to pinpoint the genetic ancestry of as many of the earth's populations as possible. Such information has consistently been used to identify important genetic and medical facts for use in the battle against disease and ethnic-specific medical problems. Also valuable is to identify the different stages of cultural development and the geographical migration waves of Indian tribes and ethnic groups, which the later section “The major culture areas of early Native Americans” delves into.

The Tribes of Then and Now

The tribal migration patterns resulted in Indian settlements all across North America, from the northwest forests and western shores to the plains, the south-east and southwest, and the northern woodlands. Some tribes were enormous; many were very small. An overwhelming number of tribes are now extinct. The tribes with the largest populations, known as the Five Civilized Tribes, inhabited the most land and had the most influence, both among other tribes and with the White settlers who came to America. The Five Civilized Tribes are the tribes that the Anglos negotiated and did business with. They consisted of

- » **The Cherokee**, who occupied extensive territory across the southeastern U.S., including the Appalachian Mountains
- » **The Choctaw**, who also occupied lands in the southeastern U.S. that covered much of Mississippi and extended into parts of eastern Louisiana and western Alabama
- » **The Seminole**, who inhabited modern-day Georgia and Alabama before migrating to Florida to escape European colonization
- » **The Chickasaw**, who lived in areas of present-day Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, and Kentucky before being relocated to what is now Oklahoma
- » **The Creek**, whose lands covered large part of what are now Alabama, Georgia, and Florida, as well as areas of Tennessee and South Carolina

Other important tribes included the Navajo, the Lakotas, Nakotas, and Santee, the Chippewa, the Pueblo, the Apache, the Iroquois, and the Arctic tribes.

Unexpected Visitors

When the Europeans arrived in North America, the Indian tribes had to deal with them whether they liked it or not. Columbus was the first to come in contact with tribal peoples, specifically the Arawaks on the Bahamas, and later Haiti, and that intercourse didn't go well for the native inhabitants. Columbus put them to work as slaves, sent many back to Spain as slaves, and, as the historical record unequivocally shows, treated them badly in virtually every way.

Spanish and French explorers soon followed Columbus to what was like a bottomless treasure chest of natural resources, fur-bearing wildlife, game, fish, and other riches that were absolutely irresistible to Europeans. Table 2-1 describes some notable explorers.

TABLE 2-1

European Explorers to the New World

Name	Nationality	What They Did
John Cabot	Italian	Helped to establish British claims to now-Canadian territories
Amerigo Vespucci	Italian	May have coined the term <i>New World</i> and undoubtedly contributed to the colonization of North and South America
Juan Ponce de Leon	Spanish	Led the first official European expeditions to Puerto Rico and Florida
Hernando Cortez	Spanish	Led an expedition that culminated in the fall of the Aztec Empire and brought much of what is now Mexico under the King of Castile
Jacques Cartier	French	Explored the Atlantic coast of Canada and was the first European credited with navigating the St. Lawrence river
Hernando De Soto	Spanish	whose expedition of more than 600 people explored the land that is now in the U.S. states of Florida, Georgia, and Alabama
Francisco Vasquez de Coronado	Spanish	Gold seeker whose explorations covered parts of present-day Arizona (he discovered the Grand Canyon), New Mexico, and Kansas
Jacques Marquette and Louise Joliet	French	The first to document and map the upper Mississippi river
René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle	French	Explorer and fur trader who also explored the Mississippi river as well as the Great Lakes region of the U.S. and Canada

The Major Culture Areas of Early Native Americans

As the earliest groups of American Indians spread across the North American continent, they encountered many different kinds of geography with each area offering its own unique combination of land, weather, native plants, and animals. As these groups began to settle, they adapted to the land and formed societies.

Scientists, anthropologists, historians, and people with OCD always like to put things in categories. And these societies were no exception! One of the ways in which anthropologists and historians categorize the early inhabitants of North America is by *culture areas*. As is commonly the case when experts start coming up with “definitions,” opinions varied. Some culture areas were bounded by major obstacles to travel such as mountain ranges, lakes, or deserts. Other culture areas matched similar weather patterns or similar languages. Cultural scientists seem to have settled on similar geographical regions as the major deciding factor for setting up the boundaries of these areas, with five to nine major ones. The following sections describe some of those areas.

The Arctic and the Subarctic

The Arctic and Subarctic culture areas are usually grouped together because they have more similarities than differences. Tribes living in the Arctic culture area are adapted to year-round cold weather. The northern *tundra* is a cold, treeless, rolling plain with a short growing season and a limited number of plants growing there. The Subarctic culture area is huge, spanning most of the northern half of the North American continent and extending into Canada. The people here lived with long, hard winters and were skilled trappers.

The Eastern Woodlands

The Eastern Woodlands culture area essentially consisted of the entire eastern half of the United States. The tribes found many different types of trees in this area. Lakes and rivers were abundant. Rain was frequent enough for a wide variety of vegetation to prosper. Housing was often a series of poles covered by bark shelving. These types of housing were often seen as *wigwams* (a round, domed structure). It usually has wooden pole supports and bark or plank walls and roofing. It is similar to the wickiups and long houses. *Long houses* were long (go figure), rectangular, usually narrow structures with poles for support and a curved or peaked roof. The siding and roof covering was often from bark. Wigwams and long houses served as long-term housing because they could not easily be moved.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Later Woodland peoples were among the first to encounter permanent settlers in the Northeast and were among the first to face dissolution as a cultural group.

The Southeast

The Southeastern tribes' lifestyles and culture were impacted by the warmer climate and their coastline locations. The Southeastern culture area includes the United States south and east of the Mississippi and Ohio River valleys to the Atlantic south of Virginia to the Gulf of Mexico. The area had a moderate climate with cool winters and hot summers. Forests covered much of the area, but it also included coastal lowlands and extensive marshes. Pine was the most common type of tree, and freshwater lakes and rivers were numerous. The Southeast area's inhabitants could grow a very wide variety of vegetation due to the temperate climate and the abundant rainfall.



TIP

Many of the tribes in the Southeast relied on a main leader and had developed complex class systems. Relationships among groups were structured as well, and it was not uncommon for tribes to fight with each other. Some tribes divided themselves up into clans based on belonging to a red or white town, meaning that they were devoted to war or to peace.

The Plains

“Plain” is an accurate word to describe this geographical location, with its few wooded areas and plains extending for light-years in all directions. Survival wasn’t easy, and because buffalo were plentiful, most Plains tribes hunted rather than grew crops.

The Plains had few early settlers in this area. Most of the populations that traveled through the Plains were hunter-gatherers. The great herds of American Bison (buffalo) allowed for adequate hunting. Some people did farming along the river valleys, with corn, beans, and squash being the natural choices for crops. Most groups also produced baskets and pottery.



WARNING

The religious beliefs of the Plains tribes are among the most exploited by non-Native people. Practices such as vision quests and sweat lodge ceremonies have been appropriated and used improperly by outsiders. For members of these tribes, these are not activities to be trifled with!

The Southwest

New Mexico, known as the Land of Enchantment, offers endless deserts and spooky caves, with red and yellow landscapes and mountains that, if you look at them at just the right angle and in just the right light, might seem to show the face of a long-dead chief or warriors. The Southwest culture area is a desert, so rainfall is light in most locations, with cold winters and hot summers. Some forested spots exist, mainly in the mountainous areas, but the Southwest has only two major rivers — the Rio Grande and the Colorado River.



REMEMBER

After contact with Europeans, raising cattle, horses, and sheep became quite common. The Navajo tribes of this culture area are particularly known for raising sheep. Baskets, weaving, jewelry-making, and pottery are highly developed art forms for many of the Southwestern tribes.

The Great Basin and Plateau

The Great Basin and Plateau area is a broad expanse that’s just southwest of Washington State and spreads across several states. It’s something of a hybrid of terrain and climate, including forests and deserts, and it’s called a *basin* because it’s almost completely surrounded by mountains, which makes it appear like it’s, well, a basin! The area has very cold winters and hot summers. There are some forested areas, mainly in the mountainous areas. The three major rivers here are the Columbia, Fraser (in British Columbia), and the Snake.

You also find some very large forests in the Plateau area. Some of the tallest trees in the world, such as giant sequoias, grow here. The trees grow so tall because of the plentiful rainfall. Conversely, the Great Basin has some of the lowest rainfalls on the continent.



REMEMBER

Tribes in this region have traditional stories that explain many of the geographic features. Some of these involve the actions of spirit beings or of distinguished ancestors.

The Great Basin and Plateau area was sparsely populated and many groups were nomadic. Many tribes had a group of leaders, and politics were usually grounded in the local village. Generally speaking, intertribal conflicts were fairly rare.

The Pacific Northwest

The Pacific Northwest is known for having its own rain forest and for its array of climatological “styles,” if you will. Ocean winds, enormous rivers, and even volcanoes and earthquakes all comprise this area stretching down the western coast of the U.S. The Pacific Northwest culture area includes the coastal areas for about 150 miles inland from Oregon to southern Alaska.

The area has cold winters and warm summers, and is mostly forested. With rainfall averaging over 100 inches a year, the area is often considered a temperate rainforest. There are many islands, rivers, and lakes in the region. Much of the area is mountainous. Traditional housing was primarily large wooden houses. They were often long and wide, with peaked roofs. The sides and roofs were made from wooden planks, often cedar. They are very durable and withstood the rain quite well.



REMEMBER

Totem poles are often found in many villages in this area. A *totem* is commonly a being that watches over a group of people. A *totem pole* is not always related to a totem. It is a large carving, usually made of wood. It features a group of figures, one on top of another. The meaning was often the recounting of a family history. It could also be religious, symbolic, or for any of a few other reasons.

California

California’s name came from a 16th-century novel, and its history is, to put it mildly, *diverse*. The state boasts an array of varied climates and geographical terrains, and four flags have flown over it since its earliest days. The California culture area includes all but the east edge of the state of California. The climate in the culture area varies widely from north to south. In the north, winters can be very cold and the summers warm. The southern area has a moderate climate.

Large forests covered much of the region, but you also find desert areas. Several mountain ranges, wide valleys, rolling hills, and long beaches also exist in California.



REMEMBER

A wide variety of Native American societies existed in California. Decisions were made by an array of bureaucratic systems, including single tribal leaders, council groups, clans, and family groups. Intertribal fighting was not that common in this area. Many conflicts could be settled by a payment arranged by dispute negotiators. (The first lawyers!)

Meeting Famous Native Americans

Native American leaders and warriors — the particularly fascinating people of the tribes — have permeated White culture and left a lasting impression on the development of the U.S. These names have truly become household names:

- » **Chief Seattle** gained fame as a leader of the Duwamish and Suquamish peoples who followed a strategy of cooperation with White settlers in the U.S. Pacific Northwest. His eloquent writings include discussions of humanity's responsibility to respect Native Americans' right to their homelands. The city of Seattle, WA, is named after him.
- » **Cochise**, who was an Apache and associate of Geronimo, led an uprising during the Apache Wars from 1861 until a peace treaty was negotiated in 1872. Although he established peace and freedom for his people, this situation didn't last long after his death in 1874.
- » **Crazy Horse**, perhaps one of the most recognized Native American celebrities, led the fight against the U.S. federal government and the white settlers' encroachment into Lakota and other Native American territories. As an Oglala Sioux Chief, he fought against his people's relocation to a reservation and joined forces with Chief Sitting Bull for the decisive Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876.
- » **Pocahontas** is a romanticized historical figure whose life is subject to many myths. For example, she was never romantically involved with John Smith, but instead met him when she was around 10 years old and he was 27. They worked together to teach each other basic aspects of their respective language. Later, Pocahontas was kidnapped by an English captain and forced to leave her family behind and adopt English clothing, the Christian religion, and the name Rebecca.

- » **Geronimo** gained celebrity as an Apache leader and continued the tradition of resisting White colonization of their homeland in the southwestern U.S. After years of leading the tribes in battle, Geronimo surrendered to U.S. troops in 1886 and spent the last 20 years of his life as a prisoner of war.
- » **Sitting Bull** — another much-recognized Native American leader — was a Teton Dakota Chief who help unite the Sioux tribes in their efforts to keep their land and survive on the northern U.S. Great Plains. He was a skilled and successful warrior who became chief of the Lakota nation in 1868. His efforts to keep his people on their homeland included famous battles such as The Battle of Rosebud and the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876.
- » **Tecumseh** spent much of his life in the struggle against the encroaching White settlers in the U.S. Midwest. He also accompanied his brother (Tenskwatawa, known as the Prophet) and followers to Indiana, where he used his oratory skills to transform the Prophet's religious movement into a political one. This movement was defeated by Indiana governor William Henry Harrison in the Battle of Tippecanoe, and Tecumseh's last effort at resistance was joining the side of the English to fight in the War of 1812.
- » **Sacagawea** was the daughter of a Shoshone chief who — after being captured by an enemy tribe, sold, and then wed to a French Canadian trapper — was invited to join the Lewis and Clarke expedition as a Shoshone interpreter. Sacagawea's skills went beyond interpretation: She helped locate edible plants and gave birth to and nurtured a son on the trek. Together, she and her son served as a peace symbol that brought the expedition group less suspicious treatment from parties they met.

Maintaining Tribal Identity and Culture

Tribes always were, and still are, the foundation and cornerstone of Native American life and culture. Indians identify themselves by their tribe. “I’m Choctaw. I’m Navajo. I’m Cree.” Tribal identity is as important to American Indians as national ethnicity is to European-descended people of America: “I’m Italian American. “I’m African American. I’m Polish American.”

From the 16th century through today, Indian tribes have produced great leaders who have often been visionaries working diligently to maintain the tribal identity and not allow their pasts to fade from memory. Their aspirations have not always been fulfilled, and many iconic American Indian leaders have watched sadly as their tribes were dispersed, or their land was taken, or their past was forgotten.

Fortunately, things are somewhat better these days.



- » Native American culture is thriving and many tribes have Web sites and historical foundations and museums working to educate people — both tribal and Anglo — about American Indian history and the roles tribes have played before, during, and currently in the history of America.
- » The U.S. government, through the Bureau of Indian Affairs, strives to support Native American community efforts, and laws have been passed to protect rights that have been commonly trampled on in the past.
- » The Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian also works diligently to chronicle Indian history and culture.

Along with seven other National Museums under the Smithsonian Institution, the Trump administration has targeted the American Indian museum for content review related to selected current and planned exhibitions, specifically those proposed in conjunction with America 250. The review will denote content correction areas for material that presents (according to the administration's review) divisive or ideologically driven language. These corrections will replace existing content (again, per the review) with unifying, historically accurate, and constructive descriptions across public-facing materials.

War Stories

The history of Indians in America has been often but not always violent. The tribes and White settlers (or the U.S. government) signed treaties that brought peace for great lengths of time between the tribes and the settlers, as well as between rival tribes.

But warfare was one of the main causes of the devastating population losses suffered by tribes in the 16th through 19th centuries. Although the American Indians were incredibly skilled at surreptitious movement and attacking from concealment, the White settlers possessed superior firepower.

Some of the more important battles — meaning that they were influential and impacted both the Indians and the Europeans — include, in chronological order, the following:

- » **King Philip's War:** An armed conflict in 1675–1678 that involved a coalition of indigenous peoples of the woodlands in the northeast (modern-day U.S.) against the English in the New England colonies and their indigenous allies. The Pokanoket chief Metacom (who had adopted the English name Philip) led the forces against the English and their allies in a last-ditch effort to expel the colonists from New England.
- » **The French and Indian War:** Lasting from 1754 to 1763, this conflict in North America between Great Britain and France counted indigenous tribes as allies for both sides. The fighting took place primarily in what is now the eastern U.S. and Canada.
- » **Pontiac's Rebellion:** This war, from 1763 to 1766, was a widespread Native American revolt in the Great Lakes region against British policies and the encroachment of British settlers on Native American territories. The term *rebellion* doesn't technically describe the conflict correctly because the indigenous nations were sovereign and independent of British colonial rule.

American Indians fought — on both sides — in these major wars as well:

- » **The American Revolutionary War:** This war, also known as the American War of Independence, was an armed conflict that lasted from April of 1775 to September of 1783. Native American allies joined forces with the English colonists — and French and Spanish troops — to defeat the British. The Treaty of Paris, signed in 1783, officially ended the American Revolutionary War.
- » **The War of 1812:** This conflict, running from 1812 to 1815, once again pitted America against Great Britain, solidified U.S. independence, and enabled the new country to rewrite its boundaries. Native Americans fought on both sides of the conflict, but the majority allied themselves with the British to try to protect their land from American expansion.
- » **The Civil War:** Native American troops served in both the Union and Confederate armies in this 1861–1865 conflict between the northern and southern states of the U.S. The Confederate (southern) states seceded from the U.S. union, and the war was fought to determine whether the practice of slavery should be permitted to expand into the western territories.

Many battles with American Indians have become an iconic part of American history and their names have morphed into having more meaning than simply identifying where the conflict took place. Because of movies and books, even people who have limited knowledge of history have heard of “The Little Big Horn” (a battle at the river of the same name in June of 1876) and “Wounded Knee” (a massacre in which U.S. Army troops killed hundreds of Lakota people in 1890).

Dysfunction Junction

Undeniably, relations between the U.S. government and American Indians have been troubled from the start, a reality that resonates throughout the Native American community and permeates the Indian culture and zeitgeist.

The U.S. was formed at the expense of the indigenous peoples. The U.S. broke treaties, “relocated” tribes, and took children from their parents and placed them in government schools. The government offered reservations as a trade-off for land grabs, but the land offered was often inferior in all ways.

But the U.S. government has tried to remedy some of the wrongs and repair the damage in through these efforts:

- » **Land Buy-Back Program**, which consolidated and returned around three million acres of land to tribal trust ownership. The program ended in late 2022.
- » **Indian Claims Commission**, which was created in 1946 to hear Native American grievances and provide compensation for lost lands.
- » **Annual funding for tribal programs**, which focused on clean water initiatives, education, healthcare, and infrastructure projects, as well as basic food, clothing, and shelter needs.

The U.S. government’s seven approaches to Native Americans

Over the centuries of U.S.–Indian relations, the United States has implemented seven specific approaches to “dealing with” the American Indians, as described in the following sections.

Treaties (1608–1830)

A *treaty* is a formal contract in writing that spells out the terms of the agreement for both sides, and treaties were the legal instrument of choice in the early years of European–Indian relations. But how can one party to a treaty agree to anything if they can’t read or write in the language of the other party to the treaty? Good question. A translator explained the terms as best as they could to the tribes, or the parties used sign language and limited verbal exchanges, and that was that.

Chief Ouray of the Ute tribe said in 1879, “The agreement an Indian makes to a United States treaty is like the agreement a buffalo makes with the hunter when pierced with arrows. All he can do is lie down and give in.”

Here are a few reasons that many Native Americans feel they haven't always gotten a fair shake from the United States:

- » In the 1802 Treaty of Fort Confederation, the Choctaw nation ceded 50,000 acres of their land to the United States government for \$1.
- » The prior year, in the Treaty of Fort Adams, the Choctaws received "care and protection," \$2,000 "in goods and merchandise," and "three sets of blacksmith's tools" for 2,641,920 acres of land.

Yes, you read that right — 2.6 million acres for a couple of thousand dollars and some tools.
- » In the 1827 Treaties of Buttes des Morts, the U.S. government bought 500,000 acres of Menominee land in the Pacific Northwest for four and a half cents an acre.



REMEMBER

These treaties were not atypical of the agreements signed between Indian tribes and the new U.S. government in the 19th century.

Removal (1830–1850)

The Indian Removal Act was a bill passed by the U.S. Congress on April 24, 1830, that essentially made official a policy of removing Southeastern tribes from their lands. The United States considered this removal necessary because it wanted to expand into lands owned by members of the Five Civilized Tribes, and they were, as many of the time put it, in the way. They were obstructing progress — holding back the growth of a nation that saw great tracts of southern lands and vast opportunities awaiting them: Cotton to be grown, and slaves to pick it. So the Indians had to go.



REMEMBER

The Five Civilized Tribes were so called because they had adopted the ways of White settlers: a European-style education, large farming enterprises, and the keeping of slaves. They were the Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, Seminole, and Cherokee.

Technically, the Indian Removal Act was not a *forced* removal, contrary to some interpretations of the bill. The government did offer money and land to members of the Five Civilized Tribes living in the South to "voluntarily" move to what is now Oklahoma. In his Second Annual Message to Congress, delivered in December 1830, President Andrew Jackson disingenuously stated:

"It gives me pleasure to announce to Congress that the benevolent policy of the Government, steadily pursued for nearly thirty years, in relation to the removal of the Indians beyond the white settlements is approaching to a happy consummation."

Many people would challenge the description of U.S. former policy as “benevolent” and the consummation of that policy as “happy.”

Many Indians did agree to move west, though very few were happy about it. Tribal leaders signed many treaties accepting cash in hand and land in Indian Territory for their lands in the U.S. South. By 1847, the various removal treaties and removal wars (First, Second, and Third Seminole Wars, in particular) had resulted in 25 million acres of southern land being opened to White farmers, cotton growing, and slavery.

Reservations (1850–1871)

Contrary to popular belief, reservations weren’t parcels of land the U.S. government paternalistically “gave” to Indians during the period of removal. In many cases, reservations were sections of Indian land the Indians “reserved” for themselves when signing treaties and agreeing to vacate and move west.

In 1850, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Orlando Brown painted a pretty picture of the whole sordid endeavor by stating that reservations should be

“. . . [a] country adapted to agriculture, of limited extent and well-defined boundaries; within which all, with occasional exceptions, should be compelled constantly to remain until such time as their general improvement and good conduct may supersede the necessity of such restrictions.”

In 1851, the Indian Appropriations Act allocated federal money to move tribes onto reservations. Reservations were “necessary” — but only until Indians displayed “good conduct.” Such admirable behavior would come after the Indians had been converted to Christianity, of course.



REMEMBER

In 1983, U.S. Interior Secretary James G. Watt deemed the reservation system to be “an example of the failure of socialism” and cited related social problems such as poverty, alcoholism, and unemployment. But much earlier, certain Native Americans and historians recognized the system’s inherent flaws and its true purpose as a tool for land seizure and cultural destruction.

Assimilation (1871–1928)

When reservations didn’t work to “civilize” the Indians, the government decreed that the only solution to the Indian problem was to absorb them into mainstream American society and culture, to “assimilate” them.

This assimilation effort was undertaken by



REMEMBER

- » **Chopping up the reservations** into smaller parcels for farming — 160 acres for a family and 80 acres for a single person.
- » **Removing Indian children from their families** and educating them at boarding schools set up by the government.

At these schools, anything “Indian” was absolutely forbidden. Students speaking their native language would be severely punished. Parents were allowed to visit only once or twice a year, thereby completely eliminating their involvement in decisions regarding their children.

The assimilation plan didn’t work, either, and the Meriam Report of 1928, which looked at conditions on Indian reservations in 26 states, spelled out its failings in horrifying detail and sent shockwaves through the U.S. government and the tribal peoples. Following are some of the more notable findings from the staggeringly important Meriam Report, which you can find at <https://narf.org/nill/resources/meriam.html>. Some items in this list powerfully illustrate just how difficult it was to be a Native American in America in the 19th and early 20th centuries:

- » “An overwhelming majority of the Indians are poor, even extremely poor, and they are not adjusted to the economic and social system of the dominant white civilization.”
- » “The health of the Indians as compared with that of the general population is bad. . . . With comparatively few exceptions, the diet of the Indians is bad. It is generally insufficient in quantity, lacking in variety, and poorly prepared.”
- » “The prevailing living conditions among the great majority of the Indians are conducive to the development and spread of disease.”
- » “Sanitary facilities are generally lacking. Except among the relatively few well-to-do Indians, the houses seldom have a private water supply or any toilet facilities whatever. Even privies are exceptional. Water is ordinarily carried considerable distances from natural springs or streams, or occasionally from wells.”
- » “The work of the government directed toward the education and advancement of the Indian himself, as distinguished from the control and conservation of his property, is largely ineffective The survey staff finds itself obliged to say frankly and unequivocally that the provisions for the care of the Indian children in boarding schools are grossly inadequate.”

The government could not ignore the Meriam Report. Something had to be done — an Indian “New Deal” of sorts — and the Indian Reorganization Act was government’s next attempt to come up with a fair, workable policy toward Native Americans.

Reorganization (1928–1942)

The Indian Reorganization Act, or IRA (also known as the Wheeler–Howard Act), had noble intentions. Its defined purposes were

- » To conserve and develop Indian lands and resources
- » To extend to Indians the right to form business and other organizations
- » To establish a credit system for Indians
- » To grant certain rights of home rule to Indians
- » To provide for vocational education for Indians

For the most part, the IRA worked to implement reforms called for by the Meriam Report. Well over 150 tribes and Indian villages adopted constitutions; the credit system allowed economic improvements; and Indian kids went to public schools and their education improved drastically.

The Indian Reorganization Act was the basis for later Indian legislation and is considered a milestone toward achieving independence and self-determination for Indians in the United States.

Termination (1943–1968)

The U.S. began to follow a termination policy that dismantled tribes under the official position that Native Americans were subject to the same laws as applied to all American citizens. It severed the government-to-government policy that had been in effect and allowed the U.S. to indulge in land grabs. And the U.S. was willing to litigate until doomsday to fight tribal resistance to this policy.

The termination policy essentially reversed many of the reforms that had been implemented during reorganization. Why did the U.S. government do that, you're probably wondering, right? To save money is why. The federal government wanted to cut the budget for Indian affairs and, in typical bureaucratic thinking, they figured having fewer Indians means spending less money on them. The fact that the terminated tribes simply didn't fade away like frost in the morning sun seemed not to have occurred to them to worry about.

Also, Indian land contained valuable mineral resources that proved irresistible:

- » The Navajo lands had uranium and oil.
- » The Crow lands had coal.
- » The Hopi lands had oil.

- » The Ute lands had oil, coal, and natural gas.
- » The Apache lands had natural gas.

The termination policy shredded the trust relationship that the U.S. government had previously established with the Indian population, leaving it in tatters.

Self-determination (1968–present)

President Richard Nixon emphasized the critical importance of tribal self-rule after the failure of the termination policy. His July 8, 1970, “Special Message on Indian Affairs” was a landmark admission by the U.S. government:

Nixon stated that any and all U.S. policies concerning Indians should serve “to strengthen the Indian sense of autonomy without threatening his sense of community.”

The trust relationship between Indians and the U.S. government was reaffirmed and financial support for tribes guaranteed.

Next, the passage of the 1975 Indian Self-Determination Act was a milestone moment in U.S.–Indian relations, giving Indians the power to contract with the government on their own and it allowing them to control how federal moneys were spent on Indian matters. This act endorsed a simple, yet profound reality: Local knows best. Native Americans at the community level know best how to spend money in their own communities. The Indian Self-Determination Act allowed American Indians to exercise their own discretion for the benefits of their own people.



TIP

Currently, self-determination is the official policy of the United States government. Indian tribal nations are sovereign entities, and the U.S. deals with them like individual countries. They make their own laws, impose and collect their own taxes, and are still an important part of America.

Stepping up

The U.S. has not shirked from attempting to remedy wrong. In the last 35 or so years, many acts, bills, and programs have been passed and launched to benefit the Native American community, including:

- » The Indian Self Determination and Education Assistance Act (1975)
- » The Indian Health Care Improvement Act (1978)
- » The American Indian Religious Freedom Act (1978)

- » The Indian Child Welfare Act (1978)
- » The Native American Graves and Repatriation Act (1990)

Looking at Native American Society

An important facet of Native American societies is the family, which forms the core unit of the tribe. The family structure of American Indians has differences between the patriarchal and matriarchal family types and involves roles for each member of the family. Other important facets of Native American societies included their communication (whether through spoken language, drawings, or other means), spirituality, and ritual.

A woman's work

The role of women in Native American culture was a surprise to the Europeans, who were quite literally shocked at the authority women wielded in both the family and the tribe. Tribal women in the 16th through 19th centuries were enormously important in terms of tribal solidarity and the continuing maintenance of a sense of community, and their duties included:

- » Keeping the household supplied with whatever it needed, including monitoring and restocking the water supplies
- » Constructing the home and tanning the hides, if the tribe was in the fur business
- » Cooking for the family and maintaining the vegetable garden
- » Having almost total responsibility for and oversight of the family's children

The kids are alright

In the pre-reservation era for Native Americans, children were somewhat indulged, yet also expected to contribute to the welfare of the tribe and achieve certain ritualistic milestones in order to officially move into adulthood. Puberty and first menses were epic transitions into adulthood for tribal children, and for males this commonly required some type of fasting, isolation, or physical endurance tests (or all of the above) for “graduation” into the world of tribal adults.

Visiting the language lab

There were almost as many Native American languages as there were tribes prior to contact with the Europeans explorers and settlers. The tribes wrote down very little written, and instead, both communicated and passed down tribal traditions and legends through the use of sign language, the spoken word, and pictographic symbols.

Today, approximately 175 Native American languages exist, yet a staggering 90 percent of them are what is known as *moribund*. This means they are not being used enough, or passed down enough to younger generations, to survive much longer.

More than words . . .

Indians did, in fact, use smoke signals to communicate among tribes. They also used pictures when communications needed to be recorded on paper or bark. The Native American pictographic symbols and drawings illustrate the validity of the old adage about a picture being worth a thousand words. A simple line drawing could easily recount a history, give instructions, chronicle the change of a season, and provide at a glance detailed information that would take lots of words (even if, perhaps, not a thousand), to write or speak.

Words as weapons

Language is a tool that can be used to educate, communicate, and do damage. The historical record is awash with racist essays and diatribes against Native Americans by White writers, but today Indian literature exists that not only counters such stereotypical hogwash but also paints a rich and multifaceted portrait of Indians.

If you want to know what real Indians are like, you must read literature by real Indians, such as

- » **Louise Erdrich** (Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians, North Dakota), writes novels, poetry, and children's books that feature Native American characters and settings. A recent novel, published in 2021, is *The Night Watchman* — a tribute to her grandfather who carried the fight against Native American dispossession from rural North Dakota to Washington D.C.
- » **Leanne Howe** (Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma) is an author, playwright, poet, and an Edison Distinguished Professor in the English department at the University of Georgia. Her writings have won various awards, including the Before Columbus Foundation's American Book Award (*Shell Shaker* novel, 2002) and the Oklahoma Book Award (*Evidence of Red* book of poems, 2005).

- » **(Mona) Susan Power** (Yantonai Dakota) writes novels and short fiction, some with complex plots covering generations of Native Americans. Her recent novel, *A Council of Dolls*, 2023, was longlisted for the National Book Award for Fiction.
- » **Wendy Roses** (Hopi descent through her father/Miwok descent through her mother) writes poetry (such as *Bone Dance: New and Selected Poems*, 1994) and nonfiction. She is active in social issues and has taught Native American and Ethnic studies at the university level. Major themes of her works include the Native American experience with colonialism and imperialism, and nostalgia for the old native ways.

Pray tell

Native American spirituality is a topic that can, and has, filled many, many books. As with Indian languages, you find almost as many tribal belief systems and creation myths as you do tribes. Although describing Native American religious beliefs as “nature based” is almost a cliché, the natural world does inform and validate tribal beliefs in a nature spirit (commonly called Wakan Tanka) that is, in one sense, the manifestation of God and the spirit of life in the world.

Animal spirits

Animals play a large role in Indian spirituality. Animals have spirits and participate in the creation of the universe. Animals and birds that appear in Indian creation myths include

Beavers	Ducks	Parrots
Buzzards	Eagles	Serpents
Coyotes	Foxes	Tarantulas
Crows	Geese	Turtles
Deer	Hummingbirds	Water beetles
Dogs	Mountain lions	Wolves

Water

Many Indians believe that all life comes from the water. Creation myths are often very specific: Before there was *anything*, there was water. Some creation myths state that all of reality was beneath the water at the beginning of time. This sacred belief has been validated by science, which uncovered the secrets of how life

sprang from the sea and moved onto dry land. Indians also have creation myths revolving around these symbols and other tribal entities such as a first man and a first woman, the wind, and the underworld.

Rituals

Native American spirituality commonly employs rites, ceremonies, and rituals to focus the percipient’s spirit and enhance the experience, including

Chanting	Singing
Dancing	Sweat lodges
Meditation	Prayer
Vision quests	

Some of the “tools” used for these rituals include

Drums	Musical instruments, especially flutes
Foods	Peyote
Prayer beads	Rattles
Sacred garments	Stone and wood fetishes

Focusing on the Future

Historians estimate that nine out of ten Native Americans died in the period between initial European contact and the end of the 19th century. This estimate depicts the staggering population loss experienced by Indians in North America during the period of European exploration and settlement. The causes for this enormous number of deaths were

- » Exposure to diseases for which they did not have immunity
- » Violent conflict with Anglos
- » Violent internecine conflicts among tribes
- » Starvation and death from illness from forced relocation



REMEMBER

Today, tribes must be federally identified as an official tribal nation in order to avail their members of government programs (see the section “Stepping up” earlier in the chapter), as well as establish and implement sovereignty regarding laws and official policies. And there are qualifiers:

- » Not every tribe that requests federal recognition gets it.
- » Not every person who wants to claim membership in a particular tribal nation is granted “citizenship.” There are “blood quantum” requirements that effectively determine whether someone is officially Cree, or Cherokee, or Navajo, and so forth.

Native Americans have suffered in the past, and it has taken decades to begin the process of turning around the headlong rush into poverty, lack of education, and dependence on the government.

Today, a new generation of Native Americans are PhDs, doctors, lawyers, accountants, computer designers, congressional members, and every other profession in America. College is now considered very important for young Indians (although still an unattainable dream for many) and the number of Native American self-owned businesses climbs annually.

In Chapter 3 of this minibook, you find out more about the Native Americans’ opportunities and achievements taking place today, and the ones that will assuredly take place in the future.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Calling an Indian a Native American . . . and vice versa
- » Going over grave matters
- » Promising progress
- » Recapping today's top ten

Chapter 3

Native Americans: Today and Tomorrow

The American Indian is a vibrant and productive member of the American melting pot, a rich color in the American ethnic quilt. Sure, the Indians have problems, and many of them result from what these Americans went through in the past. But there are also Native American PhDs, physicians, members of the U.S. Congress, engineers, teachers, computer programmers, business owners, writers, and so on.

This chapter looks at the state of the American Indian today, and what is on the horizon for this earliest inhabitant of what is now the United States of America.

An Indian By Any Other Name . . .

Columbus didn't make it to "India," so you may wonder why people still call the Native Americans (and all their descendants) "Indians," as he did.



REMEMBER

The fact is that the phrase *American Indian* is a legal descriptor. Consider:

- » The Bureau of Indian Affairs
- » The National Museum of the American Indian
- » The National Congress of American Indians
- » The American Indian Heritage Foundation
- » The *American Indian Art Magazine*
- » The American Indian Movement (AIM)
- » The American Indian Science & Engineering Society (AISES)

. . . and so forth.

Yet, the repatriation law (see the upcoming “Repatriation: Resting in Peace” section) is titled the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, and many other bills and laws use the term “Native American.”

Russell Means, a well-known activist and leader within the American Indian Movement (AIM) who died in 2012 at age 73, decided to reclaim the inaccurate and often abused term *Indian* and declare it as his and his peoples’ own, and to do so with a fierce sense of ethnic pride and entitlement. Today, many Indians prefer to be identified by their tribe.

Just as White people from the U.S. and Europe say, “I’m an American.” “I’m a German.” “I’m Scottish,” Indians identify themselves by stating the name of their “nation” — Choctaw, Navajo, Sioux, Apache, and so forth. Doing so is not only appropriate but also solves the problem of trying to find a way to establish ethnicity by using the term *Indian* — which, although it is the legal term, is still historically errant — or “Native American,” which can rankle Americans who claim the same sobriquet based on being born in Dubuque or Scranton.



TIP

We use both terms (Indian and Native American) interchangeably in this book because that’s what countless Indians and Native Americans do.

The truth is that the term “Indian” has morphed into a true identifier, and everyone knows what it means. Many Native Americans take no umbrage at being addressed as an Indian, its historical inaccuracy notwithstanding.

Repatriation: Resting in Peace

Repatriation is the returning of cultural artifacts and human remains and bones to Native American tribes. The U.S. government states that

“The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) is a Federal law passed in 1990. NAGPRA provides a process for museums and Federal agencies to return certain Native American cultural items — human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony — to lineal descendants, culturally affiliated Indian tribes, and Native Hawaiian organizations.”

For the museums that comprise the Smithsonian Institution, the National Museum of the American Indian Act (NMAI Act), passed in 1989 and amended in 1996, governs repatriation.

Repatriation is a complex process for both tribes and the institutions holding remains. From the outside, it can seem as though museums and tribes would be at each other’s throats over the right to possess and control Native American remains. In fact,

- » In the beginning, challenging situations arose, but today tribes and museums more commonly work together to determine cultural affiliation.
- » Tribes also sometimes decide to work more closely with archaeologists on other avenues of scientific inquiry. Many Native people have even chosen to become archaeologists themselves, in part because of having to work on this issue for their tribes.

These are the official definitions from the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History’s Repatriation Office regarding artifacts and remains:

- » **Culturally affiliated human remains:** The legislation defines these as human remains with whom a demonstrable relationship of shared group identity can be shown to an existing federally recognized American Indian tribe, Alaska Native Village, or Regional Corporation or Native Hawaiian organization, based on a preponderance of evidence.
- » **Associated and unassociated funerary objects:** Funerary objects are items that, as part of the death rites of a culture, are believed to have been intentionally placed with an individual at the time of death or later. An object is considered to be “associated” if the human remains with which it was originally interred are present at the National Museum of Natural History.
- » **Sacred objects:** These are specific ceremonial objects that are needed by traditional Native American religious leaders for the practice of traditional Native American religions by their present-day adherents.

- » **Objects of cultural patrimony:** An object having ongoing historical, traditional, or cultural importance central to the Native American group or culture itself, rather than property owned by an individual Native American, and which, therefore, cannot be alienated, appropriated, or conveyed by any individual regardless of whether or not the individual is a member of the Indian tribe or Native Hawaiian organization, and such object shall have been considered inalienable by such Native American group at the time the object was separated from such group.
- » **Remains of individuals whose identity is known:** The return of the remains of named individuals to lineal descendants was an established priority for the National Museum of Natural History, even prior to the passage of the NMAI Act. This policy continues to be in effect. Very few of the individuals whose remains are in the collections of the National Museum of Natural History are known by name.
- » **Objects acquired illegally:** In accordance with long-standing Smithsonian policy, the National Museum of Natural History may repatriate any materials acquired by or transferred to the National Museum of Natural History illegally or under circumstances that render invalid the Museum's claim to them. (Source: Smithsonian Institution Repatriation Office.)

As per the National Museum of the American Indian Act, the National Museum of Natural History has issued detailed reports on cultural artifacts and human remains held in its collection for dozens of cultures and ten culture areas.



TIP

These reports are painstakingly compiled upon tribal inquiries and then disposition is decided upon in consultation with tribal leaders. The Repatriation Office defers to the tribes regarding the cultural identification and significance of individual items.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

WHAT DOES IT MATTER WHERE THE REMAINS ARE?

It may be difficult for non-Natives to understand just how important repatriation is. Imagine if you had always thought that your grandparents and your grandparents' grandparents were resting quietly in their graves and suddenly learned that this was not the case. For American Indians, the removal of human remains and funerary objects is just one more in a long line of insults. To make matters worse, remains were sometimes destroyed or lost by the scientific institutions who were supposedly caring for them. When American Indian remains were taken to museums, they were often

thought of only as “specimens” for scientific study, and not as beloved human ancestors. Repatriation is the process through which the human nature of the remains is returned to them.

In addition, repatriation has meant that Native people have become more involved in the practice of anthropology and archaeology. Because tribes were forced to work with museums and archaeologists in order to bring remains home, tribal members began to acquire specialized knowledge in museum studies and archaeology. Today, many Native Americans are archaeologists, and all hold the highest standards of scientific integrity while still maintaining cultural values.

Native American Stats

Native Americans are the fourth-largest minority group in the United States after Hispanics, Blacks, and Asians, yet their overall state of affairs as a group is in many cases Third World grim. A third of all Native Americans live on reservations, where the quality of life can range from excellent to abominable.

Income

Money changes everything, money makes the world go round, (the love of) money is the root of all evil, money burns a hole in your pocket, money is time, money doesn’t grow on trees . . . choose whichever cliché you like. The reality is that the dominant force in everyone’s life is how much one earns and how much one spends.

The statistics for Native Americans when it comes to earning in the U.S. do not paint a pretty picture:

- » The median U.S. household income in the United States (per the U.S. Census Bureau) in 2023 was \$80,610. For Native Americans, it was \$57,270.
- » The poverty rate in the United States was around 10.6 percent (in 2024). For Native Americans, it was around 19.3 percent. This figure varies by tribe.
- » In 2023, just about 8.0 percent of the U.S. population had no health insurance. For Native Americans, the percent of those without coverage was about 18.7 percent in 2023.
- » In 2023, around 57.8 percent of the American workforce were employed in professional or management occupations, but for Native Americans It was about 12.1 percent. (Source: Bureau of Labor statistics report.)

- » The percentage of homeowners in the U.S. is around 66 percent nationwide; for Native Americans, around 56 percent.
- » Native Americans are incarcerated at a rate 38 percent higher than the national per capita rate. (Source: U.S. Department of Justice.)
- » Native American families, on average, are larger than the average American family: 3.41 people versus 3.15. Yet the number of single-parent Native American households — and we’re speaking of both motherless and fatherless households — exceeds the average number of single-parent American households.

The situation is improving slowly for Native Americans, and education is, as has long been touted, the silver bullet when it comes to pulling minorities out of poverty and improving their living conditions.

Education

Educational levels of Native Americans are below the national average, yet they have grown significantly over the past few decades. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in 2021–22, 74 percent of Native Americans had graduated from high school. At the time, the national average was 87 percent. In terms of higher education, only 16.8 percent of the Native American population had earned a bachelor’s degree (as of 2022), compared to more than double that — 35.7–36.2 percent — for the rest of the U.S. population. (Source: Census’ American Community Survey.)

Tribes with a high percentage of high school graduates include Creek, Choctaw, and Iroquois.

Occupations

Assessing the unemployment situation for Native Americans is tricky because Native American unemployment figures are often difficult to ascertain accurately. Someone is considered “unemployed” if they are available for work, able to work, and actively sought a job in the past four weeks.

But many Indian reservations and villages have no jobs. People living there commonly don’t look for work because they know it’s often futile. Also, some Native Americans choose to focus on seasonal subsistence strategies like hunting and fishing and are what the federal government considers “voluntarily idle”; that is, not in the workforce through choice.

When tribal governments control, through sovereignty, all aspects of a tribe's existence, including infrastructure, employment, and law enforcement, and yet resources are not in place to expand and improve, stagnation is inevitable, along with its unavoidable result, poverty.

In the past few decades, the numbers of Native American and Alaska Native businesses have climbed. In 2024, the Office of Advocacy reported that Native American-owned businesses — which number over 400,000 firms — represented 1.2 percent of the firms in the U.S. and employed nearly 300,000 workers. The states with the most Native American-owned businesses include California, Oklahoma, Arizona, New Mexico, and Washington.

Alcoholism and the Native American

The legendary Blackfoot chief Crowfoot summed up alcohol's nefarious impact on his people this way:

The whiskey brought among us by the traders is fast killing us off. We are powerless before this evil. We are unable to resist the temptation to drink when brought in contact with the white man's water. Our horses, buffalo robes, and other articles of trade go for whiskey.

Alcohol became a factor in the Indians' lives from their earliest encounters with the Europeans. It quickly became a form of currency, and traders exploited its effects in many ways, most notably in trade deals that they were able to skew in their favor.

Is it true that Indians lack a gene to process alcohol? Or perhaps the better question is, is there actually a verifiable genetic component to alcohol abuse? Can alcoholics justifiably claim that being an alcoholic is due to their genes?



REMEMBER

The answer to these questions seems to be yes. In a 1994 study funded by the National Institutes of Health at the Indiana Alcohol Research Center at the Indiana University School of Medicine, Dr. Ting-Kai Li discovered that Native Americans do not possess what he describes as “protective genes.”

But the trend in the Native American community is toward controlling alcohol and minimizing the deleterious effects of alcoholism, and this has been ongoing for years. In 1999, Yvette Joseph-Fox, the Executive Director of the National Indian Health Board, revealed in a statement before Congress that Native Americans as an ethnic group abstain from alcohol in greater numbers and percentages than any other ethnic group in America.

Observing Native American Economic Bright Spots

There's more to Indian moneymaking than casinos. Many nations even have their own banks and credit unions. The exploitation of natural resources on tribal lands has been a good source of income for some tribes, but this comes with its own set of challenging issues.

The banking Blackfeet and beyond

In the early 2000s, the Blackfeet Tribe of Montana chartered their own offshore depository called Glacier International Depository (GID). As a sovereign nation, the Blackfeet are exempt from federal and state banking regulations and were, thus, free to launch their own "offshore bank." The GID is a nontraditional bank that operates outside the typical state/federal regulation. Although the bank is currently not active under the name GID, the concept of Native Americans participating in national and global banking took hold.

Also in the early 2000s, the Native American Bank Corporation (with investors from 11 native nations) purchased the Blackfeet National Bank (founded in 1987) and restructured the bank to become the Native American Bank (NAB). Over the past 20 years, the NAB has grown to encompass more than 30 native nations as shareholders.

As of 2023, Investopedia reports that the FDIC recognizes 20 Native-owned banks with 51 percent of their voting stock owned by Native American or Native Alaskan individuals. In addition, 11 credit unions have memberships with a majority comprised of Native American, Native Alaskan, or Native Hawaiian people. These minority depository institutions offer essential services to people living in *financial deserts* (areas with inadequate banking services).

Money from mineral rights

According to the Office of Natural Resources Revenue (ONRR), in fiscal year 2025, mineral resource revenues coming from American Indian holdings in the continental United States totaled around \$975 million. Here is the breakdown:

- » **Coal:** 32 million, or about 3.2 percent
- » **Gas:** 141 million, or about 14 percent

- » **Oil and oil shale:** 756 million, or about 78 percent 755,528,179
- » **Other:** 35 million, or about 3.6 percent

Under the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Mineral Assessment Program, tribes can request a wide array of assistance from the BIA, including:

- » Economic evaluations of energy and mineral resources to Indian mineral owners as requested.
- » Studies on the current and expected energy and mineral market conditions.
- » Expert technical advice in geology, mining engineering, renewable energy resource assessments, design and engineering, petroleum engineering, and geophysics to Indian mineral owners. (Source: BIA.)



REMEMBER

You can find an excellent guide to tribal energy resource development at the Department of Energy's site, Office of Indian Energy Policy and Programs Resource Library at www.eere.energy.gov/tribalenergy/guide/fossil_fuel_resources.cfm. The site offers downloadable PDFs organized by tribe detailing the development programs that tribes have embarked upon. Reports are available as tribal case studies, for various types of energy resources, for historic information, and also economic development ideas. Truly a noteworthy compilation of detailed information.

These services are providing opportunities for tribes to reap benefits from valuable resources on and beneath the lands they own. In addition to traditional mining operations, tribes are looking to the wind and the sea, and the forest and the rivers for ways to profitably utilize lucrative natural resources and provide a steady income for their people.

For example, tribes today are involved in:

- » Oil, gas, and coal mining operations throughout Indian lands
- » The development of wind farms and tidal plants for generating electricity by the Campo Kumeyaay Nation in California and the Sioux Tribe Collaboration in the Great Plains
- » The building of new and upgrading existing facilities of hydroelectric plants utilizing rivers as an energy source by the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribes's study of its dams (Nevada) and The Metlakatla Indian Community's plan to upgrade its existing project (Alaska)

- » Development of biodiesel plants by the Blue Lake Rancheria to provide biodiesel to fuel public buses, among others
- » Use of biomass — from logging and mill residue or agricultural waste — as a power source to, for example, heat public buildings and generate electricity in Alaska

The development of mineral resources on tribal lands can be problematic, though, when the infrastructure involved puts the environment at risk. Particularly difficult are the cases in which

- » **Pipeline construction** can negatively impact sacred sites and other development may lead to erosion, pollution, and other damage — as well as potential spills.
- » **Mining operations** may threaten important mountains and the use of water in coal mining may impact sacred springs.
- » **Lumbering operations** may lead to changes in the sacred landscape or in animal habitat.



REMEMBER

Although natural resources seem like an obvious source of revenue for tribes, they are not without a high cost to the tribes.

How Native Americans Ended Up in the Casino Business

The Mashantucket Pequot tribe operates the Foxwoods Casino in Mashantucket, Connecticut. Foxwoods is the third largest casino in the world and, since its launch in 1993, has paid more than \$4.8 billion in slot revenue to the state of Connecticut as the state's share of the take. Foxwoods offers concerts, restaurants, shopping, golf, salons and spas, hotels, and, of course, a staggering array of gambling opportunities. And a Native American tribe owns it all. The Mashantucket Pequots have used their money to advance many causes dear to all Native people. They gave one of the largest donations to help establish the National Museum of the American Indian, and they built an incredible museum of their own in Connecticut.

Foxwoods' sole in-state competitor, the Mohegan Sun Casino, is the second-largest casino in the U.S. and has recently reported \$47.6 million in slot revenue

for the month of August 2025 alone. Like Foxwoods, Mohegan Sun offers many of the same amenities; also like Foxwoods, an Indian tribe runs the show. (The Mohegans are not to be confused with the Mahicans or the Mohicans.)

For many tribes, launching a gaming enterprise was the path to self-sufficiency and, in many cases, great wealth. The Seminoles were poor before starting the Indian gambling phenomenon; now the tribe leaders fly around in private jets.

As of 2021, around 515 Indian gaming establishments existed in the United States. Of the more than 574 federally recognized tribes, around 245 of them have their own casinos. Of the casinos that do exist, the majority are nowhere near as profitable as the casinos in Connecticut, or on the West Coast. Most tribes who have gaming enterprises make a modest amount of money, but of course, every little bit helps.

And there is no denying that gambling has been an economic boon for Native Americans, as well as the states in which they're located.

The Seminoles were first

The Seminoles were the first Native American tribe to offer high-stakes gambling when they opened a bingo parlor in Hollywood, Florida, in 1979. The jackpot was \$4,000, and the crowds quickly flocked to the place.

Today, the Seminole tribe of Florida has six or seven casinos in the Sunshine State and owns the line of Hard Rock Cafes (which they purchased in 2006 for close to a billion dollars). The tribe provides a dividend to each of its members in an amount rumored to be around \$128,000 per year as of 2016. (This is *per person*. So for a family of five . . . well, do the math.)

There is also a significant population of Seminoles in Oklahoma and they, too, are in the casino business with six gaming establishments throughout the state, including the Mystic Winds Casino in Seminole and the Rivermist Casino in Konawa. As is typical for most casinos, slots and blackjack are the big draws, although the Rivermist also offers off-track betting.

The 1988 Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA)

In 1988, several tribes ran gaming joints, and the federal government, as federal governments are often wont to do, decided that new laws were needed to regulate

said Indian gambling enterprises. The Feds admit as much in two of the first Findings of the act:

The Congress finds that

- » Numerous Indian tribes have become engaged in or have licensed gaming activities on Indian lands as a means of generating tribal governmental revenue.
- » Existing Federal law does not provide clear standards or regulations for the conduct of gaming on Indian lands.

The act defined three types of gambling:

- » **Class I:** Covers traditional Indian games with minimal prizes or non-monetary prizes awarded. The tribes had total jurisdiction over this type of gambling.
- » **Class II:** Covers bingo and games like bingo, including punch cards, pull tabs, and other like games. This category also included what are called “non-banked” card games. In non-banked card games, players play only against each other; there is no “bank” or “house” to beat. Again, the tribes were in charge of these types of games, and the IGRA didn’t establish any legal guidelines.
- » **Class III:** This category is the big one, the one that can be summed up in those two magic words that so many tribes love these days: casino gambling. Class III gaming includes:

Baccarat	Roulette
Blackjack	Slot machines
Craps	Texas Hold ‘Em poker
Faro	Video lottery
Keno	Video poker

In other words, Class III games are games through which you can win a bundle or lose your shirt. These are the games under federal jurisdiction, and the government wrote the IGRA so that it can implement new regulations whenever the Commissioner of the National Indian Gaming Commission sees fit.

Sharing the wealth?

There’s a widespread misconception among many Americans that all Native Americans are getting rich from the casino business, and that tribes that have

hugely successful gambling operations distribute their profits to all the Indians in America.

This notion couldn't be further from the truth, although the tribes that *do* have gaming businesses and share the proceeds end up paying out sometimes enormous monthly checks for official tribal members. For example, the Pechanga Indians of California own a casino in Temecula, California, that provides each tribe member with a check for around \$13,000 a month. Thirteen grand a month equals a \$156K a year income for simply being part of a tribe. Not bad.

Tribes that make money through gaming enterprises — like the Mashantucket Pequot tribe in Connecticut — are sovereign nations. As the Native American Rights Fund explains, if a state earns big bucks from their lottery, they have zero responsibility to share it with another state. It's the same thing with tribes and gaming earnings.

The Ten Most Populous Tribes Today

Table 3-1 details the ten tribes with the highest populations in the United States and their numbers, in descending order:

TABLE 3-1

TheTen Largest Tribes in the U.S.

Tribe	Population	When
Cherokee	466,000+	2024
Navajo	425,000+	2020
Choctaw	225,000+	2023
Chippewa	170,742	2010
Apache	158,000+	2023
Sioux	126,571	2020
Creek	101,253	2024
Pueblo	75,000+	2020
Lumbee	55,000+	2023–2024
Iroquois	28,202	2021

Here is a “snapshot” of each of the top ten today.

Cherokee

The Cherokee Nation is the largest tribal group in the United States. They comprise three separate federally recognized bands:

- » **The Cherokee Nation**, 141,000+ members who reside within the tribe's reservation boundaries in northeastern Oklahoma.
- » **The United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians**, 14,300+ members, with most living in Oklahoma.
- » **The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians**, 15,000+ members, with the majority living on the tribe's reservation in western North Carolina.

Navajo

The Navajo are the second-largest tribal group in America today in terms of population, but they possess the largest tribal reservation, with land covering 27,000 square miles in the states of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah.

In 2024, Navajo tribal revenue was \$140 million in tax revenue, with another \$72 million coming from mining royalties.

Choctaw

The Choctaw people, the third-largest tribal group in the United States, are one of the Five Civilized Tribes and today are organized into three bands: the Mississippi Band of Choctaw, the Jena Band of Choctaw in Louisiana, and the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

During World War I, Choctaw tribe members served the U.S. as code talkers, paving the way for the Navajo code talkers of World War II.

Chippewa/Anishinabe

“Chippewa” is the term most used in the United States for this tribe, but tribal members prefer to be known by their original name: Anishinabe. In Canada, they're known as Ojibway.

The Chippewa are the fourth-largest tribal group today, and Anishinabe tribes have lands mainly in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan (as well as in Canada). There are around 150 individual Chippewa bands or tribes.

Apache

The Apache are organized into six separate groups, the Western Apache, the Chiricahua, the Mescalero, the Jicarilla, the Lipan, and the Plains Apache (formerly the Kiowa Apache). Cochise and Geronimo were both Apache.

Today, Apache tribes have territory in Oklahoma, Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico.

Sioux

The Sioux are the sixth-largest tribal group in America and there are many federally recognized Sioux tribes. The Pine Ridge Reservation, home to the Oglala Sioux Tribe, in South Dakota — a 2-million-acre expanse the size of Connecticut — is the second-largest reservation in the country.

The Sioux Wars in the second half of the 19th century resulted in the Wounded Knee Massacre, during which 153 Sioux were killed by the U.S. military. In 1973, Sioux members of the American Indian Movement (AIM) occupied Wounded Knee for seventy days, resulting in 300 arrests. Six years later, the Sioux were awarded \$105 million from the U.S. government for lands that had been taken from them.

Creek

These days, many Creek Indians prefer to be identified by their original name of “Muskogee.” The Creek were known as one of the Five Civilized Tribes. Today, the federally recognized Creek tribes have territory in Alabama and Oklahoma.

In partnership with the Oklahoma State University system, the Muskogee (Creek) Nation operates the College of the Muskogee Nation in Okmulgee, Oklahoma.

Pueblo

The Pueblo Indians are not, strictly speaking, an individual tribe. There are many different tribes that are organized as Pueblos. Two of the more well-known are the Hopi and the Zuni.

Most Pueblos are in Arizona and New Mexico, but there is one Pueblo in far west Texas.

Lumbee

The status of the Lumbee Tribe is that they are the ninth-largest Native American tribe in the United States, yet they are not federally recognized and therefore not eligible for BIA services or any other benefits of federal recognition.

Iroquois

The Iroquois Confederacy — also known as the Haudenosaunee (which means “People of the Longhouse” or “People Building a Longhouse”) — was originally composed of five tribes — the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca. The Tuscaroras joined later.

Today, the six separate tribes are still extant and live in the U.S. mainly in New York, Wisconsin, and Oklahoma. There are also Iroquois in Ontario and Quebec.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Glimpsing life on the African continent prior to the transatlantic slave trade
- » Enslaving Africans in North American colonies
- » Seeing possible freedom in the American Revolution
- » Surviving the Civil War and Reconstruction
- » Ending reconstruction but still under fire

Chapter 4

From Empires to Bondage to Freedom

Mass enslavement is perhaps the most profound consequence of Columbus's so-called "discovery" of the New World. European nations, led by Portugal and Spain, came to the New World in search of riches, but they lacked a workforce necessary to procure them. Attempts to use the indigenous population proved unsatisfactory, so the eventual solution was to import Africans. This decision changed the complexion of what became the Americas. Spain and Portugal's early dominance prompted England and other countries to seek their fortunes in the New World, ultimately leading to the establishment of Black American culture in what would become the United States.

To understand Black American history, you have to recognize the chain of events that brought Africans to the Americas, bound them into slavery, and then again released them to freedom (which was still a difficult role in the America of the 19th and 20th centuries). The African continent was rich with history long before Europeans began pillaging it. When Europeans arrived there, they found three

main empires: Ghana, Mali, and Songhai. This chapter explores these African empires. It also examines the origins of the transatlantic slave trade as well as the implementation of mass enslavement in North America, freedom for slaves because of the U.S. Civil War, and the treacherous path of freedom during the aftermath of that war.

Touring African Empires

Fifty-four countries exist on the African continent with more than 1.5 billion people (as of 2025) who speak between 1,250 and 3,000 languages. However, most Black Americans trace their roots to West Africa and Central Africa. Countries in this area are plentiful and include Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), Nigeria, Mali, and Senegal, as well as the Republic of the Congo, Chad, Cameroon, and Democratic Republic of Congo.

The African continent had a tremendous history before Europeans ever set foot there. In Black American history, three empires — Ghana, Mali, and Songhai — are particularly important because many enslaved Africans hailed from these regions (see Figure 4-1). The upcoming sections provide some details about these empires.



FIGURE 4-1:
Ghana, Mali, and
Songhai Empires.

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REMEMBER

Slavery existed throughout the world, and on the African continent it differed from what would become institutionalized in the United States. As do most Americans, Black Americans have a story whose beginnings predate life in the Americas.

Ghana Empire

Located on the western coast of Africa in what is now eastern Senegal, southwest Mali, Ghana, and southern Mauritania, the Ghana Empire, populated by the Soninke, rose in the 5th century. Its capital city, Koumbi Saleh (also Kumbi Saleh), became the center of the important trans-Saharan trade connecting West Africa with Mediterranean countries. Trading gold and salt, in particular, made Ghana rich.

Historians often single out the rule of Tenkamenin (sometimes Tunka Manin), who came to power in 1062, because of his expert governance. Every day, Tenkamenin went among the people and listened to their concerns, giving them an audience until justice prevailed. Although Ghana tolerated Islam during that time, particularly because Muslim traders generated wealth, it hadn't converted, unlike other parts of Africa. The Almoravids, a band of Muslims, first attempted to bring Ghana under Islamic rule in 1068, but Ghana fought them off until 1076. Eventually the Soninke regained control of Ghana, but it was too late to prevent its complete decline by the 13th century.



TIP

Ghana's people, the Soninke, know Ghana as Wagadu, meaning "Land of Herds," by written accounts and as "Land of the Great Herds" by oral accounts. Europeans, however, took their lead from the term "ghana," meaning "warrior king" — a term used to describe Wagadu's ruler — and renamed the region the Ghana Empire. The European term is the more commonly used one in Western culture.

Mali

According to oral history, between 1235 and 1238, Sundiata Keita (sometimes Mari Jata) defeated Sumanguru, Ghana's last great ruler, to end Ghana's dominance and begin the Mali Empire, which included parts of Nigeria and the Guinea forests. However, Mansa Musa (sometimes Mansa Moussa), Mali's Muslim ruler from roughly 1307 to 1332, attracted the most attention for Mali outside Africa with the empire's tremendous wealth, largely accumulated through Ghana's salt and gold mines.

TECHNICAL
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In 1324, Mansa Musa's *Hajj*, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, became legendary. As the legend goes, Mansa Musa traveled with a caravan of 60,000 — including 12,000 enslaved people, 500 of them equipped with staffs of gold — and distributed 80 camel loads of gold dust to the poor. He gave so much gold away in Egypt that gold prices reportedly plummeted.

Songhai

By the 15th century, the Songhai (also Songhay) Empire emerged and, under the leadership of Sonni Ali (sometimes Sunni Ali or Sonni Ali Ber), took over the Niger region and encompassed the once-mighty Mali Empire. Taking advantage of Mali's declining empire, Ali conquered Timbuktu in 1469; this move immediately established Songhai as a major power.

In 1493, Askia Mohammad, a powerful general, overthrew the government. During his rule, Songhai became an intellectual center, and he used his Hajj to connect with scholars and other heads of state in his efforts to strengthen the Songhai Empire and assist Islam's expansion into West Africa. With that knowledge, he standardized trade, policed trade routes, and instituted a bureaucratic system of government. His son, Askia Musa, overthrew him in 1528. The Songhai Empire fell in the 16th century when the Moroccans overtook it.

Interaction with the rest of the world

Africans weren't isolated from the rest of the world. European and Asian contact with Africans was substantial, as evidenced by the following facts:

- » East African societies were in contact with their Asian counterparts very early on, and the interaction was markedly strong. Beginning in 900 AD, African sailors and merchants were traveling to South Asia.
- » Ethiopians lived in Greece around the 5th century BC.
- » Because of trade on and off the continent, Africans traveled to many European countries for business.
- » In 711, the Moors, Muslims who hailed from North Africa, began their rule over the Iberian Peninsula (present-day Spain and Portugal). Portugal freed itself from Moorish rule in the late 13th century, but Spain didn't completely free itself of Moorish rule until 1492.



TECHNICAL
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West African traders may have established commercial relationships with the indigenous American people long before Christopher Columbus's famous 1492 voyage. Ivan Van Sertima's *They Came Before Columbus*, published in 1976, is a classic text on the African presence in the Americas prior to the transatlantic slave trade. Evidence for this presence includes

- » **Artifacts and records:** Archaeologists have found artifacts to strengthen the idea of Africans in the area of Mexico. Mali, according to some Arabic records, sent at least two expeditions across the Atlantic between 1305 and 1312.

- » **Journals of Columbus:** Some scholars also claim that Columbus, in his journals, noted that Africans were already in the New World when he arrived.
- » **African remains, speech patterns, and features:** The discovery of skeletal remains resembling those of Africans in Central America, coupled with the African features found in the art of indigenous Americans and the similarities between the language patterns of early Americans and Africans, strongly suggest Africans could have preceded Columbus to the Americas.

Origins of the Transatlantic Slave Trade

As European countries, especially Portugal and Spain, scrambled for their riches in the New World, trafficking Africans became more competitive. By 1650, the Dutch, English, French and even Africans also aided the transatlantic slave trade.

Because Europeans arrived in Africa during financially challenging years, participation in the slave trade generated wealth for some of Africa's poorer states. That wealth became so attractive that Dahomey, a West African kingdom that had vowed not to contribute to the slave trade, eventually became a key trading center. When Africans began resisting the institution in the 18th century, Europeans, who possessed gunpowder and other warfare advantages, easily repelled them. Initially Africans participated in the slave trade primarily because slavery, inside and outside the continent, had been a common practice for centuries.

Slavery on the African continent

Unfortunately, every major civilization and almost every ethnic group has practiced slavery in one form or another. Africa was no different: Slavery existed on the African continent prior to the Atlantic or transatlantic slave trade. No matter who practiced it, however, it wasn't pleasant. Slaveholders in ancient Greece, Rome, India, and China beat and killed those they enslaved at will, and during elaborate rituals, the Aztecs may have cut out the hearts of those they enslaved.

Here are some characteristics of slavery in Africa:

- » Captors either sold or kept Africans they captured. (Early slavery on the African continent was also a punishment for crime, retribution, and so forth.) Usually these Africans became the property of the chief or the head of the family. Some of those enslaved served as human sacrifices in royal ceremonies. For the most part, children couldn't be sold and often became trusted family members.

» When Muslims invaded Africa, the system changed slightly. Purchasing enslaved people became more common than capturing them. Sometimes Muslims seized women for their harems and forced men to serve in the military and perform menial services. Some of those enslaved ended up in Arabia and Persia, among other Islamic strongholds.



REMEMBER

Still, even under Muslim rule, slavery wasn't as harsh as it would become in the Americas, particularly in the United States. In Africa, an enslaved individual could rise to a prominent position and even purchase an enslaved individual. This scenario changed with the European slave trade and its development in the New World.

Launching the European slave trade

Moved by tales of Africa's great wealth, the Portuguese prince known as Henry the Navigator sponsored several voyages to Africa as early as the 1420s. These voyages followed Portugal's 1415 seizure of Ceuta, a Moor stronghold in Morocco, which halted the spread of Islam and promoted Christianity in the region instead. In 1441, Henry's explorers penetrated Africa deeper than previous Europeans had and brought back 12 Africans caught near the coast of northern Mauritania.

Most sources cite the 1444 voyage that resulted in the capture and eventual sale of around 240 Africans in Lisbon as the first slave voyage to Africa. Within ten years, Portugal imported roughly 1,000 Africans a year to meet the tremendous demand for domestics, *stevedores* (dockworkers to load and unload ships), and agricultural workers. Because Henry the Navigator considered himself a devout Christian, his ships sailed under the Order of Christ. Therefore, those African captives often converted to Christianity.



REMEMBER

Initially, Europeans captured Africans themselves. (They also purchased men who were being held for crimes.) They didn't involve other Africans until later. Additionally, the first Africans enslaved by the Portuguese weren't subjected to race-based discrimination because race didn't predetermine their servitude at that time, and race as a social construct didn't exist at this time, either.

When Columbus gave Spain a claim to the New World in 1492, Spain took a little while to introduce slavery there. By 1501, the governor of Hispaniola (the island now occupied by Haiti and the Dominican Republic) was already requesting enslaved African labor. The first African captives arrived in Hispaniola in 1502. Reportedly these enslaved people, relatively few in number, came directly from Spain, which had a long history of slavery. After the cultivation of sugar began in the New World, the demand for enslaved labor increased. By 1518, Portugal was supplying Spain with African captives in large numbers. As Portugal established its own colonies, notably Brazil, in the Americas and Spain expanded its colonies as well, the transatlantic slave trade grew.

AFRICANS HITCH A RIDE WITH NEW WORLD EXPLORERS

Although many scholars refuse to entertain the idea that Africans beat Columbus to the New World, they do concede that Africans were prominent in conventional stories of the New World's discovery. At one time, people widely believed that Pedro Alonso Niño (also Pietro Alonso), Columbus's navigator on his 1492 voyage uncovering America, was African. Today, scholars claim that Niño was erroneously translated into "nignus" and then "El Negro." Also, at the time of the journey, the Spanish banned Africans from traveling to the New World. After Spain lifted its ban in 1501, many Africans traveled to the New World, however.

Accounts of Africans accompanying explorers include the following:

- Thirty Africans were present when Vasco Núñez de Balboa discovered the Pacific Ocean.
- Africans were with Hernán Cortés in Mexico.
- Esteban (sometimes Estevanico) was pivotal to Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's exploration of the modern-day southwestern United States. Although Native Americans killed Esteban, his travels to the southwestern interior greatly aided the Spanish conquest of the Southwest.
- French explorations, especially voyages to the Mississippi Valley and Canada, included Africans.



TIP

As the Renaissance swept across Europe, new ideas took hold. The end of feudalism resulted in the emergence of cities and a greater reliance on commercial trade. By the time the Industrial Revolution hit its stride in the mid to late 18th century, a culture of greed and profit already existed. These changes created a greater demand for enslaved labor. Although Spain, Portugal, France, England, and the Netherlands, among other countries, played major roles in the transatlantic slave trade and slavery, the Catholic Church and Africans weren't innocent bystanders.

From Servitude to Slavery

In the early 17th century, two British ships raided a Portuguese slave ship, the *San Juan Bautista*. One of those ships, the *White Lion*, which flew a Dutch flag, landed in Jamestown Colony on August 20, 1619. According to John Rolfe, Jamestown's most well-known early settler, the ship swapped "20 and odd Negroes" (presumably

taken from the *San Juan Batista*) for “victuale” (that is, food). The other ship, *Treasurer*, arrived later, leaving more African captives from the Ndongo region of what is now Angola.

After the arrival of these first Africans, the Black population grew steadily. Historical records show that parents Isabella and Antony (or Antoney) baptized their son, William, the first Black child born in the English colonies; however, in 1624, the vast majority of early Africans, like those early White settlers, arrived by boat. Approximately 300 Africans lived in Virginia in 1649, at a time when race still didn’t absolutely predetermine one’s enslaved status. Although these early Africans were enslaved, they may not have been so for life. In 1673, a Virginia court case forced a slaveholder to free Andrew Moore after completing five years of service.

The Virginia colony wasn’t an anomaly. When the ship *Desire* arrived in Massachusetts in 1638, the Africans on board weren’t automatically enslaved for life. The same was true in New York, then a Dutch colony known as New Netherland. In 1644, 11 Black people filed a petition for their freedom and secured it. In fact, records from 1651 and 1652 show that some Black people owned their own property and even had indentured servants themselves. This quasi-indentured status was short-lived, however. During the same time that many Africans gained their freedom through indentured servitude, measures leading to the lifelong enslavement of Africans based solely on race were falling into place.

Inching toward slavery

The 1640 sentencing of John Punch to a lifetime of servitude to his slaveholder was a pivotal event in the eventual enslavement of Black people based solely on race. Punch’s sentence is noteworthy because although he ran away from his Virginia slaveholder with two White servants — and the only offense cited was running away — the White servants received only four additional years of servitude, not a lifelong sentence. It wasn’t completely unexpected, however; a year before, Virginia had passed a statute to distribute arms and ammunition to “all persons except Negroes.”

Laws inching the colonies closer and closer to enslaving Africans based solely on race followed in both Virginia and Maryland, especially in the 1660s:

- » A 1662 Virginia statute established the mother’s status determined a child’s freedom.
- » Both Virginia, in 1667, and Maryland, in 1671, established laws that Christian conversion didn’t change one’s slave status (heathenism was once a justification for slavery).

- » A 1669 Virginia statute specifically equating “negroes” and “slaves” stated that a master wasn’t responsible if a slave died while he was administering punishment.

The Virginia Slave Codes of 1705, a series of laws defining and regulating enslaved status and behavior, left no speculation regarding how the colonists viewed Africans. Ultimately, various factors contributed to the formal enslavement of Africans in the colonies.

The preference for Africans as slaves

Like the Spanish, the English found that enslaving the indigenous population wasn’t plausible. Not only were Native Americans sickly due to their inability to ward off the foreign ailments that the colonists brought, but they also knew the lay of the land and could escape easily. In the free-labor system that included both Black and White people, White people (designated as English, Irish, or Dutch and not by race then) proved inept workers; they had no knowledge of the land and how to grow crops in the Americas. They also had the protection of a government, and if they managed to escape, they could blend in with other non-African settlers. From the proslavery perspective, Africans offered several advantages:

- » Because of their dark skin, Africans were easily identifiable.
- » Africans were strong as well as skilled at agriculture and other tasks.
- » Granted a monopoly on the British slave trade, the success of the Royal African Company, formed in 1672, made enslaved African labor more accessible and affordable to colonists.



REMEMBER

Slave trading became one of Britain’s most competitive enterprises. All this activity coincided with the increased commercial production of rice, tobacco, cotton, and other goods, which made slavery an indispensable means to wealth in the North American colonies.

The Triangular Trade

Slavery’s formal acceptance by the colonies significantly changed the lives of Africans, and the transatlantic slave trade, coupled with the goods produced by her colonies, made England a superpower. For England, the slave trade reached its peak during the 18th century as a very profitable three-way exchange, known as the *Triangular Trade*, developed. Here’s how it worked:

- » **Leg 1:** Typically, a shipment of goods, which could include beads, cloth, hardware, rum, salt, and guns, left England (particularly London, Bristol, or Liverpool) for West Africa.

- » **Leg 2:** In West Africa, the goods were swapped for captured Africans who were packed into slave ships by the hundreds to journey across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas. They were taken to the Caribbean, Brazil, and North America.
- » **Leg 3:** In the Americas, Africans were unloaded and replaced with molasses, rum, sugar, tobacco, or any other hot commodity before heading back to England.



REMEMBER

The term *Triangular Trade* stemmed from the fact that the route, which could take a full year to complete, actually formed a triangle on a map. In time, however, the “triangle” referred more to the route’s three-way exchange system of goods for African captives for more goods.

The Middle Passage

Named for the middle leg of the Triangular Trade from Africa to the Americas, the *Middle Passage*, which involved hundreds of Africans packed into ships for months, claimed the lives of many Africans. Death toll estimates vary widely, but approximately 1 to 3 million of the estimated 11 to 18 million Africans reportedly transported to the Americas and the Caribbean through the transatlantic slave trade between the 16th and early 19th centuries died before ever reaching land.

The capture

By the slave trade’s peak in the 18th century, European nations had established an intricate system of trading posts and forts along the West African coast. Largely ignorant of the African interior, European traders relied on Africans to capture other Africans deep in the continent.



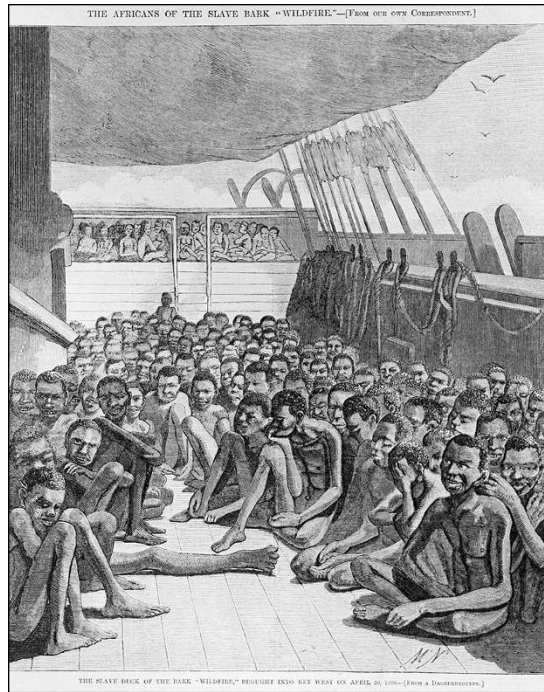
REMEMBER

Although African slavery differed greatly from the form of slavery that took hold in the Americas, greed still motivated the Africans who assisted European traders in exchange for goods or even guns to give them an advantage over other Africans with whom they were in conflict.

The voyage

Branded and chained, African captives were packed into ships with literally no room to move for a voyage that could last anywhere from six to ten or more weeks (see Figure 4-2). Length of voyage (the shorter, the better) rather than ship size (smaller ships were more common than larger ones) determined survival rates. Diseases such as dysentery and smallpox only exacerbated already horrifically unsanitary conditions. Crews threw so many dead bodies overboard that sharks often followed slave ships. Even worse, when the journey ended, some captives remained chained to dead bodies.

FIGURE 4-2:
Slave deck
of the *Wildfire*.



Bettmann/Getty Images

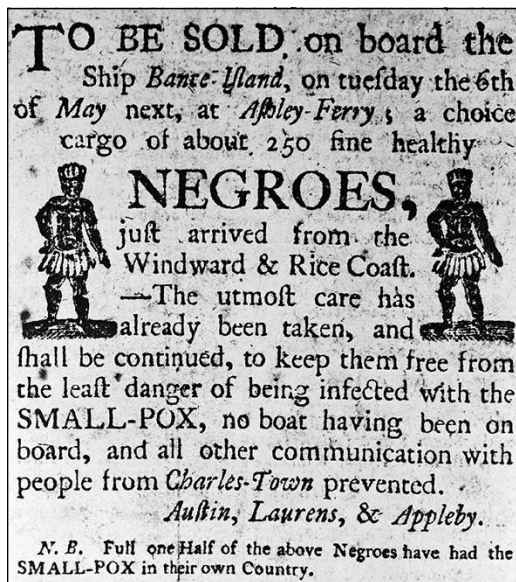
Historians estimate that two out of every ten Africans who left the African coast didn't survive the Middle Passage. White crewmembers didn't fare well, either. Yet even with the high death tolls, these voyages were still very profitable.

Arriving safely, only to be sold

A captive's transatlantic journey could be torturous because of trade winds or storms, but the last leg was usually the most pleasant. With the intended destination getting close, captives received more food to fatten them up for sale. After the ship docked, doctors examined captives either on the ship or in quarantine stations, or locations holding Africans before sale. Slave brokers determined price, discounting those captives who weren't in great health.

In the Caribbean, especially on smaller islands, buyers purchased survivors straight from the ships. Most British ships, however, headed to Jamaica and Barbados, two of Britain's largest slavery strongholds in the Caribbean. Slave traders often sold captives who reached North America in public auctions in Virginia and New England, where taverns and stores could sell captives. Figure 4-3 shows a poster announcing the arrival of slaves.

FIGURE 4-3:
Poster
announcing
the new slave
arrivals.



Bettmann/Getty Images

THE WRECK OF THE *HENRIETTA MARIE*, A SLAVE SHIP

In 1972, diver Moe Molinar, a member of renowned treasure hunter Mel Fisher's team, was searching for the sunken Spanish ship *Nuestra Señora de Atocha* off the coast of Key West, Florida. He didn't quite know what to make of the shackles he uncovered instead.

A decade after Molinar's discovery, archaeologist David Moore and salvor Henry Taylor arranged to inspect the ship more closely. They found a bell inscribed with "THE HENRIETTA MARIE 1699." Further study revealed that the ship was a 120-ton British slave ship that had set sail from London in 1700 for Africa's Guinea Coast, which spanned modern-day Sierra Leone to Lagos, Nigeria. In Africa, the ship took on 250 men, women, and children before heading to Jamaica and its wealthy sugar plantations. Fourteen weeks later, the *Henrietta Marie* reached Port Royal, Jamaica, with 190 captives for sale. The ship's cargo likely grossed more than \$400,000. In June 1700, on its way back to England, the *Henrietta Marie* shipwrecked near Key West.

Today, the *Henrietta Marie* is the rare fully recovered slave ship in the United States. More than 7,000 artifacts, including shackles, Venetian glass trade beads, and ivory "elephant's teeth," make up the U.S.'s first major museum exhibition devoted to the transatlantic slave trade. For more info on the *Henrietta Marie*, visit www.melfisher.org/henrietta-marie-1700.

At the auctions, captives sold for \$150 or more. Women of childbearing age often yielded higher prices. Usually, families were broken up prior to the voyage, and if they remained intact, those who oversaw the auction made little effort to keep them together. In the early 19th century, when the domestic slave trade replaced the transatlantic slave trade, prices and the ruthlessness of traders both rose considerably.

Black Americans and the Revolution

By the time of the American Revolution, slavery was entrenched in British North America. During this time, not one colony banned it. Despite this dim reality, when the colonists began to describe their relationship with England using the master-slave paradigm, freedom had to seem attainable to many Black Americans. Surely, those who *felt* enslaved could empathize with those who *were* enslaved. Therefore, many Black Americans embraced the American Revolution.

Fighting for freedom

In 1770, at the Boston Massacre, Crispus Attucks (see the nearby sidebar), a Black man, was not only the first to die but also encouraged those around him, White people included, to stand their ground against the British. Because of Attucks, unarmed American colonists stood eye to eye against armed British soldiers. Yet Attucks was far from the only Black American who stood up for freedom. A couple of years shy of the official start of the American Revolution, four enslaved Bostonians petitioned the colonial legislature in Massachusetts for their freedom in 1773.

A year later, Black people directly asked Thomas Gage, the military governor of Massachusetts who was also the general who commanded all British forces in North America for more than a decade, to abolish slavery. So when the fighting actually began in the American Revolution, Black people fought on both sides. The British offered freedom to those enslaved, and the ideology of freedom was linked with those fighting for independence from British.

In all, about 5,000 Black Americans fought for the American cause. Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island even had a few all-Black companies. Black soldiers Prince Whipple and Oliver Cromwell were with Washington when he crossed the Delaware on Christmas Day in 1776. Free Black Haitians even came to fight for the patriots' cause. Thus, Africans made substantial contributions to the victory that established the United States of America.

CRISPUS ATTUCKS

An escapee for more than 20 years, Crispus Attucks instigated the Boston Massacre of 1770, a pivotal event that led to the American Revolution. The son of an African father believed to have been enslaved and an indigenous mother from the Wampanoag (sometimes Natick, Nantucket) people, Attucks worked on a whaling crew that sailed out of Boston Harbor. His animosity toward the British was the product of a number of factors, including the competition he faced from British troops who took part-time jobs during off-duty hours for lower wages and his fear of being drafted into the British navy.

Three days prior to the fateful March 5, a fight erupted between ropemakers and three British soldiers. Thus, when a British soldier entered a pub looking for work, he found a group of angry seamen, including Attucks, instead. About 30 men tormented the job-seeker before soldiers came to his rescue. Despite being unarmed, Attucks and his crew didn't back down, and Attucks was the first of five to die. The significance of Attucks's actions wasn't lost on those who dubbed the incident the Boston Massacre and elevated Attucks to martyr status. Despite laws and customs restricting the burial of Black people, Attucks's body rested with the others in Park Street Cemetery.

Ironically, John Adams, later a U.S. president, painted Attucks a rogue in court to defend the British soldiers, who won an acquittal. That outcome outraged the colonists and made the American Revolution even more attractive. In 1858, Black abolitionists honored the revolutionary with Crispus Attucks Day. Thirty years later, in 1888, objections from both the Massachusetts Historical Society and the New England Historic Genealogical Society, which considered him a villain, couldn't prevent the erection of the Crispus Attucks Monument in Boston Common.

Hope and disappointment

Prior to the actual start of the American Revolution, Black Americans had many reasons to believe freedom was near. Although John Locke, in *The Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina* (which guided the form of government and society for the colony), made it clear that the enslaved had no say in government, there were other rays of hope. In the two variations of Quaker abolitionist John Woolman's *Considerations On Keeping Negroes*, as well as works by James Otis and Thomas Paine, it was clear that some White people were questioning slavery. Even without a passage specifically decrying slavery in the Declaration of Independence, Black Americans had every reason to feel encouraged by the document's statement that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

A few encouraging signs included some White people's extension of revolutionary ideology to Black Americans and the emergence of *manumission* (freedom) societies with the intent of emancipating those still enslaved. This spirit directly resulted in the freedom of the many Black soldiers who fought in the war and their families. On a larger scale, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island made early moves to abolish slavery, with New York and New Jersey not far behind. In 1775, the Quakers began establishing antislavery organizations.



REMEMBER

Still, it was clear that independence from England alone wouldn't change conditions for most Black Americans. Despite signs that the new Constitution would live up to the promise made in the Declaration — that all men are created equal — compromises that undermined the promise of freedom were also made. Though the Constitution included a provision to ban the slave trade in 1808, it also designated those enslaved as “three-fifths of a person” (an agreement reached to appease Southern delegates). These actions foreshadowed that long and arduous road to abolishing slavery ahead.

An End to Slavery via the Civil War

After decades of trying to balance slavery and freedom, the United States finally reached the breaking point and ended up at war with itself. Although the Confederacy was clearly of the view that slavery was at the heart of the disagreement (even if later cries for states' rights veiled that sentiment), President Abraham Lincoln initially refused to acknowledge slavery's role at all. Many Black people knew that the Civil War ran deeper than keeping the Union together, and they fought hard off the battlefield — and eventually on it — to determine their own destiny and have the government formally acknowledge what they knew to be truth: that they were indeed people as well as Americans.

The first Confiscation Act, 1861

As the war progressed, the issue of what to do about slavery became even more relevant. When Union forces began penetrating the South, able-bodied enslaved men sought refuge, but Union generals didn't know what to do with them. Their varying reactions, as evident in the following list, only emphasized the lack of a federal policy pertaining to the scores of enslaved people fleeing:

- » Some generals proclaimed those fleeing slavery to be free.
- » Some generals seized those claiming freedom as contraband and put them to work.

- » Some refused to take in those enslaved seeking freedom.
- » Some actively returned those fleeing to their slaveholders.
- » One Union general requested permission to allow slaveholders to cross Union lines and recover those they enslaved.

In response to all this confusion, Congress passed its first Confiscation Act in August 1861. This act established a federal policy for dealing with enslaved people. With this act, it became federal policy to seize enslaved people directly used in military action in support of the Confederacy, but the act made no direct mention of freeing anyone. Instead, it simply deprived rebelling slaveholders of any enslaved labor used against the Union. Even with no mention of freeing anyone, Lincoln worried how the Union's bordering proslavery states would react to the legislation.

Shutting down the illegal slave trade

Shutting down the illegal slave trade was one of Lincoln's first moves toward eventual emancipation. Despite numerous bans spanning several decades, an illegal slave trade continued well into the 1860s, with the last official slave ship to the U.S., the *Clotilda*, arriving in 1860. To stop the trade, Lincoln did the following during the first half of 1862:

- » **Sanctioned the hanging of Captain Nathaniel Gordon, a known enslaver from Portland, Maine.** Gordon was the first slave trader ever executed under the Piracy Act of 1820, which defined slave trading as piracy.
- » **Launched negotiations to allow Britain, which had become one of the world's leading antislavery forces, to search American ships.** For decades, the U.S. had refused these searches; as a result, the illegal slave trade flourished. The resulting treaty with Britain (signed April 25, 1862) helped end the slave trade. More importantly, the treaty attracted British sympathy to the Union's cause.
- » **Approved a bill to end slavery in Washington, D.C.** This bill was the Civil War's only instance of compensated emancipation: \$1 million was set aside to pay D.C. slaveholders up to \$300 per enslaved person, and there was another \$100,000 to fund voluntary emigration.
- » **Signed a law outlawing slavery in the territories.** The debate about the status of slavery in the territories had arguably led the country to the Civil War in the first place.

Passing the Second Confiscation Act

With the illegal slave trade finally quashed, the nation's priority was to get through the Civil War. The Second Confiscation Act became a pivotal turning point. Signed by Lincoln in July 1862, the Second Confiscation Act was an important step toward the Emancipation Proclamation because it freed those enslaved by rebelling citizens, in addition to allowing for the seizure of other property. (The First Confiscation Act purposely avoided any reference to emancipation.)

Free at last (well, sort of): The Emancipation Proclamation

On July 22, Lincoln surprised his cabinet members by reading a preliminary draft of his executive order for emancipation. Only two cabinet members fully endorsed the Proclamation, and one cabinet member suggested that Lincoln share his decision with the public after a Union battle victory, advice Lincoln heeded.

His moment came after the September 17, 1862 Battle of Antietam (also known as the Battle of Sharpsburg) in Maryland, in which Major General George B. McClellan successfully pushed back Confederate forces commanded by General Robert E. Lee. Lincoln readdressed his cabinet on September 22 for advice on the document's wording, not on the issue of whether he should deliver it or not, and shortly thereafter issued a preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. He issued the formal Emancipation Proclamation 100 days later on January 1, 1863.

In the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln vowed that if rebellion continued, "all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free."

The war's end and the 13th amendment

With Lincoln newly reelected in 1864 and the South's surrender, the future looked bright for America in 1865. On January 31, 1865, the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery passed the House with considerable political maneuvering by Lincoln. On April 9, 1865, General Lee surrendered to Union General Ulysses S. Grant. But five days later, John Wilkes Booth, a Confederate sympathizer, crept into the presidential box of Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C., and shot Lincoln, who died the next day, April 15.

As the constitutional amendment made the rounds from state to state, seeking the critical three-fourths vote needed for ratification, Black men, like those in Figure 4-4, realized that their world had changed. The Civil War was over, but the important work of reconstructing the nation was only beginning. Tensions ran as high in “peace” as they had in conflict.



FIGURE 4-4
Freed slaves.

Historical/Getty Images

(Re)constructing Democracy

Reconstruction, the period roughly spanning 1865 to 1877, presented the United States with the unique opportunity to exercise true democracy. For his part, Lincoln devised a plan to reestablish the Union long before the Civil War ended. On December 8, 1863, he proposed his Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction, which carried these key points:

- » Amnesty didn't extend to high-ranking Confederate government and military officials or soldiers who had abused Black and White prisoners of war.
- » In accordance with the Ten Percent Plan, a state could gain readmission to the Union if no less than one-tenth of the number of its citizens who voted in the 1860 election took an oath of loyalty to the Union and accepted emancipation.



Lincoln's assassination profoundly affected Black Americans, and they had reason to worry. Andrew Johnson, Lincoln's Southern vice-president, didn't share Lincoln's views. Johnson proclaimed,

"This is a country for white men, and by God, as long as I am President, it shall be a government for white men." Unfortunately, he was true to his words.

The Black Codes

With a president sympathetic to ex-Confederates, Reconstruction took a turn for the worse. Southern states may have been willing to concede to the 13th Amendment (refer to the earlier section "The war's end and the 13th amendment"), but they weren't ready to embrace Black Americans fully. Insisting that Black Americans required White supervision, Southern states passed the Black Codes in 1865 to regulate Black American behavior and social movement. Reminiscent of the Slave Codes, the Black Codes, which varied from state to state, did the following:

- » Restricted where Black Americans could live
- » Regulated their work habits, even arresting and imprisoning them if they quit their jobs
- » Prohibited Black citizens from testifying against White citizens

Taking back the power: Reconstruction Act of 1867

Thaddeus Stevens (a Pennsylvania senator) who didn't take the turn of events in the South lightly, established the Joint Committee on Reconstruction. Around the same time, more Radical Republicans won offices in the 1866 elections. With the Reconstruction Act of 1867, Congress took back the reins. The act

- » Divided the South into five military districts ruled by a governor
- » Declared that in order to have federal troops removed, Southern states had to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment, which maintains that all persons born or naturalized in the U.S. are citizens of both the U.S. and the state in which they reside and are subject to equal protection under the law

Things looked brighter for Black Americans with Congress back in control. For example, when Johnson wanted to pull the plug on the Freedmen's Bureau, which provided much-needed assistance for newly freed Black Americans, Congress revived it.

Back to the land

During Reconstruction, most of the newly emancipated received no land and had to return to agricultural work, many to the same plantations they had fled. Interestingly, a model for what would become sharecropping emerged during the Civil War.

Working for hire

At the end of the Civil War and into Reconstruction, many of the newly emancipated agreed to work contracts in which they were to receive monthly wages ranging from \$9 to \$15 for men and \$5 to \$10 for women. The contracts often included provisions for food and shelter.

Work contracts weren't always honored, even those negotiated by the Freedmen's Bureau. Some had loopholes, but quite simply, good faith was essential to the agreements' success, and it was in short supply. As power returned to White Southerners (many of them former high-ranking Confederate officials), Black Americans had no recourse if the contracts were broken.

Sharecropping

Sharecropping was a system in which Black people and some poor White people worked the land in exchange for anywhere from a quarter to half of a crop, usually cotton or corn. It eventually became the more dangerous system compared to work contracts. Sharecroppers received land and housing as well as seeds, animals, and equipment, but they had to wait until harvest time to receive any payment for their share of a crop.

As time went on, the dangers of sharecropping became more apparent. Sharecroppers faced the unavoidable evil of purchasing necessities on credit at local stores, often owned by their landowners. High interest rates made it nearly impossible for sharecroppers to bury their debt, which often meant that they had to continue working for the landowners. Falling cotton prices and a depression in 1873 only worsened the sharecroppers' plight. From Reconstruction into the early 20th century, sharecropping adversely affected Black Southerners.

Finding a new way

Moving north wasn't a much better option for Black Americans in the South than working the land because White workers in the North feared an influx of Black labor. Employers pounced on these fears and purposely hired Black workers to undermine White labor unions. Suspicious of Black workers, many White labor unions refused to accept Black workers. Unable to join the National Labor Union, Black Americans founded the National Negro Labor Union in 1869. Blacksmiths, bricklayers, and other artisans had trouble finding work because White employers favored White immigrant labor, thus forcing skilled Black men to work menial and low-paying jobs. Black women usually became domestics or independent washerwomen.

Many Black men chose to move west to work as cooks and cowboys, which for Black men was often the same. Some used the Homestead Act to become farmers; others joined the U.S. Army, which formed the all-Black 9th and 10th Cavalry in 1866 and the 24th and 25th Infantry, more popularly known as Buffalo Soldiers, in 1869. In addition to protecting settlers mainly from Native Americans being forced from the land, Black troops built roads, installed telegraph lines, and performed other duties that further aided westward expansion. Some became railroad workers, miners, and sailors.

Banking on wealth

Even before the Civil War ended, those formerly enslaved were encouraged to save their money. More popularly known as the Freedman's Bank, the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company was the primary beneficiary of this thrifty spirit. By 1872, the bank had 34 branches, mostly in the South, as well as \$3,299,201 in total deposits in 1874. Unfortunately, poor accounting, speculation, and bogus loans by its Whiteboard, led by Henry Cooke (brother of Jay Cooke, a Union financier whose dubious financial practices helped bring on the nation's 1873 depression), sank the Freedman's Bank.

When the board faltered in 1873, Frederick Douglass stepped in and, when he realized the extent of the financial difficulties, even pumped some of his own money into the bank to keep it afloat. He was too late. In 1874, the Freedman's Bank failed, literally swallowing up the nickels and dimes of far too many of the newly emancipated. The public blamed many of the nation's Black leaders for the crash, and the real culprits, Cooke and his gang, weren't held accountable.

Taking office

Politically, Black Americans fared better when Congress controlled Reconstruction. To regain admission to the Union, states were required to draft new constitutions, and Black Americans were present at the constitutional conventions held to accomplish this task. Only South Carolina boasted a Black majority, but even states like Texas, which had a small Black population, had Black American representation. In addition to abolishing slavery, many of these new state constitutions further enhanced the democratic process by ending property qualifications for voting and holding office.

Attending state constitutional conventions was just the beginning of the Black political presence. At one point, the South Carolina legislature had 87 Black and just 40 White members. Black Americans Alonzo J. Ransier and Richard H. Gleaves served as lieutenant governors of the state in 1870 and 1872, respectively. In 1872 and 1874, the speaker of the house was Black, and a Black man, Francis L. Cardozo, served as secretary of state and treasurer between 1868 and 1876.



REMEMBER

Despite these early political gains, a Black man wasn't *elected* governor in the United States until Virginia's L. Douglas Wilder, who served from 1990 to 1994. In 2006, Massachusetts elected Deval Patrick as its governor. In 2018, Stacey Abrams in Georgia almost became the nation's first and only Black female governor, coming within 1.4 percent or roughly just 55,000 votes of a win.

Many of these Black political leaders rose to national prominence. Ironically, in 1870, the nation's first Black American senator, Hiram Revels, filled a seat vacated by former president of the Confederate States Jefferson Davis. Blanche K. Bruce, another Mississippian, became the first Black American elected to a full Senate term in 1874, a feat not matched again until Massachusetts elected Edward Brooke in 1966.

The Fifteenth Amendment

Civil War general Ulysses S. Grant won the 1868 presidential election, which was a fortuitous turn of events in the fight for equal rights. Had Grant not been elected, it's doubtful whether the all-important Fifteenth Amendment, giving Black men the right to vote, would have made it to the ratification phase. But Grant did win, and the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified in 1870. This amendment states,

"The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude."

TECHNICAL
STUFF

The Fifteenth Amendment created a rift between longtime women's rights supporter Frederick Douglass and prominent suffragists Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Anthony and Stanton took issue with the Fifteenth Amendment not including gender. It came to a head during the third annual meeting of the American Equal Rights Association on May 12, 1869. Douglass argued that of the two, it was more life or death for Black men to have the vote than White women. Stanton argued that educated White women deserved the vote more and even stated

"Think of Patrick and Sambo and Hans and Yung Tung, who do not know the difference between a monarchy and a republic, who cannot read the Declaration of Independence or Webster's spelling book, making laws . . .," (a sentiment she had also shared earlier in the year).

Anthony backed that up with various arguments, including

". . . if you will not give the whole loaf of suffrage to the entire people, give it to the most intelligent first."



TIP

By "most intelligent," Anthony meant White women. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and Sojourner Truth addressed the exclusion of Black women throughout the entire discussion of the Fifteenth Amendment and women's suffrage.

A Turn for the Worse: The End of Reconstruction

Despite the ratification of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, all wasn't well in the fight for civil rights. White Southerners were determined to regain power and turn back civil rights advances, and White Northerners were growing weary of the fight.

The Redeemers

Known as Redeemers, White Southerners who were determined to seize back power from Black Americans by any means unleashed another reign of violence throughout the South. During elections, they intimidated Black voters at the polls

and at their homes. If that didn't work, murder was also an option. Frequently outgunned, Black Americans often suffered as they tried to defend themselves:

- » **Massacre at Colfax Courthouse, Louisiana (1873):** When Louisiana's progressive-minded Radical Republican governor William Kellogg replaced the sheriff and judge from the opposing party with Radical Republicans, Black men, anticipating trouble, went on the offensive and turned the courthouse into a fortress. Almost 200 members of the White League descended on the courthouse on behalf of the ousted sheriff, shooting and setting the building on fire. Although only two White people died, more than 50 Black men, including those who surrendered, died.
- » **Attacks in Opelousas, Louisiana (1868):** A mob killed as many as 200 Black Americans in days. The attackers had been angry that Black people had come to the rescue of a White editor of the local Republican newspaper and a Freedmen's Bureau teacher whom three local White people had attacked.
- » **Murders in Coushatta, Louisiana (1874):** When White Northerner and Union veteran Marshall Twitchell attempted to extend Black civil rights, members of the White League rounded up Black and White Republicans, forced them to leave town, and then murdered at least 24 of them on their way out.

The murders in Coushatta, Louisiana, prompted President Grant to send in federal troops, a move unpopular with White Southerners and many White Northerners who had grown tired of Reconstruction. Months later, when the White Man's Party went on a killing spree in Vicksburg, Mississippi, in an attempt to oust the Black sheriff Peter Crosby, Grant sent troops to Mississippi.

The Mississippi Plan

As Mississippi marched into the critical 1875 elections, White Democrats enacted the *Mississippi Plan* to gain back the government from the more progressive Republicans. Because Mississippi had a Black majority population that was solidly Republican, Democrats used economic intimidation such as firing those who voted Republican and violent attacks such as riots and burning homes to either keep Black Americans from the polls or force them to vote Democrat. Some people claimed that White people actually held guns on Black Americans brave enough to go to the polls to ensure they voted for Democrats.

Mississippi Governor Adelbert Ames asked President Grant several times to send federal troops to Mississippi to stop the Mississippi Plan, but Grant, scarred by White Northerners' criticism of his earlier use of federal troops, refused Ames's

requests in order to protect Republican chances for the presidency in 1876. Not so coincidentally, Democrats won big at the polls that November, carrying a 30,000 or more margin of votes in a state considered a Republican stronghold. Not only did Mississippi's Democrats practice this intimidation tactic in elections well into the 1960s, but Louisiana, South Carolina, and other Southern states emulated the plan.

Civil Rights Act of 1875

Distressed by the harsh reality of his Reconstruction efforts, President Grant, no doubt unsure of his options, made a frustrated appeal to Congress in January 1875 for some type of action. They responded with the Civil Rights Act originally proposed in 1870. Although school desegregation was no longer included in the bill, it did contain an important provision regarding equal access to public accommodations.

By the time it passed, however, Congress didn't have much fight left in it as far as Reconstruction was concerned. Both Stevens and Sumner were dead. White Southerners opposed to Reconstruction were regaining congressional and Senate seats. Worse yet, White Northerners appeared less and less interested in Reconstruction.

Pulling the plug

By 1870, the Union was back together, but as President Grant's trials attest, it was far from smooth sailing. After winning reelection in 1872, scandal rocked Grant's administration, and with him out of the race for the 1876 election, White Democrats and Redeemers knew that ending Reconstruction was within reach.

A critical blow came in the 1876 case of *United States v. Reese* regarding the Kentucky voting tax intended to prevent Black Americans from voting. The Supreme Court ruled that the Fifteenth Amendment, which guaranteed Black men the right to vote, only meant that citizens couldn't be denied the right to vote based on "race, color, or previous condition of servitude."



REMEMBER

With this ruling, the United States sanctioned — or rather encouraged — the development of poll taxes, *grandfather clauses* (exemptions from certain laws and practices based on past privilege), and other strategies later used to disenfranchise Black Americans, therefore undermining Reconstruction's purpose.

With slavery abolished, key pro-Reconstruction activists dead, and President Hayes opposed to Reconstruction, White Americans willing to wage the good fight on behalf of Black Americans were hard to find. After the Civil War and 12 long

years of wrestling for democracy, Black Americans were again out in the cold. Adding insult to injury, Jefferson Davis, who led the Confederacy, spent just two years in jail and never stood trial for treason. Other key ex-Confederates also escaped significant punishment.

In 1877, a year after the U.S.'s centennial celebration of independence, Black Americans didn't know how far the tide would turn. They were free and educating themselves and each other in record numbers, but the war wasn't over. Although temporarily scorned, the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments would prove to be invaluable building blocks for true democracy. Despite the disappointment of Reconstruction's end, Black Americans continued the fight for equality, even when despair greatly overshadowed hope.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Desegregating buses and public schools
- » Feeling the impact of Emmett Till's murder
- » Following Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s lead
- » Marching on Washington for Jobs and Freedom
- » Legislating equal rights
- » Recognizing Black power

Chapter 5

I, Too, Sing America: Civil Rights

The mid-1950s set the stage for another major revolution in the United States. Just as the Civil War tested the nation's core values almost a century earlier (refer to Chapter 4 of this minibook), the civil rights movement in the mid-20th century tested these values once again. This chapter examines this era's leaders (greatest among them being Martin Luther King Jr.), the events that transpired during these volatile years, and the 1963 March on Washington, where King gave voice to millions, Black and White, in a speech that defined America as it should be and not as it was.

This chapter also explores the violence of the civil rights era in the mid- to late 1960s. Particular topics of note are the impact of JFK's assassination, the events of Freedom Summer, and the rise of Malcolm X and the Black Power movement. This chapter also familiarizes you with the heated civil rights battles in Alabama, the passage of key civil rights legislation, and the impact on the nation of Martin Luther King Jr.'s murder.

The Tide Turns: Brown v. Board of Education (1954)

The dramatic battles that set the tone for much of the 1960s didn't just happen. Several events preceded those battles, perhaps none more important than the 1954 Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. Board of Education*. That decision overturned the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* edict, which had set the precedent for legalized segregation.

Before the 1950s, most court cases challenging segregated schooling targeted higher education. Longtime Howard Law School dean Charles Hamilton Houston, the first Black editor of the *Harvard Law Review*, crafted the brilliant strategy to challenge Jim Crow's "separate but equal" mandate in graduate education in the 1930s when he led the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. Consequently, the NAACP legal team, which had tried many of the key segregation cases since 1935, gained momentum with these 1950 landmark decisions:

- » ***Sweatt v. Painter***: Denied admission to the University of Texas School of Law in 1946 despite meeting all requirements but race, Heman Marion Sweatt pursued legal action to force the school to accept him. Because a law school admitting Black students opened in 1947 while his case was still being heard, the Texas courts upheld the University of Texas's denial of admission. The Supreme Court overturned the Texas courts' decision, citing that the University of Texas had substantially more professors and students plus a larger law library than the Black law school, marking the first time the Court factored in issues of substantive quality and not just the existence of a separate school. In 1950, he enrolled in the University of Texas School of Law, though he eventually withdrew.
- » ***McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents***: Although admitted to the University of Oklahoma, doctoral student George W. McLaurin was forced to sit in a designated row in class, at a separate table for lunch, and at a special desk in the library. Oklahoma courts denied McLaurin's appeal to remove these separate restrictions. The Supreme Court overturned the lower court's decision, ruling that Oklahoma State's treatment of McLaurin violated the Fourteenth Amendment, which prevents any separate treatment based on race.



REMEMBER

In essence, these decisions undermined the rationale behind the Supreme Court's 1896 ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* — that separate facilities were equal. In June 1950, NAACP lead attorney Thurgood Marshall, who later became the nation's first Black Supreme Court Justice, convened the NAACP's board of directors and some of the nation's top lawyers to discuss the next phase of attack. They decided that

the NAACP, which had already initiated some lawsuits, would pursue a full-out legal assault on school segregation.

The 1954 ruling and the reaction

Wanting to form a representative sample of the nation as a whole, the Supreme Court consolidated five cases to form the more popularly known *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Few expected the unanimous decision finally delivered on May 17, 1954, by the Supreme Court.

“In the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.”

A year later, on May 31, 1955, with the case known as *Brown II*, the Court established guidelines to desegregate all public education. As the implementation of the *Brown* ruling began, the nation discovered that instituting equality and applying its principles were two different battles. Although many White people didn’t fully support the Supreme Court’s decision, they abided by it. Others simply refused. In parts of the South, resistance reached dramatic heights.

Desegregating Central High School

No one planned on Arkansas serving as a major desegregation battleground. The Little Rock School Board issued a statement that it would comply with the Supreme Court decision and adopted an integration plan. The board selected Central High School as the first school to be integrated at the beginning of the 1957–1958 school year. Careful not to jump hastily into integration’s deepest waters, the Little Rock School Board decided to keep its high school for Black students open, allowing just a handful of students to attend Central High that first year.

The Little Rock Nine and White resistance

A few Black students tried to enroll in Central High School in January 1956. Because the attempt was made ahead of schedule (the September 3, 1957, initiation date), a judge denied the students’ enrollment, but that made little difference: White citizens opposed to integration took notice, and signs of resistance and threats began to show. The players included

» **Capital Citizens’ Council** (Little Rock’s version of the White Citizens’ Council, a segregationist group spawned in Mississippi) and the Mothers’ League of Central High, considered the second most important segregationist club and

sponsored by the Capital Citizens' Council to give the opposition to desegregating Central High a feminine edge, launched an anti-integration media campaign.

- » **The school board** solicited volunteers to attend Central High School and selected 17 students. Before any school doors opened, however, anti-integrationists went to work, and that number dwindled to nine: Minnijean Brown, Elizabeth Eckford, Ernest Green, Thelma Mothershed, Melba Patillo, Gloria Ray, Terrence Roberts, Jefferson Thomas, and Carlotta Walls. Arkansas NAACP head Daisy Bates served as their personal coach and counselor.
- » **The Mother's League** filed a suit that prompted the county chancellor to issue a temporary injunction preventing Black students from enrolling in Central High.
- » **Federal District Judge Ronald N. Davies** nullified the injunction the next day and ordered the school board to continue with its September 3 plans.

Faubus makes his move

On the night of September 2, the Arkansas National Guard and state police surrounded the school on orders from Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus to admit only White students, teachers, and school officials. A mob of roughly 300 gathered by morning.

When the nine Black students, called the Little Rock Nine, tried to enroll in Central High the next day, members of the Arkansas National Guard turned them away. Frantic, the school board requested a stay of the integration order on September 7, but Judge Davies rejected the request. On September 10, Governor Faubus received a federal summons; he also held a press conference and announced that the armed presence outside the school would remain. Wisely, the Little Rock Nine didn't attempt to enroll again before the hearings. On September 20, Faubus, following a court order, removed the troops.

Eisenhower steps in and the students enroll

On September 23, the Little Rock Nine made another attempt to enroll in Central High, but uncontrolled violence erupted and they left school before the day ended, spurring President Dwight D. Eisenhower to intervene. Although far from a drum major for integration, Eisenhower wouldn't permit blatant disregard for the laws of the land.

On September 24, President Eisenhower addressed the American public on national television to explain his decision to intervene. He said,

“The very basis of our individual rights and freedoms rests upon the certainty that the president and the executive branch of government will support and insure the carrying out of the decisions of the federal courts.” He insisted, “The interest of the nation in the proper fulfillment of the law’s requirements cannot yield to opposition and demonstrations by some few persons. Mob rule cannot be allowed to override the decisions of our courts.”



REMEMBER

Protected by federal troops, the Little Rock Nine enrolled in Central High on September 25, 1957, but they continued to be victimized. White students verbally and physically abused them, and segregationists harassed their families and members of the Black community in general. Bowing to the pressure, Minnijean Brown poured a bowl of chili over a White student’s head and was expelled. Ernest Green, the group’s only senior, graduated from Central High on May 27, 1958, but the others didn’t get their chance.



REMEMBER

Arkansas wasn’t alone in its efforts to circumvent school desegregation. The board of supervisors in Prince Edward County, Virginia, withheld all funding from the county school board, closing all public schools for the 1959–1960 school year. This policy, known as *massive resistance*, stems from U.S. Senator Harry F. Byrd Sr.’s solicitation of the support of other influential Virginians to prevent school desegregation in 1956.

When the courts reopened the desegregated Prince Edward County schools in February 1959, no White students attended. Instead, their parents enrolled them in *segregation academies*, schools established to prevent integration. This battle waged into the 1970s, with many Southern schools desegregating in theory but not in practice. Today, many argue that public school education in both the North and South operates under a system of *de facto* segregation.

Putting a Face to Racial Violence: Emmett Till

Credited as the birthplace of the White Citizens’ Council (WCC), an organization composed of civic leaders determined to fight integration that spread throughout the South, Mississippi had a reputation for extreme racism. Although Black Mississippians made up an estimated 45 percent of the state population in the 1950s, only 5 percent were registered voters because both registering to vote and voting itself were so dangerous.

Consider these examples: Grocery store owner and NAACP field worker Reverend George Lee was shot and killed in Belzoni, Mississippi, for trying to vote. Weeks later, in Brookhaven, someone shot Lamar Smith dead in broad daylight, with witnesses present, for casting a ballot. No arrests were made for either murder. These are the conditions Emmett Till, a 14-year-old boy raised on Chicago's South Side, encountered.

Emmett Till's murder

Although born in Mississippi, Emmett Till's mother, Mamie Till, grew up in Illinois and had limited experience in Mississippi. In August 1955, she sent Emmett, accompanied by family members, to visit his great-uncle, Mose Wright, near Money, Mississippi. Shortly after Emmett's arrival in Mississippi, he and a few others, including his cousin Simeon Wright, went to the general store in Money. He bought candy from Carolyn Bryant, a 21-year-old White woman who worked as cashier of her family-owned store, and she claimed that Emmett flirted with her — some accounts say he whistled at her. Three days later, Bryant's husband Roy and his half-brother J.W. Milam came to Wright's home at night and kidnapped Emmett at gunpoint.

Although arrested for kidnapping, Bryant and Milam insisted that they had only talked to Emmett and had released him alive. A couple of days later, on August 31, a boy fishing in the Tallahatchie River found Emmett Till's badly decomposed body. Authorities found a 75-pound fan from a cotton gin attached to his neck with barbed wire, a detached eye, and a bullet lodged in the skull, among other atrocities.

Despite attempts by some White Mississippians to bury Emmett there, Mamie returned her son's body to Chicago and held an open-casket funeral to expose his brutalization to the world. An estimated 50,000 people viewed his body, and *Jet Magazine* published photos of Emmett's mutilated body, displaying the horrors of Jim Crow in the South and prompting thousands of dollars in donations to civil rights organizations.

With most of the nation outraged, Mississippi tried Bryant and Milam for murder. Testifying against the men in court, Wright, Till's uncle, boldly pointed them out. Carolyn Bryant, on the decision of the judge, didn't testify at all. After deliberating for only an hour and seven minutes, the all-White jury in Sumner, Mississippi, acquitted the two men. The acquittal generated more outrage, making Emmett Till a martyr. Many who later joined the civil rights movements cited the lynching of Emmett Till as an impetus.

THE TILL CASE REVISITED

Prompted by evidence, including facts pointing to false accusations of Emmett Till whistling and other actions, uncovered by Louisiana filmmaker Keith Beauchamp while researching his documentary *The Untold Story of Emmett Louis Till*, the Department of Justice and Mississippi District Attorney's office for the Fourth District opened an investigation into the murder on May 10, 2004. Although both Bryant and Milam, who had admitted to killing Till (and even sold details to the magazine *Look* in 1956), were dead, Beauchamp's research pointed to others, Black (more than likely coerced into participating) and White, who assisted in the murder. As many as three others, including Carolyn Bryant, may have come to Wright's house the night he was kidnapped.

Ultimately, the investigation yielded no new convictions. The significance of Till's brutal murder can't be overstated, however. His mother, Mamie Till, before her death in 2003, said of her son's heartbreaking death, "Men stood up who had never stood up before." Indeed, her son's brutal murder spoke of hatred's most insidious transgressions against human existence and impelled Black and White people to join those committed to freedom and equality for Black Americans.

A New Twist in Leadership

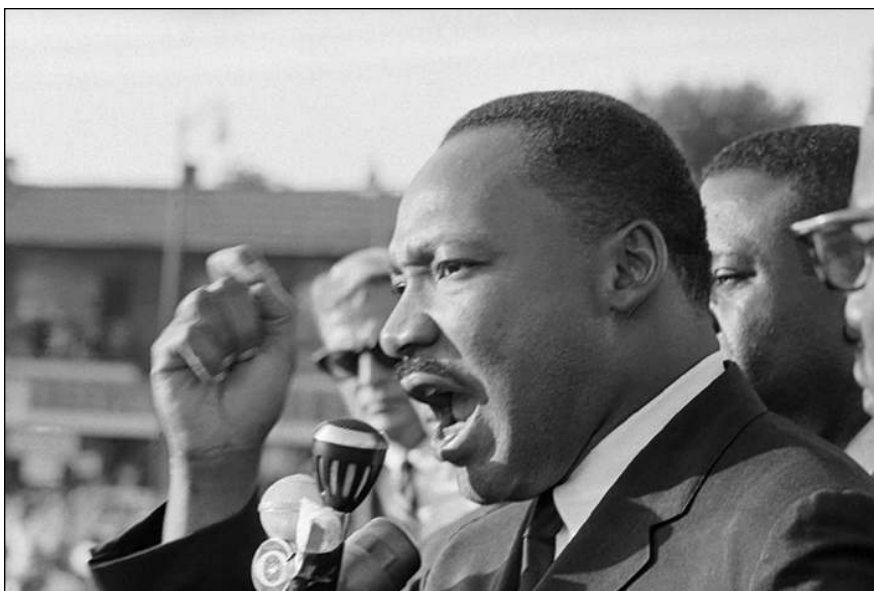
Born in Atlanta, Georgia, on January 15, 1929, Martin Luther King Jr., shown in Figure 5-1, originally planned to be a scholar and a minister. King attended Morehouse College and excelled at Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania, before pursuing graduate studies at Boston University. It wasn't until he accepted the position of pastor at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, and was tapped by Montgomery's Black male leaders to lead the newly created Montgomery Improvement Association, that King, at age 26, began his public civil rights journey.



REMEMBER

King infused the civil rights movement with a greater moral and philosophical purpose. By insisting that God's law and love truly did conquer all and through his advocacy of *nonviolent direct action*, the process of challenging societal wrongs via protest marches, boycotts, and sit-ins, among other strategies, without the use of violence, he was able to bring an initially reluctant America closer to the dream of true equality for all races.

FIGURE 5-1:
Martin Luther
King Jr. speaking
in Cleveland.



Bettmann/Getty Images

Adopting the philosophy of nonviolence

Sparked by a 1950 lecture about the philosophy of Indian activist Mahatma (Mohandas) Gandhi, King began seriously studying Gandhi while a student at Crozer Theological Seminary. He was particularly intrigued by the concept of *satyagraha*. *Satya* means “truth,” which also equals love; *agraha* means “force.” Therefore, a direct translation means truth-force or love-force.



TIP

King found that Gandhi’s teachings jelled with his own Christian beliefs (specifically the biblical philosophy to “turn the other cheek” and “love your enemies”) as well as his intolerance for racial injustice. He melded these ideas with the concept of nonviolent resistance, which he encountered during his first year at Morehouse while reading Henry David Thoreau’s *Essay on Civil Disobedience*. King became convinced that a philosophy based on love could succeed as a “powerful and effective social force on a large scale” and adopted the philosophy of nonviolent direct action.

Even when confronted with violence, practitioners figuratively and sometimes literally turn the other cheek and love, instead of hate, those who wrong them. The Montgomery Bus Boycott (see the section “The Montgomery Bus Boycott and Rosa Parks” for details on the boycott) became King’s first opportunity to use nonviolent direct action.

As the civil rights movement progressed, King’s ideology matured. Although Gandhi’s principles provided the foundation for the Congress of Racial Equality

(CORE), an active civil rights organization founded in 1942 preceding him, King developed the link between Gandhi and the civil rights movement further. In subsequent writings and speeches, not only did King define the relationship between Gandhi and nonviolent direct action, but he also explained why Christian leaders and all members of society had a moral obligation to rise above the limitations of manmade laws steeped in hatred.

Founding the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)

Buoyed by his success in Montgomery (see the section “The Montgomery Bus Boycott and Rosa Parks” for details), King and others founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), an organization of ministers and others dedicated to duplicating the changes of Montgomery throughout the South. The SCLC

- » Adopted nonviolent mass action as its chief strategy
- » Made a commitment to affiliate with local community organizations across the South to widen the reach for social change
- » Vowed to be open to all regardless of race, religion, or background

In 1957, King invited Southern preachers to the Negro Leaders Conference on Nonviolent Integration. Sixty respondents representing ten states met at Ebenezer Baptist Church, King’s home church in Atlanta, and formed the SCLC. Held in Washington, D.C., on May 17, 1957, to commemorate the third anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom, which attracted 20,000 attendees, became the SCLC’s first public act. In August of that same year, the organization convened its very first convention in Montgomery. SCLC is a national organization still based in Atlanta.

Boycotts and Sit-Ins

With its rulings regarding school desegregation (see the earlier section “The Tide Turns: *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954)”), the Supreme Court had spoken loudly, but so too had those opposing justice. Turbulent times lay ahead for the nation. Black people all across America were tired of being sick and tired. Unlike the NAACP’s legal team, they didn’t begin with a grand strategy. Instead, ordinary folks challenged racism and racist policies with small, individual acts of defiance — such as drinking from the “White only” water fountain or demanding service at a “White only” restaurant. Actions such as these erupted into a national movement.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott and Rosa Parks

The Montgomery Bus Boycott became a powerful display of what ordinary Black Americans could achieve. *Plessy v. Ferguson*'s declaration of separate but equal permeated every aspect of Southern life. In Montgomery, Alabama, and other parts of the South, Black and White people rode the same public buses but never sat together. Custom and law dictated that White people sit in the front and Black people sit in the back. The law prohibited a White rider from sharing a seat with a Black rider. So if the White section filled up and a White person needed a seat, a Black rider had to move back and relinquish their seat.

In December 1955, Rosa Parks, shown in Figure 5-2, sat in the fifth row of a bus with three other Black people. A White man boarded the bus, but no seats were left in the White section, so the bus driver directed the Black riders to move back one row. Three complied. Rosa Parks refused. The driver had her arrested. E.D. Nixon, leader of the Montgomery NAACP for whom Parks served as secretary, and White attorney Clifford Durr, a former employer of Parks and friend, bailed Parks out. The devoted wife had an exemplary background, and with permission from her husband and mother, she agreed to pursue the case. Newly minted Black attorney Fred Gray and Durr represented Parks.



FIGURE 5-2:
Rosa Parks.

Bettmann/Getty Images

The popular version of the story is that the 42-year-old Parks, a sometime seamstress and volunteer secretary of the NAACP, was too tired to give up her seat. In her autobiography *Rosa Parks: My Story*, she explains,

“People always say that I didn’t give up my seat because I was tired, but that isn’t true . . . No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in.”

Rosa Parks didn’t stumble into the fledgling civil rights movement unwittingly; she walked into it defiantly. In fact, months earlier, Parks had supported teenager Claudette Colvin, who had also been arrested for refusing to give up her seat. Other cases also went to court, for example

- » Viola White, a Black woman Parks also knew, unsuccessfully challenged bus segregation in 1944 when Alabama’s White power structure stalled her case in court, prompting later cases to aim for the U.S. Supreme Court.
- » Aurelia Browder, Susie McDonald, and Mary Louise Smith, who were all involved in challenges to bus segregation prior to Parks’s arrest in the same year, joined Colvin for the subsequent Supreme Court case *Browder v. Gayle* (see “Death knells for bus segregation”) that had a huge impact.

Organizing — and then extending — the boycott

Alabama State College professor and Women’s Political Council leader Jo Ann Robinson, who had been challenging Montgomery bus segregation for years, sprang to action. Black residents in Montgomery received flyers asking them not to ride buses on Monday, December 5. Organizers urged local ministers, one of whom was Martin Luther King Jr., to speak of the boycott in their Sunday sermons. These efforts resulted in nearly 90 percent of Black Montgomery residents not riding the buses.

The success of the one-day bus boycott inspired the city’s mostly Black male leadership of ministers and community leaders to form the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), which selected King as its president. After his first address in his new capacity, given at Montgomery’s Holt Street Baptist Church on December 5, Black attendees numbering in the thousands voted to continue the boycott.

At first, boycott organizers’ demands were modest. As early as December 8, the MIA approached the bus company with a plan not to eliminate the segregated bus system but for more equitable bus seating. The bus company refused.

The long haul: Keeping the boycott going despite resistance

As White people in Montgomery tried to end the boycott, Black people strategized ways to keep it going.

- » To counter the ten-cent fare Black cabdrivers charged boycott participants, for example, the city passed an ordinance forbidding cab services to charge less than a 45-cent fare. To keep the boycott going, the MIA organized a private taxi service of Black citizens who owned their own cars. Similar to buses, the service had designated routes and pickup times.
- » In another move to divide the Black community and end the boycott, city commissioners negotiated with three non-MIA ministers who accepted their terms. A story announcing the boycott's end leaked to the Sunday papers, and word got back to the MIA leadership. To inform the Black community that the story was a hoax, MIA members, ministers among them, hit the bars Saturday night. The boycott remained intact.

Unable to stop the boycott through false negotiations, Montgomery officials turned to intimidating the protestors.

- » In January, Montgomery police arrested King, who had begun receiving death threats, for speeding five miles above the speed limit.
- » When the MIA Executive Board filed the federal lawsuit *Browder v. Gayle* challenging the constitutionality of segregated bus laws on January 30, intimidation efforts only increased. King's house was bombed, as was E.D. Nixon's house.
- » When, on February 20, attendees at a mass MIA meeting rejected a settlement from the Men of Montgomery (a group of White businessmen), a Montgomery grand jury indicted King and 88 other bus boycott leaders for violating a 1921 Alabama statute barring boycotts without "just cause."

To top it off, the Alabama state legislature introduced bills to *strengthen* bus segregation.

In March, a grand jury tried King on conspiracy charges. Although found guilty, his punishment of a year in jail or a \$500 fine was suspended as he appealed the decision. By this time, the Montgomery Bus Boycott was a major national story, and a number of cities observed a National Deliverance Day of Prayer in support of the boycotters.

Death knells for bus segregation

In May, the *Browder v. Gayle* trial challenging the constitutionality of Montgomery's segregated buses finally began in federal district court. Two of the three judges ruled that segregated buses in Montgomery were unconstitutional. On appeal, the Supreme Court unanimously upheld the unconstitutionality of Montgomery's segregated bus system.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

The court order ending Montgomery's segregated bus system arrived in Montgomery on December 20. The next day, King, Nixon, and local Baptist minister Ralph David Abernathy (a King comrade who would become a significant figure throughout King's civil rights administration) rode in the front section of a Montgomery bus.

Victory wasn't easy, though. Two days later, a sniper fired shots into King's home. Some passengers became victims of assault by White people who opposed desegregating buses, and others were the victims of sniper fire. It was clear that although King and his team, greatly assisted by Robinson and the Women's Political Council, as well as brave women like Browder and Colvin who filed federal suit challenging bus segregation, had won an important battle, they hadn't won the war.

Sitting in for justice

On February 1, 1960, four Black college students — Joseph McNeil, Ezell Blair Jr., Franklin McClain, and David Richmond — sat at a Woolworth's lunch counter reserved for "White only" in downtown Greensboro, North Carolina. This simple act added fuel to the burgeoning civil rights movement.



REMEMBER

Sit-ins weren't a new civil rights technique. In the early 1940s, CORE successfully used sit-ins to desegregate public facilities, in Chicago primarily. Howard University students also had success in 1944 when they used the sit-in tactic to desegregate a cafeteria in Washington, D.C. These incidents were more isolated, however. The four students in North Carolina sparked a wave of additional sit-ins throughout the South and set the stage for the creation of a new organization that quickly gained momentum within the civil rights movement: the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

The day after the first sit-in at the Greensboro Woolworths, more students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College, the historically Black college the original four attended, descended on the store. Even though no confrontations took place, the local media covered the second sit-in. When the national media picked up the story, it struck a chord with other students, who began to duplicate the sit-ins in other locations.



TIP

F.W. Woolworth Company discount stores represented Americana. One of the nation's few chains, Woolworths helped create a national identity. The lunch counters at the front of the stores were popular meeting spots. Civil rights leadership recognized Woolworth's symbolic power and acted quickly to organize more sit-ins. Within two weeks, students in 11 cities had staged sit-ins at Woolworths and S.H. Kress stores. To show their support, Northern students, both Black and White, picketed local branches of chain stores that practiced racial segregation in the South.

Beyond lunch counters

The sit-in tactic helped integrate other facilities. By August 1961, an estimated 70,000 people had participated in sit-ins across the country, and more than 3,000 people were arrested. One of the most important results of these actions was that students from across the country became active participants in the civil rights movement.



REMEMBER

The sit-ins demonstrated that mass nonviolent direct action could be successful and brought national media attention to the new era of the civil rights movement. Additionally, the *jail-in* tactic of not paying bail to protest legal injustice became another important strategy. For the first time, the battle to end racial injustice combined legal action with direct public protest.

Founding SNCC

SCLC administrator Ella Baker, a former NAACP and National Urban League worker, convinced SCLC leadership to sponsor a gathering of student sit-in leaders and participants. Baker encouraged the students to form an independent, grassroots unit. The result was the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, pronounced *snick*), run by students. Throughout the 1960s, SNCC was an important fixture of the civil rights movement.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Marion Barry, who later became mayor of Washington, D.C., served as SNCC's first chairman. Other key SNCC leaders included Diane Nash, John Lewis, James Farmer, and Stokely Carmichael (later known as Kwame Ture).

Integrating Ole Miss and Increasing Federal Involvement

By 1962, the nation had experience with university integration, yet the reaction to James Meredith's entry into the University of Mississippi in Oxford, Mississippi, was especially hostile. Led by Governor Ross Barnett, Mississippi held firmly to its

segregationist reputation. Mississippi's obstinacy in refusing to allow Meredith's enrollment spurred Robert Kennedy to extend the federal government's involvement in the civil rights movement further.

The trouble began when the Mississippi-born Meredith decided to transfer from Jackson State, a Black college in Mississippi, to Ole Miss. Denied admission twice, Meredith appealed to the courts. Eventually a federal district court ordered Ole Miss to admit Meredith. On September 20, 1962, when Meredith attempted to register for school, Governor Barnett himself blocked Meredith's path. After speaking with Barnett directly, Robert Kennedy sent 500 federal marshals to escort Meredith onto the campus and into his dorm room on September 30, but an angry crowd of students and outside agitators gathered in opposition to Meredith's enrollment.

Federal marshals tried unsuccessfully to disperse the rock-throwing crowd with tear gas. More outside agitators poured into Ole Miss and used bottles, bricks, and gunshots to attack the marshals, who heeded Justice Department orders not to use their rifles. In the end, 160 marshals were wounded (28 by gunshot), and two people were killed. Reluctantly, Kennedy sent in the first wave of 5,000 army troops, who controlled the crowd without using their rifles. Although the number of troops eventually declined, Meredith attended Ole Miss with federal protection until his graduation in 1963.



REMEMBER

The incident at Ole Miss changed President Kennedy's position on dealing with the civil rights movement. He finally realized that federal intervention was necessary and, furthermore, that most of the American voting public didn't view such intervention negatively, even in the South.

1963: A Significant Year

In 1963, the confrontations and violence associated with the civil rights movement escalated. Black America's patience had worn thin waiting on justice. Previous demonstrations hadn't moved the nation as far along as civil rights leaders had hoped. The SCLC, perhaps urged on by criticism from the much younger SNCC, took bolder action.

Not-so-sweet home Alabama: Birmingham

Dubbed "Bombingham" by some for its extreme racial violence, Birmingham became a significant project for civil rights leaders. SCLC executive director Wyatt Tee Walker believed that the South would follow Birmingham; if civil rights protests succeeded there, they could succeed anywhere.



REMEMBER

What happened in Birmingham demonstrated that Black Americans wouldn't wait any longer for freedom and equality. It was an important turning point in the civil rights war, but it was by no means the last battle. Here are some examples:

- » **Project C:** On April 3, 1963, the first protest of what Walker called *Project C*, for "confrontation," began, and 20 people were arrested. Despite an injunction telling him not to lead a march, on April 13, Martin Luther King Jr. and buddy Ralph David Abernathy did so anyway and went straight to jail.
- » **The children's march:** After King left jail on bail, he saw that volunteers in Birmingham had dwindled. James Bevel, fresh from the Nashville sit-ins, suggested using high school students. A dilemma emerged when the students' brothers and sisters of all ages also turned up for nonviolent resistance training. After much deliberation, the decision was made to let the children march on May 2. Although Connor didn't use violence during the march, he and his team arrested an estimated 900 children. When more people marched the next day, Connor ordered the use of clubs, dogs, and fire hoses against the participants. The melee made national headlines, demanding the attention of President Kennedy.
- » **Negotiating for desegregation:** On May 10, Birmingham's White merchants made a pact with the SCLC to desegregate as well as hire Black workers during the next three months if the organization put a stop to the demonstrations. Not everyone was pleased, however. Some Black people criticized King for yielding to promises.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

The Ku Klux Klan (KKK) responded to the demonstrations by bombing A.D. King's home and a motel where they believed Martin Luther King Jr. and his aides were staying. These bombings induced rioting among some Black people. The federal government sent in 3,000 army troops, among other resources, and the bombings ended. Aided by Birmingham's moderate mayor, desegregation in Birmingham finally began.

LETTER FROM BIRMINGHAM JAIL

King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail," a response to a letter published by a White clergyman denouncing the demonstrations and urging patience, made this jail visit different from others. In the widely published letter, King explained why Black Americans could no longer wait for freedom. Written on scraps of paper with a pen smuggled into the jail during King's eight-day stay, the letter articulated the desires of those who marched while also justifying their defiance of unjust laws. "We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor," he wrote. "It must be demanded by the oppressed."

When Alabama Governor George Wallace vowed to bar two Black students from registering at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa in June 1963, President Kennedy ended his public silence on civil rights. In a public broadcast that evening, Kennedy stated that “all Americans are to be afforded equal rights and equal opportunities.”

Murder in Mississippi: Medgar Evers

News of President Kennedy’s commitment to civil rights only angered segregationists further. White Mississippians refused to give up segregation. The murder of Medgar Evers — one day after Kennedy’s televised speech to the nation addressing civil rights — made that clear.

Evers, the Mississippi NAACP field secretary, kept Mississippi in the fight for civil rights. His work included helping establish NAACP chapters throughout the state, investigating violent crimes against Black people, and organizing boycotts of segregated stores in Jackson, as well as Jackson gas stations that wouldn’t allow Black people to use the restrooms. Just before his death, he began a full-scale campaign to desegregate downtown Jackson. When Mayor Allen C. Thompson went on television asking Black people not to participate, Evers went on television, too. A sit-in at the Woolworths lunch counter proved successful enough that the mayor promised to desegregate some public facilities. Bowing to pressure from the White Citizens Council and other segregationists, however, he backed down from his promise.

Evers’s successes, even if they were small in comparison to the successes in other cities, no doubt sealed his fate. On the evening of June 12, 1963, in front of his house, Evers was shot in the back. With Evers seen as a martyr, his death added urgency to the civil rights movement.

CLOSING THE EVERS CASE

Following Medgar Evers’s murder, an all-White jury acquitted his assassin, Byron De La Beckwith. Thanks to the efforts of Evers’s widow Myrlie Evers-Williams, Mississippi finally retried and convicted De La Beckwith of murder on February 5, 1994. The 1996 film *Ghosts of Mississippi*, starring Whoopi Goldberg, dramatizes those efforts. De La Beckwith appealed the case, with the Mississippi Supreme Court upholding the conviction in 1997.

March of all marches

Orchestrated by labor organizer A. Philip Randolph and unsung civil rights activist Bayard Rustin, the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, held in the nation's capital on August 28, 1963, was the march of all marches. More than 250,000 people, with an estimated 50,000 White people among them, representing various organizations converged on the Lincoln Memorial to demonstrate for Black equality — politically, socially, and economically.



In addition to King, other participating civil rights leaders included the National Urban League's Whitney Young Jr., the NAACP's Roy Wilkins, and CORE's James Farmer. Entertainers such as gospel great Mahalia Jackson, Joan Baez, and Bob Dylan were present, as well as movie stars Sidney Poitier, Charlton Heston, and Marlon Brando.

Prior to the March, White House officials warned organizers that such a march could create a conservative backlash against the movement. Adjustments occurred, as the march's site shifted from the White House to the Lincoln Memorial. Organizers also agreed to censor militant speakers.

Considered one of the greatest moments of the 20th century, King's address dispelled any potential for trouble. In his famous "I have a dream" speech, King gave voice to hope:

"I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.'"

As he continued, the crowd's "amens" grew louder.

King's dream that his "four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character" moved both White and Black people.

That vision resonated so loudly that his words regarding the nation's long record of persistent Black economic inequality have frequently been overlooked, with parts of his speech still unrecognizable to many. For example

"We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. And so we've come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice."

With even some of King's skeptics acknowledging the power of his vision, his "I have a dream" speech was able to expand the national conversation on race to one of a broader American society inclusive of all. Those words resonated even

more with President Kennedy, who had been lukewarm about the gathering. Afterward, he invited key march organizers to the White House. Unfortunately, the high of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom didn't last long.

Suffering Tragic Blows

Most civil rights participants knew that death was a very real possible consequence for their actions. In some Southern states, Black residents avoided civil rights activity because of the fear of retaliation, but segregationists made no distinctions between participants and nonparticipants. White Americans weren't safe, either. Some White Southerners didn't actively resist desegregation primarily to avoid physical harm. In the fall of 1963, the lengths to which segregationists would go to prevent integration shocked and saddened the nation.

Four innocent victims

When a bomb exploded at Birmingham's Sixteenth Street Baptist Church just minutes before the 11 a.m. service on September 15, 1963, the whole nation felt the jolt. Four little girls — 11-year-old Denise McNair and 14-year-olds Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, and Addie Mae Collins — died instantly from the dynamite blast emanating from the church basement. More than 20 others were injured. Ironically, "The Love That Forgives" was the message planned for the day's service.

A hub for civil rights activity, the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church was a center of Birmingham's Black community and served as a central checkpoint for the first phase of what Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) executive director Wyatt Tee Walker dubbed *Project C* (the "C" stood for confrontation), waged only a few months prior. Therefore, the church represented Black Alabamans' progress, and that progress didn't sit well with the state's extreme segregationists, including Governor George Wallace.

Instead of stopping civil rights activity, the tragic bombing attracted national and international attention, pressuring the FBI to investigate the incident. Little was done, though, and people later learned that FBI head J. Edgar Hoover blocked the release of critical evidence to prosecutors. Only years afterward, in 1977, was Ku Klux Klan member Robert Edward Chambliss convicted. A 2000 reopening of the case brought convictions for two others: Thomas Blanton in 2001 and Bobby Frank Cherry in 2002. (The fourth man involved in the bombing, Herman Cash, died in 1994 and avoided prosecution.)



Acclaimed filmmaker Spike Lee received a 1998 Academy Award nomination for his documentary *Four Little Girls* about the 1963 bombing and its effects on the nation and the girls' families.

JFK dies

On November 22, 1963, the civil rights movement received another crushing blow. With President John F. Kennedy behind civil rights efforts and actively pushing Congress for the passage of a major civil rights bill, the prospect of achieving full Black equality appeared within reach. But during a visit to Dallas, as Kennedy rode with his wife Jackie in a convertible in a parade, three shots rang out, two of which hit Kennedy in the head and neck. He died shortly thereafter.

Kennedy's absence made the future of civil rights legislation uncertain. Because Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson hailed from Texas, few pegged him as a civil rights champion. Johnson's actions as president, however, surprised many, especially White Southerners.

Freedom Summer violence



As more and more White people, especially students, signed up for duty in the fight for Black equality, civil rights leaders shifted their goal from desegregation to voting rights. Although the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments established voting rights for Black Americans, White Americans in many Southern states either intimidated Black voters or established barriers such as poll taxes and literacy tests to keep them from voting.

Freedom Summer, 1964 in Mississippi, was the culmination of much preparation to register Black residents to vote in the upcoming presidential election. About 900 volunteers (mostly White) had signed up to help with the registration. But on June 21, local police arrested three volunteers — two White Northerners, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner; and Black Mississippian James Chaney — jailed them, and reportedly released them the same night. The three men disappeared and state police claimed that the trio had staged the disappearance as a publicity stunt.

However, the bodies of all three men surfaced in Mississippi on August 4; the FBI investigated and subsequently arrested 18 people (mostly Ku Klux Klan members) in relation to the murders. Most of those arrested received convictions for breach of civil rights, but the mastermind Edgar Ray Killen, a minister, received a manslaughter conviction more than forty years later. He died in 2018 while serving his 60-year prison sentence.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964

Ironically, Kennedy's assassination strengthened the proposed civil rights bill. Before his death, any civil rights legislation would have required significant compromise to pass both houses of Congress. After his death, President Johnson refused to compromise.

With an upcoming presidential election, Johnson's strong endorsement of the Civil Rights Act would normally have been a huge political risk. Yet with key Republicans emerging as allies and other lawmakers less inclined to squabble over a bill an assassinated president had supported, the bill passed both houses of Congress with no significant changes. On July 2, 1964, Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law. The law did the following:

- » Prohibited racial discrimination in any public accommodations engaged in interstate commerce
- » Enforced public school desegregation
- » Withdrew federal funding from any institution or program that endorsed discrimination
- » Outlawed all employment discrimination and established the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to monitor any violations
- » Ensured equal voter registration

In November 1964, Johnson easily won the presidential election.

On to Selma: Back in Alabama

To bring attention to Alabama's voting inequities, King needed authorities to arrest him and others. On February 1, he succeeded by leading a group of demonstrators in defiance of the July 1963 judgment banning all meetings and marches in Selma. When authorities, led by Sheriff Jim Clark, arrested him, local Black students marched in defiance and police arrested them, which is what King had anticipated. The national media captured the sequence of events.

From a jail cell on February 1, during his first arrest since Birmingham, King wrote in a letter to the American public: "There are more Negroes in jail with me than there are on the voting rolls."

During a peaceful march on February 18, the situation became very dramatic when 26-year-old Jimmie Lee Jackson was shot and killed trying to protect his mother from the blows of a billy club. His death galvanized momentum for a federal voter registration law. Once again, the American public placed civil rights at the top of the nation's agenda.

Then on Sunday, March 7, a group of 600 people led by SNCC Chairman John Lewis and SCLC's Hosea Williams attempted to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge, defying the armed Alabama state troopers blocking their way. As the group marched, ignoring Major John Cloud's demand to turn around, officers charged them, in the process trampling them, whipping them, beating them, and tear-gassing them. Referred to as *Bloody Sunday*, the event was captured by the media and broadcast nationwide on the evening news. The ABC network even preempted its showing of the film *Judgment at Nuremberg* with coverage from Selma.

After Bloody Sunday, a court order banned King from leading a second march on March 9, so King took the group of protesters to the edge of the Edmund Pettus Bridge, knelt in prayer, and turned the group back. Emotions ran higher as on that same night, White men severely beat Reverend James Reeb, a White minister from Boston. Two days later, he died.

With court approval and the protection of armed forces, King led a third march from Selma to Montgomery on Sunday, March 21. King, with wife Coretta by his side as well as Rosa Parks and several other key civil rights leaders, reached the state capitol on March 25. Approximately 25,000 people attended the victory rally. *Selma*, the 2014 film directed by Ava DuVernay, captures these events.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965

Without Freedom Summer and Selma, it's doubtful the Voting Rights Act of 1965 would have ever passed. Although Black men received the right to vote with the Fifteenth Amendment and the Nineteenth Amendment extended voting rights to women, Southern states actively hindered Black people from voting, using several methods, the two most popular being the poll tax and literacy tests:

- » **Poll tax:** Black voters, many of whom were poor, were charged fees to deter them from voting.
- » **Literacy test:** In order to vote, Black Southerners, many of them with little formal education, were given myriad tasks such as reciting parts of the Constitution to the administrator's satisfaction, transcribing passages from the Constitution, and answering obscure technical questions such as "how many people can testify against a person denying his guilt of treason?"

With Southern states actively stopping Black people from voting, a practice that had gone on for decades, the federal government finally stepped in. On August 6, 1965, President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act (VRA) into law. Key features of the law include

- » **Federal supervision of voter registration in areas where less than 50 percent of the non-White population had registered to vote:** Instead of waiting for grievances to be filed, the federal government became proactive in identifying areas where White authorities were intimidating Black people not to vote.
- » **Federal approval of change in local voting laws:** In areas with a history of disenfranchisement as well as less than 50 percent of the Black population registered to vote, the federal government had to approve any changes in voting requirements.
- » **Prohibition of literacy tests:** The federal government banned the use of literacy tests for all American voters.
- » **Authorizing the U.S. attorney general to investigate the use of poll taxes:** Although the act itself didn't ban poll taxes, that change did come eventually. While the Twenty-fourth Amendment, passed in 1964, banned the use of poll taxes in federal elections, the Supreme Court banned the use of poll taxes in state elections in 1966 with *Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections*.



REMEMBER

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 made it emphatically clear that the nation as a whole would no longer tolerate blatant voter discrimination. The law made an immediate impact. Within three weeks, more than 27,000 Black Americans in Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana had registered to vote. Renewed four times since its passage, the act received a 25-year extension with the Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and Amendments Act of 2006 during President George W. Bush's administration.

Black Power Rising

Not all Black Americans were committed to King's doctrine of nonviolence. As White supremacists became increasingly more violent, some Black Americans felt compelled to fight back. During the mounting tensions of the 1960s, messages of Black empowerment became louder and louder. Prominent spokespersons such as Malcolm X and organizations like the Nation of Islam and the Black Panther Party began to command as much attention as King and civil rights organizations such as the NAACP, CORE, and SCLC. These developments directly affected SNCC, which began a metamorphosis.

As Black Americans became more publicly outspoken, conflicts erupted in both the North and the South. The days of patiently waiting for change were long gone. With direct nonviolent action continuing in the South and rioting breaking out in the North, the nation found itself battling many wars.

The Nation of Islam

Until the 1960s, most Americans weren't very familiar with the Nation of Islam (NOI), which was founded in Detroit, Michigan, in the 1930s and is currently headquartered in Chicago, Illinois. Although its premise was religious, the NOI's strongest selling points for many Black Americans became its endorsement of Black nationalism and Black self-sufficiency. Its emphasis on Black separatism, including its insistence that White people were devils, greatly distinguished it from SCLC and other civil rights organizations that emphasized Christian love and forgiveness regardless of the transgression.



REMEMBER

Unlike King and his followers, the NOI sanctioned violent retaliation against acts of violence against NOI. Its stance on self-preservation and defending one's self appealed most to the nation's urban areas. Actively recruiting its membership from the prison system, the NOI found great success. NOI membership often gave prison converts the discipline they required to survive imprisonment. After their release, many found employment with the NOI, which operated several businesses.

Even though NOI leader Elijah Muhammad built the NOI into a formidable organization that exceeded its humble 1930 origins, Malcolm X propelled the NOI into mainstream awareness.



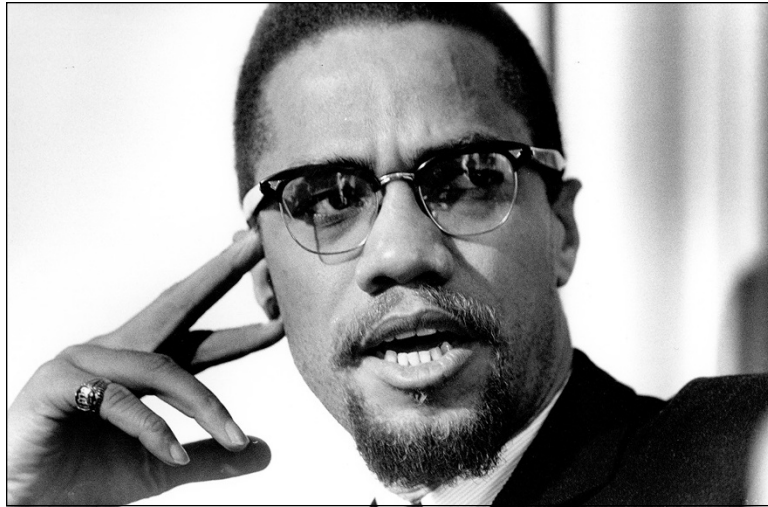
TECHNICAL
STUFF

Although not recognized by mainstream Islamic organizations until recently because of significant theological differences that have since been altered, NOI members followed certain aspects of mainstream Islam such as reading the Koran (also Quran or Qur'an) and observing Muslim practices such as the separation of the sexes during worship. Religious services, as well as the NOI's schools, emphasized the values of self-sufficiency and self-discipline.

Malcolm X

Although best known for slogans such as "By Any Means Necessary" as well as posters depicting him with a gun, Malcolm X, shown in Figure 5-3, was a complex man. Formerly incarcerated, Malcolm X exhibited strength, charisma, and intelligence that only underscored the potential the nation had tucked away in its prison systems. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, published months after his death, offered insight into who he once was, who he became, and who he might have been.

FIGURE 5-3:
Malcolm X.



Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images

His initial views proclaiming White people as devils, a view consistent with the NOI and its leader Elijah Muhammad, whom Malcolm X followed, propelled him to the attention of the news media — that and the tens of thousands who came to hear him. Ultimately, Malcolm X’s break with the NOI, as well as his renunciation of equating White people to the devil, placed him in greater favor with many, Black and White. Unfortunately, he was killed, but his legacy kept him one of the 20th century’s elite freedom fighters.

Malcolm’s message

As a national NOI spokesperson, the handsome and articulate Malcolm X generated much media attention, particularly for his disagreements with King’s nonviolent methods of protest as well as for the NOI’s message of Black self-sufficiency and separatism. Malcolm X’s criticism landed him a public platform when he appeared in a weeklong television special titled “The Hate That Hate Produced” with TV journalist Mike Wallace in 1959.

Conflicts with the Nation of Islam

As Malcolm X’s public stature grew, tensions developed within the NOI. Malcolm X, also known as El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, lived by a strict moral code. After becoming a Muslim, he remained celibate until he married Betty Shabazz in 1958. In addition, he didn’t engage in extramarital affairs (as confirmed by the FBI agents who followed him). In 1963, he discovered that Elijah Muhammad had engaged in sexual relations with as many as six women in the NOI and that some

of those affairs had produced children. Muhammad's moral failings greatly contributed to Malcolm X's eventual split from the NOI.

Around the same time, Malcolm X offended many with his response to President Kennedy's assassination. According to Malcolm X, Kennedy "never foresaw that the chickens would come home to roost so soon," meaning that White Americans or presidents weren't exempt from the violence that denied life and liberty to Black Americans. Although Elijah Muhammad suspended and silenced Malcolm X for 90 days for his statements, Malcolm X suspected that Muhammad had other reasons for silencing him. In March 1964, Malcolm X left the NOI and formed Muslim Mosque, Inc.

But he wasn't finished evolving. After traveling to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, in April 1964 and sharing his religious pilgrimage with Muslims of all races, Malcolm X returned to the U.S. and softened his stance on racial separatism. In May 1964, he founded the Organization of Afro-American Unity.

His death

By early 1965, it was clear that Malcolm X was marked for assassination. On February 14, someone firebombed his family's New York home, but the family escaped unharmed. On February 21, Malcolm X wasn't so lucky: During a speech at the Audubon Ballroom in Harlem, three men later revealed to be members of the NOI (a fact some people debate) fatally shot Malcolm X multiple times at close range. Many contend that the three men, convicted of first-degree murder in 1966, had colluded with the FBI. In February 2021, new information emerged suggesting the NYPD and FBI conspired to kill Malcolm X.

Although it's impossible to know where Malcolm X would have directed his talents, many believe that he would have worked more closely with the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Despite depictions of the two as opponents, Malcolm X shared King's commitment to freedom and equality, although they met only once in person. Just before his death, he had corresponded with King about his efforts in Selma. In addition, Malcolm X had become increasingly more pan-Africanist in his view: Before his death, he began to draw great correlations between the American oppression of Black Americans and the worldwide oppression of people of color in general. Without him, the Organization of Afro-American Unity ended.

The Black Panther Party

Like the NOI, the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, spearheaded in 1966 by Bobby Seale and Huey Newton, rejected assimilation and advocated Black power and Black liberation. The party's demands for full employment, decent education,

and affordable housing in their Ten Point Plan didn't differ greatly from the goals of many mainstream civil rights organizations. The difference was mainly in their application. Two key points of the plan included

- » **An immediate end to police brutality:** Although members of the Black Panthers often donned berets and sometimes brandished guns, the Black Panthers didn't necessarily advocate violence. Instead, they believed that Black Americans could use their inalienable right guaranteed by the Bill of Rights to bear arms to protect themselves against police brutality.
- » **Full employment:** The Black Panthers demanded that the government provide jobs for Black Americans. Employment, they believed, would improve the standard of living in Black neighborhoods.

On October 28, 1967, the arrest of Newton for allegedly killing White police officer John Frey became a turning point for the organization. Although the details are still sketchy, a jury convicted Newton of manslaughter, and he received a sentence of 2 to 15 years in prison. Convinced of Newton's innocence, the Black Panthers united in a "Free Huey" movement that turned Newton into a symbol of oppression and police brutality.

The transformation of SNCC

The appeal of Black power and the Black Panther Party became apparent to SNCC's Stokely Carmichael (later Kwame Ture), who had grown frustrated with the consequences of nonviolent tactics. Carmichael's Black Power stirrings manifested during his participation in the James Meredith March Against Fear campaign.

James Meredith, who had integrated Ole Miss in 1962 with the assistance of federal forces, proposed a lone, 220-mile walk through Mississippi in June 1966 to encourage Black people to exercise their right to vote. Beginning his journey in Memphis, Meredith was barely a day into the march when a sniper, later revealed as a KKK member, shot him as he crossed the Mississippi-Tennessee border.

King, SNCC Chairman Carmichael, and CORE's new leader Fred McKissick flocked to Meredith's bedside to get his blessing to continue the march. Meredith agreed to their proposal. As the various civil rights groups prepared to continue the march, dissension emerged. CORE and SNCC participants denounced nonviolence, proclaiming that, if struck, they would strike back. SNCC's appeal to Louisiana's Deacons for Defense and Justice, a group of armed Black men (many of them war veterans who had organized in 1964 to protect civil rights workers and activities) further demonstrated its more militant leanings. In addition, Carmichael wanted an all-Black march.

Carmichael's insistence on an all-Black march horrified the NAACP's Roy Wilkins; Carmichael's arguments that nonviolent resistance had outgrown its usefulness disturbed Wilkins even more. Both Wilkins and the National Urban League's Whitney Young believed that marching without White people and abandoning nonviolence was equivalent to suicide. Disgust for this new attitude among CORE and SNCC members prompted Wilkins and Young to leave Memphis. King stayed on the condition that CORE and SNCC participants adhere to his rule of nonviolence. Because King's presence guaranteed the media attention necessary to navigate Mississippi successfully, participants agreed.

In Greenwood, Mississippi, the nonviolent agenda changed when a SNCC member yelled "Black Power" to a crowd of Black Mississippians, and they shouted back in approval. Arrested in a June 16 rally in Greenwood, Carmichael emerged from jail and publicly revealed his newly adopted militant attitude. "We been saying 'freedom' for six years," he said, "and we ain't got nothin'. What we gonna start saying now is 'Black Power!'" As before, the crowd responded approvingly.

Carmichael went on to coauthor a book titled *Black Power* and briefly affiliated himself with the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California. Although Black people in both the North and the South had grown impatient with nonviolent resistance, race relations in the North began to take center stage.

Death of a King

Very few people doubt that the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. knew his days were numbered. The fates of other figureheads and leaders in the civil rights movement — particularly the murders of Medgar Evers and President John F. Kennedy in 1963 and Malcolm X in 1965 — greatly clarified the risk that accompanied King's work. Even after battling Alabama's notorious Bull Connor and enduring repeated jailings and assaults, King pressed on, lending his leadership and influence to various efforts, most notably in Chicago and Memphis. He seemed unfazed by or perhaps resigned to the prospect of death.

On April 4, 1968, at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, King stood alone on the second-floor balcony. At around 6 p.m., a single shot hit him in the neck. King's longtime friend Ralph David Abernathy was among the handful who immediately rushed to his side. At 7:05 p.m., not even a full hour later, doctors at St. Joseph's Hospital pronounced him dead. Before the night's end, President Johnson addressed the American public on all major networks and urged unity in this time of crisis. A national day of mourning followed.

For many Americans, especially Black Americans, more than King died on that motel balcony that fateful evening. In no fewer than 60 cities, including Chicago, Washington, D.C., and New York, Black Americans lashed out in violence as the reality of King's assassination sank in. Civil disorder was so high that as many as 40,000 regular and National Guardsmen filtered throughout the nation. Some cities adopted curfews to curtail the violence. Nationwide, an estimated 46 people died. Injuries were as high as 3,000, but authorities arrested many thousands more, mostly for looting.

Instead of canceling his scheduled appearance before a Black audience in Indianapolis, presidential hopeful Robert F. Kennedy bravely informed the crowd of King's death. According to an Indiana Historical Society blog article, Kennedy faced a stunned and weeping audience and delivered "an impassioned . . . six-minute speech on the need for compassion in the face of violence" that historians view as "one of the great extemporaneous political speeches in the modern era." You can find this article and read more of the speech by going to at <https://indianahistory.org/blog> and searching for *Robert F. Kennedy speech*.

Trying to restore hope, Kennedy told the crowd:

"We can do well in this country." We will have difficult times. We've had difficult times in the past. And we will have difficult times in the future . . . But the vast majority of White people and the vast majority of Black people in this country want to live together, want to improve the quality of our life, and want justice for all human beings that abide in our land."

White and Black people alike who witnessed the speech found it healing, and Indianapolis did not experience unrest that night.

On April 9, Jacqueline Kennedy, Vice President Hubert Humphrey, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, and other dignitaries descended on Atlanta to attend King's funeral. An estimated 100,000 people walked behind King's body during the funeral procession, and millions more watched the event on television.



American Government and Politics

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IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Recognizing the importance of the Declaration of Independence
- » Understanding the Constitution
- » Seeing how the three branches of government work

Chapter **1**

Designing a New Country

The two most important documents in the United States are the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. These two documents form the foundation of the U.S. government. The events that led up to their creation were the same events that transformed 13 British colonies into what would become the most powerful country in the world. (See Book 1, Chapter 1.)

If you understand the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the history behind them, you understand the principles of the U.S. government and know why Americans take their freedoms so seriously. In this chapter, we introduce you to both documents, filling you in on their meaning and importance.

In this chapter, we also cover the three branches of the federal government (executive, legislative, and judicial), their duties, and the important people responsible for running them. You see how the various branches share duties and check and balance each other to ensure fairness and control government power.

Announcing the Birth of a New Nation

At the time it was written, the Declaration of Independence served as an official notice to the world that a new, independent nation, the United States of America, was born. Like a birth announcement for a new baby, the Declaration notes the exact day when formal separation from England took place: July 4, 1776. We celebrate Independence Day in the United States every July 4 to mark this important anniversary.

In addition to establishing the United States as a new nation, the Declaration of Independence outlines the specific reasons the American colonists wanted to form a free country, separate and independent from England.

Leading up to the Declaration: The colonists' complaints

Between 1689 and 1763, the British kings allowed the American colonies a lot of freedom. They didn't do this because they were particularly nice guys — their energies were just needed elsewhere because England was at war with France at the time. When the war between France and England ended, King George III turned his attention back toward the American colonies. Because the war had left England with a lot of financial debt, the king thought that getting extra revenue from the colonies was a good idea. But as you may have guessed, the colonists didn't think George's idea was as good as George thought it was.

Of the many grievances the colonists had with the king, the most important problems that led them to declare their freedom and fight the Revolutionary War were the following:

- » **Taxation without representation:** Even though England required the colonists to pay hefty taxes to the British government, the colonies were not allowed to send representatives to the legislature to vote on those taxes or fight for their interests.
- » **Quartering:** Colonists were required by British law to house British soldiers in their homes.
- » **Land policy:** England restricted the colonists to settling only land located east of the Appalachian Mountains.
- » **Trade restrictions:** England forced the colonists to pay high taxes for trading with any country other than England. Of course, England also expected to pay less money for goods than the colonists would have made by trading with the rest of the world.

SEEKING THE ACTUAL DOCUMENTS

Each year, more than a million visitors flock to the Rotunda of the National Archives in Washington, D.C., to view the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. You can view the documents online at www.archives.gov.

What the Declaration says

Thomas Jefferson took 17 days to write the original Declaration of Independence. Benjamin Franklin and John Adams then helped Jefferson revise his first draft. (See Book 4, Chapter 1 for more information about Jefferson, Franklin, Adams, and other Founding Fathers.) They sent their masterpiece to the Continental Congress on July 2, 1776, and after two days of debate and more changes, the final draft of the Declaration of Independence was adopted. The Declaration of Independence announced the colonies' independence from Great Britain. See Figure 1-1.



FIGURE 1-1:
Signing of the
Declaration of
Independence.

Source: Library of Congress



TECHNICAL
STUFF

The writers made a total of 47 revisions to the Declaration of Independence before presenting it to the Continental Congress. After voting for independence on July 2, 1776, Congress then continued to improve the document, making 39 additional changes before its final adoption on July 4, 1776.

The first part of the Declaration declares the break with England and explains why the colonists felt justified in taking this important action. The second part of the Declaration lists the colonists' complaints against England's King George III (see the preceding section). The Declaration of Independence concludes that, because of the king's oppressive acts, the colonies have the right to declare themselves free and independent states.

Aside from the long list of grievances with King George III, Jefferson made two key points in the Declaration of Independence that he said were “self-evident”:

- » **That “all men are created equal” and have been given by God certain rights — namely, the right to “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” — that no one can take away.** This declaration means that anyone who lives in the United States has these rights, regardless of whether they’re a U.S. citizen.
- » **That a government exists only by the consent of the governed.** This statement means that if the citizens of a country feel that their government is not carrying out their wishes, they have the right and the duty to change or do away with that government.

The principles Jefferson set forth in the Declaration of Independence were the ideals that the Founding Fathers later incorporated into the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. These ideals appear later in the Declaration of Rights and Sentiments (1848) issued by the first women’s rights convention, Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address (1863), and the United Nation’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and they’re enshrined in the manifestos and constitutions of many nations.

The Supreme Law of the Land: The Constitution

The most important document in the United States is the U.S. Constitution, which was signed by the delegates to the Constitutional Convention on September 17, 1787. The Founding Fathers wrote the Constitution to set up and define America’s government.



REMEMBER

After fighting so hard to win their freedom in the Revolutionary War (see Book 3, Chapter 1 for more information about the revolution), the Founding Fathers wanted to ensure that this nation could never come under tyrannical rule again. They needed a system of government in which the citizens had a say in their government at the local, state, and national levels. For this reason, the Constitution was written to protect the essential “self-evident” rights that Thomas Jefferson wrote about in the Declaration of Independence. The Constitution doesn’t *give* Americans their freedoms, but rather acts to guarantee or protect those freedoms.



PROTECTIONS AT THE U.S. BORDER ARE DIFFERENT

Most of the protections guaranteed in the Constitution extend to noncitizens living in the U.S. because the protections are based on personhood rather than citizenship. However, the guarantee of such protections doesn't extend to noncitizens seeking admission to the U.S. The Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) is a foundational statute and contains many sections that define U.S. immigration law and codify the federal powers of Congress and the President related to control of immigration.

Various provisions of INA define eligibility for being admitted to the U.S., how long entrants can stay, and how they can become citizens. Also, the INA includes sections describing border protection agency powers — such as authorization to conduct warrantless searches of persons (or their personal effects) who are seeking admission to the U.S. — which create what can appear to be exceptions to Constitutional guarantees.

The U.S. Constitution has endured for more than 200 years since its signing in 1787, even through many changes in the country and the world. The Constitution is known as the *supreme law of the land* for these reasons:

- » No other laws enacted (at the state or federal level) may contradict any of the principles set forth in the Constitution.
- » Everyone must follow the rule of law set forth in the Constitution, including the leaders and government. No one is above the law.
- » The Constitution guarantees the rights and freedoms of all people living in the United States, whether or not they are U.S. citizens.

What the Constitution says

Through the years, the Constitution has been the subject of countless debates. To this day, legal experts fight over the constitutionality of certain laws. People disagree over how to interpret the Constitution when it comes to important issues like gun control, the place of religion in government, and even the immigration and naturalization process. Politicians argue about the Founding Fathers' intent when they wrote the document.

Even though many scholars and legal experts have studied it, the Constitution is essentially quite simple, based on the following principles:

- » **Popular sovereignty:** The Constitution opens with a declaration of self-government: “We the People.” The United States is a government by the people, for the people. The ultimate political authority does not reside in the government or in any single government official; instead, the ultimate political authority rests with the people. The people have the right to change or abolish their government or to amend their Constitution, and no one can take that right away from them. The Founding Fathers thought this principle was important to protect Americans from ever coming under tyrannical rule, like they had been under King George III.
- » **Rule of law:** The U.S. government is guided by a set of laws rather than by any individual or group of people, and the government possesses only the powers that are specifically granted to it in the Constitution. This means that if something isn’t in the Constitution, the government doesn’t have the authority to do it. Designed to protect individual rights and liberties, the rule of law calls for both individuals and the government to obey the law. In other words, the government is as accountable to the law as any individual. The rule of law prevents any one person or political group from gaining enough power that they can overpower the rights of others.
- » **Separation of powers and a system of checks and balances:** The Constitution establishes that no part of the U.S. government has final authority. The Founding Fathers wanted to make sure that no one branch of government could ever dominate over the other two branches. Although the separation of powers between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches (see the description of these three branches in section “How the U.S. Government Works” later in the chapter) is one of the basic laws of the Constitution, there are many places in which the responsibilities and powers of government branches intentionally overlap. This is known as the system of checks and balances, because one branch is always checking and balancing the activities of the others. Here are two examples:
 - **Congress (legislative branch) checks the power of the president (executive branch).** Although the president has the power to appoint federal judges, ambassadors, and other high government officials, the U.S. Senate must confirm those appointments before they can go into effect.
 - **The president checks the power of Congress.** That is, the president has the power to *veto* or reject laws that Congress enacts. (*Veto* means “I forbid” in Latin.) Congress may, however, override the president’s veto with a two-thirds vote of both houses (the House of Representatives and the Senate).



THE COURT IS SUPREME . . . IN SOME WAYS

Through practice, the Supreme Court has become the chief interpreter of the Constitution. The court's job is to examine laws that are challenged on the basis of being unconstitutional. If the Supreme Court finds the law in question to be in accordance with the Constitution, the law stands. If, on the other hand, the Supreme Court rules that the law goes beyond the powers granted to the government by the Constitution, it cannot be considered a law because it goes against the supreme law of the land. The court's implied powers became more official in 1803 with the historic *Marbury v. Madison* decision, in which the court assumed the authority to declare acts of Congress and the president unconstitutional.

- » **Federalism:** The Constitution created a *federal* system of government, meaning that the government's power is shared between the national government and the individual state governments. Under the U.S. Constitution, the federal government reserves for itself specific powers, such as the power to print money, declare war, create an army, and make treaties. The Constitution delegates certain powers to the state governments such as to provide schooling and education, protection (police), safety (fire departments), and a driver's license, and to approve zoning and land use.
- » **Judicial review:** The judicial branch reviews laws, explains laws, resolves disputes (disagreements), and decides whether a law goes against the Constitution. Although the Constitution makes no specific references to the power of the Supreme Court to check abuses of the legislative and executive branches, by the early 1800s the court had been called upon to review the constitutionality of both federal and state laws and acts. The right to hold laws unconstitutional actually precedes the signing of the Constitution; some colonial judges had invalidated state laws on the grounds that they violated that state's constitution.

Constitutional articles

The original body of the United States Constitution consists of seven articles or sections, each of which discuss a different aspect of the government or rules for how the country is to be run. The following list gives an overview of those articles:

- » **Article I:** Establishes the legislative branch of the U.S. government (the House of Representatives and the Senate) and provides rules for how representatives and senators are to be elected, their duties, and the limits of their powers in government. The primary duty of the Congress is to make federal law.

- » **Article II:** Establishes the executive branch of the U.S. government (the presidency), outlines the requirements for holding office, and provides details on how the president is to be elected and the scope of presidential power. The primary duty of the executive branch is to enforce laws.
- » **Article III:** Establishes the judicial branch of the U.S. government with the forming of the Supreme Court and outlines its judiciary powers. The primary duty of the judicial branch is to explain the laws of the United States.
- » **Article IV:** Deals with matters of the individual states, including how new states can be admitted to the Union, the government's guarantee to states, and rules for how the states should legally interact with one another.
- » **Article V:** Establishes the procedure for amending or changing the constitution).
- » **Article VI:** Outlines the legal status of the Constitution. This includes the supremacy of federal law over state law; and the oath of service, which binds legislators, executives, and judicial officers of the United States. Article VI also outlines the responsibilities and procedures for paying off financial debts the states accumulated before the signing of the Constitution.
- » **Article VII:** States that ratification by a minimum of nine states is enough to legally establish the Constitution between those states.

The Bill of Rights

Even before the U.S. Constitution was ratified, people began talking about how to improve it. The Founding Fathers believed they had written the document in such a way that individual rights required no express protection. But many people in 1789 were concerned about protecting certain freedoms and rights that the original document neglected to specifically mention. After all, they had just fought the Revolutionary War — they knew what it was like to *not* have rights, and they didn't want to give away the freedoms they had fought so hard for. The promise to add a Bill of Rights to the Constitution is what helped get the document ratified in the first place.

On December 15, 1791, the first ten amendments — also known as the Bill of Rights — were added to the United States Constitution, thereby guaranteeing important rights to both citizens and noncitizens alike. The Bill of Rights specifically restricts government invasion of certain individual liberties and prohibits the establishment of any official religion. Nearly two-thirds of the Bill of Rights is devoted to safeguarding the rights of those suspected or accused of crimes.

Here's an explanation of the ten amendments that make up the Bill of Rights:

- » **First Amendment:** Guarantees the rights of freedom of speech, religion, press, peaceable assembly, and the right to formally petition the government. This important amendment prevents the government from censoring citizens or the press and allows citizens to peaceably protest government policies and hold their government accountable. It also safeguards freedom from governmental religious persecution.
- » **Second Amendment:** Guarantees the right of the people to bear arms.
- » **Third Amendment:** States that the government is not allowed to house soldiers in private homes during peacetime without the homeowner's permission.
- » **Fourth Amendment:** Guarantees the right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures. In other words, the government cannot search or seize a person's property without a warrant — an official document, issued by a judge, that confirms the government has a legitimate reason to conduct the search.
- » **Fifth Amendment:** States that a person cannot be tried twice for the same crime and cannot be compelled to testify against themselves.
- » **Sixth Amendment:** Gives a person charged with a crime the right to a fair and speedy public trial by an impartial jury, to confront witnesses against them, and to have legal representation. This means that even if the accused can't afford a lawyer, one will be provided to them free of charge.
- » **Seventh Amendment:** Guarantees a trial by jury in most federal civil lawsuits.
- » **Eighth Amendment:** Prohibits excessive or unusual bail or fines or cruel and unusual punishment.
- » **Ninth Amendment:** States that the people have rights other than those specifically mentioned in the Constitution. In other words, just because the Constitution didn't specifically mention it doesn't mean that it's not your right.
- » **Tenth Amendment:** Says that any power not given to the federal government by the Constitution is a power either of the states or of the people.

Constitutional amendments

As time passed, Congress found more reasons to amend the Constitution and adopt new rules for the country to live by. Of all the thousands of amendment proposals put before Congress, only 33 have managed to obtain the necessary two-thirds approval vote. Of those 33, only 27 received approval from at least three-fourths

of the state legislatures. These majorities are required for amendments to gain approval.

Here's a summary of the rest of the constitutional amendments:

- » **11th Amendment (adopted 1798):** Prevents citizens of a state or foreign country from suing another state in federal court.
- » **12th Amendment (adopted 1804):** The electoral college votes for the president and vice president on the same party ticket.
- » **13th Amendment (adopted 1865):** Ended slavery in the United States.
- » **14th Amendment (adopted 1868):** Guarantees the citizenship of all people born or naturalized in the United States. This amendment also deals with matters of public debt and says that a given state's population determines the number of representatives it can send to Congress.
- » **15th Amendment (adopted 1870):** Guarantees the right to vote to male citizens of any race.
- » **16th Amendment (adopted 1913):** Gives Congress the right to collect a federal income tax.
- » **17th Amendment (adopted 1917):** Guarantees the people the right to directly elect senators and sets up rules for Senate terms as well as how to fill Senate vacancies that occur in the middle of a senator's term.
- » **18th Amendment (adopted 1919):** Made it illegal to produce or sell liquor in the United States. The 18th Amendment holds the distinction of being the only amendment to be repealed (see the 21st Amendment, later in this list).
- » **19th Amendment (adopted 1920):** Guarantees any citizen the right to vote.
- » **20th Amendment (adopted 1933):** Changed the date the president takes office from March to January, as well as set forth requirements for Senate assembly.
- » **21st Amendment (adopted 1933):** The 21st Amendment repealed the 18th Amendment, which was the prohibition on liquor. (The only way the Constitution provides for repealing an amendment is to pass another amendment.)
- » **22nd Amendment (adopted 1951):** Established a two-term limit for the president.
- » **23rd Amendment (adopted 1961):** Gave residents of the District of Columbia the right to vote in presidential and vice-presidential elections.
- » **24th Amendment (adopted 1964):** Guarantees citizens the right to vote for president, vice president, and members of Congress without having to pay a voting tax.

- » **25th Amendment (adopted 1967):** Establishes the presidential line of succession.
- » **26th Amendment (adopted 1971):** Gives the right to vote to citizens at least 18 years of age.
- » **27th Amendment (adopted 1992):** Says that no law that changes the salary of senators or representatives can take effect until an election of representatives has a chance to intervene.

How the U.S. Government Works

The idea of *self-government* is in the first three words of the Constitution: “We the People” begins what is commonly known as the Preamble to the Constitution. A government for the people, by the people is a cornerstone principle of the U.S. Constitution (described in the section “The Supreme Law of the Land: The Constitution,” earlier in the chapter). The brilliant insight the Founding Fathers displayed when structuring the U.S. government has allowed the Constitution to prevail despite the many changes and transitions in the world.

The three-branch system of government (executive, legislative, and judicial) outlined in the U.S. Constitution accomplishes three important things:

- » Divides the duties and responsibilities of the federal government
- » Keeps the federal government from ever gaining enough power to overthrow the will of the individual states
- » Constantly checks and balances the separation of governmental power

The duties and functions of the executive branch

The executive branch comprises the president, the vice president, the executive departments, and independent agencies. Each part of the executive branch has specific powers and duties, as outlined in the following sections.

The president

The presidency is the chief executive office of the U.S. executive branch. The president is responsible for enforcing federal laws and treaties and administers

executive power through the departments and agencies under the presidential cabinet secretaries. The president is the commander-in-chief of the military, signs bills passed by Congress (the legislative branch) into law, and has the power to forbid a bill (from becoming law by *vetoing* it. (But Congress can vote to override the veto with a two-thirds majority.)

To become president of the United States, you must be a natural-born citizen, be at least 35 years old by the time you will serve, and have lived in the United States at least 14 years over the course of your life.

The vice president

Occupying the second highest office in the U.S., the vice president stands ready to assume the duties of president if the current president dies, becomes disabled, or is otherwise unable to serve. The vice president also presides over the Senate and casts the deciding vote in cases of a tie. The office of vice president carries the same age, citizenship, and residency requirements as the president (see the preceding section).

The Cabinet and executive departments

The president's Cabinet advises the president. The U.S. vice president and the secretaries (heads) of the fifteen federal departments carry out government policies that affect nearly every aspect of our daily lives. The heads of the executive departments, usually called *secretaries*, make up the president's *Cabinet*, or official group of advisors:

- » **Secretary of Agriculture** (www.usda.gov) manages the nation's food supply by, among other duties, helping American farmers and regulating food-safety laws.
- » **Secretary of Commerce** (www.commerce.gov) deals with issues of trade, employment, and economic growth.
- » **Secretary of Defense** (www.defense.gov) manages the U.S. military and is responsible for protecting the country.
- » **Secretary of Education** (www.ed.gov) manages and regulates schools and other educational institutions).
- » **Secretary of Energy** (www.energy.gov) oversees matters of energy including conserving energy, protecting America's oil reserves, and planning for future needs.
- » **Secretary of Health and Human Services** (www.hhs.gov) advises and protects Americans on matters of health.

- » **Secretary of Homeland Security** (www.dhs.gov) protects the country against further terrorist attacks, including managing most components of immigration.
- » **Secretary of Housing and Urban Development** (www.hud.gov) helps Americans find housing and regulates fair housing practices.
- » **Secretary of Labor** (www.dol.gov) protects America's workforce by enforcing labor laws and regulating wages and benefits.
- » **Secretary of State** (www.state.gov) handles matters of international diplomacy, issues visas, and manages U.S. embassies and consulates.
- » **Secretary of the Interior** (www.doi.gov) manages publicly held U.S. lands.
- » **Secretary of the Treasury** (www.treasury.gov) is responsible for printing currency and managing the country's finances.
- » **Secretary of Transportation** (www.transportation.gov) regulates transportation safety as well as maintains and oversees the nation's transportation systems.
- » **Secretary of Veterans Affairs** (www.va.gov) administers benefits to America's military veterans.
- » **Attorney General** (www.justice.gov) acts as the country's law-enforcement agency.
- » **Vice President** (www.whitehouse.gov) as the second-highest officer in the executive branch of the U.S. federal government, the Vice President convenes cabinet meetings when the president is unavailable and is a statutory member of the National Security Council.



Although the heads of most of the departments are known as secretaries, like the Secretary of Defense or the Secretary of Agriculture, the head of the Department of Justice is known as the Attorney General.

Independent agencies

Dozens of executive branch independent agencies serve very specific and sometimes even temporary needs the government may have. Examples include the Commission on Civil Rights, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the National Labor Relations Board, the Federal Election Commission (FEC), the Small Business Administration (SBA), and the United States Postal Service (USPS). These agencies change according to the country's current needs and circumstances.

The duties and functions of the legislative branch

The legislative branch of the U.S. government consists of the Senate and the House of Representatives, collectively known as *Congress*. The Senate and House are primarily responsible for making the federal laws that govern the U.S. Sometimes they work separately, but they also share many duties and responsibilities.

The U.S. Congress

The two houses of Congress have some very specific and separate responsibilities (covered in the following sections). However, the Constitution declares that both the Senate and the House of Representatives share duties related to the following:

- » Regulating money and printing currency, borrowing money on behalf of the government, and levying and collecting taxes.
- » Regulating trade, both among states and with foreign countries.
- » Regulating the system of weights and measures.
- » Maintaining the defense of the nation, maintaining the U.S. military, and declaring war.
- » Making laws regarding naturalization.
- » Establishing post offices.
- » Passing laws to govern the District of Columbia (D.C.)_ because D.C. isn't a state per se (so it can't pass its own laws), but houses the federal government instead. The Home Rule Act of 1973 did establish a local government that can pass laws for D.C., but Congress still maintains oversight.

The Constitution also lists some things that Congress may *never* do, specifically:

- » Tax exports or pass trade laws that do not treat all the states equally
- » Spend tax money without a law that authorizes that spending
- » Authorize any titles of nobility
- » Pass any law that punishes someone for an act that was legal when the act was committed or that takes away a person's right to trial in court

Congressional members

Each state sends two senators to the Senate; currently, there are 100 senators because the U.S. has 50 states. Each senator represents all the people of their state, not any specific district. A senator must be at least 30 years old, be a resident of the state they represent, and have been a U.S. citizen for at least nine years. Elected for six-year terms, in accordance with the 17th Amendment, senators currently have no limit to the number of terms they may serve.

The U.S. census, taken once every ten years to count the inhabitants of all states, determines the number of congressional representatives a state may send to Congress. Each state, regardless of how small its population, is allowed at least one representative. Most states have more representatives because they have more people, and these states are divided into districts, with each member of the House representing their own district rather than the state as a whole. Currently, 435 voting members serve in the House of Representatives. Elected for a two-year term, representatives currently have no limit on the number of terms they may serve. To qualify to be a representative, a person must be at least 25 years old, be a resident of the state they represent, and have been a U.S. citizen for at least seven years.

Congressional leadership

Elected by the House of Representatives, the *Speaker of the House* presides over the House, leads the majority party, and represents their congressional district. The business of the House is supported by the Majority Leader, Minority Leader, and assistant leaders called *party whips*. The Speaker of the House is second in line to succeed the President, after the Vice President. Find out more about House leadership at www.house.gov/leadership.

NONVOTING MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The House of Representatives has six nonvoting members, one representing the District of Columbia and one for each of the five U.S. territories: American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. A seventh delegate representing the Cherokee Nation has been proposed but not yet seated, and an eighth delegate from the Choctaw Nation is named per the 1830 Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek but has not been formally proposed or seated. As with voting members, delegates are elected every two years, while the resident commissioner of Puerto Rico is elected every four years.

Elected by the Senate, the *President Pro Tempore* is the second-highest-ranking official of the United States Senate. During the Vice President's absence, the President Pro Tempore is empowered to preside over Senate sessions. The business of the Senate is supported by the Majority Leader, Minority Leader, and party whips. The President Pro Tempore is third in line to succeed the President, after the Vice President and the Speaker of the House. Find out more about Senate leadership at www.senate.gov/senators/leadership.htm.

How laws are passed

In spite of all their shared and separate duties, Congress spends most of its time passing (or trying to pass) laws. New federal laws can start in either the Senate or the House of Representatives. The procedure of getting a law passed may seem complex, but it's all part of the system of checks and balances designed to keep the country fair and democratic. Before a law can pass, a lot of people have the chance to discuss it, ask questions about it and its impact, and change or amend it if they think that's necessary.



REMEMBER

The process begins when a senator or representative introduces a bill that they want to become law; however, only representatives (not senators) are allowed to introduce tax or budget bills. Of course, long before the bill is introduced in Congress, citizen activists and political groups have usually been hard at work to gain support for their causes, bringing the issue to their representatives' attention.

Congressional committees

Congressional committees meet regularly to discuss policies, legislation, and funding related to their respective areas. Subcommittees regularly meet under the direction of the standing committee. Select committees convene temporarily to work on a specific issue. The House and Senate party leadership assigns members to committees. The Chair of each committee is reserved for a member of the majority party.

Congressional committees include

- » **Standing committees:** Permanent committees that have specific subjects such as appropriations or veteran affairs.
- » **Special or select committees:** Limited-time committees created for particular purposes such as a study of aging as related to issues of older Americans.
- » **Joint committees:** Composed of members from both houses of Congress, these committees are task-specific and can be either permanent (Joint Committee on the Library, which oversees the Library of Congress) or temporary (Joint Committee on Deficit Reduction).

The duties of the judicial branch

Made up of the system of federal courts, the judicial branch of government reviews laws, explains laws, resolves disputes (disagreements), and decides whether a law goes against the intent of the Constitution. Federal court duties include

- » Explaining the meaning of the Constitution, the laws of the United States, and its treaties
- » Settling legal disagreements between citizens of different states, or between or among two or more states
- » Settling legal questions between the states and the federal government, between individuals and the federal government, and between states and foreign governments and/or their citizens
- » Naturalizing U.S. citizens

The federal court system

The entire federal court system makes up the judicial branch. The court system is *hierarchical*, meaning that each court has greater power than, and can overturn decisions made by, the court below it. The courts in the federal court system include the following:

- » **The Supreme Court:** The highest court of the land. A Supreme Court ruling constitutes the final decision on a case.
- » **Circuit courts of appeals:** The country's 11 circuit courts routinely hear appeals from lower courts when their participants believe the lower courts' decisions to be unjust.
- » **District courts:** The lowest of the federal courts, district courts determine rulings for people accused of breaking federal laws.
- » **Special courts:** Congress has also established some special courts that have very specific and limited jurisdiction: Court of Claims, Customs Court, Court of Customs and Patent Appeals, and Court of Military Appeals.

The ultimate constitutional authority: The Supreme Court

Nine judges (or *justices*, as they're called when talking about the Supreme Court) preside over the highest court of the land. One of the justices, known as the *Chief*

Justice, acts as the court's leader. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court since 2005 (and at the time of this publication) is John Roberts. The Supreme Court can overturn decisions made by lower courts as well as declare state or federal laws *unconstitutional* or against the supreme law of the land. If a majority of the justices feel that a law disagrees with the Constitution, it must be abolished. The Supreme Court's decision is final.



TIP

Most of the Supreme Court's cases are *appellate* cases, meaning the participants are *appealing* a decision made by the lower courts that they believe to be unfair. The only cases that actually originate in the Supreme Court are cases involving foreign diplomats.

IMPORTANT SUPREME COURT CASES

If you want to find out more about the U.S. Supreme Court, I suggest that you check out this excellent resource: VOA Learning English: The U.S. Supreme Court (learning.english.voanews.com/p/6985.html). This series explains what the Supreme Court is, why it is important (and disputed) in American culture, how the justices ruled on eight important cases in modern U.S. history, and how those cases impact us today:

- Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 1954: Is racial segregation legal in public education?
- New York Times v. Sullivan, 1964: Can the media criticize government officials?
- Miranda v. Arizona, 1966: What are your rights if you get arrested?
- Loving v. Virginia, 1967: Is interracial marriage legal in every state?
- Lemon v. Kurtzman, 1971: What does "separation of church and state mean"?
- Roe v. Wade, 1973: Does a woman have a right to an abortion?
- Texas v. Johnson, 1989: Is burning the American flag legal?
- Obergefell v. Hodges, 2015: Is gay marriage legal in every state?

- » Looking at elections and voting
- » Exploring political parties
- » Examining functions of political parties
- » Checking out interest groups

Chapter 2

Elections, Political Parties, and Interest Groups

Democracies are based on the concept of popular will. In other words, it is the people who make policies, either directly or indirectly. In a representative democracy (which describes most democracies today), elected officials represent the public and make policies on their behalf. Thus, elections provide the major link between government and the people.

Political parties and interest groups form additional links between the government and the people. They facilitate political participation and aggregate interests, which allows the public to participate in policy making and hold office holders accountable.

In this chapter, you explore popular elections, political parties, and interest groups to show how they help make the democracy that exists in the U.S. possible.

Studying Elections

Elections provide the major link between people and government in a democratic society. Through elections, people can hold their government accountable as well as change its policies. Elections, therefore, have two purposes: (1) to hold their government accountable and change it; (2) to initiate policy change if so desired. However, for the elections link to work, people have to vote, and they have to know whom to vote for.

Typing electoral systems



REMEMBER

When studying elections, you can analyze two major electoral systems. They are the single-member district electoral system and proportional representation. In the *single-member district electoral system*, the person who wins the most votes in a district is elected to office. In *proportional representation*, seats are allocated based on the proportion of the vote a party receives.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Authoritarian regimes also hold elections. They're designed to bring about international legitimacy and increase support back home. China regularly holds elections, even though only communist party-approved candidates are allowed on the ballot.

Determining the vote

When studying voting behavior in democracies, you can discover several characteristics that determine the way citizens' vote. Among the factors influencing voting, the following stand out:

- » **Age:** One of the major determinants of the vote today is age. Turnout has a tendency to increase with age. Voters in most democracies are middle aged or older, whereas the young are least likely to vote.
- » **Gender:** One of the hottest topics in political science is the gender gap. Who is more likely to vote, women or men? There is a gender gap, and interestingly, it's country-specific. In France, for example, men are more likely to vote than women. In the U.S., on the other hand, women are more likely to vote than men.
- » **Education:** The level of education a person achieves is another major factor in determining voter turnout. Well-educated people are more likely to vote, and a good education results in people being more aware and informed about issues. They also know about candidates and their stances on issues. They not only know how to participate but want to participate. A person's education level is the most important determinant of the vote today.



TIP

» **Income:** Directly related to education is income. Studies have shown that high-income people are more likely to vote, for a variety of reasons, including the ones mentioned in the previous bullet.

» **Partisan identification:** Partisan identification refers to a person's attachment to a political party. Strong partisans habitually vote for their party regardless of candidates running for office. Partisan identification is usually imprinted on young adults by their parents through political socialization. If both parents possess the same partisan identification, the child has an 80 percent chance of having his parents' partisan identification. Strong partisans turn out to vote in high numbers. So the higher the number of strong partisans in a country, the higher the turnout will be.

Partisan identification was never very high in the U.S. For this reason, the U.S. sees more crossover voting and ticket splitting than other democracies.

» **Religion and class:** Both religion and class (upper, middle, working, lower) used to be major determinants of the vote. However, they have declined in importance in recent years. In the U.S., for example, Catholics used to form a solid voting bloc for the Democratic Party. Today the Catholic vote is evenly split between the two major parties. With fewer Europeans and Americans professing to be deeply religious, religion is less of a predictor of the vote today compared to the past.

Class is in the same boat as religion. In most democracies, fewer people identify with a specific social class, and class voting is down in every industrialized democracy.

Political Parties — Necessary for Democracy

For nearly a century, a debate has raged within the field of political science over whether political parties are necessary for a democracy to function properly. In 1942, E. E. Schattschneider claimed in his classical study *Party Government* (Routledge) that political parties created democracy, and modern democracy is unthinkable except in terms of parties. Political scientist Samuel Huntington agrees with Schattschneider, claiming that parties are found in every working democracy and are necessary to organize participation, aggregate interest, and serve as the link between society and the government.

According to these viewpoints, political parties are necessary because they act as a link between the government and the people. By supporting and voting for

political parties, people can have some input on political decisions and feel represented. This feeling will make them more likely to support government.

This chapter assumes that Schattschneider's and Huntington's viewpoints are correct and that every democracy in the world — including the U.S. — needs a fully developed and functioning party system.

Defining a political party

What is a political party? Former U.S. President James Madison gives a widely used definition of a political party in *Federalist Paper No. 10*. According to Madison, a party or, as he calls it, *faction*, can be defined as

“A number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or a minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse or passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens or to the permanent aggregate interest of the community.”

Modern definitions of political parties vary. First, some political scientists define a political party as a group that seeks to elect candidates to public office by supplying them with a label by which they're known to the electorate. Anthony Downs provides another and more detailed definition of political parties, stating that political parties are

“A team of men (and women) seeking to control the governing apparatus by gaining office in a duly constituted election.”



REMEMBER

Both definitions agree on two major characteristics that political parties have to meet.

- » Political parties want to elect people to public office.
- » Political parties provide a label or cue to their supporters that facilitates the contesting of elections.

When examining political parties in a democracy, political scientists analyze a political party in three different ways. V. O. Key, Jr. first suggested this in his seminal work *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups* (Crowell). Key urged political scientists to differentiate between political parties and other groups — such as interest groups — by recognizing that political parties are structures composed of the following three components.

- » **The party in the electorate:** The party in the electorate includes all the individuals who identify with a political party and support the party on Election Day.
- » **The party as an organization:** It analyzes the party's structure at the national, state, or local level. For example, political scientists can study a political party's structure by focusing on the number of national offices, their staff, budgets, and rules of behavior for party officials. In addition, the party's organizational view includes an analysis of the party's involvement in the selection of candidates.
- » **The party in government:** This third and final component of political parties consists of elected party officeholders. This includes executives, members of parliaments or congresses, as well as state legislators and local officeholders if they exist.



REMEMBER

Political parties are usually regulated by constitutions found in democracies. In other words, the constitution of a democracy provides political parties with a blueprint of how to organize, how to recruit members, and how to select candidates for office. This kind of regulation is absent in the U.S., as explained in the next section.

Recognizing how political parties differ in the U.S.

The U.S. differs when it comes to regulating political parties. Unlike other democratic constitutions, such as the German or French constitution, political parties aren't mentioned in or regulated by the U.S. Constitution. The U.S. Founding Fathers believed that political parties were a source of corruption and division. In their eyes, parties not only divided the newly founded country along partisan lines but also prevented the common person from judging issues on their own.

George Washington believed that political parties were so dangerous that he warned against them in his Farewell Address in 1796. This negative attitude toward political parties has persisted in the U.S., and many Americans still perceive political parties as a necessary evil and source of corruption.



TIP

With political parties not mentioned or regulated at the national level, the states had to step in. So today, state constitutions, not the U.S. Constitution, regulate political parties in the U.S.

Dealing with party systems

When studying political parties globally, political scientists distinguish between several types of political party systems. Party systems differ by how many parties are active in the system and whether these parties have a legitimate shot at winning office. They are classified in the following way:

- » **One-party system:** One-party systems are usually found in authoritarian and totalitarian societies. For example, the Soviet Union had a one-party system in which only one party, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, was legal and was allowed to run candidates for office. The party further controlled every aspect of government and the economy. China is an example of this today.
- » **Two-party system:** Two-party systems are found in many democracies, including the U.S. and Great Britain. In a two-party system, only two parties have a legitimate chance of winning office. There are other or third parties, but they can't win office. They act as a valve for discontentment, and if they advocate popular policies, these policies are taken over by the two major parties, in turn destroying the third party. A good example is the Socialist Party of the U.S., which saw most of its platform adopted by the Democratic Party in the 1930s, thus destroying it.
- » **Multiparty system:** Multiparty systems are the most widely found form of party system today. They have several parties competing, and all of them are strong enough to win seats. This situation results in coalition governments, at times unstable, and usually produces moderate policies by the government. Italy and Denmark are examples of multiparty systems.

Causing different party systems

Electoral law within a country can impact the party system a country possesses. For example, the U.S. has had a two-party system for most of its history because of American electoral law. The U.S. uses *single-member district electoral law* (see the section “Typing electoral systems,” earlier in this chapter). This type of electoral law is simple: The candidate who wins a majority of the vote wins office. For example, the U.S. is divided into 435 congressional districts. Whoever wins the most votes in a district in a general election is elected to office.

At the same time, this type of electoral law discriminates against third or minor parties. Even if a third party manages to get 20 percent of the vote, it won't be able to gain any seats in Congress. Only the two major parties have a legitimate chance of winning a majority of the vote in each district. Single-member district electoral law is the major reason countries have a two-party system.

Most of the rest of the democratic world, especially Europe, uses proportional representation. In a proportional electoral system, political parties receive seats in legislatures based on the proportion of the vote they receive nationwide in an election. For example, if a political party receives 20 percent of the vote, it will receive 20 percent of the seats in the legislature. This type of electoral law creates many smaller or third parties, because they know that they'll receive seats in a parliament even if they don't win a majority of the vote or even come in second or third. In turn, a multiparty system, where more than two parties are represented in a legislature, results.

A second determinant of a party system is the structure of parties themselves. In a two-party system, political parties are all-encompassing, which means that they

» **Aren't very ideological or extreme and represent a plethora of political viewpoints.** For example, in the U.S., the Republican Party is open to both liberal and conservative Republicans. Being open to all viewpoints on major political issues forces political parties to constantly bargain, mediate, and then compromise within the party itself. This results in moderate policies, acceptable to all factions within the party, in turn reflecting the moderate, nonideological nature of the American electorate.

» **Are very flexible and can easily absorb popular issues of the day,** especially if they were brought forward by minor or third parties. Not only do the all-encompassing parties absorb the issues but they also absorb the supporters of third parties. For example, the Democratic Party absorbed progressive issues such as the creation of a welfare state and union rights from the Socialist Party in the 1930s. This resulted in socialist voters supporting the Democratic Party and the subsequent decline of the Socialist Party in the U.S.

In comparison, in Europe, each faction within the Republican Party — conservative, moderate, and liberal — would have its own political party. This would allow each faction to pursue more extreme policies, not having to bargain and compromise with a more moderate faction within the party.



Classifying political parties

When studying political parties, political scientists classify them into cadre and mass parties.

» **Cadre parties** are decentralized, with real power vested at the local level, and led only at the national level by informal committees. Cadre parties have no dues-paying mass membership, and their functions are purely electoral. In other words, they're in it to win elections at all cost. A cadre or electoral party

has only one goal in mind: to win office. Its policies tend to be moderate, because it has to appeal to a large segment of society, and therefore rarely supports radical change. Both the Democratic and Republican parties in the U.S. are cadre parties.

» **Mass parties**, found mostly in Europe, are very centralized. Power is vested in a small leadership group, which runs the party with an iron fist. Mass parties have a large dues-paying membership, which can run in the millions. Their main purpose is not to win elections but to stay true to their beliefs (ideology). Mass parties would rather lose elections than compromise on issues. After winning an election, mass parties tend to be very radical and uncompromising in nature. The British Labour Party is a good example of a mass party today.



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A third type of party is usually found in authoritarian or totalitarian societies. It's called a *devotee party*. A devotee party is organized around one person, usually a charismatic dictator or strongman. The National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP), which was built around Adolf Hitler, is an example. In societies that are not authoritarian or totalitarian, avid supporters and admirers also can rally around a person who has an especially strong personality; in the U.S., examples include Presidents Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Donald J. Trump. These groups of supporters are sometimes labeled as a personality cult, but political and social analysts don't always agree on the exact definition or characteristics of such groups.

Seeing How Parties Function within a Democracy

Many people consider political parties to be essential for a democracy to function well. To explore the functions that political parties perform in a democracy, consider these points:

» **Political parties are a major determinant of the vote in democracies through partisan identification.** The concept of partisan identification is psychological in nature. Studies have shown that most voters in a democracy have a psychological attachment to a political party and that this attachment determines how people vote. Therefore, partisan identification — whether identifying as a Republican or Democrat in the U.S. or as a Conservative or Socialist in Great Britain — determines how people vote. Voters vote conservative not because they necessarily know about conservative stances on issues but because they identify with a conservative party.



REMEMBER

Independents are voters who don't identify with a political party. *Partisans* are voters who identify with a political party.

- » **Political parties function to provide *political socialization***, which refers to the process of how people acquire their political beliefs and values. The type of political beliefs and values people hold shapes how they act within their political system. People acquire their political beliefs through *agents of political socialization*. By socializing voters, political parties are an agent of political socialization in many countries.



REMEMBER

Political parties have an interest in instilling political values into the public. They can create lifelong supporters who will support the party during good and bad times. However, to become an agent of political socialization, political parties have to have close contact with the voters in a society, and the public has to perceive parties as being important. Political parties, therefore, organize meetings, provide entertainment such as party picnics, and even organize travel for members. In other words, parties have to have contact with the average person.

- » **Political parties first recruit and then nominate candidates for political office.** Parties attempt to recruit the strongest possible candidate to run for office to enhance their chances of winning office. Next, the party nominates the candidate and then runs their campaign for office by providing campaign funds and a staff. This setup gives the party control over the candidate, enabling the party to punish the candidate for deviating from the party line by denying them renomination, which would ultimately end the candidate's political career.
- » **Political parties mobilize voters, especially on Election Day.** Political parties try to get people to vote, initiating contacting with voters by calling them, stopping by their homes, or texting or emailing them. Staff and volunteers for the party make these contacts on Election Day and weeks before an election to make sure that voters will go out and vote.



REMEMBER

INTRODUCING THE DIRECT PRIMARY

Although American political parties performed the function of recruiting and nominating candidates a century and a half ago, times have changed. With the introduction of the *direct primary*, candidates today don't need the party anymore in the U.S. to win nomination for public office. They can recruit and nominate themselves and even run their own campaign if they have the necessary resources. The result has been nonparty-backed candidates who have upset party establishment favorites in primaries and weakened party discipline in institutions such as Congress. The direct primary is an election that allows the public, and not political parties, to pick a party's nominee for office.



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POLITICAL INFORMATION IN THE EARLY U.S.

Political parties are major sources of political information in most democracies, with the exception of the U.S. In the early years of the republic, the situation was quite different. The two major parties, the Federalists and the Democratic-Republicans, published their own newspapers, providing their supporters with information, albeit skewed in nature. Today, neither party publishes newspapers or runs a news channel. At the same time, American parties do provide voters with a limited amount of information, usually during election time. Through television or radio commercials, pamphlets, or even debates, the parties make the public aware of how they stand on the most important issues of the day.

» **Political parties provide the voters with information they can use to make decisions on Election Day.** For this reason, political parties formulate ideas and propose policies and programs to the voters in their *party platforms* — a document that outlines a party's policies and principles. In other words, the party platform presents proposed policies to the voters. Voters then are supposed to study the party platform and base their vote on the party's proposals. Although political parties create platforms outlining their policy proposals in every democracy, most voters don't bother to read the party platforms.

» **Political parties, along with interest groups, function to provide *interest aggregation*,** which is the act of joining with like-minded citizens to acquire political power. (See the section "Interest Groups: Influencing the Government," later in this chapter.)



REMEMBER

Most citizens in democracies don't possess a lot of political power by themselves. For example, if an individual travels to Paris to meet with a French senator to discuss policy, the senator likely wouldn't agree to meet with them. However, if the individual presents a petition, signed by thousands of potential voters, the situation changes. Instead of presenting only one interest, the individual now represents the interest of thousands, and a representative will meet with and take those people's interests into account. Interest aggregation usually comes about through a political party or specific interest groups.

Interest Groups: Influencing the Government

Interest groups today have become major players in democratic politics. An *interest group* is an organization that seeks to influence public policy. Interest groups attempt to influence all branches of government — the legislative, the executive, and the judiciary — to pass policies favorable to their cause and their members. (Chapter 1 of this minibook delves into the three branches of government.) Interest groups also block policies that would harm their cause, and they actively seek new members and supporters to increase their political clout, in turn increasing political participation.



TECHNICAL
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The U.S. leads the world in the number of interest groups, and in no other democracy have interest groups become as influential. Americans join interest groups to influence policy making at the local, state, or national level. When touring the U.S. and studying American politics, the influential 19th-century French political philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville noticed the prevalence of interest group politics in the country. He subsequently labeled the U.S. as “a nation of joiners.”

When analyzing the impact of interest groups on politics in a country, two major theories help to explain interest group involvement: pluralism and elite theory.

Going pluralist

You can first see pluralist theory in *Federalist Paper No. 10*, written by James Madison. The pluralist believes that as societies become more economically and socially complex, people will join together and create interest groups that push for their own interests and government benefits. These interests can be economic, professional, ideological, environmental, or even religious in nature.

Suddenly, a society has a plethora of interest groups that compete for public benefits. This competition among interest groups assures that public policy will result from bargaining and compromising by interest groups. Public policy won't benefit just a few, but the many. That is,

- » As soon as one group feels disadvantaged, it will begin to organize to be able to compete with other interest groups. Suddenly, many interest groups are competing for political benefits and hopefully balancing each other out in the long run.

- » The idea behind pluralism is that everybody will get something they ask for but nobody will get everything they ask for. This balance will make every interest group accept policy decisions by lawmakers.

Being elitist

Elite theory takes a different point of view. It believes that not all interest groups are created equal but that some are more powerful than others. Over time, they acquire a monopoly on power in the political system. At this time, they'll be able to dominate other interests, now being able to push for public policies benefiting only them and their members and not the public overall. Not being able to be counterbalanced by weaker interest groups, they further their very narrow self-interest at the expense of the many. Elite theorists believe that interest groups aren't responsible to the public and they overrepresent business and the wealthy.

Differing from political parties

Political parties are much broader, all-compassing organizations than interest groups and represent large segments of the population. Interest groups are narrower in scope, represent a small segment of the population, and push for policies that directly benefit their members and supporters. Political parties nominate and run candidates for elected office, but interest groups don't. However, they attempt to influence elections by publicly supporting candidates who agree with them on issues.



REMEMBER

In the U.S., political parties and interest groups complement one another. Although they both compete for supporters and donations, they support each other on passing legislation that will benefit both. Activists from interest groups that are closely aligned with political parties often join a party and continue their activities within it.

Classifying types of interest groups

All interest groups are not the same, but different types of interest groups can overlap or coexist. Here are some ways to categorize interest groups:

- » **Economic:** Most interest groups in the world are economic interest groups, including unions, whether independent or government controlled, and business organizations.
- » **Professional:** These organizations represent a small but powerful segment within society, and they actively push for legislation benefiting a small group

of members. Examples include medical associations or groups representing a small segment of the economy, such as lawyers.

- » **Public:** Some countries, usually advanced industrialized economies, have public interest groups. Public interest groups push for policies benefitting the majority of the people and not just a small minority of members.
- » **Government:** Government structures themselves can act as interest groups. In federal societies, local governments often act as interest groups competing for a slice of the federal budget. In societies such as France or Japan, the federal bureaucracy itself lobbies government for more funding for their agencies.
- » **Ideological:** These are usually *very* ideological in nature and push for certain narrow policies. A good example are extreme right- or left-wing groups or environmental organizations.

Joining interest groups

Most people join an interest group to receive material benefits. For example, workers join unions to receive higher wages and the ability to work in a safe environment.

People also join interest groups for ideological reasons. Especially in countries that have a weak party system, for example, in the U.S., people join interest groups instead of political parties. An environmentalist in Germany can join the Green Party, but in the U.S. they would exert more influence by joining the Sierra Club, an environmentalist interest group, because (at this point) a Green Party has little chance of winning seats in state legislatures or the U.S. Congress.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Solidary incentives for joining interest groups have increasingly come to the forefront. In today's societies, many people don't possess a large social support structure. They're separated from their family structure, may be single or divorced, and often feel lonely. Interest groups have tapped into this market, providing opportunities to join a large group of like-minded people to meet and socialize with. Many interest groups are socially active, meeting for dinners, game nights, or other activities.

Being powerful

As mentioned previously, interest groups don't run candidates for office, but they are active in politics through political campaigning and lobbying. *Lobbying* involves contacting members of the legislative, executive, or judicial branches of government in an attempt to influence public policy or administrative decisions.

Interest groups provide public support, mobilize their members to vote, and spend money on behalf of candidates. Interest groups derive power from six sources:

- » **Size of membership:** The larger the membership of an interest group, the more powerful it will be in politics. An interest group can make up for a lack of financial resources by having millions of members who will vote on Election Day.
- » **Monetary resources:** The more money interest groups can spend on candidates running for office, the more powerful they'll be.
- » **Intensity of members' conviction:** Certain interest groups, such as the National Rifle Association (NRA) in the U.S., have a large pool of very dedicated members. These members feel strongly about an issue, in this case the right to bear arms, and are likely to not only give money to the organization but also base their vote on a specific issue.
- » **Prestige of membership:** The prestige of an interest group also matters. Some interest groups consist of members who enjoy a lot of prestige in a society, which makes the interest group more powerful when dealing with policy makers. A good example is the American Medical Association.
- » **Leadership skills:** Often, an exceptional leader can overcome a lack of membership in an interest group or even a lack of monetary resources.
- » **Organizational structure:** The organizational structure of an interest group can make a big difference in its ability to influence policy. For example, interest groups that are headquartered in not just one location, such as the capital of a country, but have offices in every region of a country will be more influential. Organizational structure, in other words, determines the political power an interest group possesses.

Checking out interest group functions

Interest groups fulfill several functions in a democracy including

- » **Aggregating interest:** Individuals by themselves usually lack political power and can't influence public policy making, but when they join with other individuals who hold similar interests, they can acquire political power.

In countries with strong political parties, such as Germany or Great Britain, people join political parties to aggregate their interests. In societies with weak political parties, such as the U.S., they join interest groups instead.



REMEMBER

- » **Electioneering:** Electioneering refers to interest groups becoming active in campaigns for political office. By electing candidates friendly to their policy demands, interest groups are more likely to get what they want from policy makers. Campaign activities by interest groups can include raising money, urging their members to vote for certain candidates, providing campaign volunteers, and mobilizing their members on Election Day.
- » **Providing information:** Interest groups have become a major source of information for policy makers. Most politicians aren't specialists in policy areas, so they have to rely on information from other sources to be able to make a rational policy choice. Interest groups provide information that policy makers can then put to use. Interest groups usually provide credible and nonbiased information because if policy makers lose trust in them, interest groups lose their political influence. In some democracies, providing false information to policy makers is even a crime.
- » **Shaping public opinion:** Interest groups are well aware that policy makers care about public opinion and attempt to follow the public's wishes. They do want to be reelected. By shaping public opinion, interest groups indirectly influence policy making. Therefore, interest groups will use the media, such as TV commercials or social media, to provide the public with information favorable to their demands. Convincing the public that their demands are just as well as beneficial for the average person will get the public to fall in line and support interest-group demands.

- » Registering to vote
- » Voting in primaries
- » Making elected officials care about what you think
- » Connecting with candidates and elected officials online

Chapter 3

Be a Part of the Solution — Vote!

As Adlai Stevenson, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, said of Eleanor Roosevelt upon her death: *She would rather light one candle than curse the darkness.*

The same philosophy holds true for our government. Your vote counts. You may have noticed through the years that our system of government isn't perfect — it has its warts and flaws — but it's still the best system in the world. Our country is the single most successful exercise in democracy in history. If it's not perfect, or even not as good as it could be, maybe that's because not enough good people like you are involved. Try answering the following questions:

- » Do you tell yourself that you're so busy you can't spare the 15 minutes it takes to vote in every election?
- » Do you tell yourself that your vote doesn't count anyway?
- » If you're critical of politics and government, do you use that criticism as an excuse not to participate?

If you answered *yes* to any of these questions, that's a cop-out. You need to participate, and this chapter can help you see how to become more involved by voting and by connecting online. Your participation *can* make a difference. Politics

is an opportunity for you to exercise some control. You can decide what level of involvement you want to have and how much you want to do. You're the only one who knows how much time and money you have. But you must do one thing in order to have this control: *You must vote*. If you don't vote, you have no right or leverage to complain about politics, politicians, or government.

Should You Register to Vote?

As of the U.S. Census Bureau news release in 2025, only 73.6 percent of the voting-age population was registered to vote (about 174 million people) and just 65.3 percent (154 million) actually voted in the 2024 presidential election. You can find more information at www.census.gov.

Every citizen of the United States who is at least 18 years of age may register and vote. Twenty-one states and the District of Columbia permit some form of same-day registration. In all other states, you must register before Election Day in order to vote. Registration in those states stops in advance of an election — usually thirty days in advance!



You must be registered to vote for any elective office in the United States, from president to township advisory board. You have to register only once, though, as long as you live at the same address and vote periodically.

Upsides and downsides of registering

Maybe you're not registered because you've convinced yourself that you should avoid politics. Political decisions will be made for you even if you elect not to participate. You still have to pay taxes even if you don't vote. Elected officials make decisions about which streets get paved, which sidewalks get repaired, and which schools close without regard to your opinions, if you don't vote. There's no hole deep enough for you to bury your head in to avoid politics completely. You can't run, and you can't hide — so you may as well participate.

Explaining voting behavior

For decades, political scientists have tried to explain voting behavior in democracies. Many theories exist but most don't seem to fully explain voters. Following are some of the more popular models. All have some merit, and to truly explain voting, all of them help to explore the outcome of an election. These models include

- » **The Columbia model:** Beginning in the 1940s, sociologists developed the Columbia model of voting. This model focused on group behavior. It stated that group membership determined how people voted. In other words, a person was born into a certain group, and this group membership determined how that person voted. For example, if a person was born into a union household, union membership determined the vote. Or if a person was born a Catholic, religious membership determined how they voted. Today, race or gender, which are major determinants of the vote, constitute group membership.
- » **The Michigan model:** Social scientists from the University of Michigan conducted a major study on voting behavior in the 1950s. The model they created is labeled the Michigan model and is based on the 1952 and 1956 U.S. presidential elections. It stated that people base their vote on a *psychological attachment* to a political party, which happens when people develop a form of group identity by affiliating with a political group or party. This attachment is called *partisan identification*, and it determines how people vote.
- » **The echo chamber effect theory:** American political scientist V. O. Key, Jr. set out to create his own theory on voting behavior and came up with this one. He stated that voting echoes, or reflects, the political environment. When parties are similar in the issues they support, people have to base their vote on party identification. However, when parties begin to differ and provide the electorate with different issues, people are prone to base their vote on issues.
- » **Economic theories of voting behavior:** Many economic theories on voting behavior claim that voters are rational. Economists such as Anthony Downs claim that voting behavior can be explained by looking at the state of the economy. Downs claims that rational voters base their vote on their pocket-book and on which candidate they expect to provide them with more benefits (expected utility). If they receive what they expected, they'll reelect the candidate. If not, they'll vote against the candidate. In other words, if the economy is doing well, incumbents benefit, and if not, challengers have a good shot at winning office, because voters will blame incumbents for the poor state of the economy.
- » **Retrospective versus prospective voting:** *Retrospective voting* occurs when incumbents decide to run for reelection. Voters can look at an incumbent's record and then decide whether they like this record. If so, they'll reelect the incumbent. *Prospective voting* is the opposite. It's rare and happens only when there's no incumbent. In this case, voters have to make an educated guess on who would be the better elected official and then make their choice.

Make a difference

If you do participate by voting, you can make the political system better. It may never be perfect, but improvement is possible. Your voice can be loud enough to be heard by everyone.

Voting is a valuable right that you, as an American, have. Many Americans take that right for granted — even the politicians. In the 2010 elections, a wave of voter reaction — a “throw ’em all out” attitude after years of inaction and deadlock by Congress — shook up both major political parties, changed the dominant party in Congress, and made the politicians brutally aware of the issues about which voters had been concerned for years, and which the politicians had bypassed.

That reaction reminded every politician not to take the voters for granted. The politicians heard the discontentment among voters, and they had to respond.

Become important

Voting isn’t required in the United States, as it is in some other countries. The former Soviet Union used to brag about its 98 percent voter turnout on Election Day — but citizens faced stiff fines and punishment if they failed to turn out to support the government’s approved candidate. By contrast, this country gives us so many compelling reasons to vote, it’s a wonder the voting turnout here doesn’t come close to approaching that of the countries that demand it.



REMEMBER

When you vote and participate, elected officials have to consider what you think. They may not always do what you want, but they have to listen to your opinions. When you vote, you become someone important.

Wield your political power

Each one of us has the same number of votes — just one. You may not have an equal share of the world’s financial resources, but the secret ballot gives you all an equal amount of voting power. Each registered voter has one and only one vote to cast — regardless of what you hear to the contrary about certain big-city or downstate rural districts, where the concept of “vote early and vote often” is allegedly in force, or where that age-old question “Is there voting after death?” — is supposedly answered in the affirmative.



REMEMBER

The vote of a person who has contributed \$1 million to a candidate counts for no more than the vote of the person who has given nothing to a campaign. After all, winning elections is all about getting a majority of the votes cast. Votes are one-size-fits-all. Politicians need the votes of the “little people,” because this country has more “little people” than rich and powerful ones.



TIP

Consider how different things might be if everybody who could vote actually voted. Figure 3-1 illustrates just how few people who are eligible to vote actually do. The outer circle represents the number of people in the United States who are eligible to vote. The next circle in the figure represents the number of people who registered to vote in the 2016 elections. The next circle represents the number of people who actually voted in the 2016 presidential election. The smallest circle is the group of people who voted in the primaries.

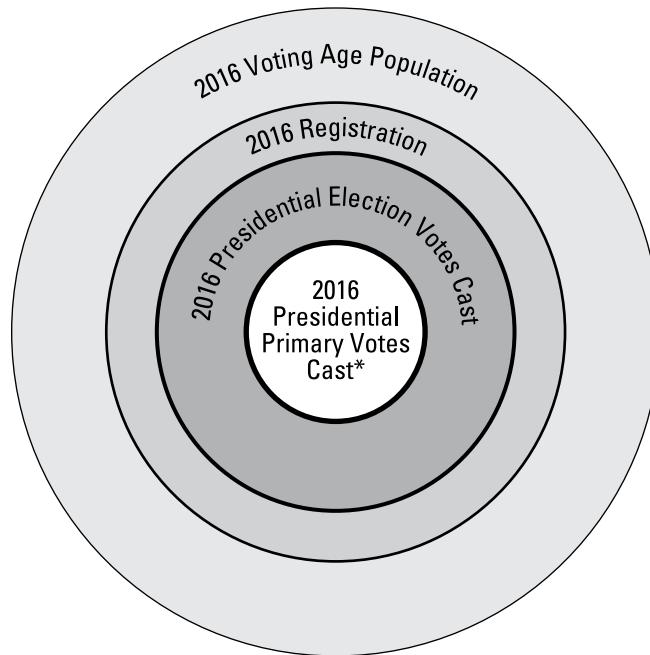


FIGURE 3-1:
What would election outcomes be if every eligible citizen voted?

*in 38 states- NY had no Republican primary



REMEMBER

After you register to vote, you can vote for the president, congressional representatives, and U.S. senators when your state has a contest. You can also vote in your state and local elections. Registering takes only a few minutes — less time than it would take to call your mother-in-law and wish her a good day, and it no longer costs a thing. You make the call because you want to stay on your mother-in-law's good side. Register to vote because you want the government to stay on *your* good side.

THE JURY DUTY MYTH

Some people don't register to vote because they may focus on the downside of registering: they fear that registering will cause them to be selected for jury duty.

Some jurisdictions do rely on voter registration rolls to select their jury pools, but fewer than most people think. Many more jurisdictions use motor vehicle and tax records (statistics) to select jurors. People who haven't registered to vote regularly get called for jury duty. These days, you'd be better off not getting a driver's license if you're so eager to avoid serving on a jury.

Even if you don't believe that you have a civic responsibility to serve on a jury when your number comes up, not registering to vote doesn't give you the protection you think it does! Unless you're prepared to give up driving and risk not paying property taxes, you may as well register to vote. You really have no reason not to.

Why Vote in Primaries?

You should know about primary elections when you register to vote, because a primary is the first place you have an opportunity to vote and have an impact.



REMEMBER

Primaries are one of the methods by which parties select candidates to represent them in the general election. Parties use primaries to select their nominees for important offices, such as governor, senator, and member of Congress. In addition, most states use primaries to select their delegates to presidential nomination conventions. Primaries are also commonly used to select legislative candidates, mayors, sheriffs, prosecuting attorneys, and other local officeholders.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

The nominees of political parties for some statewide offices — such as secretary of state, lieutenant governor, superintendent of public instruction, and attorney general — aren't as visible as nominees for governor and senator. These offices may be selected by a statewide convention convened by the political parties. Some states, like New Jersey, permit the governor to appoint some or all of these officeholders.

Taking your chance to choose the candidate

If you vote in a primary, you have a voice in choosing all of your party's candidates, including president and vice president. Not only do you have a voice — your

voice is also loud. So few people vote in primaries that your vote carries much more weight in a primary than it does in a general election. Primary voters definitely have clout!



REMEMBER

If you don't have input into the selection of the nominees of the parties in a primary, your choices usually are limited in the general election to the two major-party nominees already chosen in primary elections. You may be stuck choosing the lesser of two evils! And keep in mind that if you're dissatisfied with the incumbent and feel that a new occupant is in order for an office, the primary gives you a first shot to send the incumbent into blissful retirement. Of course, you may vote for a third party or an independent or write in your own selection for an office, but those methods are rarely successful — and usually only at the local level.

Declaring your party affiliation

Some states have *open primaries*, allowing voters to pick a party primary when they show up to vote. In other words, you may decide that you want a Republican ballot, a Democratic ballot, or another party's ballot. This system allows you to vote in the Republican primary one election year, in the Democratic primary the next year, and so on. That way, you can have a say in who is on the ballot for the final election and still maintain your position of independence.

Other states have *closed primaries*, which restrict you to the primary for whatever political party you declared when last registering to vote. You're given an opportunity to vote for the candidates of that party, but only that party, in the primary election. Independents may be altogether excluded from voting in party primaries in such states.

Still other states use primary systems in which all candidates for congressional and state-level offices (regardless of party) appear on the same ballot. These systems have various methods for advancing the candidates to the general election. For example, in a top-two primary system, the top two vote-getting candidates advance from the primary election. The states have the discretion to determine which voters (depending on how they're registered) can participate in the elections.



TIP

Check into your state's primary voting requirements, which may help you determine how to register if you want to participate in the primary elections.

In Case You Doubt That Elected Officials Care What You Think . . .

The answer to whether elected officials care what you think is a resounding *yes*, but only if you're registered to vote! If you don't register, you declare yourself out of the game, and no one makes any effort to find out what you think or what you want. Officials don't contact you to solicit your ideas or concerns because you don't show up on their carefully compiled lists of registered voters. You must be registered if you want your opinions to count. Even if you don't vote, the fact that you're registered means that your support and opinions will still be solicited. If you don't register, you don't count and you don't matter. Period.

Elected officials make genuine efforts to know what you, as a registered voter, want them to do and not do. They hold town hall events to interact with average voters like yourself and to find out what's on your mind and what worries you most about your city, state, or country. Successful elected officials — who, along with their families and staffs, have a deep and abiding interest in whether they keep their jobs — know that the key to reelection is understanding what the voters want and, within reason, delivering it.

Your opinions are worth real money

Your elected officials pay good money to pick your brain (provided you're a registered voter). They hire special consultants to organize focus groups and professional pollsters to conduct surveys. The burning question is this:

"What's on *your* mind?" . . . followed by, "How can I get what's on your mind into my mind so that you will keep me in mind come election day?"

Acquiring voter opinions comes from two main sources:

» **Focus groups:** Elected officials sometimes pay large amounts of money to stage cozy little get-togethers, called focus groups. They do this particularly in an election cycle, *Focus groups* are small, scientifically selected groups of voters in an official's district. These voters, from the list of registered voters, receive a small fee to meet for several hours with a political consultant to discuss issues and impressions in much greater depth than polls allow.

The small group doesn't even know who's paying for the session, which helps the consultant obtain their candid responses. These responses can help an official know whether the voters are paying attention to what they're saying on the stump and whether they're communicating the right information.

» **Polling:** Elected officials — particularly, occupants of higher offices (governor, senator, congressperson, and so on) — spend tens of thousands of dollars in every election year trying to find out what you think about the issues and about the officials themselves. Pollsters even ask how you personally feel about the candidate — for example: Are they honest? Do they care about people like you? Are they intelligent? Are they trustworthy?

Those same pollsters ask what you think about important policy issues. How do you feel that the state or country is doing? Are you better off now than two or four years ago? Are you (or is anyone in your family) afraid of losing a job? How do you feel about a particular tax increase proposal? Do you think education funding should be increased? Are you willing to increase sentences for violent crimes, even though the construction of more prisons will increase the tax burden? You get the idea.



REMEMBER

The pollsters may not do a perfect job of finding out what you think and interpreting your opinions for the elected official. Sometimes the method of asking the questions influences the answers. Sometimes, accidentally, the sample that the pollster selected is biased in favor of one group of voters. Polling may not be a perfect way to determine what you and other registered voters think, but it's the preferred way.



WARNING

Almost every poll screens contacted people to determine whether they're registered to vote and, if so, likely to vote. If your answer to either of these two questions is *no*, the interviewer writes you off as a nonperson and finds inventive ways to terminate the interview immediately. Spooky, isn't it? Politically, you don't exist. The elected official won't know what you think about important issues and probably doesn't care. Either way, nobody will bother to ask.

THE MEDIA'S POLLSTERS

It isn't just the elected officials and candidates who are extremely curious about what exactly you want them to do about the issues and problems you care deeply about. The news media also spends huge amounts of money to satisfy its abundant curiosity on these points, with extensive polling at the state and national levels. Like the candidates, the media is way too impatient to wait until election night to get a handle on what you're thinking. The networks and major daily newspapers want to be able to stay on top of a campaign by trying to figure out the mood of the voters while they're still in the mood.

The media recognizes that the key to electoral success is identifying what a majority of the voters in a district, a state, or the country want or don't want.

Giving voters what they say they want

Once candidates or officeholders accurately determine what the voters want, they can fashion a way to deliver it. Sometimes, of course, voters want it all. People do have a tendency to ask their candidates to give them better roads, more prisons, extra dollars for education, and, while they're at it, lower taxes. Sometimes voters want one thing one year and forget about it the next. Yes, as voters, people often have whims. And those whims can change as quickly as the length of women's skirts.



REMEMBER

No matter how hard officials try, and no matter how good they are, they're not magicians. Inconsistent goals may not be possible, no matter how much the voters want them. (Scientists still haven't developed a tree that produces dollar bills.) So, without making the thoroughly unappreciated decision to raise taxes, an official may not be able to provide for all the increased services the voters want.

Elected officials face the challenge of determining which item is most important to a majority of voters, whether they can deliver it, and how they can explain the impossibility of delivering on all goals. If delivering on the most important goal isn't possible, officials still want to be in a position to demonstrate to voters that they're fighting to get what they want and will keep doing so if people keep supporting them with their votes in the next election.

Understanding Politics on the Internet

The idea that the leader of the free world could instantly transmit random thoughts whenever he wanted to virtually every person on the planet sounds like the plot of a 1950s sci-fi novel. Yet in 2019, President Donald Trump's prolific use of Twitter (now renamed X) accomplished exactly that. What's more: You could respond to what he said with a question, and he might have given you an answer within minutes.

This direct access you have to politicians best sums up how most people think politics has been changed by the internet. But it works the other way, too: Politicians now have direct access to you.

In the past, an elected official could send out a press release to make their opinion known on an issue. As the name *press release* implies, that opinion wasn't sent directly to constituents — it was sent to the press. The press might write a story about the press release, but they would probably add information or quote a politician with an opposing view. What most Americans read in the paper might not be exactly what the politician hoped they would read.

The internet changes that arrangement. Because they no longer have to communicate with citizens by way of the press, politicians gain just as much from the direct access of the internet as you do. Here are some examples of how politicians can now directly engage with voters:

- » They can put press releases on their own websites for anyone to read.
- » They can use other platforms, like Facebook or X, to share their opinions with individual voters.
- » If you sign up for the politician's email list, they don't need for you to visit a website in order to send you a message about where they stand.

Discerning government versus campaign websites

If you go to www.whitehouse.gov, you see the website for the president of the United States — Donald Trump, at the time this book was written. You can read about his actions as president, but you won't find any information about his next campaign rally or how to make a donation to his campaign. For those sorts of activities, go to www.DonaldJTrump.com. But once you get there, you find no links to other government agencies you might be interested in. Wouldn't it be less confusing to have just one website for the president?

Or, maybe you've noticed that your local member of Congress or U.S. senator has two different accounts on X or that they seem to use two different Facebook pages. You might be tempted to believe that one of them is fake, but chances are good that they're both legitimate. So how do you know which one you should engage with?

Many elected officials have two websites or two accounts on other sites for a good reason: Federal and state laws prohibit government resources — like money, staff, websites — from being mixed with resources that are supporting a political candidate. As a taxpayer, you probably want your money to fund government services and not political campaigns (especially for candidates you oppose).

Yes, it can make things confusing online when you aren't sure which website or account to use. But after you understand the reasoning, it's a lot easier to figure out. For example, for the following situations, it makes more sense to use a government website or account:

- » You want to voice your opinion on a piece of legislation.
- » You need help connecting with government services or agencies, like Medicare or the IRS.

- » You're visiting your state capital or Washington, D.C., and you want to tour government buildings when you arrive.

However, it makes more sense to use a campaign website or account when you want to

- » Volunteer for a political campaign or attend a campaign rally
- » Make a donation to a candidate for office
- » Complain about a mudslinging TV ad that was run against an opposing candidate

You can tell whether an account or a website is for a government office or a political campaign. If the address ends with `.gov`, it's definitely for a government office. Beyond that, there are no set-in-stone rules, but there are usually some telltale signs.

If the website address or name of the account contains the name of the office as a title, it's probably for the government office. If the word *for* is part of the website address or account name, especially before the name of the office, it's probably for a political campaign. If no office is even listed, it's probably for a political campaign, or it's a personal account. (Though personal accounts can sometimes be used for both governmental and political reasons, most politicians choose not to avoid breaking any rules.)

Here are some examples of how real-life politicians have named their different accounts. See whether you can spot the telltale signs for government offices or political campaigns for each one:

- » Former President Barack Obama used the Twitter account @POTUS44 (for 44th president of the United States) for his government office and @BarackObama for his political campaigns.
- » U.S. Representative Jim Banks uses the Facebook page "Congressman Jim Banks" for his government office and a "Jim Banks for Congress" page for his political campaigns.
- » Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker uses the website address `gov.il.gov` for his government office and `www.jbpritzker.com` for his political campaign.
- » President Donald Trump uses the X account @realDonaldTrump because it's a longtime personal account, so he does both governmental and political business with a single account. Those tweets that are only governmental in nature are archived by the account @POTUS.

Engaging with elected officials and candidates online

After you understand the difference between government and campaign websites, you also have an idea of why you might interact with one or the other. But how can you find the politicians you want to engage with across all the different platforms that exist?

Though you can choose from dozens of possible platforms, just a handful of platforms are universally adopted by almost all politicians:

- » A home website you can visit
- » An email list you can subscribe to
- » A Facebook page you can like
- » An X account you can follow

The upcoming sections take a closer looking at these four methods of engaging politicians, including how a government official might use it, how a political candidate might use it, and how you can use that information to make sure your voice is heard.

Visiting a website

Most politicians have dedicated websites that contain all the information about them or their office that you might want to know, including how to contact them offline or where you might be able to meet them in person:

- » **Government official:** The websites for government officials usually focus primarily on how the office can assist you in obtaining government services, but the sites usually also contain information about the officeholder, such as a biography, policy initiatives or legislation they've authored, positions on policy or legislation, and news coverage. You can usually also find press releases sent out by the office. Finally, you should see clear contact information to reach the office, including a phone number or an email address. But you may also see a form, which is sent by email to the office, on which you can type your comments or questions.
- » **Political candidate:** Websites for political candidates focus almost exclusively on a candidate's biography and policy positions, but you should also be able to find information on getting involved with the campaign, donating money to the campaign, and attending upcoming campaign events. You'll also likely find lots of pictures and videos (many of which are current TV ads).

The easiest way to find the website you're looking for is to use a search engine, like Google. Typically, all you need to type is the name of the person you're searching for and perhaps the name of the office they hold or seek, and then you can find their home website(s) within the first few results. For government officials, you can find the official page in other ways.

- » **For a member of the U.S. Senate or U.S. House**, you can find all home websites by going to www.congress.gov and clicking the Members link at the top right of the page. The names of all members of Congress, either House or Senate, are listed by state and if you click on the name you want, it will take you directly to the member's home page.
- » **For state-elected officials or legislators**, you can type the state's 2-letter abbreviation followed by .gov and then look for listings of elected offices. So, for Alabama, you type **al.gov**; for New York, you type **ny.gov**; for Wyoming, you type **wy.gov**.



TIP

If you need help connecting with government services or you want to research or weigh in on legislation that is being considered, you definitely want to find the website for a government office. Especially if you need government services, it's important not to go to a campaign website and fill out a contact form, because the campaign may be prohibited from sharing information with the government office.

Subscribing to an email list

Email lists from politicians are a great way to stay current on what's happening in government or in a political campaign. If you're more interested in policy and the happenings of government, sign up on a government office website. If you're more interested in politics and elections, sign up on a campaign website. **Remember:** You aren't limited to email lists from elected officials or candidates only in your area. Signing up for the email list of elected officials in other parts of your state, or for candidates you might have seen on TV in other states, is a great way to gain multiple perspectives and stay up-to-date.

- » **Government official:** A government official is likely to use an email list to send out regular newsletter updates weekly, biweekly, monthly, or infrequently. However often the newsletter is sent out, it's likely to highlight positive press coverage, new policy announcements, recent accomplishments, and photos of the official traveling around the district or state.
- » **Political candidate:** A political candidate is much less likely to have a set schedule for emailing a list and is somewhat less likely to regularly update the newsletter. Instead, you should expect sporadic emails at least once every few

weeks, but possibly multiple times within one week. Right before an election, you might get multiple emails a day. The content will likely highlight a single news story, a single policy position, a new campaign ad, an invitation to an upcoming campaign event, or a fundraising solicitation.

If you've already found the website of the person or office you're looking for, you're probably pretty close. Look for the box to submit your email address and click the Submit or Sign Up button.

Liking a Facebook page

The *Facebook* social media platform allows users to write messages, share photos and videos, and discuss innumerable topics with other users in an easy-to-follow manner. Users subscribe to the posts of public officials and candidates by “Liking” their accounts:

- » **Government official:** Many government officials use their Facebook pages to share press releases, photos, links to government services, and statements on current events and legislative debates. In some sense, government officials tend to use their Facebook pages to share a lot of the information you might find on their websites, but it's more continually updated.
- » **Political candidate:** Political candidates usually focus more on sharing news stories, commentary, and statements about current events and policy positions. They also tend to share more videos than government officials because political campaigns often have professionals on their teams to make their TV ads.

If you can't find a link to the Facebook account on the politician's home website, log in to your Facebook account. After you're logged in, you can type the name of the politician you're trying to find in the search bar at the top of the screen. Generally, the account you're looking for will be one of the first results.

The same rules about visiting websites applies to Facebook: If you want to read or leave comments about government services or legislative issues being debated, look for the governmental account. If you want to weigh in on a certain aspect of a campaign or ask questions about how to get involved, find the political campaign account. But realize that in most cases, it's governmental or campaign staff who are helping to manage the Facebook page. So, although it might look like you're interacting with a politician, you might be interacting with their staff instead. Some politicians comment on their own pages, though, and they often clearly specify who's speaking. If you aren't sure, it doesn't hurt to politely ask which person you're interacting with.



Many elected officials have two accounts on websites like Facebook and X — one for their government office and the other for their political campaign. With multiple accounts under the same name, how can you be sure you're following a legitimate account? Look for the Verified checkmark — a blue circle with a white checkmark next to accounts that are verified by the account holders. This icon is especially useful to ensure that you're following real-life politicians.

Following an X account

The X (formerly Twitter) social media website allows users to post short thoughts (or responses to the thoughts of others) in no more than 280 characters. You subscribe to the posts of others by following their accounts.

- » **Government official:** Government officials often use X as a way to offer thoughts on policy or legislation ahead of a vote, or they may give updates as they travel around their districts or states. These officials usually place less emphasis on government services on their X accounts as compared to other platforms and more emphasis on current events. They may also break up large press statements over multiple posts, and they frequently link to press releases or other content on their websites.
- » **Political candidate:** Political candidates usually focus heavily on sharing and providing commentary on news stories, especially when it's relevant to their election. They also tend to engage other users, especially other politicians and reporters, more than government official accounts might do. Because of the 280-character limit on X posts, political candidates tend to sound a bit more informal on X than they do on other platforms.

As with Facebook, look for a link on a politician's home website first. If that fails, log in to your X account and enter the name you're looking for into the search bar at the top of the page. You should usually see the name in one of the first search results.

Again, some of the same rules apply when determining whether to interact with a governmental or political account. But whereas a Facebook page is likely managed by staff, politicians much more commonly use their own X accounts. Again, it doesn't hurt to ask politely if you aren't sure, but X is the platform where you're most likely to be able to interact directly with an elected official or candidate.

- » Examining electoral college controversies
- » Finding out what the electoral college means to you
- » Deciding whether the electoral college should be changed

Chapter 4

Electoral College Election Controversies

It seems fair to say that most people didn't spend a lot of time thinking about the electoral college and what it meant to their choice of president before the 2000 and 2016 elections. That situation, however, has changed.

Political pundits now regularly discuss the electoral college and whether it needs to be changed. In 2000, for the first time in more than a hundred years, the candidate with the higher popular vote count lost the presidential election — all because of the electoral college. Now the argument rages over whether the electoral college should remain the official method by which the United States chooses its president and vice president every four years.

Explaining How the Electoral College Affected the 2000 and 2016 Elections

Before the 2000 election, most U.S. residents hadn't thought about the electoral college since high school. A few people discussed changing the electoral college after the close election of 1960, but those discussions were short-lived. But then,

Al Gore won the popular vote in 2000 by about a half-million votes, but George W. Bush won in the electoral college 271 to 267. In 2016, Hillary Clinton won the popular vote by almost 3 million votes but lost the electoral college 304 to 227.

To understand what happened in these elections, you need to understand the way the system of electing a U.S. president and vice president works. The following minitable lists the states that President George W. Bush won in 2000 and the electoral votes those states brought to his total, as well as the states that Al Gore won and their electoral votes:

George W. Bush		Al Gore	
State	Electoral Votes	State	Electoral Votes
Alabama	9	California	54
Alaska	3	Connecticut	8
Arizona	8	Delaware	3
Arkansas	6	D.C.	3
Colorado	8	Hawaii	4
Florida	25	Illinois	22
Georgia	13	Iowa	7
Idaho	4	Maine	4
Indiana	12	Maryland	10
Kansas	6	Massachusetts	12
Kentucky	8	Michigan	18
Louisiana	9	Minnesota	10
Mississippi	7	New Jersey	15
Missouri	11	New Mexico	5
Montana	3	New York	33
Nebraska	5	Oregon	7
Nevada	4	Pennsylvania	23
New Hampshire	4	Rhode Island	4
North Carolina	14	Vermont	3
North Dakota	3	Washington	11
Ohio	21	Wisconsin	11

George W. Bush		Al Gore	
State	Electoral Votes	State	Electoral Votes
Oklahoma	8		
South Carolina	8		
South Dakota	3		
Tennessee	11		
Texas	32		
Utah	5		
Virginia	13		
West Virginia	5		
Wyoming	3		

Al Gore's populist campaign won the Northeast, except for New Hampshire. He also won the West Coast and split the Midwestern states with George W. Bush. Gore carried population centers, whereas Bush was more popular in rural areas.

If the 2000 election had been about who had greater support in the most square miles of the country, George Bush (and, in 2016, Donald Trump) would have been the winner by a long shot. (In the 2000 election, Bush won 2,463 counties, compared to Gore's 675.) If the election had been about who won the greatest number of votes, regardless of where they're located, Al Gore (and, in 2016, Hillary Clinton) would have been declared the winner.

Al Gore's margin of victory in the popular vote was 3 percent. That may not seem like much, but it's much larger than other presidential contests have had. In 1960, John Kennedy defeated Richard Nixon by 303 to 219 electoral votes. Even though the electoral votes weren't close in 1960, Kennedy defeated Nixon by only 112,881 popular votes. Kennedy's margin of victory was only one-tenth of 1 percent.

George W. Bush didn't win the popular vote, and his electoral vote margin was razor thin, but he did carry 30 of the 50 states. Part of the original justification for the creation of the electoral college was to guarantee that a successful presidential candidate must build a broad base of support around the country — and Bush did that.

In the 2016 presidential election, the margin of victory in the electoral college was much larger. Donald Trump received 33 more electoral votes than George W. Bush and carried one more state. What is remarkable is how much larger the popular

vote was for the losing candidate. How did a candidate fail to be elected when she received almost 3 million more votes?

The answer is that the United States elects its president and vice president indirectly, by way of the electoral college.

Examining the Electoral College's Messy History

The Founding Fathers of the United States were the ones who set up the current electoral college (although it's had some changes since then). The electoral college was established to elect a president and vice president in a nation that, at the time

- » **Was composed of 13 large and small states**, jealous of their own rights and powers and suspicious of a central government.
- » **Had a population of about 4 million people**, spread over more than a thousand miles along the east coast, with little or no communication or transportation.
- » **Had a population of approximately 700,000 slaves** — individuals who of course had no voting rights yet counted as three-fifths of a person when it came to determining electoral college votes. (This had the effect of ceding more political power to slaveholding states.)

In addition, the national mood discouraged the formation of political parties, and people believed that gentlemen didn't campaign for public office.



REMEMBER

The Founding Fathers considered and rejected several other alternatives to electing the president and vice president, such as having Congress or — since they lacked confidence in Congress — even the state legislatures elect them. Direct popular election was rejected because the Founding Fathers feared that insufficient information would cause voters to choose *favorite sons* (favorite candidates from their home states), and no candidate would have a popular majority sufficient to govern the country.

Looking at other controversial elections

In the course of the 200 years of the electoral college's existence, several remarkable elections have taken place that people on either side of the debate regarding the fairness of the electoral college point to as support for their arguments.

Under the first design of the electoral college, electors could cast two distinct votes for president, and whoever emerged as the runner-up would become the vice president. The problem with this system became apparent in the election of 1800. The electors of the Democratic–Republican Party (the dominant party of the time) gave Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr (both members of that party) an equal number of electoral votes, even though the party had specified that they wanted Jefferson as president and Burr as vice president. The tie was decided for Jefferson by the House of Representatives, but only after 36 votes and many political deals. The Congress and the states adopted the 12th Amendment in 1804 to deal with any similar future occurrences — it requires that each elector cast one vote for president and a separate vote for vice president.

The next controversial election occurred in 1824. That year, John Quincy Adams, Andrew Jackson, William Crawford, and Henry Clay ran for president. Each of these men represented an important faction of the dominant Democratic–Republican Party. They divided the electoral vote, so no one received the necessary majority to become president.

The 12th Amendment requires that the House of Representatives select the president from the top three contenders, with each state casting one vote and an absolute majority being required to elect. The House narrowly chose John Quincy Adams over Andrew Jackson, although Jackson had received the greater popular vote. This election is often cited as the first example of the candidate with the larger popular vote (Jackson) not becoming president. This argument is a difficult one to make, though, because 6 of the 24 states in that election chose their electors in their state legislatures rather than by popular vote. New York, whose population was considerable even then, was one of those states. Therefore, the real popular vote was difficult to calculate. (By 1836, every state but South Carolina chose electors by direct popular vote of the whole state. South Carolina eventually came around to this method in 1860.)

It's well worth noting the significant parallels between the election of 1824 and the election of 2000. John Quincy Adams' father, John Adams, was a two-term vice president and a one-term president. George W. Bush's father, George H. W. Bush, was a two-term vice president and a one-term president. Andrew Jackson failed to carry his home state of Tennessee in the 1824 election, just as Al Gore failed to carry his home state of Tennessee in 2000! One other interesting note: When the contest between John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson was replayed in 1828, Andrew Jackson defeated John Quincy Adams.

The next dramatic election occurred in 1876. Much had happened since 1824, including a devastating civil war. *Reconstruction*, the process under which the federal army occupied the South after the Civil War, caused dramatic changes to traditional voting patterns, as did the economic depressions of 1867, 1869, and 1873. The Democratic Party nominated Samuel Tilden, governor of New York, as

president and Thomas Hendricks of Indiana as vice president. The Republicans nominated Rutherford Hayes, governor of Ohio, and William Wheeler of New York. Third parties were also active. On election night, it appeared that Tilden had won, although South Carolina, Louisiana, and — you guessed it — Florida were undecided. Each of these states delivered *two* competing sets of electoral votes to Congress — one for Tilden and one for Hayes. Congress established a 15-member commission to decide which votes to count for each state. The upshot was that, after much political intrigue, Hayes was elected president, even though Tilden won the popular vote.

The dealmaking required to ensure the presidency for Hayes brought about an end of the U.S. army's occupation of the South as well as the adoption of policies on the part of the federal government that removed all remaining barriers to the imposition of a system of brutal segregation in the South. In 1887, Congress enacted legislation making each state the final authority on the legality of its electors and requiring a concurrent majority of both houses of Congress to reject any electoral vote. The events of 1876 never happened again.

Benjamin Harrison's election in 1888 is the classic example of the majority in the electoral college being contrary to the outcome of the popular vote. The incumbent Democrat, Grover Cleveland, won by large majorities in the states that supported him. Benjamin Harrison carried his states with slender majorities. In consequence, Harrison was elected with an electoral majority, but with less popular support than the losing Cleveland. (Cleveland ended up with 48.6 percent of the vote, whereas Harrison had only 47.8 percent.)

Gauging the impact of the electoral college

As interesting as the history of the electoral college may be, you should remember that it isn't some dusty historical relic; it has a profound impact on the way campaigns are run today and on the messages that candidates present to voters. The history determines where candidates devote their time and money when it comes to state-by-state battlefields. Without the electoral college, candidates would concentrate on media markets where they could reach the maximum number of voters. The major megalopolises of America would receive far greater attention. An area like greater New York City, which has almost 24 million people, would receive considerably more attention than most entire states. Instead, New York is a center for fundraising but not campaigning because it is a state that consistently votes for the Democratic candidate for president.

The system forces candidates to appeal to states that hold the balance of power in the electoral college. The balance of power is in the hands of states, commonly called *swing states*, that are not predictable in presidential elections; they can trend

one way or the other. In 2024, those states were Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, Nevada, North Carolina, Georgia, and Arizona.

Arguing for the electoral college

Those individuals who support the status quo — the “it ain’t broke, so don’t fix it” group — argue the following points:

» **The electoral college contributes to political stability in the United States by encouraging only a two-party system.**

The winner-takes-all nature of the state-by-state election encourages the parties to move toward the middle ground ideologically. It virtually forces political movements that could result in the formation of third parties into the main political parties in order to have any hope of electoral success. It also moderates the views of these third parties to make them acceptable to one of the major parties. In other words, political parties under a two-party, winner-takes-all system tend to become large tents embracing many different, and sometimes inconsistent, views. Accommodations to different positions are negotiated within the parties more than in the government.

» **The electoral college increases the power of states.**

States and their boundaries play important roles in a national campaign. It’s not enough for a candidate to run up huge margins of votes in metropolitan areas. To be elected president, a candidate must have a strategy to win 270 electoral votes. Winning California by 10 million votes doesn’t do a candidate any more good than winning it by a single vote (except that it avoids a recount!).

A candidate must build a national following to be successful. Having that national following makes it easier for a candidate to govern as president after the election. Regional appeals aren’t sufficient for victory because no region of the country contains enough electoral votes alone to elect a president. Even a candidate who fails to win the popular vote must have obtained a good amount of the popular vote, and that vote is distributed across the country.

Arguing against the electoral college

Critics of the electoral college argue the following three main points:

» **The electoral college hinders true democracy by limiting the numbers of parties that are able to compete effectively in presidential elections.**

Many parties field candidates, but they seldom win any electoral votes and are more likely to be spoilers than to win outright. In 2016, Donald Trump won Michigan by fewer than 11,000 votes, whereas 275,851 votes were cast for third-party candidates and independents who had no chance of election.

» **The electoral college allows candidates to take states for granted when the voters in those states vote consistently for one party in national elections.**

Winner-takes-all means that 50 percent plus one vote is all a candidate needs in any state to win all of the state's electoral votes, with the exception of Maine and Nebraska. Because the margin of victory is irrelevant in the electoral college, neither candidate spends time courting votes in states where the outcome is certain.

» **The winner-takes-all nature of state elections renders some votes for president essentially meaningless.**

For instance, a Democratic voter in Indiana, a state that consistently votes Republican for president (although it went for Barack Obama in 2008), or a Republican in Illinois, which consistently votes Democratic for president, essentially has no voice in the election of the president. Their state will give all its electoral votes to the other candidate, and the size of the nationwide popular vote doesn't affect the outcome of the election.

Critics of the electoral college don't end there, though. In addition to the main arguments in the previous list, critics argue that

» **The electoral college depresses voter turnout in presidential elections because voter turnout is irrelevant to the number of electoral votes a state has.**

For example, New Mexico has five electoral votes, even if only five citizens vote in the general election. (Of course, other elections take place at the same time — governor, senator, legislative, and county offices — and those can be turnout-dependent.)

» **Rogue electors are always possible.**

These are electors who are pledged to vote for one candidate but who actually vote for another. A number of states don't have laws requiring electors to honor their pledges, and if only three electors had switched from Bush to Gore in 2000, Gore would have been elected. In 2016, ten electors voted for a candidate other than the one for whom they were pledged to vote, but the outcome was not changed.

» **The distribution of electoral votes by state tends to overrepresent votes in rural states at the expense of voters in urban ones.**

For instance, the combined voting-age population of Vermont, Wyoming, Alaska, South Dakota, New Hampshire, Delaware, and North Dakota is approximately 5.5 million. Each of these states is so scarcely populated that they have only one representative each. However, both have two senators. So, these states have three electoral votes apiece for a combined electoral vote of 21 electoral votes. In contrast, Wisconsin has a population roughly the same, and it has only 10 electoral votes. In fact, the 27 smallest states in terms of population have 98 electoral votes between them. Combined, these 27 states have a population approximately the size of California, which has 54 electoral votes. Obviously, votes cast in rural states for president have more weight in the electoral college.

Changing the Electoral College

Changing the electoral college requires either a constitutional amendment passed by a two-thirds vote of Congress and ratification by three-quarters of the state legislatures or action in all 50 states. Given that seven small states would see their electoral impact diminished by change, it would be difficult to pass. Approximately 700 bills have been introduced in Congress over the last 200 years to change the electoral college, and none has succeeded.

The smaller states also realize that changing the electoral college could open discussion about the disproportional weight given to states with smaller populations in the Senate. For example, Wyoming routinely casts a little more than one-quarter of a million votes for presidential candidates in the general election, and New York casts more than 30 times that number. Both states have two, and only two, senators in the U.S. Senate. In other words, the vote of a voter in New York for senator is worth 1/30 of the vote of a voter from Wyoming — or North Dakota, Alaska, Montana . . . You get the picture.

Despite the fact that smaller states are in a position to essentially block electoral college reform, you'll still find proposals put forward that are meant to change the way Americans elect their presidents. One proposal involves direct election with *instant-runoff voting*, or IRV. Voters would rank their choices in order of preference. Ballots are counted for each voter's first choice. If a candidate gains a majority, that candidate wins. If no candidate receives a majority, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated. The voters who selected the losing candidate as

their first choice then have their votes added to the total of their next choice. This continues until a candidate has a majority. This system is used in several countries and in the state of Maine for congressional elections.

The other alternative to the electoral college is quite in line with the U.S. system of democracy. Rather than use the electoral college, people simply vote for candidates, and whoever gains a majority wins. Sounds simple, right? Not quite. Because this system allows multiple candidates to run, one candidate may have a difficult time getting more than 50 percent of the national vote. If a majority were required for election, runoff elections would then have to be held between the top vote-getting candidates from the first race, or instant-runoff voting would need to be implemented because the cost and difficulty of having more than one national election every four years might be prohibitive.

All these proposals would require a constitutional amendment — a long row to hoe, practically speaking. One suggestion for reform that doesn't require a constitutional amendment is the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact or NVIP.

As of this writing, 17 states and the District of Columbia (which has three electors) have signed on to NVIP. This compact is an agreement by these states to cast their electoral votes for the candidate who wins the popular vote nationwide. This compact has one caveat: The total number of electoral votes belonging to states that join the compact must surpass 270 — the number needed for victory — if it is to take effect. The total electoral votes for states signing is currently 209, or 61 votes short of the total needed to activate the compact (see <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/national-popular-vote>).

THE RUSSIANS AND U.S. ELECTIONS

There has been much discussion of Russian attempts to infiltrate the U.S. election system in the 2016 election and whether these attempts have continued. The two issues that leaders of both parties agree on are the need to modernize our voting machines to provide better security and to create a paper trail of any ballots cast. According to a May 28, 2025 press release by the United States Election Assistance Commission, more than 98 percent of jurisdictions already use voting systems with a paper record of every vote. To help further this trend and thwart foreign involvement in elections, the commission — an independent, bipartisan body — issued a policy (on May 27, 2025) in support of paper-based and auditable voting systems that are software-independent.



American Society and the Economy

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IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Honoring the flag
- » Singing America's praises: The national anthem and other patriotic songs
- » Recognizing symbols and monuments of the United States
- » Doing your part as a U.S. inhabitant

Chapter **1**

Emblems of America and Civic Responsibility

Americans take their patriotic symbols seriously. From the flag to the national anthem, the Great Seal to the national bird, symbols of the U.S. surround us. This chapter helps you see how these symbols offer ways to celebrate patriotism and perhaps find inspiration in U.S. monuments and memorials.

But in addition to celebrating and enjoying, you also find out about the rights and responsibilities of being an inhabitant of the U.S. and how your involvement in a government “of the people” is important and essential.

The Flag: Old Glory

More than any other symbol, the American flag — also known as Old Glory — best represents the country and her people. With approximately 250 years of history behind it, the flag, like the country it represents, has gone through many important changes through the years.

The symbolism and significance of the flag

For almost a year after the United States first gained its independence from England, the American flag still bore the British Union Jack along with its red and white stripes. On June 14, 1777, the Marine Committee of the Second Continental Congress at Philadelphia changed the look of the American flag by authorizing the first official flag of the United States of America:

Resolved, that the flag of the United States be thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field representing a new constellation.

And so it came to be that the American flag was composed of stars and stripes. However, the resolution gave no specific instructions as to how many points the stars should have, or where they should be arranged on the blue union. If you look at historic flags in books or museums, you'll find all kinds of creative variations:

- » Some flags have their stars staggered in rows, others made circles of the 13 stars, and still others opted for completely random placement.
- » On some flags the stars had six points; others sported eight.
- » The proportion ratio of the blue field to stripes also varied from flag to flag.

The matter was never completely resolved until June 24, 1912, when then-President William Howard Taft signed an executive order that outlined specific instructions on how the flag should look.

The 13 stripes represent the 13 original British colonies that formed the United States of America after they gained independence from England following the American Revolutionary War. The stars (48 at the time of the executive order, but now 50 in all) represent each of the country's 50 states. The flag's colors also have special significance:

- » Red represents hardiness and valor.
- » White depicts purity and innocence.
- » Blue represents vigilance, perseverance, and justice.



With the addition of Vermont (1791) and Kentucky (1792) to the Union, the original flag of the United States grew to 15 stripes (8 red and 7 white), with 15 white stars in the union of blue. Even though more states were added over the years, the flag remained with 15 stars and 15 stripes until 1818. Congress had a problem. If they continued to add new stripes for each new state, the flag would simply grow too big. They eventually came up with the two-part solution:

- » Return to a flag of 13 stripes, representing the original 13 colonies.
- » Add a new white star for each new state that joined the Union.

Displaying the flag

Many patriotic Americans are enthusiastic about displaying the flag. Unfortunately, a lot of people don't know the proper rules and etiquette of when and how to display the U.S. flag. Follow these guidelines, excerpted from the National Flag Code, and you'll always display your flag with dignity and pride, no matter what the occasion:

- » It is the universal custom to display the flag only from sunrise to sunset on buildings and on stationary flagstaffs in the open. However, the flag may be displayed 24 hours a day if properly illuminated during the hours of darkness.
- » The flag should not be displayed on days when the weather is inclement, except when an all-weather flag is displayed.
- » The flag should be hoisted briskly and lowered ceremoniously.
- » To display the flag on a building, hang it on a staff or rope with the stars away from the building.
- » When marching, carry the flag on the right in a procession or parade. If there are many other flags, carry the American flag in the front center position.
- » No other flag or pennant should be placed above or, if on the same level, to the right of the flag of the United States of America.
- » When flags of states, cities, or societies are flown on the same *halyard* (a rope used for raising and lowering the flag) with the U.S. flag, the American flag should always be at the peak.
- » When the flags of two or more nations are displayed, they are to be flown from separate staffs of the same height. The flags should be of approximately equal size. International usage forbids the display of the flag of one nation above that of another nation in times of peace.
- » The U.S. flag should always be on its own right in relation to other flags on adjacent staffs — to the left of the observer.
- » On a car, attach the flag to the antenna or clamp the flagstaff to the right fender of a vehicle, but never lay the flag over the vehicle.
- » When displayed horizontally or vertically against a wall or in a window, the stars should be uppermost and to the observer's left.

CELEBRATING FLAG DAY

June 14 is the flag's official birthday, commemorated each year in Flag Day ceremonies throughout the country. The Stars and Stripes first flew in Flag Day festivities in 1861 in Hartford, Connecticut, and the first national observance of Flag Day took place on the 100-year anniversary of the flag — June 14, 1877. Although not celebrated as a federal holiday, Americans everywhere continue to honor the flag and the ideals she represents to them through school programs and civic observances on June 14.

- » When carrying the flag, hold it at a slight angle from your body. It is also proper to carry the flag with one hand and rest it on your right shoulder.
- » At a funeral, drape the flag over the casket with the stars at the head and over the left shoulder of the body. Do not lower the flag into the grave or allow it to touch the ground.



TIP

You can find the U.S. code related to the flag by going to the website at <https://uscode.house.gov/> and clicking View on the right next to the entry Title 4 — Flag and Seal, Seat Of Government, And The States under Browse the United States Code.

Half-staff rules

Flags are flown at half-staff to show respect for the dead. Even so, the practice comes with specific rules for flag etiquette and protocol:

- » By order of the president, the flag shall be flown at half-staff upon the death of principal figures of the U.S. government or the governor of a state, territory, or possession, as a mark of respect to their memory. In the event of the death of other officials or foreign dignitaries, the flag is to be displayed at half-staff according to presidential instructions or orders, or in accordance with recognized customs or practices not inconsistent with law.
- » When flown at half-staff, the flag should be first hoisted to the peak for an instant and then lowered to the half-staff position. The flag should be again raised to the peak before it is lowered for the day.
- » On Memorial Day, the flag should be displayed at half-staff until noon only, then raised to the top of the staff.



SALUTING THE FLAG

It may seem strange, but the clothing you wear affects how to properly salute the flag. Civilians should place their right hands over their hearts, except when wearing athletic clothing, in which case they should remove their hats and stand at attention; no hand salute is necessary. Civilian men wearing hats should remove the hat and hold it at their left shoulder, with hand over heart. Others should simply stand at attention. Those in uniform should render the military salute.

When the flag is moving, as in a parade, it is proper to salute when it is six paces in front of you and hold the salute until it passes six paces beyond. During the playing of the national anthem, the salute to the flag begins with the first note and continues until the song has ended. Even when a flag is not on display during the playing of the anthem, it is still proper to face the music and salute as if it were actually there.

Caring for the flag and what to do when it wears out

According to the United States Flag Code, when the flag is lowered, no part of it should touch the ground or any other object — it should be received by waiting hands and arms. The flag should also be cleaned and mended whenever necessary.

When a flag is so worn it is no longer fit to serve as a symbol of our country, it should be destroyed by burning in a dignified manner. Check with your local American Legion Post before Flag Day; most posts conduct flag-burning ceremonies on June 14.

The United States Flag Code provides many rules for how, when, and why the flag may be displayed, but it also warns of some important flag don'ts to avoid:

- » The flag should not be displayed on a float in a parade, except from a staff, and should not be draped over the hood, top, sides, or back of any vehicle, railroad train, or boat.
- » Although it's permissible for the flag to form a distinctive feature of the unveiling ceremony of a statue or monument, it should never be used as the actual covering piece.
- » When it's permissible to use the flag to cover a casket, it should never be lowered into the grave or allowed to touch the ground.

- » When being carried, the flag should not be dipped to any person or thing. Regimental colors, state flags, and organizational or institutional flags are to be dipped to the American flag as a mark of honor.
- » The flag should never be displayed with the union down, except as a signal of dire distress in instances of extreme danger to life or property.
- » The flag should never touch anything beneath it, such as the ground, water, or merchandise.
- » The flag should never be carried flat or horizontally, but always aloft and free.
- » The flag should never be used as wearing apparel, bedding, or drapery. It should never be festooned, drawn back, nor up, in folds, but always allowed to fall free. Bunting of blue, white, and red, always arranged with the blue above, the white in the middle, and the red below, should be used for covering a speaker's desk, draping the front of the platform, and for general decoration.
- » The flag should never be fastened, displayed, used, or stored in such a manner as to permit it to be easily torn, soiled, or damaged in any way.
- » The flag should never be used as a covering for a ceiling.
- » The flag should never have placed upon it, nor on any part of it, nor attached to it, any mark, insignia, letter, word, figure, design, picture, or drawing of any nature.
- » The flag should never be used as a receptacle for receiving, holding, carrying, or delivering anything.
- » The flag should never be used for advertising purposes in any manner whatsoever. It should not be embroidered on such articles as cushions or handkerchiefs and the like, or printed or otherwise impressed on paper napkins or boxes or anything that is designed for temporary use and discarded. Advertising signs should not be fastened to a staff or halyard from which the flag is flown.
- » No part of the flag should ever be used as a costume or athletic uniform. However, a flag patch may be affixed to the uniform of military personnel, firemen, policemen, and members of patriotic organizations. The flag represents a living country and is itself considered a living thing. Therefore, the lapel flag pin being a replica, should be worn on the left lapel near the heart.

Folding the flag

A properly folded flag ends up in the shape of a tri-cornered hat, symbolic of the hats worn by colonial soldiers during the American Revolutionary War. Here's how to fold the flag:

1. Start by holding the flag waist high with another person so that its surface is parallel to the ground.
2. Fold the flag in half, lengthwise, bringing the lower striped section up to meet the upper field of blue.
3. Fold lengthwise again, keeping the blue field on the outside.
4. Make a triangular fold by bringing the striped corner of the folded edge to meet the top (open) edge of the flag.
5. Fold the outermost point on the right inward, parallel to the top open edge, which forms a second triangle.
6. Continue the triangular folding until the entire length of the flag is folded in this manner. When complete, only a triangular blue field of stars should be visible.

The Pledge of Allegiance

Today's Pledge of Allegiance (as amended by Congress in 1954) reads as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Originally written for a public-school program celebrating the 400th anniversary of Columbus's discovery of America, the pledge was developed to encourage loyalty to the United States. In 1923, the words "my Flag" were changed to "the Flag of the United States," so that new immigrants would pledge their allegiance to the United States while honoring the heritage of their birth countries. The pledge didn't receive formal recognition from Congress until it was officially adopted into the U.S. Flag Code on Flag Day of 1942. Even so, the official name "The Pledge of Allegiance" wasn't adopted until 1945.

The National (and Other) Anthems

Francis Scott Key wrote the poem, "The Defence of Fort M'Henry," on September 14, 1814. This poem commemorates the Battle of Baltimore, a city where the U.S. government officials had found refuge after the British had burned down the capital, Washington, D.C. (including the White House and the Capitol) three weeks earlier. The enormous 30-x-42-foot historic flag (15 stripes and stars!) that flew over Fort McHenry during the War of 1812 now hangs at the Smithsonian's National

Museum of American History in Washington, D.C. The poem became a song, and on March 3, 1931, the Star-Spangled Banner became the national anthem. Find out more about the Star-Spangled Banner flag and song at their online exhibit at <https://amhistory.si.edu/starspangledbanner/>.

The official anthem



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Technically, our national anthem has four original verses, although you'll almost never hear anything but the first.

Attending a public event and joining in the singing of this proud song can be an uplifting patriotic experience. Just so you're ready the next time you attend a ball-game or other public event, here are the words:

Oh, say can you see by the dawn's early light
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming
Whose broad stripes and bright stars thru the perilous fight,
O'er the ramparts we watched were so gallantly streaming?
And the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there.
Oh, say does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?

More recently, choirs have begun to perform the fifth stanza of the Star-Spangled Banner, which was written during the beginning of the Civil War by Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.

When our land is illumined with Liberty's smile,
If a foe from within strike a blow at her glory,
Down, down with the traitor that dares to defile
The flag of her stars and the page of her story!
By the millions unchained, who our birthright have gained,
We will keep her bright blazon forever unstained!
And the Star-Spangled Banner in triumph shall wave

The “millions unchained” refers to the African American slaves who gained the birthright to “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” as promised in the Declaration of Independence. The emancipation of slaves will protect the “blazon” of the Constitution. People can look deeper into the stanza to see the living promise of the Constitution to protect the basic rights of all Americans.

Other American anthems

The Star-Spangled Banner is difficult for most people to sing. Following are other popular American anthems:

- » ***America (My Country, 'Tis of Thee)***, written by Samuel Francis Smith in 1832. The melody used is the same as that of the national anthem of the United Kingdom, “God Save the Queen.” The song served as one of the anthems of the United States before the adoption of “The Star-Spangled Banner” as the official U.S. national anthem in 1931.

My country, 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of liberty,
Of thee I sing;
Land where my fathers died,
Land of the pilgrims' pride,
From ev'ry mountainside
Let freedom ring!

- » ***America the Beautiful***, written by Katharine Lee Bates in 1895 and adapted into a song in 1911. The song was inspired by a trip to Pike's Peak, Colorado, one of the highest points in the Rocky Mountains. In her song, she imagines that she can see Americans united as one living together in a beautiful, fruitful country.

O beautiful for spacious skies,
For amber waves of grain,
For purple mountain majesties
Above the fruited plain!
America! America!
God shed His grace on thee

And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea!

- » ***God Bless America***, written by Irving Berlin during World War I in 1918 and revised by him in the run-up to World War II in 1938. Since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks this song is commonly sung during the seventh-inning stretch in Major League Baseball games, most often on Sundays and holidays.

God bless America, land that I love
Stand beside her and guide her
Through the night with the light from above
From the mountains to the prairies
To the oceans white with foam
God bless America, my home sweet home
God bless America, my home sweet home

- » ***This Land Is Your Land***, written by Woody Guthrie in 1940. This American folk song of inclusion and protest has been adapted by many musicians who change the lyrics and add verses to express current issues.

This land is your land, and this land is my land
From California to the New York Island,
From the Redwood Forest, to the Gulf stream waters,
This land was made for you and me.

- » ***Lift Every Voice and Sing***, often referred to as the Black national anthem, was written by brothers James and Rosamond Johnson in 1900 to honor President Abraham Lincoln who freed the slaves by issuing the Emancipation Proclamation. The song is a prayer of thanksgiving, full of biblical imagery that refers to the Exodus from slavery to the freedom of the “promised land.” Frequently sung during 1950s and 1960s civil rights movement marches, the song came to express the struggle against racial discrimination and is the highlight of Juneteenth concerts.

Lift every voice and sing,
’Til earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise
High as the listening skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.

Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us;
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
Let us march on 'til victory is won.

Investigating American Icons

Although the flag is undoubtedly our most important symbol, you'll frequently encounter still more American icons, and their history and symbolism are no less fascinating.

The Great Seal

Our Founding Fathers believed an emblem and national coat of arms would help solidify the identity of the United States as an independent nation of free people. Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson undertook the task of creating the seal for the United States of America in 1776. Six years later, on June 20, 1782, the Great Seal was finalized and approved. Figure 1-1 shows the Great Seal as depicted on the GovInfo website at www.govinfo.gov/features/great-seal.



FIGURE 1-1:
The Great Seal of
the United States.

The Secretary of State serves as the official custodian of the Great Seal, and it can only be affixed to certain documents, such as foreign treaties and presidential proclamations. An officer from the department's Presidential Appointments staff does the actual embossing of documents after the Secretary of State has countersigned the president's signature.

The next time you gaze at the Great Seal of the United States, which is rich with patriotic symbolism, keep these points in mind:

- » Central to the seal is a bald eagle, our national bird, holding in its beak a scroll inscribed *E pluribus unum* (Latin for “out of many, one,” symbolizing how our 13 original colonies came together to form one nation).
- » The eagle’s right claw clutches an olive branch while the left talon holds 13 arrows, denoting “the power of peace and war.”
- » A shield with 13 red and white stripes covers the eagle’s breast. Supported solely by the eagle, the shield reminds Americans to rely on their own virtue.
- » The blue field on the shield represents the president and Congress, being supported by the states, denoted by the red and white stripes.
- » As with our flag, red signifies hardiness and valor; white, purity and innocence; and blue, vigilance, perseverance, and justice.
- » Floating above the eagle’s head in a field of blue is a constellation formed of 13 stars. The constellation symbolized that America, a new state, was taking its place among other nations.

On the seal’s reverse side, you’ll find a familiar image — it’s also used on the back of U.S. dollar bills:

- » An unfinished 13-step pyramid symbolizes strength and duration, and once again, the 13 original colonies.
- » Atop the pyramid, the Eye of Providence. The words *Annuit Coeptis* appear above the pyramid, meaning, “God has favored our undertakings.”
- » A scroll beneath the pyramid proclaims 1776 as the beginning of the American new era with the Latin words *Novus Ordo Seclorum*, meaning “New Order of the Ages.”

You can find this image at the Library of Congress website at www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2004676788.

The national bird

The bald eagle, the national bird of the United States, is the only eagle unique to North America. When America adopted the bird as its national symbol in 1782, as many as 100,000 nesting bald eagles lived in the continental United States, and the bald eagle populated every state in the Union. By 1963, only 417 nesting pairs were counted in the lower 48, although eagle populations in Alaska and Canada

have always been healthy. Today, thanks to efforts by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service — in partnership with other federal agencies, tribes, state and local governments, conservation organizations, universities, corporations, and thousands of individual Americans — the number of nesting pairs has risen to an estimated 71,467, and the bald eagle was removed from the endangered species list in 2007.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Benjamin Franklin, one of our most respected Founding Fathers, disapproved of the choice of the bald eagle as the national bird. He believed the eagle was a bird of bad moral character because it steals food from weaker animals. Franklin thought the best bird for the job was none other than the humble turkey, which Franklin described as

“A bird of courage that would not hesitate to attack a grenadier of the British guards, who should presume to invade his farmyard with a red coat on.”

The national motto

Increased religious sentiment during the Civil War spurred Congress to include the national motto “In God We Trust” on United States currency. Despite being barraged with appeals urging then Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase to recognize God on United States coins, an 1837 Act of Congress specifically prescribed exactly which mottoes and devices could be placed on U.S. currency. Another Act of Congress changed that in 1864, and the words *In God We Trust* were first seen that year on the newly minted two-cent coins. More congressional acts throughout the years have authorized the motto to appear on various other currency denominations. But it wasn't until July 30, 1956, that the words officially became the national motto of the United States.

The national motto comes with a certain degree of controversy because the constitutionality of the words has been challenged on many occasions. Nevertheless, the courts, which tend to favor looking at the motto in a historical rather than religious context, have consistently upheld the legality of the motto's use on the basis that it is not a specific endorsement of religion.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Many people think the Latin words *E pluribus unum* (“out of many, one”) form the national motto. You'll hear national figures who should know better make this mistake on television and radio all the time. In fact, you can even find the words labeled as such in some government publications. Although the Latin phrase is used in many patriotic emblems — including the Great Seal of the United States — *In God We Trust* remains the officially recognized national motto.

American Monuments

Since the beginning of civilization, people have erected a statue, building, or other structure to commemorate a notable person or event. When we visit these monuments, memorials, and parks, their beauty inspires us to more deeply contemplate the life of the person or event, celebrate their legacy, and silently recommit to working for the common good. Here are some key monuments which give deep expression to the American experience.

The Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island

The Statue of Liberty, officially named Liberty Enlightening the World (or Lady Liberty), is a monument that symbolizes the United States. The statue is placed on Liberty Island, in New York City Harbor, and commemorates the signing of the United States Declaration of Independence. It was given to the United States by the people of France in 1886 to represent the friendship between the two countries established during the American Revolution. It represents a woman wearing a stola, a crown, and sandals trampling a broken chain, with a torch in her raised right hand and a tablet in her left hand with the date of the Declaration of Independence appearing as JULY IV MDCCLXXVI (July 4, 1776). The statue welcomes visitors, immigrants, and returning Americans traveling by ship.

In 1903, the poem “The New Colossus,” by Emma Lazarus, an advocate for Jewish refugees fleeing persecution, was added to the base of the statue. The second stanza celebrates America as a “Nation of Immigrants”:

“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she
With silent lips. “Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

North of the Statue of Liberty is Ellis Island, which served as the busiest immigrant inspection station in the United States. From 1892 to 1954, nearly 12 million immigrants arriving at the Port of New York and New Jersey were processed there under federal law. It now hosts the Ellis Island Immigration Museum and Wall of Honor which includes slaves, Native Americans, and immigrants who were not processed on the island. Find out more at the National Park Service’s Liberty Island and Ellis Island website: www.nps.gov/stli/index.htm.

The Liberty Bell and the President's House

The Liberty Bell is a famous symbol of American independence, located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The inscription reads “Proclaim Liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof” (Leviticus 25:10). The bell was rung during a public reading of the Declaration of Independence. Abolitionists who fought against slavery adopted it as a symbol of their movement.

Formerly placed in the bell tower of the Pennsylvania State House (now renamed Independence Hall), the bell today is located across the street in the Liberty Bell Center in Independence National Historical Park. Immediately next to the Liberty Bell Center is the President's House, the site of the former home of Presidents Washington and Adams and at least seven slaves. This memorial serves as a counterbalance to the American fight for independence by including Africans who were enslaved.

The National Mall

The National Mall & Memorial Parks in Washington, D.C., has some of the oldest protected park lands in the National Park Service ([nps.gov](https://www.nps.gov)). Visitors learn about presidents, honor war veterans, and celebrate the United States commitment to freedom and equality.

In March 2022, USCIS released *A More Perfect Union: The USCIS Civics Test Guide to the Monuments and Memorials on the National Mall*, a series of free downloadable PDFs, which you can find by going to www.uscis.gov and typing the words *a more perfect union* in the Search box. Each guide describes one of 13 monuments and memorials included in the series.

The Rights and Duties of Everyone Living in the United States

Thomas Jefferson wrote in the Declaration of Independence that “all men are created equal” and “are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights” — namely the right to “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” The Constitution also protects the basic rights of everyone living in the United States, including freedom of speech, religion, the press, and other important rights outlined in the U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights, which are the first ten amendments to the Constitution (see Book 6, Chapter 1).



REMEMBER

Jefferson's other key point in the Declaration was that a government exists only by the consent of the governed. If the citizens feel that their government is not carrying out their wishes, they have the right and the duty to change or do away with that government.

To protect the government that guarantees their inherent rights, all people living in the United States have important duties to their country, including the following:

- » **Obedying laws:** Everyone needs to obey the laws of the community, state, and country in which they live, as well as support the Constitution of the United States.
- » **Paying taxes:** All persons living in the United States are expected to pay income and other required taxes, honestly and on time, as outlined in the 16th Amendment.
- » **Defending the country:** Males are required to bear arms for the armed forces or otherwise perform noncombatant services for the government when required in times of war or crisis. Males between their 18th and 26th birthdays who are living in the United States are required to register for the Selective Service (also known as "the Draft"). The U.S. military converted to an all-volunteer system in 1975, but Congress retains the right to reinstate the draft should the country ever need additional military personnel. To learn more, visit the Selective Service System (www.sss.gov/faq/).

Participating in democracy

The United States is a representative democracy. Although our government is elected by citizens, everyone — citizens and noncitizens, young and old — can participate in the democratic process by making their voices heard through individual and communal action. On the political front, you can consider joining a political party, helping with candidates' campaigns, and expressing your opinion to elected officials. You can also work at the community level by volunteering for public programs (such as community clean-up efforts) and informing the public about issues of concern by submitting articles to local newspapers or other media outlets.

If you have a little free time, start looking for volunteer opportunities and resources on <http://volunteermatch.org>, an online resource to find volunteer opportunities near you. Civic, faith, and community groups such as the Rotary Club, the Lions Club, and the Kiwanis Club also connect children and adults of all ages to volunteer opportunities.

Specific rights and duties of U.S. citizens

Here are more of the essential responsibilities and rights of U.S. citizenship:

- » **Voting in federal (also state and local) elections:** Being a good U.S. citizen begins at the voting booth. Through their votes, citizens can and do have the power to change their government. If an elected official doesn't live up to a majority of their constituents' expectations, those constituents can choose not to reelect that official to another term in office. (*Constituents* are the people who live in an elected official's district or districts.) Citizens also have the power to elect different representatives, change laws, or change the Constitution itself if a majority of the citizens agree, or even run for federal office (see Book 6, Chapter 3 for more about the importance of voting).
- » **Serving on juries:** The government may call upon citizens to serve on a jury. Jurors perform an essential role in sustaining the U.S. system of justice, so jury duty is an important responsibility of every U.S. citizen. The right to a trial by a jury of your peers is guaranteed in the Constitution, and a jury's fair and honest decisions help protect U.S. citizens' fundamental right to justice for all.
- » **Traveling on a U.S. Passport:** An American passport allows U.S. citizens to travel to almost any country in the world, in many instances, without a visa. See related information U.S. Passports at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports.html>.
- » **Running for local office:** Lift your voice on behalf of your community. Check out the candidate training resources at <http://candidatebootcamp.com>, <https://emilyslist.org>, <https://runforsomething.net>, and <https://sheshouldrun.org>.
- » **Running for federal office:** A candidate must be either a natural-born or naturalized U.S. citizen plus meet office-specific age and residency requirements to serve in a federal office. For example, a candidate for the House of Representatives must (1) be at least 25 years old; (2) have been a citizen of the United States for the past 7 years; and (3) be (at the time of the election) an inhabitant of the state they represent. You can find more information about elections in Book 6, Chapter 2.
- » **Applying for a federal job:** If you are a U.S. citizen, you meet a major requirement to apply for a federal job. Go to <https://usa.jobs.gov>, create a profile, and look for a new job! Also check your state, county, and local employment sites; however, they do not post federal jobs, and some local jobs require U.S. citizenship as a condition of employment.
- » **Accessing federal education funds:** Education is expensive. U.S. citizens and their children have access to federal scholarships, grants, and loans that are not readily available to noncitizens. Visit <https://studentaid.gov>.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Trying to hold on to nationalism
- » Debating states' rights
- » Making travel, farming, and communication easier with technological advances
- » Expanding the lands of the U.S.
- » Concentrating on America's societal issues

Chapter 2

Major Changes as America Grew

Fresh from a “victory” over England in the War of 1812 (it was really a draw), America was feeling pretty full of itself in 1815. The country made big strides in pulling together. But like any adolescent, America was subject to wild mood swings. As this chapter unfolds, the country suffers an attack of the economic blahs, encounters some pretty sick politicking, and sees one of the most tragic aspects of its national character, slavery, take firm hold as an ongoing issue.

There's also the election of Andrew Jackson, a speech from Daniel Webster that helped get the North ready to fight the Civil War, the coming of the railroad, and more shameful treatment of American Indians. Oh, and remember the Alamo.

When America leaves the 19th century behind and begins a new era that involves somewhat reluctant interaction with other countries (World War I), the politicians' and the peoples' focus are less on expansion and more on taking care of a changing society at home. Immigration, changes in the job market, adjustments to spending habits, increasingly available entertainment, and eras of the Roaring Twenties and Prohibition all left their marks on the first half of the 20th century.

Embracing Nationalism . . . Sort Of

By 1815, the generation that had brought on — and fought through — the American Revolution was fading away, as were many of the memories of what it had been like to be individual colonies before uniting to become a single country. More people began to think of themselves as Americans first and Virginians or Vermonters second. The rising tide of nationalism showed itself in the beginnings of a truly American literature and art. The District of Columbia, rebuilt on the ashes of the capital the British had burned in 1814, gradually became a source of national pride.

However, these nationalist feelings were sorely tested by several issues that different sections of the country viewed with divergent perspectives. These included the banking system, tariffs, public land sales, and Supreme Court decisions on the powers of the central government versus individual states.

Taking it to the bank

The first Bank of the United States, which had helped the nation get a grip on its finances, had been created at the urging of Alexander Hamilton in 1791. But it had been allowed to expire in 1811, and a horde of state-chartered banks swarmed to take its place. In 1811, there were 88 state banks; by 1813, the number was 208, and by 1819, 392. Most of them extended credit and printed currency far in excess of their reserves, and when the war with Britain came, most of them couldn't redeem their paper for a tenth of its worth.

In 1816, Congress chartered a second Bank of the United States, with a capital of \$35 million. The idea was to provide stability to the economy by having a large bank that would serve as the federal government's financial agent. But the new bank's managers were corrupt, stupid, or both, and they lent money like mad to land-crazed Americans flocking to the West.

In 1819, land prices dropped, manufacturing and crop prices collapsed, and scores of overextended banks failed. The yahoos who were first put in charge of the second Bank of the United States finally got the boot; new management stepped in, clamped down hard on credit, and foreclosed on its debtors.

But the Panic of 1819 — the nation's first widespread financial crisis — triggered strong resentment toward the Bank, which was nicknamed "the Monster." The Bank was particularly hated in the credit-dependent West, which saw it as a creature of Eastern financiers and speculators. The West's antipathy toward the bank drove a wedge between the regions.

A tariff-ic idea

The largest source of income for the federal government came from *tariffs*, the taxes collected on goods imported into the United States. During the War of 1812, the average tariff doubled to about 25 percent. In 1816, Congress voted to keep tariffs at those levels.

The idea was that higher tariffs would not only generate money for the government but also drive up prices on foreign goods and thus encourage Americans to buy U.S.-made products. Most sections of the country liked the idea at first, especially the North, where manufacturing of goods from furniture to textiles had developed during the war. But as time passed, the South and much of the West came to hate tariffs because those regions had little manufacturing to protect, and the taxes just drove up the cost of goods they had to get from somewhere else.

This land is my land, but for how much?

As a new country, America was attracting a crowd. In 1810, the census counted 7.2 million Americans. By 1820, that number shot up to 9.6 million — a 33 percent increase in just a decade. Much of that was the result of an astonishing birth-rate, but an upswing in the number of European immigrants crossing the Atlantic helped as well. The crossing was relatively cheap (maybe \$25 from London) — no customs, no immigration, and no passport. You got off the ship and looked for a job. By 1820, an estimated 30,000 people a year were doing just that. Although some immigrant bashing surfaced when economic times got tough, most newcomers were greeted with a big yawn.

“The American Republic invites nobody to come,” wrote Secretary of State John Quincy Adams. “We will keep out nobody. Arrivals will suffer no disadvantages as aliens. But they can expect no advantages either . . . what happens to them depends entirely on their individual ability and exertions and on good fortune.”

One reason for this attitude was the abundance of room. Between 1815 and 1821, six new states joined the Union, bringing the total number to 24. And federal land was cheap and plentiful: \$2 an acre for a minimum of 160 acres, with only \$80 down and the rest paid over four years.

But when hard times hit in 1819, even those lenient terms were too much. Many folks lost their land to banks when they couldn’t pay their mortgages. The banks themselves weren’t immune, either: Many failed, taking the settlers’ savings with them.

In 1820, Congress lowered the minimum amount of land that people could buy to 80 acres at \$1.25 an acre. The West supported the move, but the North and East,

which saw public land as a cash cow to be milked for every dollar that could be squeezed out, were less enthusiastic. Public land thus became another sore point among regions.

Orders from the court

One place where nationalism was secure was in the U.S. Supreme Court. Under Chief Justice John Marshall, the court consistently ruled in favor of a strong central government over the rights of individual states.

In *McCulloch v Maryland*, an 1819 case, the court ruled that Maryland had no legal right to try to run the Bank of the United States out of the state by heavily taxing it. “The power to tax is the power to destroy,” Marshall wrote, and states had no power to destroy federal institutions. In *Cohens v Virginia*, an 1821 case involving Virginia and an illegal lottery, the court asserted its right to review the decisions of state supreme courts in cases involving powers of the federal government. The court ruled in 1824, in *Gibbons v Ogden*, that New York had the power to regulate steamboat commerce only within its own borders, not between states.

Increasing industry

America was basically a country of farmers for much of the 19th century, but the War of 1812 had cut off the supply of many manufactured goods from Europe and encouraged the growth of domestic industry.

The rise of factories

In 1790, the first factory devoted to spinning cotton into thread opened in New England, and by 1815, 213 such factories existed.

Most goods were still produced and sold by individuals or small companies. But strides in manufacturing interchangeable parts to make assembling objects easier, the use of water- and steam-powered machinery, and increases in demands for American-made goods allowed companies to enlarge their operations while fostering overall growth in the nonagricultural segment of the economy.

Transportation gets rolling (well, floating)

As the market for goods grew, so did the need for a sound transportation system. Congressional leaders like Henry Clay and John C. Calhoun were eager for the federal government to lead the development of roads and waterways. The idea of federal transportation subsidies was part of what Clay termed *The American*

System, which also called for U.S. industry-protecting tariffs and a strong national bank system. But Presidents Madison and Monroe balked, claiming that the Constitution limited the federal government's public works efforts only to projects that crossed state boundaries. Because most states didn't have the money for big road-building projects, traveling or shipping by road remained a real pain in the back pocket.

On the water, however, things were a little different. One of the advantages of moving goods by water is that you can move a lot more with less effort — if you can get the water to go where you want to go and move in the direction you want. The development of the steamboat opened two-way traffic on rivers, particularly the Mississippi because cargo could go upstream against the current.

Construction on a remarkable engineering feat began in New York in 1817: the 363-mile-long Erie Canal, linking Lake Erie at Buffalo with the Hudson River and the Atlantic Ocean. Completed in 1825, the \$7 million canal soon repaid its costs through tolls and brought prosperity to the entire region. It also sparked a nationwide canal-building boom as areas raced to link up major natural waterways with manufactured ditches.

Nullify This

John C. Calhoun had waited a long time to be president. Intelligent but humorless, the South Carolinian had served as vice president under John Quincy Adams and was now vice president under Jackson. Then, as now, the best part about being vice president was that it made becoming president easier, and Calhoun figured on following Jackson into the White House. But two relatively trivial things happened to throw him off-course and Jackson turned his favor to his secretary of state, Martin Van Buren, to succeed him as president.



REMEMBER

Calhoun eventually resigned as vice president and was immediately elected as a senator from South Carolina. When it was clear he wouldn't become president, Calhoun abandoned his support of a strong central government and became a champion of the rights of states to pick and choose what federal laws they would obey, a theory of government called *nullification*.

The nullification debate hits the Senate

Calhoun's embrace of states' rights and nullification further pushed him from Jackson. Even though he was a Westerner and a slave owner, Jackson was an

ardent nationalist. At a White House dinner, when nullification proponents tested his loyalties by offering a series of toasts about states' rights, Jackson responded,

"Our Federal Union: It must be preserved!" (To which Calhoun replied, "The Union — next to our liberty, the most dear!")

Despite Jackson's support, nationalism was having a tough time. In the Senate, a January 1830 debate on whether to stop selling public land in the West turned into a debate on nullification.

- » Senator Robert Hayne of South Carolina gave an impassioned and eloquent speech in favor of the idea of nullification, pointing out that it was the only way a state could safeguard its interests.
- » Daniel Webster of Massachusetts then took the floor and spoke for hours. Webster was one of the greatest orators in U.S. history, and many people consider this speech to be the most famous in U.S. Senate history. The people, not the states, had ratified the Constitution, he said, and if the states were allowed to decide which sections they would or wouldn't subscribe to, the country would be held together by nothing but "a rope of sand."



REMEMBER

Webster's speech had a spectacular effect. Within three months, 40,000 copies had been published, and within a few years, parts of it were standard reading in textbooks throughout the North and West. Hundreds of thousands of young Northerners and Westerners were exposed to its sentiments — including a 21-year-old Kentuckian on his way to Illinois named Abraham Lincoln. For many of them, the speech became words worth fighting for. (You can read the speech, called "Second Reply to Hayne," at <https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/resources/pdf/WebsterReply.pdf>.)

A "terrible" idea

In 1828, Congress passed a bill that set high tariffs on a bunch of imported goods. The tariffs were favored in the North because they drove up prices of imported goods and, thus, made goods from Northern factories more attractive. The West was okay with the bill because tariff revenues were supposed to pay for public works projects the region needed. But the South, without factories and with less need for roads and canals, hated them.

In 1832, Congress passed a new tariff schedule lower than the 1828 rates. But it wasn't enough for South Carolina legislators. They convened a special convention, which decided that not only was the tariff null and void in South Carolina, but the state would also militarily defend its right to nullify the law.

The move infuriated Jackson, and he sent some army and navy units to the state while he prepared a larger force “to crush the rebellion.” Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed. Henry Clay, the great negotiator, came up with a compromise tariff that reduced the rates over a decade. The South decided that it could live with that without losing face. Both sides claimed victory, and a bloody civil clash was once again delayed.

Bringing down the bank

With South Carolina back in the fold, Jackson was easily reelected in 1832, despite his ill health and his earlier statements that he would serve only one term. Part of the reason he sought a second term was to thrash his old foe, Henry Clay, who was the first nominee of the new National Republican Party (which would soon take the name of the opposition party to the English king and become the Whigs). Another factor was that Jackson had some unfinished business with a bank.

The charter of the country’s only nationwide bank, the Bank of the United States, was set to expire in 1836, and Clay pushed a bill through Congress in 1832 to extend it. But Jackson vetoed the bill, contending that the Bank was a corrupt private monopoly that fed off little banks and benefited only a handful of rich American and foreign investors.

The Bank’s stock was, in fact, controlled by a relatively few men, and the charge of corruption was not completely unfounded. Bank president Nicholas Biddle was a brilliant but arrogant aristocrat who often loaned money at no or low interest to the “right people” — including dozens of members of Congress — while clamping down hard on banks in the West. But since 1819, the Bank had provided stability to the economy by requiring local banks to keep adequate gold and silver reserves to back up the currency they issued and to be careful about making loans.

After his veto, Jackson decided to kill the Bank off rather than wait until 1836. So, in 1832, he ordered that all federal funds be withdrawn from it and deposited in smaller banks. When his treasury secretary balked, he got a new one, and when that one also balked, he got a third who agreed to go along.

At first, the plan worked pretty well, mostly because the economy was sailing along. The federal government’s budget deficit dropped to zero for the first time in history. The budget even had a surplus, which was shared with the states for projects like road building and education. But then the boom busted.

In 1836, Jackson ordered that all public land could be sold only for silver or gold, not paper currency. Land sales sagged from 22 million acres to 6 million in one

year. Local banks held mortgages that weren't being paid, and they couldn't foreclose because the land was worth little, and no one could buy it anyway. In 1837, after a bank panic, the country sank into a four-year recession. But by that time, Jackson was out of office, and it was someone else's problem.

Inventing a Better Life

While politicians were debating lofty issues like nullification and national banks, other people were creating better ways to get around, get something to eat, and get their points across.

Riding the train

On September 18, 1830, a nine-mile race on the outskirts of Baltimore pitted a horse pulling a carriage against a noisy contraption on wooden wheels called a steam locomotive engine. The horse won after the engine broke down, but it was a relatively short-lived victory for Old Paint because the railroad had arrived in America.

Although trains had been operating in England for some years, the Baltimore & Ohio (B&O) line's *Tom Thumb* was the first in the United States. By the end of 1830, the B&O had carried 80,000 passengers along a 13-mile track. In South Carolina, a 136-mile line between Charleston and Hamburg opened in 1833. By 1840, 409 railroads had laid 3,300 miles of track, and by 1860, America had close to 30,000 miles of rail.

Early trains had their flaws. Sparks caused fires along the tracks and in the rail cars, and the rails themselves had a nasty habit of coming up through the bottoms of the cars. Trains were also subject to the occasional explosion, which hardly ever happened with horses.

But trains nonetheless had an enormous impact. The demands for labor to build tracks encouraged immigration, and the demand for capital to finance the lines attracted foreign investment. The ability to transport large amounts of goods and agricultural products opened new markets and linked old ones. Communications improved vastly, and going from here to there got a whole lot easier. Even the contrarian philosopher Henry David Thoreau conceded, "When I hear the iron horse make the hills echo with his snort, like thunder, shaking the earth with his feet and breathing fire and smoke . . . it seems the earth had got a race now worthy to inhabit it."

Reaping what you sow

As the nation grew, so did its appetite. Steel plows, most notably the kind developed by Illinois blacksmith John Deere, had made planting crops easier. But harvesting, especially grain, was still a laborious process that involved men swinging heavy scythes all day long and then going back and picking up the threshed grain.

In 1831, a Pennsylvanian named Cyrus McCormick came up with a rolling machine that both cut down the grain and threw it onto a platform. McCormick's machine could do the work of 15 men, and more quickly. By 1860, he was making 4,000 harvesters a year and selling them on an “installment” plan so that farmers could afford them by paying off a little at a time. America's breadbasket got much bigger because of it.

Communicating across America

In New York, a painter named Samuel F.B. Morse was tinkering with a device he called the telegraph, which could send messages using electricity. After he patented it, in 1841, Morse got Congress to put up \$30,000 so that he could string electric wire between Washington and Baltimore. On March 24, 1844, the first message — “What hath God wrought?” — was sent. In 1856, the Western Union Company was formed, and by 1866, a transatlantic telegraph cable had been laid between America and Europe.

The telegraph was the first true mass communication medium. By 1900, few places in the world couldn't send and receive messages. Not everyone, however, was impressed. When someone remarked that, with the telegraph, Maine could now talk to Florida, writer Ralph Waldo Emerson reportedly observed, “Yes, but has Maine anything to say to Florida?”

Staking Out New Land

When not busy inventing things, Americans were on the move, mostly in a westerly direction. That movement was unfortunate for the American Indians already there. It also proved unfortunate for the Mexican government, which was determined to hold onto an area known as “Tejas” in Spanish. Americans called it Texas.

Pushing out the American Indians

President Andrew Jackson wholeheartedly supported a policy (actually started by President James Monroe) to systematically move all the Native Americans east of the Mississippi River to west of the Mississippi or off the fertile acreage of the river valley and onto the dusty prairies of what is now Oklahoma.

In 1830, Congress passed the Indian Removal Act and set aside \$500,000 for the task. By the time the odious job was done in the 1840s, more than 100,000 natives had been moved off more than 200 million acres. Proponents contended that the forced exodus was humane because the only practical alternative was to kill them. This conveniently ignored the fact that thousands of Native Americans did die — of disease, hunger, and exposure — on the forced marches, giving rise to the term *Trail of Tears*. Of all the nation's leaders, only Henry Clay spoke out against the policy.

Two tribes, in particular, didn't go easily. The Sauk and Fox tribe, led by Chief Black Hawk, originally crossed the Mississippi and then came back. Met by a large U.S. military force that included an Illinois militia volunteer named Abe Lincoln, the tribe surrendered after bloody fights in which women and children were slaughtered along with the native warriors. In Florida, the Seminoles, under Chief Osceola, used the swamps and Everglades to fight for a decade before ultimately surrendering. The war with the Seminoles cost the U.S. military \$20 million and 1,500 lives.

In the Southeast, the so-called civilized tribes of the Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, and Chickasaw had actually been pretty adaptable to the encroaching White man's ways. They built roads and houses, raised cattle, and farmed. Some even owned slaves. When the state of Georgia tried to force the Cherokee off their land, they appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled in their favor. But the ruling didn't help; what the state couldn't do, the federal government could. By the end of the 1840s, most of the Native Americans in the eastern United States were gone.

Claiming independence for Texas

Everyone wanted Texas. President John Quincy Adams offered \$1 million for it; Andrew Jackson upped the offer to \$5 million. The newly independent country of Mexico wasn't interested in selling the area, even though it was sparsely settled and Mexico had no firm plans for it. But Mexico did allow Americans to settle there.

Growing the American base

In late 1825, the Virginia-born Stephen Austin had settled 300 American families in an area near San Antonio. By 1834, Austin's colony had 20,000 White colonists and 2,000 slaves. That was four times the number of Mexicans in Texas. Slavery was abolished in Mexico in 1831, but Austin and the other American settlers ignored the law, as well as a law requiring them to convert to Roman Catholicism. They began thinking of themselves not as Mexican subjects but as a cross between Mexicans and Texans — or *Texians*, as they called themselves.

The area began to attract restless and sometimes lawless Americans who weren't as peaceful as the Austin bunch. These folks included Sam Houston, a soldier and good friend of Andrew Jackson's; the Bowie brothers, Louisiana slave smugglers who had designed an impressive long knife that bore their name; and David (he didn't like being called "Davy") Crockett, a Tennessee ex-congressman and daredevil backwoodsman with a flair for self-promotion.

Remembering the Alamo

In 1835, Mexican President Antonio López de Santa Anna proclaimed a new constitution that eliminated any special privileges for Texas, and the Texians declared their independence. They kicked the Mexican soldiers out of the garrison at San Antonio, and a motley force of 187 Texians and American volunteers set up a fort in an old mission called the Alamo.

On March 6, 1836, after a 13-day siege and a brief predawn battle, Santa Anna's army of about 5,000 overran the Alamo, despite heavy Mexican losses, and killed all its defenders. The victory accomplished little for Santa Anna, but "Remember the Alamo" became a rallying cry for Texians. Six weeks after the Alamo fell, an army led by Sam Houston surprised, defeated, and captured Santa Anna at the San Jacinto River.

Becoming a state

Texas ratified a constitution that included slavery and waited to be annexed to the United States. But Jackson was in no hurry. He didn't want a war with Mexico that could ruin the election chances of his handpicked successor, Martin Van Buren. And the fact that Texas was proslavery would upset the delicate balance between free and slave states.



TIP

Jackson did formally recognize Texas on his last day in office in March 1841, after Van Buren had been elected. But it wasn't until December 1845 that the Lone Star Republic became the Lone Star State.

Fast Forwarding into the 1900s

With World War I over, America turned its attention back toward itself — and it was kind of uneasy about what it saw. Things seemed to be happening at too fast a pace. Young people were challenging old ways. An attempt to make the country more moral with a prohibition on liquor had the opposite effect, and the economy was making some Americans rich (and causing a lot more to spend like they were rich).

In this section, we visit the heroes and villains of the 1920s, along with the rise of mass media and its impact on the country. It was only a decade-long trip, but it was a helluva ride.

Pushing for peace

Nearly a year before World War I was over, President Woodrow Wilson had already come up with a plan of *14 Points*, in which he outlined his version of a peace treaty. Leaders of America's allies viewed it as simplistic, optimistic, and much too forgiving of the enemy. The French prime minister sneered that because humankind couldn't keep God's 10 Commandments, it was unlikely that folks could keep Wilson's 14 Points.

But Wilson was so eager to play a major role in the making of peace that he did something only one U.S. president (Teddy Roosevelt) had done before: He left the country while in office. In December 1918, a month after the fighting ended, Wilson went to Paris to meet with the leaders of France, England, and Italy. The Big Four (which soon became the Big Three after the minister from Italy left in a snit) soon drafted a peace treaty that included *almost* nothing that Wilson wanted.

Instead, the *Treaty of Versailles* required Germany to accept the blame for the war, pay \$15 billion to the winning countries, give up most of its colonies, and limit the future size of its military forces. But the treaty *did* include at least one thing Wilson *really* wanted: the formation of a League of Nations, whose members would promise to respect one another's rights and settle their differences through the league.

Wilson brought the treaty and the idea of the league back to America and presented them to the U.S. Senate for its constitutionally required approval. But the Democratic president was facing a Senate dominated by Republicans and led by Massachusetts Sen. Henry Cabot Lodge, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee.



REMEMBER

Lodge, California Sen. Hiram Johnson, and some other “isolationist” senators were adamantly against the idea of “foreign entanglements” like the league. Lodge used his position to both stall consideration of the treaty and offer amendments to it that would have watered it down somewhat.

If Wilson had agreed to go along with a few changes, he may have gained the two-thirds approval he needed. But Wilson stubbornly refused to negotiate. Each side dug in and launched thunderous attacks on the other. Wilson made a herculean 8,000-mile, three-week trip around the country, making more than 40 speeches in support of the treaty.

In the end, Wilson’s effort proved both politically futile and personally tragic. In early October, he had a stroke. The next month, the Senate resoundingly rejected the league and the peace treaty. The Senate rejected it again in March 1920 when Democratic senators brought it back for reconsideration. America would go it alone for another generation — or until the next world war.

Restricting immigration and reacting with fear

One of the reasons many Americans opposed joining a League of Nations was that they connected foreigners with growing domestic economic problems, even though the problems had more to do with the war’s end than anything else. Labor shortages during the fighting had driven up wages and strengthened workers’ bargaining — union membership rose more than 40 percent between 1915 and 1918.

But with the war over, more than \$3 billion in federal war-related contracts were canceled almost overnight. Hundreds of thousands of returning soldiers and sailors crowded into the labor market and crowded out women and minorities, particularly Black people. An oversupply of food and other products caused prices — and wages — to drop and unemployment to rise. Human nature being what it is, Americans bewildered by the sudden downturn from good times looked for someone to blame.

They found plenty of targets. One group was the communists. The Russian Revolution scared many Americans by demonstrating how an uprising by a small group of radicals could overthrow the government of a large nation. Actually, America’s relatively few communists wielded relatively little clout, but nearly every labor strike was denounced as communist-inspired. A series of bombs mailed to leading American capitalists like J. P. Morgan and John D. Rockefeller, as well as some elected officials and judges, also alarmed the country, although almost none of the explosives reached their targets. It all added up to what became known as the *Red Scare*.



REMEMBER

The chief Red-hunter was U.S. Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, who had hopes of becoming president. In August 1919, Palmer created the General Intelligence Division within the Justice Department and put an ardent young anti-communist named J. Edgar Hoover in charge of it. Its mission was to root out “foreign operatives and agitators.” On January 2, 1920, federal agents arrested about 6,000 people — many of whom were U.S. citizens — in 33 cities. Some were held for weeks without bail. Many were beaten, and some were forced to sign confessions. But only 556 were eventually deported. When a gigantic communist uprising predicted by Palmer failed to materialize, the Red Scare — and Palmer’s presidential hopes — fizzled out.

Closing the gate

The bad taste left by World War I also showed itself in anti-immigration feelings. Immigration increased from 110,000 in 1919 to 430,000 in 1920 and 805,000 in 1921. A not-altogether-unreasonable fear that war-torn Europe would flood America led to the Emergency Quota Act of 1921, which limited immigration from any one country to no more than 3 percent of the number of immigrants from that country already in the United States.

In 1924, the quotas were cut to 2 percent. In addition, all Japanese immigration was banned, an action that deeply humiliated and angered Japan. In 1929, Congress limited total immigration to no more than 150,000 per year. The fire under America’s melting pot had cooled off considerably.

Return of the Klan

Xenophobia — the fear or hatred of strangers or foreigners — also showed itself in the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan in the early 1920s. The Klan had all but died out by 1880, but it was revived in 1915 in Georgia and spread around the country. The Klan’s spread was aided by its support of Prohibition, which gave it a moral “in” with many people and allowed it to spread its racist bile more easily. By 1924, it probably had 4.5 million members, many of them in the Midwest. Approximately 40,000 Klansmen marched in Washington, D.C., in August 1925. Both major political parties felt the organization’s influence in local, state, and even national elections.



REMEMBER

The new Klan targeted not only African Americans but also Latinos, Jews, Roman Catholics, socialists, and anyone else who didn’t embrace the Klan’s views of what was moral and patriotic.

But in 1925, an Indiana Klan leader was convicted of abducting and assaulting a young girl, who subsequently killed herself. The widely publicized scandal, coupled with exposés about how some Klan leaders had siphoned off funds from the

group, led to a demise in its popularity. The influence of the KKK klowns waned considerably, although never completely disappeared.

Darwin versus God

The Klan's greatest influence developed in smaller cities and in rural areas, which was also mainly where a revival of *fundamentalism* took root. This was the belief that everything in the Bible was literally true. In 1925, fundamentalists pushed a law through the Tennessee legislature prohibiting the teaching of Darwin's evolution theory in public schools.

When a young high school teacher named John Scopes decided to challenge the law, America had the show trial of the decade (and the basis for the play *Inherit the Wind*). Clarence Darrow, a famous trial lawyer and prominent member of the American Civil Liberties Union, defended Scopes. William Jennings Bryan, the aging, thrice-defeated Democratic presidential candidate and celebrated orator, joined the prosecution.

Bryan repeatedly ridiculed the idea that humans could be descended from apes, but he made a big mistake when he took the stand himself to defend the Bible. Under shrewd questioning by Darrow, Bryan admitted that parts of the Bible couldn't logically be interpreted literally and depended on faith. Scopes was found guilty anyway and fined \$100, but the conviction was later overturned on a technicality. The trial took the wind out of the fundamentalist sails for a while, but the debate over evolution, religion, and education has never fully left the American scene.

Seeking the good times

One of the overriding themes sung by Harding and chorused by Coolidge and Hoover was "a return to normalcy," and nothing was more normal, as far as they were concerned, than the pursuit of financial wealth. So, their administrations established policies that were designed to help that pursuit.

Helping the rich

Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover all reduced the national debt by cutting spending on government programs. They increased tariffs to protect U.S. manufacturing from foreign competition. They also cut taxes for the wealthy, arguing that doing so would help create incentives for the rich to invest more, which would create more jobs, more products, and more wealth for everyone. Also, the Federal Reserve Board kept interest rates low so that those who weren't wealthy could borrow money to invest.



REMEMBER

These tactics seemed to work. Businesses became more productive by using new techniques that made workers and machinery more efficient. Chemical processes, for example, tripled the amount of gasoline that could be extracted from crude oil. Advances in electricity transmission sped the development of larger manufacturing plants. U.S. manufacturing output rose 60 percent in the 1920s, and greater efficiency and productivity naturally translated to more profit for business owners.

Increasing American spending habits

The 1920s saw the rise of two elements that are still both banes and blessings to the American consumer: advertising and installment buying. Advertising was spurred by the development of national media, such as radio and popular magazines, making it possible to reach audiences from coast to coast. By 1925, advertising was a \$1.25 billion-a-year industry.

In addition, the idea of buying *on time* — paying a little each week or month, plus interest — became more and more popular. Between 1920 and 1929, installment buying increased 500 percent. By 1929, more than 60 percent of American cars, large appliances, and pianos were being purchased on time.

The drive to sell government bonds during World War I made the average American more confident in buying securities like stocks and more willing to invest money rather than simply save it. The increased availability of investment capital enabled industries and retailers to expand: The Piggly Wiggly grocery store chain grew from 515 stores in 1920 to 2,500 in 1929; A&P grew from 4,621 stores to more than 15,000.

Making it difficult for the poor

Below the veneer of prosperity, there were indications of trouble. More and more wealth was being concentrated in fewer and fewer hands, and the government did far more for the rich than the poor. It was estimated, for example, that federal tax cuts saved the hugely wealthy financier Andrew Mellon (who also happened to be Hoover's treasury secretary) almost as much money as was saved by all the taxpayers in the entire state of Nebraska. Here are other examples:

- » Supreme Court decisions struck down minimum wage laws for women and children and made it easier for big businesses to swallow up smaller ones and become *de facto* monopolies. And union membership declined as organized labor was unable to compete with the aura of good times.



REMEMBER

» Probably worst off were American farmers (especially already poor ones). They had expanded production during World War I to feed the troops, and when demand and prices faded after the war, they were hit hard. Farm income dropped by 50 percent during the 1920s, and more than 3 million farmers left their farms for towns and cities.

For farmers in ten states along the Mississippi River and its tributaries, things were made tragically worse in 1927 when rains of biblical proportions triggered the most devastating river flood in U.S. history. More than 27,000 square miles of mostly agricultural land were inundated. At least 250 people were killed, and hundreds of millions of dollars in damage was done before the waters finally receded.

Ain't we got fun?

A lot of people think the Roaring Twenties was a decade in which everyone spent a huge amount of time dancing the Charleston and drinking. That, of course, isn't true. People also went to the movies, listened to the radio, read, and played games. The decade was marked by an explosion of popular culture, pushed by the development of mass media, which in turn was pushed by postwar advances in technology.

Going to the movies

By the mid-1920s, moviemaking was one of the top five industries in the country in terms of capital investment. A former farm community in California called Hollywood became the film capital of the world. In 1928, America had 20,000 movie theaters, and movie houses that looked like ornate palaces and seated thousands of patrons were built in every major city. Millions of Americans flocked each week to see stars like Charlie Chaplin and Rudolph Valentino on the silent screen.

In 1927, with the release of *The Jazz Singer*, the screen was no longer silent, and “talkies” made the movies even more popular. Perhaps fittingly, the first words spoken in the first talkie were “Wait a minute! Wait a minute! You ain't heard nothin' yet!”

Movies and their stars had a huge impact on the culture of the '20s. They influenced fashion, hairstyles, speech patterns, and sexual mores — and reinforced cultural and racial stereotypes and prejudices.

Listening to the radio

At the beginning of the 1920s, radio was entirely for amateurs. “Ham” (amateur) operators listened mostly to messages from ships at sea over homemade sets. But in 1920, the Westinghouse Company in Pittsburgh established the first commercial radio station, KDKA. Almost overnight, stations sprang up all over the country. By 1924, more than 500 stations existed, and by 1927, the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) had organized a 19-station National Broadcasting Company (NBC).



REMEMBER

Radio brought major sporting events and election returns “live” into American homes. It also encouraged the makers of soap, the sellers of life insurance, and the purveyors of cornflakes to reach out to consumers over the airwaves. U.S. business had its first true national medium for advertising, and Americans accepted that the price of “free” radio was commercials. By 1929, more than 12 million American families had radio sets. Figure 2-1 depicts an antique radio.



FIGURE 2-1:
An antique radio.

Creative Catalog/Adobe Stock Photos

Listening to music and writing literature

Radio, along with the increasing popularity of the phonograph, made popular music even more popular. The hottest sound was called *jazz*, which stressed improvisation and rhythm as well as melody. The genre had its roots deep in the musical traditions of Black Americans. Its stars included Bessie Smith, Ferdinand “Jelly Roll” Morton, and Louis Armstrong, and it was a key part of what became known as the *Harlem Renaissance*, a confluence of Black genius in the arts that

flourished in the 1920s in New York City. Jazz became wildly popular in other parts of the world as well and was recognized as the first truly unique form of American music.

Literature, on the other hand, was most heavily influenced by writers who were disillusioned with postwar America or who chose to satirize Americans' seeming penchant for conformity. These writers included novelists F. Scott Fitzgerald (*The Great Gatsby*, 1925), Sinclair Lewis (*Babbitt*, 1922), and Ernest Hemingway (*A Farewell to Arms*, 1929); playwright Eugene O'Neill (*Strange Interlude*, 1928); and poets E. E. Cummings, Carl Sandburg, and Langston Hughes.

Playing games

When it wasn't being entertained, America was seemingly entertaining itself in the 1920s, so much so that one contemporary observer called it "the age of play." Shorter workdays and weeks and more disposable income (or at least what seemed like more disposable income) gave Americans more time and money to enjoy themselves. Sports like golf and tennis boomed. Public playgrounds for kids became popular. Crossword puzzles and a game called Mah Jong were all the rage.

An ancient Chinese game played with a set of 144 colored tiles, Mah Jong hit the West Coast in 1922 and soon became immensely fashionable across the nation. Many women refused to play, however, unless they were suitably attired in elaborate Oriental robes. The fad faded after about five years of wild popularity. One possible reason was ennui created by confusion: By mid-decade, more than 20 different sets of rules for the game had been published.

Drying out America: Prohibition begins

Even before the country's formal inception, Americans had been a hard-drinking bunch, and the social and private costs they paid for it had been high. But on January 16, 1920, the nation undertook a "noble experiment" to rid itself of the effects of "demon rum." It was called *Prohibition*, and it was a spectacular failure.

There is some statistical evidence that Americans drank less after Prohibition started than they did before it began, but overall, the ban on booze was a bad idea. For one thing, it encouraged otherwise law-abiding citizens to visit *speakeasies* where alcohol was sold illegally. The number of "speaks" in New York City at the end of the decade, for example, was probably double the number of legal saloons at the beginning.

Gangsters like "Scarface" Al Capone and George "Bugs" Moran made fortunes selling bootleg booze, and they became celebrities doing it despite the violence

that was their normal business tool. Capone's Chicago mob took in \$60 million a year at its peak — and murdered more than 300 people. But bullets weren't the gangsters' only tools. They also bought off or bullied scores of federal, state, and local officials to look the other way, which only added to public disrespect for law and government.



REMEMBER

Part of the disrespect for the government was well deserved. Even though Congress and a string of presidents paid lip service to the idea of Prohibition to make the anti-liquor lobby happy, many politicians were regular customers for bootleggers. Congress provided only 1,550 federal agents to enforce the ban throughout the entire country, and criminal penalties for bootlegging were relatively light. Over one two-year period in New York, 7,000 Prohibition-related arrests resulted in only 17 convictions. Some states, in fact, passed laws restricting state and local police from actively enforcing the ban.

Changing morals

At the time, many observers saw Americans' lack of enthusiasm for Prohibition as an example of the country's slipping morals. So, they observed, was the behavior of young people. Perhaps more than any generation before them, the youth of the 1920s embraced their own music, fashion, and speech. The automobile gave young people a way to get away from home, at least temporarily, as well as a place to be sexually intimate. Other things contributed to the shifting moral patterns of the times, including the

- » Sexy images from Hollywood.
- » Growing availability of birth control devices.
- » Use of sex by advertisers to sell everything from cars to toothpaste.
- » Evolving emancipation of women. For example, short-haired, short-skirted young women — referred to as *flappers* (see Figure 2-2) — flaunted their freedom to smoke and drink and go out with men alone without the certainty of being morally condemned as "loose." And perhaps most important, fewer of them cared if they were.



TIP

Without question, however, the inequities between the sexes continued. Women made less than men in the same jobs and were still subject to the widespread notion that their rightful place in society was at home with the kids. But women now had the right to vote, and more and more of them were entering the workplace — from 8.4 million in 1920 to 10.6 million in 1930.

FIGURE 2-2:
Flappers took
a different
perspective on
morality during
the Roaring
Twenties.



NormanCook/Adobe Stock Photos

Recognizing an age of heroes

One thing the 1920s had a lot of was heroes. The advent of radio and the increasing popularity of national magazines and tabloid newspapers provided a vast public arena in which stars could shine. Armies of public relations agents pushed and shoved their clients into the arena.

Movie star Clara Bow reportedly received 45,000 fan letters a week. When screen heartthrob Rudolph Valentino died of a perforated ulcer in 1926, several women reportedly committed suicide. More than 30,000 mourners filed past his \$10,000 casket, which had a glass plate above his face so they could have one last look. The age also had vaudeville stars like magician Harry Houdini and humorist Will Rogers.

Every sport had its own gods or goddesses: Gertrude Ederle and Johnny Weissmuller in swimming; Red Grange and Knute Rockne in football; Jack Dempsey and Gene Tunney in boxing; Bobby Jones in golf; and Bill Tilden in tennis.

Baseball's god was the moon-faced son of a Baltimore saloonkeeper. His name was George Herman Ruth, but everyone called him *Babe*. For most of the decade, Ruth was perhaps the most photographed man in the world. He even had his image put on stamps — in and outside of the U.S. — as shown in Figure 2-3. A fine pitcher, he became the greatest slugger in the game and almost single-handedly restored baseball as the national pastime after a fixed World Series in 1919 had threatened to ruin it. Ruth was so popular that when his team, the Yankees, moved into a new stadium in New York, it was dubbed “the house that Ruth built.”



FIGURE 2-3:
Everybody
loved the Babe.

zea_lenanet/Adobe Stock Photos



REMEMBER

But as popular as Babe Ruth was, he was only second during the decade to a tall, thin, and modest airmail pilot from Michigan. On May 20, 1927, Charles A. Lindbergh lifted off alone from a New York airfield in a plane laden with gasoline and sandwiches, bound for Europe. When reporters asked him before he left if sandwiches were all he was taking to eat, “Lucky” Lindy replied,

“If I get to Paris, I won’t need any more, and if I don’t, I won’t need any more either.”

Lindbergh headed over the Atlantic, and 33½ hours later, he landed in France, the first human to fly nonstop between the two continents. The world went nuts. Lindbergh was mobbed everywhere he went. In New York City alone, an estimated 4 million people turned out for a parade and celebration in his honor. Suddenly, flying wasn’t so scary. By the end of the decade, more than 40 U.S. airline companies were carrying close to 200,000 passengers per year.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Tracking hard times prior to the Great Depression
- » Watching the rich get richer
- » Rushing to ruin on Wall Street
- » Reviewing economic lessons learned
- » Recessions that came after

Chapter 3

The Great Depression: An Economic Disaster

The Great Depression didn't just get great overnight. It took years of events — some related to each other, some not — to give it form, and even then its enormity wasn't recognized right away.

In this chapter, we look at the up-and-down cycles of the U.S. economy before the Great Depression; the prosperity of the Roaring Twenties (both real and imagined); the hidden chasm between the rich and the poor that grew during that period; and the “everyone should be rich” ethos that helped trigger the stock market crash at the end of the decade.

We also offer you a glimpse of the lessons American learned (at least, should have) from the Great Depression, as well as a string of recessions that came later.

Riding the Economic Cycle

Since the birth of the United States, its economy has tended to run in cycles, with periods of somewhere between 10 and 20 years of moderate-to-good times, interspersed with a few years of hard times.



REMEMBER

Before the rise of capitalism, recessions were usually triggered by a specific external event, such as war, crop failures, or natural disasters. In capitalist economies, however, the causes of hard times are often attributed to the forces of the marketplace: supply and demand, consumer spending and saving, and the vagaries of people's responses to economic events.

Whatever the cause (and there is ceaseless debate among economists about precisely what causes recessions), the advent of hard times is often preceded by calamities in the banking industry and stock market. Hard times also often come hard on the heels of over-speculation in land or securities. Creditors call in loans, money supplies get tight, and businesses close.

But the country always seems to get over it.

Not much fun after World War I

The First World War (1914–1918) had a major impact on the U.S. economy — and a big role in the creation of the Great Depression.

The United States stayed out of the first three years of the war, which pitted the Allies (chiefly Britain, France, and Russia) against the Central Powers (chiefly Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire). U.S. manufacturers and farmers took advantage of Europe's simultaneous preoccupation with the war and demands for food and goods by in essence becoming the war's supermarket. Between 1914 and 1918, U.S. steel production doubled, and farm exports tripled.



REMEMBER

When the United States finally entered the war in April 1917 on the side of the Allies (in part because they were better customers), the U.S. economy was bolstered by a wave of government spending, which rose from \$1.3 billion in 1916 to a hefty \$15.6 billion in 1918. The government raised revenues by increasing taxes and selling bonds. The Feds also basically took over the running of the economy. Federal boards and commissions oversaw food production and pricing, fuel allocation, railroad operations, and labor relations.

Organized labor didn't mind the federal oversight because it gave some protection to those trying to organize labor unions. Union membership increased by 40 percent between 1915 and 1918. The labor shortage caused by the military draft brought significant numbers of women into the workforce, and some 500,000 African Americans migrated from the South to take jobs in the North and Midwest. Wages went up, and life wasn't bad on the home front.

Then the war ended in November 1918. More than \$3 billion in federal war-related contracts were canceled almost overnight. Several million soldiers and sailors became civilians again, looking for jobs. Racial tensions rose as Black workers

were shoved out of jobs to make room for returning White workers. Scores of strikes sparked charges that unions were in league with communists.

The switch from a wartime economy to a peacetime economy triggered a sharp recession in 1920. An oversupply of food and other products caused severe *deflation* (a big drop in prices, followed by stalled production, rising unemployment, and even less demand). The unemployment rate reached 11 percent by 1921.



REMEMBER

Prodded by his Secretary of Commerce, Herbert Hoover, President Warren G. Harding convened a meeting of 300 business and banking leaders in September 1921 to discuss the unemployment problem. The Unemployment Conference eventually organized state and local relief efforts such as public works projects and “work sharing” programs. This was the first time a major federal effort was made to try to assuage the pains caused by a recession.

Things did get better. Manufacturers retooled from wartime products to consumer goods. Women went home, opening jobs for returning veterans. By 1923, the economy was humming again, at least for most people.

But the war left lasting marks on the U.S. economy. Technological advances necessitated by wartime demands increased productivity, and the development of new products or improvements on old ones spurred consumer demand.

The role of the United States in the world economy also changed. Before World War I, the U.S. had been a *debtor* nation, meaning that its overseas investments were smaller than the investments other countries had in the United States. That situation changed after the war, as huge public and private U.S. loans to war-torn European countries made the U.S. a *creditor* nation. New York replaced London as the Western world’s financial center, which was fine as long as the U.S. economy remained healthy.

Driving to the good life

In October 1923, *National Geographic* ran an article reporting that there were 13 million “motorcars” on U.S. roads. The author gushed, “The demand for initiative and enterprise in those who own and operate an automobile is giving to the American people a training the value of which cannot be estimated in dollars and cents.”

Notwithstanding the author’s sentiment, the dollars-and-cents impact the automobile had on 1920s’ America was pretty hefty:

- » By the end of the decade, one in every eight U.S. jobs was related to the automobile, from the people who made tires to the people who ran roadside motor hotels, or “motels.”

- » By 1925, 17.5 million motor vehicles were registered in the country, and by 1929, 27 million were — or one for every five Americans. Estimates showed more cars in New York than in all of Europe.
- » Production methods had improved so much that a car that took 14 hours to build in 1913 was coming off the assembly line at a rate of every 10 seconds by 1925. The production speedup was reflected in lower prices. A car that cost the equivalent of two years' average wages before World War I cost about three months' worth in 1929.

But the *National Geographic* writer was correct in that the value of a car transcended its price for most Americans. They were no longer captives of the streetcar or bus schedule. They could live farther away from work, shop in distant stores, and take motor vacations.

Early cars had been simple transportation machines, with no frills. Automaker Henry Ford reportedly said that Ford buyers could have a car in any color they wanted “as long as they wanted black” (which dried faster than other colors and thus speeded up production). Ford stubbornly stuck to no-frills cars (although he did close down for six months in 1927 to retool his factory for production of a new model — the Model A). However, Ford’s rivals, particularly William C. Durant at General Motors, began offering extra features for extra money. The company began offering upscale models that made them stand out from the neighbors’ cars.

And if someone couldn’t afford to pay cash for a car, no problem. In 1919, GM started the General Motors Acceptance Corporation (GMAC) to let buyers purchase on the installment plan. By 1926, 75 percent of all auto buyers were buying on credit.

A dollar down, a dollar a week: Living on credit

Americans had traditionally viewed buying anything other than real estate on credit as something between embarrassing and shameful. But in the 1920s, Ben Franklin’s “a penny saved is a penny earned” maxim seemed old hat. A 1928 business yearbook noted that installment buying “is now recognized as an integral part of our economic life.”



REMEMBER

By the end of the decade, more than 60 percent of appliances and furniture was being bought on installment plans. Consumer debt rose from \$2.6 billion in 1920 to \$7.1 billion in 1929. Installment buying at such high levels kept product demand — and thus production — at higher rates than the amount of real money

in the economy could sustain indefinitely. The result was a situation that could — and did — lead to severe deflation.

Creating demand for needless things

One of the challenges in a consumer-driven economy is to convince people that they need to keep consuming. That's where advertising comes in, and in the 1920s, it became both an art and a science. Traditional advertising had merely suggested the *availability* of a product. But in the 1920s, ads earnestly explained the *necessity* of a product, even when the necessity was wholly fabricated. Normal health and hygiene conditions were elevated to serious-sounding maladies: bad breath became "halitosis," sour stomach was "acidosis," and stinky feet "bromodosis," all of which were curable by some product or other.

The economist Stuart Chase observed in 1925 that advertising

"creates a dream world: smiling faces, shining teeth, school girl complexions, cornless feet, perfect fitting union suits, distinguished collars, wrinkleless pants, odorless breath, regularized bowels (and) happy homes in New Jersey — 15 minutes from Hoboken."

Advertisers used sex, celebrities, and pseudo-science to sell, and they utilized newspapers, mass-circulation magazines, and the ubiquitous and new-in-the-1920s medium of radio to make their pitches national. In 1919, total advertising in the United States cost an estimated \$684 million. By 1929, it was a \$3 billion-a-year business — and inspiring a whole lot of consumption, much of it on credit.

Getting Richer, or Staying Poor

Most working people still put in six-day weeks. Paid vacations, pensions, and job security were rare. The U.S. Supreme Court struck down minimum wage laws for women and children during the decade. A man held his job until he was too old or infirm to be as productive as a younger man, and then he was out the door.

Some employers adopted paternalistic practices (known as *welfare capitalism*) to keep unions at bay. Henry Ford, for example, periodically raised wages and shortened workweeks. There were sometimes fringe benefits, such as company picnics. But when company profits slipped, the fringe benefits quickly disappeared.

A much worse problem was the mountainous disparity in the distribution of wealth, as evidenced by some statistics:

- » The wealthiest 1 percent of Americans saw their incomes increase 75 percent in the 1920s, while the average worker's income rose just 9 percent. The 24,000 richest U.S. households controlled as much combined wealth as the 11.5 *million* at the bottom. In October of 2025, CNBC reported that the top 1 percent held 29 percent of the total household wealth during the second quarter.
- » Although 0.1 percent of U.S. households had 34 percent of the country's savings, 80 percent had no savings at all in the 1920s. According to a 2025 Gallup poll, approximately 60 percent of U.S. adults in 2025 had some type of long-term savings (401k or IRA, for example).
- » About 40 percent of American families in 1929 earned less than the \$1,500 annual income that the federal government deemed the poverty level. That compares to 8.1 percent of primary families (those whose members are related) living at the federal poverty level of \$32,130 for a family of four in 2024 (according to the U.S. Census Bureau).

Equally ominous for the economy was the growing gap between productivity and wages. From 1923 to 1929, productivity per hour (the amount of goods made) rose 32 percent. During the same period, wages rose just 8 percent. These figures meant that too many things were being produced and not enough people had the money to buy them. A person earning \$100,000 a year was making 50 times more than the person earning \$2,000 a year. But the wealthier person wasn't likely to buy 50 times as many cars or radios or refrigerators, or to spend 50 times as much for them.

So the rich put much of their excess money into luxury items (the making of which didn't employ a lot of people) or into investments, leading to more productivity but not more money in the pockets of average Americans.

Feeling downtrodden on the farm

If the average urban worker wasn't exactly rolling in clover during the 1920s, he had it made compared to his cousin on the farm. In fact, the best days for U.S. farmers had come and gone by the time the 1920s started.

During World War I, the U.S. government encouraged farmers to produce as much as they could to help feed the country's European allies. So farmers mortgaged more land, doubling their total mortgage debt between 1910 and 1920. As mechanized vehicles such as trucks and tractors replaced horses and mules, 25 million acres once used to grow animal feed were put into crop production for humans.



REMEMBER

But when the war ended, the European markets dried up, and prices dropped. Cotton that had sold for 35 cents a pound during the war slumped to 16 cents in 1920. Corn that had sold for \$1.50 a bushel slipped to 52 cents. Farm income during the decade dropped 50 percent. Bankruptcies in the Midwest alone quadrupled, and more than 3 million people left farms for towns and cities.

In the South, half the farmers lived on rented land. Those who lacked their own capital had to pledge shares of their crops as payment for rent and supplies. Most of these sharecroppers were Black Americans, and almost all of them were desperately poor.

Immigrants and Black Americans: Getting by at the bottom of the heap

Following World War I, America's distaste for foreign entanglements led to a series of laws limiting immigration. Even so, the 1930 Census showed that 10 percent of the population was foreign born. Handicapped by language and cultural barriers, immigrants got the worst jobs and lived in the worst parts of towns and cities. As the Great Depression took hold in the early 1930s, many of them would turn around and go back to where they originated from.

Tightening immigration quotas meant that U.S. industry had to find a new source of workers. A half million Black people left the South for factory jobs during the war. Another 1 million would do the same during the 1920s. But they remained second-class citizens. Infant mortality rates for Black Americans were twice those of White Americans. Life expectancies were 15 years shorter.

In the Southwest, a half million Mexicans, whose country had been exempted from the immigration restrictions, came for work, most as migrant farm laborers. Like Black Americans, the Mexicans were generally tolerated, more than accepted, as a source of labor, and their lots would get worse as the 1920s ended.

Crashing with the Market

Few Americans actually had a direct stake in the stock market in 1929. About 3 million people, or about 2.5 percent of the country's population of 120 million, owned shares. Only half of those who did own stocks owned enough to involve a brokerage account. Playing the market was mostly a rich person's game, with 30 percent of all 1929 dividends going to families with annual incomes of more than \$100,000.

But if they weren't actually in the stock market, it seemed everyone talked about it. A visiting British journalist noted that whatever topic a conversation started with,

"in the end you had to talk about the stock market, and that was when the conversation became serious."

Buying into the market on credit



REMEMBER

Both the wealthy and the wannabe wealthy often bought stock on credit. By putting just 10 percent down on a purchase, for example, a stock buyer could buy 10 times as much stock as he could afford out of his or her own pocket. That was all right with brokers and other lenders because they were borrowing money from Federal Reserve banks at 5 percent and charging 12 percent or more to their clients. The total loaned by brokers rose from \$4.4 billion at the beginning of 1927 to \$8.5 billion in the fall of 1929.

The problem was that if brokers called in their loans, investors had to sell their stock at whatever price it was trading at to repay the money. If the stock was down, both the lender and the borrower could be in big trouble.

But there was certainly money to be made, at least for a while. The Dow Jones Industrial Average (a weighted average of 30 major companies' stock prices) doubled from the beginning of 1928 to September 1929. But the market was fueled by speculation, not value. As long as stock prices kept going up, people weren't much interested in what a company produced or if its products were turning a profit. So money kept pouring into the market.

People warned that the tide of rising stock prices must inevitably recede. In March 1929, respected financier Paul M. Warburg wrote that

"... if orgies of unrestrained speculation are permitted to spread too far ... the ultimate collapse is certain not only to affect the speculators themselves, but also to bring about a great depression involving the entire country."

Getting gored by the bulls

October 24, 1929, was a cool and overcast Thursday on New York's Wall Street. Inside the New York Stock Exchange, the morning's session began more or less as usual. Then, at about 11 a.m., people began selling. And selling. And selling.

"The deluge broke," *New York Times* reporter Elliott W. Bell wrote some years later. "It came with a speed and ferocity that left men dazed ... it was the most terrifying and unreal day I have ever seen on the Street."

When the session closed, a record 12.9 million shares had sold — so many that the ticker tape machine that relayed market prices around the country was more than four hours behind by the end of the day.

As the market sank on October 24, which came to be known as “Black Thursday,” a half dozen Wall Street bankers tried to calm things down by buying up shares. One of the bankers, Thomas W. Lamont, calmly told reporters “It seems there has been some distress selling in the market.”



REMEMBER

The bankers’ effort failed. On October 29, which became known as “Black Tuesday,” another stock-selling stampede broke out. More than \$9 billion (about \$170.5 billion in 2025 dollars) was lost in a single five-hour period, and 16.4 million shares were sold, a record that would stand until 1978. Figure 3-1 offers a glimpse into the chaos that erupted that day. Before the market hit bottom in July 1932, its *stock index* (a measurement of the market’s value) fell from 452 to 58. It would take more than a decade to fully recover.



FIGURE 3-1:
Workers flood
New York City
streets in a panic
following the
Black Tuesday
stock market
crash.

Photo by Hulton Archive/Getty Images

Contrary to popular myth, there was no mass exodus of despondent brokers and speculators through skyscraper windows. But it’s a safe bet that few investors felt like singing along to a new tune that had debuted at a Manhattan ballroom that week.

It was called “Happy Days Are Here Again.”

Lessons Learned

Following are two key lessons that Americans learned — or should have learned — from the events leading up to, and including, the stock market crash of 1929.

It's easy to borrow, hard to repay

If there is one lesson to be learned from the 1920s, it's that using credit to buy things can be a slippery slope to chronic debt.

When the Great Depression ended with the start of World War II, Americans who had lived through the hardest of hard times did become a nation of savers. Personal savings as a percentage of personal wealth reached a heady 26 percent during the war.

But after the war, consumerism collided with the ascension of credit cards that allowed repayment in installments. In 1978, a U.S. Supreme Court decision made it easier for banks to charge higher interest rates on credit cards and cross state lines in pursuit of customers. In the 1980s, rapidly rising inflation made the use of credit cards an attractive way to buy things before their prices went up. In the 1990s, home equity loans allowed consumers to tap money that they couldn't otherwise access without selling their houses.

By the beginning of the 21st century, Americans didn't even have to seek credit — it sought *them* through endless offers that even included paying off old credit cards with new ones. Many consumers developed a sense of entitlement. One college professor reported that his students referred to credit cards as “yuppie food stamps.”

The resulting numbers were both stunning and sobering:

- » Consumer credit, not including mortgages, jumped from \$700 billion in 1988 to \$2.6 trillion in 2008. Over the same period, the average personal savings rate dropped from 8 percent to less than 1 percent.
- » In 2007, U.S. families were devoting 14 percent of their disposable income to paying off debt, the highest rate ever.
- » From 2005 to 2008, the amount of credit card debt reported in personal bankruptcy filings tripled, to \$61,000.

When the 2007 recession began, however, consumer credit began to dry up. Credit cards became harder to get, late payment fees increased, and down payments rose. In August 2008, consumer borrowing fell for the first time in a decade, indicating that — maybe — the credit lesson of the 1920s may have been sinking in.

The stock market can go down

Could a big stock market crash happen again? Well, measured just by the size of the one-day decline in the stock market, it already did. On October 19, 1987, the market dropped 22.6 percent, far more than the 12.8 percent it dropped on October 29, 1929.

But after the 1987 crash, the various stock exchanges installed safeguards to protect against a complete meltdown. The safeguards included limiting computerized transactions in overheated selling sessions, requiring the markets to close after they fall by certain levels over a specified time, and requiring trading firms to have more capital available if there's a run on the market. Congress has also created two agencies that keep an eye on things:

- » **The Securities Investor Protection Corporation:** Established in 1970, the SIPC doesn't provide insurance against broker fraud, but it does help investors recover their securities or cash when a brokerage firm is closed due to bankruptcy.
- » **The U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission:** Formed in 1934 to restore public confidence, the SEC regulates the stock market and the securities industry. The five-member commission oversees requirements that publicly traded companies disclose accurate information about their firms. It also investigates and brings civil prosecutions in fraud cases.

But even with all these safeguards available, it's worth noting that a whole lot more people have something at stake: In the 1920s, around 2 percent of households had a stake in the market. In the 2000s, more than 50 percent did.

Recessions after the Great Depression

The Great Depression was the King Kong of the U.S. economy's downturns. It easily dwarfed all the recessions before it, and the U.S. hasn't seen anything like it since. But that doesn't mean the economy has been all milk and honey since the Great Depression ended.

In fact, 13 recessions have occurred since World War II ended.



REMEMBER

On average, the first ten recessions lasted 10½ months. On average, unemployment rates increased a maximum of 2.5 percent. And the gross domestic product, adjusted for inflation, dropped an average maximum of 1.9 percent. Those are relatively mild averages. For example, the average length of 10½ months is just half of the average 21 months that recessions lasted prior to the Great Depression.

Debating “the Great Moderation”

Some economists have called the postwar pattern of milder recessions “the Great Moderation.” But because economists like to argue about nearly everything, they disagree about what caused the more moderate recessionary periods. Theories include that

- » Better information-gathering techniques allowed the Federal Reserve Board to stay on top of the economic situation and ease up or tighten interest rates. Doing so has allowed the money supply to increase when recessions hit and decrease when inflation is a threat.
- » Expansion of service industries’ role in the U.S. economy made it less prone to the ups and downs of an economy based heavily on manufacturing. At the same time, the theory goes, manufacturers and retailers did a better job of maintaining inventories at levels that neither flooded the market nor starved it.
- » An expansion of credit following World War II enabled people to adopt buy-now, pay-later spending patterns instead of everyone stopping spending when times get rough. The monthly credit card payments helped keep things rolling.

Looking at postwar recessions

Whatever the reasons, the result is that nothing like the Great Depression has come along in the post-WWII U.S. — so far. Table 3-1 gives you a look at 11 of the recessions that have occurred since 1945.



REMEMBER

The causes of what was sometimes wryly referred to as “the Great Recession” were rooted in the bursting of a real estate bubble in the United States. Simply (and simplistically) put, lenders made home loans to a large number of people who couldn’t afford them. The loans were “bundled” together and resold as securities. When the borrowers began defaulting on the loans, the securities lost value. Major lenders and other firms that dealt in the mortgage-based securities, from banks to the world’s largest insurance company, went belly up or were financially crippled. The collapses and crippling, in turn, shocked the stock market. The market lost almost 50 percent of its value between December 2007 and March 2009.

TABLE 3-1 U.S. Recessions after 1945

Recession Starting Year	What Caused It
1948	Economists say this 11-month downturn was a “natural down cycle” caused by the economy adjusting to postwar production. The unemployment rate reached 7.9 percent; the gross domestic product (GDP) dropped by 1.8 percent.
1953	This ten-month recession has been attributed to the Federal Reserve Board (the Fed) tightening money supplies in an effort to head off inflation following the end of the Korean War and the federal government diverting more money into national security. Unemployment climbed to 6.1 percent, and the GDP dropped by 2.7 percent.
1957	This recession lasted only eight months and was attributed to the Fed tightening money supplies. Unemployment climbed to 7.1 percent, and the GDP dropped by 3.7 percent.
1960	This ten-month recession was triggered by a combination of high inflation and growing unemployment (which reached 7.1 percent). Increased government spending ended it. The GDP dropped 1.1 percent.
1969	This relatively mild 11-month recession that began in December 1969 was again caused by increasing inflation and declining employment. Unemployment peaked at 6.1 percent; the GDP dropped by 0.2 percent.
1973	This 16-month recession was a nasty bugger caused by a combination of factors. The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) quadrupled oil prices, inflation soared because of federal spending (on the Vietnam War and social service programs), and the U.S. also went off the gold standard. Unemployment reached 9 percent; the GDP dropped 3.1 percent.
1980	This recession was actually just a preview of a much nastier one that began in 1981. The 1980 version started in January 1980 and ended in June.
1981	This 16-month-long recession began in July 1981 and was widely considered to be the worst since the Great Depression. It’s usually attributed to two causes: A revolution in Iran that resulted in sharply higher oil prices, and Interest rates that were raised to the highest level since the Civil War in an effort to fight inflation. Unemployment soared to 10.8 percent, and it stayed above 10 percent for ten months. The GDP dropped 2.9 percent.
1990	This relatively mild eight-month recession that began in July was most probably a result of a crisis in the savings and loan industry the year before.
2001	An eight-month recession that began in March was sparked by a severe downturn in Internet businesses (the “dot-com industry”) and aggravated by the terrorist attacks of September 11. Unemployment hit 6 percent, but the GDP dropped hardly at all.
2007	This recession began in December 2007 and lasted until June 2009. Called the <i>Great Recession</i> , its duration made it the longest recession since the WWII. Unemployment reached 8.1 percent, and the gross domestic product dropped 2.2 percent.

- » Popping economic bubbles
- » Losing jobs — and not finding them
- » Concocting economic cures
- » Carving the economy pie

Chapter 4

Recessions Can Be Really Depressing

An old economists' joke (told mainly by old economists) says that a *recession* is when your neighbor loses his job, and a *depression* is when you lose yours. Whatever you call it, the country's unsettled financial situation early in the 21st century permeated nearly every aspect of Americans' lives, from politics to lifestyles to how Americans got along with the rest of the world — and one another.

This chapter describes the web of elements that ensnared the economy early in the 2000s. It also tells of the impacts that technology, global competition, and corporate profits had on employment, the government's efforts to fix things, and the growing gap between the very richest Americans and everyone else.

Ouch! The Economy Stubs Its Toe

Here's what happened to the U.S. economy in the first years of the 21st century: A lot of people got rich (and then poor) by creating and/or investing in high-tech companies. Then, people in California bought homes they couldn't afford. And then Iceland went broke. And, thus, America had what has been dubbed the *Great Recession*.

Of course, that interpretation is way too simple; there really isn't a linear cause-effect explanation. The recession of 2007 was actually the result of many linked causes and effects. Think of it as sort of a spider's web of events and results.

Dot-com dreams and investor nightmares

As the 20th century ended and the 21st century began, America experienced an explosion of technological innovation, much of it centering on the internet. People heralded this innovation as the gateway to a new economy based on information-sharing as much as producing goods and services. The internet triggered what was labeled the *dot-com boom*: Investors poured millions of dollars into hundreds of companies that were founded on great ideas but often lacked sound business plans, large potential markets, and, in some cases, even a product or service to sell.

This situation was an example of what Alan Greenspan, the chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, had labeled in 1996 as *irrational exuberance*, referring to when investors' enthusiasm to make dollars overwhelms their common sense. By March 2001, the dot-com bubble had burst. Scores of companies went belly up, their stocks became worthless, and America had its first economic recession in a decade. The terrorist attacks on September 11 of that year also dealt a sharp blow to the economy.

The dot-com bubble-bursting recession was fairly mild, but some economists were still troubled. Although the overall economy began improving by the end of 2001, unemployment rates that had risen when the recession began stubbornly refused to go down again to anything near their previous levels.

The houses that went upside down

A much nastier recession — in fact, the worst the country had suffered since the Great Depression of the 1930s — began with another bubble bursting in late 2007. This one was centered on the American dream of owning your own home and came about partly because of something called *credit default swaps*.

Under federal law, banks and other lending institutions have to keep lots of capital in reserve to protect investors if any of the big loans the lenders make go bad. The lending industry came up with a sort of insurance policy in the 1990s, called a *credit default swap*, to free those reserves so that they could be used to turn a profit elsewhere. It involved having a third party — individual investors, insurance companies, hedge funds, and so on — assume the risk of a loan going bad in return for regular payments from the firm that had actually made the loan.

The federal government didn't regulate the deals, so no one had a good handle on how widespread they were or which companies and economic sectors were most at risk. By the middle of the decade, the arrangements had morphed into more than \$60 trillion — that's *trillion*, with a *t* — of swaps, and banks and other lenders had trillions of dollars to lend to people who, say, wanted to buy a house.

Buying up houses

In the late 1990s, interest rates were low, and real estate was an attractive investment. Americans began buying homes like crazy. Annual U.S. home sales set records for five straight years, peaking at 7.5 million in 2005. The greater the demand, the higher real estate prices went. Average home prices soared from less than \$200,000 in 2000 to more than \$300,000 in 2007.

But as prices climbed, fewer people could qualify for mortgage loans, at least under traditional methods of measuring qualifications, such as whether the borrower had enough income to make the payments.

So, lenders and mortgage brokers got creative, pushing loans with no down payments, loans that started out with low interest rates that ballooned after a few years, and loans on which the borrower paid only interest for the first few years. By 2005, more than 200 kinds of mortgage products were available, and if a time came when the borrowers couldn't meet the mortgage payments, heck, they could just refinance or sell the house for more than they paid for it and walk away with a profit. The risky mortgages boomed from about \$160 billion in 2001 to more than \$600 billion four years later.

Banks even offered a bonus for people who could afford their mortgage payments: Their homes became giant piggy banks! They could borrow on the equity in their homes and buy a new car or pay for Junior's college. And *flipping* — buying a house, fixing it up, and reselling it for hefty profits — became a hip way to get rich quickly, as long as prices kept rising.

Meanwhile, lenders pooled and sold the new mortgages as investment bonds to commercial banks, mutual funds, pension funds, and investors all over the world. The bonds were "insured" by credit default swaps issued by many of Wall Street's largest financial institutions.

Defaults and foreclosures

The housing market was fine for a while, but then it cooled off — big time. Sales of all homes sagged from a record 7.5 million in 2005 to an estimated 4.9 million in 2008, a 35 percent drop. Sales of brand-new homes dropped even more precipitously, from more than 1.2 million in 2005 to slightly more than 300,000 by 2011.

DEPRESSION? RECESSION? BROKE?

Never mind the old economists' joke at the beginning of this chapter; here's a more technical explanation of the difference between a recession and a depression: An *economic recession* occurs when a country's *gross domestic product* (GDP) — that's the value of all the country's reported goods and services — goes down for two consecutive quarters (six consecutive months) or more. A *depression* happens when the GDP drops by 10 percent or more.

During America's Great Depression, which stretched over a decade, the GDP dropped a whopping 27 percent between 1929 and 1933 and another 18 percent between 1937 and 1938. In contrast, in the new century's worst year, 2009, the GDP decreased "only" 2.6 percent. In fact, the Great Recession officially only lasted from December 2007 to June 2009, according to the National Bureau of Economic Research, which is the private, nonprofit organization of economists that has kept official track of such things since 1920.

Still, the Great Recession of 2007 is considered by most economists to be the worst of the 13 (or some say 14) recessions America has suffered since World War II because of its duration, worldwide scope, and stubborn refusal to go away and take all its effects and impacts with it.

Millions found that their gimmicky mortgages had caught up with them. They couldn't make their payments, and they owed more than they could sell their houses for — hence the term *upside-down* mortgages. So, they defaulted — big time. Between July and September 2008 alone, lenders sent foreclosure notices to 766,000 U.S. homes. A quarter of those were in California, where housing prices had climbed the fastest and come down the same way. Median housing prices across the nation dropped about 10 percent in 2008 compared to 2007 — and more than 30 percent in California.

Mortgage-based bonds went into the tank, and big lenders faced making good on hundreds of billions of dollars in credit default swaps. Some couldn't, and they declared bankruptcy or were bought up by other firms.

Credit dries up, spending shrinks, and Iceland sinks

As the financial institutions foundered, lending dried up in other parts of the economy, from car loans to credit card limits. People who had relied on equity in their homes to pay for their boats or college tuition suddenly had no equity. So consumer spending shrunk, which caused businesses to cut back, often resulting in massive layoffs. The nation's unemployment rate doubled, from 5 percent in

January 2008 to 10 percent by October 2009. At one point, an average of 750,000 people per month were losing their jobs.

Because the U.S. market was the dominant force in the world economy, other countries felt the pain. In Iceland, for example, the country's three major banks relied heavily on foreign investment. When the world's credit markets became tight, the Icelandic banks ran short of funds to meet their obligations. Iceland's government was forced to nationalize the banks to keep their doors open. Iceland wasn't the only country affected, though; the recession spread around the world, which, in turn, meant less foreign investment and business for the United States.

Brother, Can You Spare a Job?

The most vexing effect of the Great Recession was its swollen jobless numbers. Prior to December 2008, America's monthly unemployment rate had not been *above* 7 percent since June 1993. From December 2008 through November 2013, however, it never went *below* 7.3 percent. That figure didn't include Americans who were *underemployed* and could find only part-time work or gave up looking altogether. People were out of work longer, new jobs were being created at a frustratingly slow pace, and many companies found they could make do with fewer employees.

Looking for work. And looking . . .

In November 2013, *The New York Times* ran a story about a 53-year-old Massachusetts woman who had been unemployed most of the time since 2008. A college graduate, she had been turned down for dozens of low-paying, low-skill positions for reasons that included "too pretty," "too articulate," and because "we don't hire the unemployed."

She was far from alone in her lengthy quest for work. By November 2013, more than 4 million people, defined as the *long-term unemployed*, had been out of work for longer than 26 weeks. That was triple the number of long-term jobless before the recession began and 50 percent more than the highest figure in any of America's other recessions since World War II.

In July 2008, Congress approved extending unemployment benefits from 26 weeks to as long as 99 weeks and subsequently approved further extensions. But the extensions came with a \$250 billion price tag, and there was growing congressional opposition to continuing the program indefinitely. Some economists suggested that extending benefits had exacerbated the problem by serving as an incentive

for jobless people not to actively seek work and a disincentive for employers to create new jobs.

Where the work went

An estimated 9.1 million jobs had either been lost or not created as expected during the Great Recession and its aftermath. To create enough new jobs to replace them required plugging the holes through which they had leaked.

One of the holes was *outsourcing*, or the transfer of jobs by American companies to other countries with lower costs of doing business. The Department of Commerce reported that from 2000 to 2012, the largest U.S. multinational corporations cut their domestic workforces by 2.9 million while increasing their foreign payrolls by 2.4 million. The outsourcing issue was hotly debated during the 2012 presidential race, with each candidate accusing the other of supporting the practice.

Many of the outsourced jobs were in manufacturing. Between 2000 and 2009, about 6 million U.S. factory jobs were lost, and only 520,000 had been recovered. Technological changes and automation also contributed to the loss.

Costs of providing benefits, such as meeting new federal healthcare mandates, were also a factor in reduced payrolls. Employers with more than 49 workers faced fines if they didn't provide healthcare to full-time employees. Some companies responded by cutting workers to part-time status — or just cutting workers.

Cutbacks by state and local governments were another key factor. In previous recessions, public agencies had been quicker than the private sector to restore jobs, but by the end of 2013, state and local governments and schools still employed about 600,000 fewer people than they had four years earlier.

And as the recession waned, many companies found they could make more money by sharing less of it with employees. As workers scrambled to hold on to their jobs — forget about asking for a raise — productivity increased, which enabled employers to get by with fewer employees. A 2010 Northeastern University study found that although pretax corporate profits increased by 57 percent from the end of 2008 to the beginning of 2010, wages decreased by 2 percent. By the end of 2012, U.S. corporations had amassed a record \$1.45 trillion in cash reserves, more than half of it stashed overseas to avoid U.S. taxes.

As the recession slowly eased, some of the jobs came back — and some didn't. An estimated 1.5 million U.S. manufacturing jobs that existed in 2007, for example, no longer existed in 2017. Moreover, some of the people who couldn't find work just gave up looking altogether. The country's labor participation level — the

number of people working or actively seeking jobs — dropped from 67 percent in 2007 to 63 percent in 2018.

On the other hand, America's public sector workforce returned to its pre-recession level, and an average of 208,000 new jobs were created per month during the first nine months of 2018. But many of the new jobs were in industries that provided services — retail stores, restaurants, hotels. Those jobs generally paid less and provided fewer benefits than manufacturing jobs.

"We're from the Government; We're Here to Help . . ."

Perhaps because of lessons learned from the Great Depression of the 1930s, the federal government reacted quickly, if somewhat reluctantly, to the financial calamity. The U.S. Treasury Department seized control of the government-backed mortgage finance firms known as *Freddie Mac* and *Fannie Mae*. The government also bailed out American International Group (AIG), the nation's largest insurance company, but allowed Lehman Brothers, one of the country's largest savings and loan firms, to crash into bankruptcy.

On September 24, 2008, with his approval ratings wallowing below 30 percent, President Bush warned a national television audience that "the entire economy is in danger." The speech was part of an effort to sell Congress on a plan to bail out the teetering financial industry.

Known as the *Troubled Asset Relief Program* (TARP), the plan was to use \$700 billion in taxpayer money to buy up the mortgage-backed securities of floundering financial institutions.

"Without immediate action by Congress, America could slip into a financial panic," Bush said, "and a distressing scenario could unfold."

The scenario did unfold five days later, when a defiant House of Representatives rejected the Bush proposal. The U.S. stock market reacted with the biggest one-day point drop in its history. Two days later, the House reversed itself and approved a version of the bailout plan that the Senate had revised. The plan gave Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson wide latitude to use the money to shore up financial and mortgage institutions.

However, it would take time to work, and the bad economic news just kept coming. Toward the end of November, the stock market had sunk to its lowest level

in more than a decade, dragging down pension plans and individual retirement accounts with it.

The crash dashed the dreams of millions of Baby Boomers (those born from 1946 to 1964), many of whom had counted on cashing in on healthy stock prices and soaring home values to finance an early retirement. Now, they were desperately hoping to hold on to their jobs.

Brand new president, same old problems

In January 2009, President Bush handed off the crisis to his successor, Barack Obama. Less than a month later, the new Democratic president and a Democratic-controlled Congress agreed to a sweeping — and expensive — plan to revive the economy and get as much of the country back to work as possible.



REMEMBER

The plan, known formally as the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009* and informally as the *stimulus package*, called for spending \$787 billion (which eventually climbed to \$831 billion) on a combination of tax incentives. The plan also called for direct aid to states and local governments, public works projects, extensions of unemployment benefits and funding for job training, and infusions of cash for education, healthcare, housing, energy, and other programs.

The act's immediate goals were to save jobs and create new ones, help prop up state and local government programs and services such as those for public safety and education, and inject capital directly into the economy for public works projects that would encourage private investment.

The act's economic philosophy was rooted in the theories of John Maynard Keynes, a British economist who had been greatly influential in guiding the New Deal policies of President Franklin D. Roosevelt during the Great Depression. Keynes argued that when recessions cause private spending to shrink, governments should spend more to make up the difference, combat unemployment, and prevent the economy from further decline.

"Today does not mark the end of our economic troubles," Obama said while signing the act in Denver on February 17, 2009. "Nor does it constitute all of what we must do to turn our economy around. But it does mark the beginning of the end."

As it turned out, the stimulus package wasn't a bad financial investment. Of the \$631.4 billion in the package that consisted of loans or investments, the federal government got back \$728.5 billion in refunds, dividends, and interest for a profit of \$97.1 billion. But by itself, it wasn't enough to right the economic ship.

Buying time by buying bonds

While the president and Congress were busy with bailouts and job-saving, another branch of the federal government was also looking for ways to keep U.S. finances afloat. First, some explanation.

Congress created the Federal Reserve System in 1913, in essence, to function as the federal government's bank and oversee U.S. monetary policy. (You can find out a bit about the Federal Reserve Act, which created the system, in Book 1, Chapter 3.) Among other things, "the Fed" sets the *federal funds rate*, which is the interest rate banks charge one another for short-term loans and which influences the rates of almost all other kinds of loans. That comes in handy during recessions because lower interest rates help keep the economy moving.

The Fed can also influence the nation's money supply by buying or selling securities, such as government bonds. If it wants to increase the amount of available money in recessionary times, for example, it buys bonds by crediting the reserves that various banks must have on hand. This strategy lets the banks lower their reserves and use the money to make money through loans and investments.

When the Great Recession hit, the Fed wielded its financial tools with frequency. Starting in late 2007, it cut the federal funds rate nine times in 15 months, dropping the rate from 4.75 percent to near zero, the lowest in its history. Moreover, it went on a bond-buying spree, averaging \$85 billion a month by late 2013. Overall, the Fed's balance sheet rose from about \$900 billion in mid-2008 to more than \$3.7 trillion by the beginning of 2014.

"These purchases have made a meaningful contribution to economic growth and improving the outlook," Federal Reserve Board Vice Chair Janet Yellen told a congressional committee in November 2013. "A strong recovery will ultimately enable the Fed to reduce its monetary accommodation and reliance on unconventional policy tools such as asset purchases. I believe that supporting the recovery today is the surest path to returning to a more normal approach to monetary policy."

Did government intervention work?

The answer to the question "Did government intervention work?" is clear: It depends on whom you ask.

Even before much of the Bush/Obama plans were put in place or the Federal Reserve System's actions had taken hold, people were deeply divided over what kind of lifeline could rescue America's economy. A few weeks before the government approved the stimulus plan, for example, a group of about 200 economists

took out ads in national newspapers opposing it. A week after that, a similar-sized group of economists sent a letter to Congress endorsing the plan. (All of which brings to mind the famous quote by President Harry Truman: “Give me a one-handed economist! All my economists say ‘on the one hand, on the other.’”)

Some studies have suggested that the efforts saved or created more than 3 million jobs while keeping inflation in check. Other studies concluded that they were only temporary fixes that would do more harm than good in the long run or had little effect. Some liberal economists contended that the efforts didn’t go far enough and even more government spending was needed. Conservatives argued that the recession would have waned without the stimulus plan, and the biggest result of the plan was to increase the size of the federal budget debt. Moreover, they warned, the “free money” policies of the Fed had pumped up stock prices to unsustainable levels and would trigger high inflation down the road.

As it turned out, the lasting impacts of both the Great Recession — and the efforts to defeat it — were decidedly, indisputably, and unreservedly mixed — probably:

- » The stock market enjoyed a nine-year positive run that was unprecedented in modern times for its longevity. Yet it took a decade for the median household income — the amount at which half of U.S. households make more and half make less — to return to its 2007 level.
- » Home foreclosure actions dropped from a peak of more than 200,000 in 2009 to less than 31,000 in 2017, but the percentage of Americans who owned homes also dropped.
- » The nation’s unemployment rate dropped from 10 percent in October 2009 to around 4 percent by October 2018. And yet total household debt had climbed \$500 billion higher than its peak in 2008.
- » The annual inflation rate dropped from 3.8 percent in 2008 to 2.2. percent in October 2018, while the percentage of Americans living below the poverty level — a number set annually by the federal government to determine eligibility for various “safety net” programs — rose slightly.

So, 10 years after the start of the worst economic collapse since the 1930s, many Americans were back to making the same amount of money, more of them were working, and fewer of them owned homes but were less likely to lose them if they did. Although prices were going up more slowly, more poor people couldn’t afford to buy much anyway.

And as any economist, even a one-handed one, will tell you, when it comes to America’s economy, nothing is more constant than change, whether it’s caused by bursting investment bubbles — or a virus that circles the globe.

Unspreading the Wealth

The first two decades of the 21st century weren't painful for all Americans. Those with a substantial part of their money in assets other than real estate — and a substantial enough pile of dough to ride out the rough times — were, for the most part, sitting pretty by the end of 2013.

The stock market, for example, emerged relatively unscathed from the Great Recession. In October 2007, the Dow Jones Industrial Average (an index of 30 large-company stocks) reached a high of 14,198. By March 2009, it had plunged 55 percent. But by mid-2018, it had passed the 25,000 mark. The trouble was that most Americans had no stocks. In fact, it was estimated nearly 40 percent of all equities in the stock market were owned by just 1 percent of Americans. Quickly recovering from the recession's ills was a boon enjoyed mostly by those at the very top of the wealth scale.

The rich get richer

On March 2, 2009, the giant insurance company AIG announced that it had lost a staggering \$62 billion during the last quarter of 2008. The government responded by hastily funneling \$30 billion to the firm. Federal officials deemed the company “too big to fail,” meaning its collapse would do irreparable harm to the nation's economy. Two weeks later, AIG announced that it was paying \$450 million in bonuses to the firm's top executives, in part so they wouldn't quit.

The outrage was quick — and loud. “The first thing that would make me feel a little bit better towards them [is] if they would follow the Japanese example,” said Sen. Chuck Grassley of Iowa, “and come before the American people and take that deep bow and say I'm sorry and then either do one of two things: resign or go commit suicide.”

As it turned out, taxpayers “invested” a total of \$182 billion in AIG. The firm eventually restructured, and by 2012, the federal government had recouped the bailout and made a \$22.7 billion profit. But the flap became a symbol of a deepening divide between America's haves and have-nots.

The divide was intensified by the fact that whatever wealth most middle-class families had was in the value of their homes or retirement savings. When the housing market flopped and the stock market plunged, so did their nest eggs. Median household wealth plunged a whopping 39 percent between 2007 and 2011. “Overall, it is estimated that the bottom 80 percent of households lost two decades' worth of wealth,” a congressional research report concluded in 2012.

Worse, the average American couldn't buy more stuff with the money they did have. A 2018 study by the Pew Research Center found that despite the low unemployment rate and the steady addition of jobs to the economy from 2010 to 2018, the purchasing power of the average American's wages, adjusted for inflation, hadn't budged since 1978.

The wealthy also took big hits when the stock market dropped, but they had the resources to hold on to their holdings and even buy more stocks when prices were low. That meant they more than made up for their losses when the market recovered. By 2017, just an estimated 1 percent of U.S. households controlled 40 percent of the country's wealth — the highest level in almost 60 years.

However, the defenders of the *1 percenters* (in 2018, that meant those who earned at least \$481,000 a year) were quick to point out that the very wealthy also paid 39 percent of all federal income taxes, contributed more than 30 percent of all charitable giving, and were three times as likely to work more than 50 hours a week as anyone else.

The blame game

On September 17, 2011, a group of about 1,000 people showed up in New York City's financial district and set up camp in a park. The *Occupy Wall Street* movement, conceived and organized through the internet and social media, was designed mainly to protest the social and economic inequities that had grown during the Great Recession. "We are the 99 percent" became the movement's rallying slogan, and allied demonstrations were held in more than 70 other cities around the country.

Not everyone was sympathetic. "If those people could camp out in the park all day," a wealthy businessman told *The New York Times* in 2012, referring to anti-rich protesters, "why aren't they out looking for a job? Why are they blaming others?"

The occupiers' camp was cleared out by police in mid-November, and the movement rather quickly faded from the public eye. But if nothing else, Occupy Wall Street cemented the terms *1 percenters* and *the other 99 percent* in America's political lexicon and fostered debate about economic inequality.

"We can either settle for a country where a shrinking number of people do really well while a growing number of Americans barely get by," President Obama said in his January 2012 State of the Union address, "or we can restore an economy where everyone gets a fair shot, and everyone does their fair share, and everyone plays by the same set of rules."

Deciding who drew up the rules, however, became the country's biggest — and most bitter — bone of contention in the years ahead.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Electing the first Black President
- » Boiling over with the Tea Party
- » Getting sick over healthcare
- » Making “Supreme” legal decisions
- » Battling over the budget
- » Observing hot-button social issues
- » Facing a pandemic with the rest of the world

Chapter 5

Historic Firsts, Reforms, and Challenges

Although the Founding Fathers warned against them, political parties have been a prominent feature of American politics since the 1790s. Generally, two major parties have been all Americans can stomach at any one time. But every once in a while, a third party or political movement has risen temporarily to prominence, if not lasting influence. This chapter looks at the rise of one such movement (The Tea Partiers).

The chapter also covers the historic presidential election in which Americans elected the first Black president, and we discuss an ambitious and controversial effort to improve America’s health (or at least its healthcare) under that president’s leadership. The chapter also chronicles a shutdown of the federal government, delves into social movements that tackled some of society’s ingrained biases and ongoing challenges, and examines what facing a global pandemic looks like.

The Great Presidential Race of 2008

A U.S. presidential race with no incumbent chief executive or vice president running hadn't occurred since 1928, so when a wide-open field presented itself in the 2008 contest, it attracted a veritable herd of candidates.

In an effort to enhance their voters' clout in selecting the parties' nominees, a host of states raced to move their primaries to the front of the pack. As a result, six states held caucuses or primary elections before the end of January, and 30 more by mid-February. The earlier primaries meant an earlier start to serious campaigning. By the spring of 2008, Democratic presidential wannabes had participated in 26 debates or forums; Republicans in 21.

In early March, U.S. Sen. John McCain of Arizona sewed up the GOP nomination. It capped a startling comeback for McCain, whose campaign had been broken and almost done just a few months before.

In the Democratic race, Senators Barack Obama of Illinois and Hillary Clinton of New York (the former First Lady) ran away from the rest of the field by mid-February, guaranteeing that the 2008 general election would be the first of its kind, with either the first woman presidential nominee by a major U.S. political party or the first Black American. But if they outdistanced the rest of the field, they couldn't outdistance each other, trading primary victories in key states throughout the spring. Finally, Obama clinched the nomination in early June.

Obama selected Sen. Joe Biden of Delaware, a well-known political veteran, as his vice presidential running mate. But McCain surprised everyone by picking Sarah Palin, the obscure first-term governor of Alaska. At various times, Palin both energized the McCain campaign and acted as a distraction.

Obama versus McCain

The top-of-the-ticket candidates offered Americans one of the most disparate choices in U.S. history. At 47, Obama was the fourth-youngest president ever. At 72, McCain was the oldest. McCain was a naval veteran of 22 years (5½ as a prisoner during the Vietnam War) and a fourth-term senator. Obama hadn't served in the military and was a first-term senator. Obama was the son of a White American woman and a Black Kenyan man. McCain had an ancestor who had served on the staff of George Washington. Obama liked to deliver electrifying speeches before huge crowds. McCain preferred chatting with small groups in informal settings.

The two also had widely differing views on nearly every issue: the war in Iraq, healthcare, taxes, energy, and the environment. Obama fought charges that he was a socialist in a progressive's clothing. McCain fought charges that he represented four more years of policies identical to those of the highly unpopular Bush.

Obama's historic victory

Obama held a narrow lead through most of the summer. As Election Day grew closer, the country's staggering economy came to dominate the campaign, and voters decided Obama was better equipped to deal with it.

It was a convincing victory. Obama carried states no Democratic candidate had carried in 30 years. He also galvanized young voters and minorities to vote in record numbers. Obama's campaign utilized new technology and techniques, such as sending Election Day voting reminders to cell phones and using websites to raise money and organize grassroots efforts.

"If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible, who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time, who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer," Obama said in an election night celebration in Chicago.



REMEMBER

In 1858, buying and selling human beings was legal in America. In 1958, discrimination based on race was widespread. In 2008, an African American was elected the 44th president of the United States. The country had come a long way, but as Obama would find out, it also had a long way to go.

Going to a Tea Party

One of the things that stuck in the craws of many Americans during the Great Recession (see Chapter 4 of this minibook) was the series of decisions by both the Bush and Obama administrations, abetted by Congress, to provide hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars to huge banks and corporations.

Many Americans weren't buying the rationale that temporary aid to the companies would provide overall economic stability and combat unemployment. The average person worried about losing their job, paying their mortgage, and sending their kids to college — and all that without getting a government "bailout." Moreover, many reckoned there was too much federal interference in matters they

thought were best left to local or state government decisions, such as education or voter registration.

"I worked hard, and I went for the American dream, and I did okay," actor John Ratzenberger told a crowd of 5,000 on the state capitol steps in Sacramento in April 2009. "But now I'm confused . . . why does the government want to take my money and give it to people who don't work?"

Ratzenberger, who was best known for portraying a know-it-all mailman on the TV show *Cheers*, was taking part in one of about 750 rallies throughout the country. Although partly financed by Republican-affiliated groups and individuals and promoted by conservative media, the rallies' organizers insisted they were part of a nonpartisan, loosely organized, grassroots effort that became known as the *Tea Party movement*.

The movement took its name from the 1773 incident in Boston when American colonists dumped British tea into the harbor. It wasn't a formal political party, and members prided themselves that it had no leaders or formal central structure. Its message generally focused on economic issues more than social ones: Tea Partiers wanted to reduce the federal budget deficit, cut taxes, reduce government spending, and require strict faithfulness to the U.S. Constitution.

Through 2009, Tea Party devotees focused mostly on protest rallies and recruiting new members and were generally viewed as a minor ingredient in the country's political stew. By 2010, that view changed considerably.

Taking over the House

In January 2010, a special election was held in Massachusetts to fill the U.S. Senate seat of Ted Kennedy, who had died in 2009. Scott Brown, a relatively obscure Republican state legislator, squared off against the state's Democratic attorney general, Martha Coakley. With the state's Democratic voters outnumbering Republicans by a 3-to-1 margin, Coakley was a big favorite, but Brown pulled off a huge upset, becoming the first GOP senator elected in Massachusetts in 38 years.



REMEMBER

It was a harbinger of things to come. A perfect storm of ominous elements converged on Democrats: Unemployment rates remained high despite federal bailouts of banks and big businesses; many Americans found the new national healthcare plan confusing, and others just didn't like it; and Obama was the target of false but persistent rumors that he was born in Kenya and thus not constitutionally eligible to be president. In addition, Democrats had won many congressional seats in 2006 and 2008 in districts that contained many Republican and independent voters who were ready for a change.

The hundreds of Tea Party groups that had formed in 2009 also played roles. The groups raised money and organized get-out-the-vote efforts. They also endorsed candidates in Republican primaries, often against “establishment” candidates who had the official blessings of GOP leaders. How much substantive impact the movement had in the general election has since been dissected and debated in various academic studies.

But it certainly galvanized the electorate. A November Gallup poll found that 73 percent of Americans thought the Tea Party energized more people into getting involved in the political process (although 55 percent also thought it deepened partisan divisions). Larger percentages of White, older, and self-described conservative voters turned out in 2010 than in 2008, and they tended to vote Republican. Worse for Democrats, 63 percent of voters describing themselves as independents voted for GOP candidates in 2010, as opposed to just 49 percent in 2008.



REMEMBER

The result was a Republican landslide. The party gained 63 seats and a majority in the House — the biggest gain by either party in a midterm election since 1938. The GOP also picked up six seats in the Senate and captured a record 680 state legislative seats. “Tonight there’s a Tea Party tidal wave,” said Rand Paul of Kentucky, one of the Tea Party-backed Senate winners, “and we’re sending a message.”

However, the movement became a victim of its own success. Mainstream politicians, particularly Republicans, began portraying themselves as Tea Party leaders even while ignoring key movement principles, such as cutting government spending and trimming the federal deficit. By late 2015, polls showed Americans’ support of the Tea Party movement had dropped from 32 percent in 2010 to 17 percent. Even so, the movement’s distrust of big government, distaste for traditional candidates, and dislike of party leaders setting the parties’ agenda found their way into the roots of the Donald J. Trump presidential campaign that won the White House in 2016.

Compromising on tax cuts

“Taxes,” American jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. noted in 1904, “are the price we pay for a civilized society.” But in 2010, U.S. politicians were more interested in reviving the economy than in civilizing society. So, with a set of ten-year-old “temporary” federal tax cuts ready to expire on January 1, 2011 — and Republicans ready to take control of the House of Representatives two days after that — President Obama was ready to make a deal.

On December 6, the president and Republican lawmakers agreed on an \$858 billion plan that gave each side some of what it wanted. In addition to extending tax cuts for two years, the package continued lower tax rates on capital gains and dividends, expanded unemployment insurance coverage, cut Social Security tax

deductions from paychecks, and extended tax credits for college tuition and business investment in research and development.

Supporters said the plan would save jobs, give families more spending money, and generally stimulate the economy. The bill passed the Senate on a bipartisan 81–19 vote, but Democrats in the House balked, characterizing it as a huge giveaway to the super rich. They tried to limit the tax cuts to households making less than \$250,000 and then to less than \$1 million. The Senate rejected both efforts.

Eventually, the House approved the package on a 277–148 vote, with 139 Democrats joining 138 Republicans in the majority. Many of the Democrats who voted for it acknowledged the reality that Republicans would be taking over the House and feared that any bill the Republicans proposed then would be unlikely to include jobless benefits or the payroll tax cut.

Obama signed the bill on December 17 at a ceremony attended by Republican, but not Democratic, congressional leaders. “I’m hopeful that we might refresh the American people’s faith in the capability of their leaders to govern,” he said, with no apparent trace of irony.

Lurching toward Healthcare

One of Obama’s biggest first-term goals was to find a cure for the ills of America’s healthcare system. The president and many others contended that soaring healthcare costs were bankrupting individuals, shutting down small businesses, and crippling corporations. Getting well, or trying not to get sick in the first place, was sucking up larger and larger percentages of the nation’s economy, which wasn’t feeling too good itself.

Revamping the healthcare system had been tried by other presidents as far back as Theodore Roosevelt. The last Democratic president before Obama, Bill Clinton, had tried and failed in 1993. But Obama was buoyed by the relative success of a Massachusetts plan that had been signed into law in 2006 by Governor Mitt Romney, a Republican. The system required everyone to have health insurance and provided aid for those who couldn’t afford it.

With his public approval rating above 60 percent and comfortable Democratic majorities in both the House and Senate, Obama prodded and cajoled a sweeping healthcare reform bill through 14 months of intense congressional bipartisan debate, committee hearings, amendments, and negotiation before signing it into law on March 23, 2010.

At the end of all that effort, not a single Republican in either house of Congress voted for it.

The 906-page “Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010” — commonly known as “Obamacare” — was humongous in size and excruciating in detail. Basically (and a bit simplistically), here’s some of what it was supposed to do:

- » Allow individuals to keep their current health plan if they chose to do so, and allow parents to add children up to the age of 26 to their plans.
- » Prohibit insurance companies from dropping customers who got sick and from denying them coverage because of preexisting conditions.
- » Require healthcare providers to provide preventive services, such as wellness exams and tests for specific problems, such as prostate and breast cancer.
- » Require everyone to buy some kind of health insurance — known as the “individual mandate” — by March 31, 2014, or face a financial penalty, and require employers with more than 49 employees to provide a health insurance plan.



REMEMBER

At the heart of the plan was the idea that if everyone had to buy insurance, a lot of young healthy people wouldn’t use the health system and thus would help defray the costs of those who did. States were allowed to set up their own insurance exchanges to match people with plans. If states chose not to do so, their residents could use a federally run exchange.

The law also required states to expand their Medicaid programs (which provide healthcare for low-income and disabled people) to help those who needed financial assistance in buying insurance. The feds would pay for all the expanded Medicaid costs for three years and 90 percent thereafter.

“It represents a major step forward toward giving Americans with insurance and those without a sense of security when it comes to their healthcare,” Obama said while signing the act into law.

What it gave opponents was political heartburn. Critics said Obamacare would drive thousands of small companies out of business because they couldn’t afford to provide health insurance for their workers. They said it was too complex, would cost state governments millions of dollars in Medicaid payments, and was un-American in forcing people to buy something regardless of whether they wanted it. Polls showed that more than half of Americans disliked Obamacare within a week of its becoming law, in large part because it was so confusingly complicated.

“One thing all Republicans agree on is we think Obamacare is the worst piece of legislation in 50 years,” said Senate GOP leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky. “Every Republican thinks it was a huge mistake and would like to get rid of it.”

Republicans tried. The GOP-controlled House of Representatives voted more than 65 times to strip the healthcare plan of funding, suspend major portions of it, or repeal it altogether. Each time, they were blocked by the Democratic-controlled Senate. In July 2017, after Republicans had narrowly wrested control of the Senate in the 2014 elections, three GOP senators joined all 48 Democrats and independents in a defeating yet another repeal effort.

While Congress was persistently but ineptly trying to settle the program's future, other Obamacare foes had taken a different approach.

Courting the Supreme Court

In January 2011, the state of Florida sued to block the healthcare plan from taking effect on the grounds the federal government didn't have the constitutional authority to require individuals to buy health insurance. Both a trial court judge and an appellate court sided with Florida (whose cause was eventually joined by 25 other states). Similar suits followed with varying degrees of success before various appeals courts. Finally, in December, the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to decide the issue.

In March 2012, justices listened to three days of argument over the act's constitutionality. The prevailing public opinion, both expert and novice, was that the five conservative justices on the nine-member court would overturn the law. That view was buttressed at one point in the proceedings when Justice Antonin Scalia sarcastically asked if Congress could force people to buy broccoli as well as health insurance.



REMEMBER

But the prevailing opinion was proved wrong on June 26, when Chief Justice John Roberts joined the court's four liberal justices in a decision that gave Obamacare supporters most, but not all, of what they wanted. The majority ruled that mandating individuals to buy health insurance or face a financial penalty was essentially just a form of taxation, which Congress had the power to do.

States whose elected leaders opposed the law, however, did get a consolation prize: They could refuse to accept additional federal funds to expand their Medicaid programs to cover low-income people who weren't eligible for current Medicaid help but couldn't afford to buy health insurance. However, by the end of 2024, only 10 states, mostly in the South, still had not expanded their Medicaid programs.

A stumbling start

The Supreme court had ruled, but the Obamacare battles were far from over. Different states took far different approaches to implementing the plan, which began

on October 1, 2013. Although the system originally envisioned each state's setting up its own exchange where its residents could buy insurance, only 14 did so, and the residents of the other states had to join the federal government's national exchange.

Although exchanges in some states, such as California and New York, performed reasonably well, others had technical glitches, and the launch of the federal exchange was little short of a disaster: People spent hours vainly trying to even sign in to the system, let alone navigate the labyrinthine application process. By mid-November, only 106,000 of the 7 million people the Obama administration estimated might be covered had signed up.

To make matters worse, an Obama promise that people with existing policies could keep them turned out to be wrong. Insurance companies canceled thousands of policies because their benefits didn't comply with Obamacare requirements, leaving many people with higher premiums for new policies they didn't want in the first place.

All this infuriated voters and delighted Obamacare opponents. In the November 2014 elections, Republicans swept to their largest congressional majorities since 1928 and won numerous gubernatorial and state legislative seats. Along with concerns about illegal immigration, many voters cited dissatisfaction with Obamacare as a key motivator for voting GOP.

Nor were the legal battles over. In June 2014, the Supreme Court voted 5–4 to strike down an Obamacare provision that required private companies to offer birth control insurance coverage to employees even if the companies' owners objected to it on religious grounds. Through 2024, more than 2,000 legal challenges had been filed at various judicial levels against the program.

Clinging to its legislative life

Still, Obamacare survived through 2024. An estimated 48 million Americans who had lacked health insurance in 2010 had some form of coverage in 2023, although that still left 25 million with no health insurance. After soaring price increases in 2016 and 2017, the rate of cost increases for health coverage seemed to have slowed.

Even so, abolishing Obamacare remained a Republican priority. Obama's Republican successor in the White House, Donald J. Trump, was an ardent and vocal opponent of the program. With his backing, Congress approved ending the requirement that taxpayers who declined to seek insurance be fined an average of \$695 per year. Trump's administration also announced it would not try to enforce the act's requirement that health insurance companies provide coverage

to consumers with preexisting health conditions. As a result of these and other administrative actions, the estimated number of Americans *without* health insurance increased by about 3 million during Trump's first year in office.

Some experts predict that healthcare costs under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) will rise in 2026 primarily because the current tax credits are set to expire, causing much higher premiums for many people enrolled in the program. NBC News reported in December of 2025 that

"It's official: House Speaker Mike Johnson says that he won't call a vote to extend enhanced subsidies under the Affordable Care Act, effectively guaranteeing they will expire at the end of this month."

And The Decision Is . . .

The fate of Obamacare wasn't the only major ruling to come from an often sharply divided Supreme Court during the first quarter of the 21st century. With the appointment of three justices by President Trump between 2017 and 2020, the nine-member court took on a decidedly conservative tone in its most important decisions, with the six justices appointed by Republican presidents often — but not always — forming the majority. The decisions included the following:

- » Prohibiting the government from restricting corporations' and labor unions' spending in political campaigns. The ruling led to the blossoming of "Super PACs," or political action committees that poured hundreds of millions of dollars into elections.
- » Striking down a major provision of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. The ruling allowed states to change their voting eligibility laws without federal approval more easily.
- » Allowing states to give tax credits to parents for use in paying tuition at religion-based schools.
- » Limiting the Environmental Protection Agency's authority to broadly regulate energy companies.
- » Striking down race-based affirmative action higher education programs.

The court's most controversial ruling came on June 24, 2022, in a case named *Dobbs v Jackson Women's Health Organization*. On a 6–3 vote, justices overturned *Roe v Wade*, a 1973 court decision that said women had a constitutional right to

an abortion. The court's reversal spurred legislatures dominated by anti-abortion lawmakers to enact laws banning abortion in 13 states and sharply restricting it in 28 others.

Conversely, voters in 13 states responded in the 2022 and 2024 elections by approving state constitutional amendments guaranteeing rights to abortion, with varying restrictions, within their borders. The topic became one of the biggest bones of contention in the 2024 presidential race, with former president and Republican candidate Donald Trump taking credit for appointing three of the justices who overturned Roe and Democratic candidate Kamala Harris blasting the decision.

Meanwhile, Back at the Budget . . .

Despite all the warm-and-fuzzy talk about “bipartisan cooperation” after reaching a compromise on tax cuts at the end of 2010, America began a three-year pinball game of careening from one federal fiscal crisis to another.

At their essence, the fights boiled down to some deep ideological differences between Republican and Democratic lawmakers. Republicans generally favored cutting taxes — including those at the highest income levels — and limiting government spending. That approach, they reasoned, would leave more money in the hands of individuals and businesses, which, in turn, would create more jobs. Democrats argued that extending tax cuts to the wealthy was less important than having enough revenue to ensure aid to those Americans at the bottom of the economic ladder.

Add to that the fact that Republicans controlled the House and Democrats the Senate and White House. Then, buckle your seat belt for the Great Budget Battles of 2011–2013.

Hitting the debt ceiling

The *federal debt ceiling* is the highest amount the U.S. Treasury can borrow without congressional approval. Formalized by Congress in 1917, the ceiling has been repeatedly and routinely raised by Congress with little or no debate.

That changed, however, in 2011, when Republican lawmakers demanded federal spending cuts in return for raising the debt ceiling. The Treasury Department warned that if the ceiling wasn't raised by August 2, the United States would default on financial debts it had already incurred. (The only time in U.S. history

a default ever happened was in the War of 1812 when the British burned down the Treasury.) After weeks of arguing, the two parties reached a deal, and Obama signed it into law on August 2.



REMEMBER

The deal raised the debt ceiling by \$900 billion. But — and it was a big “but” — if the two sides failed to find a way to cut \$1.2 trillion from the national debt, the agreement called for automatic across-the-board cuts to take place on January 1, 2013.

The looming cuts amounted to \$1.2 trillion in reduced spending over ten years. That was relatively peanuts compared to the size of the national debt, which in late 2013 was about \$17 trillion — about 2½ times what it had been in 2003. However, it was a fortune if you depended on the government programs that would be chopped.

Most members of both parties didn’t favor across-the-board budget cuts (formally called *sequestration*) because it would include programs and projects each side supported. The hope was that sequestration would put burrs under both parties’ saddles and get them to find some long-range solutions, but Congress turned out to have a pretty thick hide.

The deal did spur the credit rating agency Standard & Poor’s to downgrade America’s credit rating for the first time ever. S&P officials said they just didn’t trust Obama and Congress to come up with a stable long-term plan. The downgrade triggered a hefty — if temporary — plunge in the stock market.

Driving off the fiscal cliff

In February 2012, Ben Bernanke, chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, warned that America faced “a massive fiscal cliff of large spending cuts and tax increases.”

His reference was to the fact that the tax cuts Obama and Congress had compromised on in late 2010 were set to expire on January 1, 2013. At the same time, the budget cuts the two sides had agreed to postpone in August 2011 were poised to kick in. That was a surefire recipe for a giant economic stomachache.

So everyone sat down to squabble, er, negotiate. Democrats wanted to eliminate tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans. Republicans wanted to continue the cuts for everyone and pay for it by cutting deeper into social programs. After months of rhetorical battle, they reached a deal in the wee morning hours of January 1, 2013. The tax cuts were extended for Americans making less than \$400,000 a year, and the budget cuts were kicked down the road again until March 2013. But despite further negotiations, Congress failed to head off the budget cuts, which kicked in on schedule.

Shutting down the government

Meanwhile, Treasury officials warned that the country would hit its debt ceiling again in mid-October, and throughout the summer, Congress also failed to agree on a spending plan to keep the federal government running.

So on October 1, 2013, the government shut down and told about 800,000 federal employees to stay home. National parks and monuments closed. People relying on the approval of various federal agencies for loans, medical procedures, and other services were out of luck.

After 16 days of rhetorically rattling sabers and studying public opinion polls (Congress's approval rating dropped to an abysmal 9 percent), the two sides agreed to fund the government until January 2014 and suspend the debt ceiling until February. In mid-December, a shockingly subdued Congress approved a federal spending plan designed to last through September 2015. The plan eliminated some of the sequestration budget cuts and helped ensure against another embarrassing government shutdown in 2014, an election year. The wheels of government began — creakily and crankily — to turn once more.

But again, in 2018, 2019, and 2025, the government experienced a total of 79 full days of shutdown time while the divided Congress fought about the budget.

Guns, Drugs, and #MeToo

As the 21st century sped through its second decade, America found itself wrestling with two all-too-familiar problems — gun violence and drug abuse — and an old problem that heretofore had not been much in the public eye: sexual harassment.

Shooting each other at alarming rates

Although this fact ran counter to the perceptions of many Americans, violent crime actually fell sharply through the end of the 20th century and the start of the 21st. Statistics compiled by the FBI found there were 747 violent crimes per 100,000 residents in 1993, compared to 364 in 2023. Sadly, however, the decline did not apply to mass public shootings.

Between 2015 and 2019, the number of *mass public shootings* — defined as incidents where four or more people were killed or injured in a public venue — totaled 1,811. From 2020 through October 2024, that number jumped more than 68 percent to 3,049. The 60-year span from 1948 to 2008 experienced 14 mass

public shootings with 9 or more victims. The 16 years between 2009 through late 2024 had 20 such shootings.

The varying scenes of the crimes fostered an impression that nowhere was safe: 60 killed and 400 injured by gunshot or shrapnel at an outdoor music concert in Las Vegas; 49 killed at an Orlando, Florida nightclub; 26 at an elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut; 26 at a church in Sutherland Springs, Texas; 21 at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas; 18 at a bowling alley and bar in Lewiston, Maine; 17 at a high school in Parkland, Florida; and 12 at a Thousand Oaks, California bar and dancehall.

“We simply cannot accept this violence as a normal part of American life,” Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf said after an anti-Semitic gunman killed 11 people at a Pittsburgh synagogue in late October 2018. “These senseless acts of violence are not who we are as Pennsylvanians and are not who we are as Americans.”

In some of the shootings, the gunmen adapted their weapons to be more efficient killers. Using a *bump stock* — a device added to a semi-automatic rifle that allows the shooter to continuously pull the trigger as the gun recoils — allowed a 64-year-old man to fire more than 1,100 rounds in 10 minutes from his Las Vegas hotel room in October 2017, spraying death on a crowd assembled below for a concert.

America certainly had no paucity of firearms. Although no firm count existed, the generally accepted number of U.S. guns in 2024 was about 393 million — or about 120 weapons for every 100 Americans. That figure was nearly double the next-highest country, Yemen. A 2024 survey found that 40 percent of Americans lived in a household with a firearm.



A Pew Research Center poll in October 2018 found that more than 75 percent of both Democratic and Republican voters supported preventing people with mental illness from buying guns, barring gun sales to those on watch lists of federal law enforcement agencies, and requiring background checks when guns changed hands at gun shows or through private sales.

Some states passed their own gun control laws. But Congress deadlocked on significant federal regulations, and the Supreme Court ruled in separate cases that there was no constitution-based prohibition on bump stocks (although individual states could ban them) and that law-abiding citizens could carry handguns without having to obtain specific permission from state or local authorities.

Black lives matter — And so do cops'

As divisive an issue as gun control was, what seemed like a continual stream of incidents occurred in which police officers killed young Black males who sometimes turned out to be unarmed and whose deaths were often videotaped by police cameras or those of witnesses. The cases included a 22-year-old Sacramento man shot in his grandmother's backyard when police mistook his cell phone for a gun; a 12-year-old Cleveland boy who was playing with a BB gun; a 17-year-old Chicago youth who was running away from officers when he was shot multiple times, and a 46-year-old Minneapolis man who suffocated after police knelt on his neck during an altercation outside a grocery store.

In that last case, four Minneapolis police officers were sentenced to prison. But although cities sometimes paid large cash settlements to the victims' families and officers were fired, criminal convictions of police in most cases were rare. Part of the reason was a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that police were justified in using deadly force if they had "reasonable apprehension" that their lives or the lives of others were threatened. Police and their defenders also pointed out that more than 50 officers were shot and killed in 2024 alone.

After Florida resident George Zimmerman was acquitted of chasing and fatally shooting an unarmed Trayvon Martin in 2013, several Black women started an online movement called *Black Lives Matter*, and the number of incidents of police deadly force subsequently caught on video heightened public attention to the issue. As the movement was spread by social media and more traditional marches and demonstrations, it also triggered a backlash that included the formation of *Blue Lives Matter*, a group that called for anyone convicted of killing a police officer to be sentenced under hate crime statutes that generally called for enhanced punishments.

Dying from drugs

In December 2017, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) published a series of reports with a sobering conclusion: The overall life expectancy of Americans had dropped, in large part because so many people were dying from drug overdoses. According to the CDC, the annual number of U.S. overdose deaths rose from about 22,000 in 2002 to about 108,000 in 2022, a 340 percent increase in 20 years.

The drugs of choice were often *opioids* — a group that included heroin, a synthetic drug called fentanyl, and prescription pain reducers, such as oxycodone, hydrocodone, and morphine. Deaths from opioids rose from about 10,000 in 2002 to 81,000 in 2023, a nearly 700 percent jump. Part of the reason was a dramatic increase in prescriptions written by doctors for opioid painkillers starting in the 1990s. The number of prescriptions tripled between 1991 and 2011.

Patient advocacy groups lobbied for pain to be treated as a disease in itself and not just a symptom. And pharmaceutical companies pushed newly developed pain reducers such as OxyContin as safe and effective. At the same time, other drugs, such as fentanyl, a pain-reducing drug that can be 50 times stronger than heroin and was primarily used for cancer patients, became a popular street drug because of its potency. It was also cheaper to produce than heroin or cocaine and was sometimes mixed into those drugs to increase their potency.

Some evidence suggests that the crisis was leveling off by the end of 2024, possibly from the impacts of public awareness programs, the increased availability of an anti-overdose drug called naloxone, and laws passed in some states that made it tougher for doctors to write prescriptions for pain-reducing drugs.

However, the collective reaction to the issue made many doctors leery of treating pain with drugs — at all — which made life more difficult for thousands of people suffering from chronic pain. Drug companies also became more cautious after four of the largest firms agreed in 2022 to pay \$26 billion to settle an avalanche of lawsuits alleging they knowingly and recklessly pushed doctors to prescribe opioids. The money went mostly to drug treatment programs — and lawyers.

Somewhat paradoxically, the use of another drug was not only spreading but doing so with the approval of many Americans. Any use of marijuana, more formally referred to as cannabis, was still against federal law in 2024, but voters in 24 states and the District of Columbia ignored the federal prohibition and legalized it for recreational use. Another 13 allowed it with a doctor's assent. The legal part of the marijuana industry was a \$33 billion-a-year concern, and surveys found at least 50 million adult Americans indulged in the drug at least once a month.

Many medical researchers and physicians warned that the drug was not as harmless as proponents contended, particularly in light of the fact that many varieties of the drug in 2024 had triple the percentage of THC, the active ingredient in cannabis, of what it had in 2000. There were indications, however, that while marijuana's popularity was rising where it was legal, its geographic legality might be reaching its limits. In the 2024 elections, legalization was on the ballot in four states, but only Nebraska voters approved it.

Confronting sexual harassment

In 1997, Tarana Burke, a New York City community activist, was talking to a 13-year-old girl who had been sexually abused and realized that she couldn't think of anything to comfort the girl — not even by saying, "Me, too." Ten years later, Burke responded by creating a nonprofit organization to help victims of sexual harassment and assault. She called it *Me Too*.

And 10 years after that, an actress, Alyssa Milano, used the web-based social medium Twitter to suggest that all women who had been assaulted or harassed write “me too.” A *hashtag* (the # symbol that makes it easier to follow a topic or group on social media) was added, and the movement gained national attention.

Milano’s tweet was in reaction to a scandal centered on sexual abuse and harassment allegations by scores of women against Harvey Weinstein, a prominent Hollywood film producer. It also followed the pre-2016 election release of a 2005 audiotape in which Donald Trump bragged about sexually harassing women with impunity because “when you’re a star, they let you do it. You can do anything.” Trump was elected president; Weinstein was found guilty of sexual assault in New York and California, and although his New York conviction was overturned, he was convicted again in June of 2025. However, Weinstein was only the start of the Me Too repercussions.

By the end of 2018, *The New York Times* reported that at least 200 men in prominent positions had lost their jobs over sexual harassment allegations, including U.S. Senator Al Franken of Minnesota, television talk show host Bill O’Reilly, actor Kevin Spacey, and Missouri Governor Eric Greitens.

In May 2023, New York juries found Trump liable for sexually abusing writer E. Jean Carroll (one of 26 women who alleged misconduct by him since the 1970s). The juries also found that the former president had defamed Carroll in statements he made denying the charges and awarded her a total of \$88.3 million in damages. Trump lost his subsequent appeals of the verdicts but awaits the Supreme Court’s decision about whether it will hear his request to overturn them.

The Me Too movement was hailed as empowering women and exposing a societal cancer that had been ignored for decades. It was also criticized for encouraging false or reckless charges that ruined men’s careers and deeming accused men guilty unless they could prove that they hadn’t done something they hadn’t done.

But the movement had an indisputable impact. *Time Magazine* named “the Silence Breakers” of Me Too its “Person of the Year” in 2017 and labeled the movement “one of the highest-velocity shifts in our culture since the 1960s.”

Catching COVID-19

On January 1, 2020, Chinese officials closed a wholesale seafood and wild game market in the city of Wuhan in Hubei Province. They were worried about cases of a new kind of pneumonia that seemed to be linked to the market. On February 2,

2020, U.S. officials ordered all Americans who had recently visited Hubei Province into 14 days of quarantine. On March 3, 2020, the Centers for Disease Control confirmed that 60 cases of the new virus, called *COVID-19*, had appeared across the United States. In the early months of 2020, it was indeed a small world. It was about to become a very sick one.

Later investigations concluded that the disease might have sprung not from the market but from experiments on bats at a Wuhan-area lab. However, no solid evidence supported theories that it was a result of biological warfare testing financed by any government. The “COVID-19” name was a shortened version of “Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) Coronavirus 2,” a variation of a virus that caused a 2003 epidemic in China that killed 774 people. The “19” referred to the fact that the first cases were detected in the last days of 2019.

Symptoms of the contagious disease — which is spread mainly through airborne particles — ranged from none at all to fever, shortness of breath, runny nose, sore throat, diarrhea, vomiting, mental fogginess, severe fatigue, headaches, and a loss of the senses of smell and/or taste. Symptoms could last for just a few days or months. Older people and the very young were most at risk — and the risk was death.

Through October 2024, according to the World Health Organization, 776.7 million cases of the *pandemic* (defined as a widespread occurrence of an infectious disease) had been reported around the world. Of those, 103.4 million (13.3 percent) were in the United States. The global death toll was 7.1 million, of which 1.2 million (17 percent) were Americans. Compared to the 1918–21 worldwide flu pandemic that saw 50 million people die worldwide, the Earth got off relatively easily, but the U.S. death toll from COVID-19 was more than twice as high as what America had suffered during the so-called “Spanish Flu.”

Counting COVID’s costs

On April 19, 2020, an estimated 50 percent of all the grocery stores in the United States were out of toilet paper. Those that did have supplies — or were rumored to have them — were inundated. Panicky Americans stood, sometimes patiently, in long, pre-dawn lines for a chance to buy a few rolls, and they chafed at the store-mandated limits per customer.

Several factors fueled the phenomenon. One was panic buying. Many Americans believed that there was or would be a toilet paper shortage because of disruptions in the supply chain caused by the pandemic. Therefore, they hoarded closets full of TP rolls. Others were compelled to stock up just because they were using more: schools, businesses, and most other public gathering places were closed, and people had to stay home.

The “Great Toilet Paper Shortage” lasted only a few months, but it was an excellent (if annoying) example of the economic toll of COVID-19. A 2023 University of Southern California study estimated that the cost of COVID to the U.S. economy would reach \$14 trillion by the end of 2024, reflecting losses in nearly every aspect of the economy, from workplace absences and loss of productivity to reduced spending on everything from gasoline to public dining, shopping, and entertainment.

“The toll we estimate that it took on the nation’s gross domestic product is twice the size of the Great Recession of 2007–2009,” the report concluded. “It’s 20 times greater than the economic costs of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and 40 times greater than the toll of any other disaster to befall the U.S. in the 21st century to date.”

The pandemic was particularly hard on lower-income families, especially hourly workers whose employers, such as restaurants and hair salons, closed down completely. The nation’s unemployment rate soared from 3.6 percent in January 2020 to 14.8 percent in March. It didn’t sink to pre-COVID levels until March 2022. Lower-income families were also the worst equipped to deal with healthcare costs related to the pandemic, as well as childcare costs because most of the nation’s schools were closed.

Paying the social price

The costs went far beyond those measured by dollars and cents. America’s homicide rate increased 27 percent in 2020 over the previous year, the highest since 1997. Much of the increase appeared to be connected to domestic violence. The National Committee on COVID-19 and Criminal Justice estimated that domestic violence cases rose 8.1 percent from January 2020 to January 2021.

Perhaps the most widespread social cost of COVID was paid by the country’s 50 million elementary and secondary school students. By March 2020, about three-quarters were forced to learn from home, mostly through online connections. Children who lacked computers were largely out of luck, and often, even those with computers but lacking online connections had to sit in cars or on the steps outside of businesses where they could gain internet access.

Most schools reopened by the fall of 2021, but post-COVID studies found the “lost year” to be costly: Just 26 percent of eighth-graders, for example, were deemed proficient in math in 2022, compared to 33 percent in 2019. Researchers reported that distance-taught students were generally less focused, less likely to ask for help, and were presented with narrower curriculums. Perhaps worse from the kids’ point of view was the loss of once-in-a-lifetime extracurricular opportunities: senior proms, graduation, and sports seasons.

“You grow up looking forward to so many firsts,” summed up a high school senior from Kentucky, “then to have all that taken away, it’s tough. It’s something none of us ever dreamed of and definitely something none of us wanted.”

Responding to COVID, government-style

Like most Americans, some confusion marked the response of federal, state, and local governments to the pandemic — and a lot of optimism. “We have the greatest doctors in the world,” President Trump told reporters in late February 2020. “We have it very much under control.” He also suggested the virus might soon go away by itself.

By mid-March, however, COVID was clearly not under control. The White House issued a series of guidelines that advised people to avoid gathering in large groups and suggested that schools be closed, but the federal government largely left it up to individual states to determine rules restricting public gatherings and which kinds of businesses could operate.

Some states imposed statewide rules. Others left it up to cities or counties to impose restrictions such as wearing face masks in the grocery store. Some of those passed ordinances but didn’t enforce them. In Pinal County, Arizona, for example, Sheriff Mark Lamb refused to enforce the state’s stay-at-home and social-distancing orders. “The numbers don’t justify the actions,” he said. “Three hundred deaths is not a significant enough number to continue to ruin the economy.” Lamb subsequently got COVID and missed a chance to meet President Trump at the White House.

Congress, meanwhile, approved three major bills that called for spending roughly \$5 trillion to combat the pandemic:

- » **Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act:** Passed in March 2020, the \$2.2 trillion bill provided cash payments to families, increased unemployment benefits, established forgivable loans to small businesses, and sent cash to state and local governments for COVID-fighting programs. The CARES Act was the largest single economic stimulus package in U.S. history.
- » **Consolidated Appropriations Act:** This 5,593-page piece of legislation (the bulkiest bill in congressional history) in December 2020 provided \$900 billion in direct payments for individuals making less than \$75,000 a year.
- » **American Rescue Plan Act:** The bill provided \$1.9 trillion in more direct payments to individual taxpayers as well as money for extended unemployment benefits and helping schools to reopen.

Cumulatively, the programs helped America recover economically from COVID — but at a cost. The General Accounting Office reckoned that as much as \$260 billion of the money went to fraudulent claims by individuals and businesses. Moreover, the hefty infusion of funds into the nation's economy helped contribute to both the federal budget deficit and inflation levels in succeeding years.

Needling the pandemic

In mid-May 2020, Trump announced *Operation Warp Speed*, a public-private partnership in which the federal government financed and coordinated the development and distribution of COVID vaccines by eight pharmaceutical companies, but it took far longer than expected to get up to any kind of speed, warp or otherwise. Delays in finding effective vaccines, manufacturing enough doses, and procuring the tools and methods needed to deliver them took months. It wasn't until early 2021 that vaccinations began turning the tide against the pandemic.

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the millions of Americans who trust and believe in the potential for their lives to achieve liberty and the pursuit of happiness when all people who inhabit the U.S. work and learn together.

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